

new member states. To celebrate this occasion, Holland implemented a vast range of cultural programs called "Thinking Forward." The visual-art component, a series of seven exhibitions instigated by Maria Hlavajova and collectively titled "Who If Not We Should At Least Try to Imagine the Future of All This? 7 episodes on (ex)changing Europe," comprised three different exhibitions in the Netherlands, as well as shows in Budapest, Ljubljana, Vilnius, and Warsaw.

At Witte de With in Rotterdam, parting director Catherine David invited Austrian artist Peter Friedl to "respond to the project's framework and to conceptualize the basis for a much needed critique by the project's position towards the so-called guests: Who is welcoming whom and to what?" Friedl decided to make an exhibition about Cyprus, which has been divided between Greece and Turkey since 1974. Although only the Turkish part has voted in favor of reunification, only the Greek part is currently EU territory. Friedl's DVD installation included slide projections of playgrounds as well as film excerpts, text, and two small video animations of blue sky. Friedl has often used playgrounds as sites of inquiry into the geopolitics of countries. Designed according to principles of ergonomics, health, and other social issues, playgrounds are seemingly devoid of politics and yet bring to mind Jean-Luc Godard's comment that "children are political prisoners."

At the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, Leontine Coelewijn and Geurt Imanse looked at the distinct historical sensibility of Eastern Europe, informed as much by recent dramatic changes as by the preceding period of stagnation under socialism. Each new beginning, it seems, is felt as a repetition of another, previous beginning, as several artists take specific recourse to earlier moments in history. Paulina Ołowska revisited Malevich's instructional charts, part of the Stedelijk collection. Roman Ondák's *Bad News Is a Thing of the Past Now*, 2003, consists of two photographs, one showing the artist, the other his father sitting on the same park bench, each reading the same August 22, 1968, edition of a newspaper. The artist replaces his father at a moment when he was his age, but history, it appears, repeats itself.

Exhibition organizer Hlavajova herself collaborated with Gerardo Mosquera on "Cordially Invited" at BAK (basis voor actuele kunst) and the Centraal Museum in Utrecht—a show about the restrictions and conditions attached to the opening of borders in a widened European Union. With



Paulina Ołowska, *Accidental Collages*, 2004, mixed media, dimensions variable. From "Who If Not We . . . ?"

twenty-two artists from across Europe as well as Cuba, this exhibition was both the most extensive and the most overtly political. But while addressing such questions as legal and illegal border crossing, xenophobia, and the systems of inclusion and exclusion, most of the works in the show managed to balance an acute sense of urgency with a highly conceptual visual language. Marko Raat's deadpan video documentary *For Aesthetic Reasons*, 1999, features Anders Kurg, an Estonian architectural historian and admirer of Danish modernism who has pursued requests for asylum in Denmark solely for "aesthetic reasons." De Rijke/de Rooij's slide projection *Orange*, 2004, simply aims at reproducing the precise shade of orange of the overalls worn by Guantánamo Bay inmates by photographing objects of that color, an enterprise made difficult by the chemical processing of color photography. Born from an overtly political national agenda, "Who If Not We . . . ?" ran the risk of cultural proselytizing. Its success and its topicality must be credited to the tenacity and rigor of the curators involved, but we should also thank the Dutch government for its trust in art as an agent of social change.

—Christian Rattemeyer

BERLIN

LARS RAMBERG

PALAST DER REPUBLIK

It's hard to miss Lars Ramberg's *Palast des Zweifels* (Palace of Doubt), 2005. The word ZWEIFEL (doubt)—written in three-story-tall letters sculpted in aluminum and filled with white neon-tube lighting—glows from



Lars Ramberg, *Palast des Zweifels (Palace of Doubt)*, 2005, aluminum and white neon tubes, 24' 7" x 128' x 6' 6 3/4".

atop the empty Palast der Republik, which is due to be demolished this fall. The former East German parliament building—and a civic-cum-entertainment center offering restaurants and bowling—was closed due to asbestos in September 1990, just weeks after what was touted as the GDR's first freely elected government voted to join the Federal Republic. When the Palast reopened as a gutted yet asbestos-free shell in 2003, tickets for tours rapidly sold out, although there was little left to see inside. The building's persistent popularity led to a series of concerts, talks, and exhibitions—notably those organized by Volkspalast (People's Palace)—as an attempt to reclaim the communal project of socialism, minus the dictatorial state apparatus.

Ramberg's sign of doubt initially functions as a temporary monument to the history of hesitations that have surrounded the building's fate since 1990. Should the palace be demolished or not? Does it have symbolic value as history or use value for the present? In light of these debates, it should come as no surprise that it took Ramberg six years to realize his project. Like Christo and Jeanne-Claude, who wrapped the Reichstag before its renovations began in 1995, Ramberg had to overcome a mountain of bureaucratic resistance from state officials, including a veto from the federal advisor for culture, Christina Weiss, who went against the Berlin Senate's approval for the project in 2003.

The sign's super size—while a press attraction—makes a sly comment on the vast sums spent in the name of stately representations. As the Palast was being closed in 1990, asbestos was discovered in West Berlin in the main buildings of the Freie Universität, but they were not con-

demned; instead, walls were sealed with high-tech masking tape. The Palast will be torn down to make way for the reconstruction of the Prussian royal castle, which occupied much of the site until it was destroyed by Allied bombing in World War II and then demolished under the German Democratic Republic government. Considering Berlin's astronomical debt—fifty billion euros and rising—tearing down a defunct parliament building to rebuild a defunct castle recalls the symbolic excesses of both the Third Reich and the GDR, two regimes that sacrificed the welfare of citizens for ideological ends, albeit with vastly different political agendas. With the help of private funding, architecture is now called on to serve neoliberal propaganda and make a cityscape that can be consumed by tourists without doubt. When the planners are finished, this historic center of Berlin will look like the twentieth century never took place.

Finally, the word *Zweifel* points to the heart of democracy. After all, democracy assumes the possibility for doubt and debate. Dictatorship suspends, if not extinguishes, any such hesitancy. Yet the Palast became a home for doubt only once the government moved out and the host of a debate that turns solely on its own survival. Ramberg's literal sign reflects the exceptional equation between the Palast's symbolic function and its material existence. Since a government needs a building to hold debates, the architecture that houses these debates must generally escape democratic processes. Ultimately, Ramberg's "palace of doubt" suggests that the architecture of the state, however visible, exists in a state of suspension.

—Jennifer Allen