After Stalinstadt (Stalin Town), Hoyerswerda and Schwedt, Halle-Neustadt was the last of the new towns built in the German Democratic Republic. It was designed to become the ultimate display of modern, state-of-the-art constructions in East Germany—internationally competitive in its architecture and construction technology—and the definitive implementation in urban development of the concept of the ideal socialist city. Under the leadership in the 1960s of chief architect Richard Paulick, the project was realized between 1964 and 1986, despite numerous obstacles, frequent changes in personnel, economic crises and countless modifications. Based on the notion of a synthesis between architecture and the visual arts, the integration of socialist art into the public sphere was part of the urban development plans for Halle-Neustadt from the outset.

1 Renamed Eisenhüttenstadt (Ironworks town) during de-Stalinization in 1961.
2 At the Bauhaus in Dessau, Richard Paulick was one of Walter Gropius’s most important colleagues before leading the city development office in Shanghai for a number of years. After World War II, he became one of the GDR’s main state architects.
3 "Direktive für die städtebauliche Gestaltung und den Aufbau von Halle-Neustadt" (1963), 5. As early as in the development plan, specifications for color schemes, placement of sculptures, murals, fountains, etc. were already defined.
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A large number of visual artworks, murals and sculptures were planned, including monumental political works which would have an effect on the entire town as well as smaller, insignificant and apolitical designs. They were all supposed to enrich the architectural ensemble on a large scale, and to shape it ideologically. Between 1968 and 1974, the Spanish artist and exile Josep Renau (1907–1982) and his collective created one of the most interesting and innovative pieces of architecture-related art in the public sphere—and an example of the (much-discussed) synthesis of architecture and visual art in urban development in the GDR—in the educational center of the chemical workers’ town of Halle-Neustadt.

This article is particularly concerned with the question of programmatic integration of visual art into urban spheres and the related discussion of synthesis as well as of its function. Using Renau’s murals in the socialist town of Halle-Neustadt as an example, its artistic influence and history of origins will be explored and presented in the context of urban development and the holistic political-ideological framework to which it is related.

The planning of architecture-related art—and in this context, chiefly commissioned political art—was a natural part of the planning process of architectural projects in the GDR. However, in its execution, a certain development is noticeable, turning away from the rather traditional concept of architectural sculpture in the National Building Tradition of the 1950s and toward the concept of art in urban space of the 1960s and 70s. This change can be attributed to the introduction of industrial building methods in residential and urban construction in the GDR from the 1950s onward, and the concurrent architectural-political reform.

During the search for a new “socialist” concept of architecture, the relevance of architecture-related art also came under discussion. In the monotonous, prefabricated construction, the party and state leadership in particular saw an opportunity for the development of a new, architecture-related form of art which—via innovative artistic means—could make new content conceivable and augment “architecture with a little more conceptual and aesthetic significance.” Especially from the 1960s onward, art in the public sphere

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4 The term “architecture-related art,” as it is used here, denotes both works of art which are directly attached to a building as well as stand-alone sculptures, fountains, etc., which are part of an architectural or urban design.
5 Inter alia Joachim Palutzki, Architektur in der DDR (Berlin: Reimer, 2000), 45.
8. The Murals by Spanish Exile Josep Renau

gained increasing significance. A synthesis of architecture and visual art was propagated, which took up a dominant position in the theoretical discussions about architecture in the GDR and necessitated the undertaking of much research and development, which in turn was intended to form a base for artists and architects to help them accomplish the new demands. Increasingly from the 1960s onward, development plans were drawn up which already incorporated in their early planning phases visual artworks in urban spaces. This was with the intention that, rather than the artwork being subsequently added to the architecture as a decorative element, it would instead be an emancipated partner in a synthesis, designed to “enhance the aesthetic-ideological statement of the space.” In a subsequent step, from the mid-1960s onward, the complex socialist shaping of the environment was announced with the intention of encompassing the entire material environment of the people, namely the living, housing, and working spheres, thus taking effect “as a designed expression of the people’s socialist way of life.” First and foremost, this was calculated to help shape the vision of the new socialist idea of man, as propagated by the state. Such a vision stated that a person possessed a wealth of skills and knowledge, was hard-working, had a distinct socialist consciousness, was always disciplined and acted morally according to socialist standards, displayed an active interest in culture and sports and had an altogether positive, optimistic view of life. The programmatic integration of art into the public sphere is to be viewed as part of this enterprise, since visual art was seen as an essential contributory element to the development of a socialist consciousness. It became an integrating aspect in the planning of urban areas in the GDR, thus receiving a new form of publicity, and served as a significant means of carrying ideology.

These new architectural-political demands were to be implemented in the realization of the considerable urban development proposal in Halle-Neustadt

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8 A discussion of “synthesis” under socialist guidelines had already taken place in postrevolutionary Russia. In 1919, a committee for devising a pictorial, sculptural, and architectural synthesis was set up as Subsection Sculpture of the Narkompros’s Department of Visual Arts. See Hubertus Gaßner and Eckhart Gillen, eds., Zwischen Revolutionskunst und Sozialistischem Realismus. Dokumente und Kommentare, Kunstdebatten in der Sowjetunion von 1917 bis 1934 (Köln: DuMont, 1979), 442.


10 Flierl, Architektur und Kunst, 25.

11 At the 5th Party Conference of the SED in 1958, Walter Ulbricht presented the Ten Commandments of Socialist Morals and Ethics, which served as a basis and a guideline for correct socialist behavior.
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alongside the experience of earlier large-scale city development projects, as well as a modern, complex, socialist living environment, based on the synthesis of architecture and visual arts and conforming to the ideological agenda of the state.

Hence, as early as in the development plans, color schemes, and the positioning of sculptures and fountains were already specified. Particular importance was attached to the town center, which, in the context of the town as a whole, presented the architectural and artistic point of culmination. The integration of monumental art at architecturally prominent locations was also part of the plans, but could only be realized in the educational center of Halle-Neustadt.

The educational center forms the western part of the town center. It was built between 1966 and 1971 and was one of the few areas of Halle-Neustadt in which the city-planning and visual-arts concept was largely realized. A draft proposal for the integration of artworks into the town was already developed in advance. An “Advisory Council for Visual Arts and Architecture,” appointed in 1965, took responsibility for this, as well as for anything concerning the arts in Halle-Neustadt. It was controlled by the district council’s Department of Culture and consisted of architects, visual artists, landscape planners, product designers as well as state officials. Its purpose was to substantiate the visual-arts concept by deciding upon the locations and the type of artworks in accordance with the political-ideological concept, and to oversee its realization—always in coordination with the governmental institutions. As with all other parts of the chemical workers’ town, these so-called visual-arts conceptions were linked to an ideological agenda, which was developed as a “political-ideological framework” in collaboration with the Department for Agitation and Propaganda (Agitprop) in the district council of Halle. According to this, the town center was to be themed “Setting up Communism.” The thematic guideline for the educational center was also aligned to this. Item 3 of the visual-arts conception states:

12 "Direktive für die städtebauliche Gestaltung und den Aufbau von Halle-Neustadt" (1963), 5.
13 With regards to urban development, the center of Halle-Neustadt is composed of three spatially separated areas: a shopping area with service and supply facilities; a cultural and administrative complex with an integrated central square for meetings and demonstrations; and an educational center, including a hall of residence for apprentices, schooling and sports areas, a dining hall, and a swimming pool.
14 Landeshauptarchiv Sachsen-Anhalt (LHASA), Abt. Mer, SED-Bezirksleitung, IV/A-1/1/81.
15 Halle Stadtarchiv, file number 1.7.659.7712: “Politisch-ideologische Konzeption und Grundsätze für die Arbeiten der Bildenden Künstler im Bereich der Chemiewerkstadt Halle-West vom 15.02.1966.” Further subjects for individual housing complexes were the fight to protect peace, friendship among the peoples, struggle against imperialism, and the chemical industry’s significance for scientific-technological progress.
The educational center is an expression of the integrative socialist education system created in our republic. Universal education and the acquisition of cultural assets must become the desire in all levels of the population and all age groups. Through the introduction to works of art, a sense of aesthetics and artistic interest should be formed. All works of visual art arranged within the area of the educational center should, in their form and technique, adhere to this relationship.\textsuperscript{16}

In 1968, the artists’ collective of Josep Renau, Helmut Diehl, René Graetz, Karl Rix and Herbert Sandberg was commissioned to design the exterior walls of the swimming pool, the dining hall and the apprentices’ hall of residence—altogether about 700 square meters.\textsuperscript{17}

Josep Renau favored a unifying concept spanning all those buildings which would be visible from the central part of the town center as well as the Magistrale, the town’s main arterial road. He planned four giant, thematically linked murals, whereas the other artists preferred building-related, autonomous solutions.\textsuperscript{18} In the course of this planning process, serious differences developed within the collective.\textsuperscript{19} These discrepancies regarding the execution resulted in the decision, taken by the “Advisory Council for Visual Arts and Architecture” in 1969, that Diehl, Graetz, Sandberg and Rix were to design the swimming pool under the theme “Bathing People,”\textsuperscript{20} and that Josep Renau would design the dining hall and the two gables of the apprentices’ hall of residence\textsuperscript{21} with his own team, still based on the overarching theme “Setting up Communism.”\textsuperscript{22} The artistic work of such a large scale that Josep Renau planned for the educational center in Halle-Neustadt, a conception

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{16} Halle Stadtarchiv, file number 2.1 HAG Ho Ha-Neu 5415.
\item \textsuperscript{17} Eva-Maria Thiele, “Neue Wandbilder von José Renau in Halle-Neustadt,” \textit{Bildende Kunst} 5 (1975): 225–29.
\item \textsuperscript{18} Anke Kunze, “Josep Renau—Über Mexiko in die DDR. Eine Betrachtung seiner architekturgebundenen Kunst mit Schwerpunkt Halle/Saale” (Thesis, Martin Luther Universität Halle-Wittenberg, 2005), 62.
\item \textsuperscript{19} Only eight months after receiving the commission, Renau informed Chief Architect Richard Paulick of the dissolution of the collective for “serious reasons” (Halle Stadtarchiv, file number 3263 IV b).
\item \textsuperscript{20} In architecture-related art of the GDR, there are many designs which thematically allude to the function of the building they are connected to. An example for this is Willy Neubert’s monumental mural \textit{The Press as a Collective Organiser} (1964) on the \textit{Freiheit} newspaper building.
\item \textsuperscript{21} Halle Stadtarchiv, file number 3263 IV b.
\end{itemize}
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with a short-range as well as long-range effect, represented an innovative approach in the development of architecture-related art in the GDR.

Josep Renau, who relocated to East Berlin on the invitation of the GDR government, was born in 1907 in Valencia, Spain. At the age of 12, he enrolled as a student at S. Carlos art college (1919–25). Renau was politically active and a committed artist and cultural functionary in the Communist Party. The early 1930s, in particular, significantly shaped his artistic and intellectual development. He worked in the disciplines of poster art, photo montage, and film.

During the Spanish Civil War, Renau acted as head of visual-arts propaganda for the Republican Army and as political commissioner. In 1939, he fled the Franco regime and emigrated to Mexico. During the time of the Spanish Civil War, he had met the Mexican muralist David Alfaro Siqueiros. Having arrived in Mexico, Siqueiros welcomed Renau into his painters’ collective. In 1939, they worked together on the mural entitled *The Face of the Bourgeoisie* on the electricity union building in Mexico City. Renau wrote about this collaboration: “My initial concept of mural painting, which I derived from my work on posters, underwent a profound and salutary transformation, starting at the moment I came into contact with the Mexican master. In Spain, that happened on a theoretical level, and then in Mexico through our collaboration.” Along with Diego Rivera (1886–1957) and José Clemente Orozco (1883–1949), David Alfaro Siqueiros (1896–1974) was part of the so-called “Big Three” of the postrevolutionary Mexican muralismo art movement. The mural, as a democratic art form with an extremely high number of recipients, was considered to be a highly appropriate medium with which to communicate a historical awareness, revolutionary successes and the new ideals to a mainly illiterate population, creating a sense of identity.

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23 17 March 1907 in Valencia.
26 Siqueiros came to Valencia in 1937 to work in the art of agitation and propaganda. Immediately upon arrival, however, he joined the Spanish army in support of the fight and became an adjutant and later a commander. See Raquel Tibol, ed., *David Alfaro Siqueiros. Der neue mexikanische Realismus* (Dresden: Fundus, 1975), 45.
Siqueiros and Rivera, who both spent several years in Europe, took back home their impressions of the avant-garde movement and the frescoes of the Italian Renaissance. The artists combined these impressions with the new form of art demanded in Mexico, a form of art “within the framework of a cultural-political program, whose fundamental pillars were nationalism, the people and education.” Mexican folklore motifs were mingled with a modern, avant-garde conception of art and with revolutionary themes. The monumental paintings were intended to have an impact on the masses and to illustrate and convey to the people a sense of their own culture, Mexican history and the necessity of social change.

After he had emigrated to the GDR, Renau was asked in an interview about his strongest impression of Mexico. He replied:

The phenomenon of mural paintings. In it, I realized for the first time how a realist and modern expression can unfold its full abundance, its highest form, which is at the same time its most traditional. I find it fascinating to see that this abundance occurs in the work of personalities who are equally strong and yet diametrically opposed to each other concerning their understanding of the wall area, as is the case with Orozco, Rivera, and Siqueiros. . . . Orozco was, without doubt, the person who impressed me the most with his deeply Spanish-Baroque resonances. Siqueiros, on the other hand, influenced me with the open and dynamic character of his pictorial conception, with his revolutionary boldness in his treatment of the wall and, above all, with his stupendous creative assimilation of the tradition of pre-Hispanic glyptics. . . . I lived with David, worked, argued and almost brawled with him.

The design drawn up for Halle-Neustadt was Renau’s first project for a monumental mural in the GDR. His proposal to create a panorama picture—a joint composition stretching across several buildings—which would be matched visually and with regards to content, represented a novelty in ar-

30 Suarez, “José Renau in Mexiko,” 409.
chitecture-related art in the GDR (Plate 8.1). On 11 November 1969, in a letter to the Director of Economy in the main contracting body, Komplexer Wohnungs- und Gesellschaftsbau, Renau wrote:

I consider it absolutely necessary to emphasize the fact that the dimensions of the two walls of the hall of residence (7 times 35 meters each) in conjunction with their vertical position pose problems for both the conception and the execution, for whose solution in the area of exterior wall design there is no precedent anywhere in the world. As far as I am aware, this is the first time a practical solution for such problems is being undertaken.

He initially started his preparations with a motion study which assumed that the direction of movement would be from the dining hall toward the hall of residence.31 Even though the buildings are staggered, to the distant viewer they appear to be on one level. Furthermore, the distant viewer should perceive the ensemble in its entirety as an abstract formation. He simulated the effect of close and distant vision in several studies.32

Renau’s design was implemented with numerous corrections regarding the style, colors, and content, which were time and again demanded by the contracting body in a long-winded, bureaucratic process.33 The ensemble consists of two murals in an extreme vertical and ribbon-like horizontal format. The images, which are visible from a long way off to the east, are distinguished by their remarkably modern and experimental visual aesthetics, intensive chromaticity and enormous stereoscopic effect. On 28 December 1970, Renau stated in a letter to the main contracting body, Komplexer Wohnungs- und Gesellschaftsbau:

It is by far my best monumental work. In it, I have succeeded in making flesh the most essential aspects of my artistic experience in the area of mural painting, which I collected during my twenty years of emigration.
in Mexico, in personal collaboration with David A. Siqueiros, my great teacher, comrade and friend. Furthermore, it is the most optimal result of those twelve years in which I’ve been fighting on the theoretical and practical level for a new, socialist monumentality in the GDR.  

The compositions, executed in majolica on stoneware tiles, gloriously proclaim—in compliance with the overarching theme—the socialist utopia of progress and the future far into the urban space.

Concerning the design of the complex, it is advisable to read it from north to south. The northernmost staircase gable is themed *Unity of the Working Class and Foundation of the GDR*. The illustration opens with a monumental handshake. Behind that appears a demonstration, out of which flags and banners protrude. From the center of the crowd grows a monumental ear of wheat, flanked to its right by a microscope and to its left by a giant organ pipe. The composition is crowned by an all-dominating head of Karl Marx. The wheat symbolizes agriculture, the microscope represents science and technology, the organ pipe denotes the arts. The wheat as the central element also stands for fertility and growth, in the picture it grows out of the unity of the workers and the farming community.

The second staircase gable, entitled *The Forces of Nature and Technology Mastered by Man*, is dominated by a moving crowd of people who appear to be conducted by a workman. He stands in front of the procession, arms raised, his right hand clenched in a fist. In contrast to the anonymous demonstration on the northern gable, the people here are portrayed as individuals. Renau modeled them after studies of friends and acquaintances— even he, himself, is depicted among them. Like Karl Marx’s head, their facial features are realized in a woodcarving style.

Skyscrapers, industrial plants, and a rocket shoot out from the crowd, crowned by a depiction of a soviet star which floats above the procession. The giant cogwheels and cosmic figures emphasize the perceived upward movement. Unlike the northern gable, which celebrates socialism, or rather, the socialist state, the second gable refers to the power of the working class and the resulting technological and cultural progress under socialism.

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34 Halle City Archive, Halle-Neustadt City Council, file number 3163 IV b.
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The most impressive of the three murals is the one on the dining hall wall, under the motto *March of the Youth into the Future*. It is 5.5 meters high and 43 meters long, and it covers the whole of the building’s facade. In contrast to the upward-reaching gables, a dynamic horizontal movement governs the image composition here. The scene opens at the northern end with a group of young people who stroll from right to left. Following the walking direction, the velocity of the people increases. Ahead of them, the movement breaks out toward the front. Following the movement, the people grow in size. A group of athletes breaks away from the crowd. Their goal is an open book, *The Communist Manifesto*. Above them is a group of bayonet-armed revolutionary fighters. In contrast to these dynamics, a group at the lower end of the picture is engaged in topographical surveying. The strict separation of both groups becomes abundantly clear, but so does their shared goal. Ahead of them both flies a flock of stylized doves.

The depiction continues around a curved corner of the building toward a landscape destroyed by war, above which a plucked eagle is enthroned. Opposite this, two doves are seated, symbolizing the new era. The composition was ingeniously aligned to the perspective of the passer-by. The third design, continuing the theme of socialist state and technological and cultural progress, shows—almost at ground level—the universally educated, new socialist people, jointly and optimistically striving toward the ideals and objectives of socialism, accompanied by their merits and achievements. The sequence of the compositions, often simultaneously aligned, is reminiscent of montage and evokes cuts and cross-fades, lending the design a strong momentum.  

Renau’s murals in Halle-Neustadt were unmistakably influenced by revolutionary Mexican muralism. They were of a decidedly superior quality to the often simplistic solutions found elsewhere. The integration of avant-garde tendencies, such as cubist, futurist or surrealist influences—which only a few years previously were frowned upon in the GDR as being formalist—were conspicuous in his work. Despite the limited opportunities the architecture afforded the designs, the expansive and highly visible compositions could, in their gray surroundings, be understood to form a synthesis.

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35 Due to irreparable damage, the redesign of the building was planned in 1988 and executed in 1996. During its removal—despite being a listed piece of art—large parts of the mural were destroyed, which made proposals to install it elsewhere redundant. Today, the remnants of the majolica painting belong to GWG and are stored in Halle.
However, the murals in Halle-Neustadt did not achieve the intensity and dynamics of the Mexican murals, nor their expressive formal vocabulary. This was doubtlessly influenced by the contracting body’s heavy interference with the stylistic and creative process, their insistence on simplistic forms and their enforcement of changes in content, which ultimately also resulted in the dilution of the planned aesthetic effect of the composition. Nonetheless, this design of Renau’s is one of the most outstanding and most experimental examples of architecture-related art in the GDR and is regarded as epitomizing the synthesis between architecture and visual arts.