

Planetary Farmers (Working Title)

May – September 2025

Werkleitz Festival and exhibition on the occasion of the 500th Commemorative Year of Thomas-Müntzer-and the German Peasants' War 2025

A Kooperation of Werkleitz Gesellschaft and Kulturstiftung Sachsen-Anhalt, Kunstmuseum Moritzburg Halle (Saale)

Project outline

2025 marks the 500th anniversary of the Peasants' War. It is considered the first revolution on German soil. It is closely linked to the person of Thomas Müntzer (1489–1525) and has its most important locations and places of remembrance in Central Germany.

This provides the impetus for a contemporary artistic examination. It deals with the preconditions and unanswered questions of the events of that time as well as the reality of life for today's farmers and social inequalities today.

Basics

To this end, Werkleitz will invite and commission 12 to 15 up-and-coming international artists or collectives to develop a new work as part of a residency in Saxony-Anhalt and an exploration of the historical hotspots of the peasant movement and Müntzer's places of activity. In particular, artists who have already explored the conditions of production and the revolutionary or emancipatory potential of today's agricultural practices and their actors are invited to participate.

The starting point and crystallization point of the work is the district of Mansfeld-Südharz in Saxony-Anhalt. As if bundled under a magnifying glass, the themes and evidence of early agricultural development can be found here; the Peasants' War and Müntzer, mining and industrialization as well as the hinterland and migration are congenially combined. Müntzer's former places of life and work in the district, Stolberg and Allstedt, predestine it as an area for artistic research into the Peasants' War. Its impact is flanked by the events of the Reformation. Müntzer's contemporary, companion and adversary, Martin Luther, is also a "Mansfeld child".

Technical innovations in the Mansfeld mining district at the end of the 18th century, such as the use of the first steam engine on German soil in Hettstedt, are catalysts for enlightenment and industrialization. Local representatives include the contemporaries Novalis, Franz Wilhelm Junghuhn and Wilhelm von Humboldt. It was the prosperity of mining at this time that transformed the peasant into a worker and mechanized him, or rather his limbs, underground.

In this respect, it is obvious that workers' uprisings and revolutions, including the Central German Miners' Revolt (1921), often refer back to the Peasants' War.

The agricultural machinery in the fields of Müntzer's homeland is tracked and controlled by GPS, and the yield of the local fields is speculated on stock exchanges such as the one in Chicago. Farmers and even the working class seem to have dissolved into milieus. So what does our future have in common with the causes of the Peasants' War, could be the question. But in collaboration with international artists, it quickly becomes clear that the adversities faced by peasants have only shifted and are sometimes still the same elsewhere as they were 500 years ago in our region. In Africa and Asia, children harvesting cash crops do not attend school; in Latin America, plantation workers have no home. At the same time, labor-saving technologies raise completely new questions, not only about the Internet at the milk churn, but also about fair prices and therefore social justice, as dairy farmers recently chanted in front of ALDI. Feeding the coming world still requires revolutionary action.

Of particular interest here is the close, long planetary network of relationships between the metropolitan region and the hinterland, between agriculture and its markets and ultimately between urban and rural areas. Agriculture is one of the oldest economies; it led to humanity becoming sedentary. Its yields are demonstrably the historical basis for fiscal policy as we know it today. Its surpluses led to the first stockpiling and thus to the development of early urban structures.

With the critical question - tank or plate? - it becomes clear that agriculture has long been an integral part of energy policy decisions. The question of arable land for a constantly growing world population is still a decisive factor in territorial conflicts and geopolitics today. The expansion of plantations is reducing the size of rainforests and displacing human communities. Worldwide, mining and the growth of settlements are destroying agricultural land. These circumstances, as well as the expansion of sales markets and the ongoing industrialization of agriculture, have resulted in migration movements that are not just seasonal, but permanent. Against the backdrop of intensive globalization, the meaning of the phrase "Who cares if a sack of rice tips over in China?" must be reassessed.

These highlights of the current situation in planetary agriculture make it clear that many of the issues that preoccupied farmers 500 years ago are still relevant today.

The artistic exploration of the present-day peasants by the international artists invited by the Werkleitz Gesellschaft for the Werkleitz Festival 2024/25 builds on this and takes into account historical events with a focus on the Peasants' War and Müntzer's biography. They will focus on different realities of peasants in Mansfeld-Südharz and around the world, with the Werkleitz Festival creating a framework for a contemporary reception of the Peasants' War.

At the same time, the State Art Museum in Moritzburg Castle in Halle (Saale) will focus on general social issues and problems that led to the Peasants' War 500 years ago and are still relevant today in a global context in various societies, both here and around the world.

This involves structural inequalities, discrimination against parts of civil society, opportunities for participation in social processes as well as how to deal with the non-fulfilment of these aspects. These issues have led and continue to lead to unrest and social crises around the world, both now and in the recent past. Examples include the Black Lives Matter movement in the USA and the international #metoo debate that has been going on for several years. But it is

also about questions of urban-rural differences, unequal educational conditions, the effects of climate change and the associated social discussions. These and other issues are negotiated very differently in societies around the world - differently in Europe than in the USA or in China, Russia or Africa.

This is the curatorial starting point for the exhibition at the Kunstmuseum Moritzburg Halle (Saale), where 12 to 15 international artistic positions will be added to the works created locally and presented in the museum. They are intended to illustrate how artists in different parts of the world deal artistically with today's virulent issues that led to the conflicts of the Peasants' War of 1525 500 years ago. Visitors to the exhibition will thus be able to view the historical events against the backdrop of their own immediate present and reflect on them from a contemporary perspective. At the same time, the global relevance of the issues, which today can no longer be resolved with a nation-state approach, is made clear with the help of aesthetic reception possibilities.

Project realization

The Werkleitz Festival in cooperation with the Kulturstiftung Sachsen-Anhalt, Kunstmuseum Moritzburg Halle (Saale), will work in at least two different formats, which will particularly promote the exchange between town and country. The starting point for artistic research is the district of Mansfeld-Südharz. Here, the participating artists will be given a temporary working space during a production residency in 2024. The essence of the resulting new productions will be transferred to the four-month exhibition at the Moritzburg castle in Halle (Saale) in 2025. An important part of the mediation is to bring the exhibition in the State Art Museum of Saxony-Anhalt and the historical places of remembrance in the district into correspondence with each other. Pictorial references to the artists' places of residence within the exhibition as well as footprints, artistic object-like interventions designated as landmarks, at the respective research locations serve this purpose. At best, the paths between the landmarks can develop into new routes through the district. There are also points of contact and connection to other cultural tourism activities planned in the district of Mansfeld-Südharz to mark the anniversary. With this interplay between essence within the exhibition and renewed dissolution in space, the artistic moments should outlast the commemorative year.

The core and focal point of the project is the exhibition at the Kunstmuseum Moritzburg Halle (Saale). It will bring together up to 30 international artistic positions on both floors of the west and north wings of the Moritzburg castle and, in terms of the standard and quality of presentation and communication, will build on the museum's major exhibitions in recent years, all of which have attracted national and international attention. The major thematic Werkleitz Festivals, such as *Utopien vermeiden* 2013 or *Modell und Ruine* 2019 on the occasion of the Bauhaus anniversary, are equally successful. The resulting bilingual publications are also a reference for the catalogue, which will be published at the start of the exhibition as part of *Planetary Farmers*.

The Werkleitz Festival will also open together with the exhibition in mid-May 2025. In addition to the three-week core festival until the beginning of June 2025, the exhibition at the Kunstmuseum Moritzburg Halle (Saale) will remain a cultural tourist attraction during the summer months of the anniversary year and offer a variety of travel opportunities both in the city of Halle (Saale) and in rural areas. At the end of the exhibition in mid-September 2025, a

joint finissage will conclude the cooperation project between the Werkleitz Gesellschaft and the Kulturstiftung Sachsen-Anhalt.

Project time

The project will run for three years, from 2023 to 2025, with a four-month festival and exhibition period from mid-May to mid-September 2025.

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