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- Thomas Crow on a talk for *A Brief History of Curating* at the Guggenheim
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- Kate Sutton at the Manchester International Festival



GRAMERCY PARK HOTEL.

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ABC 123

BERLIN 09.11.08



Left: Peaches. Right: Art Berlin Contemporary artistic director Ariane Beyn.

Fair was a four-letter word at last Thursday's opening of Art Berlin Contemporary (ABC). Artistic director Ariane Beyn continually corrected those who called it a fair: "It is an exhibition," she insisted—yet no one seemed to be listening. Standing around a Tom Burr installation, Cornelius Tittel, editor of German culture mag *Monopol*, and Alexander Schröder of Galerie Neu, one of ABC's organizers, expressed cynicism about the difference, what with today's dealers even selling directly out of the Venice Biennale.

Beyn had arranged works by seventy-four artists from forty-four Berlin galleries in the halls of a former postal train station in Kreuzberg, Berlin's official alternative neighborhood. To compete with the mammoth space, it seemed that most of the (largely sculptural) works had to be big, like Georg Herold's *Deutsche Mutti*, a yellow figure holding a phallic wooden stick. The emphasis on size seemed fitting, since the whole exhibition/fair was intended as something of a show of power against Art Forum Berlin, the city's established art fair. (Galleries like Neu, Klosterfelde, and Max Hetzler have been organizing Berlin's spring gallery weekend for a number of years, but this was a decidedly more ambitious enterprise.)



Left: Artist Uwe Kowski and Eigen + Art's Judy Lybke. Right: Artist Stella Hamberg.

There were high expectations for the vernissage, though the atmosphere had a familiar sensibility—or at least a familiar odor, what with the smoke from Grill Royal's catering filling the hall. Standing next to Stella Hamberg's giant sculpture *Berserker*—and directly in the way of the noxious cloud—dealer Judy Lybke must have smelled like one of those roasted *salsiccia* sausages by the end of the evening. Entertainment highlight Peaches turned out to be not such a highlight after all; maybe because arriving on the grounds in a stretch limo doesn't qualify as a performance, not even in provincial Kreuzberg, or maybe because every Berliner has seen her at least twice already. As dealer Guido Baudach put it: "At least at Art Basel Miami Beach, she ran into the ocean naked." Here she just did karaoke, singing relatively convincing covers of Bonnie Tyler's "Total Eclipse of the Heart" and Kate Bush's "Babushka."

There was much more excitement at the nightclub *Kleine Nachtrevue*, where Galerie Crone hosted a burlesque show in honor of Norbert Bisky's exhibition featuring new paintings (mostly of pretty boys). Painter Amelie von Wulffen posed wildly for her personal photographer in the dense crowd, while Count Alexander von Schönburg and former *Vanity Fair* editor Ulf Poschardt fought over the few curry wursts handed out by the ladies behind the bar; apparently, they didn't get enough of the *salsicce* at the fair. Later, around 11 PM, the ladies stepped onto the stage, leaving sausages and clothes behind as they performed an erotic blend of play and politics using IKEA toys. When a topless contortionist wiggled out of a suitcase, LA MoCA trustee Blake Byrne shouted, "She looks like Sarah Palin!" and almost left in fear. We left for other reasons—to try to catch the last bit of Richard Ruin's performance at Kunst-Werke. But by the time we climbed the stairs to the art center's rooftop stage, all we got to see was Martin Eder's alter ego wiping the final beads of sweat from his chest.

links



Left: Artists Vera Lutter and Darren Almond. Right: Artist Matt Mullican, dealer Johann Widauer, and Art Unlimited curator Simon Lamunière.

Friday was reserved for gallery openings. With ABC being the third of four events this year competing to draw the jet-set crowd to Berlin, there was notably less buzz and fewer international collectors—for whom we all thought ABC had been invented. At a collegial opening at Tanya Leighton's new gallery, Jeremy Deller showed photographs of allotment gardens in Münster. Paul McDevitt at Sommer & Kohl won the prize for most out-of-touch palette, both for his airbrush paintings recalling romantic posters from the 1980s and for his silver leather shoes. Michael Sailstorfer was in high form, chronicling exploding houses and flying trees. Much calmer were Vera Lutter's camera obscura pictures of a flooded Venice, while at September, we caught the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung's* Peter Richter chatting with artist Dorothy Iannone about her first love.

The dinner party for Matt Mullican at Martin Klosterfelde's apartment at first resembled parents' night out. Artist Matthew Antezzo traded stories with guests about terrifying toddlers. Indeed, the star of the party was not Mullican, who had mounted a dense and excellent show, but his teenage twins, who with their attitude of "Oh God, another one of Dad's boring art parties" and their great style (lots of black with plaid shirts) made for a fun antidote to the typical crowd. Guests fought over the duck with fig mustard and the orgasmic plums.

Next stop was Cookies, where galleries from Lindenstraße and Charlottenstraße were hosting their afterparty. At first, artist Marc Brandenburg had played his records to a packed house, but by 1 AM, he was chatting with *Tageszeitung* critic Brigitte Werneburg about suitable subjects for a hot flirt. (They couldn't agree on any.) They should have made for the Gaspavillon on the old GDR boulevard Karl Marx Allee, where coquetry was in the air. Berlin Biennial curators Adam Szymczyk and Elena Filipovic were dancing closely, while Art Basel communications director Maïke Cruse, Johann König, and Julieta Aranda were giving one another a little more breathing room on the floor. By Sunday morning, however, everyone was sober and back at the fair, though this time, the longest queue was not for access to the works but for the bouncing castle.

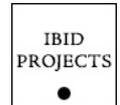
— Daniel Boese

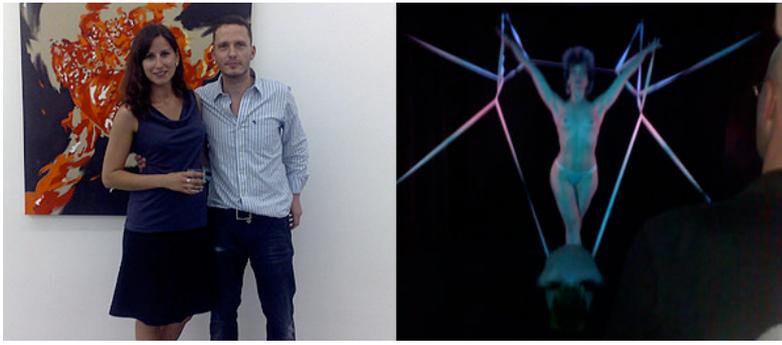


Left: Artists Rory Crichton and Jeremy Deller. Right: Dealer Johann König, artist Michael Sailstorfer, and Johann König director Kirska Geiser.



Left: Dealer Patricia Kohl and artist Paul McDevitt. Right: September's Oliver Koerner von Gustorf, artist Dorothy Iannone, and the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung's* Peter Richter.





Left: Crone's Sônia Pires and artist Norbert Bisky. Right: A burlesque performance at Kleine Nachtrevue.

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