

KP Brehmer
Welt im Kopf [World in Mind]
Curated by Elisa R. Linn and Lennart Wolff

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

Two-part exhibition in collaboration with

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

“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?

Briefmarken [Stamps]

“At the beginning of 1966, I produced my first stamp in an oversize format, the well-known Hitler stamp, which first flooded Germany during the 1000-year Reich and later half of Europe. From this stamp, I developed a motif chain of about 50 sheets. The deliberate choice of motifs is not limited only to adopting existing stamps, but some motifs were simplified, made more explicit, and others were substantially changed by montage. In this process, the content was joined by a formal process. I wanted to relate the collector of fine art rather directly to the trivial world. I wanted to depict print collection as an especially perverted form of art consumerism. So I developed complicated variations of prints, with different print runs, stamped or unstamped, off colors, etc., things equally appealing to the stamp collector and the print collector. Seen in this way, the action is a kind of contribution to the sociology of art, and I hope the consumer of art will thus come to reflect on his situation in a salutary way.”

KP Brehmer



KP Brehmer
U.S. Air
1969

Cliché print on paper
17 x 13 1/4 inches
43 x 33.5 cm

Framed: 21 x 17 inches

Edition outside of the regular
edition of 20

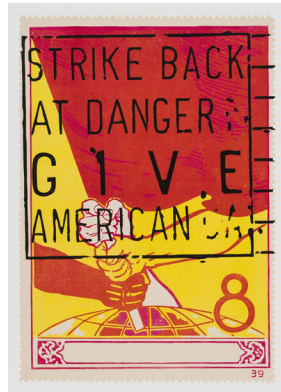


KP Brehmer
Brandenburger Tor (B 012)
[Brandenburg Gate]
1967

Cliché print on plastic
12 x 10 1/4 inches
30 x 26 cm

Framed: 16 x 14 1/4 inches

Edition outside of the regular
edition of 80



KP Brehmer
Give Art
1968

Cliché print on paper
19 3/4 x 13 3/4 inches
50 x 35 cm

Framed: 23 3/4 x 17 1/2 inches

Edition of 50 (outside the regular
edition of 70)

Signed and dated on verso

In the 1960s, Brehmer had been concerned with the possibilities of democratizing the consumption of art by making cliché prints that could be reproduced authentically and hence be sold in highly-affordable unlimited editions. When a lack of a popular market prompted Brehmer to “retreat to the play with the art collectors,” he started appropriating stamps. At the time, these “business cards of the state” (Walter Benjamin) or *Symbolwerte* [Symbolic values], as Brehmer would call them, were employed in the Cold War’s ideological competition that also played out in the so-called *Deutsch-Deutscher Postkrieg* [German-German postal war]. Here, stamps were issued to reinforce a collective national image and steer the self-perception of its subjects, to which Brehmer responded by exercising “ideological kleptomania” (Georg Jappe) through appropriating, collaging, and manipulating.

In 1967, he first exhibited his stamps at Galerie René Block in the Western part of the then-divided Berlin. With the stamps series, Brehmer developed what he would describe as multiple coded images: Ones that invite the viewer to consider not only motif and style of rendering but also color, printing technique, and choice of support material and edition. Most of the works in this series were made by Brehmer himself on his printing press, with perforations and faux postmarks added by hand. Here, he differentiated the stamps into museum, collector, or popular editions, producing single prints and series compiled into *Auswahlbeutel* [Assortments] or arranged as *Albumbogen* [Album sheet].

This *Albumbogen* [album sheet], a cliché print on cardboard, renders a manipulated 1963 commemorative stamp of John F. Kennedy in halftone and places the youth-enhancing product eye cream next to the president's portrait. As a recurring motif, Brehmer humorously "misunderstands" the purpose of the cosmetic product as one that "sharpens the visual senses," a metaphor he often used when describing a central concern of his practice: Helping the viewer unveil the visual strategies at play in the images that shape, or as Brehmer would say, manipulate, the perception of the world.



KP Brehmer
Kennedy & Eyecream (Briefmarkenblock) [Block of stamps]
1967
Cliché print on cardboard
39 1/2 x 54 1/2 inches
100.5 x 138.5 cm
Framed: 46 3/4 x 61 1/2 inches
(KP B 22/001)

Untitled (Stamps)

In this work, Brehmer plays with value and the persistent hierarchies of artistic media by attaching the stamp motives from a stretched-plastic to a rectangular format reminiscent of a painting. Arranged in a way that resembles a collector's album, the depicted stamps originated in the Soviet sphere but are manipulated by adding imprints from the other side of the Iron Curtain, such as American patriotic postmarks. For instance, Brehmer here appropriates the 1958 GDR stamp *Volkskampf gegen Atomtod* [People's fight against nuclear death] and replaces the agency's name with the *Western Deutsche Bundespost* [German Federal Post Office]. This stamp was issued at the time of the West German extra-parliamentary protest movement *Kampf dem Atomtod* [Fight against nuclear death]—a precursor to the student protests of the late 1960s—and campaigned against the military's armament with nuclear weapons.



KP Brehmer
Untitled (Stamps)
1968
Cliché print on plastic
Unframed:
63 3/4 x 45 inches
160 x 115 cm



KP Brehmer
Brief Nr. 7 [Letter No. 7]
1968-70
Acrylic on PVC
Unframed:
45 1/2 x 71 inches
120 x 180 cm

Aufsteller [Displays]

“The *Aufsteller* [display] is a fragment of a staged illusory world.”

KP Brehmer

In the mid-1960s, around the time of Brehmer's participation in exhibitions such as *Kapitalistischer Realismus* [Capitalist Realism], he started making *Aufsteller* [Displays] that he would also call *gefaltete Grafiken* [folded Graphics]. While some of these “expansions [of graphic art] into three-dimensionality” used large-edition two-dimensional *Trivialgrafiken* [Trivial Graphics] as their basis, only a few of these objects were eventually made. By laminating multi-color prints onto cardboard and folding and assembling them into stand-up displays, these works are akin to what furnished the shop windows that became synonymous with the consumer culture of postwar West Germany and the US. With added consumer goods, toothbrushes, suspenders, or cotton swabs, these works were not only an attack on the academic art establishment—reminiscent of American Pop art—but also a critique of capitalist society deemed apolitical and disengaged. While Brehmer shared an interest in the artificial world of technical images with fellow artist Richard Hamilton, with whom he frequently exchanged letters, instead of solely reproducing or commenting on social conditions, Brehmer saw a need for the artist to participate in shaping them.



KP Brehmer
Aufsteller 22 [Display 22]
1967

Cliché print on cardboard, laminated, tooth brush
(black/silver)
unframed
19 3/4 x 13 3/4 x 1.97 inches
50 x 35 x 5 cm
Edition 1/5



KP Brehmer
o. T.
1965
Cliché print on cardboard, laminated
Unframed:
19 3/4 x 24 3/4 x 1.77 inches
50 x 62.5 x 4.5 cm
Edition of 250

A recurring concern in the “*Aufsteller*” [Displays] series is the way women are depicted in advertisements and media in postwar Western societies, which Brehmer critiqued as conservative and misogynist. Here, through subverting displays and packaging of gendered products and sexist promotional imagery, he wanted viewers to become aware of the ideological constructs that guide mainstream visual culture.



KP Brehmer
Portrait Graziella I
1967
Cliché print on cardboard, cotton balls and plastic
39 1/2 x 33 1/2 x 2 inches
100 x 85 x 5 cm
Plexi-box: 39 1/2 x 39 1/2 x 3 1/2 inches
Edition 1/1 test print

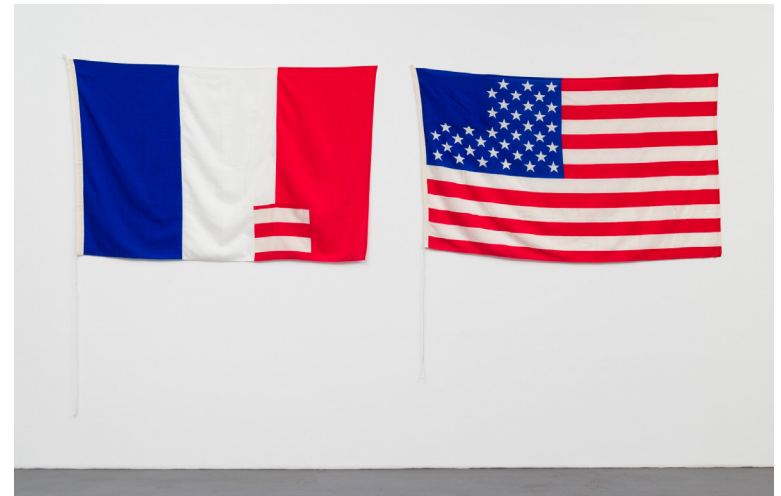
Flags and national symbols

Brehmer worked extensively with official state and national imagery and symbols, such as flags: conceptual representations of core values and ideological concepts espoused by the nation, where colors are imbued with specific symbolic and psychological meaning. Brehmer turned flags into diagrams by altering their composition and assigning new meanings to their colors. For documenta 5 in 1972, Brehmer adjusted the size of the color stripes in the postwar German flag according to wealth distribution. In the *Farbtest Nationalfarben* [Color Test National Colors], made between 1969-72, Brehmer handed out three different monochrome flags—each in one of the German national colors—to passersby and invited them to “choose and permanently change the national colors.” Brehmer recorded the choices and reactions and produced altered national flags from them.

In the 1970s, Brehmer made “corrections” to the US and French flags according to “genetic programs”—at the time, a relatively new scientific metaphor from the field of cell biology. Instead of producing a *flag-cum*-diagram on immigration and population data, here Brehmer connected the flag’s cultural meaning as an abstract representation of the ever-changing collective of a nation, composed of single individuals, to the flag’s very material composition—made from a fabric composed of single cells of cotton fiber. By interweaving cultural, political, and biological ideas, Brehmer sought to probe how society’s “processual” nature could be addressed beyond mere depiction by “forcing his production materials into parallel processes.”

In a later version of the work, which takes the form of a descriptive panel, Brehmer notes:

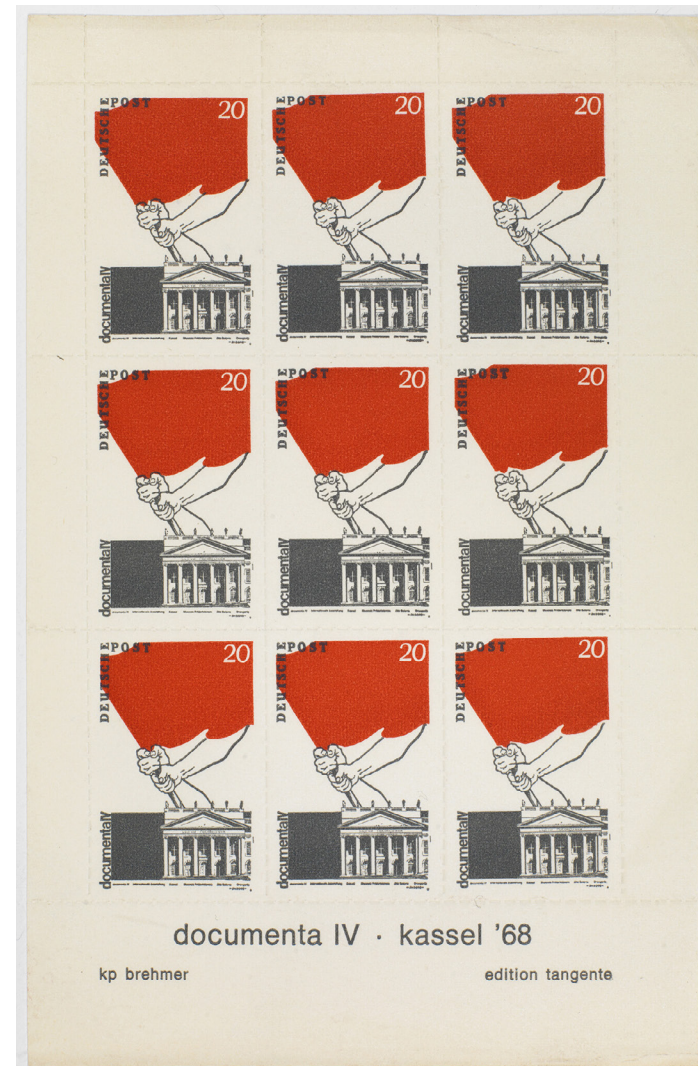
“If the flags of France and the US were composed of cells, transplanted flag material would develop according to its position and according to its genetically determined program. Undifferentiated material from the lower part of the US flag would have to form the pattern of stars on a white background in the upper-left corner of the Tricolore because the position information ‘upper left’ retrieves this behavior from the cell’s genetic program. Conversely, undifferentiated cells from the upper-left corner of the Tricolore would result in an inverted striped field in the right half of the US flag because the Tricolore cells interpret the position information ‘right half’ partly as ‘white’ partly as ‘red.’”



KP Brehmer
*Correction of the Flags of France and America on the
Basis of Genetic Programs (Version 2)*
1970s
Fabric, two parts
57 x 35 1/2 inches; 57 1/2 x 37 3/4 inches
145 x 90 cm; 146 x 96 cm

Documenta-Block [Documenta souvenir sheet]

In the wake of the student protests of 1968, the documenta council, responsible for the 4th edition in Kassel, was confronted with a manifesto published by the so-called INTERFUNKTION TEAM FOR ART PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDIES COLOGNE that criticized documenta as being authoritarian and conservative for not including any Fluxus, Happening, or installation art. The collective protest culminated in a magazine that featured artist contributions by Chris Reinecke, Jörg Immendorff, Brehmer, and others. Brehmer made a fictitious stamp—the *Fridericianum* museum building below a red flag—that pitted what is seemingly Soviet propaganda imagery against the anti-communist hysteria of the West German mainstream.



KP Brehmer
Documenta-Block [Documenta souvenir sheet]
1968
Offset print on paper
Unframed:
5.91 x 3.94 inches
15 x 10 cm

Walkings 1969–1970

Film No. 3 (No. 2)

18 m film material—18 m distance covered continually approaching a wall. The film is over when the camera hits the wall, and 18 meters of film have been shot.

Brouwn Film (No. 3)

On a beautiful day, Stanley Brouwn and I went this way. We agreed to film the route taken. This Way Brouwn.

Victory (No. 1)

A person walks from Victory Column towards the camera. The camera angle is selected in such a way that the person completely obscures the column after walking approx. 50 meters. The film is over when person and column match exactly.

Registration (No. 4)

In a first exposure, the reproduction of an object is filmed. In a double exposure, an attempt is made to fit the real object into the reproduction. The film comes to an end when the original and its reproduction match.

OUT — IN (No. 6)

Out (Imaginary)

On a city map, streets that form the word 'out' are selected. The word is spelled out by driving in a car with the camera rolling. In (imaginary), the word 'in' is written in the sky with the camera as it rolls.

PARALLEL — IDENTITY

Distance covered: 50 m, walking speed: 1 m / 6 sec.

parallel

50 m film material, film speed (25 fps): 1m / 6 sec.

The length of the film material is identical to the distance walked in the film.

Brehmer summarizes the films in his “*Walkings*” series with these words above.

Since the mid-1960s, KP Brehmer has produced more than thirty conceptual short films that can be associated with Structural film, Performance Art, and Fluxus and preceded or expanded his physical artworks.

Between 1969 and the 1970s, Brehmer shot six black-and-white 16 mm films in West Berlin. Moving through the divided city, capturing walked distances, monuments, and significant sites—such as the *Siegessäule* [Victory Column] and the Berlin Wall—Brehmer collapsed the structures and representational properties of the built environment with the medium of film itself.

In the 1960s, Brehmer met artist Stanley Brouwn through curator and gallerist René Block. Block had shown both artists and had invited Brouwn to Berlin, where he made a version of his seminal work *This Way Brouwn*, for which Brouwn had asked pedestrians for directions through the divided city. The two artists’ encounter resulted in *Walking No. 3, On a beautiful day Stanley and I went this way . . .*, for which Brouwn had asked Brehmer to produce an exact film document of the way that both had walked through the city. While Brouwn demanded to be eschewed as the piece’s coauthor, the resulting film channels the incident into larger questions about authorship and ownership over the production of technical images and their circulation.

In 1976, in conjunction with Brehmer's exhibition *Time* at René Block Gallery in SoHo, and the series "Made," *Walkings 1–6* was screened alongside works by Rebecca Horn and K. H. Hödicke at Anthology Film Archives in New York.

Walking No. 1, Victory, 1969/70
16 mm film, b/w, sound, 1:46 min


Walking No. 2, Mauer [Wall], 1969/70
16 mm film, b/w, sound, 1:53 min

Walking No. 3, On a beautiful day Stanley and I went this way . . .,
1969/70
16 mm film, b/w, sound, 3:06 min

Walking No. 4, Passer [Registration], 1969/70
16 mm film, b/w, sound, 2:37 min

Walking No. 5, Parallel / Identity, 1969/70
16 mm film, b/w, sound, 2:04 min

Walking No. 6, Out / in Imaginary, 1969/70
16 mm film, b/w, sound, 3:44 min



Made in Berlin
Films by Rebecca Horn
KH Hödicke
KP Brehmer
Saturday, May 1st, 1976, 7 pm to midnight

7:00 pm	KP Brehmer Walkings, a.o.
7:50 pm	KH Hödicke Made in New York, Tartaruga, a.o.
8:45 pm	Rebecca Horn Berlin-Dreaming Under Water
9:30 pm	KH Hödicke Pendel, Easter Be In, a.o.
10:20 pm	Rebecca Horn Performances II
11:05 pm	KP Brehmer Mama, Kleist, a.o.

René Block Gallery and
Anthology Film Archives
80 Wooster Street, New York 10012



KP Brehmer
Walkings 1-6, 1970; courtesy: Estate of KP Brehmer, Berlin, and Common Room Film Produktion,
Helmut Wietz, Berlin. All images courtesy: Estate of KP Brehmer, Berlin, unless otherwise stated; photo-
graphs: Marcus J. Leith



KP Brehmer
Walkings 1-6, 1970; courtesy: Estate of KP Brehmer, Berlin, and Common Room Film Produktion,
Helmut Wietz, Berlin. All images courtesy: Estate of KP Brehmer, Berlin, unless otherwise stated; photo-
graphs: Marcus J. Leith

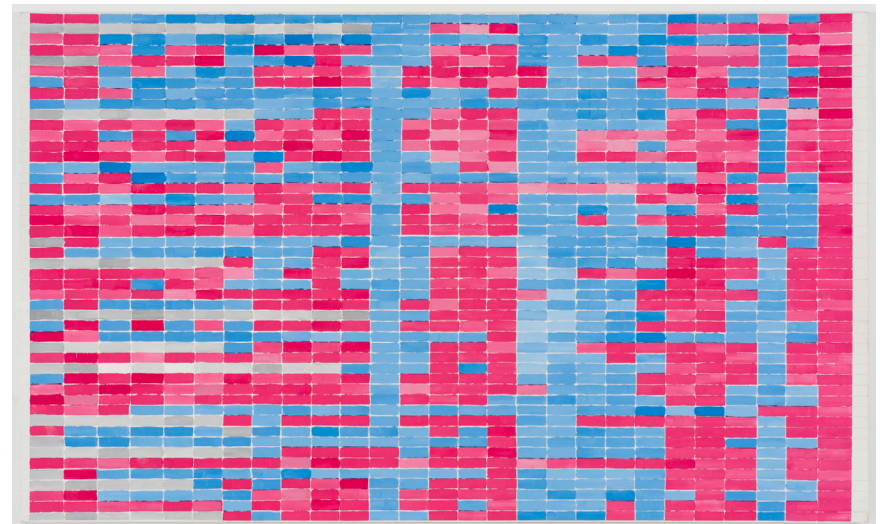
Development of Political Parties 1868 – 1972 (USA)

“The view that the exactness of a statement depends on the exactness of its expression is certainly plausible, but it is nonetheless a prejudice. Instead, the accuracy of a statement depends on avoiding this burden. In physical measurements, for example, one pays careful attention to the margin of error; accuracy then consists not in trying to reduce that margin of error to zero, nor in pretending that there is no margin of error, but rather in acknowledging that it exists.”

KP Brehmer

This seemingly abstract work is based on historic election results. It traces the development of the US two-party system from the Reconstruction era’s first election until President Richard Nixon’s election. As often in Brehmer’s work, different versions of the work exist in different media, rendering styles, and degrees of abstraction. A drawing on standard graph paper made the same year includes detailed legends, dates, and descriptions and reveals that the horizontal axis is structured by election years, while the vertical axis is organized in alphabetical order by state.

In *Development of Political Parties 1868–1972*, Brehmer purposefully eschews any additional descriptions in favor of a painting that performs a subversive mimicry of aesthetic modernist tropes. Here line, plane, and color become concrete manifestations of the abstractions that constitute a representative system of power. At the time—and not by coincidence—the very avant-garde art Brehmer referenced here furnished the command-and-control centers of Western corporate hegemony.



KP Brehmer
Development of Political Parties 1868 – 1972 (USA)
1977
Acrylic on canvas
Unframed:
47 1/2 x 78 1/2 inches
120 x 210 cm
Signed, titled and dated on verso



KP Brehmer
Ohne Titel (untitled)
1970s
Emulsion paint on canvas
4 boards, each: 6.3 x 9.6 inches; 16 x 24.5 cm
Sticks: 18.9 x 2 x 2 inches; 48 x 5 x 5 cm

This undated work was made in the 1970s. Around the time Brehmer was working on *Seele und Gefühl eines Arbeiters* [Soul and Feeling of a Worker], which used a study of industrial and organizational psychology on workers' emotions and productivity, and on the *Tagebücher* [Diaries], which comprised drawings and a publication in which the artists recorded and visualized his emotional states. The work in the exhibition brings together Brehmer's interest in "raising awareness" of the sociocultural and ideological dimension of color and the abstractions of Capitalist societies, e.g., systems of data collection: quantification and qualifications of lived experience. Thin wooden sticks display the artist's daily self-evaluation concerning four central facets of modern everyday life. These facets are defined and assigned to color in four paintings that act as a legend: *Geld* (money) in yellow, *Arbeit* (work) in blue, *Körper* (body) in green, *Emotion* (emotion) in red.

Four panels read from left to right and top to bottom:

yellow: *Geld* [money]
blue: *Arbeit* [work]
green: *Körper* [body]
red: *Emotion* [emotion]

Thermografien [Thermal Images]

“Extension of representational properties in painting. First heat paintings since 1973. As a new dimension, heat is included in the painting. All bodies radiate heat in the form of invisible infrared radiation. It can be caught with infrared devices and converted into visible images. This is done using high-sensitivity detectors, which convert the thermal radiation into electrical signals, which are then amplified and displayed on a screen. These images are the ‘model’ for my paintings. Thermal images look alienated compared to conventional photographs. Warm persons and objects appear bright, less warm ones dark.”

KP Brehmer

From the mid-1970s to the late 1980s, Brehmer made figurative works on canvas or paper by pouring or painting emulsion or watercolor. These works are based on thermal images from medical diagnostics published in the German popular magazine *Stern*. Rather than marking a shift to painting in Brehmer’s practice, the subject of these works is still how “trivial” technical images shape the individual and collective perception of reality. Brehmer makes this clear when adding below an earlier painting from this series: “This is not a modern painting, but a ‘heat photograph.’” Here, Brehmer returns to a core approach in his practice, which is forcing his artworks into parallel processes that regard the development of both artistic and technological image-making amidst the backdrop of wider societal change (a new wave of lifestyle consumerism and the emergence of a neoliberal order) that trumpets an ideology of individualism. When rendering the appropriated thermal images by brush, he comments on the return of painterly subjectivity—the figure of the singular author depicting the world around them, like the artists in the German neo-expressionist movement *Neue Wilde*—against the relentless advancement of the gaze of the apparatus, which penetrates, quantifies, and qualifies the innermost emotions, as well as bodily and mental states.

In this heat image of a male individual, Brehmer represents the body’s different intensities of heat radiation by using black, red, and gold—the colors of the German flag—prompting the work’s title: *German man in profile*.



KP Brehmer
Deutscher Mann im Profil [German man in profile]
1984
Acrylic on paper
31 1/2 x 23 1/2 inches
80 x 60 cm
Framed: 37 x 26 1/2 inches



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*.