

alphasixty

Graphic Design in Cold War Germany

P! is an experimental art space in New York's Chinatown. Its name is a pithy play on the idea of permutations—the mathematical conceit meaning different possibilities, depending on positions. OSMOS Address is a venue for contemporary art in the East Village, a sister project of the *OSMOS* magazine, dedicated to overlooked artists and photographers.

There's a dual exhibition that just opened at both spaces, called *OST UND oder WEST (East and/or West)*. The parallel shows make sense, because they're about the oddly parallel lives of two 20th century graphic designers separated by the real and conceptual divide of East and West Germany.

Anton Stankowski and Klaus Wittkugel were colleagues who studied under the same teacher in Essen, who individually went on to achieve solid careers in advertising by the 1930s. After World War II, Wittkugel was on the East German side, and Stankowski was on the West. Wittkugel went on to become a prominent designer for state material and propaganda (books, posters, and stamps) while Stankowski designed for prominent corporate clients (ads, environments, and logos).

The exhibitions, running now through February 21, display the differences and similarities in designing for Communism and Capitalism. Wittkugel was the head designer for the German Democratic Republic's Office of Information, where he developed designs that communicated the objectives of socialism. He used a modernist vocabulary for his photomontages and typography, and designed for state signage, publications, and identities of architectural landmarks in East Germany.

Stankowski, on the Federal Republic side of Germany, worked at an ad agency and designed for West German corporations and commissioners: manufacturers and financial companies including Deutsche Bank. Contrasted with Wittkugel's work, Stankowski's is more focused on ideas of symmetry, abstract corporate logos, and graphics.

These competing social systems, in the end, have a very similar goal: communicate the message, and convince.