

Berlin Artist Residency - 3-30 August 2012

My friend and fellow artist, Monika Oechsler, shared expenses on a month-long residency in Berlin arranged with the Institut für alles mögliche in the space called the Büro für bestimmte dinge. We were the first artist to use the space in this way and, although there were a few teething issues, I found the experience of living there very adequate to my needs and livable. Although, those visiting who are not familiar with big city life should arrive prepared. The space is a shop front on a main city street. I liked it - but I live in the center of London.

After our rainy arrival and settling-into our space and the community, I began a double discovery - Neukölln (a burgeoning art community alongside an older, mostly Turkish, community) and Berlin as it is now in the presence of its own modern history. Aspects of such a residency include the separation from one's normal life and the impact of a new environment for the purpose of making new work or the continuation of ones work away from the pressures of usual activities.

Although I did attempt an experiment with a new film I had planned, "Tissu de Femmes", my most important activity was a new series of digital photographic work in response to the residency itself, "Berlin Cycle". Upon arrival our host, Stefan Riebel, introduced us to the space and to two bicycles we were given to use for our stay. As Monika was not comfortable with the smaller of the two, I inherited it. This seemed to be a challenge at first but eventually proved a godsend.

Description: The bike is a 1070's style folding model, bright orange with bits of rust here and there, coaster breaks, one gear and a distinctive sticker along the down-tube declaring, "I (heart) Duchamp!".

Eventually I started referring to it as "Duchamp" or just "He". Berlin being a cycle town, I spend many KM's on this little mount. Riding it was sort of like being on a hamster wheel.

Early in my discovery trips around Neukölln I visited Templehof Airfield and the Berlin Airlift Memorial there. On a whim I photographed Duchamp resting at its base. This shot inspired me to make Duchamp a feature of whatever tourists style shots I might take as I went around town. Later as I looked through these, it became clear that these shots were making a statement of sorts.

Berlin is a very special city in many ways but mostly as a result of its modern history, a history that its people live with daily. A history that can be poignant, regretful and sad. The colorful little bicycle visiting the monuments of the city, as all tourist must do, seems to make a different statement about this history. It's still there but maybe in a contemporary space along side the past in a way that can be lived with.

The series was my main contribution to our closing exhibition, "Berlin Now", and can be seen at: <http://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.10151214670304703.508686.611604702&type=1&l=629bee2777>

A part of this exhibition features two photographs where "Duchamp" can not be seen, although he is nearby. On my final visit to the Berlin Airlift Memorial, as I was leaving I noted something written in colored chalks on the stone walkway around the base of the memorial where one finds the names of airmen who died in this relief of West-Berlin (1948-49). On one side was the word "danke" and on the other "thanks you". I also photographed these and placed them in the exhibition series.

I have done this because even in 2012 a Berliner can be moved to remember this historic moment when the city became the focus of the Cold War. Without the sacrifice of these airmen and the decisive actions of their leaders in Australia, France, Britain and the USA (lead by General Clay) - Berlin would not be the place it is today.

This special city has become an artist's beacon because of its past. Thousands of creative people are now living and working here. Although this can be a cause for concern to some, to a visiting artist it is amazing. The street scenes have gravitated eastward and southward over time with artists living/working spaces opening-up in surprising numbers. But to the temporary visitor from other big cities the presence of artist support facilities such as the Bethanien Artist House and an actual art supply and support warehouse, Modulor, is impressive.

I was able to use both the print works and media studio at Bethanien for unbelievably low prices for fine-art printing and a fully-equipped video production/photography space - all with an able and friendly technical staff.

So to say the residency was successful would be an understatement for me. I was inspired and able to do new work as well as experiment. For our closing exhibition I was able to arrange a live virtual viewing on the web - maybe a first for Neukölln? Certainly a first for our host the Institut für alles mögliche. Maybe we were able to inspire as we were inspired.

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