

ROBERT REHFELDT

## *Mail Message from my Studio*

ChertLüdde, Berlin

2 May – 25 July 2026

Chert  
Lüdde



PRESS TEXT

ChertLüdde is pleased to present *Mail Message from my Studio*, an exhibition by Robert Rehfeldt.

More than twenty years after his death, ChertLüdde dedicates a comprehensive survey to Robert Rehfeldt, focusing on two fundamental dimensions of his artistic research: his deep-rooted connection to the city of East Berlin and his expansive international network forged through the Mail Art circuit. Bringing together works across painting and diverse graphic techniques, the exhibition highlights Rehfeldt's pivotal role within his own generation and underscores his lasting influence on those that followed.

The exhibition is accompanied by a newly commissioned academic paper by art historian Christopher Williams-Wynn. The exhibition gathers works from the Robert Rehfeldt Estate, Berlin; the Mail Art Archive of Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt and Robert Rehfeldt, Berlin; the ifa Art Collection, Stuttgart and the Collection of Lutz Wohlrab, Berlin. This exhibition is presented in relation to the exhibition series *Making Public: The Work and Legacy of the GDR's Centre for Art Exhibitions*.

Born in 1931 in what is today Stargard Szczeciński, Robert Rehfeldt (1931, Stargard – 1993, Berlin, Germany) spent most of World War Two with foster carers in Austria. He moved to the Soviet Occupation Zone in Berlin with his mother in 1946, before studying at the Hochschule für Bildende Künste in West Berlin between 1948 and 1953. After living in Berlin-Mitte, he moved to Pankow in the northeast of the divided city, a location that became his base of operations for 40 years. While maintaining his studio practice, he became one of the most internationally-connected artists in the German Democratic Republic (GDR), corresponding with hundreds of artists from the early 1970s until he passed away in 1993.

### OPENING

1 May 2026 / 6–9 pm

Portrait of Robert Rehfeldt  
riding his bike, Berlin, 1981.  
Photo by Gert Börner,  
Courtesy of the Artist &  
ChertLüdde, Berlin

Rehfeldt entered the mail art network in the early 1970s. This community of artists exchanged works—often postcards, photocopies, rubber-stamp impressions, and small objects—through the postal system. By the middle of the decade, he collaborated at a distance with Horacio Zabala, whose exchanges with Robert Rehfeldt provide further insight into the development and context of his practice within the exhibition. Born in 1943 in Argentina, Zabala initially trained as an architect. While still living in Buenos Aires, he developed a conceptualist practice that grappled with the possible role of art amidst extreme political repression. After a military coup in 1976, he left the country and remained in Europe for over 20 years. His mail art will also be on view.

Maintaining open channels of communication was vital for Rehfeldt, as was his studio practice. Over the course of the 1980s, he produced a number of paintings that show how he worked within and between painterly idioms. Through complex layers of mediation, he found ways to address aspects of wider social conditions in the GDR.

## BIOGRAPHY

**Robert Rehfeldt** (1931, Stargard – 1993, Berlin) was a central figure of experimental art in East Germany and a pioneer of the international Mail Art movement behind the Iron Curtain.

He graduated in 1953 from the Hochschule für Bildende Künste Berlin in West Berlin. While working as a freelance graphic artist and press illustrator, he continued to develop his own artistic practice. Encounters with artists such as Karl Schmidt-Rottluff and Alexander Camaro shaped his understanding of art as an open, experimental act rather than an ideological tool. This foundation proved crucial after the political climate in East Germany grew increasingly restrictive. From 1963 onward, Rehfeldt was active in East Berlin's experimental art circles and became a member of the Association of Fine Artists of the GDR. As cultural exchange with the West tightened after the closure of the borders, artistic production became more constrained. In response, Rehfeldt developed what he called "Kontakt-Kunst" (contact art), producing works in his basement studio in Berlin-Pankow and sending them abroad via post. He famously coined the phrase: "Dada is dead, contact art is living in your mailbox."

In the early 1970s, through contact with Klaus Groh, Rehfeldt became deeply involved in the international Mail Art network. His studio evolved into an informal information hub for Western art developments, providing rare insight for East German artists. He corresponded with major international figures including Nam June Paik, Wolf Vostell, Robert Filliou, Horst Tress, and Dick Higgins.

Rehfeldt also built strong connections with artists in socialist countries, especially Poland and Hungary, and collected key postwar publications that influenced his collages. After an early realist phase marked by metaphysical elements under the influence of his friend Ernst Schröder, he began experimenting across styles—working abstractly and figuratively, as a pop artist, assembler, installer, activist, and filmmaker. Using a Super 8 camera, he secretly documented performances, exhibitions, travels, and daily life, often pairing the footage with sound collages made from radio recordings, which he described as "vocal/melodic audio-tape letters from East to West."

In 1975, on the occasion of his exhibition at Galeria Teatru Studio in Warsaw, he invited artists worldwide to design postcards, creating what became the first

Mail Art exhibition initiated from the GDR. This project inspired subsequent landmark exhibitions at the Arkade Gallery (1978) and Jürgen Schweinebraden's EP Gallery (1979) in East Berlin. In 1986, he organized the first meeting of the "Discrete International Mail-Art Congress."

After German reunification, Rehfeldt presented his work and a retrospective of his 1975 Mail Art project at Berlin's Ephraim Palace in 1991. He died on 28 September 1993 following a medical operation in Berlin. His work has since appeared in numerous posthumous exhibitions, including a 2008 retrospective at the Parterre Gallery in Berlin.

**Christopher Williams-Wynn** is a historian and theorist of modern and contemporary art. Currently an Alexander von Humboldt Foundation Research Fellow at Freie Universität Berlin, he examines how media have been used to explore the epistemological claims, political consequences, and aesthetic implications of disciplinary knowledge and practice. He received his PhD in art history from Harvard University, and his writing has appeared in *Art Journal*, *Grey Room*, and *The Art Bulletin*, among other venues.

**Horacio Zabala** (1943, Buenos Aires) is an Argentinian conceptual artist and architect known for his politically charged and intellectually rigorous work. Emerging in the late 1960s, he became associated with avant-garde movements that challenged authoritarianism and traditional art institutions in Argentina and across Latin America. His practice spanned drawing, cartography, mail art, and installation, often using maps and architectural plans to question borders, power structures, and systems of control. Zabala's work has been exhibited internationally, including at the Museum of Modern Art and the Venice Biennale, cementing his influence within global conceptual art.

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## PRESS MATERIAL

### IMAGES

[Download Selected Photos](#)

\*Available for distribution

### ADDITIONAL MATERIALS

- [Kunst Im Kontakt - Robert Rehfeldt](#)
- [KUNSTPOSTBRIEFE](#)
- [Kunst im Kontakt & Leben mit der Kunst](#)

### INFORMATION

"Mail Message from my Studio"

Robert Rehfeldt

2 May – 25 July 2026

Admission free

Opening hours:

Tuesday – Saturday

12 – 6 pm

### PRESS CONTACT

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