

PACT – a lively site for exchange, for artistic experimentation and production, for relationships, for the networking of ideas and different forms of knowledge

When Zollverein was an active coal mine, 3.000 miners washed the dust from their bodies here, at the end of a day of hard physical work. On the one hand, the strictly rationalized processes of extraction occurring here between 1847 and 1986 stand for an epoch of incredible leaps in technological development, while on the other they symbolize the decoupling, exploitation, and subjugation of humans and their environment. The social, infrastructural, and ecological consequences of this era present us and future generations with enormous tasks: What role do history and the surrounding environment formulate as our mandate here? How could the work in the washhouse, as a counter-model or future design, become a resource-friendly site of intimacy, plurality, and process?

About PACT

At the beginning of the 1990s, artists began exploring the site, and for the first time it became the setting for performative works. At those early improvised performances, workshops, and other uses of the washhouse, water still trickled down the walls and the glass bricks scarcely allowed light into the building. For the inaugural internationaler tanzaustausch ruhr (International Dance Exchange Ruhr, 2000), generators were used to supply the washhouse with electricity to provide lighting for the performances. This festival made apparent the viability of the space as a stage location. In the years that followed, the architectural firm led by Christoph Mäckler converted the washhouse into a cultural venue, featuring two stages and studios of various sizes. Only a few subtle alterations were made in an attempt to preserve the original structure.

From then on, the transformation of the historic building into a home for contemporary dance was further envisioned and realized, first by the Choreographisches Zentrum under the direction of Susanne Linke, later by the Tanzlandschaft Ruhr, headed by Stefan Hilterhaus. The merge of the two institutions in 2002 resulted in the Performing Arts Choreographisches Zentrum Tanzlandschaft Ruhr – PACT for short – under the overall direction of Stefan Hilterhaus.

Stage

PACT's stage program is distinguished by its diversity, transdisciplinary approach, social relevance and contribution to the public visibility of the arts. It brings people from different backgrounds and perspectives together to share a collective experience, foster dialogue and promote inclusivity. The primary venue for dance, performance, and concerts is the main stage on the upper floor, with space for almost 300 audience members. The potential to make use of the small stage, the foyer, the corridors and studios, as well as outdoor areas and other buildings on the Zollverein complex, allows for the implementation of a program that extends far beyond the traditional boundaries of theatrical production.

Frequently, partnerships with artists run for several years, meaning that PACT has the good fortune of hosting many world or German premieres, f.e. Jefta van Dinther, Dragana Bulut, Michiel Vandevelde, Forced Entertainment, Mette Ingvartsen, Rimini Protokoll, Radouan Mriziga, Claire Viviane Sobottke, Tian Rotteveel, Meg Stuart / Damaged Goods, Alma Söderberg, Xavier le Roay, Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker / Rosas, Marlene Montero Freitas, Alice Ripoll, Claire Cunningham, Cocoondance, Richard Siegal, William Forsythe, Sasha Waltz, Claudia Bosse, Ligia Lewis, Boris Charmatz, Kate McIntosh, , Laurent Chétouane.

Artists' Centre

Ever since its foundation, PACT has operated as an artists' center that offers space for open-ended artistic processes and supports the creators of artistic work in the development of their projects. As a reliable constant in the organization of the house and a fixed component of its program, the residencies constitute something like the beating heart of PACT's everyday work. As of now, PACT hosts around 140 artists from abroad, from Germany, and from the region every year. They are able to take over one of the four studios or two stages for a period of two to eight weeks, during which they can dedicate themselves to their artistic projects, alone or in groups of various sizes.

Many residents return to PACT on multiple occasions, appear here on stage, or remain involved with the artist's center as contributors and participants in its other diverse formats. Numerous collaborations, such as co-productions, have also emerged from the program, f.e.: Stephanie Thiersch, Claudia Lichtblau, DIN A 13, Eszter Salamon, Damaged Goods / Meg Stuart, Richard Siegal, Mette Ingvartsen, Ben J. Riepe, Laurent Chétouane, Kate McIntosh, Eva Meyer-Keller, Florentina Holzinger, Begüm Erciyas, Naoko Tanaka, Jefta van Dinther, Forced Entertainment, François Chaignaud, Flora Détraz, Verena Billinger & Sebastian Schulz (Billerger & Schulz), Simon Hartmann & Daniel Ernesto Müller (HARTMANNMUELLER), Geumhyung Jeong, Vlatka Horvat, Marco Donnarumma, Michiel Vandevelde, Arkadi Zaides, Radouan Mriziga, Jozef Wouters.

Platforms / PACT-LAB

Through its platforms, PACT initiates and hosts temporary communities within which specific societal questions are mapped out and transformed. The spaciousness of the former washhouse and the broader premises of the Zollverein coal mine are ideal for providing safe spaces for exchange that enable phases of concentrated work. The formats used are conceived of as transdisciplinary, and create room for encounters and collaborative processes in which the participants gain new points of access to the topics being worked through and test out new possibilities for action.

A particular strength of the platforms is that their impact unfolds beyond the time period of the events themselves. The knowledge and the connections made between new content and new contacts are carried with the participants as they leave the washhouse and proceed into the wider world.

Urban Space

PACT has been intensively engaged in the surrounding district since 2013. The area continues to face a high turnover of residents and high unemployment. In order to create an independent experimental working and meeting space specifically for the interests and concerns of the district, the WerkStadt was founded in Essen-Katernberg in 2017. Here, the premises of a former pharmacy were converted into an open space for the neighborhood, for encounters, and not least for PACT-associated artists.

Alliance of International Production Houses

The Alliance of International Production Houses (Bündnis internationaler Produktionshäuser) is an association made up of seven of Germany's most important institutions in the field of contemporary visual and performing arts. Its current members are the FFT Düsseldorf, HAU Hebbel am Ufer (Berlin), HELLERAU – European Centre for the Arts, Dresden, Kampnagel (Hamburg), Künstler*innenhaus Mousonturm (Frankfurt am Main), PACT Zollverein (Essen) and tanzhaus nrw (Düsseldorf).

These seven production houses are key actors and leading players in Germany's cultural and socio-political community, and each brings their unique expertise and international perspective to the alliance's multifaceted exchange with local artists, audience groups and urban societies. Starting in the 2016/17 season, the alliance also began receiving funding from Germany's Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and Media.

The alliance's other key areas of activity involve organising training programmes and professional-development measures designed to foster individuals active in the independent theatre scene. The annual programme series known as "Claiming Common Spaces" was developed by the alliance in 2018 as a way of bringing together artists and activists to engage in workshops at one of the venues. The discussions at these workshops usually focus on specific aspects of the alliance's key themes, and the gathering is held in a setting that encourages lively discussion and exchange.