

# Art Review:

Issue 18 £4

*This is my life... I am here and I am now. I am a product of history and of today, but today is a product of yesterday.*

JANUARY  
2008

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before it was  
awash in money

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on the cover: KRIS MARTIN  
photographed by ROBI RODRIGUEZ

John Baldessari, *Arms & Legs (Specific: Elbows & Knees), etc.: Arms with Cowboy Hat, 2007*, three-dimensional archival print laminated with Lexan and mounted on Sintex with acrylic paint, 184 x 152 cm. Courtesy Merien Goodman Gallery, New York and Paris

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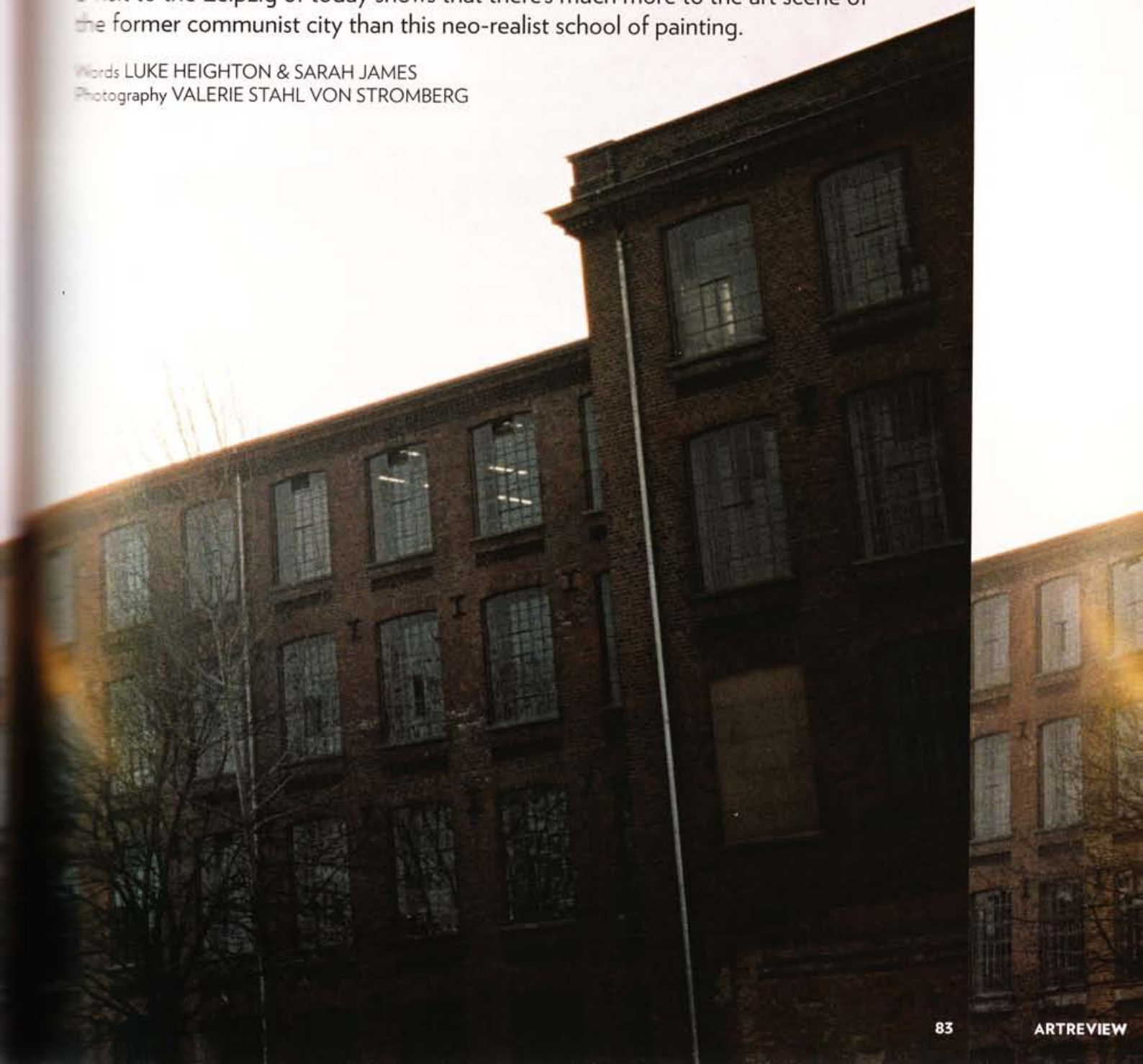
# Leipzig

The city according to art

Over the last decade, Leipzig has emerged as a key centre of production on the contemporary art world's ever-shifting map – and consequently, as a key destination for any serious collector's private jet. The New Leipzig School of painters – Tim Eitel, Martin Eder, Ulf Puder, Martin Kobe and, of course, the group's granddaddy, Neo Rauch – have been gobbled up by an art market ever greedy for a new, formally appealing fad. However, although Rauch's paintings now adorn the walls of the Guggenheim and MoMA in New York, as well as the Pompidou Centre in Paris, a visit to the Leipzig of today shows that there's much more to the art scene of the former communist city than this neo-realist school of painting.

Words LUKE HEIGHTON & SARAH JAMES

Photography VALERIE STAHL VON STROMBERG







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During the 1970s and 80s, Leipzig was arguably a far more lively and influential artistic centre than Berlin. It had East Germany's most important art school, the Hochschule für Grafik und Buchkunst (Academy of Visual Arts), and it had an energetic, edgy and – back in the days of totalitarian rule – illegal subcultural gallery world. Today the heart of Leipzig's emerging art scene is found in Plagwitz, a shabby area that seems much removed from the city centre's chocolate-box Gothic and bourgeois

Gründerzeit stolidity. Off the beaten track, and beyond the former-GDR's bleak apartment blocks, many of which are presently being demolished, lies this decrepit but strangely beautiful industrial area that is home to the **Spinnerei**. On visiting the former cotton mill, it's impossible to overlook the genuinely profound effect its history as a centre of

industry and community has had on its present incarnation. The history of the Spinnerei mirrors in several ways Germany's passage from one of the nineteenth century's youngest and most advanced industrial powerhouses to rubble-strewn bankruptcy and back again. The artists, artisans and everyone else who lives and/or works in this centre of artistic production and intellectual exchange no doubt recognises something of its old freewheeling spirit.

Currently the Spinnerei is host to about 100 studios and 10 galleries, covering 40,000 of the site's 70,000 square metres, and has plans to open up the remaining buildings for similar use. The **archiv massiv** serves as a gallery space for work produced by artists currently in residence – including Rauch (who has been a tenant in the mill since 1993), Johannes Tiepelmann, Sandro Porcu, Konstanze

Siegemund, Karl Görlich, Nicole Kegel and Patrick Barth – as well as those who might be said to fall within the Spinnerei's influence. For example, at the time of our visit it was possible to see Arizona-based artist Anthony Pessler's excellent series of graphite works *Another Undiscovered Country*, produced in 2007 during a five-month residency. Bertram Schultze, the Spinnerei's hugely personable and enthusiastic CEO, was as keen to draw attention to the complex's commitment to attracting international talent and an international audience as he was refreshingly unapologetic in stressing that none of this would have been possible were private profits not corralled into supporting the Spinnerei's goal of providing cheap space in which artists can both work and show. Not that gallerists themselves have been reluctant in striking up



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such a deal. Why pay upwards of \$20,000 a month for a space in Chelsea when you can get something better in Leipzig for \$1,500, and in the process provide opportunities for tomorrow's talent today?

One of the Spinnerei's first and still most formidable galleries is Gerd Harry Lybke's **EIGEN+ART**, which moved to the complex in 2004. Lybke was arguably responsible for Leipzig's underground art scene back in the day, originally setting up the city's first nonconformist gallery in his own apartment in 1983 (and undoubtedly amassing a vast Stasi file in the process). Having been equally instrumental in the creation of East Berlin's Mitte gallery scene when he moved to Auguststrasse, and the insane gentrification that followed, it's not surprising that Lybke's move to the Spinnerei was seen as cementing

the site's newfound importance. At the time of our visit, a gallery favourite – the painter Martin Eder – had an amazing show on; his demonic cats, sexualised insects and biblically scaled magical realism filled the gallery's impressive space, the seven-metre-high former steam boiler room.

Dominating what might loosely be regarded as the centre of the site is the enormous **Halle 14**, its five floors home to studios, exhibition, performance and production spaces (not least Universal Cube), a theatre and a library. It was originally established in 1990. Today, as then, Halle 14 is a not-for-profit venture, run in conjunction with the Federkiel Foundation and a number of other nonprofit partners. Together they seek to foster greater dialogue between the contemporary art world and the local public, hosting numerous talks

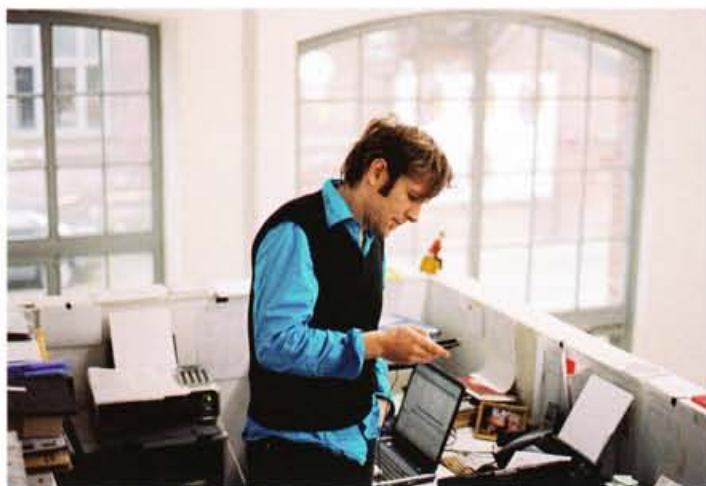
and readings. Tucked behind Halle 14 is Halle 12, the former needle-setting hall, where in 2006 the British artist Darren Almond installed his monumental *Terminus* project (1999).

A little way along the old freight tracks, you find **galerieKleindienst**, which has long held a presence on the international art fair stage and moved to the Spinnerei in 2005. Matthias Kleindienst mines the same approach as Lybke, showing Leipzig artists, but this time of a much younger generation, with sculpture and photography taking its place alongside painting. Painters like Peter Busch – an impressive younger-generation Leipzig School painter, shown in 2006 at the Barbara Davis Gallery in Houston – are exhibited aside photo artists such as Erasmus Schröter and the young photographer Sebastian Stumpf. Next door, Jochen Hempel's slightly more edgy, slightly



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more international **Dogenhaus Galerie** brings together German painters such as Klaus Killisch – who when we visited had a very slick show on of his large Pop-inspired, luridly coloured paintings – with cool young American artists such as Reed Anderson, known for his compelling deconstructed and reconstructed paper works, or the hip Californian conceptual collagist Joe Amrhein, who also happens to be the owner of another of the Spinnerei's more international gallery's – the Brooklyn-based **PIEROGI**. Amrhein was drawn to the Spinnerei because of its incredible atmosphere and the availability of large, dynamic show spaces – something that reminded him of the qualities he saw in Brooklyn when he first moved there. PIEROGI is an innovative gallery directed by Leif Magne Tangen, and like its Brooklyn counterpart, its philosophy is partly

based on the idea of displaying high-quality art for affordable prices in what the gallerist has called 'flat files': portfolios of original artwork displayed in shallow drawers. Favourites of the gallery include Stefan Bohnerberger and David Scher.

PIEROGI was joined in September 2006 by London's **FRED**, which was originally housed in a temporary space but has recently moved to a permanent gallery in what could almost be an incredible Victorian stable at the near end of the site. In the coming year the gallery plans to show *EXPORT/IMPORT*, a group exhibition bringing together seven of the gallery's American and British artists, including David Lock, John Jodzio, Peter Jones and Matthew Usmar Lauder. With this show, FRED hope to initiate a dialogue between contemporary Anglo-American painters and

the New Leipzig School painting tradition.

Similarly adept at orchestrating dialogue and exchange is Torsten Reiter's **Maerzgalerie** founded in 1999 and based at the Spinnerei since 2005. Representing or showing artists including Tobias Köbsch, Miriam Vlaming and Thomas Henninger, the gallery has over time established a successful series of exhibitions and projects entitled *maerzaffairs*.

In the large industrial hall at the other end of the complex lies **Filipp Rosbach's** gallery, a nice clean space that recently showcased the first solo exhibitions of several young German artists. Rosbach's recent successes have included the Dresden-trained sculptor Katja Wiechmann, whose uncanny resin busts play with drawn and photographic surfaces, and the Leipziger Marianna Krueger's strangely pretty and horribly kitsch acrylic



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paintings examining the construct of identity and home. Opposite is **Galerie b2**, an avowedly artist-run space whose members are largely drawn from the city's environs and the Hochschule für Grafik und Buchkunst. Tina Schulz, for example, has been an active member of the gallery since 2004. A graduate student of the HGB who studied under the well-known Köln artist Astrid Klein, her recent and conceptually coherent show brought together sculpture, video and installation.

Things are just as exciting beyond the heavy industry of the cotton mill. A little closer to the centre, the impressive **Gallery of Contemporary Art (GfZK)** resides on Karl-Tauchnitz-Strasse. The gallery's mission is a worthy one: to exhibit former East German artists alongside their colleagues from the old Soviet Bloc in order to explore how they are

addressing post-socialist life in Eastern Europe. Housed in the architecturally juxtaposed minimalist glass box (designed by the Berlin- and Vienna-based architecture firm AS-IF) and the neighbouring neoclassical museum, the collection boasts a particularly on-the-button selection of contemporary German and international artists. For example, SUPERFLEX, Francesco Vezzoli and Jonathan Meese are all presently exhibited under the title *German Histories*, with curatorial input from Liam Gillick, whose all-pervasive influence even extends to this Eastern city. Back in the centre of town, the **Museum of Fine Arts** looms high over Katharinenstrasse, where it was constructed in 2004. Its colossal spaces, reminiscent of Tate Modern's Turbine Hall, are home to a respectable exhibition programme that spans the old and new, from Ed Ruscha to the patriarch of

the original Leipzig School, Wolfgang Mattheuer.

Leipzig's Spinnerei complex makes the Shoreditch of the early 1990s look meek, whimsical and decidedly lacking in ambition in comparison. However, unlike London's, Leipzig's new art scene isn't restricted to a crappy and once-slightly-more-affordable enclave in the eastern part of the city. It is the whole city. And it's happening now. :

*See Listings for further information on the Spinnerei, archiv massiv, EIGEN+ART, Halle 14, galerieKleindienst, Dogenhaus Galerie, PIEROGI, FRED, Maerzgalerie, Filipp Rosbach, Galerie b2, Gallery of Contemporary Art, Museum of Fine Arts, Galerie Emmanuel Post and ASPN*



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the Spinnerei

02  
View of river in  
area around the  
Spinnerei

03  
Exterior views  
of the Spinnerei

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07  
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in his studio, the  
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