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Gunter Demnig turns 75

Gunter Demnig was born in Berlin in 1947, where he first studied art education after graduating from high school and then industrial design at the Staatliche Hochschule für Bildende Künste. As a student, he was already inclined to staging provocative actions in the public space. In 1968, in protest against the Vietnam War, he painted a **US flag** on the window of his studio in Kreuzberg, replacing the stars with skulls. This artistic stunt earned him a brief stint in jail.

In 1970, he moved from Berlin to Kassel where he graduated in art education, and started studying with the artist, sculptor, and choreographer Harry Kramer. The **"Atelier Kramer"** was a collective of artists and students that organized numerous art actions and exhibitions together and represented the idea of participatory art that was critical of society.

In 1980, Demnig became a research assistant at the University of Kassel and examined the question of when an artist can call themselves an artist.

To draw attention to this problem, he walked from the university in Kassel to the Centre Pompidou in Paris. He covered the entire distance by foot, printing the text **"DUFTMARKEN CASSEL - PARIS DEMNIG 80"** on the streets with the help of a homemade printing device. He was briefly detained by the French gendarmerie on the way and it took him 21 days to arrive in Paris, where he donated the printing device to the Centre Pompidou. It is still in its collection today.



© Gunter Demnig

Demnig crossing the Alps 1984

Over the following years, Demnig carried out numerous other actions, in which he left traces and made trails, combining art, performance, and provocation in the public space. In 1981, he left a **"Blutspur"** ("Blood Trail") from the Kunstakademie in Kassel to the Tate Gallery in London using animal blood. The year after, he spanned an **"Ariadne-Faden"** ("Ariadne thread") over 1,000 km from Kassel to Venice, and in 1984 he buried **"Landschaftskonserven"** ("canned landscapes") along the path of his trek across the Alps.

After 1985, Demnig participated in various projects, such as the MOLTKEREI-Werkstatt and the art space FUHRWERKSWAAGE in Cologne. Later, he constructed **sound installations** and conceived provocative **fairground automatons**. Many of these works are now exhibited in his the artist's own gallery in Alsfeld-Elbenrod.



Gunter Demnig in
Köln 1990

© Gunter Demnig

It was in Cologne that Gunter Demnig met members of Rom e.V., a Cologne-based Roma organization, and in 1990 he use a homemade contraption to paint a trail to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the deportation of 1,000 Roma and Sinti people from the city. He printed the words **"Mai 1940 - 1000 Roma und Sinti"** (May 1940 - 1000 Roma and Sinti) in over 20 places on the streets of the western German city. His action was also a criticism of contemporary European asylum policy.

Encouraged by his good friend Kurt Holl from Rom e.V., Demnig was inspired to take this trail of commemoration further. He wanted to make his project more personal and literally more concrete - the idea of the **STOLPERSTEINE** began to take shape.

The first stone marked 50 years since the "Auschwitz decree" in 1942. The first STOLPERSTEIN for individuals were placed in Cologne and Berlin in 1996.

Demnig has travelled around Europe ever since and today there are some 96,000 Stolpersteine, most of which the 75-year-old artist has installed himself.

Happy Birthday, Gunter!

www.stiftung-spuren-gunterdemnig.eu

www.stolpersteine.eu