

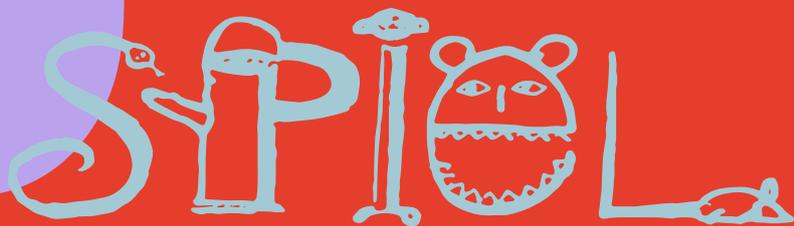
APRIL 10-MAY 24
2026

DO YOU
DARE TO
PLAY?

SPASS



PLAY AND
DEMOCRACY
IN EAST BERLIN



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PLAY AND DEMOCRACY IN EAST BERLIN

APRIL 10–MAY 24 2026

OPENING EVENT:
APRIL 9, 2026,
THURSDAY, 6.00 P.M.

BLINKEN OSA ARCHIVUM
– GALERIA CENTRALIS
ARANY JÁNOS UTCA 32, 1051
BUDAPEST, HUNGARY

TUESDAY–SUNDAY:
10:00 A.M.–6:00 P.M.

The exhibition *Do You Dare to Play? – Play and Democracy in East Berlin* examines the history and legacy of the East Berlin-based collective Spielwagen Berlin 1, which emerged in the late GDR period as a pioneering force in experimental play and informal education. The show explores the extent to which the group could maneuver within the strictly-controlled public sphere of the German Democratic Republic, as well as the often subversive tactics that made this possible. As a continuation of the exhibition *Spielwagen Berlin 1 – Das Spiel wagen in Ost-Berlin*, presented in Berlin in autumn 2025, this iteration of the project offers a more detailed exploration and interpretation of the local context in which the collective operated, also shedding light on the group's international connections, primarily with Poland and Hungary.

The origins of the collective date back to 1979, when the predecessor group Kollektiv Spielwagen Berlin was founded. Rather than limiting play to playgrounds, the members of the collective saw the whole city as a possible playground. Their work was centered around a repurposed furniture van—the Spielwagen—used to transport materials and tools for public play-actions across different East Berlin neighborhoods. The wordplay embedded in the group's name—*wagen* meaning not only “cart” but also “to dare” in German—is reflected in the title of the Budapest exhibition.

In 1985, the collective split into Spielwagen Berlin 1 and 2. While Spielwagen Berlin 2 focused more on theatrical play, Spielwagen Berlin 1—the focus of this exhibition—developed construction-based formats, such as the *Stadtspiel* [play city], in which children collectively built small towns from cardboard and planks, and enacted democratic processes in public space. These experimental practices of utopia-making took place in the final years of the GDR's Communist regime, within a still tightly controlled political context. During the period of upheaval and German Reunification, opportunities for institutional reinvention opened up for the group. In early 1990, Spielwagen Berlin 1 founded the Association Netzwerk Spiel/Kultur Prenzlauer Berg, which still exists today and embodies the group's political ideals grounded in social responsibility, local action, and participatory democracy.

Do You Dare to Play? examines broader social and political transformations through the lens of Spielwagen Berlin 1's history; focusing on the context of its foundation and topics such as “models,” “networks,” “spaces,” and “transformation.” The exhibition aims to show what was possible in a land of limited opportunities through “proto-civil society” engagement and how skillfully the actors exploited state structures to open up relative freedoms for themselves and their envisioned utopia. In addition to documents from the Blinken OSA Archivum, the show presents original materials from the private collections of the collective's members, among other sources, as well as interviews conducted with contemporary witnesses from Spielwagen Berlin 1. During the exhibition, on weekends, part of the gallery space will be reserved for children: they will be free to build and play in the space set up by the Association for Free Play.

Curated by Virág Bogyó
and Florian Manthey

The research was supported by the European Union's Culture Moves Europe program, the Visegrad Scholarship at OSA, and the Hungarian Eötvös State Scholarship. We would like to thank all the contemporary witnesses who shared their stories with us and gave us access to their archives.

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In collaboration with:
Association for Free Play

Partners:
Netzwerk Spiel/Kultur Prenzlauer
Berg e.V.
Robert Havemann Gesellschaft
Spielkultur-Buch e.V.

Children's Activities Organized by the
Association for Free Play:
Saturday, April 11, 10:00 a.m.–4:00 p.m.
Saturday, April 25, 10:00 a.m.–4:00 p.m.
Saturday, May 9, 10:00 a.m.–4:00 p.m.
Saturday, May 23, 10:00 a.m.–4:00 p.m.

Participation is recommended for
children over four years of age and is
free of charge.

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Archivum

Centrális
Galéria