

Sofie Thorsen

**Work in public space
Site-specific work
Commissions**

Selection
2007-2020

Landmark Leiser Berge

2007

The region around Leiser Berge near Mistelbach in Lower Austria has a rich archaeological history and the communities participating in the project wanted a sculpture that marks some of the interesting spots in the area.

Due to the large scale of the landscape and to the fact that there is mostly nothing to see, I did not want to produce a three-dimensional object which would take the focus away from the archaeological story on the site. Therefore I chose to develop a new font together with Anna Lena von Helldorf and work with pavement markings on the existing parking lots. The asphalt is viewed as just another archaeological layer that will change with time, the markings function in the didactic tradition of archaeology and history. At the same time the parking lot is an essential element in tourism and obviously the place where the visitors will go first.

The markings tell what is below the ground – that which you cannot see. They do not necessarily indicate the name of the site but what was there years ago. For example, the word “settlements” is written on the parking lot next to the old cemetery some 1,500 m outside of the next village, referring to the stone-age villages found in the fields around the site. On the parking lot next to the regional hospital the word “warriors’ graves” refers to the findings drawn from richly equipped graves discovered during the construction of the hospital. On a black field next to the large letters a few keywords give some further information on the findings.

Commissioned by:

Art in Public Space, Lower Austria. <https://www.publicart.at/de/home/>

Form:

Competition, permanent work

Assignment:

Permanent landmarks for six archaeologically important sites in the region

Material:

Street paint on asphalt

Budget: 40,000 Euros, incl. VAT

Collaboration:

Typography by Anna Lena von Helldorf, assistance by Helmut Heiss

Landmark Leiser Berge

2007



Landmark Leiser Berge
Site near Niederleis



Landmark Leiser Berge
Site at Oberleiserberg



Landmark Leiser Berge
Site near Großmugl

Wall Piece

2006/2008

Ústí nad Labem is an industrial city in northern Bohemia in the Czech Republic. Until the Second World War the population was mainly Sudeten German, after the war they were almost completely banished from the city. During the Communist era a new, Czech population settled there. Marks and signs of the complex history of the town are still visible in many ways in the urban landscape.

The pieces of art in public space in Ústí nad Labem produced throughout the Communist period are in a permanent process of reediting; they are replaced, taken away or simply hidden behind commercial banners. After 1989, Miroslav Houra's mosaic on the building of the regional government on the main square from 1982 was also reedited with the artist's consent, when an excerpt from the Communist manifest was replaced with the image of a single-family house. Miroslav Houra worked on several assignments for the Communist regime before 1989. He died in the 1990s.

Wall Piece is a mural painting depicting a fragment of the cityscape as it appears behind the marching people on Houra's mosaic. This image of the city had not lost its relevance in 2006, many of the urban situations and industrial areas depicted in the mosaic still define the city and its surroundings today. Issues such as the local chemical factory in the centre of the city and the question whether it should be closed or not, or the possible opening of new open mine pits were central topics of discussions in the region, as were the environmental effects of the industries on the town.

The painting was created in 2006, grey lines on white. Two years later, in 2008, the grey lines were overpainted with the same white as originally used for the background. The fresh white lines left a white shadow on the background, which had become grey from time and weather and the pollution caused by the very same industries depicted in the mosaic and in the painting.

Commissioned by:

Michal Kolecek, curator of Emil Filla Gallery, Usti nad Labem

Form:

Direct commission, temporary mural, visible from 2006 to 2008

Assignment:

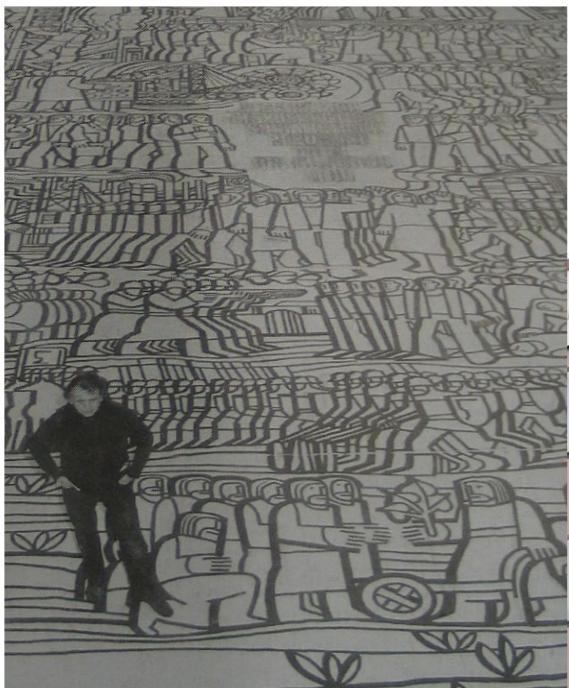
Site-specific work in Ústí nad Labem, Czech Republic

Material:

Wall painting



Wall Piece
2006 and 2008



1982

Miroslav Houra standing on the full scale sketch for the mosaic in the first version with a text excerpt from the communist manifest.



2006

The mosaic on the main square with the changed central motif, the tiles slightly cleaner around it.

Wenn wir da sind

2008

The work *Wenn wir da sind* (When we are here) was a piece in public space consisting of three parts, each addressing a different audience and with its own specific time-perspective. The work was based on a workshop in summer 2008 with the members of a youth club in the small alpine industrial town of Mürzzuschlag. With a camera team Katharina Lampert and I followed the teenagers around town, filming what they do in their spare time – hanging out with friends, skating, chatting, taking up spaces and defining these for themselves.

The recordings were edited into a short film. The film maps the town from the kids' perspective and shows how they use it, how they continuously perform in the public space of the town, on ephemeral self-defined sites. The film was shown at the opening of the project, and each participant was given a copy.

In front of the youth club three sets of posters were installed, based on the recordings for the film. When they were taken down after some months, the poster boards were to be used by the club.

The most permanent part of the project is a series of wall drawings made in a tunnel near the centre of town, in the form of a reverse graffiti; by erasing dirt from the walls of the tunnel, a shadow drawing becomes visible. As ephemeral as the spaces used by each generation of teenagers in town, and yet strangely durable. In summer 2022, the drawings were still mostly visible.

Commissioned by:

FREIZEICHEN. A cooperation between < rotor >, Institute for Art in Public Space and Steirischer Dachverband der Offenen Jugendarbeit

Form:

Direct commission, temporary work for the FREIZEICHEN project

Assignment:

Collaborative work with the youth club of Mürzzuschlag

Material:

Video (HD) 14 min., Katharina Lampert and Sofie Thorsen; mural (inverse graffiti) and poster series, Sofie Thorsen

Collaboration:

Katharina Lampert

Wenn wir da sind

2008



Wenn wir da sind
2008
Wall drawings



Wenn wir da sind
2008
Wall drawings



Wenn wir da sind
2008
Opening event in the tunnel



Wenn wir da sind
2008
Wall drawings

Baustelle (Aichenegg, Lenneisgasse 6-8, 1140 Wien)

2009

The wall drawing, Baustelle (Aichenegg, Lenneisgasse 6-8, 1140 Wien), was part of the ongoing investigation of the ideas and images of space, architecture and the urban as manifested in the many public art pieces in Vienna from the 50s, 60s, and 70s. At the time, the City of Vienna had a programme that designated one percent of the construction budget to public art, often in the form of murals that were integrated into the architecture. Many of these pieces were commissioned by the City of Vienna and were integrated in social housing projects of the time, spread generously across the city. In these murals of varying artistic quality, the urban space and the architecture are rarely more than the background of the images.

In the wall drawing the architectural elements of a 1953 sgraffito, *Baustelle*, by the artist Hermine Aichenegg are isolated by removing the people and other things in the foreground. The remaining elements, the city, scaffolding and ladders, are drawn as outlines using blue and red crayon.

Commissioned by:

Wien Museum

Form:

Direct commission for the exhibition *Fifty Fifty. Kunst im Dialog mit den 50er-Jahren*. Temporary work. On display from 2009 to 2020

Material:

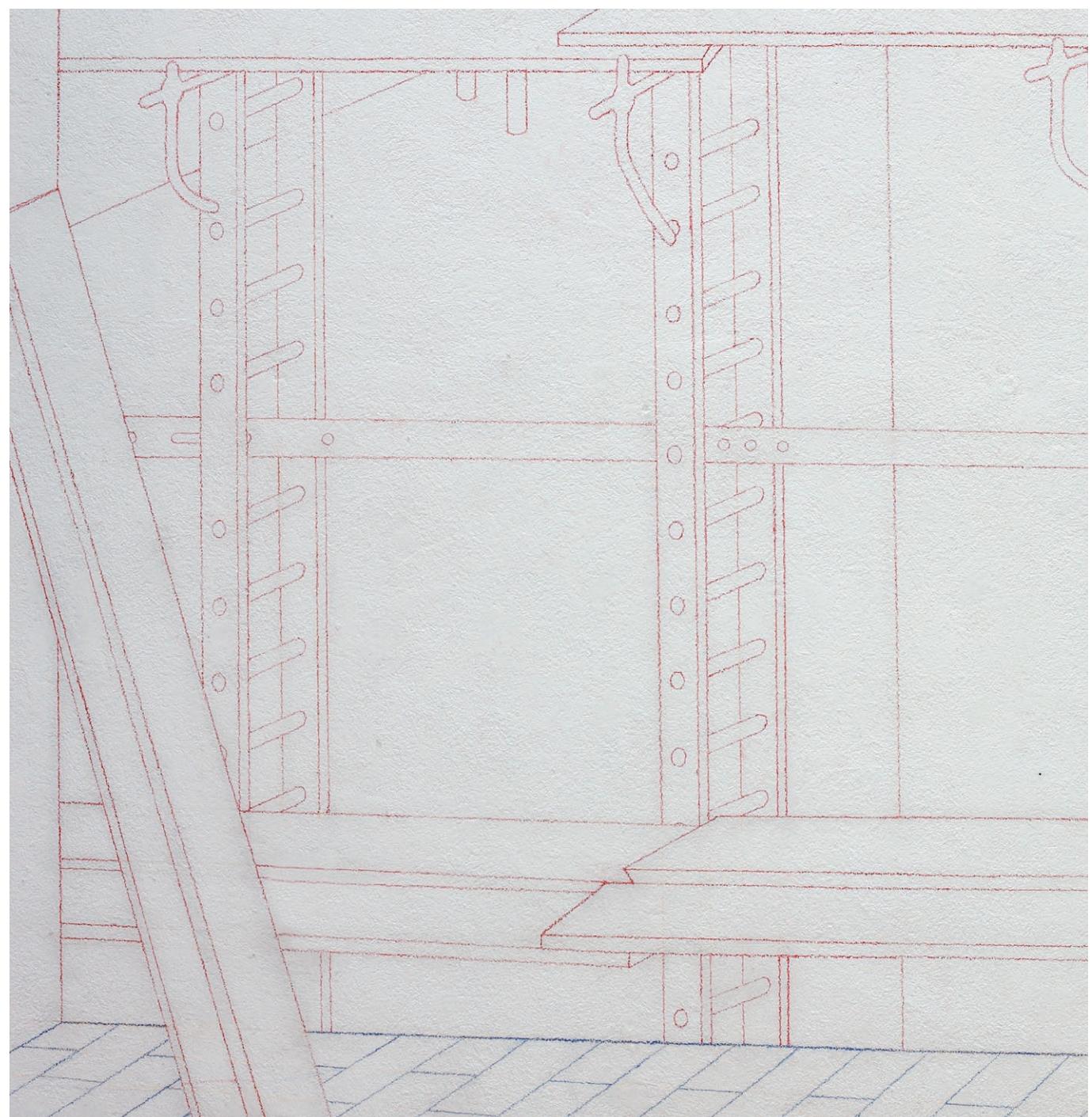
Wall drawing 3 × 14 m, crayon on wall, Atrium of Wien Museum

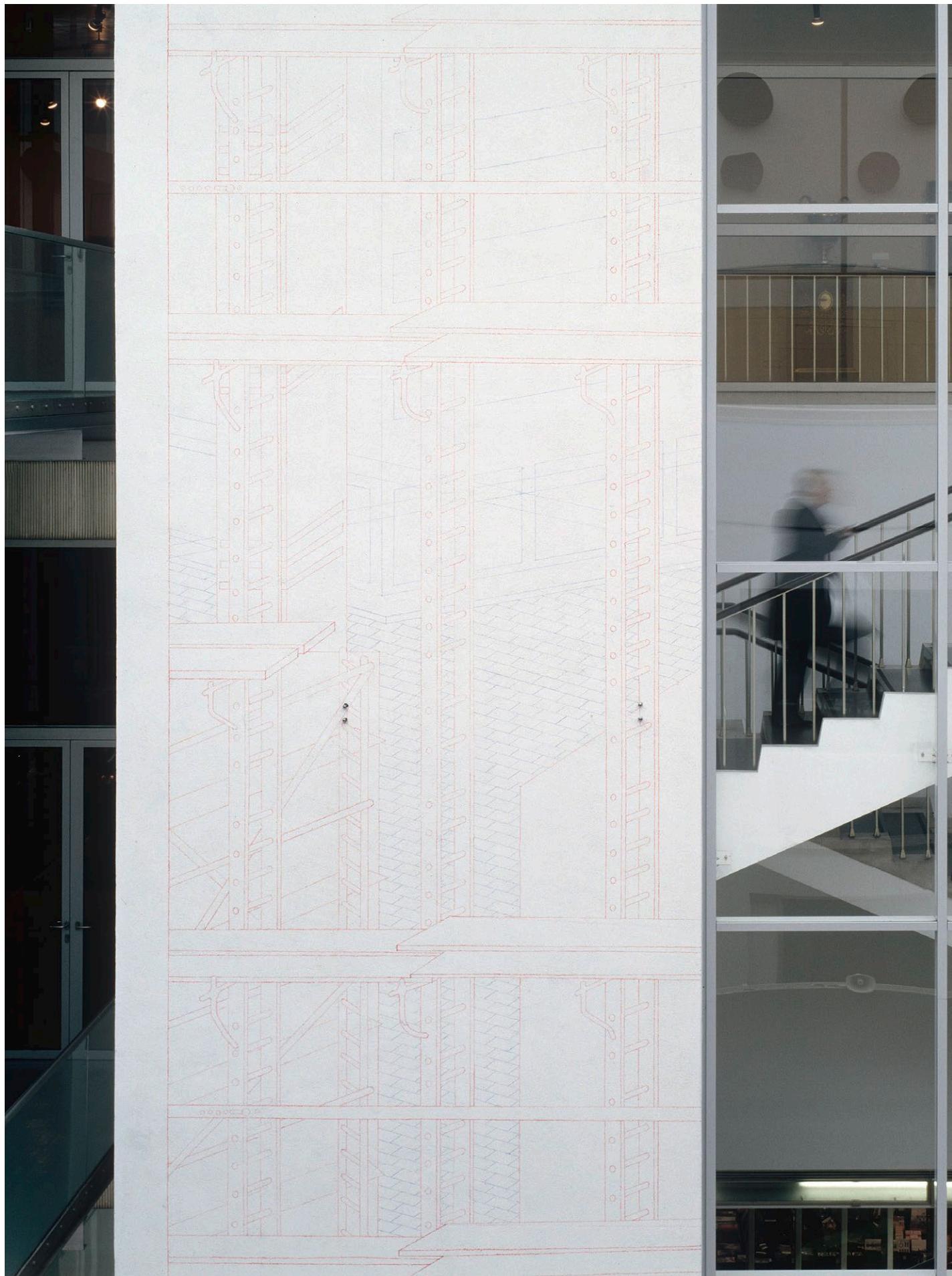
Collaboration:

Isolde Christandl, assistance by Luiza Margan, Michael Part

Baustelle (Aichenegg, Lenneisgasse 6-8, 1140 Wien)

2009





Baustelle (Aichenegg, Lenneisgasse 6-8, 1140 Wien)

Installation view

Fifty Fifty. Kunst im Dialog mit den 50er-Jahren, Wien Museum

Foto: Lisa Rastl



Baustelle (Aichenegg, Lenneisgasse 6-8, 1140 Wien)

Installation view

Fifty Fifty. Kunst im Dialog mit den 50er-Jahren, Wien Museum

Foto: Lisa Rastl

Ballspielwände

2015

Five slabs of concrete with ornaments and numbers are placed next to the sports facilities of the high school Kremszeile in Krems, Austria. The loops and holes invite the children aged 10 to 18 to play – throwing balls through the loops, aiming at markings and playing balls against the surfaces of the objects – there are no pre-defined games. The large holes and other surfaces can be used for sitting. The shapes of the walls and the ornaments are modelled after historical Viennese walls for playing ball at playgrounds, mainly by the Viennese artist Josef Seebacher.

The remodelling of the school is based on ideas of transparency and permanent visual contact with the pupils. The positioning of the walls produces a space separated from the school and its pedagogical concept. The walls are a playground, but perhaps also a place to retreat from the view of the school building and to hang out with friends.

Commissioned by:

BIG ART

BIG ART develops artistic interventions for construction projects belonging to the Bundesimmobiliengesellschaft (BIG), which administers the buildings of the Republic of Austria (www.big-art.at)

Form:

Competition, permanent work

Assignment:

A permanent work for the high school Rechte Kremszeile in Krems, Austria

Material:

Concrete, metal ornaments and mineral silicate paint

Budget:

150,000 Euros, incl. VAT

Collaboration:

Walter Kräutler and Isolde Christandl

Ballspielwände

2015



Ballspielwände
2015
BRG Krems



Ballspielwände
2015
BRG Kremst



Ballspielwände
2015
BRG Krems

Excavation

2017

Excavation was a site-specific work placed in the courtyard of the Florentinum business and shopping complex in Prague. It consisted of three unique concrete sculptures and a 6" HD video presented in the lobby of Florentinum. The video was also shown on a screen of a viewing window at the construction site of the future Central Business District Praha designed by Zaha Hadid Architects. This new business complex is located next to the Florentinum and will open in 2023.

Like all construction sites in Prague's historical area, this also had to be excavated before construction could begin. The view into the excavation provided the rare opportunity to see many layers of the city at once, the shapes of pits and walls of the old houses and the current city with its older and newer developments. This view into the ground was gone by the time the exhibition opened, the place ready for construction.

The digging on an archaeological site leaves holes and shapes largely defined by the decisions somebody took hundreds of years ago to build a wall, make a separation between houses, use a particular spot as a garbage pit. When dug out, organically shaped negative spaces emerge, curved and amorphous with a strong sculptural language.

The three sculptures in the work were casts of some of these shapes, fibre concrete copies of actual holes in the ground. These sculptures are a collection of documents that mark specific moments in time. The film shows images of the original pits, a slow and silent succession of the shapes and colours in the ground of the excavation site and some of the artefacts found in there.

Commissioned by:
m3 / Art in Space

Form:
Direct commission

Assignment:
Temporary work in public space, installed for the duration of the exhibition *Traces of Time. VICE VERSA: Our Earth is Their Moon, Our Moon is Their Earth*, curated by Jen Kratochvil and Laura Amann; this was the 2018 iteration of the yearly festival m3 / Art in Space

Material:
Fibre-reinforced concrete, silicate paint and HD video

Budget:
20,000 Euros

Produced in collaboration with:
Studio BUBEC, Prague

Excavation

2017



Excavation

2018

Installation views: M3 Festival, Art in Space, Prague

Photo: Hynek Alt



Excavation

2018

Installation views: M3 Festival, Art in Space
Prague



Excavation
2018
Installation views: M3 Festival, Art in Space
Prague



Excavation
2018
Video stills

Strokes and Incisions

2020

The small village of Brseč on the Istrian peninsula overlooks the sea, with a beautiful beach and historical centre. The work consisting of three large stone blocks is placed at the entrance of the village, in a small park which is also the site of the local boules court. Boules is traditionally played all over Croatia, and the local boules courts are often central meeting points in the villages.

The small public school of the village was closed in 2018 after 175 years. Placed in the centre of the village, above the water reservoir, it constituted the heart of the community. The school and its closure were a central topic of the project. Next to the school there is a wall where people, probably both tourists and locals, have been scratching graffiti for decades; names, dates, random scratches. The pattern of these lines, combined with writing and drawings from notebooks from the last few generations of school children, form the basis of the line drawings in the limestone.

The stones serve as benches in the small park where the local boules court is located. The court had been relatively unused over the last decade, but was renovated in the course of the project and the park revitalised.

Commissioned and produced by:

Rijeka 2020 / European Cultural Capital 2020

Form:

Direct commission for the Rijeka 2020 flagship project Lungomare, curated by Michal Koleček

Assignment:

Permanent work in the village of Brseč, Croatia

Material:

Three limestone objects, 140 × 260 × 40 cm each, line drawing carved and painted in the surface of the limestone; renovated boules court

Budget:

37,000 Euros

Strokes and Incisions

2020





Strokes and Incisions
Lungomare Flagship, Rijeka 2020

Objects for Oberneukirchen

2020

In the course of the renovation of the neo-Gothic parish church built in 1898, in Oberneukirchen, Upper Austria, the liturgical objects and several other elements were part of an artistic commission, developed in collaboration with architect Walter Kräutler and project manager Isolde Christandl.

Since the 1960s the Archdiocese of Linz has had a close relationship to contemporary art. In its ruleset it is stated that whenever the liturgical elements of a church are to be rebuild, this must be done by a contemporary artist. This happens via competitions and means that there is quite a large amount of art works in the churches of Upper Austria.

The liturgical objects consist of a number of steel poles holding slabs of limestone. These are placed on fields of a darker floor material that provides an optical foundation for the very light objects and defines an area of activity for each object. The position of the poles is loosely based on the pattern of the columns in the floor plan of the church and refers to an idea of many seemingly fragile elements carrying something large and heavy conjointly.

The original baptismal font was reinstalled as such after having served as the foundation of the altar since the last renovation. It was placed on the same level as the other liturgical elements on a field of darker cement. In addition to the objects, we contributed a concept for the spatial reorganisation of the church. This concept was based on the recommendation to move the altar into the middle of the community in order to improve the flow between the different spaces in the church. Furthermore, the number of seats in the church was adapted and a series of other spaces and objects were renovated or redesigned.

The dimensions of the project for us as a team grew tremendously in the process, but allowed us to participate in many more decisions than originally planned. Walter Kräutler designed the windscreens and the additional benches. We were involved in numerous questions concerning the renovation, such as deciding the exact colour of the walls and the materials of the floor in collaboration with the monuments office and the liturgical consultant. Being involved in all the many decisions made, the project came together as a whole in a way that would otherwise have been impossible.

Commissioned by:

Diocese of Linz, Upper Austria

Form:

Competition

Assignment:

Design of altar, ambo, tabernacle, candle holders, seats and other objects in the parish church of Oberneukirchen, Upper Austria; development of spatial concepts and contributions to the renovation of other parts of the church

Material:

Limestone, painted steel, brass, concrete floor, oak wood

Budget:

70,000 Euros, incl. VAT

Produced in collaboration with:

Walter Kräutler and Isolde Christandl

Objects for Oberneukirchen

2020



View towards main altar and the presbytery
Photo: Hertha Hurnaus



View towards the nave
Photo: Hertha Hurnaus



Closeup of altar
Photo: Hertha Hurnaus



Original baptismal font and new tabernacle
Photo: Hertha Hurnaus



Tabernacle
Photo: Hertha Hurnaus



Object for sacrificial candles
Photo: Hertha Hurnaus