Frank Wagner (1958–2016)

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Frank Wagner, an independent curator who organized shows for over three decades, passed away on Wednesday, June 1, at the age of 58.

Frank Wagner was a towering figure both in stature and heart. He was engaged in every way with art and artists. He was a radical curator who committed himself to ideas of the socially conscious in art. He lived and breathed the challenge of art, that we as artists had to live up to. We are all devastated by his death and mourn his loss.

One of the first curators to curate exhibitions addressing the topic of AIDS, Wagner worked for many years at the Neue Gesellschaft für bildende Kunst in Berlin NGBK. In 2014 he served as curator and artistic director of the sixth European Month of Photography Berlin. He was on the Advisory Board of Participant Inc.

Wagner organized retrospectives for Felix Gonzalez-Torres and Valie Export that appeared at the Nationalgalerie Hamburger Bahnhof and the Akademie der Kuenste respectively, Wagner also presented work by artists including Group Material, Gran Fury, General Idea, Piotr Nathan, Nan Goldin, Stan Douglas, Rineke Dijkstra, Trevor Paglen, Ken Lum, Barbara Kruger, Holly Zausner, Robert Gober, Jeff Wall, and David Wojnarowicz and countless others.

Wagner was one of the first curators to address the topic of AIDS with a group exhibition in 1988. Five years later, for a show at KW Berlin dealing with sexual rebellion and resistance, Wagner created a memorial room for his friend David Wojnarowicz.

As a regular exhibition organizer for Berlin's Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst (NGBK), he presented works stemming from artistic practices governed by strong political or social agendas.

Throughout his long career, he was often the first to exhibit artists in Berlin before their international breakthrough, including Cady Noland, Barbara Kruger, Marlene Dumas, Stan Douglas, Jeff Wall, Sanja Iveković, Hannah Wilke, Robert Gober, and Wolfgang Tillmans.

Wagner was a member of the NGBK for over 40 years, an institution which stages exhibitions by local artists selected for the senate's stipend program. He thus became a mentor to many artists in the early stages of their career.

“I was interested in collective interactions and social conflicts,” he once said of his approach to exhibition making, a conceit which was also prevalent in his work as independent curator.

In 2006, a decade after the passing of Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Wagner organized his retrospective at Berlin’s Hamburger Bahnhof museum.

In 2013, he organized a retrospective show about AIDS activism [LOVE AIDS RIOT SEX] since the mid-eighties at the NGBK. Most recently, and despite already being weakened by cancer, Wagner curated the German pavilion of the Dubai Photo Exhibition, which opened this past March.

Consider donating to the Frank Wagner Memorial Fund in honor of Wagner’s important life and legacy.

{Text from artnet.com and the Frank Wagner Memorial Fund}

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