

Robotron. Code and Utopia

25.10.25–22.2.26

Opening, Friday, 24 October 2025, 7 pm

GfZK Neubau

Press preview: Friday, 24 October 2025, 11 am

With: Karl-Heinz Adler, Tina Bara, Horst Bartnig, Nadja Buttendorf, Carlfriedrich Claus, Karl Clauss Dietel, Georg Eckelt, Antye Guenther, Su Yu Hsin, Margret Hoppe, Francis Hunger, knowbotiq, Irma Markulin, Helga Paris, A. R. Penck, Ramona Schacht and Luca Bublik with Rita Große, Sandra Schäfer, Suzanne Treister, Werner Tübke, Marion Wenzel and Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt

Curatorial team: Inke Arns (HMKV), Sabine Weier (GfZK), Jan Wenzel (Spector Books), Mathias Wittmann (HMKV), Franciska Zólyom (GfZK)

Project management: Hanar Hupka

Graphic design: Wolfgang Schwärzler

Szenography: Julia Gerke

The rapid rise of computers and microelectronics since the 1960s is often described as the 'third industrial revolution'. In East Germany, the name Robotron became closely associated with this transformative technology, which reshaped every sector of the economy. Revisiting the history of this state-owned enterprise highlights not only the technical possibilities and societal hopes it carried, but also the political and economic contradictions that ultimately contributed to the collapse of East Germany.

Bringing together works by more than 20 artists, the exhibition explores the transformation of the industrial landscape in East Germany. It addresses themes such as cybernetics and bureaucracy, espionage and reverse engineering, the promises of automation and labour in 'real existing socialism' cleanrooms and environmental destruction, the decline of once-significant production sites, and the re-industrialisation of the Dresden region as 'Silicon Saxony'. The photographs, films, installations, and graphic works – some created in the GDR – reflect the diverse intellectual and aesthetic impulses that continue to resonate from this period.

An essay unfolds along the walls of the exhibition space, framing questions that speak not only to the history of Robotron but are also relevant for understanding our present, shaped as it is by technology. It traces the connections between geopolitics and global markets, the crisis-ridden planned economy of the GDR, and the role of international trade embargoes. In doing so, it challenges conventional ideas that have solidified in the narrative of a 'socialist' past.

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The project *Robotron. Code and Utopia* is a collaboration between GfZK – Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst Leipzig and HMKV – Hartware MedienKunstVerein Dortmund. It was initiated by Jochen Becker. The exhibition will be presented under the title *Robotron. Working Class and Intelligentsia* at HMKV from 14 March to 26 July 2026. A publication accompanying the exhibition will be released by Spector Books in February 2026.

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A selection of images can be found online at:
www.gfzk.de/presse

We are happy to arrange interview appointments and tours of the exhibition with the curators at:
presse@gfzk.de

We will inform you about the accompanying programme shortly.

Biographies of the participating artists

Karl-Heinz Adler (1927 Remtengrün, Vogtland – 2018, Dresden) was an artist and educator, and is considered an important representative of constructive-concrete art. He focused on structures composed of repetitive elements. In addition to his independent artistic work, he pursued the applied concept of 'production systems' in the 1950s in close collaboration with Friedrich Kracht. Together, they developed a variable system of concrete molded blocks that shaped architecture in the GDR. His works have been shown in numerous solo and group exhibitions in Germany and abroad.

Tina Bara studied history and art history at Humboldt University in Berlin and photography at the Academy of Visual Arts in Leipzig. In the GDR, she worked as a freelance photographer and was active in the opposition peace movement, including 'Women for Peace'. In July 1989, she moved to West Berlin. Since 1993, she has been a professor of artistic photography at the HGB. Since 2000, Bara has regularly participated in exhibitions, published books and conducted art and teaching projects in Germany and abroad.

Horst Bartnig (1936 Milicz, Poland – 2025, Berlin) completed an apprenticeship as a painter and studied at the Technical College for Applied Arts in Magdeburg. From the mid-1960s onwards, he became an important representative of concrete art. Inspired by mathematics, physics and technological developments at the end of the 1970s, he created his first computer graphics. Bartnig was a member of the Association of Visual Artists in the GDR. His works can be found in collections such as the

Neue Nationalgalerie Berlin, the Bundeskunstsammlung, and the Haus Konstruktiv Zurich.

Carlfriedrich Claus (1930, Annaberg-Buchholz – 1998 Chemnitz) is considered a co-founder of visual poetry. He created filigree works on transparent paper, which he densely marked and described on both sides. He also created an acoustic work. He was part of the Clara Mosch collective, which was mainly active in Karl-Marx-Stadt. In the years following the political change in 1989/1990, the artist received numerous honors. He was a member of the Academy of Arts in Berlin, and in addition to prestigious art prizes, he was awarded an honorary professorship by the Free State of Saxony and the Federal Cross of Merit.

Nadja Buttendorf is a trained goldsmith and studied fine arts at Burg Giebichenstein University of Art and Design Halle (Saale). In her work, she questions gender constructs and value creation mechanisms of the human body in our digital society. With interactive installations and videos, she makes women in the history of technology visible. She has exhibited at numerous institutions in Germany and abroad, including the HKW Berlin, the Gaîté Lyrique in Paris, and the Seoul Museum of Art.

Karl Clauss Dietel (1934 Reinholdshain, Glauchau – 2022 Chemnitz) is one of Germany's best-known designers. He designed GDR classics such as the Simson Mokick mopeds, Erika typewriters and radio sets, small technical devices, logos, product graphics, independent visual artworks, and architecture-related works. In 2014, he was the first and only designer from the former GDR to receive the Federal Design Award for his life's work. Dietel participated in numerous (inter)national exhibitions. His design classics are represented in major museums.

Georg Eckelt (1932 Wischütz, Lower Silesia – 2012 Königs Wusterhausen) was one of the most important documentary photographers in the GDR. From the 1960s onwards, he staged and documented design and everyday culture on behalf of design studios, industry, state archives, and numerous magazine and book publications. Most of his pictures can be found in the photo library of the Industrial Design Collection, which was founded in the GDR and transferred to the Haus der Geschichte foundation at the Museum in the Kulturbrauerei in Berlin in 2005.

Antye Guenther, aka (baby) DATA DIVA, is a glitter-loving knowledge-inventor and unreliable narrator, born in a country that no longer exists. Rumoured to have been a former child test subject in Soviet brain experiments, she now joyfully interrogates the conditions and fictionalities of Western knowledge and data regimes. With a warm fondness for troublemaking, she mischievously crosses disciplinary boundaries, often while crafting cheap-ass rhinestone jewellery as part of an ongoing collaborative glitter-as-(communal)-care-practice.

Su Yu Hsin is an artist and filmmaker. In her research-oriented practice, she explores the relationship between ecology and technology. Her analytical and poetic narratives focus on the critical infrastructures where humans and non-humans come together. Her video installations have been exhibited worldwide in museums and at international art biennials, including the Bundeskunsthalle Bonn, the Centre Pompidou-Metz, the Museum of Contemporary Art Busan and the Taipei Biennial.

Francis Hunger combines artistic research and media theory with the possibilities of storytelling in his practice. In installations, radio plays, performances, and internet-based art, he explores the applications and implications of digital technologies such as artificial intelligence and civil drones. Hunger teaches at the AdBK Munich and is a postdoctoral researcher at the Dataunion ERC project at the VUB in Brussels. His work is exhibited internationally. He is co-editor of www.carrier-bag.net.

Margret Hoppe studied photography at the Academy of Visual Arts in Leipzig and at the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris. She has been devoted to architectural photography for many years, often in a historical or social context. In projects such as *Die verschwundenen Bilder* and *Bulgarische Denkmale*, she deals with the disappearance of art and monuments in the context of social upheaval. Hoppe's work has been shown at the Venice Biennale in 2024 and in numerous European institutions. In 2024, she was a scholarship holder of the Bauhaus Dessau Foundation at the Meisterhaus Muche.

knowbotiq (Yvonne Wilhelm, Christian Hübler) experiment with forms of knowledge, political representations, and epistemic disobedience. In various formats—performative settings, critical fabulations, inventions, encounters—they explore molecular, psychotropic, and derivative aesthetics. They have participated in documenta fifteen and the 49th Venice Biennale (Austrian Pavilion), among others, and have exhibited at the New Museum New York, Kunstinstituut Melly (formerly Witte de With), and Kunsthalle St. Gallen.

Irma Markulin completed her education at the Academy of Fine Arts in Zagreb and the Weissensee Academy of Art in Berlin, among others. She works with images that are anchored in the collective memory and uses painterly means to examine their staging in different political contexts. Markulin's works have been shown in numerous exhibitions at home and abroad, and she has received several international art scholarships, most recently *Culture Moves Europe* in 2024/25 and the scholarship from the Croatian Ministry of Culture and Media in 2023.

Helga Paris (1938 Gollnow, Pomerania – 2024 Berlin) plays a prominent role in German photography. She is considered a chronicler of the post-war period in East Germany and photographed people and everyday life in the big city over several decades. With a few exceptions and without formal training, she worked exclusively on her own initiative, as there was no market for her pictures in the GDR. Nevertheless, her work was extremely popular even during the GDR era. Her photographs were shown in exhibitions and books worldwide. In 2019, the artist donated her negative archive to the Academy of Arts, of which she had been a member since 1996.

A. R. Penck (Ralf Winkler, 1939 Dresden – 2017 Zurich) was a painter, draftsman, sculptor, graphic artist, Super 8 filmmaker, musician, and author. In his life and artistic practice, he combined analytical and visual thinking with ideas from philosophy, natural science, information theory, and technology. In 1980, Penck left the GDR and moved to the Federal Republic of Germany. Penck is considered one of the fathers of the Junge

Wilde" (Young Wild Ones) and one of the most important artistic chroniclers of recent German history. His works can be found in collections such as the Museum of Modern Art, New York, the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, and the Hamburger Kunsthalle.

Ramona Schacht and Luca Bublik combine artistic and social science research in their joint practice. For several years, they have been working with archives and image collections that document work in the GDR and the Soviet Union. Schacht studied photography at the Academy of Visual Arts Leipzig under Heidi Specker and was the recipient of the Wüstenrot Foundation's Documentary Photography Award 2023/2024 and the MdbK Leipzig (Connect) Award 2018. Her work has been exhibited at Urbane Künste Ruhr and Kunsthaus DAS MINSK, Potsdam, among other venues. Luca Bublik received his doctorate from the Bauhaus University Weimar and works as a freelance author and curator. Most recently, he participated artistically in Urbane Künste Ruhr 2025 and curated the exhibition *Reading the Spinnerei* on Rita Große's work and industrial photography at the Archiv Massiv Leipzig.

After completing her master's degree in photography in 1974, Rita Große opened a photo lab in Leipzig's Waldstraßenviertel district. This made her one of the few independent contract photographers in the GDR in the 1970s and 1980s. In addition to large companies such as the Baumwollspinnerei Leipzig cotton mill and the Halbleiterwerk Frankfurt (Oder) semiconductor factory, she photographed for various combines, museums, the monument preservation office, banks, hotels, and restaurants, and accompanied construction projects such as the Bowlingtreff in Leipzig. She ran her photo studio until 2005. After that, she continued to work as an industrial and architectural photographer.

Sandra Schäfer's work in film, photography, and artistic research focuses on the processes of creating urban and transregional spaces, history, and image politics. In 2018, she completed her artistic PhD on militant images and space politics at the HfbK Hamburg. Schäfer is a professor at the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich and an associate member of the feminist film distributor Cinenova in London. Her work is regularly shown at festivals such as the 66th and 67th Berlinale (Forum Expanded), Berlin, and in exhibitions in Germany and abroad. She has published numerous books, including with Archive Books, Camera Austria and Spector Books.

Suzanne Treister initially worked as a painter and became a pioneer in the field of digital media and the internet in the early 1990s. She uses various media such as video, drawing and watercolour to explore the relationship between new technologies, alternative belief systems and the future of humanity. With speculative reinterpretations of history, she examines the existence of hidden forces at work in the world. Her work has been exhibited in numerous institutions, including the Tate Modern, London, the 14th Shanghai Biennale, 2023, and the Centre Pompidou, Paris.

Werner Tübke (1929 Schönbeck, Elbe – 2004, Leipzig) was a co-founder of the Leipzig School. After completing an apprenticeship as a painter, he studied at the art academies in Leipzig and Greifswald. He is known for his painting style in the tradition of the Renaissance and Mannerism. From the early 1970s onwards, Tübke enjoyed international success and museums in Germany and abroad acquired his paintings. His monumental *Peasants' War Panorama* in Bad Frankenhausen was completed in 1989.

Marion Wenzel studied photography at the Academy of Visual Arts in Leipzig under Prof. Evelyn Richter. Inspired by her professor, she began photographing the open-cast mines in the south of Leipzig in the early 1980s. Over several decades, she created an archive that reveals the man-made changes to the landscape and the accompanying environmental destruction. From 2005 to 2025, Wenzel worked as a collection photographer for the University of Leipzig, documenting the university's history in numerous photographs, including the removal of the Karl Marx relief, the demolition of the socialist campus buildings, and the construction of the Paulinum.

Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt (1932, Wurzen – 2024, Berlin) created a diverse oeuvre of paintings, drawings, collages and so-called *typewritings*. In these works, created with a typewriter on paper, she combined poetry, graphic design and conceptual art. Together with her partner Robert Rehfeldt, she was part of the international mail art movement in the GDR, which enabled international artistic exchange and the uncensored dissemination of art and ideas. After 1989, Wolf-Rehfeldt completely ceased her artistic work. Her works have been exhibited widely, including at DAS MINSK, Potsdam, and at documenta 14, Kassel, and can be found in collections such as the Bundeskunstsammlung and the Museum Ludwig, Cologne. In 2022, she was awarded the Hannah Höch Prize.