

THE FIRST

FLUSH

***Mesmerizing, feathery and bewitching:
Artist “Fiona Bennett” and designer “Hans-Joachim Boehme”
have created restrooms for Berlin’s “Wintergarten” Varieté Theatre,
presenting a very special experience***

It might just be Berlin’s most idiosyncratic neighbourhood project. At Potsdamer Strasse, where the true center of the capital is located, *Fiona Bennett*, the famous hat artist, and her business partner *Hans-Joachim Boehme* run a shop, that is so much more than that and which attracts worldwide recognition. Hats balancing on racks, floating within walls, passers-by are craning their necks and won’t take their eyes off the exhibition workshop, in which the marvels arise. Brad Pitt and Yoko Ono wear Bennett’s designs, the ‘Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung’ lionizes her ‘creations of almost surreal beauty’.

Across the street, since a quarter of a century, resides Berlin’s Varieté Theatre “Wintergarten”. Time-honoured premises, acrobats, artists, music. It was about time for a new piece of art there. A cosmos of its own was supposed to develop in the basement floor of an extension, restrooms as the city has never seen before. *Hans-Joachim Boehme* says: “*Maybe it was actually the absurdity of the task that made it exciting for us. We wanted to create the most beautiful toilets on earth.*”

The plain specifications: an area of 270 square meters, in a newly developed underground construction in the courtyard, 12 cabins for ladies, 4 for gentlemen, 2 barrier-free, 5 urinals. But the spirits of the creative couple have been awakened; the keywords just kept coming: picture puzzles and irritation, flying feathers in mirror frames, men’s woodlands and silhouettes, experiences in incalculable spaces. “*Behind all of it lies the challenge*”, as *Fiona Bennett* says, “*to serve a functional space with grace and poetry*”. Sterile tiles and cool design are the standards, they didn’t want to play by. The location simply set the theme: A Varieté, a dream world filled with magic.

A staircase sweeps in an ample coil from the foyer down to the new designed underworld. A glistening mosaic is drawing its circles on the floor of the anteroom, three tons of mosaic tiles underlaid with gold. The round form finds its reflection on the organically shaped ceiling, like soap bubbles there are iridescent glass spheres floating above heads. Those who are not in a hurry might settle below, on red velvet seats. From there, the ladies will enter their realm to the right: A spacious powder room in tender pastels, with water running from copper taps, and the ones stepping in front of the mirror, will find their face surrounded by delicate feathers. *Fiona Bennett* and *Hans-Joachim Boehme* have designed this mirror object with a lot of willful research and engineering talented partners. The middle of the room is owned by a make-up column, crowned with copper leaves growing aloft like a tree. Between walls with a drape, like a frozen curtain, the path continues to the cabins, losing itself in an endless glass corridor. Stars are shining on the doors, whereas glitter globes melt away in the corners inside the cabins. Ladies will leave this place with an inspired smile.

Vis-à-vis gentlemen will enter their own world. Monochromatic blue walls, hand casted bronze basins as heavy as Hercules couldn’t lift them and still balancing, quasi floating above a drop shaped pedestal. Visitors will get lost in the play of shadows that is separating the spaces. *Monstera Deliciosa* is the name of the plant, which has served as the model for giant, cobalt blue and mirrored leaves, growing exuberantly from the floor, projecting their outlines on the walls. A mysterious forest, a secret place, the promise of a hideout for everyone. If it should ever become necessary, gentlemen would be even queuing up by choice.

While every space is unique, the design remains consistent, is opulent, exciting, alluring. To use solely high quality materials and no mass products, are the values on which the dream world is built upon. To translate fantastic, original ideas into forms and constructions that are without parallels, that was the task which *Fiona*

Bennett and Hans-Joachim Boehme set up for themselves. The interior design for the Wintergarten's FLUSH underworld is customized and in many cases manual work. The bronze basins for the gentlemen's rooms have been hand casted in England, the mirrored leaves were designed after personal drawings, the iridescent glass spheres mouth blown in a German manufacture, the floor mosaics broken in Italian tradition and set manually, the push and door handles made by one of the last German artist blacksmiths. The design process has been a challenge, which they have faced with close attention down to the last detail, the pioneering work was huge. Almost forgotten trades had to be searched and found, to create individual pieces that would not only look amazing, but also meet all the practical standards. A construction site is no place for dreamers. That is what one would expect. Who would have thought that one might once enter a restroom, thinking: "I am in the most beautiful toilet on earth."

Fiona Bennett has enchanted the world for almost 30 years with her hat designs. She has created her very own productions, settings for fashion shows and performances. To design the restrooms for the Wintergarten Berlin though, has been a new challenge for her.

Hans-Joachim Boehme has realized temporary spaces, with architectural experience and creative impetus, since 1985. He for example, has build pavilions for the King of Thailand and created, on an area of 3000 square meters, a dignified setting for the 500th anniversary of Deutsche Post.

With their collective implementation of the design of their shop, *Fiona Bennett and Hans-Joachim Boehme* were able to achieve their first artistic symbiosis. The First FLUSH is their second statement of extraordinary interior design.

Wintergarten Berlin dedicated to enthrallment: top variety shows with acrobatics, music, dance and live entertainment in a unique atmosphere with stylish gastronomy – that's the Wintergarten Berlin. In the heart of downtown Berlin – keeping pace with the times – the world meets in the glamorous charm of the Golden Twenties. More information on the Wintergarten Berlin and its shows and spotlights can be found on www.wintergarten-berlin.de

**Concept, design,
interior and object
decoration:**

Fiona Bennett & Hans-Joachim Boehme
Bennett & Boehme GbR
Potsdamer Str. 81-83
10785 Berlin

www.bennettboehme.vision

**Wintergarten Berlin
Management:**

Georg Strecker, Joerg Wiesner

Architect:

Meyer-Rogge & Kutsche Architektur GbR

Building owner:

Arnold Kuthe Liegenschaft Potsdamer Straße 96 GmbH

Planning/Realization: 2014-2017

Corporate design

colours: Ruby red, cobalt blue, cream white, brass, copper

Materials: Bianco Perlino Limestone, glass mosaic, finishing coat, brass, copper, bronze, steel, aluminium cast, corian, velvet, porcelain, travertine, wood, glass, terrazzo.

**Trades involved
(all manufacturers):** Studio for mosaic art, workshop for sculptures, scene sculptor, metal worker and artist blacksmith, plasterer, glass manufacture, metal foundry, upholstery, shade printer artist, glassblowing, art production, master electrician, surface finisher, stone manufacture and master for terrazzo

Brand objects: Villeroy & Boch, Vola, FSB, Hewi, Gira, Philipp Watts, Neo- Craft S. Scherrer, Vitra, Geberit