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PLAYER OF THE WEEK SEPTEMBER 26, 2016

"Let the future come"



How to finance a gallery in Berlin-Mitte? Irina Ilieva is a freelance architect and gallery owner in Berlin. In 2002, she founded her own company "aquabit »architecture | art | design" where she combines artistic positions that move in the experimental field of architecture, art and new media. Her gallery, aquabitArt has been located in Berlin-Mitte since 2008. In "Player of the week" she talks about connection of art and architecture, the future of galleries in Berlin-Mitte and about the power of "The Honeymoon" in the context of the European Month of Photography.

CCB Magazin: Hello Irina, who are you and what are you doing?

Irina Ilieva: Hello, I am Irina Ilieva, an architect and gallery owner in Berlin. I was born in Bulgaria, where I spent my childhood and studied architecture at the University of Architecture, Civil Engineering and Geodesy (UACEG) in Sofia. I arrived in Berlin shortly after the wall came down, and in 2002 founded my company aquabit. Aquabit combines architecture, art presentations and their communication through (web) design. My work style integrates my years of experience as an architect with the role as a gallery owner. As an architect, I'm searching for solutions, which provide a different view on our everyday life. As a gallery owner, my ambition is to initiate creative awareness in the exciting city of Berlin. At the gallery, we organize exhibitions that challenge the viewer artistically and on multiple levels.

" The great thing about art is that it makes possible unlimited thinking in a limited physical space."

CCB Magazin: How do you "challenge artistically"? What kind of solutions are you looking for?

Irina Ilieva: As gallery owner and curator, I am looking for spatial solutions and concepts that interact with a defined space. This interaction helps create an unexpected view of the work. As an architect I combine artistic positions with an architectural environment to give an imaginative view on the everyday life. In many cases, there is even an unexpected and positive surprise. For example, in one project, the redesign of a building entrance in Berlin-Prenzlauer Berg, we added visual value to an everyday function.



Entrance redesign, Pappellalee 76, Berlin

CCB Magazin: How can the artistic approach affect the architectural space and vice versa?

Irina Ilieva: The great thing about art is that it makes possible unlimited thinking in a limited physical space. The architecture, on the other hand, can get inspiration through this thought. Then the results are spaces, which broaden our senses.

CCB Magazin: But can this also mean that art increases the value of the architecture and this revaluation causes an increase in the price of living spaces?

Irina Ilieva: Of course art can enhance the architecture, but I do not believe that it has a direct impact on housing costs. I am not only talking about "art on site", but also about the important connection between artists and architects at the beginning of a project. Architects could therefore think more artistically, and artists can be inspired by the definition of the architectural space. And if the building or object becomes more valuable, then it is rather a value that makes us ultimately all more human.



*Gallery aquabitArt, EX und HOPP ? refuncioning between Architecture and Art, 2015.
Facade Installation: BORGMAN | LENK, Photo: aquabit*

CCB Magazine: In your gallery aquabitArt you have organized three exhibitions with a focus on architecture versus art. How did you come to the idea to bring the architectural into the gallery?

Irina Ilieva: As a gallery owner I have always been fascinated by artists who work in two and three dimensions at the same time. My program focus is on painting and sculpture, and more recently photography and installations. The connection between art and architecture is my main objective. It fascinates me, when both disciplines enrich each other and create something new. For example, the PLACEBO Pavilion this year in my gallery, created by Vanessa Enriquez and Jürgen MAYER.H, attracted many visitors, who were impressed by the interplay of visual and acoustic stimuli. I am convinced that only the interaction of many disciplines allows an exhilarant perspective on our environment, allowing us to live and dream consciously. And when I am able to contribute to this development with my work, than I feel contented!

CCB Magazine: Your artists Margaret Hunter and Peter Lindenberg are working in painting and sculpture. Sebastian Häger on light collages and Lan Hungh in performance. Another of your artists, Marina Braun, is designing furniture. Striking is the great heterogeneity of your choice. According to what criteria do you choose your artists?

Irina Ilieva: The art just has to refer to me. The personality of an artist is as important for me as the art, because we should be able to work together confidently for a long time. Most of my artists are based in Berlin, but not exclusively. Many are born and live abroad. The inspiring superposition of many cultures draws ultimately my artist choice.



Gallery aquabitArt, PLACEBO, Affects between Architecture and Art, 2016. Installation Vanessa Enriquez and Jürgen MAYER.H. Art talk. Foto: aquabit

CCB Magazine: Your gallery is located in Berlin-Mitte. You are situated there since 2008. The rents in Berlin-Mitte exploded immensely in the last years. How hard is it to keep a gallery in that location?

Irina Ilieva: It isn't simple. It's permanently a challenge to survive due to many reasons, like the inevitable rent increases (which happened recently). But this is reality in Berlin. I don't have to stay here forever. If things come to an end here, then something new will start somewhere else. What you need as a gallery owner is courage, endurance and a large dose of stubbornness.

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CCB Magazine: A study by the Institute for Strategy Development (IFSE) showed that only a quarter of the Berlin galleries can survive from their own resources. 15 percent of Berlin galleries have an annual turnover under € 17.500. 12 percent are in the sales class 17.501-50.000 euros. How is it with you?

Irina Ilieva: I live from both, from my work as an architect and as a gallery owner. Otherwise this would not be possible. I generate my turnover by my architectural projects and exhibition co-operations, but also by selling art work. So, for example, I offer my gallery to selected artists, I curate their work and take over the entire press and public relations work. Since three years I also have a gallery partner. We share the space and have alternating exhibitions. It is not only that the costs are half, but also the fun on the job is double.

CCB Magazine: What is special about your work as a gallery owner?

Irina Ilieva: The combination of many disciplines and knowledge makes my job so special. I come into contact with different people, get to know their work and personalities. To make a successful collaboration with clients, artists and collectors from such diverse backgrounds, it helps to have some insight into human nature. As an architect and gallery owner, I practice several occupations simultaneously, but they have very much in common. What is needed is professionalism, discipline, motivation, diplomacy, analytical thinking and empathy. All of them combined together. And finally, celebrating a successful exhibition is a must!

CCB Magazine: You are from Berlin. In the city where, according to the ratings, exist 400 galleries. What does Berlin mean for you as location and place to live?

Irina Ilieva: I have followed and witnessed the whole development of the city in recent years and decades in Berlin. Berlin has changed a lot! While the increase in costs is a problem, especially for the arts in the city, it is difficult for me to imagine to live in another place. The unique blend of different cultures makes Berlin a creative humus for ideas and exploration. I feel my work is very well incorporated with this city.



*Château de Versailles , from the series The Honeymoon.
Copyright: Peter Marron, Zettabyte.*

CCB Magazine: If you had one wish: How should Berlin be designed in the future?

Irina Ilieva: New life models with small and flexible units should come into being in Berlin, so that the agglomeration of the city does not lead to displacement. Also green areas should be kept and fostered in Berlin. And the promotion of art should have the highest priority!

"The promotion of art should have the highest priority in Berlin!"

CCB magazine: Irina, what are you planning in the future?

Irina Ilieva: In the next few days will start the European Month of Photography. This year I'm very happy to be part of it and, together with publisher Peter Marron, to show photo excerpts from a book called "The Honeymoon." "The Honeymoon" is a bit of a mystery story, told through photographs of an unknown couple in a forgotten era. We do know they were taken in the 1960s at locations covering the Eastern Bloc, the Caribbean, the US and Europe. They show us a world of joy and lightheartedness. And in the near future, I am planning the next exhibition, which will focus on architecture and art, as well as art projects in and outside the gallery. I'm also preparing to start on the architectural design of a family house in Berlin. And following a successful art installation in the historic center of Prague this summer, which was dedicated to the Baroque architecture of the local Clam-Gallas Palace, I'm intrigued to continue with further examination of the unfinished beauty of this city. In Berlin, with its crude charm, there are also enough places to be discovered. I remain curious! Let the future come.

CCB Magazin: Irina, we wish you success and thank you for the interview.

Irina Ilieva: I thank you!

[Profil von Irina Ilieva auf Creative City Berlin](#)

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