

Berthold Dietz and sport

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The Erzgebirge (The Ore Mountains) is one of the most picturesque areas in the German Democratic Republic. Tens of thousands of recreationseekers spend their holidays in the extensive spruce forests of this mountainous region. And it is also the region in which the sculptor Berthold Dietz has-chosen to make his home. This 47 years old artist derives inspiration for much of his work from sport. One of his sculptures is to be featured in the « Art and Sport » exhibition which will traditionally open its doors during the Sports and Gymnastics Festival of the GDR, to be held at the same time as the Ninth Children's and Youth Spartakiade in Leipzig in July 1983.

His father, a stone mason, introduced him to sculpture at a very early age. This apprenticeship, under a strict but encouraging master, strongly influenced the young boy. He left the family home to follow painting and drawing courses under Professor Michel at Zwickau from 1952 to 1955, then continued his studies with Professors Arnhold and Jaeger at the College of Fine Arts in Dresden from 1955 to 1960.

Berthold Dietz had a predilection for animals. « *Professor Michel would often take me to task because I used to run away from class to observe and draw birds and four-legged creatures in the zoo* », he recalled with a smile. His favourite models were seabirds, horses, bison, bears and foxes, and it was through these subjects that he became known as a sculptor of animal figures.

However, the artist still looked for new forms of expression, and, turning his attention to man, he naturally became interested in the vast sphere of physical culture and sport. This influence was by no means accidental. In the GDR, physical culture and sport are widely taught, as they contribute so much to the development of the personality. Thus in 1964 Berthold Dietz took part in a competition organised by the county executive of the Karl-Marx-Stadt sports school, presenting his first work inspired by sport: three bronze sculptures of judo players adopting different



Berthold Dietz at home.

postures. He won first prize. "Since then sport has held a great fascination for me", admitted the artist, "I simply remained under its spell".

Familiarising himself with the role of sport in art, Berthold Dietz is seeking to lend his work not only an artistic dimension, but also an educative import. These thoughts led to the creation of a sculpture of the mountaineer Kurt Schlosser, who was also a cabinet-maker. This workman had used his talents as an athlete to save many members of the resistance during the last war, showing great strength of character, kindness, fervour and selflessness. He lost his life in his fight for liberty. The bust rests on a white stele carved with mountaineering scenes. It has been placed at the entrance to the Sports School in Verdau.

It also gives Berthold Dietz great pleasure to encourage young people in the art of modelling. For more than twenty years' he has directed a group of young people interested in modelling and sculpture. His children and his wife work with him, and some of their creations have already been exhibited in the "Gallery of Friendship". The artistic tradition in the Dietz family is now in its third generation.

After my visit to Berthold Dietz's studio I remembered that Pierre de Coubertin had said that sport could be viewed as a procreator of art and as an opportunity for art. These words by the founder of the modern Olympic Games are abundantly illustrated in the German Democratic Republic. Berthold Dietz is a case in point.

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