

# **Karl Waldmann: Ein Phantom-Kriminalfall eines Phantom-Künstlers.**

By Alexeev Vladimir

[Karl Waldmann: Ein Phantom-Kriminalfall eines Phantom-Künstlers. Teil I. Es spukt.](#)

[Karl Waldmann: Ein Phantom-Kriminalfall. Teil II. Showdown-Konferenz.](#)

[Karl Waldmann: Ein Phantom-Kriminalfall. Teil III. Existenz des Autors.](#)

After gathering all the articles published by the German press (Augustus 2015), Vladimir Alexeev, an academic from Frankfurt University and member of the "British Kurt Schwitters Society", publishes a series of articles on the Affaire Karl Waldmann on his blog <http://culturmag.de> in November 2015. He shows his knowledge of the Dada movement and challenges the position taken by the German press on the sole important question of the whole case: "Who is Karl Waldmann?". A large number of art works in museums do not have an author assigned to them and the idea of a forgery has rarely occurred, the arguments regarded quality, composition and technique. This is the point of view taken by Pascal Polar in his research on K. Waldmann proved by the specialized laboratory reports ([PTS Laboratory, Munich](#)).

**Vladimir Alexeev:** [alexeev@em.uni-frankfurt.de](mailto:alexeev@em.uni-frankfurt.de)

In this article we list some extracts from Vladimir Alexeev's publications.

<http://merzdadaco.hypotheses.org/241>

## **Part I: A ghost a criminal case a ghost artist.**

He is haunted.

Vladimir Alexeev, 09/09/2015

[...]

KW now haunts the pages of newspapers that talk about the arts. A mysterious story, a scandal, a criminal case! A ghost. A ghost. A fraudster! What do we know about this?

[...]

In November 1989, shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall (and this is important), a journalist discovers (his name is not important), some interesting collages on a flea market in Dresden.

[...]

He found a total of 1 200 works, the journalist gets them and they find their way to Brussels to the Pascal Polar gallery. Slowly, these collages become famous, and will be exhibited and sold. .... They have a presence in a virtual museum and arrive this summer at the Kunsthaus Dresden in conjunction with the exhibition "[Künstliche Tatsachen / Boundary Objects](#)".

## **A spooky criminal case by a ghost artist**

[...]

This exhibition has been followed by several articles in the "Süddeutsche Zeitung", who have been written by journalist Thomas Steinfeld. The latter doubts the authenticity of the works and the authenticity of the artist Karl Waldmann - especially because, in fact, the name Waldmann in the context of the historical avant-garde does not exist, and this is why Steinfeld cherishes a suspicion of criminal history.

## **The spark in the powder keg. The drama of the landscape explodes.**

There is now talk about counter fights regarding the crime. We remember counter fighting [Kesting Trinkaus](#). [The Pascal Polar Gallery](#) is subject to fraud (by negligence or malice), and the Kunsthaus

Dresden accused of incompetence. In Berlin (the) art dealers are reimbursed by unknown persons - and Landeskriminalamt is now involved. Pascal Polar is called in Dresden for clarification.

[...]

But behind this story there are many more. Because many journalists have neglected the alarming signs. Or ignored them (the journalists of quality can allow themselves to do so....)

<http://merzdadaco.hypotheses.org/245>

## **Part II. Karl Waldmann: A spooky criminal case. Showdown Conference.**

What is it that the columnists have not noticed yet?

In the enthusiasm, most authors have ignored a number of very interesting clues.

[...]

The description of the work of Waldmann in the brochure of the Dresden Kunsthaus exhibition:

As the origin of the work and the identity of the alleged artist himself now leave a number of questions in suspense, it is also possible that this is a contemporary art project that uses fiction strategies. To provide the impetus for further exploration of the many open questions about Karl Waldmann, is one of the concerns in the exhibition.

So far the debate has not taken place:

[...]

The journalists have not even tried to take their time to think, that he is neither an unknown artist, nor a criminal in malicious tampering, but a contemporary art project.

[...]

### **The death of the artist.**

[The author is dead](#), Roland Barthes has already informed us of this in the middle of the century. This message has probably not spread everywhere.

If you visit the website of the Virtual [Museum of Karl Waldmann](#), you will be welcomed by this work. And even the allusion was ignored by journalists of quality:

"An artist is really valued when we forget it in his work." ([inv 0646](#))

[...]

Now, what do the chroniclers? They forget the works and condemn the artist. Instead of interpreting the works, they call it the "greatest Kunstverarsche Berlin" (the art dupery), "a fraud", "Clans and counter fighters," and Thomas Steinfeld has issued a clear ultimatum, unequivocal and uncompromising before the meeting of clarification ....

[...]

Take your time and think about it: a conference needs to be convened, whose mere purpose is to clarify whether there was an artist or not. Under pressure from the public and the press (the public actually smiled in comments about the fury of journalists).

But even after the press conference, the press is not satisfied. They were not given a clear answer. Because the only thing that interests them is binary in nature: Does Waldmann exist or not? Is it art? The decision on the artistic validity should only depend on the proof of his existence. The whole historical avant-garde is for nothing?

[...]

**My advice to all museums – in order to protect yourself against the inquisition of the press, one should place tags on works whose provenance is uncertain saying "Unknown origin. A gaze at your own risk. This is perhaps no art. "**

[...]

The press is still confident in the crime. [...] And over all this tohu-bohu hovers the shadow of the Judicial Police of the State. Like pigs in Prussian uniforms, hanging from the ceiling during the First International Dada Fair in the 1920s.

But what kind of stories these work want to tell? [...]  
<http://merzdadaco.hypotheses.org/279>

### **Part 3: Karl Waldmann: A ghost, a criminal case? The existence of authors**

[...]

Thousands of amazing collages by Charles Jules Verneesque AA Dellschau have been discovered in the trash. Hundreds of thousands of unique pictures of [Vivian Maier](#) have been found in a cabinet at a auction. Works by Karl Waldmann were saved on a flea market. How many other works of unknown artists have been lost so far (or worse: will never be discovered)!

In all these cases, little is known about the identity of the perpetrators and the "figure" of the author is shady. And it is always the aura of the work that fascinates us so much.

Pascal Polar, the Belgian gallery owner, wrote in his highly readable critical essay ["the existence of nobody"](#)

**What is the proper name for a work of KW? The tautology is appropriate in response to this question: it is a work of KW, regardless of the author's name and his identity.**

So we would like to get involved in something for which none of the previous reviewers found the courage to do: we look sine ira et studio, at the works of KW, or someone who took up this pseudonym.

### **Karl Waldmann: His Works**

*The uniqueness of the work of art is identical with its roots in the context of tradition.*

*Walter Benjamin, The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction, Chapter V*

The virtual museum Waldmann provides an overview of the whole work of the mysterious artist - all images are supplied with comments and you can even send your own comments for each picture to the museum.

What is already noticeable at first glance is the knowledge of the artist (in what decade he lived) through the historical avant-garde.

[...]

But the works are much more than just a simple attempt of "Epigonalitäten" or bridges. The collages do not want to imitate Schwitters by any means. In contrast with the interests of the artist MERZ in various materials, the selection of materials is concentrated in the works of KW - newspaper cutting with text, photos and advertising, here and there a bit mixed with media. Calm handling of symbolism. Instead of the pathological intensity of Heartfield one sees here distant irony of a media critics, almost a return to the culturally and politically confused cruel years of the first half of the 20th century.

### **And then suddenly this**

A tribute to Richard Hamilton's collages. "Just what it is that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?"

[...]

Not an imitation. No plagiarism. A clear-cut tribute, in which criticism on US consumerism of Hamilton, with his bodybuilders, artifacts of the Wirtschaftswunder and porn erotic motifs are extrapolarized on the debate of Waldmann and his - *already passed* – Nazi period. There is currently no escalation in terms of Heartfield. *There is already a mature coming to terms with the past.* But how is it printed? Subtle. The incrustation of details that have nothing to do with the Nazi era at first sight: Hollywood star Joan Crawford, athletes, furniture (note the typological similarities of Hamilton's compositions and the ones of KW). "Degenerated Art" on the wall? And a sudden radical juxtaposition with swastika in the window, outside, amid the walking masses, - a ruthless way of interpretation. These are no beginners' experiences, no plagiarism, no fakes. This is the power of bonding KW per se.

[...]

### **Then that**

However, he recognizes a trend - despite the striking nature of the kind of collage, he still retains an attitude of self irony and carries the respective direction tirelessly with absurdity. There is no fake.

[...]

About the "infringement" quoted constantly in the media. Would it be "identified" as a collage of Schwitters, can we still play with the concepts of "falsification of the art"? But what has been forged here? A work of art? A whole individual ? We do not know when the works have been achieved. We do not know by whom. We do not know in which context.

But in the end there are works that exist freely liberated from the constraints of fatherhood. Works that speak to us, instead of hiding behind the CV of the artist.

**The existence of the author is irrelevant from now until further notice.**

<http://culturmag.de/litmag/essay-ungeloest-karl-waldmann-ein-phantom-kriminalfall-um-einen-phantom-kuenstler/89992>

Posted On 4 November 2015 By Vladimir Alexeev

[...]

### **Karl Waldmann, Dadaist?**

The gangsters unmasked from art have created a false Dadaist artist with malice. Thereupon journalists have immediately agreed. However, they were not yet scarcely bothered to actually confront the works of Waldmann, Dada and the whole phenomenon.

### **Waldmann, was he a Dadaist?**

That's when my modest person is asked to intervene (see my little art history analysis). Accuse me to put myself on stage, but one does not find a debate around the work of Waldmann anywhere else.

So can I then answer this question?

Waldmann, was he dada? A clear answer.

[...]

### **JEIN (YES AND NO)**

Let us finish this battle that can be put under the title of "serial writers and art dealers fighting Waldmann" and consider everything as a whole.

### **Waldmann, was he dada?**

The art market was during the artist's life a commendable and useful protection of his existence. However, since the author left this world, the patronal attitude of the art market turns into a kind of cannibalistic mortuary meal during which the artist's body will be devoured. What now matters is fame, relationships, the superficial. In a way that the merchant is able to explain to the guests of the event: "that one on the wall, how is he called again? He often had breakfast with Max Ernst and played chess with Tristan Tzara. " But if it happens to be that information is imprecise, that the materials used for the works were recently purchased at a hardware store, then one begins to nitpick.

### **So now - Waldmann dada or no dada?**

What pops up in the eye at first glance is the right information about the artist as to the historical avant-garde (but also concerning the decade in which he lived). Thus you can find fun tributes to Prounen El Lissizky, daring monochrome and psychedelic compositions in the manner of a Max Ernst, obvious forms of Russian constructivism. But also indications concerning the time of events of daily life that are not necessarily to be found in all the educational books there are.

However, these works are much more than mere imitations without genius, or hasty attempts. These collages do not want in any way be related to something. On top of this, they transform and rework.

**Karl Waldmann was not dada** – if you think of dada as an important component of the historical avant-garde. We find no mention of him in the notes and diaries of the best Dadaists of the movement which is relevant evidence in this direction (but not decisive). According to the Pascal Polar gallery, the majority of works from Waldmann have been achieved after the Second World War. Moreover, the Waldmann Museum is more than a simple art gallery. The press forgets this too easily as the research team of the museum brings together historians, psychologists and scientists who publish texts of great interest.

**Karl Waldmann was DADA** - considering dada as a timeless universal phenomenon, timeless and subversive, that calls into question, as such, forgotten traditions, the tastes of the art market, journalists and the cultural industry.

*"There must be more anonymous and untitled works in museums around the world than works where the author's name is known" Pascal Polar "The existence of nobody"*

The press continually refers to "false". If it was about "newly found" collages of Schwitters, one could understand the obsessive fear of "false." But in this case, which kind of falsification are we talking about? One of a work? One of a whole person? Because in this case, it is already a creation.

We do not know when the works were created. We do not know by whom. We do not know in what context.

Ultimately, they are works that exist, freed from the shackles of their origin. Works that speak to us instead of hiding behind the CV of an artist.

**So far, we have not gathered probative evidence on the existence of the artist.**

**Vladimir Alexeev**

PS. In October 2015, Kunsthaus Dresden presented the results of [a scientific analysis](#) of some collages (paper, glue, etc.). As reported in the "Süddeutsche Zeitung", the Papiertechnische Stiftung Heidenau responsible for this analysis could not find any clue regarding works dating after 1958. The mystery remains.