

**Goethe-Institut - Topics - Under Discussion**<http://www.goethe.de/kue/bku/thm/idd/en1960039.htm>**documenta, the Myth – 100 Days of Art in Kassel in 2007**

Since 1955 *documenta* has taken place every four to five years in Kassel - a world art exhibition in the heart of provincial Germany. Originally intended as a one-off cultural side event to accompany the Federal Garden Show in Kassel, a city along the former East/West German border that suffered enormous damage in World War II, it rapidly became one of the world's most significant institutions for contemporary art. Today, *documenta* is a firm element of the international art scene and of Germany's official culture policy.

**documenta 1**

catalogue exhibition  
*documenta* was conceived by the Kassel painter, designer and professor Arnold Bode (d. 1977), who joined forces with a group of culturally interested citizens to set up the Society for Occidental Art in 1954. The society became the organiser and predecessor entity of the limited liability company *documenta*. During the first four *documenta* shows Bode himself created new concepts and designed dedicated rooms for the exhibits. He placed Picasso's *Bathers* in a large tub of water and suspended Ernst Wilhelm Nay's *Drei Bilder im Raum* at an angle from the ceiling in a corridor. The showcasing of art by the curator and his unconventional approach to presenting the exhibits became an important characteristic of this contemporary art show.



Prof. Arnold Bode



*documenta* became a firm Kassel institution during the 1960s. A diverse group of art experts led by founder Arnold Bode, whose special talents and ideas conformed to the zeitgeist, the event's special political and geographical background, the proximity to the "Iron Wall" and the existence of the main venue, the Museum Fridericianum, transformed *documenta* into a cultural instrument on the front lines of the Cold War, a 'soft' locational factor, and a synonym of contemporary art.

**'Drei Bilder im Raum'**

From the fifth show in 1972 onwards, *documenta* was organised by a series of internationally acknowledged exhibition-makers such as Harald Szeemann (d 5), Manfred Schneckenburger (d 6 and 8), Rudi Fuchs (d 7), Jan Hoet (d 9), Catherine David (d 10) and Okwui Enwezor (d 11). *documenta* 12, which is scheduled for June 16 to September 23, 2007, will be directed by Roger M. Bürgel, who was born in Berlin in 1962 and moved to Vienna in 1983. He was personal assistant to the Austrian artist Hermann Nitsch, an art critic for Springerin, the curator of Austria's contribution to Expo 2000 in Hanover, Germany, and has designed exhibitions together with his partner Ruth Noack.



Roger M. Bürgel

**documenta 12****view of the exhibition**

*documenta* in 2007 will be accompanied by a worldwide magazine project led by Viennese publicist Georg Schöllhammer. The aim is to establish a decentralised network of around 70 established publications from various areas that will discuss and reflect on the subjects and theories of *documenta* 12. The leitmotifs proposed by Bürgel are "Is modernity our antiquity?", "What is bare life?", and "Education: What is to be done?". Various preparatory meetings of representatives of international art publications have taken place in Sao Paulo, Cairo, Hong Kong and New Delhi, with further meetings in New York and Johannesburg to follow, all in cooperation with local Goethe-Instituts.

At the same time, a local committee will examine the significance of the three leitmotifs for Kassel. The *documenta* 12 committee comprises some 40 experts from Kassel and is charged with forming a local agenda and asking schools, businesses, informal venues and the media to discuss these aesthetic and social policy questions. This will create a relationship between various exemplary points in the *documenta* city and apparently remote locations. The committee members are also the point of contact for artists who are developing their works of art in and with a reference to Kassel.

Until the opening of *documenta* 12 only two artists have been announced - those whose names begin with A and Z, respectively. The works of Polish media artist Artur Zmijewski (\*1966) focus on everyday trivia, human disability, and phenomena on the very periphery of society. In his 2002 project *Singing Lesson*, which was staged in Leipzig, a choir of deaf and hard-of-hearing persons accompanied a solo mezzo soprano - an acoustic experience that challenged and transcended cultural norms.



'Gesangsstunde2'



The other known *documenta* participant is the world-famous chef and restaurant owner Ferran Adrià (\*1962) who has run *El Bulli* on Spain's Costa Brava since 1984. He serves exceptionally complex menus that can consist of anything up to 25 or 30 small courses. In cooperation with scientists, designers, food technicians and artists Adrià creates specialities such as hot ice-cream, caramelised algae, and olive oil bonbons, and fills salt cellars with fragrant artificial mists.

Ferran Adrià Ricardo Basbaum (\*1961), a Brazilian writer and artist, and his "social sculpture" *Would you like to participate in an artistic experience?* is accompanying the preparations for *documenta*. In the autumn of 2006 he distributed white-and-blue steel tubs - which he termed "beautiful, but useless objects" - among households in Kassel, Ljubljana, Mexico City and Dakar to document the reactions of the tubs' temporary owners.

The central venue of *documenta* will be the Museum Fridericianum. Other venues include Wilhelmshöhe Palace and its Bergpark, and a temporary building in Karlshausen. The organisers are also planning to stage parts of the exhibition "in places of a non-institutional format". "Wait and see," is Buerger's recommendation. Art enthusiasts the world over are in a state of anticipation.

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a cultural studies expert, lives and works in Kassel

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January 2007

## Related links

*documenta* 12   
<http://www.documenta12.de/aktuelles.html?&L=1>

*documenta* magazine   
<http://www.goethe.dehttp://www.documenta12.de/magazine.html?&L=1>

"Ja, ich bin Romantiker" (Yes, I am a Romanticist): An interview by weekly newspaper DIE ZEIT with Roger M. Buerger after his appointment (2003)   
[http://www.goethe.dehttp://www.zeit.de/2003/51/B\\_9frgel\\_2fdocume](http://www.goethe.dehttp://www.zeit.de/2003/51/B_9frgel_2fdocume)

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