

In Berlin, a Creative Paradise That's Easiest to Reach by Boat

Along the Spree River, artists are reviving sprawling industrial buildings in which to let their imaginations run wild.

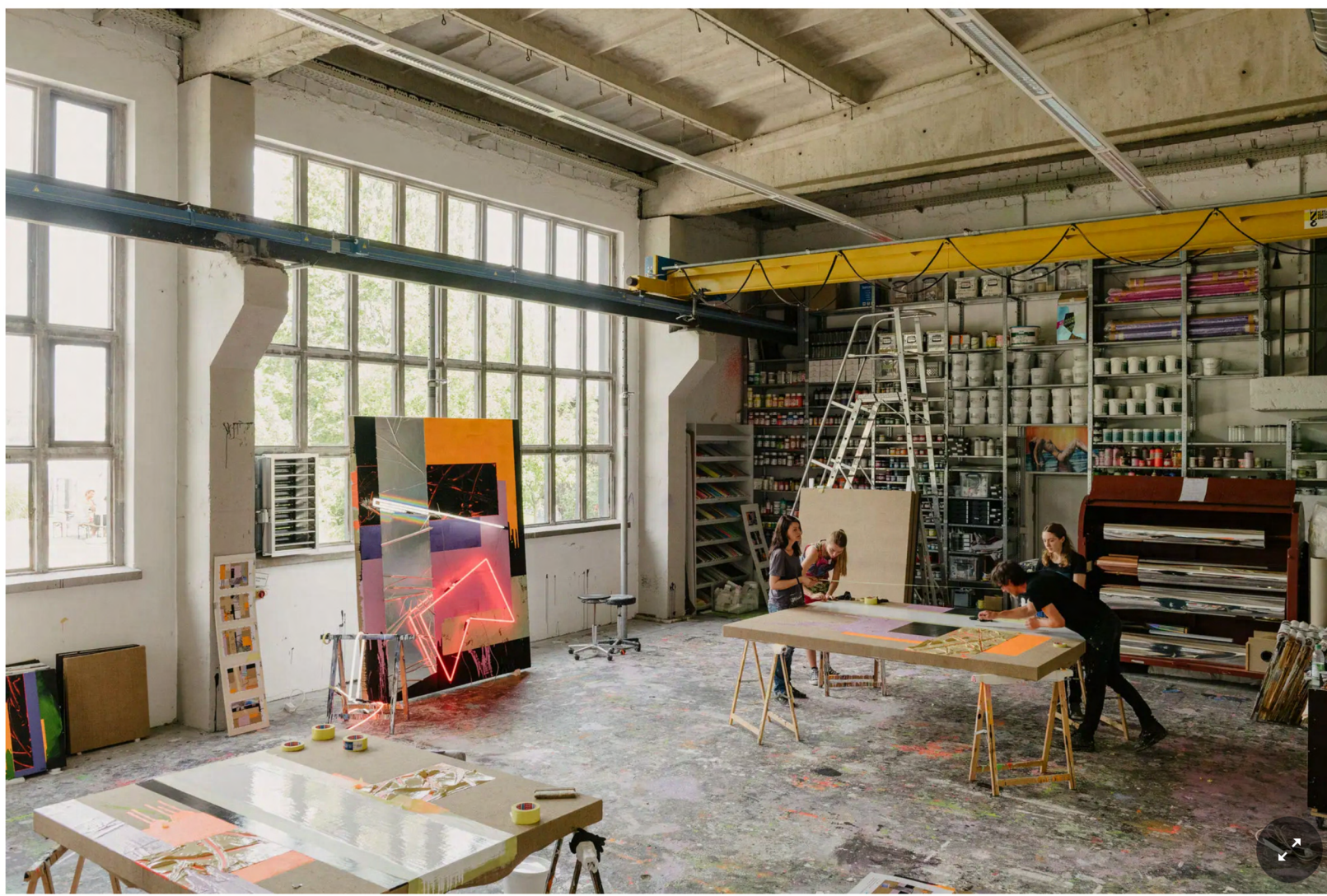


The compound that the artist Anselm Reyle and the architect Tanja Lincke built on the Spree River in Berlin between 2012 and 2016. Robert Rieger

By Gisela Williams
Published Oct. 7, 2019 Updated Oct. 11, 2019

Thirty years ago, when the [Berlin Wall](#) came down, the city was left with huge swaths of empty buildings in the former East: old German Democratic Republic embassies and factory complexes, some still riddled with toxic waste. It was both a daunting and heady opportunity for [Berlin](#) to reinvent itself and start over. Artists and musicians moved into abandoned breweries, warehouses and basements and slowly brought new life to neighborhoods like Mitte, Prenzlauer Berg and Pankow, which in turn attracted people from around the world. But now, thanks to rising rents, [Berlin's gentrified areas](#) have become too expensive for many of its creative residents, and people have begun to move to farther-flung corners of the city. Three such neighborhoods are the historically industrial areas of Treptow-Köpenick, Rummelsburg and Oberschöneeweide, 10 or so miles southeast of the city center, where some of Berlin's most pioneering artists now occupy a string of former industrial buildings along the Spree River. It is in Oberschöneeweide, too, that the Berlin [gallerist Johann König](#), who represents several artists who have moved their studios to the area, is currently negotiating to take over and revive an old cable factory that will host artist studios and residencies. Although the area's landscape may look post-apocalyptic, with its giant weeds and empty power plants, strangely, the future here can seem positively Arcadian: Real estate is still cheap enough that artists are able to buy, rather than rent, their spaces. Here, four artists discuss how their work is shaped by the Spree.

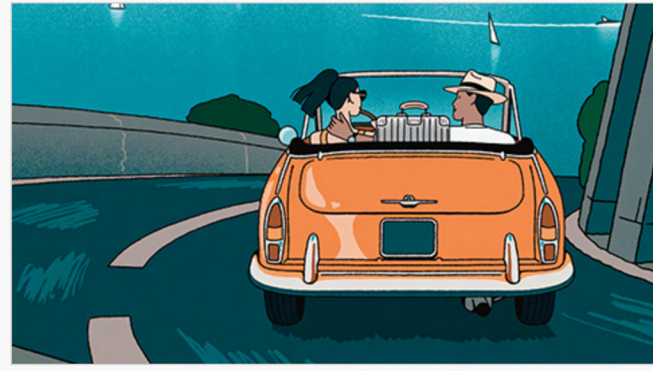
[Sign up here for the T List newsletter, a weekly roundup of what T Magazine editors are noticing and coveting now.]



The artist Anselm Reyle's studio, in a converted industrial shed on the Spree River in the Treptow-Köpenick area of Berlin. Robert Rieger

Anselm Reyle & Tanja Lincke

Though the house of the artist [Anselm Reyle](#), 49, and the architect [Tanja Lincke](#), 42, resembles a massive [Brutalist](#) concrete Greek cross, inside one has the sense of floating in the air: The structure is balanced 14 feet above the ground on sturdy concrete pillars that give the building views over the wide, slow-moving Spree River. Designed by Lincke, it was one of four structures that the couple built or restored on the more than two-acre compound where they live and work, a sprawling lot of riverside land in the area of Treptow-Köpenick that Reyle bought from the former German Democratic Republic Harbor Police in 2008 and planted with birches, sumac trees and clusters of long grass. The place still has a deliberately unfinished feel; not far from the water, a mountain of concrete shards sits beside the remains of an old warehouse and a disused crane. "We both think it's so important to leave the faults and the cracks," said Lincke. Much of Reyle's work, from his large-scale wrinkled silver foil sculptural paintings to his new monumental, rough-surfaced Fat Lava ceramic vases, is about discarded materials and preserving mistakes. "What some people might think of as ugly, we find beautiful," explains Lincke. A two-minute walk from the house along the river are the pair of connected industrial sheds, together 265 feet long, that Lincke renovated and turned into the couples' working spaces: two airy studios, Reyle's office and Lincke's architectural practice.



RIMOWA

GIFTS FOR THE JOURNEY AHEAD



The architect Tanja Lincke, with Reyle, at the entrance to Lincke's office. Robert Rieger



Four ceramic vases from Reyle's Fat Lava series of vibrantly glazed textured vessels. Robert Rieger

The couple met in 2008, the year Reyle bought the land. It was a moment that coincided with a major crisis for Reyle. He was in a middle of a divorce and reckoning with a dramatic dip in the art market that affected the value of his work. "It was a difficult and confusing time," he says, "but also an interesting one." He was forced to drastically scale back operations at his former studio in Kreuzberg, which at one point had employed 50 people, but eventually started experimenting with his work again and resumed production. Not long after, between 2012 and 2016, he and Lincke began slowly creating their world on the Spree. Building this complex with Lincke didn't just transform the land, it helped to revive Reyle's art practice. "If artists have more space to work and experiment," said his gallerist, Johann König, "it results in a larger body of work, both in terms of size and scope."