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Jochen Seidel

(German Painter, 1924-1971)



Jochen Seidel was born in 1924 in the German industrial town of Bitterfeld. He was the son of an engineer, and counted several artists among his extended family.

In 1941 he was drafted into the army. After a brief period of imprisonment he returned in 1945 to the newly-formed German Democratic Republic. He enrolled in the art school Burg Giebichenstein in Halle, where he studied painting with Charles Crodel. He did not finish, instead leaving school to earn a living painting propaganda murals for the East German government.

He belonged to a circle of friends around the painter Hermann Bachmann, which included Otto Müller, Karl-Erich Müller and Willi Sitte. Like many artists in East Germany at the time he came under pressure to abandon modernism and adhere to propagandistic works. To preserve his artistic freedom and integrity, he followed Bachmann to West Berlin in 1953. He resumed his artistic studies, this time with Ernst Schumacher.

At this time Seidel began to break from representational painting, when he had “given up dependence of color and planes on the subject, and worked solely with the dynamics and composition of colors in a field-like organization of the painting square.”*

He began to produce works that gained attention of dealers and critics, notably the Rudolf Springer Gallery in Berlin. This proved to be a fruitful time for Seidel, and his work was shown in many exhibitions, including in West Berlin, Kassel, Vienna, Stockholm, Oslo, Helsinki, Caracas, Lima, Buenos Aires, Montevideo. In 1961 and 1964 he exhibited at the Carnegie International Exhibition in Pittsburgh, PA. In 1962 he accepted an offer to teach at Fairleigh Dickinson University in New Jersey. His work of this period spans a variety of styles, taking opposing approaches to art making: pictorial construction/composition versus pictorial dismemberment/destruction. He produced a series of drawings based on text, handwriting and his signature, utilizing letter forms and their negative spaces as compositional elements. Elements of color-field painting, geometric abstraction, pop art, and combine painting find their way into Seidel’s work at this time.

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He achieved some success but not to his satisfaction. He apparently struggled with depression throughout his life. His father committed suicide when Seidel was young; Seidel himself

attempted suicide twice. In 1971 Seidel took his life at the age of 47, leaving behind a studio with more than 200 medium to large paintings and 1200 drawings. In 1992, he was the subject of a comprehensive retrospective exhibition that traveled to Staatlich Kunsthalle Berlin, Hallescher Kunstverein E.V. in Halle, and Raum Trinitatis in Köln.

* Angelika Stepken, "The Leap Into Painting - The Leap Within Painting," an essay from *Jochen Seidel 1924-1971*, Kunsthalle Berlin.

Selected Public Collections

Museum of Modern Art, New York
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York
National Museum of American Art, Washington D.C.
Kupferstichkabinett SMPK Berlin
Staatliche Galerie Moritzburg Halle
San Francisco Museum of Modern Art
Brooklyn Museum
Princeton Art Museum, Princeton, NJ
Denver Art Museum, Denver, CO
Museum of Art, Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh, PA
Pratt Institute, New York
Fogg Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA
Goethe House, New York City
Neuberger Museum, Purchase, NY
Fairleigh Dickinson University, Madison, NJ
Allentown Art Museum, Allentown, PA