



A piece of history: Bunker K101 | Photo: Philipp Gabriel

New spaces

With small art associations leading the way, Cologne's art scene is exploring new niches

The art scene in Cologne is the very definition of diversity. Apart from high-profile institutions and city-centre fixtures, there is a wealth of other project and art spaces to discover on either side of the Rhine, whether underground or at street level, windowless or flooded with natural light. Throughout the furthest reaches of the city, Cologne's creative artists are finding the most exciting niches, transforming controversial, previously undiscovered or historically connoted locations into spaces for discourse. This not only makes it possible for people to discover exciting new artistic works, but also to come into contact with little-known places that give them a new perspective, allowing them to view the city in a whole new light.

In the heart of the Südstadt (the south part of the city), next to Chlodwigplatz and Severinstraße – a busy street dotted with a wide range of small shops – is Kunsthaus KAT18, which consists of a gallery and a workshop. The first thing visitors see is a large glass front

encompassing the door to the exhibition space. This bright room with cosy furnishings not only displays art but also serves as a café. Which means that visitors can admire work by the studio artists while tucking into a slice of their favourite cake. KAT18 sees itself as a space for interacting with artists, art aficionados and urban society. There are collaborations with guest artists and curators on a regular basis and guided tours of the studio are given to the general public several times a year. Here, you will find art that is far removed from the art market system – highly personal creations that draw on an inner wisdom and aren't afraid to break the rules. The KAT18 gallery is an open, vibrant space with a long table at its centre that symbolises the interaction that is made possible here.

Formerly belonging to a brewery complex, in the 1980s it was taken over by squatters with whom it was actually later redesigned and legalised. There are several factors in the leafy backyard and immediate vicinity of Kunsthaus KAT18 that contribute to its creative charm, including a residential project, workshops, a meeting point for the local LGBTIQ* scene and a music and concert space. Another starting point from which to explore the multifaceted involvement of Cologne artists and their cultural scene.

In one of the many narrow streets in the Ehrenfeld district, a bulky, windowless building stands in stark contrast to the small cafés surrounding it. The former air raid shelter that once provided protection for thousands of people in the Second World War and later served as a poorhouse is now known as Bunker K101. The remnants of the original floor layout are still visible on the ceiling: families often had to stay put for days in the small rooms with low doorways. Later on, some of the walls were torn down to create a larger space. And the walls tell this story, with several layers of paint, each covering the one that preceded it. The aim here is to change as little as possible, hence the original coat of dark green paint that can still be seen at the very bottom. Today, the space is mostly lit up by light art and media art. As well as the exhibitions, an extensive line-up of performances, plays, film screenings, readings and discussion formats is designed to attract a wide cross-section of people, who are invited to engage with the venue. Devoid of daylight and with its own very distinct character, Bunker K101 is the opposite of the plain white cube aesthetic. The building makes a statement on what takes place within.

Formerly a fixture on Sudermanstrasse in the north of central Cologne, the Mélange project space is now located in the basement of an office building on Ebertplatz, a central square in the same district. If you press on one of the many doorbells, the doors open as if by magic. And when you take the stairs down to the basement, you will see the hexagonal floor plan of the new Mélange, divided up like slices of a cake. Light falls from above through small shafts. Mélange is a curated project that is not tied to a specific space. The project is relocated every few years, providing a useful opportunity to rethink and revamp exhibitions. Unlike many

other Cologne project spaces, it often reaches out to artists from outside the region, primarily those involved with artistic production. *Mélange*'s new home on Ebertplatz sits alongside a relic of Brutalist architecture from the 1970s. In recent years, a hotspot for the local art scene has evolved in the underpasses around this once abandoned area, spawning many project spaces.

Simultanhalle is located in Volkhoven, which is in the far north of the city but easily reached by S-Bahn train. In 1979, an architectural model for the new Museum Ludwig building was set up there. The former schoolyard is also home to the city's first municipal art studios. At the time, one of the artists campaigned to have the temporary model retained as an exhibition room and its nickname, Simultanhalle (Simultaneous Hall), has stuck. The model-like, moving, sketchy and experimental works in the room cover a wide range of media such as sculpture, video, painting, photography and performance art. For the last two years, it has not been possible to enter the building on account of structural problems, but the young curator team sees this less as a limitation than as an opportunity to go one step further and develop whole new exhibition formats. Simultanhalle, one of the oldest project spaces of its kind, now showcases exciting sculpture and performance projects set up around the outside of the hall like a kind of festival.

KAT18 Gallery / KAT18 Coffee Bar

Kartäuserwall 18, 50678 Cologne, **kunsthaukat18.de** (<https://kunsthaukat18.de/>)

Bunker K101

Körnerstr. 101, 50823 Cologne, **bunkerk101.de** (<https://www.bunkerk101.de/>)

Mélange

Ebertplatz 23, 50668 Cologne, **megamelange.com** (<http://megamelange.com/>)

Simultanhalle

Volkhovener Weg 209-211, 50765 Cologne, **simultanhalle.de**
(<https://www.simultanhalle.de/>)

(by Dora Cohnen)

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