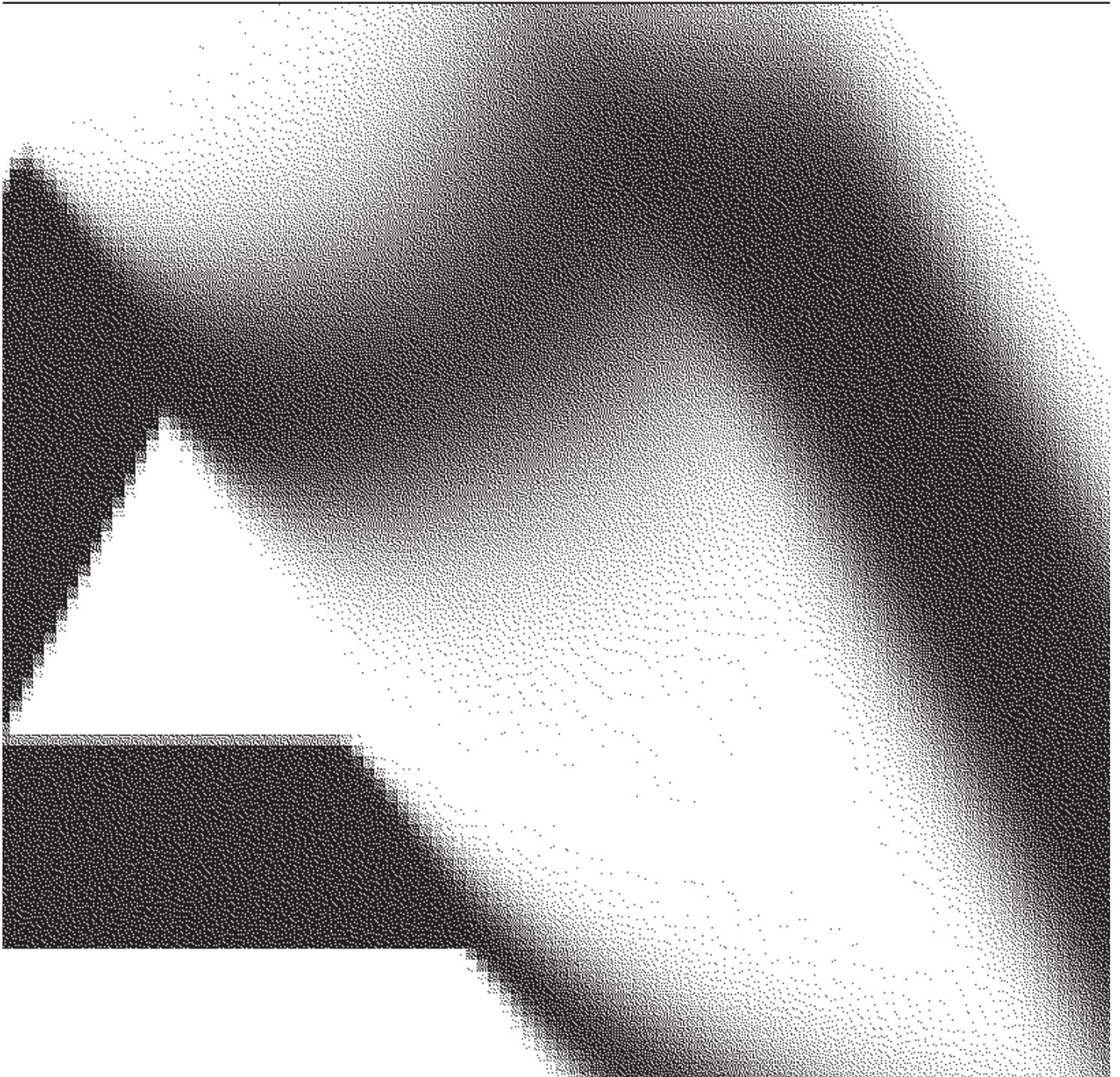


AFTER ABUNDANCE

Austrian Contribution, London Design Biennale 2018, Sept 4th—23rd
East Wing, Room Nr. 18 at Somerset House London



PRESS RELEASE

FOR THE LONDON DESIGN BIENNALE 2018 – TAKING PLACE FROM 4th TO 23rd OF SEPTEMBER AT SOMERSET HOUSE LONDON – STUDENTS FROM DESIGN INVESTIGATIONS, A FIVE YEAR DIPLOMA PROGRAM AT THE UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED ARTS VIENNA, LED BY PROFESSOR ANAB JAIN, PRESENT A SPECULATIVE INSTALLATION CURATED BY THOMAS GEISLER.

1

The second London Design Biennale will see the presentations of more than thirty nations from six continents in Somerset House in London. The participating countries are focusing on key themes encapsulated in the motto 'Emotional States', the main challenges facing our society at present: sustainability, migration, environmental pollution, general availability of water and social equality.

In the Austrian contribution the students investigate the opportunities, as well as the tensions and unintended consequences of a complex and contradictory world. They create tools, tactics, strategies, stories, actions, instruments and systems that aspire to be pioneering, transformative and stimulating, but also inclusive and full of humility.

Transporting visitors to an Austria contending with the stark realities of climate change, they demonstrate how those who live in this world face down new challenges with tradition and technology, using craft and cunning to thrive in an altered landscape. Visitors will experience the emotional tensions of this altered Austria through first-hand experiments, legal hacks, protest rituals, performances and atmospheric soundscape.

The contribution is a cooperative venture between the Werkraum Bregenzerwald and the Vienna University of Applied Arts, commissioned by the Austrian Federal Chancellery / Section II – Art and Culture.

AFTER ABUNDANCE

—a speculative installation
of Studio Design Investigations
led by Anab Jain,
curated by Thomas Geisler

The Austrian installation, AFTER ABUNDANCE, transports visitors to an Alpine landscape reshaped by climate change, where human ingenuity and interspecies solidarity offers the key to survival. Studio Design Investigations shows how local communities confront new challenges with tradition and technology, using craft and cunning to thrive in an altered terrain. Through encounters with experiments, legal hacks, protest, ritual and performance, we invite you to immerse yourself in the lives of people from this possible future.

2

CORN CARTEL

—Sarah Franzl, Bernhard Poppe, Julia Brandl, Isabel Prade

ILLEGAL RAIN

—Florian Semlitsch, Lucy Li, Agnieszka Zagraba

GLACIER

—Felix Lenz, Sophie Falkeis, Carmen Farr, Ula Reutina

HEISCHE RITUALS

—Fabio Hofer, Ali Kerem Atalay, Catherine Hu, Catalina Gomez Alvarez

MICROGRID

—Mia Meusbürger, Maximilian Scheidl, Silvio Skarwan,
Simon Platzgummer, Lisi Sharp

DWELLINGS FOR CHANGED LIFESTYLES (Research)

—Ege Kökel, Anna Neumerkel, Laura Hoek, Lang Fei

CORN CARTEL

—Sarah Franzl, Bernhard Poppe,
Julia Brandl, Isabel Prade

Currently, there is no need for genetically engineered corn in Austria. However, by 2050, as risks of flooding and drought increase and food supply becomes precarious, such changes might force us to reevaluate our attitude toward genome editing. As technological advances make such techniques more accessible to laypeople, greater need for food products will give rise to thriving black markets, as individuals circumvent ethical and legislative barriers to meet this demand. This exhibition concept allows visitors a glimpse into the basement laboratory of an illegal CRISPR technician. The lab shows the tools required to work with CRISPR without pristine equipment and regulatory oversight, while a poster informs visitors about the difference between government and illegally edited corn. Taken together, they show how people are starting to resist restrictive legislation, while documentation produced by the lay scientist reveal her efforts to deal with the uncertainties of the time.

3

“One of the network nodes broke down today. Only later did I hear some farmer had been arrested, a Vorarlberger. They found his laboratory. I have to admit I'm scared, even though I'm careful when sending out my packages. My own lab here is a stopgap solution, but it does the job. I can document what I'm doing and the steps can be repeated elsewhere. Once again, the companies' PR agencies are all over the news. Anyone who can't afford the correct licenses is painted as a villain.”

“Unregulated engineering is dangerous”, they claim, as if people haven't been moulding and shaping genomes since the dawn of agriculture. Consider corn: from an inedible grass to thousands of varieties, only for 96% of those to be wiped out by the monocropping of big agriculture. We're the ones giving farmers access to real biodiversity.”

Anna Moser, 43,
Unemployed

ILLEGAL RAIN

—Florian Semlitsch, Lucy Li,
Agnieszka Zagraba

A severe drought has hit post-abundance Austria – the citizens of the Alpine country are suffering the consequences of climate change. Defending its monopoly on water, the Austrian government uses cloud seeding technology to trigger and regulate rainfall. Deep in the country's rural areas, however, a community of cunning farmers has developed strategies to produce their own weather. You find yourself in a traditional Austrian farmhouse Stube – lights dimmed, the sound of rain falling on the roof. The picture feels familiar, but some odd details arouse your curiosity: the disassembled drone on the kitchen table, the old family pictures on the walls – you start investigating the room and the life of whoever lives here. A story, told via headphones located around the corner bench, gives more detailed information in an emotional narrative.

4

"For the first time in forever, it feels like we have reason to be hopeful. The past few months were really dry. The soil turned hard as stone, all the plants suffered, many died. At least the fires have started to burn out. I'm quite nervous, as this time it'll just be me and my dad. My older brother was caught a few months back, so he is on some police watch list. I hope I don't make any mistakes! My dad always tells me how important it is to be fast, but also precise. So now I have to run to make some illegal rain. Hear you soon."

Anton Rau, 32,
Heische Association Member
and Cabinetmaker

GLACIER

—Felix Lenz, Sophie Falkeis,
Carmen Farr, Ula Reutina

In a post-abundant Austria, natural entities have gained the status of a legal person. According to the „Declaration of Rights for Natural Entities“, issued by a future Austrian government, certain entities are entitled to certain rights, including the right to bring proceedings in front of court of law. The case exhibited tells the story of a melting glacier, which – represented by its guardian – claims restitution through civil forces in the form of a physical rebuilding. This Sisyphean task is expected to last for multiple generations, as an attempt to re-establish the injured entity's dignity.

Visitors to the installation will experience an atmospheric soundscape featuring cracking sounds of a glacier occasionally disrupted by the noise of a siren. Reacting to this alarm, life-sized figures fulfilling their compensatory civil service – spraying water to replenish the melting glacier – are projected onto the translucent face of a monumental ice-like structure.

5

“When I was in school, the teacher told us the legend of Gepatschferner, a being so magnificent it bordered three countries. Those who made it to the top spoke of their experiences with awe, but not everyone came back. We also heard stories of mysterious encounters and missing people, the mistakes of those who came before. People treated it with reverence and wonder. Now we are obliged to accord it the same kind of respect. As a kid, I enjoyed the spraying, and it's important that our people are exposed to the practicalities from an early age. It can be dangerous and tiring, particularly in summer, when the meltwater flows can catch you by surprise.

Sometimes it feels unfair that our community is tied to this agreement. My family didn't cause this climate shift, but I carry responsibility as a weight on my back.”

Johanna Mohr, 39,
Elementary School Teacher

HEISCHE RITUALS

—Fabio Hofer, Ali Kerem Atalay,
Catherine Hu, Catalina Gomez Alvarez

In a post-abundant Austria, a majority of citizens are suffering from social inequalities created by or amplified by climate change. In their fight for communal sustainability, people from various backgrounds work together to revive an old Alpine ritual – the „Heische“. Costumed people travel from door to door, performing the ritual, bringing blessings and demanding their well-deserved payment – donations, that are later distributed among victims of extreme weather events from across Austria.

The installation consists of 3 exhibited costumes, on structures suggesting persons wearing them. They stand in front of a wall, onto which a video of a performance is projected. Virtual reality glasses are incorporated into the masks, so, if visitors look inside, video and sound gives the impression of being in the middle of the ritual. For the opening event, we also imagine the live performance of a full Heische ritual (approx. 10 performers), and more scattered daily sessions over the course of the Biennale.

“Sweat from every pore, gasping for breath, a stabbing in my back – the costume pulling me to the ground. A flash of standing knee-deep in mud, stacking sandbags day and night. Of stumbling through a burning forest, hoping for survivors lost inside the wads of smoke. A sudden cheering – the heavy bells at our waists fall silent. People press close to me, pulling the mask from my head. My friends’ faces are also uncovered, one after another. Our crowd hails us as heroes. They fill our pockets, overwhelming us with their donations. All across the country people await our aid, the spoils from this most ancient Alpine tradition. Hopeless eyes everywhere. No stories to comfort us, no leaders to lie to us, nothing. Where government failed, the Heische take over. And so our procession moves on.”

Anton Rau, 32,
Heische Association Member
and Cabinetmaker

MICROGRID

—Mia Meusburger, Maximilian Scheidl,
Silvio Skarwan, Simon Platzgummer,
Lisi Sharp

In search of energy autonomy, a group of small villages decide to form a microgrid, giving them the ability to both produce and control their own renewable energy. With their energy sources vulnerable to weather conditions, and resulting variations in supply, these previously scattered communities form a so-called “Stadfreundschaft”: each individual contributes to the collective, neighbours support each other, and grids work together in order to tackle the challenges of energy volatility.

7

“Things got pretty bad back then. Can you imagine living without power for a week, a month? Providers making excuses and stalling, unable to tell us when things might return to normal? They never did. Eventually, we decided to do something about it. At first, it was just me and a neighbour. A few solar panels on rooftops, a cluster of small wind turbines close to the fields. Later, as more people joined in, we dammed the stream and installed a half-dozen reclaimed power units in an outbuilding down at the farm. It would have been impossible to power everything at once, but with the technology in place, we could begin directing electricity to where it was needed most.

Still, it may be better this way. Last year, we connected another village to our grid, and started sharing on a bigger scale. Our final goal is still a way off, but we might yet be able to claw our way back to where we started.”

Laura Felder, 53,
Councillor

UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED ARTS —Studio Design Investigations & Anab Jain

Design Investigations has been directed since 2016 by Anab Jain (Superflux, UK) as professor, who is from India and lives in London. Thus the invitation to this cosmopolitan staffed studio, Design Investigations, will build a bridge to the Biennale location and open up a culturally diverse approach to the selected topics and design practice. The Vienna University of Applied Arts in the 150th year of its existence is being placed in the spotlight as one of the leading and most famous design training institution.

Anab Jain and the design studio Superflux she co-founded are regarded as the spearhead of critical and investigative approach to contemporary design that casts light on the trends of a world that technology is changing rapidly – but without ever questioning new technology in general. More recent works like Uninvited Guests or The Future Energy Lab show not only the wide range of projects but also their patrons, such as the Victoria & Albert Museum in London or the British Government Office. Her works are already represented in the leading collections and are continually honoured with awards. Together with her students from Design Investigations, she took part in the 2017 Vienna Biennale with the contribution Design for Agency.

WERKRAUM BREGENZERWALD —Thomas Geisler, Curator

As a further geo-reference and “research workshop” outside the urban setting of Vienna, Werkraum Bregenzerwald is a collective of around ninety craft workshops and studios in Vorarlberg combining traditional knowledge of crafts with modern design and the interest in innovation. In dealing with the issues about future-potential “tools” and “workshops” in a world of limited raw materials, the Werkraum acts as a rural-alpine learning ground for the in-depth development of the project After Abundance.

Thomas Geisler is a curator, author and critic on the themes of contemporary design and everyday culture. He has been directing the Werkraum Bregenzerwald in Vorarlberg since 2016. Prior to this he was in charge among other things of the Design Collection at the MAK Vienna and was co-founder of the Vienna Design Week.

STUDIO DESIGN INVESTIGATIONS

Catalina Gomez Alvarez, Ali Kerem Atalay, Julia Brandl, Sophie Falkeis, Carmen Farr, Lang Fei, Sarah Franzl, Laura Hoek, Fabio Hofer, Catherine Hu, Ege Kökel, Felix Lenz, Lucy Li, Mia Meusburger, Anna Neumerkel, Simon Platzgummer, Bernhard Poppe, Isabel Prade, Ula Reutina, Maximilian Scheidl, Florian Semlitsch, Lisi Sharp, Silvio Skarwan, Agnieszka Zagrabka

LED BY PROFESSOR ANAB JAIN AND TEAM

Stefan Zinell, Nikolas Heep, Matthias Pfeffer, Peter Knobloch, Bernhard Ranner, Justin Pickard

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Follow us with the hashtag #afterabundance on the creation and research process of the Austrian contribution at the London Design Biennale 2018.

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