

WIELAND FÖRSTER

It is rather unusual to see the bust of a non-politician being given a place of honour in a parliamentary building. Such an honour has been accorded the Jewish physician Dr. Benno Hallauer (1880–1943), who owned one of the biggest private clinics in Berlin, the gynaecological clinic located at Schiffbauerdamm 31/32 on the Spree opposite the Reichstag Building. In the twenties and thirties, his

ready been demolished in 1940 to make way for Albert Speer's planned reconstruction of Berlin as the new world capital »Germania«.

The land on which Dr. Hallauer's gynaecological clinic stood is part of the site where construction of the Marie-Elisabeth-Lüders-Haus, containing the library of the German Bundestag, started in 1998. Even before the Bundestag moved to Berlin, the Art Council of the German Bundestag therefore resolved to commission a bust of Dr. Hallauer as a memorial to the earlier history of the site and to the tragic fate of its previous owners. The bust honours both Dr. Benno Hallauer and, by association, other victims of National-Socialist tyranny such as the Wertheim family, who likewise possessed land located near the bend in the River Spree.

The Art Council commissioned the sculptor, graphic artist and writer Wieland Förster to create the bust. Förster studied at the College of Fine Arts in Dresden and later worked under Fritz Cremer as a master-class student at the Academy of Arts of the GDR. Influenced by Wilhelm Lehmbruck, Henry Moore and Marino Marini, in his work Förster continues the significant figurative tradition of the Berlin school of sculpture, which is associated with such names as Käthe Kollwitz, Gustav Seitz, Fritz Cremer and Werner Stötzer. Förster nevertheless extends their artistic vocabulary by adding his own mannerist accents.

Influenced as he has been by such distressing war experiences as the destruction of Dresden (which inspired him to his bronze sculpture Large Grieving Man) and also by his years as a political prisoner in Bautzen after 1945, Förster has devoted a significant portion of his work to the represen-



clinic built up a wide reputation in the field of gynaecology before the National-Socialist boycott of Jewish physicians precipitated its economic ruin. Dr. Hallauer was finally forced to give up the clinic in 1937: it was compulsorily auctioned while he was serving a sentence in Moabit Prison for alleged »malicious slander«. After his release, he worked in the Jewish hospital in Breslau. In 1943, he and his wife were deported to Auschwitz where they were murdered. The building housing his clinic had al-

tation of grief, suffering and transience. Another substantial segment of his work consists of expressive busts of such personalities as Pablo Neruda, Heinrich Böll and Erich Arendt. Both of these aspects of his oeuvre are united in his bust of Dr. Hallauer, for in this work Förster strives to achieve empathy with the renowned physician's tragic destiny.

In conceiving his bust of Dr. Hallauer, Förster was forced to rely on a handful of photographs that had survived only by chance, and that were put at his disposal by Dr. Hallauer's son. This artistic procedure, which might at first sight appear to make his task more difficult, is precisely one which Förster commonly employs for his portraits. In explicitly creating posthumous portraits, he strives to assimilate elements from various stages of the subject's life, avoiding the kind of staged poses common in studio portraits by using as models random snapshots – thus achieving what he describes as a »higher level of concentration and truth.« As Förster explains: »A posthumous portrait allows one to draw up the balance of an entire lifetime, to attain forms of expression that expose the essential human being.«

Beside his sculptures, Förster has produced a significant body of drawings and poetry, as exemplified by his diaries (Encounters, 1974; Seven Days in



Wieland Förster, born 1930 in Dresden, lives in Berlin, Bust of the Physician Dr. Benno Hallauer, 2001, bronze

Kuks, 1983; and Labyrinth, 1988) which combine texts and drawings. One of his best known sculptures is his »Nike 89«, Victory with Broken Wings, which stands in front of the Saxon State Parliament in Dresden. The goddess of victory, visible for miles on the banks of the Elbe, rises up as if liberated from the bonds of this earth – and yet she consists of only a torso with broken wings. Few sculptors beside Wieland Förster have managed to articulate so impressively what Franz Fühmann has called the »ancient sonnet of the misery and magnificence of man.« In his bust of the murdered physician Benno Hallauer, Förster has created a timeless metaphor for the indestructibility of the human spirit and its triumph over suffering and persecution.

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ART AT THE GERMAN BUNDESTAG WIELAND FÖRSTER

