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In Transit
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Transforming a Berlin Gas Station Into Art

By **Emilie Trice** March 31, 2011 6:00 am

Freie Internationale Tankstelle, or FIT, is back in Berlin, offering passersby a “fueling station for the creative spirit” in the most unlikely of art venues: a gas station. Founded in 2002 by the artist Dida Zende, FIT sits just off the beaten path on a leafy street in Prenzlauer Berg. The station itself dates back to the 1920s, a quirky historical monument that Mr. Zende has transformed into what he describes as an “inverse white cube” for contemporary artists.

Starting April 6, FIT (Schwedter Strasse 262) will host “The Fountain of Clarity,” by the artists Mark Jenkins and Sandra Fernández, on view through April 28. The show is part of the Pictoplasma Festival for contemporary character design and art, which features as part of its program a “character walk” of exhibitions at 25 galleries and project spaces around Berlin-Mitte.

Mr. Jenkins, an acclaimed street artist, casts life-size sculptures that combine the macabre and the absurd with a dose of dark humor. Using his own body (or that of Ms. Fernández) as the models for such urban interventions, Mr. Jenkins clothes his creations in modern street wear and wigs before positioning them in compromising public situations: face down in a canal, attached to helium party balloons, for instance, or with a head seemingly embedded in a solid wall.

Mr. Jenkins and Ms. Fernández, collaborators since 2005, have left such anonymous urban pieces in cities across North and South America, Europe, the Middle East and Asia. For their Berlin debut, the artists plan to make full use of the FIT’s exterior structure as an urban canvas, essentially turning the entire building into a public artwork.

In truth, FIT serves the community more as a social sculpture than a classical exhibition space. Mr. Zende's philosophy derives from the German artist Joseph Beuys and his Free International University (from which FIT takes its name). In the spirit of accessible art, Mr. Zende has replicated his stylized white and red Berlin FIT in cities including Miami, Copenhagen and Cologne, with plans for an upcoming FIT Vancouver later this spring, in collaboration with the Goethe Institute.

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