

ARGUS de la PRESSE
21 bd Montmartre 75002 PARIS
Tél. 286.99.07

HERALD TRIBUNE
181 ave Charles de Gaulle
92200 Neuilly

27 OCT 84

INTERNATIONAL HERALD TRIBUNE, SATURDAY-SUNDAY, OCTOBER 27-28, 1984

Page 7

ARTS / LEISURE

Düsseldorf's 'von hier aus' Exhibit Pushes City's Bid to Become Cultural Capital

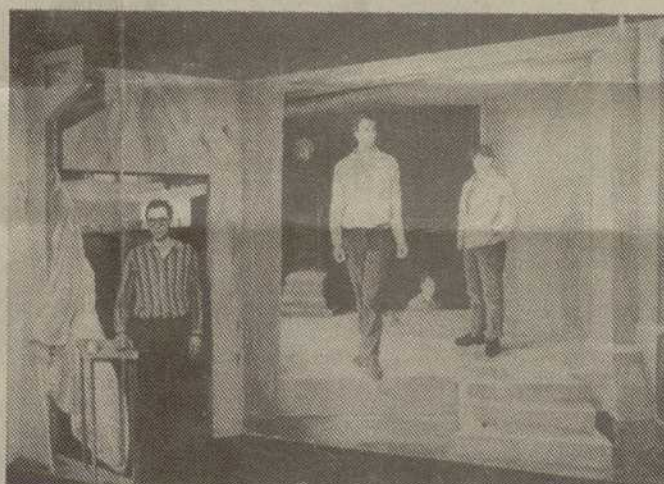
By David Galloway
International Herald Tribune

DÜSSELDORF — A broad ramp made of roughly hewed pine rises from the parking lot before the Düsseldorf Fairgrounds in provocative contrast to the asphalt sea that surrounds the starkly functional exhibition halls. Until Dec. 2, visitors to Hall 13 can scale the 60-meter (195-foot) ramp to an observation platform, which offers a bird's-eye view of the artscape that architect Hermann Czech has created. Streets and plazas, temples and kiosks sprawl below in a post-modernist melange that some critics have compared to Disneyland.

The urban allusions of this improbable setting reflect the absence of a cultural capital in West Germany — a metropolitan retort where ideas are tested, styles polished, standards refined. In a mammoth show that sprawls over 14,000 square meters, curator Kaspar König seeks to correct the deficiency. His temporary metropolis of plywood and muslin houses 60 artists under the title, "von hier aus" (from here on).

The title not only refers to a particularly fertile moment in the history of postwar German art. The "here" is also a pitch for the city of Düsseldorf as a cultural center. In recent years the capital of North Rhine-Westphalia has been repeatedly upstaged by nearby Cologne. There, according to many art enthusiasts, the atmosphere is more sympathetic to avant-garde experiment, and gallerists less inhibited by the high-fashion syndrome of "Dazzeldorf."

The international art fair that once alternated between Cologne and Düsseldorf has become a per-



Holger Bunk in his "Zweifacher Raum" (Twofold Space).

manent fixture of the Cologne season (Nov. 15-21, this year). Exhibitors had repeatedly complained about poor services, high rents and tepid audiences in Düsseldorf. In an attempt to reverse that image, local patriots last year organized a "Society for Contemporary Art," with a budget of 3 million marks funded through private donations and Novea, the municipal corporation that owns and manages the fairgrounds. Their objective was a definitive presentation of "new German art."

First choice as choreographer for the extravaganza was Switzerland's Herald Szeemann. When he pleaded prior commitments, the choice fell with unmistakable irony on a citizen of Cologne. For more than two decades an energetic middleman on the trans-Atlantic art circuit, Kaspar König had successfully weathered both the accolades and the brickbats that came his

way as initiator of "Westkunst." Staged at the Cologne Fairgrounds in 1981, the exhibition attempted to come to terms with postwar "isms." Many felt the idiosyncratic juxtapositions obscured more than they clarified, but the showmaster remained unflustered. An informed subjective opinion, he insists, is always more interesting than the homogenized view of a committee.

In 1969 König helped found the International Communications Center in Antwerp — a forerunner of the "alternative spaces" of the 1970s. As editor of Nova Scotia Press, he assembled data on Claes Oldenburg, Steve Reich and Michael Snow. Book and installation came together when he curated exhibitions of A. R. Penck in Halifax, On Kawara in Bern and Andy Warhol in Stockholm. Two years ago he launched a press for artists' postcards with his brother Walther, who owns one of West Germany's

top bookshops for art, architecture and film — in Cologne, of course. Born in 1943, König came of age during the *Wirtschaftswunder*, but "in the shadow of Auschwitz." The son of a conservative Westphalian businessman, he was a teenager when he saw his first exhibition of modern art at the Brussels World's Fair. At 18, turning his back on church, school and military service, he enlisted in the merchant marine.

The following year König was a volunteer at Rudolf Zwirner's Cologne gallery, then with Robert Fraser in London. Meanwhile, he had begun to publish his own books, sometimes in editions of only two or three copies, and made such a favorable impression that Documenta founder Arnold Bode asked his assistance on the Kassel show in 1964. New York was the next stop, and he worked his way there on a freighter. Within weeks he was enrolled at the New School, organizing publications and haunting Manhattan ateliers.

Skeptics called him an "art groupie," but the impressions collected during these years taught him much about how art is produced and marketed. "My memory is my archive," he says. Next year he will help rejuvenate the Carnegie International in Pittsburgh and launch a new Paris Biennale. Meanwhile, he has been appointed to a professorship for "Art and the Public" at Düsseldorf's Kunst akademie.

For his latest show, König visited 200 ateliers, and the relatively high percentage of newcomers represented in "von hier aus" is to his credit. Nonetheless, dissatisfactions remain — not merely in the overall lack of focus or the exclusion of key contemporary figures

like Klaus Rinke. More baffling is the retrospective motif that repeatedly surfaces. The American Eva Hesse, who died in 1970, is included on the dubious strength of the year she spent working near Düsseldorf.

Equally perverse is the inclusion of an installation by Joseph Beuys from 1967. Though his work was an unmistakable herald of the political concerns that exercise many young

Germans, in this context the earlier pieces seem curiously mummified. One waits for that historic day when a curator will have the courage to exclude the 63-year-old *enfant terrible* from an exhibition of "new" or "young" or "avant garde" German art.

If historical perspective is required, the Düsseldorf Kunsthalle is currently providing it with a show entitled "Departures" (until

Nov. 25), which focuses on the pioneering work of Beuys and the Zero Group in the 1960s. Simultaneously, the Kunsthalle presents a virtuoso troop of 15 younger painters and sculptors, none of whom show up on König's roster. Nor does it include any of those on view at the fictitious "Paul Pazzoza Museum" in an abandoned warehouse on the Rhine (until Nov. 10). With such vigorous correctives to the König

presentation, and an excellent parallel program sponsored by local galleries, it is a good time for an art-watch on the Rhine.

"von hier aus" is open daily from 11 A.M. to 7 P.M.; the Düsseldorf Kunsthalle is open Tuesday through Sunday from 10 A.M. to 6 P.M. The Paul Pazzoza Museum, on the Rhine between the Pegeluhr and the Landtag, can be visited daily between 2 and 6 P.M.