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## For Sale: A Glass Mural Commissioned by East Germany's Secret Police

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Next week, art lovers with cash to spare will travel to Florida for Art Basel Miami Beach, the international art fair, which runs from December 1 to December 4. Attendees typically splurge on modern and contemporary art, but this year, [The New York Times reports](#), they have the option to purchase a relic of communist East Germany: an enormous stained glass mural created for the Stasi, the infamous secret police of the German Democratic Republic.

Thilo Holzmann, a German art historian, found the free-standing mural among his uncle's belongings. It had sat forgotten in a shipping crate for years. Hoping that the work's history will lend it unique value, Holzmann is hosting a pop-up exhibition during Art Basel at an undisclosed location. There, he hopes to sell the mammoth stained glass creation for more than \$21 million.

Erich Mielke, the longest-serving head of the Stasi, commissioned artist Richard Otfried Wilhelm to create the three-ton, 65-foot-wide mural in 1979. (Wilhelm was the German Democratic Republic's chief master of glass for public works.) The mural depicts Lenin, two doves, a hammer and sickle symbol, a Communist slogan, and other iconography. The work also contains precious metals,

including 55 pounds of gold pigment. Wilhelm titled the work *Revolution: Frieden unserem Erdenrund* ("Revolution: Peace to the Whole World").

The mural was completed in 1983, and it furnished a general purpose room in the Ministry of State Security's compound (today the Stasi Museum). In 1990—one year after the Berlin Wall fell—Holzmann's uncle bought the work from the Deutsche Reichsbahn, the state railroad company, which was charged with selling the Stasi's belongings.

There's no record of how much Holzmann's uncle paid for the work, but the art historian is hoping that a museum (or a private citizen who wants to donate it to a public institution) is willing to pony up millions. Some experts question whether the work is truly worth \$21 million, pointing out that stained glass works were once common in East Germany, and that Holzmann hasn't fleshed out the specifics of its history. Also, from an artistic standpoint, the quality simply isn't that great.

If Holzmann does end up landing a multi-million dollar buyer, "you will see a storm of the same kind of art coming on the market, because many of these kinds of stained glass windows are very often in buildings from the '70s and '80s that aren't used anymore," Sjeng Scheijen, a Soviet art expert and associate researcher at Leiden University, told the *Times*.