

Kunst-Werk (KW) institution of contemporary art

“Always a lightning rod for the local art scene” [*Timeout*, 2013] the Kunst werk (which translate to works of art) or the KW institution of contemporary art is revered as one of Berlins’ most prominent contemporary art spaces. Unlike mainstream galleries and surrounding contemporary art spaces, the non-profit Institution holds no collection of its own, allowing for no exclusion of the public and a flexible platform for regulars and non-regulars of the contemporary art reality to engage with the institution and vice versa.

Located in Augustrasse, Berlin-Mitte, a central area of Berlin, the gallery is comprised of Western and Eastern Berlin Districts. Augustrasse, and areas closely surrounding this, are known to be self-established sources of hip, modern contemporary hot spots. Even the KW’s origin whisper’s an element of hipster chic, as the building was a former derelict margarine Factory around the 1870s. Not until the early 1990s, when a group of passionate art enthusiasts and Klaus Bienesbach [1976 *German born*], (chief curator at MoMA’s newly formed department of media and performance art as of 2006), did they come upon the factory. This resulted in eventually renovating and re-working the gallery, with the help of a diverse group of contemporary artists integrating site specific works, supported by organisations such as the Berlin Lotto Foundation and The Heritage Foundation. This has created what we now know as the KW institution of contemporary art.



Fig 1

KW's layout is split into a close yet spacious group of Art spaces. Upon first glance at the main front building, there is a singular building almost plucked from an earlier time. The building is deserted and creates an aesthetic juxtaposition between the industrial, run down, exposed building and an early 18th century form of architecture. The white building stands out, contrasting with the more modern refurbished habitats but is immediately, out of place. The building stands proud, speaking volumes for much of the culture that surround Augustrasse berlin-Mitte.



Fig 2

Entering KW you are met with a mirrored glass and steel structure that houses CAFÉ BRAVO. This building was designed by artist Dan Graham and architect Johanne Nalbach. Built in 1999, the café is part of the many site specific pieces integrated into the institution. Progressing through the gallery from BRAVO, is BASIS, the main buildings more industrial site that features much of the historical scars and wounds that come with Berlin. At around 400 Sq. meters wide and around seven meters in height; this main building features space '1+2', these are the main buildings floors. The first and second floors are connected by an open floor, creating an interesting dialogue between the spaces. The gallery offers an area open for not only discussion between art work and the viewer, but also between viewers themselves in CHORA, a third floor designed for the use of open discussion, lectures, talks, and workshops by artists, lectures etc. Other spaces located at the KW include the 3 ½ an area used as an independent exhibition space. STUDIOLO, GARDEN and a number of other areas located on site are included and used for independent use and public spaces.



Fig 3

KW gained much of its popularity and credentials as a contemporary institution by firstly exhibiting programs that presented artists, not only from Berlin, but also international artists. The Gallery have collaborated with partners such as Documenta X and have a partnership with MoMA PS1, with help of Chief Curator, Klaus Bienesbach, this partnership with such a highly regarded institution of contemporary arts, instantly created a bridge for contemporary conversations.

The creation of the Berlin Biennale, founded in 1996, by Bienesbach and other head curators, were supported by funding from the Federal Cultural Foundation, an organisation whose goal helps in the promotion of arts and culture on “an international level.” [FCF, about the foundation, online page]. The Biennale took place in 1998, showcasing over 60 contemporary artists. Both increased audience’s hunger for culture. The arts had finally met something that hadn’t been looked at before. This was supported by the FCF, originally only funding the Biennale for 5 years. With the rise of art passionate enthusiasts coming into the city for the Berlin Event, the support from the FCF board of trustees, who “decided to fund the 9th and 10th Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art with 2.5 Million Euro each.” [KW History online] showed a reinforcing interest from the government and the public of cultural arts.

Currently at the helm of Chief Curator, Ellen Blumenstein and director, Gabriele Horn, KW's current professional place as a space for showcasing art, brought the title of popularity within the area of Auguststrasse and the central Mitte. This gallery will continue to further influence the art scene of Berlin. The area of Auguststrasse has recently become a thriving ground for contemporary urban spaces, with the KW and other locations such as the 'Jewish Girls School', a recently renovated Gallery being the beating heart of this new growing market. This one street at the centre of Berlin has become a cultural core for more than a decade now. With an increasing market of the modern contemporary and chic, a growing modern age audience, that businesses are tapping in to, comes with it. This correlation of young, trendy art that's being showcased locally saw the arrival of trendy restaurants, dance clubs and public spaces such as The Grand, a sleek banquettes situating in a two story dining room featuring with exposed walls and bullet holes all with stories dating to WWII. And with this growth promises more rejuvenation of trendy hot spots and open spaces for discussion of various contemporary fields.

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