



# Mit dem Kreidestift und Farben: Revolutionizing Grünewald in the German Democratic Republic

Tamara Golan

*The subject matter is visible to everyone, the content is found only by those who have something to do with it, but the form remains a secret of the masters.*<sup>1</sup> (Wilhelm Worringer, 1953)

## Grünewald's Mythology

In 1957, the East German town of Halle (Saale) commissioned the sculptor Gerhard Geyer to design a memorial plaque dedicated to the sixteenth-century artist Matthias Grünewald. Drawing on the formal idiom of high medieval tomb sculpture, epitomized by the famous tomb of Rudolf of Swabia (c. 1025–80), the bronze monument features the attenuated form of the painter, who stands proudly erect, grasping his brush and palette in each hand (plate 1). An inscription along the edge, formulated by the eminent Marxist art historian Peter Feist, identifies Grünewald as 'Painter of the cardinal. Comrade-in-arms of the peasants. Fountain engineer for the townsfolk'.<sup>2</sup> The peculiar appellation of 'comrade-in-arms of the peasants' refers to Grünewald's supposed participation in the German Peasants' War of 1525 – the ill-fated uprising of commoners who, inspired by Martin Luther's doctrine of spiritual freedom and guided by Thomas Müntzer's millenarian theology, revolted against their landlords and rulers in an attempt to usher in a new social and political world order.<sup>3</sup>

While several prominent artists of the time were directly caught up in the tumult, the evidence for Grünewald's involvement in the 1525 rebellion, as I shall detail below, is scantier. Compared to his contemporary, Albrecht Dürer, very little verifiable information on Grünewald has survived; indeed, the artist's true name – Mathis Nithart Gothardt – was not uncovered until the 1910s. Thanks to this striking lack of biographical detail, his surviving works became ripe for projection, scholarly imaginations fuelled by the dramatic historical backdrop against which he worked.<sup>4</sup> Previous scholars have demonstrated the artist's particular vulnerability to manifold ideologies and mythologies throughout Germany's history.<sup>5</sup> My article explores another chapter in Grünewald's reception history and his adaptation to evolving conceptions of 'Germanness' – one that was specifically designed to counter earlier fascist formulations – homing in on a new mythology developed in the early years of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), exemplified by the inscription on Gerhard Geyer's memorial plaque. For it was only during these formative years, when East German politicians and academics struggled to create a cohesive national identity, haunted by the shadows of their Nazi heritage and the desire to distinguish themselves from their capitalist Western counterpart, that Grünewald the revolutionary emerged.<sup>6</sup>

**Detail of Bernhard Heisig, *Problems of Military Chaplaincy, from The Fascist Nightmare*, c. 1960 (plate 10).**

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I Gerhard Geyer, *Grünewald Memorial*, 1957. Bronze, 200 × 120 cm. Halle: St Ulrich's Church (exterior wall of eastern choir). Photo: Seatoj/Creative Commons.



The architect of this Grünewald mythology was the art historian W. K. Zülch, an influential Grünewald scholar, who came to fame for his important archival reconstruction of the artist's life based on his research in the Frankfurt city archives. In 1917, he first published the results of his findings, identifying Grünewald as Mathis Gothardt Nithart.<sup>7</sup> After several more articles over the next two decades, Zülch published his magisterial monograph *Der historische Grünewald* in 1938, which provided the first comprehensive biography of Grünewald. It remains one of the foundational works on the artist.<sup>8</sup>

However, it was not until the end of his career that Zülch would reconceptualize the artist as a revolutionary hero. In 1952, the dramatic discovery of three Grünewald drawings (inserted in the so-called 'Plock Bible') in East Berlin served as a generative moment for the new revision of Grünewald (plate 2, plate 3 and plate 4). A flurry of articles in both East and West German newspapers reported on the find, reigniting public interest in an artist who had largely fallen out of favour since the Third Reich.<sup>9</sup> Capitalizing on this renewed interest, Zülch published a polemical article in 1953 on

the Plock Bible drawings, weaving a fantastic narrative of Grünewald as a persecuted revolutionary and peasant sympathizer.<sup>10</sup>

Zülch had, in fact, laid the groundwork for the early 1950s legend of Grünewald the revolutionary several decades earlier when he published his discovery of archival evidence that connected the painter to the war.<sup>11</sup> His alleged support of the peasant uprising hinges on two documents from an inventory of the artist's estate made shortly after his death in the summer of 1528.<sup>12</sup> Later scholars, notably Hans Jürgen Rieckenberg and Wolf Lücking, would query whether these documents actually attest to Grünewald's participation in the uprising, and his involvement is no longer generally accepted as fact.<sup>13</sup> It is beyond the scope of this article, however, to adjudicate what these documents do or do not prove.<sup>14</sup> Instead, I am interested in the shift in Zülch's methodology between his 1938 and 1953 publications.

Zülch's argument in the earlier essay is based purely on methodical archival work – indeed, after the destruction of the Frankfurt archive by Allied bombing, he



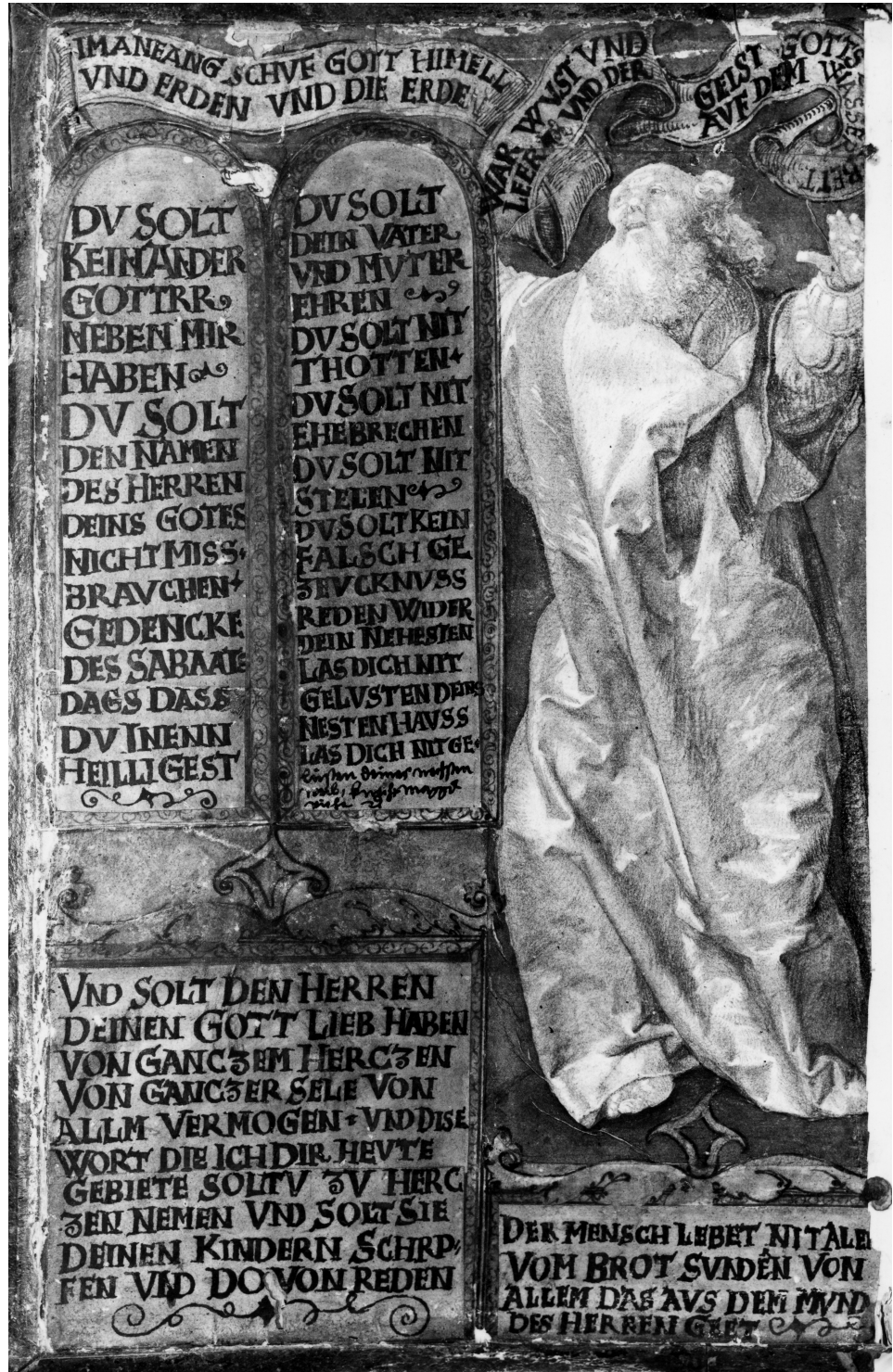
2 Matthias Grünewald and Hans Plock, *Prophet [Moses or Aaron?]*, from the *Plock Bible*, 1541. Black chalk over grey wash, heightened with white, 37.5 × 25 cm. Berlin: Kupferstichkabinett, Staatliche Museen (on permanent loan from the Stiftung Stadtmuseum Berlin). Photo: bpk Bildagentur/Staatliche Museen Berlin/Jörg P. Anders/ Art Resource, NY.

was explicitly prized by colleagues as a living repository of the archival information lost in the war. His post-war account of Grünewald's participation in the rebellion, by contrast, is not grounded in documentary research but in formal analysis – that is, the practice of describing and analysing the formal elements of a work of art. This approach, of course, is not unusual. What is striking, however, is that Zülch does not use formal analysis to gloss the images themselves but to capture the interiority of a historical person – specifically, the artist's political convictions – arguing that



3 Matthias Grünewald and Hans Plock, *John the Evangelist* [?], from the *Plock Bible*, 1541. Black chalk over grey wash, heightened with white, coloured with red and green, 37.5 × 25 cm. Berlin: Kupferstichkabinett, Staatliche Museen (on permanent loan from the Stiftung Stadtmuseum Berlin). Photo: bpk Bildagentur/Staatliche Museen Berlin/Jörg P. Anders/Art Resource, NY.

4 Matthias Grünewald and Hans Plock, *God the Creator* [?], from the *Plock Bible*, 1541. Charcoal, yellow-greenish colour (added by a different hand), 36.6 × 23.8 cm. Berlin: Kupferstichkabinett, Staatliche Museen (on permanent loan from the Stiftung Stadtmuseum Berlin). Photo: Berlin Kupferstichkabinett.



his radical sympathies are evinced by his frenetic lines, potent colours, even the suggestive moment of a figure's drapery. Grünewald, he writes, 'only revealed himself through his chalk and paint [Kreidestift und Farben]'.<sup>15</sup>

On the surface, Zülch's text reads as an almost parodic example of leftist, partisan scholarship – indeed, as we shall see, his Marxist rhetoric was driven by careerist opportunism rather than any motivated commitment to socialist ideology. Thus, I am not attempting to recuperate Zülch's formalist method as an example of

'good' Marxist, or even political, art history. But nor do I think that we can simply reduce his work to mere *Realpolitik*, a cautionary tale of scholarship that tries to meet the demands of a totalitarian regime. To do so would be to uphold the Cold War biases that plague post-unification scholarship on East German art, which has largely written off artists who worked for the ruling Socialist Unity Party (SED) as slavish propagandists devoid of any artistic merit while simultaneously privileging so-called dissident artists and the oppression of their work by the state.<sup>16</sup> In recent years, a spate of challenges to this narrative from scholars such as April Eisman, Seth Howe, Sara Blaylock, Sarah James and Briana Smith has enriched our understanding of East German art by more closely attending to its social, political, and cultural context, revealing the circumstances of artistic production in the GDR to be more messy and complex than the official-vs-unofficial-art dichotomy would have us believe.<sup>17</sup> A comparable treatment of East German art history, however, remains to be seen.

Building on these recent correctives to such mechanistic explanations, my account of Zülch and his analysis of the Plock Bible drawings offers a snapshot of a discipline in formation that reveals what happens when a scholar must decide how to make art history relevant to a new social order. It shows that what looks superficially like ideological appropriation of Grünewald for careerist ends is in fact a careful and sophisticated engagement with form's ideological potential.<sup>18</sup> Starting with the discovery of the Plock Bible drawings, I argue that the subsequent controversy prompted Zülch to gear his formal analysis to address serious concerns plaguing the East German artistic community – namely, their struggle to find the conceptual tools for creating works of art that met the criteria of Socialist Realism (the style prescribed by the SED) without sacrificing artistic quality. As cultural functionaries debated how art could promote the socialist ideals of the GDR, Grünewald's graphic style offered an alternative path through the gridlock produced by the false alternatives of state-sponsored culture, which were construed by party leaders as 'realism' against 'formalism'. The artist was presented through formal analysis as a successful model for reconciling form and content.

For Zülch, it was ultimately the tools of the artist's trade, his '*Kreidestift und Farben*', that activated and gave form to his revolutionary spirit. As such, his reinvention of Grünewald as a painter of the people not only attests to the degree to which East German art history needed to locate exemplary artistic prototypes, but also the ways in which scrutinizing the visual record yielded answers to pressing questions about suitably radical modes of picture-making. By tracking the odd turns by which Grünewald's image was reforged, I show how his resuscitation in East Germany did not simply exemplify, but in fact paved a new path for, the theory and practice of socialist form.

### **The Discovery of the Plock Bible**

The story of Grünewald's transformation began with a remarkable discovery that dramatically exposed the political fault lines separating a recently partitioned Germany. In early October 1952, Dr Walter Stengel, then director of the Märkisches Museum in East Berlin, discovered three Grünewald drawings cut and pasted into a Luther Bible printed in 1541.<sup>19</sup> The so-called Plock Bible was created by Hans Plock, a silk embroiderer for Cardinal Albrecht, Archbishop of Mainz.<sup>20</sup> At the time of the bible's discovery, Plock was already known through archival work as one of the official witnesses of Grünewald's death in Halle. The bible spans two volumes into which Plock cut and pasted eleven drawings, twenty-six copper engravings, ten woodcuts,

and two pages embellished with coats of arms. The drawings and prints are by, or copied from, a variety of predominantly German artists, including Dürer, Cranach, Schongauer, Holbein and Grünewald. Plock altered many of the drawings by colouring the figures with watercolours, decorating the pages with abstract ornamentation, and adding his own inscriptions. While the original subject matter of Grünewald's drawings remains an open question, Plock's assemblage recast the figures as God the Father, John the Evangelist, and a prophet (perhaps Moses or Aaron).<sup>21</sup>

Noteworthy for contributing three more drawings to Grünewald's limited oeuvre, the discovery set in motion a series of dramatic events that played an important role in reviving interest in Grünewald in the GDR. Stengel electrified the art-historical community when he announced his findings on 12 December 1952, at the conference of the Kunstgeschichtlichen Gesellschaft in West Berlin. Reporting on the conference for the Western daily *Die Neue Zeitung*, the art historian and critic Will Grohmann wrote:

[Stengel] was not on the programme and announced a find he had just made of earth-shattering importance: while leafing through a Luther Bible from 1542 [sic], he discovered three glued-in drawings by Grünewald [...] the oeuvre of Grünewald's drawings has unexpectedly risen from 33 to 36; Stengel has suddenly taken centre stage in the field of Grünewald research, and the entire art-historical world will soon know his name.<sup>22</sup>

This praise in the Western press raised the suspicions of the East German cultural politicians, who resented that Stengel had not first disclosed the discovery to any of his colleagues in East Berlin. Stengel had already incurred the displeasure of the SED after vehemently protesting the destruction of the Berliner Schloss by the government in 1950.<sup>23</sup> In August 1952, a lengthy report from the 'Genossen des Märkischen Museums an die Parteileitung der SED im Hauptamt Kunst' renounced his leadership of the museum for failing to align with the progressive values of the party.<sup>24</sup> The report cast doubt on Stengel's commitment to Marxist principles, complaining that he 'sees no social mission in his work, but instead views the museum as a kind of private collection from which "politics is to be kept out of at all costs"'.<sup>25</sup> In the report, Stengel was accused of a litany of offences, including mistreatment of staff, regressive working methods, and concealing the origins of his acquisition of silver goods that had been stolen from Jewish families during the Third Reich. The report ultimately proposed a collective takeover of the museum's management, condemning Stengel in its conclusion as 'a qualified bourgeois academic whose qualifications are currently being used against and not for us'.<sup>26</sup>

Stengel's dramatic reveal of the Grünewald drawings at the conference in West Berlin hastened his inevitable downfall.<sup>27</sup> On 16 December, two days after Grohmann's article appeared in *Die Neue Zeitung*, two museum associates installed by the SED questioned the director about the drawings. In the middle of the meeting, he received a phone call from a journalist with *Time* magazine about the discovery. The call further compromised Stengel's position, leaving the two associates with the impression that he had a relationship with the American press. That same day, Stengel furnished Grohmann with photos of the drawings for a feature-length article on the discovery in *Die Neue Zeitung*. Grohmann urged Stengel to flee to West Berlin before the article appeared at the end of the month.

Events quickly escalated after Stengel's interrogation, with rumours spreading that he was, in fact, a spy for West Germany. On 19 December, following the



instructions of the Staatlichen Kommission für Kunstangelegenheiten, the Volkspolizei were deployed to the museum to confiscate volume I of the bible, which contained the Grünewald drawings, on the grounds of ‘suspicion of a crime against public property’.<sup>28</sup> Fearing arrest, on 23 December, Stengel tendered his resignation and fled to West Berlin with his wife. The Volkspolizei continued to occupy the museum, confiscating the bible’s second volume on 3 January.<sup>29</sup> In addition, several of the former director’s close colleagues were interrogated and relieved of their positions at the museum.<sup>30</sup> According to a brief note on Stengel’s departure circulated sometime in late January, a representative of the East Berlin magistrate, Hans Baltschun, visited him in West Berlin to ask him to return to his position. Stengel turned down the request because he suspected that the police were occupying the museum in order to arrest him if he returned to work. Following his departure, the East Berlin government had Stengel’s personal property and private art collection confiscated. The official explanation for Stengel’s sudden resignation from the museum was vague and noncommittal until 1958, when a publication by the new director of the Märkisches Museum, Herbert Hampe, denounced Stengel as a supporter of fascism and fascist racial incitement.<sup>31</sup>

Shortly after the events of December 1952, a flurry of articles about the discovery and subsequent confiscation of the drawings appeared in Western publications like *Der Abend*, *Die Neue Zeitung* and *Time*. In the same issue as a multi-page feature decrying the Communist Party in America – full of criminals and in a state of disrepair – the *Time* article opens with dramatic flair:

In Berlin’s East zone one day last week, a squad of Communist police sped to the Märkisches Museum and shouldered their way inside. A few minutes later, they came out bearing two leather-bound volumes darkened with age. The books thus placed under ‘state protection’ were the rare (but not invaluable) 1541 edition of the Martin Luther Bible. What made this particular Bible worth state protection to culture-conscious East zone Reds were the three drawings loosely fastened inside: freshly discovered work of the early 16th-century German master, Mathias Grünewald.<sup>32</sup>

Grohmann, in *Die Neue Zeitung*, would go on to accuse the East German government of secreting away the Plock Bible to prevent further examination of its drawings.

While Western journalists, living through the final days of the Korean War and McCarthy era, exploited the Grünewald discovery to air anxieties about communist regimes, Stengel’s own scholarship on the drawings was remarkably, even deliberately, apolitical.<sup>33</sup> His most extensive treatment of the subject is a 1952 article published in the *Zeitschrift für Kunstwissenschaft* in which he argues that the three drawings were preparatory studies for Grünewald’s lost Transfiguration altarpiece. He further surmises that Plock acquired the drawings by stealing them from Grünewald’s estate after his death. When Baltschun visited him in West Berlin in January 1953, Stengel was asked to give a lecture on his findings at the Märkisches Museum or, failing that, to at least give a statement to the East German press; he declined both requests, stating that he wanted ‘the press to leave him alone and that he wished that both sides would let the matter go’. As his colleagues at the museum bitterly complained, he did not seem aware of the fact that ‘with this objectivist attitude, he is already siding with the western warmongers’.<sup>34</sup>

### Grünewald the Revolutionary

The first publication from the Eastern perspective was not to appear for almost an entire year. In the autumn of 1953, the newly revived East German journal *Bildende Kunst* [BK] published Zülch's article on the drawings.<sup>35</sup> The intensely polemical nature of its content is signalled by the editor's note that precedes it: 'To us, his [Zülch's] comments appear an important starting point for discussion, during which it will be necessary that we return to the background that led to the distorting representations in the western press'.<sup>36</sup> Zülch starts off with a condemnation of the West German newspapers, in which one reads 'about the mysterious disappearance of the drawings in the vaults of the *Volkspolizei* and the GDR's indifference toward Grünewald', claiming that their 'lack of knowledge and tendentious misrepresentation has brought nothing but new confusions into the world of Grünewald research'.<sup>37</sup>

The real target of his scholarly ire, however, was Stengel's reading of Grünewald. The article argues that the drawings were not preparatory sketches for a Transfiguration altarpiece, as Stengel had proposed, but for a Creation scene in the dome of the Mainz Cathedral.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, he takes almost personal offence at the suggestion that Plock might have stolen the drawings from Grünewald's estate. Instead, he provides a brief biographical history of Plock and Grünewald, both of whom worked at the court of Albrecht von Brandenburg, archbishop of Mainz. They were both – in Zülch's telling – devoted supporters of the Peasants' War, escaping religious persecution by fleeing together to Halle, where Grünewald died shortly thereafter of the plague. Zülch paints a picture of a faithful Plock tending to the dying wishes of his persecuted friend, going as far, in a later 1955 article, to describe the two artists as 'Arbeitskameraden'.<sup>39</sup>

Zülch uses the Plock Bible to tell a rich story about the Lutheran Reformation and Peasants' War, in which Plock emerges as a fervent sympathizer of both. There is little concrete information in the article, however, to support the notion that Plock was even tangentially involved in the war; Zülch primarily offers circumstantial evidence, making much of coincidences of time and place. In other words, he presumes that events of the rebellion can be used to explain events in Plock's own biography.<sup>40</sup> The historical evidence for Grünewald's sympathy for the rebellious peasants is, as I have already noted, tenuous. Surprisingly, Zülch does not mention the archival records that he himself discovered and published as proof of the artist's involvement in the 1525 uprising in his 1938 monograph. Nevertheless, Grünewald is overwhelmingly portrayed as a radical, even proto-Marxist, figure. Zülch concludes his article with gusto, describing the painter as '[...] an artist and fighter for the truth, a servant and aide to all of mankind'.<sup>41</sup>

It is important to note that Zülch's proto-socialist figuration of the artist played into the prevailing Marxist interpretation of the Peasants' War, first articulated by Friedrich Engels in his seminal account of the uprising published in 1850.<sup>42</sup> Engels drew parallels between the doomed revolution led by Thomas Müntzer and his band of peasants and the failures of the German revolutions of 1848 and 1849, arguing that both revolutions were betrayed by similar class interests – Martin Luther in 1525 and bourgeois liberals in the nineteenth century.<sup>43</sup> Taking up this formulation of history, East Germans framed their state as the natural culmination of a long line of revolutionary socialist upheavals initiated by the Peasants' War, now referred to, in the GDR at least, as the 'frühbürgerliche Revolution' [early bourgeoisie revolution].<sup>44</sup>

At first glance, it is difficult to discern any radical, revolutionary, or even vaguely Lutheran sentiments expressed by Grünewald's drawings found in the Plock Bible. In both past and present-day scholarship, the identification of an image as

explicitly ‘Lutheran’ or ‘Reformist’ is typically grounded in iconography. Indeed, the Wittenberg artist Lucas Cranach the Elder worked closely with Martin Luther to develop a new pictorial vocabulary that would give form and perpetuate the ideas underpinning Lutheran theology.<sup>45</sup> Similar claims can be (and have been) made for images that purportedly reveal artists’ sympathies with the more revolutionary ideas of the theologians of the Radical Reformation, although these iconographies tended to be more idiosyncratic and subversive, rather than part of any comparable systematic formulation.<sup>46</sup>

Zülch, however, does not make an iconographic argument. He notes that Grünewald consistently deviated throughout his oeuvre from ‘the ecclesiastically sanctioned form of representation (iconography)’.<sup>47</sup> Pointing to the Isenheim Altar (1512–16), he claims that the artist’s breaks with such ‘schematisms’ in this work became more pronounced once Luther appeared on the scene. Here, Zülch seems to suggest that Grünewald’s political commitments cannot be identified by his adoption of a reformist iconography precisely because they predate, even anticipate, its formulation.

Foregoing any discussion of the archival evidence, Zülch instead argues that Grünewald’s revolutionary inclinations are attested by the formal qualities of the works themselves. Of the drawing of God the Creator (see *plate 4*), for example, he writes:

Grünewald never seeks the tranquillity of being as it is; his expressive power grasps the psychological high point of the dramatic movement, here the very moment of the dawning light. The creator floats up in a spiralling motion from the lower right, the robe breaking into turbulent crinkling folds as if a spontaneous reaction against the air pressure. From the bald skull, a wreath of hair shafts wafts towards the shaggy beard surrounding a face that is hardly beautiful. The mouth is still open, and the outstretched arms engage the work to come, that is, the first day of creation. In a powerful gesture, only by the force of the Word, God summoned the light.<sup>48</sup>

Tellingly, Zülch completely neglects the image’s obvious Lutheran iconography, namely, the imposing tablets of the Ten Commandments prominently displaying the Word of God. Instead, he finds an affinity with the Lutheran privileging of the Word in the movement of light around the floating figure surrounded by the opening lines of the Gospel. Through ekphrastic description, Zülch simultaneously identifies Grünewald’s Lutheran commitment and renders that commitment visible for the reader.<sup>49</sup>

Strangely, Zülch elides the fact that the interaction between these formal elements was not part of Grünewald’s original composition; the formal emphasis on the Word of God was a result of Plock’s intervention, who cut and pasted the drawing of God the Creator into a logocentric setting of his own creation.<sup>50</sup> Nevertheless, he seems to suggest that there is something inherent in Grünewald’s forms that lent themselves to Plock’s reinterpretation, claiming that the artist’s revolutionary spirit is recognizable in the transcendental qualities of the drawings. In his formal description of John the Evangelist (see *plate 3*), he writes:

The movement of the garment [...] is intensely personal, as in no other; it shares in the life of the movement of the wearer’s soul [...]. The end of the mantle flipped up in the grasping movement to the candlestick; it will fall

back in the next moment. A passing moment is painted, transitory, as is so often in Grünewald's work.<sup>51</sup>

Grünewald 'only revealed himself through his chalk and paint [Kreidestift und Farben]'.<sup>52</sup> The most alluring, powerful aspects of his work are what characterize him as a revolutionary: the forcefully potent colours, lines, and gestures.

### **Socialist Realism and the Crisis of Form in the GDR**

One can find throughout Zülch's essay evocations of the language of art historians and artists at the turn of the twentieth century, who similarly admired the transcendental and quasi-magical formal elements of Grünewald's work.<sup>53</sup> Yet the political framing of his formal analysis clearly spoke to issues convulsing the GDR art world in 1953 – namely, the so-called formalism debates (*Formalismusstreit*) of the late 1940s and early 1950s. The formalism debates were part of an official state-run campaign that promoted the Soviet model of Socialist Realism as the only acceptable mode of artistic production in the GDR. Broadly defined as art that was 'realistic in form and socialist in content', Socialist Realism was understood as a challenge to the bourgeois, modern art forms prevalent in the west.<sup>54</sup> Indeed, as April Eisman has noted, Socialist Realism was not so much a style as it was 'a position (*Haltung*); it was a commitment on the part of the artist to creating art for Socialist society and its people'.<sup>55</sup> Much ink has already been spilt on the vicissitudes of Socialist Realism in East Germany, and its long, fraught history needs no rehearsal here.<sup>56</sup> What follows, instead, is a brief account of the formalism debates and the particular issues at stake that I argue motivated Zülch's peculiar formal approach to the Plock drawings.

The early years of the GDR saw the establishment of cultural policies and institutions modelled after those of the Soviet Union that were used to familiarize East German artists with the fundamental tenets and theories of Socialist Realism. Artists were tasked with creating works of art that were built around the tripartite concept of ideological commitment, party-mindedness, and national/popular spirit; in other words, the formal elements should be determined by a single governing socialist idea (ideological commitment) to produce a work that actively contributed to building communism (party-mindedness) and that expressed the will of the masses (national/popular spirit).<sup>57</sup> Yet even as cultural officials insisted that it was the only acceptable model for East German artists, they struggled to satisfactorily articulate what this new socialist art should look like, defining it instead by what it was not: namely, formalism.

Following Soviet cultural policy, the notion of formalism captured the perceived modernist tendency to privilege formal experimentation at the expense of the work's content; any work deemed overly abstract, expressionistic, pessimistic, or even unrealistic could fall under this heading. As the official SED resolution on formalism from 1951 put it, the dry tone barely concealing an official position of contempt: 'According to [the formalists], the meaning of a work of art lies not in its content, but in its form. Wherever the question of form acquires independent significance, art loses its humanistic and democratic character'.<sup>58</sup> Thus, the term 'formalism' or 'formalist' was used to condemn art that did not follow the Socialist Realist model, and it quickly became shorthand for 'cultural degeneracy' and Western decadence. Artists were alive to the problems entailed in this artificial and bureaucratic formulation; as the painter Hermann Bruse quipped, 'Is formalism still formalism if we fill it with new content?'<sup>59</sup>

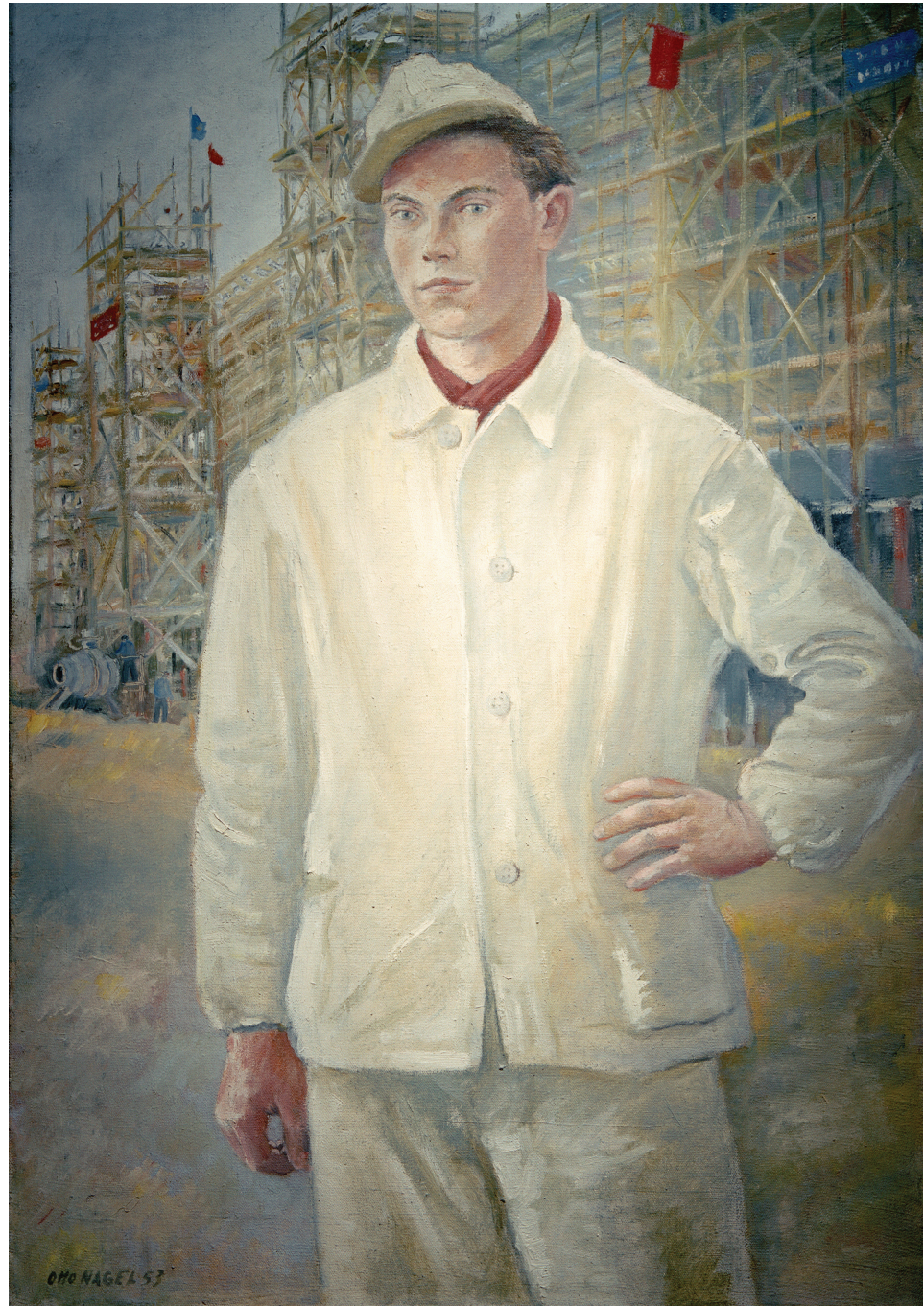
The inability of SED policymakers to constructively articulate the demands of Socialist Realism led to a prolonged period of conflict between the different artists' groups and governing officials.<sup>60</sup> Starting in 1948, several high-profile publications excoriated East German artists for their perceived failure to make any kind of discernible progress toward Socialist Realism.<sup>61</sup> Even those with anti-fascist bonafides, such as Horst Stempel, were not immune to accusations of formalism. Stempel's 1948 wall mural at the Berlin Friedrichstrasse station, *Trümmer weg! Baut auf!* ['Clear the rubble! Rebuild!'], which celebrated the achievements of the SED party in rebuilding the city after the Second World War, was condemned for its formalist tendencies and eventually destroyed in 1951.<sup>62</sup> Critics took particular issue with his abstract and overly symbolic representation of the working class, which they described as misshapen, robotic, and even repulsive. Because such figures, they argued, 'do not exist in reality [...] such art cannot express progress and construction'.<sup>63</sup> In other words, the revolutionary content of the work is negated by the insufficiency of Stempel's form.

Stempel was but one of many East German artists who, despite their commitment to socialist ideals, failed to produce art that satisfied the dictates of party policy. As a result of these perceived failures, the SED tightened its control over cultural policy, exerting pressure on artists through various administrative means to enforce the normative aesthetics of Socialist Realism and promote the art of the Soviet Union as a model for East German artists to follow.<sup>64</sup> In March 1953, the party celebrated its first success with the opening of the Third German Art Exhibition in Dresden; the art displayed in the exhibition was extolled by party leaders for its successful embrace of Socialist Realism, exemplified by works such as Otto Nagel's *Young Mason* (plate 5).

The exhibition also coincided with the death of Stalin (5 March 1953), which ushered in a brief 'thaw' to cultural policy that made a certain level of dissent possible.<sup>65</sup> As a result, the exhibition became a flashpoint for the artistic community's resistance to the SED's enforcement of Socialist Realism.<sup>66</sup> The works of art that received the most praise from party functionaries were those that received the harshest criticism from local artists. The artists' dissatisfaction with the Soviet model was twofold. First, they criticized these works as derivative, artificial, and of inferior quality. Second, and perhaps most importantly, many expressed profound discomfort with the close stylistic and thematic similarities between Socialist Realist art and the art of the Third Reich.<sup>67</sup> Others remarked that the Soviet terminology used to condemn formalism was indistinguishable from the rhetoric used by the National Socialists to defame modern art only a few decades earlier. In August of that year, at the executive board meeting of the Berlin Union of Visual Artists, the sculptor Fritz Cremer opined that artists with so-called formalist tendencies were 'simply rebels against that which was called "art" in the Nazi period'.<sup>68</sup>

Thus, by 1953, the artistic community was in a crisis. If East German artists chose to ignore the prescriptions of the SED, their art was designated by the leading authorities as decadent, imperialist, or at odds with the socialist ideals of the GDR. Yet because of the narrow guidelines for Socialist Realism provided by cultural functionaries, artists struggled to find the conceptual tools for creating works of art that spoke to the ideals of the GDR without compromising their artistic integrity. The measure of what counted as socialist 'success' was not always obvious to artists, critics, or officials, and it was clear that none knew how to chart a satisfactory course for East German art.

5 Otto Nagel, *The Young Mason*, 1953. Oil on canvas, 116 × 79.5 cm. Berlin: Stiftung Stadtmuseum. © Artists Rights Society, New York/ VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn. Photo: akq-images.



In 1953, the Central Committee of the SED and the States Arts Commission revived the publication of the art journal BK.<sup>69</sup> As the official organ of the Verband Bildender Künstler Deutschlands (VBKD), it served as a medium for transmitting the SED's art policy. The purpose of its revival was to respond to the party leadership's fears that artists were showing little demonstrable progress towards a Socialist Realist image.<sup>70</sup> The journal was advertised in the catalogue for the Third German Art Exhibition as:

a campaign organ for Socialist Realism [...] it fights against all trends of decadence that are hostile to art and mankind: formalism, naturalism, and

kitsch. The journal is aimed at artists, art historians, cultural officials, and all working-class people. It wants to help them contribute to the flourishing of a truly progressive German art.<sup>71</sup>

BK served as a guidebook for East German artists; it provided a space for art historians and cultural policymakers to discuss the failures of formalism and the successes of realism.

The revival of BK was part of a larger cultural policy that turned to the art-historical past for answers to the problems plaguing the artistic community. Troubled by the failures of the Soviet-inspired model, cultural functionaries in the early 1950s began to stress the value of the GDR's cultural heritage [Kulturerbe] for developing practices of Socialist Realism. Strongly influenced by the aesthetic theories developed by György Lukács in the 1930s, who argued that all art was to be seen as a result and a sign of the social conditions in which it was produced, critics began to formulate a canon of works that prefigured Socialist Realism.<sup>72</sup> In March 1951, the Central Committee of the SED published a series of resolutions on how to 'combat formalism in art', proclaiming that 'We must study our national, classical cultural heritage since truthfulness and reality are inherent to classical art'.<sup>73</sup> Artists were exhorted, however, not to 'blindly' appropriate their classical heritage but to turn instead to art that both embodied and contributed to new, revolutionary worldviews.

East German artists struggling to adapt their practices to the directives about the sorts of art demanded by the SED and its theorists had to consider how much existing German art was 'salvageable'. What resources really were there to be mined and what had to be hived off and condemned from the inherited canon? Few heroes in the traditional pantheon could offer a model that combined a reductive notion of realism with explicit attention to social relationships. Thus, BK was conceived as a space to answer pressing questions about what could be reclaimed from the past and, more importantly, how appropriate precursors could be identified and made useful.<sup>74</sup> By defining certain artistic models as suitable in a publication sanctioned by academic prestige and party approval, the editors hoped to ensure the successful adoption of Socialist Realism by contemporary artists.

### **Grünewald the Socialist Realist Artist**

Appearing in the inaugural year of BK, Zülch's article can be understood as part of the journal's campaign to foreground the work of the GDR's artistic heritage as a way to resolve the conceptual inconsistencies of socialist art.<sup>75</sup> Yet Grünewald certainly was no obvious choice for the task at hand. Enthusiastically adopted by the German Expressionists at the beginning of the twentieth century as their patron saint – a paragon of the quintessentially German spirit that appealed to the increasing nationalist overtones of their work – Grünewald's fate was hitched to the legacy of the Expressionists in the years leading up to and after the Second World War.<sup>76</sup> While GDR cultural functionaries acknowledged their importance as anti-fascist heroes persecuted during the Third Reich, the Expressionists were largely rejected as antithetical to the dictates of Socialist Realism during the formalism debates of the late 1940s and early 1950s. Their unrealistic, subjective forms of expression were deemed elitist and incomprehensible and were, in turn, equated with the revolutionary failures of the period in which they emerged.<sup>77</sup> Grünewald was, by extension, ripe for critique. In an article published in the

newspaper *Tägliche Rundschau* from 1952, for example, the politician Herbert Gute wrote:

Grünewald's representation of people focuses on agony and despair. His figures show the exuberance and excesses of emotions that serve as a model for the formalists, especially the Expressionists [...]. And if it is so that the Expressionists once referred to Grünewald as their father and if this has resulted in this harmful and deeply dangerous tendency for our national culture, we will not conceal it.<sup>78</sup>

Yet despite the programmatic rejection of the Expressionists by party hardliners, other artists, curators, and party officials struggled to reconcile the condemnation of their work as 'decadent' and 'bourgeois' with their exhortation during the Third Reich as 'degenerate' artists. Indeed, the Expressionists continued to offer an attractive model to GDR artists.<sup>79</sup> The so-called 'thaw' of 1953 made it possible for art historians and critics to examine how art of the early twentieth century could be used in service of the development of Socialist Realism, laying the groundwork for the eventual acceptance of the Expressionists in the 1960s.<sup>80</sup>

While Zülch's article in *BK* anticipates the later reintegration of Expressionism, it also appeared at a moment when the GDR's policy of *Kulturerbe* sparked renewed interest in the artists of the German Renaissance, particularly Albrecht Dürer, Lucas Cranach the Elder, and Hans Holbein the Younger.<sup>81</sup> In the journal's first year, there was a notable emphasis on German Renaissance artists: two articles appear each on Dürer, Cranach, and the German Renaissance broadly, in addition to Zülch's own on Grünewald.<sup>82</sup> The journal's first issue features Albrecht Dürer's 1498 self-portrait on the cover and a quotation from Lenin on the relationship between art and the masses printed in imposing font on one of the opening pages (plate 6). Moreover, the editors' essay on the aims of the journal is framed by one of Dürer's drawings from *Emperor Maximilian's Prayer Book* (plate 7), in which they state:

We want to make accessible again the sublime content, revolutionary greatness, and realistic statements of the classics of our people [...]. Our classics will give every German patriot the strength, courage, and ability to cope with the tasks that are given to us by history. The continued struggle for the abolition of oppression and class exploitation in the western half of our Fatherland absolutely demands that we equip our people with the best weapons for this struggle. These weapons were forged by the Bamberg and Naumberg Masters, Dürer and Holbein, Riemenschneider and Veit Stoß, Menzel, Leibl, and Käthe Kollwitz, to name only a few. Their work holds vital importance for contemporary artistic progress as well as the development and fortification of our socialist culture.<sup>83</sup>

In proclaiming the artists of the German Renaissance suitable to this lofty task, part of a genealogy traceable to Kollwitz, the editors drew upon Engels' reformulation of this period as 'the greatest progressive revolution that mankind had so far experienced' – not despite but precisely because it served as the origins for modern bourgeois society.<sup>84</sup> In this account, its revolutionary character is what made the era's cultural and intellectual achievements possible.



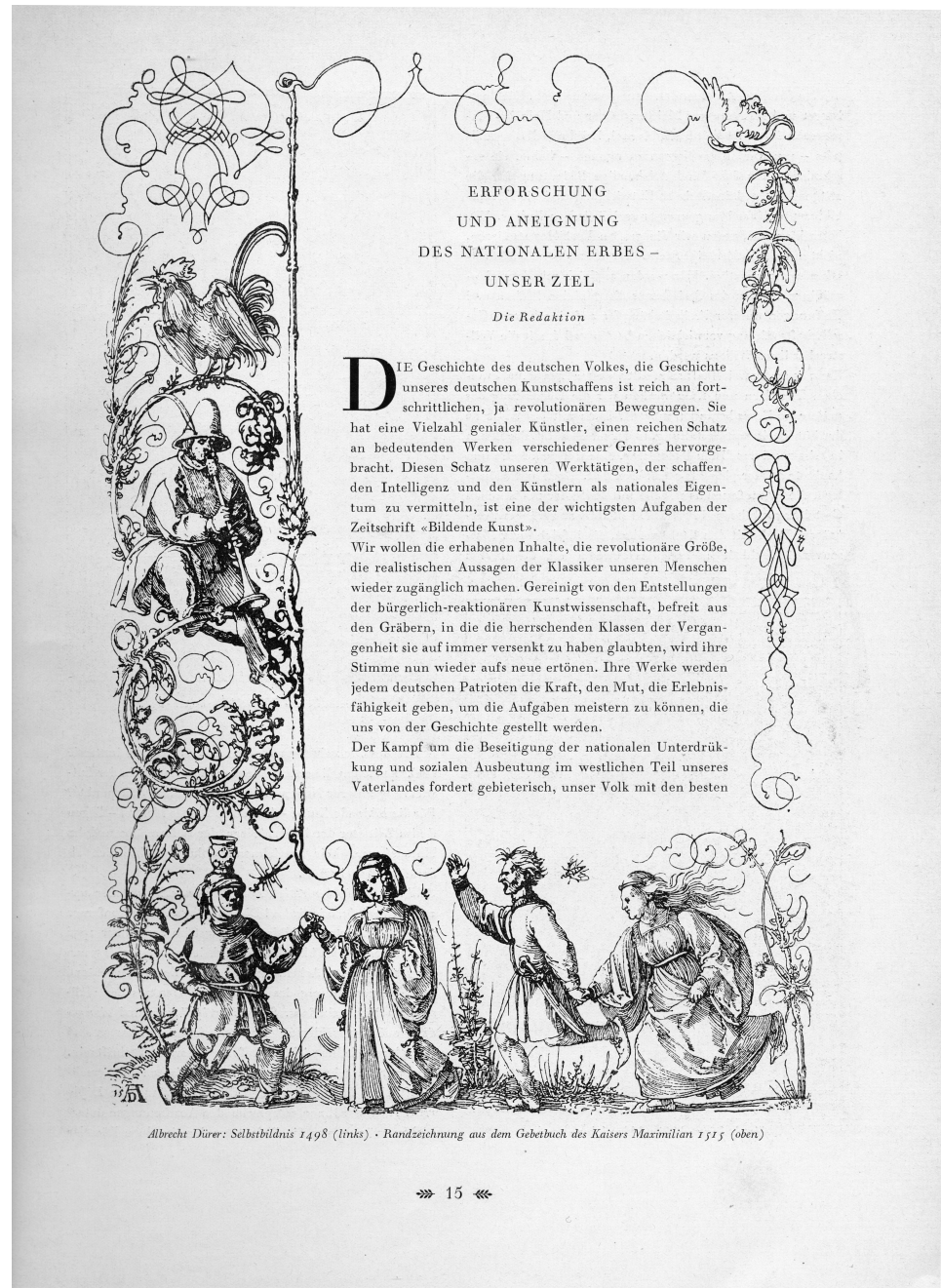
6 Front cover of *Bildende Kunst*, 1, 1953, showing Albrecht Dürer, *Self-Portrait*, 1498.



Citing Engels' text towards the end of the article, the editors clearly invoke his claim that the great men of this period 'almost all live and pursue their activities in the midst of the contemporary movements, in the practical struggle; they take sides and join in the fight, one by speaking and writing, another with the sword, many with both'.<sup>85</sup> The later reception of this passage in the GDR repurposed Engels' characterization of Renaissance artists as active participants in the revolutionary currents of their time as a polemic aimed at the bourgeois artists and writers of the nineteenth century and their notion of 'art for art's sake' – what East German functionaries would later describe as 'formalism'. Working in a time of tumultuous upheaval and offering a model of the politically engaged artist, the artists of the German Renaissance were presented as a valuable source for East German artists in their struggle to find new forms suitable to the socialist

content of their work. Indeed, the editors go on to describe artists such as Dürer and Cranach as the forerunners of Socialist Realism, celebrating them as ‘artists who were able to actively change reality [...] with the help of realistic design methods’.<sup>86</sup>

Similar conceits appear throughout the journal’s history. German Renaissance art was popular, partisan, and typical; the ‘democratic realism’ of these artists participated in and even brought about revolutionary change; their privileging of truth showed their connections to the concerns of the people, and so on. Yet while the authors in BK described these artists as committed to and enacting social change through their art, the question of the proper relationship between form and content remained largely untheorized.



Albrecht Dürer: Selbstbildnis 1498 (links) • Randzeichnung aus dem Gebetbuch des Kaisers Maximilian 1515 (oben)

**7** Frame around ‘Erforschung und Aneignung des nationalen Erbes – unser Ziel’, *Bildende Kunst*, 1, 1953, 15, showing a drawing by Albrecht Dürer from Emperor Maximilian’s Prayer Book, 1515.

Consider, for example, Joachim Uhlitzsch's 1953 article on Cranach, which opens with a description of the artist's 1504 *Rest on the Flight to Egypt* (plate 8):

The most exquisite work that Cranach created during his stay in Vienna came into being out of a deep attachment to common people and nature. At the edge of the forest, by a spring, the family has settled down under an old fir tree. In the centre of the picture stands Father Joseph with his hat in his right hand and a cane in his left. In front of him sits the young mother, holding the lively, naked child on her knees. Little angels have joined this simple and modest human couple, frolicking and playing, trying to amuse the child on the mother's lap. Here the harmonious relationship between man and nature has become a magnificent life-affirming unity.<sup>87</sup>

Here, the analysis remains firmly in the realm of narrative description. The author also focuses on the composition, seemingly to undergird his argument about the



**8** Lucas Cranach the Elder, *Rest on the Flight to Egypt*, 1504. Oil on panel, 70.7 × 53 cm. Berlin: Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen. Photo: bpk Bildagentur/Staatliche Museen Berlin/Jörg P. Anders/Art Resource, NY.

painting's 'life-affirming unity', though rather vaguely. Nevertheless, Uhlitzsch quickly follows up with the claim that:

It is not difficult to understand that such a painting played an active role in the social conflicts of that time and educated people in the spirit of humanism [...]. Only as a result of sincere connection with the progressive forces of his time could Cranach succeed in creating such an outstanding work of genuine affirmation of life, reflected in its subject matter, composition, and passionate colour scheme.<sup>88</sup>

For East German artists who were told to turn to their cultural heritage to find inspiration for new forms to give expression to new, socialist content, the visual evidence for Cranach's 'solidarity with the progressive forces of his time' would likely have been underwhelming. Instead, Uhlitzsch recycles the tropes formulated by party officials: a simple composition depicting the happy, harmonious nuclear family that conveys an optimistic attitude toward life. Rather than using Cranach to articulate a useful model of Socialist Realism that addressed contemporary artists' concerns, Cranach is assimilated to the traditional (Soviet) model of Socialist Realism that had left these artists so dissatisfied.

Appearing in the same issue as Uhlitzsch's article, Zülch's article is comparatively unusual in that it purports to show how Grünewald puts an aesthetic theory into action. Cranach's 'solidarity with the progressive forces', Uhlitzsch claims, is reflected [*spiegelt*] in his forms – but in Zülch's article, one gets the sense that the revolutionary currents of the time and Grünewald's forms are mutually constitutive and that the artist himself serves as the conduit for their expression. Consider his description of John the Baptist's drapery (see plate 3): 'The movement of the garment [...] is intensely personal, as in no other; it shares in the life of the movement of the wearer's soul'.<sup>89</sup> Zülch forges an almost mystical connection between the visible exterior of the drawn figure and its intangible interior; a small artistic detail, here the suggestive movement of St John's drapery, suddenly contains the potential to communicate the very soul of the person depicted. Yet in addition to revealing something essential about St John, the drapery discloses the preoccupations of a thoughtful, politically revolutionary artist. Extrapolating the magically articulate force of Grünewald's emotive lines, colours, and gestures even further, Zülch views the artist's treatment of his material as an expression of his own spirit. He concludes the article, stating, '[Master Mathis the painter] exuded the richness of his great soul in glowing, burning colour visions'.<sup>90</sup>

Thus, what we start to see in Zülch's article are the early stabs at a model of artistic creation that can accommodate individual expression and experimentation without sacrificing the political content of the work. The key is that Grünewald does not turn to external appearances (i.e. nature) but to his own interior convictions. This concept is more fully articulated in Zülch's later book, *Grünewald: Mathis Neithart genannt Gothart*, a slim volume published in 1954 that offers an extended meditation on the formal qualities of the painter's most famous works (including the Plock Bible drawings) and the ways in which they testify to the political upheaval of Luther's Reformation and the 1525 Peasants' War.<sup>91</sup>

Published only a year after his BK article, the book continues to offer Grünewald as an exemplar to the East German artistic community. Zülch explicitly states in the opening pages that 'Master Mathis does not search for form, he consciously discards the order-bound ecclesiastical tradition, because, for him, the First and the Last is

the expression of the soul'.<sup>92</sup> Here, Zülch is clearly at pains to ensure that Grünewald is not construed as a formalist, an artist who prioritizes form above all else. Instead, recycling the rhetoric of his earlier BK article, he prioritizes the expression of his soul. This opaque formulation is clarified later when he compares the painter to his contemporary, Albrecht Dürer, who 'weighs, calculates, circles, and writes in books about the eternal law of form, working from the outside in'.<sup>93</sup> Zülch finds Dürer's approach to form insufficient because it inscribes a model of form as calculable, replicable, and trainable; it makes pictures correspond to the world that already exists rather than the better one to come. He may even be analogizing it to Soviet models that work according to a prescriptive, paint-by-numbers logic. By contrast, in Grünewald's work:

colour waves and dynamic currents flow from the boundless depths of mystical unreality [...] to the form, to the picture, from the inside out; invisible, yet compelling lines of force perceptibly lead the viewer into the core of the dramatic event.<sup>94</sup>

The equation is worth spelling out: Zülch finds Grünewald's forms artistically and politically compelling because they are not derived from the observable world but instead emerge from the artists' inner depths; moreover, these inwardly found forms resonate with the broader ambitions of social revolution precisely thanks to the artist's sympathetic attunement to a revolutionary project. His 'compelling lines of force' cut through the superfluous to draw the beholder to what counts. Zülch uses similar language when he turns to the Isenheim Altar, where 'melodies emerge out of the fathomless depths [...] in colourful waves [...]'. The whole altar fades away, lives on in us like an undeniably powerful sound. This is the revolution of the spirit'.<sup>95</sup> His account implicitly connects the social protest of the past – made manifest in line and colour – to the socialist ambitions of the present, figuring the picture as the occasion that bridges the two temporal moments. It is through the picture's formal properties, rather than its historically contingent iconographic codes, that makes its revolutionary thrust equally accessible to the twentieth-century critic as the sixteenth-century peasant.

If Zülch's exposition serves as its own evidence of Grünewald's ambitions, with his thunderous account of the picture authenticating its rebellious qualities, he adduces the picture's very survival as evidence that earlier beholders recognized its political bent. Echoing the Socialist Realism dictum that art must come from and work with the people, he goes on to claim that the 'Volk' apprehended the altar's revolutionary spirit, and as a result, during the Peasants' War, the rebelling peasants in Alsace did not destroy the altarpiece.<sup>96</sup> Unlike the Berlin workers who could not recognize themselves in the distorted, abstract figuration of Stempel's wall mural, the Alsatian peasants – or so Zülch claims – saw their own rebellious spirit expressed in the formal qualities of the altar. Thus, the work's persistence certifies its radical politics – a revealing claim in the absence of the image's explicitly revolutionary content, one that also begins to (tautologically) model a precursor for the ideal Socialist Realist feedback loop between artist and audience.

Tellingly, the affinity of Grünewald's work with revolutionary movements – both past and present – also lent it the quasi-prophetic capacity to envision impending social upheavals. In one of the most haunting passages from his book, Zülch describes the Karlsruhe Crucifixion (c. 1523–24) in proleptic terms (plate 9):

Blood oozes out of the hills in front of a gruesome wasteland, forming a wide pool. [John the Baptist] is a peasant from the bleeding Franconian earth [...]. Is this then not a memorial of the year 1525, of the atrocious spearing and burning, hanging, eye-gouging, and village razing, of the sculptor Riemenschneider's miracle-working hands shattered on the rack, of painter Jerg Ratgeb's body strapped to four horses and drawn asunder?<sup>97</sup>

The painting's violence prefigures the tumult of the Peasants' War to come. Zülch makes it a memorial before the fact, perhaps a diagnosis of the social conditions that would lead to rebellion or, more interestingly, a work the real message of which would uncannily be realized only after a delay. It would come to serve, in Zülch's telling, as a poignant epitaph for the broken bodies, uncarved sculptures, and shattered visions of other revolutionary artists. Thus, Grünewald is the revolutionary painter whose charged landscapes and figures come to embody – rather than straightforwardly



**9 Matthias Grünewald, Tauberbischofsheim Crucifixion, c. 1523–24. Oil on panel, 195.5 × 142.5 cm. Karlsruhe: Staatliche Kunsthalle. Photo: bpk Agentur/Staatliche Kunsthalle/Wolfgang Pankoke/Art Resource, NY.**

depict – the broader worlds of social struggle, and whose work attests to a common, trans-historical community of radical painters. Indeed, for Zülch, Grünewald's pictures point so far beyond a specific public that the artist even serves as an 'oft rebellious advocate of man before God'.<sup>98</sup>

### Grünewald the Redeemer

Appearing in the inaugural year of BK, Zülch's article addressed the sense of urgency felt in the East German artistic community in 1953. He capitalized on the propitious discovery of the Plock Bible in order to present Grünewald's work as a possible solution to the current crisis, recalling the editors' earlier proclamation that the forefathers of their German artistic heritage would provide the 'best weapons' to cope with the 'tasks that are given to us by history'. His article tried to conform to current trends in the formation of an East German socialist identity, shrewdly positioning Grünewald in this discourse in the following ways.

First, the reason for Grünewald's abrupt departure in 1526 from Cardinal Albrecht's court in Brandenburg for Frankfurt am Main remained unresolved.<sup>99</sup> Zülch argued that the artist left his patron as a result of the Cardinal's betrayal of the Reformation in the aftermath of the Peasants' War and, therefore, as eloquent proof of Grünewald's own radical convictions. He describes Grünewald throughout the article as an 'ousted and persecuted court artist'.<sup>100</sup> The trope of an artist chased out of work because of a clash in political convictions would have resonated strongly with the East German artistic community, many of whom, such as Johannes Becher and Bertolt Brecht, had only recently returned to Germany after being exiled during the Third Reich.<sup>101</sup>

Second, in 1952, one year before Zülch's publication, there was a renewed interest in the Peasants' War heralded by the publication of three different books on Thomas Müntzer and the Peasants' War.<sup>102</sup> While the GDR's attitude towards Luther was one of marked ambivalence, Müntzer, his more radical colleague, was celebrated as a German hero up until the reunification of 1990.<sup>103</sup> The Peasants' War's heightened importance for the GDR's self-identity afforded Zülch both incentive and opportunity to rehabilitate Grünewald, an artist whose star had faded somewhat since the early years of the Third Reich.<sup>104</sup>

Additionally, Zülch's salvoes contributed – if obliquely – to the East German government's ongoing cultivation of an anti-fascist identity. By opening his BK article with a polemic against Stengel and the Western press, he draws on already disseminated propaganda that depicted neo-fascist Western governments, as seen, for example, in the Third German Art Exhibition's catalogue, which excoriated the Federal Republic and its art for being 'authoritarian, antisocialist, and even neo-fascist'.<sup>105</sup> Zülch's invective against Stengel establishes an antithetical relationship between his own work and the words of the West. If the 'malicious' and 'tendentious' reports from the West are read as fascist, then Zülch's work must be anti-fascist, thus overwriting any lingering memory of the Nazi regime's appreciation and appropriation of Grünewald for their own ideological purposes. This implicit binary would have later real-world implications in the later denunciation of Stengel as a fascist.

Of course, it might be objected that Zülch simply took advantage of the situation to reposition himself as an exemplary anti-fascist critic. After all, he had been an active member of the Nazi Party.<sup>106</sup> Moreover, his previous work appears to have been written in the idiom of Third Reich ideology.<sup>107</sup> His most famous monograph, *Der historische Grünewald*, was printed in the emblematic Schwabacher script favoured by the Nazi regime and published on 20 April 1938 – Hitler's birthday.<sup>108</sup> The book briefly

mentions the artist's alleged participation in the Peasants' War but only through the scant documentary evidence found in his death inventory – no consideration is given to any perceived connection between the 1525 uprising and his images. Moreover, Grünewald's sympathy with the peasants is conceived in distinctly fascist terms, Zülch claiming that he shared in their common cause to 'establish a new order and an improved Reich'.<sup>109</sup> Thus, if by the 1950s Zülch intended to dispel the heavy cloud of Nazi interest in Grünewald, he was also implicitly refiguring his own participation in the artist's fascist cult.

For Zülch, the personal stakes of this rehabilitation project were high. Several years before his 1953 article, it appears that his Nazi past may have caught up with him. In a letter from Zülch to Friedrich Winkler, dated 11 November 1950, he complains:

In the course of reorientation, savings, and 'social commitment', I am to be terminated from my 'leading' position as director of the [Vogtländisches] Kreismuseum, which I built from a heap of rubble, on 31 December 1950, by the city administration [...]. As I have no assets or any possessions [...] I am a total victim.<sup>110</sup>

Now penniless, Zülch asks Winkler for advice on how to confirm 'my status as a recognized scholar from the Eastern zone (!)' in order to receive a pension from the GDR.<sup>111</sup> The political motivations behind his termination are signalled by the phrase 'social commitment', which, as we saw in the August 1952 denunciation of Stengel's leadership, implies a failure to align with SED ideology.<sup>112</sup> Indeed, around the same time, Zülch was also stripped of his SED party membership. When he wrote his 1953 article, he was still unemployed, living off a meagre pension of sixty-five DM and unable to afford to visit research libraries in larger cities.<sup>113</sup>

While Zülch's attempt to rehabilitate Grünewald was largely meant to redeem the artist for an East German vision of art history in the past and the present, it was also meant for a more personal redemption project. This is, to some degree, no surprise; it is characteristic of East German academia that the personal, professional, and philosophical could not be easily disentangled. But his project was largely successful on both counts. On 3 November 1953, the art editors of the *Berliner Zeitung* wrote a letter to Johannes Becher, then president of the Deutsche Akademie der Künste (DAK), to advocate on the scholar's behalf, outlining his financial difficulties since his dismissal as director of the Plauen Museum and expulsion from the SED; an identical letter was sent to Otto Grotewohl, prime minister of the GDR, and Paul Wandel, minister of education.<sup>114</sup> The letter describes Zülch as the most prominent international authority on Grünewald, responsible for archival research that established the artist's true name and his leadership in the German Peasants' War in Mainz. According to the editors, these archival discoveries:

created the preconditions for a realistic interpretation of Grünewald's work, free from all clerical and formalist distortions, as well as a historically accurate reconstruction of Grünewald's life as one of the most important revolutionary personalities in German art history [...]. The cultural-political significance of [his] work in clarifying the flowering of realistic German art goes without saying, especially since the Western side, under the guidance of the American *Neue Zeitung*, is increasingly working towards a misrepresentation of these traditions, particularly in the case of Grünewald.<sup>115</sup>



Noting the ‘extraordinary value of [Zülch’s work] for the appropriation of the revolutionary artistic heritage by the working class’, they stress the importance of finding opportunities for the ageing art historian to continue his research.<sup>116</sup> They therefore request that Zülch be granted the following: (1) a research contract that would provide material support for his work on Grünewald (and Jerg Ratgeb); (2) an honorary pension on the occasion of his seventieth birthday; and (3) assistance in securing publication opportunities for his academic research in the GDR. Enclosed with the letter was a copy of his 1953 article in BK on the Plock Bible.

The request was granted shortly after; in a letter to Zülch from 4 December, Johannes Becher inquires whether he had already received his research contract from the DAK and reaffirms the institution’s commitment to materially supporting Zülch’s work in any way it can.<sup>117</sup> The backing of the DAK helped relaunch the art historian’s stymied career. With its financial support, he would go on to write more than half a dozen new articles and a book on Grünewald over the next decade. In 1955, Zülch was nominated for a third-class National Prize in Arts and Literature, a highly esteemed award that recognized important contributions to socialist culture and science.<sup>118</sup> Unlike Stengel, he was fêted in the East German popular press, too. On the occasion of his seventieth birthday, 17 November 1953, the *Berliner Zeitung* ran a piece celebrating the life and research of W. K. Zülch. The article is a clear instance of what we might call ‘red-washing’; the author describes Zülch as someone who had worked against the Nazis and who, in his spare time, enjoyed reading the work of the most important Marxist historians of the Peasants’ War – Engels, Smirin, and Meusel.<sup>119</sup>

Zülch’s 1953 article also relaunched Grünewald’s career, for the artist had not received much academic or critical attention since 1938.<sup>120</sup> In 1954, the DAK planned an entire day dedicated to ‘a debate on the current state of Grünewald research’ for the inaugural conference of the Lucas-Cranach Committee. The organizers also hoped to exhibit the Grünewald drawings from the Plock Bible in the conference room, but it is unclear whether they did so. Several exhibitions dedicated to Grünewald were organized over the next several decades, including a 1978 exhibition in Dresden devoted to the artist’s influence on East German artists. Other cultural events cemented him in the public eye, such as a celebration of the painter’s life in Halle that occasioned the commission of Geyer’s 1957 memorial plaque. The Staatliches Rundfunkkomitee even planned a radio play titled ‘Die Todesstunde des Matthias Grünewald’ in 1954, to be penned by the West German (and former Nazi) author Hans Rehberg, who was visiting the GDR through a cultural exchange programme. However, the production was ultimately cancelled due to concerns that the manuscript had actually been written ‘without doubt between 1933 and 1945’ and because its ‘historical imprecision obscures and suspends the historical reality’.<sup>121</sup>

### Grünewald’s Socialist Legacy

Zülch’s scholarship transformed a painter with alleged peasant sympathies into a committed revolutionary on the frontlines of the uprising, who sacrificed ‘all his works, his peace and happiness, even his name to the cause of the first German revolution’.<sup>122</sup> GDR art historians, writing after Zülch, would perpetuate this Grünewald mythology. From Wolfgang Hütt to Wilhelm Fraenger, Grünewald’s role in the Peasants’ War became inextricable from readings of his work.<sup>123</sup> This scholarship had significant implications for artistic practice as well as academic mythography; as Goeschen argues, art historians in the GDR ‘negotiated and helped build bridges between the extreme positions taken by artists on the one hand and aesthetic-political dogmas on the other. They reappraised art history in order to find

academic and ideological grounds for what the artists were trying to do'.<sup>124</sup> Thanks to Zülch, Grünewald could offer art historians and artists alike a historical template, an artist with appropriately revolutionary politics who could also help mend the relations between form and content. In an unpublished talk delivered in Cologne shortly after his defection to the West, Zülch's good friend Wilhelm Worringer lamented the passing of a primordial time when 'form was not something that was added to content, but what was identical with this content'.<sup>125</sup> This was the fantasy that Zülch conjured from the sixteenth century.

Nevertheless, few, if any, art historians took up Zülch's attention to Grünewald's form per se. His formal readings echoed throughout the discipline, licensing the interpretations of later scholars who wanted to draw inferences from his claims about Grünewald's role in the 1525 uprising, but rarely affording them an interpretive



10 Bernhard Heisig, *Problems of Military Chaplaincy*, from *The Fascist Nightmare*, c. 1960. Lithograph, 60 × 45 cm. Dresden: Kupferstich-Kabinett, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden. © Artists Rights Society, New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn. Photo: Herbert Boswank.

model.<sup>126</sup> It was, rather, artists who picked up on his ideas about what Grünewald's line and shade could do for revolutionary art. His success in presenting Grünewald's work as a paradigm of Socialist Realism is attested by Grünewald's influence on some of the more successful East German artists from the 1960s and 1970s, such as Werner Tübke, Heinz Zander, and Bernhard Heisig.<sup>127</sup> These artists conveyed socialist themes in what we might read as a more expressionist style than was previously allowed in the earlier decades of the GDR.

In Heisig's series of lithographs titled *The Fascist Nightmare* (1964/65), for example, a figure resembling Grünewald's crucified Christ from the Isenheim Altarpiece features prominently in one of the prints as the brutalized target of rifle fire (plate 10). Violating the crucified Christ through the frenetic and almost abusive inky lines that distort the body, Heisig appropriates the tortured form of Grünewald's Christ to address one of the more popular themes of Socialist Realism: the horrors of fascism.

Meanwhile, Zander's 1971 triptych devoted to the Peasants' War emulates specific elements of Grünewald's painting and draftsmanship rather than the arrangement of his figures (plate 11). The central panel depicts a cluster of militant peasants who erupt from the grounds of history, as it were, overtaking the slumped bodies of armour-clad elites whose corpses pointedly make up the picture's compositional margins. The violence threatened by these axe-wielding peasants seems poised to encroach into the viewer's space – not through any feats of illusionism, but through the centrifugal force exerted by the stocky, hypermasculine forms of these revolutionary heroes and the maelstrom of explosive bursts of red and orange that illuminate them. This is the Peasants' War as a heroic revolution from below, rendered with Grünewald's volatile palette and frenzied lines.

The art historian Helga Möbius made the connection between Grünewald and Zander in her 1973 article for *BK*, juxtaposing details of the later painting's central figures with a detail of the guards sleeping before Christ's tomb from the Isenheim Altarpiece (plate 12). In her telling, Zander draws inspiration from Grünewald's style as well as his commitments; but whereas the sixteenth-century artist could not directly depict the events in which he was engaged, the twentieth-century painter

11 Heinz Zander, *The German Peasants' War*, 1971. Mixed media on plywood, 153 × 77 cm [right panel], 153.5 × 153.5 cm [central panel], 153 × 77.5 [left panel]. Leipzig: Kustodie der Universität Leipzig. © Artists Rights Society, New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn. Photo: akg-images.



12 Details of Heinz Zander, *The German Peasants' War*, 1971, and Matthias Grünewald, *The Resurrection*, from the Isenheim Altarpiece, c. 1512–16; reprinted in Helga Möbius, 'Dialog über Jahrhunderte hinweg. Zu Fragen der Beziehungen zwischen Renaissancekunst und Gegenwart', *Bildende Kunst*, 4, 1973, 161. © Artists Rights Society, New York/ VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn.



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could both render the upheavals his precursor lived through and explicate their relevance to the present day:

[Grünewald] never explicitly included the social problems of his time in his work, even though he must have been personally involved in them. Zander portrayed the Peasants' War in almost congenial empathy with the passionate

spirit of the great realist [...]. In the relentless exposure of pain, suffering, and death, in the hymn to the irrepressible strength of the downtrodden, but also in the evocative expressive power of the colours and gestures, the artist of our era knows himself artistically connected to that of the Peasants' War. The cold metallic sheen of the armour set against the flaming blood red, the oppressive force with which the fighter rushes out of the background, these are Grünewald's expressive means of design, applied in a modern way that is appropriate to the historical events as well as our relationship to them.<sup>128</sup>

Zander, in other words, painted as Grünewald might. He updated the artist's formal vocabulary for modern use.



13 Willi Sitte, *Veneration for M. Grünewald*, 1984. Lithograph, 79 × 55 cm. Leipzig: Galerie Schwind. © Artists Rights Society, New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn. Photo: Galerie Schwind, Leipzig.

Finally, Willi Sitte's 1984 lithograph *Veneration for M. Grünewald* (plate 13) shows how East German artists took up other features of Grünewald's formal approach. Here, Sitte combines Grünewald's chalk drawing of a crying angel (c. 1515–20), now in the Berlin Kupferstichkabinett, with the figure of God the Creator from the Plock Bible drawing (see plate 4). In lieu of any obvious socialist iconography, Sitte diagrams a socialist argument by conscripting Grünewald's drawings into a dramatic vision of anachronic solidarity. He heightens the diffusive light of creation that pulses out from the figure's garments and fingertips in the original Plock drawing; it transforms into a blinding, dynamic light that dramatically sweeps across the figure's body, its movement carried forward by the progression of gesturing hands, finally skipping over the screaming head to spotlight a clenched fist. The light of creation from the original drawing has a generative effect as it moves across the page. In other words, here form creates content, much as Zülch had suggested it should. For gestating within the gnarled, grotesque deformation of this utterly Grünewaldian hand is the embryonic form of the raised worker's fist. Sitte thus offers a visual equivalent to Zülch's claims, claims about the vibrant revolutionary possibilities of form that were achieved through formal analysis and, in the printmaker's hands, through the provocative concatenation of past and present solidarities.

Notes

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- 1 Wilhelm Worringer, 'Für und wider den Formalismus', unpublished manuscript of a lecture given in Cologne [March 1952], 1124. Published in Wilhelm Worringer, *Schriften*, 2 vols, ed. Hannah Böhringer, Helga Grebing, and Beate Söntgen, Munich, 2004, 2: 1121–1134. 'den Stoff sieht Jedermann vor sich, den Gehalt findet nur der, der etwas dazu zu tun hat, die Form aber bleibt ein Geheimnis der Meister'. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own. Here, Worringer is evoking an aphorism of Goethe.
- 2 The original inscription reads: 'Maler des Kardinals. Mitstreiter der Bauern. Wasserkunstmacher der Bürger'.
- 3 While 'Commoners' Revolt' is a more accurate description of the events of 1525, the 'Peasants' War' is still preferred by most scholars. As Peter Blickle and others have argued, the uprising was not a rural phenomenon nor was it exclusively in hands of the peasants. The rebels included townsmen, miners, and villagers, and the rebellion affected the majority of towns that were subject to princely authority. See Peter Blickle, *The Revolution of 1525: The German Peasants' War from a New Perspective*, trans. Thomas A. Brady, Jr. and H. C. Erik Midelfort, Baltimore, 1981 and *From the Communal Reformation to the Revolution of the Common Man*, trans. Beat Kümin, Leiden, 1998. For a more recent study on the issue, see Benjamin Heidenreich, *Ein Ereignis ohne Namen? Zu den Vorstellungen des 'Bauernkriegs' von 1525 in den Schriften der 'Aufständischen' und in der zeitgenössischen Geschichtsschreibung*, Berlin, 2019.
- 4 Susan Meurer, "'Yearning for Biography": The Elusive Life of Mathis Grünewald', in *Challenge of the Object: 33rd Congress of the International*

*Committee of the History of Art*, ed. G. Ulrich Großmann and Petra Krutisch, Nuremberg, 2012, 1050–1054.

- 5 The most invidious appropriations of Grünewald, of course, were the nationalist, ideological narratives – closely bound up with earlier notions of the *deutsche Sonderweg* – developed by art historians such as Kurt Gerstenberg, Wilhelm Worringer, and Oskar Hagen. As Keith Moxey, Ann Stieglitz, and Andrée Hayum have shown, these narratives would eventually go on to serve the chauvinist and racist ends of the Nationalist Socialist party in the 1930s. Keith Moxey, 'Impossible Distance: Past and Present in the Study of Durer and Grünewald', *Art Bulletin*, 86: 4, December 2004, 750–763; Ann Stieglitz, 'The Reproduction of Agony: Towards a Reception-History of Grünewald's Isenheim Altar after the First World War', *Oxford Art Journal*, 12: 2, 1989, 87–103; Andrée Hayum, *The Isenheim Altarpiece: God's Medicine and the Painter's Vision*, Princeton, 1989. For a general overview of Grünewald's reception in Germany up until 1945, see Katharina Heinemann, 'Entdeckung und Vereinnahmung: Zur Grünewald-Rezeption in Deutschland bis 1945', in *Grünewald in der Moderne: Die Rezeption Matthias Grünewalds im 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Brigitte Schad and Thomas Ratzka, Cologne, 2003, 8–17.
- 6 The GDR's carefully constructed anti-fascist legacy played a key role in the legitimization of its history and national identity. A useful (and balanced) overview of this founding myth can be found in Alan L. Nothnagle, *Building the East German Myth: Historical Mythology and Youth Propaganda in the German Democratic Republic, 1945–1989*, Ann Arbor, 1999, 93–142.
- 7 W. K. Zülch, 'Grünewald oder Grun?', *Repertorium für Kunstwissenschaft*, 40, 1917, 119–129. For a useful overview of the controversy over Grünewald's name, see Alfred Schädler, 'Zu den Urkunden über Mathis Gothart Neithart', *Münchner Jahrbuch der bildenden Kunst*, 13, 1962, 69–74.
- 8 Walther Karl Zülch, *Der historische Grünewald: Mathis Gothardt-Neithardt*, Munich, 1938.
- 9 On Grünewald's reception in the GDR, see Ingrid Schulze, 'Zur Grünewald-Rezeption in der Kunst der DDR', in *Erbe und Gegenwart*, ed. Ingrid Schulze, vol. 2, Halle [Saale], 1988, 4–25; and Rudolf Kober and Gerd Lindner, 'Paradigma Grünewald: Zur Erbe-Rezeption in der bildenden Kunst der DDR', in *Grünewald in der Moderne*, 32–43.
- 10 W. K. Zülch, 'Die Lutherbibel des Grünewaldfreundes', *Bildende Kunst [BK]*, 5, 1953, 21–27.
- 11 Zülch, *Der historische Grünewald*, 373–375.
- 12 The first is a small, printed pamphlet titled 'erklärung der 12

- artikolen des cristlichen glaubens', which Zülch interpreted as a reference to the so-called 'Twelve Articles', a list of demands of the Swabian League drawn up by the rebelling peasants in 1525. The second is a cryptic note that he believed was a guarantee of protection against prosecution for Grünewald's involvement in the Peasants' War ('Item 1 rol uff eyn gebugen, [?] der uffror halben'). See Zülch, *Der historische Grünewald*, 54–55 and 423–425.
- 13 Hans Jürgen Rieckenberg, *Der historische Grünewald, Mathis Gothart-Nithart, eine Fälschung*, Frankfurt am Main, 1978; and Wolf Lücking, *Matthis: Nachforschungen über Grünewald*, Berlin [FRG], 1983.
  - 14 A summary of the criticisms of these documents can be found in Georges Bischoff and Pantxika Béguerie, *Grünewald: Le Maître d'Issenheim*, Brussels, 2000, 94–96. According to the authors, there is little evidence that the pamphlet 'Twelve Articles of the Christian Faith' refers specifically to the 'Twelve Articles' of the Swabian League; moreover, they criticize Zülch's translation of the guarantee of protection, which they note is difficult to read and could potentially refer to a water fountain rather than an uprising (Grünewald was a hydraulic engineer).
  - 15 Zülch, 'Die Lutherbibel des Grünewaldfreundes', 27. 'Nur mit dem Kreedestift und Farben offenbart er sich [...]'.
  - 16 For a useful critique of post-unification scholarship on East German art, see April Eisman, 'Whose East German Art is This? The Politics of Reception After 1989', *Imaginations*, 8: 1, 2017, 78–99. These biases are not unique to the field of art history but are instead found in broader scholarship on East German history and culture. See Andrew Port, 'The Banalities of East German Historiography', in *Becoming East German: Socialist Structures and Sensibilities after Hitler*, ed. Mary Fulbrook and Andrew Port, New York, 2013, 1–30.
  - 17 April Eisman, *Bernhard Heisig and the Fight for Modern Art in East Germany*, Rochester, 2018; Seth Howes, *Moving Images on the Margins: Experimental Film in Late Socialist East Germany*, Rochester, 2019; Sara Blaylock, *Parallel Public: Experimental Art in Late East Germany*, Cambridge, MA, 2022; Sarah E. James, *Paper Revolutions: An Invisible Avant-Garde*, Cambridge, MA, 2022; and Briana J. Smith, *Free Berlin: Art, Urban Politics, and Everyday Life*, Cambridge, MA, 2022.
  - 18 For a recent account of how Marxist political commitments drove formal choices, see Todd Cronan, *Red Aesthetics: Rodchenko, Brecht, Eisenstein*, Lanham, 2022.
  - 19 A fourth Grünewald drawing was removed from the Plock Bible at an unknown date before Stengel's 1952 discovery.
  - 20 Albrecht Henkys and Tanja Baensch, eds, *Vom Kardinalsornat zur Luther-Bibel: Kunst und Leben des Seidenstickers Hans Plock im Spannungsfeld der Reformation*, Berlin, 2005; Albrecht Henkys and Claudine Moulin, eds, *Die Hausbibel des Seidenstickers Hans Plock (c. 1490–1570)*, Heidelberg, 2022. The Plock Bible is currently the focus of a research and digitization project led by the Trier Center for Digital Humanities, the Department of German Studies and Medieval Philology at the University of Trier, and the City Museum of Berlin: <https://tdch.uni-trier.de/en/projekt/digitalization-plock-bible>
  - 21 On the different identifications of Grünewald's figures, see Werner Timm, 'Die Einklebungen der Lutherbibel mit den Grünewaldzeichnungen', *Forschungen und Berichte*, 1, 1957, 110–112. Currently, the figures are labelled rather broadly as man with outstretched arms, an apostle, and figure with a hood. I have chosen to use Plock's designations in my text since this is how Zülch referred to them in his text (even though he had his own interpretations regarding their original identification). In addition, the Grünewald drawings were later detached from Plock's interventions by museum conservators (Werner Timm, 'Zur Rekonstruktion von zwei Grünewald-Zeichnungen', *Forschungen und Berichte*, 7, 1965, 96–97). However, I have chosen to illustrate the drawings as they appeared in the Plock Bible since these were the images that Zülch worked with in his analysis.
  - 22 Will Grohmann, 'Neue Grünewald-Funde. Ein großer Tag in der Kunstgeschichtlichen Gesellschaft', *Neue Zeitung*, 14 December 1952, 11.
  - 23 Kurt Winkler, 'Walter Stengel (1882–1960) – Eine biographische Skizze', in *Jahrbuch Stiftung Stadtmuseum Berlin*, Band III, ed. Reiner Güntzer, Berlin, 1997, 201–202.
  - 24 Hausarchiv Stadtmuseum Berlin (HA) V, 'Genossen des Märkischen Museums an die Parteileitung der SED im Hauptamt Kunst', August 1952.
  - 25 HA V, 'Genossen des Märkischen Museums'. 'Dr. Stengel sieht in seiner Arbeit keine gesellschaftliche Aufgabe, sondern betrachtet das Museum als eine Art Privatsammlung, aus der "die Politik unter allen Umständen fernzuhalten ist"'.
  - 26 HA V, 'Genossen des Märkischen Museums'. 'Dr. Stengel ist ein qualifizierter bürgerlicher Wissenschaftler, dessen Qualifikation aber im Augenblick gegen und nicht für uns ausgenutzt wird'.
  - 27 The following account comes from Stengel's own personal reflection. HA V, 'Begründung der Flucht aus Ostberlin am 22. Dezember 1952', 19 August 1953.
  - 28 HA V, 'Bericht betr: Dr. Walter Stengel', 1953. 'Am 19. Dezember wurde Band I. der Bibel aufgrund des Verdachts auf ein Verbrechen gegen das Volkseigentum beschlagnahmt'.
  - 29 HA, Plock Bible object files, 'Übergabeschein', 19 December 1952 and 3 January 1953.
  - 30 Winkler, 'Walter Stengel', 202.
  - 31 Herbert Hampe, *Das Märkisches Museum*, Berlin [GDR], 1958, 20.
  - 32 Unknown author, 'Hand of the Master', *Time*, 61: 1, 5 January 1953, 5.
  - 33 Walter Stengel, 'Der neue Grünewald-Fund', *Zeitschrift für Kunstwissenschaft*, 6, 1952, 65–78 and 'Drei neu entdeckte Grünewald-Zeichnungen', *Berliner Museen*, 2: 3/4, 1952, 30–33.
  - 34 HA V, 'Bericht betr: Dr. Walter Stengel', 1953. 'Stengel erklärte, dass ihn die Presse in Ruhe lassen solle und zwar beide Seiten, er wünsche, dass über die ganze Geschichte erst einmal gras wachse. Dass er mit dieser objektivistischen Einstellung bereits Partei für die westlichen Kriegstreiber ergreift, scheint ihm nicht klar zu sein'.
  - 35 Zülch, 'Die Lutherbibel des Grünewaldfreundes', 21–27.
  - 36 Zülch, 'Die Lutherbibel des Grünewaldfreundes', 21. 'Seine Ausführungen erscheinen uns als wichtiger Ausgangspunkt für eine Diskussion, in deren Verlauf es notwendig sein wird, dass wir uns noch einmal mit den Hintergründen beschäftigen, die zu den verfälschenden Darstellungen in der westlichen Presse geführt haben'.
  - 37 Zülch, 'Die Lutherbibel des Grünewaldfreundes', 21. 'Dazu las man seit der Jahreswenden in westdeutschen Blättern vom geheimnisvollen Verschwinden der Zeichnungen im Panzerschrank der Volkspolizei und von der Uninteressiertheit der DDR an Grünewald [...] die durch mangelnde Kenntnis und tendenziöse Entstellung [...] nichts als eine neue Verwirrung in die Grünewaldforschung brachten'.
  - 38 Zülch, 'Die Lutherbibel des Grünewaldfreundes', 25–26.
  - 39 W. K. Zülch, 'Die Grünewaldfunde in Donaueschingen und Berlin', *Aschaffener Jahrbuch*, 2, 1955, 200.
  - 40 More reliable historical evidence does not appear until his 1955 article, which discusses several of the embroiderer's diary entries in the bible. According to Zülch, his peasant sympathies are attested to by a brief anecdote related by Plock in which he witnessed the decapitation of a tailor who publicly decried his lack of payment for services rendered. Zülch, 'Die Grünewaldfunde in Donaueschingen und Berlin', 199.
  - 41 Zülch, 'Die Lutherbibel des Grünewaldfreundes', 27. 'ein Künstler und Kämpfer für die Wahrheit, ein Diener und Helfer der ganzen Menschheit'.
  - 42 Friedrich Engels, *The Peasant War in Germany*, trans. Moissaye J. Olgin, New York, 1926.
  - 43 Stephen P. Hoffman, 'The GDR, Luther, and the German Question', *Review of Politics*, 48: 2, 1986, 246–263; and Hartmut Lehmann, 'Das marxistische Lutherbild vom Engel bis Honecker', in *Luther zwischen den Kulturen*, ed. Hans Medick and Peer Schmidt, Göttingen, 2004, 500–514.
  - 44 Laurenz Müller, *Diktatur und Revolution: Reformation und Bauernkrieg in der Geschichtsschreibung des Dritten Reiches und der DDR*, Berlin, 2016.
  - 45 The so-called Law and Gospel iconography is the most well-known example of a new kind of Lutheran imagery.
  - 46 Jürgen Müller and Thomas Schauerer, eds, *Die gottlosen Maler von Nürnberg: Konvention und Subversion in der Druckgrafik der Beham-Brüder*, Nuremberg, 2011.
  - 47 Zülch, 'Die Lutherbibel des Grünewaldfreundes', 27. '[...] der kirchlich sanktionierten Darstellungsform (Ikonographie)'.

- 48 Zülch, 'Die Lutherbibel des Grünewaldfreundes', 25. 'Grünewald sucht niemals die Ruhe des zuständigen Seins, seine Ausdrucksgewalt erfasst den psychologischen Hochpunkt der dramatischen Bewegung, hier den Augenblick des werdenden Lichtes. In Schraubenbewegung von rechts unten schwebt der Schöpfer herauf, das Gewand bricht sich in unruhig knitterndes Gefält [sic] wie in momentanem Verhalten gegen den Luftdruck. Vom kahlen Schädel weht ein Kranz von Haarwellen zum struppigen Bart um ein kaum schönes Antlitz. Der Mund ist noch geöffnet und die gebreiteten Arme greifen in das werdende Werk des ersten Schöpfungstages. In machtvoller Gebärde, nur mit der Gewalt des Wortes, rief Gott das Licht'.
- 49 On the Marxist interpretation in the GDR of the Lutheran Reformation as both a progressive force of revolution and also a hindrance, see Rainer Wohlfeil, 'Reformation als "frühbürgerliche Revolution"? Die deutsche Reformation in der Historiographie der DDR', in *Geschichtswissenschaft in der DDR*, vol. 2, ed. Alexander Fischer and Günther Heidemann, Berlin, 1990, 177–214.
- 50 Plock's Lutheran and even revolutionary inclinations are well attested in his own diary entries pasted in the back of his bible. Matthias Meinhardt, 'Reformation, Reichspolitik und individuelle Frömmigkeit – Umbruchwahrnehmungen im Spiegel eines Sammelbandes aus dem Besitz Hans Plocks', in *Die Hausbibel*, 25–36.
- 51 Zülch, 'Die Lutherbibel des Grünewaldfreundes', 26. 'Die Gewandbewegung bei Grünewald ist ein Höchstpersönliches, so wie bei keinem anderen; sie lebt die Seelenbewegung des Trägers mit [...]. In der Griffbewegung zum Leuchter schlug das Mantelende hoch, es wird im nächsten Augenblick zurückfallen. Ein vorübergehender Augenblick ist gemalt, Transitorisches, wie oft im Grünewaldwerk'. The nominalization of 'lebt [...]' mit' is 'Mitleben', a philosophical concept that literally translates to 'living with' but has also been translated as 'communality' or 'social life'. The term is used to convey a shared or communal existence, which my translation has attempted to capture.
- 52 Zülch, 'Die Lutherbibel des Grünewaldfreundes', 27. 'Nur mit dem Kreidestift und Farben offenbart er sich [...]'.
- 53 Ingrid Schulze, *Die Erschütterung der Moderne: Grünewald in 20. Jahrhundert*, Leipzig, 1991.
- 54 This succinct formulation comes from a 1939 speech by the Soviet artist Aleksandr Gerasimov, cited in Matthew Bown, *Socialist Realist Painting*, New Haven, 1998, 141.
- 55 Eisman, *Bernhard Heisig*, 5.
- 56 The foundational study on Socialist Realism in the GDR is Ulrike Goeschen, *Vom Sozialistischen Realismus zur Kunst im Sozialismus Die Rezeption der Moderne Kunst und Kunstwissenschaft der DDR*, Berlin, 2001.
- 57 Leonid Heller, 'A World of Prettiness: Socialist Realism and its Aesthetic Categories', in *Socialist Realism without Shores*, ed. Thomas Lahusen and Evgeny Dobrenko, Durham, NC, 1997, 51–75.
- 58 Hans Lauter, ed., *Der Kampf gegen den Formalismus in Kunst und Literatur, für eine fortschrittliche deutsche Kultur. Entschließung des Zentralkomitee der SED, angenommen auf der V. Tagung vom 15.-17. März 1951*, Berlin [GDR], 1951, 152. 'Nach ihrer Auffassung besteht die Bedeutung eines Kunstwerkes nicht in seinem Inhalt, sondern in seiner Form. Überall, wo die Frage der Form selbständige Bedeutung gewinnt, verliert die Kunst ihren humanistischen und demokratischen Charakter'.
- 59 Hermann Bruce, 'Formalismus – Feind der Kunst', *BK*, 2, 1953, 59. 'Ist Formalismus noch Formalismus, wenn wir ihn mit neuen Inhalten füllen?'
- 60 Goeschen, *Vom sozialistischen Realismus*, 36–67; and Eckhart Gillen, *Das Kunstkombinat DDR. Zäsuren einer gescheiterten Kunstpolitik*, Cologne, 2005, esp. 167–172.
- 61 The two most important of these publications were Alexander Dymshitz, 'Über die formalistische Richtung in der deutschen Malerei', *Tägliche Rundschau*, 19, 24 November 1948; and N. Orlow, 'Wege und Irrwege der modernen Kunst', *Tägliche Rundschau*, 20, 21 January 1951.
- 62 See Günter Feist, 'Das Wandbild im Bahnhof Friedrichstrasse. Eine Horst Stempel Dokumentation 1945–1955', in *Zone 5. Kunst in der Viersektorenstadt 1945–1951*, ed. Eckhart Gillen and Diether Schmidt, Berlin, 1989, 92–137.
- 63 Lauter, *Der Kampf gegen den Formalismus*, 27. 'Weil es solche Menschen in Wirklichkeit gar nicht gibt [...] darum kann eine solche Kunst auch nicht den Fortschritt und den Aufbau zum Ausdruck bringen'.
- 64 Goeschen, *Vom sozialistischen Realismus*, 27–59; and Petra Ullmann and Sabine Wolf, 'Meister und Schule. Strukturen der Nachwuchsförderung an der Sektion Bildende Kunst der Deutschen Akademie der Künste zu Beginn der fünfziger Jahre', in *Kunstdokumentation SBZ-DDR, 1945–1990*, ed. Günter Feist, Eckhart Gillen, and Beatrice Vierneisel, Berlin, 1996, 262–279.
- 65 While scholars often describe the period after Stalin's death as a 'thaw', it would be more accurate to refer to it as a decade or so of alternating 'thaws' and 'freezes', during which time party regulations over cultural production were relaxed or strengthened, respectively. Moreover, while a 'thaw' certainly made more liberal forms of expression possible, none could be so radical as to risk party disapproval. A useful discussion of the impact of these 'thaws' and 'freezes' on the East German film industry can be found in Sebastian Heiduschke, *East German Cinema: DEFA and Film History*, New York, 2013, esp. 41–43. For an introduction to the 'thaw' and Soviet culture more broadly, see Denis Kozlov and Eleonory Gilburd, 'The Thaw as an Event in Russian History', in *The Thaw: Soviet Society and Culture During the 1950s and 1960s*, ed. Denis Kozlov and Eleonory Gilburd, Toronto, 2013, 18–81.
- 66 Goeschen, *Vom sozialistischen Realismus*, 59–67; Gillen, *Das Kunstkombinat DDR*, 54–59.
- 67 Heather Mathews, 'Formalism, Naturalism, and the Elusive Socialist Realist Picture at the GDR's Dritte Deutsche Kunstausstellung, 1953', in *Contested Legacies: Constructions of Cultural Heritage in the GDR*, ed. Matthew Philpotts and Sabine Rolle, Rochester, 2009, 90–105; and Goeschen, *Vom sozialistischen Realismus*, 59–67.
- 68 Gottlieb Rese and Walter Besenbruch, eds, *Neuer Kurs und die bildenden Künstler Beiträge aus den Protokollen der außerordentlichen Vorstandssitzungen am 7. und 8. August 1953 und 14. November 1953*, Berlin [GDR], 1953, 138. Cited in Goeschen, *Vom sozialistischen Realismus*, 66. "'sogenannte formalistische Tendenzen" aufwiesen, seien "zunächst einmal einfach nur Rebellen gegen etwas, [...] was in der Nazizeit Kunst genannt wurde"'.
- 69 On the history of the journal, see Beatrice Vierneisel, 'Wechselbäder einer Verbandszeitschrift: *Bildende Kunst*', in *Zwischen Mosaik und Einheit. Zeitschriften in der DDR*, ed. Simone Back, Martina Langermann, and Siegfried Lokatis, Berlin, 1999, 276–288.
- 70 Frederike Eschen, 'Positionen zur Moderne in der DDR am Beispiel der Zeitschrift *Bildende Kunst*', in *Bildgespenster. Künstlerische Archive aus der DDR*, ed. Elize Bisanz and Marlene Heidel, Bielefeld, 2014, 327–365.
- 71 *Katalog der III. Deutschen Kunstausstellung Dresden 1953*, Dresden, 1953, 31. 'ein Kampforgan für den sozialistischen Realismus [...]. Sie kämpft gegen alle kunst- und menschenfeindlichen Richtungen der Dekadenz: Formalismus, Naturalismus und Kitsch. Die Zeitschrift "BK" wendet sich an Künstler, Kunstwissenschaftler, Kulturpolitiker und an alle werktätigen Menschen. Sie will diesen helfen, am Aufblühen einer wahrhaft fortschrittlichen deutschen Kunst mitzuschaffen'.
- 72 A useful overview of this programme can be found in Maik Steinkamp, *Das unerwünschte Erbe: Die Rezeption 'entarteter' Kunst in Kunstkritik, Ausstellungen, und Museen der SBZ und frühen DDR*, Berlin, 2008, esp. 85–118.
- 73 Lauter, *Der Kampf gegen den Formalismus*, 152. 'Wir müssen unser nationales, klassisches Kulturerbe studieren, da der klassischen Kunst Wahrhaftigkeit und Realismus eigen sind'.
- 74 Vierneisel, 'Wechselbäder einer Verbandszeitschrift', 280–282.
- 75 See Sigrid Hofer, 'The Dürer Heritage in the GDR: The Canon of Socialist Realism, its Areas of Imprecision, and its Historical Transformations', *Getty Research Journal*, 4, 2012, 109–126, for an account how art critics and historians turned to Dürer in the 1960s and 1970s to address a different set of issues in East German cultural policy at the time. However, as Hofer points out herself, the analysis of Dürer's forms remained superficial at best.
- 76 Moxey, 'Impossible Distance', 754–755. For more general information on Grünewald's reception among the Expressionists, see Heinemann, 'Entdeckung und Vereinnahmung', 10–12; and Ingrid Schulze, 27–36.
- 77 Steinkamp, *Das unerwünschte Erbe*, 175–190.



- 78 Herbert Gute, 'Was können unsere Künstler von Albrecht Dürer lernen?', *Tägliche Rundschau*, 23 October 1952. 'Grünewalds Darstellungen vom Menschen konzentrieren sich auf Qualen und Verzweiflung; seine Gestalten zeigen Exaltiertheiten und Übersteigerungen der Emotionen, die den Formalisten, vor allem den Expressionisten als Vorbild dienen [...]. Und wenn es so ist, daß die Expressionisten einmal Grünewald als ihren Vater bezeichnen haben, und wenn von ihm aus sich diese schädliche und für unsere nationale Kultur zutiefst gefährliche Richtung ergeben hat, so werden wir das nicht verschweigen'.
- 79 Goeschen, *Vom sozialistischen Realismus*, 100–104.
- 80 Steinkamp, *Das unerwünschte Erbe*, 319–332.
- 81 Gillen, *Das Kunstkombinat*, 41–51. See also Peter H. Feist, 'Die sozialistische Nationalkultur Erbe der Kultur und Kunst der frühbürgerlichen Revolution', in *Albrecht Dürer – Kunst im Aufbruch*, ed. Ernst Ullmann, Leipzig, 1972, 173–189.
- 82 Hans Holbein the Younger was the subject of little interest until 1956, after which numerous articles in *BK* proliferated.
- 83 'Erforschung und Aneignung des nationalen Erbes – unser Ziel', *BK*, 1, 1953, 15. 'Wir wollen die erhabenen Inhalte, die revolutionäre Größe, die realistischen Aussagen der Klassiker unseren Menschen wieder zugänglich machen [...]. Ihre Werke werden jedem deutschen Patriot die Kraft, den Mut, die Erlebnisfähigkeit geben, um die Aufgaben meistern zu können, die uns von der Geschichte gestellt werden. Der Kampf um die Beseitigung der nationalen Unterdrückung und sozialen Ausbeutung im westlichen Teil unseres Vaterlandes fordert gebieterisch, unser Volk mit den besten Waffen für diese Auseinandersetzung auszurüsten. Die Bamberger und Naumburger Meister, Dürer und Holbein, Riemenschneider und Veit Stoß, Menzel, Liebl und Käthe Kollwitz – um nur einige Namen zu nennen – haben sie geschmiedet. Ihr Schaffen hat lebendige Bedeutung für die zeitgenössische, künstlerische Entwicklung und die Herausbildung und Festigung unserer sozialistischen Kultur'.
- 84 Friedrich Engels, *The Dialectics of Nature* (1883), trans. Clemens Dutt, Moscow, 1986, 21.
- 85 Engels, *The Dialectics of Nature*, 21. The text is cited in 'Erforschung und Aneignung des nationalen Erbes', 21–22.
- 86 'Erforschung und Aneignung des nationalen Erbes', 16. 'Doch mit Künstlern, die in umfassendem Maße mit Hilfe der realistischen Gestaltungsmethode die Wirklichkeit aktiv zu verändern vermögen'.
- 87 Joachim Uhlitzsch, 'Lucas Cranach – Der Maler der deutschen Reformation', *BK*, 5, 1953, 3. 'Aus tiefer Verbundenheit mit den einfachen Menschen und der Natur entstand im Jahre 1504 das köstlichste Werk, das Cranach während seines Wiener Aufenthaltes geschaffen hat [...]. Am Waldrande, an einer Quelle hat sich die Familie unter einer alten Tanne niedergelassen. In der Mitte des Bildes steht Vater Josef mit dem abgenommenen Hut in der Rechten und einem Krückstock in der Linken. Vor ihm sitzt die junge Mutter, das lebhaft nackte Kind auf den Knien haltend. Kleine Engel haben sich diesem einfachen und schlichten Menschenpaar zugesellt und versuchen tändelnd und spielend, das Kind auf dem Schoß der Mutter zu erheitern. Hier ist das harmonische Verhältnis von Mensch und Natur zu einer prachtvollen lebensbejahenden Einheit geworden'.
- 88 Uhlitzsch, 'Lucas Cranach', 3. 'Es ist nicht schwer zu begreifen, daß ein solches Gemälde eine aktive Rolle in den gesellschaftlichen Auseinandersetzungen jener Zeit gespielt und die Menschen im Sinne des Humanismus erzogen hat [...]. Nur infolge einer aufrichtigen Verbundenheit mit den fortschrittlichen Kräften seiner Zeit konnte es Cranach gelingen, ein so hervorragendes Werk echter Lebensbejahung, die sich in Gegenstand, Komposition und leidenschaftlicher Farbgebung spiegelt, zu schaffen'.
- 89 See footnote 51.
- 90 Zülch, 'Die Lutherbibel des Grünewaldfreundes', 27. 'verströmte den Reichtum seiner großen Seele in glühenden, brennenden Farbvisionen: Meister Mathis der Maler'.
- 91 W. K. Zülch, *Grünewald: Mathis Neithart genannt Gothart*, Leipzig, 1954.
- 92 Zülch, *Grünewald*, 2. 'Meister Mathis sucht nicht die Form, er verwirft bewußt die ordnungsgebundene, kirchliche Tradition, denn ihm ist das Erste und das Letzte der seelische Ausdruck'.
- 93 Zülch, *Grünewald*, 4. 'Albrecht Dürer wägt, rechnet, zirkelt und schreibt in Büchern vom ewigen Gesetz der Form, arbeitet von außen nach innen'.
- 94 Zülch, *Grünewald*, 4. 'In völliger Umkehrung quellen aus grenzenlosen Tiefen mystischer Irrealität bei Meister Mathis Farbwogen und dynamisches Strömen quellen zur Form, zum Bild von innen nach außen; unsichtbar, doch zwingend führen spürbar Kraftlinien den Blick in den Kern des dramatischen Geschehens'.
- 95 Zülch, *Grünewald*, 12. 'Aus unergründlichen Tiefen des Isenheimer Altares dringen auf farbigen Wellen Melodien [...]. Der ganze Altar klingt aus, lebt fort in uns wie ein unabweisbar gewaltiges Tönen. Das ist die Revolution des Geistes'.
- 96 Zülch, *Grünewald*, 12.
- 97 Zülch, *Grünewald*, 25. 'Aus den Hügeln vor schauerlicher Öde im Grunde sickert Blut zu einer breiten Lache. Johannes ist der Bauer aus blutender fränkischer Erde! Ist's nicht doch das Mahnmal auf das Jahr 1525, nach dem grauenhaften Speien und Brennen, Rädern, Hängen, Augenausstechen und Dörferbrennen, nachdem des Bildhauers Tilmann Riemenschneiders wunder tätige Hände in Würzburg auf der Folter zerbrochen, des Malers Jerg Ratgeb, des Kriegsrats der Bauern Leib vier bischöfliche Pferde in Stücke rissen?'
- 98 Zülch, 'Die Lutherbibel des Grünewaldfreundes', 27. 'Die Kunst eines Neuerers, eines Gewaltigen im Geist wird zum Dienst am Menschen als eines oft rebellischen Anwaltes des Menschen vor Gott'.
- 99 Indeed, Zülch was the first to suggest, in his 1938 monograph, that Grünewald departed the court because of political differences, but this is mentioned only in passing.
- 100 Zülch, 'Die Lutherbibel des Grünewaldfreundes', 21–22.
- 101 East Germany became home to many previously exiled artists, such as the poet Johannes Becher, because most had spent their exile in Soviet Russia.
- 102 Alfred Meusel, *Thomas Müntzer und seine Zeit. Mit einer Auswahl der Dokumente des großen deutschen Bauernkrieges*, ed. Heinz Kamnitzer, Berlin [GDR], 1952; M. M. Smirin, *Die Volksreformation des Thomas Müntzer und der große Bauernkrieg*, Berlin [GDR], 1952; Karl Kleinschmidt, *Thomas Müntzer: Die Seele des deutschen Bauernkrieges von 1525*, Berlin [GDR], 1952.
- 103 Hartmut Lehmann, 'The Rehabilitation of Martin Luther in the GDR', in *Religion and the Cold War*, ed. Diane Kirby, New York, 2003, 200–211.
- 104 See footnote 76.
- 105 *Katalog der III. Deutschen Kunstausstellung*, 13.
- 106 Ute Haug, *Der Kölner Kunstverein im Nationalsozialismus Struktur und Entwicklung einer Kunstinstitution in der kulturpolitischen Landschaft des 'Dritten Reichs'*, Aachen, 1998, Dok. Nr. 1752 and 2594.
- 107 Both Rieckenberg and Lück criticize Zülch for misrepresenting data for political reasons in the context of the Third Reich. Rieckenberg, *Der historische Grünewald*, 7; and Lücking, *Mathis*, 9.
- 108 Zülch, *Der historische Grünewald*, Vorwort, [n.p.].
- 109 Zülch, *Das historische Grünewald*, 38. 'die neue Ordnung, das neue bessere Reich zu beginnen'. On the reception of the Peasants' War in the Third Reich, see Müller, *Diktatur und Revolution*, 73–166.
- 110 HA, Plock Bible object files, Letter from W. K. Zülch to Friedrich Winkler, 11 November 1950. 'Im Zuge der Neuorientierung, Einsparung und "gesellschaftlichem Einsatz" bin ich von der Stadtverwaltung aus meiner "leitenden" Stellung als Direktor des Kreismuseums, das ich aus einem Schutthaufen aufgebaut habe, zum 31. Dezember 1950 gekündigt [...]. Ich habe kein Vermögen und irgend welchen Besitz, da ich mit meinen Angehörigen jeder nur einen Handkoffer gerettet habe, Totalgeschädigter bin'.
- 111 HA, Plock Bible object files, Letter from W. K. Zülch to Friedrich Winkler, 11 November 1950. 'Dazu ist nötig, dass ich aus der Ostzone (!) Bestätigungen meiner Eigenschaft als anerkannter Gelehrter vorlege'.
- 112 Zülch joined the SED party in 1946.
- 113 Archiv der Akademie der Künste (AAK), Becher-Johannes-R-Korrespondenz 11281. Letter from the Berliner Zeitung editors to Johannes R. Becher, 3 November 1953.
- 114 AAK Becher-Johannes-R-Korrespondenz 11281. Letter from the Berliner Zeitung editors to Johannes R. Becher, 3 November 1953.
- 115 AAK Becher-Johannes-R-Korrespondenz 11281. Letter from the Berliner Zeitung editors to Johannes R. Becher, 3 November 1953. 'Diese in der Fachwelt unbestrittenen Leistungen Zülchs schufen die Voraussetzung, das Werk Grünewalds realistisch

- zu interpretieren und von allen klerikalen und formalistischen Entstellungen zu befreien sowie das Leben Grünewalds als eine der bedeutendsten revolutionären Persönlichkeiten der deutschen Kunstgeschichte historisch getreu zu rekonstruieren [...]. Auf die kulturpolitische Bedeutung dieser Arbeiten zur Erhellung der Blütezeit der realistischen deutschen Kunst braucht nicht besonders hingewiesen zu werden, zumal von westlicher Seite unter Anleitung der amerikanischen "Neuen Zeitung" in ständig wachsendem Masse auf eine Entstellung dieser Traditionen speziell im Fall Grünewalds hingearbeitet wird'.
- 116 AAK Becher-Johannes-R-Korrespondenz 11281. Letter from the Berliner Zeitung editors to Johannes R. Becher, 3 November 1953. 'Dessen ungeachtet sind wir der Meinung, dass, wie die Dinge auch liegen mögen, die Lebensarbeit Dr. Zülchs für die Aneignung des revolutionären künstlerischen Erbes durch die Arbeiterklasse von außerordentlichem Wert war und vor allem dem Gelehrten alle Gelegenheit gegeben werden sollte, die Ergebnisse seiner Forschung niederzulegen und soweit wie möglich fortzuführen'.
- 117 AAK Becher-Johannes-R-Korrespondenz 11297. Letter from Johannes R. Becher to W. K. Zülch, 4 December 1953.
- 118 AAK AdK-O 0126 04.1.3 'Diskussion der Nationalpreis-Vorschläge 1955', 5 May 1955.
- 119 Jürgen Rühle, 'Auf den Spuren Grünewalds. Zum 70. Geburtstag des Kunsthistorikers Dr. W. K. Zülch', *Berliner Zeitung*, 17 November 1953, 3.
- 120 Schulze, 'Zur Grünewald-Rezeption in der Kunst der DDR', 4–25. Schulze remarks on the limited interest in Grünewald by GDR artists in the early 1950s and the later more pronounced interest starting in the mid-1950s until the 1970s. She does not, however, make a connection between this revival of interest and Zülch's article.
- 121 AAK SV 2659, Letter from the Staatliches Rundfunkkomitee to Ludwig Justi, 13 July 1954. 'deren Entstehungszeiten ohne Zweifel zwischen 1933 und 1945 liegt'; Letter from the Staatliches Rundfunkkomitee to Hans Rehberg, 23 July 1954. 'und die geschichtliche Unkonkretheit des Grünewald-Hörspiels aber verschleiern und verschieben die historische Realität'.
- 122 Rühle, 'Auf den Spuren Grünewalds', 3.
- 123 See Maurice Pianzola, *Bauern und Künstler: die Künstler der Renaissance und der Bauernkrieg von 1525*, Berlin [GDR], 1961; Wolfgang Hütt, *Mathis Gothardt-Neithardt, genannt 'Grünewald'. Leben und Werk im Spiegel der Forschung*, Leipzig, 1969; Wolfgang Hütt, *Deutsche Malerei und Graphik der frühbürgerlichen Revolution*, Leipzig, 1973; Ernst Ullmann, *Kunst und Reformation*, Leipzig, 1984.
- 124 Ulrike Goeschen, 'From Socialist Realism to Art in Socialism: The Reception of Modernism as an Instigating Force in the Development of Art in the GDR', *Third Text*, 23: 1, 2009, 48.
- 125 Worringer, 'Für und wider den Formalismus', 1123. 'Wo also Form nicht etwas gegen ist, das zu einem Inhalt hinzukam, sondern was mit diesem Inhalt identisch war'.
- 126 The myth of Grünewald's participation in the Peasants' War persists today in much of the Anglophone scholarship on the painter.
- 127 See footnote 9.
- 128 Helga Möbius, 'Dialog über Jahrhunderte hinweg. Zu Fragen der Beziehungen zwischen Renaissancekunst und Gegenwart'. BK, 4, 1973, 163. 'Der Ekstatiker unter den deutschen Renaissancemalern hat die soziale Problematik seiner Zeit nie ausdrücklich in sein Werk aufgenommen, obwohl er persönlich an ihr beteiligt gewesen sein muß. Zander gestaltet das Bauernkriegsthema in fast kongenialer Einfühlung in den leidenschaftlichen Geist des großen Realisten [...]. Im erbarmungslosen Bloßlegen von Schmerz, Leid und Tod, im Hymnus auf die unbändige Kraft der Geknechteten, aber auch in der erregenden Ausdrucksgewalt der Farben und Gebärden weiß sich der Künstler unserer Epoche dem der Bauernkriege auch künstlerisch verbunden. Der kalte Metallglanz der Rüstung brennendem Blutrot entgegengesetzt, die bedrängende Wucht, mit der der Kämpfer aus dem Bildgrund herausstürmt, das sind expressive Gestaltungsmittel Grünewalds, in moderner Weise angewandt, den historischen Geschehnissen ebenso angemessen wie unserem Verhältnis zu ihnen'.

# Mit dem Kreidestift und Farben: Revolutionizing Grünewald in the German Democratic Republic

*Tamara Golan*

In 1952, the director of East Berlin's Märkisches Museum discovered three drawings by Matthias Grünewald pasted into a Luther Bible. This remarkable find set off a fascinating tale of art-historical espionage, but also served as a generative moment for the construction of the well-worn cliché of Grünewald as a revolutionary and peasant sympathizer. I examine the artist's transformation into an embodiment of the GDR's socialist ideals by interrogating East German art historian W. K. Zülch's analyses of the newly discovered drawings, which used formal analysis – rather than historical evidence – to figure Grünewald as an ideological accomplice in the German Peasants' War of 1525. Significantly, Zülch presented the tools of the artist's trade ("Kreidestift und Farben") as a way to reconcile form and political content, offering an alternative Socialist model to the SED's state-sponsored culture.

*Tamara Golan is assistant professor of medieval and early modern art at the University of Chicago. Her interests include: the intersections of art, science, and the law; paradigms of expertise; artistic fraud and deception; and questions of failure. She is currently working on her first book, which investigates the role played by legal definitions of evidence in the development of pictorial naturalism in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Swiss art.*