

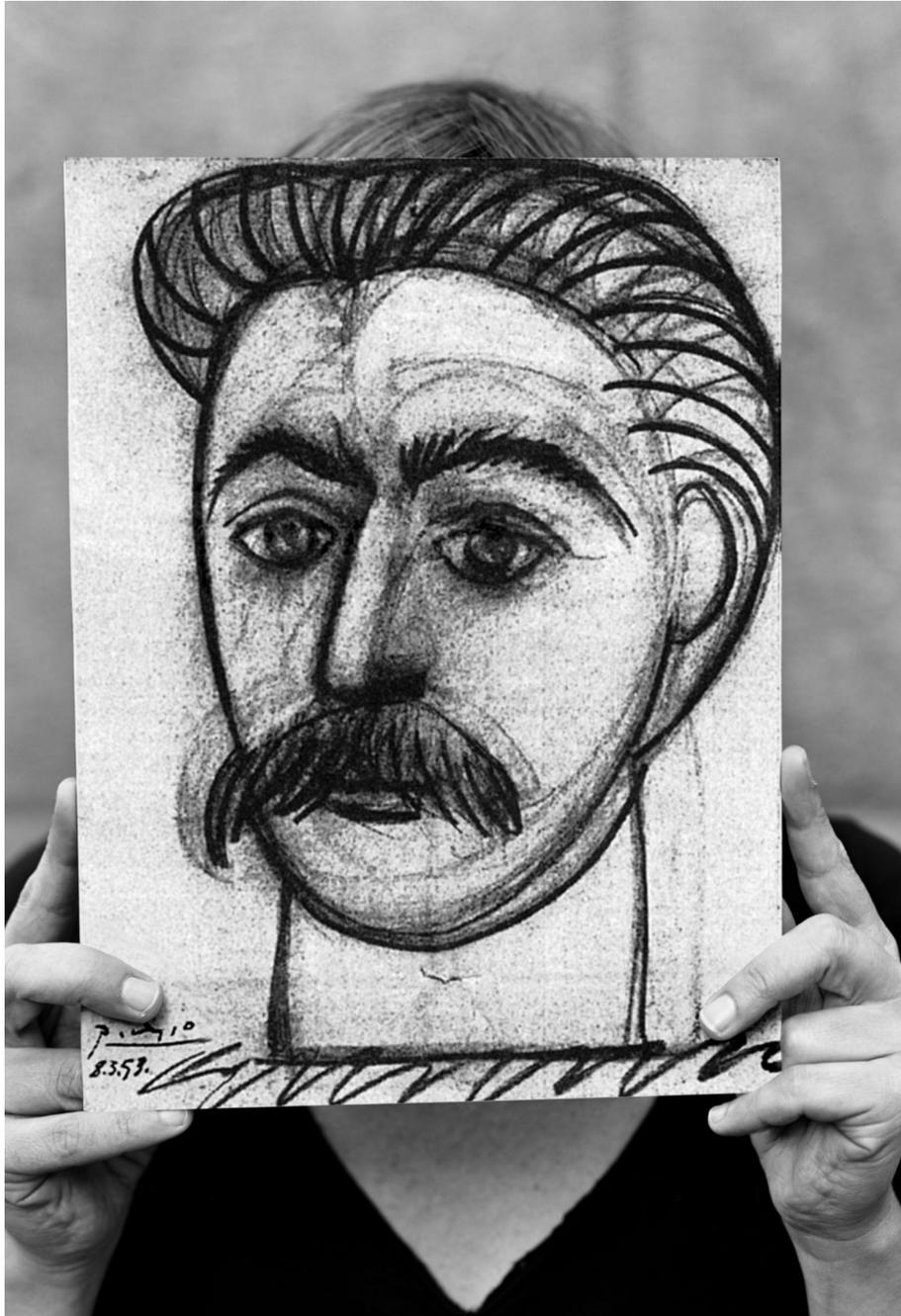
e-flux

September 25, 2017

Haus der Kulturen der Welt (HKW)

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Lene Berg, *Stalin by Picasso or Portrait of a Woman with Moustache*, 2008. Façade-banner. Courtesy the artist.

Parapolitics: Cultural Freedom and the Cold War

November 3, 2017–January 8, 2018

Opening: November 2, 7pm

Accompanying program:
December 15–16

Haus der Kulturen der Welt (HKW)

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11am–7pm

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In Amos Tutuola's 1954 novel *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts*, the young protagonist is running away from slave-catchers when he accidentally crosses the border of reality as he knows it. His flight from bondage, however, does not earn him freedom. Rather, he finds himself in an absurd, liminal world of conversing symbols and delirious phantasms, in which the entire regime of meaning-production is subject to tectonic shifts. Tutuola—whose idiosyncratic use of English language and Yoruba folklore propelled a battle of interpretations—would later become a member of the Mbari Clubs, the first of which was established in Ibadan in 1961. These cultural centers, initiated by the German-Jewish expatriate Ulli Beier, were a gathering place for a generation of African artists, writers, and musicians. Together, they spearheaded a renaissance of Yoruba culture.

One of the sponsors of the Mbari Clubs was the Paris-based Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF), an organization founded in West Berlin in June 1950 by a group of writers driven to consolidate an "anti-totalitarian" intellectual community. Its ten-year anniversary was celebrated at the then newly inaugurated Kongresshalle, today's Haus der Kulturen der Welt. With offices in more than 30 countries, the CCF subsidized countless cultural programs from Latin America to Africa and Southeast Asia, developing a network of journals, conferences, and exhibitions that advanced a "universal" language of modernism in literature, art, and music. By 1967, it was revealed that the CCF was secretly bankrolled by America's espionage arm, the Central Intelligence Agency. The CIA scandal confirmed the lingering suspicion that had trailed the CCF from the days of its origin: not quite an autonomous entity, the organisation had been enlisted in shoring up an anti-Communist consensus in the service of US hegemony during the Cultural Cold War. The disclosure destroyed the CCF's reputation, exposing the ideological contradictions and moral ambiguities of advocating freedom and transparency by means that are themselves outside of democratic accountability.

The term "parapolitics" refers to the use of soft power in the Cold War. Employing the history of the Congress for Cultural Freedom as an optical device, the project brings Picasso's famous dictum "art is a lie that tells truth" into relation with the work of an intelligence agency whose "art lies in concealing the means by which it is achieved."

In the shadowy underside of liberal consensus, freedom appears as always contingent on its foreclosures. Tracing tectonic shifts in intellectual affiliations across political conflict lines through the 20th century, the exhibition explores artistic strategies of engagement and subversion. It underlines how the play with meaning in an increasingly conceptually and semantically oriented world of art production has acted on the assertion of an endangered, precarious autonomy. Within the choreography of parapolitics, the canon of the Cold War modernism becomes a bush of ghosts.

Parapolitics brings together archival documents and artworks from the 1930s to the present by artists that prefigure and reflect the ideological and formal struggles arising from the cultural Cold War, but also works by contemporary artists critically reassessing the normalized narratives of modernism. It features magazines such as *Der Monat* (Germany), *Encounter* (UK), *Sasanggye* (South Korea), *Quest* (India), *Africa South* (South Africa), *Black Orpheus* (Nigeria), *Transition* (Uganda / Ghana), *The New African* (South Africa), *Hiwar* (Lebanon), and *Mundo Nuevo* (Latin America), that were either initiated or at times supported by the Congress for Cultural Freedom.

With works by **Art & Language, Doug Ashford, Michael Baers, Antonina Baever, Alessandro Balteo-Yazbeck (with Media Farzin and Paolo Gasparini), Robert Barry, Romare Bearden, Samuel Beckett, Lene Berg, Broomberg and Chanarin, Fernando Bryce, Daniel Buren, Luis Camnitzer, Alice Creischer, Didactic Exhibition, Liu Ding, Charles and Ray Eames, Miklos Erdély, Peter Friedl, Liam Gillick, Sheela Gowda, Philip Guston, Gruppe Gummi K, Max de Haas, Chia Wei Hsu, Iman Issa, Voluspa Jarpa, David Lamelas, Jacob Lawrence, Norman Lewis, İlhan Mimaroglu, Moiseyev Dance Company, Museum of American Art in Berlin, Solomon Nikritin, Irving Norman, Guillermo Nuñez, Branwen Okpako, Boris Ondreička, Nam June Paik, Décio Pignatari, Howardena Pindel, Sigmar Polke, Rebecca H. Quaytman, Walid Raad, Steve Reich, Ad Reinhardt, Gerhard Richter, Faith Ringgold, Norman Rockwell, Peter Roehr, Martha Rosler, Charles Shaw, Yashas Shetty, Francis Newton Souza, Frank Stella, The Otolith Group, Endre Tót, Suzanne Treister, Twins, Seven Seven, Josip Vaništa, Wolf Vostell, and Susanne Wenger.**

An accompanying conference titled "**Freedom in the Bush of Ghosts**" will be held on December 15 and 16, 2017 at Haus der Kulturen der Welt.

Curated by **Anselm Franke, Nida Ghose, Paz Guevara, and Antonia Majaca.**