



The City of Yesterday

/ „die stadt von morgen“ in der Akademie der Künste

On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Interbau building exhibition of 1957 and the rebuilding of the Hansaviertel in the center of Berlin, the Akademie der Künste is hosting the exhibition Die „Stadt von Morgen“ from May 16th until July 15th. The city quarter in the center of Berlin was almost completely destroyed during the war and then re-built as a model of what modernist city of the future would be like. The title, The City of Tomorrow, is taken from the section of the original exhibition that showcased modern city design and the supposed lifestyle city-dwellers of the future would have.

The fifteen artists were invited to engage in “artistic research” and develop works about the Hansaviertel, where the Akademie der Künste is located. In addition to the artworks, the curators have organized a series of films and conferences that will take place at the Akademie during the show.

Although the curatorial statements lead one to expect a dry academic assessment of the goals and failures of modernist urban planning, this is not at all what we encounter in the exhibition. Most of the artists approach the task abstractly. Sofia Hultén, for example, enacted anti-climactic performances at locations around the quarter, bringing in members of the community to help dismantle furniture or to take part in an enigmatic ceremony that involved portable stereos. The group e-Xplo wandered around Hansaviertel collecting stories from the population, which they used to compose a musical score spoken/sung by an actress accompanied by trumpet and drums. And Oliver Croy presents somebody else’s research, exhibiting the library of a resident who had collected books on city planning, architecture and similar building projects around the world.

Ute Richter’s work concisely invokes the complex ideological shifts that have occurred since the time of the Hansavi-

ertel’s construction and the Cold War. Richter transported a sculpture made in 1970 by Karl Schönherr, Mothers with Children, from Prager Strasse in Dresden – the GDR’s counterpart to the Hansaviertel – to an outdoor site that had been occupied by an abstract sculpture during the Interbau exhibition in 1957. The stiff figurative sculpture of two women with children stands in contrast to the abstract art that was predominant in the West at that time, and simultaneously brings out the ideological overlap between the two enemy states: both projects focus on the family as a building block for society. Summed-up in the image of a mother with children, Richter’s work further references the continuing anxiety in contemporary Germany about its low birth rate.

Interbau represented the rationalist project of city planning at the mid-century, but art – at least in West Germany – was dominated at the time by the abstract expressionism shown in the first Documenta. In 1957, it would have been inconceivable for an art exhibition to be about a topic in the way that The City of Tomorrow uses art to reflect on the Hansaviertel. Yet despite its aims, the show does not deliver any solid conclusions and it is not clear what the exercise proves. More often than not, the artists seem uncomfortable working with the assignment – like the inhabitants living in an overly rationalized building project.

„die stadt von morgen“

Beiträge zu einer Archäologie des Hansaviertels Berlin
Akademie der Künste, Hanseatenweg 10, 16.5–15.7.2007

Oliver Croy, Mark Dion, e-Xplo, Sabine Hornig, Sofia Hultén, Kaltwasser/Köbberling, Annette Kisling, Korpys/Löffler, Dorit Margreiter, Ute Richter, Eran Schaeerf