

## LAUREN REID AND VAIDA STEPANOVAITĖ DISCUSS THE PROJECT SPACE FESTIVAL IN BERLIN



([http://runway.org.au/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/ProjectSpaceFestival2015-Day6-KleineHumboldtGalerie-Philippe\\_Rives05-PRESS.jpg](http://runway.org.au/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/ProjectSpaceFestival2015-Day6-KleineHumboldtGalerie-Philippe_Rives05-PRESS.jpg))

Project Space Festival 2015 Day 6 @ Kleine Humboldt Galerie. Photo by Philippe Rives.

The Project Space Festival is a month-long look into the independent art scene in Berlin. Running from the 1 – 31 August, each day is dedicated to a different space that hosts an event of their choice. The festival is now in its second year and is continuing to raise discussions about Berlin's project spaces.

Lauren Reid, Co-Director of the Festival, originally from Melbourne, and Lithuanian-based art manager Vaida Stepanovaitė, who joined the team in Berlin as the Festival's Public Liaison, chat about its role in Berlin.

VS: This August in Berlin marks a second edition of the Project Space Festival that maps a range of project spaces through a full program of daily events. Being part of the curatorial team of a project space insitu, you also have an insider's view of Berlin's independent art scene. What was your interest in setting up such a festival?

LR: The project spaces play an integral role in the creative scene in Berlin. They are free spaces for artists, curators and other cultural producers to experiment, play and discuss, build community and also often act as seismographs of cultural trends to come. The festival, initiated by Marie Graftieaux, Nora Mayr and myself was intended to give a small slice of what is happening in Berlin each year and shine a spotlight on the unique work of some of the independent spaces. Through the festival we hope to not only welcome a new public but also strengthen the network between the spaces themselves.

LR: I'm curious to hear from you, coming from outside of Berlin, whether you notice anything about the independent scene here that makes it unique from other cities you have visited?

VS: The independent art scene here in Berlin seems to be thriving and essential to the city's image. It is noticeable that it has a strong voice in local and global political, social, economical contexts. International artists, curators, project spaces and other creatives actively engage in discussions about the present state and future possibilities or threats to the independent art scene here. Berlin's cultural diversity is what makes the city, where anyone coming from elsewhere with different experiences is welcome and can actively contribute to the art scene.

In Lithuania where I am from, the art scene is more institutionalised, dependent on governmental funding and based more on individual practices or local contexts. In Berlin the emphasis seems to be on community, openness and collaboration. I could say that discussion and constant change is essential and the driving force of Berlin's art scene.

VS: Through the Festival, what questions do you feel need to be raised and answered about this scene?

LR: In Berlin we talk about having around 150 project spaces, however their average life-span can be quite short. So a few key things within the independent art scene that need questioning are how do we remain sustainable, what forms of support do the spaces want and also what role within the creative art scene do they serve?

The independent scene in Berlin is currently garnering a lot of attention and alongside this comes interest from institutions, sponsors and others to promote, support or include project spaces within their program. While this interest is fantastic, it is also important to consider what are acceptable working conditions and how to maintain independence. To take this one step further, what then does 'independence' actually mean?

VS: How can the Project Space Festival add to this discussion?

LR: The Festival has increased visibility for the scene by bringing large audiences to its events, local and international publicity, and recognition from the cultural sector of the project spaces as a vital aspect of Berlin's identity. This year a couple of spaces have initiated events to gain more insight into the practices of the project spaces. These two spaces – General Public and Neue Berliner Räume – are tackling the question of the definition and future of project spaces head-on through a public talk and publication launch respectively.

VS: How would you define what a project space is?

LR: A big discussion this year has been on this exact question. In 2014 for the first Festival, we focused on the diversity of the scene and tried to show many different models and approaches to project spaces. We identified some basic points that define a project space such as that they are usually self-initiated/organised, non-profit places for creative experimentation. The term 'project' as (opposed to, for example, 'exhibition') implies an openness to many disciplines, formats and approaches and it is this openness and diversity that we wanted to celebrate.

For 2015 we had an open call and invited a jury to make the selection. As the project spaces are so diverse in their organisational models, physical structures (some are even nomadic) and creative approaches it quickly became apparent to the jury how difficult it is to define a project space. They therefore tried to develop additional potential criteria on which to base their selection, which included, for example a space's political contribution to the city or role in gentrification processes.

LR: We are now halfway through the Festival, what have been some of your highlights so far?

VS: It is very difficult to single out one particular highlight as there have been so many different project spaces and events that always offered something interesting and original. One of the most interesting settings was the beautiful Animal Anatomical Theatre of the Humboldt University where project space Kleine Humboldt Galerie

held an event to present unfinished works of several invited artists.

I am looking forward to Grüntaler9's whole day of performances 'Prepare to Lift' and

Kinderhook & Caracas event 'A Soft Tragedy' that will take place along the canal, people can follow the moving event by foot or by raft.

The Project Space Festival Berlin continues until 31 August 2015. For more information:

<http://www.projectspacefestival-berlin.com/> (<http://www.projectspacefestival-berlin.com/>)

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