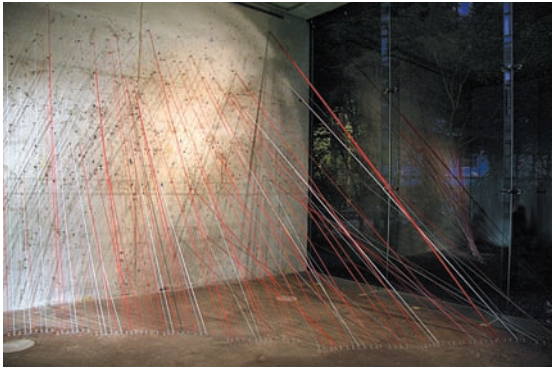


GWEN MACGREGOR AND SANDRA RECHICO: BACKTRACK

A TRANS PAVILION, BERLIN, GERMANY

JULY 30 – SEPTEMBER 10, 2011

by Lisa Myers

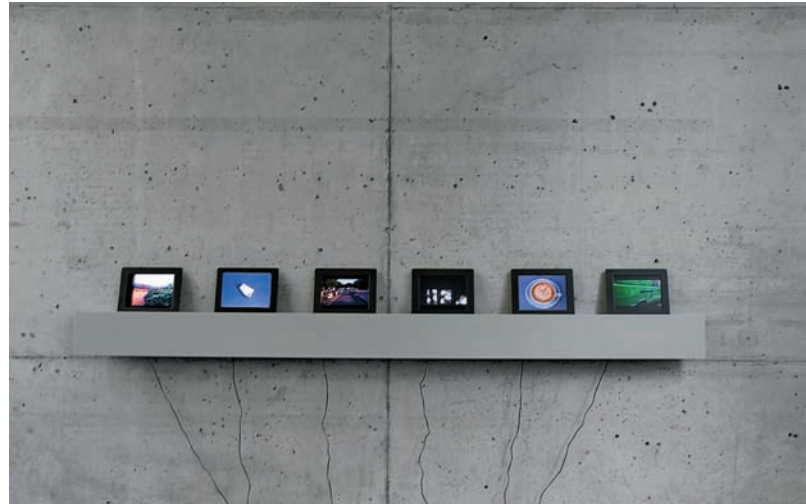


Today, sections of the Berlin Wall still stand as witness and memorial to the violence of obstruction, but there are other traces of the wall that I can easily step across, such as the cobblestone inlays with bronze text reading *Berliner Mauer 1961–1989* that cross the streets and sidewalks. On my way to Kreuzberg by bicycle, I navigate past the *East Side Gallery* where a section of the wall provides a backdrop of mural art and graffiti for tourists snapping photos. As a first-time visitor, I'm compelled by the history embedded in Berlin's geography and architecture to reflect on the social and political implications of moving through this city today. In their installation *Backtrack*, curated by Isolde Nagel at the A trans Pavilion in Berlin, Canadian artists Gwen MacGregor and Sandra Rechico enabled me to further consider the geographies of mobility as they examine the movement of people and their experiences in urban space.

MacGregor and Rechico's joint art projects investigate human geography and mapping, in part by tracking their own geographical positions, which take numerous visual and material forms. MacGregor uses digital data from a GPS device to constantly record her location, whereas Rechico documents her position through observation, note-taking and photography.¹ For their project in Berlin, the artists sought to create a collective portrait of the city through two projects: *Call and Response* (2011) and *Saturday* (2011).² The resulting artworks exhibit a fixed representation of a highly participatory art-making process. These spatial and temporal reflections also display the congruence and divergence of MacGregor and Rechico's respective digital and analogue methods.

Located in one of the Hackesche Höfe courtyards, replete with trees, gardens, and cobblestone paths, the concrete and glass building of the A trans Pavilion, a modernist cube-scape, offers a view of the show through the glass front to the frosted glass back wall. Experiencing the exhibition from outside resonates with the artistic premise behind *Call and Response*, in which a series of videos presents a dialogue between artists living in Berlin and artists based outside of Berlin who have been invited to engage in this video-dialogue by MacGregor and Rechico. Displayed side-by-side along the left wall of the space, six small digital monitors call to mind vacation snapshots or

"wish you were here: postcards. Along with Annie Onyi Cheung, Mareike Lee, and David Krippendorff, MacGregor and Rechico enter this conversation by each making videos that respond to "video-calls" by Shannon Cooney, Dan Hudson, Maria Sewcz, Molly Sigalet, Kika Thorne, and Sonya Schoenberger and Christof Zwiener. Negotiating the inside and outside through video exchanges echoes the history of Berlin as a city that was once physically divided.



The video works portray various personal experiences and perspectives on Berlin. In *Berlin Commute* (2011), Dan Hudson creates a video with a polished tourist-promotional aesthetic that uses his route along Berlin bike paths and through bustling traffic as the main narrative. Interspersing and contrasting slick cut-away shots of contemporary street scenes, markets, and people lounging at the edges of the canals amid urban commercial development with historical photographs, Hudson creates a collage that brings to mind the many layers of history beneath the rapid process of gentrification taking place in Berlin. MacGregor's video made in response to *Bike Commute*, ironically titled *Smooth Sailing*, humorously mirrors Hudson's video but features the candid shots of incidents taken by a lone videographer traversing new territory. With one hand on the camera and the other fumbling to open an apartment door, she drops her keys and her handlebars hit the doorframe, inferring that the process of unlocking a bike and getting out of the building may be enough to end the bike commute before it begins. By indulging each obstruction that inhibits her leaving the apartment, MacGregor seemingly pokes fun at the ease of Hudson's trip. Similarly, Rechico's video, *untitled* (2011), also conveys the artist's point of view as she embarks on what initially appears to be a precarious bike ride that develops into a rapid ride along a rain-soaked street. Shot from the perspective of a camera hanging around Rechico's neck and looking down at her bike, her pedalling feet, and the pavement moving beneath, the sense of place she inhabits is imperceptible. This durational video suspends any evidence of direction and destination, suggesting that there is no need to look ahead for obstructions. Rather than the flashy kaleidoscopic images of Hudson's piece, the subtle monochromatic shades of grey and black of Rechico's video impart a

↑ Gwen MacGregor and Sandra Rechico, *Saturday*, 2011, thread, eye screws, 400cm x 400cm x 400cm, Installation view from *Backtrack* at the A trans Pavilion, Berlin
PHOTO: KARSTEN HUTH

↑ Gwen MacGregor and Sandra Rechico, *Call and Response*, 2011, 6-20cm digital displays, looping video, 23cm x 170cm x 7cm, Installation view from *Backtrack* at the A trans Pavilion, Berlin
PHOTO: GWEN MACGREGOR

raw, solitary, and reflective journey.

MacGregor and Rechico used the A trans pavilion not only as an exhibition space but also as a laboratory site for social interventions. Their project *Saturday* (2011) invited passersby to enter the space-cum-studio/workshop and answer two questions: *What time did they leave their house today? How far did they travel to get to A trans Pavilion?* The visitors were then invited to sit at tables equipped with maps, paper, pens, and pencils and draw their respective routes. Using this data as the formulae for creating a visual interpretation, the artists marked intervals of time down one wall and across a section of the floor. Lengths of red, white, black, and grey thread were cast meticulously through eyelet screws drilled into the concrete wall and floor to represent the distances travelled. The artists also constructed an installation consisting of a diagonal swath of lines cutting across the space. This minimalist sculpture recalled the strings of an enormous instrument and the various thicknesses of strings represented people's daily journeys across Berlin. These threads symbolized the many tones that culminated to create an interpretation of the city. As an illustration of one participant's engagement with the project, Vinzenz Adldinger left his house in the early morning and rode the S Bahn line repeatedly until almost 7pm, then arrived at the A trans Pavilion to add his 295-kilometre ride to the exhibition's data log. Adldinger's performance, embedded conspicuously as the thickest bulk of red thread suspended carefully within the installation, brilliantly illustrates urban mobility and interactivity with the MacGregor and Rechico project.

For the *Backtrack* exhibition, *Call and Response* and *Saturday* sat across from one another in the A trans Pavilion, with videos on one side and the thread installation on the other, each symbolic of MacGregor and Rechico's digital and analogue methodologies. MacGregor and Rechico explore the city by mapping people's movement; the engagement and willingness of the participants highlights a social aspect to this art process. The video works display artists' interpretations of their place in the world, how they imbue meaning on personal spaces as well as the public spaces they encounter and experience, all of them converging to create varying ways of being a part of Berlin. These new, collaborative works contribute to the geographical interpretation of space by creating a portrait of Berlin that conveys the dynamism of

movement and exchange in a place that continues to contend with how the intersections of history, the built environment, and mobility affects people both living in and visiting from outside of the city.

→ Lisa Myers is an independent artist and curator of Ojibwe heritage. Her research interests include Indigenous North American art practice, geography, and food studies related to colonialism. Myers lives and works between Toronto and Port Severn, Ontario.

MacGregor and Rechico's documentation of the art process and exhibition work reaches outside of Berlin in a blog and on their website. See <http://backtrackberlin.wordpress.com> and <http://cargocollective.com/MacGregorRechicoProjects#1564649/Backtrack-A-trans-Pavilion-Berlin>

ENDNOTES

- 1 See Sally McKay, "Spatial reckonings: Gwen MacGregor and Sandra Rechico invite us to get lost" in *Magenta Magazine*, Summer 2011, Volume 2, No. 3 Accessed August 6, 2011. <http://www.magentamagazine.com/7/features/canadians-in-europe>
- 2 See exhibition brochure *Information 31/2011 Gwen MacGregor + Sandra Rechico (C.A.) BACKTRACK*

EL ARTE DEL COMER: DE LA NATURALEZA MUERTA A FERRAN ADRIA (THE ART OF EATING: FROM "STILL LIFE" TO FERRAN ADRIÀ)

CX CATALUNYA CAIXA OBRA SOCIAL, LA PEDRERA, BARCELONA
MARCH 14 - JUNE 26, 2011

by Jill Glessing



Food and pictures: these human drives come together in this gluttonous collection of art objects. Food's vital importance for sustenance and pleasure makes it a potent signifier for other concerns: social and power relations, religious ideologies, national identity, and personal expressions of attachment, sexuality, and loss. These are among the intimate relations between food and art explored in the 125 works of "The Art of Eating," installed in the exhibition space of Antoni Gaudí's *La Pedrera* in Barcelona. As an appetizer, a sampling of early still life paintings was served and dessert was the work of artist/chef, Ferran Adrià, with rich and varied courses offered in between.

The first section, "Evolution of the Still Life Genre," began with northern European paintings from the 17th century, when the genre became coded and established. Embedded in realistic displays of flowers, fruits, insects, and blemishes are familiar tropes: the abundance of earthly life troubled by the inevitable presence of death, all wrapped in the Christian imperative to

↑ Ori Gersht, *Pomegranate*, 2006, video still
IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND
MUMMERY + SCHNELLE, LONDON