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Post-war Kassel had little to offer architecturally and the cultural life had a difficult time in the province, too. The art exhibition documenta revitalized the area profoundly up to now. The Documenta started in 1955 as an appendage of the Bundes-Gartenschau (National Garden Festival). The initiator, art professor and designer Arnold Bode, wanted especially to exhibit the ostracized art banned during the Nazi era.

Since 1972 the documenta comes every five years to Kassel and is a hub of the contemporary art during one hundred days.

Oliver Schuster

documenta 13

Motto: Collapse and Recovery
(ger. Zusammenbruch und Wiederaufbau).

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The DB Bahn Parking Lot adjacent to the Northern Wing of Main Station Kassel. When it comes to documenta everything is labeled **Culture**, even a simple parking lot is called **KulturParkplatz**. The car park adopts the typography of dOKUMENTA 13 and shows up as P13. Your car will enjoy the highly cultural parking.

documenta 13

The Motto 2012: Collapse and Recovery

(ger. Zusammen-
bruch und Wieder-
aufbau)

With a record 860 000 visitors the exhibition came to an end on 16th September 2012 after one hundred days: The 13th documenta in Kassel, which has to be written DOCUMENTA 13 according to the curator Carolyn Christov Bakargiev shortened = CCB . This messed up typography matched perfectly other font design idiosyncrasies and gave many visitors probably a hard time. One really cannot say that the findings of modern communication design were incorporated into the vast, extensive exhibition. Even such mundane text labels such as *ward*

tight to appreciate the works of art on their own in an unguided way.

Online, but disconnected

This time's online use must have increased immensely in comparison to the documenta 12, because I cannot remember to have seen so many electronic devices five years ago although I am familiar with the internet since the early 1990s. Nowadays nothing seems to work without internet. Visitors to an international art event expect a useful, informative web site. However the documenta 13 had a poor web site neither appealing nor helpful nor easy to navigate. Browsing through the official web sites was not useful for my preparation. The main sponsor, the SPARKASSEN FINANZGRUPPE, offered a free web site called dMAPS for an overview. The validity of the dMAPS contribution was mediocre and gave rather standard information, but only when connected to the internet by WiFi, a very limited service because there were only a few hot spots within the documenta area.

In contrast to the poor d13 content the entrance fee was strikingly visible on the web site: the one day pass for 20 Euro. As it turned out on the spot, your ticket was only valid for the circular shuttle, but not for the trams and buses of Kassel Transportation Service, which would have allowed a time saving, direct link between the different venues. So you had to spend for a short distance, that's four stops without changing the line, 1.60 Euro in addition.

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»**Rahmenbau**« erected on behalf of the 6th Documenta by the Austrian Group Haus Rucker Co in 1977. The huge slide framing the Orange rie Palace has become the hallmark of Kassel Documenta City.

robe, toilet etc. written on the white cubes were so discreetly thin that one could hardly decipher them.

Read, read, read ..., you have to read a lot, if you want to understand a tiny bit of documenta 's art. Therefore, you saw many people who buried their noses in pale green catalogues or looked rather irritated at the tiny tiny screens of their smart phones, iPads & Co for help. They were too up

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dTOURS with Worldly Companions

Guided tours of two hours, called dTOURS, could be booked for 11 Euro. The tour guides were euphemistically designed »Worldly Companions«. It is stated that they had a local background and were trained specifically for this mission. One of the most prominent Worldly Companions was the former finance minister and former mayor of Kassel, Hans Eichel.

I arrived on a hot Wednesday in mid August important: not on a weekend. My intention was to see the outdoor exhibition in the Karlshaus free of charge at first and then join the guided TOUR »Interrupted Objects: What is Left of Things?« in the evening. Therefore I bought an evening ticket valid from 5 to 8 p.m. = 10 Euro. I thought the guided tour in the evening would be a suitable introduction for the next two days 2 day ticket = 35 Euro. The effect was meagre, because of a difficult acoustic communication. Unfortunately, these worldly companions, ladies and gentlemen, as described in the brochure, relied only on their natural voice which was hard to understand either in the crowded interior or in the vastness of the outdoor exhibition. The high flown promise was formulated in a bombastic style: »The mostly two hour long dTOURS of dOCUMENTA 13 will be led by trained people called Worldly Com-



panions, mainly from Kassel and with different background and knowledge, including people of different generations. These dTOURS ... address a variety of subjects ... providing different experiences.«

At least my guided tour did not fulfil this promise. In the crowded, stuffy documenta Hall and the pleasantly air conditioned Neue Galerie, the tour guide covered only a few exhibits, but in the end I was too exhausted to continue on my own the remaining one more hour which the evening ticket would have allowed.

What I have seen during the dTOUR of interrupted objects and heard was no great revelation. The fact that the exhibits, unless they are purchased by the city of Kassel or patrons, will be taken away after the show was not new to me. What was new, however, was that even during the documenta 13th the planned disappearance of paintings in the *Limited Art Project* by Chinese artist Yan Lei occurred daily. During one year Yan Lei has reproduced daily a picture on canvas in oil or acrylic taken from the internet. Mostly portraits from Mao to Putin, from

*In Action in Documenta Hall: The **Worldly Companion Lady** with Thomas Bayrle's Collages of Airoplanes and Motor Test Riggs.*

Queen Elizabeth II to Marilyn Monroe were hung in the large Cabinet 3 documenta Hall on the walls and from the ceiling. Additionally some of his paintings you could pull out from vertical drawers.

Every day one of the supposedly 377 images, the number reflecting the days of the Chinese calendar, is sent to the trainees' workshop at the ne

ting space into a quieter ambiente. During my day of visit, overpainting was already beyond the half point.

Moving on to the »Neue Galerie«

In blistering heat we thirteen women and three men walked approximately 20 minutes with the Worldly Companion Lady to the New Gallery. Rosella Biscotti's installation was an good example of interrupted objects: What is Left of Things? It consists of fragmentary concrete casts from the basement of the Foro Italico, formerly the Foro Mussolini planned for the World Expo 1942 in Rome. The pompous fascist architecture of the Palazzo had long been discredited. The building was converted into an office building with small scale subdivisions. The basement served in the 1970s as a high security prison for the trial of the Red Brigades, which had a similar effect on Italian society as the Red Army Faction RAF in Germany. Compared with the gloomy pictures of the RAF trial in Stammheim, one cannot detect any trace of horror on Rosella Biscotti's concrete blocks. Back in time this place for the judicial hearings to the murder of Aldo Moro and the attempt on Pope John Paul II by Ali Ağca as sumingly has triggered a shudder.

An observer with no prior knowledge cannot understand the concrete casts, but he might feel the material related heavy load, evoking pression and repression. That alone could evoke respect for the artist Rosella Biscotti. Probably most visitors are unable to share this view, as documented by Markus Thieme's picture. The former Foro Mussolini is facing a renewed transformation, also the maximum security prison in the basement will be



Installation by Rosella Biscotti: Casts of Concrete from the dungeon of Foro Italico, where the trail of the Red Roten Brigades took place the visitors are non aware and wait without empathy to see the next »Highlight«.

Markus Thieme's picture »Trepp-ab bei Rosella Biscotti« illustrates the situation perfectly and was awarded by ART Magazin.

arby Volkswagen plant in Baunatal, where it will be sprayed completely with car lacquer, and then return to its rightful place. As in the hundred days, not all images did disappear, it would be interesting to figure out who or what may be left at the end.

I was not impressed by even one of the images in this plethora. They were like decals, like thousands of it in their repetitiveness. However, it was the disappearance of the images, which turned into monochrome pink, red, turquoise, yellow etc. and transferred the once distract

dismantled. Then only the casts remain as a reference to jail and court architecture. The concrete castings are appreciated only by the informed visitors as oppressive; the others pass by without any reaction or wait patiently on the other side until the line moves on to the next station. Nearby was a big queue to »Leaves of Grass,« where press cuts pierced on reeds by Geoffrey Farmer confused the viewer. The Canadian installation artist had built a platform of 40 meters in a narrow connecting corridor of the Neue Galerie. He covered the long podium with pictures cut from the American magazine Life. A roll call of American bad dreams of the time from 1935 to 1985 is offered chronologically with 16000 press photos. One could lose oneself for hours contemplating the pictures and discover more and more pictures behind pictures. But when you think of the line in front of the door and also mindful of their waiting time, you proceed rather rapidly the 40 meters back and forth, where Geoffrey Farmer poured up to 3 meters high a veritable flood of images.

Culture's Main Station (ger. Kulturbahnhof)

The exhibition area Culture Train Station is a remnant of the great railway time when people and goods from Podunk to Hog Island were dispatched quickly and reliably on rails. In the run down brick buildings and the overgrown outdoor area, bygones meet provocative contemporary art. The screams of outrage from Kassel's art pundits and modern art despisers about this contrast is immense every time, especially since the determined visitors as well as unsuspec



ting passers by are faced this year with Lara Favaretto's scrap yard at the entrance to the station. The Italian artist asked for material from Kassel's landfills and dumped it beside the tracks. She took away some parts of it and displayed the pieces separately in a gallery of the north wing.

Recycling without Relief

A recycling specialist would balk at this mess, because even Germany's wildest landfill would not house such a mix of materials: steel and iron, aluminium and copper, plastic and con



Geoffrey Farmer: 40 Meters Collage »Leaves of Grass«



Scrap Heap by Lara Favaretto »Momentary Monument IV«



Garbage on Beauty Contest!
Plastics neatly displayed just beside Lara Favaretto's vigorous, chaotic scraps.

crete: The German waste is to be disposed only sorted – as if we had to worry less if the waste is sorted properly. We cannot be worried, all the worries return at the end again. The tsunami in Japan 2011 produced yet more chaotic garbage dumps as seen in Kas sel. The racing boat was next to the plastic tub, the toilet bowl besides the broken refrigerator. And a large landing bridge from Fukushima was found in Canada at the beach accompanied by a Harley Davidson motor cycle.

A few meters from Lara Favaretto's scrap heap there is packaging waste on display in a walk-in container. But even the neatly lined closures, caps, plugs and various plastic offerings in pretty shape and colour variety make you think about the havoc they cause in nature. Even after decades, the remains of the packaging mania will be found in the water and on the land and end on our table through the food chain. Was that the message of these works of art, I wonder?

During the two days, I saw just a few things, but looked at them

closely, as Javier Téllez's 45-minute film *Artaud's Cave* on the conquest of Mexico combined with life in the psychiatric hospital Fray Bernardino Alvarez in Mexico City. Very touching the film trilogy *Breitenau*: Clemens von Wedemeyer showed in it the history of the former monastery changed into a Nazi concentration camp, later an institution for delinquent girls, then a psychiatric hospital.

Without official explanation I have certainly not always understood the documenta *Œuvre* in the sense its highly influential curator Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev intended us to understand it. But what the heck? »I do not believe that every visitor must understand everything.« according to CCB's interview at the end of the hundred days when she pointed out that she was satisfied with the venue and the visitors but she would have expected more criticism and added: »I do not believe that every visitor must see everything.« □

Impressum



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