Arno Fischer’s Berlin Before the Wall

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In the 1950s Arno Fischer photographed everyday life on both sides of divided Berlin. The Berlinische Galerie places this sustained attention to the ordinary at the center of his project Situation Berlin. Here, two views from those years invite a close comparison of how he pictured a city and the people moving through it.

Start in Friedrichshain, where the figures appear small against a broad paved space, then move to West Berlin, where faces fill the frame. The backs of the prints add another layer of evidence. Both prints were made later and carry the Edition argus fotokunst number 3/10. Fischer’s handwritten dates identify when he made the photographs.

Photographs

East Berlin, Friedrichshain

West Berlin

Reading the versos

East Berlin, Friedrichshain



Arno Fischer · 1956 · AFI2

A group crosses the broad paved foreground while a solitary figure walks apart. The expanse of paving and the long horizontal wall keep the people small in the frame. Follow the figures across the square before looking up at the buildings beyond.

Fischer signed, dated, and annotated the reverse. The Edition argus fotokunst stamp identifies this impression as 3/10. The 1956 date refers to the image. The exact printing year is undocumented. The auction catalog cites a reproduction in Arno Fischer: Fotografie (Hatje Cantz, 2009), p. 49.

Sources

1. Verso reference photograph showing Fischer's signature and the edition stamp
2. Bassenge, auction 127, lot 4172, Ost Berlin, Friedrichshain
3. Elke aus dem Moore and Matthias Flügge, eds., Arno Fischer: Fotografie (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2009), p. 49, as cited by Bassenge
4. Berlinische Galerie, Before the Wall: Situation Berlin

Arno Fischer. "East Berlin, Friedrichshain." 1956. Silver Gelatin Street, object AFI2.
https://silvergelatinstreet.com/works/afi2

West Berlin



Arno Fischer · 1957 · AFI1

Fischer moves close enough for faces and gestures to crowd the frame. The boy at the right edge looks beyond the picture. Behind him, the scaffolding traces the height of the street scene. Compare the way this picture draws the viewer into the crowd with the distance Fischer keeps in Friedrichshain.

The reverse is signed, dated, and annotated in pencil by Fischer. The Edition argus fotokunst stamp identifies this impression as 3/10. The 1957 date refers to the image. The exact printing year is undocumented. The auction catalog cites a reproduction in Arno Fischer: Fotografie (Hatje Cantz, 2009), p. 40.

Sources

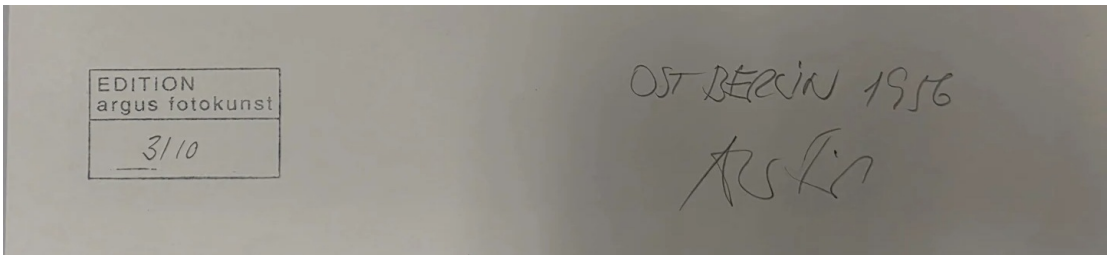
1. Verso detail showing Fischer's pencil title, date, and signature
2. Bassenge, auction 127, lot 4173, West Berlin
3. Elke aus dem Moore and Matthias Flügge, eds., Arno Fischer: Fotografie (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2009), p. 40, as cited by Bassenge
4. Berlinische Galerie, Before the Wall: Situation Berlin

Arno Fischer. "West Berlin." 1957. Silver Gelatin Street, object AFI1. https://silvergelatinstreet.com/works/afi1

Reading the versos

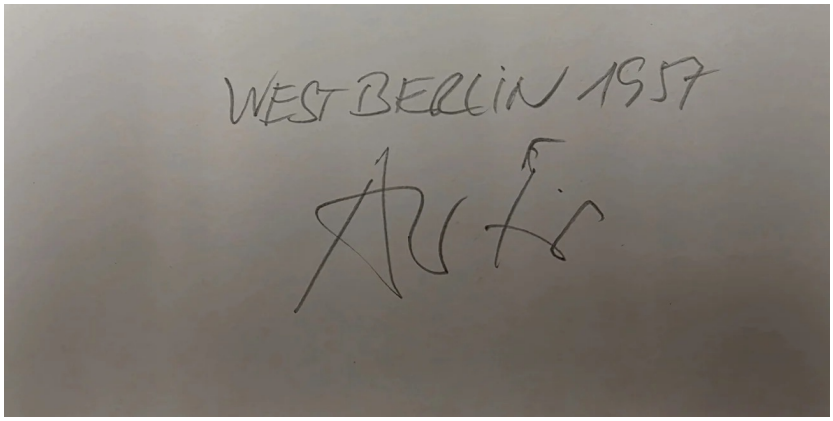
The verso is the back of the print. Labels and inscriptions can document who made the photograph, when the image was taken, and which edition a later print belongs to.

East Berlin, Friedrichshain



Verso detail · AFI2. The Edition argus fotokunst stamp at left carries the number 3/10. Fischer's handwritten place and date are at right. View the verso record

West Berlin



Verso detail · AFI1. Fischer wrote "West Berlin 1957" above his signature. Galerie Bassenge records the edition stamp and number 3/10 elsewhere on the reverse. View the verso record