

CHRISTINE GEDEON: "THERE'S A REFLECTION BETWEEN THE WAY PEOPLE THINK AND HOW THEY WALK IN THEIR DAILY ROUTINES."

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CHRISTINE GEDEON TALKS TO DIANA NÓBREGA

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Christine Gedeon was born in Aleppo, Syria, lives in New York City and is currently a resident artist at The WYE in Berlin.

She is finding and tracking urban spaces in Berlin and New York and rethinking them in relation with people's daily routines. You can follow her work in progress at The WYE's second floor.

Diana Nóbrega: So you arrived in Berlin recently. Why Berlin?

Christine Gedeon: I've always been in love with this city. Partly because Berlin feels much more creative than New York City, and is more livable as an artist, which we've all been seeing for some time now. The N.Y.C. art world is more concerned with commerce and there's a lot of ambition there, which is good in many ways. But sometimes being around artists that are ultra-ambitious and just focused on where their careers are going feels less about the work, creating an atmosphere that doesn't feel as creative. I think that the ideal situation though is to have a bit of the N.Y.C. ambition with Berlin's creative energy, or at least, to go back and forth for a while. In Berlin you need to be much more self-motivated whereas in N.Y.C. if you get sleepy it really catches up with you. Since I've been in Berlin, I've been interested in exploring the city through walking. My work relates to cities in general so I did spend the first six weeks walking around and finding my place here until I came up with the idea for the project that I'm working on at The WYE now.

DN: For the project you're tracking and analyzing your walks in Berlin and New York.

CG: I've been living in N.Y.C. for fifteen years and I've always loved it but then something switched in the beginning of this year. I just felt like my life was becoming a routine and I really needed to change something. There was a moment when I was flying back to N.Y.C. from Paris in May – and suddenly I just felt so anxious about coming back to N.Y.C. The interesting thing is that I've never thought about this before, but what was making me anxious was going back and walking in the grid. And I realized how stifling that is. Especially after being away for a couple of months. When you walk through Europe and see the way the streets are built, especially in the older sections – of course you have the newer sections, that are also like a grid – you have a lot of areas where you can just get lost and wander and see where life takes you. I think there's a reflection between the way people think and how they walk in their daily routines. Walking through the grid in N.Y.C. is an efficient way of getting from one point to another. It's very direct, there's no room for getting lost, you really can't get lost – unless you're in the West Village or near Wall Street, and I think that reflects the character of the people too, where efficiency is key and "time is money". In Berlin, for example, I get out – and also I don't know the city that well – but it's easy to get lost while walking and have so many different paths to get to the same place. And as I do walk around, I see that there's more room for imagination too, one's mind can wander in a more organic way, than walking straight-left-up and down, all close to right angles pretty much, like in N.Y.C.

DN: In what consists the project?

CG: The project that I'm doing at The WYE is located on the second floor hallway. It's the first time I'm working in such a public space. The work develops from the ceiling down to the wall and I'm using masking tape, thread, yarn and nails. I've been tracking the walks that I've been doing each day in Berlin and then going on to Google Maps and inserting my starting place and the end destination and then seeing the line, that it creates. At the same time I was looking back at my last month in N.Y.C., and I know exactly where I was going. I had my routines. I also put those in Google Maps and analyzed the lines as well. It's a much different shape, a much different space. The ones in Berlin are curved and erratic, because of the detours, and many parks and indirect roads. The ones in N.Y.C. are all angular – pretty much all right angles. So I basically decided to take 30 walks from N.Y.C. and 30 from Berlin, inserting them in Google Maps, then creating each line in Illustrator making a library of my walks. With that I'm doing this installation that's using many of those shapes. They're color coded. The ones with black masking tape are my N.Y.C. walks and the blue ones are my Berlin walks. They're overlapping and the thread and nails help to create a third dimension to it. That's the starting point, but it expands and evolves from there.

DN: And you relate your analysis with your personal experience or with the collective dimension of it?

CG: I see this more in relationship with the culture. There's so much in N.Y.C. that makes it what it is – and if you want you can look at it as the capital of the world. The idea that the city was built upon people emigrating there and creating a better life for themselves and being ambitious is really the foundation of it. But, at the same time, if you imagine N.Y.C. with the layout of Berlin, the possibilities of meandering and getting lost, you see that the people would really be different. And if you imagine Berlin being a grid, it would feel like a much more efficient place and in some areas would be probably quite boring. There are a lot of empty spaces in Berlin, can you imagine them included in a grid? I'm interested in this idea of collective thought, how societies are made and what the essence of a society is. That's the relationship that I'm finding through these walks, so this isn't so much about my personal perspective but more of an interest in the collective point of view.

DN: You also develop other works around the concept of city.

CG: Yes, I'm also interested in areas of rebuilding, urban planning and especially places that went through destruction and war. I create abstractions using a sewing machine as an architectural drawing tool on large pieces of canvas with fabric and paint. Looking at areas that had been destroyed, and the idea of how we choose to rebuild them is my interest. Do we choose to replicate these areas as it once was or do we rebuild and remodel the city in a more futuristic way? At the same time I think there's a sort of a utopian vision of how we choose to rebuild and that affects societies and consciousness. Which exactly is better? Is it better to have a memory of the past or is it better to start completely from scratch? You see a city like Warsaw, for example, where it was rebuilt as a complete replica of before the war. It's almost like erasing the past, it's like nothing has ever happened. I like looking at areas like this from aerial views and looking at the past, present and the ideas for the future, and creating an impossible utopian space based on these places.

DN: What's your favorite city?

CG: Berlin, probably. And I've said that for a while. It's still Berlin!

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