

21 March to 31 August 2014

## Colour for the Republic Commissioned photography on life in the GDR



The exhibition “Colour for the Republic – Commissioned photography on life in the GDR” is devoted for the first time exclusively to the official journalistic photo production in the German Democratic Republic using the example of colour photography.

The core of the presentation comes from the extensive archives of two photojournalists, Martin Schmidt (born in 1925) and Kurt Schwarzer (1927-2012), which are now preserved

in the collection of the German Historical Museum.

As freelance photographers, Martin Schmidt and Kurt Schwarzer worked on behalf of various magazines, but they were also commissioned by mass organisations such as the Free German Trade Union Federation (FDGB) and by different companies. They took their cameras to publicly owned companies (VEBs) and agricultural collectives (LPGs), kindergartens and old age homes, and produced promotional photos for trade fairs, products and cookbooks. In keeping with their mandate – to present the positive aspects of the GDR for internal and external consumption – the photographers took pictures that show facets of a fulfilled life and work routine in Socialism. At the same time, colour photography was given a very important role to play in conveying socialist ideology. It was supposed to exude – especially in the 1960s – a spirit of optimism and new beginning and to present the GDR as a modern state. Up-to-date factories, efficiently organised agricultural production, new construction projects and the great variety of social achievements propagated by the state were advantageously depicted in colour, and thus colour photography became the expression of modernity in Socialism. At the same time it illustrated the promise of a socialist future.

These commercial and commissioned colour photographs are presented in the exhibition as large-format prints as well as in their original published form. Additional work materials used by the photojournalists supplement the original colour slides and negatives. The exhibition offers insight into the history of the origin and impact of commissioned photography and a critical reflection on its manifestation.

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