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#artcologne

Christian and Karen Boros - ART COLOGNE prizewinners 2024

Koelnmesse and the Bundesverband Deutscher Galerien und Kunsthändler (German association of galleries and art dealers) announce Christian und Karen Boros as this year's ART COLOGNE prizewinners.

The couple has rendered outstanding services in the mediation of contemporary visual arts and is being honoured with the prize for its achievements as museum founders, exhibition organisers and book publishers. Christian and Karen Boros have been making parts of their art collection accessible to the public through exhibitions in a former bunker in Berlin since 2008.

Christian and Karen Boros

"Collecting begins when the house is full and one nonetheless continues." This point in time came when Christian and Karen Boros acquired a ventilator from Olafur Eliasson, which floated through the dome of the Postfuhramt on the occasion of the Berlin Biennale. They opened their bunker ten years later with this object. The couple has retained this preference for articulated sculptures to the present day. In 2020, a buoy by Julius von Bismarck swung from the ceiling through the Berghain hall and provided the start for the unique exhibition organised by the Boros Foundation during the pandemic.

Christian Boros was already interested in fine arts as a schoolboy and preferably visited galleries in Cologne in the 1980s. He acquired his first work at the UNFAIR, a special fair of ART COLOGNE. It was a work by Damien Hirst. This was followed by a photograph by Wolfgang Tillmans for 300 Deutschmarks, entitled Lutz und Alex in den Bäumen (Lutz and Alex sitting in the trees), which is today considered one of the artist's key works.

Christian Boros had already founded his own agency in 1990 before completing his studies in Wuppertal with Bazon Brock, the original Action Teacher and inventor of art education. The start, with campaigns for the culture scene, for example, for the music broadcaster Viva, was so successful that film and music festivals, opera houses, museums, galleries and foundations remain key customers to the present day.

Profession and passion are also united in Karen Boros. She changed from a course of studies in psychology in Australia to art history and began to work for galleries in the Rhineland in the 1990s. It was thus an obvious step to one day meet Christian Boros at the Liste newcomer art fair in Basel and offer to sell him a work by Tobias



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Rehberger at the stand of the gallery she was working for there. "My wife radicalised me. She was the accelerant of a passion", says Christian about Karen Boros, together with whom he has since compiled a grandiose collection of international contemporary art.

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Bunker Berlin

Stimulated by the (un) places where the Berlin subculture was unfolding in the 1990s, where exhibitions took place, artists had their studios and something was always going on, Christian and Karen Boros began searching for a home for their collection at around the turn of the millennium. The decision in favour the bunker in the Reinhardstraße in Berlin was made in 2003. There was no alternative. The challenge of creating exhibition spaces with varying heights and depths, sometimes for large art objects, in a solid, reinforced concrete structure consisting of 120 uniform units, was immense.

The bunker is not just any building. It was constructed in 1941 by forced labourers as a refuge for residents from the area around the Friedrichstraße. With a roof slab three metres and outer walls nearly two metres thick, the bunker provided protection from the rain of bombs for up to 4,000 people and remained undestroyed. After 1945, the structure was used as a prison, then during the GDR era as storage for tropical fruit from Cuba ("banana bunker"). Following German reunification, it became the hotspot for unregulated techno and fetish parties and was known as the hardest club in the world. It was closed in the mid-1990s.

"Interest in a work of art is preceded by a borderline experience, a strangeness that should not be rejected." This maxim of Christian and Karen Boros is echoed in the form of the bunker. It is the legacy of a monstrous war initiated by National Socialism. This is not whitewashed by its transformation: the exterior damage caused by grenades has been preserved, as is the rough appearance of the interior. The perception of the architecture and the art objects exhibited within it is ambivalent: irritation alternates with fascination, trepidation with curiosity, attraction with repulsion.

Since its opening in 2008, exhibitions from collection holdings of more than 1,000 artworks by 183 international artists have been taking place with a quarterly rhythm in a total area of 3,000 m². In the context of more than 50,000 guided tours with the around 40 employees of the Boros Foundation also founded in 2008, 780,000 guests have to date been able to experience parts of the Boros Collection. These figures too speak in favour of a concept from which cultural life in Berlin as a whole profits - and which also harmonises well with monument protection regulations.

Boros Collection #4

27 artists with a total of 114 works are currently being shown in the fourth exhibition. The exhibits can be traced back to acquisitions since the 2000s; what they have in common is an examination of the human body. Few newer, but instead more classic media - painting, drawings, sculptures and installations from various, also everyday materials - can be seen. The Orthesen (Ortheses) of Berenice Olmedo evoke the image of impaired children; a tractor shovel lying on its own by Cyprien Gaillard transforms into a kind of larynx when looked at; the medial self-reference

of our times is expressed grotesquely in the obscenely fitted out dolls of Anna Uddenberg.

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"The materials used and the objects formed from them seem like objects that have been rinsed out of their original coordinate system and find themselves in a spin cycle." The objects have no desire to please, but perception intensifies in this place. One is irritated by the online game characters cast in bronze by Bunny Rogers. One puzzles over a brown heap that turns out to be the extract of tons of boiled down Coca Cola - with which the Chinese artist He Xiangyu has found his form of consumption critique. One encounters several of the positions here for the first time. Karen Boros on this: "We have many artists in the collection who hardly anyone talks about - but they are important for us." Victor Man, with his puzzling portraits, on the other hand recently had an exhibition in the Städel Museum in Frankfurt.

STUDIO BERLIN

During the pandemic, Christian and Karen Boros provided proof that they could realise good ideas not only for difficult spaces, but also in difficult times. When the Berlin club scene was suffering under the lockdown, they presented a breathtaking exhibition in the legendary Berghain techno club under the title STUDIO BERLIN as of September 2020. Yael Bartana, Tacita Dean, Alicja Kwade, Rirkrit Tiravanija, Anne Imhof, Isa Genzken, Klara Lidén, Wolfgang Tillmans and many others were invited to show their works across media originating during the corona period on the gigantic dance floor, in the corridors, bars and countless smaller rooms. One tour for small groups booked online followed another, and, in addition to the decreed protective measures, the prohibition against photography usual in the Berghain also prevailed.

During a time of massive restrictions on communication, the exhibition curated by Karen Boros once again provided one hundred artists living in Berlin with an audience - and this audience with a premium cultural event. A joy for all those who missed the Berghain and for those who hadn't dared enter it to date. The catalogue for STUDIO BERLIN, which documents the exhibition project in a state of emergency, has long since sold out. It appeared, like all catalogues revolving around the Boros Collection, with the DISTANZ publishing house.

DISTANZ Verlag

The wish to allow as many interested parties as possible to participate in art in general, led to the founding of the DISTANZ Verlag in 2010. In addition to publications on fine arts, architecture and design, exhibition catalogues are also published in cooperation with museums. Writing on art and cultural theory also appear in the DISTANZ series Fundus and Kontext.

The publishing house and the Berlin office of the Boros agency are located on the Landwehrkanal in a former waste water pump station from the 19th century. Here too, the present and the past collide. Eyecatchers in the elongated boiler hall, now a conference room, are a completely preserved cast-iron steam engine, a light object by Olafur Eliasson hanging from the ceiling and a several metres high sculpture of Hercules - a relic of the former lapidarium. This because the building was used for several decades for the storage of old Berlin monuments. Attached

behind the pump station is a minimalist extension for offices. The ensemble thus provides an example of a perfectly successful aesthetic linking of usage in keeping with the times and the preservation of a historical structure.

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The ART COLOGNE Prize

The ART COLOGNE Prize for art communication is endowed with 10,000 Euro and is presented annually by Koelnmesse and the German association of galleries and art dealers (BVDG). The prize will be awarded on Friday, 8 November 2024 at 10:00 a.m. in the historic city hall of Cologne.

Previous winners of the ART COLOGNE Prize (selection): Arnold Bode (1975), Ileana Sonnabend (1988), Harald Szeemann (1989), Annely Juda (1993), Rudolf Springer (1995), Otto van de Loo (1999), Frieder Burda (2002), Nicholas Serota (2004), Harald Falckenberg (2009), Michael Werner (2011), Fred Jahn (2013), Rosemarie Schwarzwälder (2014), Günter Herzog (2017), Christian Kaspar Schwarm (2019), Monika Sprüth (2022) and Walther König (2023).

Christian and Karen Boros will be present on Friday, 8 November 2024 at 4:00 p.m. for a public talk in the context of the ARTtalks at ART COLOGNE.

DISTANZ VERLAG will be represented at ART COLOGNE with a book stand.

ART COLOGNE opens on Thursday, 7 November 2024 with the preview for invited guests. This is followed by the public days from 8 to 10 November 2024.

RECOMMENDATIONS (from these, also the quotes from above)

Worth reading

The catalogues for the previous exhibitions in the Boros Bunker were published by DISTANZ Verlag. The most recent appeared in 2022: Boros Collection / Bunker Berlin. Texts by Timo Feldhaus and Raoul Zöllner, ed. Boros Collection.

Worth listening to

Podcast - Was mit Kunst. Interview with Christian and Karen Boros, Januar 2021

Worth seeing

Agentur Boros - ein unvergleichliches Büro. The clip provides insights into the redesigned Berlin pump station, in which DISTANZ Verlag and the Boros agency are located.

Boros Collection

Viewing of the Boros Collection is possible in the context of tours from Thursday to Sunday; tickets must be booked in a timely fashion in advance. Further Information here.

Bunker, Reinhardtstraße 20
10117 Berlin-Mitte

STUDIO BERLIN

The list of artists for the legendary exhibition of the Boros Foundation in the Berghain can be found [here](#).

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Text: Birgit Maria Sturm, BVDG

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