

The Museum of Modern Art

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BERLINART 1961-1987

June 4 - September 8, 1987

In some sense, Berlin stands for every place in the modern world, every vulnerable city and town. It is a symbol of freedom and freedom in the arts, and of the possibility of the arts developing in a free way, in spite of a threatening future. . . . The art of Berlin, with its strong Expressionist flavor and its self-aware political reality has made a significant contribution to the art of our time.

--Kynaston McShine*

During the past quarter-century, Berlin (West) has become a major center of artistic activity. On June 4, 1987, The Museum of Modern Art opens BERLINART 1961-1987, the first extensive American look at this extraordinary city's contributions to contemporary art. Organized by Kynaston McShine, senior curator in the Department of Painting and Sculpture, the exhibition focuses on Berlin's unique role as both a pervasive presence in the work of its artists and as an environment for the making of art.

Berlin's international stature has grown since the sixties as German artists have received increasing exposure abroad and European and American artists have come to live and work in Berlin. On view through September 8, BERLINART represents fifty-five artists from ten countries (complete list of artists attached). Featuring diverse mediums, the exhibition includes over 150 works, most of them unfamiliar to the American public.

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Affairs, Berlin; and the National Endowment for the Arts, Washington, D.C. Deutsche Bank, Philip Morris Companies Inc., and The International Council of The Museum of Modern Art have also provided generous support. Additional assistance for transportation has been received from Lufthansa German Airlines. The publication accompanying the exhibition has been made possible by The Bohen Foundation.

Berlin's contributions to the history of modernism are well known. Since the early part of the century, the city has been a crossroads of the arts, attracting an international group of artists. But its spirit was unnaturally stopped with the advent of Nazism and the Second World War. The isolation and alienation of Berlin artists became acute in 1961 with the construction of the Wall by the Soviet-backed East German government. This same year was notable for a strong resurgence of expressionist painting.

In his introductory essay to the catalog accompanying the exhibition,* Mr. McShine writes, "Unlike the contemporary, more optimistic, and often humorous inventions of Pop and Nouveau Réalisme, Berlin's art bore witness to melancholy, claustrophobia, and social tensions. Out of the pressures of this period came the beginnings of the figurative, socially-involved art that has since become a major current in the contemporary art world."

BERLINART begins with this expressionistic work of the sixties, focusing on the paintings of Georg Baselitz and Eugen Schönebeck, who in 1961 published a manifesto, Pandemonium, and organized an exhibition of their work. Although Baselitz eventually left Berlin, and Schönebeck stopped painting, other painters of their generation--Karl Horst Hödicke, Bernd Koberling, and Markus Lüpertz--remain with their gestural, expressionist work a major influence there.

While painting was the predominant activity in the sixties, Conceptual and Performance art also emerged as important presences in Berlin. Joseph Beuys's performances and "actions" became an important element of and influence on the Berlin scene. The Fluxus group, a loose association of international artists to which Beuys was closely connected, also presented in Berlin its sometimes slightly absurd but always memorable activities, performances, poetry, and concerts. The exhibition includes works by such Fluxus members as Robert Filliou, Ludwig Gosewitz, Allan Kaprow, Arthur Koepcke, Tomas Schmit, Ben Vautier, Wolf Vostell, and Emmett Williams.

By the early seventies, as Berlin art was at the height of its recognition internationally, artists from other countries continued to add to the city's art scene. It is also at this point that a second generation of artists began to emerge, some of whom founded the Galerie am Moritzplatz, located in Kreuzberg, an area where many artists live. Such artists as Luciano Castelli, Rainer Fetting, Dieter Hacker, Helmut Middendorf, Salomé, and Bernd Zimmer were among those who became known as the "violent" painters, the New Wild Ones (Neue Wilde).

While the influence of the Moritzplatz painters and their predecessors remained strong during the late seventies and early eighties, artists emerged who explored new directions. For example, the collaborations and vigorous individual paintings of Thomas Wachweger and Ina Barfuss are, in comparison to Neue Wilde, almost abstract symbolic abbreviations. Martin Kippenberger's paintings comment ironically on German culture; Peter Chevalier and others take a "metaphysical" approach to the object.

Many of the foreign artists who have worked in Berlin since the early sixties were invited by the Berlin Artists Program of the DAAD (German Academic

Exchange Service); others came to stay without official support. Their art has helped to define Berlin and what it means to live there. Those whose works are represented in the exhibition are Günter Brus (Austria); Jonathan Borofsky, Christo, Terry Fox, Edward Kienholz, and Malcolm Morley (United States); David Hockney and Bruce McLean (Great Britain); Luciano Castelli and Markus Raetz (Switzerland); and Emilio Vedova (Italy).

The Berlin scene today is vivid and immensely varied. The younger artists, many of whom are former students of Baselitz, Hödicke, Koberling, and Lüpertz, work in an alternative scene similar to those of Paris, London, and New York. The plurality of current styles is demonstrated by the work of such artists as ter Hell, Olaf Metzel, Hermann Pitz, Martin Rosz, and Eva-Maria Schön.

In recognition of the integral role played by film in the Berlin art community, the exhibition includes a film component, BERLINART: 20 FILMS. Organized by Laurence Kardish, Curator in the Department of Film, its thirteen programs include fiction and nonfiction works made between 1971 and 1987 by more than twenty filmmakers.

Demonstrating the mixed-media approach taken by many artists today, BERLINART includes performances by the Berlin group, Die Tödliche Doris (The Deadly Doris) on Tuesday, June 9, and Thomas Kapielski, also of Berlin, on Wednesday, June 10. A third performance by New York artist Joan Jonas, who lived and worked in Berlin in 1982, is on Friday, June 12. All performances take place twice each evening at 7:00 and 9:00 p.m. in the Roy and Niuta Titus Theater 2. Beginning May 25, tickets--\$10; Museum Members \$9; students \$8--are available at the information desk in the Museum lobby.

After its New York showing, the exhibition will be on view at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (October 22, 1987 - January 3, 1988).

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*CATALOG

BERLINART 1961-1987 documents the exhibition and the period. Introduction by Kynaston McShine. Essays by John Willett, Wieland Schmied, Karl Ruhrberg, Michael Schwarz, René Block, and Laurence Kardish. Chronology, biographies of the artists, and bibliography. Approximately 97 color and 317 black-and-white illustrations; 282 pages. Published by The Museum of Modern Art and Prestel-Verlag. Clothbound, \$40.00, distributed in the United States by te Neues Publishing Company, New York; paperbound, \$25.00.

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