

PRESS RELEASE

***100 Jahre Held(t)en. Werner Heldt and Burkhard Held***

**16 February – 16 June 2024**

**Stiftung Kunstforum Berliner Volksbank  
Kaiserdamm 105, 14057 Berlin-Charlottenburg**

To mark the 70th anniversary of the death of the painter, printmaker and poet Werner Heldt (1904–1954), the exhibition *100 Jahre Held(t)en. Werner Heldt and Burkhard Held* presents works by this influential artist of the post-war period in dialogue with works by the contemporary Berlin artist Burkhard Held (\* 1953).

On display are paintings, works on paper and prints from various creative phases that illustrate the intellectual proximity and common themes of the two artists.

Born in Berlin in 1904, Werner Heldt initially studied at the city's Kunstgewerbeschule (School of Arts and Crafts) from 1923 and from 1924 to 1930 at the Vereinigte Staatsschulen für freie und angewandte Kunst (Unified School for Fine and Applied Art), Berlin. He found his favourite subjects early on: the city and its architecture, of which he became a silent observer. When the National Socialists seized power in 1933, Heldt fled to Mallorca, which he was forced to leave just three years later due to the Spanish Civil War. Back in Berlin, he moved into a studio in the Ateliergemeinschaft (studio community) Klosterstraße, where Käthe Kollwitz, Werner Gilles and Hermann Blumenthal, among others, also worked. In 1940, he had to serve in the Wehrmacht and was taken prisoner of war by the British in 1945. He returned to Berlin in 1946, initially living in Weissensee, before moving to West Berlin in 1949. Heldt died on Ischia, Italy, in 1954.

Burkhard Held was born in 1953 in West Berlin. From 1972 to 1978, he studied at the Hochschule der Künste (Berlin University of the Arts) in West Berlin. From 1979 to 1980, he spent a year studying in Garrucha, Spain, on a scholarship of the Studienstiftung des Deutschen Volkes. From 1993 until his retirement, Held was a professor at the Universität der Künste Berlin (Berlin University of the Arts). He lives and works in Berlin.

The works in the first room on the ground floor are based on the motto "As you dream, so should you paint", a quote from Werner Heldt: "Stadt (Traum)" (1929), "Traum von Barcelona" (1930) and "Theater (Traum)" (around 1930) are works that are close in time, but stylistically disparate, whose common feature is the dreamy depiction of the inner world. The reality permeated by the dream is put on paper sometimes in a cubist, sometimes in an expressionist manner and, combined with a perceived longing, becomes a kind of magical realism. Heldt records his surroundings and reproduces them in the mood he feels in each case; in the work "Straßenarbeiter auf Mallorca" (1935), for example, the grey and threatening atmosphere of Berlin is combined with an experienced situation on Mallorca.

Burkhard Held also refers to a visually perceivable reality, which he subjects to a pictorial analysis and

transforms into a moment of longing by means of form and colour. The themes of figure and space play a special role here: in "Alexanders Traum" (1992) and in the works on paper of the same name "Ohne Titel" (1993), the figures become the decisive element of the composition and determine the pictorial space. In "Berliner Fenster" (1986), it is especially the head – in contrast to the seemingly disappearing figure – that dominates the picture plane. Held plays with familiar viewing habits and the usual examination of a picture.

In the process of painting, which works towards overcoming the motif, Held begins to separate figure and space from the mid-1990s. In "Fenster – Orange mit weiblicher Figur" (1996) the figure recedes from the pictorial structure, in "Intérieur (Fenster Blau)" (1995/96) it disappears completely and in works such as "Neapolitanischer Kopf" (2003) the head dissolves into coloured lines.

The view from the window also plays a prominent role in Werner Heldt's still lifes from the late 1940s and 1950s. "Totenkopf vor Stadt (from the portfolio: Berlin)" (1949) is an example of Heldt's most intensive creative phase. Against the backdrop of his destroyed hometown, he created vanitas still lifes, arranged in front of windows that offer a view of the city. In these works, Heldt explores geometric arrangements and uses still life motifs in an alienating way. In the spirit of "Neues Sehen" (new ways of seeing), the composition of the drawing "Stilleben am Fenster" (1947) is irritating due to the size and depiction of the object in the foreground. At the same time, Heldt was working on a series in which the city of Berlin is relocated to the sea. With the houses surrounded by wild water in "Häuser (from the portfolio: Berlin)" (1949) and "Berlin am Meer (from the portfolio: Berlin)" (1949), he opens up a "complementary contrast between urban civilisation and the sea (...), between metropolitan pride in being the seat of Western rationality, including the reign of money – and its collapse", according to Ralf Köhnen in the accompanying publication. Nature triumphs over the work of man, as Heldt himself put it in words.

The nature of Portugal, the light and warmth perceived there and, in particular, the sea have been at the centre of Burkhard Held's work since 2018. "Oceano II" (2019) and "Oceano IV" (2019) focus on the vast, endless ocean and the dramatic moment when a wave breaks. Held uses the means of painting to stretch the moment that has long since volatilised. It is this transience that Held finds both fascinating and longing.

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**100 Jahre Held(t)en. Werner Heldt and Burkhard Held, 16 February – 16 June 2024**

**Tuesday – Sunday, 10 am – 6 pm, closed on Mondays**

**Admission: 5 euros; reduced: 3 euros; under 18 free. Accompanied by a 48-page publication.**

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