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# Cultural Landscapes



## Cultural Landscapes

by Michael Bienert

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### And the Shark has Teeth



"Berlin is a wonderful opportunity, could you possibly steal 500 Marks and come over? Everything here is full of tastelessness, but with such magnitude, my friend!" The young **Bertolt Brecht** wrote these words to his friend Caspar Neher in Augsburg on that cold day in February of 1920. Shortly after his 22nd birthday, Brecht traveled for the first time to the capital. He was literally overwhelmed by the masses of people, by the underground railway, the department stores, the cultural life. "This scam named Berlin is different from all other scams because of its shameless grandiosity. The theaters are wonderful here: they give birth to little bladder stones with such an entrancing ardor. I love Berlin, although with limited liability".

Croaking on the guitar some saucy verses for his friends, Brecht wrote little plays and wanted to work in theater. Together with his school friend (later his stage designer) Caspar Neher, he was determined to write theater history. But conquering Berlin was no easy task, there were simply too many young people out there who considered themselves to be artistic geniuses. Until 1926, Brecht traveled to Berlin on nine different occasions for longer periods of time. He was eager to establish contacts. At long last, a

director friend found him a job as a dramatic advisor at the Deutsches Theater and actress Helene Weigel, who would later become his wife, left him her Berlin apartment. The rest can be read in school books. In Berlin, Brecht became one of the 20th Century's most important theater personalities as a playwright and director, and celebrated a sensational success in 1929 with the "Three-penny opera". At the same time, he also wrote for newspapers, produced the first proletarian sound film with friends and worked with musicians as well. Nowadays, he would probably be considered a multi-media, multi-tasking genius who experiments with all sorts of materials and styles. Brecht aspired to change society; he became a communist and was forced to flee from the Nazis in 1933.



Brecht at Berliner Ensemble  
© Bienert

Fifteen years later, he returned to the city "that makes you smart" and together with Helene Weigel, he built up the internationally renowned

**Berliner Ensemble** until his death in 1956. Brecht's last residence, his apartment on Chausseestr. 125, is now a museum. His grave in the Dorotheenstädtischer Friedhof has become a place of pilgrimage.

The poet now sits as a bronze statue in front of his Berliner Ensemble and the square bears his name. Sometimes children like to use the monument as a jungle gym. In the theater next door, the "Three-penny opera" has been going strong for the past 12 years under American director Robert Wilson, and Brecht's piece "The Resistable Rise of Arturo Ui" has seen its rendition by Heiner Müller endure for over 20 years and 400 performances. Oliver Reese, the acting director since 2017, has also enriched their repertoire with remarkable Brecht plays: "The Caucasian Chalk Circle" in Michael Thalheimer's production proves to be a highly topical piece about war and the fate of refugees, and Frank Castorf's six-hour "Galileo" treatment urgently questions who actually benefits from the inventions of scientists.

### Magnet Berlin

Berlin has changed a lot since Brecht's days, but the irresistible fascination it is exercising on **artists and creative free spirits** has in no way diminished. They don't come flocking only from the provinces anymore. In the last few years, there has been a considerable number of artists represented in the big modern art exhibitions worldwide who have established their studio in Berlin but originate from foreign countries: the Icelandic installation and

light artist **Olafur Eliasson** ran the "Institute for spatial experiments" from 2009 to 2014, and his Chinese colleague **Ai Weiwei** taught at the Universität der Künste from 2015 until 2018. Considered undesirable in his native China, he continues to travel the world while retaining his big studio in Berlin. In addition to an active and vibrant cultural life, there are also rather mundane reasons for **the city's irresistible appeal**: compared to other capitals, you can still live in Berlin on a relatively small budget. There is also a multitude of cultural programs benefiting immigrant artists as well. What makes Berlin exceptionally stimulating is its messiness and utter roughness. The historic fractures and the social distortions lie there, close to the visible surface. "A training camp for the unprejudiced eye", that's how the former Festspiele festival's artistic director Ulrich Eckhardt named the city, and even "a transit station for expeditions into uncertainty".

In Berlin, tens of thousands are struggling as painters, sculptors, multi-media artists, actors, directors, filmmakers, musicians, dancers, architects. Most of them are living at or below poverty level. For this reason, the "Koalition der Freien Szene" (Coalition of the Independent Scene) was formed in 2012 to demand fairer **distribution of subsidies allotted to culture**. Of the 450 million plus euros Berlin spends on culture each year, 90% is allocated to established institutions where roughly 2,000 people are employed. It is estimated that roughly 10 times as many artists are scraping for the pathetic subsidy crumbs and for whatever they can

to be the showcase of the entire country of Germany. Consequently, it is not in any Federal Government's interest to see some highly regarded Berliner cultural institutions close down or dry-out financially.



You would actually expect to find **contemporary Berliner art** at the **Berlinische Galerie** or the **Hamburger Bahnhof**, the National Galerie's "Museum der Gegenwart". Until recently, rather than promoting Berlin's artists, the Hamburger Bahnhof preferred the big collectors who brought high-caliber contemporary art for which there was no acquisition budget. That's why the private collections Marx and Flick dominate the museum. Since 2009, when Udo Kittelmann took over the direction, a fresh spirit of innovation has been coursing through Hamburger Bahnhof. He has gone to great lengths in making the museum more attractive to families and to Berlin's cultural scene.



Art at Kleistpark

© Herden

There is hope for the Stadtmuseum since Dutchman Paul Spies was hired as its director in 2016. He was granted 65 million euros in order to

renovate the **Märkisches Museum**. Additional exhibition space is to be created in the neighboring Marinehaus. Spies is experimenting with new exhibition formats to make the house more attractive to the city's residents and tourists alike.

The comparatively well-to-do Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz was for many years the envy of the city's other cultural institutions: the Stiftung surprisingly received a 200 million **cash infusion** from the Federal Government in 2014 in order to solve some of their most pressing issues: for one, the **Neue Nationalgalerie** at the Kulturforum has too little exhibition space, especially for classical modernism. They have been closed to the public since the start of 2015 due to several years of renovations. Thanks to the Federal Government, there's at least money for the much anticipated **Museum der Moderne** for 20th century art. They intend on building it next to the Neue Nationalgalerie at the Kulturforum. The winning entry of the competition for best architectural design (by star architects Herzog & de Meuron) reminds of a huge barn but remains highly controversial. In the years to come, small portions of their early 20th century art collection will be on display at changing locations, mainly in the Neue Galerie, located at Hamburger Bahnhof as a temporary solution.

## A Castle for the World

At Schlossplatz, Berlin's most ambitious cultural project, the **Humboldt-Forum**, has reached the next stage of construction now that the foundation has been completed.

The Stadtschloss, which was heavily damaged during the Second World War and dynamited following orders of GDR-leaders in 1950, has been rebuilt as a modern cultural palace with a baroque façade. This former Hohenzollern residence was transformed into a museum already back after the end of the Kaiserreich Empire during the Weimarer Republic. The former East-German Republic established a multi-functional cultural center in the Palast der Republik inaugurated in 1976, in which the GDR-People's court resided as well. However, this was first and foremost "Erich's (Honecker) lamp store", a popular venue for concerts, shows, small artistry, exhibitions and gastronomy. In 2008, the last asbestos-infested relics from this prominent GDR-symbol finally disappeared from the face of the earth. The Bundestag (House of Representatives) decided to rebuild most of the façade and establish a Humboldt-Forum in the building. The conceptual design of Franco Stella from Italy, who was able to win the architectural competition, is closely following these guidelines.

The name Humboldt-Forum brings to mind the cosmopolitan brothers **Wilhelm and Alexander von Humboldt**. While the former was leaning towards the humanities, the latter had a strong affinity for the natural sciences. The ethnological collections of the Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz as well as the natural science collections of the Humboldt University will be exhibited in the Humboldt-Forum. In addition, Berlin wants to present itself as a cosmopolitan city in a new exhibition.

Wilhelm von Humboldt greatly influenced the modern concept of education while displaying the archetypal personality which develops and grows through commitment to culture.



Humboldtforum, work in progress

© Jaschinski

The idea of the Humboldt-Forum is noncontroversial, (as opposed to its architectural expression) because it is casually integrated in Berlin's general museum history. The very first museum was actually the Royal Treasure Chambers in the Hohenzollern Palace, in which art objects, various specimen and all sorts of exotic things from all over the world were deposited. As an antithesis to the Palace, Karl Friedrich Schinkel conceived Berlin's first museum building on the opposite side of the Lustgarten: the **Altes Museum**, completed in 1830. Soon, it became too small. Until 1930, the half-island area behind Schinkel's art temple was filled by the **Neues Museum**, the **Alte Nationalgalerie**, the **Bode-Museum** and the **Pergamon museum**. Today, the Museum Island is included in the UNESCO World Heritage and is one of the city's strongest tourist magnets. The renovations and new furnishing of

each house, which began after the reunification, are expected to drag on until 2025 and cost at least 1.5 billion euros.

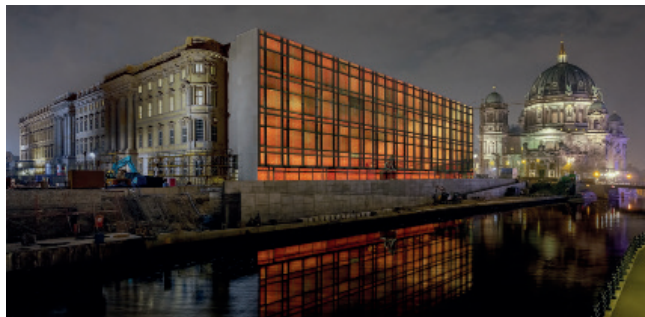
Construction of the new entrance building at the Kupfergraben, the **James-Simon-Galerie**, was late to start in 2013, because the marshy subsurface had once again caused a massive delay and an enormous budget deficit.

In 2019, the new entrance to the Museum Island was completed. British architect David Chipperfield was entrusted with the planning after his splendid success in creating an exemplary symbiosis of old and new in the reconstruction of the Neues Museum, which was completed in 2009.

Pertaining to space and substance, Frank Stella's **Humboldt-Forum** will expand the Museum Island with the cultural heritage of non-European

countries and the natural sciences. This ambitious plan is aspiring to create a kind of "Berlin Louvre" right in the middle of the city; a universal museum that shares the cultural history of humanity since antiquity.

Since the end of the Middle Ages, the **palace** had always been the power center of the city until the last Kaiser abdicated in 1918. Thanks to the cultural treasures which the Prussian kings and emperors had amassed, there was no vacuum left behind. In the future, the cultural splendour should be enhanced with the expansion of the Museum Island and with the Humboldt-Forum. From there, only a few steps will lead to the Staatsoper, to the Deutsches Historisches Museum, to Humboldt University and to the imposing Staatsbibliothek Unter den Linden. The City Center as a treasure chamber, as a place of beauty, as a forum for discussion and a place for cultural education: this is the vision Berlin is building towards.



30th anniversary of the Peaceful Revolution – Fall of the Wall, Visualisation  
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## ■ KULTURPROJEKTE BERLIN

### Cultural Projects Berlin

Long Night of Museums, Berlin Art Week, the festival for the 30th anniversary of the peaceful revolution – fall of the wall, or online portals that guide you through Berlins museums and stages: all this is organized by Kulturprojekte Berlin. Kulturprojekte Berlin promotes art, culture and urban history while also connecting and supporting Berlin-based artists, cultural creators and creative professionals and organising large-scale city-wide events. More information to the various projects can be found here: [www.kulturprojekte.berlin](http://www.kulturprojekte.berlin)

### Events and services



Lange Nacht der Museen  
© Kulturprojekte Berlin, Foto Oana Popa

**Long Night of Museums**  
31 August 2019

**Berlin Art Week**  
11 - 15 September 2019

**30th Anniversary of the Peaceful Revolution - Fall of the Wall**  
4 - 10 November 2019

**Museumsdienst Berlin**  
Guided Tours, Workshops?  
School-group visits? Museum-dienst Berlin will advise you, organise and carry out programmes in several Berlin museums and memorials  
[www.museumsdienst-berlin.de](http://www.museumsdienst-berlin.de)  
[museumsdienst@kulturprojekte.berlin](mailto:museumsdienst@kulturprojekte.berlin) 030 247 49 888

**www.berlin-buehnen.de**  
The online guide to Berlin stages, including schedules, festivals, tickets, news and more.

**www.museumsportal-berlin.de**  
Your guide through Berlin's museums, palaces and memorials.



Museumsdienst Berlin  
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Julia Alice Treptow



## National Museums of the Prussian Cultural Property in Berlin



### Museum Island (Mitte)

Museumsinsel, Bodestr.

1-3, Mitte

U + S Friedrichstr.,

S Hackescher Markt,

Bus 100, 200,

Tram 12, M1, M4, M5, M6

daily 10-18, Th -20 h

all exhibitions on Museum Island:

18 €, red. 9 €

### Alte Nationalgalerie

(Old National Gallery) Paintings and sculptures from the 19th century. German Romantics are on display here, including works by Caspar David Friedrich, Karl-Friedrich Schinkel and Carl Blechen and French Impressionists such as Monet, Manet, Cézanne and Renoir.

10 €, red. 5 €

### Altes Museum

(Old Museum) The Altes Museum is Berlins oldest museum. After a lot of construction work on Museum Island, it now shows the complete Collection of Classical Antiquities.

10 €, red. 5 €

### Bode-Museum

Opened in 1904 and recognizable by its striking dome, this museum, formerly Kaiser Friedrich Museum, was renamed after its spiritual creator into "Bode-Museum". The building houses the Coin Collection, the Sculpture Collection and the

Museum of Byzantine Art. Numerous paintings from the inventory of the Gemäldegalerie present an enriching addition to the exhibition of European sculptures. Unfortunately, the 'Big Maple Leaf' (100 kg gold coin with 99,999% purity) – that spectacularly disappeared in a 2017 heist – has yet to turn up.

10 €, red. 5 €

### Neues Museum

After enduring massive destruction during the war and after lying in ruins for more than 60 years, the Neues Museum has experienced a spectacular resuscitation under the direction of British architect David Chipperfield during ten years of extensive restoration. This gem of a museum, celebrated as the Museum Island's newly-reborn star since 2009, is shining brightly with its multiple historical facets. The museum accommodates such treasures as the Egyptian Museum and the Papyrus Collection, the Museum of Prehistory and Early History and parts of the Antiquity Collection. The true highlight is without a doubt Berlin's most beautiful resident: Nefertiti.

Bodestr. 1-3

14 €, red. 7 €

### Pergamonmuseum / Panorama

With over 1 million visitors, the Pergamon used to be one of Berlin's most frequented museums. Hardly surprising given the three outstanding collections under one roof: the Antiquity Collection, the Museum of the Near East and the Museum of Islamic Art. Famous highlights are the Pergamon Altar, the Market Gate of Miletus, the Procession Street of Babylon with the Ishtar Gate and the façade of a Jordanian desert castle.

## National Museums of the Prussian Cultural Property

The National Museums are located at these three major museum locations: **Museum Island, Kulturforum, Charlottenburg.**

In Dahlem, only the Museum of European Cultures is still open for visitors. The two others – Ethnological Museum and Museum of Asian Art – are closed since January 2017. Once the Humboldt-Forum is finished, they will move to Schlossplatz in the center of Berlin.

**Admission prices** for the single museums may change when there are special exhibitions. We recommend the **Museum Pass Berlin**, valid for three days and more than 30 museums. It can be purchased at all museum cash points of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin: 29 €, red. 14.50 €, or the **Annual Pass**: 15 museums, 365 days, from 25 €.

**Reduced rates** (usually 50 %), apply to schoolchildren, students, those engaged in national military or community service, unemployed persons claiming "ALG I" job-seekers' allowance, and disabled persons, on presentation of the appropriate identification.

The following can get a **free admission**:

- Children and young people up to the age of 18,
- Schoolchildren in supervised groups on educational outings,
- University / college students in scheduled lecture time accompanied by a lecturer,
- Members of the International Council of Museums and the German Museums Association, on presentation of the relevant identification,
- Holders of press ID / accreditation cards

The fee for a **guided tour** for max. 25 persons is:  
German / other languages

60 Min. 80 € / 90 €

90 Min. 120 € / 135 €

120 Min. 160 € / 180 €

For special exhibitions it is 10 € more.

Further Information about the national museums can be found on the internet: **www.smb.museum** and by calling the Service-Hotline: **030-266 42 42 42.**

Prices change from time to time – that's why we are not liable for anything.