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## Touring Feminist Realism in Actually Existing Socialism: The Exhibitions and Travels of Danish Artist Dea Trier Mørch across the Iron Curtain, 1962–1989

### Abstract

Dea Trier Mørch (1941–2001) was a popular – and recently rediscovered – artist often associated with feminism and the formative years of the Danish Women’s Rights movement. Throughout her career, she worked and exhibited frequently in the Eastern Bloc countries, but the details of these activities and the reception of her work in this context is still a little known aspect of her life and work. The article will analyse the case of Trier Mørch as a Danish artist exhibiting in the communist bloc countries. From attending art academies in the 1960s (mainly in Poland and the USSR) to taking part of exhibitions both individually and as part of artist collective Røde Mor such as *Biennale der Ostseeländer* in Rostock and *Intergrafik* in East Berlin, the activities of Trier Mørch show encounters and interactions with the other art world of state socialism at various levels, such as conflicts and paradoxes, including on the issue of feminism and women’s rights in the different systems. Following an individual through larger structures like international exchanges and art diplomacy will also shed fresh light on the developments in international cultural relations in the Nordic-Baltic region and provide context for the artist’s commitment and positioning through a formative period in contemporary history.

**Keywords:** Danish art history, art and Women’s Rights, cultural exchange, cold war culture, poster art.

## A well-known artist on the fringe of art history

Artist and author Dea Trier Mørch (1941–2001) is a well-known name and at the same time a marginalised figure in Danish art. For instance, she is not mentioned in the most recent Danish art history and although being a best-selling author, she is not featured in a leading survey on Danish literature in the twentieth century – despite being part of the previous, 1982 edition.<sup>1</sup> When the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, one of the most prominent Danish art museums, presented the exhibition *Dea Trier Mørch – Into the World* in 2019, it was a minor rediscovery for the public. The exhibition introduced a younger audience to an artist presented as a “singular figure” in Danish graphic art and highlighted her work from 1967 to 1977 as having a “body-activist and feminist character” from birth scenes to political motifs.<sup>2</sup> The audience could also see a number of works from “Eastern Europe” and was briefly introduced to the travels and studies of the artists in Eastern European countries as formative of her work. However, it was not the aim of the exhibition to investigate the implications of actual socialism for the artist and no studies have hitherto been made on the topic. The travels and exhibitions of Trier Mørch constitute important material for understanding the artist’s career as well as artistic contact, cultural diplomatic relations and the complex feminist position in the Cold War context.

This article will investigate the activities of Trier Mørch in the state-socialist countries from the early 1960s to the system change in 1989. Through these years the artist had an unusual interaction with the art scenes in Poland, USSR, the GDR and other countries, acting as a visiting student, interlocutor, communist activist, post-communist dialogue-seeker, best-selling author and many more. Apart from being an important part of the artist’s biography, this trajectory presents an encounter with the socialist art world from a Danish perspective, and what might be seen as a feminist perspective: a profiled artist, outspoken on women’s rights, acting within the field of art politics and interacting with the systems at various levels.

My analysis is chronological in structure and examines three distinct phases: Poland in the 1960s, the GDR in the 1970s, and the Soviet Union in the 1980s. It will follow artistic production (and the exhibitions where it was presented) and other activities such as study, artist meetings, public debates, and organisational work. This partly biographical approach may shed light on the artist’s activities and the surrounding structures and not least the

1 P. Hornung, ed., *Ny Dansk Kunsthistorie*, Vol. 1–10, Copenhagen, 1996, and A.M. Mai, ed., *Danske digtere i det 20. Århundrede*, Copenhagen, 2000, whereas she is featured in the previous edition, T. Brostrøm, M. Winge, eds., *Danske digtere I det 20. århundrede I–V*, Vol. 5, Copenhagen, 1980–82, pp. 96–105.

2 M. Laurberg, *Dea Trier Mørch. Det grafiske værk*, Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, 2019, p. 4 [“et udpræget kropsaktivistisk og feministisk snit”].

interplay between individual artistic intentions and the possibilities (and difficulties) in the changing context of the Cold-War superstructure. The specific case of Dea Trier Mørch may also contribute to the growing studies on cultural exchanges and the actors involved, supplementing the traditional focus on governments and the superpower rivalry of the USA and the USSR. I shall use materials from the Danish context, including from the artist's archive,<sup>3</sup> and available materials from the state-socialist countries, especially Poland and the GDR. Despite the considerable archiving efforts of the artist herself, her collaborators, and the official institutions involved, documentation on the activities varies, both on the young artist from abroad and from the fact that many of the central institutions disappeared after 1989 or are inaccessible due to the current situation.<sup>4</sup> Research in art exchange between the Nordic countries and the Eastern Bloc has also been sparse until now, but new initiatives have started to cast light on the field and to fill in the gaps, to which this article can hopefully contribute.<sup>5</sup>

## Formative experiences: Contacts with Poland, 1962–1968

Dea Trier Mørch was born in Copenhagen during the WW2 occupation of Denmark and grew up in post-war Denmark with its rise of cultural institutions and new international connections. Her mother Ibi Trier Mørch (1910–1980) was an architect and designer, who played an important role in the promotion of Danish arts and crafts abroad through exhibitions and organisational work in Landsforeningen Dansk Kunsthåndværk; remarkably in her time, she raised her two children on her own without the involvement of the father. The family also had strong ties with the Danish Højskole environment at Vallekilde in Odsherred. Trier Mørch pursued a career as an artist and was enrolled

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3 Dea Trier Mørch kept an archive of press clippings and materials from exhibitions posthumously submitted by her daughter Sara Trier to the Danish National Library. Similarly, Røde Mor collected an archive for the library. These artist-archives form a rich resource, even if it is under the control of the artist and does not necessarily cover all activities.

4 Materials from Russia have not been accessible after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

5 On cultural exchanges with Poland in particular (but not specifically on art) see M. Rossgaard, "Dansk kulturdiplomati over for Østblokken ca. 1960–1972", *Historisk Tidsskrift*, 2011, 111, No. 2, p. 495, on design exhibitions see Y. Karpova, "The Afterlife of Danish Modern: Design Exhibition in Moscow, 1969–70." *Artl@s Bulletin*, 2022, 11, no. 2, article 7, and on exhibitions of Cobra in the socialist countries see: K. Handberg: "Exhibiting Cobra across the Iron Curtain: Exhibition Diplomacy and Modernism as Ostpolitik across Borders in Northern Europe during the Cold War", *Artl@s Bulletin*, 2022, 11, no. 2, article 6.

at the Royal Danish Art Academy at the age of 16 in 1958. Shortly after, the first abstract – and autodidact – artist was inaugurated as a professor at the Academy, the former Cobra-member Egill Jacobsen (1910–1998), who became Trier Mørch's teacher. From Jacobsen's point of view, his teaching should be a platform for "independent minds" with a focus on the needs of the students and not be limited by categories such as figurative and abstract art. It should be an "academy" in the open sense rather than the "drawing class" it traditionally tended to be.<sup>6</sup> Trier Mørch would in retrospect express her dissatisfaction with the teaching at the academy, which highlighted artistic individualism and the purity of art outside of any political or social commitment. She did, however, make her debut as an exhibiting artist at *Kunstnernes Efterårsudstilling* [Artists' Autumn Exhibition]<sup>7</sup> in 1961. The work was in an abstract style and bore the almost arch-typical title "Rektangulær konstruktion, komposition med cirkel" [Rectangular construction, composition with circle]. In the following years, Trier Mørch exhibited at another censored exhibition *Charlottenborg Forårsudstilling* [Charlottenborg Spring Exhibition] from 1962 to 1967, also with abstract works with lyrical titles such as "Værelset i søvne" [The Room in Sleep] (1962), "Tankespring" [Brainstorming] (1964) and "Den genfundne tid" [Time Regained – obviously a literary reference to Marcel Proust] (1964). These works were colourfully painted with heavy impasto – probably inspired by her teacher Jacobsen and typical of the abstract trends in Danish post-war art (Fig. 1).

During her institutional education, Trier Mørch became involved with the students' union, where she acted as chairperson of the students' council of the academy. This gave her the opportunity to participate in an international students' conference in Gdańsk, in communist Poland in 1962.<sup>8</sup> The experience had a profound impact on the young art student: "Despite all the political difficulties, despite censorship and divisions between people, the posters on the walls were eloquent and strong – exactly as they should be! And the poets wrote and the painters painted, and it was a flourishing confusion of madness and talents and tiny theatres".<sup>9</sup> Trier Mørch also emphasised the meeting with Polish theatre, like the student theatre CO TO whom she befriended and the year after she travelled to Opole to visit Jerzy Grotowski's Theatre of 13 Rows.<sup>10</sup> These formative meetings happened in a climate of new openings of the "Polish thaw" in the late 1950s and early 1960s. A Danish newspaper reported on the "giant experiment" of reforms taken up by Gomułka forming a new attitude in the cultural field.<sup>11</sup> The Danish government also

6 P.M. Hornung, *Egill Jacobsen og hans tid*, book manuscript, 2023, pp. 152–154.

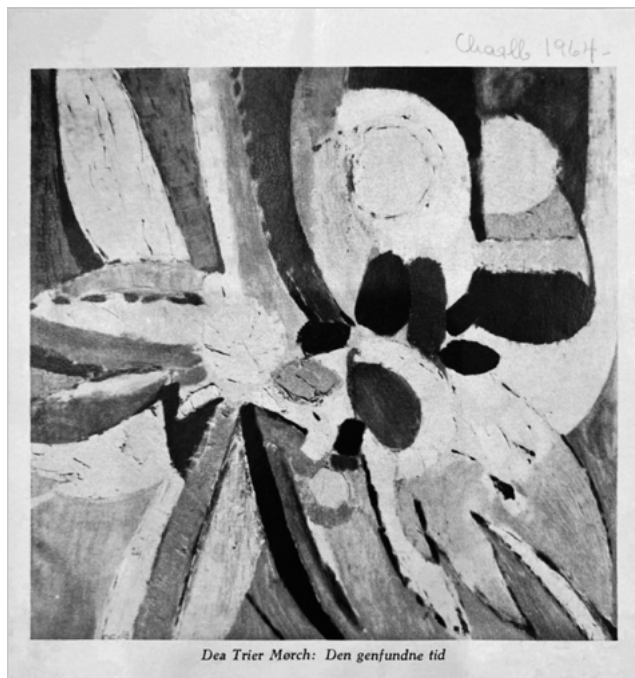
7 *Kunstnernes Efterårsudstilling* is a censored exhibition at Den Frie Udstillingsbygning, the house of the artist's associations, running since 1915.

8 Presented as a "Polish-Scandinavian conference of culture for students" in Gdańsk in 1962.

9 Portrait article on Dea Trier Mørch in *Woman's Journal Advocate*, October 1986.

10 Dea Trier Mørch, exhibition pamphlet, Gdańsk 1968.

11 E. Steffensen, "Har Gomułka en kulturpolitik?", *Information*, 25 February 1958.



**Fig. 1.** Dea Trier Mørch,  
"Den Genfundne tid", 1964.  
From the catalogue  
of Kunstneres  
Efterårsudstilling 1965.

followed the events in Poland with interest and Prime Minister H.C. Hansen expressed to his NATO colleagues in 1957 that liberal tendencies in Poland were prominent and that cultural exchanges with the country should be encouraged to stimulate them further.<sup>12</sup> Against this background, cooperative endeavours were undertaken between Denmark and Poland around 1960 and developed through the 1960s. As a result, a Cultural Exchange Agreement was signed by the Danish and Polish foreign ministries in 1961 as a formal channel of exchange in science, education and culture. The agreement made student exchanges possible, opening the door for Danish students to Polish universities. This opportunity was barely used by many, but in 1964 Trier Mørch applied to study in Warsaw at the Painting School of the Arts Academy and was accepted as a guest by the Polish Ministry of Culture. Trier Mørch went to Poland to study and continued her stay in Cracow in 1965. After more than a year in Poland, she continued with study visits to the academy in Belgrade Yugoslavia (1966), the academy in Leningrad, USSR (1966–67) and Prague, Czechoslovakia (1967), while also making shorter trips to other Eastern Bloc countries. For this unusual itinerary she made sure to refer to the former stays when applying for the next destination. It is worth noting that Trier

<sup>12</sup> Telegram dated 25 February 1957 to Danato. Mentioned in a note on the exchange with Poland by Undervisningsministeriet, 1 February 1958. 41. Dan Pol 2. Blandede Kommission. UM Gruppeordnede Sager 1945–1972.

Mørch's education in the state socialist countries did not happen through political contacts in communist organisations. Rather, she used the new structures of diplomatic exchange and contacted as much of the art world as she could, primarily younger artist environments. She commented on her impressions of the different countries: "Of course, differences and contrasts caught my attention, but nonetheless I constantly felt the same strong will to better human conditions, an urge that for me manifested itself under the common banner of socialism" (this was expressed for her exhibition in Poland in 1968 and should be viewed within that officially sanctioned context).<sup>13</sup> As a sign of their rarity, her travels caught the attention of the Danish public and a newspaper interviewed her before her departure for Leningrad under the headline "On artistic education in Soviet Russia".<sup>14</sup> In the interview, she emphasised that little was known about art in the Soviet Union and that she looked forward to discovering traditions like icon painting, "billeddigtning" ["Image poetry"] and the meeting with younger Soviet artists.

During these educational stays and travels, the artist did not just play the role of an observer. In Poland, she had already actively involved herself in official networking tasks for Danish-Polish exchange. In January 1965, she sent a report on the conditions of practising artists in Poland to the Danish Ministry of Culture, seemingly on her own initiative. There she described the circumstances of Polish artists as materially difficult and with an "unsatisfied need for contacts". There were, however, "excellent culture conferences and international festivals", where "Denmark ought to participate". And accordingly, she "urged the Ministry of Culture, the Academy of Fine Arts, the artists' organisations and the galleries to investigate the possibilities for and then organise Polish art exhibitions in Denmark" and offered to establish contacts.<sup>15</sup> As one outcome, the Polish artist Alexander Kobzdej (1920–1972) (her professor at the art academy in Warsaw) participated as a guest exhibitor at *Kunstnernes Efterårsudstilling* in Copenhagen 1965, where Trier Mørch wrote an introduction to his work in the catalogue. At the same exhibition, Trier Mørch herself showed for the first time a motif from her travels with the painting "Vinter i Ulica Asfaltowa Warszawa" [Winter in Ulica Asfaltowa, Warsaw] – a small step towards a figurative style in a half-abstract depiction of the street.

Polish-Danish exchange had an upsurge in 1965, not least through two larger Danish exhibitions in Poland. First, an exhibition of Danish arts and crafts

13 Dea Trier Mørch, exhibition pamphlet, Gdańsk 1968: ["Naturligvis fangede forskelle og modsætninger min opmærksomhed, men ikke desto mindre følte jeg konstant den samme stærke strøm af vilje til at forbedre menneskets skæbne, en viljestrøm, der for mig manifesterede sig under det almindelige navn socialisme"].

14 "På kunstopdragelse i Sovjetunionen", *Berlingske Tidende*, 30 September 1966.

15 D. Trier Mørch, *Rapport til Kulturministeriet vedrørende udøvelse af kunstneres kår i Polen*, 2 January 1965, Danish National Archives (41. Dan Pol 2. Blandede Kommission. UM Gruppeordnede Sager 1945–1972).

was organised in Warsaw.<sup>16</sup> It was a remarkable success with over 100,000 visitors and Dea Trier Mørch was involved in the project, as seen in the article “A Day at the Danish Arts and Crafts Exhibition”, which she wrote in the journal *Dansk Kunsthåndværk*.<sup>17</sup> Her mother Ibi Trier Mørch was chair of the organising Foreningen Dansk Kunsthåndværk at the time and Dea apparently worked as the daily host of the exhibition. The article describes her observation of the visitors queuing up from the morning, their interest in Danish design, and the visit of Icelandic and Norwegian fellow exchange art students in the evening, where they threw a party and switched the Carl Nielsen music on the turntable with a rock n’ roll record in the exhibition after closing time. The article concludes that the exhibition was a great success, also in terms of “social and political aspects” hard to understand for the Danes. The Poles would always read between the lines and no matter what they knew about Denmark previously, felt that Denmark is a country where one has time, money, energy and opportunity in an amount unknown to themselves.<sup>18</sup> This reading was probably well matched with the goals of the Danish organisers.

Later the same year, a larger solo exhibition of Egill Jacobsen – the previously-mentioned Trier Mørch’s academy teacher – was exhibited in Warsaw and Cracow. Again, it was an outcome of the cultural exchange agreement, where the Danish Ministry of Culture had already mentioned the opportunity of Jacobsen’s exhibition in 1962.<sup>19</sup> In Warsaw the exhibition took place at the Zachęta gallery, the most prominent exhibition venue and the headquarters of the Centralne Biuro Wystaw Artystycznych (CBWA) – the national agency for art exhibitions in socialist Poland.<sup>20</sup> It was a retrospective of Jacobsen’s oeuvre from the Cobra era to the present, selected by the artist, who was also present at the hanging in Warsaw. Such a presentation of a Western artist was rare, even during the 1960s thaw and was also the first solo exhibition for the Danish cultural exchange. On Jacobsen’s initiative, a group of students from the Danish art academy were to be given the opportunity to travel to Poland to learn about Polish art. This came to fruition when six students visited Warsaw and Cracow in November. Trier Mørch acted as host for the students in Cracow.<sup>21</sup>

These semi-official tasks show that Trier Mørch was active in collaborations with the Danish authorities. Her stay in Poland was not primarily

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16 The Danish Design exhibition, Warsaw, 29 March to 27 April 1965. Organised by Foreningen Dansk Kunsthåndværk as part of the Danish-Polish Cultural Exchange Agreement.

17 “En dag på Dansk Kunsthåndværks udstilling i Warszawa”, *Dansk Kunsthåndværk*, 1965, No. 1, pp. 11–13.

18 Ibid, p. 13: [“Ligeegyldigt hvad de vidste om Danmark i forvejen, så mærker de nu, at det er et land, hvor man har tid, råd, energi og mulighed i en for dem ukendt udstrækning”].

19 “Program for Kulturelt og videnskabeligt samarbejde mellem Kongeriget Danmark og Den polske Folkerepublik 1.4. 1962–31.3. 1964”, Danish National Archives, 41. Dan Pol 2. Blandede Kommission. UM Gruppeordnede Sager 1945–1972.

20 The activities of the CBWA at Zachęta are the topic of *Ikonotheka* 26, 2016.

21 Christine Scherfig, one of the students, has been interviewed for my research.

politically motivated, but is was rather driven by her interest in Polish art and life in a time of transition. In notes from an interview from 1971, Trier Mørch looks back on her time in Poland, which from her first visit as a 20-year old affected her like “a shock” and “a drug” as “it was harrowing, dynamic, strange and at the same time familiar, a fantastic situation. I felt attracted by the hardness and the rawness [...] to learn and get to know the life-struggle”.<sup>22</sup> She had, however, become aware that it was a specific epoch, which had come to an end by the late 1960s. At the time of her first visits at the beginning of the 1960s, “the cultural situation in Eastern Europe was more free than it had been for a long time [...] it was primarily in Poland that this freedom manifested itself”.<sup>23</sup> However, this freedom had stopped due to the political situation and by the end of the 1960s a “new Stalinism had sadly occurred. But a new thaw can happen”.<sup>24</sup> So there was sympathy with the Polish art scene, but a clear distance towards the political rulers and the dictated course.

Her attachment to the Polish art scene in the 1960s manifested itself in two significant outcomes. First, she was given a solo exhibition in Gdańsk in 1968 organised by the association Gdańskie Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Sztuki [Gdańsk Society for the Friends of Art]. The exhibition consisted of 25 works, many from her recent travels and probably graphic works, like the portrait of a young man in a fur hat in front of the Winter Palace from her recent time in Leningrad depicted in a small pamphlet produced for the exhibition. A short bio, a portrait and an introduction introduced the artist and highlighted her first meeting with Poland and the continuous contact with and interest in this country. Apart from the pamphlet, few details are available on the exhibition and its reception, which was her first solo presentation and happened in the town of her formative meeting with Poland (Fig. 2).

Then, in 1970, Trier Mørch published her book *Polen* [Poland] as a travelogue with several illustrations. It followed up on *Sorgmunter Socialisme* pub-

22 Manuscript for the interview with Gunnar Jespersen, partly published as “Jeg tror ikke på den fri kunst”, *Berlingske Tidende*, 3.01.1971. Papers of Dea Trier Mørch, Royal Danish Library [“Det var et chok. Polen påvirkede mig som et euforiserende stof. Det var stærkt oprivende, dynamisk, fremmed og alligevel kendt, en fantastisk situation. Jeg følte mig tiltrukket af hårdheden og råheden i de lande. I Østeuropa er det vigtigt at lære livskampen at kende”].

23 Ibid.

“[Jeg mærkede, at det var en periode, der var forbi. Derfor havde en et mere nostalgisk præg. Det var en periode, der var forbi i Polen. Jeg mærkede, at det ikke stod så godt til som det gjorde i årene 1956–66. Dengang var tingene i opbrud og blomstring. Der er flere forklaringer. I begyndelsen af 1960’erne var den kulturelle situation i Østeuropa mere fri end den havde været i lange tider. [...] Det var i første række i Polen, at denne frihed manifesterede sig”].

24 Ibid. [“I slutningen af 1960’erne var der desværre indtrådt en ny-stalinisme. Men der kan godt senere ske en optøning”].





Fig. 2. Exhibition pamphlet, Gdańsk 1968. Royal Danish Library.

lished in 1968 in a similar form, which had depicted her time in Leningrad and encounters with everyday Soviet life and the art academy.<sup>25</sup> Both books emphasise her own perspective as a fascinated, but also foreign observer, and empathetic depictions of the people's everyday life and struggles – especially the women, like in the poetry-image “Historien om en russisk pige. Et ikon fra det 20. Århundrede” [The story of a Russian girl: An icon from the 20<sup>th</sup> century] with a series of scenes from the life of a war widow (Fig. 3).

*Sorgmunter Socialisme* was well received in Denmark and even made into a TV-film,<sup>26</sup> and the same was the case with *Polen*. Artistic reports from the other side of the Iron Curtain were rare in Denmark and prominent intellectuals like author Klaus Rifbjerg applauded her as a “reporter on a sentimental journey”.<sup>27</sup> Another reviewer characterised the book as follows: “This is a Poland seen by an artist with all senses wide open for the things, the atmosphere, the people. One finds no analyses, but images with great depth. The book

25 D. Trier Mørch: *Sorgmunter Socialisme: Sovjettiske raderinger*, Copenhagen, 1968, and *Polen*, Copenhagen, 1970.

26 A 30-minute film was produced for Danish national broadcast DR combining graphic images and film footage, including her Røde Mor colleagues acting as Russians. *Aktuelt*, 4 November 1969.

27 K. Rifbjerg, “Fra Polen”, *Politiken*, 31 November 1970.



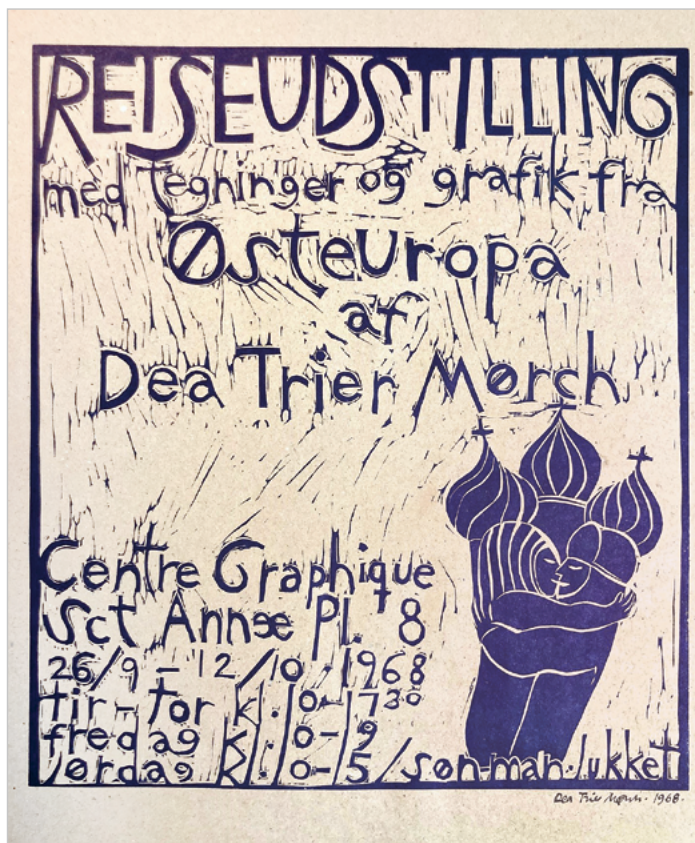
Fig. 3. Dea Trier Mørch, "Historien om en russisk pige. Et ikon fra det 10. århundrede". From *Sorgmunter Socialisme*, 1967.

is a poem".<sup>28</sup> In the larger perspective, the book appears as a testimony to Trier Mørch's decade with contacts in Poland, which corresponded with the "Polish thaw" and its upsurge in artistic activities, including the cultural exchanges between Denmark and Poland, where we can see that the artist played an active role. The works from her stays in the socialist countries were exhibited in a small gallery exhibition in Copenhagen in 1968 marking a distinct phase in the artist's career<sup>29</sup> (Fig. 8).

28 K. Holst, "Polske Billeder", *Information*, 2 December 1970 ["Det er et Polen set af en kunstner med alle sanser susende åbne for tingene, stemningerne, folkene. Man finder ingen analyser, men billeder med dybdevirkning. Bogen er et digt"].

29 *Rejseudstilling med tegninger og grafik fra Østeuropa af Dea Trier Mørch*, Centre Graphique, Sct. Annæ Plads 8, 26 September to 12 October 1968.

**Fig. 8.** Poster from the exhibition of works from Eastern Europe by Trier Mørch in 1968. Archives of Dea Trier Mørch by courtesy of the family.



## Collective works: Trier Mørch and Røde Mor in the GDR, 1967–1980

Shortly after her return to Denmark, Trier Mørch co-founded the political art collective Røde Mor (Red Mother) in 1969. The group of 13 young artists – Danes except for one Japanese artist Yukari Ochiai (1937–) whom Trier Mørch had met at the art academy in Leningrad – were committed to the cause of creating “political, proletarian art” working with collective art forms in posters, graphical works, painting, music, song-writing, poetry, photo, film and sound.<sup>30</sup> Røde Mor would become an essential part of the Danish cultural scene in the 1970s, both through their widely distributed graphic works and

<sup>30</sup> The aims of Røde Mor were declared in a manifesto and the journal *Røde Mor*, 1970, 1.

the rock-theatre group Røde Mor Rock Cirkus.<sup>31</sup> The visual works included drawings, comics, posters and graphical sheets and series, often published as posters and books, fitting with the lino-cuts that were now Trier Mørch's main medium. A preferred form was the collective image, where several members contributed with various elements, often combining the case-specific message with more associative, symbolic images.

Their frequent manifestos explained the motivation for forming the group as a "despair over the general situation of the arts in Denmark", where in the capitalist society the artist is isolated and forced to sell their works to the upper class and their institutions alienated from the working class, whereas art should be "individualistic, rich in experiment and above all purified from political content".<sup>32</sup> However the revolts and international protest movements of 1968 forced artists to leave their ivory towers and understand the cultural background of the people. Røde Mor would thus "turn their backs on the formalistic, meaningless, multinational art meant for the upper classes" and towards inspiration in the social-realism of the twenties and thirties, while also "[t]he arts of the socialist countries had been a source of inspiration to us for a long time, an inspiration which grew from day to day".<sup>33</sup> Which arts of the socialist countries this refers to is not specified – was it the official socialist realism, applied art, or specific genres like Polish poster art?

Interestingly, an article in the Polish design journal *Projekt* presented the work of Røde Mor in 1972 (Fig. 4). Their practice was here seen as an exponent of the new phenomenon of the "poor poster", where in "a conscious resignation from the refined technologies of print, the come-back to the elementary forms of visual communication defines the attitude of artists who map out other, non-commercial, and even beyond-aesthetic aims".<sup>34</sup> The tendency had become visible at the 4<sup>th</sup> International Poster Biennale in Warsaw in Poland the same year (Trier Mørch or Røde Mor did not participate here) as artists' attempt to take control over the production and distribution in self-chosen "graphic poverty".<sup>35</sup>

However, the genre was especially prominent in Western countries, where "poor" graphic art was an expression of protest against the values of a bourgeois society and the need for interference of art in social life. The practice in Denmark was particularly highlighted in the following description:

"In Denmark, known for its placidity, youth collectives have been set up that are preoccupied with the creation and popularisation of political art,

31 Røde Mor organised itself in two sections, the graphical art group and the orchestra in the early 1970s.

32 Manifesto distributed in the mid-1970s and translated into English, German and Russian. Papers of Dea Trier Mørch, Royal Danish Library.

33 Ibid.

34 N.N., "Røde Mor", *Projekt*, 1972, 90, pp. 62–63.

35 *Projekt*, 1972, 88, p. 17.



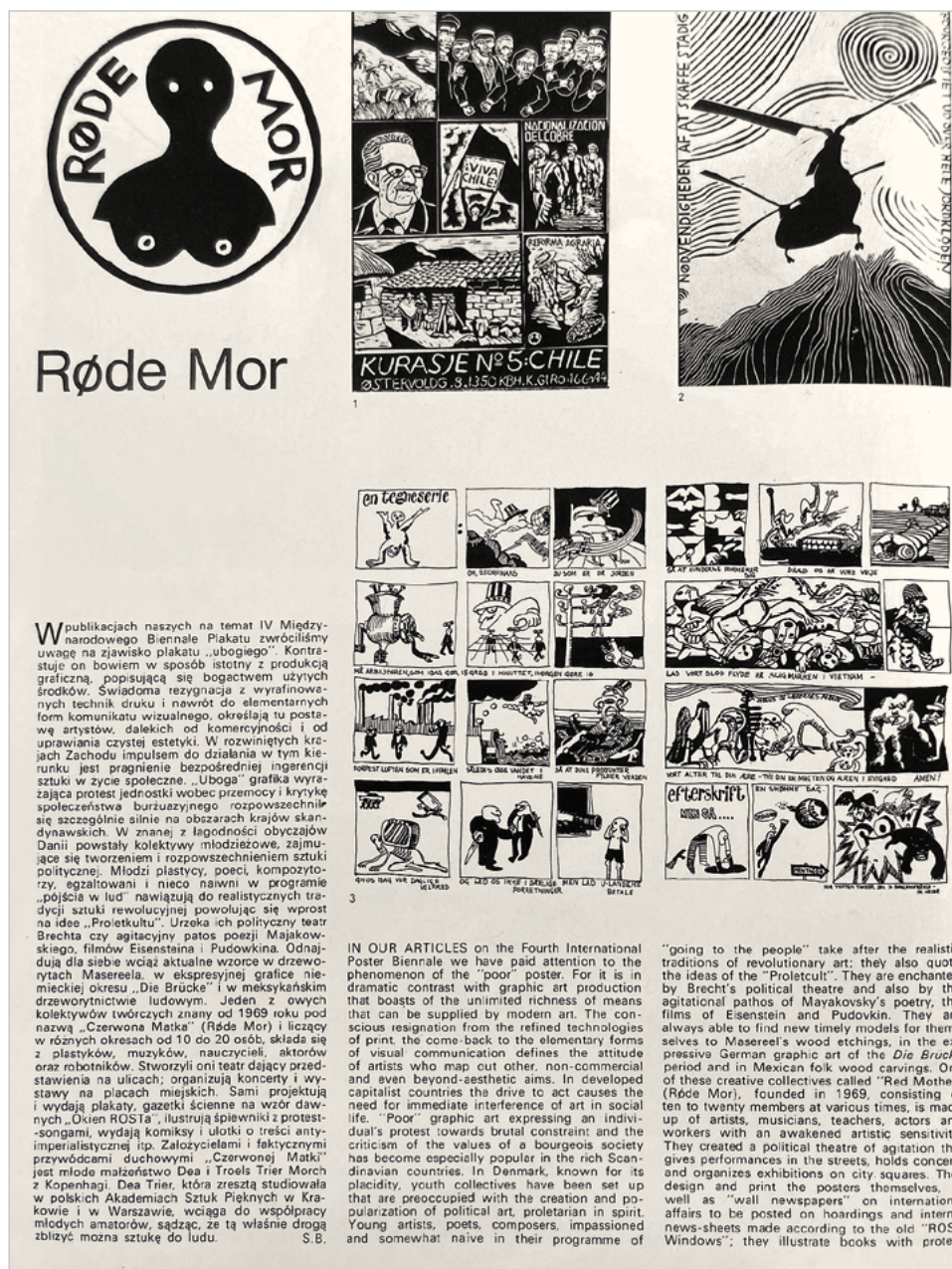


Fig. 4. Røde Mor in *Projekt*, 1972

W publikacjach naszych na temat IV Międzynarodowego Biennale Plakatu zwróciliśmy uwagę na zjawisko plakatu „ubogiego”. Konstruuje on bowiem w sposób istotny z produkcją graficzną, popisującą się bogactwem użytych środków. Świadoma rezygnacja z wyrafinowanych technik druku i nawet do elementarnych form komunikatu wizualnego, określają tu postawę artystów, dalekich od komercyjności i od uprawiania czystej estetyki. W rozwiniętych krajach Zachodu impulsem do działania w tym kierunku jest pragnienie bezpośredniej ingerencji sztuki w życie społeczne. „Uboga” grafika wyrządzająca protest jednostki wobec przemocy i krytykę społeczeństwa burżuazyjnego rozpowszechnia się szczególnie silnie na obszarach krajów skandynawskich. W znanej z łagodności obyczajów Danii powstały kolektywy młodzieżowe, zajmujące się tworzeniem i rozpowszechnianiem sztuki politycznej. Młodzi plastycy, poeci, kompozytorzy, egzaltowani i nieco naiwni w programie „pójścia w lud” nawiązują do realistycznych tradycji sztuki rewolucyjnej powołując się wprost na idee „Proletkultu”. Urzeka ich polityczny teatr Brechta czy agitacyjny patos poezji Majakowskiego, filmów Eisensteina i Pudowkina. Odnajdują dla siebie wciąż aktualne wzorce w drzeworytach Masereela, w ekspresyjnej grafice niemieckiego okresu „Die Brücke” i w meksykańskim drzeworytnictwie ludowym. Jeden z owych kolektywów twórczych znany od 1969 roku pod nazwą „Czerwona Matka” (Røde Mor) i liczący w różnych okresach od 10 do 20 osób, składa się z plastyków, muzyków, nauczycieli, aktorów oraz robotników. Stworzyli oni teatr dający przedstawienia na ulicach; organizują koncerty i wystawy na placach miejskich. Sami projektują i wydają plakaty, gazetki ścienne na wzór dawnych „Øken ROST”, ilustrują śpiewniki z protest-sångami, wydają komiks i ulotki o treści anty-imperialistycznej itp. Założycielami i faktycznymi przywódcami duchowymi „Czerwonej Matki” jest młode małżeństwo Dea i Troels Trier Mørch z Kopenhagi. Dea Trier, która zresztą studiowała w polskiej Akademii Sztuk Pięknych w Krakowie i w Warszawie, wciąga do współpracy młodych amatorów, sądząc, że tą właśnie drogą zbliżyć można sztukę do ludu.

S.B.

IN OUR ARTICLES on the Fourth International Poster Biennale we have paid attention to the phenomenon of the “poor” poster. For it is in dramatic contrast with graphic art production that boasts of the unlimited richness of means that can be supplied by modern art. The conscious resignation from the refined technologies of print the come-back to the elementary forms of visual communication defines the attitude of artists who map out other, non-commercial and even beyond-aesthetic aims. In developed capitalist countries the drive to act causes the need for immediate interference of art in social life. “Poor” graphic art expressing an individual’s protest towards brutal constraint and the criticism of the values of a bourgeois society has become especially popular in the rich Scandinavian countries. In Denmark, known for its placidity, youth collectives have been set up that are preoccupied with the creation and popularization of political art, proletarian in spirit. Young artists, poets, composers, impassioned and somewhat naive in their programme of

“going to the people” take after the realistic traditions of revolutionary art; they also quote the ideas of the “Proletkult”; they are enchanted by Brecht’s political theatre and also by the agitational pathos of Mayakovsky’s poetry, the films of Eisenstein and Pudovkin. They are always able to find new timely models for themselves to Masereel’s wood etchings, in the expressive German graphic art of the *Die Brücke* period and in Mexican folk wood carvings. One of these creative collectives called “Red Mother (Røde Mor), founded in 1969, consisting of ten to twenty members at various times, is made up of artists, musicians, teachers, actors and workers with an awakened artistic sensitivity. They created a political theatre of agitation that gives performances in the streets, holds concert and organizes exhibitions on city squares. The design and print the posters themselves, as well as “wall newspapers” on international affairs to be posted on hoardings and internal news-sheets made according to the old “ROS Windows”; they illustrate books with protest

proletarian in spirit. Young artists, poets, composers, impassioned and somewhat naïve in their programme of ‘going to the people’ take after the realistic traditions of revolutionary art; they also quote the ideas of the ‘Proletcult’.”<sup>36</sup> One of these creative collectives was Røde Mor. After an introduction to their work and principles, special attention was given to Trier Mørch and her partner: “The young couple Dea and Troels Trier Mørch are the founders and real spiritual leaders of the ‘Red Mother’. Dea Trier, who *nota bene* has studied in Poland at the Academy of Fine Arts in Cracow and Warsaw, is full of enthusiasm and elemental temperament and she encourages young amateurs to cooperate. She thinks that this is the way to bring art closer to the people.”<sup>37</sup> This indicates a special interest in Trier Mørch in the Polish context, even though the exact reason for the article is unknown. The “poor poster” was obviously a product of the Western counterculture after 1968, where it had been inspired by the Polish Poster Movement in the late 1950s and early 1960s, which the Danish artists were much aware of as an experimental form of everyday design.

The activities of Røde Mor mainly took place in a Danish context focused on local publics and topics, from workers’ struggles and women’s rights to solidarity with decolonial struggles. There were fewer travels and stays abroad, even though a collective study trip to China in 1973–74 was planned, but in the end not undertaken.<sup>38</sup> Instead, Røde Mor and Trier Mørch would be exhibited in the GDR. As part of their stated political practice, Trier Mørch joined DKP, the Danish Communist Party, in 1972. In the light of the artist’s antipathy for the party authorities in Poland and the Soviet Union and their restrictive acts in 1968, this appears to be a surprising decision – both regarding the hard “normalisation” course of the regimes in the socialist states after the end of the Prague Spring and the generally doctrinaire and Moscow-loyal stand of the Danish DKP. The reasons were probably mostly related to an aim to belong to a workers’ party and make a statement in the Danish context.

In 1967 Trier Mørch had been invited to exhibit among the Danish artists at the *II. Biennale der Ostseeländer* in Rostock, GDR. This exhibition was the first to carry the “Biennale” moniker in Northern Europe as an ambitious project of the GDR to establish an international art exhibition with participation from non-socialists abroad from the Nordic countries and socialist states around the Baltic Sea. The “Baltic Biennial” was part of the Ostseewochen festival, a strategic attempt at creating interaction with the Nordic countries to stimulate international diplomatic recognition of the GDR state.<sup>39</sup> From its

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid.

38 At first, Dea Trier Mørch and Troels Trier showed interest in visiting China in 1973 and contacted Selskabet for kulturel forbindelse med Kina. It was delayed, as it was decided to plan the tour for the whole Røde Mor group in 1974. However, this did not happen.

39 For more on the background of *Biennale der Ostseeländer* and *Ostseewochen* see: E. Neumann, *Die Biennale der Ostseeländer – außen- und kulturpolitische Dimensionen der größten*

first inauguration in 1965, it was promoted as “Sammelpunkt für realistische Kräfte” [A centre for realist forces in art], but with freedom of choice for the participating artists for each country. As Denmark did not recognize the GDR state, no official contacts could be held with the country, so instead of the usual channels for international exhibitions (active with Poland, for instance), individual artists and their network were in charge of the Danish participation. This included realist painter Victor Brockdorff (1911–1992) and political cartoonist Herluf Bidstrup (1912–1988), who were members of the exhibition’s international committee and well connected with the art world in the GDR. They invited a selection of Danish artists for each Biennale – a difficult task as interaction with the GDR at the time was still controversial. For the second Biennale in 1967 some younger artists were invited intentionally, including Trier Mørch. She accepted the invitation and showed four smaller paintings, including “Winter in Warsaw” (1965) and “Balkan” (1966) from her recent travels, which had not included the GDR. The same year, she also exhibited at the Corner exhibition in Copenhagen, where her graphical works from her stay in Leningrad were shown and caught attention, just before the publication of the book the following year.

After a few years, Trier Mørch again participated in the *Biennale der Ostseestaaten*<sup>40</sup> in 1973, this time both as a solo artist and as part of the Røde Mor collective. In her own name, she presented a series of illustrations for Karl Marx’s *The Communist Manifesto*. Issued as a large-format book in 1969 (commented upon by a reviewer as a luxury product for the few),<sup>41</sup> the illustrations depicted contemporary issues like the anti-imperialist struggle in the Vietnam War and Black Panther protests against Marx’s text from 1848. Shown in the GDR, these images were well-received in the official art journal *Bildende Kunst* as “the surprise of this Biennial”. The “admirable linocut series [...] provides exciting evidence of the undiminished, burning relevance of the 125-year-old script. Today’s events are reflected line by line. The imagery combines the documentary and universal with the subjective, with graphic freshness and the appeal of the moment”.<sup>42</sup> There was also praise for Røde Mor’s graphics –

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*Internationalen Kunstaussstellung der DDR*, PhD Dissertation, Technisches Universität Berlin, 2022.

40 The slight title change was made in 1969 to highlight the focus on nation states to which the GDR wanted to belong.

41 Ø. Hjort: “Hvad Marx og Engels ikke drømte om”, *Information*, 27 November 1969.

42 H. Raum: “Wie realistisch ist die Biennale?”, *Bildende Kunst*, 1973, 10, pp. 470–480:

[“Die Überraschung dieser Biennale ist die Grafik, vor allem Dea Trier Mørchs grossartige Linolschnittserie zum Kommunistischen Manifest und die Plakate der Gruppe Røde Mor (Rote Mutter). Die kämpferische Grafik der Generation von Jörn Matthiasen, Herluf Bidstrup, und Palle Nielsen wird von einem kräftigen Nachwuchs weitergeführt. Trier Mørchs Zyklus belegt in spannungsvoller Weise die ungeschmälerte, brennende Aktualität der 125 Jahre alte Schrift. Zeile für Zeile werden die heutige Geschehen widerspiegelt. Die Bildsprache verbindet das dokumentarische und Allgemeingültige

this kind of collective was an unknown form in the GDR and Trier Mørch had to explain clearly to Brockdorff for the catalogue: "We will absolutely prefer to be anonymous and only appear as a *collective*, i.e. without artist names".<sup>43</sup>

It was planned that Trier Mørch and members of Røde Mor should attend the opening in Rostock, but this was delayed for a later visit to another event, where they were also invited to exhibit: The *Intergrafik* exhibition of graphic and poster art in East Berlin. *Intergrafik* was another international exhibition in the otherwise closed GDR art world founded in 1965 by the national artist's association Verband Bildende Künstler as an international forum of "engagierte Kunst" [committed art].<sup>44</sup> A wide range of countries were invited to participate, from the socialist countries as well as from the non-socialist abroad in the West and from Asia, Africa and Latin America, including a larger group of Vietnamese artists from the socialist Democratic Republic of Vietnam. The multinationalism of the exhibition would obviously serve the goal of presenting an image of the GDR as purveyor of international solidarity instead of restrictive isolation. Denmark participated from the second *Intergrafik* exhibition in 1967 onwards, where invitations for selected graphic artists were sent directly from the VBK. In 1973 the exhibition included around 50 countries "for peace, friendship and anti-imperialist solidarity"<sup>45</sup> also to correspond with the 10th World Festival for Youth and Students in East Berlin – a mega-event attracting thousands of visitors from abroad and a kind of "Red Woodstock" for GDR youths, symbolising a moment of extended cultural freedom. The exhibition was installed in the Altes Museum, where available photo documentation shows the work of Trier Mørch clearly visible with the soldier portrait from the illustration of the Communist Manifesto, here as a single poster in black-and-white (Fig. 5). Thus, a prominent spot was given to the Danish artist, who was present with topical works in the series "Vietnam" and "Cuba" (1969). Røde Mor was also exhibited with three works credited as "Solidarity with Chile" (1971), "Solidarity with Freedom Fighters in Africa" (1971) and "Working Struggles".<sup>46</sup> Corresponding with the World Youth Festival and the international current for activist art, *Intergrafik* 73 was planned to sharpen its "committed" profile and connect further with

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mit dem Subjektiven, mit grafischer Frische und dem Reiz des Momentanen. Auch die Gemeinschaftsarbeiten der acht sozialistischen Grafiker von Rode Mor haben diese Spannung. Hinzu kommt die Fähigkeit, ein Bündel von politischen Grundtema des Plakates ausgehender Bildgedanken in einer verdichteten grafischen Gesamtform zu fassen, die die schnelle Erfassung als Ganzes ebenso ermöglicht, wie das Ablesen als Bilderbogen".

43 Letter from Dea Trier Mørch to Victor Brockdorff dated 14 March 1973, Archives of Victor Brockdorff, courtesy of Hans-Henrik Brockdorff ["Vi vil absolut helst være anonyme og kun optræde som *kollektiv*, dvs. helst uden at nævne kunstnernavne"].

44 *Intergrafik*, exhibition catalogue, Verband Bildende Künstler, Berlin, 1965.

45 *Intergrafik* 73, exhibition catalogue, Verband Bildende Künstler, Berlin, 1973 ["Für Frieden, Freundschaft und Antiimperialistischen Solidarität"].

46 The other participating Danish artists were Palle From and Jørgen C. Rasmussen.



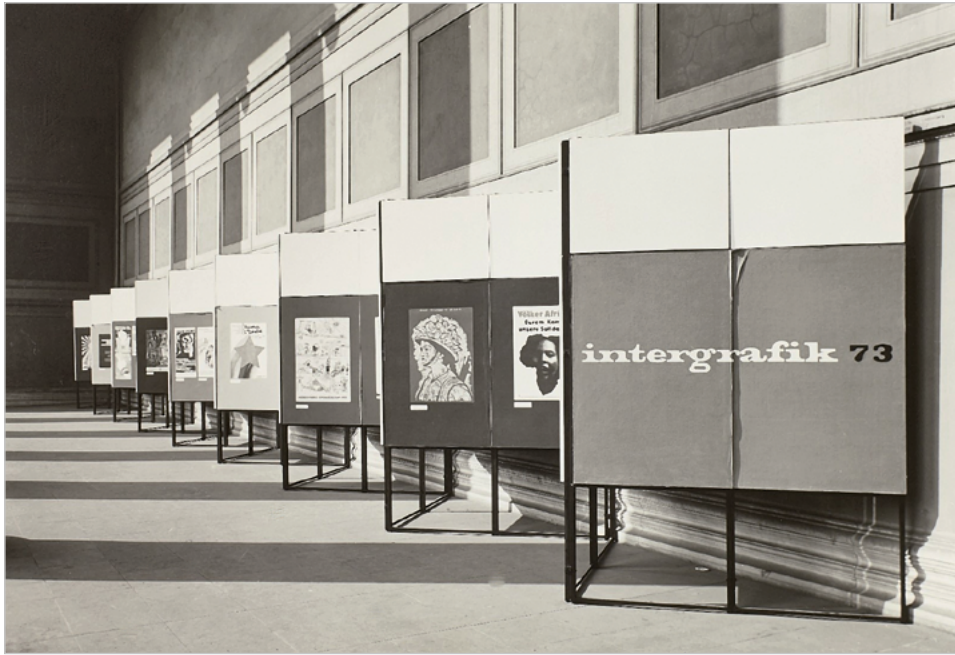


Fig. 5. “Intergrafik 73”, *Europeana*.

“progressive forces all around the world”.<sup>47</sup> This should highlight new combatting political art forms besides the traditional graphical arts formats previously predominant at *Intergrafik*, including political posters, activist graphic, photo montages, leaflets, caricatures, wall newspapers – experimental forms of political graphic arts that, however, should be delimited from “anarchist-bourgeois solutions”.<sup>48</sup> The invitation of “progressive groups” was central in this aim and “Rote Mutter” was specifically mentioned in the planning and was invited with the help from the organisers of the Ostseebiennale, indicating Rostock as an entrance point to the GDR for Danish artists.<sup>49</sup> The *Intergrafik* exhibi-

47 Report from the 1<sup>st</sup> planning meeting of *Intergrafik 73* (1<sup>st</sup> draft), Verband Bildende Künstler, Berlin, 1972. Archive of the Berlin Academy of Arts (1252 – 1972/73). [“IG73 soll ihr kämpferischer, bekenntnishafter Charakter weiter profiliert und die einzigartige politische Möglichkeit genutzt werden, sie noch enger mit dem Kampf der progressiven Kräfte in der ganzen Weltz u verbinden, als Ausdruck der Sammlungsbewegung und Friedensmanifestation der mit den Kämpfen ihrer Völker eng verbunden ist”].

48 Ibid. [“Neben den traditionellen Formen der Grafik soll der besonders kämpferische politische Charakter der INTERGRAFIK durch die Ausnahme von politisichen plakaten, den verschiedenenden Formen der Aktionsgrafik, wie Flugblätter, Fotomontagen, Karikaturen, Wandzeitungsgrafik u.a. zum ausdruck gebracht werden”].

49 Ibid. [“Was die Teilnahme von fortschrittlichen Gruppen aus dem Ostseeraum betrifft, wie z.B. Gruppe ‘Rote Mutter’, Dänemark, u.a. so sollten die Organisatoren der

tion also included a program of artist meetings billed as the “Klub Intergrafik” and a solidarity bazar, where works were sold to raise money for a children’s hospital in Vietnam. It is uncertain to what extent Trier Mørch and Røde Mor participated in these events for *Intergrafik* 73, but interest had been raised for their work in the GDR, which would lead to further appearances. It was also planned that the Røde Mor Rock Cirkus should have performed at the World Youth Festival, which did not happen for unknown reasons.<sup>50</sup>

The *Biennale der Ostseestaaten* in 1975 again featured the work of Trier Mørch, this time with a graphic series illustrating Pablo Neruda’s *Canto General* in 10 images. Chilean poet and politician Neruda had an officially promoted iconic position in the GDR and protests against the military coup in 1973 was a major topic in GDR public life and culture. This is visible in the book *Chile: Gesang und Bericht* (1975), collecting contributions from artists and authors, including Trier Mørch and Røde Mor, each with one image.<sup>51</sup> In the Rostock exhibition, the ambition of presenting as a collective was abandoned this time, maybe conflicting with the practice in Rostock centred on individual artworks as a meeting ground. Instead, Røde Mor participant Thomas Kruse (1943–) appeared as an individual artist alongside Trier Mørch. The two graphic artists also participated at the following *Intergrafik* in 1976.<sup>52</sup> This time Trier Mørch showed seven linocuts, including “Freedom”, the image of the construction of the Statue of Liberty in New York as a symbol of power rather than liberation.

*Intergrafik* 76 included 60 countries and again highlighted “anti-imperialist solidarity” and the importance of “progressive artists” from around the world. Press coverage again noticed Trier Mørch, both in words and illustrations, stimulated by the presence of the artist for the activities of the exhibition. Trier Mørch travelled to the artists’ meeting and solidarity bazar together with Thomas Kruse and Yukari Ochiai. The artists’ meeting in Club Intergrafik included a debate entitled “Problems of political graphic art in the West-European Countries” with presentations by the West-German group Tendenzen and by Trier Mørch.<sup>53</sup> The manuscript of Mørch’s presentation is preserved and, like their founding manifesto, starts with an analysis of the conditions

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Ostseebiennale beauftragt werden, in Vorbereitung der Biennale 1973 gleichzeitig die INTERGRAFIK mit vorzubereiten”].

50 The Library and Archives of the Labour Movement, Copenhagen (Box 2801 – The Danish Festival Committee 1972–73, by secretary John Poulsen).

51 T. Billhardt, V. Braun, W. Bräunig, P. Dessau et al., eds., *Chile: Gesang und Bericht*, Halle, 1975. In here: D. Trier Mørch, “Indianer, Chile”, p. 16 and Røde Mor, p. 162 (Danish artist Jørgen C. Rasmussen also contributed with the work with “Zuschauer”, p. 240).

52 *Intergrafik* appeared as a somewhat irregular triennale happening in 1965, 1967, 1970, 1973, 1976, 1980, 1983 and 1987 (an *Intergrafik* 90 was in planning for 1990).

53 “Die Rolle den politischen Grafik in westeuropäischen Ländern”, *Club Intergrafik*, Verbandsräume, Liebknechtstrasse 11, 7 November 1976. Program from the archives of Thomas Kruse.



Fig. 6. “Zum Beispiel ‘Rote Mutter’”, *Neue Berliner Illustrierte Magazin*, 1976.

of the artist in the capitalist society and then describes how Røde Mor operates in a different way, highlighting collective works and collective critical discussion in the production and evaluation.<sup>54</sup> This practice also included artists’ participation in *Intergrafik*, as discussed on the basis of meeting with Røde Mor back in Denmark, where both the exhibition and the artists’ meeting was seen as “successful, leading to many new contacts”, even if the primary aim was to make “socialist images” or “tell stories”.<sup>55</sup>

In the GDR press, Trier Mørch stood out as a remarkable artist. An article in the magazine *Neue Berliner Illustrierte* on *Intergrafik* and the solidarity bazar was called “For example ‘Red Mother’” and introduced Dea as a mother to three children with her husband, who was also an artist in the collective. “We formed this group, because we wanted to create art that is directly applicable to class struggle”, the artist said<sup>56</sup> (Fig. 6).

The official art journal *Bildende Kunst* highlighted Trier Mørch in the coverage of *Intergrafik* 76, introducing her as an “artist and class struggle fighter”, whose works make one realise the “core of Western European class struggle”.<sup>57</sup>

54 “Zur der Politischen Grafik in den westeuropäischen Ländern”, manuscript, 1976, the archives of Thomas Kruse.

55 Report from Røde Mor Basismøde, 24 November 1976. Papers of Røde Mor, Royal Danish Library.

56 “Zum Beispiel ‘Rote Mutter’”, *Neue Berliner Illustrierte*, 1976, 48: “Wir gründeten dieser Gruppe, weil wir Kunst schaffen wollen, die im Klassenkampf unmittelbar anwendbar ist”.

57 N. Stratmann, “Westeuropäischer Künstler af der Intergrafik 76”, *Bildende Kunst*, 1977, 1, pp. 11–14 [“Wenn man die Arbeit der 35jährigen Kopenhagener Künstlerin und Klassenkämpferin Dea Trier Mørch, ihres genossen Thomas Kruse und ihrer – zeitweilig

“The lino posters of ‘Røde Mor’ have a lot of love in them, believable joy. Because they are really sure of what they are doing, their laughter has a genuine sound, and a clear view is created that perceives moments and details in the midst of the turmoil that testify to the humanity of the fighters”, the applauding critic stated.<sup>58</sup> As another sign of their resonance, Bildende Kunst also published the talk by Dea Trier Mørch from the *Internationale Künstlertreff* on the practice of Røde Mor.<sup>59</sup>

The analysis report on *Intergrafik* from the VBK also described Røde Mor as a highlight of the solidarity bazar, which took place in the prominent and official frames of the newly-built Palast der Republik.<sup>60</sup> The report also offered a longer reflection on the form of Røde Mor and its specific potential for *Intergrafik*. It was recommended that the works of Røde Mor be presented in an even more lively form together with the rock circus and other contextual materials, also because the works could appear too crude or amateurish to the GDR audience.<sup>61</sup> This remarkable discussion shows the great potential GDR art organisations saw in Røde Mor, but also how their practice of the “poor poster” stood out against the more conventional formats favoured in the GDR. Even though the rock circus would never perform in the GDR or any other socialist country, Røde Mor and Trier Mørch had become prominent names in the GDR, mainly through the international, official exhibitions *Biennale der*

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in Kanada lebenden – japanische Kollegin Yuhari Ochiai betrachtet, wenn man ihre bis zu zwölfteiligen politischen Drucke abliest, erfährt man die Kernpunkte der west-europäischen Klassekämpfe”].

58 Ibid, p. 12 [“Die Linolplakate der ‘Røde Mor’ haben viel Liebe in sich, glaubwürdige Freude. Weil sie ihrer Sache wirklich sicher sind, hat ihr Lachen den echten Klang, entsteht ein freier Blick, der mitten im Getümmel Momente, Details wahrnimmt, die von der Humanität der Kämpfer werbend Zeugnis geben”].

59 D. Trier Mørch: “Das Künstlerkollektiv ‘Røde Mor’ (Rote Mutter) in Dänemark”, *Bildende Kunst*, 1977, 4, pp. 199–202.

60 “Analyse Intergrafik 76”, Verband Bildende Künstler, Berlin, 1977. Archive of the Academy of Arts.

61 [“Die Gruppe Rote Mutter zeigt Linolschriftfolgen zu bestimmten aktuellen politischen Probleme Dänemarks oder zur internationalen Solidarität. Wenn man das Programm der Roten Mutter beim Künstlertreffen erlebt hat, bekommen diese Arbeiten eine andere Funktion, eine Teilfunktion im Aktionsprogramm der Roten Mutter mit ihrem Rock-Zirkus, einer Agit-prop nicht unähnlichen Veranstaltungsform, die Mittel des Zirkus des Teatro Buffo, der Show, der Beat – und Rockmusik für agitatorische Zwecke der Gewerkschaften in der KP und andere fortschrittlicher Parteien und Organisationen umfunktioniert. Löst man diese Arbeit aus ihrem Gesamtzusammenhang, (Abdruck auf Plakaten, Einbeziehung in diese Veranstaltungen) dann zeigen sie letztlich ein künstlerisches Niveau unserer durchschnittlichen Laienzirkel. Man sollte zukünftig diese besondere Funktion der ‘Roten Mutter’ in der Intergrafik anschaulich machen, eventuell mit Hilfe von Fotoreien und auch musikalische Einlagen usw. Das belebt die Ausstellung und ist zugleich der Sache der Intergrafik dienlich, das Forum aller fortschrittlichen Kräfte in der Grafik zu sein. Versichtet man darauf, wird uns der Vorwurf nicht erspart bleiben, dass die qualitätsmassstabe der Intergrafik manchmal zu niedrig angesetzt werden”].

*Ostseeländer* and *Intergrafik*. Trier Mørch was also asked by the VBK for artist recommendations for the following *Intergrafik* – a sign of exchange, even though she was never part of any official GDR organisations. Apart from the exhibitions and their affiliated events, Trier Mørch did not stay in the GDR and had no artistic collaborations with GDR artists. Instead, Røde Mor had their closest international collaboration with political realist art groups in West Germany, mainly the artist group and the *Tendenzen* journal, which was in itself a forum for left-political realist art and often reported on art and exhibitions from the GDR.<sup>62</sup> Works of Røde Mor appeared in *Tendenzen*, for instance on the back cover of issue 108/109 in 1976 showing that the Danish group belonged to the Western European network of committed realist art in the 1970s.

After being absent in 1977, Trier Mørch exhibited at *Biennale der Ostseeländer* again in 1979. This time the works were illustrations from the book *Vinterbørn* (English edition *Winter's Child*, 1986). Published in Danish in 1976, it was a big breakthrough in the Danish public with its description of a maternity ward and the experiences of a group of women before and after childbirth. The theme of underexposed women experiences in society had been present in Trier Mørch's work before, including in the *Sorgmunter Socialisme* and *Polen* travelogues, but was now the main topic. 1975 was declared International Women's Year by the United Nations leading to a series of events corresponding with the active years of the Women's Liberation Movement. From the Danish side, Røde Mor artist Yukari Ochiai had produced a poster entitled "Kvinder er den halve verden" [Women are the half of the World] with a series of images of working women from all over the world, which became widely distributed and an iconic image of the era.<sup>63</sup> Like her previous books, *Vinterbørn* was illustrated by linocut images, which became as known as the book itself with their sincere depictions of pregnancy and childbirth. A series of these images were shown at the 8<sup>th</sup> *Biennale der Ostseeländer* in 1979 fitting with the theme of that year being the UN International Year of the Child, also marked at the Biennale. The novel was published in the GDR in 1979 as *Winterkinder* and an article in *Neues Deutschland* claimed that "every fourth Dane" had read the book by the socialist author.<sup>64</sup> *Intergrafik* 80 featured Trier Mørch with three of the linocuts from *Vinterbørn*. This would be the last appearance of Trier Mørch in the GDR. At this point, Røde Mor had stopped as a collective in 1978, so the high hopes of a revitalised proletkult via the Dan-

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62 It has been revealed that *Tendenzen* received financial support from GDR authorities, Neumann, op. cit., p. 211.

63 The poster was originally produced for Danmarks Demokratiske Kvindeforbund founded in 1948 as part of the *Fédération Démocratique Internationales des Femmes*. Despite having no official ties, the organisation was seen as affiliated with communist politics.

64 "Jeder vierte Däne las das Buch 'Winterkinder', *Neues Deutschland*, 11 April 1979. The book was published as *Winterkinder*, Rostock 1979.





**Fig. 7.** Dea Trier Mørch and Thomas Kruse at Intergrafik 1976. Archives of Røde Mor. Royal Danish Library.

ish group in the GDR could not be pursued further. The contact between Dea Trier Mørch and the GDR was characterised by frequent participation in the most important exhibitions and following recognition here. It was probably both the focus on anti-imperialism and political art outside of the capitalist art world that motivated the contact. Contrary to the previous interaction with Poland and the USSR, Trier Mørch did not stay in the GDR for longer periods and gave no accounts on her observations. There are no comments on significant events, like the expatriation of Wolf Biermann right at the time of the visit to *Intergrafik* in 1976.

The issue of women's rights was complicated in the socialist states. Marxist-Leninist politics generally prioritised class struggle over gender and Stalin had already notoriously declared the women's issue in the Soviet Union as solved in the 1930s. In the post-war era, the socialist countries occasionally played a proactive role in international women rights, and were associated with gender equality in some ways.<sup>65</sup> In the West, the communist-led Women's

<sup>65</sup> See F. de Haan: "The Global Left-Feminist 1960s. From Copenhagen to Moscow and New York", in: *The Routledge Handbook of the Global Sixties: Between Protest and Nation Building*, eds. C. Jian et al., New York, 2018, pp. 230–242.

International Democracy Foundation (WIDF) founded in 1945 was active, for instance with a congress in Copenhagen 1953 – it was for this organisation that Ochiai produced her iconic poster in 1975 with women being half of the world and Trier Mørch also collaborated with WIDF. In the GDR, the official policy was that women's rights were not necessary as communism had granted equality in all aspects of life. The realities at the exhibitions looked different: at the national 7. *Kunstaussstellung der DDR* in Dresden 1972–73, only 53 of 350 artists were women and at *Intergrafik 73* 23 artists exhibited for the GDR with only 2 women and 2 out of 12 at *Intergrafik 76* (Fig. 7).

## Inside and Outside of the USSR, 1979–1991

While participating in the Røde Mor activities and having started her career as an author, Trier Mørch also exhibited as a solo artist in Denmark, for instance at the Corner exhibition. This led to her participation in a Corner group exhibition in the USSR in 1979. Through Brockdorff's contacts, who was active in the friendship society Landsforeningen Danmark-Sovjetunionen, the association had been invited to exhibit in Leningrad and Riga in 1979. Previously, some Soviet artists had been invited guests at the Corner exhibitions in Copenhagen, including a larger group from the Soviet Academy of the Arts in 1977. The exhibition of Corner in Leningrad took place in the Museum of the Academy of Arts in February 1979 and featured over 20 Danish artists. It was the first exhibition of contemporary (realist) Danish art in the Soviet Union and attracted considerable attention with media coverage in *Pravda* and *Sovjetskaja Kultura*. A pamphlet reproducing a selection of the art works as postcards was also in high demand. Extraordinarily, Corner organised a group trip for its members to the Soviet Union (Leningrad and Novgorod) and to the opening of the exhibition.<sup>66</sup> After the show in Leningrad, the exhibition was also shown in Riga, at the Museum of Foreign Art, in an abridged form with 12 painters and three sculptors. The exhibited works manifested various forms of realism from artists active since the 1930s like Karl Bovin (1907–1985), Victor Brockdorff and Hans Scherfig (1905–1979), to the younger figurative artists of the 1970s generation such as Henning Andersen (1944–2023), Jørgen Buch (1943–2021), Jørgen C. Rasmussen (1943–2000), Jørgen Tang Holbek (1942–) and Dea Trier Mørch and Røde Mor – they had all also exhibited in Rostock and the non-members of Corner Buch and Trier Mørch were also invited by Brockdorff because they had studied in Leningrad and could thus strengthen the local interest in the exhibition. Trier Mørch was represented with two linocuts including illustrations from her recent novel *Kastaniealléen*

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<sup>66</sup> The trip was organised in collaboration with the friendship society Landsforeningen Danmark-Sovjetunionen. It is unknown if Dea Trier Mørch participated in this trip to her former hometown.

(1978), while Røde Mor was present through images from their recent decoration of Byggefagenes Hus (House of Construction Work) with contemporary workers of various functions. This was described in detail in an article on Danish art and an exhibition in the major Soviet art magazine *Iskusstvo*.<sup>67</sup> In accordance with Soviet art politics, the practice of Røde Mor was described as: “The critical orientation and the struggle for justice are the guiding principles of Røde Mor – a collective, who has a special position in modern Danish art”.<sup>68</sup> This was one of the last exhibitions while the group was active and their collective production had already ended. The exhibition was the largest presentation of Danish art in the Soviet Union. Centred on Corner, it presented a portrait of Danish art similar to the exhibitions in Rostock of realists from different generations.

Events were, however, put in motion in the 1980s, also affecting Trier Mørch’s relation to communism and the state socialist regimes. In 1982, she declared her departure from the communist party – an event which made the news as she had been a prominent communist artist along with authors such as Martin Andersen Nexø, Hans Kirk, and Hans Scherfig.<sup>69</sup> The reason for her decision was not directly declared, but the day before her departure she had published the essay “Kunstner og kommunist” [Artist and Communist] in the non-communist leftist newspaper *Information*. Here she revisited her inspirations and convictions throughout her career, not least in the communist art worlds. She stated that the “the abrasive style of the late sixties and early seventies is not of any use anymore – neither for the movement nor for ourselves”.<sup>70</sup> Western communists also needed to break with the party doctrine and acknowledge the situation of system critics in the state-socialist societies and stopped automatically viewing dissidents as enemies of socialism.<sup>71</sup> This was controversial in the Moscow-loyal Danish communist party and a clear indication that she had grown out of being an artist and communist in their way. It was not said, but the situation in Poland with the repression of Solidarity and martial law could have been the turning point, considering Trier Mørch’s earlier dedication to Poland.

Trier Mørch mainly worked as an author in the 1980s, maybe in an attempt to avoid the agitation style. The position of an author also became her platform to take part in the growing scene of dialogue meetings with Soviet authors and intellectuals. The First Literature Conference for Danish and Soviet Authors was organised at Aarhus University in 1985 in a collaboration

67 *Iskusstvo*, 1981, 3, pp. 53–59.

68 Ibid. Translation courtesy of Hans Østergaard Pedersen.

69 “Dea Trier Mørch har meldt sig ud af DKP”, *Information*, 7 April 1982.

70 D. Trier Mørch, “Kunstner og kommunist”, *Information*, 29 March 1982 [“Parolestilen fra slutningen af 60erne op til midten af 70erne er ikke brugbar længere – hverken for bevægelsen eller for os selv”].

71 Ibid. [“Kommunister i Vesteuropa skal væk fra den opfattelse, at en såkaldt dissident straks er en fjende af socialismen”].



between the Soviet Writer's Union and the departments of literature and Slavic studies at the University. The meeting was reported as having been planned for a long time and had the theme of "Literature and Ethics in the Modern World".<sup>72</sup> Trier Mørch was on the panel of Danish authors along with Klaus Rifbjerg and Tage Skou Hansen, while guest authors from the Soviet Union included Daniil Granin, Vasil Bykov, Feliks Kusnetsov, Oleg Sjestinskij and Valentina Morosova. The discussion was described as a cautious opening avoiding controversial issues in the "official" article by the Danish Soviet Friendship Society. In return, the Danish authors were invited to a conference in Moscow in 1987 with the theme of "The problems of modern civilization in literature and politics". According to the transcription notes from the debate, the speech by Trier Mørch ended with the statement "Women are half of the world". In the following debate, Trier Mørch asked the author Feliks Kusnetsov about the relationship between men and women in Soviet society. The author replied that "you think this is a big problem in our society. 50–60 years ago we had our great struggle for equality – with demands for the emancipation of women. We still have problems, but I hope that love proves stronger than the problems".<sup>73</sup> The Soviet author thus repeated the view of gender issues as solved by communism and that traditional "love" within the family was the answer rather than public debate, while Trier Mørch tried to pursue issues of women's roles and rights, even if the will to answer was limited.

After these conferences a public symposium took place at the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art north of Copenhagen as a major meeting of Soviet authors, Soviet authors in exile, and their Danish colleagues with the following theme: "The role of the creative intelligentsia in the reform process in the Soviet Union and its future perspectives". The organisers now included another Danish university, Sydjysk Universitet (now the University of Southern Denmark) with their Center for East-West Research, Thorkil Kristensen Instituttet TKI (Center for Øst-Vest Forskning).<sup>74</sup> Trier Mørch was not featured as a speaker, but participated in the meeting, which was described as "one of its kind" that brought together the Soviet scene and the exiles and "organised on a Danish initiative" as an opportunity arising from glasnost.<sup>75</sup> Yet another conference in the dialogue came in 1989 with the Danish-Soviet writer and scientist conference on "Literature and Politics" with Trier Mørch

72 J.P. Lund Nielsen, "Som nypløjet jord", *Fakta om Sovjetunionen*, July/August 1985, 7–8, pp. 58–59.

73 Transcription notes, 18 March 1985. Papers of Dea Trier Mørch, Royal Danish Library.

74 Thorkil Kristensen Instituttet TKI (Center for Øst-Vest Forskning) was a research centre established at the University Centre of Southern Jutland in 1978 on the initiative of economist Thorkil Kristensen. The focus was research in the economic, social and cultural development in the East and Central European countries and exchange activities. The centre, which was the only one of its kind in Denmark, existed until the late 1990s.

75 J. Kerte, "Russisk på Louisiana", *Politiken*, 3 March 1988.

as panellist.<sup>76</sup> These series of events were an important part of the pre-1989 events as contacts between Denmark and the Soviet cultural sphere outside of the framework of the friendship societies or directly political organisations. The commitment of Dea Trier Mørch in this cause constitutes another phase in her interaction with the state socialist art world, switching from communist and artist in the 1970s to a more critical, yet dialogue-seeking position.

In 1987 Trier Mørch gave an interview under the title “The desert walk of suspicion might be over”.<sup>77</sup> There was no prediction of the fall of the Iron Curtain, but a cautious optimism on the bettering of the relationship with the communist bloc. She was asked to look back on her stays in Poland and the USSR and said “[I] had tried to face the realities of the world, when I was in Leningrad. I was both very attracted to and scared by the Soviet society”.<sup>78</sup>

After the actual fall of the Soviet bloc and throughout the transition phase following the end of the Cold War, Trier Mørch took part in international collaborations with Chile and Cuba, while also co-working with European and Israeli artists in the Ex Dania project.<sup>79</sup> After 1989 she commented less on her encounters with the state-socialist societies – with her experiences she could have delivered an insightful status as memoir and commentary in retrospect. In this respect, they stand as an unfinished chapter, also since until now there have been no studies of the activities and the framework around them.

## Conclusion

Few artists of her generation had such an entangled interaction with the state-socialist countries and so vividly expressed her reactions upon encountering the art world there. As shown in this article, the connection took place in three distinct phases starting with her first curious travels in the Thaw-era Poland, continuing in the seventies as a communist and artist with many exhibitions in the GDR, and then a more revisionist stance as debating author in the 1980s. This is visible through her travels, stays and, not least, her exhibitions, as well as quasi-diplomatic activities, organisational work, and participation in public debate. The itinerary from the early 1960s to the end of the Cold War corresponds with general developments such as the burgeoning détente

76 Danish–Soviet writer and researcher conference on the theme “Literature and Politics”, Sandbjerg Estate and Copenhagen, 23–29 July 1989.

77 “Mistænksomhedens ørkenvandring er måske ved at være forbi”, *Information*, 9–10 May 1987.

78 Ibid. [“Jeg prøvede at se virkeligheden i øjnene, da jeg var i Leningrad. Jeg blev både meget tiltrukket og meget skræmt af det sovjetiske”].

79 Ex Dania included Yukari Ochiai, Greenlandic artists Aka Høegh and her children Sara and Thomas Trier, among others. The group made projects in Israeli Kibbutz and in Rundetaarn, Copenhagen 1995, where the two Romanian artists Dinu Mendrea and Sandu Mendrea participated as guests.

and the initiatives that followed in its wake such as cultural exchange agreements, which was the primary basis for the travels of Trier Mørch. However, there were also personal choices – sometimes surprising in retrospect – such as joining the Moscow-loyal DKP not long after the Prague Spring, which she obviously supported. The question of feminism across the Iron Curtain also arose. The life and identity of women is a central and recurring theme in Trier Mørch's work, both in her travel books as an external observer and her novels such as *Winter's Child* in a more embodied way, securing her a position as an icon in Danish women's rights literature. Her own relationship to the women's rights movement was complex, as during its most prolific years she followed her conviction as a communist more than a women's liberation activist and stated that she was not a feminist, but a communist and humanist, wherein women and men were equal – even if her works pointed clearly towards a commitment to the issues. On this background, the understanding of Trier Mørch and feminism across the curtain could be further explored through studies of the distribution and reception of her literary works such as *Winterkinder* in the GDR and other socialist countries and the organisations and institutions active in cross-curtain cultural exchanges.

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