



Sitz: Kunsthof Lietzen, Falkenhagener Straße 10,
15306 Lietzen, Telefon: 033470/248

Endmoräne – Künstlerinnen aus Brandenburg und Berlin e.V.

Annette Munk

Only Those Who Change Remain True to Themselves. „Endmoräne e.V.“ – An Exemplary Development

What can, or should, a review of 25 years of Endmoräne endeavor? Appraisal and summarization, uncovering change and continuity, documenting art history – in short: it should draw attention to the exceptional that arose alongside Endmoräne, and that the association still carries and supports – not least so as to honor and show appreciation for the work of the numerous participants involved over this long period of time.

Every year in the summer, a major site-specific art project encompassing stimulating artistic positions as well as contemporary working methods and principles is publicly presented at a different location. Organized by the participating artists of the women-only association, each project is unique in many respects. Endmoräne always taps upon novel locations in Brandenburg and converts the empty „non-spaces“ into treasure troves of art: places of interest, well worth a visit. The art works are developed to the specific context, and therefore they are usually only experienceable at the given location and for a short time. The individual artistic approaches are manifold, and definitely require a high degree of conceptual planning, flexible responsiveness, and supportive teamwork. That’s easy enough to say, but all those involved are well aware that time and again it invariably represents an enormous and new challenge. Artworks of unmistakable quality are the outcome, however, as well as – neither last nor least – an artistic collective within which each person can rely on the combined professional experience and strengths of the others.

We find and visit the locations together. Each artist subsequently develops her own concept and work and/or intervention approach. Usually, a three-woman project group assumes the preparatory conceptual design and organization, and the spatial planning is executed jointly and on site. During this time span – the so-called „Sommerwerkstatt“ [summer workshop] – all the individual participating artists realize their respective artworks. The original ideas are tested, adapted, implemented or discarded. Often, completely new approaches emerge that were previously inconceivable.

I have been taking part in Endmoräne projects since 2011. In my experience, they are a major artistic and personal enrichment. Here, unlike in other exhibitions, the experience transcends the simple reception of the work of other artists. Every person involved has the opportunity, concurrent to the creation of her own work, to experience firsthand the creation process of many other works, and to likewise partake in the affiliated discussion and exchange. The exhibition project as a whole – in other words, the overall synergetic effect of the diverse artistic contributions – does not simply accrue „on its own“. It is a risky adventure, for there is no curatorial control. The process demands the conscious and responsible commitment of everyone involved – above and beyond one’s own work, and for the exhibition in its entirety.

The professionalism with which this large group conducts itself is result of numerous years of collaborative work. But it is not rigid, however, as its processes and decisions are consistently open to discussion and disposition. It is not a piece of cake to achieve a balance between the artistic positions and strong personalities. Agreements, however, are reached. Modifications prove themselves, or are discarded. The friction engenders transformation and vitality.

Self-organization likewise means that the artists involved in the project have to wear more than just one hat: they are flexible organizers, competent haulers, resourceful technicians, improvisational cooks, clever „proposal poets“, professional installers or gifted performers, fearless cleaners, economic financial planners, communicative art mediators and public-relations experts, documentary photographers, diplomatic conflict managers, talented networkers, friends, enemies... and tolerant and fair colleagues instead of competitors. That it is even possible to transcend the individual positions and collectively and discursively develop a compelling exhibition dramaturgy is not only amazing, but each time also seems like a small miracle to me.

For that, however, although Endmoräne is a tried and tested project, it is in no way an established institution. In other words, every year there is always a struggle for funding; every year, each and every participant must first provide, in their own way, a lion's share of unpaid work.

Endmoräne has existed as an association for 25 years. This in no way means, however, that the collaboration has maintained the same form throughout all those years. On the contrary: the project has successfully undergone a long-term transformation process, one that is closely connected to the profound social changes in Eastern Germany, including Brandenburg. These transformations can be understood as creative strategies undertaken within the context of new possibilities and framework conditions for art and artists.

The composition of the group has also changed a lot: some of those there at the beginning left after many years of collaboration. And many new artists joined after the turn of the century. They gradually changed the structure and framework of the project. Two of the original founding members of Endmoräne are still actively committed and involved today: Erika Stürmer-Alex and Elke Postler. Both have witnessed the entire development, even if the growth and change is no longer that obvious today.

The association Endmoräne was founded by women artists from Brandenburg and Berlin in 1991 at the Kunsthof Lietzen [Lietzen Art Farmyard] shortly after the collapse of the GDR. It was, as were so many other newly formed projects and groups at the time, an aspect of the social change and upheaval in the newly created federal state of Brandenburg.

The central issue of the association was to initiate a multifaceted and intensive exchange and cooperation between artists and, likewise, to bring the results to the public eye. As Endmoräne consists only of women artists, in the early years vehement discussions regarding feminist self-conception and awareness were conducted – the outcome, still open: to date, in regard to both these as well as artistic terms, the group has maintained a more pluralistic than programmatic objective.

The Sommerwerkstätten [summer workshops], the annual joint work sessions, were an aspect of Endmoräne from the outset. At the beginning of the nineties, however, they were something much different from today. Not only were other artists involved at the time, but the method and model of working together were different as well. Building upon the productive experiences of the East German times, the artists from Brandenburg and Berlin met at Kunsthof Lietzen to „do something together“.

Prior to 1991, in the eighties, the Kunsthof Lietzen was already one of the rare, privately created independent spaces for experimental art in the GDR. Whereby, today it is barely conceivable that „experimental“ meant any and all forms of art that did not toe the line of the stringently figurative, illustrative dictates of „socialist realism“: non-figurative, symbolic, conceptual, performative artistic practices. Collaborative multidisciplinary artistic production lent itself as a consolidatory medium for unrestricted engagement, experimentation, and open-minded interaction. The conscious, procedural involvement with oneself and the others in the group was strongly empowering as well as an assertion of inner freedom and individuality in the world – and, in turn, of not being alone. Designated titles such as *Zeichen in der Landschaft* [Signs in the Landscape] already testified to bold objectives and a venturesomeness for uncharted artistic territory.

In a speech given on the occasion of the exhibition POLITEIA in Leipzig in 2002, Erika Stürmer-Alex said in regard to this that her aim had been „to empower an awareness for the diversity and beauty of nature, and the courage for subjective emotion. To counter the increasing narrow-mindedness of public thinking with openness [...] encouraging critical, self-determined living in the midst of the constriction and one-sidedness of the dominant ideology of the state.“ A statement that makes the political dimension clear, for the matter at hand was not only about art and projecting oneself, but something more far-reaching: „Exchanging knowledge by inviting the experienced, and passing onwards that which each person had themselves discovered – feminist literature, transactional analyses, exhibition reviews, readings, concerts, slideshow lectures. We gave it the designation of a ‚learning community‘. [...] That creative coexistence held us together for so many years.“

With the founding of the association, Kunsthof Lietzen became the seat and workspace of Endmoräne. Gradually, officially, and consciously it opened to an audience and to the public. The summer meetings at the start of the 1990s, however, still had more of this previously described internal workshop character, which in turn also spawned collaborative artistic productions. This was augmented by presentations at the Kunsthof or in the immediate vicinity, or by thematic exhibitions in gallery spaces.

And perhaps most importantly, according to Erika Stürmer-Alex, „Thanks to the abdication of the GDR, we could finally do that which was not previously possible: travel ourselves, and invite women artists from West Germany and other countries to our summer workshops. Our curiosity and desire for exchange was immense.“

The initial encounters with women artists from West Berlin, West Germany and other countries yielded significant artistic stimuli as well as new perspectives and strategies: a changing self-concept on the whole. West Berliner women who were active in the women’s movement and had worked together on women’s projects in squatted houses visited Brandenburg and met women artists who had grown up in the Eastern part of Germany. An invigorating exchange thus commenced.

Due to the economic decline of numerous companies in Eastern Germany, in the nineties there also simultaneously arose a continually expanding number of vacant buildings. The artists began to comprehend these empty spaces as open spaces, and to use them for site-specific, spatially-related art forms. The initial spaces were all within the immediate vicinity of the Kunsthof Lietzen. At that time, the Kunsthof was still used for working and living during Sommerwerkstatt. As the radius of action expanded to include all of Brandenburg, the workshops eventually came to be held entirely at the given, specific locations. And thus the present form of the projects gradually came into being.

The projects are context-related and participatory. In other words, the impact of the exhibitions is externally oriented: the exhibitions take up relevant site-specific themes, draw attention to contexts and interrelationships, chronicle or create narratives, generate (with often the most minimal of means) completely new poetic spheres for the public, facilitate the participation of the population – young and old alike. The cooperative work has shifted from the artwork itself to the joint management of the entire given project. The public funding of the project means that the corresponding responsibility must also be shared by everyone involved.

In retrospect, it is clear that regardless of how and where and who was respectively involved in the Endmoräne summer workshops, it has always been about the joint production of intellectual and human enrichment for everyone involved and for the public. The collaborative activities of the group can really be understood as following a basically democratic model: a form of utopian experiment which, despite all the conflicts, is ventured time and again. The primary objective is artistic quality. Thereby, the goal is not „the lowest common multiple“, but rather the largest collective variety.

The journey getting there is a form of collective exploration. Empathic qualities are – alongside the artistic ones – crucial. For Endmoräne, therefore, challenges such as solidarity, tolerance, setting limits, visibility, intuition, knowledge, and all forms of practical organizational tools are not just pithy-sounding topics for theoretical discussion or „workshops“: they are relevant prerequisites for the togetherness within in the project. In the context of art, big egos that are also well-versed in using their elbows are admired often enough. For us, however, it's not at all about the law of the strongest.

The aim for exchange and the philosophy of networking between the East and West, between different countries, generations and artistic genres – which was present from the very outset – transpires on a cooperative basis with mutual recognition and support. The core questions are: „What do we have to do to get something to grow together in a positive sense – in Germany and beyond?“ and „How do we learn to deal with each other respectfully and imaginatively at the same time?“ This represents not only a continuation of the current feminist discourse, but the artistic one as well. In this manner, personal as well as societal perspectives can be opened. In the words of Erika Stürmer-Alex, „When I consider the list of our activities, guests, and exhibitions, I think we can let ourselves be seen with our contribution to the understanding, creativity, sisterhood.“

The cooperative group process of the Endmoräne projects delineates the primary distinction to other exhibition projects. Its continuation over such a long period of time is without parallel. And over this period of time, the function and perception of art has profoundly changed – and not just in Brandenburg. The women artists' group Endmoräne is an exemplary reflection of this change, as is vividly revealed in the anniversary project organized in cooperation with the Cottbus art museum, dkw. Kunstmuseum Dieselkraftwerk. It appears to me that the accomplished work can well be called „lasting“: it gives one hope, and makes one curious about this „wonderful world“, a world that continues to roll...

And for the endurance of all of you who have participated over all these years: Thank You!

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quotation „...as the weird world rolls on“ originally in English by Rose Hawthorne