

Foreword

For 40 years, international artists have met each summer for a symposium at [kunstwerk] krastal, which has become primarily identified with and renowned for art made in stone.

Forty years are a long time in art. Stone sculpture too has changed within this time-frame, both internally and in its public face. Its reputation, which in Austria had most lustre during the generation of the students of Fritz Wotruba, has since acquired thick layers of patina. The contemporary art world has scant interest in stone sculpture, its logistical problems and a limited circle of individual buyers contribute to persuading private galleries to concentrate on other media. Its previous role in public art or in monuments is rarely considered worth a mention, let alone worth a commission.

In contrast, we can observe a rising desire for stone in practical applications. Natural stone of high quality is increasingly employed in exterior surfacing, flooring, bathrooms, paving in public spaces, etc. The fascination it exercises as a material for artistic creation is also unbroken. What has changed in stone sculpture is its protagonists, and the manner of their approach. The classic approach with a hammer and chisel is now found equally as rarely as the once defining subject of the human figure. Even the repertoire of abstract form is no longer at the centre. Today, stone sculpture is characterised by spatial relationships, land-art placings, quotations from industrial processes, design solutions inherent in the material, by the boundaries set by tools and equipment, by conceptual and even interactive uses involving the viewer/user of the artwork. And its perhaps most refreshing impulses were gained by absorbing elements from object-based art.

It was primarily this state of affairs within stone sculpture that gave rise to the "WORLDPOOL" project as the idea of a "symposium of symposia" to celebrate Krastal's anniversary year in 2007. The invitation extended to representatives of significant international stone sculpture symposia, to meet up together at Krastal for a session of communal work and for the first conference of this particular kind, was intended not only to announce a vigorous sign of life on the part of stone sculpture, but also to serve as an opportunity for direct exchange: exchange of information about the current situation, and to collectively define our position, to identify historical and contemporary references and differences, to evaluate one's own place in a wider context, and possibly also to facilitate future initiatives within new networks.

We wish to express our most grateful thanks for their generosity to our sponsors, to the regional and federal subsidising bodies, the local councils of Treffen and of the city of Villach, our supporting members, the friends and neighbours of [kunstwerk] krastal - all of these, through their increased support, paid recognition to the significance of this project which involved twelve nations. It is thanks to Silvie Aigner that this publication has its essays on the artists, and also thanks to her that [kunstwerk] krastal has the continuing benefit of such a committed art historian with a passionate interest in stone sculpture.

Symposium means teamwork, also and especially for its organisers. My sincere respect and appreciation therefore go to my Krastal colleagues: to Max Seibald, for the countless steps he took together with myself, in a working process stretching from the initial idea to beyond the concluding celebration; to Sibylle von Halem, who was a valuable partner in the project from detailing the concept through to the creation of the catalogue; to Helmut Machhammer, whose essential contribution during the realisation of the project ensured its success.

WORLDPOOL: the fact that this idea and the invitation to Krastal was accepted with such enthusiasm by the participating artists and by the symposium's organisers endowed the 40th Symposium at Krastal with a very constructive and amicable atmosphere from its first moment. Much of the value of such encounters, and of the quiet but fruitful support engendered by such communality, can unfortunately only be experienced by those who were there at ground level, whether as a participant, as a guest or a visitor. This is also true of the complex development processes of each and every sculpture, and of the density of information at the conference in the KunsthausSudhaus in Villach and the light-footed, joyous open air celebration, which was so warmly and generously provided for us by all the Krastal neighbourhood.

The catalogue in hand will fulfil its documentary tasks and may also provide the reader with at least an after-image of the lively 40th symposium at Krastal. And for the foreign participants in WORLDPOOL, it may not only preserve friendly memories but also act as a calling-card in a doubled sense of the word: standing for artistic proximity across boundaries - and for [kunstwerk] krastal as an organisation with a pivotal role in Austria's contemporary sculpture.

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(Chairman 2007)