

NOTES on LIA

Alison Kennedy (Scotland/Australia, 3 months summer/ autumn 2017)

„I participated in a residency at Spinnerei through the LIA program from 1 August – 30 October 2017. The residency brief was open – there was no fixed theme or ideology and no specific outcomes were required – it was a terrific opportunity to make work in an amazing place.

The accommodation was a combined studio and living space and I shared basic kitchen and bathroom facilities with 3 other artists from Australia, North America and South Korea.

I decided to respond to the change of environment in an open ended way. My work is digitally based and my initial response was to walk around taking lots of photographs that I incorporated into my work. After creating a series of works that referred to Leipzig I also worked with skilled printmakers that also had studios within the Spinnerei complex. I kept my experience speculative and open-ended and my practice benefited from this.

The benefits that I obtained from the residency were not only the fantastic formal exhibition opportunities but the many informal opportunities and conversations that I had with art practitioners within the Spinnerei complex. I was introduced to a situation where innovation, discussions and artistic experience were encouraged and supported – and this intangible experience is by definition hard to describe and the advantages difficult to quantify. But the benefits are real – the residency worked as a circuit breaker and allowed me to reconsider my practice in a hospitable environment where artistic endeavor is seriously valued.

LIA organisers provided a well-organized, flexible and structured program that introduced me to the heritage of Leipzig whilst allowing solitary time to work on my practice. Visiting critics were helpful and pertinent – they varied for each artist. Great efforts were made to introduce artists to relevant critics and contacts. The program functioned as an introduction to the geographical area of middle Germany and allowed all artists to access the advantages of a much wider area – therefore I visited centres including Dresden, Antwerp, Berlin, Amsterdam and Leipzig to visit relevant exhibitions and events. It was impossible to experience everything that was interesting so I found that brutal prioritization was necessary.

During the residency I felt privileged to be working in a vibrant environment and exposed to multiple influences that made me question my practice and view it in a different light. This will have lasting and positive influences upon my work.“

Kylie Lefkowitz (New York City / 6 months School of Visual Arts fellowship 2015)

„The cultural exchange I experienced while living and working in LIA was amazing. Leipzig itself was such a breath of fresh air, like a true artist’s paradise after being in NYC for years. The city itself seemed to move slower than New York, which was such a blessing. I loved the fact that people there take the time to have cake and coffee and conversations, walk by the canal and drink some wine in a park. I loved not feeling rushed and anxious all the time. I met so many people there who I was able to have really great intellectual conversations with, even despite the language barrier.

In general, I feel like I grow so much spiritually, academically and in my studio practice when I travel to new places. I love living in new cities for just long enough to feel like a local. In Leipzig, I felt very welcomed and made so many great connections with people who I still keep in contact with. I’m sure I will be back! As for New York, well New York is a big beautiful monster who can’t ever be tamed, but is fun to play with for different periods of time. There is nowhere in the world like New York, but that very fact is what makes people there kind of arrogant. Everyone there has a type of survivalist attitude, and interactions with strangers are usually limited to people figuring out what they can get from each other. It is an incredible, eclectic center of culture and business, but it is not the center of the universe and people often forget that. Being in Leipzig for a while was great reminder to humble myself and to work hard, but also find balance between work and leisure. It was a safe haven for me to spend time thinking about big ideas, and concerning myself with things other than the superficial world of fashion, nightlife, and highbrow commercial art galleries. It was very pure.“

Tanja Koljonen (Finland/ 6 months total in Leipzig 2018/2019)

„Before my residency period in Leipzig I had visited various German cities, first in Frankfurt & Kassel. In 2014 I lived in Berlin for six months while taking part to International Studio Program in Künstlerhaus Bethanien. After the residency I've returned to Berlin for 1-3 month periods. Life in Berlin was always great but after I had my daily life experience from Leipzig in 2018-19 I understood how little I was familiar with German culture! Though as far as I've understood German culture is very versatile and regionally orientated, local features are very much highlighted. Every region seems to be very active and I have a feeling that each region holds a volume big enough to maintain its own art scene and cultural activities. In Finland the art scene is very much focused on the capital city of Helsinki. There is very little happening in the field of arts in more sparsely populated areas. Also majority of the funding opportunities for arts are based in Helsinki.)

My LIA residency started from November 2018 til end of January 2019. So good time that my stay in Leipzig turned out to be over six months instead of three. I left Leipzig in June '19. There are many reasons that made my stay in Leipzig pleasant. To be a city with over 500 000 inhabitants Leipzig has a strong feel of a small town. The artistic community in Leipzig is naturally smaller than ie. in nearby Berlin, and – more calm yet active. This kind of 'kindness' and space is not appreciated enough in the contemporary art world. City landscape itself in Leipzig has plenty of visible layers of history, industrial ruins, wasteland etc. Not a single part of the city is too polished (aka there is some room for 'poetry'). *(And 50% of the city is green! I walked a LOT during my residency. Parks and forests and outskirts of the city offered such an intense experience of spring. I will remember the various types of trees in bloom forever! Total scent madness! In Finland blooming period is less than a month for trees etc. so there is no time to 'go mad' :)). I've never experienced the long spring in central Europe with nature so close by).*

Baumwoll Spinnerei is a unique place of its own. It's amazing to find a gorgeous old factory complex nowadays that is still dedicated mostly to artists and rented out with a fair price. I hope Spinnerei will stay like that. It reveals a lot of the bold values that private property owners are ready to support.

Germany, "Das Land der Dichter und Denker", and no wonder. Also Leipzig / Saxony has a long history in music, literature, philosophy and fine arts. Long success in the art history

must strengthen the general appreciation towards the arts. This might be one significant difference between FI and DE. Finland is a young country that has reached today's economical status in fairly short time. Actions are measured through the visible profits they produce and artists need to defend their positions to make their work appreciated. In Germany I've always had the feeling that arts are as important as sports, science or any other field and being an artist is as valuable than any other occupation.

I appreciate a lot the peaceful work surroundings and a fantastic studio that Spinnerei and LIA had to offer. For me it was perfect time to have the time and space (think, explore, experiment) and work in a stress-free environment. It was great to meet locals who shed light on history by telling their stories. Perspectives shifted. For me the most valuable outcome of taking part to artist-in-residencies¹ is exactly to widen one's perspectives. To step out from the familiar routine in safe but unknown, new surroundings makes one's senses more alert. It's important to throw oneself out there! Every time I've gained more understanding and acceptance. Artists colleagues from different educational and cultural backgrounds mean A LOT. They are a good push for re-routing one's own thinking.

Leipzig is known of its long book printing history. Though I was told the scene is not as active as it used to be but for me coming from Helsinki the services on that field are vast. In general the workshop culture that Germany has to offer is exceptional, there are outstanding amount of skilled people from different field of arts and crafts that you can easily collaborate with. Production possibilities in Leipzig, even just under the roofs of Spinnerei are great. I enjoyed to collaborate with Vlado and Maria Ondrej etching workshop so much that I continued to collaborate with them for a couple of editions after my residency. Who knows, maybe in the future too (my wish)! During my residency I produced an edition of an artist book that with the help of text and image is about the vastness of subjective experiences and interpretations. We read the same word but we each then tell the world – a personal point of view of it ..."

Tuukka Haaparkopi (Finland/ 3 months 2018/ 2019)

„The Spinnerei in itself was definitely the most influential thing as it is a very lively and dynamic setting. Compared to Finland, the many events, galleries and the flow of people created an atmosphere in which one felt like being in an open world, an art world that extends beyond the everyday. The stories I heard about artists working on projects and structures that exist were something that I don't come across here where I live.

Also, coming from Finland I experienced myself as very privileged as in my home country the structure we have for financing and educating artists creates an illusion that one could live by art only. The work itself for Finnish artists is dictated by the directions given by the funding institution, following the current trends set in the Finnish art scene which is very different to the work I was able to come across in Leipzig.

Leipzig for me had a strong effect especially in how I felt I was able to detach from the expectations that I impose upon myself as an artist: what kind of subjects and approach are currently essential and in the air so to speak. The residency period allowed me to jump aside my usual trajectory of producing art, giving a lateral transition to how I usually go about the creative process.

I also do have to mention the great spirit we had with the other artists in residency, I felt there was really a sense of community and respect between us and I've stayed in touch with most of the group on that batch.

Structurally and architecturally Leipzig is an interesting mix of the old DDR and the new Europe, compared to Finland where every unused space in the city is torn down and built as quickly as possible, Leipzig felt it had more air to breathe in a manner of speaking. The surroundings we're in make up a lot of the actual substance of the art itself we create and that should be more the emphasis of art in the future just to think of art and artists from a point of view of sustainability and the connection of the work to its surroundings.“

