



# Art's new power axis

*Contemporary art is making strange bedfellows of Berlin and LA*

It's a balmy January morning in Venice Beach, California, and Thomas Demand's cheeks are turning a light cherry red. 'There is so much sun here,' says the Berlin-based artist as he walks down the neighbourhood's main thoroughfare, passing the flip-flopped and golden-haired. 'There is just no gloom.'

Demand has temporarily relocated to Los Angeles for a fellowship hosted by one of the city's premier institutions, the Getty Research Institute. The year-long programme stipulates the German artist has ample amounts of free time to explore the campus and city, with the hope he will use whatever inspiration garnered in his upcoming series of work; at the top of Demand's list during his residency is collaborating with luminaries from LA's biggest industry, Hollywood.

January mornings in LA are not like January mornings in Berlin. And a nine-hour time difference adds to the sense of profound disconnect. But in terms of cultural climate, the two cities are closer than you might imagine. And

getting closer all the time. 'I have always thought of LA as having a similar sense of potential as Berlin,' says Demand. The Munich-born artist moved to Berlin in 1995 and has lived there ever since. For Demand, there are cities for falling in love with art – Paris and Rome – and cities, like Berlin and Los Angeles, for making art. 'Here and in Berlin there is space for growth, pockets and possibilities,' he says.

Berlin is 344 sq miles, LA over 498, and the cities' sizes only underscore their deep connection. For Philomene Magers, co-owner of the Berlin- and London-based Sprüth Magers gallery, it is the very abundance of inexpensive studios that is key. 'It is not some invisible magic happening here,' says Magers. 'They are huge cities with cheap housing. And this makes them nurturing places for artists.'

It was precisely because of these striking similarities that former LA-based artist Jennifer Bornstein accepted a year-long fellowship with the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) and moved to Berlin. 'The bridge between LA

## LA CONFIDENTIAL

Los Angeles is well on the way to becoming a new contemporary art capital, with a giant Eli Broad-financed museum in the works, as well as celebrated New York galleries, including Matthew Marks and L&M Arts, opening new Californian outposts

and Berlin is the mental and physical space in each city,' says Bornstein. 'They present opportunities for artists to be underground and flourish in quirky ways. And it also allows them to be idle.'

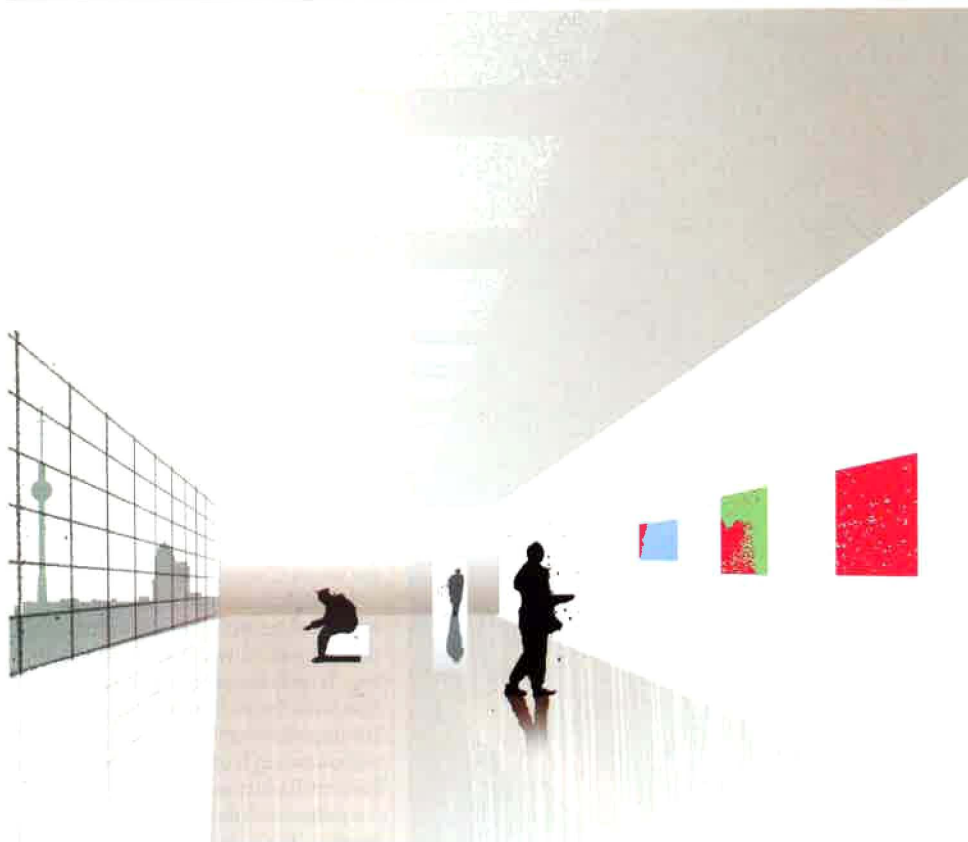
In LA, the sheer distance between destinations means it is not uncommon to spend large chunks of your day alone driving from place to place, forcing a kind of quietness one rarely associates with a bustling metropolis of ten million. The city's most established gallery, Blum & Poe, best exemplifies LA's unusual sonic ambience. Streaming into the 22,000 sq ft gallery is not the echo of car horns, but the sound of songbirds.

'It might be absurd to say, but the space in these two cities allows for more thought and clarity,' says co-owner Jeff Poe. 'It leads to a more organic lifestyle that is not forced like in other art hubs.' His impressive art compound – replete with 14,000 sq ft of exhibition space, a basketball court and a sculpture garden – is indeed unfathomable in New York or London. 'For both Berlin and LA, it comes down to the great quality of life.'

But the bond between the two cities is not merely about topography and cut-rate real estate. And, in contemporary art terms, it goes way back. For Andrew Perchuk, deputy director of the Getty Research Institute, the relationship began in 1972, when Swiss curator Harold Szeemann became director of Documenta V, an avant-garde international showcase of art taking place every five years in Kassel, Germany. At the event, Szeemann put Los Angeles artists such as Ed Ruscha and Edward Kienholz 'front and centre', says Perchuk. The move set in motion a cultural exchange that he describes as today's strongest global art connection.

Many of today's notable Los Angeles artists, including Chris Williams and John Baldessari, who also presented at Szeemann's Documenta, were first made famous in Germany. The favour was duly reciprocated soon after by Baldessari. 'If you look at several German artists' CVs, like Ulrike Rosenbach's, you will see a line that says "Gallery A402, California",' says Perchuk. 'This was a classroom at CalArts [the California Institute of the Arts] where Baldessari put up visiting artists' work.' The list of Germans who frequented the space includes the likes of Hilla Becher, Klaus Rinke, Ulrich Rückriem, Klaus vom Bruch and Rebecca Horn.

In art terms, both cities are on a roll, and rolling closer together. This autumn, to try to deepen the understanding of the California art movement, the Getty Institute's long-standing Pacific Standard Time project will culminate in the largest-ever regional exhibition. Over 60 venues, including the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) and the Los Angeles >>



County Museum of Art (LACMA), will stage exhibits that address art made in the region between the Second World War and the 1970s. 'People constantly say there was no art scene in LA until the 1980s, but it didn't come out of nothing,' says Perchuk. 'This project will give a historical context to the city's art scene.'

The city's art schools, which include the elite CalArts and UCLA, also laid much of the groundwork that gave rise to the Los Angeles art community of today. 'The faculties here are so strong,' says Los Angeles' Hammer Museum curator and co-director of the 4th Berlin Biennial Ali Subotnick. In spite of fame, many of LA's most seminal arts instructors, including Mike Kelley and Baldessari, have continued to teach for most of their careers. 'In the last ten to 20 years, people have opted to come here instead of studying back East,' says Subotnick. 'Once they are out of school, these communities interact with each other. And with the more artists staying, the stronger the community gets.'

Institutionally speaking, LA museums are now getting a lot of attention. Not all positive, it has to be said, but they are clearly now operating in a different league. Much of the buzz was prompted by the appointment of several East Coast art world celebrities, including former dealer Jeffrey Deitch to MOCA and one-time DIA Art Foundation director Michael Govan to LACMA. Billionaire philanthropist Eli Broad announced last August plans for his own Diller Scofidio + Renfro-designed, 120,000 sq ft museum in downtown LA. 'The museums

#### ART TO ART

##### Los Angeles

**01. BLUM & POE**  
Culver City split-level bastion for art heavyweights. [www.blumandpoe.com](http://www.blumandpoe.com)

**02. L&M ARTS**  
The first of several East Coast galleries going West. [www.lmgallery.com](http://www.lmgallery.com)

**03. THE BOX**  
A stronghold for emerging artists. [www.theboxla.com](http://www.theboxla.com)

**04. REGEN PROJECTS**  
An institution known for its cutting-edge shows. [www.regenprojects.com](http://www.regenprojects.com)

**05. MICHAEL BENEVENTO**  
Set in a former brothel, a gallery with a knack for spotting young talent. [www.beneventolosangeles.com](http://www.beneventolosangeles.com)

##### Berlin

**01. SPRÜTH MAGERS**  
The city's most formidable gallery. [www.spruthmagers.com](http://www.spruthmagers.com)

**02. PERES PROJECTS**  
Two innovative galleries in Mitte and Kreuzberg. [www.peresprojects.com](http://www.peresprojects.com)

**03. JOHANN KÖNIG**  
Groundbreaking shows featuring such talents as Tatiana Trouvé and Jordan Wolfson. [www.johannkoenig.de](http://www.johannkoenig.de)

**04. GALERIE NEU**  
Focuses on 'new' artists such as Kai Althoff. [www.galerieneu.net](http://www.galerieneu.net)

**05. GALERIE GITI NOURBAKHSCH**  
A 12-year-old space still bolstering the local art scene. [www.nourbakhsch.de](http://www.nourbakhsch.de)

#### BERLIN WALLS

Known for its cheap studio spaces and great quality of life, Berlin also has strong artistic ties with LA, which many say date back to 1972's Documenta V, which brought the works of artists such as Ed Ruscha to Germany

## 'Berlin is the wild, wild East. It's a creative economy'

here are going to have more gallery space for contemporary art than any other city in the world,' says Broad. His \$200m endowment to his future museum, The Broad, is larger than MOCA and LACMA's combined. 'I don't mean to sound like the chamber of commerce, but Los Angeles is becoming the contemporary art capital of the world.'

To ensure Berlin maintains its reputation as a key creative hub, its municipal leaders are encouraging projects such as Atelierhof Kreuzberg, which saw former stables transformed into studios and exhibition spaces. The rambling platform, which rents out some of its artists' studios for as little as \$250 per month, hosts exhibitions of emerging and established artists. 'It's the wild, wild East,' says Berlin-based dealer Javier Peres. He shut down his LA gallery in 2010 to focus solely on his two Berlin spaces in the Kreuzberg and Mitte districts. 'We have no industry here, it's an economy based on creative capital,' he says. 'Just like New York in the 1970s.'

Commercially, Los Angeles and Berlin still fall far behind their New York and London counterparts. Yet several blue chip galleries have opened, or are in the process of opening up LA outposts. New York's L&M Arts has erected a sprawling Venice Beach gallery (W'140). Matthew Marks gallery is opening a space later this year. Iwan Wirth, of Hauser & Wirth, has also expressed plans to set up an LA office. 'To say there is an energy here is an understatement,' says Sarah Watson, director of L&M Arts. The once 'rarefied' Los Angeles art scene is one she now sees as wholly 'real and genuine.'

For most, though, the attraction of Berlin and LA will never be about commercial ventures. 'One of the reasons I came to LA is because it is an artists' community; it is not driven by the market the way New York is,' says Subotnick. 'Both Berlin and LA are incredibly important for art production and generating dialogue around art,' she adds.

It was precisely this kind of 'dialogue' that spurred Sprüth Magers to relocate its German operations from Munich to Berlin. 'It just felt right, since most cultural production has been heading here in the last couple of years. Artists want to have a discourse and exchange with their peers,' says Magers. 'And besides,' she adds, 'in Berlin and Los Angeles it is about maximum response and maximum exposure.' ★