

At Berlin's Futuristic New Performance Venue, Even the Walls Make Music

The Reethaus's spatial sound system inspires events that are immersive, experimental — and surprisingly spiritual.

By Gisela Williams
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One Sunday night in late September a group of Berliners stood waiting at a metal gate in the industrial Rummelsburg neighborhood, at the far edge of the city. The low thump of techno music reverberated through the air; down the street, the renowned club Sisyphos had been going strong since the night before. But on this block, the elegantly dressed crowd was more meditative. Behind the gate, past a courtyard and a recently renovated, East German-era office building, stood a pyramid-esque tower covered almost entirely in reed thatch, rising up from a small grassy field, the Spree River flowing behind it.

Was this a nightclub made of dried grass? A land art piece? It was both and more: The Reethaus, as the building is called, is a new cultural venue that its co-founder Claus Sendlinger, 60, describes as a “modern temple” for sound-based performances and rituals. The concrete, glass and reed structure, designed by the Austrian architect Monika Gogl, is the heart of a campus called Flussbad that Sendlinger along with his business partner Peter Conrads and their team have been developing for almost a decade.



A 360-degree spatial sound system, programmed by the Berlin-based studio Monom, is installed throughout the wood ceiling of the Reethaus's central performance space. Felix Brüggemann



A table made of burnt cork, by the Antwerp-based designer Cédric Etienne. Felix Brüggemann

The Flussbad complex will soon be home to a hotel, working lofts, a clubhouse and an auditorium, all set to be completed in the next two years. For now, though, the newly opened Reethaus is the complex's primary draw, and on that Sunday in September, it had attracted a mix of curators; musicians, including the Chinese composer Pan Daijing; artists such as the Scottish multimedia artist Douglas Gordon; and the evening's guest of honor, the photographer and activist Nan Goldin. The main event was a live performance of the score for "All the Beauty and the Bloodshed," the 2022 documentary about Goldin's life and work, as well as her addiction to OxyContin and fight against the Sackler pharmaceutical family.



A young birch tree grows inside one of the building's glass atriums. Felix Brüggemann

Upon arriving, visitors proceeded down a wide ramp to the entrance of the Reethaus, which is partly subterranean. Inside, they passed through coat check (where they were required to hand in their smartphones), and into a wide corridor, from where they could peer into one of the building's glass atriums — in which a single birch tree grows up toward a skylight — before continuing on to a bar serving alcohol-free drinks, including a tincture made with hibiscus tea and clarified raspberry juice. Some people headed through a pair of glass doors onto a poured-concrete terrace to mingle, while taking in the view of the Spree. At the center of the building is a bunkerlike 1,300-square-foot room with asymmetrical walls, its trapezoidal ceiling embedded with a 360-degree sound system. A dramatic skylight gives the space the feel of an observatory or one of the artist James Turrell's contemplative Skyspace installations.



The Austrian architect Monika Gogl often integrates elements of nature into her spaces. At the Reethaus, the concrete walls are stamped with the texture of wood planks and a wall of windows brings in sunlight and the outdoor landscape. Felix Brüggemann

With the Reethaus, Sendlinger is also launching a new entrepreneurial initiative called Slowness, which he explains as a “collective of people, places and projects that reframe the way we live.” The international company also has a wellness angle; holotropic breathwork and yoga sessions, as well as visits from mindfulness experts and artists, feature at its various sites. In addition to the Flussbad campus, Slowness is currently co-developing a communal, biodynamic farm south of Lisbon; a manor and retreat in a village outside of Berlin; and a set of private cabins for Wonderfruit, a festival with a focus on holistic health in eastern Thailand.

A performance venue, in a neighborhood of nightclubs and factories, might seem, at first, to be an odd addition to the group's portfolio, but in Berlin, unexpected juxtapositions are commonplace. “There are industrial spaces here that might host a ritual sound bath one night and then a nomadic rave another night with a film event in between,” says Nayme Hassany, a co-founder of the queer party collective Mala Junta who attended the September performance. “To have such a radically designed space like the Reethaus that crosses over to different worlds —

spiritual, art, music — is brilliant.”



In the lounge of the Reethaus, tables made from burnt cork are arranged alongside wooden couches upholstered in black linen, all designed by Etienne. Felix Brüggemann

Around 8 p.m., everyone filed into the Reethaus’s theater wearing slippers provided by the venue and sat on black linen cushions scattered across the tatami-covered floor. Soundwalk Collective, an artistic project led by the musician Stephan Crasneanski and the producer Simone Merli, performed the score they had composed for “All the Beauty and the Bloodshed,” with lead vocals by the R&B singer Mulay. The room was mostly dark, and spotlights sometimes followed the ensemble of two dozen singers who moved slowly and expressionlessly through the space. The sounds echoed from all directions; the space itself was an instrument. When, at different points during the performance, the doors slid open, the light that filtered in from outside simply underscored the tomblike nature of the theater. The effect was at once unsettling and seductive, the experience a futuristic spin on either nightlife entertainment or religious exaltation — or, because this was Berlin, it was something of both.