

On the exhibition *Der Mantel* at Museum Haus Konstruktiv

Text by Olaf Holzapfel

The overcoat is something that envelops us, warms us, and protects us outdoors on hikes and in daily life. Overcoats are coverings that we take with us, that clothe us, perhaps even conceal us. A first layer of architecture beyond the skin. A garment that, like Saint Martin's cloak, connects people's inner and outer selves with their surroundings.

The largest work in the exhibition bears the title *Alphabet*. It is a dismantled wooden framework that looks a little like what might be found in a farmyard: things that can be used for something, semi-structures for something else. *Alphabet* represents vocabulary, a way of turning tree trunks into lines for structural elements, resulting in rails, beams, diagonal crosses, struts and braces. Conceptually ambiguous, the elements symbolize the hybrid quality of these human-nature housings in a built world that encompasses both the half-timbered and the high-rise building. Opposite this installation, there stands an enclosing space, *Mantel* (Overcoat), a place made of straw and reeds, where sound is muffled. Its effect is that of a chapel or even a corridor, which directs the observer and casts them back upon themselves. Other woven tubes, called *Bäume* (Trees), lie in the exhibition space as vessels of the power stored in their material.

Again and again, artists find archetypes for the spaces of their time: Yves Klein, with *Le Vide* (The Void) at the museum Haus Lange (1961), produced a prototypical white cube, a space summarizing existentialism's attitude to life, with white stone walls illuminated by neon tubes. Louise Bourgeois created *Cell* (*The Last Climb*) in 2008, two years before her death: a module in which a spiral staircase leads upward, to an unknown destination. Joseph Beuys highlighted the warming/nourishing material of a post-war society with *Luzerner Fettraum* (Lucerne Fat Room) in 1969.

Since 2008, I have been interested in spatial forms of transition, in intermediate zones that trigger activity. If a world is defined by a circular economy, then vessels and the houses in settlements are built from materials found in the landscape. For a long time, the modern world focused on the use of freely adaptable and location-independent materials, in order to tap the full potential of ambitious engineering and to fully exploit the possibilities of free design. Nature and the rural, the already given, became a passive space, a waiting place in the background, a place of meditation. Plants, with their annual cycles, were in essence no longer active creative entities. Thus, in language and technology alike, the fixation on stone spaces, on deeper and deeper urban interiors as a reaction to an increasing acceleration of ideas, an acceleration confronted in turn by the much slower, but nonetheless powerful, physical world of nature that has a rhythm of its own, seems all the more like a culmination.

Stone spaces have been built to change our perception of time – be it as wayside chapels, or as dark rooms in techno clubs. In these places, we retreat, rediscovering and redirecting our perception in the midst of day-to-day life.

It is important to hone sensory perception of the everyday, of what has grown.

In the *Straw Pictures* and *Hay Pictures*, we recognize observations of folded time, the symbolism of ripening in the sun, the light and the information that have passed through the straw. Although the pictures sometimes appear floral and organic, this is where the most direct reference is made to Haus Konstruktiv's focus on content that constitutes an abstract and self-generating language of forms. These pictures are made on the basis of principles that reside in the possibilities of plants; everything comes from abstraction – fabrics, structures and constructs arise from their own distinct language. Their fibers, the size of the trees and the properties of the blades of grass all portray a particular climate, a landscape. Thus, these pictures are derived from observation of the landscape, constructed from its material, in which the landscape itself is reflected. A inside-out landscape from within the overcoat.

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