

ARTFORUM

Klaus Wittkugel and Anton Stankowski

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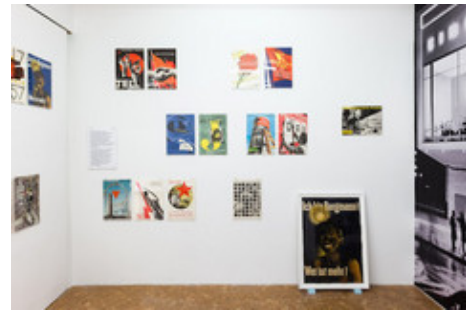
334 Broome Street

January 14–February 21

A column protruding from the gallery's plate-glass storefront is papered with reproductions of 1930s to 1970s posters and graphic design from East and West Germany. Inside, the varied products of Klaus Wittkugel, a central figure in Eastern European graphic design little documented in Anglophone histories of the subject, are arrayed. Though the exhibition focuses on one designer, it more generally serves as an imagining of the curious nature of the profession in the Eastern Bloc, where the state was the client and propaganda the principal product.

A vitrine contains artifacts of East German material culture: Wittkugel's designs cover packaging, glassware, and paperbacks, including the Jim Crow–shaming *Auch ich bin Amerika: Dichtungen amerikanischer Neger* (I Too Am America: Poetry of American Negroes) (1948). A self-awareness runs through the works but is most apparent in the posters: In *Das Plakat* (The Poster), 1954, a ladder is propped against a column with an advertisement for an exhibition of posters. This nesting is characteristic of the sleight of hand with which Wittkugel stages the interaction with the image, suggesting a spatial relationship between the viewer and abstract subjects, such as electrification, Lenin's political philosophy, or manufacturing quality.

The exhibition itself has reflexive touches as well, signaled by the poster column spilling onto the street, bearing the image of a poster column. The curator, Prem Krishnamurthy, foregrounds the nature of the presentation by embedding contextual texts among the objects, including record sleeves, stamps, and a slideshow that cycles through the artist's exhibition designs, which are punctuated with slides of layouts using 3-D modeling software or Facebook screen grabs. A parallel show at OSMOS Address displays the designs of Anton Stankowski, Wittkugel's contemporary and maybe West German double. The two designers' points of intersection and ways of differing illuminate the contours of the histories being peddled (or taken for granted) on opposite sides of the Berlin Wall.



View of "Klaus Wittkugel and Anton Stankowski," 2016.

— Zachary Sachs