



Tour d'Art | Berlin Gallery Week

CULTURE, TRAVEL | By SAMEER REDDY | MAY 3, 2011, 5:10 PM | 1 Comment



Jens Ziehe, courtesy of Neugerriemschneider, Berlin

A banner designed by Rirkrit Tiravanija accompanying Ai Weiwei's new installation at the Neugerriemschneider gallery in Berlin.

Where is **Ai Weiwei**? It's a good question, and one posed by the artist Rirkrit Tiravanija on a banner created to accompany Ai's exhibition at Berlin's Neugerriemschneider gallery, the opening of which Ai was regrettably unable to attend this past weekend because of a previous engagement with Chinese authorities. Despite his absence, his show was a big crowd pleaser during **Berlin's Gallery Weekend**. The 44 participating galleries and numerous off-calendar spaces presented a thoughtful program that celebrated Berlin's low-key ethos, and where the work, rather than celebrity-stocked private dinners and A-list parties, was the main attraction.

Ai's meditative installation features two sculptures, "Rock" and "Tree," and offers a sanctuary in which the solace of nature has been fabricated with the help of premodern technology. "Rock" consists of a series of white porcelain outcroppings, fabricated in the city of Jingdezhen (the supposed birthplace of porcelain) and painted with a swirling blue motif. "Tree" assembles two trees together from segments of fallen trunks harvested

in southern China, using a traditional Chinese technique involving giant screws and that adds a kinetic twist to their natural shape. The arrangement encourages a Taoist interpretation — the white “rocks” also resemble a formation of clouds floating across the floor, suggesting a temporary union of Heaven and Earth in which distinctions between the natural and synthetic have been collapsed.

Another standout on the exhibition circuit is Tim Noble and Sue Webster’s “Turning the Seventh Corner,” a terrifying installation showing until July 16 at **Blain Southern**’s brand-new, nearly-14,000-square-foot Berlin space, located in a building that once housed the printing press of the newspaper *Der Tagesspiegel*. Designed in collaboration with the architect David Adjaye and inspired by the tombs of the pharaohs, “Turning the Seventh Corner” takes visitors down a narrow, near-pitch-black passageway that makes seven turns. Each corner is marked only by a sliver of ambient light, which unexpectedly rises, falls, contracts and expands, and is enough to trigger acute claustrophobia. The corridor ends at an inner sanctum of sorts, where one of Noble and Webster’s signature sculptures — in this case a golden assemblage of crow’s feet, Egyptian vulture’s feet, squirrels, a chicken foot, a baby rat, a mouse and five frogs — casts a self-portrait of the artists in shadow on the wall behind it.



Courtesy of Galerie Christian Hosp

Leila Pazooki's "Fair Trade" shows several artists' interpretations of Lucas Cranach the Elder's "Allegory of Justice."

Leila Pazooki's off-calendar show, "Fair Trade," at Galerie Christian Hosp, is also worth checking out. (It closes June 18.) Pazooki has transformed a spectacular space, previously occupied by the now defunct Indian mega-gallery Bhodhi, into a room from London's National Gallery, only all of the Old Master works on display were outsourced to painters-for-hire in China's Guandong province. The results subtly skewer old-fashioned notions of authorship and authenticity while highlighting the differences between inspiration and imitation; the "best" copies are those that veer off in bizarre aesthetic directions that bring to mind the arts-and-crafts hour at a penitentiary for the criminally insane.

Other names on the official calendar of exhibitions include John Bock, Olaf Nicolai, Chuck Close, Raymond Pettibon, Gilbert and George, and Anselm Reyle, making Berlin an attractive detour on the way to the Venice Biennale or the Basel Art Fair. And perhaps Ai Weiwei will get to see his own show before it closes on June 4.

For more information, go to gallery-weekend-berlin.de.