Georg Kolbe after 1945

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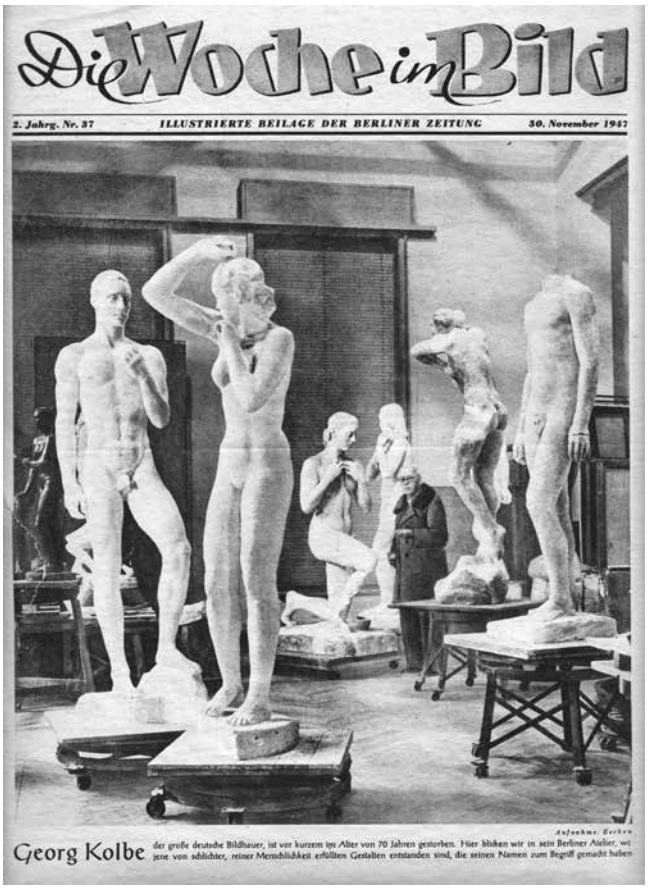
“Rightly forgotten”? Georg Kolbe after 1945



1 Georg Kolbe in his studio, published in the weekly newspaper *Die Woche im Bild. Illustrierte Beilage der Berliner Zeitung* 2, no. 37, November 30, 1947

Georg Kolbe spent the end of the Second World War in his destroyed studio and home on Sensburger Allee in Berlin. He had returned there in January 1945, having been evacuated to Silesia a little more than a year earlier, in December 1943, after his house was destroyed in an air raid. Kolbe experienced the "day of liberation by the Russians as a resurrection,"[1] as he wrote in a letter to his patron, the collector and noodle manufacturer Erich Cohn in New York. In other statements, too, he repeatedly made it clear how glad he was that the National Socialist regime and its "megalomania" had been brought to an end (fig. 1).[2]

Yet compared to many others, Kolbe had not fared badly during the National Socialist period. He had already been one of Germany's most successful artists in the 1920s, and this was not to change for the time being after the National Socialists seized power in January 1933. His popularity and his increasingly large-format, muscular, idealized depictions of the human body, which began in the early 1930s, made him compatible with the artistic ideas of the NS era. Although he was not one of the celebrated sculptor-stars such as Arno Breker and Josef Thorak, his sculptures continued to be appreciated. His works were thus included in numerous museum and gallery exhibitions, as well as in

official presentations; from 1937 onward, his sculptures were regularly shown at the annual *Große Deutsche Kunstausstellung* (Great German Art Exhibition), and he appeared internationally, too, with works at the Biennale di Venezia in 1934 and at the Exposition Internationale in Paris in 1937.[3] He also received recognition on another level. In 1937, he became an honorary member of the Akademie der Künste in Berlin, where his work was honored in a special room; in 1942, on the occasion of his sixty-fifth birthday, he was awarded the Goethe Medal for Art and Science; and finally, in 1944, like more than a thousand other cultural workers, he was placed on the so-called "Gottbegnadeten-Liste," a list of "divinely gifted" artists who were indispensable to the regime and thus exempted from military service.[4] However, the Heinrich Heine monument he created in Frankfurt am Main between 1910 and 1913 was damaged and removed in the early 1930s; the one planned for Düsseldorf was never erected; and the Rathenau fountain he created in Berlin in 1930 was dismantled in 1934. His limestone *Genius* (1927/28) was removed from the Berlin opera house,[5] as was the large sculpture *Nacht* (Night, 1926/30) from the Haus des Rundfunks. Thus, Kolbe's relationship to the National Socialist regime in the early years of the dictatorship was thoroughly ambivalent, and the artist did not publicly distance himself until the very end. Private letters and testimonies, however, reveal that he rejected the inhuman ideas of the new powers that be and continued to cultivate his friendships with artists who had now been declared "degenerate," such as Karl Schmidt-Rottluff. He also never joined the NSDAP.[6]

At first the fact that Kolbe had not publicly distanced himself from the NS regime did not seem to matter after the end of the Second World War. Like many of his colleagues, he became involved in the newly founded cultural organizations in Berlin and thus continued his official activities during the years of the Weimar Republic. For example, he registered as a member of the Kammer der Kunstschaffenden (Chamber of Artists), even being appointed to its presidential council, and joined the Kulturbund zur demokratischen Erneuerung Deutschlands (Cultural Alliance for the Democratic Renewal of Germany), founded in June 1945.[7] The Kulturbund in particular was very active, with its Commission for the Fine Arts organizing exhibitions, lectures, and other cultural events. Kolbe's involvement was limited, however, due to serious health problems. Other members of the Kulturbund included old friends such as Karl Hofer, Karl Schmidt-Rottluff (who headed the local Kulturbund group in Chemnitz), Max Pechstein, Otto Nagel, Heinrich Ehmsen, Herbert Sandberg, and the sculptress Renée Sintenis, as well as the art historians Adolf Behne and Will Grohmann.[8]

As the names above make clear, it was primarily artists and cultural workers who had been successful during the Weimar Republic who, after the end of the war, became involved in organizations for a "new beginning" in culture and at the same time sought to regain their voice and influence. At numerous events, meetings, and lectures—often initiated by the Kulturbund—they discussed the role and tasks of a new, "progressive" art. The focus was on distancing themselves from NS cultural policies: a process that received active political support. In particular, artists who had been defamed as "degenerate" during the National Socialist era were intensively involved in cultural reconstruction, both by the

four occupying powers and by the new Berlin administration. As the painter Hans Grundig noted in an article in the magazine *Zeitschrift für Kunst* in 1947, no truly creative forces had been developed during National Socialism, so that "today we are faced with the serious fact that the generation of visual artists from 1918 to 1933 still represents the most advanced artistic forces that represent us beyond the borders of Germany."[9]

Georg Kolbe's planned appointment to the newly founded Hochschule für bildende Künste (HdK, Academy of Fine Arts) in Berlin-Charlottenburg makes it clear that a connection to the period before 1933 was not always without pitfalls. The painter Karl Hofer had taken over as director in August 1945. Together with his deputy Heinrich Ehmsen, Hofer had succeeded in recruiting such colleagues as Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, Max Taut, Max Kaus, Oskar Nerlinger, Max Pechstein, Renée Sintenis, and Georg Tappert, as well as the art historian Adolf Behne (and, after Behne's death in August 1948, Will Grohmann), to teach at the academy.[10] He also wanted to bring Kolbe on board; he contacted him in November 1945 and offered him a professorship. Kolbe gladly—and surprisingly—accepted, since he had not considered teaching before the war.[11] Shortly thereafter, however, the past caught up with him. Hofer came across a statement by Kolbe that had been published in the NS-aligned student newspaper *Deutsche Studenten-Zeitung* in 1934. In it, Kolbe had expressed his delight that German students saw an intellectual affinity between his work and that of the national youth who were to carry out cultural construction in the "new Germany." However, the article is not as affirmative as it might seem at first glance; one also reads Kolbe's criticism of the National Socialists' restrictive cultural policies that defamed certain art movements, as well as his appeal to students not to simply follow art-historical buzzwords.[12]

Despite the discernible nuances, Hofer expressed his disappointment at the publication of the article, saying that everyone had believed that "inwardly, you [Kolbe] had felt far removed from this terrible society"[13] and that he, Hofer, continued to believe this. He asked Kolbe for a credible explanation that would exonerate him, emphasizing that no one from the academy would hold this acclamation against him personally, but that there were others "who do not want to have lived twelve years in darkness and abandonment or in a concentration camp for nothing. They would come forward if you went public."[14] In addition, Hofer added in another letter to Kolbe two weeks later, on December 16, 1945, people knew—in contrast to himself and the other members of the academy—"that you have portrayed one or more of the bastards for umpteen thousand marks. This is now much more serious and embarrassing, because one can rightly say that you stabbed the others in the back, because the gentlemen then bragged about their association with Kolbe." For himself, Hofer said, it was important that Kolbe, unlike the "bastard Nolde," had not inwardly belonged to the perpetrators, but that the contemporary public might think otherwise.[15]

A written response by Kolbe to Hofer's letters has not been preserved. For the production of the Franco bust in 1938, to which Hofer indirectly referred in his letter, he justified himself to his friend and patron Cohn, to whom he wrote on July 8, 1946: "I would like to speak again about the Franco bust. First of all, I did not see the reality clearly, and

secondly, it was a private commission, formally interesting, which allowed me to get to know Spain. […] I was grateful during those years to be able to remain on the sidelines, which was really no small thing."[16]

In retrospect, Kolbe's justification seems opportunistic and naïve. Even if the explosive nature of the commission was indeed not clear to him, he was well aware of the discrimination against many fellow artists and their exclusion from public cultural life. But the possibility of receiving a prominent commission apparently outweighed this for the sculptor, who was used to success, and not only in this case.

Kolbe did not accept a professorship at the academy.[17] In other areas, however, his lack of public distance from National Socialism had no consequences. On the contrary, he was visited in his studio by numerous allies, especially from the Soviet Union and the United States and, as a respected sculptor, was asked to sell some of his works to them.[18] And he was also taken seriously as an authentic voice of the artistic community on questions of the further development of contemporary art: a role that he gladly accepted. As Schmidt-Rottluff had already written in the newspaper *Sächsische Zeitung* on January 8, 1946, the "pre-war artists" felt obligated to make the younger generation "think and see again." The artists had made mistakes before 1933 that had contributed to the rise of National Socialism. In particular, the lack of contact with the people and the social isolation of the artists had fatal consequences. This must now change.[19] Kolbe expressed a very similar view in a radio report also broadcast in January 1946. In the daily program "Stimme des Kulturbundes" (Voices of the Cultural Alliance), he spoke about the situation of sculpture in Germany and condemned both the "grandiloquent" sculpture of the Kaiser era and, above all, that of the "megalomaniacal" so-called Third Reich. What the sculptors presented, especially in the first small exhibitions after the war, was "admittedly not yet able to give an idea of future sculpture," but even if one did not yet know what it would look like, one already knew what it would *not* look like:

> "Sculpture will no longer be bothered by p r e t e n t i o u s, ostentatious commissions. It will be allowed to be simple. Certainly, there have been times of reasonable approaches that have encouraged the pursuit of pure form. We may be grateful for our tradition—it is, thank God, indestructible, even if many a great work has been destroyed—the spirit has remained and will live on and perhaps flourish even more. These works are based on the very great achievements of our ancestors, who led German sculpture to its heights. Now the coming time should protect us from the good being overrun by the inferior, by appearances, and by megalomania. It will be easier for us to recognize the truth; let it be our only teacher. The people, each individual human being, should become the starting point of the design. Working men and women will then be able to understand us better and follow us in our ways. Simplicity and love for the truth will captivate them; they will not pass by our works as if they were empty pots. There will be no more forced or dictated work, where the lack of freedom can be seen at first glance."[20]

Like Schmidt-Rottluff, Kolbe was concerned with closing the gap between art and the people—a common slogan that became increasingly important during the first post-war years, especially in the Soviet occupation zone. However, unlike there, where from 1947/48 onward, art was increasingly supposed to serve the people or the party according to concrete guidelines, for both Kolbe and Schmidt-Rottluff the freedom of art was of paramount importance. Kolbe initially interpreted the fact that questions of art were being discussed so vigorously as something positive, but he argued that the artists should be given some time to become creatively active again. On May 9, 1946, the first anniversary of the end of the war, Kolbe wrote in the newspaper *Tägliche Rundschau*, which was published in the Soviet occupation zone:

> "In general, efforts to deal with questions of the fine arts are extremely lively at the moment. Exhibitions are springing up everywhere and are being discussed and criticized eagerly, although it is easy to understand those artists who say: 'Let us first come to ourselves, so that after such terrible shocks to the world, the creative spark in the soul may light up again.'"[21]

Exhibitions

The sculptor himself participated in several of the exhibitions that were "springing up everywhere," as Kolbe described in his statement to the *Tägliche Rundschau*. Kolbe was represented, among others, in the *Allgemeine Deutsche Kunstausstellung* (General German Art Exhibition), which opened in Dresden in August 1946. This exhibition was the first major survey of contemporary art after the end of the Second World War, especially of art that had only recently been declared "degenerate." It was organized by the Kulturbund zur demokratischen Erneuerung Deutschlands, the Saxon State Administration, and the Dresden City Council, and conceived by the sculptor Herbert Volwahsen and the art historian Will Grohmann.[22] The exhibition had a supra-regional appeal and included works from the Soviet, French, and American occupation zones. The presentation was a statement, a demonstration of regained artistic freedom after twelve years of the NS regime. On display were works by Expressionists, Bauhaus, and New Objectivity artists, and members of the Dresden ASSO (Association of Revolutionary Visual Artists), founded in 1928.[23] Most of the works were from the pre-war period, but there were also works from the war years, with figurative works dominating. However, the experience of National Socialism, war, and the misery of the post-war period were only sporadically reflected in the works on display. For example, the organizers included Otto Dix's monumental triptych *Der Krieg* (The War, 1929–32), which was still considered compellingly contemporary. Hans Grundig's *Vision einer brennenden Stadt* (Vision of a Burning City), the central panel of his triptych *Das Tausendjährige Reich* (The Thousand-Year Reich, 1935–38), was staged as a counterpart to Dix's painting, which was based on memories of the First World War. Both were complemented by etchings

2 Announcement of the exhibition *Allgemeine Deutsche Kunstausstellung* in Dresden with Georg Kolbe's figure *Flehende* (Supplicator) and two figurative paintings, published in: *Tägliche Rundschau*, September 1946

by Lea Grundig from the graphic cycles *Unterm Hakenkreuz* (Under the Swastika) and *Krieg droht* (War Approaches), both from 1936.

Pain and sorrow were also evident in several sculptural works; the medium was well represented with nearly seventy exhibits. Along with works by Käthe Kollwitz and Ernst Barlach, Kolbe's small sculptures *Flehende* (Supplicator, 1944) and *Befreiter* (Liberated Man, 1945) were among the few sculptures or paintings that referred directly to the war and its aftermath. This disproportion is also impressively demonstrated in an announcement of the exhibition in the *Tägliche Rundschau*, in which Kolbe's *Flehende* is printed next to two harmless portraits (fig. 2). Kolbe had created *Flehende* in Silesia in 1944. It is a kneeling female figure with folded hands, looking to heaven for protection. After 1945, it was one of his most successful works; a total of ten bronzes were cast during his lifetime, and another ten were produced until the early 1960s. One of these was acquired by the *Tägliche Rundschau* in 1946, which donated it to the Nationalgalerie in East Berlin in 1958 (fig. 3).[24] In the 1940s, a second cast was acquired by the collector Hermann Reemtsma, with whom Kolbe remained in close contact after 1945.[25] The work *Befreiter* was also very popular. It was the first sculpture Kolbe made after the war, to which the title naturally alludes. The seated man, leaning forward with his hands in front of his face, is a powerful admonition and a reminder of the recently ended world war (fig. 4).

The fact that Kolbe's sculptures in particular refer to the circumstances of the time is rather unusual in his oeuvre, since not only his dancers and filigree female figures of the 1910s but also his more monumental figures created since the mid-1920s, are

3 Georg Kolbe, *Flehende* (Supplicator), 1944, bronze, h. 44 cm, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Nationalgalerie

4 Georg Kolbe, *Befreiter* (Liberated Man), 1945, bronze, h. 34 cm, Georg Kolbe Museum, Berlin

characterized by idealization and temporal indeterminacy. This was also true of his sculptures from the NS period, such as the nearly three-feet-tall female figure *Der Weg* (The Way, 1943), the third sculpture Kolbe showed at the Dresden exhibition. All three were shown in various exhibitions after the war. For example, Kolbe showed the *Flehende* at the *Ausstellung bildender Künstler* (Exhibition of Visual Artists) organized by the Kulturbund with the support of the Kammer der Kunstschaffenden, which ran from December 1945 to January 1946 and was conceived as a sales exhibition.[26] Six months later, in May/June 1946, he showed *Befreiter* and *Der Weg* together with two other bronzes (*Große Kauernde* [Large Crouching Woman, 1925/27] and *Statuette* [1925]) and two plasters (*Bildniskopf Max Liebermann* [Portrait Head of Max Liebermann, 1929] and *Großer Stürzender* [Large Foundering Man, 1940/42]) at the *1. Deutschen Kunstausstellung* (1st German Art Exhibition), organized by the Central Administration for National Education in the Soviet occupation zone in Berlin. Held in the damaged Zeughaus Unter den Linden, it included nearly 600 sculptures and paintings that often directly addressed contemporary events, such as Kolbe's *Befreiter*, Kollwitz's *Klage* (Lament, 1938–40), and Hofer's *Frau in Ruinen* (Woman in Ruins, 1945). Also on view were works by so-called "proletarian revolutionary" artists such as Heinrich Ehmsen, Hans Grundig, Hermann Bruse, Alice Lex-Nerlinger, Otto Nagel, Oskar Nerlinger, Horst Strempel, and Magnus Zeller, as well as Ernst Barlach, Hermann Blumenthal, Max Pechstein, Richard Scheibe, Renée Sintenis, and Horst Tappert.[27] The

exhibition was praised in the *Tägliche Rundschau* by Carola Gärtner-Scholle, a staff member of the Fine Arts Department of the German Central Administration for National Education, as a new beginning and a stocktaking. In selecting the works of art, the organizers had in part deliberately focused on a creative period of about twenty years prior, which seemed to them to be suitable for giving young people access to this art. Such a presentation, which stands at the beginning of a new period in German art, would necessarily have to juxtapose heterogeneous artistic views, contents, and styles.[28]

Kolbe was also well represented in the first major exhibition of the Berlin museums: *Meisterwerke deutscher Bildhauer und Maler* (Masterpieces of German Sculptors and Painters), which opened in October 1947, also in the former Zeughaus Unter den Linden, and which presented their accessible and preserved holdings. Responsible for the exhibition was Ludwig Justi, who had taken over as director general of the (former) Staatliche Museen after the war. For the presentation, Justi deliberately combined old and new art, as he wrote in the accompanying catalog, in order to give the public access to modernism through older art.[29] According to him, he wanted to open people's eyes again, so that they could see the art they had been deprived of during the NS regime. Works by Franz Marc, August Macke, Oskar Moll, and Karl Hofer, who had only recently been defamed as "degenerate," were presented. In addition, Käthe Kollwitz's son had given Justi her sculpture *Mutter mit Kindern* (Mother with Children, 1923/26) as a temporary loan. One of the main works was undoubtedly the triptych *Nacht über Deutschland* (Night over Germany, 1945/46) by Horst Strempel, in which the artist had impressively processed the horrors of the Second World War. As one of the modern protagonists of the Nationalgalerie's collection, Kolbe was also very well represented in this presentation. This is hardly surprising, since it was Justi who laid the foundation for modern sculpture in the collection with the acquisition of the *Tänzerin* (Dancer) in 1912. Kolbe had lent a total of seven sculptures, including the *Kauernde* (Crouching Woman, 1925), the *Genius* (1927), and the plaster model of the *Nacht* (Night), the bronze cast of which had been removed from the Funkhaus on Mauerstrasse after the seizure of power and subsequently disappeared. Justi had placed his monumental sculptures *Junger Streiter* (Young Fighter, 1935), *Pietà* (1930), *Großer Torso* (Large Torso, 1929), and *Herabschreitender* (Descending Man, 1936) in an impressive enfilade in the great hall of the Zeughaus (fig. 5).[30]

In the first two years after the war, Kolbe's works were also shown outside Berlin. For example, in 1946, on the occasion of his seventieth birthday, the Städelsche Kunstinstitut in Frankfurt am Main organized an exhibition of works from its holdings; next to the Berlin museums, the Frankfurt museums had the largest collection of works by the artist. Kolbe had always been on good terms with the Städel's director, Alfred Wolters, who had published several texts on the sculptor and was responsible for many of the museum's acquisitions. On display were Kolbe's Heine monument, which had been removed in 1933, and the *Mädchenstatue* (Statue of a Girl, 1936/37), which the sculptor had donated to the Goethe House in Frankfurt when he was awarded the Goethe Medal. In addition, the figures that were to be installed in the *Ring der Statuen* (Ring of Statues), commissioned in 1933, were also on display. In the 1930s, Kolbe was only able

5 Exhibition view of *Meister deutscher Bildhauer und Maler* in the Berlin Zeughaus, 1947, here with four works by Georg Kolbe: *Junger Streiter* (Young Fighter, 1935), *Pietà* (1928/30), *Weiblicher Torso* (Female Torso, 1925/29), and *Herabschreitender* (Descending Man, 1936), historical photograph

to complete work on the female figures—the *Junges Weib* (Young Woman) and the *Hüterin* (Guardian), both from 1938, as well as the *Amazone* (1937) and the *Auserwählte* (The Chosen, 1939)—which he presented prominently at the *Große Deutsche Kunstausstellung* in Munich in 1938 and 1939 (fig. 3). This circumstance apparently did not play a role in 1946; rather, the four women, together with the three larger-than-life male figures that Kolbe had just completed, were to demonstrate images of a new humanity in their "resolute worldliness" in the *Ring der Statuen* (fig. 6). The final installation of the *Ring der Statuen* in Frankfurt's Rothschild Park did not take place until after Kolbe's death.[31] The exhibition also included images of various stages of the Beethoven monument, another project from the 1930s that was not completed until after Kolbe's death.[32] The actual model had been stored away during the war and returned to him damaged after 1945.[33] It was finally erected in Frankfurt in 1951.

In addition, there were a few smaller exhibitions to which Kolbe was invited, including one in September/October 1946 at the Städtische Kunsthalle Gera. He was obviously not entirely satisfied with this outcome. In August 1946, for example, he wrote to his American friend Cohn: "If Mr. Zigosser could succeed in exhibiting works by me, that would be a great satisfaction for me, because here [in Germany] there is still a great confusion of

6 Exhibition view with two of Georg Kolbe's figures from the *Ring der Statuen* (Ring of Statues), *Die Hüterin* (Guardian, 1938) and *Die Amazone* (Amazon, 1937), in the Georg Kolbe exhibition at the Städelsches Kunstinstitut, Frankfurt am Main, 1946, historical photograph

views, and the work of sculptors is pretty much at the bottom of the list when it comes to interest in art."[34]

In general, the stock of works initially available to Kolbe after 1945 seems to have been relatively small. However, before his evacuation to Silesia, Kolbe had been able to leave a number of works, especially earlier ones, together with his studio building, in the care of his son-in-law, Kurt von Keudell, where they were still be found after the end of the war.[35] Several plaster models and casts had been destroyed by bombing, both in the studio and in the Noack fine art foundry. The surviving figures at Noack were presumably brought back to Kolbe's studio in 1946 with the help of a few "Russian officers," as the evening newspaper *Nacht-Express* reported, including the designs for the Beethoven monument in Frankfurt am Main.[36] In all, some 250 figures had survived. However, the loss of drawings and watercolors was considerable. In January 1947, for example, Kolbe wrote to the Hamburg collector Reemtsma: "How gladly I would return drawings to you if I still had any. I have lost about 700 sheets. Everything I owned. Most of them were stored here as my private property, together with museum objects from the Nationalgalerie, in the Zoo Bunker. The Russians took it over."[37] And to the Wurzen Cultural Office he wrote: "If you had been informed about my [war] losses, you would understand me immediately. The few things available are already in exhibitions in Dresden, Gera, Berlin, and Potsdam."[38] However, he did produce some new work after 1945, although he was in poor health, suffering from advanced cancer and further handicapped by an eye disease that led to blindness.

Kolbe was thus certainly in demand after 1945. With his death in November 1947, however, this popularity came to an abrupt end, although he continued to be honored sporadically as an "old master" in gallery exhibitions. In 1948 the Kunstverein für die Rheinlande und Westfalen in Düsseldorf dedicated a memorial exhibition to him, but due to the tense political situation, it had to do without loans from Berlin. Finally, in 1950, the Georg Kolbe Museum opened in the artist's former studio building. Judging by the surviving press coverage, however, the general public took only moderate notice.

"Beyond Time" or "Rightly Forgotten"?

Shortly before Kolbe's death, Edwin Redslob, former Reichskunstwart (Imperial Art Protector) of the Weimar Republic and then editor of the *Tagesspiegel*, a daily newspaper licensed in the American sector, praised Kolbe's work as "beyond time" in a tribute on the occasion of the artist's seventieth birthday. He wrote: "Hardly any of today's German work rises above the bizarre contours of contemporary events of the last four decades in such a clearly drawn outline, so unswervingly leading to the goal, as that which in Kolbe's oeuvre points beyond the temporal into the eternal." The sculptor had resisted the "lure of National Socialist patrons" and, despite "dangerous attempts to fraudulently misuse his name for propaganda purposes, had worked in the silence of his Berlin studio, which meant the world to him."[39]

Gert H. Theunissen, another old companion who had written for *Kunst der Nation* in the 1930s, found a similar interpretation in his article "Gestalter und Künder" (Creator and Herald) in the *Tägliche Rundschau*. He described Kolbe as a sculptor who was not affected by the "confusions of the times." In his article, he wrote:

> "Whoever no longer knows his way in and out of the evil confusions of the times, but whoever in a quiet hour would like to give an account of the good and beautiful that slumbers in the heart, whoever, in a word, would like to recognize the genius of the Germans in order to draw hope and to feel solid ground under his feet again, should immerse himself in the multifaceted landscape of Kolbe's art—and such a viewer would be in a sad state if he did not find here what he was looking for: trust in himself and in the people from whom this artist also came."[40]

And in 1948, on the occasion of Kolbe's memorial exhibition in Düsseldorf, the *Westdeutsche Blätter* wrote:

> "Kolbe's reputation is not rationed by any political dates; it was equally high both before and after 1933. He was not 'for' or 'against'; he was an artist. That is his strength and at the same time his limitation. It would be easy to prove how the ideas of a Nordic-Germanic ideology of beauty nevertheless unconsciously

> flowed into his work, or how he sacrificed his intimate sense of touch to the fashion for the 'monumental.' But one cannot deny that his errors had always remained artistic errors and that he had clearly withstood every mental challenge."[41]

Kolbe was certainly not as detached from the world and as unbroken as described by Edwin Redslob and others, especially the later executor of his will and first director of the Georg Kolbe Museum, Margrit Schwartzkopff—even if this image follows a diction that he helped to create. It is interesting to note that, in the first years after the war, Kolbe's person was interpreted as untouched by the political and social events of the time. However, he was not the unworldly artist, one of the last "great seers of divine essences,"[42] as he was described in 1952 in an accompanying text in the visitor's booklet of the Georg Kolbe Museum. On the contrary, Kolbe was very much aware of the political circumstances and his role in them, as his actions under National Socialism as well as his commitment in the post-war period show. At the same time, there was no conscious change in his artistic work around 1933 or after 1945, or in his relationship to it. And perhaps this attitude also reveals the whole ambivalence of both the NS period and the early postwar years. Neither the National Socialists nor their followers disappeared after 1945. And at first, the followers in particular did not have to bear any visible consequences for their involvement and possible guilt in the NS system; on the contrary, they were integrated into the "reconstruction" of Germany. Kolbe gratefully accepted this task. Like many other artists, he took on a role-model function after 1945, even though he had not been one of the artists defamed as "degenerate." His role-model function was also emphasized by the sculptor Gustav Seitz, who wrote to Kolbe on the occasion of his seventieth birthday on April 14, 1947:

> "You embody for us younger artists—you are not angry with us for saying this, are you!—the generation of Lehmbruck and Barlach, which stands exemplarily for a particularly lively time. We have always looked at your sculpture with admiration, and we are happy that in Berlin, which is so lacking in artistic talent today, a man like you is with us."[43]

This positive assessment of his person and his work changed by the end of the 1940s at the latest. By this time, if it was still of interest at all, the status of figurative sculpture had already changed. Kolbe's work was no longer in keeping with the times. The triumph of abstraction, which in the West was interpreted as an expression of artistic freedom, was also becoming increasingly apparent in sculpture, which was initially even more caught up in a holistic, figurative image of man than was painting. But Kolbe's work did not find much resonance in the East, either; after all, the idealistic, timeless-looking female and male figures were not perceived as a contemporary response to an art under socialism—unlike, for example, the sculptures of Fritz Cremer, whose *Trauernde* (Mourning Woman) and

Anklagede (The Accuser), both from 1947–51, could be interpreted in a decidedly political context. It is not surprising, then, that as early as July 1949 the British *Art News* wrote:

> "A few of the accepted leaders of yesterday have survived, but seem to exercise practically no influence on the younger men at all. Some of them like Carl Hofer and Georg Kolbe are even rejected as outmoded or working along lines unacceptable to the present generation of artists."[44]

And it was not only internationally that Kolbe's time was over in the 1950s. In 1957, Gottfried Sello wrote in the weekly newspaper *Die Zeit*:

> "On April 15, 1957, Kolbe would have turned eighty. The public hardly took any notice of the day. An understandable reaction to false praise and overestimation. It is indeed *difficult* enough to discover the artist beneath the patina of pathos and the heroic German soul."[45]

Notes

1 Letter from Georg Kolbe to Erich Cohn, July 8, 1946, quoted in: Maria von Tiesenhausen, *Georg Kolbe. Briefe und Aufzeichnungen* (Tübingen 1987), p. 187, no. 279 [translated].

2 Georg Kolbe, "Betrachtungen über den Bildhauerberuf in heutiger Zeit, Januar 1946," enclosure to a letter from Georg Kolbe to the Kulturbund zur demokratischen Erneuerung Deutschlands (Cultural Alliance for the Democratic Renewal of Germany), January 6, 1946, MvT Estate, GKM Archive, Berlin [translated].

3 See: Josephine Gabler, "Georg Kolbe in der NS-Zeit," in: *Georg Kolbe. 1877–1947*, ed. Ursel Berger, exh. cat. Georg Kolbe Museum, Berlin (Munich 1997), pp. 87–94, here pp. 92–93, as well as the essay by Paula Schwerdtfeger in this volume, pp. 116–135.

4 See the essay by Ambra Frank in this volume, pp. 136–151.

5 After being removed from the opera house, the *Genius* was handed over to the Nationalgalerie in Berlin, where it remains today; https://id.smb.museum/object/959795/genius [last accessed March 12, 2023].

6 See: Julia Wallner, "Georg Kolbe und die Skulptur der Moderne," in: idem (ed.), *Georg Kolbe* (Cologne 2017), pp. 22–24, here p. 24.

7 Inquiry from the founding committee of the Kulturbund, represented by Wolfgang Harich, to Georg Kolbe, June 26, 1945, GK Estate, inv. no. GK.469, GKM Archive, Berlin, and letter from Georg Kolbe to Paul Wegener, November 14, 1945, MvT Estate, GKM Archive, Berlin.

8 Magdalena Heider, *Politik – Kultur – Kulturbund. Zur Gründungs- und Frühgeschichte des Kulturbundes zur demokratischen Erneuerung Deutschlands 1945–1954 in der SBZ/DDR* (Cologne 1993), pp. 55–59.

9 Hans Grundig, "Sinn und Ziel der künstlerischen Ausbildung an der Akademie der bildenden Künste in Dresden," in: *Zeitschrift für Kunst*, no. 3, 1947, p. 68 [translated].

10 See: Christine Fischer-Defoy, *"Kunst, im Aufbau ein Stein." Die Westberliner Kunst- und Musikhochschulen im Spannungsfeld der Nachkriegszeit* (Berlin 2001).

11 Letter from Karl Hofer to Georg Kolbe, November 18, 1945, in: von Tiesenhausen 1987 (see note 1), p. 183, no. 270.

12 See: "Prof. Dr. h. c. Georg Kolbe: An die deutschen Studenten!" in: *Deutsche Studenten-Zeitung*, no. 10, 1934, p. 3, collection of newspaper clippings, GKM Archive, Berlin.

13 Letter from Karl Hofer to Georg Kolbe, December 1, 1945, quoted in: von Tiesenhausen 1987 (see note 1), p. 184, no. 273 [translated].

14 Ibid. [translated].

15 See: letter from Karl Hofer to Georg Kolbe, December 16, 1945, in: von Tiesenhausen 1987 (see note 1), p. 185, no 274 [translated]. In addition to Franco, Kolbe had portrayed Konstantin Hierl, the head of the Reich Labor Service, in 1942.

16 Letter from Georg Kolbe to Erich Cohn, July 8, 1946, quoted in: von Tiesenhausen 1987 (see note 1), p. 187, no. 279 [translated].

17 Instead of Kolbe, his good friend and fellow sculptor Richard Scheibe was appointed.

18 See the records of Allies who visited Kolbe in the MvT Estate, GKM Archive, Berlin.

19 See: Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, "Wege und Aufgaben der deutschen Kunst," in: *Sächsische Zeitung* [Chemnitz edition], January 8, 1946, p. 2 [translated].

20 Kolbe 1946 (see note 2) [translated].

21 Georg Kolbe, "Wahrhafte Pflege der Kultur," in: *Tägliche Rundschau*, Berlin, May 9, 1946, transcript of the article in the MvT Estate, GKM Archive, Berlin [translated].

22 See: Kathleen Schröter, "Kunst zwischen den Systemen. Die Allgemeine Deutsche Kunstausstellung 1946 in Dresden," in: Nikola Doll, Ruth Heftrig et al. (eds.), *Kunstgeschichte nach 1945. Kontinuität und Neubeginn in Deutschland* (Cologne, Weimar, and Vienna 2006), pp. 211–237.

23 See: *Allgemeine Deutsche Kunstausstellung*, exh. cat. Stadthalle am Nordplatz, Dresden (Dresden 1946).

24 See the short text by Ursel Berger on Kolbe's *Flehende* (1944), in the online databank of the Nationalgalerie: https://id.smb.museum/object/960333/flehende [last accessed March 12, 2023].

25 Index card, Georg Kolbe Museum, Berlin.

26 See: *Ausstellung bildender Künstler*, exh. cat, December 1945–January 1946, Kulturbund zur demokratischen Erneuerung Deutschlands (Berlin ca. 1946).

27 See: *1. Deutsche Kunstausstellung der Deutschen Zentralverwaltung für Volksbildung in der Sowjetischen Besatzungszone*, exh. cat. Zeughaus, Berlin, May/June 1946 (Berlin 1946).

28 See: H. C[arola] Gärtner-Scholle, "Abbild deutschen Kunstschaffens," in: *Tägliche Rundschau*, May 22, 1946, p. 3.

29 Ludwig Justi, in: *Meisterwerke deutscher Bildhauer und Maler*, exh. cat. Museum im Schlüterbau, Berlin (Berlin 1947), p. 4.

30 In the catalog, the sculptures are partly illustrated under different titles. The *Junger Streiter* is titled as *Fünfkämpfer* (Pentathlete) and the *Herabschreitender* as *Schreitender* (Striding Man). See: exh. cat. Berlin 1947 (see note 29).

31 For more on the *Ring der Statuen*, see the essay by Ambra Frank in this volume, pp. 136–151.

32 See: Dr. Herzberg, "Menschliche Daseinsformen im Bildwerk, Eine Georg-Kolbe-Ausstellung," title and date of the newspaper unknown, collection of newspaper clippings, GKM Archive, Berlin.

33 See: Frank 2023 (see note 31).

34 Letter from Georg Kolbe to Erich Cohn, August 17, 1946, MvT Estate, GKM Archive, Berlin [translated].

35 Thomas Pavel, "'Ich sah mich selbst auf diesem Sockel sitzen.' Siehe Befreiter, 1945," in: Julia Wallner (ed.), *Georg Kolbe* (Cologne 2017), pp. 137–139, here p. 138.

36 Frib., "Bei Georg Kolbe. Neue Werke des großen Bildhauers," in: *Nacht-Express*, April 25, 1946, collection of newspaper clippings, GKM Archive, Berlin.

37 Letter from Georg Kolbe to Hermann Reemtsma, January 17, 1947, MvT Estate, GKM Archive, Berlin [translated].

38 Letter from Georg Kolbe to Dr. Thomas, Cultural Office of the City of Wurzen, October 5, 1946, GK Estate, inv. no. GK.630.1, GKM Archive, Berlin [translated].

39 Edwin Redlob, "Jenseits der Zeit. Zu Georg Kolbes siebzigstem Geburtstag," in: *Tagesspiegel*, April 15, 1947, [translated].

40 Gerd H. Theunissen, "Gestalter und Künder. Zum 70. Geburtstag Kolbes," in: *Tägliche Rundschau*, April 15, 1947, [translated].

41 N. N., "Dem Gedächtnis Georg Kolbes," in: *Westdeutsche Blätter*, August 25, 1948, transcription [translated], collection of newspaper clippings, GKM Archive, Berlin.

42 Adolf Schleicher, "Georg Kolbe und wir," in: *Georg Kolbe Museum* (Berlin ca. 1952), pp. 1–6, here p. 1 [translated].

43 Letter from Gustav Seitz to Georg Kolbe, April 14, 1947, quoted in: von Tiesenhausen 1987 (see note 1), p. 190, no. 285 [translated].

44 N. N., "The Arts in Germany," in: *Art News & Review*, London, July 30, 1949, collection of newspaper clippings, GKM Archive, Berlin.

45 Gottfried Sello, "Georg Kolbe – zu recht vergessen?" in: *Die Zeit*, April 25, 1957 [translated].