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Daniel Joseph Martinez

*I am Ulrike Meinhof or (someone once told me time is a flat circle)*

Roberts & Tilton

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By Jody Zellen



For Daniel Joseph Martinez, art and politics are inseparable. Martinez is known to shock and challenge viewers but never without purpose. His projects are extremely specific, well researched and heavily invested in both conceptual and artistic paradigms. *I am Ulrike Meinhof or (someone once told me time is a flat circle)* is a body of eighty photographs (ten of which are on view in the gallery) created while Martinez was on a residency in Berlin. The project is about physical and political borders— specifically, the borders created by the Berlin wall. Martinez uses rarely seen as well as iconic images of Ulrike Meinhof, a Red Army Faction leader, as banners, photographing himself holding these reproductions at specific places along the 103 mile perimeter of the old wall.

*I am Ulrike Meinhof or (someone once told me time is a flat circle)* is a mapping project as well as a performance, albeit a performance (in the tradition of Sophie Calle or Vito Acconci) for the camera rather than an audience. Martinez bicycled the route of the wall during Germany's cold winter months carrying a selection of images to be used in the photographs. At each location a camera was set up and Martinez dressed in work boots, hooded jacket and warm hat. Then, he was photographed staring blankly into the distance while holding a tall pole with an image of Meinhof (1934-1976) at differing ages in her short life. The title of each low contrast black and

white photograph references the specifics: This was a tiny valley floor at the “Rudower Höhe”. The park is located in the districts of Rudow and Alt-Glienicke. The Rudower Höhe was created from a 70-meter-high mountain of rubble in the 1950s. Further east, the Wall ran before the turnaround. Approximately 400 meters of the Wall can still be seen in the original. Since 2001, these remains have been declared a Historic Monument, (2017). In the image, Martinez is pictured from a distance, just below the center. He is in the middle of a wide, leaf filled path surrounded by trees. The top third of the composition depicts a cloud filled gray sky. In his hands is an extension pole topped by a horizontal banner with tassels, displaying an iconic image of the deceased Meinhof (also used as the source for a Gerhard Richter painting).

Berlin today is no longer divided and the presence of the wall has mostly disappeared. It is hard to fathom West Berlin as an island surrounded by a dark and drab East Berlin. Martinez does not celebrate gentrified Berlin in his photographs, rather he depicts people-less places and Soviet Block style architecture in flat winter light to suggest a connection between present and past.

To trace the route from photograph to photograph and to understand the meaning of each location Martinez chose would require vast knowledge of German history and politics, something beyond what is expected of the average viewer. Full understanding would also require knowledge of the Baader Meinhof gang and the relationships within the Red Army Faction as well as their relationship to German politics at the time. Martinez carefully selected pictures that spanned the life of Meinhof with a desire to create a way to memorialize her and her contributions beyond the label of “terrorist.”

Without all the facts, viewers can only extrapolate and while Martinez likes to converse with informed viewers, he does not dismiss the uninformed. He presents ten photographs, each taken in a specific location— where a barrier once stood, but stands no more. Each image celebrates the life and death of Meinhof and locates her in these scenes. While only research can connect the dots, Martinez leaves a trail and invites viewers to pick up the clues to learn why he is Ulrike Meinhof and why time is a flat circle.

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