

Schwules Museum*

Press Release | Exhibition Opening

Stage Design: Peter Kothe. An East-West German Life.

16 July – 17 October 2016. Opening with Wolfgang Theis on 15 July



This exhibition of Peter Kothe's life and work is a continuation of our series about "queer" stage designers. So far, the Schwules Museum* has honored Paul Seltenhammer and Rochus Gliese with exhibitions, both men had major stylistic influences on the Berlin theater scene. In this new exhibition, we explore Peter Kothe's career and life which both began in East Germany.

After studying architecture, Kothe began to work as a professional stage designer for East German TV. From 1977 onwards, Kothe worked at the Kleist Theater in Frankfurt an der Oder, at the Elbe-Elster Theater in Wittenberg, and at the Thomas Münzer Theater in Eisleben. Also, Kothe took on jobs at many different theaters, including Anklam, Greifswald, the German-Sorbian Theater in Bautzen, and the cabaret Kugelblitz in Magdeburg. Although Kothe did not have had a big artistic during this time, the provinces offered many possibilities for

improvisation and innovation.

In 1976 Kothe, having wanted to expand his artistic horizon, applied for a visa to travel into "capitalistic" foreign countries. His application was rejected, and his request landed him on a government watch list. On 22 October 1984 he was expatriated.

In 1985, the employment office of West Berlin sent him to work at the municipal theaters of Bielefeld, where he was employed until 1988. With the fall of the wall, Kothe's old East German "playgrounds" became accessible for him once more. He moved to Berlin and worked as a freelancer there from then on.

Thanks to a collaboration with the Stadtmuseum Berlin, to whom Kothe handed over his artistic estate in 1996, the Schwules Museum* is now able to show his extensive career as a stage designer. Peter Kothe served the whole scope of East and West

PR contact: Jan Schnorrenberg & Dr. Kevin Clarke

Public relations, Schwules Museum*, Lützowstraße 73, 10785 Berlin
T +49 (0) 30 69 59 92 52, presse@schwulesmuseum.de, www.schwulesmuseum.de

German municipal theaters: from children's theater to spoken theater to opera and operetta. He was also responsible for both costumes and set design for Rosa von Praunheim's films *Ich bin meine eigene Frau* and *Der Einstein des Sex*.

Kothe's remaining (private) estate was given to the Schwules Museum* by his partner Wolfgang Schulze. It allows for the reconstruction of his entire life between the two German postwar states.

Peter Kothe's life as a gay man is illustrated with photos shot by Herbert Tobias and with numerous private snapshots from his time in East Berlin from the late 1950s onwards, other photos are from his later life in West Berlin's queer subcultures. Additionally, there are costumes and fanciful hats which Kothe wore for family dinners, street festivals, and Pride marches. There are school reports from his primary school, from his high school days at Humboldt-Oberschule in Potsdam, from dance school and from university, but there are also socialist certificates as "Best Worker" and many letters.

Next to his theater career, Kothe worked as an East German fashion photo model in the 1970s. He illustrated children's books and was at home in the art scene. The documents of his expatriation from East Germany and of his new beginning as a refugee in the West tell an almost "everyday story" of massive state control in the DDR.

The Schwules Museum* had promised Peter Kothe a homage and an exhibition for many years. He had been in contact with various curators. Unfortunately, preparations did not really move forward until in 2015 Wolfgang Theis met with Kothe to discuss this project. Sadly, Kothe became very ill after only two meetings with Mr. Theis and had to be hospitalized. He died on 23 August, 2015. This is the first exhibition dedicated to his like and oeuvre.

Stage Design: Peter Kothe. An East-West German Life is an exhibition of the Schwules Museums* in cooperation with the Stadtmuseum Berlin, it is curated by Wolfgang Theis. The exhibition runs from 15 July to 17 October, 2016 at Lützowstraße, Berlin-Mitte.

STIFTUNG STADT **M**USEUM BERLIN