

Obituary Heribert Becker

On the night of August 18-19, 2025, Heribert Becker died in his apartment in Cologne after a short, serious illness. For decades, he worked as an author and translator, primarily from French, and organized two exhibitions in Bochum on the subject of Surrealism ("Imagination" and "Latin America and Surrealism") in 1978 and 1993. He published more than 80 books and was acquainted with and friends of numerous artists and authors of the movement throughout his life, traveling extensively around the world, particularly in the 1970s and 80s, to visit them. Later, the trained educator also worked for public broadcasting and proved himself to be one of the leading experts on global Surrealist culture, thus playing a key role in popularizing it in Germany.

Throughout his life, he rejected everything bourgeois and its conventions in true surrealist spirit, living, as he liked to mention, for almost 40 years in a "common-law marriage" with his partner, the love of his life. He loathed the Christian church and its institutions, especially the ostentatious, gold-plated Catholic trappings, and consequently lived very modestly. Material possessions held no value for him, and money didn't interest him. If one of his more lucrative projects (for example, the anthology "The Surrealist Poem" in 1985) brought in some money, he used it to finance another of his favorite projects. He was, in a way, the antithesis of Scrooge McDuck, and any form of vanity was strange for him. He was a cosmopolitan who viewed all nationalistic rhetoric with suspicion, and his stance even extended to waving the black, red, and gold flag at international football tournaments. Despite his lifelong passion for football, he avoided this fuss and couldn't make the slightest sense of this form of national euphoria.

He loved and lived Surrealism with every fiber of his being. He especially loved its poetry and prose and strove to make it known in this country as well through his meticulous and knowledgeable translations: Mansour, Péret, Arp, Carrington, Césaire, al-Maaly, and Prévert, to name just a few of its authors. He certainly succeeded to some extent. I was even allowed to design the cover for one or two of his titles.

But he was also enthusiastic about the movement's artistic output from his youth onward. Tanguy and Miró particularly fascinated him. For the last 20 years, he strove to find a publisher for the complete edition of Miró's "Constellations," one of his most cherished projects of recent years. Unfortunately, it never came to fruition; it remains an unfulfilled legacy, existing only as a digital file on his computer.

I knew him for almost 30 years. In 1998, he was an interested observer of the founding of the short-lived, post-surrealist group "Antlogonis" here in Cologne, but kept his distance. From 2001 onward, he actively supported my web project "Antlogonis infek, Forum of Poetic Cultures," becoming an important pillar and a good friend. I will miss him. The surrealist movement has perhaps lost its most important expert and advocate here in its no-man's-land.

Peter Schneider-Rabel, Köln 2025