


HOME PAGE | MY TIMES | TODAY'S PAPER | VIDEO | MOST POPULAR | TIMES TOPICS | Log In | Register Now | Subscribe: Home Delivery / Digital

The New York Times **Art & Design** Arts All NYT **ING DIRECT**

WORLD | U.S. | N.Y. / REGION | BUSINESS | TECHNOLOGY | SCIENCE | HEALTH | SPORTS | OPINION | ARTS | STYLE | TRAVEL | JOBS | REAL ESTATE | AUTOS

ART & DESIGN | BOOKS | DANCE | MOVIES | MUSIC | TELEVISION | THEATER

THE CLEVELAND ORCHESTRA
Franz Welser-Möst, music director and conductor
 July 13, 14, 16, 17 Lincoln Center Festival [Tickets](#)



ART REVIEW
Berlin's Biennial Brings a New Art Scene to an Old City



Paul McCarthy's mixed-media installation "Bang-Bang Room" (1992) in the former Jewish School for Girls.

By **ROBERTA SMITH**
 Published: May 6, 2006

BERLIN, April 30 — Move over London, Los Angeles and maybe even New York. Berlin, the art scene, is moving up the outside track, a track of its own devising. That, at least, is the mood that pervades "Of Mice and Men," the fourth Berlin Biennial for Contemporary Art, which has been extended through June 5.

Readers' Opinions

Forum: Artists and Exhibitions



Oliver Croy and Oliver Elser
 Paper models of 387 buildings made by Peter Fritz, an insurance clerk.

The show was organized by the KW Institute for Contemporary Art, the bustling alternative space on Auguststrasse in the Mitte, the old East Berlin neighborhood that is now home to a great many galleries.

Predictions of Berlin's imminent ascendance on the contemporary art front have echoed throughout the last decade and have yet to come true. But over last Saturday and Sunday, as dozens of Mitte galleries staged simultaneous openings under alternately clear and cloudy skies, the city felt like an unprecedented fusion of New York (density and energy), Los Angeles (lots of cheap space) and London (old Europe merging with new).

Still, the most interesting sign of art life was the biennial itself, which was organized by a three-person team: the Italian artist Maurizio Cattelan and two independent curators, Massimiliano Gioni, also Italian, and Ali Subotnick, an American. The three are known informally as the Wrong Gallery, after a doorway-size gallery they started on West 20th Street in Chelsea, which has since moved to Tate Modern in London.

They have come up with something that perhaps shouldn't work but does: an unusually poetic show that forms a kind of rebus about the arc and tumult of life itself. Its humanistic content makes it almost old-fashioned, evoking some of the Sturm und Drang of postwar figuration. Yet the art on view actually moves back and forth between Conceptual and more Romantic and Expressionist sonorities.

[More Articles in Arts »](#)

THE CLEVELAND ORCHESTRA
Franz Welser-Möst, music director and conductor
 July 13, 14, 16, 17
 Lincoln Center Festival [Tickets](#)



MOST POPULAR

[E-MAILED](#) | [BLOGGED](#) | [SEARCHED](#) | [VIEWED](#)

1. How 10,000 People Keep a Secret
2. Home Tech: Noise-Canceling Devices for a Good Night's Sleep
3. Nicholas D. Kristof: Taxes and Billionaires
4. Watches Are Rediscovered by the Cellphone Generation
5. L.A. Prepares for Worst and Hopes for Best in Freeway Shutdown
6. David Brooks: The Mother of All No-Brainers
7. For Mexicans Looking North, a New Calculus Favors Home
8. Endangered Dragon: Building Boom in China Stirs Fears of Debt Overload
9. George Lang, Mastermind Behind Café des Artistes, Dies at 86
10. Op-Ed Contributor: Assimilation's Failure, Terrorism's Rise

[Go to Complete List »](#)



Married, with infidelities

Also on NYTimes.com
 A gay softball league raises questions
 A fresh coat of creativity for paint

nytimes.com

ADVERTISEMENTS

The biennial certainly has its share of negligible work, but somehow it all fits together. Some of it will never look more substantial. The mood of the show echoes that of the more overtly thematic "Melancholia: Genius and Madness in Art" at the Neue Nationalgalerie, a wildly popular extravaganza closing on Sunday that sprawls from Albrecht Dürer to Jörg Immendorf.

"Of Mice and Men" is a dark, unpretty show for dark, unpretty times, much like the current Whitney Biennial. It has avoided the something-for-everyone impulse that plagues so many big shows. But its major advantage is a brilliant installation.

The show is more or less embedded in Auguststrasse, taking advantage of the street's architectural patchwork, workaday atmosphere and layered history. It has been staged in the KW Institute itself and, across the street, in a ready-made time capsule: an empty, decaying 1927 structure that reflects Modernism's roots in Berlin's Neo-Classicism. The former Jewish School for Girls, it was closed by the Nazis in 1942 and then opened again during the Communist era. Full of peeling paint, mismatched wallpaper and graffiti, it almost doesn't need art.

In addition, nearly 20 of the show's 76 works are displayed in smaller spaces up and down Auguststrasse, beginning in a church and ending in a cemetery. The first work, in the St. Johannes Evangelist Church, by the Belgian artist Kris Martin, is a mechanized timetable, whose clicking squares revolve as expected but are all painted black. So here it is: the defining fact of life is death, an inevitability that was multiplied exponentially by the human animal in the 20th century.

Between the church and the cemetery, art can be viewed in three private apartments, a stable, a basement and a fabulously decrepit old ballroom. In the last is Tino Seghal's live performance, "Kiss," in which a man and woman perform a carefully choreographed slow-motion seduction (lasting about 12 minutes and quite chaste). The youth of the couple doesn't diminish the sensation that, in this setting at least, you are watching ghosts.

The quiet of this piece is exploded by the furious hilarity of a video by Erik van Lieshout, a Dutch artist, screened in a room-size container at curbside. Viewed from crude seats cut into sloping plywood, "Rotterdam-Rostock" documents a manic bicycle trip from the Netherlands to Germany, during which the artist interviews strangers on a range of topics, laments a departed girlfriend and endures anxiety attacks.

1 | 2 [NEXT PAGE »](#)

"Of Mice and Men," the fourth Berlin Biennial for Contemporary Art, continues through June 5; www.berlinbiennale.de.

[More Articles in Arts »](#)

[Connect with The New York Times on Facebook.](#)

Ads by Google what's this?

[Watch Don Carlo in HD](#)
 In The Comfort Of Your Local Movie
 Theater on 7/27. Get Tickets Today!
fathomevents.com/DonCarlo

Related Articles

- [Spring Art Auctions Open At Phillips's New Home \(May 8, 2001\)](#)
- [MUSIC; Orff's Musical And Moral Failings \(May 6, 2001\)](#)
- [ART/ARCHITECTURE; A Glimpse Through the Walls of Privacy \(May 6, 2001\)](#)
- [ART REVIEW; A Show of Appetizers by Chagall Leading to His Theater Banquet \(May 4, 2001\)](#)

Related Searches

- [Art](#)
- [Berlin](#)



Exclusive offers delivered to your inbox

THE NEW **DealB%k** dealbook.nytimes.com
CONNECT TODAY ON FACEBOOK ▶

Copyright 2006 The New York Times Company | Privacy Policy | Search | Corrections | XML | Help | Contact Us | Work for Us | Site Map

Great Homes »	Dance »	"Opinion" »	Home & Garden »	Home & Garden »	World »	Fashion & Style »	Art & Design »
 <p data-bbox="50 401 212 434">A Home Far From Paris's Tourist Center</p>	 <p data-bbox="261 401 440 434">Feiffer's Dancer Returns to Leap Ever So Seriously</p>	<p data-bbox="480 176 675 226">Bloggingheads: Legalize Cocaine?</p> <p data-bbox="480 226 675 310">John McWhorter of The New Republic and Mark Kleiman of U.C.L.A. debate drug legalization.</p>	 <p data-bbox="690 401 885 434">Charlotte Bacon: Lessons From a Year in Bali</p>	 <p data-bbox="904 401 1099 434">A Cottage That Reflects the Landscape</p>	 <p data-bbox="1118 401 1313 434">Israel Debates Weekends' Length, and Its Lifestyle</p>	<p data-bbox="1338 176 1516 205">Modern Apothecaries: Skin-Care Goes Natural</p>	<p data-bbox="1542 176 1620 205">Cy Twombly's Abandon</p>