

Political Landscape

Internal Workshop // Research // Public Edition

Artists

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A project commissioned by the Institute for Art in Public Sphere Styria / Universalmuseum Joanneum in cooperation with Netzwerk Salzkammergut, supported



Europäischer Landwirtschaftsfonds für
die Entwicklung des ländlichen Raums: Hier
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Das Land
Steiermark

1. Proposed Project

The particularly striking region of the Salzkammergut is perceived as a picturesque, cultural landscape. To this day, the region has lost none of its appeal, and has salvaged a collective political history that has moulded this part of the countryside and its people. In the mid-1940s, a great many actions both for and against Hitler's fascist rule were concentrated here in the Austrian Salzkammergut, a traditionally popular summer resort formed by a triangle that stretches between the high mountains of the present-day states of Salzburg, Upper Austria and Styria. Parts of the proto-partisan-like resistance used the impassable areas of the high mountains as retreat. After the collapse of the Nazi-Regime also National-Socialists were hiding in the mountains or lived anonymously on the region. Likewise a burning lens many events culminated until May 1945 as for instance art robbery, betrayal, active and passive resistance, escape and murder. These complex and ambiguous times have normative effects on our political system until today. 2015 marks 70 years since Europe's liberation from national-socialist totalitarianism, at which point only few living witnesses will remain. The research project "Political Landscape" addresses a specific landscape within which the research group sculpture will process the issue of individual and collective memory in several steps. Part of the project's research will be located in the valley, and another part in the high mountains. The artworks develop new perspectives on the landscape and help to enhance a broad regional debate and social awareness of the political of landscape and everyday culture from a contemporary artistic perspective.

The project is structured as follows:

1. During a **workshop** in Bad Mitterndorf artists, theoreticians and regional experts exchange knowledge (august 2014). Parts of the workshop will be public in Bad Mitterndorf and Aussee.
2. Artists and theoreticians will visit the high mountains (Totes Gebirge, from Blaa-Alm to Albert-Appel-House and more) to do research on material and sites (august 2014).
3. The results of the workshop will be published in a **catalogue and artist's editions** (winter 2014 - spring 2015). The book contains maps and information in text and images. The editions represent an exemplary proposal for a future project. The small-scale edition-objects made by the artists will be made accessible in early summer 2015 in the high mountains. The multiple is to be carried in a backpack by one person. This will not become a sculpture route but a placing of several art works in the mountains and in the valley (still to be defined). Furthermore an exhibition of the book and the edition is planned in Graz.

2. Conceptual background

This project has been inspired by Eva Grubinger. Her idea was to take those historical events and sites as a starting point for artistic thoughts. This connects the region with nowadays developments in the art field. For a long time artists use research-methods to generate knowledge in a non-scientific way. To this field belongs the recently so-called artistic research. The supplementary “artistic” sets the open method free of scientific legitimisation. Hence it is a means to make art.

The international workshop with artists and experts connects aspects of geology, history, and sociology of Salzkammergut including the actual spatial planning of the region in order to combine historical with contemporary information. The internal workshop will be planned and prepared in cooperation with Dr. Günther Marchner of Network Salzkammergut (www.netzwerk-salzkammergut.net). The network has been founded in 1998, enhances the transfer of knowledge with innovative impulses for the regional development. The refurbished Woferstall in Bad Mitterndorf, a traditional shed, will serve from summer 2014 as a place for education, cultural, scientific, and media projects. It is fully equipped and situated close to the research area. Günther Marchner also makes available the contacts to a network of regional experts. For the workshop inputs to the following topics are planned: social history, history, traditional handcraft, regional spatial planning, agriculture and forestry, pathway systems, artistic research. Alongside knowledge transfer, the workshop’s goal is the early communication with local representatives and/or groups. Two public events are envisaged in the Woferstall and in Altaussee (location still to be defined). The region Ausseerland and parts of Totes Gebirge will be explored by hiking ensuing.

The project regards the mountain landscape beside its natural appearance as a social fact, being in constant interdependency with human acting, thinking and feeling. It is subject to historic and natural changes. Landscape changes in this perspective from a noun to a verb, or from an object to an acting in public space. Insofar public space has always been viewed as the terrain of the inner-city, yet today with increasing urbanisation, tourism, transport infrastructure, and new technology it extends to the outlying countryside. The concept of public space may be applied to the mountains ranges beyond the cities, which are freely accessible for everyone and even supported by Styrian law based to the “right to roam” (§ 5 Steiermärkisches Wegereifreiheitsgesetz 1922).

3. Historical Background

Political Resistance in the Salzkammergut 1943-1945

In the 19th century the Salzkammergut was a popular destination for city dwellers in search of relaxation. Today it is the best-developed cultural and touristic region in Austria. The name is attributed to the salt mining that took place here under imperial rule, and an eventful history has left its traces across the Salzkammergut's picture-book landscape. This is a history interlinked with that of the forestry, mining and tourism industries, with the literature and fine arts of the Romantic Era, as well as the political events of the 1930s and 1940s' war years. Salt mines were used to protect people during air raids, and misused by the Nazis as bunkers for looted art. Only through insubordination during the last days of the war could this cultural potential be salvaged from destruction by the Nazis. Legends are spun of Nazi treasures buried deep at the bottom of a lake. However these mountains also provided refuge and escape for the Austrian Resistance to the dictatorship of the Third Reich, the history of which is a far less known.

In acts of nonviolent local resistance men and women supported for example escapees from concentration camps or army defectors who were hiding in the mountains. Beginning in 1940, a group was formed in Bad Aussee around the figures of Albrecht Gaiswinkler, Hans Moser and Valentin Tarra. During the final days of the war in 1945, in an unsuccessful attempt to arrest the Reich Propaganda Minister, Joseph Goebbels, Gaiswinkler parachuted over the Hölleengebirge mountains together with Josef Grafl. Another group of conspirators was formed by Sepp Plieseis in 1943, following his escape from an outdoor warehouse at the Dachau camp. Agnes Primocic, Mali Ziegleder und Theresia Pesendorfer were among the group's supporters. Plieseis contributed to the capture of Ernst Kaltenbrunner (Chief of the Security Police and the Security Service of the SS, as well as the Reich Main Security Office), which took place on the Wildenseealm near Altaussee. Edith Hauer-Fischmuth performed life-threatening acts of passive resistance by sounding out high-ranking Nazi officials at the Seehotel in Altaussee and used this information to save people in peril. For these acts, Hauer-Fischmuth was distinguished with the honourable title of "Righteous Among the Nations" by the State of Israel in 1999.

Directly following the war, many activists involved in the events of this period were employed either in municipal or city councils. Then, with the onset of the Cold War and its ideological infighting, they found themselves once again on the defensive and, ultimately, sunk into oblivion. The scenes of these noteworthy events remain hidden from both the locals and the tourists to the region, with only a very few exceptions. The Ebensee Society for Contemporary History (Verein Zeitgeschichte Ebensee), for example, has marked the site of the Willy-Fred group's hiding place - "IGEL (The Hedgehog)" - with a commemorative plaque, albeit difficult to find.