

Dr. Günter Blutke, Berlin 1981

On the exhibition at the Local History Museum and tile factory gallery in Boizenburg

Not long before his move from big-city Leipzig to the Büdnerhaus (Cooper's House) outside Gädebehn, Winfried Wolk coined a memorable phrase: "Being out in the provinces," he said, "that's a frame of mind."

I have known Winfried Wolk long enough, to surmise publicly here that he also included in this phrase an absolute urge to assert himself. In a strange environment, far removed from his spiritual and artistic homeland, with unknown partners, he was not so confident that his inner strength would be sufficient to survive the adventure confronting all young artists of finding themselves and of evolving a language worthy of one's own talent and inner personality.

Winfried Wolk has meanwhile lived and worked in this little village for ten years. He has made himself at home and discovered that the locals accept him because they realize that he does not work any less than they do. He finds that even the manual labourers take no more from him than from the long-term residents for moonlighting. In these last few years he has proved to himself and to them that the provincial nature or world relevance of art has nothing to do with one's place of residence.

This exhibition is primarily devoted to paintings, sketches, etchings and silk-screen prints of recent years. The few exceptions, — such as the etchings of Hochuth's "The Representative" (1972) or "Country, your children or postscript to Vietnam" (1973) — have been chosen deliberately. They show us not just his points of departure as an artist, but also permit us to assess the determination with which he has pursued the material, and even individual themes, over the years. The face of the girl craving sympathy in the Vietnam sketch, for instance, is closely related to the ghetto child with her arms raised in the silk-screen print about fascism from 1976; while in 1980 he also used these photographs taken by a German soldier in the Warsaw ghetto, in the etchings on Jevgeni Schwarz's "Dragon". The child's haplessness lies one side of the scale, on the other lies violence. The verdict beyond any doubt is already incorporated in this confrontation, and with these works he has already unmistakably formulated his position in the struggles of our day. His art demonstrates precisely what he loves and what he hates, mentions his dreams, his hopes, his fears and his doubts. A key position in his work so far is occupied by the "Icarus" variations and the picture on the "Lancelot/dragon" theme. In the Greek myth, the imprisoned builder Daedalus and his son Icarus seek to flee from Crete with the aid of wings they have made from birds' feathers and wax. Despite his father's

warnings, the son approaches the sun too closely, the wax melts and he plunges into the sea. In GDR art, especially from the beginning of the 1970s, the theme of "Icarus" was of extraordinary significance. It was taken to signify man's unbounded creative skills, his daring, conquests of ever-fresh horizons, as well as threats to human progress. Winfried Wolk's interpretations are based on the conviction that every human possesses the ability to grow beyond him/herself. Still more, it is just this that they regard as the purpose of every human life and at the same time the great opportunity for fresh social conditions for each individual. Of the series of variations so far, "Icarus I" is the most dialectical. The pitiful body of a naked man and his helplessly outstretched arms - here is a human plagued by fear who sees himself confronted by challenges that, as he believes, will far exceed his strength. Yet he too will fly, because that is in his nature. (Winfried Wolk painted this woeful Icarus slightly from below, which lends the figure a memorial-like dimension). Carnal desires prevent "Icarus II" from rising. His dreams have flown away as the butterfly dancing lost in the sky.

The productive character of almost all the variations lies in their moral rigorousness. Winfried Wolk addresses every single one of his viewers; he sets out to rouse each of them at least to reflection. (He has so far done eleven paintings and four graphic works on this subject, some of the paintings having meanwhile been over-painted because they did not stand up to this criterion). The reason why this exhibition concentrates on the works of recent years lies in the pronounced changes in Wolk's language as a painter in recent years, apparent in the "Icarus" variations and "Lancelot", in a freer relationship to painting. By comparison with earlier works, today's paintings are fresher and seem to be more strongly colour-based. Not all the reasons behind the change can be mentioned here; a growing mastery in contact with the craft could play a part, prefaced by a growing maturity and also fresh experiences in art derived from work related to buildings. The perils with every new start of measuring oneself on too small a scale and setting oneself excessively meagre goals have accordingly been avoided by the artist from Gäddebehn because he absolutely deliberately confronts the challenges of his time. He has assumed responsibility with his work, and moreover for years Winfried Wolk has headed the Central Working Group of Young Artists in the GDR Artists' Federation and furthermore he is a member of the Central Fine Arts Board. These are no mean burdens and above all, ones not easily born, yet he neither will nor can make life easy for himself.