

AIR – ARTIST IN RESIDENCE FINAL REPORT
(PAVOL RANKOV)

I have been an Artist In Residence in Kunstmeile Krems / Unabhängiges Literaturhaus NÖ for the period of one month in August 2015. I was selected by the partner institution from Slovakia – Literárne informačné centrum, Bratislava. From the point of view of my creative work the residence was highly useful.

After writing two historical novels – It Happened on September the First (German translation Es geschach am ersten September, Wieser Verlag 2014) and Mothers, both addressed the history of 20th century in Central Europe – I came to Krems with a very vague and unclear idea to begin work on a new novel. In Krems and Wachau I studied visible footprints and recollections of the First World War and the Second World War in public space. I have understood that memorials and monuments of Austrian soldiers died in the world wars have lost all ideological contents (e.g. the memorial plaques on church walls in Förthof and Unterloiben, the small memorial tablet on the foot-path track in a forest between Furth and Göttweig, the memorial in Marktstrasse in Spitz, as well as the plaques on inner walls of Frauenbergkirche in Stein – today this church as a whole is a memorial to fallen soldiers of both world wars). Even the memorial of Greek antifascists killed by Waffen-SS on April 1945 is more historical than ideological artifact, the memorial is situated on Steiner Landstrasse in Stein).

Thanks to my research in Krems and Wachau I have known that the war reminiscence can't work as a driving force for revenge or retribution in political sense. This is a completely different finding comparing to what I saw in July 2015 in Ukraine, where reflections of WW2 (both antinazist and anticommunist) nowadays have become a living part of public discourse again.

The second topic linked to the upcoming novel which I have studied during my residence in Krems was the role of a great river in contemporary European city and society. It has been confirmed to me that the Danube River plays a crucial role in the life of the city, the river has got the same role in Bratislava or Budapest.

In addition to planned work I have been influenced by surroundings and atmosphere of Kunstmeile Krems with the jailhouse across the street. I realized that in the new millennium Austria has reached headlines of world press and top stories of TV news owing to two oddly crimes of domestic violence. One was Josef Fritzl case, the other was Natascha Kampusch kidnapping and eight years of captivity. I had started a research in resources and I found information about some interesting hypotheses: Natascha's previous life with her mother was reportedly not a happy one, speculations of child pornography in her early childhood were offered, Natascha didn't exercised several previous options to escape from her kidnapper Wolfgang Přiklopil.

Advantages of residency are following: the highly inspiring place of Kunstmeile as a space for creative exchange and discussion between different artists situated in the pitoresque region of Stein / Krems / Wachau. I don't see any disadvantages of the residence, even the city and the region has so many sights that one have to choose between his/her work and exploring the surrounding area, he/she must select what he/she would like to see and what he/she misses. The studio is equipped and furnished on a very practical way, I haven't miss anything.

I am very thankful and grateful to Kunstmeile Krems Betriebs GmbH and Unabhängiges Literaturhaus NÖ that they allow me to spend one month in Krems. This residence gives a new energy to my work.

Krems; August 31, 2015

P. Rankov