

THE CONCRETE CANVAS



Killing the wall with three colours



WIDE ANGLE DESK

Keith Haring began painting on the streets. Subways and subway terminals became the backdrops of his continuous linear figures and patterns. In 1986, after he had achieved international acclaim, the Museum Checkpoint Charlie asked him to paint a mural on the Berlin Wall. Checkpoint Charlie was one of the most frequented passageways through the wall.

In yellow, red, and black, Haring's mural covered 100 feet including parts on Western and Eastern territory.

These colours represent the flag colours of both West and East Germany. His organic figures lay horizontally on the wall, linked together by the connection of hands and feet. Haring alternated red and black figures on the yellow backdrop, through which previous artworks can still be seen. In his distinct style, the figures are surrounded by lines and detailed with circles. Haring's mural was meant to show a unity between East and West.



Berlin. The chain-linked figures were meant to identify with anyone who looked at the work. But the painter described it as a "political and subversive act – an attempt to psychologically destroy the wall by painting it."

Haring's work was both sanctioned and unsanctioned. While he was invited to paint at Checkpoint Charlie, he did not have authorisation to paint on the part in East Germany. A team from the Museum painted the 100 feet of yellow in the dead of night. Haring then spent 6 hours completing the mural the next day. He was watched by guards from both sides of the wall and would move back to the West Berlin side of the wall anytime he felt he was going to be arrested. West Berlin guards even warned him of the potential for arrest via megaphone as they watched him hop across the border. Highly publicised by the Museum, Haring had a steady string of onlookers as he worked. He did interviews with both local and international media spreading the word and the photographs of his work.

By the time it came down in 1991, Haring's mural had completely disappeared. But he was never bothered. Not at all. He wrote once that his work, "is temporary and its permanency is unimportant. Its existence is already established. It can be made permanent by the camera."

Haring just wanted to draw attention to the crisis.

Source : sites.duke.edu, washingtonpost.com, diaryofasmartchick.com

THE WHITE LINE

A story of punks, spies, sibling betrayal and buckets of white paint



WIDE ANGLE DESK

November 3, 1986. A group of five masked men drew a white line on the Berlin wall. Starting at Mariannenplatz, the line was heading west via the Checkpoint Charlie border crossing in the city centre.

After around 5km, the line suddenly stopped. At 11:30am next day, border guards from the eastern side of the wall had ambushed the line-painters and put an end to their project.

The wall collapsed almost exactly three years later.

All five of the wall-painters had been born in the east, in Weimar, but had begun to rebel against the communist regime's social norms in their late teens. Frank Willmann read Nietzsche and Solzhenitsyn, his friend Frank Schuster wore sandals and string vests. Wolfram Hasch grew his hair long. Jürgen Oniseit played in a punk band called Creepers. Thomas, his younger brother, was arrested for spraying dadaesque slogans such as Macht aus dem Staat Gurbensalat ("Turn the state into cucumber salad") on to walls around Weimar.

The regime's tolerance for alternative lifestyles was low. Between 1983 and 1985, after a series of run-ins with the authorities, the five friends were all granted permission to resettle in the west and moved to Berlin.

For Willmann, now a journalist and author, the line was, above all, an artistic statement, a protest against what other artists were doing with the wall.

For Thomas Oniseit, who is now a graphic designer and lives in Dresden, the line was political rather than artistic. For Schuster, the line was political, too, but more of a protest against the complacency of the west.



All of them agree that it was the older Oniseit brother, Jürgen, who first had the idea. He painted a manifesto on the wall next to the start of the line: "This line will demarcate the Berlin area anew and reveal the wall as a ghetto wall. Its beginning and end is here."

In 2010, Willmann started ordering up documents from the Stasi archive. He found the white line had yet another meaning for the leader of their group.

Between 1981 and 1985, Jürgen Oniseit had worked as an "unofficial collaborator" for the secret police. By naming a group of people involved in the "Turn the state into cucumber salad" stunt, he had indirectly brought about his younger brother's imprisonment.

In a documentary titled "Drawing a Line", the older brother is asked if he regrets betraying his friends. "I don't have friends," Jürgen says. The white line on the Berlin Wall had one other meaning. On the eastern side, border guards used white paint to reiterate the "anti-fascist barrier" against the west. When the five masked men with the buckets of white paint were first spotted on the morning of November 3, it seemed obvious to them that the white line was no art project or political protest, but the state enemy in disguise, attempting to redraw the physical border between east and west.

As a consequence, border guards were ordered to slip through a hidden door in the Berlin Wall the next morning and ambush the painters. Four of the friends escaped.

But Wolfram Hasch was seized and pulled back into the east, where he remained in prison for three months before being released back to the west.

He no longer wants to talk about the white line.

Source: The Guardian, Reflex.cz

ART OUT OF GALLERY

French street artist THIERRY NOIR was the first to daub the ultimate symbol of communist repression with cartoonish graffiti, and his creations became world famous. Here he talks about some of his Berlin Wall paintings.



"This is a collaboration with Christophe Bouchet, a remake of the Tortoise and the Hare fable. In our version, the hare wins. We painted these on 13 August 1985, for the 24th anniversary of the construction of the Wall."

SOURCE: THE GUARDIAN

"This elephant was one of my first paintings on the Berlin Wall. I started painting outside because I wanted to say that it's good to put art in the streets and not solely in museums and galleries. This painting represented the key to success – heavy work every day. If you wait at home for inspiration, you can wait a very long time."



"This is me painting the wall in 1985. The dinosaurs represent a mutation of nature – because the Berlin Wall and the paintings I created were like a mutation of culture."