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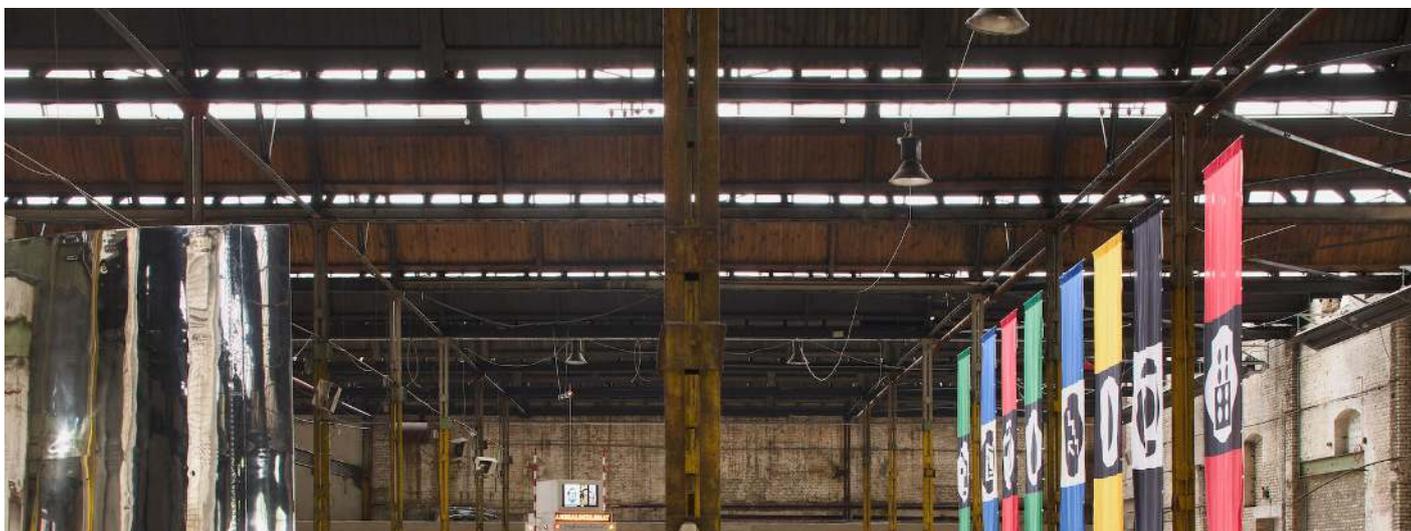
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# Berlin Art Week Explores the Idea of Value Amid Rapid Gentrification

Chiara Zampetti Egidi

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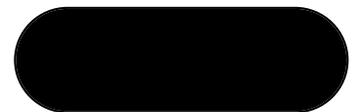




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galleries, and museums — collaborate on a program of exhibitions, screenings, performances, talks, and other events. The work of over 1,000 emerging and established artists appears in venues scattered throughout the city. Audiences can view work by [Rachel Rossin](#), [Lu Yang](#), [Jenna Sutela](#), [Anna Uddenberg](#), [Simone Forti](#), and [Leila Hekmat](#), to name a few.

Given the sprawling nature of the week’s festivities — and of Berlin itself — the festival center at Uferhallen becomes a central hub. Uferhallen is a nearly 200,000-square-foot industrial site located in Wedding, a multicultural district in the northwest part of Berlin’s central Mitte district. The site features BAW Garten, a venue for workshops and performances, while BAW Open Studios hosts discussions and exchanges.

Aram Bartholl, installation view of *This Is Fine*, 2022, in “On Equal Terms” at Uferhallen, 2022. Photo by Marvin Systemans. Courtesy of the artist and Uferhallen.



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Aram Bartholl's gigantic installation, which features a print of a massive flame emoji, welcomes visitors to Uferhallen's forecourt. The Berlin-based artist uses the symbol to suggest the area as a hotspot of cultural exchange and art production — but also of danger. Currently, 150 artists, including Asta Gröting, John Bock, and Monica Bonvicini, live and maintain their studios in Uferhallen, but they do not know how long they will be able to stay.

For years, real estate investors have planned to convert the historical site into expensive flats and offices. The project will transform the historic low-rise brick buildings with the addition of a multi-story tower, creating exponentially more traffic and increasing housing prices to rates that will drive locals from the area. Gentrification is an old story, but its effect on Berlin is especially challenging for the contemporary art world. Since the 1990s, many international artists and galleries have moved to Berlin for spacious, charismatic spaces at affordable prices.

FORT, installation view of *Little Darlings*, 2017, in “On Equal Terms” at Uferhallen, 2022. Photo by Chiara Zampetti Egidi. Courtesy of the artist and Chiara Zampetti Egidi.

While rising real estate prices and housing shortages are detrimental to the creative scene at large, they have inspired thoughtful new exhibitions at Berlin Art Week. “On Equal Terms,” located in the main building of Uferhallen, explicitly asks questions about gentrification and its effects. Wall text at the entrance queries: “A large majority of Berlin-based artists are trying to resist the economic displacement of spaces for artistic experimentation.... What is the price to pay for entering the political bidding war for space? What is the relationship between cultural and monetary capital? Are both sides of the conversation on equal terms?”

The group show includes 26 works selected by curators Sophia Gräfe and Arkadij Koscheew. Among them are *Little Darlings*, an installation featuring a selection of dog houses by the German artist duo FORT, and German artist Bianca Kennedy’s *We are all in this together*, a three-channel video installation featuring a montage of historical film scenes of people in bathtubs. Altogether, these works consider the commodification of cultural and artistic values.

Bianca Kennedy, installation view of *We are all in this together* in “Learning from bathing” at Kurtheater Baden, 2021. © Bianca Kennedy. Courtesy of the artist and Uferhallen.

Such considerations have become increasingly fraught since the onset of the pandemic: A number of Berlin-based artists moved out of the city in order to access greener landscapes and enjoy remote

...the city, in order to access green landscapes and enjoy remote work possibilities in nearby towns and villages. Artist Isa Melsheimer is in the process of such a move. She noted how difficult the city is to pin down to begin with: “I could not say where the center of Berlin is, if there is one at all,” she said.

During Berlin Art Week, Melsheimer is exhibiting large-scale ceramics and other works on paper in the major group exhibition “K60.” The show is a collaboration between 15 Berlin galleries: Alexander Levy, carlier, I gebauer, ChertLüdde, Efremidis, Esther Schipper, Klosterfelde Edition, HUA International, Klemm’s, Mehdi Chouakri, neugerriemschneider, Nome, PSM, Soy Capitán, Sprüth Magers, and Sweetwater.

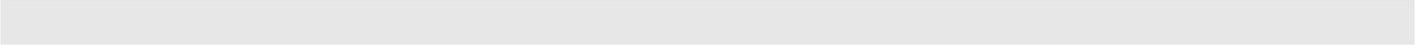


Installation view of “K60” at Wilhelm Hallen, 2022. Photo by Joe Clark. Courtesy of Hallen #3.

“K60” is located in Wilhelm Hallen, a former iron foundry in Reinickendorf, a district in northwest Berlin. The site features an ensemble of protected heritage halls, loft areas, and offices. The red brick architecture demarcates over 200,000 square feet of usable area, much of which is devoted to creative work and production.

Gallerist Mehdi Chouakri opened a second space here, which he sees as a complement to the gallery space he keeps in Charlottenburg. “One is a classical space with a shop window; the other is a historical industrial space that allows large scale projects as well as production and storage,” he said. He noted that many artists live and work in Reinickendorf, like Angela Bulloch, Berta Fischer, and Thomas Scheibitz. What’s happening in Berlin is what’s

happening in other European capitals like Paris, he said: Artists and galleries look for interesting industrial spaces to show and produce large-scale works, and such sites can only be found in eastern and northern parts of Berlin.



Rosa Barba, installation view of “Radiant Exposures,” at Esther Schipper, Berlin, 2022. Photo by Andrea Rossetti. Courtesy of Esther Schipper.

While this might suggest that artists are indeed moving to the periphery of Berlin, gallerist Esther Schipper rejects the idea that there is such a periphery. As the largest city in Germany, Berlin covers 23 miles from north to south and 28 miles from east to west. It takes time to get anywhere, and Reinickendorf is as convenient to Mitte as Schipper’s own gallery, which is just in a different part of the city center. During Berlin Art Week, Schipper is exhibiting works by Rosa Barba in her Potsdamer Strasse gallery.

Outside the events at Uferhallen and Wilhelm Hallen, galleries and institutions have opened shows around the city, featuring established artists. Beirut-born, London-based artist Mona Hatoum has mounted a retrospective at Neuer Berliner Kunstverein (in collaboration with the Kindl Centre for Contemporary Art and the Georg Kolbe Museum). Berlin-based American artist Leila Hekmat has transformed the Haus am Waldsee into a religious sanatorium for women. Out at Tempelhof Airport, a former airport in the south of Berlin, the Positions Art Fair is selling contemporary art.

Installation view of Positions Art Fair, 2021. Photo by Clara Wenzel-Theiler. Courtesy of Berlin Art Week.

Berlin Art Week is geographically scattered, for both voluntary and involuntary reasons. Its sprawl allows visitors to discover different city centers and their local communities, creating a vibrant sense of connection. While artists, gallerists, and curators question the idea of Berlin's periphery, it's clear that the city is still a strong art capital. Despite the real estate market and other trying economic factors, Berlin adapts quickly to change. The city itself remains a crucial center for art and the art market in Europe. ■

Chiara Zampetti Egidì

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