

After 20 years, spring has gradually arrived in a countryside once notorious for the gray, somber impression visitors found behind a smiling poster face doggedly promoted by officials.

Regal castles and pastoral river views greet visitors today, while gray vistas have been replaced with brighter colors and happier faces.

The shadows of a troubled past are slowly receding from a land of striking natural beauty.

By Michael Killelea

Behind Old Walls

Impressions painted on location
in Eastern Europe

Wawel Castle in Krakow, Poland remains the spiritual heart of the country even after the capital was moved to Warsaw





Krakow

POLAND (left)

The old world beauty of this city shades a painful history for many former residents. The remains of a wall around the old Jewish quarter stand in mute testimony to pogroms and exterminations. Oscar Schindler's nearby factory offered minimal hope.

Warsaw

POLAND (below)

Old Town Square is a colorful and busy gathering place for citizens and children alike.



Prague

CZECH REPUBLIC

In a city overflowing with baroque structures and statuary, the Vltava River offers a placid counterpoint.

Looming above the river (above) where its elevation separates it from most tourists, is the old Vysehrad Fortress and church.

But directly on the river is the world famous Charles Bridge (left). Like most of Prague, it's a monument to God and man, and while it gladly welcomes traveling tourists, it's not quite as warm to visiting artists.



Dresden

GERMANY (left)

Frauenkirche (Our Lady's Church) was rebuilt as a symbol of world peace, in part with original stones. The city was totally leveled during WWII and has been reconstructed over the last 20 years by duplicating the pre-war structures. Some locals now refer to it as a "Disneyland".



Schwerin

GERMANY (right)

70% of Schwerin was destroyed in WWII but today it is another city risen in beauty from the ashes. The Old Military Barracks and St. Paul's Church are reflected in one of the many waterways surrounding the city.



Berlin

GERMANY (left)

Brandenburg Gate was once a symbol of the division between East & West Germany. Today it stands as a symbol of reunification and prosperity. The surrounding area is a mecca for celebrations, protests, break dancers and gawking tourists.

Gothmund

GERMANY (above)

This quaint thatched roof village once sheltered fishermen and their families. It's now a protected site tucked away near Lubeck.

Meissen

GERMANY (right)

Meissen porcelain is an industry that flourished even under Soviet rule. Now town squares, vineyards and 15th century buildings attract more casual visitors.





Hamburg

GERMANY

This vital port on the Elba River is a swirl of activity on land and sea. In the 1912 tunnel (above), cars and pedestrians descend by lift and take a slow one lane road to the other side.

In the 3rd largest port in Europe, mammoth container ships (right) load and unload at a frantic pace, and are underway again almost before their crew can step ashore.



Tangermünde

GERMANY (left)

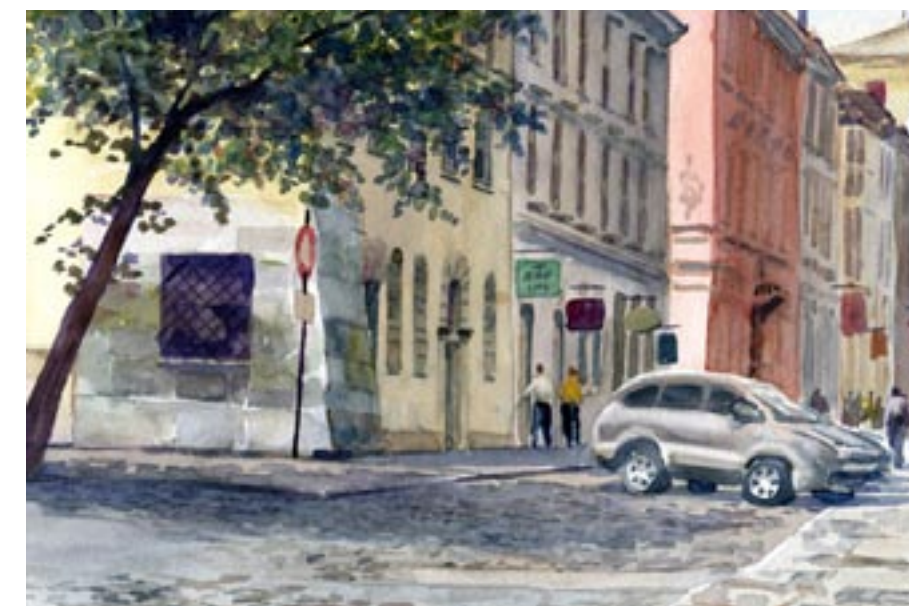
If the East German government did little for most citizens, it also left this village of ancient half-timbered buildings alone.

Occasionally they used it as a movie location to show how good the good old days were in the east. Parts of the city are well maintained and others are not, amplifying its rustic charm.

Krakow

POLAND (right)

Wisina Street sits astride a pretty park on the University Route in Old Town. Busy students, seminarians and shoppers pass over its cobblestoned streets. It is located midway between the castle/cathedral complex and the town square.



I paint everywhere and everything, and I'm not above sharing pointers with other artists. Both Lucas Cranach the Elder (left) and I painted in the German countryside. Lucas was a close friend of Martin Luther in Lutherstadt-Wittenberg, but his work was a little stiff and I thought he could loosen up a bit.

I also enjoyed painting my friend Gerhard Golisch while visiting at his home in Hamburg.

-- Mike Killelea

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