

# "Das kommt mir spanisch vor." Shared conflictive heritage of dictatorship

"Eso parece español."

El patrimonio conflictivo compartido de las dictaduras



Jörg Haspel

Prof. Dr. phil. Dipl.-Ing. Graduated  
in Architecture and History of  
Art in Stuttgart and Tübingen

joerg.haspel@denkmalschutz.de

## Resumen

El siguiente artículo es un estudio de caso local que examina la herencia compartida del fascismo alemán y español en Berlín y su revalorización artística crítica utilizando como ejemplo lugares históricos y monumentos de arte y arquitectura del siglo XX. El texto se basa en las experiencias y debates controvertidos sobre la conservación y restauración del patrimonio en la capital alemana tras la apertura del Muro de Berlín (1989/90) y la caída del Telón de Acero en Europa (1989/1991). También se ponen de manifiesto las diferencias características en la recepción de la historia y el patrimonio cultural entre los sectores occidental y oriental de Berlín después de 1945. El texto debe impulsar esenciales al reciente Grupo de Acción «Enfoques Integrados y Globales para el Patrimonio Dissonante en Europa» de la «Asociación Cultura y Patrimonio Cultural» en el marco de la «Agenda Urbana de la UE» y pretende ser una contribución a la actual discusión en la II Conferencia Internacional "patrimonio y conflicto: Debate sobre la gestión y el tratamiento de un objeto polifacético". El artículo se opone a una iconoclasia políticamente motivada de símbolos y monumentos de sistemas autocráticos del pasado y aboga por su reevaluación crítica y comentario *in situ*.

## Abstract

The following article is a local case study that examines the shared heritage of German and Spanish fascism in Berlin and its critical artistic reappraisal using the example of historical sites and monuments of art and architecture of the 20th century. The text is based on the experiences and controversial discussions of the heritage conservation and restoration in the German capital after the opening of the Berlin Wall (1989/90) and the fall of the Iron Curtain in Europe (1989/1991). Characteristic differences in the reception of history and heritage between the western sectors of Berlin and East Berlin after 1945 also became apparent. The text owes essential impulses to the recent Action Group 'Integrated and Comprehensive Approaches for Dissonant Heritage in Europe' of the 'Partnership Culture and Cultural Heritage' within the framework of the 'Urban Agenda of the EU' and is intended as a contribution to the current discussion at the II International PAMEFRAN Conference "Heritage and conflict Debate on the management and treatment of a multifaceted object". The article opposes a politically motivated iconoclasm of symbols and monuments of autocratic systems of the past and advocates for their critical reappraisal and commentary *in situ*.

## Palabras Clave

Guerra Civil Española, Segunda Guerra Mundial, Guerra Fría, Berlín Este, Berlín Oeste, Memorial.

## Keywords

Spanish Civil War, World War II, Cold War, East-Berlin, West-Berlin, Memorial.

## 1. Introduction

”That seems Spanish to me...”. This is a phrase in German when something seems unclear, strange, odd, possibly even dubious or suspicious, in any case not understandable immediately. The term probably goes back to the 16th century and the era of the Spanish King Carlos I and the German Holy Roman Emperor Charles V (1500 - 1558). As is well known, the sun was never supposed to set on the Habsburgs’ global empire, but the multinational court sometimes caused irritation, at least in Germany and the Netherlands, where the ceremonial and language from Spain were not yet familiar.

The following article is not intended to shed light on German-Spanish relations in the early 16th century, but is dedicated to the 20th century, specifically the years of fascism in both countries. The focus is on historical testimonies and places in public space in Berlin that remind us of the National Socialist past of the “Third Reich”, but also today of the afterlife of Nazism and Francoism and their repression and coming to terms with them in the divided German capital city (1945-1989). Perhaps Germany and the memorial sites of Berlin not only reflect local and national history, but can also shed light on facets of the topic and the questions that the PAMEFRA project -for whose second conference on Dissonant Heritage this paper was initially drafted- wants to address: “Debate sobre y tratamiento de un objeto poliédrico / Debate on and treatment of a polyhedral object”<sup>1</sup>.

## 2. The Spanische Allee (Spanish Avenue) In Zehlendorf

The street name “Spanische Allee” is a direct link between the two countries. What a new Berliner might see as a sign of wanderlust and cosmopolitan openness - after all, there are street and square names everywhere in Berlin that refer to distant countries and capitals (Argentinische Allee 1934; Französische Straße 1706; Limastraße 1935; Mexikoplatz 1959; Rigaer Straße 1893; Warschauer Straße 1874 etc.) - as a kind of homage to a beautiful travel destination and holiday resort, turns out on closer inspection to be decidedly politically motivated.

In contrast to Lisbon Avenue (Lissabonallee), which was given its name in 1979 in the wake of and in honour of the Carnation Revolution in Portugal (1974/75) and the liberation of the country from the Salazar regime, the street name “Spanish Avenue” seems highly questionable. After all, it is not dedicated to the re-democratisation of Spain after Franco’s death (1892-1975) and the introduction of free democratic parliamentary elections, but to the sheer opposite: the former Wannseestraße was given the name “Spanish Avenue” on 6 June 1939, the day on which around 15,000 members of the “Condor Legion” marched in Berlin for the ceremonial victory parade and Adolf Hitler laid a wreath to invoke the fascist brotherhood in arms between the fascist regimes in Spain and Germany.

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1. A currently comprehensive overview of monuments, historical sites and works of art in Berlin’s urban space with reference to the fascist past of both countries can be found on Dietrich Hackenberg’s websites at <https://lichtbild.org/spaniens-himmel-ueber-berlin/> (accessed 18 April 2024) and “El Cielo Espanol sobre Berlin” at <http://spanien-berlin.de/index.html> (accessed 8 April 2024).

Germany's invasion of Poland started just three months later, followed by the attack on France: the Second World War had broken out - the Spanish Civil War had prepared the ground for Nazi Germany's aggression, militarily, technically, but also in its unprecedented brutality, which completely disregarded international law and human rights. The air raid in which German fighter pilots from the Condor Legion, supported by Italian units, bombed the Basque town of Guernica to rubble in three hours on 26 April 1937, killing hundreds of innocent civilians, shocked the world public. The canvas painting "Guernica" by Pablo Picasso, which was exhibited at the World Exhibition in Paris in the summer of the same year, made the war crime an unforgettable indictment. However, Guernica and the Spanish Civil War was only a foreshadowing of the crimes and destruction that fascism brought upon humanity during the Second World War.



PHOTO 1.1

"Spanische Allee" in Berlin: named on 6th of June 1939 after the return and in honour of the German Legion Condor, who helped the fascist coup to victory and anticipated in Guernica (26th April 1937) war crimes of the Second World War - here a cover page of teaching materials for Spanish lessons at external learning locations (vol. 82/2023).

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The reconstruction of Germany and its capital Berlin took place in East and West alike in the name of a new political beginning, to which all militaristic and Nazi names and symbols of German fascism were eliminated on a large scale<sup>2</sup>. The renaming of Wannseestraße to Spanische Allee in 1939 was neither questioned nor even cancelled after the German capitulation in 1945 or after the dividing of Berlin and the founding of the two German states in 1949. Located in the American Sector of West Berlin, Spanische Allee was apparently not perceived as politically offensive or incriminating, let alone in need of revision. [Photo 1.1]

Political consequences were only drawn after German reunification in 1989/90. A first revision of the mission statement took place in 1998 and in 2005 the renaming of barracks that had referred to the Condor Legion and its fighter pilot Werner Mölders (1913-1941). Also, at the turn of the millennium, a small (low-maintenance and overgrown) green area was designated at a road junction with a bus stop on Spanische Allee in Berlin. It was given the name “Guernica Platz” (Guernica Square) and a plaque, which was followed in 2009 by additional text and image information on the role of the Condor Legion and its crimes in Guernica. [Photos 1.2 a, b & 1.3]



PHOTO 1.2 A & B

“Guernica Platz” along the “Spanische Allee” in Berlin: instead of a work of art or memorial sign in the urban space, a street crossing with a bus stop and information plaque on Spanische Allee has been commemorating the crimes of the Condor Legion since 1998.

© OTFW / Gedenktafeln in Berlin.



2. cf. Directive No. 30 of the Allied Control Council of 13 May 1946 on the removal of German monuments and museums of a military and National Socialist character - <https://www.lwl.org/westfaelische-geschichte/nstopo/normen/1946-05-13.pdf> (accessed 18 April 2024)

The debate about Spanische Allee and the renaming of the street from the Nazi era has flared up again and again since then, not least in connection with a critical examination of racist and anti-Semitic place names and memorials. It is obvious that the elimination of the street name or renaming cannot undo the history of German war crimes before and during the Second World War, or even be a reason for a self-critical examination of historical responsibility. Perhaps it is precisely the potential for remembrance kept alive by the street name Spanische Allee that can be made productive again and again for a democratic positioning vis-à-vis the history of German dictatorship - the original historical place name "Wannseestraße" could hardly mobilise this potential for enlightenment. And an anti-Nazi renaming, for example as "Guernica Allee", could easily arouse suspicion of "heritage washing". On the other hand, the installation of a 'Guernica. Platz' (Guernica Square), which is constantly crowded by overgrown bushes and advertising posters, seems completely inappropriate as counter-information, indeed embarrassing and shameful in view of the war crimes committed by the Condor Legion, which this marker is intended to commemorate. constantly crowded by overgrown bushes and advertising posters, seems completely inappropriate as counter-information, indeed embarrassing and shameful in view of the war crimes committed by the Condor Legion, which this marker is intended to commemorate.



**Jahrestag des Luftangriffs**

**Gernika**

**87 Jahre**

**27.04.2024 | 17:00 Uhr**  
**Guernica-Platz**  
 Spanische Allee // Breisgauer Str.

**GB**

PHOTO 1.3  
 Announcement of a commemorative event at Guernica-Platz in April 2024 to mark the anniversary of the 1937 Condor Legion air raid.  
 © Gernika / Deutsch-Baskischer Kulturverein e.V. (Euskal Etxea Berlin).

### 3. The Spanish Embassy in Tiergarten

After the founding of the German Empire in 1871, Berlin's embassy district emerged from an elegant residential neighbourhood (Alsenviertel) on the edge of Berlin's Tiergarten park. Most of the foreign embassies were not too far from the ministry buildings of the German Empire and the Weimar Republic and not far from the parliament in the Reichstag building. China (1878) and Spain (1898) were among the first foreign missions to move into the newly emerging diplomatic quarter at the end of the 19th century.

In the "Third Reich", Albert Speer and the General Building Inspectorate (GBI), which he headed, planned a radical remodelling of Berlin for Adolf Hitler as a National Socialist "World Capital Germania". The backbone of the redesign presented in 1938 was a north-south axis up to 120 metres wide, which was to meet a huge domed "Hall of Fame of the People" with a span of 250 metres and an apex height of 290 metres in the parliament and government district. **[Photo 2.1]**



PHOTO 2.1

Berlin, model from 1939 for the redesign as 'Welthauptstadt Germania' (north-south axis), view from the planned southern railway station over the triumphal arch to the Great Hall at the Brandenburg Gate.

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The “gigantomaniac” breakthrough road required the large-scale clearance of existing buildings, including some embassy buildings in the historic diplomatic quarter, for which the Nazi regime planned to relocate to prestigious new locations on the southern edge of the Tiergarten. Among the twelve new embassies to be planned was the Spanish legation, which had already moved into a palace from the 1870s in the traditional diplomatic quarter in 1898 (Palais Tiele-Winckler, Regentenstraße and Hitzigallee 21, 1873-76, designed by Julius Benda & Gustav Ebe). [Photo 2.2]

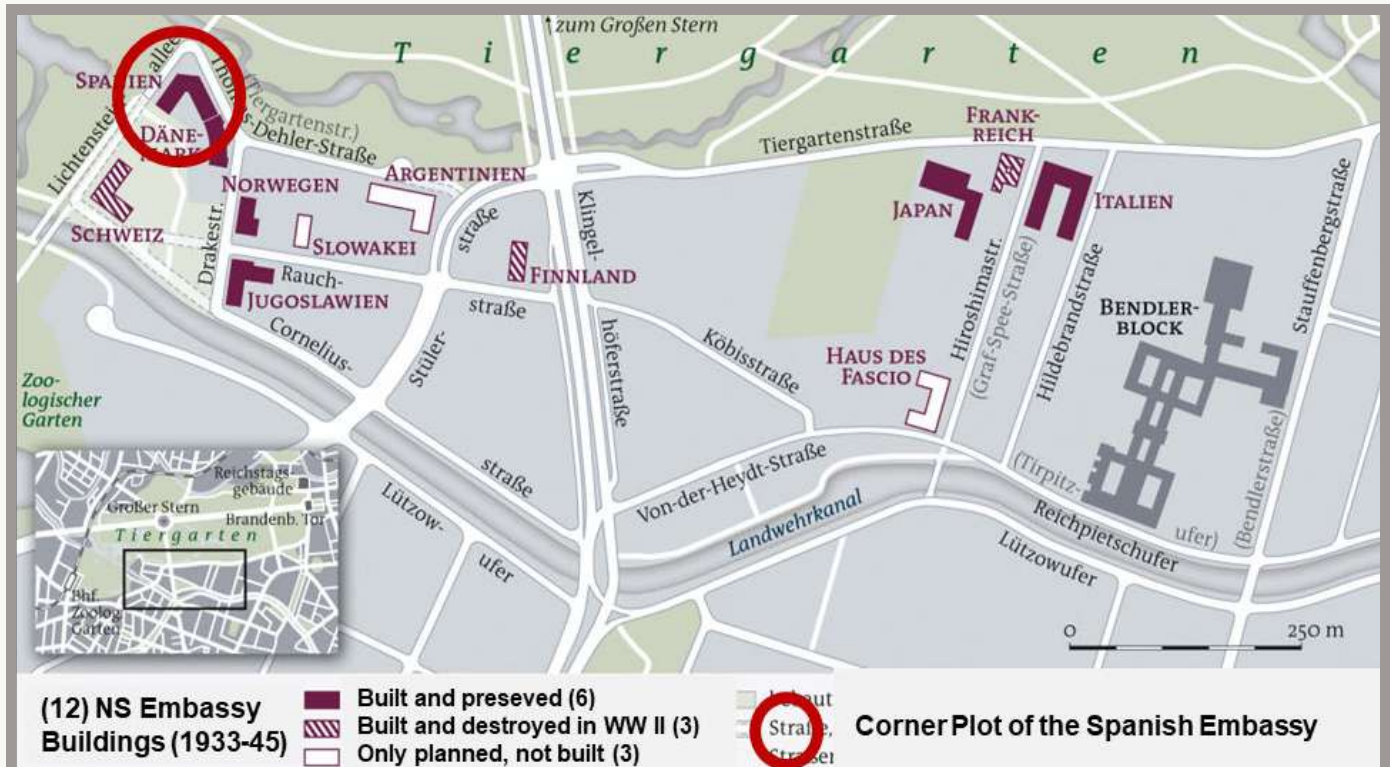


PHOTO 2.2

Map of the Embassy Quarter in Berlin-Tiergarten, marked locations of the planned new diplomatic missions from the Nazi era (1938).

© NordNordWest / Medienarchiv Wikimedia (adapted by Jörg Haspel).

Six of the planned diplomatic missions from the Nazi era have survived to this day and are protected as architectural monuments; three of them are still or once again being used as embassies by the successor states of the 1940s: the missions of Italy and Japan, i.e. allies of the Nazi regime in the Second World War, as well as Spain, whose Francoist regime endeavoured to remain neutral in the Second World War, but after all owed its final victory in the Spanish Civil War largely to the military intervention of fascist allies from Germany and Italy<sup>3</sup>.

The architects of the Spanish Embassy were the brothers Walter Krüger (1888-1971) and Johannes Krüger (1890-1975), both renowned villa and office building architects, commissioned by the Nazi

3. Jost Dülffer, Jochen Thies, Josef Henke (Eds.): *Hitlers Städte. Baupolitik im Dritten Reich. Eine Dokumentation*. Köln / Wien 1978; Larsson, Lars Olof Larsson: *Die Neugestaltung der Reichshauptstadt. Albert Speers Generalbebauungsplan für Berlin*. Stuttgart 1978; Hartwig Schmidt: *Das Tiergartenviertel. Baugeschichte eines Berliner Villenviertels*. (Die Bauwerke und Kunstdenkmäler von Berlin, vol. 4), Berlin 1981; Hans-Joachim Reichardt, Wolfgang Schäche (1985): *Von Berlin nach Germania*. Berlin 1985; IBA BERLIN (Ed.): *Dokumentation Diplomatenviertel Berlin-Tiergarten. Vergangenheit - Wettbewerb 1985/86 - Gegenwart 1987*. Berlin 1987; Wolfgang Schäche: *Architektur und Städtebau in Berlin zwischen 1933 und 1945*. (Die Bauwerke und Kunstdenkmäler von Berlin, vol. 17), Berlin 1992; Kerstin Englert, Jürgen Tietz (Eds.): *Botschaften in Berlin*. Berlin 2004; Landesdenkmalamt Berlin (Ed.): *Denkmale in Berlin - Ortsteile Moabit, Hansaviertel und Tiergarten* (Denkmaltopographie Bundesrepublik Deutschland), Petersberg 2005.

state (GBI - General Building Inspector for the Reich Capital Germania), but who had already become famous early on for their design for the monumental Tannenberg Memorial in the mid-1920s and for its transformation into a National Socialist memorial in the mid-1930s. It was not least this monumental building in East Prussia that brought them both the highest recognition and, in 1944, even inclusion in the so-called “list of artists honoured by God” (around 300), who were to enjoy special protection from the Nazi regime<sup>4</sup>.

Pedro Muguruza Otaño (1893-1952), “a Spanish architect and Falangist politician”, as Wikipedia characterises him<sup>5</sup>, was involved in the planning and execution from the Spanish side. He had left the Republican territories at the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936 and joined the Falangists. After Franco’s victory, he was appointed “Chief of the Services of Architecture of FET y de las JONS (= Falange Española Tradicionalista y de las Juntas de Ofensiva Nacional Sindicalista = ‘Traditionalist Spanish Phalanx of the Councils of the National Syndicalist Offensive’; FET y de las JONS) and Head of the Directorate General for Architecture (until 1946) in 1939 in order to enforce Franco’s building policy. In this role, together with his student Diego Méndez Gonzales (1906-1987), he was also the main person responsible for the expansion of the Valle de los Caídos war memorial (officially since 2022 “Valle de Cuelgamuros”), before Mendez replaced him completely in 1949.

After the war, the two German architects remained active and successful in their profession, especially in West Berlin. Johannes Krüger was even responsible for the local management of the reconstruction of the war-damaged chancery wing of the Spanish Embassy in 1960/61, which was then used as a consulate general by the Franco regime and afterwards (1968-1998). The Spanish embassy for the Federal Republic of Germany was established in Bonn, and in 1973 Spain under Franco and the socialist GDR established diplomatic relations and set up embassies in Madrid and East Berlin<sup>6</sup>.

After German reunification in 1989/90 and the German parliament’s capital city resolution in 1991, Spain also relocated its embassy back to Berlin and moved into the location from the Nazi era (as did Italy and Japan) in the traditional embassy district. The conversion from consulate general to embassy required a modernisation and expansion of the programme. This refurbishment was led by the Spanish architects Jesús Velasco Ruiz and José Luis Iniguez de Onzono y Angulo, who had the chancery wing (Lichtensteinallee), which had been rebuilt after 1945, dismantled and replaced it with a new building in simplified historical design (1998-2003). While preserving the historic façades of the head building and eastern residential wing (Thomas Dehler Straße), the new western wing façade

4. *Walter Krüger, 1888 – 1971 - Johannes Krüger, 1890 - 1975: Architekten*. Berlin (ex. cat. Art Library / National Museums Berlin, ed. by Elke Blauert) 2004; Wolfgang Brauneis, Raphael Gross (Eds.): *Die Liste der „Gottbegnadeten“. Künstler des Nationalsozialismus in der Bundesrepublik*. (ex. cat. Deutsches Historisches Museum) Berlin/Munich 2021

5. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pedro\\_Muguruza%20\(accessed%2018%20April%202024](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pedro_Muguruza%20(accessed%2018%20April%202024)

6. Cf. Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, Unión Europea y Cooperación: Embassy of the month – the Spanish Embassy in Berlin - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sjmS1qg2lfl> (accessed 18 April 2024)



was rebuilt in shell limestone with the same structure and materials and the roof was extended to two storeys. The representative portico at the head building with the main entrance was retained; the crowning Francoist relief was replaced by square natural stone slabs with the current Spanish coat of arms<sup>7</sup>.

It is worth mentioning that the sheer volume of the new Spanish embassy was significantly larger than the space available for the former embassy. Above all, however, the exposed urban location, which not only favoured the choice of location for the Italian and Japanese embassies, but also the Spanish representation, cannot be overlooked to this day. All three embassies are not located on a side street in the Tiergarten district, but in a prime location directly opposite the park with its patriotic sculpture programme of the 19th and 20th century.

The Spanish embassy is particularly impressive as a stone corner building (the Italian and Japanese legations were executed and rebuilt as plaster buildings) with two elongated street fronts and a representative front building decorated with a driveway, columns, balcony and coat of arms as an entrance motif. The bevelled main front of the two-winged complex is not simply oriented towards the green space of the park, but the address-forming Lichtsteinallee leads straight to the Großer Stern, the central square of the Tiergarten, which the National Socialist planning in 1938/39 had just upgraded and effectively staged by the new erection and addition of the translocated Victory Column (1864-73, by Heinrich Strack for the King's Square, later Republic Square), accompanied by transferred monumental statues of prominent Prussian- German politicians and generals of the imperial unification wars of the 19th century (Bismarck, Moltke and Roon). At least from a heritage point of view and monumental perspective, more urban planning attention for an embassy in 1940s Berlin could hardly have been expected. **[Photos 2.3-2.7]**

Anyone who visits this historic memorial site today as a city traveller, on a park promenade on the edge of the Tiergarten or as a visitor to the Spanish Embassy can learn nothing about its fascist past. Secrecy is a diplomatic custom, indeed a virtue. This applies equally to hosts and guests in the service of diplomacy. In this case, however, the discretion exercised by both sides, the German hosts and the Spanish guests, hardly avoid the misleading impression that the involved parties want to sweep something under the common carpet.

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7. María J. Ocón-Fernández: Die neue Spanische Botschaft in Berlin (1938-1943), in: kritische berichte 22 (1994), pp. 110-118; María J. Ocón-Fernández: Repräsentationsarchitektur zwischen spanischem Faschismus und Nationalsozialismus, in: Jahrbuch des Landesarchivs Berlin 1995, pp. 141-154; Blumers Architekten: Wiederaufbau Spanische Botschaft, Berlin-Tiergarten, in: <https://www.blumers-architekten.de/de/projekte/details/spanische-botschaft> (accessed 18 April 2024);

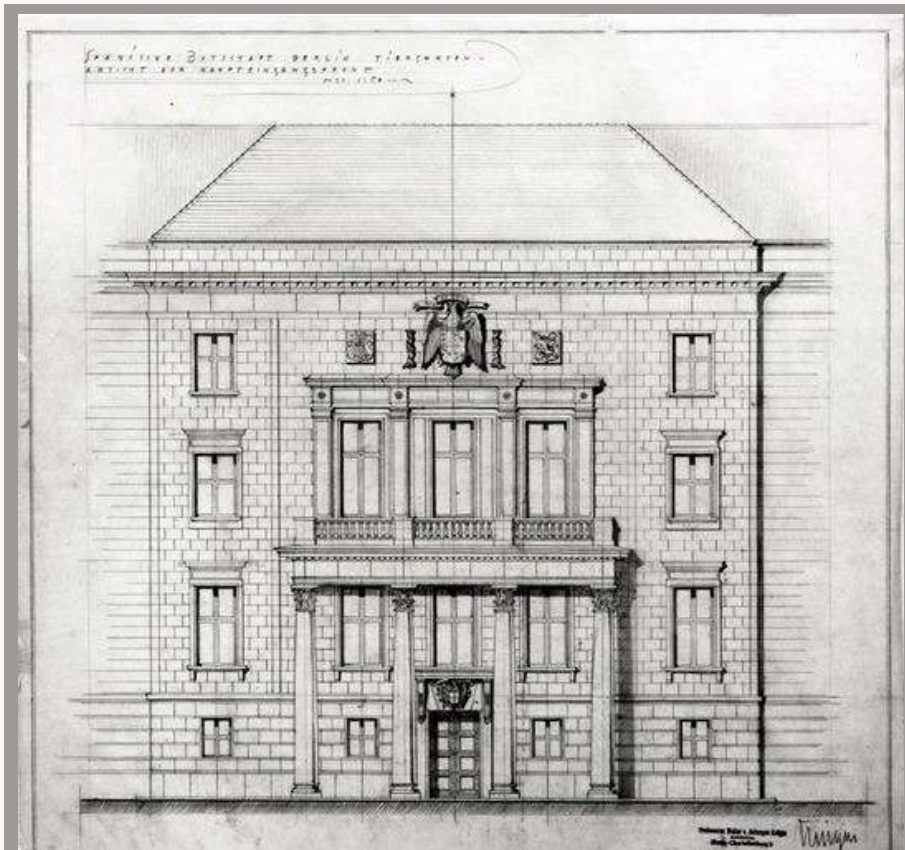


PHOTO 2.3

Blueprint of the main front of the Spanish Embassy (around 1940).

© BauNetz 12.03.2004 / Kunstbibliothek Staatliche Museen zu Berlin.



PHOTO 2.4

Spanish embassy building in Berlin (2017): Main front with driveway to the entrance colonnade under balcony and replaced coat of arms stone, on the left the repaired old wing, on the right the newly replaced wing of the chancery section.

© Marek Swilecki / Medienarchiv Wikimedia.



PHOTO 2.5

Spanish Embassy (2024), repaired and completed old building wing on Thomas Dehler Strasse, in the background the former Danish embassy, which has been converted and reused as a hotel.

© Jörg Haspel, ICOMOS Germany.



PHOTO 2.6

Spanish Embassy (2024), newly complemented embassy wing in place of the historic chancery wing facing Lichtensteinallee.

© Jörg Haspel, ICOMOS Germany.



PHOTO 2.7

View from Lichtensteinallee along the Spanish Embassy into the Tiergarten Park with the Victory Column, which was moved to the Großer Stern in 1938/39, as a point de vue in the background (2024).

© Jörg Haspel, ICOMOS Germany.

## 4. The Memorial to the Spanish Fighters in Friedrichshain

As is well known, Germany was doubly involved in the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939): Germans fought on the Francoist side, but were also combatants on the Republican side. Monuments commemorating the volunteers from Germany who fought on the Republican side in the so-called International Brigades initiated by the Communist side were only created decades after the Second World War and remained rare. During the Cold War, they were probably only carried out in the post-war socialist German state; in any case, they only survived on the territory of the former GDR (like Karl-Marx-Stadt / Chemnitz, Zeuthen etc.) and in East Berlin.

The International Brigade Monument preserved in Berlin is over half a century old and can be considered a programmatic monument in the sense of modern socialist memorial art. The complex is appreciated the most important monument to the Spanish fighters in Germany, and perhaps this superlative even applies in a European comparison (like Luxembourg, Dudelange: *No pasarán!* by Lucien Wercollier, 1997).

The surrounding location area of the Berlin Inter-Brigadist Monument dates back to 1840, when the city council of Berlin decided to create a municipal public park in the east of the city to mark the 100th anniversary of the coronation of Frederick the Great (\*1712 in Berlin / †1786 in Potsdam) as a counterpart to the noble people's park Tiergarten in the west and to name it "Friedrichshain" after the Prussian King Frederick II (1740-1786). The municipal park was to play a central role early on as a place of remembrance for the democracy and opposition movement and, after the Second World War, provided an ideal starting point for a socialist memorial policy in the eastern part of the divided city and republic. The "Cemetery of the March Fallen" for victims of the suppressed revolution of 1848/49 and the November Revolution of 1918/19, which was laid out in the park grounds as early as 1848 and expanded after 1918, was a point of reference for the redesign of the park grounds after 1945 (map, no. 13). The green park ground was topographically re-accentuated in the ruined city after the founding of the socialist German republic by two bunker hills and rubble mountains (map, no. 5; two bunkers built in 1941 and blown-up in 1946). **[Photo 3.1]**

The district of Friedrichshain, where the eponymous Volkspark was created in the 1840s and was to take shape as a green space again after 1945 under the direction of Reinhold Lingner (1902-1968), was traditionally regarded as a workers' and industrial district. It was from there that the construction of the first socialist flagship arterial road - initially called "Stalin-Allee" (1949-1961), later renamed "Karl-Marx-Allee" - began. And a second arterial road, which led east along Friedrichshain Park, was called Lenin-Allee from 1950 (until 1992); in 1970, at the intersection with the park, it provided a new political and aesthetic dominant feature in the modern socialist urban space (called "Leninplatz"; today Platz der Vereinten Nationen - United Nations Square) with a group of high-rise buildings

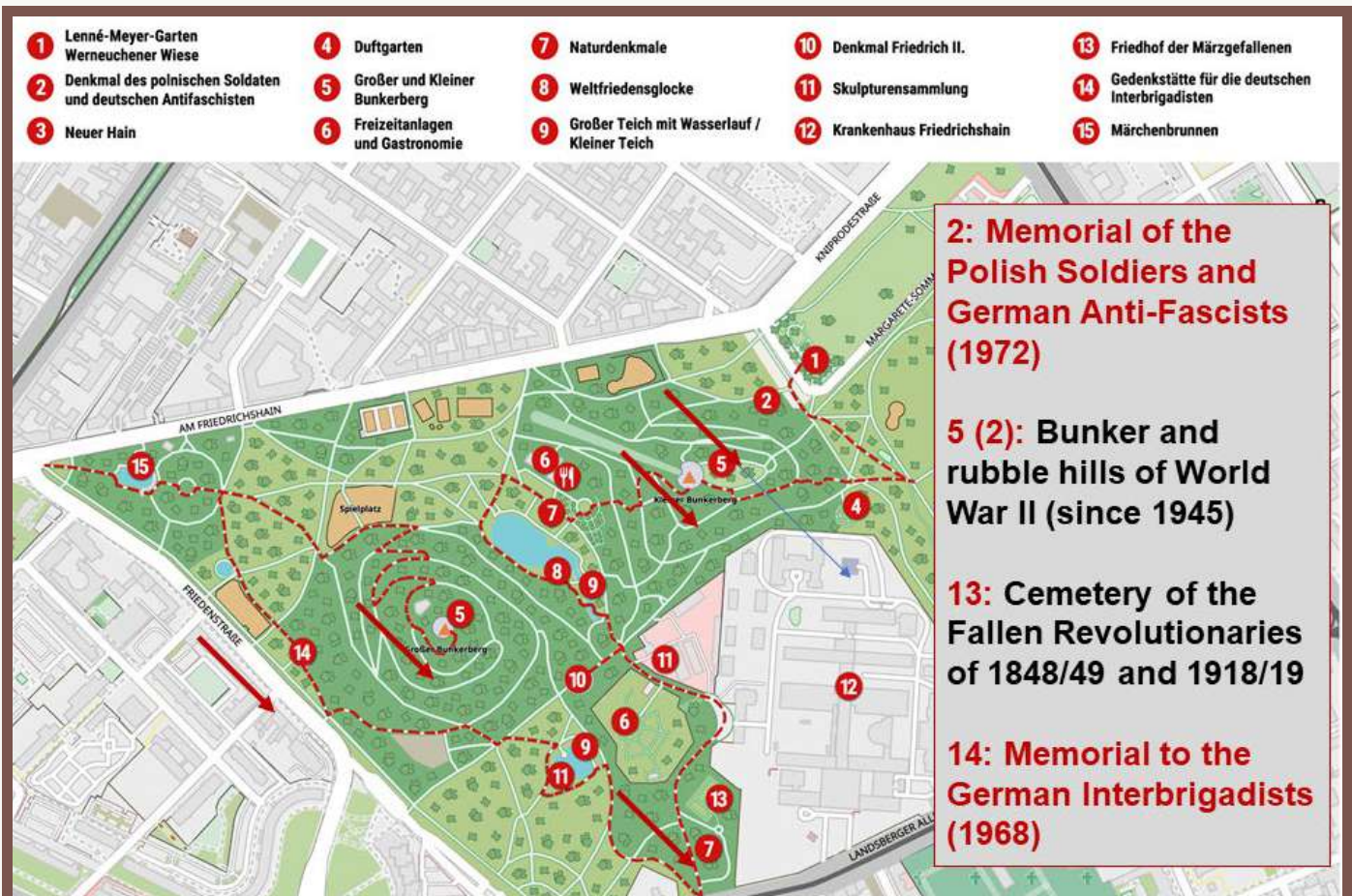


PHOTO 3.1

Current overview site plan of the Volkspark Friedrichshain in Berlin, indicating: No. 14 Memorial to the German Interbrigadists – Spanish fighters monument (1966-68); No. 5 Large and Small Bunker and Rubble Hills (1946-50); No. 2 Monument to the Polish Soldiers and German Anti-fascists (1972); No. 8 World Peace Bell (1989); No. 13 Cemetery of the March Fallen (1848/49; 1918/19).

© Bezirksamt Pankow von Berlin.

framing a monumental statue of Lenin (Nikolai Tomski, unveiled in 1970, dismantled in 1991) in the centre<sup>8</sup>.

To this day, two memorial complexes in the Friedrichshain Park are dedicated to international solidarity and resistance against fascism and war; they are clearly accessible at the foot of the two bunker and rubble mountains via staircases and staged on several levels. Both are laid out over a wide area as rally sites and slightly elaborated from the open edge of the park, meaning they can also be seen from the public street. The memorial for the “Monument to the Polish Soldier and German Anti-Fascist”, which was unveiled in 1972, is the result of a Polish initiative (1965) and a joint German-Polish competition and achievement (1968/69).

The erection and unveiling of the monument to the so-called Spanish fighters on the opposite edge of the park was only a short time before. It was dedicated to the German members of the so called Interbrigadists, an army of volunteers from all over the world, initiated in 1936 by the Comintern

8. Cf. Landesdenkmalamt Berlin (Ed.): Baudenkmale in Berlin. Bezirk Friedrichshain (Denkmaltopographie der Bundesrepublik Deutschland), Berlin 1996; Landesdenkmalamt Berlin (Ed.): Gartendenkmale in Berlin. Parkanlagen und Stadtplätze, Petersberg 2013; Landesdenkmalamt Berlin (Ed.): Gartendenkmale in Berlin. Nachkriegszeit bis Ende der 1960er Jahre. Petersberg 2018.



PHOTO 3.2

GDR six-part stamp series for the 'Heroes of the Anti-Fascist Freedom Struggle' (1966) with portraits of German inter-brigadists on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War and the formation of international volunteer organisations like the German Thälmann Battalion.

© <https://www.briefmarken-muenzen-shop.de/ddr>.

PHOTO 3.3

Stamp of the German Democratic Republic (1972) showing the Polish-German Antifa Memorial in Berlin Friedrichshain Park.

© nightflyer / Medienarchiv Wikimedia.

(Communist Internationale) under the lead of Stalin's Soviet Union, to support the republican side against the falangists and their allies from Germany and Italy. [Photos 3.2, 3.3]

The monument to the Spanish fighters mainly consists of three parts, which can be experienced as a unit via a slightly ascending staircase and, to a certain extent, define a stage and assembly area open to the urban space at the edge of the park: in the background on the right, a larger-than-life sculpture of a dynamic Spanish fighter with a beret, clenched left fist and raised sword in his right hand; in the centre ground on the left, a two-sided bronze relief panel depicting scenes from the Spanish Civil War and the deployment of the inter-brigadists; and in the centre, a horizontal text panel, which is placed over the steps as an inclined plane and connecting element and presents the theme of the memorial; since 1993 after an explosives attacks, this has been replaced by an emphatically matter-of-fact and unheroic manner with the words "Memorial / to the / German Interbrigadists / Spain / 1936 - 1936". [Photos 3.4 a,b,c]

The memorial dates back to a decision by the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED) in 1965, 20 years after the end of the Second World War. The foundation stone was laid in 1966 to commemorate the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War and the formation of the XI International Brigade (with the







PHOTO 3.4 A, B &amp; C

Memorial to the German Interbrigadists in Volkspark Friedrichshain (1966-1968), consisting of a larger-than-life bronze sculpture of a fighter figure by Fritz Cremer with a memorial plaque in front of it and a two-sided bronze relief by Siegfried Krepp with scenes from the Spanish Civil War, including the depiction of National Socialist air raids on the Spanish Republic .

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© Thomas Knoll Berlin / Denkmal an Berlin e.V.

© Dorothee Haffner / BiB Bildhauerei in Berlin

German Thälmann Battalion) on the Republican side in autumn 1936. The laying of the foundation stone marked the memorial's intention and location, as there was no agreed memorial design yet. The commission was awarded to Fritz Cremer (1906-1993), an internationally recognised anti-fascist sculptor and graphic artist at the time, responsible for sculptures at concentration camp memorials in Austria and Germany, among other things, who was to design and execute the memorial together with Siegfried Krepp (1930-2013), one of his master students at the Academy of Art.

It is known that Fritz Cremer's early designs met with scepticism in the government and party and that the large sculpture in particular had to be reworked. After all, the sculpture was intended to express the victory over fascism in Europe proclaimed with the founding of the GDR in the sense of a militant and heroic representation. The socialist unity party had not only continued the anti-fascist resistance of the inter-brigadists in East Germany, but had also led it to success and victory over fascism. In the eyes of the party leaders, Cremer's studies could obviously only partially fulfil this claim. In fact, not even the realised sculpture of a fighter can be said to have an unbroken confidence in victory. The diagonal dynamic of the figure leaping up to attack seems slowed down, even awkward, by the right

hand reaching over the head with the bent sword. Socialist fighter and victor types look different. Critics who criticised the unnatural arm position of the inter-brigadist because such a blow could not be delivered with a sword were told by Cremer that he had not wanted to present a sword fight, but had tried “to awaken the viewer’s willingness to fight himself” and further “... to create movement that demands mental movement.”<sup>9</sup> [Photo 3.5]



PHOTO 3.5

1986 Stamp of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) showing Fritz Cremer's Spain Fighter Sculpture to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the formation of the so-called “interbrigades” in 1936.

© stamp community forum.

Possible iconographic references for the bronze sculpture and its characteristic arm position could have been provided by the Barlach sculptures of “swordsmen” or “spirit fighters” (avengers, berserkers) known in Germany, whose art was considered “degenerate” during the Nazi era. Inspiration has also been drawn from the motif of the female torchbearer in Pablo Picasso’s monumental composition “Guernica”. Closer associations could have come from the diagonally rearing dynamic and the sword-wielding Berlin equestrian statue of the dragon slayer St George (1855, August Karl Eduard Kiss), which was erected in the Volkspark Friedrichshain (Trümmerberg, Schwanenteich) from 1951 to 1987. [Photo 3.6]

9. Quoted from Diether Schmidt (ed.): Fritz Cremer. Leben – Schriften – Werke – Meinungen. Dresden 1972, pp.70-71; cf. [https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fritz\\_Cremer](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fritz_Cremer) (accessed 18 April 2024).



PHOTO 3.6

1988 Stamp of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) on the occasion of the 35th anniversary of the so called "Kampfgruppen - Combat Groups of the Working Class" which shows the motif of the Spanish fighters monument in Friedrichshain and places the paramilitary organisation of the GDR in a line of tradition with the International Brigades of the Spanish Civil War - it was the last jubilee of the reserve force with nearly 200.000 personal in 2.000 units, which was demobilised in 1989/90, and it was the last stamp presenting the Spanish Fighters Monument.

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In contrast to the German-Polish Antifa Monument in Friedrichshain presented at the beginning of this article, which has repeatedly remained the subject of public monument debates in the course of the ongoing reappraisal of German-Polish history in the 20th century, the Spanish Fighters Monument seems to have fallen more and more into the slipstream of social attention since 1990, even though it is more publicly effective on the roadside than the Polish monument on the opposite side of the park. It was said years ago that the memorial was now in particular need of explanation. In particular, the younger generation - so the impression of the older generation - seems to be finding it increasingly difficult to understand the memorial, especially as the inscription (*Memorial to the German Interbrigadists, Spain 1936-1939*), which was reduced in 1993, leaves visitors' questions unanswered. [Photos 3.7 a, b]

In 2015, the local district office announced a limited ideas competition for a memorial commentary and historical contextualisation of the Spanish Civil War period and its socialist reception in the GDR.



„Ich habe viel Material von meinem Vater aus Spanien der 1941 aus einem französischen Internierungslager nach Deutschland ausgeliefert wurde. Der Wachmann im Stuttgarter Gestapo-Gefängnis war ein ehemaliger Schulkamerad meines Vaters. Er hat die Originaldokumente meines Vaters in Sicherheit gebracht.“  
Katrin Baum, Workshopleiterin

„Die Arbeit der Schülerinnen und Schüler wird am Denkmalort präsentiert. Das spricht auch andere Menschen an, die extra dorthin kommen. Die Relevanz von Geschichte wird hier deutlich.“  
Sophia Thomalla, Lehrerin



## Friedrichshain

„Die Skulptur stellt die Unschuld der Kinder dar, und dass man für die Zukunft gekämpft hat, für die Unschuldigen [...]“  
Schüler 13 Jahre



Ausgehend vom Spanienkämpferdenkmal im Volkspark Friedrichshain und anhand wertvoller historischer Quellen untersuchten die Schülerinnen und Schüler unterschiedliche Facetten des Spanischen Bürgerkriegs.

### Workshopteilnehmer

Die Schülerinnen und Schüler der Klasse 8A sowie die Lehrerin Frau Thomalla des Werner-von-Siemens-Gymnasiums Berlin Zehlendorf unter der Leitung von Katrin Baum und mit Hilfe des Museum Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg und dem Verein Kämpfer und Freunde der Spanischen Republik 1936-1939.

### Präsentation zum Tag des offenen Denkmals

Am Samstag, den 10. September 2016 von 11.30 bis 13.30 Uhr, präsentieren die Schülerinnen und Schüler ihre Workshopergebnisse und führen durch die von ihnen erarbeitete Ausstellung. Parallel dazu gibt es einen Infostand, auf dem sich der Verein Kämpfer und Freunde der Spanischen Republik 1936-1939 vorstellt.

**Treffpunkt am Denkmalort:** Spanienkämpferdenkmal an der Friedensstraße im Volkspark Friedrichshain, 10249 Berlin

13



# Friedrichshain

### Gedenkstätte für die Interbrigadisten im Spanischen Bürgerkrieg

Volkspark Friedrichshain, 10249 Berlin  
Zwischen 1966 und 1968 gestaltete der Bildhauer Fritz Cremer die überlebensgroße, äußerst expressive Figur eines aus dem Schützengraben springenden Spanienkämpfers. Ihm zur Seite gestaltet die doppelseitige Relieftafel des Bildhauers Siegfried Krepp aus dem gleichen Zeitraum. Auf ihr sind Szenen aus dem Spanischen Bürgerkrieg abgebildet, die heute nur noch schwer lesbar sind. Beide Bronzen erinnern an den Einsatz internationaler Brigaden im Spanischen Bürgerkrieg. Zwischen 1936 und 1939 kämpften zehntausende internationale Freiwillige, Männer wie Frauen, an der Seite des spanischen Volkes, um den faschistischen Putsch Francos abzuwehren und die Spanische Republik zu verteidigen. Darunter auch über 5000 Deutsche. Ein einmaliger Akt internationaler Solidarität. Die prägnante Lage des weitläufig angelegten Denkmals am Rand des Volksparks Friedrichshain ist auch Ausdruck der zeitgenössischen Funktion. Der Ort wurde als Aufmarsch- und Versammlungsgelände für Veteranen, Sportler und Pioniere genutzt und stellte eine Verbindung zu den Bewohnern der angrenzenden neuen Wohngebiete her.

### Friedrichshain

#### Spanienkämpferdenkmal im Volkspark Friedrichshain

Die Bedeutung des weiten Platzes am Rande des Volksparks Friedrichshain mit der in den Boden eingelassenen Gedenktafel und den beiden Skulpturen erschließt sich nicht auf den ersten Blick. Grund genug für die Schülerinnen und Schüler der 8. Klasse des Zehlendorfer Werner-von-Siemens-Gymnasiums, sich eine Woche lang intensiv mit dem Interbrigadistendenkmal und dem Spanischen Bürgerkrieg in allen Facetten auseinanderzusetzen.

Zum 80. Mal jährt sich in diesem Jahr der Einsatz der Internationalen Brigaden in dem durch den faschistischen Putsch Francos ausgelösten Spanischen Bürgerkrieg. Doch der Kampf um die Spanische Republik von 1936 bis 1939 ist in der allgemeinen Geschichtsvermittlung nicht sehr präsent. Katrin Baum, Workshopleiterin und Tochter eines Spanienkämpfers weiß um die unterschiedlichen Erinnerungskulturen: „Oft ist es eine Frage der gesellschaftlichen Umstände, ob Erinnerung zugelassen wird. Das war in den beiden deutschen Staaten sehr unterschiedlich, aber auch innerhalb Europas gab es große Unterschiede. Selbst die Spanier haben bis heute die Diktatur nicht wirklich aufgearbeitet, das passiert erst jetzt so langsam.“

Die Schülerinnen und Schüler besuchen die Gedenkstätte im Friedrichshain und lernen im Workshop nicht nur die historischen Hintergründe des spanischen Bürgerkriegs kennen, sondern arbeiten auch mit wertvollen originalen Quellenmaterial. Sowo (15 Jahre) hatte Freude an der „Arbeit mit den Originalen, die uns einen tieferen Einblick in die Geschichte gibt, von der wir vorher gar nichts wussten.“

Auch die Lehrerin Sophia Thomalla schätzt die Arbeit mit den Originalen, die „normaler Geschichtsunterricht oft nur punktuell hergeben kann.“ In acht Arbeitsgruppen erforschten die Jugendlichen u.a. die Biografie der Politikerin Dolores Ibárruri, das fotografische Werk Robert Capas und die dramatische Situation der Kinder im Bürgerkrieg. Antworten zu ihren komplexen Fragestellungen fanden sie in einem von Archäologen entwickelten umfangreichen Begleitmaterial. Die engagierten Lehrerinnen halfen ihnen bei der Auswertung.

Die Ergebnisse ihrer Arbeit präsentieren die Schülerinnen und Schüler auf selbst gestalteten Schautafeln. Diese werden am Tag des offenen Denkmals an der Gedenkstätte für die Interbrigadisten im Spanischen Bürgerkrieg präsentiert.

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PHOTO 3.7 A & B

“Preserving monuments together” - this was the motto of a young talent project in which Berlin students and young people joint the European Heritage Days 2016 to explore cross-border similarities: the bulky Spanish Fighter Memorial in East Berlin, to which a school from West Berlin was dedicated, not only brought together young people from different backgrounds, but also addressed the children and grandchildren of contemporaries of the Spanish Civil War.

© Denkmal an Berlin e.V / Thomas Knoll Berlin (2).

Of the five entries submitted, the winning design was by Benno Hinkes, who submitted a work called “Hörstück” (audio play; sound piece), consisting of a park bench and a loudspeaker pole in the shape of a parking lamp on the passing footpath and cycle path. The signals triggered by infrared motion detectors can play acoustic information about the Civil War and the memorial, as well as historical audio documents, eyewitness accounts or workers’ songs from the Civil War for listeners at the bench in the manner of an audio guide in museums<sup>10</sup>. [Photos 3.8 a, b]



PHOTO 3.8 A, B

Winning concept by Benno Hinkes in collaboration with Regina Weiss and Gabriel Artavia for an artistic commentary on the monument to the Spanish fighters by installing a park bench and sound system with a look at the memorial ensemble: competition design (2015) and 1:1 test installation on site (2016).

© Benno Hinkes.

10. Memorial to the German Members of the International Brigades in the Spanish Civil War, Berlin-Friedrichshain - <https://spanien-kaempfer.jimdofree.com/english-version-a-monument-in-need-of-explanation/> (accessed 18 April 2024).

The responsible state conservators, who had not been involved in the art competition, welcomed the attempted mediation, but voted against an open-air installation of an acoustic sound system in the listed park and next to the memorial sculpture group. At its meeting in September 2016, the Berlin State Monuments Council, which advises the Berlin Senate on heritage matters, had the questionable application on its agenda. The minutes of the expert committee's session state:

The Landesdenkmalrat (State Council for Monuments) considers the submitted design to be interesting in its innovative form of mediation, but unsatisfactory in its museum-orientated approach. It recognises that the problem of commenting on and communicating monuments in line with the spirit of the times is and will be a recurring one. He therefore suggests discussing this general topic in a broader context, such as a colloquium, within the framework of the Friedrichshain Volkspark.<sup>11</sup>

As the planned completion of a commentary installation on the 80th anniversary of the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War and the formation of the International Brigades in 1936 was no longer possible, the Berlin Senate Administration suggested that the district project be revisited and further developed as a German-Spanish project in multinational context as part of the European Year of Cultural Heritage (EYCH) proclaimed for 2018.

The experts' recommendation from 2016 went without a response. Ten years later, however, it has lost none of its relevance. Perhaps the preparation for upcoming anniversaries in 2026 will provide a suitable occasion to raise again open questions about the culture of remembrance of the Spanish Civil War in Berlin. The vote of 2016 seems burningly topical, to explore better options by including affected stakeholders and descendants on a multinational level.



PHOTO 3.9

LaBuerlinica – Cacciatore: wall painting by Stephan Jaeger on the Berlin Wall Section of the East Side Gallery.

© <https://www.eastsidegalleryausstellung.de/kunstwerke/jaeger-la-buerlinica/>

11. Recommendation of the State Council for Monuments Berlin (Landesdenkmalrat Berlin) on the monument to the Spanish Fighters in Volkspark Berlin-Friedrichshain, Protocol of the session of 30 September 2016, Top 6 - <https://www.berlin.de/sen/stadtentwicklung/denkmal/landesdenkmalrat-berlin/positionen-und-empfehlungen/> (provided by Landesdenkmalamt Berlin 18 April 2024).

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# JÖRG HASPEL

Prof. Dr. phil. Dipl.-Ing., graduated in Architecture and Urban Planning in Stuttgart and in History of Art and Cultural Studies in Tübingen till 1981. He then became a custodian in the inventory department of the Monument Protection Authority in Hamburg and taught at the Hamburg University.

From 1992 till 2018 he was Berlin State Curator of Historic Monuments (Landeskonservator) and from 2012 to 2021 president of ICOMOS Germany. Since 2014 he is chairing the Board of Trustees of the German Foundation for Monument Protection (Deutsche Stiftung Denkmalschutz).

Jörg Haspel is a permanent member of the Expert Group on Urban Heritage Conservation of the Federal Government in Germany and a founding member of the International Scientific ICOMOS Committee on the 20th Century Heritage Preservation (ISC 20C). He teaches as an honorary professor in heritage conservation studies at the Technical University of Berlin. His research and publication activities focus on the modern heritage of metropolitan culture. He is a member of the Action Group "Dissonant Heritage" of the Urban Agenda of the EU.