

Delegates attending WOC 2010 should take a walk through the Enlightenment in Berlin



By Renata Rubnikowicz

A great city's history is displayed in its great monuments and rich museums, and Berlin certainly has no shortage of fine art. But just as the two bears on Berlin's coat of arms signify its joining together with Cölln on the other side of the river Spree in 1307, so science has marched with arts down the centuries – most notably as the town developed as a centre of the Enlightenment under Friedrich the Great in the 18th century.

For delegates attending the The World Ophthalmology Congress 2010 (WOC® 2010) in Berlin, a major attraction will be the annual "Long Night of the Sciences". On the evening of Saturday 5 June, from 5pm to 1am, dozens of learned institutions will open their doors to celebrate the city's tenth such festival. Hundreds of events, including lectures, guided tours, experiments, readings, interactive demonstrations, workshops, performances, concerts and even cookery demonstrations will make science come alive for all ages and interests.

The programme will be posted on www.langenachtderwissenschaften.de (<http://www.langenachtderwissenschaften.de>) from 10 May. Tickets and printed listings will be available from 20 May. One of the educational establishments taking part is the Humboldt University, now based at the Adlershof campus in the south-east of the city. (Will there be cats in boxes at its Erwin Schrödinger Centre that night? No one knows.)

The university's first home when it was founded in 1810 was the former Palace of Prince Heinrich of Prussia on Unter den Linden, a 1.5km-long boulevard that was already the backbone of Enlightenment Berlin. Stroll down this route, originally a ride down to the hunting grounds of Tiergarten, and you have an instant introduction to Berlin's historic past as a centre of learning.

Begin at the magnificent Brandenburg Gate, opened in 1791, and so a relative latecomer to the area. Its crowning glory, the Quadriga statue showing Victory in her chariot, was taken by Napoleon in 1806 and held by him for eight years before she was reclaimed to reign again over Pariser Platz. Once a symbol of the division of the city after World War II, the gate has become a symbol of its reunification two decades ago. This is where US President Ronald Regan said, "Mr Gorbachev, tear down this wall." JFK spoke here too, and nearby you'll find a photographic archive chronicling the Kennedy family.

Now rebuilt like so much of the well restored centre of Berlin, the Hotel Adlon opposite claimed the Emperor Wilhelm II as its first guest when it first opened a century ago. Comparing its marble with that in his palace, he apparently said, "mine is not as shiny and nicely polished." With certain



Brandenburg Gate

unavoidable interruptions, the hotel has been welcoming royalty and celebrities, including Garbo, Chaplin and Einstein, ever since. If you don't want to try one of its three Michelin-starred restaurants, you can still experience the glamour with afternoon tea or a glass of champagne in the Lobby Bar.

Passing the British and Russian embassies, and the Deutsche Guggenheim Museum (which has an exhibition of the work of Kenyan-born artist Wangechi Mutu until 13 June) you come to the Berlin State Library (Staatsbibliothek) which can claim a lineage stretching back three and a half centuries and whose expanding collections are now housed in various different buildings around the city. A new reading room is being constructed in the current, century-old building on Unter den Linden to replace the central domed reading room which was damaged during the second world war. As well as being Germany's largest research library – with more than 10 million books – the institution is also the guardian of treasures such as a Gutenberg Bible and original scores by Bach, Beethoven and Mozart.

Crossing the boulevard near a statue of Frederick the Great on his horse, you find the curving Baroque frontage of the Alte Bibliothek or Old Library, which the Staatsbibliothek replaced when it became too small. Nicknamed "Kommode," or "chest of drawers" by Berliners, it had its origins as a royal library. Now it is one of

the many buildings that make up Humboldt University and forms one side of Bebelplatz, once Kaiser Franz Joseph Platz and centrepiece of the Prussian Enlightenment.

Planned in 1740, this square was inspired by the Forum of ancient Rome. Yet here is one of the jarring notes in the otherwise elegant Enlightenment symphony of the area. This is the place where, on 10 May 1933, Nazis burned books on Hitler's blacklist. A square of glass set in the ground showing a sunken library lined with empty bookshelves with a line from Heinrich Heine – "Where they burn books they end by burning people" – is a reminder of the shocking event.

More harmoniously, Bebelplatz is also home to the celebrated Staatsoper. The original building on this site was the first in Frederick II's "Forum Fredericianum" and gave the square its prewar name. Destroyed by fire in 1843, it was soon rebuilt and remains one of the world's most beautiful music spaces. On the nights of 5 and 6 June, the state opera house proclaims "Opera for Everybody" (www.staats-oper.org), with a live broadcast of Eugene Onegin on 5 June, and a live concert by the State Orchestra conducted by Daniel Barenboim on Bebelplatz the following night, 6 June.

Next to the opera house look up to see the copper dome of St Hedwig's Cathedral, Berlin's only Catholic place of worship until 1854, and like so much of central Berlin, reconstructed after the second world war

along the lines of the 18th-century original, which itself was closely modelled on the Pantheon in Rome.

Further along Unter den Linden is the Neue Wache, once a royal guardhouse and now an antiwar memorial with a sculpture by Käthe Kollwitz of a mother holding her dead soldier son, and, finally, the Zeughaus or Arsenal. The oldest building on Unter den Linden, its first stone was laid in 1695. By the 18th century it had become Prussia's greatest weapons' hoard, and home to the first Royal Weapons and Model Collection, which was opened to the public in 1831. At the end of the 19th century it was reconstructed as a pantheon of Prussian military history, eventually becoming, in the days of the German Democratic Republic, a museum of German history with a Marxist-Leninist bent. Now it offers a permanent exhibition – with a walk through 2,000 years of German history – and temporary exhibitions (in June there will be a display of 20th-century photography) in an annex built by the celebrated modern architect IM Pei.

Ahead lies the Schlossbrücke, the bridge that leads over the western channel of the river Spree to Mueuminsel, or Museum Island, but such are its many riches that it would be better to save them for another day.

* For further information on WOC 2010, which takes place from June 5 to June 9, 2010, visit www.woc2010.org.