

Brandenburg gait

Culture-starved Berliners and visitors looking for a break from COVID-19 have a number of excellent destinations in surrounding Brandenburg

BY JAN KEPP

As Berlin's erstwhile vibrant art and theater scene continues its coronavirus-induced slumber, urban dwellers are increasingly being forced to get their cultural kicks in the countryside. Especially on those warm late-summer days, there's nothing better than trading in the hot city life for a refreshingly cool lake, a shady spot under the trees and a delicious drink with a breathtaking view. And just imagine if you could do all those things and at the same time enjoy an invigorating stroll through a landscaped garden where art and nature have entered into a harmonious symbiosis. Well, that's just what awaits you at the Schlossgut Schwante Sculpture Park, less than one hour by car northwest of Berlin.

The current iteration of the stately manor known as Schlossgut Schwante was built in the 18th century. And the first thing visitors will notice as they make their way along the tree-lined cobblestone driveway is a small manor pond in the distance. Amid the reeds on the opposite side of the pond, there's a glowing neon sign that reads "Everything is going to be alright." It's a welcome gesture that resonates with confidence and encouragement. Indeed, the pandemic too shall soon pass. And until then, we might as well make the best of the current situation.

This is exactly what Loretta Würtenberger and Daniel Tümpel have been doing in the year since they became owners of the mansion. Together, they run a company called Fine Art Partners, which provides interim financing to art dealers looking to make expensive acquisitions. Their "Institute for Artists' Estates" also handles the estates of artists or collectors, and especially heirs in need of guidance or advice. These business activities mean that the couple is closely connected to the art world, which is where they came up with the idea to open their new residence up to art works created by artists they know. The mansion itself remains a private retreat for the family of six, but they've transformed the park around the home into a parcours of sculptures that invites visitors on an enjoyable stroll through their midst.

The tour begins with a clear statement: Ai Weiwei welcomes the art-loving pedestrians with a work called the "Flag for Human Rights," which he created in 2018 to mark the 70th anniversary of the Declaration of Human Rights. When the wind blows, one can make out a footprint on the flag's blue background – a marking designed to represent people and worldwide migration. The flag is an appeal to us all to respect and uphold the inalienable rights of every individual in the world facing persecution and fleeing wars. It is the only artwork that belongs to the couple's private collection, and it was especially important to Würtenberger to have this flag at the



Silver surfer: Tony Cragg's *Elliptical Column*

entrance: "There are too many 'Reichsdeutsche' flags waving in Brandenburg," she says.

All of the other artists whose work is on display were invited by the "lords of the manor" to contribute a piece over the course of the summer. These include well-known names such as Tony Cragg, whose "Elliptical Column" twirls up and out of an uncut meadow into the blue sky and shines in the sunlight. Dan Graham contributed his "Play Pen for Play Pals," a glass pavilion that invites visitors to re-discover space and the environment in a brand new way.

Stalwarts such as Hans Arp and Ulrich Rückriem are also represented with abstract works, as are a series of artists who are less well-known among wider audiences. For example, the Japanese artist Toshihiko Mitsuya planted his "Aluminum Garden," a shiny silver bed of flowers and blossoms that looks as if it was harvested into reality from a magical world. And Polish artist Monika Sosnowska set up her twisted steel staircase called "Stairs" – a kind of relic of a road to nowhere where the beginning and the end meet in an eerie way – between trees and bushes.

Like a meandering golf-course driveway, the spacious lawn winds its way along uncut grass, meadow orchards and patches of trees. After each curve in the path, visitors are offered new views and perspectives of the sculptures, which are carefully placed so as not to steal attention from each other. The entire area is a great place to linger, especially with the manor house in the background, a light breeze in the trees and here and there a lone pony grazing away on the grass. The glow of the late summer sun, that fresh countryside air and a quick coffee before you go – Corona indeed feels very far away.

It should be noted that the two minds behind the Schlossgut Schwante Sculpture Park came up with their art-in-nature idea before the pandemic hit. The priority for Würtenberger and Tümpel was to provide the art works with a new and unusual space in which to unfold and develop – a space that would allow them to achieve a completely different appearance than in a conventional museum. Not only have the initiators achieved their goal, they have also created a site that helps urban dwellers overcome the symptoms of cultural withdrawal that have emerged over the past several months. When it's time to leave, it's good to take one last look back at the lake at "Everything is going to be alright" shining from the shadow of the reeds. An afternoon in Schwante certainly helps us believe it's true.

Schlossgut Schwante Sculpture Park. Open to the public until Oct. 31, Fri & Sun 11am-6pm, Sat 11am-8pm; Tickets €12; www.schlossgut-schwante.de

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A down town: Bad Belzig in the 1980s



Woman in the mirror: Roger Melis' portrait of Eva-Maria Hagen (1967)



French-Italian-German: Claude Monet's *Villas at Bordighera* (1884) in Potsdam

Destruction and reconstruction

This year's annual cultural festival known as Kulturland Brandenburg is commemorating the 75th anniversary of the end of World War II under the title "War and Peace." Six municipalities in the state of Brandenburg have set up open-air exhibitions that allow visitors to experience and understand the destruction of historic old towns during the war. Visitors are also shown how entire buildings – and sometimes entire streets – were left to become ruins during the GDR's "economy of scarcity." It was not until after 1990 that most municipalities began to redevelop and refurbish old town centers, many of which would soon become real gems. Destroyed – Preserved – Recovered is the title of the self-guided walking tours offered in the towns of Altlandsberg, Brandenburg an der Havel, Bad Belzig, Beeskow, Doberlug/Kirchhain and Wusterhausen/Dosse. Visitors can explore the historical town centers on their own, with each exhibition telling its unique story of loss, decay, preservation and reconstruction using town models, photos and accounts from historical witnesses.

Destroyed – Preserved – Recovered: Self-guided Tours of Old Town Centers. Six municipalities in Brandenburg, until Dec. 31; www.kulturland-brandenburg.de

Urban open-air museum

No other city in eastern Germany gives visitors the opportunity to experience socialist urban planning in such an up-close and personal way as Eisenhüttenstadt near the Polish border. In 1950, the GDR government ordered the construction of a steelworks and an adjacent residential area to be built in the architectural style of Socialist Classicism. In 1953, the "planned city" was built next to the steelworks as Stalinstadt, only to be renamed Eisenhüttenstadt in 1961. Today, the former "model city" feels more like an urban open-air museum. The Documentation Center for Everyday Culture in the GDR recently moved into the former crèche once affiliated with the industrial factory, or *Kombinat*. This is where a comprehensive selection of photographer Roger Melis' work will be on display starting in November. Melis was able to capture the everyday lives and realities of people in the GDR with his melancholic, dense, subtle and symbolic photographs. Just like Eisenhüttenstadt itself, Melis' photographs of a "silent country" document the life of a state that has long since ceased to exist.

Roger Melis – In a Silent Country – Three Decades of Photographs of the GDR. Eisenhüttenstadt, until Feb. 7, 2021; www.alltagskultur-ddr.de

Prussia and impressionism

What Eisenhüttenstadt is to socialism, Potsdam is to Prussia. Visitors to the city can explore the various epochs of Prussian history and architecture much like on a gigantic excavation site. After World War II, the Old Market (Alter Markt) – which had previously marked the historical center around the city palace (Stadtschloss) and St. Nicholas Church (Nikolaikirche), and which Frederick the Great had redesigned in the style of a Roman Piazza in the mid-19th century – had almost disappeared. One of the most imposing structures on the square was Palast Barberini, which was rebuilt in its original dimensions and with its original historical façade as late as between 2013 and 2016 by the art patron Hasso Plattner. Since its reopening, this new building has housed the Museum Barberini, which quickly became a crowd magnet. Starting in September 2020, the museum will boast a new attraction: the collection of Impressionist art works belonging to the museum's founder will be on display for the first time, including paintings by Monet, Renoir and Signac, among others.

Impressionism. The Hasso Plattner Collection. Museum Barberini Potsdam, from Sept. 7; www.museum-barberini.com.