

Program

Thursday, September 14, 2023
19:00

Opening of the exhibition

Commented exhibition tour together
with Regina Bittner (Akademie der
Stiftung Bauhaus Dessau)

**Special opening hours for
Berlin Art Week:**

September 15–17, 2023
daily from 15:00–19:00

Information on the accompanying
program at ngbk.de

station urbaner kulturen/ nGbK Hellersdorf

The nGbK location in Hellersdorf was initiated by members who have been active on this late-GDR housing estate since 2014. Over time, it has become an exhibition and event space, and a place for artists and local residents to work together, with activities including forms of urban practice as well as open-air events and exhibitions on the nearby green land, known as Place Internationale. At this location, too, the nGbK as a decentralized institution explores new discursive approaches to artistic and curatorial practice. The nGbK work group station urbaner kulturen uses different art and culture projects to initiate and develop interventionist processes, social structures, and ways of thinking about the future of the neighborhood.



Sabine Bitter & Helmut Weber

September 15, 2023 – January 20, 2024

Darkroom of Educational Modernism: On Form & Function

neue Gesellschaft
für bildende Kunst

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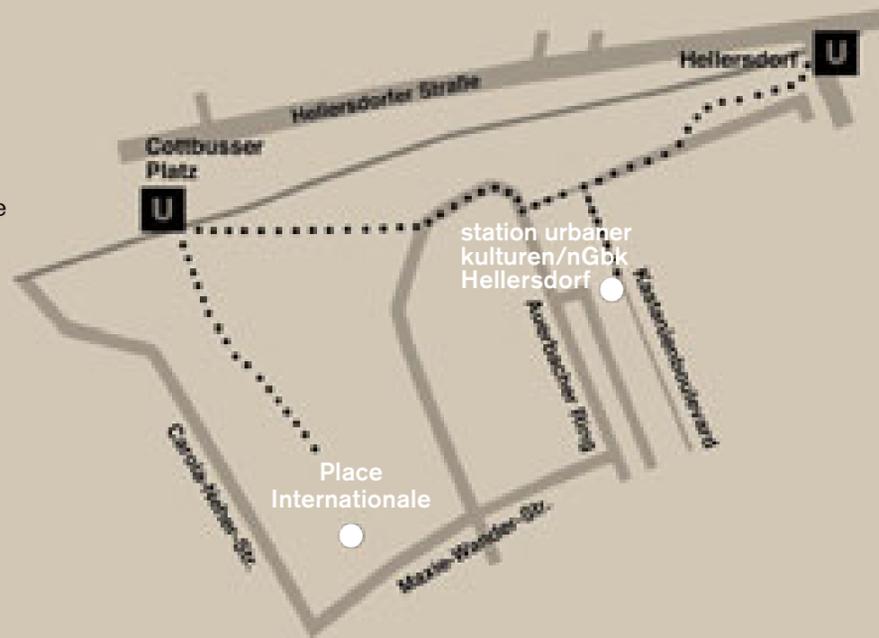
station urbaner kulturen/
nGbK Hellersdorf

Auerbacher Ring 41
12619 Berlin
Entrance on Kastanienboulevard

station-urbaner-kulturen@ngbk.de
+49 173 2009 608

Thu+Sat 15:00–19:00

www.ngbk.de



Since the late 1990s, the artist duo **Sabine Bitter** and **Helmut Weber** (Vienna/Vancouver) have been visiting, photographing, and researching buildings and structures of postwar educational modernism, as well as the backgrounds and realities of their use, in countries as diverse as Brazil, Canada, Croatia, Nigeria, Serbia, and the United States.

Exemplary works ranging from 2005 until today from the long-term project **Bildungsmoderne/Educational**

Modernism examine the role and meaning of images of educational architectures in narratives of modernization from different geographies and ideologies. They explore how colonialism and racism become visible in them and how criticism of the promises and crimes of modernity can be captured in terms of image politics.

The exhibition **Darkroom of Educational Modernism** and accompanying events ask whether and how,

considering the complicity of knowledge and education with planetary exploitation processes, spaces can still be opened up today for a “critical legacy” of modernism in which other forms of knowledge are developed and conditions and ways of dealing with education that are fit for the future are made possible.



Partner of **BERLIN ART WEEK** 15–17 SEP 2023

ngbk

nGbK work group
station urbaner kulturen
Juan Camilo Alfonso, Jochen
Becker, Eva Hertzsch, Margarete
Kiss, Constanze Musterer,
Adam Page, Ralf Wedekind

In collaboration with
AK Schule der Zukunft

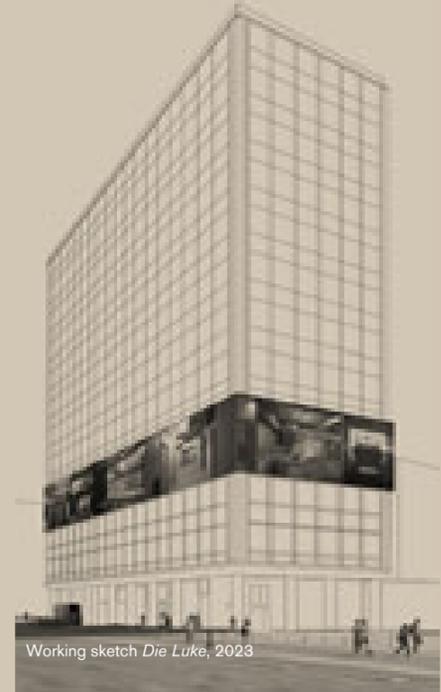


Sabine Bitter & Helmut Weber: Detail from *Trophäen ihrer Exzellenz*, 2016

The photographic series *Unsettler Space* (2021) engages with the iconic architectures of the brutalist-modernist mega-structure of Simon Fraser University in Vancouver. Built in the 1960s by architect Arthur Erickson, the “radical campus” and its built environment were once characterized by experimental concepts of learning and teaching. The collaborative research group “Guests & Hosts” initiated by Bitter & Weber questions the narrative of this “radical campus.” To this end, the work uses the spaces of a settler-colonialist institution in shifting perspectives to disrupt prevailing Western concepts of education and knowledge. Performative interventions into the institutional spaces reclaim them as sites for Indigenous ways of knowing and learning.

Using photographs from the archives of the University of Lethbridge in Alberta, the video installation *Public Seminar* (2020) brings the history of its 1972 brutalist university building, also designed by Erickson, into the present. The selected photographic

documents remind us that public seminars took place in the university’s central hallway as a form of experimental pedagogy. In the video, in turn, archival materials and texts by Erickson from the 1960s on the role and mission of educational architecture are discussed, recontextualized and restaged by students



Working sketch *Die Luke*, 2023

in the Advanced Studio Class of the art faculty there in terms of their relevance to student life today.

The current work *Die Luke* (2023) looks behind the mural on the façade of the Haus des Lehrers at Berlin’s Alexanderplatz. The iconic building was constructed in the International Style by the Hermann Henselmann collective in 1961–1964. The mosaic mural *Unser Leben* by artist Walter Womacka – at seven meters high and 127 meters long, one of the largest in Europe – wraps around the entire building at 3rd and 4th floor level. Conceived as a meeting place for educators, the mural concealed the extensive educational library of the teachers’ association, which had survived both world wars. In the course of the renovation and privatization of the building, the library was relocated and other rooms such as the reading room, café, restaurant, bookstore, event halls, and a cabaret stage disappeared.

About the works

While the campus of the Illinois Institute for Technology (IIT) in Chicago, designed by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, is today considered a landmark of modernist architecture, most accounts of its history obscure the fact that a large section of the Bronzeville neighborhood, inhabited mainly by African-Americans, had to make way for the new building in the 1940s. According to the narrative, the alleged slum was replaced by the functionality, transparency, and rationality of modernism. The solarized images of Sabine Bitter and Helmut Weber’s series *Bronzeville* (2005) reveal how the modernist “architecture of light” perpetuates tropes of light and darkness in racializing discourses.

The image essay *From Our House to Bauhaus – Occupy Modernity* (2012) illustrates Tom Wolfe’s polemic against modernist and postmodernist architecture with 23 photographs of the Silver Towers apartment complex built by New

York University. Unlike Wolfe’s essay, meaning is not produced through text here, but through images of this contested urban site, which take up both Wolfe’s polemic and critiques of it, raising questions about the potential of modernist architecture and its relationship to cities and the ways we want to live.

In *Trophäen ihrer Exzellenz* (2016), photographic objects speak to the complicity between architecture and changing power relations. The work examines the transformation of Johann Wolfgang Goethe University in Frankfurt from a castle-like citizens’ university of the German Empire to a modernist mass university which housed the Frankfurt School, to neoliberal “Clusters of Excellence” within the University. Based on the collaborative research with urban sociologist Klaus Ronneberger, architectural

fragments and appropriations of meaning operate as trophies that mark the path to excellence. Trophies here are not only objects, but also images of the architectural and urban processes of appropriation, as well as agents for changing interests and power relations.



Guests & Hosts: *Unsettler Space*, 2021 Photo: Sabine Bitter

Seeing is followed by listening: a situation for conversation with texts by Brigitte Reimann, Maxie Wander, and Christa Wolf will trace flaws, fractures, and hidden parts of historical narratives. Do they offer potential for a deepening criticism and fragile knowledge of history, modernism and education?

About Sabine Bitter & Helmut Weber

Vienna and Vancouver-based artists Sabine Bitter and Helmut Weber investigate how cities, architectures, and urban territories are negotiated through images. Their photographic, spatial, and research-oriented works address moments and logics of



Bronzeville, 2005

urban transformation. In 2004 they founded the research collective *Urban Subjects* with Jeff Derksen.



Sabine Bitter & Helmut Weber: Videostill from *Public Seminar*, 2020