

DOK Leipzig Retrospective explores 'third ways' outside of the bipolar alliances of the Cold War

Press Release
17 September 2024

Matinee Saxon State Archive to augment the section with examples of amateur filmmaking from the region



DOK Leipzig 2024 | Artwork: Stefan Ibrahim

Titled **“Third Ways in a Divided World. Utopia and Subversion”**, the DOK Leipzig **Retrospective** will focus on the formation of the ideological fronts of the Cold War. This section will feature a compilation of films that reflect various aspirations of autonomy or view communist and socialist doctrine through a different lens. In this vein, the Retrospective also brings up DOK Leipzig’s own history as a festival.

The impact of the GDR maxim “If you’re not for us, you’re against us” was felt at what was then known as the International Leipzig Documentary and Short Film Week particularly in the wake of the “purging plenary session” of the SED leadership in 1965. Thus, one of the questions explored in this Retrospective is the extent to which films were—or were not—screened in Leipzig that didn’t conform to a dualistic view of the world, such as those that revealed a liberalisation in the domestic and cultural policies of the “fraternal socialist countries”. Works by Jean Rouch, Peter Voigt, Dušan Makavejev, and Volker Via Lewandowsky will be screened in this programme, which was curated by film critic Sylvia Görke. The section opens with “The Truth About Fidel Castro Revolution” by Victor Pahlen (1959), an endorsement of the Cuban Revolution by US Hollywood star Errol Flynn, which was screened at the third edition of the Leipzig festival in 1960.

The “third ways” described in the Retrospective include communism in Cuba following the revolution, the Black Waves in Yugoslavia and Poland that were significant movements in film history, and positions taken on the Middle East conflict as the boundary between the ideological blocs. Furthermore, all of these “third ways” reflect a voluntary commitment to “anti-imperialism” and watershed moments in the politics of the Leipzig festival. With this in mind, the Retrospective also looks at films whose makers or protagonists were connected to revolutions, such as “Chile” (1975) by Juan Forch, or that took a critical approach to the excessive bureaucratisation of their own socialist environment, such as “Black Film”

67th International Leipzig
Festival for Documentary and
Animated Film
28 October to 3 November

Publicists
Nina Kühne
Melanie Rohde
Sevara Pan
Tel. +49 (0)341 30864 1070
presse@dok-leipzig.de

Leipziger Dok- Filmwochen GmbH
Katharinenstraße 17
04109 Leipzig

Chairwoman of
the Supervisory Board
Dr. Skadi Jennicke

Managing and Artistic Director
Christoph Terhechte

Place of Performance
Leipzig

Handelsregister
Commercial Register, HRB 35 89

VAT Tax ID
DE141498242

(1971) by Želimir Žilnik and “Refrain” (1972) by Krzysztof Kieślowski.

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In some cases, the dissident potential of these films only becomes apparent when looking back at them. An example of this is Karlheinz Mund’s “15.000 Volt” (1963), in which Wolf Biermann’s “Frühjahrslied der Eisenbahnerin”, a song about a society hoping for change, can be heard—more than a decade before Biermann was expatriated from the GDR. Another example is “Hello Cubans” (1963) by Agnès Varda, which earned the Silver Dove in Leipzig in 1964, even though it portrayed a different kind of real-world socialism that fascinated but also annoyed the local ideological allies. The educational film “Something Self Explanatory (15x)” (1971) by Hartmut Bitomsky and Harun Farocki and “Associations” (1975) by British director John Smith probe another, playful kind of “third way”. Neither film was screened in Leipzig at the time of its release—one reason presumably being their facetious and satirical aspects.

“If we were to connect the geographic locations that this programme traverses, we’d end up with a pretty wild map—certainly not a purely East-West axis,” says curator Sylvia Görke. She also sees a correlation to current events in the way the films align with each other: “Terms such as ‘third way’ and ‘alternative’ came about in a context of removing ideological barriers, and people shouldn’t be allowed to simply appropriate them in order to advocate for new restrictions.”

This year’s **Matinee Saxon State Archive** will once again echo the theme of the Retrospective. Titled “**So Comrades, Come Rally! The GDR in Solidarity**”, this programme curated by Konstantin Wiesinger will present examples of local and regional amateur filmmaking. These works focus on the demonstrative solidarity of the GDR with the “oppressed peoples” of the world, that is, solidarity with the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam, Chilean President Salvador Allende, and the Palestine Liberation Organization. The historical footage, created by film enthusiasts in youth organisations, companies, and clubs, shows interactions with people from other countries, such as during friendship visits and the World Youth Festival.

“Albeit unintentionally, this often led to skewed comparisons, blind spots, and co-opting attributions,” says Wiesinger. “Fortunately, film as a medium—just like filmed reality—usually turns out to be more powerful than the intended script. Disparities are clearly revealed through unintentional looks and inadvertent tragicomedy.”

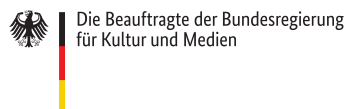
The complete schedule for DOK Leipzig, including all dates and times, will be published on 10 October. Tickets will also go on sale at that time.

The Retrospective is funded by the Foundation for the Study of the Communist Dictatorship in Eastern Germany. DOK Leipzig would like to thank the Saxon State Archives for their support of the Matinee.

Wir danken für die Unterstützung

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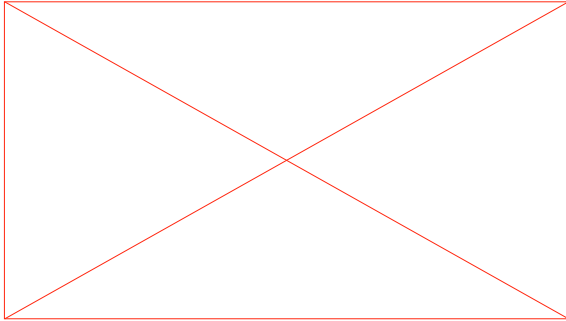
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Förderhinweise Freistaat Sachsen: Gefördert durch das Sächsische Staatsministerium für Wissenschaft Kultur und Tourismus. Diese Einrichtung wird mitfinanziert durch Steuermittel auf der Grundlage des vom Sächsischen Landtag beschlossenen Haushalts. Kreatives Europa: Von der Europäischen Union finanziert. Die geäußerten Ansichten und Meinungen entsprechen jedoch ausschließlich denen des Autors

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Retrospective



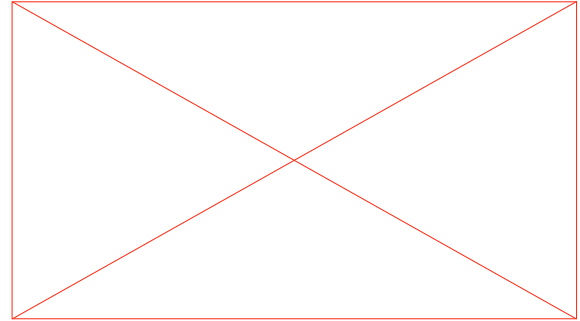
[Eröffnungsrede zur Retrospektive "Kubanischer Dokumentarfilm"] [Ausschnitt]

Acoustical Film

Santiago Álvarez
GDR 1974 | 15 min, -
No Premiere

Der kubanische Dokumentarist Santiago Álvarez spricht zu DDR-Kulturoffiziellen und zur "kämpferischen" Leipziger Jugend: vom Dokumentarfilm als Waffe gegen Imperialismus und Kolonialismus. – *Cuban documentarist Santiago Álvarez speaks to GDR cultural officials and the "fighting" youth of Leipzig: about documentary film as a weapon against imperialism and colonialism.*

Language German, Spanish
Subtitles German (Overvoice)



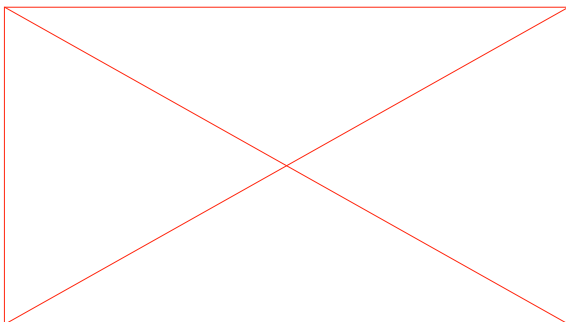
15.000 Volt

Documentary Film

Karlheinz Mund
GDR 1963 | 18 min, Colour & B&W
No Premiere

Auf der Oberleitung 15.000 Volt, darunter Arbeitsalltag auf der E-Lok. Auf der Tonspur fährt ein Passagier mit, den die DDR 1976 über Bord werfen wird: Wolf Biermann. – *On the overhead wire 15,000 volts, underneath everyday working life on an electric locomotive. On the soundtrack a passenger who the GDR will throw overboard in 1976: Wolf Biermann.*

Language German
Subtitles None



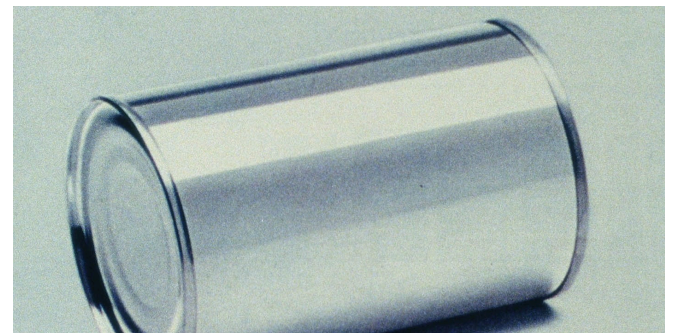
Aida

Documentary Film

Marwan Salamah
GDR 1985 | 22 min, Colour
No Premiere

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Language
Subtitles



Associations

Documentary Film

John Smith
UK 1975 | 7 min, Colour
No Premiere

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Language English
Subtitles None

Retrospective



Black Film

Documentary Film

Želimir Žilnik
Yugoslavia 1971 | 17 min, B&W
No Premiere

Language Serbian
Subtitles English



Chile

Animated Film

Juan Forch, Jörg Herrmann
GDR 1975 | 2 min, Colour
No Premiere

Der Exil-Chilene Juan Forch und der Dresdener Silhouettenfilm-Spezialist Jörg Herrmann spielen zum Kampf gegen Pinochet und seine imperialistischen Verbündeten auf: mit Gesang und Orgelmusik. – *Exiled Chilean Juan Forch and Dresden-based silhouette film specialist Jörg Herrmann call for battle against Pinochet and his imperialist allies: with singing and organ music.*

Language German, Spanish
Subtitles English



Eine Sache, die sich versteht (15x)

Documentary Film

Harun Farocki, Hartmut Bitomski
FRG 1971 | 64 min, B&W
No Premiere

Language German
Subtitles English



Farbtest. Die Rote Fahne

Documentary Film

Gerd Conradt
FRG 1968 | 13 min, Colour
No Premiere

Language without dialogue
Subtitles None

Retrospective



Hello Cubans

Documentary Film

Agnès Varda
France, Cuba 1963 | 30 min, B&W
No Premiere

Die Grande Dame der französischen Nouvelle Vague verbrachte den Jahreswechsel 1961/62 in Kuba. Mit einem Fotofilm voller Cha-Cha-Cha und fröhlichem Sozialismus kehrte sie nach Europa zurück. – *The grande dame of French Nouvelle Vague spent the turn of the year 1961/62 in Cuba. She came back to Europe with a photo film full of cha-cha-cha and cheerful socialism.*

Language French
Subtitles English



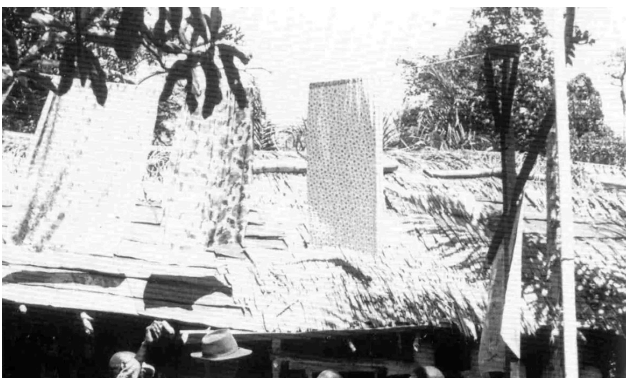
Ich bin Ernst Busch

Documentary Film

Sebastian Eschenbach, Peter Voigt
Germany 2000 | 58 min, Colour & B&W
No Premiere

Der Brecht-Schüler und Multikünstler Peter Voigt setzt der vielleicht stärksten Stimme der antifaschistischen Propaganda ein filmisches Denkmal: Ernst Busch in Liedern, Stein und Zorn. – *A disciple of Brecht, multi-artist Peter Voigt has mounted a filmic memorial to perhaps the strongest voice of anti-fascist propaganda: Ernst Busch, made of songs, stone and anger.*

Language German
Subtitles None



The Mad Masters

Documentary Film

Jean Rouch
France 1955 | 28 min, Colour
No Premiere

Anhänger des Hauka-Kults in Ghana fahren in die Körper der Kolonialisten und spielen zu europäischer Marschmusik verrückt. Eine bis heute verstörende wie streitbare Ethnofiktion. – *Followers of the Hauka cult in Ghana enter the bodies of the colonialists and go mad to European marching music. An ethnofiction that remains disturbing and controversial to this day.*

Language English
Subtitles None



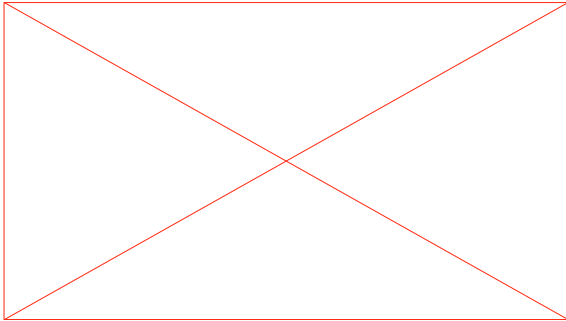
Refrain

Documentary Film

Krzysztof Kieślowski
Poland 1972 | 11 min, B&W
No Premiere

Language Polish
Subtitles English

Retrospective



Report

Experimental Film

Volker "Via" Lewandowsky
GDR 1987 | 7 min, B&W
No Premiere

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Language without dialogue
Subtitles None



The Truth About Fidel Castro Revolution

Documentary Film

Victor Pahlen
USA, Cuba 1959 | 51 min, B&W
No Premiere

Hollywoodstar Errol Flynn liebt Havanna, die Spielcasinos, die Cocktails. Als Augenzeuge der Kubanischen Revolution lernt er auch, Fidel Castro zu lieben, den "kubanischen Robin Hood". – *Hollywood star Errol Flynn loves Havana, its casinos and its cocktails. As an eyewitness to the Cuban Revolution, he also learns to love Fidel Castro, the "Cuban Robin Hood."*

Language English
Subtitles None



W.R. – Mysteries of the Organism

Documentary Film

Dušan Makavejev
Yugoslavia, FRG 1971 | 85 min, Colour & B&W
No Premiere

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Language Serbian, English
Subtitles English

Matinee Saxon State Archive



[Sierra Leone]

Documentary Film

unbekannt
GDR 1968 | 10 min, B&W
No Premiere

Language without dialogue
Subtitles None



Festival war überall

Documentary Film

Kollektiv
GDR 1973 | 12 min, B&W
No Premiere

Language German
Subtitles None



Moskauer Mosaik [Ausschnitt]

Documentary Film

Alfred Dorn
GDR 1957 | 10 min, Colour
No Premiere

Language without dialogue
Subtitles None



Der neue Präsident

Documentary Film

Kollektiv
GDR 1969 | 4 min, B&W
No Premiere

Language without dialogue
Subtitles None

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Por la Vida

Documentary Film

Kollektiv
Chile 1970 | 10 min, B&W
No Premiere

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Language German
Subtitles None



Der Schoß ist fruchtbar noch, aus dem das kroch

Fictional Film

Josef Hovorka
GDR, Czechoslovakia 1973 | 10 min, B&W
No Premiere

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Language without dialogue
Subtitles None



Solidarität in Aktion

Documentary Film

Kollektiv
GDR 1970 | 5 min, B&W
No Premiere

–

Language German
Subtitles None



Tania in Berlin [Ausschnitt]

Documentary Film

Heinz Thomas
GDR 1977 | 10 min, Colour
No Premiere

–

Language German
Subtitles None

Matinee Saxon State Archive



Vietnam Is Not Alone

Documentary Film

Kollektiv
GDR 1968 | 8 min, B&W
No Premiere

–

Language without dialogue
Subtitles None