

This is a transcript of the podcast interview with **Claudia Linzel and Gerd Harry Lybke** for „**Die Leichtigkeit der Kunst**“ episode 23, from March 19, 2021.

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**Hello everyone and welcome to our podcast „Die Leichtigkeit der Kunst“** (the lightness of art)

**Claudia Linzel (CL):** I'm in Berlin, on Auguststraße, the connoisseur probably guesses right. I'm visiting a - may I actually say - veteran of the contemporary art scene. Gerd Harry Lybke, owner of the gallery EIGEN + ART and I think also a visionary, adviser, observer, friend and now it comes - former nude model - sits across from me charmingly and with curiously flashing eyes. In the meantime, you have exchanged Adam's outfit for what I consider a very chic three-piece suit.

**Gerd Harry Lybke aka Judy (GHL):** Yes, it was necessary. But I also started rather early, so nude modeling as well as wearing three-piece suits. Nude modeling was every day from 1983 to 1989, Monday to Friday. Nude modeling was kind of a good thing.

**CL:** I definitely want to learn more about that in a minute. But before that, I have a little bit more introduction prepared.

**GHL:** Oh, good.

**CL:** Originally, your career didn't begin in Berlin, but rather in Saxony, more specifically in Leipzig. And also already ten years before the reunification and actually also with the dream of a cosmonaut career, the desire to become an actor and the training as a machine mechanic. I am quite happy that you know how to reach for the stars and hand them to your collectors, as well as artists. I consider myself extremely lucky that I don't have to look for you between Venus and Mars, but meet you here in Berlin. I'm sure we'll gain some insight and anecdote in this episode and I'm already excited to meet you. Thank you for your time and for giving me the opportunity to get to know such an art formative person like you. Would you like to start and also introduce yourself to those people who may not have heard so much about you and maybe why you are called Judy or Judy.

**GHL:** You are absolutely right. We have never met before and we are just getting to know each other. And that's good, we can look each other in the eye during this interview.

**CL:** I can lift my glasses a little bit. (laughs)

**GHL:** Yes, what's interesting about the whole thing with art is actually the love for the people who make the art. That's actually the defining thing for me. The people I interact with, whether it's the colleagues in the gallery who deal with art and education or whether it's the artists. You always have the idea that it's something very special. I also started by modeling, nude modeling for the artists at the art academy or at the evening school in Leipzig (Hochschule für Grafik und Buchkunst). Through this direct access I actually got something to do with art during the former GDR. For your today it is easier, you can just open the door of a gallery, no matter which one, and you don't even have to pay

admission. You just go in, look at the works, maybe get a sheet about the biography, you get to know a bit more about the artist and then you can try to form your own

opinion. That is not directly whether you like it or not, but maybe it's just the film, the painting or the photo raises a question in you, which you have never asked yourself like this on your own, which opens a window for you in your own building in which you are already all the time and allows you a look into something that you have not seen before on your own or that it exists at all. So I think art and the people who make this art and have to do with it, are much more open than you think and are much more willing to respond to a reaction of someone who has never dealt with art, that's what's interesting.

**CL:** When did you open your first window to art?

**GHL:** Well, I would say already by standing nude for the first time, because for me that was of course also a closed world, something inaccessible. But now that I became a nude model, there was suddenly a physical participation of me in a room surrounded by people who had beads of sweat on their foreheads, because they were driven by the professor again and again to draw exactly what they have in front of them, a nude in the room. Maybe they didn't manage it at all and then the professor came and drew on my body with a crayon, "here goes the muscle, you must see that" or something. So you also saw the work behind it, so to speak. And none of the artists who drew there perceived me as an object or anything else, but they were actually so concentrated on their drawing that they perhaps didn't even recognize me days later when I was dressed or on the street.

**CL:** Yes, I was just about to ask, how does it feel? Well, I think when I look in the mirror now, I wouldn't think in the first place, I'll go to the academy and let myself be painted.

**GHL:** But yes. At that time it was like that, I was banned from working through the GDR government and couldn't find work anywhere, that was the only possibility. And it wasn't about beauty, but rather about having the extreme. I was unfortunately not quite so extreme, they took me anyway, because models were just rather rare, but actually they were looking for more extreme people, where you can draw something that is special there. The absolutely average body was not so desirable for the people who did it.

**CL:** Why were you banned from your profession? And what did you actually do?

**GHL:** I did all kinds of things that didn't fit into this... At that time it was still the GDR and it happened very quickly... I wasn't allowed to study, I wasn't allowed to practice a profession. That was a kind of criminalization and common practice that was done with people who were in the way of the state and who were not criminals. In order to criminalize them, for example, they were not given any work and after a year they were arrested, because there was a right to work but also an obligation to work. So they were arrested because they had not worked for a year, the reason was that they were not allowed to work, and then after a year they were locked up in a labor camp because they had not worked. And then most of the time that was also politically justified and so the possibility was given that the Federal Republic gives money to buy these people then free and so the GDR has also made some money by selling the people.

**CL:** Now you didn't end up in jail, you weren't sold to the West, but you went to the art academy with curly hair.

**GHL:** Yes, exactly. I then took a different path, like many others. You could still work at the cemetery and in the church, but that was not my thing. I was rather than the type of being a model. And there, of course, another world suddenly opened up to me that I didn't even know existed, not only because there were parties without end, but because there was of course a freedom. And many of the artists for whom I stood in the evening school were people who had a normal day job or a study, but who wanted to go to the academy. They did their studies in the evening after work to prepare for the entrance exam to the art academy and then after a year of preparation they didn't make it and came back to the evening school and then after two years they didn't make it again - sometimes just because of the political demands. And with all these „losers" I started to do the gallery because they really wanted to. They proved it, they were at work during the day and in night school at night and didn't make it past the exam and with those who didn't make it I started to make the gallery. All the others who were accepted to the art academy didn't need a gallery back in '83, because they had a podium for themselves where they could live out what they wanted. But the others, who wanted to do it and didn't manage to get over this hurdle, I founded a space with them.

**CL:** Why didn't they take the hurdle?

**GHL:** I would say, like me, they weren't good enough. Sometimes, yes, you're not good enough for any standards that are made to go to another phase. But if you think that maybe you don't have to reach the norm at all, but you can't imagine it any other way than to do that, then you just have to reach this goal through another way. That happens just as much today.

**CL:** Yes, of course the first thought that comes to my mind, I also have roots near Mecklenburg, is that perhaps they should not be admitted for possibly political reasons in the first place.

**GHL:** Possibly, yes, but as I said, whether political or not, there are also some norms today. Admission committees, if you want to go to drama school or somewhere else like e.g. studying medicine, where you have to have a 1.0, that doesn't make you a doctor automatically. There are simply people who are nevertheless the greatest doctors even with an average that is far below and then you just have to take other paths.

**CL:** And then you thought to yourself that you fight so hard for your calling, now I'll open a gallery?

**GHL:** Well, that was in 1983 on April 10th and in the beginning it was more that we said "well, we've had so many parties, it's getting tiring, we need to find a theme". At first we had a few theme parties but then that was no longer the case and then we said: Well, let's do an exhibition. And since we ourselves didn't know what we actually wanted, but wanted to be active, we called it that. The New Unequivocal, because we didn't know what we actually wanted, whether we had a manifesto or something else, I don't know. Yes, and that's how it started, and then it became more and more serious, and then the political reunification came.

Suddenly there was a situation that you also needed money to have a gallery. Sales had to happen, things had to be done that had never been done before and a professionalization had to take place. And this phase was actually the most difficult, because before that in the GDR it was still a bit like cops and robbers. If you were as far outside of society as I and many of my friends were, then the

regression over the state was also no longer so that it could take hold, because we had nothing to lose anyway. But then after the political reunification, where it was then a matter of adhering to the norm even more strongly actually than before and also one could not break out of the norm as in such a totalitarian form of society, such as the GDR, which was then but of course already surreal theater. Suddenly came into a money and performance flow after '89, that had more to do with economics, more with reality and also more with the fact that you did not even have parents who could support you, but you had to earn every penny yourself, so to speak, and make every agreement yourself. That was more difficult. And those who had studied as artists then, had it perhaps still a little easier than we autodidacts. And the gallery owners, like me, who were starting out, first had to find their way into the whole thing, because suddenly it was all about business and capital.

**CL:** Tell me, do you think you were actually in the focus of the Staatssicherheit (Homeland Security) ?

**GHL:** Yes, not only me, but there were many many many who were in the focus and the gallery in particular, of course.

**CL:** And then came the political reunification. You said that everything had to be found anew, and suddenly the economic aspect was the focus. I could also imagine that it was damn difficult to build up a network, because in the West there was certainly also a functioning art scene.

**GHL:** Yes, nobody needed a gallery owner from Leipzig in Cologne - the most important art city in that time in West-Germany, they had gallery owners. So from there, of course, it was really difficult. Also, I didn't have the stable smell of the others who went to school with each other, or the father knew the uncle, and so on. And I hadn't been in the job for generations either, so I came from way outside. But therefore I was often considered under value, which was good. That helped, if you were under the radar, then you didn't get shot immediately.

**CL:** How did you manage to gain a foothold then?

**GHL:** It's the same as it is today. You have to get up relatively early, get things done ahead of time, and then throughout the day you have to try to keep working as well.

**CL:** The diligence?

**GHL:** The fun of getting something off the ground, alone or now of course with the team, which is not done anywhere else the way we do it together. To creatively bring something into the world that would not have existed before and without the team, that's fun.

**CL:** You just said that no one in Cologne needed a gallery owner from Leipzig. Now it's the case that art from Leipzig is not exactly insignificant.

**GHL:** Sure, but nobody needs the gallery owner himself. The artists could have gone somewhere else, but they grew with the gallery. But it is also known that we as a gallery have gone a long way with the artists. And people join us and artists join us, but even with the new ones you go a long way. That's actually quite interesting, because you have more experience with what's happening and can certainly also be a good educator who knows the work and can thus open up other perspectives for those who come, that's interesting to me. And for the artist it is certainly also good when he has

finished his exhibition and hands it over to the gallery in the hands of the gallery owner. Then maybe the opening day is still the day where he is present, where he can share something about it or answer a question, but from then on the whole time an education has to happen that is the way the artist would like to see it and in which focus he would like to see his work and of course you can do that better if you know the work well, have talked a lot with the artist and the artist is also sure that the education is going to happen the way he would like it to be seen.

**CL:** Do you have artists from the early days?

**GHL:** Yes, a lot of them. All of them are actually still with us from the beginning, and the ones that have joined have been with us for a while.

**CL:** Do you want to talk about names?

**GHL:** You can mention all the names again later if you want.

**CL:** No, I ask the questions here. (laughs)

**GHL:** (laughs) Well, the same question would be, if you would ask which is your favorite artist in the gallery, then I could also say: Please tell me all the names.

**CL:** Right, that's also a little bit like asking a mother about her favorite child.

**GHL:** Yes, well, I'll put it this way, there really isn't one, and there's no such thing as a favorite work. Rather, there is when you say, what do you prefer the work or the artist, then I still prefer the artist than the work. But that is also what I have as a good positive, because I can work with the artists and with colleagues. I have really made a passion into my profession, that is, to get together with people. Whether I was a nude model, I was a kind of ferryman from the person who wants to make a drawing to the sheet. Or if I wanted to become an actor, I am also the text of the author to the one who hears or sees. And as a gallery owner you are of course also a ferryman, who brings the works that are made in the studio into the form of a gallery and an exhibition space, to the one who looks at them or acquires them or in a museum. That is actually the beautiful thing about it and always the most important thing is actually the communication with the person, the one who is at the moment then also facing you.

**CL:** I would like to ask about an artist anyway. Of course it's very exciting to ask how you and Neo Rauch got to know each other, how the collaboration came about.

**GHL:** Yes, Neo Rauch, we've known each other either since '82 or '83, and since that was so long ago for both of us, we can't put a number on it.

**CL:** So now if one of you was a woman, it would be more dangerous at that point.

**GHL:** Or it's just so beautiful that you would like to push it further and further. We've actually known each other for a very long time, and like with many others who were also there at the time, we've just come a long way. We have represented Neo only since 1993, because he was still studying in the

meantime. I was also his model for a long time, or the whole time Neo was studying. So there are many, many hours where I modeled for him or his fellow students, but also for others. But all the time, even for five years, I was Neo's model. And when he was finished with his studies and also the master student was finished, only then after the studies at that time it was rather a no-go to show people in a gallery during the studies. Back then it was a no-go, today it's often the case that people who haven't finished their studies exhibit in a gallery, but back then it wasn't like that, it was "no, you have to finish your studies first". And since '93, where he was then no longer in contact with the academy and has gone his own way, then we have really exhibited him and we are the first gallery that has shown him and properly represented him. And then there's a second gallery, that's David Zwirner's gallery in New York, who also comes from Cologne, by the way.

**CL:** That puts a smile on your face.

**GHL:** His father was already a gallery owner, he co-founded Art Cologne. And here it shows that it's not necessarily just the smell of the stable and the origin, but also the friendship, because David and I, we were also friends long before he also worked with Neo or is working now. And that's when the friendship between us developed, and then it became clear that it's also good when you have a business relationship, because you trust each other, and then he started to work with Neo Rauch.

**CL:** Let's imagine that someone is listening to this podcast who hasn't quite heard of Neo Rauch and the New Leipzig School. Could you describe it briefly?

**GHL:** The New Leipzig School is a term that was quite simply coined by someone, who exactly is no longer clear, who fed off the whole thing that was happening at the time, so to speak, that a lot of art from Leipzig became better known. And who perhaps could not remember all the names of the artists, otherwise it would have been called Neo Rauch, David Schnell, Tim Eitel or so, but who said yes the Leipzig School, because they all studied there.

**CL:** That could have happened to me. (laughs)

**GHL:** And because at a party it's also easier in English to say "Leipzig School", because even if you don't know what that means, Leipzig means okay that can be a place or it's a place and School is a school and it's about painting, okay. Because if you say Neo Rauch at a party, that's where it starts, can they say Rauch, Rausch. David Schnell, Tim Eitel, Kristina Schuldt, Titus Schade. Then you have to remember quite a few names. And the other one is then also pushed into the corner, because if he doesn't know the names, you can't nod and then be asked whether he also thinks it's good that he's making a film, whereas he's a painter. So New Leipzig School is where you can nod, so it's easy to communicate. That the whole thing has not been an organized movement in itself, but only refers to the fact that there was simply still painting, because at that time at the end of around 80/90, photography was on the march of victory, because for a long time it was not seen as art, but rather as a craft many many years ago. That's why hardly anyone had taught painting or studied it. And in Leipzig they still have it, and it was the school that produced the most important and interesting painters, or female painters, as I said earlier with Kristina Schuldt, for example. And Neo Rauch actually opened the door for painting worldwide again. He is the one who later on in history, when it is about how things were back then, was the one why painting is there again today. He was the one who took the risk of putting his head up and say I'm a painter, at a time when that was not at all in vogue. And he managed to stay.

**CL:** I was just about to ask what makes Leipzig art so magical?

**GHL:** Yes, Leipzig doesn't just have painting. They also have great photography, they have book art, because that's the Academy of Visual Arts, actually in the title already. They have performance, they have media art and so on. I don't think it's just Leipzig, what is the magic of art itself? I think the magic of art itself is that something is being done that makes people take the risk, as I said earlier, of doing something that others don't do, of showing something that others don't show, of dealing with something that perhaps also has a certain potential for desire. And if then all people go on it and all people go with the matter, then this has perhaps a kind of hype. But it's only there because there was a vacuum at the beginning. Something like when spring starts and the first ice cream store opens. That's also a risk, does someone come or not, it's cold outside the sun is shining but no people go there and say ah finally. Art has a lot to do with people taking a big risk. Also the risk of wanting to live from it, that is not necessarily said that you can live from it. How many people actually have art on their walls at home, as a sculpture, as a photograph? I don't just mean homemade or the child's, which are all wonderful, no something you bought.

**CL:** Why do you think that is?

**GHL:** Most people don't know that you can go to a gallery without buying anything.

**CL:** Yes, I think so too.

**GHL:** If you know that instead of going to a museum and having to buy an annual pass or going to a museum and maybe buying a ticket, you can go to any gallery without paying anything. And then once you start going to different galleries and then you also ask for the price and then you see oh there's a print for 800 euros or there's an edition for 200 euros and then maybe there's something for 1,200 as an original. At some point you get to the point that you say okay I don't really need the other two jackets I wanted to buy but now I'm so crazy about this piece of art I'm going to buy it and then maybe I can even pay for half of it and then agree to pay in installments over six months for the rest. Suddenly buying art comes closer into my cosmos than I ever thought and then already with the first piece of art one is hooked. Rather trade with art than with drugs. And with that, you're already very close.

**CL:** Do you sometimes think - maybe this is also very flat thinking on my part - that people are also afraid of their own taste? I think if you now assume you invest 1,000 euros in a work of art. You yourself find it quite beautiful, but you feel a bit limited.

**GHL:** Yes, of course there is the case, you are proud, you have it at home and then friends come and say what is this shit. Yes, there is that. But either you stand by it or you buy something that everybody likes, that's also possible. But that will be more expensive, because what everyone likes is then the hype and that is then usually expensive. So you should rather buy what you like, that is usually cheaper and then have the Protzge and say okay this is my taste. That can be kitschy, that can be abstract, it should be most like you might feel most comfortable yourself.

**CL:** I know this quite well. The podcast is a bit over half a year old and you slide a bit in the direction of an expert. I have to smile a little bit and then people come up to me and say: Claudia do you have *Galerie EIGEN + ART*

a suggestion. And I think what kind of suggestion. Which artist is worth investing in? And then I say, I have no idea, buy what you think is beautiful.

**GHL:** Yeah, or what excites you, most of the time it's a good fingernail test. If you like it right away and just like it, it might decrease a little bit in energy after three or four months when you have it at home. But if you buy something that excites you a little bit just looking at it and doesn't let go and if you have the feeling when you're in the room with your back to the work that the work is doing something to you or the room and you turn around and see something is there and then it almost feels like a lodger at home because it's also taking up space, then it will last a little bit longer than just what everyone might think is good. But nothing against what everyone finds good. There is music that everyone finds good that is totally insane, whether it is classical or not, so that also goes. You also don't have to be afraid of falling for a hype and simply finding Johann Sebastian Bach cantatas good, why not.

**CL:** Yes, it is quite exciting. I often have the impression that people limit themselves because it has to be an investment, it has to please everyone, but I also want to present a certain uniqueness. And yes of course it should still be affordable. And then I think no one would hang an egg-laying willow on the wall, but it is often expected from art.

**GHL:** Yes, and then you can bend it so that the expectation is fulfilled or you take it as a counterpart like a relationship and try to open up something in this relationship to art, almost to work out what you would otherwise not have experienced in your life.

**CL:** Have you built up a relationship with a work of art that has accompanied you for a very long time?

**GHL:** I don't collect art myself. Because otherwise I would stand in the way, so to speak, of whoever comes in here to the gallery. When I show an exhibition of an artist whom I of course find great, the works terrific, and I myself begin to collect, then I have already put aside the three works that I like best. That is a conflict of interest that arises there and I have not done that from the beginning. We don't have that here in the gallery. What is shown is really for the collectors and not for our own personal consumption.

**CL:** Let me ask you about that. If I imagine I have a certain budget to start a collection and I approach your gallery. I've seen an artist here that you represent and I would totally like to have that and that painting. You say maybe then and then it will be available. How does that happen? I could imagine that 5-100 others have the idea to have exactly this picture. Is there then also the possibility, if I then realize, in my four walls the red now does not fit quite so well I would like to have something else. Can I then come back to you?

**GHL:** Well, you should think about who you're moving in with beforehand.

**CL:** Yes, as well as. (laughs)

**GHL:** I mean you can get that lodger out, of course. But the bottom line is you should think about it beforehand and most people do.



**CL:** What I'm getting at is more that when I say I have the work of a major or minor artist here. Are there perhaps people who are interested in buying this work from me, would you then also act as a mediator?

**GHL:** You can act as an intermediary when you know that someone else would have just wanted this work. You have a proper archive. Then you call the one and say, the work is free again or the one who has it can't handle it, doesn't want to handle it, has noticed it doesn't work, then of course I can mediate the work to the other one. Or the one who has the work says, I'll just give it to my aunt or uncle. Or he says maybe a museum wants it and asks a museum if they would like to have the work as a gift because he is a philanthropist. Or he says I'll give it back to the artist, maybe he can handle it best. Or one says well no I'll give it to an auction and I still want to make money. So it depends on the character and the intention of the person who bought it.

**CL:** Now we are sitting in Berlin, your origins are in Leipzig. Why don't you tell me where you have locations everywhere?

**GHL:** Well, since 1983 in Leipzig - right now in the Spinnerei area. One in Berlin Mitte, here in Auguststraße since 1993 and another one in Berlin the LAB since 2012, that's the gallery for the artists that we don't represent in the way that we represent the others and these are young artists and currently located two blocks from here at Torstraße. And we are of course then also as a location on our website, internationally on the web. We are of course world wide at the big fairs, art fairs. Asia, America, Europe. We are a gallery that is probably one of the leading galleries in Germany and internationally, because we are at all these fairs, because we represent artists who are also very internationally active themselves in the museums in all collections. And we have a price range in the gallery that goes from 200/800 euros to over a million. You can start collecting something here even with a budget of 200 euros, you just have to go to the gallery and then you will find something.

At the moment Stef Heidhues is here at the gallery in Berlin. Cornelia Balthes is at the LAB. In Leipzig we just opened Martin Groß on Saturday, without people but on the internet. There are interviews, you can look at the exhibition on the website and there are also works that start with graphics at 1,200 and a bit lower, also goes up to 9,500 euros, large works. So that's always a question of course of the artist's biography, how old he/she is, how many museums, exhibitions he/she had, how many people are really interested in it.

**CL:** You said that you are internationally active, that you are nationally, that the gallery definitely plays a greater role there. How do you decide who gets exhibited in Berlin and who gets exhibited in Leipzig? Is it a different audience?

**GHL:** The audience for us is more worldwide. Normally there are many more here in Berlin, internationally, and fewer come to Leipzig from there. Nevertheless, of course we are positioned and very transparent in all other media outside the gallery. So we are present on all media, whether it's WeChat, whether it's Instagram, whether it's the website etcetera etcetera. So you can say that everybody everywhere on earth can always be currently engaged with what we're doing right now in Leipzig, Berlin, or anywhere else at fairs. So we are international and we are everywhere at the same time.

**CL:** LAB sounds like a laboratory.

**GHL:** That's what it is.

**CL:** In a laboratory, people experiment and research.

**GHL:** I was there just now and there the artist Cornelia, has her works there, which are actually canvas works, so canvas stretched on frames with four corners, but has then adapted them to the room by making a wall painting on this wall painting again has made a panel of wood cut out, which has somewhat taken up the form, which is also in her pictures, which are rather abstract. And on top of these two elements wall paint and panels with this paint painted which has a form, brought as a third component the canvas on it, so that you see as a viewer or as a visitor aha she has made the canvas but for her the canvas is perhaps even more than just the two-dimensional, but she also gives us something in the hand a tool that you can see aha it is also about space and if it is about space, which is the space in the exhibition, then it is also an indication that although it is a two-dimensional canvas with a surface that is abstract, it is perhaps nevertheless also a space in which you move. So spatially it is not just a picture and there is nothing on it that draws a perspective, as for example with David Schnell or with Neo Rauch, but it is a perspective that can also only develop through a color surface, by dealing with this color surface and seeing myself personally as a perspective to the picture.

**CL:** Now I'll ask a little ignorantly. When I go into a gallery, I assume that I can buy the work.

**GHL:** Yes, possibly yes.

**CL:** How do I do it then...?

**GHL:** ...with the wall paint and the panels? That is, because this work was created when she came to the gallery and saw that she wants to do something with this wall and the picture and the panel and the work was created there, it means that there is a price for the work with these three components and if you want to have it in your apartment, it would be just like the work she did for the room in the LAB, she would come into the room and would adapt it to your space, because that would be then again the interesting and also the exciting part actually, that you say well you get involved in the next room. The basis is the one canvas that stays the same, but then how does the panel look and how does she do that? Does it maybe go over the corner at your place with a mural design and a mural painting?

**CL:** You just mentioned the winter jackets, then maybe I don't buy two winter jackets, I buy one piece of art. A winter jacket I can try on. Is there the possibility that the artist would then come to my home and would say in that place I can imagine it well.

**GHL:** Yes, definitely. So nowadays, of course, there is always the possibility of making a model, which she also did at the gallery, at the LAB. And then something is brought into the model on the computer so that you can see what it looks like. And then, of course, it is changed again in what you then really put on the wall, because it is a real situation. But you can imagine and present it well beforehand and then it is executed and if it works it is good and if it doesn't work you can maybe change it again. But I think that once it has reached the point where you want to have it for yourself in the room, then the approach to the art begins via the artist. The conversation, then it becomes more interesting again.

Even if you buy a picture without wall painting without panels without everything, but the picture or the photo as it hangs on the wall, it can also happen that you have it at home and then say, just does not fit at all. That is then nevertheless too difficult for me and I do not get along with the look of the person who looks out of the picture here, and I'm always afraid when I turn around that he or she gives me one in. Then you can also say if you think that, could we hang the sample? When the exhibition is over and no one else is interested in it, then you can hang it as a test.

**CL:** How is that, you as a businessman too?

**GHL:** Hanging a sample is great. Most of the time, a relationship is already established through test hanging. Then you can't really say no anymore.

**CL:** I also find it nice, when I walk through a gallery, to think about exactly where it fits, and then realize, once it's in my home, you actually belong in a completely different place.

**GHL:** You should also always look when buying art, if the dimensions in the gallery, large images usually look very small, because they are large areas on which it is hung. And then you can do a trick, that you draw it on the wall, how big would the picture be at home. And then you see that you don't have the walls or the cabinets are such that you would have to make holes in them to hang the picture on. So you have to be careful.

**CL:** But I think that's a nice way to say, okay, hang it up for a moment, if it's still available. If I imagine now, we are here in Auguststraße, well-known artists, and there is a value for art there, a tangible value. When you work with young artists now, for one thing I wonder, how long do you observe?

**GHL:** The young artists, those are the three I mentioned earlier, Martin Groß in Leipzig, Stef Heidhues here in the gallery in Berlin and in the LAB Cornelia Balthes. These three are young artists, and it took a while to find a way to do something together. Not only do we observe them, but the more important thing is actually that the young artists are given the opportunity to observe us.

**CL:** Go on!

**GHL:** Well, I mean, if you're interested in someone, then you go and see the exhibition, if they're maybe somewhere, in other galleries or even better, of course, in an art association. You go to the studio, you get to know each other. And that also gives the artist the opportunity to see what they're actually like. Maybe the artist comes, checks out an exhibition opening in the gallery, how they deal with the artists, and so on.

**CL:** Yes, of course it is something very personal.

**GHL:** Yes, and that's why it's not about observing the artist, it's more important if the artist can work with the gallery.

**CL:** What a nice attitude.

**GHL:** That is much more important.

**CL:** Yes you also said in the beginning that the love for the people....

**GHL:** Yes, that is the most valuable thing. If you, even as a gallery owner, for example, are only involved in the work that an artist is doing... He or she is 26, out of school for a few years already and always makes wonderful triangles on her painting, which are penetrated by squares or whatever and all that is in green and you are a green lover as a gallery owner and therefore take her into the program, then the poor artist has to paint triangles penetrated by squares on green until the end of her life, because you only take her into the program because of these works. But this is not the reason why you should work with someone. Actually, of course, it's about a certain quality. It is also about whether it fits in, whether it works, whether this position that is there for you is also something you can work with, yes. But actually even more important is whether the chemistry is right, whether you believe the artist and you also believe her when she makes a next step, this trust must be there, that she then makes photography next and starts performances out of photography and then paints a canvas again but at the very end maybe she becomes someone who makes something completely different or maybe suddenly uses large walls in the outside space to make a slide projection on them. And if you then believe in the person and their intention, then you go along with it and then the great thing is actually as a gallery owner that you can take these development steps and this struggle that one takes the risk again and make something new, that you can go along with this person ...

**CL:** In theory, on both shoulders.

**GHL:** Yes, both take the risk, but the artist takes the greater risk. And that you can participate in it, that you go along with it and that you carry it all, that's actually the fun of it.

**CL:** The joint development, yes.

**GHL:** But if you only go purely by the artwork, and that affects all the years you work together and make your judgment about it, that doesn't work. Also, a gallerist shouldn't make judgments about artworks either, because that's interfering with what is actually an artist's creative work. It's more about clearing the way for the artist. Being a sparring partner yes but not about what should be done, whether the picture should be blue or yellow and what would be better or big or small, that's just not the point. The point is that the artist gets the courage to be who he actually is and that you stand behind it.

**CL:** Are you ever asked for advice during the process of development? Are there moments when an artist says: Judy, it's hard for me right now, would you recommend a blue or a black?

**GHL:** No, nobody asks that. At least not me. You notice and also the artists notice with me, when I just say: oh shit how do we continue this here, especially Corona. Then you give yourself courage and say: Hey, it's going to happen, you can do it. You're so great as a team in the gallery, it's such a good team, all of you working here, you'll get it done. And you can do the same the other way around, it's like a friendship. You don't give your girlfriend or boyfriend the advice to stop talking to him or her, you might say, "Gee, why," and approach the matter differently.

**CL:** I think it's nice that you do it all at eye level with a give and take, between you and the artist or the team..

**GHL:** That's where most of the fun is, that's also selfish, definitely. A healthy egoism, in my case, is that it's at eye level and that there's an exchange.

**CL:** That's probably felt by the collectors as well.

**GHL:** Yes, they are again a completely different world and they also have their own ideas, which they perhaps also feel through the fact that one is d'accord with the artist and that it is not only about the business. But of course the collector also wants to be close to the artist, sometimes to the gallery owner, but often the collector just wants to be left alone.

**CL:** I sometimes wonder, I like stories and also stories behind the pictures. Your office is also part of the gallery here, so when the public comes in again, you sometimes wonder what they might think about this painting. Do you interpret stories into how a certain work is perceived?

**GHL:** Yes, certainly. Of course I try not only to read the picture from my experience, if you stay with the picture as a picture, and to know why the picture came into being and how it came into being and what the background is and maybe what the next step is. But of course I also try to read the one who comes in, then I try with my words to design a world that is certainly parallel to what you see but rather allows access to the image that is there in front of you. And to make these accesses possible, that I find very important, because one must read such a picture for itself also, completely personally, completely privately. Just as it will be in 200 years, this picture what is in front of us today can be read again quite differently and quite privately. And if a picture photo or something else has the quality that it could have been read today and in 200 or 200 years ago also quite specifically, then that also has a quality I believe.

**CL:** There you raise a very fascinating point. I often ask myself the question, now we live in the contemporary art world, your gallery stands for contemporary art: How does art become perpetual?

**GHL:** I don't have to get up in the morning at all, if I didn't strive for immortality with what I do, because without that I don't need to get up early as an artist or as a gallery owner, then I'm doing something wrong. That is of course also very important to create this kind of unique selling point and if it is only for myself that I stand as an artist or as a gallery owner, standing behind something as a gallery owner, where I think it is so important that it has filled in the time of my life also a large period for me this, to stay with image, image.

**CL:** Do you still have goosebump moments sometimes?

**GHL:** Every time at an opening or before an opening.

**CL:** From excitement or from fascination?

**GHL:** From excitement, because I think: Oh God, no one is coming and now really no one is coming and then it always gets crowded. So at least then and hopefully in the future. And of course it's totally exciting how people react to it, the artist certainly feels the same way. You can't let yourself be completely influenced by it, but it's interesting to see the different projection possibilities, and that's also great for a gallery owner.

**CL:** Let's assume that everything will be reopened in two weeks.

**GHL:** Then hopefully they'll all be beating down our doors.

**CL:** What else can we expect here, in the LAB, and in Leipzig this year?

**GHL:** After Martin Groß, Martin Eder is coming to Leipzig.

**CL:** One of your long-time artists.

**GHL:** Yes, I've been working with him for ages. He comes from Augsburg, more precisely from Batzenhofen, which is also Bavaria. And where the Augsburger Puppenkiste comes from. He has also done many different things in his life like me and that is also reflected a bit in the way he works, what he paints, that he makes music and so on and on. You have to have courage to collect Martin Eder, because there are always discussions at home or when visitors come.

**CL:** Why?

**GHL:** Because the works are not quite so catchy, or sometimes they are so catchy that they are terribly catchy, even kitschy and thus provoke again. We will then show Tim Eitel here in Berlin. Artist who, like the others mentioned earlier, belongs to the names that actually run under the Leipzig School, although he also left Leipzig at an early stage. He went to New York, he was in England, now he is already many years in Paris is professor there also, at the art academy in Paris, what actually never a German has managed. I also believe that the French believe he is French. They like to do that when someone lives there and has a certain position. That can not be that this would be a foreigner, that would be all French. That is also good like that, Tim Eitel. He also has very good students. We have already done something with his class, with the former students at the art academy. He will be shown here. So we have a lot of things that we will be doing in the future. We still have David Schnell soon in September and Karl-Heinz Adler and we have the fair in Basel which is then moved from June to September. We have the fair in New York, the Armory, which is also postponed again to September. We have the Cologne fair I think, I hope. We have Taiwan Taipei the fair. The Hong Kong fair is postponed. There are quite a few but in the gallery the ones I mentioned earlier.

**CL:** My fingers are crossed that it will all work out that way..

**GHL:** Yes, if not in real life, then just on the net. We can all do that, and it has its appeal, and it's also wonderful when you're surprised when you've maybe only seen something on the net. You know this from clothing. You have it at home and it fits and after a few years and after a few unsuccessful jackets and pants purchases, you can't send everything back even over the net, but at some point you realize that it's also stupid to send everything back, shoes and so on. But then you have such a sure hand that you keep it and wear it. This may also be the case with art at some point and it still remains the most wonderful way to go shopping. Shopping, art shopping. I mean, there's nothing more awesome than shopping for art. People buy art, that's great or just deal in art and not drugs, that's also a motto I would write big on the wall.

**CL:** And listen to art podcasts. (laughs) Are you already working on concepts to set up the fairs digitally?

**GHL:** That's what we're doing anyway. That's what the fairs do and that's what we do. You can visit any fair that's happening these days, whether it's happening for real or has been postponed, all of them can be visited digitally in spaces. We do films with professionals with interviews with the artists for all exhibitions now and in the future, whether it's in the gallery or anywhere else, and it's all happening at the same time and it's going to continue. And I think that's also a good way of archiving and it was long overdue to do it that way.

**CL:** I have one more question about the collection. I hear so often: I have to complete my collection.

**GHL:** Well, if you have shoes, you complete your collection of shoes.

**CL:** Yes, but others fly out.

**GHL:** Yes, that also happens with collections. They either fly out because they get sold again, go to an auction. Or what I said earlier, that you give it to a museum or to your aunt. Or you have a storage and you put it in there for now.

**CL:** Yes, exactly, because I wonder: can you complete a collection? Or is it more of a never ending story?

**GHL:** Yes, completing means of course never ending story, because you don't complete it to finish it, you complete it to continue it.

**CL:** A bottomless pit...

**GHL:** Well, not a bottomless pit. It's a learning process, after all, and it's like fashion. Sometimes you have the taste and feel comfortable in it, and then you wonder why you've been running around in it all this time and take something else. But there are also people like me who always run around in a three-piece suit. So there are people who just collect photography from 1954 to '90 all the time. And they wallow in it like a pig in the mud and feel totally comfortable. So every collection shouldn't be what you expect it to be, but rather what the collector has created it to be.

**CL:** I find that totally exciting, too. I had an exciting podcast conversation partner the other day, it was about the dialogue between contemporary art and the old masters.

**GHL:** Wonderful, also good.

**CL:** Dr. Dr. Thomas Rusche (a Germany collector), he started with the experience of his childhood and the period rooms. And if I imagine today, one comes into the room of the 80s - so there it was of course about the English and the Dutch - today one would then perhaps come into the art room of the 80s, the 90s and recognize his own development on the basis of his collected art. I find that exciting as well.

**GHL:** But I think not only art is vital, it's also cooking skills that you develop. It's also restaurants you go to. Plays, books, ballet, whether you go or not. It's operas that you listen to directly or on CD. They are friends and former friends. It is enemies and former enemies. It's all part of it. There is nothing that should be left out. And art should have the same normality and since you don't have to pay an entrance fee for galleries and you should never be afraid to cross this barrier, I simply invite you: Visit art, buy art, get to know each other in galleries, look around what's there, you're always welcome there.

**CL:** So now you can't get around it. Why are you called Judy?

**GHL:** Judy, that was, wait a minute - I was born in '61, I was five, so in '66 - in 1966 there were some people in the GDR who also watched the forbidden Western Federal Republic television. There were only antennas at that time and you had to align them directly to the west so that you got a picture at all and because if you align an antenna to the west all see that is aligned to the west, you had to hang this antenna under the attic. There was of course not such a good reception but it was somehow still reception, because if you had it on the roof, then it got broken off, because you were visibly looking west which was forbidden. So you hang it under the roof, in an attic, where in Germany a lot of things disappear, under the attic. And hanging there one got to see western television. But you couldn't even say that you were watching Western television, because it was forbidden. You couldn't expose yourself and say that you were watching West German television, because it was forbidden, and you would have turned yourself in. But on this West German television there was a series called "Dear Uncle Bill". And Uncle Bill, he had the task of bringing two orphans through life, an American series. And they were called Jody that was the boy and Buffy that was the girl, twins. Jody and Buffy. That was kind of a very popular series. There weren't that many series back then, but this one already existed. And everybody was watching that show. And I saw, these were five to six year olds at that time this Jody and this Buffy and I was between five and six years and looked exactly like Jody. Now, however, in Saxony one could not pronounce High German, I don't think one knew in Saxony that there was High German, because what one spoke was considered High German or the normal language, but it was Saxon. And since one could not say Jody, that could not be pronounced in Saxon, but in Saxon here Jody Judy. The Judy. And I looked exactly like Jody and when I walked across the street one was completely shocked that one saw someone who looked like Western television and one could finally say about the reflection of this person who was there five: Oh look, he looks like Judy. With that one made oneself known that one was watching western television and the other one if he knew what was going on, he was also watching western television, so there was a conspiracy among each other. And only those knew this conspiracy also about the code that I looked like this Jody, only those belonged to this great conspiracy as a group. And so I ran around there for a long time, two three years, as Jody/Judy. And since I was, so to speak, the embodiment of this code, it became very, very firmly established, and the GDR went on for a while, and so I never got rid of it again, and I never tried to get rid of it. And in America they also said: What's your name? And when I said: My name is Gerd Harry Lybke, then in America it sounds more like a gun ointment than like a name. And Judy is cool, that's a girl's name that a man has, that was kind of cool. That was okay for them and it helped me. And somehow it became established that it was more Judy than Gerd Harry Lybke.

**CL:** I find that also symbolically totally beautiful that you were at that time as a little boy, already a mediator between a not quite conventional point of view and that you are now the mediator in the art scene.



**GHL:** And I have fun with it and without the people with whom I work here, who keep our backs free every day and right now, there would be no such thing. And without artists and many other people forget that, there would be neither a gallery nor a museum or anything else in this direction, they are the real reason.

**CL:** And I'm glad you took me with you today and mediated neatly. Thank you very much for the time you gave me and I'm glad to have met you in person.

**GHL:** Okay, thanks you, see you soon!

**CL:** See you soon!