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A Berlin Exchange: Dominik Mersch

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By [Sammy Preston](#),
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Gallerists Dominik Mersch and Patrick Ebensperger swap their entire galleries for a whole month, between Sydney and Berlin.

Berlin stands as the present epicenter of new, emerging and experimental contemporary art. A city once divided, Berlin has since become a brilliant and thriving jungle of artistic creativity. Abandoned architecture has been repurposed into artist squats, galleries or new museums. Culture here is not a token injection, but rather the lifeblood of the city. And for Sydney gallerist, Dominik Mersch, director of the Dominik Mersch Gallery, opening a channel between the German capital and the more subdued Australian scene has always been a part of his vision.

"I show 50 per cent Australian artists, and 50 per cent overseas artists," says German-born Mersch. "And these overseas artists are predominantly based in Berlin, although they're not necessarily German. Berlin is this hub of culture, and subculture. So much is happening there." After relocating from London to Sydney in 2006, Mersch opened his gallery on Danks Street, with a host of new European artists in his stable. The Dominik Mersch Gallery is now housed in a much larger warehouse loft space on McLachlan Street in Rushcutters Bay. Here Mersch has developed and expanded his concept of an international, European artistic connection.

This month Mersch will stage his first gallery swap with Berlin space, Galerie Patrick Ebensperger. While the Dominik Mersch gallery has exchanged artists, or invited Berlin-based artists to exhibit in Sydney for some time, this idea is slightly more involved. "Of the last times I was in Berlin, I said, 'Hey Patrick, why don't we just swap galleries?'" Mersch recalls. "The idea was that he would take on my space, I would take on his space, he would take my car, I would take his car, he would take my flat, I would take his, and so on."

Mersch met Ebensperger via one of his Berlin-based artists, Clemens Krauss. The pair quickly realised they shared a vision for the direction of a commercial space, as well as how to work with and develop emerging artists. "We started talking, and exchanging artists too," says Mersch. "For example, one of Patrick's stable artists is Locust Jones, an artist from New Zealand who I've been working with for the past five or six years." For both gallerists, seeking out and showing exciting emerging artists, while giving them the opportunity to delve into the art world and develop their practice, is the most pivotal part of their role. "We want to give artists the opportunity to get in contact with curators and collectors on an international scale," adds Mersch.

For the Berlin-Sydney gallery swap, Mersch will send a survey of new, site-specific work from a selection of his stable that will include Philip Wolfhagen, Jon Cattapan, Tim Johnson, Lucas Davidson, Anton Pulvirenti and Alexander James.

Like many Berlin galleries, Galerie Patrick Ebensperger inhabits a repurposed space – it resides in what was once a crematorium in Wedding, in the city's west. "It's next to a cemetery – so it is a little creepy," says Mersch. "The ground floor is quite light, it's a gigantic hall with curved walls, which is where we will install sculptural works. There are lots and lots of tiny little rooms. But this is perfect for showing video pieces."

And as for which Berlin-based artists will arrive at Dominik Mersch Gallery, Mersch says this will also be a sample of Ebensperger's stable. "There are some quite well known artists, and some really cutting edge emerging artists. And the mediums will vary from installation to video art to drawings and paintings and photography."

The Gallery Swap will take place in Sydney on July 11 at Dominik Mersch Gallery, and in Berlin at Galerie Patrick on July 17 running until August 16.

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