

Palast der Republik

Ausstellungen:

"Palast der Republik", Hamburger Bahnhof, Museum für Gegenwart, Berlin, 25.5.-26.8.2006

"Berlin/Tokyo, Tokyo/Berlin", Mori Art Museum, Tokyo, 28.2.-7.5.2006

Argos Festival Brussels, 15.-22.10.2004

Kunstbank Berlin, Stipendiatenausstellung, 6.2.-27.2.2004

"Überreichweiten", ACC Galerie Weimar, 15.5.-20.6.2004

"From dust to dusk", Museum Charlottenborg Copenhagen, 30.10.-7.12.2003

"Pause", 4th Gwangju Biennial, South Korea, 29.3.-29.6.2002

Bard College, Center for Curatorial Studies, New York, April 14.4.-28.4.2002

Galerie EIGEN+ART Berlin 19.10.-30.11.2002

Galerie EIGEN+ART Leipzig, 5.5.-16.6.2001

Nina Fischer, Maroan el Sani

Palace of the Republic - A reconstruction by memory

The representative building, that has been opened on April 23rd, 1976 in the GDR as a people's house, with a parliament on one side and a cultural centre for the people on the other side, had been closed in 1990, after the wall came down, for public. 750 tons of asbestos, injurious to health, had to be removed from its interior. 2002 the removal had been finished. The building was empty, like an arch, a shell. A new beginning or the end.
- The demolition for the Palace of the Republic has been planned for winter 2006.

When we started our work about the PdR in 2001, the future of that building was still uncertain. The public discussion wavered between demolition and reconstruction. Personally we knew the PdR just from the outside, a facade, containing history. A space that has not been used corresponding to its former concept any more, but still didn't get a new signification either. A vacuum situation.

PART 1 - 2001

Palast der Republik / PDR-Weißbereich

PdR-Weißbereich / PdR-White Area

In 2001, we started the series about the Palace of the Republic with a sort of stocktaking of the remaining facade of the building and the arch inside:

An imaginary reconstruction of the PdR with three outline drawings of the former interior design / a coffee- and hyacinth scent, as a reconstruction of the original smell of the building's entrance hall / 4 panoramic photographs of the buildings' facades (north, south, east, west) / 2 video-loops: camera-travelling in the empty Volkskammersaal: „PdR - Weißbereich“.

This work was firstly presented in 2001 in our solo exhibition at Galerie EIGEN+ART Leipzig, then in spring 2002 in the Bard College, Center for Curatorial Studies, New York, and in the show „Present Tense“ Gwangju Biennial 2002, South Korea.

In these last two exhibitions, the installation was adjoined by a live web image of the Palast der Republik in Berlin. „PDR - Weißbereich“ has also been shown in 2003 at the Museum Charlottenburg, Copenhagen and in 2006 in the exhibition Berlin/Tokyo at the Mori Art Museum Tokyo.

PART 2 - 2002

Klub der Republik / Club of the Republic

In autumn 2002, we realized the 2nd part of the series, the idea of a temporary use of the Palace in the present condition. A fictitious interim usage as „Klub der Republik“. We constructed an object that is an architectural model of the palace and a ghetto blaster at the same time - a club model, which cannot be entered by the public. The visitor only hears and feels the strong bass of the sub-woofer inside, the facade elements of the model are vibrating through the heavy sound. The roof of the model is made from denim, with the initials of the „Klub der Republik“, KdR embroidered analogically to the original Palace of the Republic Logo.

This work got an immense topicality, when the government and the daily press discussed the possibility of authorizing a cultural interim use of the building. The government approved the idea, but a funding concept would not be adopted.

The „Klub der Republik“ has been first shown at our solo exhibition in 2002 at Galerie EIGEN+ART Berlin.

In 2003 in the exhibition „From Dusk to Dust“ at Museum Charlottenborg, Copenhagen, in 2004 at the Argos-Festival in Brussels, Belgium, and in 2006 at the Mori Art Museum Tokyo and the Hamburger Bahnhof, Museum of Contemporary Art, Berlin.

PART 3 - 2003

After-image of the vanishing Palace of the Republic
After-image of the vanishing
Palace of the Republic

After-image. phenomena from the theory of visual perception. Subsequent to a faded projection of an image the spectator will see an after image. The spectator will see this after image in a dark room on the empty wall, when the actual image has already gone.

The Palace of the Republic ceased its role of a representative building with central importance in the GDR. And, after the successful removal of the asbestos, it will finally be destroyed in 2006, despite of numerous discussions about its possible future use.

For the time just before the deconstruction of the building, we proposed an artwork for the facade that got finally no permission to be realized. A video projected onto the glass-facade, which would show film-images of the opening of the Palace of the Republic in 1976, a sort of „After-Image“ of the Palace. For a short period of time, just before the actual disappearance of the edifice itself, passer-bys would experience an „After-Image“ of the vanishing Palace of the Republic.

For this installation in public space, we realized a model of the palace with a split screen projection of video-loops on its facade. For the proposal of this artwork, we got the Scholarship for Fine Arts, City Department for Science, Research and Culture, Berlin and presented the work 2004 at „Kunstbank“ Berlin, and in the exhibition „Überreichweiten“ at ACC gallery, Weimar,

PART 4 - 2004

PDR - Dance-floor Memories / Dance-floor Memories

Based on memories by its guests, Nina Fischer and Maroan el Sani reconstructed the dance floor of a former youth venue of the Palast der Republik, Berlin Mitte.

This reconstruction preceded a number of interviews with visitors at that time of the youth club, who memorized all very different. The work has the insecurities of their transmissions as a subject. The artwork consists of a turning model of the dance-floor and a series of 12 works on paper, memory sketches of the former club-visitors. This work has been produced for the exhibition „The future is not what it used to be“, at the GFZK, Leipzig in 2004. In 2005, it was presented at „Motor-enhalle“, Dresden, and in the exhibition „Global Players, contemporary Art from Japan and Germany“ in Yokohama, Japan, in 2006, then at Ludwig Forum, Aachen.



Palast der Republik, 4 colour photographs on Alu Dibond, framed, west and east side: 160 x 60 cm, north and south side 82 x 60 cm, 2 series, 2001, 2002,

PART 1 - 2001
Palace of the Republic

Courtesy Galerie EIGEN + ART Leipzig/Berlin



"Palast der Republik, south-side, detail", colour photograph on Alu Dibond, 160 x 65 cm



Palast der Republik - Weißbereich, video double projection: 2 Video Loops, DV, colour, 7 min. stereo, 2001

Palace of the Republic - White Area

On the construction site, the asbestos free part of the building was called "White Area", and the other part "Black Area". "White Area" was the former GdR parliament. A space, that had been closed for public in the GDR and ever since.

Two camera travellings in the empty space of the former parliament of the Palace of the Republic, Berlin Mitte, "White Area". The slow travelling is like a scan of the emptiness. The view to the outside is blurred, because the windows are covered with a spray to fix the last asbestos remains in the air. The same substance gives the floor a silky, waxy cover, the Palace of the Republic is ready for the archive of history.



Palast der Republik - Weißbereich, video double-projection, 7 min.-loop, 2001; Exhibition-view, Mori Art Museum Tokyo, 2006



"Palast der Republik - Weißbereich I", colour photograph on Alu Dibond, framed, 100 x 66 cm, 2001

Inside views of the former parliament of the GDR, the so-called „Volkskammersaal“ of the Palace of the Republic, after the removal of the asbestos.

The photo-works, and the film „PDR-Weißbereich“ permit an exclusive view, as the entrance was always prohibited for the people of the GDR. Even after the close down in 1990, there was no opportunity to visit this space up to then. The photographs show the space after the finished asbestos removal in 2001.



"Palast der Republik - Weißbereich II", colour photograph on Alu Dibond, framed, 100 x 66 cm, 2001



"Palast der Republik - Weißbereich III", colour photograph on Alu Dibond, framed, 100 x 66 cm, 2001



"Palast der Republik - Weißbereich IV", colour photograph on Alu Dibond, framed, 100 x 66 cm, 2001



"Palast der Republik - Weißbereich V", colour photograph on Alu Dibond, framed, 100 x 66 cm, 2001



Klub der Republik, object, gabun wood, acryl glass with copper-coloured mirror foil, metal, construction wood, concrete, graffiti, jeans, subwoover, 360 x 180 x 60 cm, exhibition view, Gallery Eigen+Art, Berlin, 10/2002

PART 2 - 2002
Club of the Republic

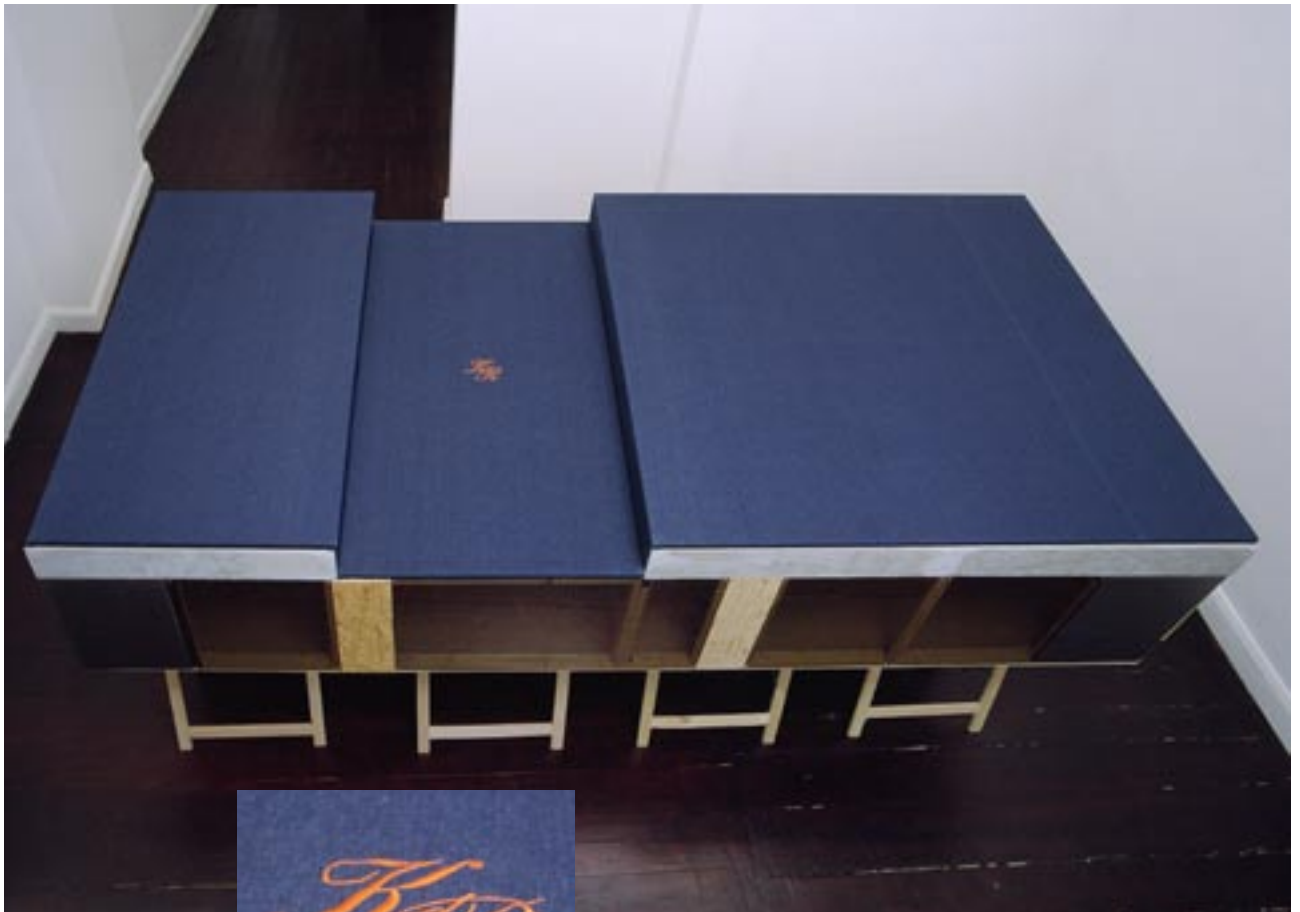
A model of the PDR in 1:50. Our proposal for the final use of the PDR. Inside of the model a subwoover has been installed. The music "Rhythm 76" is composed by Carsten Nicolai. The bass-sound-waves make the window-glass vibrate, as if standing outside a club, with no chance to pass the doormen. The "Club of the Republic" is our proposal for a new use of the empty building. The Palace of the Republic has been the last "object of desire" of the berlin club culture, that used a lot of empty buildings in Berlin temporarily before their final sale or demolition.



Klub der Republik, object, gabun wood, acryl glass with copper-coloured mirror foil, metal, construction wood, concrete, graffiti, jeans, subwoover, 360 x 180 x 60 cm, exhibition view, Gallery Eigen+Art, Berlin, 10/2002



Klub der Republik, c. i., following the original PdR ci., 2002



Klub der Republik, object, gabun wood, acryl glass with copper-coloured mirror foil, metal, construction wood, concrete, graffiti, jeans, subwoover, 360 x 180 x 60 cm, exhibition view, Gallery Eigen+Art, Berlin, 10/2002



KdR "Milchbar", Outline drawing, acryl on gabun wood, 160 x 170 cm, 2002

Outline drawings of the former interior design of the Palace, serve as a kind of memory report for a determined call back of selected furniture for the authentic final wear out of the building as Club of the Republic.



KdR "Foyer mit gläserner Blume"
Outline drawing, acryl on gabun wood,
160 x 170 cm,
2002



KdR "Jugendclub"
Outline drawing, acryl on gabun wood,
160 x 170 cm,
2002



Palace of the Republic – "What's your idea of a people's house?" Installation, Pavilion of gabun wood, Exterior: copper-coloured mirror foil, plotter foil, wax pens, graffiti, 2 monitors with internet stream of the Palace of the Republic, Berlin, and historic 16 mm film from 1976, colour photograph on alu-dibond, "PDR Westseite", 160 x 50 cm, Interior: "Palast der Republik-Weißbereich" video double-projection, DV, 7-min.-loop, artificial smell of coffee and hyacinths. Exhibition view: "PAUSE, Project 1", Gwangju Biennial, South Korea, 2002

For Gwangju, we designed a pavilion to show the 2 film loops. The public enters from the sides in the front wall and meets on a central footbridge in a dark hall. On their left and right, they can watch the camera travelling and join this travel. The interior smells like coffee and hyacinths, a smell that was especially designed for this installation. In the entrance the public will find 2 monitors: a permanent live web-image of the Palace of the Republic in Berlin at present, updated every 30 seconds, and a copy of a historic 16 mm documentary about the opening of the Palace, 1976. Inside of the projection space, the voices and sound of this documentation mix with the sound of the high pressure water cleaner, that was used to clean the Palace from Asbestos, in the video-projection. The outside of the wooden pavilion was used for large outline drawings of the former interior of the PdR and could also be used by the public to write or draw their own ideas of a "peoples house". Hanging pencils were provided.



Nachbild vom Verschwinden des Palast der Republik - Object, gabun wood, acryl glass with copper-coloured mirror foil, metal, cardboard, plastic, construction wood, concrete, video projection, 184 x 66 x 33 cm, model for a work in public space, exhibition view, ACC Gallery Weimar, 2004



Nachbild vom Verschwinden des Palast der Republik, detail

Part 3 - 2004

Modell of the vanishing of the Palasce of the Republic

A more detailed model of the PDR in 1:100. On the front side of the model, a multi screen video projection, shows loops from a 16 mm film about the opening of the building in 1976. The film was produced by the east German TV station. This work is our proposal for an last event before the demolition of the building which was planned for winter 2006.



Tanzboden Erinnerungen - Rekonstruktion des Tanzbodens aus dem Jugendtreff des Palastes der Republik, Turning object, (prototype), mixed media, 4 m diameter, 2004, Exhibition view, Gallery for Contemporary Art, Leipzig, "The future is not what it used to be", 2004

Part 4 - 2004

Dance-floor memories - Reconstruction of the dance-floor of the youth-club of the Palace of the Republic

On the basis of memories Nina Fischer and Maroan el Sani reconstructed the dance-floor of a former youth venue of the Palast der Republik, Berlin Mitte.

This reconstruction preceded a number of interviews with previous visitors of this youth club, (that danced in the club between 1976 and 1989), and whose memories were all very different. The work has the insecurities of their transmissions as a subject.



Tanzboden Erinnerungen, Series of 12 paper works, 30 x 42 cm, framed, 2004

"In the 80ies I was a couple of times at the youth club dancing with some friends. Actually it was quite square, "Popper" all over the place. The dance floor had a helical pattern in black and white. I think it was made of artificial stone and then the whole was also a podium at the same time, that went up and down whilst turning round. Even quite quick though, one had to watch out by getting on and of. Sometimes that was quite dangerous."
Kerstin, Berlin 2004

2003

Jill Winder

Fischer & el Sani's "Palast der Republik"

Nina Fischer & Maroan el Sani are German artists of a younger generation whose work is informed not only by the post-1989 emergence of a "new" Berlin, but also by the removal of remnants of the past in the name of the future. Their large-scale installation, "Palast der Republik" (2001/2002), combines found documentary, live web-cast, video, and a line drawing on foil presents surprising evidence of stasis and suspension hidden within this context of overwhelming acceleration. The Palace of the Republic, located on the Unter den Linden, was built in 1976 on the ruins of an eighteenth century Prussian Imperial Palace. The building, which functioned as the seat of the East German Parliament and a popular meeting place for its citizens, is perhaps the most visible architectural remnant of Berlin's GDR (German Democratic Republic) past. Vacant since early 1990, the interior of the building has been completely gutted due to asbestos removal, while its famous facade remains basically unchanged. After a decade of controversy, the Palace's future remains undecided, and the battle between those who wish to see it remain as a sort of monument (at least symbolically) to the GDR period, and those who demand that the Royal Palace be rebuilt on the site continues.

Fischer & el Sani's Palast der Republik installation returns the sealed interior of the structure to visibility, exposing the abandoned and emptied building. Here documentary and nostalgia collide in a rebellion against the linear time of "reunification" and the reorganization of Berlin's urban terrain in the service of new ideologies of progress. Collapsing the distinctions between past, present, and future, the installation begins with an official GDR television documentary produced for the opening of the Palace (first broadcast in 1976), and a live web-cam image of the building projected via the Deutsches Historisches Museum web site. The image of the Palace's almost unchanged facade is seen on a computer screen, offering viewers who may have no connection to the building a picture of its current state. By contrast, the official GDR documentary provides interior views of the Grand Foyer, official state reception and meeting areas, cafes, and the bowling alley as a moderator extols the virtues of the space. Fischer & el Sani present the documentary with equal doses of irony and earnestness, since it is in these images alone that we encounter the Palace as it exists in the popular memory of GDR citizens. In addition, a single line drawing executed on foil* and installed on a glass facade (visible from both inside and outside the gallery), also evokes the décor of the Palace's most populist space: the Milk Bar. More stylish and seductive than the other works, Milchbar (2001) is based on interior design sketches and archival photographs.

By contrast, the four photographs in the installation, Palast der Republik: Nord, Süd, Ost, and Westseite, document the shining Belgian bronze glass facade of the Palace from the North, South, East, and West. As if to supply visual evidence of its current state, Fischer & el Sani have simply recorded what can be seen. The patchy scaffolding and various construction vehicles visible in the margins of the photographs only hint that the building is undergoing alterations. The composition of the photographs is unremarkable, even banal. The images function as basic construction documents, a survey of the site as it appears to any casual observer.

Yet two seven-minute videos, Palast der Republik Weissbereich Volkskammer (2001) that the artists filmed with a digital camera in the condemned interior of the Palace destroy our initial impression that this architectural relic of East Berlin, although abandoned, has been left in peace. The videos are projected simultaneously on opposite walls, which creates a sense of disorientation in the viewer as she moves through the artificially constructed

space of the images, a feeling that is metaphorically linked to the precarious nakedness of the empty interior. Even if one never entered the Palace of the Republic during the GDR period, the viewer still has access to uncanny emotions the films may engender: the feeling of walking in a tomb, the tentative curiosity of exploring in a forbidden space, the strange stillness of a sealed-off interior, a cold sense of loss and abandonment, a pang of loneliness. The perspective of both films shows the interior of the Palace, but one is focused on the view outside (through the glass façade), the other primarily on the emptiness of the interior rooms. The 2 views are moving parallel, simultaneously, so one can watch the inside and outside at the same time. The camera glides over the interior spaces of the building in a smooth mechanical motion with a tedium that seems to suck in the emptiness of each dark space. The only sounds we occasionally hear are the low din of asbestos removal in a remote part of the building, the quiet footstep of the cameraperson, or the echoing speech of an invisible worker floating down from the floors above.

The perspective of one film is directed outside the Palace façade, through its plastic covered but transparent glass outward toward the Spree River canal, Prussian Imperial buildings, and the newly reconstructed center of Berlin. This is the Berlin of 2001 seen through the distorting haze of the glass, a projection from the past into the now. The survey of the interior culminates as the camera scans layered beams and open corridors, moving toward a sun-washed floor. This is the eerie image of the asbestos-free "white area" where the great meeting halls of the Parliament are reduced to skeletal columns of exposed beams and concrete foundations, an empty space too powerful a memory to be devoid of meaning. Light streams in through the glass façade, covered from within by thick sheets of semi-opaque plastic. The floor is an undulating sea of uneven concrete, interspersed with steel plates, chemical stains, and watermarks. It is hard not to see this as an image of a phantom, both in terms of the building's literal vacancy, and in the sense that it housed the functions of a state that no longer exists. Here the Palace exists suspended in a vacuum of elemental transition. The multiple temporalities of time and space evoked in Fischer & el Sani's work, particularly in the installation's conflation of past, present, and future, engage with the central debates concerning Germany's unification, and the unfinished process of articulating a shared history.

*The foil used by the artists is a type of transfer material that leaves the shape of the outline drawing on the wall where it is installed.

Previous installations of Palast der Republik have included two additional line drawings of the Palace's Youth-Club and Grand Foyer, and additional elements such as linoleum flooring from the Palace, vases of hyacinths (a feature of the Palace lobby), and the scent of coffee.

Extract from the exhibition catalogue: "Die Aufgabe der Zeit", Westfälischer Kunstverein Münster, 2003

2004

Hou Hanru

Excessive, Dense, Speedy, Complex, Empty But Humane -- Contemporary creative activities (digitally) facing the post-planning urban world

(...) It is useful to re-examine briefly the evolution of urban space and social structure in the heart of the established centres of the modern Western world. The end of the Cold War and the expansion of global capitalism (to a great extent, the revitalisation of the project of a greater Europe is a natural product of such a trend) have fundamentally changed Europe's urban spaces and its social reality. The reunified and refreshed Berlin represents the most typical transition from the Cold War urban reality to the new utopia of globalisation. However, the fact that Berlin has not been able to achieve its beautifully planned blueprint as the centre of a new Europe has rendered it perhaps the continent's most disappointing city. It faces unexpected vacancy and crisis. Berlin's example is emblematic and symptomatic of the post-planning phenomenon. It is particularly interesting to note that, since the anticipated influx of global business headquarters and investments has failed to occur, Berlin has become one of the cheapest capitals in Europe. Thus the city has attracted many members of the German and international art communities who have moved there partly out of abiding optimism in its future prospects and partly because of the low cost of living.

This makes a very strong case for the interaction between art languages, especially DV and other digital art forms, and urban transformation. Many Berlin-based artists have been working systematically on this issue. Nina Fischer and Maroan El Sani are among the most engaged. Their approach to the changing face of the once-divided city is particular. Instead of envisioning the future, they explore the gradual digestion of Berlin's history by examining how the Western part has literally eaten up the former Eastern part. The debate surrounding the fate of the Eastern Palast der Republik has been at the centre of their attention. The proposed replacement of this symbol of the DDR by a replica of the old Prussian Imperial Palace reveals the conservative ideological nature of the liberal market system and is the subject of the artists' critique. Using DV and various forms of installation, Fischer and El Sani have documented, scrutinised and demonstrated the problematics of the urban transition of the city so intensely embodied by the history of the Palast der Republik. Their multimedia installation Klub der Republik, which will be presented at Argos 2004, is a potent sample of their engagement.

Extract from the catalogue - Text by Hou Hanru, Curator for the exhibition: "Excessive, Dense, Speedy, Complex, Empty But Humane, -- Contemporary creative activities (digitally) facing the post-planning urban world" at Argos Festival for Electronic Arts, Brussels 2004