

SLEEK

Art

Disappearing Berlin

The event series reclaiming Berlin's liminal spaces

25 November, 2021

Take your pick of examples – there's the old Ballhaus Grunau bulldozed for luxury condos, Greismühle being punted out of Neukölln to make room for some atrocious real estate development, everyone's favourite abandoned water park, Blub, which is currently a Blub-shaped patch of dirt. The stories repeat themselves and continue to repeat throughout Berlin; as more money and people come arrive in the city, spaces that aren't sufficiently profitable are forced to give way to ones that are. These changes shape not only the architecture of the city but also who has access to these spaces, what functions are prioritised within them, and who, ultimately, is capable of making those decisions.





DISAPPEARING BERLIN, MÄUSEBUNKER with Julianknxx and Nathan Eddy, 15.8.2021, Image by Joseph Kadow und Malina Heinemann © 2021 Schinkel Pavillon and the artists. All rights reserved.

Disappearing Berlin, an ongoing series of experimental performances produced by the Schinkel Pavillon, has placed itself squarely within these battles. The events take all sorts of forms – in just the past few months there has been a film screening at a former animal testing lab (the Mäusebunker), a festival at the iconic and perpetually vacant Bierpinsel, and an album release at Cafe Keese, one of Berlin's last standing traditional dance halls. All of these spaces are exposed to the possibility of disappearance, whether through renovation, abandonment, re-zoning, or outright destruction.



DISAPPEARING BERLIN, Café Keese with Hania Rani and Dobrawa Czocher, 8 October 2021, Image by Frank Sperling © 2021 Schinkel Pavillon and the artists. All rights reserved.



DISAPPEARING BERLIN, about blank with Bendik Giske, Wojtek Blecharz and poliginal, 25.8.2021, Image by Hyesoo Chung © 2021 Schinkel Pavillon and the artists. All rights reserved.

Sometimes the events feel like eulogies, addressed to a city that is disappearing right in front of our faces. For example, the club :// About Blank, where Disappearing Berlin hosted a saxophone performance by the ethereal Bendik Giske on a site specific collaboration and production with Wojtek Blecharz, is currently sitting in the path of a proposed highway project. Giske wandered through the garden behind the club in a light rain, saxophone wailing, almost like a ghost of the place that had come back before its time.



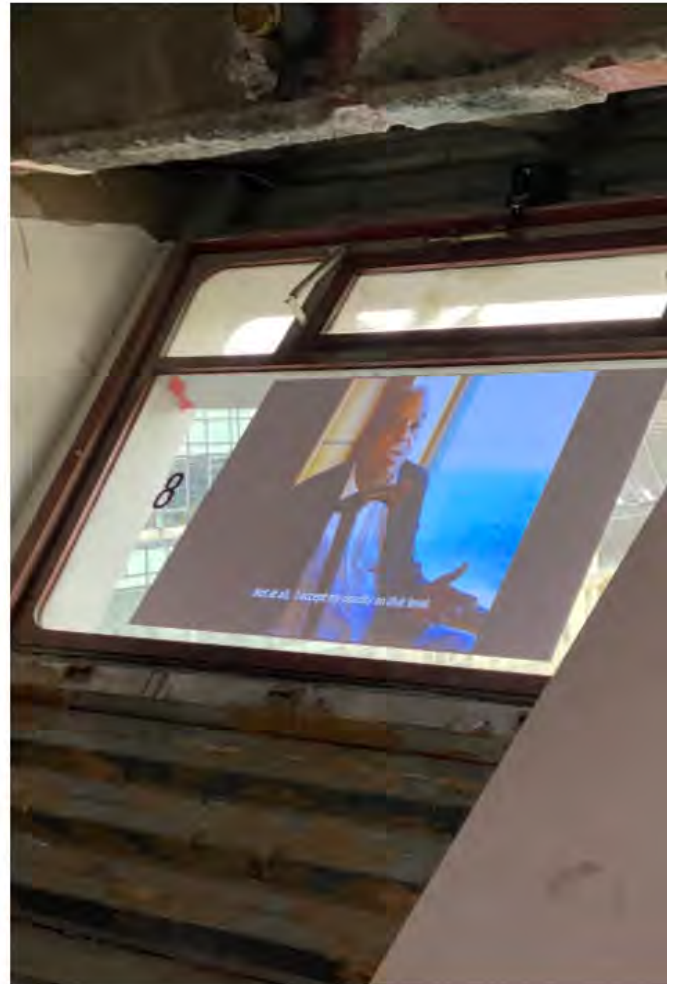
„Unter“ by Billy Bultheel & Viviana Abelson for Disappearing Berlin / Schinkel Pavillon and Radialsystem at Wellenbad am Spreewaldplatz.

The freedoms associated with liminal spaces – club nights, abandoned buildings, forgotten shopping malls – often have a lot to do with the fact that these places, and the marks people left of themselves within them, will eventually disappear. There's also something inherently egalitarian about them; a place that nobody owns or stakes an exclusive claim to belongs a bit more to everyone. And this is what's really at risk as profit-seeking and optimization and all that become more dominant in the city fabric – who can be in a place and what they can do there.



DISAPPEARING BERLIN, Bierpinsel with Éva Mag, Amnesia Scanner, YaYa Bones, Asad Raza, Simon Denny, Sarah Friend, STILL, Lamin Fofana, Manthia Diawara, Cao Fei, Cyprien Gaillard, 18. + 19.9.2021, Image by Thorsten Gall © 2021 Schinkel Pavillon and the artists. All rights reserved.

So Disappearing Berlin is about more than just encouraging people wring their hands over the things that are lost as the city changes. It's also about creating opportunities for people to engage with spaces that they normally don't have access to, and to come up with new ways of engaging with familiar things. A recent performance at the soon-to-be-renovated wave pool in Spreewaldplatz literally put the artists into the pool, while the audience sat around the edge of the water, listening to compositions arranged for the bouncy tiled acoustics. The events, importantly, are all free (though tickets often sell out fast).



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DISAPPEARING BERLIN, Bierpinsel with Éva Mag, Amnesia Scanner, YaYa Bones, Asad Raza, Simon Denny, Sarah Friend, STILL, Lamin Fofana, Manthia Diawara, Cao Fei, Cyprien Gaillard, 18. + 19.9.2021, Image by Dorothea Tuch © 2021 Schinkel Pavillon and the artists. All rights reserved.

Maybe the thing that is most to the program's credit is that it doesn't get lost in the weeds of the ideology that motivates it. It's easy to get tweedy and hyper-analytical about the politics of urban space, which is all well and good, but also often obscures the stuff at the heart of the whole discourse – the people, the laughter, the stupid jokes, the life that happens for a while and then disappears. When you go to one of these events, that's what you get – life, something we made ourselves, for one another.

