

Lass' sie nach Berlin kommen Stephen Zaima, NYC 2012

Young, free, and on their own in one of the premier art cities in the world. What a truly great adventure, with no guarantees -- or need for any. Their charge is to create art for an exhibit at Kunsthalle am Hamburger Platz. Perhaps the art could have been created in other places – but for these students, Berlin was the place. Berlin, the city that had a rare historic chance to reinvent itself, like a big socio-cultural experiment. It is the city that embodies the zeitgeist of a new generation. So much hope, so much promise.

These seven sculpture graduate students from Syracuse University have just a few days to make their installation and individual works. Arrangements have been made by their sculpture faculty back in New York State to partner with the Kunsthochschule Berlin Weißensee, with their modernist looking campus nearby. Any perceived pressure in working like this, without a safety net, is transferred into adrenalin. Their work remains informally and casually separated individual pieces, and not a group installation. They arrive with a handful of materials, gather local materials that they are in most cases unfamiliar with, and get to work. All seven are working in one big approximately 2500 sq. ft. open space. The building in which the gallery is located stands on the ground floor at an intersection in the former East Berlin. The building looks repurposed, but from what is anyone's guess. The space is open, not precious, and with its non-Bauhaus pedigree, perfect.

Ironically now, the task is to forget where you are. It no longer matters that you are in Berlin, the latest global art capital. It only matters that these artists are in front of their individual works, left to their own devices and totally focused. This unexpected paradox serves to make for a delicious cocktail, as revealed in the strong works produced specifically for the exhibit by Maximilian Bauer, Lauren Boldon, Emily Dunlap, Jim Gallagher, Michael Giannattasio, Becky Reiser, and Davana Wilkins.

The hopes and promises of many are all here, nearly fifty years after JFK's famous phrase *Ich bin ein Berliner* (I am a Berliner), which was inspired by the boast of freedom uttered over two thousand years ago as *civis Romanus sum*, (I am a Roman citizen). Kennedy added in his famous speech: *Lass' sie nach Berlin kommen* (Let them come to Berlin). It is the good fortune of this talented group of students, with

the encouragement of their faculty, to have heeded that plea.