



Why Berlin is an alluring home for Canadian artists

In the German capital 'artists are part of the fabric of society,' says AA Bronson

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AA Bronson standing in the living room of his apartment in Berlin's Charlottenburg neighbourhood. The artist, who's originally from Canada, moved to Germany eight years ago. (Vanessa Greco/CBC)

AA Bronson: We moved here eight years ago, on Valentine's Day 2013. I was invited to participate in something called the DAAD Artists-in-Berlin Program (German: Berliner Künstlerprogramm des DAAD), which is a fellowship program by which they invite artists to come and live and work in Berlin for a year. They give you a studio and allow you to bring your family, whoever that might be. It's an amazing program.

I think Berlin is the number one place in the world for an artist to be. It's better than New York, better than London, better than Paris — and it's cheaper than any of those places as well.

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My first visit to Berlin was in 1983. [The artist collective] General Idea was invited to be in an exhibition that was called *Oh Canada!*, I think. What a horrible title! (*laughs*) The Berlin Wall was still up at that time, and we chose to drive to East Germany in a car. We came through the wall, and drove through East Berlin, and then back through the wall to get into West Berlin. That was one of the scariest experiences of my life. I've never seen so many soldiers with machine guns, looking very unfriendly. But it's no longer what Berlin looks like today. It's changed so much.



Canadian artist AA Bronson looking out from his terrace in Berlin. The street below is home to several art galleries and the longtime cultural hub The Literaturhaus Berlin. (Vanessa Greco/CBC)

There are roughly 180 artist-run spaces in Berlin. That's more than there are in all of Canada. I mean, Canada doesn't have an awful lot to offer in the art world. The only way to be an artist in Canada is to be represented by a fairly powerful gallery outside of Canada. And when artists get to a certain point in their artistic life, they leave. I was talking to a young woman in Berlin, a Canadian artist who's been here

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almost 10 years. She came out of the Emily Carr University of Art and Design in Vancouver. She said that every year, all the best students from Emily Carr just immediately pack up and come to Berlin. You can come to Berlin and have an exhibition within a year. You can't do that in Vancouver.

For all artists, it's possible to be much more relaxed here, because all the systems are in place to be an artist. The atmosphere is here to be an artist. Art supply stores are everywhere. You've got access to support people, such as framers. If you want somebody with some fairly obscure skill, like a stonemason, all those old East German craftsmen are here. You can do so much without having to jump through the hoops that you have to jump through in North America. A few days ago, I went to an ear doctor to get my ears cleaned. As she was cleaning my ears, she said, "How is your art career going?" I didn't even know she knew I was an artist, but she knew quite a lot. It's funny. Artists are part of the fabric of society in Germany. They're not some sort of weird outlier, like they are in Canada. It's just normal to have artists as part of your society -- and that's considered a plus, not a negative.