

## OUR HAUS | CURATOR'S STATEMENT

by Amanda McDonald Crowley

2012 marks the 10th anniversary of the opening of the new building of the Austrian Cultural Forum New York. It is also 70 years since the the original Austrian Institute (a predecessor of the ACFNY) was founded. In 1942, the Institute was a gathering place for ex-patriate Austrians, especially those that had been driven out of the country by the Nazis. The initial focus on politics soon shifted to culture and it began to host conversations with scientists, artists, intellectuals, and musicians, showcasing new work and new ideas.

Ten years ago, with the opening of Raimund Abraham's extravagant contemporary building, the Austrian Cultural Forum clearly positioned itself as a provocative center for the presentation of some of the most contemporary art and ideas in New York City. To celebrate this 10th Anniversary, we have chosen the work of ten Austrian artists to animate and activate the galleries of the Austrian Cultural Forum. But this exhibition is not intended as a "best-of" show. Rather in keeping with the mission of the ACFNY, we have chosen to take a subjective look at contemporary positions on exchange and dialogue between artists in Austria and New York. The bilingual title for the show, *Our Haus*, speaks to these bilateral cultural navigations. And for my perspective as curator of the show, the idea of the *Haus* plays a particularly important role - in keeping with the long history of the Austrian Institute, the Austrian Forum, and now, the Austrian Cultural Forum: the building is not just a place for the presentation of contemporary culture, it is a center for the discussion of ideas and establishing cross-cultural relationships.

The works included in *Our Haus* explore the relationship to our building's environment and to the architecture of New York, while simultaneously providing the audience with an invitation to participate in the discussion. *Our Haus* is an exhibition that recognizes the ACFNY as a cultural center, but also as a space for conversation, contradiction, intimacy, and conviviality.

Just as good ideas and provocative art feed our minds, so does good food feed our bodies. What better way to anchor *Our Haus* than with Rainer Prohaska's site specific installation *Cuisine a tous les étages* (2012) – a work that celebrates the narrow vertical structure of the building with a multi-level kitchen that runs through the center of the gallery. With a kitchen in place, we will surely celebrate with food, as many of the finest conversations begin over good food.

Similarly, the work of the collective Wochenklausur establishes an office and meeting place inside the gallery. The artists will spend the first days of the exhibition building connections with local non-profit organisations who will then be invited to take over the space and to make the installation their own for the duration of the exhibition.

And as we consider the built environment in New York City, Rainer Ganahl, a veteran of the Upper East Side of Manhattan for 22 years, reminds us that only a short bike ride away from the ACFNY, Third Avenue in Spanish Harlem is home to a busy street level of stores and local commerce. But look just a little higher and just above these shops are walled up apartment buildings and broken windows – a deserted architecture? Or a redevelopment waiting to happen?

Sabine Bitter and Helmut Weber continue their longterm investigation of space and architecture, and of the public and private. Their intervention and visualization of space - literally developing a wallpaper designed for New York City and for the architecture of the gallery in Abraham's building – intends to provoke discussion about our access to public space in urban centers.

Judith Fegerl does such a wonderful job of literally breaking apart the technical infrastructure of buildings and asking us to look inside them, that I immediately fell in love with her work. And the idea of controlled electrical fires inside of walls seemed perfect. I also love that Judith uses electricity as a medium, in the same way that a painter uses paint. There is a formalism to her work, but there's also a larger question about the technological infrastructure of our buildings and our cities.

The young American-born and Vienna-raised painter, Fabian Patzak, is exhibiting in New York for the first time with paintings which refer to his sense of an architectural slippage as he moves between New York and Vienna. His paintings evoke personal and psychological connections to architectural spaces. Windows, here both literally and metaphorically, into our lived experience, memories or dreams.

With *Bruennerstrasse 165*, Johanna Kandl and Helmut Kandl provide us with a very personal narrative addressing our memories of place, as they present the site of Kandl's early childhood home – by melding archival super-8 footage of the manicured garden of her childhood home with new footage of its current abandoned state.

Matthias Herrmann's project is the result of a recent residency in New York. In one sense, his role in *Our Haus* is to rethink its HIStory from inside out. Herrmann's new body of work re-thinks personal issues, blending them with art ideas and ideas about sex, image, health, etc. His work speaks from a deeply personal place. For *Our Haus*, he has used images sourced during his recent residency in NYC and turned them into still lifes. Furthermore, and, for the first time, he is presenting the work as postcards – works intended to be freely taken, reminiscent of work by Felix González-Torres or Bruce Nauman's 1974 piece, *Body Pressure*, which is quoted in this work.

Transcultural migration plays a key role in the work of the Linz-based artists' collective TIME'S UP. Inspired by the historic and contemporary immigration waves of New York City, *Unattended Luggage* will be premiered at **Our Haus**. The audience gains insight into the narratives of this interactive story by rummaging through the luggage: journal, letters, photographs, and objects trigger stories, like hidden memories of the city and its inhabitants.

With *Das Eismeer Die gescheiterte Hoffnung*, Mathias Kessler also focuses on interaction and exchange. His work was recently shown alongside a Caspar David Friedrich in an exhibition in Linz, because of their similar approaches to landscape and the environment. Here, Caspar David Friedrich's landscape is represented by a 3D sculpture in the freezer of a small domestic refrigerator. With more than just a hint of irony, the visitors are invited to gaze into the landscape, help themselves to the contents of the fridge, and engage in a conversation with each other.

Finally, we're in New York. Johanna Kandl's painting, *Wir haben viele Freunde*, boldly reminds us that we know a lot of people. Bring all the people you know to the Austrian Cultural Forum this summer for a meal, a casual encounter, a conversation, and to reflect on contemporary culture - in *Our Haus*.

- New York, May 2012

## **OUR HAUS | MAY 17 - AUG 26, 2012 | Open Daily 10AM - 6PM**

**Curator** Amanda McDonald Crowley

**Exhibition Coordinator** Natascha Boojar

**Curatorial Assistants** Hephzibah Druml (New York), Hannah Menne (Vienna)

**Exhibition Assistants** Mandana Hambrusch, Sara Oran, Ines Raub, Antonia Zippermayr

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