

CRITICS' PICKS

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- "Undercover: Performing and Transforming Black Female Identities"

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Berlin

Wieland Speck and Shelly Silver

EXILE

Alexandrinenstr 4, HH,
November 4–December 5

One August afternoon in 1978, painter Per Lüke straddled the western end of the Berlin Wall and played a small harp. Filmmaker Wieland Speck (who would go on to make the 1985 queer classic *Westler*, about a romance between two men living on either side of the wall) documented this potentially life-endangering performance, which captured the curiosity of passersby—as well as the hostile attention of authorities on both sides of the divide. The footage forms the half-hour-long video centerpiece of Speck's installation *Berlin Off/On Wall*, 1978, which also includes photos taken by the secret police as well as photocopies of the Stasi files on Speck's documentation of the action, the documentation itself regarded as a provocation by the East German authorities. Speck's piece cleverly asserts the blunt material stupidity of the wall—that massive symbolic failure of a few bureaucrats and politicians, blinded by chauvinistic allegiance to their respective ideologies, whose inability to sit down and have a conversation resulted in the needless suffering of millions.

The immediate aftermath of the *Mauerfall* (the toppling of the wall) forms the subject of Shelly Silver's 1994 documentary *Former East/Former West*, which consists wholly of interviews with inhabitants of Berlin in the years 1992 and '93. That denizens hailing from both sides of the divide were already strongly divided about the wall's collapse reflects a state of ambivalence, a perspective that the ongoing jubilee celebrations in the German capital have carefully avoided.

— Travis Jeppesen

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Nan Goldin

C/O BERLIN

Postfuhramt, Oranienburger Straße 35/36
October 10–December 6

As a photographer, Nan Goldin has inspired a legion of imitators who tend to confuse certain lifestyle traits with artistic substance, a privileging of content over form with an excuse for taking sloppy photographs. I tend to think of them as the *Vice* generation, after the magazine that first published many a Goldin copyist under a hipster anti-ethos saturated with attention begging and unwarranted self-destruction. Where one finds a similar mode of annihilative glamour in a Goldin original, it appears more authentic, perhaps accidental. Her subjects, whether laughing or crying, often seem as though their minds are somewhere else, and their eyes are lost in pensive reverie (unlike the random soulless fashion victims hamming it up in, say, a Ryan McGinley). Revisiting *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency*, 1981, in this exhibition, one is struck by this generational lapse in the twenty or thirty years since most of the photographs comprising the famous slide show were taken. Whatever happened to empathy?

For it is her empathetic identification with her subjects that has always been at the core of Goldin's work, from the *Ballad* to the more recent *Heartbeat*, 2003, a series of couples captured in moments of intimacy. It is this most "uncool" facet of her output that endows it with its lasting appeal, as the four slide shows that constitute this exhibition—each set to a sound track compiled by the artist—attest.

— Travis Jeppesen

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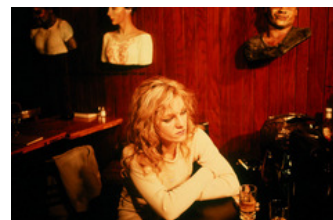
Mat Collishaw

HAUNCH OF VENISON

Heidestrasse 46,
September 12–December 19



Wieland Speck, *Berlin Off/On Wall*, 1978, still from a black-and-white video, 22 minutes.



Nan Goldin, *Cookie at Tin Pan Alley*, NYC, 1983, color photograph, 30 x 40".