

embrace the future

June 16-26, 2020

Düsseldorf, Germany
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drupa 2020 – Press Release No. 4 / 31/05/2017

drupa Prize 2017 awarded to Anne Sokoll

Scholar of German convinces with her Doctoral Thesis on the Writers' Movement in the GDR

The drupa Prize 2017 goes to Anne Sokoll (36) from the Faculty of Philosophy of Heinrich Heine University in Düsseldorf. This German scholar was awarded the prize for her doctoral thesis on the “Die Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter in der DDR. Geschichte, Ästhetik und Kulturpraxis einer Bewegung” (The Circle of Writing Workers in the GDR. History, Aesthetics and Cultural Practice of a Movement). The prize comes with prize money of EUR 6,000 and was presented by Claus Bolza-Schünemann (Chairman of the Board at Koenig & Bauer AG and Chairman of the drupa committee), Werner M. Dornscheidt (President & CEO of Messe Düsseldorf) and Prof. Dr. Anja Steinbeck (Rector of Heinrich Heine University Düsseldorf) at the Industrie-Club Düsseldorf on 31 May 2017

In his laudatory speech Claus Bolza-Schünemann recognised the work of this year's prize-winner, which was judged by a jury: “In her work Anne Sokoll carried out an academic study examining the background of the movement of “writing workers” in the GDR for the first time and attempted to shed some light on this field of literature and the associated movement that thousands of people formed part of.”

What is the thesis receiving the drupa Prize 2017 all about? The majority of authors refused to embrace the ideology of the Socialist Union Party (SED), the leading state party of the German Democratic Republic, in their literature, and to educate the workers in the workers' and farmers' state along party political lines. This is why in the 1950s the SED planned to have workers

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write themselves under the slogan “Greif zur Feder, Kumpel” (Take up your Pens) so as to create new socialist nationalist literature for the GDR. Professional writers were called upon to go to factories and report on the “magnificent societal reorganisation” from their own perspective. This decision was announced in the city of Bitterfeld in 1959, which is why this GDR workers’ movement is also referred to as “Bitterfelder Weg” (the Bitterfeld Way).

In the wake of this over 250 literary circles formed in the GDR. They became the contact points for those wanting to write and with an interest in writing. Under the guidance of experienced writers and journalists the lay authors produced masses of text in those circles, which ultimately did not qualify as new GDR national literature. However, the diversity of companies and regions where these circles were located characterised the type and contents of the circle literature, and this is why their analysis allows us to gain special insight into people’s lives and their work in the GDR.

After German reunification in 1989 most of the circles of writing workers disbanded and we only owe it to some activists that the circle literature was not lost altogether. Part of the documents could be secured in the basement of an East Berlin nursery, for example. This archive became the motivation and also an inspiring treasure trove, in the early stages, for the doctoral thesis of Anne Sokoll, which received this year’s drupa Prize.

“Her work not only fulfils a desideratum of literature and cultural sciences in a subtle and very fertile way,” said Claus Bolza-Schünemann quoting from the jury’s expert opinion but also lives up to all demands made by the humanities to the highest degree. “May this doctoral thesis awarded with the drupa Prize 2017,” said Claus Bolza-Schünemann, “prompt the investment of more energy and commitment into the academic appraisal of the East and West German past that today forms part of the pan-German commemorative culture.”

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About the Award Winner

Anne Sokoll was born on in Cologne on 16 June 1980. After her school-leaving examination she studied German philology, media and political sciences as well as “German as a foreign language” at the Faculty of Philosophy of Heinrich Heine University Düsseldorf. In 2008 she completed an MA with distinction. 2009 saw her start her doctoral thesis on the “Circle of Writing Workers in the GDR. On the History, Aesthetics and Cultural Practice of a Movement”. Successful disputation followed in March 2016 and the dissertation received *summa cum laude* and a distinction. Anne Sokoll is married and the mother of one son. She currently works as a senior scientific advisor to the editors of the *düsseldorf university press* and as a lecturer in the Faculty of Philosophy at Heinrich Heine University Düsseldorf.

About the drupa Prize

Every year, Messe Düsseldorf presents the drupa Prize to the best doctoral thesis at the Philosophical Faculty of HHU. Since 1978, it has honoured outstanding work in the humanities produced at Düsseldorf University promoting their publication and dissemination with prize money of EUR 6,000. The drupa Prize is awarded each year by an expert panel composed of the President and Vice-President of Heinrich Heine University Düsseldorf, the Chairman of the drupa committee and the President & CEO of Messe Düsseldorf.

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