

**Florian Göttke** is a visual artist living and working in Amsterdam. Public statuary is a major area of investigation in his recent works. His new book *Toppled*, a work tracing the ups and downs of Saddam Hussein's statues, is out now.



*Perceiving History, by: Florian Göttke, courtesy: Galerie Metis-nl, Amsterdam, 2009*

*Friedrichsfelde Zoo Berlin Ruins, by: Florian Göttke, courtesy: Galerie Metis-nl, Amsterdam, 2006*



A couple of years ago, while I was visiting the Tierpark Berlin-Friedrichsfelde (the former East Berlin's city zoo), the Berber monkey enclosure caught my eye. It suggested a "temple ruin" yet was clearly built of rubble stones from buildings destroyed in the Second World War. In this fantastic enclosure the post-apocalyptic vision from science fiction (e.g. *Planet of the Apes*, *12 Monkeys*) had become reality: the monkeys were living in the ruins of our civilization. Or was this instead an example of applied rhetoric?

The Berlin Stadtschloss, the palace of the Hohenzollern Dynasty in the heart of the city, had been badly damaged in WWII. Efforts to clean up the *Trümmerlandschaft* (rubble landscape) started to gain momentum when in 1950 the East German authorities decided to drastically alter Berlin's urban centre. The symbol of Prussian Feudalism had to make space for the proletarian masses. Despite much protest the Stadtschloss was demolished. Walter Ulbricht, the GDR Head of State, personally helped to clear the rubble, handing stones one at a time, in line with hundreds of "voluntary" workers, to the waiting trucks.

The resulting void in the centre of Berlin was named Marx-Engels-Platz (Marx-Engels Square) and was dedicated to political mass demonstrations and military parades. The viewing stand for party officials was built from stones from the Stadtschloss. The rest of the rubble was dispersed to various rubble hills and dumps across East Berlin, amongst them one in Friedrichsfelde.<sup>i</sup>

Just one small part of the facade of the Berlin Stadtschloss was preserved. Karl Liebknecht had proclaimed the First German Socialist Republic in November 1918 from the balcony of Portal IV. Such an important counter-consecrated landmark couldn't be wasted. The ornamented Portal IV was integrated into the Staatsratsgebäude (the GDR's Council of State building), built in 1964 just next to the former site of the Stadtschloss.

---

<sup>i</sup> Gerhard Eiderling, *Berlin ist endlich trümmerfrei* (Berlin: Edition Luisenstadt, 1999) or via: [www.luise-berlin.de/bms/bmstxt99/9903prog.htm](http://www.luise-berlin.de/bms/bmstxt99/9903prog.htm)

In the neighbouring city of Potsdam, the stones from the likewise demolished Potsdamer Stadtschloss (Potsdam City Palace) were used to build the first housing blocks of the workers housing corporation “Friedrich Engels”.

The slogan *Friede den Hütten! Krieg den Palästen!* (Peace to the huts! War to the palaces!) coined during the French Revolution was first adopted by the German liberal revolutionaries of the 1830s<sup>ii</sup>, but it took another 120 years to enact it by their East German communist successors.

In 1976, a new palace was erected on the site of the Stadtschloss: the Palast der Republik, a shining modernist building with a startling facade of golden anodized glass. This “Palace of the Republic” was meant as a cultural centre for the people and became quite popular. It contained a congress centre, a concert hall, a theatre, restaurants, a bowling alley—as well as the seat of the East German Parliament.

The competition between East and West Berlin continued throughout the years. As the counterpart of the West Berlin Zoo, a new zoo was founded in 1954 on the grounds of Schloss Friedrichsfelde (Friedrichsfelde Palace) in East Berlin, where in 1979 the “temple ruin” enclosure was built for the Japanese macaques. While a fake temple ruin might be an appropriate backdrop for gray langurs, which in India actually do on occasion live in temples dedicated to the monkey god Hanuman, it seems a mismatch for this Japanese species.

But a ruin built from ornamented stones and columns from neo-classicist buildings? And how did the fragment of the Reichsadler, the German Emperors’ heraldic eagle, end up prominently positioned in the back wall? Were the stones from the adjacent rubble dump really just the most convenient building material? Or was the whole temple ruin intended as an ideological side cut, a mocking of their rival in the West?

---

ii Georg Büchner, *Der Hessische Landbote* (Frankfurt: Insel, 1975).

Was it really so easy to symbolically conflate the Prussian Kings, the German Reich and the aggressor of WWII with the West German representative democracy?

The current zoo director was not at all forthcoming about the circumstances of the temple ruins construction and categorically denied any political intentions.

But what remains clear is that the monkeys do live in the actual ruins of Berlin. Despite two possible readings, either as a fable of the catastrophe of WWII or as a warning for a future apocalypse, both versions would make us the monkeys.

Meanwhile times have changed, the Socialist experiment in East Germany has failed, the two parts of Germany are united, and the cityscape of Berlin is in a prolonged state of drastic change.

After a long struggle, the Palast der Republik was finally demolished. Archaeologists are excavating the grounds of the Stadtschloss to document the foundations and remnants of earlier structures. And work on the reconstruction of the Berlin Stadtschloss has started as well; it is about to rise in all its old glory.

It was actually one man, the Hamburg industrialist Wilhelm von Boddien who together with influential backers managed to dominate the discussion about the future of the Marx-Engels-Platz (after reunification renamed Schlossplatz—not the historical accurate name, but rather a rhetorical designator). His (among others) conservative idea of historical reconstruction merged with the anti-modernist concept of the European city<sup>iii</sup> as guiding principle for the rebuilding of Berlin, and slowly all successive city councils and German governments gravitated to the plan to rebuild the Stadtschloss as if it were a black hole.

Thanks to photographs from the archive of the German Institute for Photogrammetry and graphics software able to render all details into a new building plan, the Stadtschloss will be reborn—or rather a clone.

<sup>iii</sup> Susanne Ledanff, *The Rebuilding of the City Centre in Berlin in the Nineties Under the Label of the “European City”: A Critical Perspective*. In: Lilly/Bosselmann (Ed.), *Repositioning Europe: Perspectives from New Zealand*. (Christchurch: National Centre for Research on Europe, 2003) 179-193.

An entire crew of stonemasons are already at work, reconstructing the Stadtschloss facade stone by stone, broken in the same quarry as the original ones. No contemporary mass production methods will be used, all figurative elements will be hand-cut in the traditional way, so that each of the 50 eagles in the new facade will be unique.

But what will these eagles represent? The German Empire and the Prussian kings, the German Federal Republic, the city of Berlin, or rather the interests of the initiators of the reconstruction?

While the building's historical-looking exterior was the focal point of the whole endeavour, the vision for the interior was subject to many changes.

No historical reconstruction here, the core of the Schloss will be built from concrete and steel according to contemporary needs: a congress centre, hotel, restaurants, a science and arts centre, a library—much like that other palace. But this time around it will operate as a public-private partnership where the profits fall into the hands of the shareholders.<sup>iv</sup>

Just opposite the main entrance of the demolished and still unbuilt Stadtschloss, lies the empty plinth of the Kaiser Wilhelm Monument, demolished in 1949. It was meant to honour the first German Emperor as the Unifier of Germany.

The plinth is now proposed as the site for a future National Memorial to Freedom and Unity. The first open competition for the monument was a failure due to the very vaguely formulated aims. The announcement for the second competition (limited to artists and architects) states its purpose as “remembrance of the peaceful revolution in the autumn of 1989 and the reinstatement of Germany's national unity.”<sup>v</sup>

Will the Memorial emphasize the continuity in Germany's strive for unification, will it be a warning sign against nationalistic hubris and for civic courage, or will it just become the default location for the obligatory Chancellor's speech on the Day of German Unity?

<sup>iv</sup> [www.berliner-schloss.de/en/Editorial.htm](http://www.berliner-schloss.de/en/Editorial.htm)

<sup>v</sup> Bundesamt für Bauwesen und Raumordnung, *Competition for the Design of a Freedom and Unity Memorial in Berlin 2010*, 2010.

What ideological relationship will this Memorial have with the newly reconstructed Stadtschloss? And how will the rescued and rededicated original Portal IV relate to its counterpart, the simulated replica on the original site just across?

Over the next couple of years a glossy simulation of a past that never existed in that form will rise in the heart of Berlin, a collective effort of selective memory. The reconstruction will create another layer of contradictions, another slippage of the symbolic tongue in the struggle to define and redefine the identity and purpose of the city that is the German capital once again. It seems that the creators of the enclosure in Friedrichsfelde Zoo were not so far off to build a mock Berlin ruin for a tribe of monkeys.