

SINCE 1997
SHIFT



HAPPENING

DOTMOV FESTIVAL 2008
SHIFT 2009 CALENDAR COMPETITION
SONAR 2008
HISTORY IN THE MAKING: A RETROSPECTIVE OF THE TURNER PRIZE
SELECTED EMERGING ARTISTS 2008
NEIL DENARI EXHIBITION
NEW LIFE BERLIN FESTIVAL
ROBERTO CUOGHI EXHIBITION
POETS OF THE PASTE
PRIMAVERA SOUND 2008
GLAZED PARADISE BY MARK JENKINS & MIHO KINOMURA
DMY 2008
BOB & TERRY RICHARDSON EXHIBITION
SHOBOSHOBONONSEN BUS TOUR
PAINTING AND SOUND DESIGNING 2008
DESIGN FESTA VOL. 27
OFFF 2008
AINU MUSIC FESTIVAL
NEW YORK PHOTO FESTIVAL 2008
MILANO SALONE 2008
PRE-VIEW & AFTER-VIEW
ORGANIC COTTON T-SHIRTS DESIGN EXHIBITION
TSUNEMI UMETSU RETROSPECTIVE
TATSUO MIYAJIMA I ART IN YOU
NOMADIC! EXHIBITION
NYC STREET ART
5TH BERLIN BIENNALE
WHITNEY BIENNIAL 2008
SHIBBOLETH EXHIBITION
PARIS FASHION WEEK 2008
LYON BIENNALE 2007
SHIFT LOGO COMPETITION
CHINA DESIGN NOW EXHIBITION
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SOMETHING OLD... EXHIBITION
11TH JAPAN MEDIA ARTS FESTIVAL
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FRANCOIS PINAULT FOUNDATION COLLECTION
SCVF 2008
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RE:CONSTRUCTION
TRANSMEDIALE 2008
SCULPTURE PROJECTS MUENSTER 07

NEW LIFE BERLIN FESTIVAL

Perform in an opera. Be a part of a tv studio audience. Or be invited to film your favourite film star. It sounds like a virtual entertainment centre, but it's actually a Festival of Participatory Art – ['New Life Berlin'](#), curated by a collective of online artists at [Wooloo.org](#).

Artistic curators Martin Rosengaard and Sixton Kai Nielsen chose thirty projects out of over 1,000 applications, to make up the festival program, using the Wooloo.org website as the key meeting point for applications, information, and dialogue. It's their first festival, with another being planned for Denmark in 2009.

New Life Berlin's open call, artist-run approach isn't new, but its use of the Internet, to generate and document an entire festival, is. Much like Myspace or Facebook, on Wooloo.org artists can register and create profiles online, which are tailored to the presentation of artistic endeavours, and an open dialogue of critique through blogging, as seen through the collaboration with critical writers at ['Open Dialogues'](#).

Martin Rosengaard, Festival Director, explained: "We're trying to challenge the perceptions of a 'model' for art, to allow for experimentation with the whole structure of a festival, in a similar spirit to Fluxus, for example. It's risky, but really interesting things come out of it. Through the direct participation of artists working together on collaborative projects, and by favouring those projects that directly involve the public as more than mere viewers, we hope to create new networks for communication and creative exchange".



Opening Night © Jonathan Groeger

It's a warm, sunny day, and I'm headed over to an address in Prenzlauer Berg in Berlin's East, to check out ['Fictive Days'](#), devised by Peruvian artist [Sergio Zavallos](#), where eight artists have been living together for nearly two weeks, as fictitious characters from iconic films. They're opening their doors for a public performance, and I'm already curious to see what the flat is like, and just how true to their characters the live-in artists actually are. It can't be easy being Regan McNeil, the possessed young child from the film *The Exorcist*, on a daily basis for two weeks, especially if you're sharing a room with Zorba from the film *'Zorba The Greek'*.

Already there are crowds of people standing around with video cameras in hand, as I make my way through the front door. There are four rooms in the apartment to explore, all of which have been in some way modified to suit their character's tastes. Reclining in an elaborately decorated bordello-style surrounding is a long-legged lady dressed in gold; she my name with a haughty sneer, and then introduces herself as none other than Princess Aura, from the film *Flash Gordon*. It's actually artist [Ve Magni](#), who, like the others participants, were selected from a range of artists who applied for the project.

AGNES HOTEL ART FAIR 2008
 TIGER TRANSLATE
 INTO THE ATOMIC SUNSHINE EXHIBITION
 BREAD & BUTTER WINTER 08
 BLICKFANG WIEN 2007
 THE 13TH STUDENT COMPUTER GRAPHICS CONTEST
 HENRY MOORE EXHIBITION
 CATHERINE YASS' EXHIBITION
 BIWAKO BIENNALE 2007
 DOTMOV TOKYO 2007
 APMT3
 PRIMAVERA CLUB 07
 ART BASEL MIAMI BEACH 2007
 ANALOGUE AMNESTY
 ASIA MEDIA FESTIVAL 2007
 HIGH5
 LUXURY PLEASE
 MICROWAVE 2007
 DESIGN FESTA VOL. 26
 BAC! FESTIVAL 2007
 SINGAPORE DESIGN FESTIVAL 2007
 DOTMOV FESTIVAL 2007
 BORN IN HOKKAIDO
 URBALLOON
 OFFF NYC 2007
 DESIGNTIDE 2007
 PORTLAND FASHION WEEK 2007
 52ND VENICE BIENNALE
 FIAC 2007
 CORPORA IN SI(GH)TE
 DUAL CITY SESSIONS: TOKYO AND SINGAPORE
 ZOO ART FAIR 2007
 YAMAGATA INTERNATIONAL DOCUMENTARY FILM FESTIVAL 2007
 DOCLISBOA 2007
 UNDERGROUND EXHIBITION
 NY-TOKYO MUSIC FESTIVAL 2007
 ART PARADE 2007
 100% DESIGN LONDON 07
 UFP EXHIBITION 2007
 7TH LOMOGRAPHIC WORLD CONGRESS
 BLUE MAN GROUP IN TOKYO
 MEDIA OPERA <H />OUR
LINK
 MAGICAL CAMP 2007
 METAMORPHOSE 2007
 PAUL McCARTHY EXHIBITION
 ILLUSTRATIVE BERLIN 07
 LIFE - FLUID, INVISIBLE, INAUDIBLE ...
 BURNING MAN 2007
 SHCONTEMPORARY 07
 BREAD & BUTTER SUMMER 07
 WHAT MAKES SHANGHAI ADDICTIVE?
 DANIEL JONHSTON LIVE
 TERASHIMA DESIGN EXHIBITION
 IGUAPOP! EXHIBITION
 YOUNG ART AUCTION
 ABU DHABI ART PROJECT
 INGENIUM EXHIBITION
 SUMMERCASE 2007
 BORIS HOPPEK EXHIBITION
 UT GRAND PRIX 2008
 RICHARD SERRA SCULPTURE
 11TH JAPAN MEDIA ARTS FESTIVAL



Fictive Days © Andreas Bastiansen

I like the way she then describes her story, acting up to the part – although I do feel strangely voyeuristic. Her recital of her love for Flash Gordon and her father's 'power' in the Universe comes across quite clichéd, while the onlookers record her movements and occasionally ask questions. But I'm keen to see what the artist Amelia Geocos, acting out the part of Regan McNeil from the Exorcist has done with her role, and in the next room I find her! She's strapped to a bed, writhing and crying out for help, and her wrists are connected to a long cord, which is controlling some kind of widgie board device, to summon up the spirits. It's funny and kind of creepy - she challenges me to take her hand and help her out of bed, but I decline, actually fearing she might spit on me, or bite my hand off.



Fictive Days © Peta Jenkins

Not all of the characters in this fictive space are intent on staying in character – artist Nikki Johnson, who is playing Diane Arbus, famous photographer from the recently released 'Fur', is happy to talk to me openly about her role in the project.

SONAR 2007
 DOCUMENTA12
 PRIMAVERA SOUND 2007
 DESIGN FESTA VOL. 25
 DESIGNMAI 2007
 DOCVILLE FILM FESTIVAL
 TAKAHI KAWANISHI EXHIBITION
 JORDAN WOLFSON "OPTICAL SOUND"
 OFFF FESTIVAL 2007

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'It's been a very interesting project so far. We've all interpreted our roles in different ways - some of us have been more true to character than others. As a photographer based in New York, it's fantastic to come here and be involved in such a risk-taking project. No one really knew how it was going to develop, which is part of the fun'

I stuck around to talk with some of the other artists, as 'Queen Elizabeth' handed out free beer. As time went by the mood changed; it was neither a party nor an exhibition, but a strange assortment of people for a Saturday night in Berlin. At around nine o'clock, one of the participants staged a performance with a rocket, which when lit, fizzled out very quickly. It was an odd ending to a very curious project, and I had mixed feelings about its success. If anything, it was an intriguing experience for the viewer, and I left with more questions than answers, about this type of performative art.

While Fictive days dealt with characters from film culture, the piece '[Assisted Living](#)' set up a different premise – a live TV studio. Multimedia artist [Marisa Olsen](#) devised a television show, for final presentation toward the end of the Festival. Viewers could take part by sitting in the studio audience, and an open call went out on the website to hire crew members for the show.



Assisted Living © Viviana Druga

The studio was set up on the ground floor of a soon-to-be demolished housing complex right near Alexanderplatz, the main city square of Berlin. The artist took the role of talk show host, in a parody of Martha Stewart's US TV show format, presenting 'heat' craft projects and cooking recipes for a fictitious technologically advanced audience somewhere around 2030. She provoked us to imagine what a mainstream day-time TV show of the future might look like, with environmental concerns (like radioactive heat and global warming) making our need for counteractive household products all that more urgent. Protective goggles from the sun's damaging rays, recipes for heat-resistant salads, and stain removal from furniture (due of course to increasing water levels across the globe), were all presented to the audience via short but sweet demonstrations, and taped live as the final show in a 15 part series.



Assisted Living © Viviana Druga

I enjoyed the tongue-in-cheek play with the TV format – the oversized day-glo props, the studio producer shouting instructions from the back of the room, and Marisa under the studio lights, talking through the headset. But I wanted to know why she decided to get involved in New Life Berlin.

'What interested me about the Festival was the crossover between art and activism – I want to get involved in more risk-taking work, and it seemed a good platform for developing my TV show format. There's always a bias against open-call projects, but for me it's more about whether it suits the particular exhibition or not'

With shows at the Whitney Museum of Modern Art and the Venice Biennale, and a one-off performative piece on American Idol, Marisa Olsen is already a 'household' name. Which makes New Life Berlin all that more interesting – a range of artists were involved, some more advanced in their careers than others, but no means an exclusive selection of artists based on their name alone.

Participatory art can just as easily be seen as social experiments, whereby artists have a chance to test their own theories and practices on a 'suspecting' public. The 'Powell Opera – A Mini Opera For Non Musicians' invited members of the public to create an opera in one rehearsal, and perform it on the final day of the Festival.

So how do you pull off a performance by inexperienced singers, with only one rehearsal? I asked artist and composer Franck Leibovici, the director of the project.

'There's already been a fair bit of experimentation in this area. It follows in the spirit of 60's experimental music – musicians like John Cage and Christian Wolff, who wanted to open up the possibilities for music as a social activity. In this performance, there's no hierarchy, and no time signature. It's a series of statements that are chanted, and passed around the group.'



Opera Rehearse © Viviana Druga

The result could have been chaotic, but it was in fact melodic and almost soporific, with singular voices punctuating the collective chant. I asked one of the participants, Antonio, how he felt about being involved.

'I don't sing normally, or play an instrument.. it was just a nice feeling to be a part of it, to have a purpose, to play around a bit. At the performance, towards the end, I felt quite embarrassed when most people had finished but I was still singing my part, so the focus shifted to me!'



Opera Perform © Viviana Druga

Engaging visitors and other artists in performances has a community feel to it, as a collective, people can create new works with unfamiliar modes of expression, which is a much more memorable experience than being a viewer per say. Perhaps then, it is more about the participant's own experiences, than the merits of an end result for the audience's appreciation.

Minutes after the Powell Opera, it was time to take a look at the 'Eat The Wall' participatory work, which was already on its way to being completed. Imagine a city made entirely of food – towers made of ice cream cones, roads of liquorice, whole suburbs held together by slices of bread - scaled to a manageable size, of course, and then devoured by its creators. This is artists Ali&Cia's ongoing 'Eat The City' project, and for the Berlin version, people were asked to bring in a brick of food to build the wall, and then slowly devour it to 'enjoy the collective catharsis... break down barriers, bridge differences, and forge relationships'.

I'd brought along my two bricks of food – one plastic container containing a couple of garishly coloured 'dunkin donuts', and another with the more 'healthy' option of organic banana chips.



Eat The Wall © Nicola Kuehne

A range of foods for the discerning and the indiscriminate palette were on offer, with everything from Italian sausage to marshmallow sweets and some rather gross-looking German liver pate. And there was a wide selection of people there too – young backpackers from Australia had turned up, some familiar Berlin locals and a fair handful of Italians, along with the Festival regulars.

All we had to do now was eat and drink, as the artists encouraged people to take a brick of the wall, and give it to someone else to enjoy. It wasn't really a re-enactment of the Berlin Wall's demolishing in the late 80's, instead, it was a rather hippy-ish communal eating ceremony, which by its nature will never be boring, especially if you're hungry.

This project was a scaled-down version of major works created for the City of London and the Melbourne City Council in Australia, where local residents and community groups, with months of planning in advance, built up the respective cities bit by bit, out of food. I could imagine these larger scale works resonating much more than the Berlin event, as so many more people had invested themselves in the task, but at least we all had a chance to gain an insight into this ongoing sensory project, devised by an artist collective who shrewdly capitalise on the power of food to engage.

And that's the nature of open call, participatory work – it's experimental, it's unpredictable, and allows the artist (and the curator) to play with ideas, even if the outcome doesn't turn out as planned. The Eat The Wall artists were given a chance to test their 'Eat Art' format in a different context, assisting in the ongoing development of the project.



© Viviana Druga

With so much creative content around us these days, and a large part of the art world preaching to the converted, it's refreshing to find a curated program that engages directly with the viewer through participation. Why, for example, should participation be the exclusive realm of reality TV shows, which play on our own fears and emotions, and for the most part ends up as crass statements of aspirational wealth and ideas of 'beauty'? The artists in New Life Berlin expect much more from art, and are prepared to take the risks. It's controversial, it's irreverent, and I'd like to see more.

New Life Berlin Festival

Date: 1st - 15th June, 2008

Place: Berlin, Germany

<http://www.wooloo.org/festival/>

Text: Peta Jenkin

Have a look at "A New City Guide Berlin" for the latest information of events held in Berlin.

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