

Die GRUPPE – international artists´ cooperative, 1983-2002

a personal point of view

I had already moved into a viable studio in Stuttgart, and was doing my first showing of paintings at the America Haus in the Friedrichstrasse, when I chanced to meet him: András Márkos, an ethnic Hungarian from Romania, had just arrived on the scene and was eager to encounter artists from the west, simply to initiate art activities that might shed light on the new predicament in which he suddenly found himself. The year was 1980 and the Berlin Wall was still standing.

He was rushing in from the communist east, while I was bouncing in from the capitalistic west. We collided in a culture foreign to us both, in a place that became our playground of somber debate for the next 2 decades. Even in the onset of our spontaneous alliance Márkos and I shared a mutual interest in the exotic of foreign relations, and the antagonism of borderline experiences. Instinctively we decided that matadors of our caliber couldn't take the world alone, believing that a group effort was more effective if our cultural endeavors were to make any difference.

To those ends we founded an international artists´ group in Leonberg called "Die GRUPPE". In 1981 the original blueprint involved 6 artists of 6 nationalities, including the German Saxon, Gert Fabritius from Bucharest, the ethnic Romanian, Adrian Buba from Paris, and Austrian, Norbert Fleischmann of Vienna. Hans Mendler from Leonberg rounded out the group, offering us a base for our meetings in the initial months of our structuring. Nearly a year later Fleishmann and Buba dropped out, and we carried on as a 4 member group.

By and by our frenzied system of self-promotion began to prosper, but mainly because we were all so distinctly different. In fact our group dynamic came to depend on it. Our quartet of 4 nationalities from all sides of the globe was really unique at the time, setting a standard for anyone wanting to bet their chances on the art scene; and competition throughout the art market was no less fierce then than it is today. As a loosely netted team with distinct, individual profiles and locations throughout Europe, we recognized that we had better chances to disseminate our ideas and philosophies and get a footing in the market, than if we did it on our own. By and by exhibitions took in bookings in cities such as Paris, Berlin, Dortmund and Vienna, and gave us encouragement to try other things.

Not long after our founding we were able to win the backing from experts such as Dr. Helge Bathelt (Herrenberg), a widely recognized authority on contemporary art in European art circles, and from Bjorn Engholm, formerly the head of the German ministry for culture and education in Berlin, who opened the group's exhibitions on a number of occasions, or authored introductory remarks in various catalogs. By 1992 the Stuttgart gallerist, Gerlinde Walz had entered the scene, and contributed extensively to the formal marketing of the group.

Back in the year 1984, the making of our first big exhibition in the la Esplanade Gallery of Paris was to become the real acid test. I recall the enormous challenge of driving there with two cars with no ready works to show on hand - just a lot of paint, brushes and canvas in order to see what we could create for the announced exhibition in the remaining time span (the original speaker even receded his offer after realizing this!). The overall experience was invigorating, both in the making, as well as in the high quality of painting that we as individuals were able to achieve. Every painting, installation, or drawing exposed in the final exhibition was born on site. Our self-imposed symposium of two weeks had proven itself a success.

In retrospective, our slugging, unswerving interaction in that enclosed underground premise of the la Esplanade had evolved into a "risk" laboratory of sorts, where concepts and ideas for the upcoming public opening had to be incubated on the spot. That no-way-out approach seemed all the more authentic, in that the impetus for producing was then for the sake of art, and not necessarily for a prescribed market. This style went on to set a significant tone for work and cooperation throughout the group's whole existence.

Frederick Bunsen 2014

Presseinformation (April 1984)

Ein Name wird Programm

Die Gruppe

Stuttgart. Mit dem "Freien Markt für aktuelle Kunst", Dortmund, feiert auch eine Künstlervereinigung Premiere, die sich schlicht „Die Gruppe“ nennt. Der Name verrät ein Programm. Sechs Künstler haben eine Gesellschaft bürgerlichen Rechts gegründet, die neben den aktiven auch stille Teilhaber zulässt. Rechtsanwälte, Betriebswirte und Kunsthistoriker helfen mit ihrem Fachwissen den Künstlern, ihre Zukunft selbst in die Hand zu nehmen.

Durch den unkonventionellen Schritt wird den gemeinsamen Aktivitäten ein juristisches Fundament gegeben, die finanzielle Unabhängigkeit gesichert und die Möglichkeit geschaffen, frei von den Interessen anderer zu arbeiten.

In der "Gruppe" soll die Konkurrenz zur Kooperation werden. Die Künstler, zuhause in Stuttgart, Wien und Paris, tauschen ihre Informationen aus, nutzen gemeinsam ihre Kontakte und verstehen auch die Internationalität der Vereinigung als Chance für die eigene künstlerische Entwicklung.

Besuchen Sie „Die Gruppe“ zu einem Gespräch auf Stand 155 in der Dortmunder Westfalenhalle, in der der „Freie Markt für aktuelle Kunst“ vom 21. bis 25. April 1984 stattfindet. Ein Katalog wird Sie näher in die ungewöhnliche Gruppenkonzeption und die Arbeiten der einzelnen Künstler einführen.

Die Gruppe

international artists' cooperation

Founded 1983 in Leonberg, Germany by 4 international artists, originally as a structure for self-promotion and exposure in international art circles.

Bunsen (1952)

Fabritius (1940)

Mendler (1950)

Márkos (1950)

Drawing, painting, printing, performance implemented the artists beginning as a group. Apart from the freshness and expressiveness of painting, the group members have never developed a uniform group style. Each member has chosen a distinct approach along his creative path of development. First successful exposure for *Die Gruppe* came with a major performance and installation in the 2000 m² exhibition space of the Paris *Galerie d'Esplanade de la Defense* in 1984.

Group appearances have proceeded since then at regular intervals. In 10 years of active participation primarily within the European art community art audiences can readily identify with the consistent high quality of *Die Gruppe*.

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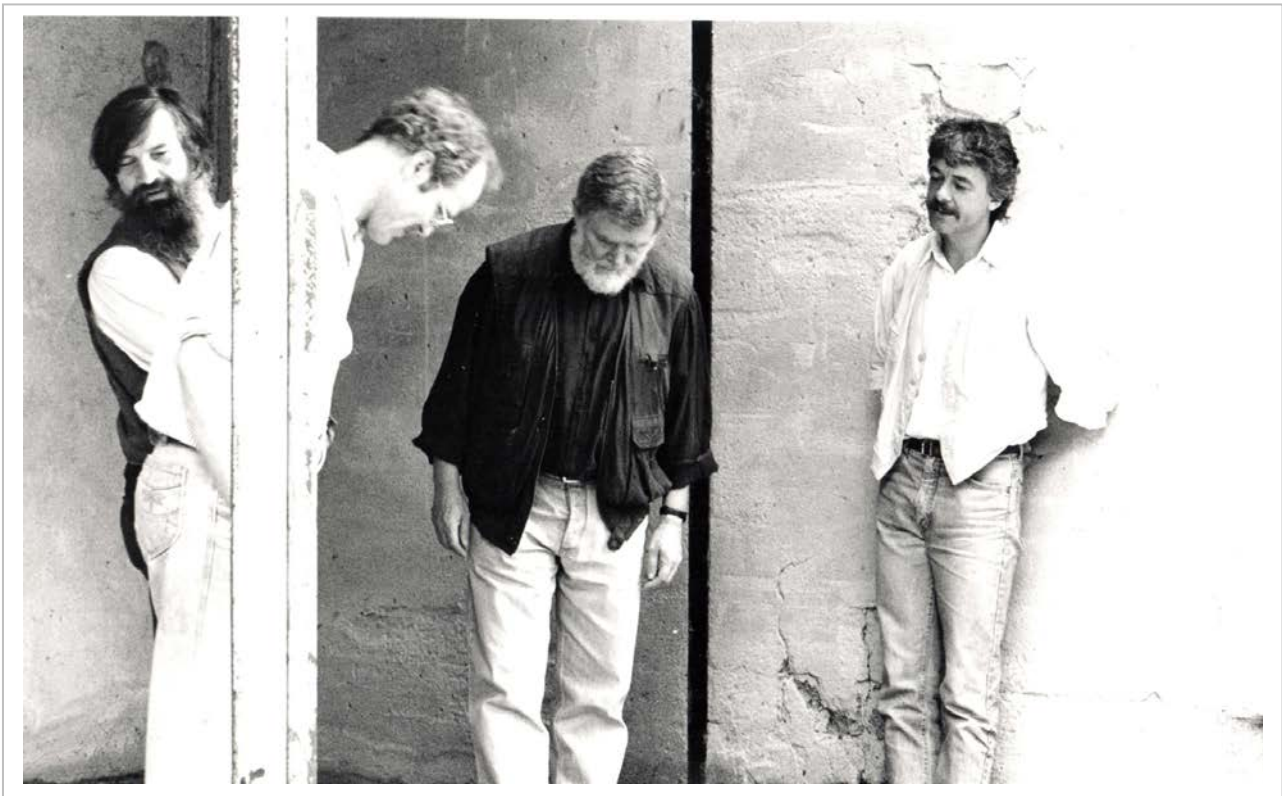
- Paris, Galerie d'Esplanade de la Defense 1984, *Klausur Avec Die Gruppe*
- Heimsheim (BRD) 1984, *Kafka Installation*
- Köln ART COLOGNE 1985, *Die Gruppe*
- Saarbrücken (BRD), Galerie Steiner 1985, *Die Gruppe*
- Dortmund KUNSTMESSE 1985, *Die Gruppe*
- Leonberg, Böblingen, Herrenberg (BRD) 1988, *Die Gruppe*
- Niemwegen-Overasselt (Holland), 1990 Galerie Xenia
- Dusseldorf ART MULTIPLE 1992, *Die Gruppe*
- Syombohely (Hungary) KUNSTHALLE 1992, *Die Gruppe*
- Waldkreiburg (BRD) Städtisches Museum 1992, *Die Gruppe*
- Böblingen (BRD) Landratsamt 1993, *Die Gruppe*
- Stuttgart (BRD), Galerie Gerlinde Walz 1993, *Die Gruppe*
- Düsseldorf ART MULTIPLE 1993, *Die Gruppe*
- Düsseldorf ART MULTIPLE 1994, *Die Gruppe*

Published graphic portfolios

Dionysian Rapture

10 years Die Gruppe

Moon Ladder



Die Gruppe Juni 1992: András Márkos, Frederick Bunsen, Gert Fabritius, Hans Mendler
Foto: Inge Pfitzenmaier, Urbach