



Yoko Ono's 'Dream Together' Among the Shows Burnishing Berlin's Status as Global Art Hub

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By David Hiroshi Jager

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Aside from the blockbusters of note, several galleries this summer are addressing both human figures and the human condition in a pointedly Berlin way.



Julian Opie, 'Five Towers.' Courtesy Roman Marz and Koenig Gallery



DAVID HIROSHI JAGER

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Sprawling, unapologetically gritty, and full of contrasts, Berlin is not the most picturesque European capital. Yet its irrepressible energy, relative affordability, and freedom make it an incubator of cutting-edge culture. It maintains, too, its status as an international art hub, prompting comparisons to New York City's downtown scene in the early 1990s.

This combination of affordability and status allows Berlin to be both inside and outside the box. Aside from the blockbuster shows of note, here is a round-up of galleries that address both human figures and the human condition in a pointedly Berlin way. A hodgepodge of established and cutting-edge, they reflect how Berlin allows curators to take risks while leading the international art market.

Julian Opie at the St. Agnes Building

Koenig gallery, Alexandrinenstrasse 118–121, 10969 Berlin

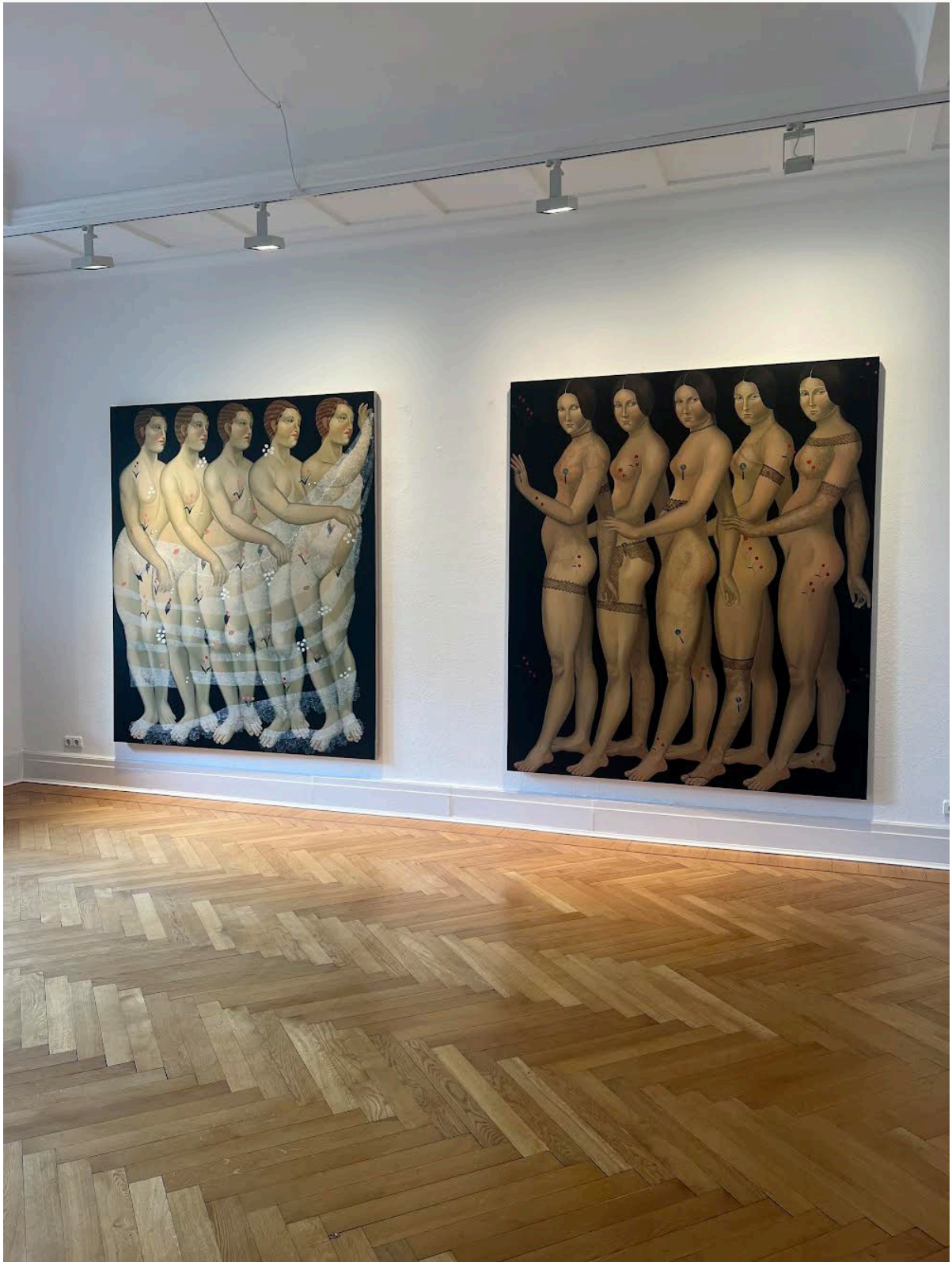
Through August 2025

The cleanly-distilled cut outs and sculptures of British pop minimalist Julian Opie occupy Koenig gallery's retrofitted church interior. The brutalist spaciousness is particularly well suited to his current show, an attempt to recreate, in his inimitably reductive fashion, the busy London area near his studio. Using live models as a starting point, they are engaging experiments in a streamlined simplicity that manages nonetheless to convey complex idiosyncrasies of movement, gesture and resemblance.

Two striding aluminum figures occupy the front lawn, "Red Pants" and "Blue Cigarette." Once again, they are nearly commercial glyphs or logos, yet they retain the feel of busy Londoners rushing past. Five towers confront viewers inside, all from his London neighborhood, reduced to two dimensional glyphs. At 8 meters tall and fashioned of black stainless steel, they give the feeling of a city in miniature. LED animated computer schoolchildren, also modelled on live video, prance past.

Once again, Mr. Opie demonstrates that whatever he takes away in terms of pictorial detail he supplants with scale: illustrative graphics brought to improbable, three-dimensional life. Same with the concrete portraits, which

occupy the back garden. Despite their extreme, emoji-like simplicity, the individuality in each one fairly bleeds through.



Ewa Czwartos: 'Cabaret' and 'Showtime,' 2024. Photo courtesy Suzanne Levesque

Ewa Czwartos and Karolina Zladow: 'We Have No Troubles Here'
Gnyp Gallery, Knesebeckstraße 96, 10623 Berlin
Through August 2, 2025

The women in the paintings of Ewa Czwartos and Karolina Zladlow in this second-floor gallery are archetypes from another era. They have an art deco fullness, combined with a proto-Renaissance, even medieval attention to detail. In some, the extremely stylized poses and elegant lines call to mind Botticelli. Yet they are grouped together in ways that suggest early modernism. Such is the confluence of elements that governs contemporary painting today.

Though they paint separately, the feel and subject matter of both resonate together very readily. Ms. Czwartos creates multiples of the same woman or similar women, distinguished by certain arresting details, a pendant here, a bright bauble or piece of embroidery there.

Ms. Zladlow paints women engaged in surreal rituals or dances. Their formalism and mystery make for oddly retrograde portrayals of women that nonetheless sparkle with contemporary mischief. Both are worth noting for showing the extraordinarily broad range that painting now occupies. We borrow from everywhere and everywhen, and it shows.

Next door to Gynp, Ramsden's current show addresses a timeless painterly problem posed by Philip Guston: what to do with the lingering presence of one's peers, teachers, and critics in the studio. In this exhibit of stately, modulated abstraction, she has gamely tried to banish this internal mental baggage from the studio entirely.

Instead she aims to paint from a purely intuitive place, without much intervening thought. The result: Dense forests of form and color. Though I'm not generally a fan of pastel or jewel tones, Ms. Ramsden's palette here is exactly right. The pairing of two paintings, "Tryst" and "Kepler's Supernova," resemble twin portals rather than paintings, such is the power of her color and compositional depth. They could be a window out onto a mysterious landscape, either terrestrial or celestial, grounded solely through a judicious sense of balance.

This is excellent painting, no doubt coaxed into being through years of rigorous looking, practice, and a multitude of influential mentors and voices. Yet she is right to banish them now, if these paintings are any indication.



Karolina Zladlow, 'The Legend of the Sleeping Knight,' 2025. Photo Courtesy Suzanne Levesque

Mary Ramsden: 'In Touch'

Wentrup, Knesebeckstrasse 95, 10623 Berlin

Through August 9, 2025



Anca Munteanu Rimnic, 'Treatise on Bruises, installation view. Courtesy Suzanne Levesque

Anca Munteanu Rimnic: 'Treatise on Bruises'

Plan b, Strausberger Platz 1, 10243 Berlin

Through July 26, 2025



Anca Munteanu Rimnic: 'Haystack.' Photo courtesy Suzanne Levesque

A German artist with roots in Romania, Anca Rimnic makes conceptual work that pits her “folk art” roots against contemporary art aesthetics in ways that are both unnerving and funny. Ms. Rimnic specializes in wry, conceptual jokes. In this current show she plays with art in ways that unnerve and occasional outright chafe.

Plan b is well suited for this sort of show, which measures the weight of art history against the clumsy realities of image making. One video shows a blowsy older woman resting uneasily on her plinth, as if tired of the demands of being a statue.

Another figure, encased entirely in medieval armor, struggles on all fours to stand. There is even a complete haystack, a three-dimensional throwback to Monet that resurrects art history in discombobulating fashion.

Which is the point. If bruises are the theme of this show, Ms. Rimnic is interested in the way the art of past eras leaves long, lingering impressions on the surface of our culture, much like a bruise: Marks that often shift and change unexpectedly before they vanish entirely.

Yoko Ono: 'Dream Together'

Neue Nationalgalerie, Potsdamer Straße 50, 10785 Berlin

Through September 14, 2025

The widow of John Lennon was, before her marriage, a contemporary artist and activist in her own right, and she has continued apace over the decades. Yet his strong influence on her work is evident. In this series of rooms, comprising what is closest to a blockbuster exhibit, Ms. Ono has filled several rooms with more than a half-century of projects and art pieces.



Yoko Ono, 'Dream Together.' Courtesy Neue Nationalgalerie, photo: David von Becker

This show gathers together installation, video, prints, music and photography, instruction pieces, and scores. There is an emphasis on interactivity, and the viewer is often urged to “stop and reflect.” At another you are encouraged to make a paper crane for peace. All in all it is instructive if not faintly nostalgic, a throwback to when some of us believed a heady mix of activism and conceptualism could save the world.

It’s a look back at a more hopeful, naive era, imbued with the belief that paper cranes, prayer stones, and wish trees could transform thinking and spur positive community action. If it seems a bit insipid in retrospect, it is nonetheless a portrait of an era.



DAVID HIROSHI JAGER

Mr. Jager is an arts and culture writer. He received his doctorate in philosophy from the University of Toronto. He also writes screenplays and rock musicals.

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