

Petzel

KP BREHMER

Welt im Kopf [World in Mind]

Petzel Gallery
March 1 – April 29, 2023
35 East 67th Street

Maxwell Graham / Essex Street
March 1 – April 1, 2023
55 Hester Street

“I have always been particularly interested in social issues, and as society is constantly subject to change, as it is processual, this form of representation plays a part. Whereby I am not interested in ‘reproduction,’ but rather I am trying to force my production materials into parallel processes.” (KP Brehmer)

Maxwell Graham and Petzel Gallery are pleased to announce the collaborative exhibition *Welt im Kopf* [World in Mind], dedicated to the German artist KP Brehmer (1938–1997), curated by Elisa R. Linn and Lennart Wolff. It is the artist’s first solo presentation in the United States since the 1976 show at René Block Gallery on West Broadway in New York.

Born in Berlin, Klaus Peter Brehmer trained as a reproduction technologist and, in the early 1960s, studied at Kunstakademie Düsseldorf. Around this time, he adopted the initials “KP,” both a nod to the then-banned West German Communist Party (KPD) and a playful attempt to complicate an ideological subject position. Rather than becoming a party member, he saw being an artist as a way to be “useful to society.” For Brehmer, that meant superseding not only the cult of the singular author prevalent in Abstract Expressionism but also the specific messaging of agitprop. Discussions about art and politics culminated in the initiative Capitalist Realism—a more overtly radical answer to US Pop Art—including Brehmer, Sigmar Polke, Konrad Lueg, Gerhard Richter, and Wolf Vostell, among others. Appropriation remained a central motif in Brehmer’s practice. His work hinged on the subversion of capitalist visual representation approached through politics, economics, science, consumer culture, and everyday life. Through this, Brehmer developed a unique body of work that is situated at the intersection of Fluxus, Pop, and Conceptual art. Diverse in media, technique, and edition, his works share a profoundly democratic concern with the capacity for a viewer’s emancipation through “visual agitation.” Amidst the Cold War’s binary conception of the world, this “sharpening of the senses,” as Brehmer called it, aimed at enabling the viewer to see through ideological constructs and established narratives to unfold competing interpretations.

The title *Welt im Kopf* [World in Mind], borrows from Brehmer’s 1970 16 mm video work. The exhibition combines seminal and previously unexhibited artworks—drawings, prints, paintings, films, and objects—and ephemera and archival documents made between the 1960s and mid-1980s. The exhibition is organized in two parts and does not follow chronology, providing an overview of Brehmer’s complex methodologies structured by a central question: How can the way capital shapes the perception of reality in the minds of the individual and the collective be made visible?

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At Petzel Gallery, artworks from the 1960s are intended to exercise “ideological kleptomania” (Georg Jappe), achieved by subverting state symbols from both sides of the Iron Curtain. Works based on commemorative stamps, the “business cards of the state” (Walter Benjamin)—e.g., depicting John F. Kennedy, Soviet propaganda, and German monuments—or altered flags are juxtaposed with those made from appropriated advertisements. Influenced by correspondence with Richard Hamilton, these “Trivialgrafiken” test how consumer desire is engineered and ideology naturalized. Not only did Brehmer depict politically-charged subject matter, but he also addressed techniques (such as the cliché print), distribution, and collective actions with other artists. For example, a rare 1968 edition of the influential magazine *Interfunktion*, on view in the exhibition, documents how Brehmer and artists like Chris Reinecke positioned themselves in opposition to documenta and its organizers, several of whom had past ties to the Nazi regime, such as Werner Haftmann.

Maxwell Graham Gallery presents stamps alongside abstract works made around the time of his participation in exhibitions that include *Art Into Society, Society Into Art* at ICA London with Hans Haacke, among others. These works are meant to reflect the politics of societal systems, geography, and hegemonic and colonial mechanisms, as seen in the large-scale *Zeitzone* installation first presented in 1976 at René Block Gallery, and subsequently at Centre Pompidou. From the 1970s onwards, Brehmer started working with diagrams and statistics that considered economic output and population data, coinciding with the conceptualization of biopolitics in the Western welfare states. The expansive series of works *Seele und Gefühl eines Arbeiters* (1978–81)—based on a study on worker’s emotions and productivity—brings to mind the tension between quantification, administrative abstraction, and lived experience at play in the works of artists such as Stanley Brouwn or Hanne Darboven. With works such as *Über die Bilder* from 1979—brushstroke renderings of thermal imaging of brain activity while discussing pictures—the exhibition traces the artist’s emergence as a prototype for the individualized cognitive worker and the rise of a form of capitalism driven by data and feedback.

About KP Brehmer

KP Brehmer (1938–1997) was widely exhibited in his lifetime; at documenta 5 and 6, Kunstmuseum Bonn, Whitechapel Gallery London, and the 55th Venice Biennale, among others. From 1971 until his passing, he taught at HFBK University of Fine Arts in Hamburg. During the 1980s, he was a guest professor at the China Academy of Art in Hangzhou and taught artists, including Shan Fan and Zhang Peili.

Recent institutional solo exhibitions include *Real Capital-Production* at Raven Row London in 2014, which featured a publication with essays on Brehmer by Doreen Mende, Mark Fisher, and Kerstin Stakemeier, among others. From 2018–21 a large-scale traveling monographic exhibition brought Brehmer’s works to Neues Museum Nürnberg, Hamburger Kunsthalle, Gemeentemuseum Den Haag, and ARTER, Istanbul, accompanied by the comprehensive monograph *KP Brehmer: Art ≠ Propaganda*.

This exhibition is organized in collaboration with Galerie Volker Diehl, Berlin and Galerie Weiss Falk, Basel/Zürich.

Petzel Gallery is located on the parlor floor and third floors of 35 East 67th Street New York, NY 10065. Gallery hours are Tuesday through Saturday from 10:00 AM–6:00 PM. For press inquires, please contact Ricky Lee at ricky@petzel.com, or call (212) 680-9467.