**Wolf Vostell (1932, Leverkusen – 1998, Berlin)**

**Biography (translation from German)**

**1932**

Born October 14 as the son of Hubert Schäfer and Regina Vostell, his parents, in Leverkusen. Father is a train conductor.

During World War II, flight to Chomutov in Sudetenland (Czechoslovakia).

**1945**

Return to Cologne on foot in three months via Budweis, Prague, Dresden, Gera and Kassel.

**1950-53**

Apprenticeship as a photo-lithographer. First attempts in painting, photography and lithography. Fascinated by the fantastic drawings of Alfred Kubin whom he visits in Austria.

**1954**

Attends the Werkkunstschule in Wuppertal. Free painting and experimental typography. From August to September, first visit to Paris. On the front page of the daily newspaper *Le Figaro* of September 6, 1954, Vostell finds the word *dé-coll/age* (= lift up, detach, separate, scrape off) which is used in connection with the crash of a Super Constellation airplane into the Shannon River. Vostell transfers the term to torn posters on urban walls or billboards/stripped off billboards and in 1958 to his happenings. For Vostell, *dé-coll/age* becomes his design principle and comprehensive concept of art.

**1955-56**

Student at the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux Arts in Paris in the subjects painting, graphic art and anatomy.

In-depth studies at the Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris of sheets by Hieronymus Bosch, Francisco de Goya, Pieter Bruegel and Fernand Léger. Assistant of A. M. Cassandre, the graphic/ ads artist and poster designer.

Vostell begins to use any available everyday materials for his own art. He uses paints and fire to process and work on torn off parts of billboards.

**1957**

Attending the Kunstakademie in Dusseldorf. Iconographic studies of events in the paintings by Hieronymus Bosch.

**1958**

In Paris, he realizes the happening *Das Theater ist auf der Straße*. This is the first happening in Europe.

He creates the first object pictures in which car parts are integrated and television sets are installed behind partly torn up canvases.

Thus, Wolf Vostell is the first artist who introduces the medium of television (initially as the object of television sets) into the art of the 20th century.

First environment *Das schwarze Zimmer*, comprising *Deutscher Ausblick, Treblinka* and *Auschwitz Scheinwerfer 568*.

Since the 1950s, Wolf Vostell addresses the Holocaust in numerous works and makes it a subject of discussion. With his clothing, Wolf Vostell did not want to express to be Jewish; much rather, his clothing was a means for him to remind society of something that should never be forgotten. Since the postwar period, he felt strong pressures in society of people wanting to forget what had happened. He intended to confront and counter that trend. Wolf Vostell was not a religious person; for him, art was his religion.

First trip to Extremadura and first solo exhibition in Cáceres.

**1959**

Marriage with Mercedes Guardado Olivenza in Cáceres. She will be his lifelong, inseparable creative partner. Return to Paris and Cologne.

First electronic dé-coll/age blurrings as television distortions. Work with oscillograms and electroacoustic objects. Contacts with the radio and tv station WDR and the record company Electrola. Performance of *TV-dé-coll/age für Millionen*.

**1960**

Solo exhibition in Cáceres.

Preparation of the first Paris exhibition at the gallery Le Soleil dans la Tête. Meets the *affichistes* Francois Dufrene, Jacques de la Villeglé, Raymond Hains and Mimo Rotella. These representatives of *Nouveau Réalisme* operate with a method of tearing off poster walls – a method similar to Vostell's dé-coll/age. However, unlike Vostell, they are exclusively interested in the esthetic result and not in the process of manufacture.

Birth of his first son, David.

**1961**

Coll/age and dé-coll/age exhibition in Paris.

First German solo exhibition at Galerie Lauhus in Cologne.

For a short period of time, he works as a layouter for the magazine *Neue Illustrierte*.

He creates his first blurrings for which he works on magazines or photographs with turpentine and carbon tetrachloride which is then wiped off and wiped up. In contrast to Robert Rauschenberg, a blurring is, for Vostell, not just a creative pictorial event but a content-specific act.

In his happening *Cityrama*, streets and ruins in Cologne are declared to be works of art for a chance audience. Vostell defines the premise of his concept of art: **Life is art, art is life.**

Participation in exhibitions in Paris and Milano, together with Jean-Jacques Lebel, Lucio Fontana, Erró, Robert Rauschenberg, et al.

Spontaneous actions with Nam June Paik, Benjamin Patterson in Cologne.

**1962**

The artist and composer George Maciunas, living in New York, is the organizer of the Fluxus movement and prepares – together with Vostell and Nam June Paik in Cologne – the first international Fluxus festival. The *Fluxus Internationale Festspiele neuester Musik* take place at the Museum in Wiesbaden from September 1 to 23, 1962 and bring about the collective awareness of the Fluxus movement.

FLUXUS (= flowing, in flow, in motion) becomes an expression of the mindset, attitude and outlook on life of an entire generation of artists and musicians, as well as for a renewed awakening to broaden and expand the concept of art in the second half of the 20th century.

At the same Museum in Wiesbaden, Vostell presents the music dé-coll/age action *Kleenex 1*. He meets Dick Higgins, Alison Knowles and Emmett Williams.

That same year, the group of artists will travel to Fluxus concerts in Copenhagen and Paris.

Vostell is founder of the magazine *dé-coll/age - Bulletin aktueller Ideen*; the first three issues are published. *Dé-coll/age-Bus-Happening P.C. Petite Ceinture* in Paris.

**1963**

First solo exhibition in the U.S. at the Smolin Gallery in New York; Vostell’s *6 TV-dé-coll/ages* are the first TV environments presented in the U.S. Participation in the *Yam Fluxus Festival* in New York with his happening *TV-Begräbnis*.

Meets John Cage, Allan Kaprow, George Brecht, Robert Watts, La Monte Young, Allen Jones, Al Hansen as well as Christo, Claes Oldenburg, Andy Warhol and Boris Lurie.

In Wuppertal, the happening *9-Nein-dé-coll/ages* is staged, for a select audience, at 9 different locations in the city. Declares the car accident a sculpture.

First retrospective at the Galerie Parnass of Rolf Jährling in Wuppertal.

Vostell discovers for himself the method of transferring photographs to emulsified canvas. In the following years, he develops a technically and chemically complicated process for a combination of blurrings, silkscreen printing and spray can colors on canvas photos which culminated, at the end of the 1960s, in the layered pictures of the series *Umfunktionierung*.

The first experimental video film *Sun in your head* is created by filming a faulty (blurred) television program, with the inclusion of film actions. In 1964, the film – a new form of dé-coll/aged electronic pictures – has its world premiere in Amsterdam.

**1964**

Second visit to New York. Realization of the dé-coll/age happening *You*.

In Berlin, the first Fluxus event and happenings in the newly established Galerie René Block. Involved in Berlin’s art scene.

Performance of the happening *In Ulm, um Ulm und um Ulm herum* at 24 locations in Ulm (among others, concert by three jet fighters at a German Armed Forces aerodrome and a dinner in a slaughterhouse) upon the invitation by the theater of Ulm. Vostell’s happenings develop into complex situations of experiences and decisions for a select audience.

**1965**

Realization of two happenings in Berlin; *Phaenomene* at an auto salvage yard, and *Berlin 100 Ereignisse* in collaboration with René Block. A series or cycle of 50 drawings is created, entitled *Phaenomene* which are exhibited at the Galerie Block.

Performance of the happening *Die Folgen der Notstandsgesetze* at the *24 Stunden- Happening* at the Galerie Parnass in Wuppertal.

In collaboration with Jürgen Becker, Vostell publishes the documentation *Happenings, Fluxus, Pop Art, Neuer Realismus* with the publishing house Rowohlt Verlag. Encounter with Marcel Duchamp in Hannover.

Birth of his second son, Rafael.

**1966**

Realization of the happening *Dogs and Chinese not allowed* in New York in collaboration with Something Else Press founded by Dick Higgins. For a total of 14 days, the happening takes place all across New York City and even includes the entire subway system. Publication of a documentation about the Vostell happenings. Retrospective in the Kölnischer Kunstverein.

Encounters the psychologist Wilhelm Salber.

**1967**

Realization of the happening *Miss Vietnam* in Cologne.

Vostell is grappling with the Vietnam war.

**1968**

In Cologne, Wolf Vostell is founder – together with the composer Mauricio Kagel, and Alfred Feussner as well as F. Heubach, et al. – of the Labor e.V. zur Erforschung akustischer und visueller Ereignisse [Laboratory for researching acoustic and visual events, registered society].

Upon invitation by the Institut für Moderne Kunst in Nuremberg, Vostell realizes – in collaboration with the technologist Peter Saage – the installation *E.d.H.R*. (*Elektronischer dé-coll/age-Happening-Raum*) which is subsequently shown in the special exhibition at the Art Biennale in Venice.

Action lectures in Karlsruhe, at the documenta 4 in Kassel and in Berlin. He protests against politico-cultural practices behind the scenes of the documenta organization. In parallel with the Cologne art market, the *1. Labor-Festival 5-Tage-Rennen* takes place in the underground garage underneath the Kunsthalle in Cologne.

**1969**

Installation *Induktion* for Galleria Schwarz in Milano.

Performance of the radio happening *100 mal Hören und Spielen*, commissioned by the WDR.

Founding *Kombinat l* in Cologne.

First concrete embedding *Ruhender Verkehr* (Opel Kapitän) in collaboration with Helmut Rywelski’s art intermedia gallery in Cologne. Vostell calls his plastic concrete embeddings event sculptures or action plastics.

**1970**

*Concrete Traffic* at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago as the second automobile concrete sculpture.

Realization of the installation *T.E.K. (Thermoelektronischer Kaugummi)* at the Kunsthalle in Cologne and the happening *Salat* in a train between Cologne and Aachen which is continued for one year.

In collaboration with Wolf Vostell and Harald Szeemann, the Kölnischer Kunstverein organizes the first retrospective exhibition of the international happening and Fluxus movement.

At the last minute, a performance ban prevents the realization of the Vostell happening *TV-Ochsen* which was to show the birth of a calf at the Kunsthalle in Cologne.

First meeting with Italian art collector Gino di Maggio, founder of the Galleria Multhipla in Milano.

**1971**

Moving from Cologne to West Berlin.

*Beton-Stuhl* in collaboration with René Block and Modus GmbH in Berlin.

Foundation of *H.A.B. (Happening Archiv Berlin)*.

**1972**

*Schnee* happening in Switzerland and installation *T.O.T (Technological Oak Tree)* in the U.S.

Co-founder of the first **video library for video art** in Germany at Neuer Berliner Kunstverein.

On commission of the video library of Neuer Berliner Kunstverein, he makes a 45-minute film called *Desastres* in a Berlin shunting yard, showing the concrete embedding of a railroad sleeping car and concrete embeddings of bodies.

Vostell now begins to also express and formulate his concept or view of man by means of painting.

**1973**

Work on the cycles *Mania* and *Calatayud.*

First version of the installation *Endogene Depression* at Galleria Rotta in Genoa.

Co-founder of the *Festival ADA – Avant-Garde Actions* which takes place in Berlin for the first time in the fall. As the main organizer, Neuer Berliner Kunstverein commissions Wolf Vostell with the realization of the installation *Auto-Fieber* and of the happening *Berlin-Fieber.*

**1974**

Participating in *ADA 2* with the happening *Erdbeeren*.

In December, the great Vostell retrospective is opened in the A.R.C. 2 of the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris; in an expanded scope, the retrospective will go to the Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin in 1975.

In the barren landscape of the central Spanish Extremadura, near the village of Malpartida, Vostell founds the Museo Vostell Malpartida in the building of an old wool scouring line.

**1975**

Exhibition of the *Extremadura* cycle at the van de Loo gallery in Munich.

Exhibition of the installation *Fandango* at the Galleria Multhipla in Milano.

In collaboration with Neuer Berliner Kunstverein, Jörn Merkert shows the Vostell retrospective at Neue Nationalgalerie Berlin.

**1976**

First happening in Spain *Hinterm Baum* in collaboration with the Galería G in Barcelona.

Performance of the happening *Regen* in Berlin.

Realization of his third automobile concrete sculpture *VOAEX* at the Museo Vostell Malpartida.

**1977**

Participating in documenta 6 in Kassel with the installation *La Quinta del Sordo / Das Haus der Tauben.*

Guest lecturer at the Comprehensive University of Essen. Lectures on the esthetics of action or performance art. In January 1978, Vostell and his students perform the happening *Heuwagen*.

Since 1977, intensive work on painting. Vostell is working in Berlin, Milano and Malpartida de Cáceres.

**1978**

First large retrospective in Denmark at the Anja Art Center in Aabenraa.

Vostell meets Salvador Dali who commissions him for a sculpture at Dali’s museum in Figueras. Vostell creates the *TV-Obelisk*.

Vostell invites Dali to realize – for the Museo Vostell Malpartida – the sculpture *Der Vorhang des Parzifal* according to an idea by the Catalan artist from the year 1929.

Retrospective at the Museo Español de Arte Contemporáneo in Madrid; in 1979, the retrospective goes on to Barcelona and Lisbon.

For the first time, Vostell organizes the *SACOM* at the Museo Vostell Malpartida and presents the cycle of paintings and the sculpture *Der Tote der Durst hat.*

**1979**

For the dramaturgist Hansgünther Heyme, Vostell designs the stage for a Hamlet performance where the actors operate with TV equipment and video cameras.

Vostell gets to know the TV filmmaker and art critic Rudij Bergmann. Exhibition of the cycle of paintings *Der Tote der Durst hat* at Berlin’s Ars Viva! Gallery managed by Peter Schiller. S.A.C.O.M. II at the Museo Vostell Malpartida.

**1980**

Exhibition of the cycle of paintings *Johanna, die Wahnsinnige* at the Galleria Il Centro in Naples.

At Kunstverein Braunschweig, Jürgen Schilling organizes the retrospective of Vostell pictures from 1954 to 1979.

At the Institute of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, Vostell realizes the largest version of his installation *Endogene Depression* (30 TV concrete sculptures with 7 live turkeys).

**1981**

Exhibition of the cycle *Garten der Lüste* at the Ars Viva! Gallery in Berlin.

Organized by Dagmar von Gottberg and under the patronage of Johannes Rau, Prime Minister of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia, Vostell realizes the *Fluxus-Zug* as a mobile museum in NRW: A train with 9 containers comprising 7 installations travels through 16 cities in North Rhine-Westphalia. Vostell accompanies the train and provides educational and awareness training during the three-day stays respectively in the various cities.

**1982**

Vostell exhibition in Berlin at the DAAD Galerie in Berlin.

Exhibition of the installations of the *Fluxus-Zug* at theCentre Culturel du Marais in Paris.

In Madrid, Vostell is given the Pablo Iglesias cultural award. Retrospective at the museum in Calais/ France.

On the occasion of the music festival, Pro Musica Nova and the radio station Radio Bremen commission a Mixed Media Opera. Thus, *Der Garten der Lüste* is created.

The Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris exhibits Wolf Vostell’s complete graphic print work.

On the occasion of his 50th birthday, the Museo Vostell Malpartida organizes a homage to the artist. Mercedes Vostell publishes her book *El enigma Vostell.* Vostell presents the picture cycle and the Fluxus concert *La Siberia Extremeña*.

**1983**

Trip to Buenos Aires. At the Centro Arte y Comunicación, Vostell realizes the Fluxus action *Beton-Tango*.

Performance of two major Fluxus concerts *Die Nackten und die Toten* at the Galerie Michael Wewerka in Berlin and *La Siberia Extremeña* at the Hedendaag Art Center in Ghent/Belgium. With the Fluxus group, participation in the Sao Paulo Biennale.

Organizes S*ACOM* at the Museo Vostell Malpartida.

**1984**

Vostell presents the installation *Die Winde* from the Fluxus train in the exhibition Art and Automobile at the MOCA Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles.

As a guest professor, Vostell has, for the first time, his own course at the International Summer Academy for Fine Arts in Salzburg.

**1985**

Participation in the major international exhibition *Dialog* in Lisbon. Exhibitions with works on the subject of Spain in the galleries Inge Baecker, Cologne and Michael Wewerka, Berlin.

Renewed invitation as a guest professor at the International Summer Academy in Salzburg.

Production of the video *TV Cubisme Liège* at Espace 251 Nord in Liège. A complete retrospective of Vostell’s video works is shown during an exhibition in Liège. Participation in the Video Festival in Stockholm.

Exhibition of current works at the Musée d'Art Moderne in Strasbourg.

**1986**

Presents a cycle of paintings and the installation *Milonga* at ARCO'86 in Madrid in collaboration with Galerie Inge Baecker, Cologne.

The Goethe Institut in Madrid dedicates to Vostell a one-week series of events with exhibitions, concerts and lectures entitled *Vostell. Kunst lehrt Leben*.

**1987**

Realization of the sculpture *Zwei Beton-Cadillacs in Form der nackten Maja* for the boulevard of sculptures at the Rathenau Place in Berlin on the occasion of the 750-year anniversary.

Realization of his fifth automobile concrete sculpture *Auto-Baricade* for Belfort in France.

**1988**

Large plastic *VW for Zen* for the Seoul Olympics’ Sculpture Garden.

Large plastic *La Tortuga* for the Anhalter train station in Berlin; final destination for this plastic will be the city of Marl.

On commission by the radio and tv station SFB, Vostell realizes for television *Das Happening Das Frühstück des Leonardo da Vinci in Berlin*.

Designing the Art Hotel in Berlin.

**1989**

*Tauromaquie, Automaquie, Frauenmaquie* at Galerie Chobot in Vienna.

Directly after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the large-format picture *9. November 1989* was created and in the following year, the cycle *The Fall of the Berlin Wall*.

**1990**

Exhibition of the picture cycle *The Fall of the Berlin Wall* at the Galerie am Weidendamm in East Berlin.

Solo exhibition at Fundazione Mudima in Milano.

Participation in the Fluxus retrospective *Ubi Fluxus ibi motus*.

In Paris, five exhibitions organized by Galerie Lavignes are dedicated to Wolf Vostell. Realization of his Fluxus concert *Le Cri*.

Vostell is awarded the Médaille de la Ville de Paris, the highest award of the city of Paris.

**1991**

Realization of the event sculpture *Auto-TV-Hochzeit* for the Galerie Michael in Darmstadt.

Upon invitation by the Spanish television corporation, the video *TV-Rebaño* is created for the television series El arte de Video.

**1992**

To mark his 60th birthday, five museums in Cologne, Mülheim/Ruhr, Bonn, Leverkusen and in Mannheim jointly organize the so far most comprehensive retrospective of the work by Wolf Vostell: *Vostell 60-Rückblick 92*.

Exhibition *Vostell-Extremadura* in Mérida and Cáceres. Picture cycle *Die Weinenden* at the Galerie Inge Baecker in Cologne.

Berlin’s Senator of Culture awards the title of professor to Wolf Vostell.

**1993**

Retrospective at the Kunstgalerie Gera.

**1994**

Nationalization of the Museo Vostell Malpartida by the Regional Government of Extremadura.

Exhibition and Fluxus concert *3 Sara-Jevo-Pianos* at the Fundación Miró in Palma de Mallorca.

**1995**

Vostell presents his picture cycle *Drei Grazien* at Galerie Enderle in Wuppertal. One-man show at Art Cologne’95.

**1996**

Realization of the sculpture *Warum dauerte der Prozeß zwischen Pilatus und Jesus nur 2 Minuten?* for the First *Festival di un Altro Mondo/Fluxus & Fluxus* at the Villa Scheibler in Milano.

Participation in the exhibition *Face à l’histoire* at the Centre Pompidou in Paris.

Birth of his grandson Levin Jonathan.

**1997**

On the occasion of his 65th birthday, the Department of Culture of the company Bayer honors Wolf Vostell with the exhibition *Vostell in Nordrheinwestfälischen Sammlungen*.

Exhibition at the Centre Kyron in Paris.

First presentation of his picture *Shoah 1492 - 1945* at the Galerie Fine Art Rafael Vostell, Berlin.

Inauguration of his sculpture *Warum dauerte der Prozeß zwischen Pilatus und Jesus nur 2 Minuten?* at the Museo Vostell Malpartida.

Participation in the exhibition *Deutschlandbilder* at the Martin-Gropius-Bau in Berlin and presentation of his video films.

Berlin’s Senator of Culture together with the Berlinische Galerie award the Hannah Höch Prize to Wolf Vostell.

**1998**

*Shoah 1492 - 1945* is presented at the Palacio Galveias in Lisbon and subsequently at the MEIAC museum (Museo Extremeño e Iberoamericano de Arte Contemporáneo) in Badajoz.

Exhibition *Out of Action* at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles.

At the age of 65, Wolf Vostell dies of heart failure in Berlin on April 3, 1998.

His grave is located at the Cementerio Civil de la Almudena in Madrid.