Franz Ackermann’s multipart installation Condominium is an interactive built environment that draws upon the rapidly transforming urban geography of unified Berlin and constitutes part of the artist’s ongoing investigation into how globalization, urbanism, and tourism affect how we engage with place and space. The title’s literal meaning, “the power or claim of two parties over one space,” points to the cold war period in German history (1945–89), when architecture physically represented Berlin’s political division. The installation’s disparate group of cartographic elements, drawings, plans, and photographs of both recognizable and obscure architectural sites throughout Berlin conceptualize the geographical flux and ambiguity of the burgeoning reunified metropolis.

Ackermann maps the city’s dissonant structure in large-scale ornamental panels that display black-and-white photographs of buildings set within a continuous psychedelic pattern of interwoven black lines. The pattern, which is based on an architectural motif found on the entrances to Berlin’s apartment buildings from the turn of the twentieth century, creates a historically incongruous context for the photographs, which reference architecture from different time periods. The active, interlocking lines nevertheless metaphorically link these visual markers of Berlin’s urban transition and growth in a complex network of temporal layers and spatial
correspondences. The panels also create an environment by encompassing visitors who approach the glass vitrine that dispenses abstract, colorful city maps hand-printed on cloth handkerchiefs. Their bright colors, small scale, and soft texture prompt visitors to hold and examine the maps and to imagine Berlin’s intangible urban geography as if they are “tourists” in an ever-changing and expanding postmodern metropolis.

Bibliography


