The Writing on the Wall, Berlin, 1992-93: Projections in Berlin's Jewish Quarter

Shimon Attie


Stable URL:
http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0004-3249%28200323%2962%3A3%3C74%3ATWOTWB%3E2.0.CO%3B2-P

_Art Journal_ is currently published by College Art Association.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at http://www.jstor.org/about/terms.html. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at http://www.jstor.org/journals/caa.html.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

The JSTOR Archive is a trusted digital repository providing for long-term preservation and access to leading academic journals and scholarly literature from around the world. The Archive is supported by libraries, scholarly societies, publishers, and foundations. It is an initiative of JSTOR, a not-for-profit organization with a mission to help the scholarly community take advantage of advances in technology. For more information regarding JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.
Memory has always been very important to me. I have also always responded very strongly to spaces and places. Therefore, it is no surprise that as an artist I am most interested in the relationship between place, memory, and identity and how this relationship might be distilled and articulated through visual and aesthetic means. I am particularly concerned with giving visual form to personal and collective memory and how histories of marginalized and forgotten communities may be visually introduced into the physical landscape of the present.

My work lives between the media of installation art, photography, performance, new media, and public art, depending on the nature of each project. I use contemporary media to reanimate sites with images of their own lost histories. I think of my work as a kind of peeling back of the wallpaper of today to reveal the histories buried underneath.

For the Writing on the Wall project, I slide-projected portions of prewar photographs of Jewish street life in Berlin onto the same or nearby addresses today. By using slide projection on location, fragments of the past were introduced into the visual field of the present. Thus, parts of long-destroyed Jewish community life were visually simulated, momentarily recreated.

The projections were visible to street traffic, neighborhood residents, and passersby. As much of my art practice is a marriage between photography and installation art, during the course of the installations, I photographed the projections.

The Writing on the Wall project was realized in Berlin’s former Jewish quarter, the Scheunenviertel, located in the eastern part of the city, close to the Alexanderplatz. At the heart of Berlin, the Scheunenviertel was a center for eastern European Jewish immigrants from the turn of the century. The few historical photographs that remained after the Holocaust reflect the world of Jewish working class rather than that of the more affluent and assimilated German Jews who lived mostly in the western part of the city.

The Scheunenviertel today is a neighborhood undergoing rapid gentrification. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Scheunenviertel became the new chic quarter and frontier for many West Berliners. As a result, the neighborhood has seen a huge influx of new residents and capital from the West. Within the course of only a few years, block after block of houses and buildings in the Scheunenviertel has become completely transformed. Most have been entirely renovated, from the inside out. Others have been transformed into fashionable and trendy bars and restaurants. As a result, the Scheunenviertel has become almost unrecognizable even in the few years since the Writing on the Wall project was realized in 1992–93.

The “remaking” of the Scheunenviertel affects both Jewish as well as postwar East German collective memory and identity, as the last physical evidence of these histories is now disappearing as well.

Shimon Attie is a photographer and installation artist. His art reflects on the relationship among place, memory, and identity. It has been shown in major group and solo exhibitions in the United States and abroad and documented in books and on film. A new book, The History of Another, will be released by Chicago’s Museum of Contemporary Photography in spring 2004.

Following pages:

Following pages:
