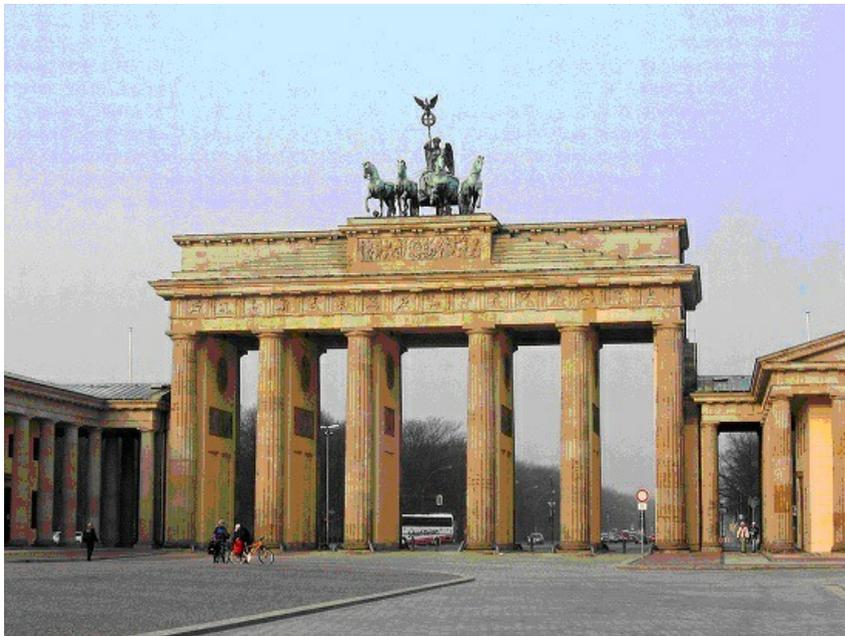


**The Art and Architecture of Berlin:  
From the Brandenburg Gate to the Holocaust Museum**

**A Study Day with Beth Taylor - 20 May 2015**



***Brandenburger Tor***  
**Carl Gotthard Langhans, 1788-1791**



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## Introduction

Berlin is now the vibrant capital city of a united, democratic Germany – but it is a city which has experienced many changes, some traumatic, which continue to mark its landscape. It has always been a city on which its rulers stamped their understanding of what a capital should demonstrate through the means of art and architecture. In this study day, we will look at three, consecutive periods of the city’s history from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century to the present day and consider the changing styles and connotations of the art and architecture that has been created in Berlin and displayed in its museums. It is impossible to consider Berlin without understanding its political history and we will focus on some of the key events which have shaped what one commentator has called its “historically contaminated terrain”, a terrain into which the past still intrudes, even on its 21<sup>st</sup> century buildings and art.

## Becoming a Capital City.

Berlin’s political, economic and cultural status as a capital city developed from the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century. Under Hohenzollern rule, it became the capital of the Prussian kingdom. By the time of the rule of Friedrich Wilhelm II (1786– 97) work was afoot to transform the city into “The Athens on the River Spree”, a city of neo classical architecture to rival that of the ancient world. The Brandenburger Gate was erected during his reign.



*Napoleon in Berlin* by Charles Meynier, 1809.

By 1806, the German States had fallen to Napoleon's armies. This period was marked by a growing sense of nationalism and a shift to Romanticism in the work of artists like Caspar David Friedrich (1774-1840). After Napoleon's defeat, neo-classical and early neo-Gothic buildings by K.F.Schinkel (1781 -1841) were erected including the Altes Museum in 1830.

1848 saw a revolutionary uprising in the city but this failed to achieve the democratic, united Germany the rebels desired. A period of conservatism followed, reflected in Biedermeier and historicist styles in art and architecture.

By 1871, when Prussia defeated France, Berlin had become the capital of a German national state. 1873 saw the completion of the Victory column (Siegessäule) marking this development. By 1877, the population had reached 1 million. Electric street lighting was installed in 1879, the first urban train line in 1882. By the time the Reichstag building was completed in 1889, Germany had embarked upon a period of colonialist expansion and rapid economic development. The academic art of Germany continued to be produced in a traditional style, but the Berlin Secession, established in 1898, encompassed a variety of styles – the impressionism of Max Liebermann (1847-1935), the naturalism of Jacob Alberts (1860-1941), the realism of Kathe Kollwitz and, later, the expressionist works of Emile Nolde (1867-1956) and the Brucke circle. By the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Bode Museum had been completed and the Pergamon museum was underway. Berlin was also demonstrating that its manufacturing industry was ready to embrace early Modernism when the AEG Turbine Hall by Peter Behrens (1868-1940) was built in 1908-9.

The 1914-18 war marked the city and the artists who took part in it, like George Grosz (1893-1959) and Otto Dix (1891-1969). By the end of the war, artistic protest in the form of the Dada movement had reached Berlin.

## From Weimar Republic to National Socialist Berlin.



After the defeat of Germany and the abdication of the Kaiser, the Weimar Republic was declared in Berlin. An attempted communist revolution in 1919 was brutally put down and the city – an increasingly busy metropolis – was still marked by the impact of the war, and the subject of harsh imagery by painters like Grosz and Dix. This was also the era of New Objectivity in painting by artists like Christian Schad (1894-1982) and photography, for example August Sander's *Face of Our Time* series. Modernist architecture developed with Bauhaus inspired workers housing estates designed by Bruno Taut and Walter Gropius. Notably the development of popular culture – press, cinema, radio, cabaret and theatre - contributed to what some saw as the constant activity and superficiality of city life with its culture of the spectacular.

The 1920s saw the growth of the National Socialist Party which used the media and the spectacle to promulgate its own propaganda. The depression of 1929 and subsequent inflation contributed to the rise of the Party, and by 1933 Hitler had been elected Chancellor.



*January 1933 Nazi rally following Hitler's selection as German chancellor*

By the late 1930s, the Nazi party had embarked on a programme of purging modernist art and artists from the Reich, including the series of 'Entartete Kunst' free exhibitions which toured the country. Realist works which celebrated the characteristics of the German 'folk' in paintings by artists like Adolf Wissel (1894-1973) and monumental sculpture by artists like Arno Breker (1900-91) were favoured by the regime. With his favourite architect, Albert Speer, Hitler planned to develop huge neo-classicist buildings in Berlin which, renamed 'Germania', would not only declare the city to be the worthy capital of the Reich, but which, even in decay, would mirror the ruins of the classical world. Some – like the Olympic Stadium and the Reich Chancellery - were completed but the impact of the 2<sup>nd</sup> world war meant this vision was not achieved and by 1945 much of the central city lay in ruins, destroyed by allied bombing or demolished by the city's Russian occupiers.

## **A Divided City, 1945-1989.**

At the end of the war, the city was occupied by the allies – the USA, France, Britain and the Soviet Union. By 1949, Germany was divided into the Federal Republic of Germany (the West) and the German Democratic Republic (in the east). Berlin – a detached enclave 110 miles from West Germany – was divided into west and east zones. The Federal Republic capital was established at Bonn, while the GDR made Berlin their capital. Berlin became the site in which the Cold War was made overt, not just politically but in the art and architecture which was developed in the democratic West and in the communist East. In the west, which benefited from the economic growth of the Federal Republic and the support of the NATO powers, areas like the Kulturforum were furnished with buildings like the Philharmonie by Hans Scharoun (1963), the National Gallery by Mies van der Rohe (1968), and the State Library by Scharoun and Wiesniewski (1967-1978). In the eastern sector, the GDR built equally impressive institutions like the Alexanderturn and the Palace of the Republic as well as apartment blocks for the workers. However, it was the Berlin Wall, erected in 1961 as an ‘Anti-Fascist Protection Rampart’ by the East Berlin authorities that became the iconic structure of the city and the Cold War



Cologne became the centre of the West German visual art scene; publicly supported institutions like museums were dominated by an internationally oriented avant garde that promoted abstract expressionism. In the GDR, after an initial support for the modernism the Nazis had suppressed, the state created its own theory of art – Socialist realism which required a traditional and figurative style. Many artists, like Sigmar Polke, Gerhard Richter and Georg Baselitz fled to the west, others produced subversive or ‘underground’ works.

### **Fall of the Wall and German Unification**

In 1989, the wall dividing the city was pulled down and the GDR’s communist regime collapsed. By 1990, Germany was reunited, and in 1991 Berlin was named as its capital. The Reichstag, symbolically wrapped by the artist Christo, was rebuilt by Norman Foster (1994-99). The GDR’s Palace of the Republic was demolished and the Prussian State Palace – which the communist regime had pulled down – is being reconstructed. New public buildings, like the British Embassy, the German Historical Museum, and the Potsdamer Platz area, by internationally known architects, proclaim Berlin’s capital city status. In 2001 architecture in the city embraced postmodernism as well as acknowledging its past: Liebeskind’s Jewish Museum opened in 2001 and Eisenman’s Holocaust Memorial was completed in 2005. Berlin is now a centre of modern art and architecture.

### **Recommended reading:**

E. Abenstein and J. Fiedler *Art & Architecture: Berlin*. h.f.ullmann publishing GmbH, 2013

*Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe (The Holocaust Memorial)*  
Peter Eisenman, 2005

