

## Center

Clémence de La Tour du Pin, Antoine Renard  
Kurfürstenstraße 174, 10785, Schöneberg

Center is located in a narrow, triangular storefront, on the ground floor of a social housing building at the edge of Park am Gleisdreieck. The area, once host to abandoned train tracks and overgrown woods, is now a manicured multipurpose park—one of Berlin’s most recent urban renewal projects since German reunification in 1990. Set between Station Berlin—the converted train station and site of abc (art berlin contemporary) art fair—and the commercial gallery cluster on Potsdamer Straße, new building projects sprouting up provided opportunities for artists to step in and revive unused spaces. The storefront is lined from floor to ceiling with windows and doors, which used to be adorned with the building caretaker’s plants, until artist Lin May Saeed took over in 2003 and founded Center. Over 90 artists and curators have shown at the nonprofit exhibition space, set initially in the middle of a no-man’s land, which has now become a hub of activity. In 2013, Saeed invited artists Clémence de La Tour du Pin and Antoine Renard to co-direct Center, and in doing so, managed to transfer their collaborative online work offline, and bring together an art community IRL.

### **Arielle Bier: What inspired you to open a gallery?**

**Clémence de La Tour du Pin:** I didn’t want to start a gallery, in fact—I was driven to it. In 2013, Antoine proposed to work on an online video project. We started exchanging ideas with artist Jol Thomson about a collaborative platform based on a DIWO (Do It With Others) approach. From those conversations, the name and web platform unfolded. Simultaneously, I was invited by the artist Lin May Saeed to run the art space Center, so we decided to take our embryonic video project offline and a few months later, launched the first exhibition, “Fight.”

**Antoine Renard:** We bought two flat screens and each Friday, over a few months period, we hosted artists and writers for a “blind video battle” named “Fight : Two Artists, One Text, New Videos” (2013–2014). The forum became an arena, evolving from something purely digital into a physical installation. We chatted on Skype and used WeTransfer to send video files, working with artists Steve Bishop, Cécile B. Evans, Zoe Barcza, Sandra Mujinga, Olivia Erlanger, Amalia Ulman, Hanne Lippard, Max Ruf, Yves Scherer, and Renaud Jerez, among others. Every week was a new setup. We spent lot of time discussing with each artist. It was very rich and intense, and luckily the art community began following. Since we didn’t stream the videos on our website, people had to come each week to see the new video battle. That’s how we started our network.

**AB: How do you balance your own art practice with running the gallery?**

**AR:** We had day jobs and spent most of our evenings planning and installing. During that time, Center became our practice like a social sculpture. It was not just about curating, we would turn our ideas into exhibition projects, a lot of them came from issues we encountered in our life: being young artists, living in a trashy studio, being addicted to the Internet. It was as much a gallery space as a self-made post-graduate program.

**CLTP:** Center became our practice for a while. There was no clear distinction between our art practice and exhibitions for the gallery. At the time, we decided to live in our studio to save money so we could afford running Center. This lack of intimacy drove our attention to certain aspects of today's living and needs, influencing our exhibition projects like the suicide-zen-bedroom "Aftercare" (Center, Berlin, 2014), a rehab dormitory art fair "EDENunlimited/tbc.tbc" (Alt Stralau 4, Berlin, 2014), and a hallucinatory teenage squat "Windowlicker" (Center, Berlin, 2015).

**AB: How do you decide which artists to work with? Are you drawing primarily from your own community?**

**CLTP:** We've hosted solo, duo, and group shows, off site projects, hybrid collaborative shows, reading, and performances. We like the exhibition program to be spontaneous so we organize shows when we feel a necessity, when we have something to say. Many relationships with artists and spaces were driven by friendships, some we met through blogs and social media. We don't have rules and prefer not to be fixed at any particular logic or pattern—it's one of the few advantages of being independent from the market.

**AR:** Our concept was to work with young international artists. A lot of them were living in Berlin or London but many are also students from Städelschule in Frankfurt. We had a vested interest in artists engaging with technology and post-digital issues but this evolved over time and we opened the spectrum to more traditional practices such as painting and text-based performance. We worked within our community as much as we contributed to developing it.

**AB: What's next?**

**CLTP:** Right now, we have individual projects underway and we're also preparing a duo-exhibition in New York, so we invited Irish curator Thomas Butler to take over CENTER from December 2016 with his project Room E-10 27. Next year, we want to focus on off-site projects.