Interior of the Sony Center. The roof concept was created by Paris-based light artist Yann Kersalé

Berlin

We step out of the new Volvo XC60, turn around and stare. Ten years ago, this was a giant building site where the Berlin Wall once stood, as the city reconstructed itself in the years following reunification. Now the ultra-modern Potsdamer Platz, in the heart of Berlin, is a triumphant testimony to a city that has been forced to reinvent itself not once, but twice in the last 60 years. But Berlin and its people have not faltered in the face of this. They have embraced the opportunities and created one of the most exciting urban environments in the world.

Undeniably, 21st century Berlin is a city of the present. Packed with stunning new buildings, created in a frenzy of regeneration after East and West Germany were reunified in 1990, the place is fizzing with artists, designers, architects, thinkers, poets, writers, musicians, performers, film-makers and anyone else who wants to unleash their creative talents in an environment where property is cheap and a kindred spirit is never more than a shout away. Yet it would not be the city it is today if it hadn't been for its past. Mulling this over with Fotini Lazaridou-Hatzigoga, Berlin resident and co-director of an art/architecture crossover project called *Program*, she concurs. "There are traces of history everywhere that you just can't ignore," she says. Her colleague, Carson Chan, agrees: "The simple reason why there's a parking lot next door to our building is because a bomb fell on it during the War. To confront that kind of thing every day is exciting. It's a very rich context to be working in."

In *Program*'s exhibition space, we are transfixed by German artist Michael Wesely's ultra-long exposure photograph of the Potsdamer Platz taken over a period of several years from

Program Is it art? Or is it architecture? This progressive Berlin-based group can tell you

Carson Chan is a Harvard-educated Canadian architect who moved to Berlin three years ago. He and colleague Fotini Lazaridou-Hatzigoga founded *Program*, a project that encourages collaboration between architects and artists in a highly experimental, non-commercial environment.

What is your project about?
To create a platform to define the disciplinary boundaries of architecture. How can architecture teach itself about itself? This is done here by working with people from fine arts. We have an exhibition, a residency program, lectures, a reading group and desk space for hire for anyone from the arts or architecture. We also aim to educate. People look at structures in a way that's far too casual. We want people to be able to differentiate between "architecture" and "buildings".

So what's the difference between architecture and art?
Architecture has a huge social dimension that fine art doesn't need. It has a responsibility for utility. It's interesting to work with artists precisely because they *don't* have these concerns. They can show architects what they're missing, make them think in ways they don't think in often enough.

And what's so special about being in Berlin for you?
The availability of cheap spaces to rent, plus the huge amount of creative talent that has been drawn to the city make a powerful combination. For example, we wouldn't be able to do so many things here at *Program* if we didn't have such a large space – we'd never be able to afford somewhere this big in another city. Also, the low costs allow us to operate on a non-profit basis, which is really important. It allows the people who work here to be truly creative and experiment as much as they like without having to worry about selling their work in the end.

Program, left to right: Fotini Lazaridou-Hatzigoga (co-director), Denis Pieper (German artist), Magnus Nilsson (Swedish architect), Bryan Boyer (US architect) and Carson Chan (co-director)