

## Solitude

### A unique academy in profile

**As disputes rage over arts funding, amid demands for accountability and commercial viability and accusations of cultural elitism, one of Baden-Württemberg's most impressive monuments acts as a port of tranquility within the stormy seas of this debate. The Akademie Solitude sees itself as a bastion of artistic freedom and excellence creating an innovative environment for independently-minded artists. *Stuart Marlow reports.***

In 1987, Stuttgart's baroque icon Schloß Solitude was in a rather dilapidated state. What to do with one of the city's most important historical buildings was a key question for the municipal government at the time. After much deliberation, it was decided to house an international residential arts academy at Solitude. Renovation work began and by 1990 the Akademie Solitude boasted 29 studio apartments offering living and working space for young resident artists from all over the world. Founder and director Jean Baptiste Joly has been careful to create a climate in which young artists feel they are part of a creative ensemble without being subjected to any kind of institutional pressure or claustrophobia-inducing conditions. On the whole this delicate balance has been well maintained. There are few complaints of 'castle fever' from the artists who spend between six and eighteen months in the relative isolation of Schloß Solitude.

Up to two thousand applications per year are processed from promising, mostly young artists from all corners of the globe. Fields of artistic expertise range from the graphic arts to design, music, literature, theatre, and video. Under the heading "Art, Science and Business" the Academy has also been widening its scope of activities since 2003. Exhibitions, performances, and concerts are held regularly at the academy.

"Promoting and maintaining high artistic standards at an international level is the most vital element of our work here," says Jean Baptiste Joly. "It's about creating a climate for creativity and intercultural artistic exchange. To do this we constantly adapt to the needs of our residential ensemble. When they leave, these artists become part of a global network spread across eighty nations worldwide."

The language used most often at the Akademie Solitude is English. There is a minimum set of social requirements the resident artists are expected to observe, but respect for private space and relaxation are two key elements involved in maintaining a creative atmosphere to work in. Conversations with two resident artists, one American and one British, attest to the benefits of the Solitude model.

Avant-garde New York artist Jackie Sumell arrived in November 2005 with memories of the horrors of the New Orleans floods still present in her mind. "My first few weeks here were influenced by the

contrast between the peace of Schloß Solitude and the turbulence of what had happened in New Orleans. I soon discovered how important peace and quiet is, to take a step back and reflect on what you are doing. I've got to know artists working in so many other areas. Through mixing with designers here, I lost my 'anti-designer' prejudice, for example. You share skills through being part of a working ensemble and you move on as an artist. It makes a great contribution to your development."

Electronic interaction designer Ben Hooker is a resident artist in Schloss Solitude, though he occasionally has to fly back to London from Stuttgart to fulfill work obligations. He enjoys the contrast between the stresses of the English metropolis and the peace of Solitude.

"There is a lot of social and financial pressure in my field, which is very demanding. In London you can't avoid it. The peace here is an important luxury that many artists don't get. Here, I don't have to meet production targets all the time – I am free to experiment. You have to experiment to move forward as an artist."

Talking to both members of staff and resident artists at Akademie Solitude, you are left with the impression of a uniquely 'laid back' working climate. Solitude appears to be far less elitist than many other resident art academies, which can sometimes be seen as exclusive enclaves for a select few. The achievements of the last decade can be measured by both the international network of fellows that's been built up and the high number of regular visitors to Schloß Solitude. Check out the Academy's website for exhibitions and events: [www.akademie-solitude.de](http://www.akademie-solitude.de)