



instead to engage with the objects of daily living as experienced in the divided state of her childhood. We find drawings, for example, taken from repro-photos from pieces of recycled plastic made and sold in DDR as 'Bastelunterlagen', a sort of cover to protect a child's desk when the kid was fumbling with glue.

The resulting works have very little to do with tired analyses of propaganda. Rather, her works seem to be more involved with provoking question. They implicitly raise questions about the point at which the coincidental and prosaic become politicised in a visual form. Do the depictions in these kinds of artefacts have an overtly political layer? Or does the ideological dust that covers them come from the projection of our expectations? In our eagerness to engage with the ideological idiosyncrasies of the DDR, because of a kind of thought 'Ostalgia' as it were, we run the risk of equating certain visual aesthetics with specific ideological intent when, in fact, the vernaculars themselves could be the product of far more practical reasons such as lacking the resources to use up-to-date technologies.

Of course, this does not remove the association between the visual aesthetic and an ideological state apparatus. But it does question the notion that that a visual aesthetic was created by and in order to serve the ideological state in a hermetic, divorced way. Contrary to the contemporaneous propaganda circulated in the 'free world', the DDR had limited resources and needed to make pragmatic decisions as much as political ones. One of the effective coups of Western propaganda during the Cold War was subtly equating the state mechanisms of the DDR with what people increasingly understood of the Nazi state's ability to entirely usurp culture as propaganda, restructuring almost all cultural forms to carry its symbology, codes and content. By contrast, despite the state's sweeping reach, the DDR was never in an economic position to exert the level of control exerted by the Third Reich. The visual language of the DDR, once one leaves the realm of artefacts made for explicit ideological and propaganda purposes, is ultimately ersatz, even if recognisable. The 'East German look' to things is often a testament to problems with the state coffers rather than an active aesthetic choice.

Carl's work does not attempt to completely deconstruct the paradigm. Her own particular focus is not an overtly political analysis of DDR aesthetics. Rather, it follows her winding trail of the core expressions inherent in earlier movements of Romanticism and how these segue into ideas expressed through art since then. She is concerned with 'Sehnsucht', a German concept incorporating high expectations and wishful thinking that informs so many of the ideas expressed through historical artistic movements, such as the early Modern avant garde's envisioning of a 'new art for a new world, inhabited by a New Man'. And most of all, she is interested in its failures, its inevitable failure. For example the recent "Holzroboter" wooden robots have a lot to do with cubism, and more generally with its promises, the 'Sehnsucht' to re-invent the world in a glorious non-capitalist industrial age to come.

Yet, in Carl's work, these starting points, the things embedded in art or quintessential objects, are more like Proust's madeleine, something trivial, ephemeral and passing that sparks a stream of emotive, sensory and personal connections. Like the simple little cake for Proust, once it has served its purpose, triggering a lengthy lucid vision full of clarity, what remains is the work itself and very little of the thing that unleashed it. Bettina Carl looks to simple sources that inextricably unleash a deluge of associations of living through a period in which Germany was not as it is now and in which that difference stamped itself onto the objects of daily living. And, as with Proust, what remains is not those things themselves, but a removed, abstracted and free artistic manifestation of the thinking they trigger. KP

Bettina Carl lives and works in Zürich and Berlin. She has exhibited in international institutions and project spaces including Kunstbank, Berlin; Temple Bar Gallery, Dublin; Immanence Art, Paris; MAMA, Rotterdam; Kunstamt Kreuzberg Bethanien, Berlin; White Space, Zürich; and Villa am Aabach Städtische Galerie Uster, Zürich. She has contributed writings to numerous journals and catalogues including the essay "Hard Work Looking Easy, the Ballerinas Always Smile. Notes on the Art of Hanne Darboven" in the book "Afterthought. New Writing on Conceptual Art" edited by Mike Sperlinger.