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ROOT-AND-BRANCH TACTICS

KLAUS LITTMANN HAS TRANSFERRED HUNDREDS OF TREES TO THE MIDDLE OF AN AUSTRIAN FOOTBALL PITCH WITH A PARTICULAR GOAL IN MIND - TACKLING THE ISSUE OF ENVIRONMENTAL COLLAPSE. AS HE WRITES HERE, THE PLANET DOESN'T HAVE THE LUXURY OF EXTRA TIME

About 30 years ago I organised an exhibition in Vienna called *Fussball in der Vitrine* (*Football in a Showcase*). There, a drawing by the architect and environmentalist Max Peintner caught my eye: *The Unending Attraction of Nature* (c1970). In his dystopian vision, the threat to our natural ecology is conveyed by a thought experiment: imagine a time when forests exist only as exhibition objects. Over the years, the drawing has become an absorbing icon far beyond the realm of fine art, making its way into German-language textbooks, as well as being referred to in a wealth of international publications. I was keen to buy the original. But when I tracked Max down, he smiled at me and said: 'You're too late. It's already been sold to an American art collection.' That's when I decided I wanted to realise the drawing, to experience it in real life.

We started by commissioning a feasibility study and then chose companies that could implement our temporary intervention. At the same time, we had to apply for different permits and organise funding, logistics, staff, advertising, media work. In the run-up to the project, we hosted countless events and presentations to plant the seed and convince people of its necessity. The whole process has taken about six years. Throughout I was on the lookout for an appropriate venue. I then chanced on the Wörthersee stadium in Klagenfurt, which had been built for Uefa's Euro 2008 and was no longer used to its maximum capacity. After nearly 30 years of dreaming, a window of three months opened up.

Nobody has ever tried to bring 299 trees into a stadium. To mastermind the technical challenges, I enlisted Enzo Enea. This eminent landscape architect even has a tree museum in Switzerland, so I knew he'd be perfect for the job. He sourced all the specimens from different nurseries. Nursed trees are those that have been replanted every couple of years. Not only did this prepare them for their performance in the stadium, but it also readies them for their final planting site. For both of us it was crucial that the trees live on

after the project. We chose 16 species – larch, birch, silver fir, maple, lime, to name a few – all of which can be found in the forests of Carinthia. This kind of mix only appears marginally in nature, but it's the most effective for combating climate change.

The mise-en-scène is key in creating a positive response from the audience, for enlivening their senses. By design, a stadium is a closed circle, giving the impression that the forest is kept in captivity like animals in a zoo and that it is losing ground to human activity. The manmade architecture offers a contrast to the colourful and living forest, emphasising its dignity. The stadium evokes ephemerality as well as artificiality: all of its events are limited in time, and so is this project. But not its impact.

As I write, a general election is about to take place in Austria, right in the middle of our intervention, and inevitably the project has been used as a political football. Falsely claiming it was a waste of taxpayers' money, the far-right FPÖ has hijacked *For Forest* for their campaign of trench warfare. I have been attacked on social media and assaulted in the street. In fact, our financing rests on three pillars: private Swiss supporters; contributions in kind and manpower from companies; and tree adoptions. Individuals and institutions who adopt a tree for €5,000 each receive an edition of Max Peintner's work, hand-coloured by me (see above); these prints are limited to the number of trees in the stadium.

After many years working within gallery and museum spaces, I increasingly believe that art is far better residing in places where people already are. Environmental collapse is an existential danger for mankind and so it's important to tackle it in everyday life. *For Forest* is about changing perceptions. In most of my work, I question our eyes' habits and irritate them. Here I take something we're familiar with – trees – and put them in a new context. This forces people to question things they take for granted ■ *'For Forest' runs until 27 Oct. For details, visit forforest.net*

ILLUSTRATION: MAX PEINTNER, *THE UNENDING ATTRACTION OF NATURE*, PENCIL DRAWING, 1970/71, HAND-COLOURED BY KLAUS LITTMANN IN 2018