

The East Side Gallery: An Attempt at Incorporation

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ABSTRACT

The East Side Gallery is a 1.3 kilometre stretch of the Berlin Wall which was preserved after 1989 and painted by artists in 1990 as a response to the fall of the Wall and to German reunification. This paper explores the East Side Gallery as a space that enables the expression of the emotions triggered by the events of 1989. It turned from a symbol of division into a site of public memory. The main question of the study is whether the East Side Gallery is a good example of incorporation, a concept that describes how architecture can absorb trauma into its own material. Through the analysis of five artworks, the study examines questions of narrative, power and emotions with reference to the site's historical context. It shows that the Gallery is a battleground over who controls the story: the state wants to make it appealing for a global audience, while the artists keep pushing for their work to be understood the way they intended. The research concludes that the East Side Gallery is a successful, yet unfinished, example of incorporation, and that what distinguishes it from an ordinary monument - the presence of an authored art. The existence of the Gallery in a state of permanent conflict is essentially its primary function. Its ongoing conflicts are actually what define it, keeping the trauma alive and sparking constant debate.

INTRODUCTION

The Berlin Wall's collapse wasn't just about tearing down a physical barrier that symbolized division and the Cold War, it ripped open deep emotional wounds. For nearly three decades it functioned as a structure of separation that changed people's sense of belonging and created two opposing political and social systems. East and West Germany formed a dual organization that could be understood only in relation to each other. The deeper strength of the Wall lay in how it changed the order of everyday life, redefined belonging. Today, more than three decades later, debates about memory, identity and the legacy of division remain active, showing that the past is not fully resolved. At this point, the East Side Gallery emerged as a spontaneous attempt to transform an instrument of division into a surface of expression. Studying this site today can help to understand how people incorporate trauma into everyday urban life. The East Side Gallery is the longest surviving section of the Berlin Wall: a stretch of roughly 1.3 kilometres in the Friedrichshain district of Berlin. In 1990 artists from many countries painted its eastern face with murals responding to the fall of the Wall and to German reunification. Unlike a purpose-built memorial, it is the original barrier itself, physically preserved and converted into an open-air gallery. This place is more than just a monument. It illustrates Stoppani's concept of incorporation, the process by

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which architecture and art absorbs traumatic events into their materials. The aim is to analyse whether the East Side Gallery can be considered a successful example of incorporation. The research examines the historical context of the Wall and reunification, analyses theoretical concepts of trauma and incorporation, exploring key artworks that help prove the theory. It also raises a question: who controls the narrative of such a place? Because artists claim authorship and interpretative authority over their work. The state affirms legitimate ownership and responsibility for conservation, urban planning and heritage management. The public - both local and global visitors - view the place as a space of collective memory, extending beyond formal property relations. It unfolds as a dynamic negotiation between artists, the state and audiences, each seeking to shape the narrative of Germany's divided past.

To answer these questions, the study is structured as follows. Chapter one provides historical context, examining the trauma of the Berlin Wall, the concept of “deferred action,” the emergence of the Ostalgie as a cultural phenomenon, and the unresolved nature of Germany’s divided past. The second chapter focuses on the political dimension of the East Side Gallery, analyzing it as a battleground for controlling storytelling, applying the concepts of “weak weapons” and “equal division”. Before turning to individual works, it also confronts a necessary objection by comparing the Gallery with preserved Cold War structures that carry no artwork, in order to distinguish incorporation through art from the ordinary life-cycle of a monument. It then examines three key works: Birgit’s “Test of the Best”, “My God, Help Me to Survive This Deadly Love”, Dmitry Vrubel. and Günter Schaefer’s “Vaterland” as places of ongoing conflict over memory and meaning. The third chapter explores the emotional side of the gallery, investigating how art functions as an embodiment of trauma through analysis of “It Happened in November” by Kani Alavi and “The Dancers” by Sabin Kuntz, think about how color, symbols, and personal stories turn private trauma into something everyone can see and understand.

The whole study is based on the hypothesis that the East Side Gallery functions as a space of ongoing trauma of the past, where art transforms the material remains of the division into a public space for collective memory. However, the incorporation is not complete, as political tensions and conflicts continue to reshape its meaning. In doing so, it contributes to the broader debate about how societies confront a traumatic past, and how urban spaces are shaped by collective memory.

THE TRAUMA OF THE WALL

The Berlin Wall (1961-1989) was far more than a physical barrier, but a symbol of division, representing what John Borneman calls a “dual organization”, which means that East and West Germany can be understood only in terms of their relationships to each other, as parts of a whole (Borneman, *Belonging in the Two Berlins*, 1992: 1) The fall of the wall foreshadowed an about-face in Berlin’s and Germany’s identity, stitching together two parts of one city. This division created two distinct systems of reality, each with its own logic of belonging, value, and daily practice. The Guardian's collection of reader memories provides visceral testimony to this rupture.

Barb Dignan, a teenager in West Germany in 1961, recalls the moment the barrier went up: “We began to hear people outside yelling, crying, louder and louder... Neighbours were telling each other... that they had relatives in East Berlin – they had tried to contact them, but couldn’t – that no one knew what was happening... I had never witnessed anything like this. Everyone cried.” (Barb Dignan, quoted in *The Guardian*, 2014). This collective panic highlights how the Wall instantly severed the most fundamental human bonds: families, friendships, communities - transforming the ever-changing urban landscape into a landscape of fear and irreversible separation. In East Berlin it personified the border between socialism and capitalism, was officially called the “Antifaschistischer Schutzwall” (Anti-Fascist Protection Rampart), serving as a means of forcefully preventing citizens from fleeing to the West. In West Berlin it was called the “wall of shame” – the concept introduced by Willy Brandt, as it represented the violent partition of the German nation. It was an ideological and political prison, where, as Borneman notes, unauthorized crossing transformed a citizen into a Grenzverbrecher – a border criminal (Borneman, p. 5).

The deferred action and the birth of Ostalgie

The moment of the fall of the Wall was the beginning of what Terence Stoppani terms a “deferred action” of trauma (Stoppani, *Architecture and Trauma*, 2016: 5). The “deferred action” distinguishes the immediate physical destruction from the later cognitive and cultural revival of that event within architecture (Stoppani, 2016). The sudden removal of the barrier later exposed deeper, more complex social problems.

Ostalgie (a term blending Ost (East) and Nostalgie) emerged directly from this deferred shock. Ostalgie is a social-psychological response to what scholar Dominic Boyer analyses as the systemic devaluation of Eastern lived experience (Boyer, *Ostalgie and the Politics of the Future in Eastern Germany*, 2006: 363). It is important to understand it as a reaction to Eastern peoples' memories being downplayed, not as an unpolitical yearning of old products and daily routine, but as a form of memory and a critique of a unification process itself. In the immediate aftermath many older citizens mourned the disappearance of the socialist utopia they had imagined, not because they longed for the GDR itself but because its collapse erased a hopeful future and forced them into a new “one-Germany, one-history, one-burden” order (Boyer, 2006).

The cultural phenomenon of ostalgie went through a process of commodification. It was quickly repackaged by the Western culture and tourism. Western firms created magazines, films and branded merchandise that packaged nostalgia for the GDR and the Berlin Wall as marketable products, turning the cultural phenomenon into a tourism-driven consumer industry. Deprived of its original critical or social weight, the GDR’s nostalgic symbols have become products consumed primarily by Western audiences. The magazine *Super Illu*, published by the Bavarian publishing house Burda Verlag, was deliberately designed as an integrated marketing campaign for the former East, with its editorial office and the most creative staff coming from West Germany, while former GDR citizens were limited to minor roles. Burda’s strategy positioned the East German consumer as a “frustrated Fordist” who would gladly accept West German consumption on condition that familiar GDR brands and icons were offered as niche products, thereby transforming the entire Ostalgie industry. (magazines, movies, T-shirts, Trabant, etc.) in a

tourism-oriented product. Time allowed to create the mechanism by which West German society could create and control an acceptable image of an Eastern past that was sentimental and politically neutral. This made it possible to integrate the GDR into the national narrative as a closed chapter – a “no-place” past that could be comfortably consumed (Boyer, 2006). Then the East Side Gallery risks becoming part of the same process. It may turn division into a consumable image for tourism.

Unfinished past

Personal stories from *The Guardian* show how Wall brutally shattered the family history, leaving a legacy of pain. For example, Petra Tobin’s story is a sad one: her father, who fled from East Germany, lost his first family when his wife, isolated in the West, took their children back across a newly built border. Decades later, after the fall of the Wall, a tense reunion revealed lasting scars: “It was strange and we didn’t really get on” (Petra Tobin, quoted in *The Guardian*, 2014). These personal stories help to see the human cost of division. The East Side Gallery, which appeared in 1990, captures this ambiguity of the moment. Its historical significance is not that it offers a decisive conclusion to this trauma, but that it was one of the first collective spaces where joy, fear, hope and loss were publicly and permanently recorded. In addition, the absorption of the gallery into the tourist economy of Berlin represents another layer of incorporation: the transformation of memory into a commodity. The site risks becoming a depoliticized spectacle, where complex, painful and controversial experiences of separation, including the sense of loss underlying *Ostalgie*, are smoothed out into a consumer product. The crowd of tourists taking pictures represents an audience that interacts with the Wall mainly as a historical background, development far from the origins of the gallery as a place of urgent testimony and from the living, emotional realities of those who experienced division.

That means that the East Side Gallery (ESG) exists in this unresolved historical state. It emerged not as a state-sanctioned monument to the completed past, but as a spontaneous collective attempt to make sense of the still unhealed wound of the Wall itself. Yet, it was this act of public registration - the transformation of a nation-division instrument into a place for public memory - that immediately put it at the center of the political struggle it aimed to address. The subsequent fate of the gallery - its preservation, restoration and management - would become a protracted battle over who has the right to control this narrative: the artists who created it, the public that claims it, or the state power to which it belongs. This positions ESG not just as an artistic artifact, but as the main source for studying the political dimensions of memory in post-reunification Germany.

A BATTLEGROUND FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO BUILD A NARRATIVE

The East Side Gallery (ESG) was created in 1990 not as a product of a government order, but as the result of a collective, spontaneous push. It was an act of immediate response to a historical event, an attempt to capture the real emotions caused by the fall of the Berlin Wall. However, since its birth, the gallery has ceased to be merely an artistic object, it has become a tense field of political struggle for the right to interpret the past and control its material heritage. This conflict revolves around fundamental questions: Who owns the wall? Who has power over its meaning? And how does the process of incorporating trauma

- its absorption and transformation into a city's cultural environment - confront resistance and reinterpretation?

Using the concept of the “weapon of the weak,” creating the ESG can be seen as a classic act of symbolic resistance (Lewellen, Ted, *Political Anthropology*, 2003: 113-114). That is, a form of power accessible to the people organized in non-violent protests. The artists, who had no real power in shaping the narrative of the reunification of Germany, appropriated the main instrument of state oppression - the Wall - and turned it into a place for personal and collective expression. However, this initial problem of “ownership” of the gallery soon met with other, more powerful forces seeking to incorporate this place in another logic - tourist, commercial, political.

“Equitable division” of the gallery

Power over the East Side Gallery is a controversial concept, reflecting its complex legal and ethical status. The paradox of ESG, like many street art works analyzed by Peter Salib, is that art created on someone else's property (in this case - state) without permission acquires a huge cultural and market value (Salib, 2015). This leads to a constant conflict between three key actors:

1. An artist whose moral rights constantly collide with legal realities and who is perceived as the main storyteller.
2. The state as legal property owners, seeking to manage the site within the framework of urban planning, historical heritage and city branding.
3. The public (local and global) for whom the gallery is not an object of ownership, but rather a place of collective memory, emotional attachment and public property.

Salib proposes the concept of “equitable division” of rights when neither party has full control. This model accurately describes the current state of ESG: neither artists can unilaterally dictate conservation terms, nor can a city manage a place without public protest. The gallery exists in a state of constant negotiations, where power is situational and non-permanent. It can be said that there is still a struggle over whose version of events will be presented to the public.

Two sides of incorporation

Before the murals can be read as evidence of incorporation, an objection must be addressed. Many of the phenomena described so far are not unique. They attach to almost any heritage of the Cold War. If a segment of the Wall, for example, a former checkpoint, causes the same reaction, then what has been described may be nothing more than an ordinary life-cycle of a monument. To show that the concept of incorporation does real analytical work to the ESG, incorporation through art must be distinguished from a general monument life-cycle.

Berlin offers ready material for this comparison. The Berlin Wall Memorial on Bernauer Straße is an authentic 70-meter segment of the border fortifications enclosed by tall, rusted steel walls. This site is photographed by a large number of tourists, and has its own disputes over management and presentation. In this case preservation alone is enough to produce a monument life-cycle. However, preservation alone doesn't produce authorship. At Bernauer Straße the meaning of the site is circulated from above: the state selects what is shown and fixes the official narrative which remains educational, the same over years and avoids any artistic intervention. The ESG differs, because its surface carries authored works whose meaning can still be changed by specific people.

This is the sense in which incorporation operates here. A preserved but blank structure fixes trauma as heritage: it is set aside, framed and, in Boyer's terms, made into a safe "no-place" for the past (Boyer, 2006). An authored surface, by contrast, keeps trauma in circulation, because the artwork can be re-signed by its maker, argued with by vandals and re-read by audiences. Incorporation through art is therefore not merely the survival of a traumatic object, but its survival as a contested text – one that remains open to challenge because someone made a claim on it that others can still dispute. It is this feature, absent from the plain wall, that the following analyses set out to demonstrate.

Teresa Stoppani's concept of incorporation is central to understanding this. She describes it as the mechanism through which a field, such as architecture or art, absorbs a traumatic experience, incorporating it into its representations, and practices. This transformation, according to Stoppani, converts the initial shock into a "productive element" within the symbolic landscape (Stoppani, 2016, pp. 3-4). For the ESG, this process manifests in a complex, often conflicting, dual manner.

Birgit Kinder's artwork "Test the Best" can be called one of the most famous works of the gallery, depicting an East German Trabant car breaking through a wall. Here, the "Trabi" stands for the revolution in East Germany, which peacefully broke the Socialist Unity Party's rule. It was not just a car but a material embodiment of East German everyday life. At that moment the narrative clearly belonged to the artist. However, in 2009, the artist, dissatisfied with the approach of the city authorities to preserve the gallery and its commercialization, changed the name to "Test the Rest." This minimalist act of changing the sign has become an act of everyday resistance (Lewellen, 2003). The meaning of the painting has been completely changed. Through this powerful change, the artist demonstrated that the narrative never stays the same and it can be challenged by the creator of the work in the first place. From an optimistic symbol of unification, it has turned into a criticism of the approach to gallery management, that is to say, the curators of public memory. Kinder's work shows that incorporation is a dialogue in which the author can re-think and challenge the official reading of his own creation. The work also interacts with the phenomenon of ostalgie. The artwork went through the process of commodification. The Trabant has been transformed into a nostalgic souvenir a long time ago, detached from its original critical context.



Figure 1: Birgit Kinder, “Test the Best”, 1990.

Dmitry Vrubel, “Mein Gott, hilf mir, diese tödliche Liebe zu überleben” (“My God, Help Me to Survive This Deadly Love”) is a satire on socialist propaganda that hid repressive control. Vrubel’s famous Wall painting shows GDR head-of-state Erich Honecker and Soviet president Leonid Brezhnev kissing. While painting it, he has said, he felt as if he were caught between the lips of the two “disgusting old men”. It was the “weapon of the weak” in its purest form - a brazen mockery of the recently disintegrated political system, painted on the wall that was its symbol. At first the narrative belonged to the artist, later on the work has become the world’s media icon, the most photographed place in the gallery. The picture was incorporated into the tourism industry as a memorable image of the “Cold War era”, becoming a kind of brand logo for ESG itself. The author’s satirical context and the original critical tone have partly dissolved into endless reproduction on social media. As a result the narrative shifts from an artist to a global audience. The work itself illustrates how a political image can become a consumable symbol.



Figure 2: Dmitry Vrubel, “My God, Help Me to Survive This Deadly Love”, 1990.

“Vaterland” by Günter Schaefer is a unique case in the East Side Gallery, showing the continuous and painful process of incorporating historical trauma - a process that never reaches completion. It symbolizes German reunification and reflects on Nazi history and the divided nation's future, according to the artist. The painting has been often defaced with politically motivated and antisemitic slogans and Schaefer has cleaned and restored it over 60 times. The vandalism here is not random hooliganism but a direct, aggressive response to the artist's statement. Every act of vandalism proves that incorporating trauma through art is neither passive or safe, it provokes conflict. This cycle of destruction and restoration materializes the concept of “deferred action” (Stoppani, 2016). Each restoration is a new attempt to “work through” the past. It shows how the narrative changes over time, proves that trauma will always be reactivated and be the subject of long-term debate. The concept of “working through” does not mean simply remembering. This means actively confronting the difficult aspects of the past rather than suppressing them. “Vaterland” shows that the Wall is no longer just a historical object. It continues to generate conflicts, dialogue and bring an emotional response. Also, it can be said that vandalism doesn't weaken the artwork's significance, it helps to stay relevant. The conflict around “Vaterland” demonstrates that the ESG presents the ongoing struggle over how history should be told, who should tell and how that history should be understood. The cycle of damage and repair shows that incorporation of the trauma into public space is never complete.



Figure 3: Günther Schaefer, “Vaterland”, 1990.

The East Side Gallery thus represents an unfinished monument, but a continuing political process, a place of controversial incorporation. Its story is a chronicle of negotiations and conflicts over ownership, meaning and memory, demonstrating that the absorption of trauma in an urban environment is never a neutral act that remains unnoticed and quickly forgotten, but rather a dynamic struggle for interpretative power. This struggle is evident in the pictures themselves. Changing the name of Birgit Kinder from “Test the Best” to “Test the Rest” is a direct pointer to the incomplete union and the unhealed wounds associated with it. The endless cycle of vandalism and restoration of the artwork “Vaterland” by Günther Schaefer physically demonstrates the ongoing struggle for national identity. The legendary kiss of Dmitry Vrubel, both a tourist photo shoot and a target for distortion, its satirical context may be greatly spoiled by tourism culture. These works do not offer solutions, they unfold the conflict.

Thus, the analysis of power and incorporation naturally leads to the question of feelings. Having studied who claims the Wall and how its trauma has been treated and challenged over many years, we must now turn to the emotional logic of this process. The next chapter will dive into the emotional side of the gallery by exploring how works like “It Happened in November” by Alawi or Sabina Kuntz’s “The Dancers” function not just as political statements or aesthetic objects, but as symbols of controversial emotions appeared at the time of the fall of The Wall.

ART AS AN INCORPORATION OF TRAUMA

While the first two parts of this work focused on the historical-political context of the East Side Gallery and its form of an area for struggle over memory, the third part turns to its emotional side. The gallery is primarily about collective expression in the language of emotions, as a result of long and ongoing debates and public controversies around the gallery. In other words, The East Side Gallery is an attempt of

incorporation. But it's not about physical repair, but about how the field of arts absorbs a traumatic event into its own materials, representations and practices (Stoppani, 2016). It is a process where trauma ceases to be an extreme shock and becomes a "productive element", turning loss or event into a symbolic component of the built environment (Stoppani, 2016). Roger Sansi discusses that art is understood not merely as an aesthetic value, but also as an important social medium. It is capable of encoding and transforming collective feelings, values and experience (Sansi, Roger, Art, 2023). In the case of the East Side Gallery, this transformation is directed at working through the trauma of the Berlin Wall. Instead of building something new on a cleared ground, it incorporates the traumatic object itself—the last standing segment of the barrier. Based on this, the central research question—is the East Side Gallery a successful example of incorporation?—must be examined through the prism of its emotions.

How art captures the emotional legacy of the wall

The power of the ESG is its ability to show us not just what happened but how it felt. Emotional landscape is revealed through an analysis of individual works, each offering a unique view and level of engagement with the process of incorporating trauma. This section examines two significant works that embody different versions of emotional experience. Through their symbolism and personal perspective these paintings help to understand the collective feelings and translate the deferred trauma into a public form.

Alavi's painting "It Happened in November" shows his interpretation and perception of the invisible feelings on the night the Berlin Wall fell. It was originally painted on canvas by Alavi and later transferred to the East Side Gallery. The image is intended to represent the fear of change and the future at that time. The multitude of faces is not individualised, at the same time painting conveys not a single emotion, but a spectrum of coexisting feelings: confusion, caution, fear, doubt, combined with hope and disorientation. This emotional layer visualises the very essence of "deferred action". Instant political freedom and changes are not equal to immediate emotional and psychological resolution. The visual language is defined by a complex colour palette of cool blue and greys. These colors create an atmosphere of anxiety. They work here as an emotional filter: does not allow the viewer to perceive the event solely as a moment of celebration. Alavi's work includes trauma, recognizing its complexity and duality. It gives legitimate, public form to those mixed, uncomfortable feelings that were often suppressed in the dominant version of unification that followed 1989.



Figure 4: Kani Alavi, "It Happened in November", 1990.

Sabine Kunz's painting "Die Tanzenden" ("The Dancers") proposes physical engagement with the legacy of trauma and transforming action. Her painting depicts both her joy at the new freedoms offered by the fall of the Wall and a sense of menace. The figures don't just exist, they physically interact with the Wall—allowing yellow sunlight to shine through.



Figure 5: Sabine Kunz, "The Dancers ", 1990.

Here, warm yellows dominate the composition, representing the sense of movement and release. But even in the bright pallet there is a sense of tension – shadows and dark contours serve as a reminder of the recent threat. Color here becomes the language of hope, which realizes its origin from trauma. This image is a symbolic model for healing and reconstruction. Art becomes both a representation of a past event and a symbolic template for social relations (Sansi, Roger, Art, 2023). Kunz's work is a model of transformation. As Egyptian writer Radwa Ashour stated about revolutionary art, "It is our act of self-defence, proclaiming our denied agency" (Awad, Sarah, The Street Art of Resistance, 2017: 2). Her figures, like Egyptian graffiti artists using public walls to assert their presence in a political space, perform an act of peaceful restoration of the tool that once deprived them of their freedom. The central figure represents the artist herself, by doing it, Kunz makes this painting personal. They are dynamic as they physically interact with the Wall, opening it to light. Thus, while Alavi's work represents the complex shock of the past, Kunz's painting provides a lighter, more forward-looking vision. It shows how to physically and symbolically engage with the legacy of trauma to create openness and a feeling of a hope for a bright future.

These two works together cover the full spectrum of emotions associated with accepting the past: from awareness of pain, difficulty, an instant sense of shock and loss (Alavi) to attempts to creatively overcome them, inspiring hope for a bright future (Kuntz). They demonstrate that the East Side Gallery is not a single whole, but a multi-voice space where different emotional aspects of the fall of the Wall collide and interact. In this way, the Gallery becomes a permanent emotional repository, where trauma does not freeze, but is continuously experienced and rethought, remaining a living part of the collective memory of Berlin and Germany.

CONCLUSION

The East Gallery is a complex, controversial site. At the same place, destruction and division connect areas such as arts, architecture, politics, and emotions. In this study, the East Side Gallery is examined not as a simple art object, but through an ongoing process of “incorporation” by which the former instrument of Cold War division was transformed into a public space. The Berlin Wall was not just a boundary. It was an instrument that shaped people's sense of belonging, identity, and everyday life, creating what Borneman calls a “dual organization” - two systems understood only in relation to each other. When The Wall was destroyed it made visible the private feelings and collective trauma caused by it.

Its fall in 1989 did not solve the problem of this division, instead, it triggered social problems, served as the beginning of a process called a “deferred action”: the trauma of the wall was not so much overcome as it was put on hold to emerge again - in conflicts over narrative, identity, and memory. In this context, the East Side Gallery emerged as a spontaneous artistic response, turning the tool of division into the surface of expression. The artists transformed the tool of division and oppression into a place where feelings of the moment can be captured and further understood. But the transformation could never be neutral. The gallery was created as a resistance to power, but today it is controlled by another structure that simplifies the past of the gallery for the world public, adapting it to the tourism industry. It led to conflicts over authorship, restoration, and commercialism that show that the question of who controls the narrative of the past remains open. Artworks such as Birgit Kinder’s “Test the Best”, Dmitry Vrubel’s “My God, Help Me to Survive This Deadly Love”, and Gunter Shefer’s repeatedly restored “Vaterland” demonstrate that memory is constantly disputed. Birgit Kinder, by renaming her artwork from “Test the Best” to “Test the Rest”, shows that the author can challenge the official reading and that control over The East Side Gallery remains not only with the authorities, but also with artists. The gallery exists in a space between artistic intentions, government and public appropriation; as such, it continues to generate conflicts and emotional responses.

This is also what separates the Gallery from the many bare relics of the Cold War that Berlin preserves. A blank wall segment may be photographed and disputed, yet its meaning is fixed from above as heritage. The East Side Gallery carries authored works that their makers, their vandals and their audiences can still re-interpret, keeping its trauma open to challenge rather than closed as commemoration. It is the presence of art, not merely the survival of the object, that makes incorporation an appropriate description of the site.

At the same time, an emotional analysis of such works as “It Happened in November” by Kani Alavi and “The Dancers” by Sabin Kunz shows how art reflects the duality of 1989 - the coexistence of hope, fear of the future, uncertainty, and relief. Through color, composition and symbolism these murals translate personal feelings into public images. They show that incorporation is not only a political process, but also an emotional one, and that all parts of society are involved. The Gallery functions not merely as a political statement, but as an emotional archive.

In this way, the East Side Gallery is a successful but incomplete example of incorporation. Its success is not in creating a final memorial, but in turning trauma into a subject of ongoing public dialogue and conflict. The gallery is successful in maintaining the visibility and relevance of the division trauma, but this success is fragile: commercialism and tourism risk simplifying, masking a deep and complex history by turning trauma into a means of public entertainment. The gallery risks becoming what Boyer calls a “no-place” – safe, depoliticized, and convenient for consumption, turning the trauma of division into a public entertainment. The gallery does not heal wounds, it makes them visible and open to discussion, engaging artists, the state, and the public in continuous negotiations. The gallery’s existence in a state of permanent conflict is essentially its primary function. Thus, incorporation remains incomplete and unstable, and open to further reinterpretation.

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