

So as I said in my previous despatch last month, in this, the third and final piece to come out of my three month Berlin residency, I'm going to write what little I know about where to look at some things that are going on artwise in spaces other than the commercial galleries and big museums. It isn't something I would claim to have really managed to explore with any great efficacy but the places I did find I more often than not enjoyed and they aren't venues that are in the kind of general Rough Guide type thing that I know is popular and that I'll often bring if I'm going to a city I don't know. I would not have found them without artists and curators kindly sharing their local knowledge and enthusiasm and it is the kind of information that I found the most generous and rewarding.

In any city only a tiny proportion of the things going on happen in those main spaces and I know in London some of the programs I most keenly anticipate belong to what might be called variously off /alternative/project/artist-run/curator-run/not for profit spaces<sup>1</sup> so I did my best to seek out some of their German counterparts. For whatever reason these spaces, perhaps as a result of wanting to show good work that for numerous reasons is less likely to appear in more financially minded environments, often seem to have a fair share of language based content; talks, texts, publications, performances, films etc. Whilst this seems to be true of their Berlin based equivalents don't let this put you off, I mean if there is going to be an academic talk on Kant or something maybe give it a miss but I went to some performance and film events and of those that included a linguistic element quite a few were in English in whole or in part. It is extremely fortuitous that most things you'll see that are by non-German artists (and some by native German speakers also surprisingly) end up being in English and even in small independent galleries texts are often available in both languages. Also you can always ring up to check in advance.

At this point I would like to say though, have a go. What's the worst that can happen? If you can't speak German, you'll look like you can't speak German, which doesn't seem so much embarrassing as accurate, on the plus-side you'll be the kind of person who gives things a go; that is in my opinion much better than looking like you can't speak German, which is still true, but with the added aspect that you don't care and you won't bother to try; personally apathy and laziness are not qualities that have ever struck me as particularly endearing. There is however a very strange side-effect from the general Berlin populous's English language ability and that is that if, for instance, you ask for something in a bar in really bad German, occasionally the bartender might be kind of offended, as if you presumed he or she couldn't speak English when in fact they can. I've put this in only really as a caveat as I think that is the kind of attitude held by people who would be equally offended if you presumed it would be fine and so just spoke English, or even if you asked them first off if they could. Basically there is no pleasing some people and there are plenty of bars. I promise I won't go on about this too much longer but, well, it is embarrassing to see people whom it would seem, absolutely ignore the fact that they are in a foreign country and totally unapologetically speak in English to people straight away without at least asking. Yes 90% of the time they'll understand you but I mean, come on. I met people who have lived in Berlin for three years whose German is barely better than mine, and I didn't do German at school. I'd say don't stress out about the genders of words and if you are going to give it a go don't be afraid of doing your level best to pronounce things correctly. My fear is constantly that you'll end up totally overshooting it and sounding like someone doing a kind German equivalent of Dick Van Dyke's London accent in Mary Poppins. I've been assured that this isn't the case and in fact if you don't try and pronounce things properly you'll probably be closer to how Dick Van Dyke may have sounded if at some point Mary Poppins had called upon him to speak some German whilst maintaining his ridiculous mockney twang. Gripe over, sorry.

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<sup>1</sup> I was going to write a list of spaces here but as I thought of them I realised immediately that even off the top of my head the list would be totally unwieldy and basically where would you stop?

So where was I...art...yes...

The first port of call for slightly more alternative art information is a gallery guide called PIGS, the Berlin Independents Guide. Their website is [www.bpigs.com](http://www.bpigs.com)<sup>2</sup> you can use it like a normal site or you can download the print version which is kind of more practical for when you are out and about. This features a list of galleries and 'other venues', you can also find a list of up and running web projects, links to various things of interest and you can sign up to their weekly newsletter which will let you know about smaller things going and one off events, things like that. If you are doing something while you are there you can email them and you may or may not be included in said newsletter. This inclusion policy is based on whether or not they think events look like they have promise, which I suppose is as good a criteria as any and at least they are honest about it.

The bulk of activities that feature in things like PIGS or in things like [BerlinerPool](#) (and their links) seem to be in perhaps slightly more out of town destinations places like Kreuzberg<sup>3</sup> its southern neighbour Neukölln and Wedding in the north east.<sup>4</sup> I enjoyed these areas a great deal whilst I was over and they also offer an opportunity to go to Turkish shops and buy things like hummus and pitta bread, which as I think I mentioned in dispatch one, they don't sell in the supermarket. Good studio food. Kreuzberg is home to, amongst many things, the institution (in the broad sense of the word) [The Forgotten Bar](#), which is worth a visit and a gallery which I somehow only made it to once, on a Tuesday, when it was shut, but which looks really promising; the [Gimmuseum](#), open Wednesday to Sunday. I was reminded that I had really meant to go there as I was leaving and the bus drives past it on the way to Schoenefeld Airport. One of the benefits of being a non-commercial space is that the German trading laws don't apply to you so you can, if you wish, open on a Sunday, where as some of the museums and all the commercial galleries are closed.

There are also loads of things that aren't in the guides that I came across. Studios often have galleries attached, the gallery at Milchhof studios where the Artquest residency is based, is a quite beautiful Dan Graham style pavilion that allows all of the work to be seen even when the gallery is closed. In Wedding, the next area north of Prenzlauer Berg, artist run spaces like [Essays and Observations](#), [Art Laboratory](#), [Koffer](#) and [Montgomery](#) are all worth checking out as is [AutoCenter](#) in Samariterviertel (just north of Frankfurter Allee). More towards the centre of Berlin another space I came across, not far from the Hamburger Bahnhof heading down Invalidenstrasse, was [PROGRAM](#), which occupies at least part of a now defunct GDR hotel. [PROGRAM](#)<sup>5</sup> is a one of those things that I suppose defines itself as a platform, i.e. it has a gallery but that isn't its main focus. As an organisation it is engaged with Art and architecture and so offers desk spaces, studio spaces, a residency program, a reading room etc. It seems like a good endeavor.

Without wanting to turn this into a listings I think I'll stop there, safe in the knowledge that combined with the last dispatch I haven't even nearly scratched the surface of what is happening. And that is just art stuff, at least as big if not bigger is the Berlin music scene, which is as far as I am aware, to a large degree electronic(a) based. This isn't something I know about but if you're into it, well, you'll know all about it. What I will say is this, don't be in the least surprised if you walk past a warehouse at two O'clock on a Sunday afternoon when there is clearly still a party on which will have undoubtedly started on Friday night and will end

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<sup>2</sup> I told a friend who was going over that they should check out [www.pigs.de](http://www.pigs.de) if they were stuck for something to do whilst they were over. Whilst writing this dispatch I have discovered that this is in fact an 'adult contact' site. They now have a German partner though I don't think this is connected.

<sup>3</sup> This obviously became a 'cool' destination in the late 90's but it is actually still alright and doesn't feel like the morning after as can Shoreditch

<sup>4</sup> Oh someone said that something was happening one night in Kreuzkölln meaning the transitional area between Kreuzberg and Neukölln. They do the compound word thing in German a lot so maybe this is less reprehensible than it sounds, but to be honest I doubt it.

<sup>5</sup> I'm never sure about these things that write their names in capitals, are they, as names, case sensitive, I trust it isn't implying that the name should be shouted, a la capitalised words in text messages

on Monday. If you fancy going out but aren't that hardcore I found joining on a Sunday pretty common and to be honest more than enough for me.

In my last week I thought I should take advantage of being on the continent and how easy that makes it to get to places. Driving for a day or spending an hour on a plane will get you to a vast number of hugely different cities and it was something I would absolutely recommend. With the use of a car, in five days, I went to Prague, Bratislava, Vienna, Budapest and a host places in between. For the food alone it was totally worth it. Driving on the wrong side is a bit weird but you get used to it. Just. After three months I still crossed the road in the style of a nervous child who has no idea how traffic works. I don't think that would ever change somehow.

I had never before spent any significant period of time outside of the UK or Ireland and in practice it was totally different to how I imagined it would have been. It is in most ways much easier than you might think, you really adapt quickly to the differences in the society and, if you are a non-German speaker, the language barrier. It isn't much at all like being on a long holiday, as I thought it might have felt. It is way more like being at home if all your friends had gone on away for a while. It is, and I use this term with trepidation, uncanny. At the end of three months I'd say Berlin is a city that reveals its charms quite slowly, if you haven't been there before don't be in the least surprised if, on arrival you find it a little underwhelming. I think it is, but that is a good thing. If you are just coming for a weekend it is probably good to have some ideas of where things are that you want to get to and to try and make it to them. Somehow it isn't, at least for me, the kind of city that rewards an aimless wander as does say Paris or Rome but it is a really great place if you sort of relax into it. If you get the opportunity to spend a decent amount of time there, as luckily this residency did allow for me, you'll no doubt find it really blossoms. I am really grateful to Artquest and Acava for the opportunity, it has been a real joy and something that I would never have done without their support. Without hesitation I'd say that if you were thinking about checking it out for a break, or if you were in two minds about going for a few months, definitely try it out. Now I'm back in London I do miss Berlin, often for the strangest details and I'd definitely do it again, but it is ever so nice to come home.

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