

**Industrial Transnationalism at the 44<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale:  
Reinhard Mucha's *Das Deutschlandgerät* (The Germany Device)  
Althea Ruoppo**

**Abstract**

In 1990, Reinhard Mucha, together with the photographer duo Bernd and Hilla Becher, was West Germany's representative at the 44<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale. With his site-specific installation, *Das Deutschlandgerät*, Mucha drew attention to a striking parallel between the long manufacturing histories of his native Rhine-Ruhr region of western Germany and the Veneto region of northern Italy.

This paper contends that *Das Deutschlandgerät* reveals the artist's development of an industrial transnational approach to artmaking. Through the medium and strategy of sculptural assemblage, Mucha treated the West German Pavilion of the Federal Republic as a space of intercultural encounter in which two post-industrial societies could converge both conceptually and materially. In 2002, and again in 2021, the artist adapted this project for its permanent display in the Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen's grand neo-Renaissance building, K21 Ständehaus, effectively bringing two distinct but related regions in Germany and Italy into dialogue twice more.

**Keywords**

Reinhard Mucha, *Das Deutschlandgerät*, Assemblage, Industrial transnationalism, West German Pavilion, Venice Biennale

# Industrial Transnationalism at the 44<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale: Reinhard Mucha's *Das Deutschlandgerät* (The Germany Device)

Althea Ruoppo

Art may be treated like coal: Its practical value is not self-evident and certainly not at first glance.<sup>1</sup>

In the summer of 1990, German sculptor Reinhard Mucha (born Düsseldorf, 1950) represented the Federal Republic of Germany at the 44<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale with an expansive sculptural room installation titled *Das Deutschlandgerät* (The Germany Device) [fig. 1].<sup>2</sup> This paper argues that the work by Mucha should be seen as a foundational example of the artist's development of a German transnational sculptural aesthetic that is marked by his deep interest in industrial heritage.<sup>3</sup> It displays Mucha's profound reverence for the common manufacturing history of his native Rhine-Ruhr region in the German state of North Rhine-Westphalia and an interest in finding a common ground with another post-industrial society in the Veneto region of northern Italy.<sup>4</sup> Mucha, then, aims to present his audiences with a transnational view of former industrial landscapes from a holistic and comparative perspective of two distinct but related regions of the world.

1

Reinhard Mucha, letter to Reinhard Richter, Operations Manager of the Grimberg 3/4 Mine, 4709 Bergkamen-Oberaden, Pantenweg 6, February 13, 1991, "Letters and Texts 1980–2021", in Reinhard Mucha, *Mucha: Holiday in Space / Urlaub im All* (Cologne: Walther and Franz Koenig Verlag, 2023), Volume 2: 339.

2

The work is now called *Das Deutschlandgerät*, *Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, K21 Ständehaus, Düsseldorf* [2021], [2002], *XLIV Biennale di Venezia, Deutscher Pavillon, Venedig* 1990 (The Germany Device, North Rhine-Westphalia Art Collection, K21 Ständehaus, Düsseldorf [2021], [2002], 44<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale, German Pavilion, Venice 1990). The installation's extensive title refers to its exhibition contexts (the North Rhine-Westphalia Art Collection in the former Ständehaus, Düsseldorf, Germany; and the German Pavilion at the 44<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy) as well as its dates of creation (1990) and modification (2002 and 2021). According to Mucha's dating system, no brackets around the year indicate when an artwork was first made, while square brackets indicate when it was revised or adapted. For the sake of clarity, hereafter I refer to this installation simply as *Das Deutschlandgerät*.

3

Mucha's engagement with industrial transnationalism is not a distinctly German strategy. One could make a similar argument for artists from other countries who have explored the subjects and materials of industrial cultures and nations and/or probed similarities between them, including the Canadian Edward Burtnytsky (1955), the British Jeremy Deller (1966-) and Bill Woodrow (1948-), the Czech Josef Koudelka (1938-) and the Indian Prabhakar Pachpute (1986-).

4

The study of industrial heritage and deindustrialization processes in the late 20th century in a global perspective is a relatively new field. My analysis is aided by recent work by scholars of urban and environmental studies and social history, including Alice Mah, Donald K. Carter, Stefan Berger, Christian Wicke, Jana Golombek, and Stefano Musso.

fig. 1

**Reinhard Mucha**  
**Das Deutschlandgerät, XLIV**  
*Biennale di Venezia,*  
*Deutscher Pavillon, Venedig*  
**1990** (partial view)  
**The Germany Device, XLIV**  
*Biennale di Venezia, German*  
*Pavilion, Venice 1990*  
 Multi-part sculptural room  
 installation  
 Installation view, La Biennale di  
 Venezia (German Pavilion  
 with Bernd and Hilla Becher),  
 Venice 1990  
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 muchaArchive.



The following analysis will show how various national cultures and societies are inextricably linked and mutually implicated in Mucha's work. It will deliberately combine the terms German—which designates artworks that specifically refer to the history and culture of Germany—and transnational—used to describe sculptures that bring together identifiable forms and subject matter that relate to two or more nations. My use of the latter designation primarily draws on art historian Caroline Jones's definition of the prefix "trans", which is used "to cut across or dissolve [the borders of nation states], even as it depends on their infrastructures". For Jones, the trans "can be regional, hemispheric or global; what is consistent is that it seeks to chart a vector across national or international circuits of exchange, establishing alternative relations".<sup>5</sup> Rather than seeking to identify a definitive "German" aesthetic in Mucha's *Das Deutschlandgerät*, the aim is to evaluate the artist's sculptural installation in terms of its national *and* international character.<sup>6</sup> His treatment of the German transnational is a result of the medium and strategy of assemblage: a three-dimensional artwork comprised of a variety of seemingly incompatible elements that are drawn from diverse contexts.<sup>7</sup> Mucha's

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When Jones coined the notion of "trans-objects" to describe global artworks created since the 1960s by artists who are acutely aware of polarities between their national/cultural identity and universalist ambitions, she used the term almost exclusively in relation to Brazilian artists Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica. See Caroline Jones, "Transnational Openings", in *The Global Work of Art: World's Fairs, Biennials, and the Aesthetics of Experience* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 153-155.

6

James Hodkinson and Benedict Schofield have demonstrated that the question of how one can define and evaluate the local particularities and qualities of a specifically German-language culture within a globalized public sphere is inevitably fraught. Still, Elisabeth Herrmann, Carrie Smith-Prei, and Stuart Taberner have argued that we can avoid what Ulrich Beck has termed "methodological nationalism" by holding nation and world in tension with one another. See James Hodkinson and Benedict Schofield (eds.), *German in the World: The Transnational and Global Contexts of German Studies* (Rochester: Camden House, 2020); Elisabeth Herrmann, Carrie Smith-Prei, and Stuart Taberner (eds.), *Transnationalism in Contemporary German-Language Literature* (Rochester, New York: Boydell & Brewer, 2015), 2.

7

Although the term assemblage dates from the early 1950s, when the French artist Jean Dubuffet (1901-1985) referred to his collages of butterfly wings as "*assemblages d'empreintes*", the technique has roots in the early twentieth century, particularly in Cubist collage and Dada's readymades. This art form gained greater recognition thanks to the Museum of Modern Art's survey exhibition *The Art of Assemblage* in 1961. Following the Hirshhorn Museum's 2006 exhibition *The Uncertainty of Objects and Ideas: Recent Sculpture* and the New Museum's *Unmonumental: The Object in the 21st Century* a year later, several scholars have emphasised the centrality of sculptural assemblage in the work of international artists.

specific interdisciplinary approach is called herein “industrial transnationalism”, a sculptural strategy in which the artist juxtaposes disparate everyday objects, industrial, and commercial materials, and cultural references and titles from divergent national contexts to draw parallels between two countries’ industrial cities or regions. Much of the artist’s work from the last thirty-five years interlaces references to some of the most important former manufacturing regions in the industrialised West, including Germany’s Rhine-Ruhr; northern Italy’s Piedmont, Veneto, and Lombardy regions; and the so-called American Rust Belt, confirming that *Das Deutschlandgerät* is a pivotal sculptural installation which epitomises the artist’s ongoing industrial transnational approach to artmaking.<sup>8</sup>

In 1990, curator Philip Monk stopped short of claiming *Das Deutschlandgerät*’s transnational character when he argued that the installation was a site of exchange, where two contexts, Düsseldorf and Venice, were “transposed”. “In presentation”, Monk argued, the conditions of “production [the site of the studio] and display [the site of the pavilion] intersect or, rather, each is buried in the other and their relations are obscured by the deliberate inversion of what is public and what is private”.<sup>9</sup> For Monk, *Das Deutschlandgerät* demonstrates reciprocity between studio and pavilion, but these locations are ultimately masked by each other and imperceptible to the viewer.<sup>10</sup> Contrarily, this essay posits that Mucha created a dialogical exchange between two distinct and identifiable places. In 2018, art historian Graham Bader cited scholar and critic David Joselit’s article “Painting Beside Itself” (2009) in his discussion of how *Das Deutschlandgerät* and other assemblages by Mucha are “transitive”, non-autonomous, and conceptually expansive entities that belong to larger shared material and symbolic networks, from the railroad to electronic media.<sup>11</sup> Most recently, in a catalogue essay published to accompany the Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen’s comprehensive retrospective exhibition of Mucha’s works from the past forty years, art historian Sebastian Egenhofer considered the work’s “spatialised memory”, or its commemoration of a geographic-historical reality spanning the German Empire to the Federal Republic of Germany.<sup>12</sup> *Das Deutschlandgerät* was variously called a “technical unit (much like a car battery)”, a “kind of memorial or monument”, a “three-dimensional collage”, a “topological and semantic network”, and a “constellation of site references”.<sup>13</sup> The proposed interpretation of how Mucha’s work embodies interactions among industrial nations and cultures and their infrastructures of production engages with and expands upon these authors’ analyses of the complex system of relations at play in the artist’s sculptural installations.

8

Other sculptural installations by Mucha that fall under my category of the industrial transnational include *Mutterseelenallein* (All Alone) [2009], [1991] [1989] 1979; *The Wirtschaftswunder, To the People of Pittsburgh III* [2016] 1991; and *Insel der Seligen* (Island of the Blessed) [2024] 2016.

9

Philip Monk, “Transposed Contexts: Reinhard Mucha (1990)”, <http://www.philipmonk.com/reinhard-mucha-1990>, last accessed July 2024.

10

Monk’s essay, originally commissioned for the official publication that accompanied Mucha’s representation of West Germany at the 44<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale, never appeared because it was the artist’s wish to have a single text in the standard biennale languages of publication: German, Italian, and English. See Monk, “Transposed Contexts”. Instead, two excerpts were published from Rolf Ostendorf’s *Eisenbahn-Knotenpunkt Ruhrgebiet: Die Entwicklungsgeschichte der Revierbahnen seit 1838* (Railway Junction in the Ruhr Area: The History of the Development of the District Railways since 1838) (Motorbuch-Verlag Stuttgart, 1979).

11

See Graham Bader, “Trains of Thought”, *Artforum* 56, no. 5 (January 2018), 188–197.

12

The *Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen* in Düsseldorf staged *Der Mucha—Ein Anfangsverdacht* (*The Mucha—An Initial Suspicion*) (September 3, 2022–January 22, 2023) at its two locations, K20 and K21. This was the first major exhibition of Mucha’s work since 1987, when it was shown in the double solo exhibitions *Kasse beim Fahrer* in Bern and *Nordausgang* in Basel.

13

Sebastian Egenhofer, “Spatialized Memory: Reinhard Mucha, *Das Deutschlandgerät*, [2021], [2002] 1990”, in Susanne Gaensheimer and Falk Wolf (eds.), *Der Mucha: Ein Anfangsverdacht* (Munich: Hirmer Verlag, 2022), 169–183.

The transnational has become a dominant paradigm in German Studies, radically expanding and enriching the field beyond its traditional, national roots.<sup>14</sup> However, the concept of transnationalism has most often been used as an analytical tool in the reading of German literature, comics, film, and music.<sup>15</sup> By questioning the interpretive limits of the term, the article sets forth a more comprehensive understanding of transnational production by a postwar German-born sculptor. At the same time, the emphasis on assemblage as a transnational art form expands upon previous studies of contemporary sculpture and offers a theoretical framework for examining artworks that reflect the complex entanglements of multiple geo-political, cultural, social, and economic settings.<sup>16</sup> This approach to Mucha's works offers a model for thinking about the complexities of place and belonging in contemporary global art. It seeks to bring forth new ways of understanding how international artists have found resonances with other nations in their cultural heritage.

Tracing the industrial transnational in sculptural assemblage deepens our understanding of the complexities of identity formation and self-representation during the Cold War and beyond. Mucha possesses a strong sense of belonging to Düsseldorf, the Rhine-Ruhr, and to Germany, and his works preserve strong bonds of affiliation with his city, region, and country. Though he does not deny his biography and cultural origins, at times he does move away from the constraints of an unequivocal German identity. For example, in an undated conversation with the art critic of a German magazine, Mucha pointed out other possibilities, explaining that his name was Polish: "Polish has been influenced by Slavic and Romance languages. The name Mucha is of Romance origins".<sup>17</sup> Mucha seems to subvert questions of nationalism by looking at the non-German ancestry of his family name.<sup>18</sup> He complicates biographical and cultural affiliation as a default means for one to define an artist or to frame their practice. In 2009, he told art critic Hans-Joachim Müller that "Making binding public statements about it would amount to nipping the questions my work poses to me in the bud".<sup>19</sup> On one hand, *Das Deutschlandgerät's* "Germanness" seems to contradict its own transnationalism, while on the other it parallels the presence of the transnational in the work. This sculptural installation permits a consideration of how a postwar German artist can simultaneously conform to and exceed the strictures of their national identity.

14

See Konrad H. Jarausch, "From National to Transnational German Studies: Some Historical Reflections, 1977-2017", *German Studies Review* 39, no. 3 (2016): 493-503; and Celia Applegate and Frank Trommler, "The Project of German Studies: Disciplinary Strategies and Intellectual Practices", *German Studies Review* 39, no. 3 (2016): 471-492.

15

See Kirkland A. Fulk (ed.), *Sounds German: Popular Music in Postwar Germany at the Crossroads of the National and Transnational* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2021); Randall Halle, *German Film After Germany: Toward a Transnational Aesthetic* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008); Christina Kraenzle and Julia Ludewig, "Transnationalism in German comics", *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics* 11, no. 1 (2020): 1-9; and Elizabeth Nijdam, "Transnational Girlhood and the Politics of Style in German Manga", *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics* 11, no. 1 (2019): 31-51.

16

Over the last twenty years, art historians have shown that the medium is fundamentally elastic and without fixed boundaries, but they have not identified the emergence of transnational sculpture or how it specifically relates to assemblage. See Martha Buskirk, *The Contingent Object of Contemporary Art* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003); Judith Collins, *Sculpture Today* (London; New York: Phaidon Press, 2007); and Anna Moszynska, *Sculpture Now* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2013). More recent studies have been limited to the ecological and ethical dimensions of sculptural assemblage. See Dan Adler, *Contemporary Sculpture and the Critique of Display Cultures: Tainted Goods* (New York: Routledge, 2019); Amanda Boetzkes, *Plastic Capitalism: Contemporary Art and the Drive to Waste* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2019); Jaimey Hamilton Faris, *Uncommon Goods: Global Dimensions of the Readymade* (Chicago: Intellect, 2013); and Gillian Whiteley, *Junk: Art and the Politics of Trash* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2011).

17

Patrick Frey, "Reinhard Mucha—Connections", trans. Catherine Schelbert, *Parkett* 12 (1987), 115.

18

Germany's Rhine-Ruhr region has a growing middle class and a large working class as well as a sizeable group of immigrant laborers and their descendants (12%). The current immigrant community comes predominantly from Poland and the Mediterranean countries. See Linde Egberts, *Chosen Legacies: Heritage in Regional Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 139.

19

Hans-Joachim Müller, "Raum und Zeit", *Monopol* (November 2009), 59. All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

**Das Deutschlandgerät in Venice, 1990**

Mucha was selected, together with the photographer duo Bernd (German, 1931–2007) and Hilla Becher (German, 1931–2015), for the West German Pavilion of the Federal Republic in the summer of 1990, specifically because of his works' attachment to his place of residence and work. All three artists were chosen by commissioner Klaus Bußmann, director of the Westphalian State Museum of Art & Cultural History in Münster (1985–2004), together with Kasper König, organiser of Sculpture Project Münster.<sup>20</sup> In his introductory text for the general catalogue for the 44<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale, *Dimensione Futuro: L'artista e lo spazio* (Dimensions of the Future: The Artist and Space), Bußmann explained his choice of artists that lived “in the same place, Düsseldorf...[and were] exposed to the decisive influence of the industrial culture of the Bundesland North Rheinland-Westphalia”.<sup>21</sup>

Despite Mucha's and the Bechers' strong attachments to the local, Bußmann acknowledged that “their artistic viewpoints are linked to traditions that abroad are perhaps not associated with German art, as Romanticism and Expressionism are”. “Nevertheless”, he wrote, “[they are] part of the legitimate inheritance of German Illusionism [...] which found forceful international expression in Bauhaus and *Neue Sachlichkeit* during the Twenties”.<sup>22</sup> Meanwhile, in the brochure for the West German Pavilion, Bußmann noted that his selection was driven by an interest in artistic positions that dealt with architecture as well as the relationship between formal aesthetics and industrial purpose. He reiterated his belief that the resulting sculptural and photographic installations made the “great tradition of the New Objectivity of the 1920s fruitful for our present”.<sup>23</sup> The subjects and forms of the Bechers' and Mucha's works were undoubtedly influenced by the industrial architecture of their shared native region. Yet, it is limiting to suggest that these artists' projects only focused on the cultural and technological history of the Rhineland-Ruhr area and strictly recalled early 20<sup>th</sup>-century German photographic precedents like Karl Blossfeldt, Albert Renger-Patzsch, and August Sander.<sup>24</sup> Rather, their artistic practices equally respond to large parts of Western Europe and North America and resonate with the serial approach of contemporary Minimalism and Conceptual art.<sup>25</sup>

In the West German Pavilion's side rooms, the Bechers' display of black-and-white photographs from their *Wassertürme* (Water Towers) (1960–1990)

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Mucha had previously exhibited his work with the Bechers in a group show with another West German artist, Günther Förg (German, 1952–2013), at Luhring Augustine & Hodes Gallery, New York (November 19–December 20, 1986). In 1978, as a kind of tribute to the artist couple, Mucha had made a diptych consisting of two light boxes with two black-and-white large-format transparencies with the German word for photograph, *Foto*, superimposed on what are presumably details of the Bechers' pictures of industrial structures in Leipzig, Germany.

21

Klaus Bußmann, “German Federal Republic”, in Simonetta Rasponi (ed.), *Dimensione Futuro: L'artista e Lo Spazio: XLIV Esposizione Internazionale D'arte, La Biennale di Venezia; Catalogo Generale 1990* (Venice: Edizioni Biennale, 1990), 160.

22

Bußmann, “German Federal Republic”, 160.

23

Klaus Bußmann, “Reinhard Mucha: ‘Das Deutschlandgerät’ 1990”, in *XLIV Biennale Venedig 1990: Bernd und Hilla Becher, Reinhard Mucha: Deutscher Pavillon, 27. Mai bis 30. September* (Milan: n.p., 1990), n.p.

24

For an interdisciplinary and cross-cultural study of the formal and ideological links and divergences between industrial imagery in Germany and the United States in the 1920s and from the 1970s to 1990s, see Kim Sichel (ed.), *From Icon to Irony: German and American Industrial Photography* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1995).

25

The 2022–2023 traveling retrospective on Bernd and Hilla Becher shed light on how the artist couple developed their ideas in tandem with American sculptors like Carl Andre and Sol LeWitt, who collected their photographs. See Jeff L. Rosenheim, *Bernd & Hilla Becher* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2022).

series extended beyond Germany in both content and message.<sup>26</sup> They exhibited not only examples from the built environment within their home country but also those from across Western Europe and the United States.<sup>27</sup> 340 prints were serially arranged in a grid of three rows of three in order to encourage the viewer to consider the photographs as typologies of comparable structures with the same functions, each with their own regional idiosyncrasies, resulting in what the Met's curator of photography, Jeff Rosenheim, has called a "sociological" perspective that allows one to distinguish the "individual" from the "family".<sup>28</sup> The duo's innovative formal arrangements juxtaposed single structures from many different countries, presenting a "global view of industrialisation" that pictures the transnational homogeneity of disappearing industrial architecture, from blast furnaces and winding towers to gas tanks and grain silos.<sup>29</sup>

The Bechers' photographic account of the aesthetic relations between constituent parts of a series was mainly surface-level, however, because the two artists framed their subjects in a frontal manner that isolated them from their surrounding environments and freed them from any associative meaning. By contrast, Mucha's own contribution in the middle of the West German Pavilion's entrance hall brought a more detailed personal, historical, and geographical consciousness to bear on the materials at hand.<sup>30</sup> The artist installed a rectangular 5 x 8 metre inner chamber whose dimensions corresponded exactly to his primary studio space on the first floor of *Kölner Straße* (Cologne Street) 170, Oberbilk, Düsseldorf, where he has been working since 1981.<sup>31</sup> Located a short walk from the city's main train station, the four-story stone and brick clad building is an architectural witness to the industrial history of a former working-class manufacturing district that is now home to an upscale residential neighborhood.<sup>32</sup>

The memorial plaque above the building's mailboxes tells passersby that it first housed the main plant of a railway equipment and streetcar manufacturer called the *Düsseldorfer Eisenbahnbedarf AG* (Düsseldorf Railway Equipment Corp.), formerly *Carl Weyer & Co. Waggonfabrik* (Carl Weyer & Co. Carriage Factory), from 1861-1939, and then the piping systems manufacturer *Paul Kahle Rohrleitungsbau* (Paul Kahle Pipeline Construction), from 1939-1980; the latter company's name and

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Following their presentation at the Venice Biennale, the Bechers's photographs were shown in Germany and the United States, traveling to the *Kölnischer Kunstverein* ("Cologne Art Association"); the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts at Harvard University; and the Cleveland Center for Contemporary Art.

27

Together the Bechers photographed over two hundred industrial plants and buildings in mainland Europe, taking pictures of structures in the Netherlands from 1961 to 1965; in France, Belgium, and Luxembourg after 1964; in England, Wales, and Scotland after 1965; and in the United States after 1968. See Emma Lewis, "Bernd Becher and Hilla Becher: Water Towers 1972-2009", Tate, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/bernd-becher-and-hilla-becher-water-towers-p81238>, last accessed July 2024.

28

Metropolitan Museum of Art, "Bernd & Hilla Becher: Metropolitan Museum tour with Jeff Rosenheim", Duration: 00:25:42, July 2022, <https://fraenkelgallery.com/conversations/watch/metropolitan-museum-tour-with-jeff-rosenheim>, last accessed July 2024.

29

Metropolitan Museum of Art, "Bernd & Hilla Becher: Metropolitan Museum tour with Jeff Rosenheim".

30

The Biennale's seven-member international jury (Gillo Dorfles, Jean-Christophe Amman, Richard Francis, Rudi Fuchs, Dieter Honisch, Catherine Millet, and Mark Rosenthal) gave Mucha a "special mention...for the rigour and precision of his work", and the Bechers the *Leone d'Oro* ("Golden Lion") in the category of sculpture "for the particular plasticity of their photographic work". See Simonetta Rasponi, "The Jury", in *Dimensione Futuro*, 9.

31

Müller, "Raum und Zeit", 48-63. Several reviews commented on the installation's massive scale and expense. See Michael Kimmelman, "ART VIEW: A Changed Biennale Remains the Same", *The New York Times*, June 10, 1990, <https://www.nytimes.com/1990/06/10/arts/art-view-a-changed-biennale-remains-the-same.html>, last accessed July 2024. The general catalogue confirms that the realization of *Das Deutschlandgerät* was "made possible thanks to the contribution of the Stiftung Kunst und Kultur of the Bundesland North Rheinland-Westphalia, Dusseldorf". See Rasponi, *Dimensione Futuro*, 160.

32

My thanks go to Jochen Arentzen for graciously accommodating my visit to Mucha's studio on March 21, 2022.

logo are found on the building's front and left façades. *Kölner Straße* 170 was also an important site for German popular culture. In conversation with Helga Meister, Mucha described it as a "special house, where the *Toten Hosen* [Dead Trousers, a punk rock band from Düsseldorf] had their office and some documenta participants came and went. *Tatort* [Crime Scene, a German crime series] was also filmed here".<sup>33</sup>

Inside *Das Deutschlandgerät's* inner chamber, Mucha positioned two red-cable extension reels and a red wooden desk with metal folding legs that he had found at the City Savings Bank in his wife's hometown in Lower Saxony (and also used himself for a while).<sup>34</sup> The interior room was sheathed in gray felt, a material that many critics have suggested refers to German artist and educator Joseph Beuys (1921-1986), who served as professor of monumental sculpture at the *Kunstakademie* Düsseldorf from 1961 to 1972.<sup>35</sup> However, Mucha has argued that this material "comes from childhood memories of shop windows in which coloured felt formed backdrops for merchandise displays resembling tiny theatres".<sup>36</sup> The artist placed, in rows of three, twenty-seven rectangular, glass-fronted aluminum vitrines on top of the felt walls [fig. 2]. Each case contained worn, reddish-brown pitch pine floorboards on which industrial administrative work had been carried out since ca. 1908 and on which Mucha worked between 1981 and 1990. Mucha assembled the planks in their previous horizontal arrangement.

The reverse of the sliding glass panels of each display case in *Das Deutschlandgerät's* inner chamber features a system of brown-red and blue-gray alkyd enamel lines. These markings delineate the contours of the windows and doors in Mucha's studio rotated by 180 degrees, but they could also be read as the sections of parallel railway lines like those found across Germany. In 1994, Anna Moszynska reflected on possible formal connections between the Rhineland's industrial landscape and Mucha's choice of display method:

He reflects the geography of his own area, not only in the photographs which often feature in his exhibitions or installations, but also in the landscape references suggested by the shape of his recent vitrines. The greyness and horizontality of its format relates, albeit abstractly, to the flat lands of the industrially-worked terrain of the Nordrhein Westfalen district and to the grey, northern light of that part of Germany.<sup>37</sup>

The German artist Martin Kippenberger (1953-1997) saw similar traces of the Rhineland in Mucha's use of colour that year:

He is German thoroughness personified, and in gray; he is really what [Konrad] Adenauer was in politics, but in art—always just thorough! German, too. And he doesn't make such clumsy references to history,

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33

Helga Meister, "K 21: Mucha erklärt das Deutschlandgerät", *Westdeutsche Zeitung*, September 1, 2009, [http://www.wz.de/nrw/duesseldorf/kultur/k-21-mucha-erklart-das-deutschlandgeraet\\_aid-31330683](http://www.wz.de/nrw/duesseldorf/kultur/k-21-mucha-erklart-das-deutschlandgeraet_aid-31330683), last accessed July 2024.

34

Jürgen Hohmeyer, "Unheimlich nach oben drücken", *Der Spiegel* 21 (1990): 215.

35

Roberta Smith, "Art in Review: Reinhard Mucha "Collected: Recollected", Luhring Augustine, SoHo", *New York Times*, October 29, 1993, <http://www.nytimes.com/1993/10/29/arts/art-in-review-220293.html>, last accessed July 2024. In a conversation with Hans-Joachim Müller in 2009, Mucha acknowledged comparisons to Beuys: "I have occasionally been compared to Beuys. And I do admire his work. Our common roots lie in an explicit artisanry. Beuys was a gifted artisan, down to the tiniest detail – we're similar in that respect. But I have always maintained a certain detachment. I don't like dependencies. Already at the academy, in Rinke's class, I saw how the Beuys class produced mainly followers. That's not my role, this master's role". See Müller, "Raum und Zeit", 50; 53.

36

Toby Kamps, "Reinhard Mucha", in Jonathan Rothfuss and Elizabeth Carpenter (eds.), *Bits & Pieces Put Together to Present a Semblance of a Whole: Walker Art Center Collections* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 2005), 406.

37

Anna Moszynska, "Train Spotting with Reinhard Mucha", *Art Monthly* (March 1994), 9.



fig. 2

**Reinhard Mucha**  
**Das Deutschlandgerät, XLIV**  
*Biennale di Venezia,*  
*Deutscher Pavillon, Venedig*  
**1990** (partial view)  
**The Germany Device, XLIV**  
*Biennale di Venezia, German*  
*Pavilion, Venice 1990*  
 Multi-part sculptural room  
 installation  
 Installation view, La Biennale di  
 Venezia (German Pavilion  
 with Bernd and Hilla Becher),  
 Venice 1990  
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of coming to terms with German history [...] He presents that sense of color from West German history having grown up there in the '50s and '60s, and that's gray.<sup>38</sup>

While *Das Deutschlandgerät's* vitrines express a literal and metaphorical attachment to German place, Mucha has written that his display cases more generally ask the question "Where am I?"<sup>39</sup> Indeed, the artist did not limit his frame of reference to his studio or to Germany but broadened it to speak directly to the local Venetian setting, in keeping with his "way of developing works on site and taking account of the space and its history".<sup>40</sup>

Mucha's transnational approach was directly in line with the overall exhibition framework selected by the Italian art critic Giovanni Carandente (1920–2009), who served as director of the XLIV Venice Biennale: *Dimensione Futuro: L'artista e lo spazio* ("Dimensions of the Future: The Artist and Space").<sup>41</sup> For this edition, Carandente sought a younger international generation and explored "the relationship that the artist establishes with the surrounding space".<sup>42</sup> Many aspects of the exhibition spoke to the theme of transnationalism. For instance, when selecting artists for the national pavilions, some of the country commissioners

38

Gisela Capitain, *B. Gespräche mit Martin Kippenberger*, exh. cat. Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, Rotterdam (Ostfildern, Germany: Reihe Cantz, 1994), 25.

39

Mucha in a letter to unknown recipient, \*\*\*\*, signed R.M., trans. J.W. Gabriel and Fiona Elliott, October 2009.

40

Müller, "Raum und Zeit", 60–61.

41

Clarissa Ricci traces Italian art critic and historian Achille Bonito Oliva's introduction in 1993 of a more transnational approach to artistic display at the 45<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale. See Clarissa Ricci, "From Obsolete to Contemporary: National Pavilions and the Venice Biennale", *Journal of Curatorial Studies* 9, no. 1 (2020): 8–39.

42

Forty-nine countries from five different continents participated. See Giovanni Carandente, "XLIV Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte Dimensione Futuro, The Artist and Space", in *Dimensione Futuro*, 16.

subverted questions of nationalism by looking beyond their traditional borders, marking the first time that artists at the Biennale exhibited in buildings that did not belong to their own countries. The Indian-born and British-trained Anish Kapoor represented his adopted country of Great Britain, for example, and a group of six young Soviet artists was shown in dialogue with American-born Robert Rauschenberg in the U.S.S.R.'s Pavilion.<sup>43</sup> Some country commissioners, like Linda Shearer representing the United States, questioned whether or not the U.S. selection of artists had “some quintessential ‘American’ element” or if their work was “legible from a global and truly international perspective”.<sup>44</sup> Reporting on *Dimensione Futuro* for *The New York Times*, Michael Kimmelman noted that an international conference was held in Venice at the same time as the Biennale opening and challenged the relevancy of hosting an exhibition organised around the idea of nation when definitions of national identity and style were becoming increasingly untenable.<sup>45</sup>

In the Biennale's Arsenale location, Carandente staged a kind of “confrontation of artists” in two special sections of the exhibition.<sup>46</sup> The first, held in the Corderie, was a show titled *Aperto 90*, a multinational display of more than one hundred young artists from twenty-seven countries, including the binational collaboratives Readymades Belong to Everyone and the Border Art Workshop, collectives from New York and Paris and San Diego and Tijuana, respectively.<sup>47</sup> The second, called *Ambiente Berlin* (“Environment Berlin”), was a group satellite show mounted in the Central (Italian) Pavilion.<sup>48</sup> Conceived by Carandente at the suggestion of Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen director Werner Schmalenbach in the summer of 1988, the exhibition displayed work by several international artists who had lived and worked in East and West Berlin since the mid-1960s. *Ambiente Berlin* brought together 129 works by German Berliners, “Berlin Italians” (Emilio Vedova, Giuseppe Spagnulo), “Dutch Berliners” (Armando), “Hungarian Berliners” (Laszlo Lakner), and “American Berliners” (Nancy and Edward Reddin-Kienholz). This exhibition spoke to cultural links between the city and the rest of the world; of a give-and-take between Berlin and non-German guests of the Artist in Residence Program of the *Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst* (“German Academic Exchange Service/DAAD”), which has brought foreign artists to the once-insular city since 1963. Reflecting on the impending unification of the city and of the two Germanies in his catalogue essay for *Dimensione Futuro: L'artista e lo spazio*, Jörn Merkert, then director of the Berlinische Galerie, asked “How much longer will it take until Berlin becomes englobed in a vast railway network for high-

43

Kapoor still held an Indian passport at the time of the Venice Biennale of 1990.

44

Linda Shearer, “Towards an “International” Perspective”, in *Dimensione Futuro*, 270.

45

Kimmelman, “ART VIEW: A Changed Biennale Remains the Same”.

46

In his statement for the 1988 Venice Biennale catalogue, Carandente uses the term “un confronto di artisti della contemporaneità” to describe his cross-cultural ambitions for the exhibition. See Giovanni Carandente, “La XLIII Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte. Il luogo degli artisti”, in *XLIII Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte. La Biennale di Venezia. Il luogo degli artisti* (Milan: Gruppo Editoriale Fabbri, 1988), 15.

47

Initiated by curators Achille Bonito Oliva and Harald Szeemann as part of the 39th Art Exhibition directed by Luigi Carluccio, *Aperto 80* was designed to explore the work of emerging artists and those whose national origins were not represented by permanent national pavilions. See La Biennale di Venezia, “Biennale Arte History – The 1980s”, <https://www.labiennale.org/en/history-biennale-arte>, last accessed December 2024.

48

*Ambiente Berlin* followed Carandente's 1988 *Ambiente Italia* exhibition in the Italian Pavilion, for which he invited eight foreign artists working or living in Italy to participate: Cy Twombly, Jan Dibbets, Markus Lüpertz, George D'Alema, Léon Gischia, Sebastian Matta, Niki de Saint Phalle, and Sol LeWitt. See Stefania Portinari, ““Dimensione futuro”. Il luogo degli artisti alle Biennali di Giovanni Carandente, nel 1988 e 1990”, in *Giovanni Carandente: Una vita per l'arte* (Milan: Silvana Editoriale, 2021), 128; and Clarissa Ricci, “La globalizzazione di Aperto”, in *Aperto | 1980 – 1993 La mostra dei giovani artisti della Biennale di Venezia* (Milan: Postmedia Books, 2022), 151.

speed Paris-Moscow trains and the European centre between East and West?”<sup>49</sup>  
“By Carandente’s estimation, *Ambiente Berlin* was “symbolic of the future, ‘greater’ Europe”.<sup>50</sup>

Just as Carandente strove to organise an exhibition that both depicted Berlin as a cosmopolitan metropolis and revealed the intersections between foreign-born artists working there, Mucha intended to present a sculptural installation that evoked and juxtaposed local and global places at a time of heightened geopolitical changes. The artist determined the form of *Das Deutschlandgerät* in accordance with the spatial and pragmatic institutional prescriptions of the exhibition site. The installation was especially conceived for and with Venice in mind, with Mucha looking directly at the neo-classical architecture of the German Pavilion for inspiration. Writing in 2016 about the work’s presentation at the *Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen* in Düsseldorf, Jan Verwoert argued that Mucha’s “large-scale installation is like a blend of a doge’s palace and a temple to West Germany”.<sup>51</sup> The chamber’s four exterior enclosure walls were clad with 51 x 51 centimetre light-yellow laser-polished marble slabs, and as is always the case with Mucha’s work, this choice of material was deliberate. Indeed, writing more generally about the artist’s sculpture in 1985, Renate Puvogel observed, “Mucha locates objects that are particularly tied to a place and that characterise a place in order to make the impossibility of such a transplantation pictorially and almost painfully palpable in this purposefully elevated, new situation”.<sup>52</sup> In Venice, Mucha went to great lengths to ensure the successful “transplantation” of stone. He strived to match that of the pavilion’s marble flooring, commissioning a Venetian architect’s office to search for the Italian quarry in Chiampo near Vicenza in the Veneto region from which the natural stone *Chiampo mandorlato giallognolo* was unearthed in the 1930s.<sup>53</sup> *Gewinnung in der Lagerstätte selbst (In-situ-Verfahren) (Quarrying at the Deposit Itself (On-site Operation))* (1991), Mucha’s watercolour drawing of an open-pit mine and stone temple columns, verifies the importance he placed on retrieving the industrial material directly from the site.<sup>54</sup> His interest in gathering resources from Chiampo may have stemmed from the area’s local economy and infrastructure. Though predominantly known for its distinct 16<sup>th</sup>-century architecture by Andrea Palladio (1508-1580) and its production of gold jewelry, the province of Vicenza is one of the most industrialised areas in the Veneto region and has the greatest concentration of manufacturing companies. It is home to numerous marble, sulphur, copper, and silver quarries and steel and textile factories in Chiampo, Montecchio Maggiore, and Sovizzo.<sup>55</sup>

49

Jörn Merkert, “Berlin Views and Perspectives”, in *Dimensione Futuro*, 73.

50

Carandente, “XLIV Esposizione Internazionale d’Arte Dimensione Futuro, The Artist and Space”, 15.

51

Jan Verwoert, “World Speaks Thing”, in Søren Grammel (ed.), *Manual No. 5: Reinhard Mucha* (Basel: Kunstmuseum Basel, 2016), n.p.

52

Renate Puvogel, “Pflicht und Kür: Denk-Modelle zwischen Skulptur und Architektur”, *Das Kunstwerk* 38 (December 1985): 55.

53

Hohmeyer, “Unheimlich nach oben drücken”, 213. In our email correspondence in January 2022, Frederike Klussmann (Visual Arts Department, Project Lead German Pavilion 2022, ifa (*Institute für Auslandsbeziehungen*)) and Martin Weigert (*cfk architetti venezia*) confirmed that the German Pavilion’s floor had only been replaced once, in 1993, following Hans Haacke’s methodical destruction of the marble pavement for his installation *Germania*. Haacke not only tore open the floor, but also smashed the remains of Mucha’s work. For her installation at the 59<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale, *Relocating a Structure* (April 23–November 27, 2022), Maria Eichhorn again broke through the marble tiles, revealing brick and cement supports in the foundation. The German Pavilion’s four side rooms still have the original stone tiles from 1938.

54

Mucha, *Mucha: Holiday in Space / Urlaub im All*, Volume 2, 224–225.

55

Along with the nearby regions of Lombardy and Emilia-Romagna in the northeastern part of the country, the Veneto is referred to as the “third Italy” to distinguish it from the “first Italy”, represented by the traditional triangle of heavy industry formed by the northwestern cities of Turin, Milan, and Genoa. See Bagnasco Arnaldo, *Tre Italie. La problematica territoriale dello sviluppo italiano* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1977).

In its dialogue with the specific site housing it, Mucha's installation resembled Jenny Holzer's room-sized LED installations for the United States Pavilion. The first woman to represent the US at the Biennale, Holzer carved her trademark "truisms" – aphorisms written in five languages (English, Italian, French, German, Spanish) into alternating red and white Italian marble floor tiles. Peter Frank acknowledged the diamond pattern's suggestion of those of northern Italy's Romanesque churches, but failed to see Mucha's thoughtful considerations of Venice, calling his *Das Deutschlandgerät* "the most disappointingly vacant installation I (and a number of other observers) have ever seen from this very gifted artist, one of the leading figures in the new architecturally-oriented German sculpture".<sup>56</sup> Yet Holzer's bevy of carved messages and electronic signs in the US Pavilion, along with posters and T-shirts all over Venice, was meant to be immediate and accessible, while Mucha's marble room and vitrines, with their complexly interwoven references to place, require slow, contemplative deciphering. Reporting on Holzer's and Mucha's installations in September 1990, art critics Lars Nittve, C.H. van Winckel, and Mark Kremer declared that the two artists' projects appeared – through their rigorous attention to detail and to their individual sites at the Biennale – as though they were each part of the original United States and West German Pavilions, dating to 1930 and 1909, respectively.<sup>57</sup>

Mucha's room within a room attempted to merge four distinct contexts – artwork and exhibition space, and German studio and Veneto region – through the symbiosis of materials in such a way that they formed an indissoluble, visible unity. The marble floor of the pavilion and the outer marble walls of Mucha's chamber came into immediate contact, thereby entering a mimetic relationship with one another. Writing in the catalogue that accompanied the exhibition in the West German Pavilion, Bußmann explained that "only a small groove interrupts the continuous courses of the interstices, which changes from horizontal to vertical".<sup>58</sup> Mucha removed a narrow channel of the pavilion's marble flooring and inserted the walls of his cell directly into the paving, just as he did with the second iteration of the work in Düsseldorf [fig. 3]. For an artist who is obsessed with precision and for whom every detail is potentially significant, the subtle distinction Mucha made between floor and wall is notable. By Jürgen Hohmeyer's estimation, the marble was "an offshoot of the same historical substance, it seems. But it is again marked as a foreign body by a depression in the ground all around it. Mucha sees it as if a child had pressed a plastic sand toy into the ground with a cake tin".<sup>59</sup> If the little groove incised in the floor around the inner room marked the chamber as an extraneous, detached entity, it also registered it as something that was a part of the West German Pavilion as an exhibition space. Hans-Joachim Müller observed the spatial gap as well, writing in *Die Zeit*: "Were it not for a narrow ditch, an open seam between the house and the ground, no one would suspect that the dark chamber was not part of the permanent fixtures".<sup>60</sup> Through its simultaneous spatial assimilation into the existing environment and its critical interruption of the existing order of the site,

56

Peter Frank, "Sculpture at the 1990 Venice Biennale", *Sculpture* (September/October 1990): 37. Frank admired the "force and sensitivity" that Mucha brought to his found objects and materials but found his vitrines to be "pompous and vacuous".

57

See Lars Nittve, "Money Talks", *Artforum* (September 1990), 132, <https://www.artforum.com/print/199007/lars-nittve-60654>, last accessed July 2024; C.H. van Winckel and Mark Kremer, "Reinhard Mucha: De opheffing van het kunstenaarschap en andere manoeuvres", *Metropolis M* (September 1990), 32. The Bavarian Pavilion, built in 1909, was renamed the German Pavilion in 1912 and redesigned by Ernst Haiger in 1938 to reflect fascist aesthetics. See Christoph Becker, "The Venice Biennale and Germany's Contributions from 1895 to 1942", in Elke aus dem Moore and Ursula Zeller (eds.), *Germany's Contributions to the Venice Biennale 1895–2007* (Cologne: DuMont, 2009).

58

Bußmann, "Reinhard Mucha", n.p.

59

Hohmeyer, "Unheimlich nach oben drücken", 213.

60

Hans-Joachim Müller, "Das Deutschlandgerät", *Die Zeit*, May 18, 1990, <https://www.zeit.de/1990/21/das-deutschlandgeraet>, last accessed July 2024.

fig. 3

**Reinhard Mucha**  
**Das Deutschlandgerät,**  
*Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-*  
*Westfalen, K21 Ständehaus,*  
*Düsseldorf [2021], [2002], XLIV*  
*Biennale di Venezia, Deutscher*  
*Pavillon, Venedig*  
**1990 (detail)**  
**The Germany Device,**  
*Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-*  
*Westfalen, K21 Ständehaus,*  
*Düsseldorf [2021], [2002], XLIV*  
*Biennale di Venezia, German*  
*Pavilion, Venice 1990*  
 Multi-part sculptural room  
 installation. Installation  
 view K21, Düsseldorf  
 Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-  
 Westfalen, Düsseldorf  
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*Das Deutschlandgerät* visualises art historian Rosalyn Deutsche's distinction between integrationist and interventionist approaches to site-specific art. In Deutsche's view, the former strategy seeks to closely interact and become unified with the location's pre-existing forms; the latter aims to graft itself onto the setting and purposely exposes its alterity.<sup>61</sup>

Mucha made further references to Venice on the West German Pavilion's apse wall. As with the display cases in the inner room, the thirty-eight vitrines outside of it were similarly covered by glass panes with groups of etched vertical lines that are often overlapped by short transverse elements that terminate in an ornamental curved shape [fig. 4]. In a recent conversation, Falk Wolf, curator at the *Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen* in Düsseldorf, reminded me that these patterns may indicate the structure of Venice's famous handcrafted gondolas.<sup>62</sup> Traditionally, the S-curve shape of a gondola's *fero da prorà* (iron bow) is symbolic of the twists in the Grand Canal. The *broche* (the six horizontal lines that one finds on the prow-head) are associated with the six *sestieri* (districts) of the city (San Marco, San Polo, Santa Croce, Castello, Dorsoduro, and Cannaregio), and the line opposite with the Giudecca Isle. An untitled drawing by Mucha from 1991, a focused study of a Venetian gondola's prow, demonstrates the artist's attentiveness to its form.<sup>63</sup> Meanwhile, on a marble-topped wooden table to the left of the room, Mucha placed a single horizontal vitrine that was physically connected to the outer marble wall

61

See Rosalyn Deutsche, *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1996). Miwon Kwon has examined these existing models of site specificity, as well as her own paradigms of phenomenological, institutional, and discursive site-specificity. See Miwon Kwon, "Sittings of Public Art: Integration versus Intervention", in *One Place After Another: Site Specificity and Locational Identity* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2002), 56–99.

62

The author in conversation with Falk Wolf, Düsseldorf, March 16, 2022. This connection was also made by Jan Verwoert. See Jan Verwoert, "World Speaks Thing", in *Manual No. 5*, n.p.

63

See Mucha, *Mucha: Holiday in Space / Urlaub im All*, Volume 2: 78-79.

of the inner room while inhabiting the outer space of the pavilion [fig. 5]. Writing for the French journal *Cahiers du Musée national d'art moderne* in 2000, Patrick Javault stated that this dark felt-covered display case looked like a kind of stylised gondola.<sup>64</sup> Thus if the horizontal vitrines found within the installation's inner chamber reference Mucha's attachment to the local, specifically his studio doors and windows, then the vertical ones on the outside walls hint at an international context.

Intriguingly, the transnational qualities of Mucha's installation were discounted by other critics. Writing in *Artforum* in September 1990, Lars Nittve called Mucha an "almost archetypical representative of German contemporaneity".<sup>65</sup> Some claimed *Das Deutschlandgerät* was too esoteric; even Bußmann called Mucha one of the "most difficult and strange artists".<sup>66</sup> Others thought the interior chamber projected a "crassly overpowering image" that was too unyielding, strict, and downright cold in character, likening the work to a self-erected mausoleum with standing coffins and a horizontal sarcophagus; a bunker; and even the Reich Chancellery.<sup>67</sup> In 2009, Helga Meister similarly pointed to the work's imagining of certain national characteristics, including the official flag of the Federal Republic of Germany:

The dark gray of the felt and the deep matte black of the untreated bronze casts, the broken red of the former studio floorboards, the bright yellow of the travertine and the golden cut surfaces and edges on the untreated casting channels of the bronze footstools. Black Red Gold.<sup>68</sup>

Collectively, these interpretations of the project emphasised its visualisation of "Germanness", or the qualities that made it seem fundamentally German in character: its categorical precision, monumentality, rationality, reticence, and symbolic colours.<sup>69</sup>

Mucha has acknowledged that his project was indebted to the Nazi architecture of the West German Pavilion, comparing the 250 x 60 centimetre felt-lined glass-and-aluminum display cases, which were vertically mounted only twenty-five centimetres above the floor on the three walls outside of his inner chamber, to the fascist vestibular pillars of Munich architect Ernst Haiger's remodeled German Pavilion of 1938. Each rectangular vitrine contained a wooden footstool, the legs of which Mucha also compares with the atrium pillars of the Pavilion.<sup>70</sup> Approximately twelve to fifteen of the forty footstools found in the exterior room vitrines came from a second-hand store, housed in a World War II bunker, that was recommended to the artist by his Frankfurt dealer Bärbel

64

Patrick Javault, "Toutes mémoires confondues: Sur quelques oeuvres de Reinhard Mucha", *Cahiers du Musée national d'art moderne* 71 (Spring 2000): 36.

65

Nittve, "Money Talks", 133. Four years later, Anna Moszynska called Mucha a "quintessentially" Düsseldorf artist. See Moszynska, "Train Spotting with Reinhard Mucha", 9.

66

Peter Dittmar, "Im Gespräch Reinhard Mucha: Einer der Verquersten" (1990), n.p.

67

See Michael Kimmelman, "Review/Art; Venice Biennale Opens with Surprises", *The New York Times*, May 28, 1990, <https://www.nytimes.com/1990/05/28/arts/review-art-venice-biennale-opens-with-surprises.html>, last accessed July 2024; Van Winckel and Kremer, "Reinhard Mucha", 33; Michael Gibson, "From Poetic to the Kitsch at the Biennale", *International Herald Tribune* (June 2–3, 1990).

68

Helga Meister, "Diskussion: Deutschlandgerät", *Kunstforum International* 199 (2009), 411.

69

Significantly, no one perceived a potentially dangerous underlying nationalism in *Das Deutschlandgerät* as they had, for example, in Joseph Beuys' works when they were presented in his retrospective at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, a decade earlier. See, for example, Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, Rosalind Krauss, and Annette Michelson, "Joseph Beuys at the Guggenheim", *October* 12 (Spring 1980): 3–21.

70

Hohmeyer, "Unheimlich nach oben drücken", 215.

fig. 4

**Reinhard Mucha****Das Deutschlandgerät.***Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, K21 Ständehaus, Düsseldorf [2021], [2002], XLIV Biennale di Venezia, Deutscher Pavillon, Venedig***1990 (detail)****The Germany Device.***Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, K21 Ständehaus, Düsseldorf [2021], [2002], XLIV Biennale di Venezia, German Pavilion, Venice 1990*

Multi-part sculptural room

installation

Installation view K21,

Düsseldorf

Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf

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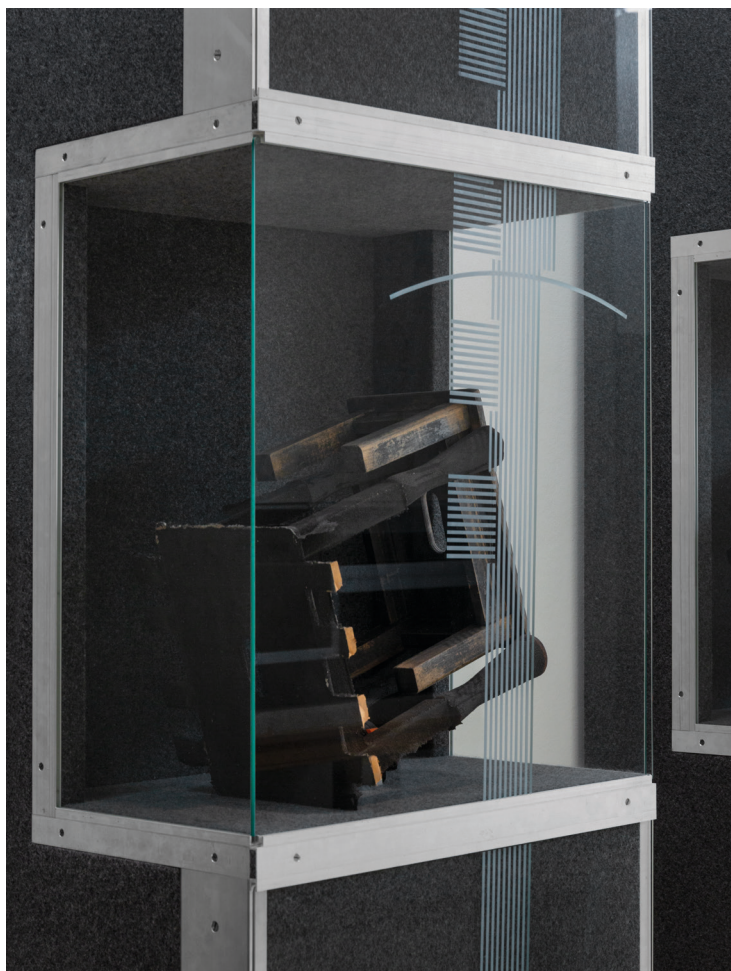


fig. 5

**Reinhard Mucha****Das Deutschlandgerät.***Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, K21 Ständehaus, Düsseldorf [2021], [2002], XLIV Biennale di Venezia, Deutscher Pavillon, Venedig***1990 (detail)****The Germany Device.***Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, K21 Ständehaus, Düsseldorf [2021], [2002], XLIV Biennale di Venezia, German Pavilion, Venice 1990*

Multi-part sculptural room

installation

Installation view K21,

Düsseldorf

Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf

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Grässlin.<sup>71</sup> Mucha's attention to the forms and materials of the German Pavilion and his interest in objects that relate to the country's totalitarian past suggest his contemplation of the historical weight of this building and its connection to the Nazi era. Yet, the artist failed to scrutinise or explicitly critique this space. As Kirsty Bell wrote in 2023,

Mucha's aim is not overthrow. Instead, he represents and repeats given structures, adhering to their parameters in his modes of display, staying in the lines, while performing gestures of disruption or shifts from within. The question of how to respond to authority in a society where authoritarianism was at the root of its historical calamity remains open.<sup>72</sup>

Mucha's response to the German Pavilion is profoundly different from that of his successors. In 1993, for the next iteration – the first after German reunification, which took place on October 3, 1990 – Hans Haacke destroyed the building's marble floor slabs to symbolise the state of his country, deconstructed the space's associations with Hitler and National Socialism, and contested the pavilion's role in fortifying nationalist ideology.<sup>73</sup> At the 59<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale in 2022, Maria Eichhorn's installation made historical changes to the German Pavilion's architecture the subject of her work, continuing the theme of subversive projects by German artists who have deliberately undermined the building.<sup>74</sup> Eichhorn has argued that terms such as nation are becoming obsolete and spoke of the importance of making art that “remains international and cosmopolitan, anarchic, resistant, political and polemical, fragmentary, critical and independent of [nation]”.<sup>75</sup> Mucha, on the other hand, seemed to retain stale conceptions of the independent nation state, and by keeping this structure intact, he diminished his own work's transnational capacity. Like the late 19<sup>th</sup>-century's world's fairs, this founding concept formed the guiding framework around the *International Art Exhibition of the City of Venice* – established in 1893 by the mayor of Venice, Riccardo Selvatico (1849-1901) – and its exhibition model of national pavilions, introduced in 1907.

Mucha's act of transposing his Düsseldorf studio to the world stage at the Biennale suggests that the nation state appealed to his sentimental and nostalgic side. This transposition calls to mind the postmodern artist's own deterritorialisation, a topic explored by Miwon Kwon in her groundbreaking book, *One Place After Another: Site Specificity and Locational Identity*. Kwon argues that the nomadic artist's site-oriented practice articulates the local particularities of a place as a reaction to the homogenising force of advanced capitalism which erases cultural differences.<sup>76</sup> Mucha's installation might be connected then to what Kenneth

71

Polly Robinson, letter to Mr. and Mrs. Heinz Ackermans regarding *Reinhard Mucha: Weight on Drivers* (December 10, 1993-January 28, 1994), Anthony d'Offay Gallery, London, December 20, 1993.

72

Kirsty Bell, “Reinhard Mucha's “Der Mucha—An Initial Suspicion”, *e-flux*, February 9, 2023, <https://www.e-flux.com/criticism/518048/reinhard-mucha-s-der-mucha-an-initial-suspicion>, last accessed July 2024.

73

See Hans Haacke, “Gondola! Gondola!”, in Pierre Bourdieu and Hans Haacke (eds.), *Free Exchange*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995); and “Questions to Hans Haacke about his contribution GERMANIA, German Pavilion 1993, 45<sup>th</sup> International Art Exhibition-La Biennale di Venezia”, in Yilmaz Dziewior and Maria Eichhorn (eds.), *Maria Eichhorn: Relocating a Structure* (Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther und Franz König, 2022), 126-127.

74

Dziewior and Eichhorn, *Maria Eichhorn: Relocating a Structure*. Eichhorn originally aimed to remove the German Pavilion from its site, transport it to a temporary storage place, and then reconstruct it at its original location after the Biennale concluded.

75

“Biennale-Künstlerin: Begriffe wie Nation lösen sich auf”, *Merur.de*, December 31, 2021, <https://www.merur.de/deutschland/berlin/biennale-kuenstlerin-begriffe-wie-nation-loesen-sich-auf-zr-91206134.html>, last accessed July 2024.

76

Kwon, “By Way of a Conclusion: One Place after Another”, in *One Place After Another*, 156-167.



Frampton posed as a “critical regionalism” in architecture, a means of countering placelessness by sustaining cultural specificities. Mucha’s relocation of his German studio in Venice might also suggest the artist’s wish for a mobile workspace in an ever-shifting globalising world where one can be at home anywhere. Indeed, in a text from 1980, Mucha wrote about the notion of creating a work “in the local elsewhere” that reflected “the memory of something distant, lost, absent and at the same time as a piece as if from the inner apparatus”.<sup>77</sup>

Other aspects of *Das Deutschlandgerät* appear to uphold the nation state and endorse the Rhineland’s industrial heritage. For example, in each of the thirty-eight outer wall vitrines, Mucha paired his wooden footstools with their respective rough cast-brass copies, propped up on one point by a retractable metal tape measure.<sup>78</sup> Each mimics the so-called *Deutschlandgerät*, a late 19<sup>th</sup>-century pneumatic-hydraulic train car device manufactured for the purpose of lifting particularly heavy loads such as bridge constructions or putting derailed locomotives and wagons back on track. This important industrial tool was produced by the former *Maschinenfabrik Deutschland* (Dortmund, 1872-1996), which had become famous during the era of the German Empire for its production of *Deutschlandgeräte* as well as coal feeders for locomotives and loading bridge turntables.<sup>79</sup> A *Deutschlandgerät* is shown righting a derailed G7 locomotive in Bußmann’s brochure for the West German Pavilion [fig. 6]. Mucha selected the image, and two comprehensive excerpts, from Rolf Ostendorf’s 1979 book *Eisenbahn-Knotenpunkt Ruhrgebiet: Die Entwicklungsgeschichte der Revierbahnen seit 1838* (Railway Junction in the Ruhr Area: The History of the Development of the District Railways since 1838).<sup>80</sup> The texts aid the reader’s understanding of the term *Deutschlandgerät* and explain that the *Carl Weyer & Co. Waggonfabrik* was largely responsible for the development of the railway system in the North Rhine-Westphalia industrial district and elsewhere in Germany, supplying train cars to the Prussian State Railroad and other German railroads such as the Saxon, the Baden, and the Oldenburg State Railroads. Thus, with *Das Deutschlandgerät*, Mucha honoured the technological ingenuity and achievements of 19<sup>th</sup>-century Germany.

Despite the work’s attention to the “Germanness” of the German Pavilion’s architecture, commemoration of the Rhineland’s manufacturing activities, and failure to critically engage with a biennale problematically organised along national lines, its industrial transnational elements should not be overlooked. Mucha’s selection of Ostendorf’s excerpts from his book on the development of the Ruhr railways highlighted the fact that the *Düsseldorfer Waggonfabrik*’s financial and technical success was not limited to national railroads at home but to those abroad as well. The company’s products were shown at various expositions in Düsseldorf, Paris, Milan, and Brussels. Many foreign administrations ordered German railroad cars from the factory, including the Anatolian, Middle Eastern, Baghdad, Italian, and Portuguese Railroads. Rolling stock was also exported to the German and Dutch colonies.<sup>81</sup> Given the international history and reach of the *Waggonfabrik Carl Weyer & Cie*, Doris von Drateln argued that “the company itself spreads out a network of destinations, of transport routes”.<sup>82</sup> The impression of a widespread linkage of places in *Das Deutschlandgerät* was shared by art critics C.H. van Winckel and Mark

77

Mucha, “Letters and Texts 1980–2021”, in *Mucha: Holiday in Space / Urlaub im All*, Volume 2: 332.

78

In his previous 1986 exhibition with the Bechers and Günther Förg at Lühring Augustine &amp; Hodes, New York, Mucha also showed footstools supported by a tape measure that gave the objects a precarious tilt.

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Bußmann, “Reinhard Mucha”, n.p.

80

Ibid. See also Rolf Ostendorf, *Eisenbahn-Knotenpunkt Ruhrgebiet* (Stuttgart: Motorbuch Verlag, 1979), 259.

81

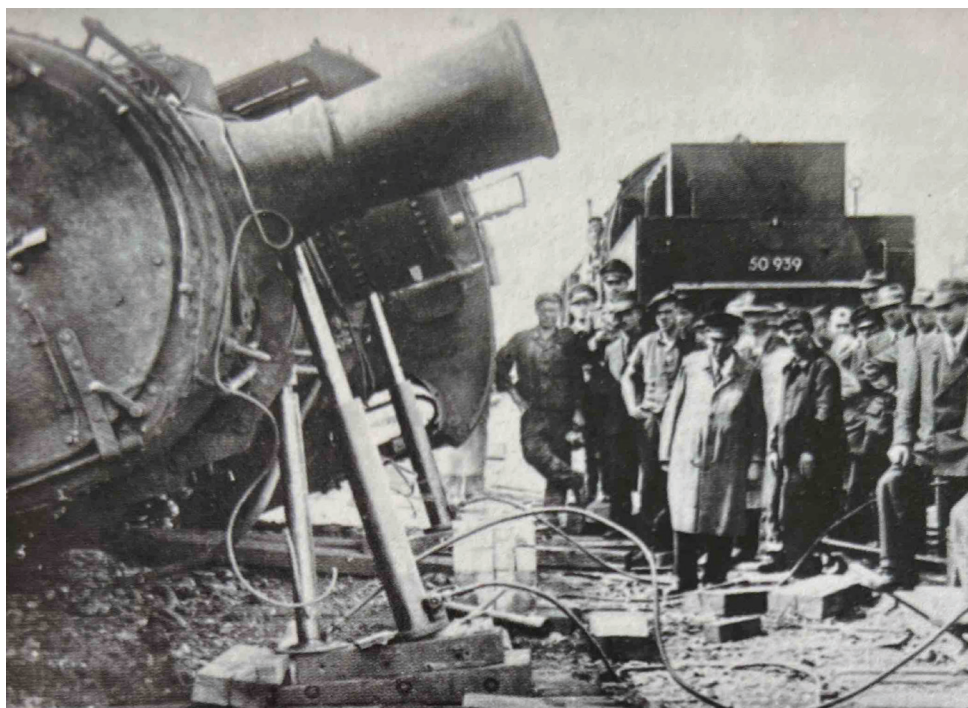
Bußmann, “Reinhard Mucha”, n.p.

82

Doris von Drateln, “Pavillon BRD: Reinhard Mucha und Bernd und Hilla Becher”, *Kunstforum International*, no. 109 (August–October 1990), 295.

fig. 6

The *Maschinenfabrik Deutschland's* Germany Device righting a derailed G7 locomotive, n.d. Bußmann, Klaus. "Reinhard Mucha: 'Das Deutschlandgerät' 1990." In *XLIV Biennale Venedig 1990: Bernd und Hilla Becher, Reinhard Mucha: Deutscher Pavillon, 27. Mai bis 30. September*. Milan: n.p., 1990; Ostendorf, Rolf. *Eisenbahn-Knotenpunkt Ruhrgebiet*. Stuttgart: Motorbuch Verlag, 1979.



Kremer. As they noted in the September 1990 edition of the Dutch contemporary art magazine *Metropolis M*, "Waterways, rails, trucks have the strange property of threading places, a property that is strange because the places within this interconnected network become potential targets".<sup>83</sup>

Mucha's 2018 artist book, *Zossen: Ein Ausflug* (*Zossen: An Excursion*) – named after a train station south of Berlin that opened in 1875 – further underscores the importance of railroads in forging connections.<sup>84</sup> In multilingual text excerpts in German, French, English, and Italian, Mucha quotes an entry in *Pierer's Universal-Lexikon der Vergangenheit und Gegenwart* (Universal Lexicon of the Present and Past) (1846):

This tremendous means of communication is like an infant Hercules who will one day free people from the suffering of war and famine, who will fertilise their fields, eradicate national hatred and unemployment, and revive the workshops of the people. It has already achieved the most incredible things since its short period of influence and taken up the struggle against the ignorance and brutality to which it is superior. Its technology has brought fortune and grace to the most distant peoples.<sup>85</sup>

Mucha's inclusion of this excerpt is teeming with irony. Train engineers may have aimed to "free people from the suffering of war", "eradicate national hatred", and work "against ignorance and brutality", but by the 1930s their prosperous vision of the railway failed tragically when the *Deutsche Reichsbahn* (German Imperial

83

Winckel and Kremer, "Reinhard Mucha", 32.

84

Mucha's recent wall vitrine "*L'Étoile du Nord*" (Star of the North) (2019) is another celebration of the rail network. The artist titled the work after an international express train that connected Paris Nord with Brussels and Amsterdam from 1924–1927. See Mucha, *Mucha: Urlaub im All / Holiday in Space*, Volume 1, 251–254.

85

See Reinhard Mucha, *Zossen: Ein Ausflug* (Düsseldorf: Richter Verlag, Sprüth Magers, Luhring Augustine, Bärbel Grässlin, Lia Rumma, 2018), 140.

Railway) enabled the Nazis to transport their victims to concentration and extermination camps during the Holocaust.<sup>86</sup>

The artist's inconspicuous criticism of Germany's dark industrial history in *Zossen* helps us to understand his use of subtle irony, rather than overt political message, in *Das Deutschlandgerät*.<sup>87</sup> The metaphor-heavy title of the work can be understood as a witty comment on the symbolic role of the West German Pavilion. Mucha interpreted the building as a "Germany Device" and interrogated its idealised self-image as a stand-in for a potent, stabilised nation at an utterly tumultuous and transformative time in the country's history. Just seven months before the Venice Biennale opening, the Berlin Wall— which served as the physical representation of the Iron Curtain for two generations — fell, posing pressing concerns about the impending national reunification of the two German states, the dissolution of East Germany, and social and economic dislocation across the country.<sup>88</sup> Yet the German Pavilion in Venice boasts a fixed, unrelenting presence. When asked in a 2009 interview why he called his work *Das Deutschlandgerät*, Mucha admitted that it served as a cipher for the fractured nation state: "In the period of upheaval after 1989 the title was an allusion to the political situation in Germany".<sup>89</sup>

In 1990, the artist explained that the transference and display of his site of production was a kind of fantasy: "If I set up my studio here in a symbolic way, it means, among other things, that I no longer believe in the possibility of breaking down the structures that were created around the Biennale".<sup>90</sup> But it is unclear if Mucha ever truly thought that he could effectively change the mechanics of institutions and their exhibition operations. In a text from 1983, he explained that artists like himself expand the framework of the exhibition, "not by trying to negate and neutralise it outwardly, but rather by cannibalizing it figuratively and internalizing it as part of itself. Granted, this chunk will never be fully digested". Any "provocative efforts" or "pranks" to co-opt the institution, however, "remain without consequence no matter how brazen they are, because, as "political" artful stunts, they are the first to be swallowed and digested with relish".<sup>91</sup> In 1990, Mucha may have implied, then, that he felt it was not feasible to overcome the longstanding exhibition's 19<sup>th</sup>-century idea of the autonomous nation. As Hans-Joachim Müller reasoned, "He doesn't want to play the desperado at the Biennale and certainly not in this art-laden building with the monstrous pathos of its architecture".<sup>92</sup> But did Mucha have faith in the social agency of his practice and its ability to promulgate political change? He seemed to be offering up his "Germany Device" as an apparatus

86

Many other contemporary German artists, including Anselm Kiefer, Martin Kippenberger (1953-1997), and Gerhard Richter, have used the trope of the railroad as a means to address the history and legacy of the Third Reich.

87

For a discussion of West German artists' use of humour as a critical tactic in the 1970s and 1980s and how modes of reception changed after the dismantling of the Berlin Wall, see Gregory H. Williams, *Permission to Laugh: Humor and Politics in Contemporary German Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012). Within this framework, Mucha seems to operate with wit or subtly subversive forms of humour like Isa Genzken, George Herold, and Rosemarie Trockel. On the occasion of the artist's retrospective, Falk Wolf characterised Mucha's work as an example of "Socratic irony". See Wolf, "Latency, Postminimalism, and Irony", 31. In a 2009 letter to an unknown recipient, Mucha described the artist (perhaps himself) as a "Rabble Rouser—Illuminator—Visionary—Revolutionary—Missionary? As Artist—Jester—Trickster, as a Fool? Disrupter, Destroyer, Eternal Child?" See Mucha, "Letters and Texts 1980–2021", in *Mucha: Holiday in Space / Urlaub im All*, Volume 2, 341.

88

Just three days after the close of the 44<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale, Germany was whole again, and eventually all the former communist regimes of Eastern Europe would collapse.

89

Meister, "Diskussion: Deutschlandgerät".

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Müller, "Das Deutschlandgerät", 61.

91

Mucha, "Recursive Model—Context and Cannibalism", in *Mucha: Holiday in Space / Urlaub im All*, Volume 2: 335.

92

Müller, "Das Deutschlandgerät", 61.

that then-Chancellor of Germany Helmut Kohl and East German Prime Minister Lothar de Maiziere could use to realign the symbolic West German-East German train. Reviewing the 2022 Mucha survey exhibition at the *Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen*, Ralf Stiftel considered the artist's footstools and their bronze casts object representatives of the FRG and GDR: "Perhaps the hugging pieces of furniture also symbolise the parts of Germany that are finding each other again".<sup>93</sup>

Rather than performing a blatant critique, Mucha tapped into the German Pavilion's history, formal language, and purpose, suggesting that he was passively contemplating issues of nationalism during a period of national soul-searching.<sup>94</sup> He highlighted the traditional nation-state framework invoked by the pavilion but fell short of truly deconstructing the site or exposing the inherent ideologies and power structures that underly its display of German art. This important detail makes his comparatively conservative project distinct from the confrontational tactics of institutional critique during the 1970s.

*Das Deutschlandgerät* exceeded local and national events in 1989 and 1990 through its presentation abroad. By placing items from his studio in conversation with building materials from northern Italy's Veneto region (marble) and incorporating elements of the surrounding site of the Biennale (gondolas), Mucha collapsed spatial boundaries. In some ways, this undertaking references post-Wall Germany's radical change in international relations.<sup>95</sup> The artist understood the pavilion not just as an isolated German territory on Italian soil, but as an organic part of Venice engaged in interplay with an event of international renown.

### ***Das Deutschlandgerät* in Düsseldorf, 2002/2021**

Immediately following the Venice Biennale, collectors Heinz and Simone Ackermans acquired *Das Deutschlandgerät* but were not able to show it for lack of a suitable space. In 2002, they lent the work and others in their collection to the *Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen*. Since *Das Deutschlandgerät* had been dismantled after the Biennale, Mucha needed to reassemble the work from the ground up for its permanent display on the second floor of the *Kunstsammlung's* new location for art after 1980, K21.<sup>96</sup> The artist painstakingly amended this project for over a year so that it would correspond to the spatial conditions of the local situation, calling the work "*quasi a posteriori autochthonous*" (native to the place, so to speak).<sup>97</sup> *Das Deutschlandgerät* was installed in German architect Julius Carl

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Ralf Stiftel, "Die Kunstsammlung NRW zeigt das Werk von Reinhard Mucha", *Wa*, September 27, 2022, <https://www.wa.de/kultur/die-kunstsammlung-nrw-zeigt-das-werk-von-reinhard-mucha-91815002.html>, last accessed July 2024.

94

In 2021, German writer Ingo Schulze appropriated *Das Deutschlandgerät* to support his commentary on nationalist discourse in the novel *Tasso im Irrenhaus: Erzählungen*. Schulze's fictional narrator uses the derailment inherent in Mucha's work as a metaphor for his own experience as an East German dissident writer who is forced to leave the GDR for West Germany and feels unsettled in this new political and social environment. See Ingo Schulze, *Tasso im Irrenhaus: Erzählungen* (Munich: dtv Verlagsgesellschaft, 2021), 7-49.

95

West Germany had signed the Schengen Agreement in 1985, along with France, Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands, signaling the gradual abolition of national borders.

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In 2009, *Das Deutschlandgerät* was slated for temporary removal for five years by former *Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen* director Marion Ackermann so that the museum could exhibit modern and contemporary works from the permanent collection. Mucha and several artists and museum professionals protested the decision, and the work was subsequently never dismantled. See Ulrich Deuter and Helga Meister, "Das sind meine eigenen Ansätze", *kultur.west*, October 1, 2009, <https://www.kulturwest.de/inhalt/das-sind-meine-eigenen-ansaeetze/>, last accessed July 2024; and Christiane Hoffmans, "Aus der Hüfte geschossen", *Welt*, September 13, 2009, [https://www.welt.de/welt\\_print/vermischtes/article4522876/Aus-der-Huefte-geschossen.html](https://www.welt.de/welt_print/vermischtes/article4522876/Aus-der-Huefte-geschossen.html), last accessed July 2024.

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Georg Imdahl, "Kunstsammlung. Streit um das 'Deutschlandgerät'", *Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger*, September 7, 2009. *Das Deutschlandgerät* formally entered the collection in 2004, when the Ackermans donated 142 works to the *Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen*, many by artists with great international renown who have attended the Düsseldorf Art Academy, lived in the city, or had their first successes there: Katharina Fritsch, Martin Honert, Reinhard Mucha, Thomas Ruff, Thomas Schütte, and Pia Stadtbäumer.

Raschdorff's grand neo-Renaissance building of 1880 – the *Ständehaus* (Estates House) – which had served NRW's changing state parliaments until 1988 and was renovated by Munich firm Kiessler & Partner from 1996 to 2002. In accordance with Mucha's practice of repurposing and recontextualising his works in relation to the place in which they are exhibited, the artist made use of the 9 (h) x 17,5 (l) x 17 (w) metre deep gallery space of the old plenary hall in which his installation would be housed, placing his central chamber—now titled *Gallery 2.1* and slightly larger than in Venice at 5 (h) x 6,4 (l) x 9,2 (w) metre—in the large space behind the room's eight faux-marble black and white columns. Just as in Venice, the inner chamber matched the dimensions of Mucha's Düsseldorf workspace, showcased its worn floorboards, and included his desk. For a second time, the artist had transported elements of his studio across national borders, suggesting an image of uninhibited movement from Germany to Italy and back home again.

Mucha supplemented the original work with an oblique reference to a place not far from his studio. The source of a loud, continuously whirring noise in K21's gallery is unrecognisable, but it has been identified as vehicles crossing the expansion joint of southern Düsseldorf's *Fleher Brücke* (Flehe Bridge) over the Rhine River, a major waterway that was central to the formation of German national consciousness and identity from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century to the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>98</sup> If the reverberating traffic sounds along this internationally-important commercial transport route suggest the “relentlessness of the post-industrial everyday”, then the addition of fifteen televisions, fifteen DVD players, three CD players, and nine loudspeakers might have implied the global reach of the media, pointing to the notion that the boundaries defining national identity had become even more nebulous in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>99</sup>

Mucha also added, in front of the architectural columns, an imposing glass and felt-covered wood sculpture called *Zollverein I/II* (2002), which serves as a barrier to entry into the installation and as a wall that shields the doorway into a neighboring gallery on the north side of the building. The work's title refers to Essen's monumental Zollverein Coal Mine and Zollverein Coking Plant which opened in 1847; shuttered in 1986 and 1993, respectively; and were jointly designated a United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage Site in 2001.<sup>100</sup> Mucha's recreation of this towering structure in sculptural form reaffirms *Das Deutschlandgerät*'s Rhine-Ruhr roots and serves as a steadfast reminder of the artist's immense pride in his region's manufacturing past. At the same time, connecting *Das Deutschlandgerät* with what the World Heritage Committee defines as a cultural or natural site that has “outstanding universal value”, or global significance that transcends national boundaries, endorses the work's capacity for industrial transnationalism.<sup>101</sup>

Despite *Das Deutschlandgerät*'s return to Düsseldorf, certain features of the installation referred to its original Venetian site, securing the memory of its first presentation. For example, with the aid of stone experts, Mucha searched again in Italy for the quarry that produced the *Chiampe mandorlato giallognolo* marble that made up the Nazi era floor in the German Pavilion.<sup>102</sup> He also expanded the work

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See Ulrich Loock, “Can a contemporary art museum support the anachronism of a work which fundamentally challenges the museum's historic mission?”, *Cura Magazine* no. 3 (January-February 2010), 58–62.

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Bell, “Reinhard Mucha's “Der Mucha—An Initial Suspicion”.

100

For more information, see “Zollverein Coal Mine Industrial Complex in Essen”, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/975/>, last accessed July 2024.

101

UNESCO World Heritage Convention, “Recommendation concerning the Protection, at National Level, of the Cultural and Natural Heritage”, November 16, 1972, <https://www.unesco.org/en/legal-affairs/recommendation-concerning-protection-national-level-cultural-and-natural-heritage>, last accessed July 2024.

102

Meister, “Diskussion: Deutschlandgerät”, 410.

by adding CRT monitors which displayed looping, split-screen video animations that juxtaposed and wove together images of the studio building in Düsseldorf; the dismantling and removal of his workspace's wooden floor; mining tunnels, hydraulic lifting devices, and bridge structures; the architecture of the German Pavilion in Venice and Mucha's and the Bechers's presentations there; and studies of the footstools and their casts. As Sebastian Egenhofer has pointed out, Mucha even installed a U-shape row of double fluorescent tubes above the thirty-eight exterior vitrines in a way that mimics the permanently installed lighting and their metal fixtures in the German Pavilion.<sup>103</sup> Through these thoughtful modifications, Mucha effectively brought Germany and Italy into dialogue for a second time.

In the winter of 2021, in anticipation of his upcoming retrospective at K20 and K21, Mucha again made technical and content adaptations to *Das Deutschlandgerät*, turning the existing CRT monitors on their sides by ninety degrees and using them as supports for fifteen flat video monitors [fig. 7]. He also carved a small square insert into the inner chamber, revealing the solid brick structure that lay underneath the gray felt wall. In it the artist placed his work, *Menzione d'Onore* (Mention of Honour, 2021), a red case containing the Golden Lion honourable mention plaque that he received in 1990, on top of a tan and black upholstered foot stool. These most recent additions to the installation reveal the ongoing importance of the Venice Biennale in Mucha's work.

fig. 7

**Reinhard Mucha**  
**Das Deutschlandgerät,**  
*Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, K21 Ständehaus, Düsseldorf [2021], [2002], XLIV Biennale di Venezia, Deutscher Pavillon, Venedig 1990 (detail)*  
**The Germany Device,**  
*Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, K21 Ständehaus, Düsseldorf [2021], [2002], XLIV Biennale di Venezia, German Pavilion, Venice 1990*  
Multi-part sculptural room installation  
Installation view K21, Düsseldorf  
Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf  
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Photo Althea Ruoppo  
Courtesy the Artist and Sprüth Magers  
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Egenhofer, "Spatialized Memory", 173.

In a conversation with art critic Helga Meister in 1989, Mucha stated that careful consideration of his sculptures' individual elements was essential to comprehending their subtexts: "Seen in isolation and at first glance, many things do not look like art from the outset, like an artistic whole. Only those who see, recognise and name all the components of a work can understand the meaning of my pictures".<sup>104</sup> For Mucha, a sculpture is like a documentary photograph: an image that attempts to objectively record the world. His instructions for interpretation place a heavy burden of responsibility on the curator, the critic, and the art historian, who run the risk of boring the visitor or reader with descriptive detail. One may grasp that *Das Deutschlandgerät*'s various materials are connected to the artist's private studio in Düsseldorf, Germany's national railway, and the country's impending reunification: contextual ties that aid in its classification as another example of an artwork that belongs to a national category. Indeed, Mucha's return of the work to its German origins with its reconstruction at the *Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen* in his native Düsseldorf complicates the notion of the industrial transnational. In the artist's 2022 exhibition catalogue, *Gallery 2.1* is labeled as a "non-demountable exhibition space" in the media description of *Das Deutschlandgerät*. This characterisation seems to suggest that a "Germany Device" is meant exclusively for display in a German space.<sup>105</sup> Yet by following Mucha's advice and reevaluating the work's components, as has been done in this essay, one might arrive at the conclusion that the artist rendered, in 1990 and again in 2002 and 2021, the industrial transnational through his appropriation of various forms and materials from, and references to, the local Venetian context. *Das Deutschlandgerät* illuminates his efforts toward cultural sensitivity to the shared manufacturing heritage of familiar and foreign places alike. It creates a complex network of associations, simultaneously moving within and far beyond its local German sources.<sup>106</sup> With this work, the artist memorialised, more generally, what he calls our "collective biography", or the common experiences that shape us. Indeed, for Mucha, the railways serve as a "model for explaining the world".<sup>107</sup>

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Meister, "Diskussion: Deutschlandgerät", 411.

105

See "List of Works", in *Der Mucha: Ein Anfangsverdacht*, 297.

106

Here again, Miwon Kwon's study of site-specificity is a helpful model in understanding a relational sensibility that holds places in a state of dialectical tension. Such site-oriented practices address "the uneven conditions of adjacencies and distances *between* [...] one place [...] *next* to another, rather than invoking equivalences via one thing *after* another". See Kwon, "By Way of a Conclusion", 166.

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Alexander Pühringer, "Reinhard Mucha - Eine Annäherung", *Noema* (July/August 1990): 46. Mucha is quoted as using the German word *Welterklärungsmodell*.

### Author's Biography

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