
Fun on the Titanic: Underground Art and the East German State

January 16-April 16

Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library

Behind the Iron Curtain, a generation of poets, artists, musicians, and performers turned their backs on the promise of “really existing socialism” and official culture in the East German state. In back-courtyard apartments, private studios, and workshops, they created a space for free creative expression that (they hoped) might elude the dictates, police, and policy-makers of the Communist regime, which they viewed as a dead end for culture, or—in the prescient metaphor of the poet “Matthias” Baader Holst—a sinking ship.

In this new exhibition, *Fun on the Titanic* explores the creative diversity and exuberant performativity of culture nurtured behind closed doors by the East German underground of the 1980s. Rare and colorful, the self-published ‘zines and artist’s books on display from Beinecke’s collection tell a story of persistent resolve, resourcefulness, and mischievous youthful determination—punctuated by betrayals, arrests, voluntary exile, and even suicide—all in the name of a lost generation and its yearning to have fun in the final days of a totalitarian state.

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