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# ANTIQUE

## COLLECTING

DEC/JAN 2020

**WHAT THE  
DICKENS!**  
A GUIDE TO  
COLLECTING  
*A Christmas  
Carol*

INVESTMENT SPECIAL

## *Liquid Gold*

WHY YOUR DRINKS CABINET  
COULD BE WORTH A FORTUNE

20/20 VISION

WHAT THE  
NEW YEAR HAS  
IN STORE

## GUESS WHO'S COMING TO DINNER?

Antiques favourites reveal their ideal Christmas guest

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His use of reduction and destruction to create beauty places him firmly within the modern post-war avant-garde and bears witness to the hope and needs of a country which was coming to terms with the wounds left by its past.

### Hidden beauty

Imagine the weathered look of a wall of advertising posters, where old fliers have been torn away to glue on new ones. The wall presents different layers of dead campaigns, revealing a crumbly and distant reality, a last trace, the abstract aesthetic of absence. Koehler single-handedly developed the 'déchollage' technique, which he then subjected to a multitude of experiments resulting in a panoply of radical new techniques displayed in much of his work.

He also worked extensively with sand and glue in his so-called *Sandbilder*, which vary from flat, scratched, sandy surfaces to heavily-worked space fields dotted with mini-craters.

This incomparable body of work was at the centre of German 1950s avant-garde, matching the endeavours of Otto Piene, Heinz Mack, Emil Schumacher and Wolf Vostell. In the UK, the Boyle family – a group of collaborative artists based in London – was working along similar principles exploring the idea that art should not exclude anything as a potential subject.

### 'Gruppe 53'

Both Koehler and his art belong to the North Rhine-Westphalia lands of Germany, where 'Gruppe 53' came to prominence in its capital of Düsseldorf in 1953. Together with 'Quadriga', founded in Hessen's capital, Frankfurt, and 'ZEN 49' founded in Bavaria's capital, Munich, it made up the post-war German 1950s avant-garde known as 'Informel'.

The Düsseldorf 'Gruppe 53' profiled itself as the leader of the avant-garde, with painters such as Peter Brüning, Karl Fred Dahmen, Albert Fürst, Herbert Götzinger, Gerhard Hoehme, Hann Trier, Otto Piene and Heinz Mack.

In 1958, the latter two founded the ZERO group which shed all previously accepted notions of art in an attempt to come to terms with the trauma of the WWII. The ZERO group flourished in Germany, Belgium, Holland and Italy.



**Above** *Plakat-Déchollage* 1957/3, 1957, mixed media on card

**Right** *Objet Décollagé* 1968 no.4, 1968, broken china on canvas media on card



## Cutting EDGE

*On the eve of a new exhibition, An Jo Fermon puts the work of the German déchollagist Reinhold Koehler in the spotlight and reveals why collectors should get stuck in*

**I**n the few years between WWII and his sudden death aged 51, Reinhold Koehler (German b.1919-1970) developed an immense body of artistic work, dedicated to his principle of déchollage.

In little more than two decades, Koehler experimented with paper, sand, glue, glass and ceramics, challenging the accepted principle of beauty by using the processes of reduction and destruction and creating some of the finest examples of the genre ever produced.



## ORIGINS OF DÉCOLLAGE

Reinhold Koehler is widely considered one of the pioneers of 'déchollage'. The term was known to the Surrealists but is traditionally used in reference to the nouveau réalisme movement founded by the French art critic and art philosopher Pierre Restany, in Paris in 1960.

While Raymond Hains and Jacques Mahé de la Villeglé first used the technique in 1949, in a large lacerated poster called *Ach Alma Manetro*, it was not until 1957 that the technique became prominent within the Paris movement.

In 1963, in the German city of Wuppertal, Wolf Vostell exhibited screenings of temporal sequences of television images, called *9 Nein 9 Dé-coll/agen*.



**Above** *Sandbild 1958 II*, 1958, sand, glue and pigments on canvas

**Left** *Sandbild*, 1958-1960, mixed media on canvas

**Below** *Déchollage 1958*, 1958, mixed media on card



covered with black ink. In 1949, he applied the same technique in a series of female nudes and landscapes.

In 1953, Koehler moved to the city of Siegen where he would work until his death. During 1955-58, Koehler produced work in which he scratched and scraped the imagery into monotypes covered with oil paint, printing inks and gouache. These works are known as *Déchollage-Vorstufe*, which translates as 'Déchollage - Preliminary Stage' and visibly feature all the hallmarks of originality.

During this period, Koehler also made his first sand paintings. In the early stages, these appeared as relatively flat, sand-coloured surfaces incised with Koehler's freehand scratching. But, over time, they developed into coloured, built-up works decked with hollow points, reminiscent of craters of the moon. In fact, from a distance these convey a level of space-expansion through the effects of optical illusion.

During the late 1960s, the sand paintings were reduced to traces of sand on raw canvas.

## Gerhardt Richter

In 1961, Joseph Beuys was appointed professor at the Düsseldorf Academy from where his influence resonated throughout Europe and into America. During the same year, Gerhardt Richter crossed over from Eastern Germany to be able to paint freely; he enrolled at the Düsseldorf Academy, where he practiced the Tachist style of the 'Informel', then a form of Pop Art, before turning to his trade-mark style of blurry press-photographs.

## Koehler's early years

Deployed by the German army as a foot soldier, Koehler experienced the traumas of war first-hand at the frontlines in Belgium, northern France and Russia. He was injured and hospitalised in Denmark, where he was taken prisoner of war by the Allied Forces. Having been released by the British, Koehler married and decided that a career as an artist was his calling.

In 1945, he settled in a studio in Altenseelbach near the city of Siegen, where he worked as an autodidact. He spent the summer of 1948 on the Island of Sylt, where he first used the technique of 'déchollage'. In a series of depictions of sea gulls, Koehler shaped the birds by manually tearing away parts of the top layer of a card support he had first

*'Dada reacted to the insane horrors of WWI, by promoting the idea of anti-art. From the ashes of the conflict emerged not only a new world order, but also a new aesthetic'*





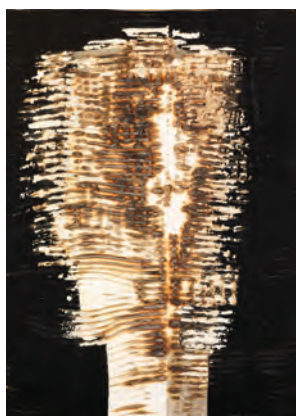


**Left** *Décollage*, 1958, 1958, mixed media on card

**Right** Reinhold Koehler in his studio

**Below left** *Décollage Gravé 1962 V/1*, 1962, ink on card manipulated by hand

**Below** *Plakat-Décollage*, 1959, mixed media on canvas



**Above left** *Décollage Pur et Brûlé*, 1961, ink on paper scorched with heated forks

**Above** *THORAX, Décollage Positiv-Negativ 1960/ XII*, 1960, mixed media on card, manipulated by freehand

**Far left** *Contre-Collage*, 1963-1965, paper, glass, biro, glue and ink laid down on canvas

**Left** *Thorax Fragment, Contre-Collage*, 1963, paper, glass, glue and ink laid down on canvas

## Collecting Koehler

While Koehler's unique contribution to art history was recognised during his lifetime, his work is barely known outside Germany, with few sales at auction recorded outside the country since his death.

But things are starting to change. While other post-war era German artists, such as Otto Piene, can fetch hundreds of thousands of pounds, in his first show in London at Whitford Fine Art last October, his work could be bought for £5,000 to £25,000.

In collecting terms, he fits all the criteria: his work is avant-garde, executed before 1970, Koehler was successful during his lifetime and was collected by all German museums and it was his untimely death that caused his prominence to falter. Furthermore, there are décollagistes of the 1950s or 1960s whose work is more affordable, with the main two – the French artists Jacques Mahé de la Villeglé and Raymond Hains selling for considerably more.



## Newspapers and glue

In 1957, Koehler created his first *Plakat-Décollages*, made by gluing layers of newspaper, magazine adverts and posters, on card from which areas were carefully torn away, revealing to a greater or lesser extent the imagery underneath.

From 1958, Koehler introduced areas cut, or scratched away by knife in works that became known as *Décollages Gravés*. In 1959, Koehler added yet another variant of 'décollage' with *Décollage Positiv-Negativ* in which he carefully tore away a layer of paper by hand to then fold it over and glue it as to permanently show its underbelly.

In 1960, Koehler experimented with fire making a series of paper supports blackened with the imprint of heated metal, usually forks but also other kitchen paraphernalia, known as *Décollages Brûlés*.

## Creative peak

In 1963, Koehler reached another creative height with the production of his unique glass collages known as *Contre-Collages*. Layers of paper (sourced from newspapers, advertisements, magazines and printing matter) were glued onto a piece of glass, which Koehler then smashed with a hammer. Subsequently he covered the broken glass with black or coloured ink which could seep into the cracks, leaving the paper underneath with a linear image created by chance. These works are unique in their time.

London-based gallery Whitford Fine Art will be taking its exhibition Reinhold Koehler: New Realities in Collage and Décollage 1948-1970 to the Brussels art fair, Brafa from January 26 to February 2. Visit them on stand 60a or, for more details go to [www.whitfordfineart.com](http://www.whitfordfineart.com). Read our preview of the event on page 61.