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# James Franco, Artist, Surfaces in Berlin

By **Emilie Trice** February 18, 2011 6:00 am

It might seem like the actor James Franco is everywhere these days. He is a co-host — and a nominee — at this year’s Academy Awards. He may soon appear on Broadway opposite Nicole Kidman. He’s a partner at a secret bar in Los Angeles. And his artwork — yes, he’s also an artist — is currently appearing at two Berlin galleries.

“The Dangerous Book Four Boys,” showing at the two locations of Peres Projects, in Kreuzberg (Schlesische Strasse 26; 49-30-6162-6962) and Mitte (Grosse Hamburger Strasse 17; 49-30-6162-6962), through April 23, is comprised of multimedia installations, photography, short films and works on paper that Mr. Franco completed over the past several years.

The show, which first premiered at Clocktower, an alternative nonprofit arts space in New York City, takes as its subjects adolescence, emerging sexuality, gender identity and a rebuttal of the traditional family paradigm.

Javier Peres, who runs both galleries, is no stranger to the comingling of contemporary art and celebrity, not to mention professional reinvention. After leaving behind a lucrative legal career to establish his Los Angeles gallery in 2003, the Cuban-born dealer rapidly achieved art world ubiquity alongside his roster of artists, among them Terence Koh, the “asianpunkboy” and Lady Gaga collaborator whose 2007 solo show at the Whitney sealed his and Mr. Peres’s cultural bellwether status.

Mr. Peres, who once graced the cover of Art Review Magazine making an obscene gesture, has earned a reputation for defying the art world’s elitist trappings, while steering its tastes to his program’s avant-garde and often hedonistic aesthetic.

It comes as no surprise, then, that Mr. Peres won the honor of heralding Mr. Franco's European arrival.

In her review for *The New York Times* during the show's Manhattan run, Roberta Smith observed that Mr. Franco's imagery includes "frequent violence, mindless destruction, kinky sex of several kinds and a nearly complete absence of women." She added: "There is plenty to be put off by."

But the show's new location may be a better match for the artist and his work. "James and Berlin seem a match made in heaven," said Gary Shteyngart, the acclaimed novelist and Mr. Franco's former creative writing professor at Columbia University. "They're both far-thinking, friendly and cool."

"Berlin chose me," said Mr. Franco when asked why he chose Berlin for his European debut at the after-party for the show's opening. "Javier Peres saw the show in New York and asked me to bring it to Berlin. I've always been a fan of his exhibitions and artists and Berlin has a great art scene so it was really a no-brainer."

(Mr. Franco's exhibition overlaps with the Berlinale Film Festival, running to Feb. 20, taking full advantage of the artist's cinematic stature.)