

Capsule of Berlin

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by **Meg Walker**

A room-sized capsule of contemporary art from Berlin is about to open at the ODD Gallery, where the walls will be hung with close to 90 works by more than 70 artists.

Rinald and Irmelin Nohal are still determining the number of artists and works for *Berlin – Klondyke 2011* the day we sit down to talk. Their indecision isn't about hesitation; it's about abundance.

Rinald co-owned, and Irmelin was active in, the legendary Paris Bar in Berlin for about 30 years, where hundreds of artists and musicians exhibited art, socialized and/or ran a tab.



Rikke Aamann (r.) and Anne Louise Blicher take a breather from their paint-and-canvas immersion

PHOTO:
Michael Edwards

“We’re not rich, so we don’t collect art. We’re collecting friendships with artists,” Rinald says.

The Nohals have a long-term connection with the Klondike region. Rinald built a log cabin at Cassiar Creek in the '90s, then took on building the Martin Kippenberger “MetroNet” installation – a subway entrance to nowhere and thus anywhere – that lived in Dawson from 1995-2009.

He also built the Bunk House at the corner of Princess and Second Avenues. Irmelin translates art books and writes fiction during her months here.

Several years ago the two began dreaming of bringing artists to stay in the Bunk House and produce work in the Klondike area.

While they continue imagining options for a possible artist-in-residence program, they have been encouraged by friendship with the Klondike Institute of Art and Culture. KIAAC has liaised with the Yukon School of Visual Art to allow visiting artists access to SOVA’s studio space for part of the summer.

This year, artists Rikke Aamann and Anne Louise Blicher are using the sun-drenched rooms for nearly four weeks. The two met at the Paris Bar and live about two minutes apart in Berlin. They meet for coffee almost every day and talk about their creative work.

“Our processes are so different,” says Blicher, who recently completed training in the traditional techniques of still life oil painting at the Florence Academy of Art.

“Traditional painting has died out almost in Europe, apart from Florence ... so what I’m doing is almost using a new tradition, a new language. So it’s hard for someone who hasn’t learned the language ... It’s more on the level of discussing what we like, or if something is a good idea.”

“It’s great to have that support regularly, almost every day, around the fact of being a painter,” Aamann adds.

An established graphic designer before turning to paint full time, Aamann was one of the artists who came to Dawson with the Nohals in 2009. She left several canvases behind in the Yukon that summer.

They are abstracted images of old mining machinery that pulse with a series of hard-edged, brightly coloured rays pushing out from washes of colour at the centre.

“It’s nice to see the paintings from two years ago, but it was also a bit of a shock – I’ve changed a lot,” she says.

“But it’s great to be back, it’s really like coming home in a way. And it seems calmer this time, but maybe that’s because I’m more calm.”

Both painters are making fresh work for *Berlin – Klondyke 2011*. Aamann started thinking about her Klondike series again before stepping on the plane, “so for the last month, really I’ve been here,” she says.

The two painters have been soaking up the wide spaces the region offers. They have cycled to places on the mine tailings that Aamann photographed on her last visit, driven to Two Moose Lake on the Dempster Highway and toured the Parks Canada Bear Creek site.

Blicher’s work springs off the traditions of still life painting, in terms of how she layers and applies her oil paints, and her subject matter is contemporary. The combined effect for me is that I want to look twice.

For example, there’s a painting of a rabbit right beside a raven, with the Crocus Bluff-like backgrounds in shades of Yukon pine and birch. The juxtaposition is unnatural, though the figures are realistic.

“It’s just nature with a twist sometimes, you know. And I normally say it’s like unnatural nature ... it could even be the Surreal, but not painted like the dreamy way they did in the 1920s but painted realistically.”

The goal is to intensify what is already visible, Blicher says, and so she sets up still life compositions in real locations, like the edges of a red windowsill on an old building across from the studio.

That composition, combined with a stuffed songbird she brought from Berlin, inhabits one canvas Blicher exhibits this week.

The *Berlin – Klondyke 2011* exhibition will include paintings, drawings, etchings and photographs by artists from many different European countries, all working and living in Berlin.

“From the beginning we said there was no prescription, it doesn’t have to do with the Yukon. Everybody was free to do whatever they like, and that makes it more interesting,” says Rinald.

“I’m really curious to see how the different styles and works and formats compete or correspond with each other. It will be an adventure.”

Berlin – Klondyke 2011 shows at the ODD Gallery from July 21 to August 3, then goes to the Art Centre of Los Angeles this October before travelling to Zurich, Munich and Berlin in 2012.