

SoS (Soft Solidarity) Assembly

We Have to Create New Forms of Solidarity

SoS Assembly is a gathering of local artists and activist groups as well as a process-based exchange of ideas, sentiments, and values of solidarity, a virtue we consider crucial at this point in time. From **November 12th to 14th November 2020**, a social and discursive platform shall be created at **Betonhalle (silent green)** within the framework of **SoS (Soft Solidarity)**, the eponymous two-year exhibition program at **Galerie Wedding – Space for Contemporary Art (2019-20)**.¹

Inspired by the local history of »Roter Wedding«² (Red Wedding), a worker's movement at the beginning of the 20th century, we want to get together with artists, thinkers and local grassroots organizations and initiatives. In the attempt to open up the fields of art and politics for a local exchange we want to discuss the importance of solidarity.

We choose to call it »Soft Solidarity«- a soft solidarity that would reconfigure power beyond cultural differences and authoritarian leadership. What characterizes Wedding today is a post-industrial and post-migrant population and their current needs to recap or redefine the commons in this city-part.

»If we want a change, we need new alliances. We invite you to create these coalitions now, to launch an offensive together.«

»For a new social offensive. Solidarity for all«, Interventionist Left, 2016³

Based on the eventful local history of Wedding and global historical events such as the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Arab Spring and the Syrian War which led to intensified cycles of migration towards Germany and the EU, we raise the issue of the democratization of the term solidarity – who can show solidarity with whom, under which circumstances? Given the current pandemic, we are inviting you to collectively reflect on decelerated living, authoritarianism, social immunity and new cultural economies towards building new trans-local alliances in order to create the caring life we want to live on this planet with other beings. The inequalities and dysfunctions revealed by the pandemic will keep us on our toes for a very long time.

We want to start off in our own neighbourhood by addressing crucial questions such as: Who or what makes Wedding »red« today? What does it mean to be integrated or not in this heterogeneous district? Are we investing enough, socially and financially, in every human being who lives here without leaving anyone behind in this Covid-19 generated crisis? Which stories emerge, are told and still have to be told in this context? How

¹ **SoS (Soft Solidarity)** – developed by the curatorial team Nataša Ilić and Solvej Helweg Ovesen – aims to further develop this now distinctive cultural location in Berlin and to try to connect and negotiate a variety of the most pressing problems of our present through the idea of solidarity.

² On May 1st 1929, bloody clashes between the Social Democratic-led police and demonstrating Communists took place in Berlin's working-class districts, especially in Wedding, leaving 32 dead and 250 injured. The cause had been the ban on street demonstrations, although the KPD did not want to be deprived of the right to demonstrate on May 1st. »Roter Wedding« was a song of the workers movement and was originally performed by the Agitprop Group »Der rote Wedding«. The melody was composed by Hanns Eisler, and the text written by Erich Weinert. »Left, Left. Left - the red Wedding is marching!«, was the sound of the paroles in the 1930s. Commieball: Unofficial Anthem of the Red Front. (2018) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kXI52c611i8>.

³ Interventionistische Linke. Für eine neue soziale Offensive. (2016) <https://interventionistische-linke.org/en/beitrag/fuer-eine-neue-soziale-offensive-solidarity-for-all> (own translation).

do we exercise solidarity, online and/or on the streets? As the population of Berlin keeps on transforming, what do we know about the histories of other political subjectivities rooted in our local environment? Will we come closer to each other? What does the closure of national borders in order to contain the virus mean for the future of the EU and its significance as a solidarity-based community?

The Galerie Wedding exhibition space was immediately converted into a public contact point for basic social security by the authorities of the City of Berlin due to Covid-19 measures. What are the long-term consequences of what we go through right now for the art and culture infrastructure/economy in Berlin? How can we rethink cultural, political and civil alliances in general starting from the independent scene Galerie Wedding is part of? In the end, how can we build a new social and political immune system that makes us more resilient in the face of the changes caused by the illnesses of our time?

»Unlearning is essential in order to emphasize the degree of our implication in institutionalized imperial violence through different facets of »good« liberal citizenship designed to protect the differential principle on which citizenship is predicated: conceiving of art and museums as a sign of progress, caring for the preservation of the past by saving documents, rescuing endangered cultures, feeling compassion for and expressing the solidarity with people living in poverty as though they are dwellers of other planets, supporting reform initiatives for the victims of the regimes under which citizens are ruled, and endorsing progressive social projects aimed at »improving lives« in other places by enabling their inhabitants to benefit from seemingly advanced and transparent institutions for managing populations, debts, and cultural traditions.

Ariella Aïsha Azoulay, 2019⁴

Through SoS Assembly we would like to look at the present as a possibility for transitions and peaceful revolutions, which change habits and socio-economic systems. We hear many voices saying that they do not want to go back to the way things were before the Covid-19 crisis. Therefore, we would like to ask the participants of **SoS Assembly** what changes they wish to see as a result of the current pandemic. What should emerge from the experiences and developments in our every-day behaviour during this crisis – i.a. in terms of resource exhaustion, consumption and ecological awareness? What kind of new alliances do we need to create to flatten the curve of privileges? How can we help to strengthen the structures of care for the elderly, sick, homeless, refugees?

»There is no reason why one shouldn't be able to imagine Syrians, or Palestinians, or Kurds, expressing solidarity with the victims of a political or natural catastrophe in Western countries. Yet the direction of solidarity seems almost always to be the contrary; it is those in affluent, powerful, Western nations who express solidarity with troubled countries elsewhere, and the political misfortunes faced by their peoples, or certain groups of them.«

Yassin al-Haj Saleh, 2018⁵

This public chapter of the **SoS (Soft Solidarity)** programme is devoted to the design and criticism of collective spaces and groupings in public space as well as collective actions and shared impulses of collective memory.

⁴ Ariella Aïsha Azoulay. *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism* (2019). London: Verso Books.

⁵ Yassin al-Haj Saleh. *A critique of Solidarity* (2018) <https://www.aljumhuriya.net/en/content/critique-solidarity>.

Our goal is to trigger a stronger network among the various participating agents such as creative locals and collectives, new and old neighbourhoods, temporary groups and allies who come to Berlin to create a heterogeneous sense of belonging rooted in Wedding, Moabit and Mitte – but also culturally in the plurivocal local diaspora.

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