Science in culture

Class action

Werner Tübke's huge wall-painting will grace a new building at the University of Leipzig.

Alison Abbott

Part of the extraordinary legacy of Werner Tübke, one of the former East Germany's most renowned artists, who died in May, is this vast wall painting in the rectory of the University of Leipzig.

The story of the painting is at least as interesting as the multifaceted story it tells. The university, founded in 1409 by Pope Alexander V, is among the oldest in Europe. Its beautiful central buildings were extensively damaged by bombing raids in the Second World War, however, and the new Communist-style administration building was an ugly concrete block. To inaugurate the building, the government opened up a competition in 1970 for an artwork to reflect the theme: "The working class and intellectuals are inseparably bound in socialism under the leadership of the Marxist–Leninist Party." Tübke won.

His *Arbeiterklasse und Intelligenz* ("Working Class and Intellectuals"), completed in 1973, is a wall painting of immense, floor-to-ceiling proportions, some 13 metres wide. It was painted with oils and tempura on wood, and it depicts a series of discourses laden with social commentary. Some of the figures are recognizable portraits of contemporary local dignitaries. The immense detail and Renaissance references are typical of Tübke, whose most well known work is a monumental panorama depicting the struggle between peasants and the bourgeoisie in the sixteenth century and includes more than 3,000 figures.

Tübke, who has been referred to as "the last court artist", was never apologetic about accepting contracts from the East German state — and his works have never been simple political endorsements. *Arbeiterklasse und Intelligenz* is so valued that when the university opened a competition last year to design a building to replace the concrete block, one of the criteria was that any design should be able to display this grand work appropriately. The painting's new home is due to be completed in time for the 600th anniversary of the university in 2009.

controlling cell growth is dependent on the cell context, but the pathways that make up these networks are generally shared. Nine of the chapters discuss pathways, such as the 'target of rapamycin' pathway, and processes, such as protein synthesis, that are at the heart of all cell growth. Finally, the book closes with several chapters discussing the specific growth-control mechanisms in specialized cells, such as lymphocytes, myocytes and neurons, which vary in size from one another by many orders of magnitude.

In compiling this book, the editors have successfully overcome many obstacles. For instance, it is clear that cell growth control mechanisms often vary significantly between commonly studied systems. Rather than discount this fact, the editors have put together a complementary collection of chapters that address this problem and search for common themes. Furthermore, with each chapter representing a separate review, one might expect a high degree of redundancy. Although there is some overlap, the authors of each chapter do a remarkable job of staying focused on their area of expertise yet still manage to tie their subject into the wider context.

Our knowledge of the pathways that control cell growth is increasing rapidly, making it difficult to publish an up-to-date book on the intricacies of this field. However, the overall balance achieved between detailing our current understanding of the molecular control of cell growth and outlining the fundamental research challenges that remain, make this book indispensable to those with new, or renewed, interest in this topic.

Collectively, the different chapters cover a wide range of topics that will be of particular interest to cell, developmental and evolutionary biologists alike. Some of the mechanistic details described, however, although necessary, may be difficult for a general audience to follow. But the book's multidisciplinary nature will make it an excellent reference for many scientists. *Cell Growth*, like many titles from the Cold Spring Harbor monograph series, should stand the test of time and serve as a solid foundation for this ever-expanding field. ■

Brendan D. Manning is in the Department of Genetics and Complex Diseases, Harvard School of Public Health, Boston, Massachusetts 02115, USA. Lewis C. Cantley is in the Division of Signal Transduction, Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, and the Department of Systems Biology, Harvard Medical School, Boston, Massachusetts 02115, USA.