

Press Release

Arwed Messmer (ed.) Anonymous Heart Berlin. With texts by Annett Gröschner and Florian Ebner

The anonymous heart of Berlin in the central district of Mitte takes in the area that is regarded as the cradle of the German capital. The earliest documentary reference to the settlement of Cölln, which was later subsumed by the adjacent settlement of Berlin, dates back to 1237. It includes Schlossplatz where there are controversial plans to rebuild the Royal Palace on the former site of the demolished East German Palace of the Republic. Second World War bombing raids and the ravages of post-war urban planning have left this neighbourhood practically devoid of life save for the heavy streams of outbound traffic, which head off in all directions.

Arwed Messmer has visited this area, which also includes the former settlement of Friedrichswerder, countless times since 1995 and recorded the changes photographically in multi-part panoramic sequences and individual photographs. For him, this is a magical place. Messmer has documented the demolition of the East German foreign ministry, the transformation of the Neue Reichsbank building, which once housed the Central Committee of the East German communist party and is now home to the German Foreign Ministry, the metamorphosis of the Palace of the Republic, the communist era developments on Breite Straße, Sperlingsgasse and along Friedrichsgracht, the new construction on Friedrichswerder and the archaeological excavations on Petriplatz. In his search for historical images of the locality in the archives of East Berlin's former City Planning Office, Arwed Messmer was, particularly, struck by the work of a photographer who was still unknown at that point. Later, he was identified as the surveyor and topographer Fritz Tiedemann, who, between the years of 1948 and 1952, kept returning to this place of ruin and resurrection, just like Messmer himself. Messmer's engagement with Fritz Tiedemann's images led to the exhibition *As Far As No Eye Can See*. The panorama photos of Berlin from 1949 to 1952 drew a big crowd to the Berlinische Galerie in 2008.

The writer Annett Gröschner accompanies Messmer's journey around the centre of Berlin with her essay about the past and present of Berlin's anonymous heart. Curator and photo historian Florian Ebner explores the artistic qualities of Arwed Messmer's work in the context of urban photography in Berlin, analysing his photographic viewpoint and aesthetic, as well as his specific archaeological approach both in terms of the photographer's own work and his engagement with the work of others.

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