

Interview - Zwischentöne

A conversation between Gerd Harry Lybke aka *Judy Lybke* and Marietta Schwarz, published on 19. November 2025

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Announcement 1: Deutschlandfunk Zwischentöne.

Announcement 2: For copyright reasons, all music in this program has been shortened.

Marietta Schwarz: Welcome to Zwischentöne. Today, Marietta Schwarz is joined in the studio by a gallery owner who once wanted to fly high into space as a cosmonaut, but then went quite far in a completely different profession - the art market. He started out naked, working as a nude model and later sold the paintings of the artists he had modeled for, sometimes for horrendous sums. That's true at least for Neo Rauch, the most prominent painter represented by Gerd Harry Lybke, known as Judy, alongside Olaf and Carsten Nicolai, Tim Eitel, Birgit Brenner, Ricarda Roggan, and many others. Forty years ago, Judy Lybke founded his gallery Eigen+Art, rose rapidly when the Berlin Wall fell, but at the same time seems to be a kind of symbol of consistency in the very fast-moving art market. How this all fits together and much more will be revealed here in Zwischentöne over the next hour and a half. Welcome, Judy Lybke.

Gerd Harry Lybke: Yes, hello.

Marietta Schwarz: Eigenart, Eigen plus Art, Eigen und Art. What's the real name of the gallery?

Gerd Harry Lybke: Yes, that is of course the origin of the name. Eigen plus Art actually comes from a situation in the GDR, you have to imagine, back in 1983 and before, because the gallery was founded on April 15, 1983. It was actually forbidden to open private galleries because the state art trade - the name says it all, it was the art trade of the GDR - actually intended to market all artists and their works itself, especially, of course, in Western countries, especially in the Federal Republic of Germany, in order to obtain foreign currency. That was pretty important to the GDR. And since they didn't want anyone else competing for this market, it was forbidden to establish private galleries. So we, a group of friends who always threw parties and so on, looked for a name for a new party, which then grew into a gallery. And the name was easily found by saying, "Eigenart," which is the German word for "individuality."

Marietta Schwarz: It's really quite a beautiful word.

Gerd Harry Lybke: Yes, it is quite a beautiful word. And then there's "Eigen" and "plus Art." And you have to imagine that back then, the English language hadn't really arrived in the GDR. We learned Russian in school, not English. And not everyone knew, especially most of the state officials, police, and others, didn't necessarily know what "Art" meant. And it was never called "Galerie Eigen plus Art", because then it would have been a gallery, but it was always just called "Eigen plus Art." And that was how they addressed those who were, so to speak, in the inner circle. And it was also a kind of code word to get in.

Marietta Schwarz: Okay, so not everybody got in.

Gerd Harry Lybke: No.

Marietta Schwarz: I find it funny that the first thing I wrote down in my notes here is the word ban, and that you directly started talking about things that were banned.

Gerd Harry Lybke: Yeah, that is nice. Bans are there to be to be ignored, after all.

Marietta Schwarz: Seems like it, yes. Certainly in your case.

Gerd Harry Lybke: Yes, it was fun too. It was a bit like, I was lucky to have been born later. For me, growing up in the GDR wasn't quite so aggressive. If you were ten years older than I was at the time, you really had to decide whether to stay in the GDR or to really leave. But for me, at that time - in '83, when I was 22 - it was like it is for everyone who is 22: the world is big, everything is possible, and nothing stands in your way. And bans are there to be ignored.

Marietta Schwarz: So there was also a certain desire to break the rules, perhaps?

Gerd Harry Lybke: Yes, yes. No matter where you spend your childhood and youth, or under what systems,

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it's always influenced more by your family or friends. For example, my mother didn't send me to kindergarten. Interestingly, in the GDR, everyone had to go to kindergarten. And my mother somehow managed to get me out of it. She took me with her to work because, like everyone else, she and my father worked, of course. And I grew up in a kind of gang of kids. We used to bother the kids coming home from school and take their pens and things like that. We were just hanging around in the streets.

Marietta Schwarz: And that was in Leipzig, but not directly in central Leipzig, right?

Gerd Harry Lybke: Leipzig Meußdorf. That's where that was, out in Meußdorf. Nowadays, it's hard to imagine what it was like back then. You can't really wrap your head around it anymore. Even me, when I talk about it now, I think to myself huh? Were you really there back then? There weren't even any cars on the road yet, in Meußdorf.

Marietta Schwarz: So, a rural suburb of Leipzig? Or did it even have anything to do with Leipzig?

Gerd Harry Lybke: Yes, it's still the city of Leipzig. But it was just a housing estate, and not everyone had a car, actually hardly anyone did. Everyone had bicycles. Telephones hadn't yet made their way into people's homes. Interesting times. If you wanted to visit someone who didn't have a telephone and you couldn't call them because you didn't have one yourself, you either had to send a telegram to let them know you were coming, or you drove there and then you were there.

Marietta Schwarz: I can still remember the 90s in Berlin, there were these kind of, toilet-paper-rolls, like little rolls of receipt-paper hung up next to the front door, where you could leave a message.

Gerd Harry Lybke: I used to have those too, it was a roll of paper where you could leave a note when the person wasn't there. "I was there, I'll be back at such and such time, I'll be in touch". I still have all the notes, by the way, I have a huge archive, somehow I didn't throw anything away back then because I always believed that if they ever- well, from '83 onwards it was already more difficult for me in the GDR. And it lasted until 1989, as we all know, with the GDR, and during that time I archived everything we did. All the notes, the letters. We took photos of all the exhibition objects and so on, because I thought, okay, if they do kick me out of the GDR, then at least I'll have proof that I did something. And I could build on that.

Marietta Schwarz: Leaving notes, or receiving notes.

Gerd Harry Lybke: Then I could use that to build something in the new society. But it didn't end up coming to that after all.

Marietta Schwarz: There's quite a lot of potential in that, no?

Gerd Harry Lybke: Well we have the archive, and most of it has been digitized as well. And there's also a museum of contemporary history in Leipzig. For example, there is the door to my apartment, where the gallery began in 1983 at Körnerplatz 8. The apartment door is covered with messages and has a hole drilled into it so that you can see that there is no lock, encouraging people to simply enter the apartment rather than kicking the door down all the time. That was also another way to just come in. That door is on display in the museum.

Marietta Schwarz: So you have already- Judy Lybke has already arrived at the museum, that of contemporary history. Let's listen to the first song, Frank Zappa: Bobby Brown (Goes Down).

Gerd Harry Lybke: Frank Zappa. Yes, well, we didn't understand any English, but of course we listened to loads of English music, and with Frank Zappa, the sound was somehow the communication. The album cover was amazing, and we were fans of something that was so far away that we felt it still belonged to us.

An excerpt of Frank Zappa's Bobby Brown (Goes Down) plays: *Hey, there people I'm Bobby Brown, they say I'm the cutest boy in town, my car is fast my teeth is shining. I tell all the girls, they can kiss my heinie. Here I am at a famous school. I'm dressin' sharp and I'm actin' cool. I got a cheerleader here wants to help with my paper, let her do all the work and maybe later I'll rape her. Oh God I am the American dream, I do not think I'm too extreme. An' I'm a handsome son of a bitch, I'm gonna get a good job and be real rich. Women's Liberation came creepin' all across the nation. I tell you people I was not ready...*

Marietta Schwarz: Bobby Brown (Goes Down) by Frank Zappa, requested by gallery owner Judy Lybke, who is our guest on Zwischentöne today. Do you actually see yourself in Bobby Brown? The American Dream, the handsome son of a bitch, get a good job and get real rich?

Gerd Harry Lybke: (laughs) Yes. Well, as I said, from today's perspective, it's of course an interesting line of lyrics. Back then, it was more of a vision, a dream you had, an idea.

Marietta Schwarz: Did you have the dream of becoming rich?

Gerd Harry Lybke: No, not that, not that. But of course, back then, the American Dream already existed. Everyone wanted to go to New York or somewhere else. In the GDR, of course, you wanted to get away

and go somewhere else. But actually, it was also a reflection of my own experience at the time. Because the sound was a reflection of the time I spent there between ,83 and ,86, how I experienced myself and my time there in the GDR.

Marietta Schwarz: Complete freedom?

Gerd Harry Lybke: Yes, it was complete anarchy, freedom, and the feeling that you could actually do anything. When you lived together with people in this way, as I did, then from ,83 onwards you were absolutely free because you were antisocial to the others. Antisocial, outside of normal society.

Marietta Schwarz: Non-conforming.

Gerd Harry Lybke: Non-conforming. I was banned from being employed after all, banned from work, banned from studying and therefore I was, in any case- I wasn't gonna get in anywhere. I had no opportunities, so I had to go look for something else.

Marietta Schwarz: You got that employment-ban because you had misbehaved during your time in the army?

Gerd Harry Lybke: Well, there were several reasons for that ban. During my time in the army, I had, while on armed duty, written the phrase "Make Love not War" onto the wall, in a spot where everybody could see it.

Marietta Schwarz: Well that fits with Frank Zappa.

Gerd Harry Lybke: Yes, of course that didn't go down too well within the barrack itself. And I was no longer allowed to carry out armed duty, instead I was transferred to the library as punishment, and became an army librarian. And at first that really was a punishment, because I didn't get to see anyone anymore. All the friends I had made there spent the whole day together, and I was there in the library, all by myself.

Marietta Schwarz: Solitary confinement?

Gerd Harry Lybke: Exactly, because there wasn't anyone else there.

Marietta Schwarz: I have a hard time picturing you of all people, in a situation like that.

Gerd Harry Lybke: And no one came to the library to borrow anything. So I was alone all day, even in the afternoon. And at some point, after a couple weeks had passed, I started to look around and realize that I could actually do something crazy and read. And I have to say, by then I had read three books, I think. I was 22. "Space, Earth, Man", which you got when you were 14 for your Jugendweihe ceremony. And "Me and You".

Marietta Schwarz: That was some sort of sex educational book?

Gerd Harry Lybke: A sex-ed book. And I had read those two books, or at least looked at the pictures. And then I just started reading at the library. And where do you start when you start something like that in a library?

Marietta Schwarz: With A.

Gerd Harry Lybke: Exactly, with A, I started with A and had gotten to P by the time I was finished serving in the army.

Marietta Schwarz: Okay, so that was your time at the library, the time of solitary confinement with the army. We had wandered off when we were talking about the employment ban, I interrupted you there.

Gerd Harry Lybke: Yes, that was difficult, of course. But then the state continued to support me because I was supposed to study power plant technology, specializing in nuclear power plant construction, because my dream was to become a cosmonaut. But that would have meant going to the Soviet Union for five years to study and then spending at least another three years doing an internship in Chernobyl.

Marietta Schwarz: So it's a good thing that you weren't there.

Gerd Harry Lybke: Yes, mathematically speaking, I would have been there at the exact time of the accident. If I had done it, of course, there would have been no accident, because I would have been there. Or something like that. But I came back from the army and was supposed to go to a kind of preparatory camp and I couldn't go back to that kind of place, the preparatory camp. So I just turned on my heel and went home and didn't go. And that's how it is when the big father state reaches out its hand and you reject that hand. I think that was too much. I applied everywhere. I reoriented myself and wanted to become an actor. But they all refused to take me because my file said that I was not eligible for study. And I wasn't allowed to work either because, the funny thing was, that they actually wanted to criminalize me, but had no reason to. So they came up with something very interesting. Not just with me, but with many others. They simply didn't

give us any work and didn't allow us to study. And after a year of not working, back in the GDR before '83, the state had the option of locking you up in a labor camp. But there was the option for people like me to work for the church, mostly as gravediggers. That wasn't really my thing, or you could be a nude model, because as a nude model you have-

Marietta Schwarz: That was of your thing?

Gerd Harry Lybke: That was more like my thing. I would say, gravedigger or nude model? I would choose nude model. That's what I did. As a nude model, you just went to the art colleges and asked the students, "Do you need someone?" They said yes. And after a month, you went downstairs and had a slip of paper stamped to prove you had been there. For example, the Academy of Visual Arts, the HGB. And they weren't allowed to hire you, but you had proof that you had worked there. They couldn't forbid it. They couldn't get anyone, because they hadn't hired you and you had proof that you were earning your money.

Marietta Schwarz: And I guess you had a good time there, at the HGB?

Gerd Harry Lybke: It was a great time. It was interesting, of course, I mean, the GDR was of course, a terrible time for many who were born much earlier, as I said before. But for my generation, it was kind of interesting because this surrealist theater was already unfolding, so you couldn't really take it all that seriously anymore.

Marietta Schwarz: Yes, that's how it sounds coming from you. I find it interesting that you paint a picture of great freedom and lots of development, and also fear. I haven't heard that word yet, even though there was a threat. So I think it's nice to hear that perspective.

Gerd Harry Lybke: Of course, everyone had their exit application in some letter box or with friends or a lawyer or a pastor, because if you were locked up for some reason or something happened, you didn't want to be imprisoned as a criminal or as someone who wasn't working. If you were going to be imprisoned, it was better to have an application for permanent departure, because then the Federal Republic had the opportunity to buy your freedom with money, with foreign currency. The Federal Republic paid foreign currency and in return got someone who was, in quotation marks, a political prisoner, someone who had applied to leave the country. But if you went to prison without an application to leave the country, the Federal Republic couldn't buy you out. Then you went back to the GDR, and that was of course not the idea if you were ever imprisoned. So there were so many precautions and ambiguities, so to speak. You have to imagine that we all watched East and West German television. So we were really educated on both sides in political language, in language regulations, in the ambiguity of perception. Everyone in the GDR watched all the programs from the West and mostly also from the East, all the news. And that was of course a learning process for me too, where you then read political statements in a completely different way. Even today, people have a completely different awareness of history because they have seen that, in principle, two states have collapsed. It was impossible to imagine that the GDR, the system and the state, would collapse. And the old Federal Republic that we knew after 1989 no longer exists either. So, you saw two systems suddenly evaporate, so to speak. That's why it's not like that, change is actually part of my life.

Marietta Schwarz: What part of the old Federal Republic was it that went away?

Gerd Harry Lybke: Virtually all of it. I mean, what's left of it today? The old Federal Republic no longer exists today. It has become something else. It must also be said that, at the beginning, when we all took to the streets in Leipzig for the Monday demonstrations, we didn't think we really wanted to be absorbed into the Federal Republic. It was still about a better GDR. We wanted to create our own identity, so to speak, independent of the system we lived in, with a different, more idealized idea of a state. And that wasn't necessarily the same as the Federal Republic. I am absolutely glad that it turned out the way it did, that the GDR no longer exists. That the Federal Republic, that we have become one German state, is more than good, because it has allowed everyone to develop in a way that would have been unimaginable for us in the GDR. But it must also be said that there are difficulties in finding one's place, I believe even today, and also difficulties with identity. That may take time.

Marietta Schwarz: Perhaps more so today than 20 years ago?

Gerd Harry Lybke: Oh no. I think today, in fact any time you live in, including today, actually offers more opportunities than times gone by. I'm not someone who looks back and says everything was better then. I'm more someone who looks to the future and seeks out opportunities.

Marietta Schwarz: Alright, but let's take a quick look behind now, musically at least, with Wenzel's An mich, nachts. Do you have any comment?

Gerd Harry Lybke: It's another typical example. Look, if you grew up in the GDR and spent your youth there and were still there at 22, 25, almost 30. You were surrounded by a barrier, like on a pool table, with all your energy. The cushion was the wall that surrounded the entire state. Not just the physical wall, but another wall, a mental wall. And as a young person aged 18, 20, 22, you had so much energy. The engine was running, you wanted to do something, and the energy was just bursting out. Then you constantly bumped into

the walls and into each other. And there were the encounters between people, the real energy, so to speak. The real refuge was communication with each other. And that went beyond all boundaries.

An excerpt from Wenzel's An mich, nachts plays: *Steht, klopft es nun das Herz, das Licht im Zimmer, geborgt vom Vorderhaus, gefällt das Bett. Mein Kinn ist schwer und doch flieht mich noch immer der Schlaf, erschreckt von einem Düsenjet. Ich steh noch einmal auf das Wasser schlag ich im Becken ab der Küche, doch die Ruh' Sie will nicht kommen. Unterm Schädel trag ich...*

Marietta Schwarz: Today's Zwischentöne with Marietta Schwarz and my guest Gerd Harry Lybke, one of Germany's most successful gallery owners. He grew up in the GDR and rose to fame after the fall of the Berlin Wall with the New Leipzig School. An exciting story of work and success awaits us. After the music by Ryuichi Sakamoto: Regret.

An excerpt from Ryuichi Sakamoto's Regret plays: *Hope. Happiness. Love. Bliss. Anger. Pain. Sorrow. Regret. If I had it all to do again, maybe I would do it just a little bit different my friend. Little Esser for the body, more for the mind. Ignorance and all the hatred, I leave it behind. All I need is some time. If I had it my way, you know that I don't, if only you...*

Marietta Schwarz: Regret by Ryuichi Sakamoto from the 1994 album Sweet Revenge. A request from Judy Lybke, who was busy spreading his wings in the wider world at that time. As a gallery owner, what do you associate with this song, Judy Lybke?

Gerd Harry Lybke: Yes. Ryuichi Sakamoto is a friend of Carsten Nicolai, as he already was, back then.

Marietta Schwarz: An artist who, well I shouldn't say is signed to you. More like an artist you work with?

Gerd Harry Lybke: Well, most of the artists who have been with the gallery since the beginning are still with the gallery. We're also friends, like Carsten Nicolai and Olaf Nicolai. Yes, it's been a long time, and he started performing at concerts with Ryuichi Sakamoto in the 90s. Then they made records together, and most recently they even made the soundtrack for the Hollywood film "The Revenant." And yes, he was someone who constantly crossed paths with me in my life, even with a huge grand piano that suddenly appeared in the back of Carsten's studio, where they made recordings. So somehow that accompanied me from back then.

Marietta Schwarz: An extremely laid back album, I would say. So we're back to the vibe of Frank Zappa in a way. You get the feeling that they had a chill life.

Gerd Harry Lybke: (laughs) Well, not laid back necessarily. Let's just say that the moments of being laid back were important for surviving everything else.

Marietta Schwarz: What was everything else?

Gerd Harry Lybke: Well, the other thing is, of course, getting up very early and working long hours, and doing so as a team. And without the team, the gallery wouldn't exist at all.

Marietta Schwarz: Even back in the 90s, you were getting up early and working long hours?

Gerd Harry Lybke: Yes, that started relatively early on. The artists joined, new artists, including international artists.

Marietta Schwarz: You just mentioned friendship. It's certainly not the case in every gallery that the owner says, "I want to be friends with my artists." Is that a selection criterion for you?

Gerd Harry Lybke: Well, selection criterion, in any case, the work must of course be such that it fits into the program and orientation of the gallery, which has developed over the years, when someone new joins and a new artist joins, that it fits. That it doesn't duplicate someone who is already there.

Marietta Schwarz: But how does something like that work, then?

Gerd Harry Lybke: Well, you try to bring the word "quality" into play, but from your own perspective and point of view. And what counts then, once you've looked at the works of a wide variety of artists and identified ten or fifteen artists who could work in the context of the others who are already there. Then it's also a little bit, or a lot, about chemistry, whether it's right. Because if you select an artist based solely on the work you're currently seeing, the artist is, in a way, doomed to continue reproducing that work over and over again, because you've specialized in that work and that's why you selected him or her. But if it's also about the person, that the person has breaks, that they have a development that existed before, that there may be a possible development after that, that you can do something else. Then it's also much more fun for those who accompany them, the artists. When you see that things are moving forward, that you can question things, that the artist is developing a critical eye for their own work, that you are accompanying them on their journey, then of course this kind of work is enjoyable. I mean, look at the path Neo Rauch has taken, for example. From the beginning to today. It's a journey into a world which he is the center of.

Marietta Schwarz: But also a certain continuity, no?

Gerd Harry Lybke: There's also a certain continuity. There's a world being built there, a universe you can travel through. So I'm like a cosmonaut in the universes of the artists.

Marietta Schwarz: In that of Neo Rauch?

Gerd Harry Lybke: No, in all of them, of course, and I can visit many worlds with them, so to speak.

Marietta Schwarz: Is that what makes art interesting for you?

Gerd Harry Lybke: Definitely the people who make this art. Is it the people who engage with it? We can't forget that there is also great potential in the fact that so many people engage with it, whether they are collectors or visitors to galleries. It should be made very clear that galleries do not charge admission. Galleries are open to everyone. Anyone can come.

Marietta Schwarz: Of course, not everyone dares to go in.

Gerd Harry Lybke: Well, of course, we try to lower the threshold by offering gallery tours. There are tours in Leipzig, Berlin, and of course in other cities as well. We try to find platforms on the internet. So there are still plenty of ways to access art, and I think we also have a certain responsibility as galleries. It is, after all, a formative experience for people who are interested in art. When you show contemporary art by living artists, you are doing something that you don't really see every day in museums. But we do it for the generation that surrounds us.

Marietta Schwarz: So your responsibility is what, exactly?

Gerd Harry Lybke: Well, mediation. Mediation of a worldview, of creativity, of the possibility of building connections. Being in spheres and worlds that may not necessarily provide answers right now, but perhaps also leave questions open as a possibility, reveal possibilities.

Marietta Schwarz: That's what Judy Lybke says in 2023. We need to take a step back. In the 1990s, you once described your first appearance at an art fair as a revolutionary act.

Gerd Harry Lybke: Yes, it was.

Marietta Schwarz: Why?

Gerd Harry Lybke: Well, at the Frankfurt art fair, you have to remember, from '83 to '89 I was always sending letters to West Germany, to the art fairs that were already there back then, and I always applied. They said I was welcome to come, but I couldn't because the wall was there. And in East Germany, the group of people we were, let's just say, was very active, but what we didn't have, and what we didn't want, was to offer art for money. Instead, we offered art in exchange for communication, for the opportunity to come together in one space, to get to know each other. Maybe also to exchange art for a wooden ladder, which also wasn't available. So, this economy of shortages was also used to create economies of exchange. And someone who sold their art through the state-run art market no longer fit our definition. So, it was in 1989 that they finally said, „now you can come.“ That was before the monetary union, and at that moment I was able to come, but I didn't have any idea about prizes. And the first person to arrive, it was the opening, everyone was running around, and we had three works on waxed paper hung up on the walls by Carsten Nicolai, with the Frankfurt Altarpiece in the middle. Peter Dietmar and Rainer Görß had created it as part of a project. We sent letters to all the politicians in East and West, asking them for their urine, which we wanted to set to music in the Frankfurt Altarpiece. Of course, no urine came through. Then, when we were setting up the exhibition stand, we had to fill about 70 disposable glasses with urine. But, well, try filling a glass with urine. With your own. That was also a new experience for me. It's impossible. You can't even fill one glass with urine, let alone 60, within two days. So we did something else. We filled them with tea. That was better for everyone. Since we had already sent it everywhere, two days before the fair opened, the Federal Intelligence Service, the BND, came and shut down the booth because it was forbidden to publicly display politicians' urine. The BND shut the booth down. Then there was a huge press circus. „Booth of the first East German gallery shut down“ interviews back and forth, a massive media frenzy. The booth was eventually reopened because we were able to prove that there was no urine. And of course, masses of people came wanting to see what these crazy people had brought. We had added sound to it, with loudspeakers above the glasses. That caused quite a stir, naturally. Then the first person came up and asked, for example, how much this work on waxed paper by Carsten Nicolai cost. And I couldn't come up with any answer. So I went next door to Walter Storms, the gallery from Munich, which is still around today. I asked how much it cost. He told me about 1,600. That was too much for me. I couldn't do that, so I told the buyer 600, but only cash. Then he went off, the guy got cash from an ATM, and then he came back. There were already five of them. Then he wanted the work. I was able to sell it to him, but I wanted to keep the frame and glass because frames and glass were in short supply in the GDR. You couldn't get them, not even for money. So he had to take it unframed. And now try unframing a piece of waxed paper and then getting it

onto the floor. Because I didn't have any furniture or anything for the booth. I didn't have money for that sort of stuff. And then, very slowly, the waxed paper went down and then it finally laid flat on the floor, and then he counted it next to me, crouching like me. 600 Marks. One, two, three, four, five, six, on the floor. That was a lot of money. Even today. Actually, the most money I've ever felt I've received. And then he took that waxed paper. Behind him were already seven or eight people who had seen it, and he walked through the second coming of Christ. This became public knowledge, and everyone wanted to witness this spectacle: someone carrying around a piece of waxed paper and cash next to it.

Marietta Schwarz: The transformation of Judy Lybke, probably, at that point.

Gerd Harry Lybke: Probably. Then we sold out, so to speak, these three drawings. And back then, there wasn't any bubble wrap for packaging, everything was wrapped in packing paper. And we hadn't wrapped anything, but the other galleries had. And then we went to the warehouse and tore bits off the other galleries' packaging, because we didn't have any scissors with us. And then we drew in the back, framed them, and sold them out front. And then three or four days later, the press reported that the East Germans were still following the traditions of Joseph Beuys and working with low-quality materials such as packing paper. That's complete nonsense, of course. We did it out of necessity-

Marietta Schwarz: You were simply doing business.

Gerd Harry Lybke: Yes, we did business, and that was a good thing!

Marietta Schwarz: Next track, Judy Lybke. We're playing another beautiful song from your list. Nancy Sinatra: You Only Live Twice. Unforgettable, of course, thanks to the James Bond movie.

An excerpt from Nancy Sinatra's You Only Live Twice is played: *You only live twice, or so it seems. One life for yourself, and one for your dreams. You drift through the years and life seems tame...*

Marietta Schwarz: You Only Live Twice. The theme song from the James Bond film of the same name. You only live twice, sung by Nancy Sinatra and requested by Leipzig gallery owner Gerd Harry Lybke here on Zwischentöne. Mister Lybke, you actually live a life that one only lives once. Always living life to the fullest, right?

Gerd Harry Lybke: Well, I don't know, yeah. Or maybe you have many, many lives, because I have the great opportunity to work with so many artists and make them known to the public, to ensure that their work is brought to the public's attention without changing it, leaving it as the artist wants it to be. That's a big task, because when the opening comes, the artist has full control over everything until then, because he's the one who produces the works. And after that, we as gallery owners are the mediators. So the mediation level is very important.

Marietta Schwarz: But really? I mean, if someone wants to buy a work by a famous artist from your gallery, they don't need the story from you anymore. They have the money, and-

Gerd Harry Lybke: Well, no one leaves without getting a story (laughs). Or to put it another way, when you come into our gallery, the first thing we do is say hello and welcome, and thank you for coming. This is a solo exhibition by such-and-such an artist. And then it all begins.

Marietta Schwarz: Yes, but you're romanticizing art collecting a bit, aren't you? I think there are people who have a lot to do with, or connect with the work they acquire. But we know that, especially in the higher price range, art ends up in some kind of depot, in duty-free warehouses, and is only acquired as an investment.

Gerd Harry Lybke: Possibly. Let's put it this way, it's a small proportion. And those collectors who deal with contemporary art, with living artists and with the artists in my gallery, are also interested in the artists' biographies and careers. They also have a lot more fun with it.

Marietta Schwarz: They're serious about it, you think?

Gerd Harry Lybke: What do you mean, serious? It's just part of life. And it's an enrichment that you're very reluctant to simply settle for a monetary amount.

Marietta Schwarz: Okay, but we do have to talk about money again. I find it an exciting topic. It's rarely done here on Zwischentöne because many people consider the topic of money to be so taboo. As I said earlier, when you told us about that trade fair story from Frankfurt, that was the turning point for Judy Lybke, because you said at the beginning that money in the GDR-era was not a currency, it was uninteresting. And then suddenly these banknotes came along and that had an effect on you.

Gerd Harry Lybke: It didn't just affect me, but it affected everyone in the GDR. Because before, before the fall of the Berlin Wall, money really wasn't a currency. At least, East German money wasn't. The only currency was perhaps West German currency. The currency was actually friendship, sharing experiences, trying to build our own world, even if it was in a parallel world like we lived in - that was a currency. And

then, when we – especially when I started going to the trade fair – suddenly a third person came between me and the other person, and that was money. You suddenly had to think about it: Do you go to that restaurant with them? Can they afford to go on vacation? Can you go here or there? Going somewhere in the evening, to the cinema, the place you live – suddenly everything was shaped by this third, real person, by money. And that's where I say you've truly arrived in capitalism.

Marietta Schwarz: How did that feel?

Gerd Harry Lybke: It was complicated. Especially on the day the currency union finally happened. It was surreal, really.

Marietta Schwarz: But how did it feel at the art fair when you suddenly sold the waxed paper for so much money?

Gerd Harry Lybke: Well, at some point at the end of the fair, there was a suitcase full of money because someone had also bought this work, the Frankfurt Altarpiece.

Marietta Schwarz: And how did that feel?

Gerd Harry Lybke: Uh, well, okay, I can put it this way. I went to the printing press in Leipzig with the cash and said, „Here, smell this, West German money.“ It smelled different.

Marietta Schwarz: Did it smell good?

Gerd Harry Lybke: It smelled different, (laughs) it really did smell different. And with this smell of something different, you could achieve so much. And the fact that you could achieve something with money, that was interesting and new. It was possible to get from A to B very quickly, and that was a good experience.

Marietta Schwarz: And it's stayed that way. I mean, money obviously plays a much, much bigger role in your work because there's so much more money in circulation than, let's say, in my life. At some point, Brad Pitt comes along and buys a Neo Rauch painting for a million, I think, or maybe more or less. It doesn't really matter, but there's a lot of money circulating.

Gerd Harry Lybke: Brad Pitt, of course, had to- he came to the fair in Basel. We had our booth in Basel, and there was a work by Neo Rauch hanging there, but Brad Pitt was wearing sunglasses and was showing interest in it. And I said, well, can you even see the work? You're wearing sunglasses, you can't see the colors at all. Then there was a brief moment silence. That's when I noticed he wasn't sure whether to just walk away, offended, or take off his sunglasses. He took off his sunglasses, and then he bought the work. So, there are people who naturally think about sums of money where someone might normally consider whether to spend 50€ or 500€ on a piece of clothing. Other people think about it just as little, or not at all, before buying a new work of art for a lot of money, because they live with a different scale.

Marietta Schwarz: Yes, but is there an upper limit? Because I mean, the art market is crazier than any other market. So, would you draw a line?

Gerd Harry Lybke: Well, firstly, because we operate in Germany and don't have a gallery in New York, we're more involved with the European circle. An artist like Maja Behrmann, currently in Leipzig, would probably attain much higher prices in America and would also be seen in different contexts than in Germany, because in America, money is a different thing altogether. It's about showing that you have money. People buy extra-expensive pieces to then donate them to museums, so that in the end, their family name will be displayed above the museum's main hall. Or they build their own large museum. That's more the idea, and that's simply not done in Germany. For example, you can claim a lot of expenses as tax deductions, and that's why, through fundraising, people in America contribute a lot of money to museums and buy artworks for them. You can't do that here in Germany.

Marietta Schwarz: But how do you achieve high prices? That's the goal, isn't it? The goal of your work is to drive up prices.

Gerd Harry Lybke: No, the goal of the work is immortality, world fame, and immortality. And to go down in art history, preferably while still alive.

Marietta Schwarz: He said, with a grin on his face.

Gerd Harry Lybke: Well, that's the truth. I mean, nobody, nobody is solely in it for the money, everyone has other goals, of course. And as an artist, you want your work to be appreciated and respected, through museum exhibitions, by being placed in the context of the masters of the past, so that you're valued by your generation and that you exert a certain influence through your work, an influence that no one else can ignore, unless they engage with it. An artist has an impact on their generation because they ask questions that, while unanswerable, remain in the air, for everyone and forever. And future generations will grapple with that. That's essentially the essence of being an artist: to take up with this world of ideas that

you possess, things that have been and that also extend into the future.

Marietta Schwarz: That's the essence of being an artist.

Gerd Harry Lybke: Yes, but also for the gallery owner, because only when you present yourself in this way, when you go out into the world, are people perhaps ready for it, because these ideas are also theirs, and because the works then mean something in their environment and show other people that you are active in this field, also intellectually. Then they are also willing to spend something on it.

Marietta Schwarz: If a famous artist can get a lot of money for their works, then they also want to go get that money, right?

Gerd Harry Lybke: I think making art is a job, by the way. Of course, it's also a calling. But it's a really tough job. Let's say you're in a studio. Then you're there all alone. Every decision you make, you have to answer for yourself. Maybe you have assistants, but you make these decisions again and again, every single day. And if you then let yourself be seduced by the public eye, by always being in the press, by making a lot of money with your art, by pushing yourself and your needs to the outside world, and you don't stay focused on your work, you don't develop your actual idea. And it's even worse if, for example, if you're a painter sitting in front of your canvas, which is maybe 140cm by 140 cm and you think that it will bring in €30,000 or €20,000 or whatever. That would be a terrible thought. Then you can't even begin to make a single stroke or apply a single coat of paint.

Marietta Schwarz: But surely some successful artists must have this feeling.

Gerd Harry Lybke: Then they're no longer successful if they have that feeling, or they move the production of their works into workshops, then they no longer have to see what they're doing, that's possible. But most of those who are successful are still successful precisely because they avoid it. Because the artist is still grappling with the questions she's always had. Still trying to reflect on the results for herself.

Marietta Schwarz: Has the money changed you?

Gerd Harry Lybke: Well, let me put it this way. You can slow down or speed up the pace at which you get from A to B. And with money, you can do both. You can slow it down by taking the train with an all-out rail pass, or you can speed it up by jetting everywhere by plane. You can be more visible because you can attend the big art fairs, which are all very expensive, and you can afford them. You can work with fantastic people at the gallery. We're 25 people at the moment, and that, of course, also depends on whether you can afford it or not. And having money is an important factor because money is a means of transportation.

Marietta Schwarz: Omara Portuondo, Junto A Un Cañaveral. A song from Cuba.

Gerd Harry Lybke: Yes, Cuba, for example, was a place we also went to. But that was a very long time ago. And somehow, the atmosphere we experienced there has stayed with me.

An excerpt from Omara Portuondo's „Junto A Un Cañaveral“ plays: *Junto a un cañaveral, una guajirita había, junto a un cañaveral. Una guajirita había, sollozándome decía, no me canso de llorar. Que lindo son los paisajes...*

Marietta Schwarz: Omara Portuondo with „Junto A Un Cañaveral.“ Cuban music, which gallery owner Judy Lybke requested for this interview. Judy Lybke, Listening to you, it all sounds so carefree. Like the last 40 years have been consistently full of success. But that can't really be true, can it?

Gerd Harry Lybke: No, that's true. Of course, there are difficult moments and also some really sharp turning points. In both my personal and professional life. But, quite clearly, I am an entrepreneur. I didn't study, I didn't study art, I didn't study anything else. But as an entrepreneur, you have to take risks. And as an entrepreneur, you also have to think things through starting at the point you want to get to, and then think backwards toward where you are currently. So you have to consider the consequences, you have to think ahead when you act. And then you shouldn't be surprised when consequences occur. And you simply have to get through them. There are always necessities that require you to take risks. There are always necessities that require you to accept these risks because you are, after all, an entrepreneur.

Marietta Schwarz: Do you take fewer risks today than back then, when you stood naked in front of your gallery on Körnerplatz?

Gerd Harry Lybke: No. Back then, you didn't even know what kind of risk you were actually taking.

Marietta Schwarz: Aha, that's a big difference.

Gerd Harry Lybke: These days, with the experience we have and the daily grind, we're more aware of the risks involved in taking action or inaction. In any case, taking action is the best option. And the very best thing is not to follow the market, but to try to create a market.

Marietta Schwarz: Yes, that's perhaps an important point in a time when everyone is calling for innovation and then everyone is looking at how others have innovated and trying to copy it. That's not how it works. How do you create a market?

Gerd Harry Lybke: Well, you create a market by first having an offering that you truly believe in. And then, as a first step, you have to create the need for this market, which people don't yet know about. And that's achieved more through storytelling, by bringing together the various creative forces that tend to operate in their own bubbles. It's all about people. I love being with people.

Marietta Schwarz: Yes, I can well imagine that. (laughs)

Gerd Harry Lybke: Anyone who doesn't do this and is a gallery owner is in the wrong profession, in a way. And for me, it's just absolutely fantastic that I've been able to, or can, connect with people. This includes the artists I meet, colleagues without whom I couldn't even be sitting here - they're absolutely essential. And of course, it also includes everyone who's interested or who comes into the gallery. Everyone. Without that, it wouldn't be any fun for me at all.

Marietta Schwarz: When you say storytelling, that's also a term that's become important these days. Perhaps that also means not just telling these stories, but also living them yourself, doing things that somehow attract attention. And when I look at your work, you've always done quite well at that. For example, when you suddenly showed art in a peep show in Paris in the 90s, or art in an empty building in New York, where one other important art dealer was already located.

Gerd Harry Lybke: Yes, Leo Castelli. Well, it was always just a series of ideas. Reflecting on the status quo, how things were. Of course, we could have tried to open a gallery in West Germany starting in 1991, but in '90 we went to Tokyo with a temporary gallery, and in '91 nobody wanted to see us in Paris. We did it anyway. In '92 we were in Berlin, a temporary gallery, and that's how the gallery came about, our second gallery after Leipzig, in Berlin, a permanent one.

Marietta Schwarz: Which is still there.

Gerd Harry Lybke: Which is still there. In '93 we were in New York, at a time when everything was empty, totally vacant. And we were in the Prince Building, and the Prince Building has 16 floors, and it was all vacant. Only Leo Castelli was downstairs. And I got the lease without having to pay anything because I suggested I turn the lights on in the apartments when I go upstairs and off again when I go downstairs, because then people would think there's something going on in the building and might want to rent there too. The Americans thought that it was a very good idea. I just had to share the doorman with Leo Castelli, and that's why they gave me the lease and thought it was kind of cool, and then of course they sold me on to their people as this newcomer. Because now there's a German spending his money in America. So things have got to move forward now that they're coming. And on ZDF news, they did the interview with me, and they were actually supposed to broadcast it on ZDF's cultural programming, but they aired it on ZDF news. And that's why it was in the news that a German gallery had opened in New York, and then at the Cologne art fair in '94, everyone came up wanting to see this German gallery that had opened in New York.

Marietta Schwarz: And was something like that calculated on your part? Probably.

Gerd Harry Lybke: No, no, it wasn't calculated. But you have to say that every era and every situation needs its heroes. And I've always been ready for that. And that's the thing, you have to seize the momentum, you simply have to be open to such a situation, to a stroke of luck.

Marietta Schwarz: When would you break your loyalty to an artist?

Gerd Harry Lybke: To an artist? Never, actually. Because breaking loyalty would presuppose that you have some kind of contract, and there isn't one. At least not a written one between the artists and the gallery. That's one thing; as a gallerist, you have to be in a way every day so that the artists want to work with you. And if a gallery no longer meets the artist's expectations, then it can no longer work with them because it's no longer the right gallery.

Marietta Schwarz: Judy Lybke. Finally, we have a special recording of Bach's St. John Passion, for tenor, harpsichord, organ, and percussion. I think that really brings out Bach's modernity. How did you come across it?

Gerd Harry Lybke: Well, Johann Sebastian Bach worked in Leipzig for 27 years. I was in Leipzig for 28 years. And that's how it came about.

Marietta Schwarz: (laughs) Every era needs its heroes..

Gerd Harry Lybke: (laughs) Yes, every era needs its heroes. And Bach is always performed in Leipzig, in St. Thomas Church, of course, where his grave is. During the pandemic, that wasn't possible. But there was still this performance at Easter in an empty church with only three people. All the singing was done by one per-

son, and the instruments were played by two. They had to concentrate on that and brought something out of it, into the present day. It was born out of necessity, really. But it also brought it into a new situation, and in that situation, something new was created, something connected to the old, which catapulted it into the present, so that suddenly we - or at least I - got goosebumps when I heard it, and I was completely hypnotized by the whole thing. And for me, that's a very important moment: that we can still live with everything that people conceived or created before us. We just have to apply it to our own lives.

Marietta Schwarz: The first aria, „Herr unser Herrscher“, Bach catalogueno. 245. Benedikt Kristjansson sings, Elina Albach and Philipp Lamprecht play the instruments. And that was Zwischentöne with gallery owner Judy Lübke. I'm Marietta Schwarz. You can listen to this program including all mentioned songs in full for one week. After that, the music unfortunately has to be removed. And next week, author Dirk Oschmann will be a guest on my colleague Joachim Scholl's show. Judy Lybke. That's all. Thank you for coming.

Gerd Harry Lybke: Thank you for having me.

An excerpt from Johann Sebastian Bach's „Herr unser Herrscher“ plays: *Lord, Lord, Lord...*

Announcement 2: For copyright reasons, all music tracks in this program have been shortened.

Galerie EIGEN + ART
Gerd Harry Lybke

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