

Amerika is a *produzentengalerien* located in Brunnenstrasse 7 in Berlin. The idea behind this type of artist-run space is to have a gallery that is founded by artists but one that is not run by the artists themselves. For the administrative responsibilities the artists have 'hired' Sebastian Klemm who works on any number of things from curating the shows and answering e-mails to attending art fairs as well as making sales and art world contacts for the exhibiting artists.

The space itself is a standard white cube, albeit generous in size in comparison to some other new galleries in Berlin, but there is nothing here that would make one feel ill at ease for wanting to experience young contemporary art. Indeed there is even a certain humbleness about the gallery with its unassuming lighting, no spot lights, that allows us to feel capable of spending large amounts of time acquainting ourselves with the work. As such, a viewer enters an environment that is simultaneously art world familiar, yet slightly tinged with an enthusiasm that comes from both youth and the will to create a situation that invites us to discover and explore new talent in a context that resembles more resplendent big name galleries without the smoke and mirrors.

The gallery opened over a year ago in March 2005 and focused primarily on group shows. One of these exhibitions *Goldene Ruinen*, featuring the photographs of Viktoria Binchtok, I found particularly thought-provoking. What is apparent in these works is the artist's empathy with her subject-people-or rather what these people have left behind. Greasy hair stains and marks made from individuals sitting in chairs and leaning against walls more than likely for hours waiting for bureaucracy to hopefully take care of them. The ghosts of her performers make themselves ever present in these works leading our minds to fill in the gaps. What kind of life do these people have here in Berlin and where do they come from? What connects them and binds them together? Perhaps something as simple as a mark on the wall-an affirmation that says yes I have been here too. Formally these works have precedents in drawing and painting: Twombly like calligraphy as well as Tapiés inspired incisions make their appearance. No doubt what the artist's photographs make evident is the unexpected beauty that reveals itself through

quotidian interaction in space and that chance/uncalculated movements are rather consistent all over the world.

Curious about the political nature of the gallery's name, I asked, and it would seem that one of the artists was reading Kafka's *Amerika*. At which point a call went out suggesting this as the title and was eventually approved-not by all but by most of the gallery's artists. And it hasn't been without its problems: someone keeps stealing the A and the M from the sign out front. A bit tedious given that one of the artists has to keep sculpting As and Ms, and it's not as if America is as popular as it was when Kennedy went over and made his Berliner/donut speech. Indeed it would seem the name Amerika would be a ridiculously bad choice given the volatile political climate, because although it refers to Kafka in a literary sense and Kippenberger in an art world sense, it is also quite simply how one spells America in German. Therefore, the result is... **AMERIKA** in full glorious view over a street in Berlin.

Risks, however, seem to be at the heart of what this group of artists are all about, and no doubt dreams make up a big part of the how and why this whole undertaking got started in the first place. Perhaps a fitting epithet to this project might then be: *Amerika*: 'gallery' of ambition! Maybe, maybe not, but I find a venture that involves twenty artists getting together and forming a gallery to exhibit, sell, and have work seen on the international stage at art fairs-something not so common among *produzentengallerie* and a testament to their first year success-extremely refreshing, and stimulating to know that perhaps what is the true 'spirit of America' has found a home in the city of Berlin.