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Karl Hermann Roehricht: Lebensverläufe. Innenansichten aus der DDR

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Roehricht, Karl Hermann. *Lebensverläufe: Innenansichten aus der DDR*. Berlin: Morgenbuch Verlag, 1991. 185 pp.

Karl Hermann Roehricht (born 1928) is a painter and author who describes here difficult years and curious stories from his life in the former German Democratic Republic. He recounts experiences of an individual involved in the arts as he copes with GDR realities. On the one hand Roehricht's text reflects content similar to Erich Loest's *Der Stasi war mein Eckermann* (1990) and Christa Wolf's *Was bleibt?* (1990). On several occasions he had altercations with the *Staatssicherheitsdienst*, which attempted for years to recruit him as an IM (*Inoffizieller Mitarbeiter*). He relates disconcerting stories about Stasi intrusions into his life including the theft and damage of personal property, coffins being sent to his house, food poisoning, mechanical problems with the family automobile, and commissions for art work, play performances, or publications of work mysteriously falling through. As such the book serves as another document of *Stasi* terror tactics against GDR citizens.

On the other hand Roehricht discusses aspects of his life in the context of GDR history, reflecting content closer to Günter de Bruyn's *Zwischenbilanz* (1992) or Stefan Heym's *Nachruf* (1988). Here, Roehricht talks about his days in the FDJ and we learn about how he left West Berlin to return to the GDR and city of his birth, Leipzig, in 1960. Roehricht does not divulge his reasons for initially leaving the GDR nor does he explain his motivation for returning. He does not conceal the fact that he and his family regretted their return. Possibly he felt that artists had more favorable employment opportunities in the east than in the west. Much of the book describes his frustrations and countless disappointments in finding work as an artist. He was especially interested in working for the state. He was commissioned to paint landscapes for the *Palast der Republik*, still lifes for important party functionaries, and a landscape for the *Volkskammer*. But the state turns out to be, in all instances, a peculiar benefactor. He assures readers that neither his return nor his subsequent life in the GDR were political in nature: "ich wollte keine Politik machen, ich wollte nur meine Bilder malen und vielleicht einmal Stücke und Romane schreiben" (28).

As the title implies going astray or losing one's course are the book's central themes. This leads one to believe that Roehricht views his time in the GDR (he and his family left in 1984) as wasted years. Actually Roehricht deals with little beyond his

tribulations and limited contact with writers and artists. If a person bought a painting from Roehricht, staged one of his plays, or helped him find an apartment s/he is discussed in this book. In this respect we experience the art world in the GDR from the logistical point of view as Roehricht describes his difficulties finding work, space, materials, commissions, and arranging exhibitions. He also drops names of several more famous GDR cultural figures such as Christa and Gerhard Wolf, Helene Weigel, Erich Arendt, Wolfgang Kohlhaase, Peter Hacks and Konrad Wolf, But he describes no other relationship to them other than having crossed paths with them at some point during his GDR years.

The book is anecdotal in its approach, thus, its structure is eclectic and arbitrary. No chapter follows the other in any chronological order or contiguous fashion. Roehricht's prose style is rather wooden and flat, (remember, he is a realist who paints landscapes and still lifes). The narrative often lacks smooth transitions from one paragraph to the next and contains a few grammatical difficulties. Nonetheless, Roehricht's text is a contribution to a growing collection of books that can aid the western reader in developing her/his picture of what life was like in the former GDR. In this respect Roehricht delivers pertinent information and insights, especially where the art scene is concerned. Of course, it is recommended reading for anyone interested in Roehricht himself.

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