

CRITICS' PICKS

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Wieland Speck and Shelly Silver

EXILE

**Alexandrinenstr 4, HH,
November 4–December 5**

One August afternoon in 1978, painter Per Lücke straddled the western end of the Berlin Wall and played a small harp. Filmmaker Wieland Speck (who would go on to make the 1985 queer classic *Westler*, about a romance between two men living on either side of the wall) documented this potentially life-endangering performance, which captured the curiosity of passersby—as well as the hostile attention of authorities on both sides of the divide. The footage forms the half-hour-long video centerpiece of Speck's installation *Berlin Off/On Wall*, 1978, which also includes photos taken by the secret police as well as photocopies of the Stasi files on Speck's documentation of the action, the documentation itself regarded as a provocation by the East German authorities. Speck's piece cleverly asserts the blunt material stupidity of the wall—that massive symbolic failure of a few bureaucrats and politicians, blinded by chauvinistic allegiance to their respective ideologies, whose inability to sit down and have a conversation resulted in the needless suffering of millions.

The immediate aftermath of the *Mauerfall* (the toppling of the wall) forms the subject of Shelly Silver's 1994 documentary *Former East/Former West*, which consists wholly of interviews with inhabitants of Berlin in the years 1992 and '93. That denizens hailing from both sides of the divide were already strongly divided about the wall's collapse reflects a state of ambivalence, a perspective that the ongoing jubilee celebrations in the German capital have carefully avoided.



Wieland Speck, *Berlin Off/On Wall*, 1978, still from a black-and-white video, 22 minutes.