

AIR Krems April 2011.

Report from Margareta Klingberg, Sweden

I arrived to Krems at the time when *die Marillen* were in blossom and *Bärlauch* was offered at every lunch and dinner table. I was introduced to Bärlauch during a lunch welcomed by curator Karin Pernegger at Kunsthalle Krems. I continued to choose this local primeur as often as possible for the rest of my stay in Austria. During our conversation Karin Pernegger stated I'm a conceptual artist. This definitely became true for the work I carried out during my residency.

Expectations

I applied for a residency in Niederösterreich because of its location. To me as a citizen in remote Sweden this is Central Europe, close to Austria's Eastern border and the neighbouring countries that once were situated behind the former iron curtain and outside the European Union. I have good experiences from Austria ever since my participation in a well curated exhibition at Gallerie im Taxispalais in Innsbruck; Arbeit/Work/Labour in 2005. My residency in Krems added another good experience to my Austrian memoirs.

A month is a short period to get acquainted with a new context and new surroundings. In my computer I brought some work that would keep me busy and before leaving Sweden I imagined myself working in a bright and quiet studio with the view of Donau at distance. When in my Krems studio I also had a close view into what I learned was a maximum security prison. The sound of the bell in the watchtower every quarter of an hour made me aware of the time that passed, probably in the opposite way compared to how the prisoners estimated their time. Every moment of my residency was precious to me.

My project: Searching Borders

However, the short distance to Austria's Eastern border and the countries beyond attracted my attention and interest more than I had expected. For some time I have been

influenced by the Russian theorist and thinker Michail Bachtin's words. Like Janus, the god of beginning and transition, every border has two faces, he writes. The border faces two opposite directions and thus can be seen from two different points of view. I had this statement in mind as I watched the map to search for transitions between Austria and the neighbouring countries. The first border crossing I visited was the one between Gmünd and České Velenice, which was accessible by regional train where I could bring a bicycle. The bike was part of the comfort that I was offered during my residency. That was how I crossed the creek that marks the border and separates Austria from the Czech Republic at Gmünd/Velenice.

A grant from IASPIS, the Swedish Arts Grants Committee's International Program, made it possible to speed up and search for several crossings in areas that not so easily were accessible without a car. I rented one in Krems and headed for the bridge at Hohenau that connects Austria to Slovakia near Moravský Ján. I stopped at the river, walked with my heavy Pentax 6x7 camera along both shores of the river and enjoyed the wonderful afternoon and made shots into both countries. From there I could easily continue to the crossing between Slovakia and the Czech Republic some kilometres up the river March/Morava. I followed the Slovakian highway south in the direction of Bratislava but turned right near Malacky. It was already dark when I arrived to the border at Sáhorská Ves/Angern. I expected to pass the border on a bridge but instead found myself on board a ferry that brought me across the river along with a few other late drivers. This short voyage was so beautiful and breathtaking that I had to return later and enjoy it at daylight.

This was how I searched crossings along Austria's Eastern border. In order to travel efficiently I couldn't avoid the large-scale crossings at Klagenfurt/Sopron, Bratislava, Deutschkreuz (A)/Kőpháza (H). But the places that attracted me the most were the less trafficked such as Pamhagen (A)/Pomogy (H), Mörbisch (A)/(H), Lutzmannsburg (A)/Zsira (H), Bonsdorf (A)/Kuzma (SLO), Sicherdorf (A)/Gederovci (SLO) and Hodos (H)/(SLO). In advance I didn't know what to expect at these less significant crossings and I often arrived to peaceful and seemingly neglected places in nature respected as reserves by the countries at both sides of the border. More than once I was surprised by the huge and uninhabited forests close to the Hungarian western border. On the other

hand I was equally surprised to sit in a comfortable café in the densely populated Slovenian city Gornja Ragoda and watch the Austrian city Bad Radkersberg just across the river Mur/Mura. For Slovenian citizens the possibility to pass the ancient bridge connecting Austria had only been open the last five years, after Slovenia's entrance into the European Union.

Experiences

At the borders my main interest was to follow Bachtin's statement and focus across the border into the other country and to do the same from the opposite side. This was not always easy and often time-consuming. I had to find spots where the terrain was equally visible at both sides. Often it wasn't and I faced a wall of thickets or brushwood no one cared to clear. This is part of the history. Sometimes I used ramshackle wooden towers, which I could climb. If they once were watchtowers they now seemed to be towers for bird watchers. The more so in the reeds near Neusiedler See. Of course these constructions as well as the official border stations attracted my interest. To focus on these forsaken and abandoned buildings was not part of my specific project this time. I save that for another occasion.

During April Austrian Radio Eins was continuously reporting about the pressure on the country's Southern borders and an expected invasion of refugees from Northern Africa. To my disappointment I didn't meet or see any of the expected migrants during my journeys. Neither in the vast and uninhabited Hungarian forests nor in the shrubs I had to break through in order to make my photographs. Short after my arrival to Sweden Denmark announced that the country plans to protect both its Southern and Northern borders more carefully. Border control is definitely part of contemporary Europe and the larger world although some of the stations along the Austrian border at the moment seem out of use.

I carried out my project with an analogue Pentax camera for negative film, picture size 6 x 7 cm. For quick documentation of my own work and journeys I used a digital Leica. Only after my return to Sweden I could start working on the images I shot during April. For this part of the work I need to digitalize the negatives in a high resolution scanner,

then continue the work in the digital darkroom. I now can add the images from April in Austria to the series of photos that I previously have made along the borders of Lithuania, Sweden and Thailand.

My investigation along the Austrian border turned out to be much more interesting than I had expected. Therefore also more expensive. I finished all the film I had brought and travelled longer distances than I had imagined. This is not to say that I was away from my comfortable studio in Krems much. The studio was my point of departure from where I left early mornings and returned late at night sometimes after long drives along Autobahn. Only once I stayed over night in a place too far away for a return.

Advantages

The studio in Krems was extremely useful to me during April because of its comfort, brightness, and quietness which allowed me to think, read, write, plan, rest ; to dedicate my time to my artistic work 24 hours of the day and night. In addition to the comfort of the studio I found Austrian food has high quality. This is an experience I shared with my American fellows. I mostly prepared my daily meals myself. Good bread, potatoes, cheese and the variety of basic canned preserves contributed to our/my well-being. In my Swedish apartment I neither have a washing machine nor a dishwasher. In Krems they were just waiting to be used in my kitchen. What surprised me the most was the lady who came to clean the apartment once a week. In Sweden such private service is regarded a privilege that only the wealthy pay for whereas most people are expected to clean up for themselves in their private sphere. I was totally unprepared for such support to an artist.

My appreciation

I appreciate how program coordinator Sabine Gueldenfusz had connected the curators at Kunsthalle Krems to the residency program. This facilitated short but intense conversations between us during my stay. Karin Pernegger soon understood my particular interests and quickly searched and found the information I needed before I even asked.

The grant I received from AIR Krems made my month in Krems unproblematic once I had arrived there. In addition to that the grant from IASPIS allowed me to move and travel by car and train as freely as I did, to buy and develop film and to pay the ticket to Austria and back again. My conclusion is: those artists who are able to leave their professional and private duties back home for a while are recommended to apply for a residency in AIR Krems and thereby to a position in the centre of Europe.

2011.07.03

Margareta Klingberg