

Berlin East Side Gallery

A feature documentary by Karin Kaper and Dirk Szuszies

On the occasion of the 25th anniversary
of the East Side Gallery in 2015

For the first time!
The entire story of the longest surviving
part of the Berlin Wall!

World Premiere on 6th of January 2015 at Kino Babylon Berlin Mitte

Nationwide cinema release on 8th of January 2015

Original version with English subtitles

The longest remaining stretch of the Berlin Wall is the world's
largest open air gallery, attracting millions of visitors from around
the world since opening in 1990.

Karin Kaper and Dirk Szuszies have accompanied many of the
artists and followed the restoration and renovation in 2009 and all
following events until today. They were the only film team in the
world to do so.

Private archive material from the artists from 1990 provide a
fascinating retrospective.

The documentation gives a multi-faceted insight into the overall
history of the East Side Gallery. It also covers the current conflicts
that threaten the survival of the monument which has been
declared symbol of the peaceful revolution.

In the film, artists from many countries make an unusual
contribution to the reappraisal of the German-German division and
the associated culture of commemoration. What does freedom
mean to us and what is it worth?



TOP STORIES / GERMANY

CULTURE

Berlin's East Side Gallery on film

The East Side Gallery is an art object, a tourist attraction and a bone of contention in reunited Berlin. Now the most famous stretch of the Berlin Wall has also been portrayed in a documentary film.

Karin Kaper and Dirk Szuszies see Berlin's famed East Side Gallery as a creative interface between spontaneous street art and urban city politics - it's certainly the most-photographed attraction in the city after Checkpoint Charlie.

For six years, the documentary film producers captured all visible changes to this 1.3 km-long painted stretch of the former Berlin Wall along the Spree river. It also mirrors local Berlin history, film maker Szuszies says. "Every Berliner has his own profound prejudice against the East Side Gallery."



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Berliners avoid the East Side Gallery ...

Art in no man's land

The film shows that even today, the land between Berlin's Ostbahnhof and Oberbaumbrücke is a 'no man's land' with wide empty spaces. Locals tend to avoid the once-forbidden area: during the East German era, this stretch of the wall was part of an interior wall designed as a 'bulwark' to stop people from fleeing the country even before they reached the death strip or the actual Berlin Wall. Watchtowers, the notorious death strip and a path for East German border patrol guards were positioned between the two walls.

For the past 25 years, the East Side Gallery - this historical interface between East and West, and a memorial to the Cold War - has attracted tourists from around the world. Selfies with the famous murals in the background abound on social networks, and there are numerous video clips on YouTube. Postcards of the murals are standard fare in Berlin souvenir shops. Couples even take wedding pictures at the historic site these days.



...but it's been a tourist magnet for years

Berlin construction history

The two committed filmmakers started documenting the changes this section of the Berlin Wall has faced ever since its controversial restoration in 2009. Back then, all tourist graffiti was removed from the murals. Activists, Berlin citizens and students united to fight against the destruction of the wall. Meanwhile, entire chunks have been broken off: Berlin construction policies and ruthless investors have left their mark.

That's also an element of the documentary, Kaper und Szuszie explain, adding that they deliberately chose to produce the film independently. While various people portray their positions in the documentary, the film makers wanted to avoid giving local political initiatives a platform. There is no commentary. "There cannot be an almighty narrator or author, allowed to pass on to the audience the alleged truth about the East Side Gallery from his subjective point of view." The audience, they say, can thus come to its own conclusion.



Experts inspect the condition of the concrete slabs

In 1990, 118 artists from 21 countries staged a now legendary painting session along the Wall's longest surviving stretch, before the Berlin government declared the East Side Gallery a monument. Ever since, the murals have been exposed to freezing easterly winds and hordes of tourists. Time has taken its toll on the brittle concrete.

Which - the filmmakers argue - makes it even more important to preserve the monument on film. The documentary "Berlin East Side Gallery" premiered Tuesday (January 6) in Berlin, and will be available in movie theaters from Thursday, January 8, 2015.