

So it is time for my second dispatch and I've spent quite a lot of time looking at the vast quantity of art on display whilst I've been in Berlin so I thought I would use this opportunity to write a little about my experience of the galleries. I'm not interested in writing reviews of the shows I've been to, which taken as a whole, are somewhat inevitably absolutely no better and no worse than any other random group of shows one might find in any other city. Rather I'd like to just point out a few things I've found which, if you hadn't had the luxury of staying in Berlin for a couple of months, you might not know about. This will doubtless fail to even nearly scratch the surface of what is happening but I'll do it because I spent years coming on day trips to London and just visiting Tate, the ICA and Cork Street. Now I realise that a lot of the interesting things going on involve trips out of the centre of town and then, even crazier, the ringing of doorbells on what appear to be blocks of flats.

There are a large number of contemporary commercial galleries in Berlin. People say that for the last year or so young galleries have been dropping like flies, but as I don't know what the city was like before I can only say that the evidence for this is purely anecdotal. There still seems to be a huge number and I didn't visit anywhere near all of them, or indeed anywhere near half of them. Apparently part of the reason for the disappearance of many of the younger galleries is that the lack of big business in Berlin means a lack of big earners, or at least it would seem, big earners who want to spend large amounts of disposable income on contemporary art. This means it has been historically extremely difficult for galleries to sell work in Berlin, (or in gallery speak 'the market is under developed'). Galleries who previously relied on fairs for the majority of their yearly income really felt the pinch as the credit crunch meant international collectors bought a little less and haggled a little harder. Whether or not this is a good thing for art in general I have no idea, I can appreciate both sides of the argument, but it is definitely hard on commercial galleries, especially those showing work that is well, not painting I suppose.

Anyway, as I say, galleries are by no means thin on the ground, it certainly feels comparable to London, and there seems to be a lot more going on than I have noticed when I've been to Paris or Amsterdam, (though I've not spent much time in those cities so I'd be happy to be told I was wrong). A number of big German galleries – [Daniel Bucholz](#), [Christian Nagel](#), [Gisela Capitain](#)¹ have second spaces in Berlin, their other spaces being in Cologne,² there are also international galleries with Berlin spaces [Haunch of Venison](#) and [Sprüth Magers](#) being examples and there are big Berlin only galleries like CFA

¹ This is actually a joint space with NY's Friedrich Petzel named Capitain Petzel

² I didn't know this but in the 80's Cologne was along with New York *the* big artworld city, and the Cologne scene was by and large what I believe is called 'bad painting'; artists like Martin Kippenburger and Juetta Koether

(which seems to be a kind of painting centric German version of [White Cube](#)). A number of big international galleries have pulled out of Berlin, preferring to consolidate their efforts at their primary locations during leaner times. I remember reading one gallerist saying that you only get artists and intellectuals coming to the Berlin shows and he isn't there to provide a free kunsthalle, which I can understand from a business point of view.

In terms of finding where to start looking for the galleries there are a number of routes to take, any of which I think will prove more rewarding than the 'get off the train in some vaguely built up area and wander about' tactic that I have often employed in a city I'm unfamiliar with. The problem that I have often encountered is that in any city the galleries are to a large extent hard to find, especially it seems the kinds of galleries I most want to see. One of the great things about Berlin is that it has so many young artists³, hardly any of whom you will have heard of, and whilst it is amazing to go and see a load of Bruce Nauman works from the 70's and 80's in the Hamburger Bahnhof, it is also really great, and in some ways more exciting to accidentally find a good show in some gallery you've never heard of showing an artist you don't know in a small, slightly too cold room with bad lighting. These galleries unsurprisingly don't advertise in the big international, English language magazines and even if they did want to and could afford to, I wouldn't know what they were advertising. Basically this means I think that you have to look at a load of galleries most of which will be of no interest to you. This is an amazing treat of a position to be in, though that's not to say I haven't seen a lot of dreadful paintings.

Basically I think a gallery guide is essential and Berlin has it covered. As far as I could see there isn't one general gallery guide or art map that covers all (or rather a lot) of the city's galleries like the monthly London/England art listings thing which you find in the entrance ways or reception desks of most galleries that feature in it. Have a look at [BerlinList](#) which is a general culture guide; it is in English and covers a good deal. You can look at shows in general or by specific geographical area and it also has sections for music, parties and at the moment Christmas markets, which are amazingly popular...maybe I'll come back to that. The closest thing to the London guide is a guide called [INDEX - Contemporary art in Berlin](#). The A6 size folded print version can be found fairly easily but it isn't in every gallery by any means; if you can't see one and you're the sort of person who feels OK about asking things at gallery desks you will doubtless ask at the desk and they will give you one or point you in the right direction I imagine. It unfolds into a rather more manageable single sheet than its London/England equivalent which is quite good as it means you feel a bit less awkward as you try to discreetly look for where you are trying to get to, whilst standing in the middle of an housing estate where if someone tried to mug you, you wouldn't

³ Low rents for both flats and studios mean there are an enormous number of artists living in Berlin, from young German and immigrant artists just out of UdK or those who have moved there after their graduating from Leipzig or the recent cool school Städelschule, to Ex-Pat International big hitters like Tacita Dean and Jonathan Monk and everyone else in between.

understand them.⁴ The map is, due to its scale, pretty general so you'll need a proper map too.

Other guides I came across were [ArtInfo.com](#) and [Berliner Galerien](#). Berliner Galerien is not so comprehensive with regards to galleries as INDEX though it does also have museum information and from their website you can get an iApp if such a thing appeals to you. One useful thing about this guide is that it has a number of quite detailed maps good enough to actually navigate by. You can get this from those perspex leaflet stands they have near the front desk in the museums. The bulk of commercial galleries are bunched together in smallish areas, enough to see in maybe a few hours (think more Bethnal Green than Chelsea, New York). The most concentrated area is around Checkpoint Charlie and the U- bahn stop Kochstrasse. This area has around 40 galleries and its own guide [The Berlin Gallery District Guide](#), which is also accessible online. Although this district is I think still technically Mitte there is another grouping of galleries that would be more often be called the Mitte galleries and these can be searched for and occasionally found in the side streets between Rosa Luxemburg Platz and Oranienburger Str. This area includes a lot of youngish galleries but the kind that might show at Frieze art fair. This area also has KW, which is kind of like the ICA but perhaps without the financial worries.

Another fairly concentrated area to visit is [Heidestrasse](#), it's about a ten-minute walk from the Hamburger Bahnhof and it has maybe 15 galleries all on top of one another. I'll warn you now, this walk is along the side of a dual carriageway and is seemingly taking you nowhere or perhaps onto the motorway, but on your left hand side after about 5 minutes there are some of those shops that hire industrial vacuum cleaners or sell motorcycle exhausts and behind those are some 5 and 6 story industrial units and on most of the floors of these there are galleries. Don't worry, it isn't as difficult as it sounds, and literally just past this, in the next building is [Haunch of Venison](#) so you'll feel suddenly relieved that you are in fact on the correct road.

Since reunification it seems the East has really been the place to be and a lot, if not most things, art wise seem to be happening there. I don't know whether it is just that I am prone to obscurism or that London has engrained in me the notion that by the time something can even be detected as starting to happen it is already time to start saying it is over but I really think that West Berlin's time is long long overdue and people need to get back in there. There are residential blocks of flats that aren't just yet more careless brutalism and some even feature such frivolities as fountains in the lobbies and God forbid,

⁴ This said Berlin is, in my experience and at the reports of locals, incredibly safe. There is really nowhere that I felt at all worried for my safety at any time of the day or night; the same can definitely not be said in London where the atmosphere at even fairly major tube stops often puts me on edge. A case in point (which proves absolutely nothing but is a rather unfortunate coincidence) is that a friend in Berlin was vaguely horrified that someone had stolen his unlocked bike when he left it outside a bar for the evening, on the same evening in London four men ambushed my housemate, knocking him off his bike as he rode home through Bow. They proceeded to give him a bit of a kicking and took his bike, wallet, phone and laptop. He took it surprisingly well, at least as well as the careless Berliner.

lifts! There are also quite a few defunct nightclubs that look like some sort of strange hinterland between Studio 54 and Tech Noir⁵, which I'm guessing must have been the style choice of bourgeois West Berlin in the mid 80's. The West Berlin gallery area is in the area around Potsdamerstrasse & Kurfürstenstrasse and there are a further 15 or so galleries here all fairly close together, if not quite as close as in the other districts. Some of these galleries have relocated from the east and some, like [Tanya Leighton](#) and [Max Hans Daniel](#) have chosen this district to start up.

Finally there are some, often quite big, galleries (like the aforementioned Capitain Petzel, Daniel Bucholz or Max Hetzler) which are a bit more geographically on their own so you might want to check out what they are showing before you make the trip.⁶ There are also galleries that are worth going to for the location and if you like the show it's a bonus, in this camp I'd put [Lüttgenmeijer](#), [Miky Schubert](#), [Akademie der Kunst](#), which are all close to one another; on the other side of Tiergarten Park is the [Haus der Kulturen der Welt](#) then there is the [Haubrok Foundation](#) which you can walk down the impressive start of Karl Marx Allee in order to get to and of course there is the Mies van der Rohe designed Neue Nationalgalerie. Not far from the Neue Nationalgalerie and on your way to the Potsdamerstrasse/Kurfürstenstrasse galleries if you wanted to go on foot (though it is quite far especially in Berlin terms) there is [The Bauhaus Archive](#), which is housed in quite an amazing building, built using plans drafted by Walter Gropius. The entrance is very modern cool as you walk over a small walkway and see various Bauhaus, colour coded design elements on your way to the door but all in all this was, for me, something of a let down. The museum is very small and in fact half of it is currently shut, in fairness they've reduced the entry price from I think €7 or €8 to €5 in order to reflect this, but it still didn't seem worth it with the bulk of the archive given over to blown up photographs and wall texts all of which you would find in even the most meagre book on the subject. If you did want to pay a visit and you are an audio guide type person, remember to bring some photo ID, as you need that to check out the player. On the plus side the shop is inevitably quite nice and the print archive is one section that is really worth the effort to go and see and for that you must ring ahead and make an appointment.

I wanted to say something about the independent galleries and residency opportunities both of which I've found a little out about but I'll save that for my final dispatch. If I use up all my information now I'll have nothing left to talk about except what I've been making in the studio and I don't think that would be particularly useful to potential Berlin visitors. So anyway that was a very brief summation of what I've found out about the Berlin galleries. Oh, the general private view evening is Friday⁷ so it is easy to just wander around an area and see what is happening. There is normally a few at once in any

⁵ The nightclub in the first Terminator film into which Sarah Conner goes in order to use a pay-phone

⁶ These three have, in my opinion, good and occasionally great artists on their books so it is worth the effort to at least have a look what's going on.

⁷ You may also notice that there seems to be a trend for fashionable clothes shops to also have some sort of private view looking affair on Fridays, but I'm not sure what that is about.

district and they are staggered throughout the month, so it seems most Fridays will have a fair bit happening. INDEX carries a list of the openings if you wanted to see when a specific show or gallery's next vernissage is and the views seem to last until quite late, generally after the time it says on the invite. I'm not sure about the other areas but after the PVs in Mitte people seem to go to [Bar3](#), quite a big, somewhat non-descript bar on Weydingerstraße near Rosa Luxemburg Platz; it's pretty nice. I'll forewarn you, it seems that it is fairly common for there not to be anything to drink at the private views, especially at the more blue chip galleries, I'm sure it helps keep the riff raff at bay, but don't let that put you off. It is a really enjoyable experience to be an observer in a system that you basically understand but ultimately aren't a part of. I know a lot of people hate private views because of the whole cliques and networking thing but in a foreign country it really doesn't impact on you and so it is a bit like, well, it is like a private view at home, except without the social paranoia. I recommend it.

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