

Artists Anonymous Gallery (AA)

Located behind Hamburger Bahnhof **Artists Anonymous Gallery** is one of a cluster of six new spaces opened by galleries that are well established outside of Berlin, such as Haunch of Venison. All are spacious and industrial which offers freedom from the constraints of smaller gallery spaces. Also with a new location comes the possibility for experimentation; at AA you must find the way in through a muffling white fur-fabric cave. The space has been transformed into a den with a thick black beach of glittery sand covering the floor. Walls are clad with junk furniture, toys and all manner of trashy objects, including working TVs and fridges. The presence of these galleries in Berlin is interesting as they offer an alternative space for contemporary art, which is neither a commercial nor a national gallery.

Bikes

are important here. Berliners sing while cycling. It doesn't really matter how old the bike is, when it comes to bikes anything goes here. Shops offer part exchange on second hand bikes, and it's also possible to rent them. The flea markets are cheapest, you can buy one for about €50. It is worth taking your time choosing a good one though as not all the older bikes have brakes. Repairs can be a bit pricey so if you need any work done seek out a small un-flashy shop.

Concealment

Berlin's streets bear the scars of a troubled past. The paving stones and the walls of many buildings are scarred by grenades and bullet holes. These traces are being removed and it is possible to walk oblivious to this history. In Prenzlauerberg many squats are being re-developed, the signs of their 'unofficial' occupants are being removed, and trees planted by these communities are under threat. These trees, re-planted after the Second World War, are liable to be removed by the government under the justification that they signify something standing outside of authority, having been planted without permission.

In Schöneberg there exists a peculiar construction: A bombshell encased in concrete. This gigantic structure is straddled by a block of flats and life continues around it. People here seem to want me to see these things, I don't believe that they want to mourn the past but know that it does not deserve to be glossed over. The attempt at erasure and pretence by the authorities is unnerving.

Dogs

Berlin is a city of dogs and has fed my obsessions with them. Recently I read that dogs were heroes of Francis Alys'. He studied architecture and in his thesis linked the decrease of animals in Renaissance representations with the disappearance of animals from walled spaces¹. Perhaps dogs are the heroes of the modern city as they are a reminder of this past arrangement when living space was shared with animals.

¹ Cuauhtemoc Medina, *Survey 057 'Fable Power'*, Frances Alys, Phaidon Press Ltd, 2007.

Parks in Berlin have designated areas for Dog owners and their pets. They have become social spaces used regularly by the same people and animals. Dogs in the park are directed by smells, the wake of other animals. They operate in the present, but their noses make them aware of recent passings through the space.

The dogs tied in the street physically delineate the spaces dogs are allowed and the spaces dogs are not. They wait for an unspecified amount of time in constant anticipation of this period of waiting to come to an end.

Escape from Berlin

The following are recommendations for places to visit outside of Berlin.

- Kloster Chorin in the Schorfeheide forest. www.kloster-chorin.com
- Hiddensee and Rugen. These are both islands in the Baltic sea. There is a train from Berlin to Stralsund and from there you can take a boat to the islands.
- Sassuik a town on Rugen
- Konigsstul (which is walking distance from Sassuik) is a chalk rock in the Jasmund national park. www.n-vp.de/0151/english/index.htm
- Friedrichshagen, a district of Berlin that is the home of the oldest and last private brewery in Berlin, from where you can walk through a pedestrian tunnel to the Muggelsee, which is the largest Berlin Lake.

Friedrichshain

People in Berlin have strongly opinions about which quarter of the city is better. This is probably why Berlin's districts retain their own character. Friedrichshain is known as 'dog shit city'. I spoke with someone recently who made the remarkable implication that people living in this area were distinctly coarse compared to those living in the rest of Berlin. This observation was interesting in its suggestion that bestial demeanour is associated with the visible presence of animals on the street².

Graveyards

The city has many graveyards that are jungle-like spaces in the process of reverting to the wild. Most have walled sections that make them feel like mazes with grand family shrines that are frequently crumbling. Many graves are being enveloped by the shrubs planted on them and the gardeners battle with these bushes to keep the

² This quote is from a case study based on documents on London in the 19th Century where there existed a confusing mixture of animals and people.

'a locality regularly inundated by large beasts devoid of human qualities was automatically being cast as one in which the "higher" processes of human thought and sensibility were impaired in the people living and working there. The anticipation was that these people would be debased, bestial in their habits and strangely similar in disposition to the animals with which they shared their spaces.'

Chris Philo, *'Animals, Geography and the City: Notes on Inclusions and Exclusions'*, *'Animal Geographies; Place, Politics and Identity in the Nature – Culture Borderlands'*, J. Wolch and J.Emel, Verso 1998.

headstones visible. Plants also battle against one another competing for space and in doing so morph together becoming an indistinguishable from one another.

Herr Lehmann

This film was important to me when I arrived, it was written about Kreuzberg before the wall came down. It is based around the life of Herr Lehman, a 'nobody' lacking ambition in life. The film revolves around his relationships and conveys some idea of the heartache felt by those whose lives were divided by the wall. In a memorable opening scene Herr Lehmann finds his way home blocked by a dog on the pavement. The animal refuses to let him pass so he shares a bottle of whiskey with it. They end up sleeping drunkenly on the pavement.

'I don't know but I've been told, Eskimo Pussy is Mighty Cold'

A sculptural installation by Agathe Snow, Pere's Projects, Schlesische Strasse, 29.

A multi-layered work, the viewers experience of this piece is preceded by pulsing disco lights and pumping music that build the atmosphere in which the installation is seen. There is an intermittent voice to be heard under the music. The installation consists of three crucifixes stood in front of mud-cruled steps, which lead into (or emerge from) a ruined white wall. Around this are smaller sculptural pieces on castors that are made of the mud/clay that appears on the steps. These lumps incorporate fabricated objects and detritus such as army helmets, dollar bills, pot plants, barbed wire and vibrant fabric sausages. The mud itself feels like a force coming from underneath a city. The press release for the show refers to urban chaos and a state of panic in emergency situations and the installation succeeds in creating a churning, dizzy feeling.

Jannis Kounellis

Neuen National Galerie

This is one of a series of major solo exhibitions for this gallery. The space is interesting in itself because it has only glass walls³ and some of the work is visible from outside. Kounellis has built a large steel maze topped with coal which viewed from inside creates a jagged false horizon super-imposed on the Berlin scenery. The maze houses many smaller works that require an intimate space, (like a dead fly on cotton wool). Some touches I really liked; tables of church bells that lay open-mouthed, compressed parcels of clothing rolled in lead. Other pieces like a static toy train on a steel spiral seemed like less joyful echoes of earlier work. Overall, given the materials (coal, dirty Hessian sacks, rusted steel etc), the pieces seemed to have a surprisingly pristine finish.

Kling and Bang

Gallery, Torstrasse, 111

³ Writing this reminded me of a project run by the artists at Milchhof where they used a greenhouse as an exhibition space. It had a similar quality, as you could see the work from the outside. The greenhouse is transported to different locations for exhibitions. One night the glass was covered and a live band played inside. It was strange knowing that there were people with their instruments in there but not to be able to see how the sounds were being made.

A really big and confusing space, which seems to be a fusion of a squat and a gallery. This combination seemed problematic when installations were hard to discern from living spaces. Some remnants of performance pieces and a party lingered in the yard and over five floors there was little memorable. One promising but difficult to describe work was a CD Walkman in the middle of the room with electrical wires extending to the window where small pads stuck to the glass played back street noises. Disappointing that the speakers didn't play the feed back from the street you were looking down on.

Linienstrasse and Auguststrasse

are both well known for their small commercial galleries, which often have their own bookshops. 'Index' is a free list of what's on and is easy to go through to check websites before visiting (worth doing because opening times are often inconsistent). Index also lists the private views that happen every Friday night.

At the moment there is a good exhibition showing sketchbooks by Nanne Meyer at Barbara Wien Gallery. The books are displayed on a shelf and the drawings shown on a laptop in the gallery. The artist often incorporates parts of diagrams in her sketches; contours of maps, arrows, old paintings (e.g. a picture of a man with turban became a man with a fox curled up on his head). The drawings often elaborate on the familiar to create something fantastical.

Mike Kelly

Kandors, Jablonka Galerie, Kochstrasse, 60.

This is a very beautiful exhibition, it feels magical when you step into the gallery. This feeling comes from the way the work illuminates itself (no gallery lighting is used), glowing objects radiate pink, blue and yellow light into the space. The objects themselves are manifestations of a fictional place that has numerous mutations in the minds of those who drew it.

Neuer Berlin Contemporary

Chauseestrasse 128/129

The gallery was set up in 1969 to encourage public access to contemporary art and to give exposure to younger Berlin artists (with a particular emphasis on showing lens based media). While the gallery downstairs hosts exhibitions by internationally recognised artists, the upstairs space houses Artothek, a collection of work by up and coming artists and an extensive library of video artworks (the Video Forum has over 800 pieces). As a resident of Berlin you are able to borrow these items free of charge; non-residents can use the collection by appointment.

Open Workshop

facilities are available at affordable rates at Künstlerhaus where it is possible to take some training and to use equipment under supervision. The materials and facilities are subsidised by the BBK. For example there is a print studio which enables artists to make work at an affordable price. Generally Berlin seems good for access to

facilities at reasonable rates and you find opportunities advertised in magazines like Exberliner, Zitty and Tip.

Prices

The low rent in Berlin is one of the big attractions for newcomers. It's worth shopping around when looking for accommodation as prices vary a lot even within the same area. The flats that I have visited were mostly old, the rooms large and open-plan and often with balconies. Flats needing renovation are available at cheaper rates and tenants are permitted to improve the flat themselves. In some cases an original contract made with a landlord remained unchanged and been passed from one tenant to the next keeping the rent at the same price. Most old flats are cold and heated by coal burners, however increasingly landlords are putting in central heating and raising the rent.

Tip and Zitty are the two Berlin magazines that have sections for advertising properties. Look out for short-term room lets, (*Wohugemeinschaft* or *Zwischenmiete*) which give the opportunity to rent without long-term commitment.

Studios are also cheap to rent especially those subsidised by government money through the BBK. Applicants for studio space are often selected by a panel. This is not done on merit of the work but on whether the panel thinks the artist will be actively using the studio. There is an advantage in being known by the other artists in the studio, this can make these artistic communities difficult to break into. The rent at Milchhof works out at €4 per m² per month. Two areas worth exploring for studios are Wedding and Neukoln.

Quarters

The areas lying further west such as Charlottenburg and further into the suburbs Wansee are in general the more wealthy parts of the city. Here the city becomes more like a series of villages where the communities are long established. The east of the city has obviously gone through changes and there are new affluent areas in Prenzlauerberg especially around Kollwitzplatz, which are perhaps comparable to Hoxton/Shoeditch. Unlike some of the communities in the west, people here are in the most part new to Berlin. Kreuzberg, formerly in the west, seems an interesting area and while some parts are quite recently changed in character by the influx of a Turkish population, it also has retained pockets of traditional Germany. Parts of it bear a resemblance to Dalston/Kingsland road. Shoneberg is quite hard to sum up because it seems such a mixture and depending on where you walk you can get a totally different impression of the area. I've not spent much time in either Wedding or Neukoln and neither seem to have a great reputation. Neukoln, like Kreuzberg, has a large Turkish and Arabic community and it is supposed to be a less safe area of the city. (see F for Friedrichshain).

Re-development

Although Berlin has been developing in the long-term, the pace of the change has picked up considerably in the last two years. I felt aware of derelict spaces since arriving because they are something that you don't see in London, but the longer I

stay the more I am aware of change. Empty spaces between buildings have become building sites with foundations laid in the duration of my stay and the large empty area opposite the studios has become active with billboards advertising new apartments. Some of these – derelict and empty buildings were previously bars and coffee shops run by small communities. With investments in land, particularly by Canada and Sweden, these underground places are disappearing from Berlin.

Shopping for Materials

there is Boesner which has a branch in Prenzlauerberg that is easy to reach. It has an extensive range of materials, sculpting tools etc. Worth looking in the catalogue before you go as you might find some things cheaper in local art shops. I've needed to buy computer equipment and used Saturn in Alexanderplatz. They are well stocked but it is quite difficult to navigate and also tricky to find help.

The food markets here are really nice and you can buy home grown seasonal produce. It's great to see stalls dedicated entirely to selling different kinds of potatoes. There are lots of small markets and you tend to just happen upon these, but there is a big one on Wednesdays and Fridays where Ufer Paul-Lincke crosses Kottbusser Damm.

Tasso Café

Frankfurter Tor, 12.

I found this place by accident but I keep going back there. It is a fair-trade coffee shop which also sells second-hand books and LPs. Everything costs 1€ or 6 for 5€ and I have picked up some beautiful books and old maps. I have found the Humana (charity) shops much more pricey and it takes much more hunting as their collections are vast and jumbled.

Urban Foxes

are a reminder of the wild that has re-surfaced in the city. Sightings of foxes are common in Berlin and there are plenty of quiet parks and waste spaces which make it easy for them to go undisturbed. It is not only foxes that are living in the city, wild pigs also come out in the streets at night. I have started to collect people's stories about these animals; just simple descriptions of where and when they saw the animal with the idea of building up a map of the city plotted with fox sightings. I would eventually like to record the animated descriptions that people give of these sightings.

Video Stores

Negativland, Danziger Strasse 41, is a good, low-key, independent video store with an extensive collection including films unavailable in mainstream stores. A lot of the older material is on VHS but it is possible to hire a video player.

Filmgalerie 451, Torstrasse 231, houses an even bigger collection. The shop is a bit like an old fashioned library with ladders to reach films on high shelves. It also has a

very good website search-engine which displays the covers and titles of the films and other related movies. A lot of German and Austrian films are not available with English subtitles.

Waste or Derelict Spaces

are a reminder of the city's turbulent recent history. In these untouched spaces there exist jungles of foliage. Plants have crept in to grasp a foothold. These places have been gradually overtaken. Mosses grow in the cracks of concrete and start a breakdown process that allows other plants to thrive. I have started working map-like drawings of these mosses.

Xmas markets

These little flat-pack villages sprung up overnight at the beginning of December so that people can drink Gluh-wine from ceramic shoes. They are all over Berlin and seem to reflect the character of the area to some extent. The strangest was in Neukoln where there was nothing German for sale but you could get fresh nougat or a Chinese take away. In Prenzlauerberg it was only upmarket wurst but Spandau was the most hectic. The market had taken over every street and you had to let yourself be carried by the crowds. It felt like a cross between a fairground and a Christmas market.

Yesterday

is an 80's bar on Shonehauser Alle. Full of lava lamps and psychedelic paintings and fabrics it feels like a hippie den. The mannequin couple at the bar make you double-take each time you walk past. The music is good and the DJ has his old dog there. The bar stays open all night.

Zionskirsch

is round the corner from Milchhof studios. Used as a conventional church by day, by night it hosts art exhibitions and live music events. It is a beautifully simple space, not dressed up with gilding, and paint peels off the walls. Despite this it doesn't seem uncared for instead it feels lived in. During the day there are frequently people singing or playing music and the acoustics are incredible.