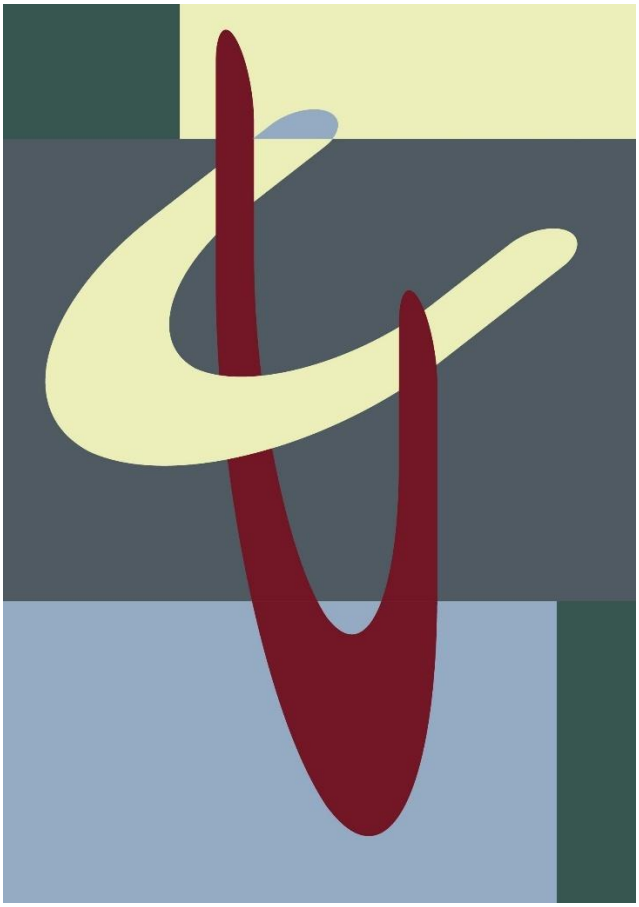
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Relations in Place

mit | with Özcan Ertek, Zhenru Liang, Vanessa Amoah Opoku & Joy Weinberger

Ausstellung | Exhibition 14.11.25 – 25.1.26

Pressemappe DE | EN

Konzept | Concept
Veranstaltungen | Events
Künstler*innen | Artists
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Relations in Place

with Özcan Ertek, Zhenru Liang, Vanessa Amoah Opoku & Joy Weinberger

The spaces we inhabit are more than passive settings to our lives. They are formed by our actions, decisions and relationships – and, in turn, shape how we relate to one another and the world around us. *Relations in Place* examines how spatial constellations, sometimes caring, sometimes coercive, embody the social, political and affective forces that structure our ways of living together. Set within the Bärenzwinger, historically a site of both confinement and civic curiosity, the exhibition takes this charged architecture as its point of departure. Built under National Socialism as a public animal enclosure, the Bärenzwinger bears traces of control and spectatorship that continue to resonate today. Within its walls, ideas of protection and containment, access and exclusion, proximity and distance intersect and blur. This ambivalence becomes a lens for reflecting on how spatial practices, whether architectural, social or emotional, can both enable and restrict, nurture and discipline. From this starting point,

Relations in Place unfolds across multiple spatial registers: from the transnational experience of the diaspora to the urban landscape of Berlin and the historical layers embedded in the site itself. By bringing these dimensions into dialogue, the exhibition traces how *place* is never fixed, but continuously redefined through relations of power, care and belonging. The convergence of these perspectives at the Bärenzwinger, an architectural remnant of a controlled past now repurposed as a public exhibition space, underscores the need to reimagine how we inhabit and share space amid shifting political and social boundaries.

Vanessa Amoah Opoku and Joy Weinberger engage with the emotional and material dimensions of diaspora, reimagining “home” as an evolving practice of repair and intergenerational care rather than a static structure. Özcan Ertek transforms the site through sound, mapping the acoustic landscape of Berlin’s public spaces and reflecting the echoes of past and present struggles embedded in them. Zhenru Liang’s intervention in the passage between cage and garden reconsiders the monument itself: its gestures of permanence and exclusion, its possibilities for adaptation and openness. Together, these works bring into focus the balance between autonomy and constraint, intimacy and distance, care and control that defines spatial experience. In an increasingly polarized world marked by enclosure and displacement, *Relations in Place* asks how spaces might still hold the potential for relation – for forms of being together that remain responsive, situated and in motion.

Vanessa Amoah Opoku & Joy Weinberger

Bricks and Cement Don’t Make a House, 2024/25
Multi-media installation
Video 22:59 min, sound, textile, reinforced steel frameworks, variable dimensions

In the collaboration between Vanessa Amoah Opoku and Joy Weinberger, care takes form through the intergenerational labor of homemaking across distance. Rooted in a family story – a grandfather’s desire for his emigrated son to build a house “back home” in Ghana – Bricks and Cement Don’t Make a House reflects on how belonging is constructed within diasporic life.

Using her smartphone for LiDAR scanning, Opoku captures fragments of unfinished houses across Ghana, each telling a story of interrupted construction and deferred dreams caused by ongoing neo-colonialism. Traditionally used for territorial mapping and land extraction, Opoku reconfigures LiDAR into a gesture of connection by touching surfaces with light to generate point cloud scans. This process transforms physical space into a digital representation through millions of tiny points of data. Weinberger translates these digital point clouds, as well as photographs from Opoku’s family archive, into woven textiles that act as bridges between the virtual and the physical, the digital and the material, linking “here” with “there,” and “then” with “now.” Together, the artists weave a new house

that unfolds as a dislocated, yet tactile architecture of care: a home built not from walls, but from shared histories, familial responsibility and acts of repair.

A newly created textile for the exhibition renders the depth map of this new communal home as a woven blueprint where one side maps proximity from dark (near) to light (distant), while its reverse inverts this spatial reading. This reversible depth mapping suggests that proximity and distance are matters of perspective, holding space for multiple ways of belonging. Unlike architectural plans that typically serve property ownership and exclusion, this depth map functions as both technical drawing and love letter, offering precise coordinates that enable others to rebuild this collective home in virtual environments, extending the collaborative framework beyond the artists themselves.

Özcan Ertek
Acoustic Horizon, 2021– ongoing
Kinetic–interactive sound installation
Metal horn, Arduino, speaker, electronic compass sensor, amplifier

Acoustic Horizon transforms the Bärenzwinger into a resonant body, inviting visitors to engage with the urban environment through sound. The installation features a kinetic metal horn that transmits soundscapes collected from various locations in Berlin's eastern districts. Each recording carries with it the echoes of historical and contemporary struggles with division, power and transformation embedded in the city's fabric. As visitors direct the horn, they activate sounds recorded at corresponding sites, including the nearby former Heinrich-Heine-Straße border crossing, a significant contact zone between East and West Berlin that saw both controlled passage and intense movement of goods and people. Visitors will also hear the sounds of Kreuzberg, especially around Kottbusser Tor, a vibrant area where diverse communities are united by networks of care and a shared history of protest and solidarity, even as the neighborhood navigates the challenges of gentrification. The work also draws from Tempelhofer Feld, a public space for recreation and community that resists the pressures of privatization and commercial interests, highlighting the ongoing contestation and transformation of Berlin's urban landscape.

The act of listening in *Acoustic Horizon* becomes one of engagement and negotiation, where visitors shape their auditory path and decide which voices and stories to attend to. Yet this agency exists within a framework of tension. The installation's controlled parameters of movement reflect the limits on visibility, access and participation that define urban life, shaped by broader social and political forces. The work speaks to the politics of proximity and attention: Who is heard, who is left out of the frame? By engaging with the sound pieces, visitors are invited to reflect on how the boundaries we draw in space also reflect the boundaries we impose on ourselves and others.

Zhenru Liang
on-site Bärenzwinger (Temporary Theater), 2025
Installation
Bricks, 222 x 222 x 154 cm

Zhenru Liang's *on-site Bärenzwinger,* part of her ongoing series Temporary Theaters, presents a subtle architectural intervention at the threshold between the Bärenzwinger's tunnel and left-sided garden. Developed through an ongoing dialogue between the artist, the site's architecture and layered history, the installation reflects on how form, access and encounter unfold within spatial and social contexts. Initially conceived as an "X" structure to obstruct the passage between tunnel and garden, the work's development evolved into a conversation about accessibility and spatial ethics. As a listed monument, the Bärenzwinger is defined by architectural constraints and existing barriers that cannot be altered, making any new intervention a negotiation with its fixed conditions. The structure, formed by the intersection of two walls creating four distinct spaces, now extends unevenly, with one arm descending to create a stair-like incline. From the outside, this gesture subtly invites visitors into

the garden. Composed of loosely stacked bricks, typically reserved for interior walls, the structure blurs the boundary between inside and outside, reshaping the spatial rhythm of the passage. Approached from different sides, the installation's asymmetry creates new focal points and draws attention to the ways bodies experience the site. Beyond its formal concerns, this installation engages with the Bärenzwinger's complex history, particularly its role as a bear pit built during the Nazi era. In its tension between adaptation and resistance, the structure evokes the ambivalence of a monument once designed to control and confine. Today, it invites a rethinking of the site, not as a space of exclusion but as a place for more open, flexible encounters.

Curated by Annika Reketat

EXHIBITION

14/11/25 – 25/1/26

Curated by Annika Reketat

»Relations in Place« is the fourth part of the annual exhibition programme HANDLE (with) CARE

Exhibition management and production:
Katrin Winkler, Josephin Hanke and Alexandra Gaul

Program coordination:
Josephine Steffens and Hannah van der Est

Graphic: Nora Keilig

EVENTS

13/11/25, from 6 PM
Opening
7 PM: "Acoustic Horizon" –
Sound Intervention by Özcan Ertek

15/11/25
"Mapping Care around Bärenzwinger: What Space Does Care Take in the City?"
11 AM–5 PM: "In-Between. Listening as an Everyday Practice" – Public Intervention by Yun-Chu Liang
3–4:30 PM: "Traces of Care" – A Care Walk around the Bärenzwinger with the Feminist Spaces Collective

18/1/26, 4 PM
“Kaffee, Kuchen & …”
Neighbourhood meet-up

25/1/26
Finissage
4–7 PM: »on-site Bärenzwinger« – participatory action with Zhenru Liang

ARTISTS

Özcan Ertek

Özcan Ertek (*1989, Istanbul) is a Berlin based sonic and media artist whose work explores the relations between sound, sculpture, and motion. Drawing on his background in mechanical and sound engineering, he creates interactive sound sculptures, kinetic objects, and site-specific installations that investigate how technology, movement, and materiality shape perception and embodied experience.

Through constructing experimental infrastructures, Ertek proposes alternative modes of listening, interaction, and spatial perception, creating dynamic sonic environments where sound becomes an active force that redefines sensory and spatial relationships.

Zhenru Liang

Zhenru Liang (*1994, China) is a multidisciplinary artist whose practice explores the intersection of urban structures and the Earth's primordial memory. Working across installation, performance, drawing, video, and other visual languages, she investigates how natural forms are shaped, disrupted, and reconfigured by human activity and the evolution of civilization.

Her series of ephemeral installations, Temporary Theatre, as a form of anti-monument. Using construction materials in their primary state, Liang constructs modular systems that represent the processes of construction and deconstruction. These spatial interventions seek to reconnect artificial structures with the rhythms and spatial logic of nature.

Liang's practice is deeply rooted in volcanic territories, which she visits for artistic and performative interventions. Her research encompasses sites of geological and cultural significance, including Mount Etna, the Aeolian Islands, Greece, the Balearic Islands, volcanic deposits near Girona in Catalonia, the Roman Castles around Lakes Albano and Nemi, Vesuvius, and the Eifel region. These locations serve as frameworks where the "spatiality of dwelling" unfolds in direct confrontation with the raw, dynamic forces of nature.

Her work reveals how these temporal and spatial layers shape our understanding of architecture, memory, and the environment.

Liang holds a Master's degree in Visual Arts from the Brera Academy of Fine Arts in Milan. In 2025, she has been a Visiting Professor at the Brera. Her work has been featured in collective projects at the Venice Biennale in 2022, 2023, and 2025, as well as in the Biennale's Poetry Session in 2024, and at nGbK Berlin in 2025.

She currently lives and works between Milan and Berlin.

Vanessa Amoah Opoku

Vanessa Amoah Opoku (*1992, Germany) is a German-Ghanaian interdisciplinary artist exploring history, digitality, and marginalized narratives through mixed realities. Her world-making practice constructs alternative epistemological frameworks that challenge conventional notions of innovation and future visions. Her primary artistic tools include 3D scans, video, sculpture, performance, and sound.

Opoku is part of the artist collective PARA, which uses an interdisciplinary, research-based and performative approach to explore various phenomena of globalization and politics of memory. Since 2021, she co-curates the Balance Club Culture Festival, a platform that examines the political significance of club culture, its role within various communities, and its contributions to technological and cultural progression.

She studied Book Art and Graphic/System Design, Art and Digital Media, and Photography in Leipzig, Vienna, and Jerusalem. In 2021, she obtained her Diploma in Fine Arts and finished her Meisterschülerinnen studies (artist distinction) in 2024, with Prof. Tina Bara at the Academy of Fine Arts Leipzig.

Opoku has had solo exhibitions at EIGEN+ART Lab in Berlin, Synnika in Frankfurt a. M. and in Guangzhou, hosted by the HBS Research Centre of the Times Museum. She has

exhibited and showcased at institutions such as Belvedere 21 Vienna, Deichtorhallen Hamburg, Fotomuseum Winterthur and Staatstheater Nürnberg. She won multiple awards and has been recently nominated for the S+T+ARTS Prize 2025 of the European Commission and Ars Electronica. In addition to her artistic practice, Opoku teaches at HGK Basel FHNW, Institute Experimental Design and Media Cultures (IXDM), among others. She lives and works in Berlin and Basel.

Joy Weinberger

Joy Weinberger is a textile artist and designer whose practice explores textile structures as metaphors for network systems. She combines the analog process of weaving with digital technologies and understands textiles as a culturally, socially, and politically charged medium that opens up new perspectives through its presence. Collaboration with other artists is an essential part of her work. She studied at the Berlin-Weissensee Academy of Art (B.A. Textile and Surface Design) and at the Burg Giebichenstein University of Art and Design Halle (M.A. Conceptual Textile Design).

Since 2021, she has been a member of PARA, an interdisciplinary artist collective, and since 2025, she has been conducting research at a textile institute on the connection between art and science.

History

Until that day in autumn 2015, on which Schnute, the last female city-bear was euthanized, several generations of brown bears – Berlin's heraldic animal – had inhabited the Bärenzwinger (bear enclosure) for almost eighty years.

The Bärenzwinger was officially opened on the 17th of August 1939, with the four bears Urs, Vreni, Lotte and Jule. Urs and Vreni came from the world-famous bear enclosure of Bern and were gifts from the city of Bern to mark the occasion of the 700th anniversary of Berlin, in 1937. Originally built for the city's sanitation department in Köllnischer Park, it was converted into the Bärenzwinger by Berlin architect Georg Lorenz. Bound to an almost eighty-year history of the city, the Bärenzwinger faced closure on two occasions. All the bears except for Lotte were killed during the Second World War, and the Bärenzwinger itself was buried under rubble. Thanks to the intervention of citizens, the area was cleared of rubble and re-opened on the 29th of November 1949, housing the bears Nante and Jette. The preservation of the bear enclosure, located in the former East of the city, became a matter for debate shortly after the fall of the Wall due to its poor structural condition, until private do-nation initiatives finally set its restoration in motion.

Around the turn of the millennium, the keeping of the bears on the site encountered increasing opposition once again, this time because of doubts concerning the welfare of the animals. Criticism from animal welfare groups finally led to the municipal decision to discontinue the site's usage as a bear enclosure after the death of Schnute.

Cultural Site

The cultural use of the Bärenzwinger as a location for exhibitions and events, lectures and discussions has been made possible through the transfer of the property to the Department for Further Education and Culture of Berlin-Mitte and the provision of support through interdisciplinary funding. Artists and scientists will be able to develop exhibition ideas on-site and progressively pre-sent them by way of carefully considered site-specific interventions and installations. The cultural program of the former bear enclosure is organized by young curators of the Department of Arts, Culture and History, to whom the Bärenzwinger will be made available as a place of practice and learning during their traineeship.

After having stood empty for almost two years, the Department for Further Education and Culture has assumed responsibility for a cultural monument, which was home to Berlin’s heraldic animal for more than 80 years and thus has developed a high degree of popularity and sympathy among the citizens of Berlin. Its immense effect on creating identity among Berliners is therefore of great value, both for the future urban planning around the area of the northern Luisenstadt as well as for the nearby historical center of Berlin.

The aim is to develop the location as a public place of cultural learning and teaching as well as a knowledge base for urban culture. In addition, exhibitions, work-shops and events will reference cultural urban design, the history of Berlin and contemporary art.

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Öffnungszeiten
Montag – Sonntag, 11 – 19 Uhr
Eintritt frei

Verkehrsverbindungen
U8 Heinrich-Heine Straße
U2 Märkisches Museum
U+S Jannowitzbrücke
Bus 165, 265, 248

Der Bärenzwinger ist barrierefrei erreichbar. Gäste mit Kommunikations- bzw. Assistenzhilfebedarf melden diesen bitte an unter Rufnummer (030) 9018 37461 oder per E-Mail an info@baerenzwinger.berlin

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Katrin Winkler, Josephin Hanke

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