

Christiane Möbus, *Auf und ab und unterwegs* (Up and down and on the move), 1997-2001, four suspended mobile racing eights, hall, Block 1 of the Jakob Kaiser Building

Arriving in Block 1 of the Jakob Kaiser Building, designed by architects Schweger + Partner, visitors enter a spacious hall. From the ceiling of the hall, artist Christiane Möbus has suspended four rowing boats – racing eights painted yellow, red, black and blue – which float up and down through the space. As each boat follows its



Christiane Möbus Up and down and on the move

own rhythm, with the up-and-down motion determined by a random generator, the configuration of the boats constantly changes. The installation was in operation until 2008 but was then immobilised for safety reasons. Thanks to the kind support of the Foundation for Art and Culture in Bonn, the boats have been floating up and down again since 20 June 2022.

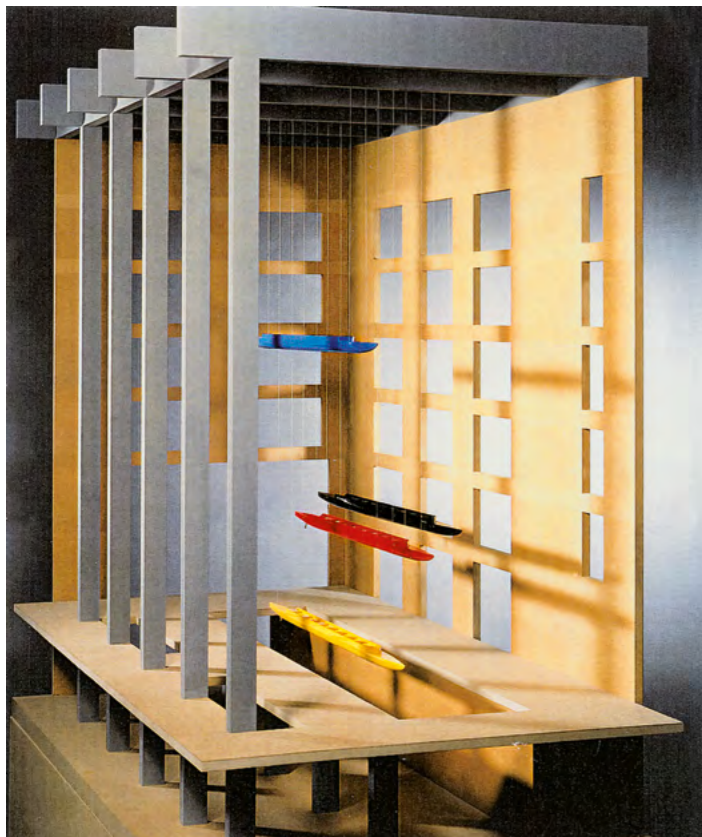
The boats are an allusion to the rivers and lakes which are a ubiquitous feature of Berlin's landscape, in particular to the River Spree, which flows past nearby. The opening in the floor of the hall creates the illusion that the basement is a pool, with the boats drifting down close to the edge. But the four racing eights not only link in with features of the local landscape, notably the ship lift at nearby Niederfinow. They also recall the legendary men's eight rowing team which

won Germany's first-ever gold medal in this event at the Rome Olympics on 3 September 1960. And there is another major sporting event which directs our gaze to the deeper meaning of athletic rivalry: the traditional boat race between the universities of Oxford and Cambridge, held on the Thames since 1829, evokes the democratic competition among equals – whether in sport, science or politics.

Image: Christiane Möbus soon after the completion of the installation (DBT / Jens Liebchen)



Image: Niederfinow ship lift in Barnim county in Brandenburg (Steffen Zahn, Berlin (Wikimedia Commons))



In that sense, in a political setting, the boats can encourage compliance with the rules of fair play, hinting that team spirit (“we’re all in the same boat”) and disciplined interaction are fundamental to success, while the boats’ up-and-down motion is a reminder that defeat in the political arena should be accepted with grace and seen as a spur to renewed effort.

The dance-like rhythm of these brightly coloured boats as they drift through the air in this spacious hall creates not only a buoyant atmosphere but also a connection between play and sport. In a building where the parliamentary groups have their offices, it symbolises both the dynamism and the fair play of political contest.

But beyond this, a boat is also a timeless metaphor for the human journey through life, the risks faced when leaving the safety of the harbour, and the hopes of a safe landing. It is an image which was invoked, for example, in the Baroque age by poet Andreas Gryphius (1616 – 1664) during the turbulent times of the Thirty Years’ War. His sonnet *To the World (An die Welt)*, composed in 1637, commences with the words: “My oft-stormed ship, plaything of the wrathful wind ...” This deeper meaning echoes in the interplay of the boats and has acquired painful topicality with the fate of the boat refugees.



Artist Christiane Möbus was born in 1947 in Celle and lives and works in Hanover and Berlin. After holding professorships in Hamburg, Braunschweig and Gothenburg, she was a professor at the Universität der Künste in Berlin until her retirement.

Image: The 1841 Oxford-Cambridge Boat Race: engraving by F.W. Topham (Wikimedia Commons)

Image: The German men’s eight rowing team, 1964 (Eric Koch (Wikimedia Commons))



Art at the German Bundestag Christiane Möbus



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Image: Model of the installation by Christiane Möbus which formed part of the artist’s presentation of her design for the Art in Architecture competition in 1997 (Christiane Möbus)

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