

Who we are and what we do

in the middle of the museum



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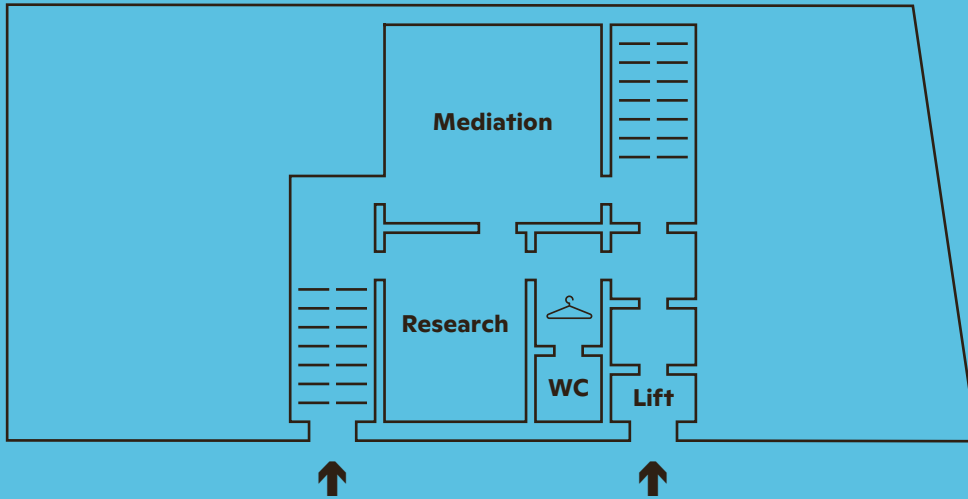
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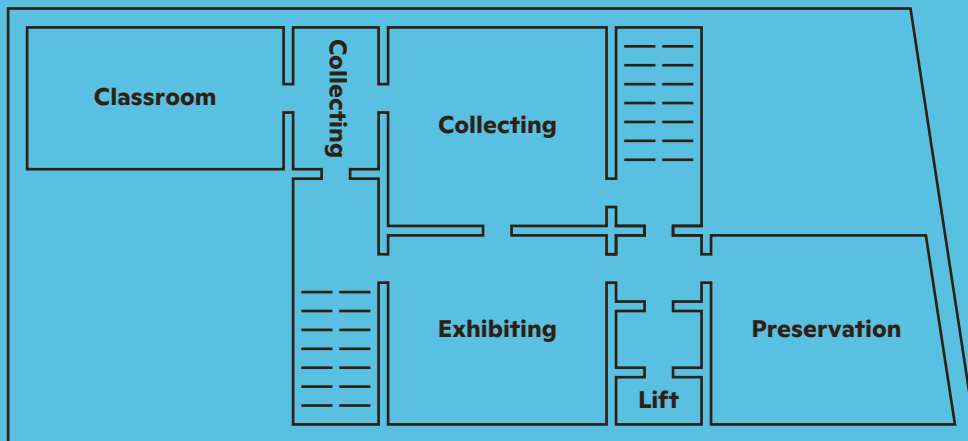
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Mitte Museum

Ground floor



First floor



- 1 Kathrin Sonntag, from the series *Atlas*, 2012–2020
- 2 Peter Woelck, *Fernsehturm im Aufbau* (Television Tower in construction, 1968), b/w photograph
- 3 Gustav Hermann Blaeser (attributed), *GieBer* (Founder, 1853), replica 1990

Who we are and what we do— in the middle of the museum

In this exhibition, selected rooms in Mitte Museum have been made accessible again after it was closed from spring 2016 to summer 2019 due to renovation and restoration.

Who we are and what we do— in the middle of the museum deals with the parts of the collection that were already in the rooms. It provides insights into the world of Mitte Museum's work and creates connections between objects in the collection and the fields of work of the participating artists: Johanna Diehl, Seiichi Furuya, Cornelia Herfurtner, Wilhelm Klotzek, Stephan Kurr, Pia Linz, David Polzin, Sarah Schumann, Kathrin Sonntag, Annette Weisser, and Peter Woelck.

The encounter between the museum's actual situation and contemporary art opens up new doors and facilitates new points of view. Our material culture is a master at telling about the multi-layered relationships things have with each other. At the same time, art and culture are subject to myriad influences and ideas when it comes to the use of colours, shapes, and patterns. The exhibition also tells that story.

Museum work is not self-explanatory. An exhibition as a presentation of exhibits seems to be something that visitors can simply take at face value. But it's not that simple. Museum work also encompasses collecting, research, preservation, and mediation. These

fields of work interconnect and reclaim exhibition as a method. Thoughtful, questioning, researching, and with humor, the exhibition "Who we are and what we do—in the middle of the museum" explores the relationships between specific things and fields of work.

As guest curators, we had the freedom to create new neighbourhoods among the objects. We devoted each of the five rooms to one of a museum's fields of work. The five rooms are located on the ground floor and first floor, but their spatial separation does not negate the reality that they function as a whole.

On 7 June, in the 'Mediation' room a change in exhibits took place. Works by Sarah Schumann and Peter Woelck entered into dialogue with a new work by Kathrin Sonntag. Annette Weisser developed an installation specifically for the historical classroom. (SW)

Susanne Weiß and Theo Thiesmeier, curators

Why is Mitte Museum in Berlin-Wedding?



4

- 4 Kathrin Sonntag, *Atlas #4*, 2012
5 Exhibition photo 'Mediation': main wall shows the work *Atlas* (2012–2020) by Kathrin Sonntag, which was exchanged in the exhibition on 7/6/2020.

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Mitte Museum is the local history museum of Berlin's Mitte district. Its work focusses on the preservation of witnesses of local and district history. Furthermore it researches events in the history of the district, and highlights the significance of the district's history to its diverse modern identity and future development.

While its exhibitions and mediation programmes are directed to the general public, the museum's activities like collecting, preservation, and research attract little public attention. But these fields of work are of fundamental importance to the museum's identity.

Today's Mitte Museum started as three separate institutions: Heimatmuseum Wedding, Heimatmuseum Tiergarten, and Museum Mitte von Berlin.

Museum Wedding emerged from Heimatarchiv Wedding, an archive around the district that was established in 1952 by the Wedding district office. The history of the district was presented to the public there and a collection on local history was developed and maintained. In 1989, the archive moved to its present quarters on Pankstraße 47.

A comparable cultural institution was established in the Tiergarten district in 1984: Heimatarchiv Tiergarten. The archive emerged from the collection of the Arbeitsgemeinschaft für die Geschichte Tiergartens (AGT) established in 1961. In the wake of Berlin's 750th anniversary celebration in 1987, it was expanded and became Heimatmuseum Tiergarten.

At the same time, Heimatmuseum Mitte was established in the Mitte district in what was then East Berlin. As Museum Mitte von Berlin, it occupied new rooms in the Palais am Festungsgraben from 1997. Each of the three museums developed their agenda independently.

Mitte Museum, Regionalgeschichtliches Museum für Mitte, Tiergarten und Wedding in Berlin, a merger of the three museums, was established in 2004 after the administrative fusion of the Mitte, Tiergarten, and Wedding districts. Mitte Museum is an institution of the Art, Culture, and History department in the Office for Further Education and Cultur of the district office of Berlin-Mitte. (SSch)



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Mediation: What stories are you bringing into the museum?



6

- 6 Exhibition photo 'Mediation': wall with works by Sarah Schumann, Kathrin Sonntag, and Peter Woelck
7 'Das ist mein Ding' (It's my thing), *Mein Bär* (My Bear), on loan from Merle Imeri

In the foyer, the main topics are seeing, listening, collecting, and with it, mediation. Speaking, listening, and asking questions are key elements of both interviews and the programmes designed for museum visitors. Here mediation takes place in the form of live speakers, texts, exhibition architecture, and accompanying programmes. You can get to know the representatives of a museum at exhibition openings and during guided tours. The video interviews shown here offer insights into the fields of work of some members of staff and convey their personal approaches to their work.

Without narratives, objects are impressive yet silent. Especially personal stories can make mediation meaningful. Do you also connect a special story with an object that has perhaps accompanied you for a lifetime? *Das ist mein Ding* (This is my thing) invites you to contribute an object of your choice to an exhibition within the exhibition.



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The installation of the Berlin artist Kathrin Sonntag (*1981) entitled *Atlas* (2012–2020), which was previously shown [→ fig. 5], established seemingly paradoxical relationships among apparently commonplace museum objects and extraordinary everyday objects. In the new exhibition situation, the artist presents the detail of a brick wall in dialogue with gouache works by the Berlin artist Sarah Schumann (1933–2019) and black-and-white photographs by the Berlin photographer

Peter Woelck (1948–2010). Woelck was an emphatic chronicler of his era. His images convey this impressively. After receiving a degree from the Hochschule für Grafik und Buchkunst Leipzig (HGB) in the 1970s, he returned to East Berlin's Prenzlauer Berg district and became part of the art scene there. The selected photographs from the 1960s and 1980s have the impact of a historical short-circuit. In his images, the symbolic power of the destroyed city fuses with hazy, romantic impressions of socialist post-modern icons.

Sarah Schumann's work is also marked by the horror of war, which she addressed again and again with informal images, material collages ('shock collages'), and illustrations. After numerous journeys and periods abroad, she returned to Berlin in 1968. Schumann lived in Berlin-Charlottenburg but made frequent trips to the surrounding GDR. Her images are reflecting her observations and experiences, as she typically let long periods of time go by before creating the work. The selected paintings on display here examine buildings in Berlin that support the state, but they are not the focus. Schumann's pictorial language contains a timeless element. In the work *Neue Wache* (New Guardhouse, 2000), she presents the restored building by Karl-Friedrich Schinkel (1781–1841) in gouache on handmade paper. The model-like cars in the foreground present everyday life—in front of the Neue Wache, the Central Memorial of the Federal Republic of Germany for the Victims of War and Dictatorship. (SW)

Research: "How do I transform danger into a blessing?"



8

- 8 Exhibition photo 'Research': linoleum runner manufactured by Germania Linoleumwerke AG, 1920s. On the wall: Johanna Diehl, *Gefrorene Räume: Haus Hamberger, Rosenheim* (frozen rooms: Hamberger house, Rosenheim) 2006
- 9 Johanna Diehl: *Gefrorene Räume: Haus Diehl, Kassel* (frozen rooms: Diehl house, Kassel), 2006

A linoleum runner donated by a former museum employee is placed in the centre of this room. The rare object attracted our attention as there are only very few pieces of linoleum designed in the form of a woven carpet to be seen in museums.

Museums are important places for the conveying of history, but history can be written in them as well. How do I find information about the objects in a museum's collection?

Scholarly research in museums is science, both applied and living. It uses contemporary witnesses, experts, and specialist literature. A seemingly simple question is—where does an object come from and how did it end up in the museum?

The runner is presented in a manner that allows you to sit around it. On one side, you can listen to an interview with the donor, Irene Wüste. On the other side, the ethnologist Dr Razi Hejazi reflects on the significance of a possible model for the piece. It is an Anatolian kilim that the linoleum factory's draughtsman might have used as a template in the 1920s. Rams and snakes are the pattern's main motifs. They stand for repulsion and attraction at the same time.

Objects are silent witnesses of our lives and we have connections to them. What remains when we have ceased to exist? What is passed down or saved? What do rooms tell us about their past? The artist Johanna Diehl (*1977) ponders questions such as these in her artistic practice.

Her series *Gefrorene Räume* (frozen rooms, 2006–2007) began in the house of her grandmother, who had preserved the bedroom of her son—the artist's father—in its former state. With her photographs, Diehl researches the atmosphere that is created in rooms when things remain in their context after their former owner is no longer present or has passed away. (SW)



9

Collecting: Which perspectives are missing?



10

10 David Polzin, from the series *Im Hintergrund* (In the background), ink on paper, 2019

At first glance, collecting could be considered a museum's main task. Objects travel different routes only to end up in museums, and fate often plays an important role. They are donated or acquired to develop the collection's approach further. The objects gathered are archived and preserved, sometimes exhibited, and at times used for research.

In ancient Greece, the *museion* was the place where the nine muses were honoured. Typically located in places such as mountain peaks, groves, and grottos, they not only contained an altar but were also used as sites for teaching.

Persephone is a character who dates back to that world of Greek mythology. She was spirited away by Hades, the god of the underworld. Her mother, Demeter, the goddess of fertility, grains, and the seasons, mourned her loss and therefore forbade the plants to grow, the trees to bear fruit, and the animals to multiply. When humans began to die as a result, Demeter's siblings persuaded the god of the underworld to let Persephone go. Since then, she has been able to spend part of the year above ground (the spring) and must return to the underworld to rule as the queen of the dead during the rest of the year. The statue of Persephone in the collection is a historical reproduction of the sculpture by Christian Friedrich Tieck (1776–1851). Before ending up in the museum, it was located next door, at the entrance to the courtyard of the building on Badstraße 35 in Berlin-Wedding.

The original was part of the wall ornamentation for Crown Princess Elisabeth of Prussia's tea salon (1825–1828) in Berlin Palace. Perched atop a marble pillar with a height of more than 1.70 metres, it was designed to be looked at from below.

The Berlin artist David Polzin (*1982) is a sculptor and notorious collector. We invited him to take a look at Mitte Museum's temporary art storage room. During his exploration, he noticed that men were often depicted in portraits, and many of them were in groups. Women, on the contrary, were primarily depicted in the background and

seldom appeared in interaction. Polzin began to transfer the depictions of women into ink drawings and included the Berlin artist Cornelia Herfurtner (*1985) in the process. This is how they created *Frauen verlassen das Museum* (Women leave the museum), an animated collage in text and images. Based on the thought that the emancipation of women cannot be considered separately from the emancipation of everyone, their work reflects what the collection includes and excludes. It makes a connection to the still-revolutionary demands of the proletarian women's movement of the 19th century, and to a bourgeois concept of a collection that does not include the reality of former working-class district Berlin-Wedding.

One of the few female artists in the collection is Martuschka Arendt (1909–2005) from Berlin. Her watercolour *Im südlichen Garten* (In the southern garden, 1959) is the only painting from the collection shown in this context.

Polzin's installation *Maintenance I, II, III*, speaks about how museums and exhibition-makers exercise their influence by using the selection and presentation of exhibits to manage the relationships between objects and their viewers. Accordingly his architecture creates a situation that only allows for certain perspectives. (SW)

Artworks in a local history museum



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11 Exhibition photo 'Collecting': in the foreground, the historical stone replica of Persephone by Christian Friedrich Tieck as part of *Maintenance I, II, III*, installation by David Polzin, 2019

12 Detail of *Maintenance I, II, III*, installation by David Polzin, 2019

The story of Mitte Museum's collection is closely tied to the museum's own history and takes place over decades. The art collection contains approx. 1,500 drawings and art prints, 500 art photographs, 300 paintings, and 30 small sculptures dating from 1770 until today. The majority of the works were created in the 20th century.

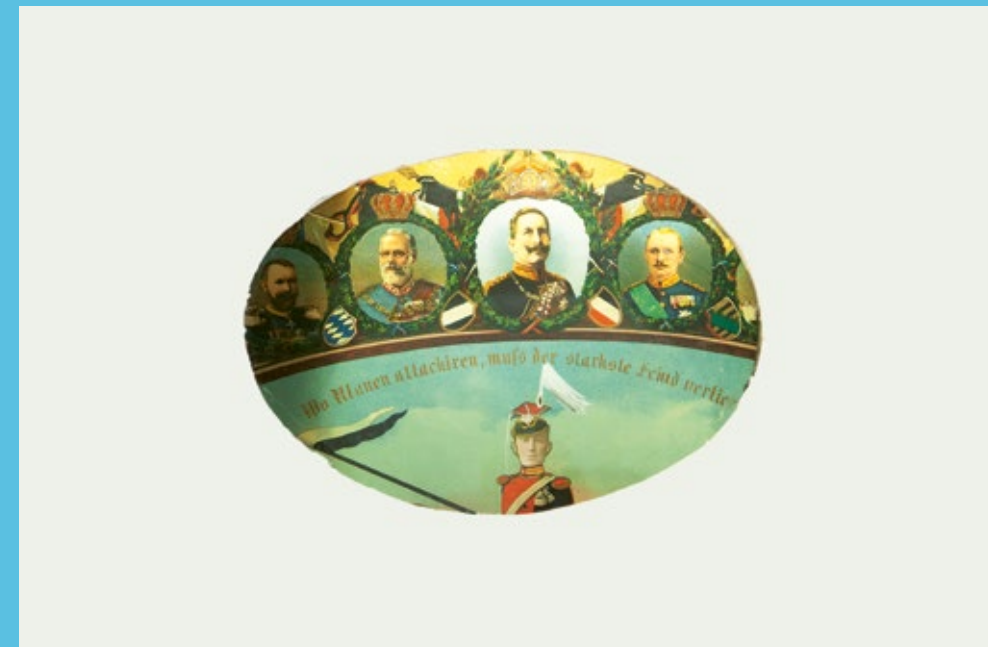
To be accepted into Mitte Museum's collection, a work of art must be related to the past and present of Berlin-Mitte or the history of one of the areas that were designated "Berlin-Mitte", "Berlin-Tiergarten", and "Berlin-Wedding". The districts (*Bezirke*) were merged to become Berlin-Mitte in 2004. The artworks' relationship to this area might be obvious in the image's motif, the place where an artist used to live or work, the origin of the artwork, or its history of use.

The majority of the works were donated to Mitte Museum by residents. Further artworks were acquired by the district's art and cultural office and were used to decorate their walls before they were ceded to the museum.

Not all of the works come with documentation of their origin. One of Mitte Museum's ongoing projects is to reconstruct the unresearched histories of artworks that were traded between 1933 and 1945.

The current storage situation of framed artworks and small sculptures on the first floor, which the intervention by David Polzin refers to, represents a temporary solution. It only presents part of the art collection.

Due to the restoration of the building between 2016 and 2018 and the new technical and sanitary infrastructure that was added, earlier storage space was lost. For the moment, the artworks are being stored on the first floor as a means of keeping them accessible collection management purposes. (SSch)



12

How does art become part of education?



13 Exhibition photo 'Classroom': *What can be shown cannot be said*, installation by Annette Weisser, 2014–2020

14 Annette Weisser, *What can be shown cannot be said*, photo series, 2014

'As the mother of a primary school pupil and professor of fine arts, I often wonder: Exactly when does a child become an artist? While free expression is encouraged during the first few years of school, accurate manual and technical skills are the focus in secondary school. And when young adults begin studying art, the skills they learned earlier are devalued and conceptual strategies are considered the key to artistic success.'

This is how Berlin artist and author Annette Weisser (*1968) describes the conflicting evaluation of the various aspects that make up artistic sovereignty. Mitte Museum invited her to develop a site-specific installation for the historical schoolroom. The point of departure was her photo series from 2014, entitled *What can be shown cannot be said*. This sentence—No. 4.1212 in Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*, completed by the philosopher in 1918—makes a categorical differentiation between visual and verbal expression. Weisser, who lived in Los Angeles from 2006 until 2019 and taught art there, locates the postulate 'What can be shown cannot be said' in the context of art, school, and learning. In doing so, she points out the limits of (western) pedagogy, which is primarily based on language.

To help to recall her own art education, she sneaked into the art room of her former secondary school (Gymnasium) in Königsfeld in the Black Forest during the Christmas holidays. She happened upon a group of clay reproductions year nine pupils had created based on the image of the statue of pharaoh Chephren. In the darkened classroom, she put on white gloves and held each of the reproductions up to the camera. This appreciative gesture presents the objects with their individual differences and at the same time, asks questions: Is it possible to appropriate the idea of an artwork by copying it? Doesn't the act of copying doom the attempt to failure? Where is the line between free artistic interpretation and simple failure? In the case of deliberate rejection, at what point does creative potential become visible and

when it is simply defiance? Can viewers read expressions of fun, joy, or pride? (AW/SW)



14

Exhibiting: What to show and how to show it?



15 Exhibition photo 'Exhibiting': in the foreground, large-scale insulator with 11 protective covers manufactured by Schomburg AG, 1920

Exhibiting is the most visible activity of any museum. It encompasses curating and presentation—as a collaboration among scholars, restorers, and designers. Their interplay determines how an exhibition is perceived. The exhibition architecture by s.t.i.f.f. mediates between the fabric of the historical building and the exhibits. This room brings together objects of contradictory materiality and intention: the reproductions of sculptures in cast zinc from 1853, *Schmied und Gießer* (Blacksmith and founder), looked forward to the coming century of industrialisation. Inflated and medieval, the sculptures were designed by Gustav Hermann Blaeser (1813–1874) as gatekeepers for Borsigwerke, an important machine factory and iron foundry, founded in Berlin. In contrast, the AEG model represents the spirit of the modern era in the 20th century. The building of the glass-curtained factory hall, design in 1908/1909 by Peter Behrens and Karl Bernhard for AEG (Allgemeine Elektrizitäts-Gesellschaft), a German company that introduced and produced electrical equipment for everyday life, reflects a new attitude in industrial culture. The architect and designer Peter Behrens became head of the AEG artist's advisory council in 1907. He developed its corporate design, and built several of the company's main buildings in Berlin-Wedding and Berlin-Moabit.

The large-scale insulator from the 1920s was produced by Schomburg-AG, a porcelain factory founded in Berlin-Moabit in 1853. At first glance, it looks like a contemporary work of art but in the spirit of the new aesthetics, it is an exemplary design for everyday objects in early 20th century whose clarity and elegance still resonates today.

Whereas the sculptures, locker, model, and insulator reflect the prevailing power structures, the small carte-de-visite photograph of a young craftsman, the photographs by Peter Woelck (1948–2010), and the water colours by the writer and painter Paul Gurk (1880–1953) talk about how the process of industrialisation affected individuals. The vivid portraits by the photographer Peter Woelck cover a wide spectrum.

They show children playing on the street, women posing, men working, couples dancing, artists in their flats, self-portraits, and public life. None of his images convey the impression of a fleeting gesture. Instead, they tell about a relationship between the photographer and his subject at the very moment it was captured. The people appear relaxed. They express their concept of privacy, allowing the photographer to take part in their lives and in their very individual circumstances around work without making them the subject of the image. (SW)

Transcribed captions by Paul Gurk

i.[n].t.[ormentis] p.[inxit] / Morning after cold night / -4°C, clear sky, light wind
Paul Gurk / 29/2/1937

i.[n].t.[ormentis] p.[inxit] / Goethe Park / Late winter morning 0°C / slightly windy / change to wind, clouds / rise +10°C / birdsong
Paul Gurk / 17/3/1937

i.[n].t.[ormentis] p.[inxit] / aftern. 4½ windy / grey clouds / above a grey estate / next day steady rain
Paul Gurk / 1/4/1937

i.[n].t.[ormentis] p.[inxit] / (.....)
+20°C 8½ blustery / wind picking up / the myrtle (?) are starting to bud
Paul Gurk / 27/9/1937

i.[n].t.[ormentis] p.[inxit]
Faraway Lichtenberg / 8½ +16°C increasing / variable cloudiness
Paul Gurk / 17/8/1937

i.[n].t.[ormentis] p.[inxit] / -2°C 7½ / evening cloudiness / light snow during the night / next day steady snowfall
Paul Gurk / 21/12/1937

i.[n].t.[ormentis] p.[inxit] / +3°C 840 / very windy, westerly gale / (probably sleet later, highly variable cloudiness)
Paul Gurk / 2/2/1938

Morning mist / +11°C very humid air
Paul Gurk / 14/11/1938

Bloody sunset / quite windy +4°C 4½ o'clock
Paul Gurk / 27/11/1938

Preservation: From where are you looking at the city?



16 Exhibition photo 'Preservation': in the foreground, Wilhelm Klotzek *Politik der Freundschaft: Der Bürgersteig* (Politics of friendship: pavement), 2017; main wall: Seiichi Furuya *Aus der Serie Berlin-Ost* (From the Berlin-East series), 1985–1987

17 Seiichi Furuya *Aus der Serie Berlin-Ost* (From the Berlin-East series), 1985–1987

The world is standing on its head! The model that shows Berlin-Moabit in the early 20th century tells about the industrialisation of this district and the key role that the River Spree played in this process. But the theme of preservation—on a number of levels—is also part of the story. Not only through the historical time that the model refers to, but as a result of the manner in which it is presented as well. The model was created in 1981 in the context of the exhibition *Berlin—von der Residenzstadt zur Industriemetropole* (Berlin: from royal seat to industrial metropolis) at Technische Universität Berlin. After the exhibition, it ended up in the storage facility of Berlin Museum, which at that time was West Berlin's central city museum. It was moved to the local history museum in Berlin-Tiergarten in 1987, where it was broken down into its component parts and stored. For the permanent exhibition in Mitte Museum, it was restored and retouched in 2007.

Have a seat on the artist Wilhelm Klotzek's (*1981) pavement! The history of Berlin's pavement is one of 19th century street planning, health care and craftsmanship. From 1835, King Friedrich Wilhelm III financed the nascent pavement construction industry in Berlin with a dog tax. His primary concern was to relieve Berlin's pedestrians from having to walk through the city with their eyes to the ground in order to avoid the piles of filth. The elements of Berlin's paving stone typology, which included the Charlottenburg and mitre types, worked like a grammatical system. Klotzek invites viewers to look into the model, while the red numbers guide you through his impressions of everyday life in Berlin-Moabit.

The Japanese-Austrian artist Seiichi Furuya (*1950) lived in the GDR between 1984 and 1987. His photographs tell of observation, an urge to understand, and the preservation of memories. He and his family moved from Graz (Austria) to Dresden and East Berlin, where he worked as a translator for a Japanese firm. Through his photos, the artist provides us with insights into his family life, which was marked by both the special circumstances of every-

day life in the GDR and the mental illness of his wife, Christine, during those years. On 7 October 1985, the 36th anniversary of the GDR, she committed suicide. From 1989 to 2010, Furuya published five photo books under the title *Mémoires*.



Wilhelm Klotzek's three collages are part of his video sculpture in three parts, *das architektonische trio* (The architectural trio, 2012). The artist grew up in East Berlin. The city's continuous process of transformation after the fall of the wall is an integral component of his work. Of course, nobody paid attention to his contribution to the cultural-political debate over the reconstruction of Berlin Palace.

In the drawing of the artist Pia Linz (*1964), also a Berlin local, written records overlap with events that she witnessed while she was drawing. Her steps measuring space, Linz draws outdoors, adopting a position and observing what happens from that vantage point. Her work *Blick auf den Berliner Fernsehturm vom Rande einer Brache in Berlin aus* (View of the Berlin Television Tower from the edge of a wasteland in Berlin, 2003) makes space for the weeds, with the tower glowing in the centre. The drawing meditates about the former no-man's-land between Berlin-Kreuzberg and Berlin-Mitte. Today, the old border zone is occupied by overpriced buildings. (SW)

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An exhibition with works by
Johanna Diehl
Seiichi Furuya
Cornelia Herfurtner
Wilhelm Klotzek
Stephan Kurr
Pia Linz
David Polzin
Sarah Schumann
Kathrin Sonntag
Annette Weisser
Peter Woelck

in dialogue with the permanent collection
and contributions by the staff of Mitte
Museum

**9/8/2019—
31/1/2021**

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Mitte Museum

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Tiergarten, and Wedding in Berlin

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