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**National Identity and
Representation**

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The Conflict of the German Pavilion at
the Venice Biennale

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1. Introduction

Nestled upon the hill of the *Giardini* gardens, overlooking the blue waters of the Venice lagoon, stands the German Pavilion. It was first constructed in 1909 to present the artworks of Bavarian artists at the Venice Biennale. The event was introduced to the city in 1895 and has, aside from a few breaks due to two World Wars and other disruptions, taken place in a two-year rhythm ever since.

In the early 1890s, the government of Venice wanted to revive the city as a centre for art and use the already touristic atmosphere to establish a well-connected market for artistic products, that would also economically benefit the city.¹ A small, yet successful, national exhibition had been held in the *Giardini* in 1887, not only attracting the curious public, but also generating a substantial amount of revenue through the sale of artworks.² Inspired by this triumph, it was decided to expand upon the idea and establish an international exhibition of art that would take place every two years. For this, the existing concert hall in the gardens was reconstructed into an exhibition space named *Pro Arte*. Accompanied by King Umberto and his wife, Margherita of Savoy, the very first *Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte della Città di Venezia* opened its doors on April 30, 1895.³ It hosted 150 Italian and 150 international artists within its halls, exhibiting a total of 516 works. The considerable profit obtained, as well as the overwhelming number of guests (224,327 visitors overall), generated an unforeseen amount of attention in Italy and abroad.⁴ The Biennale was influenced by a few different institutions at the time, including the Paris Salons, which

¹ J. May, *La Biennale di Venezia. Die Ausstellungsinstitution im Wandel der Zeit*, in: *Germania. Die deutschen Beiträge zur Biennale Venedig 1985-2007*, edited by K. Reich, Köln: DuMont-Literatur-und-Kunst-Verl., 2007, pp. 17-30, here p. 19.

² E. Di Martino, *The History of the Venice Biennale, 1895-2005. Visual Arts, Architecture, Cinema, Dance, Music, Theatre*, Venezia: Papiro Arte, 2005, p. 9.

³ J. May, 2007, p. 18.

⁴ E. Di Martino, 2005, p. 15.

offered a space for artistic critique and discourse.⁵ The idea for the national pavilions was based on the structure of the Universal Exhibitions which had started to flourish all across the globe during the course of the 19th century. The 1889 Paris *Exposition Universelle* for instance, presented not only the Eifel Tower but exhibited a multitude of other specially constructed buildings along the *Rue des Nations* (Street of Nations). Among them were the pavilions of participating countries, designed to best represent their history, traditions and overall identity.⁶ Their unique architecture strengthened the idea of creating structures that reflected national characteristics.

The Biennale's adaptation of this system began with the idea of designating certain rooms of the exhibition building to participating countries. This was based on the success of the *Prima Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte Decorativa Moderna* (First International Exposition of Modern Decorative Arts) which was held in Turin in 1902.⁷ From there on, as the Biennale continued to grow, the General Secretary of the event, Antonio Fradeletto decided to expand further into the *Giardini*.

Due to its great and recurring success, the Biennale managed to obtain regular financial support from Rome, which was used to decorate the main exhibition hall as well as establish additional buildings for some of the participating countries.⁸ The first national pavilion to be built was that of the kingdom of Belgium in 1907. Its construction would be a milestone for the Biennale, turning the event's organisation by countries into its defining characteristic. Other countries soon followed, with Hungary, Great Britain and Germany each receiving their own building in 1909.⁹

⁵ K. Bódi, *Die Pavillons Bayerns und Ungarns. Oder wie die Pavillons in die Giardini kamen*, in: *Der Deutsche Pavillon. Ein Jahrhundert Nationaler Repräsentation auf der Internationalen Kunstausstellung "La Biennale di Venezia" 1912-2012*, edited by J. May and S. Meine, Regensburg: Schnell + Steiner, 2015, pp. 29-46, here p. 30.

⁶ B. Wyss, *Ausstellen im Spiegelstadium*, in: *Der Deutsche Pavillon. Ein Jahrhundert Nationaler Repräsentation auf der Internationalen Kunstausstellung "La Biennale di Venezia" 1912-2012*, edited by J. May and S. Meine, Regensburg: Schnell + Steiner, 2015, pp. 19-24, here p. 20.

⁷ K. Bódi, 2015, p. 30.

⁸ J. May, 2007, p. 20.

⁹ B. Wyss, 2015, p. 19. The construction of the Hungarian Pavilion was an interesting case, seeing as the country was not an independent state but part of the Austria-Hungarian Empire at the time and so, was subjected to the emperor Franz Joseph. The Austrian pavilion was not added to the Biennale until 1934.

It is the history and architecture of the German Pavilion that will be discussed in the following chapters. This thesis aims to elaborate and analyse the structure's turbulent history in order to understand the national conflict it presents. In particular, the impact of its reconstruction during the Second World War on the exhibitions that followed, as well as the country's artistic struggle for national representation and identity within its walls, will be thoroughly examined.

The German Pavilion at the Biennale offers a unique look into the history of national buildings at the international event. Housing art for over a century, it reflects the changing mentality of our world and has portrayed the impact of multiple traumatic political, as well as societal events. Michael Diers organises the history of the building into four distinctive periods: the initial period from 1895-1933, the era of National Socialism from 1934-1942, the post-war period from 1950-1968 and, lastly, the current phase from 1970 until today.¹⁰ However, it could be argued that an additional fifth era was established after the Reunification of East and West Germany in 1990. The immeasurable influence of this shift within the nation must be considered when examining the idea of national identity in the Pavilion. Each step in this history is characterised by different outside circumstances that had an impact on the artists and art displayed inside the building.

For the discussion of national representation in connection with the German Pavilion, important contributions will be analysed, beginning with the Nazi era and its propaganda exhibits. To fully understand the immense impact of the National Socialist interventions on the history and character of the building, as well as the art, it is important to acknowledge its origin.

¹⁰ M. Diers, *Germania a Margine. Der Deutsche Pavilion in Venedig und die Intervention der Kunst. Ein Historischer Abriss*, in: *Germania. Die deutschen Beiträge zur Biennale Venedig 1985-2007*, edited by K. Reich, Köln: DuMont-Literatur-und-Kunst-Verl., 2007, pp. 33-53, here p. 34.



Ill. 1: The *Padiglione Bavarese* at the Venice Biennale, Daniele Donghi, 1909, image taken from “Deutscher Pavillon”: <https://www.deutscher-pavillon.org/en/pavilion-1909-2019/>.

The first German Pavilion was constructed in 1909 and named *Padiglione Bavarese* (Bavarian Pavilion). The reason for this was the influence of the artists of the Munich Secession, who had been dictating the works presented for the German participation of the Biennale since 1905.¹¹ When Emperor Wilhelm II showed no interest in the event, the responsibility for selecting artworks had gone to them, with some support by the Berlin secession movement as well the artists Max Liebermann and Fritz von Udhe.¹² The plans for the new structure in Venice were designed by the association’s president, Hugo von Habermanns, and were later carried out by the Venetian architect Daniele Donghi.¹³ The focal point of the building was its entrance, which was

¹¹ A. Lagler, *Der Deutsche Pavillon*, in: *Germania. Die deutschen Beiträge zur Biennale Venedig 1985-2007*, edited by K. Reich, Köln: DuMont-Literatur-und-Kunst-Verl., 2007, pp. 55-61, here p. 55.

¹² B. Best, *Die Geschichte der Münchener Secession bin 1938. Eine Chronologie*, in: *Zentralinstitut für Kunstgeschichte*, 2007, pp. 9-27, here pp. 21-22.

¹³ A. Lagler, 2007, p 55.

reminiscent of the temples of antiquity (Ill. 1). Raised upon four steps, stood four ionic marble columns upon man-high pillars, supporting the simple frieze on which the words *Padiglione Bavarese* had been engraved in capital letters. Above, a simply decorated gable crowned the impressive entrance. Unlike the white-washed walls of the portico, the brick walls of the side chambers were left exposed. Overall, the exterior aesthetic was meant to reflect the architecture of the main exhibition hall, as well as the Secession building in Munich.¹⁴

The inside was made up of one central hall, a large room to the right of the entrance, as well as two smaller ones to the left. The interior was decorated in a comfortable style, with herringbone parquet and curtains in all the doorways (Ill. 2).

The paintings were hung from the ceiling in all the rooms and small display cabinets were placed throughout the building. Multiple chairs and tables were positioned all around, offering visitors an opportunity to sit and contemplate or discuss the presented



Ill. 2: The Interior of the *Padiglione Bavarese* at the Venice Biennale, 1909, in: Y. Dziewior, Maria Eichhorn. *Relocating a Structure: German Pavilion 2022, 59th International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia*, Köln: König, 2022, p. 249.

¹⁴ A. Lagler, 2007, p. 55.

artworks. The interior was mostly organised and sponsored by the Deutsche Werkbund (German Association of Craftsmen).¹⁵



Ill. 3: The *Padiglione della Germania* at the Venice Biennale, 1912, in: *Bungalow Germania. Deutscher Pavillon*, 14. *International Architektur-Ausstellung, la Biennale di Venezia*, Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2014, p. 112.

As one of the first pavilions in the *Giardini*, the building was surrounded by the garden's natural vegetation. Together with the greenery used to decorate its entrance, the structure seemed to blend into its environment.

The Munich Secession only hosted two exhibits in the new pavilion.¹⁶ In 1912, fearing an outbreak of cholera in Venice, the association's organisers decided to cease all activities in the city, leaving the Biennale management to take over the responsibility of curating a German exhibit for the 10. edition of the event.¹⁷ At the same time, the

¹⁵ U. Hassler and K. Kainz, *Stilfragen und Staatsrepräsentation*, in: *Bungalow Germania: Deutscher Pavillon*, 14. *International Architektur-Ausstellung, la Biennale di Venezia*, Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2014, pp. 89-107, here pp. 95-97.

¹⁶ A. Lagler, 2007, p. 57.

¹⁷ C. Becker, *Die Biennale von Venedig und die deutschen Beiträge 1895-1942*, in: *Germania. Die deutschen Beiträge zur Biennale Venedig 1985-2007*, edited by K. Reich, Köln: DuMont-Literatur-und-Kunst-Verl., 2007, pp. 63-87, here p. 72.

building was renamed *Padiglione della Germania* (Pavilion of Germany) and a small number of redesigns were instigated.

The original labelling of *Padiglione Bavarese* was removed, leaving the area bare. Additionally, a decorative frieze was placed along the upper edge of the outside walls, spanning the entire length of the building (Ill. 3). It was modelled after the images of Greek antiquity, depicting various people dressed in the classical white robes of the period. The same was done to the previously undecorated gable giving it the appearance of an ancient temple tympanum. Above the doorway, a simple *Germania* indicated the building's new inhabitance.

The interior of the pavilion was changed as well, transforming it into a more minimalistic and museum-like space (Ill. 4). The chairs and table were removed in favour of simple white cushioned benches from which the artworks could be viewed. The curtains and display cabinets were also discarded and small pedestals for sculptures were added. Overall, the aesthetic of the inside appeared more formal and less homey, giving the pavilion a rather serious atmosphere.



Ill. 4: Interior of the *Padiglione della Germania* at the Venice Biennale, 1912, in: Y. Dziewior, Maria Eichhorn. *Relocating a Structure: German Pavilion 2022, 59th International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia*, Köln: König, 2022, p. 251.

Over the course of the next decades, the Pavilion would house the exhibitions of the Weimar Republic and the beginnings of the National Socialist era. It was during this time that the structure was subjected to an extensive reconstruction which would leave it almost unrecognizable and change the course of German art at the Biennale forever. Under the watchful eye of Adolf Hitler, the building was redesigned to fit the newly defined ideals and goals of the National Socialist Regime. The art exhibited within its walls was meant to represent the national identity of Nazi Germany and proclaim its greatness to an international audience. The delicate and rather playful appearance of the building was transformed into a monumental and imposing structure, with a tell-tale architecture that is still recognizable today. The work presented in this thesis aims to compile an extensive overview and understanding of what makes the German Pavilion a special case in the context of the Biennale. The burdened history of the building has made it a hard environment for artists, curators and visitors alike to focus on art. For many participants, the idea of displaying their work and representing modern-day Germany in such a structure was a source of struggle and conflict.

After the horrors of the Second World War, the European artistic landscape was in ruins. The strict rules of fascism had left their mark and disrupted the development of certain movements and styles. The strong focus on propaganda work, the exclusion of “degenerate” artists as well as the celebration of those who conformed to the Third Reich’s ideals created a hole in the art world that needed to be overcome. This proved to be particularly hard in a Pavilion with an architecture that reflected the core ideals of the Nazi regime. The journey to the exhibitions of today was long and might have looked very different were it not for a few artistic interventions that confronted the problematic structure head-on.

In the following chapters, the exact development of the exhibitions and with it the mindset of the artists and audience, will be examined. Beginning in Chapter 2, the origin of the conflict will be described in order to work out the precise circumstances surrounding the Pavilion's reconstruction and why the change had such a lasting impact. The building's usage as a tool to spread Nazi propaganda will be explained in detail, offering insights into the artistic sphere of pre-war, as well as wartime, Germany. Chapter 3 investigates the country's first Biennale exhibitions after the

conclusion of World War II, focusing especially on the process of rebuilding not only their tarnished reputation, but also the damaged art world. The 1950s and 1960s were a period defined by coming to terms with the country's role in the war and the hosted exhibitions reflected this. However, a change emerged towards the end of the decade, allowing artists to embrace more confrontational styles and challenge the architecture of the pavilion itself. This transformation will be analysed while keeping the German mentality of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (Struggle of Overcoming the Past) in mind.

The central focus of this thesis lies in the exhibitions discussed in Chapter 4. Starting in 1976 with Joseph Beuys, there have been a series of contributions which have integrated the pavilion into their work, choosing to not just depict their art, but also use the building's history to give their exhibition a special meaning. Overall, the works of Beuys (1976), Hans Haacke (1993), Gregor Schneider (2001), Christoph Schlingensiefel (2009), Anne Imhof (2017) and Maria Eichhorn (2022) offer an interesting insight into the development of the German contributions. By thoroughly investigating the political and social circumstances of each exhibition, as well as the artist's background and previous work, their display in the pavilion should be better understood. Furthermore, the critical reception in Germany at the time will be examined in order to further understand the impact their work had at the time. The objective hereby is to examine the artist's individual struggle with the idea of national representation in general and particularly in the context of the Pavilion. While the country has gone through many hardships and developments such as the Reunification in 1990, the building still reflects the regime of the past. For an event that focuses largely on presenting art by countries, the notion of national identity seems hard to work with in a structure that does not embody modern-day Germany.

To conclude, a brief overview of the concept of national representation at the Biennale will also be discussed. In a world that is starting to fight against the idea of borders and boundaries, especially in the art sphere, the limits the national pavilions present seem almost archaic to some.¹⁸ The question arises if the way the Biennale is structured

¹⁸ B. Mauk, *We'll Burn Your Pavilions*, in: "Frieze", Issue 203, May 2019, <https://www.frieze.com/article/well-burn-your-pavilions>, [last accessed on 14. September 2023].

is still relevant in our highly globalized world and how it can lead to a number of injustices related to the participation of less privileged countries.¹⁹

Taking all of this into consideration, this paper aims to answer the question of how the architecture of the National Socialist pavilion has affected the German Biennale contributions and how exactly the different levels of confrontation were achieved. In the end, an extensive overview of how the uniquely German conflict has affected its national identity should be achieved. Taking a closer look at the above-mentioned exhibitions and the recurring phenomenon of destruction and violence towards the architecture, will further help in understanding the deep-seated problems the building provides.

The original German Pavilion, just as some of the other ones built in the early 20th century were financed by the city of Venice and then leased to the country's Artists' associations.²⁰ The payment for the interior furnishing and design, however, needed to be provided by the individual countries.

In 1914, the German contributions were organised by the *Allgemeine Deutsche Kunstgenossenschaft* (German General Art Society), which focused strongly on national representation and traditional artistic values in light of the political and social atmosphere leading up to World War I.²¹ Only two years after the end of the war, the activities of the Biennale resumed. Germany, however, due to their leading role had not been invited to participate.²² For the 13. edition of the event, the organisation was taken over by the German Federal Foreign Office, which had instated a special cultural department to deal with artistic activity abroad.²³

¹⁹ A. Hüscher, *Aus der Zeit Gefallen. Nationale Repräsentation auf der Biennale von Venedig*, in: *Der Deutsche Pavillon. Ein Jahrhundert Nationaler Repräsentation auf der Internationalen Kunstausstellung "La Biennale di Venezia" 1912-2012*, edited by J. May and S. Meine, Regensburg: Schnell + Steiner, 2015, pp. 25-28, here p. 27-28.

²⁰ J. May, 2007, p. 20.

²¹ C. Becker, 2007, p. 72.

²² During their absence the pavilion was used by Poland, which was met with disapproval by the German Press at the time. C. Becker, 2007, p. 73.

²³ C. Becker, 2007, p. 73.

From the very beginning of the national participations, the idea of identity and representation played a key role in choosing relevant artworks to show at the Biennale. Particularly, in the overall competitive climate of 20th-century Europe, the need to present oneself as a mighty country in which arts and culture could flourish, was great. All pavilions were designed to reflect their country's self-image. As they are not meant for continuous use, but rather to occasionally house art, they were made more decorative and frivolous than every-day structures.²⁴ In a way, the buildings became part of the exhibitions, showing the visitors and participants from other countries their architectural achievements and identity. In his book about the history of the Biennale, Lawrence Alloway categorised the national structure into three types: Folkloric, international and classicizing.²⁵ The Hungarian and Russian Pavilion, for instance, can be placed within the first category, while buildings such as the Spanish, Swiss and Japanese are in the second. The German Pavilion would be described as classicising, together with the ones of France and Great Britain, among others.

Over the course of the century, it was not uncommon for countries to redesign their national pavilion, either in order to keep it up to date with their current style, to expand the space or because general renovations were needed that then encouraged a change in appearance. The Belgian Pavilion, for instance, was first erected in a playful and delicate art nouveau style by the architect Léon Sneyers.²⁶ To keep up with the overall growth of the Biennale, rooms were added to the main space in 1929 and 1930, and in 1948, the building was fully restored. This last process gave it the more modernist façade it still has today.

The conflict surrounding the German Pavilion partially stems from the fact that its general appearance was never changed after its construction under the Nazi regime. The whole building is a constant reminder of the horrors of the past, confronting both artists and visitors with its brutality. While the question of its possible redesign has

²⁴ L. Alloway, *The Venice Biennale 1895-1968. From Salon to Goldfish Bowl*, Greenwich, Conn.; New York: Graphic Society, 1968, p. 17.

²⁵ L. Alloway, 1968, pp. 17-18.

²⁶ Official Website of the Belgian Pavilion: <https://www.belgianpavilion.be/en/about-us>, [last accessed on 14. September 2023].

been a recurring topic since the country's reintroduction to the Biennale, due to various reasons examined in the following chapters, the pavilion still remains mostly unchanged. Since 1998, the building has been officially listed as a protected Italian monument, further complicating any future reconstruction plans while also raising the question of whether a structure of this nature should be protected at all.²⁷

Additionally, the building had been officially bought for 35.000 Lire from the Venice government by the Third Reich in 1943 under the instruction of Adolf Hitler.²⁸ Due to this, the building seems to have an even deeper connection to the past as it is only because of Nazi actions that it is German property today.²⁹

After World War I, the exhibitions held by the Weimar Republic focused on selecting fewer artists than previously, but showcasing more of their works.³⁰ The idea was to offer a comprehensive overview of the German artistic landscape. The commissioners, who were appointed by the new cultural department, tried to present a variety of different styles in order to properly reflect the country's cultural wealth. Towards the 1930s, the exhibitions, also in other pavilions, slowly became more and more nationalistic, a sign of times to come. The influence and control of the Nazi regime on artistic activity, as well as their utilization of the Biennale as a stage for propaganda, changed the story of the German Pavilion. Most notably, the impact it had on the perception and awareness of national identity can be detected in the evolution of the exhibits hosted within.

Today, the German Pavilion is surrounded by old companions such as the British and French buildings, but also by new additions. The Japanese Pavilion was added in 1955, the Canadian one in 1956. Immediately to the left of the German structure stands the last addition to the *Giardini*: The Korean Pavilion, which was added in 1995.

²⁷ M. Eichhorn, *Relocating a Structure*, in: *Relocating a Structure. German Pavilion 2022, 59th International Art Exhibition, La Biennale di Venezia*, ed. Yilmaz Dziewior, Köln: Walther König, 2022, pp. 129-139, here p. 136

²⁸ Purchase Contract between the City of Venice and the Third Reich, 30. August 1943, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts, LGS-ITA 8-229.

²⁹ After the End of the Second World War, the contract passed on to the Federal Republic of Germany as the rightful heir to the Third Reich.

³⁰ C. Becker, 2007, p. 74.

The struggle related to the representation of national identity is not only a German one, but the unique history of the Pavilion creates an especially burdened atmosphere that changed the trajectory of the country's contributions.

In the process of this thesis, the works published by the German Institute for Foreign Affairs offered an extensive and detailed insight into the over 100 years history of the country's contribution to the Biennale. Especially Ursula Zeller's *Germania. Die Deutschen Beiträge zur Biennale Venedig, 1895-2007*, published in 2007 helped provide a comprehensive overview of the exhibitions.³¹ The work of Jan May and Sabine Meine *Der Deutsche Pavillon. Ein Jahrhundert Nationaler Repräsentation auf der Internationalen Kunstausstellung "La Biennale di Venezia" 1912-2012*, compiles a series of informative essays concerning the topic of the German pavilion, which greatly supported the discussion of national representation demonstrated in this thesis.³² Additionally, the website of the German Institute of Foreign Affairs, which has been handling the country's contributions from 1971 onward and has played the role of the commissioner since 2009, has been a remarkable resource for relevant publications and current affairs.³³ Finally, the examination of the relevant exhibitions explained in the following chapters was supported by the various catalogues accompanying the German contributions. Particularly, the extensive research compiled by Maria Eichhorn for her exhibition "Relocating a Structure" in 2022, offered an in-depth analysis of not only the pavilion, but also the surrounding construct of the Biennale and the city of Venice itself.³⁴

The analysis and discussion provided in this thesis would not have been possible without the resources provided by the Biennale Library, as well as the Historical Archive of Contemporary Arts (ASAC) in Venice.

³¹ *Germania. Die deutschen Beiträge zur Biennale Venedig 1895-2007*, edited by K. Reich, Köln: DuMont-Literatur-und-Kunst-Verl., 2007.

³² *Der Deutsche Pavillon. Ein Jahrhundert Nationaler Repräsentation auf der Internationalen Kunstausstellung "La Biennale di Venezia" 1912-2012*, edited by J. May and S. Meine, Regensburg: Schnell + Steiner, 2015.

³³ Official Website of the Institute of Foreign Affairs: <https://www.ifa.de/kunst/deutscher-pavillon-venedig-biennale/>.

³⁴ *Relocating a Structure. German Pavilion 2022, 59th International Art Exhibition, La Biennale di Venezia*, ed. Yilmaz Dziewior, Köln: Walther König, 2022.

2. A Look into the Past - Understanding the Controversial Beginnings

To understand the complicated relationship between the architecture and the art/artists presenting within, it is crucial to understand the pavilion's controversial origin. In order to fully comprehend the effect, the structure's early history had on its perception and character, the following chapter aims to present an overview of the years leading up to the pavilion's reconstruction, as well as the first few exhibits hosted under the Nazi flag. Just as with most aspects of Germany's national identity, the devastation and tragedy of World War II, as well as its lasting aftermath, has had an immeasurable impact on the country's representation at the Venice Biennale. The effects of the turbulent pre-war years could be felt within the city of Venice and were visible in the few Biennales that were hosted in the years leading up to the war's culmination.

In the beginning of the 1930s, the political climate all throughout Europe was shifting rapidly. The political structure and with it the atmosphere in fascist Italy was starting to become noticeable within the Biennale itself. These changes particularly impacted the art displayed and thereby also the artists who had been chosen to participate. The new alliance between Benito Mussolini and Adolf Hitler, who had been elected as Germany's chancellor in 1933, further reinforced and accelerated this changing power hierarchy.³⁵

For the 1934 Biennale, the participating countries were asked by the event's organisers to present their best artists and their most prized works while also emphasising the national component.³⁶ The focus should once again return to the human subject, its reality and characteristics, moving further away from expressionism and the abstract.³⁷

The commissioner of the German Pavilion for that year and the following event was Eberhard Hanfstaengl, who at the time was the director of the Berlin national

³⁵ E. Di Martino, 2005, p. 33.

³⁶ U. Christoffel, *Die Biennale in Venedig. 1. das Bildnis des 19. Jahrhunderts*, in: "Die Kunst für alle", 49. Jg. Heft 11, 1934, pp. 285-293, here p. 288.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 288.

gallery and a man with close family ties to Hitler himself.³⁸ He was appointed by what had previously been known as the Cultural Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and had been renamed the Ministry of Propaganda only a few months prior.³⁹ Together with the sculptor Josef Wackerle and the painter Oswald Poetzelberger, it was his responsibility to properly represent the identity and values of the new nationalist Germany to the outside world.⁴⁰ Especially knowing that Hitler was highly interested in the proceedings in Venice, the pressure to please the chancellor with an adequate exhibit was high.⁴¹

While the cultural programme and ideology of the country were still being defined, some of the works chosen by Hanfstaengl already represented the idealistic direction the arts were about to take. In his curation, he focused almost exclusively on artworks that had already been deemed acceptable by the government and avoided all that could be seen as problematic.⁴² The 30 statues exhibited in the pavilion included a bust of Hitler by Ferdinand Liebermann, as well as one of Reichspräsident Paul von Hindenburg by Edwin Schardds. The painting *Deutsche Erde* (German Soil) depicting a hardworking farmer unperturbed by the threat of an oncoming storm was loaned to Hanfstaengl from Hitler's personal collection and was given a special placement within the pavilion.⁴³ The painter Werner Peiner would later become one of the main artists commissioned by the Nazi government.⁴⁴

³⁸ C. Becker, 2007, p. 81. Eberhardt Hanfstaengl was the cousin of Ernst Hanfstaengl, an art dealer as well as a close friend and financial supporter of Adolf Hitler. In the 1930s he was made the head of foreign public affairs of the NSDAP.

³⁹ J. May, *Eberhard Hanfstaengl als deutscher Kommissar auf der Biennale von Venedig 1934 und 1936*, in: *Der Deutsche Pavillon. Ein Jahrhundert nationaler Repräsentation auf der Internationalen Kunstausstellung "La Biennale di Venezia" 1912-2012*, edited by J. May and S. Meine, Regensburg: Schnell + Steiner, 2015, pp. 85-100, here p. 89.

⁴⁰ J. May, 2015, p. 85.

⁴¹ Ibid, p. 85, p. 91.

⁴² Ibid, p. 91. Hanfstaengl however emphasised that this decision should not be seen as a judgement of the art exhibited in the pavilion in previous years.

⁴³ J. May, 2015, p. 92.

⁴⁴ E. Klee, *Das Kulturlexikon zum Dritten Reich. Wer war was vor und nach 1945*, Frankfurt am Main: Fischer-Taschenbuch-Verlag, 2009, p. 452.

In order to additionally emphasise and celebrate the country's changing ideals, a swastika and the *Reichsadler* (Imperial Eagle), two of the main symbols of Nazi Germany were placed at the entrance of the pavilion for the Biennale of 1934.

Hitler visited the 19. Biennale on June 15, 1934, an event which would change the story of the pavilion forever. It was due to his perception of the German representation at the Biennale that it was decided to completely remodel the building. He was shown around the grounds by the Biennales' President, Giuseppe Volpi di Misurata and the Secretary-General Antonio Maraini (Ill. 5).



Ill. 5: Hitler visiting the German Pavilion, 15. Juni 1934, left to right: Ambassador Ullrich von Hassell, Biennale President Giuseppe Volpi di Misturata, Adolf Hitler, Secretary-General Antonio Maraini, in: *Germania. Die deutschen Beiträge zur Biennale Venedig 1985-2007*, 2007, p. 83.

According to Jan May's contribution to the topic, the chancellor enjoyed some of the works presented in the German pavilion, especially *Deutsche Erde* and its special placement within the exhibition.⁴⁵ However, most of the other artworks shown at the Biennale did not seem to be to his liking, particularly those more in the style that would

⁴⁵ J. May, 2015, p. 92.

later be termed “degenerate” in Nazi Germany.⁴⁶ It was the dilapidated condition of the pavilion itself however, that truly seemed to trouble Hitler during his visit. The weathering and depreciation of the previous years were clearly visible, and in his opinion, the building appeared too modest. He believed it was not a place worthy of representing his vision of Germany on the international stage. Especially compared to some of the newer additions, such as the recently built Austrian pavilion, he felt the German one appeared run down and outdated.⁴⁷

The increasingly strenuous political situation and Italy's ongoing war with Ethiopia led to several countries announcing their non-participation in the upcoming Biennale of 1936.⁴⁸ The United Kingdom, the Soviet Union as well as the United States, whose pavilion had only just been built a few years prior in 1930, chose not to exhibit due to current circumstances.⁴⁹

Once again, the German pavilion was commissioned by Eberhard Hanfstaengl and the influence of Nazi Germany's rapidly changing cultural policies was inescapable in that year's exhibition. The Ministry of Propaganda, led by Joseph Goebbels, was now officially in charge of the country's representation at the event and was on a mission of eliminating modernity from the German art world. Instead, the focus was put on landscape paintings, with the aim of presenting a broad spectrum of artistic contributions from all over the country.⁵⁰

Although the Ministry of Propaganda deemed the 1936 exhibition successful, Goebbels himself described it as dismal after his visit to the Biennale. Hanfstaengl would not return as commissioner in 1938 and was relieved of all his duties in the Nationalgalerie in Berlin in 1939.⁵¹

⁴⁶ E. Di Martino, 2005, p. 33.

⁴⁷ J. May, 2015, p. 92. The Austrian pavilion was added to the Biennale in 1934 and was designed by the architect Joseph Hofmann.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 24.

⁴⁹ E. Di Martino, 2005, p. 34.

⁵⁰ A detailed description of some of the most important art works shown in the German pavilion of 1936 can be found in: J. May, 2015, p. 95.

⁵¹ J. May, 2015, p. 97.

In his final report, Hanfstaengl stresses the importance of rebuilding the German pavilion:

As already pointed out and justified in detail, a satisfactory impression of contemporary artmaking at the Biennale can never be created as long as Germany has to reckon with the existing pavilion at its disposal⁵².

It is clear that the dilapidated state of the German building at the Biennale was turning into an increasingly irritating problem. Especially compared to those of other countries, it was perceived as run-down, outdated and inadequate. It was no longer worthy of housing the art of such a great country as Germany perceived itself to be and was even seen as damaging to its identity given the international character of the Biennale. The need for a newer, monumental building that adequately reflected the country's strong self-image had become clear and the remodelling was finally set into motion.

The delicate and playful pavilion that Daniele Donghi had originally conceived for the German participation did not conform with the new national socialist vision of architecture. In their article "National Socialist Architecture as an Acceleration of Time" the authors Michaud and Fox describe Hitler's fascination with creating monumental structures that would stand the test of time.⁵³ He believed that in order to become a great nation they would have to construct monuments worthy of such greatness. Just as the Egyptians and Greeks before, he wanted his people to outlast all others through the structures they built. At a Nazi Congress in Nürnberg in 1935 he proclaimed, "no people lives longer than the products of its civilisation⁵⁴" (kein Volk lebt länger als die Dokumente seiner Kultur). These monumental structures should

⁵² E. Hanfstaengl, *Bericht über die Beteiligung Deutschlands an der Internationalen Kunstausstellung in Venedig 1936*, 22. Dezember 1936, in SMBZA, I/NG 769, as cited in: J. May, 2015, p. 97.

"Wie schon hervorgehoben und ausführlich begründet, kann ein befriedigender Eindruck über das zeitgenössische Kunstschaffen auf der Biennale nie geschaffen werden, solange Deutschland mit dem vorhandenen ihm zur Verfügung stehenden Pavillon rechnen muss".

⁵³ E. Michaud and C. Fox, *National Socialist Architecture as an Acceleration of Time*, in: "Critical Inquiry", Winter, 1993, Vol. 19, No. 2, pp. 220-233, here p. 222.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 220.

communicate their greatness to others and legitimise the Aryan culture. The rejection of contemporary art in Nazi Germany had the same reasoning: to expand their culture all art that could harm their ideal image needed to be suppressed. The importance of the German Pavilion as a house of German Art becomes even more clear. Not only did the building need to be worthy of housing the country's art, but it also needed to be monumental and imposing enough to justify the greatness of the Aryan people.

For the 21. Biennale the commission of the German pavilion was taken over by the painter Adolf Ziegler, who was thought to be better suited to presenting the German artistic ideology in Venice than his predecessor. Only one year earlier in 1937, he had been assigned the task of confiscating all artworks the Nazi Party deemed as “degenerate art” from all German museums. Additionally, he had been responsible for curating the German contribution to the World Exhibition in Paris in 1937, as well as assembling the *Große Deutsche Kunstausstellung* (Great German Art Exhibition) in Munich for the opening of the Haus der Deutschen Kunst (House of German Art, today: Haus der Kunst (House of Art)).⁵⁵ The need for a newer building that adequately reflected the country's strong self-image had become clear and the remodelling was finally set into motion.

To the Ministry of Propaganda, these achievements must have deemed Ziegler a more than suitable candidate to commission the first exhibition in the new pavilion in 1938. In order to conceive this new structure, a clean slate was needed. The neoclassical building of 1909 was partly torn down and rebuilt after the plans of the architect Ernst Haiger.⁵⁶ Haiger had previously worked together with Ernst Troost, whose architectural company was responsible for some of Munich's most significant buildings of the Nazi era such as the *Führerbau* and *Haus der Deutschen Kunst* (Ill.6).⁵⁷

⁵⁵ C. Becker, 2007, p. 84.

⁵⁶ F. Martini, *Pavilions / Architecture at the Venice Biennale*, in: *Pavilions/Art in Architecture*, edited by R. Ireland, Bruxelles: La Mulette, 2013, pp. 101-117, here p. 104.

⁵⁷ A. Lagler, 2007, here p. 57.



Ill. 6: Das Haus der Kunst, 1970, photographed by Joachim Kankel, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Bildarchiv kank-000437.

The new building itself is characterised by strong symmetry and simple geometric forms (Ill. 7). The most monumental of the changes is the pavilion's new entrance. The playful decorations and delicate round columns make way for four colossal square ones. Instead of the decorated gable, the fluted columns carry a mighty architrave with the bold lettering GERMANIA identifying it as the German pavilion. Compared to the previous structure, the entrance hall was enlarged significantly in size, adding to its monumental presence. To both walls flanking the portico a row of narrow windows was added along the upper section, further enhancing the appearance of verticality throughout the structure. The solid walls stand in contrast with the delicate windows and give the building a powerful yet open appearance.

The overall size of the building was increased as well to create more exhibition space (Ill. 8). The room layout of the old pavilion remained more or less the same, but instead of the previous main hall and three rooms, the number was increased to six rooms in



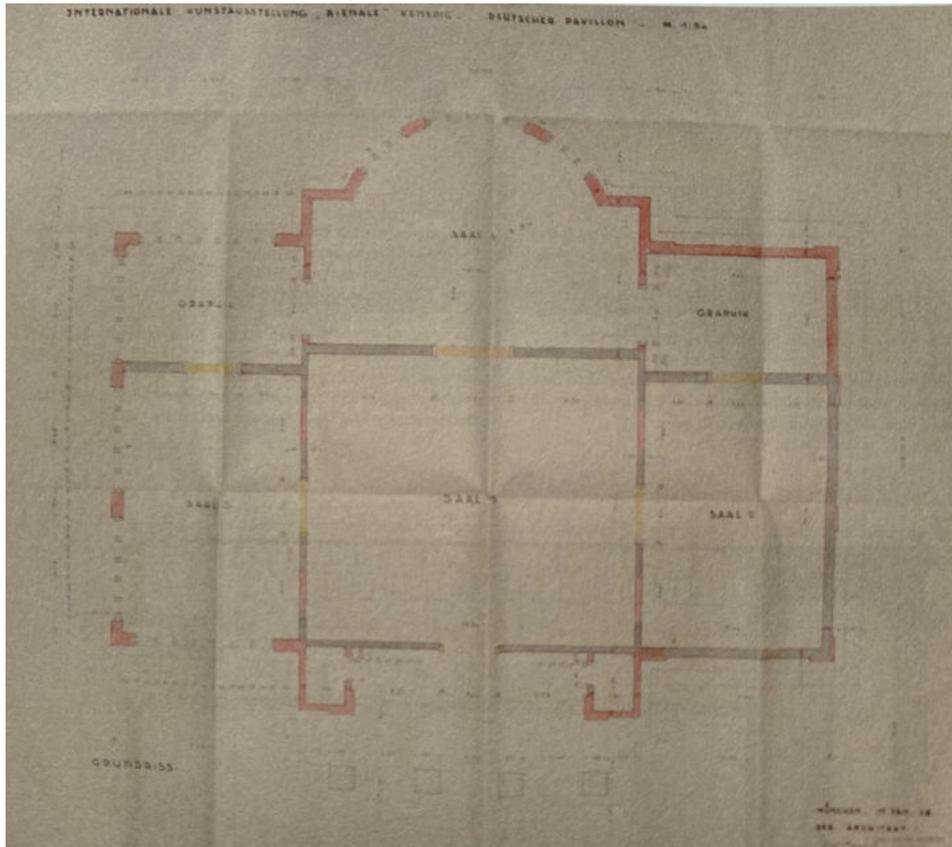
Ill. 7: The German Pavilion by Ernst Haiger, 1938, in: *Der Deutsche Pavillon. Ein Jahrhundert Nationaler Repräsentation auf der Internationalen Kunstausstellung "La Biennale di Venezia", 1912-2012*, 2015, p. 11.

total. The centre room in the back was constructed with a semi-circular apse, creating a perfect space to highlight sculptures. Likewise, the size of the portico was increased by including the two side rooms.⁵⁸

This new layout allowed for a more concise exhibition space, with the front three rooms best suitable for paintings, the back rooms for prints or drawings and the centre apse for sculptures. In order to accommodate this noticeable growth, the trees in front of the pavilion were cut down, further opening up the façade to the rest of Giardini.⁵⁹ The full extent of the overall expansion can be seen in the illustrations depicting the

⁵⁸ Y. Dziewior, *Maria Eichhorn. Relocating a Structure: German Pavilion 2022, 59th International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia*, Köln: König, 2022, p. 258.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*.

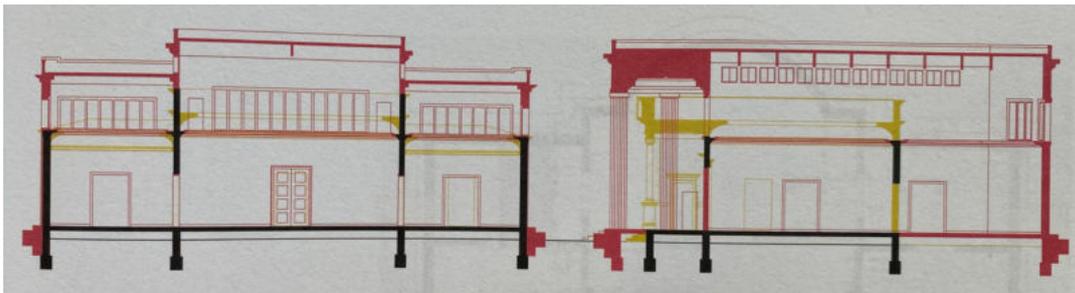


Ill. 8: Layout for the German Pavilion by Ernst Haiger, 1938, in: Y. Dziewior, *Maria Eichhorn. Relocating a Structure: German Pavilion 2022, 59th International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia*, Köln: König, 2022, p. 259.

elevation, as well as the transverse and longitudinal sections (Ill. 9, Ill. 10). Here the yellow drawing depicts the outline of the previous pavilion and the red one the new structure of 1938. The elevation image (Ill. 9) clearly shows the increase in overall height, with the tip of the old pavilions Gabel only reaching the architrave of the new one. It can also be seen that the sides have almost doubled in height, the yellow lines of the old roof only reaching the bottom of the new windows. The images of the transverse and longitudinal sections (Ill. 10) likewise illustrate the dramatic change in height, as well as the general increase in size. Compared to the delicate structure of the Daniele Donghi, the thick red lines depicting the walls of the new pavilion show a significant difference in the building's appearance and character.



Ill. 9: Elevation of the 1938 German Pavilion, in: Y. Dziewior, *Maria Eichhorn. Relocating a Structure: German Pavilion 2022, 59th International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia*, Köln: König, 2022, p. 258.



Ill. 10: left: Transverse Section, right: Longitudinal section, German Pavilion, in: Y. Dziewior, *Maria Eichhorn. Relocating a Structure: German Pavilion 2022, 59th International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia*, Köln: König, 2022, p. 259.

The strong lines, strict symmetry, as well as the monumentality of the entrance generate a clear contrast to the delicate, almost playful appearance of the pavilion's predecessor. When viewed side by side with other structures of the time such as the *Haus der Deutschen Kunst* in Munich (Ill. 6), the resemblance in style is undeniable, forever linking the pavilion to the political architecture of Nazi Germany.

The interior of the pavilion was also changed substantially during the reconstruction. The rather intimate and warm setting was replaced by a cold and minimalistic atmosphere (Ill. 11). Instead of the herringbone parquet a beige marble was placed throughout the building. Together with the white-washed walls and the enormous doorways, it gave the structure an imposing, almost intimidating atmosphere that was only further emphasized by the sheer height and size of the pavilion. Overall, the drastic changes bestowed a completely new aesthetic upon the building, truly transforming it into a new exhibition space for the art of the Third Reich.



Ill. 11: Interior of the German Pavilion under Construction, Ernst Haiger, May 1938, in: Y. Dziewior, Maria Eichhorn. *Relocating a Structure: German Pavilion 2022, 59th International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia*, Köln: König, 2022, p. 256.

In the eyes of the government and the Ministry of Propaganda, the new pavilion was finally worthy of the important task of presenting Germany's new aesthetic ideals on such an international stage as the Biennale. An article published in the “Zentralblatt der Bauverwaltung” (Central Journal of the Building Administration) in 1938 highlights the importance the construction:

It is not indifferent in which external setting the art of our German Fatherland is presented abroad. The new German Art Exhibition building in Venice is not only an impressive, noble and dignified representation of the Third Reich, but also proves that an artistically impeccable setting is capable of enhancing the effect of the art displayed there⁶⁰.

The new building was a demonstration of Germany's growing power. The Biennale was seen as having a vital role in representing the country's greatness to the outside world, which is further exemplified by the sizeable budget allotted to the event by Goebbels himself during a time when funds for the art were starting to run low.⁶¹ It is clear that they believed the new pavilion would enable them to finally display the full extent of the country's greatness.

The German Pavilion was not the first to receive a new upgraded appearance in order to align with the political structure of the times. Other fascist governments were recognising the possible potential the Biennale had for spreading their political agenda. In 1932 the central pavilion, which displayed Italian art, had been remodelled to depict a style more representative of the government's aesthetic and the current political order.⁶² The new design was the work of architect Duilio Torres, and similar to the German Pavilion the entrance is defined by four columns. The enormous white lettering of "ITALIA", which was placed above, has since been replaced with "la Biennale".

⁶⁰ *Das deutsche Ausstellungsgebäude in Venedig*, in: *Zentralblatt der Bauverwaltung*, 44. Jg., 1938, p. 1194, as cited in: A. Lagler, 2007, p. 60.

“Es ist nicht gleichgültig, in welchen äußeren Rahmen die Kunst unseres Deutschen Vaterlandes im Ausland dargeboten wird. Das neue Deutsche Kunstausstellungs-gebäude in Venedig stellt nicht nur eine eindrucksvolle, vornehme und würdige Repräsentation des Dritten Reiches dar, sondern beweist auch, daß ein künstlerisch einwandfreier Rahmen das darin gezeigte Kunstgut zu gesteigerter Wirkung zu bringen vermag.”

⁶¹ C. Becker, 2007, p. 85.

⁶² E. Di Martino, 2005, p. 33.

However, it was not only the architecture and political circumstances that should define the character of the new German structure. The artworks exhibited for the countless visitors to see surely also left a dark stain on the building's history. The art displayed in the pavilion in 1938 is characterised by the influence of the Ministry of Propaganda and was described by Christoph Becker as being nothing more but an outpost of the Haus der Deutschen Kunst.⁶³ Until the end of the war, the pavilion displayed the same few artists most prized by the German Reich and only the artworks which represented the country in the most favourable way.



Ill. 12: Interior of the German Pavilion during the 1938 Biennale, showing the works of Adolf Wissel, Josef Thorak und Arno Breker in: *Der Deutsche Pavillon. Ein Jahrhundert Nationaler Repräsentation auf der Internationalen Kunstausstellung "La Biennale di Venezia", 1912-2012*, 2015, p. 149.

As demanded by Hitler, the art displayed in the pavilion in 1938 should reflect the new German cultural policies and only these artists registered in the *Reichskulturkammer* (Reich Chamber of Culture) could be chosen for the event.⁶⁴ This strict monitoring and

⁶³ E. Di Martino, 2005, p. 33.

⁶⁴ Ibid..

controlling of the arts greatly limited their circulation for exhibition events. Many of the artists on display during the 1938 Biennale had been present in the opening exhibition of the Haus der Deutschen Kunst the previous year.⁶⁵ The works of Arno Breker, one of Hitler's favourite sculptors were shown, together with paintings by Adolf Wissels (Ill. 12).

The sculptures showed the perfect human form, depicting athletic bodies as the ideal aesthetic of national socialist Germany, while the paintings, among other things, depicted farmers, hard at work for their country. Additionally, the busts of Hitler and Mussolini by Josef Thorak, which were placed at the entrance and always decorated with fresh flowers, further emphasised the deeply political agenda of the pavilion.⁶⁶ Just like Breker, Thorak belonged to the circle of Hitler's most trusted and celebrated artists, with his sculptural works for the 1937 World Exhibition in Paris being seen as one of his great achievements.⁶⁷ For the event, he had created two groups for the entrance of the German Pavilion. Named "Family" and "Camaraderie" the over seven meters high sculptures depicted the idealised human form, their clasped hands a symbol of racial Comradeship.⁶⁸

The 1938 contribution to the Biennale and with it the new pavilion was deemed a success. At the time, the German Press declared Hitler as the man responsible for this great triumph and praised him for not only restrengthening the country's artistic representation abroad, but also recognising the important role art could play in building his Reich.⁶⁹

In 1940, the effects of the political situation in Europe had escalated even further. Instead of the traditional 16 countries, only a small handful decided to participate. Great Britain, Poland, Denmark, France and the USSR left their pavilions vacant and many of the remaining participating countries were either occupied by German forces

⁶⁵ C. Becker, 2007, p. 85.

⁶⁶ Ibid..

⁶⁷ J. Gabler, *Josef Thorak*, in: "Neue Deutsche Biografie", No. 26, 2016, <https://www.deutsche-biographie.de/sfz74958.html>, [last accessed 15. September 2023]

⁶⁸ Ibid..

⁶⁹ C. Becker, 2007, p. 85.

or also part of a fascist government.⁷⁰ The Austrian Pavilion was also left empty, their artists now exhibiting in the German structure after the Anschluss from 1938.⁷¹

The ongoing war was once again the focus of many of the exhibits, with most countries, including Italy, Spain and Germany, once again choosing an artistic programme that supported the commanding and glorious self-image of their nation.

Again, the works of Arno Breker were displayed in the German pavilion, the eight monumental sculptures each depicting different victorious war heroes. Watercolour pictures by the war painter Wolfgang Willrich, as well as 50 medals by Richard Klein and Rudolf Schmidt, depicted and celebrated Hitler and his government.⁷²

Additionally, Ziegler, who was once again in charge of the German commission, tried to create a direct connection between the country and Venice: one of Brekers' works was a bust of Richard Wagner, who died and had been buried in the city and was adored by Hitler himself.⁷³ Lastly, a series of small paintings depicting different landscapes were intended to present the abundance, diversity and beauty of the newly reunited Germany to its visitors.

It is undeniable, that every single work chosen for the 1940 Biennale serves the same purpose. The art is no longer purely for viewing pleasure, but should communicate a clear message of greatness, superiority and predestination. Together, the paintings and sculptures created a perfectly curated representation of Germany's self-conception. Art was seen as just another tool for pushing Nazi ideals and strengthening the country's identity abroad.⁷⁴

Clearly, the exhibit put on in 1940 was nothing more than propaganda, with the new pavilion housing only those few chosen and celebrated artists who conformed to the government's idea of appropriate art such as Breker and Willrich. Due to the strict rules imposed upon the artists, the possible pool of artworks to choose from was rather

⁷⁰ M. Zucchi, *Faschismus, Krieg und Kunst. Die 22. Biennale in Venedig, 1940*, in: "Kritische Berichte", Vol. 31, No. 1, 2003, pp. 23-26, here p. 23.

⁷¹ Ibid..

⁷² C. Becker, 2007, p. 85.

⁷³ M. Zucchi, 2003, p. 25.

⁷⁴ C. Becker, 2007, p. 84.

limited, which led to a number of paintings and sculptures being used repeatedly for international exhibitions.⁷⁵ Instead of artistic innovation, they presented a show of power and might, meant to simultaneously intimidate and impress its visitors.

The Biennale of 1942 would be the last under the influence of Nazi ideals. The political control over the exhibited artworks had reached its peak, partly due to the growing call to arms of the military. The art displayed aimed to legitimise the still ongoing war and portray the German victory as inevitable. It was seen as a show of confidence and unquestionable power that even in the deep turmoil of war, they were still able to participate in such a great tradition as the Venice Biennale.⁷⁶

The participating countries had become fewer once again, with the US leaving their pavilion vacant after their war entry following the attack on Pearl Harbour in 1941. Overall, only ten countries participated in the 23. Biennale. Many of the unoccupied buildings were either used by countries that had remained neutral towards the war or were used by the event organisers to exhibit various fractions of the military.⁷⁷

Only shortly after the 1942 Biennale the German advances in the war began to slow down. Italy surrendered on 8. September 1943, Germany two years later on 8. May 1945. No Biennales took place during these turbulent and unpredictable times.

The Giardini finally opened its doors again in 1948.⁷⁸ Much had changed in the past decade and the war's impact on the art world and with it the Biennale was clearly visible. Only fifteen countries participated in the 24. instalment of the event, as many were still recovering and busy dealing with the aftermath of the war. After their devastating role in the war, Germany was not invited to exhibit, nevertheless, the country's pavilion remained open. The only action taken to remove the stain of the Nazi ideals was to remove the national emblems of the Third Reich, the swastika and

⁷⁵ C. Becker, 2007, p. 85.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 86.

⁷⁷ A. Vettese, *Die Länderpavillons der Biennale von Venedig als Orte kultureller Diplomatie*, in: *Germania. Die deutschen Beiträge zur Biennale Venedig 1985-2007*, edited by K. Reich, Köln: DuMont-Literatur-und-Kunst-Verl., 2007, pp. 151-165, here p. 161.

⁷⁸ J. May, 2007, p. 26.

the Imperial eagle, from the building.⁷⁹ All else remained the same and has not been significantly changed since.

This overview of the Biennale during the turbulent years leading up to and particularly during the war itself shows the strong impact and influence the political climate had on the event and all participants. Over the years, the long-standing tradition of the Biennale had been misused as an instrument of power to support the political agenda and to glorify the ideologies of fascist governments. The event's original motivation of creating a space for the unprejudiced development and unification of art had been almost erased over the past decade. The pavilions had no longer been used to present the country's most creative or innovative artists. Instead, the artworks and artists were carefully chosen by the controlling government to curate a perfect exhibition that would represent the new self-image and ideals. Towards the end, some artists even had no control over their works and would often find out about their exhibition only after the fact.⁸⁰ Art and with it the Biennale had become a tool to push ideals and display power.

The German pavilion might have been one of the earliest ones built in the initial years of the Biennale, but it has become clear that its character is deeply rooted in the rebuilt structure of 1938. Those first exhibits hosted during the height of Nazi Germany greatly impacted the building's nature and turned it into a symbol of the country's destructive past that the removal of the national emblems cannot even come close to dispersing. Analysing this origin is crucial to understanding the fundamental distrust and dislike many artists as well as visitors have shown towards the pavilion over the decades. It is also this dynamic which makes the relationship between the art displayed during the Biennale and the architecture so complex.

⁷⁹ O. W. Fischer, *Die unerträgliche Gegenwart der Vergangenheit. Der Deutsche Pavillon: Pièce de Résistance oder die Stolpersteine von Venedig?*, in: *Der Deutsche Pavillon. Ein Jahrhundert Nationaler Repräsentation auf der Internationalen Kunstausstellung "La Biennale di Venezia" 1912-2012*, edited by J. May and S. Meine, Regensburg: Schnell + Steiner, 2015, pp. 141-150, here p. 141.

⁸⁰ C. Becker, 2007, p. 85.

3. The Relationship between Art and the Architecture of the Pavilion following World War II

The turbulent pre-war years and the following devastation of World War II left its mark on the Biennale and the participating countries. After the 23. edition, the reality of war had finally caught up with the event and although the preparations for the 1944 Biennale were already in motion, it was cancelled after Mussolini's dismissal.⁸¹ All across Europe, countries were turning their backs on fascism and starting to focus on rebuilding following the devastation of the previous years.⁸²

Although the Art Biennale reopened again in 1948 after a six-year break, it could not go on in the way it had during the height of the last government's rule. Many of the fascist and imperialistic undertones it had acquired were not appropriate for a country that had been on the losing side of such a monumental war.⁸³ To lead the Biennale into a new era, the art historian Rodolfo Pallucchini was appointed the new Secretary General.⁸⁴ The goal was to unburden the event from any association with its fascist past.⁸⁵ Instead, the focus should once again be on embracing modernity and, just like the newly instated democratic government, working towards the idea of a unified Europe.⁸⁶ The plan was to recuperate all that had been lost culturally due to the war and reignite the artistic movements from the pre-war Biennales.⁸⁷ No longer should the event be used as a tool for political propaganda but would instead be a place where art, as well as artistic movements, could flourish and be exchanged between all participating nations.

⁸¹ J. May, 2007, p. 25.

⁸² M. Zucchi, 2003, p. 25.

⁸³ L. Alloway, 1968, p. 133.

⁸⁴ E. Di Martino, 2005, pp. 37.

⁸⁵ J. R. Gold and M. M. Gold, *Longevity and Reinvention: Venetianization and the Biennale*, in: *Festivals and the City. The Contested Geographies of Urban Events*, edited by: A. Smith, G. Osborn, B. Quinn, London: University of Westminster Press, 2022, pp. 149-168, here p. 153.

⁸⁶ N. Jachec *Anti-Communism at Home, Europeanism Abroad. Italian Cultural Policy at the Venice Biennale, 1948-1958*, in: "Contemporary European History", Vol. 14, No. 2, May 2005, pp. 193-217, here p. 198.

⁸⁷ E. Di Martino, 2005, p. 39.

However, dealing with the Biennale's tarnished reputation was not the only obstacle that had to be overcome. Reforming the structures which had been established during the 1930s and still governed most of the institution's organisation would prove itself to be an even more challenging task.⁸⁸ For instance, some of the positions within the Biennale's board, which was still regulated by laws set in 1938, were left vacant as they did not exist in the framework of the new democratic government. This lack of important structural figures destabilised the board and threatened its authority.⁸⁹

For the German Pavilion, overcoming the shame of its recent history would become the main focus. Not only was the monumental architecture too similar to that of other known Nazi structures such as the *Führerbau* (The Führer's Building), but also the only exhibits the new pavilion had housed so far were those of the Third Reich. The years of propaganda exhibitions, the repressed art and artists, as well as the national glorification, had tainted the building. It was left with a tarnished legacy that generations of artists would feel deeply conflicted with.

In order to truly understand this deep-seated conflict, this chapter will briefly examine the relationship between the architecture and art after Germany rejoined the Biennale in Venice. For this, the evolution of the exhibitions hosted within the pavilion over the decades is particularly interesting. Analysing this will offer a comprehensive overview of the growing difficulty of representing a quickly developing country in a building with such a meaningful history. According to Michael Diers, the post-war period marks the beginning of the third era of the German participation at the Venice Biennale which would last until 1968.⁹⁰ These exhibitions would be defined by the spirit of reparations that were slowly gaining momentum in multiple aspects of the German identity. With this knowledge, it becomes equally important to gain insights into these first few participations after the war in order to understand the new mentality of

⁸⁸ S. Collicelli Cagol and V. Martini, *The Venice Biennale at Its Turning Points. 1948 and the Aftermath of 1968*, in: *Making Art History in Europe After 1945*, edited by N. de Haro García, P. Mayayo, J. Carrillo, New York; London: Routledge, 2020, pp. 83- 100.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

⁹⁰ M. Diers, 2007, p. 34.

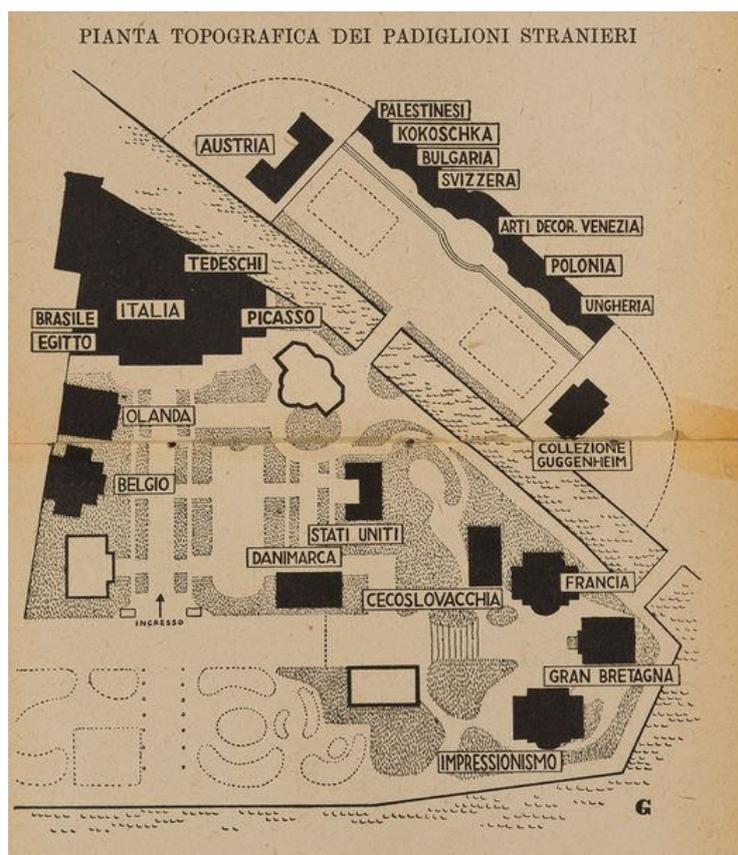
Vergangenheitsbewältigung (coming to terms with the past) that was quickly influencing the German social sphere.

Vergangenheitsbewältigung or the more modern term *Vergangenheitsaufarbeitung* (the process of coming to terms with the past) refers to the process of reconciling the horrible acts committed during the Second World War.⁹¹ Beginning with the Nuremberg trials from 1945 to 1949, in which the main culprits of the Third Reich were trialled, Germany was going through the difficult process of accepting their role in the war. Since 1945, there have been different phases of this mentality.⁹² To begin with, the opinions towards the German contributions to the war could not change overnight. Many started to hide their true mindset either out of fear, guilt or shame, transforming the past into a taboo subject. One was quick to blame others for their participation in order to distract oneself from any fault. The further away society moved from the Nazi Era in time, the stronger *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* became, reaching new heights in the wake of the international protests of 1968 and then again after the reunification of East and West Germany. It is a phenomenon that is deeply ingrained in the German social sphere and has played an essential role in the relationship between the artists and the architecture of the pavilion. The growing intensity of the communal consciousness of working to overcome the burden of the past can be easily identified over the course of the German contributions analysed here. Due to the lasting effects of the war, many countries were still in a state of rebuilding and so had no resources to participate in the 1948 Biennale.⁹³ Overall, only fifteen countries decided to join the event, leaving a few pavilions accessible for other exhibitions. The map of the Giardini in 1948 depicts the vacant pavilions as blank structures (Spain, Hungary, USSR) and shows the others in black (Ill. 13). The Greek

⁹¹ E. Jesse, *Doppelte Vergangenheitsbewältigung in Deutschland. Ein Problem der Vergangenheit, Gegenwart und Zukunft*, in: *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, ed. E. Jesse and K. Löw, Berlin: Duncker & Humboldt, 1997, pp. 11-26.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁹³ E. Di Martino, 2005, p. 38.



Ill. 13: Plan of the Pavilions from the Catalog of the Biennale di Venezia 1948, Archivio Storico della Biennale di Venezia – ASAC, © Fondazione La Biennale di Venezia

Pavilion was left empty due to an ongoing civil war, which offered an opportunity for the Collection of Peggy Guggenheim to be presented within its halls.⁹⁴

After not having been invited to the first post-war Biennale due to their role in the war, an exhibition of impressionist art was hosted within the freshly renovated German Pavilion.⁹⁵ Nevertheless, this did not mean that there would be no form of participation from the country. With the help of former Commissioner Eberhard Hanfstaengl, President Giovanni Ponti and Palluchini organised a special exhibition of impressionist art in the otherwise vacant pavilion. In exchange for Hanfstaengl's help with coordinating some of the artworks, he asked for the opportunity for selected

⁹⁴ S. Collicelli Cagol and V. Martini, 2020, p. 87.

⁹⁵ E. Di Martino, 2005, p. 38.

contemporary German artists to be exhibited at the Central Pavilion of the Biennale.⁹⁶ This idea was met with enthusiasm by Pallucchini, who promised a room big enough to host 20-25 artworks.⁹⁷ Their participation is noted by the label “TEDESCHI” on the map (Ill. 13). Although this was not an official German contribution for the Biennale, the selection of single artists to present their work would be one of the first steps in reintroducing the country’s art world on an international stage. Among the German artists were some previously well-known names such as Otto Dix, Max Pechstein, Karl Hofer and Willi Baumeister. To also include the avant-garde movement of the interwar period, artists representing Bauhaus, *Die Brücke* (The Bridge), *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity) and surrealism were also selected.⁹⁸ The fact that all chosen artists were part of the group that the Third Reich had deemed “degenerate” should further show the changed German mentality, as well as the willingness to move forward. Hanfstaengl wanted to re-establish a connection to European culture and prove that Germany was still a part of the communal cultural heritage.⁹⁹ For him, the goal was not only to overcome the stain of the World War attached to the country and the pavilion, but also to restore and strengthen the connection between Germany and Italy.¹⁰⁰

Additionally, the former commissioner hoped that exhibiting impressionistic works in the pavilion would shine a positive light on the building.¹⁰¹ Impressionism was seen as a proven tool to create an understanding and establish a common ground among

⁹⁶ P. Joch, *Die Ära der Retroperspektiven 1948-1962. Wiedergutmachung, Rekonstruktion und Archäologie der Progressiven*, in: *Germania. Die deutschen Beiträge zur Biennale Venedig 1985-2007*, edited by K. Reich, Köln: DuMont-Literatur-und-Kunst-Verl., 2007, pp. 89-106, here p. 90.

⁹⁷ Letter from R. Pallucchini to E. Hanfstaengl, 20. November 1947, Venezia, Archivio Storico delle Arti Contemporanee della Biennale di Venezia (ASAC), Fondo storico, b. 3, folder 3; Letter from R. Pallucchini to E. Hanfstaengl, 29. April 1948, Venezia, Archivio Storico delle Arti Contemporanee della Biennale di Venezia (ASAC), Fondo storico, b. 3, folder 3.

⁹⁸ P. Joch, 2007, p. 90

⁹⁹ E. Hanfstaengl, *Padiglione della Germania*, in: *Biennale di Venezia. Catalogo: XXIV Esposizione biennale internazionale d'arte*, Venice: C. Ferrari, 1948, p. 192.

¹⁰⁰ Letter from E. Hanfstaengl to R. Pallucchini, 14. November 1947, Venezia, Archivio Storico delle Arti Contemporanee della Biennale di Venezia (ASAC), Fondo storico, b. 3, folder 3.

¹⁰¹ P. Joch, 2007, pp. 90-91.

different nations. The very first German participation in 1895, as well as the first Biennale post World War I had been good examples of this unifying effect.¹⁰²

A review of the 24. Biennale by contemporary Douglas Couper sheds light on the exhibition's reception.¹⁰³ The Impressionist show seems to have been well received, and is described as a “fascinating, if very unequal show”¹⁰⁴. There is no mention of it taking place in the German Pavilion, nor of their connection to Hanfstaengl. Furthermore, the German paintings in the Central Pavilion were deemed an “unsatisfactory”¹⁰⁵ selection.

Similarly to Germany, most of the other countries also focused on presenting retrospective exhibitions of modern art to make up for the cultural delay caused by the disruption of the war.¹⁰⁶ Additionally, Picasso was finally invited to the Venice Biennale and showed some of his works in a special solo exhibition.

Together, all these various exhibitions are proof of the new direction the institution was trying to take. After years of being misused for political agendas, as well as influencing and suppressing art and artists alike, a new air of artistic liberty was developing. In order to recover from the recent past, the Biennale for the first time since World War I, finally showed some historic recognition and embraced styles which had previously been shunned.¹⁰⁷

The first official participation of the new Federal Republic of Germany inside the Pavilion was once again presented by Eberhard Hanfstaengl. For the 1950 Biennale, he was reinstated as the commissioner of the German Pavilion after having been dismissed by the Nazi government twelve years earlier for not conforming to their

¹⁰² P. Joch, 2007, pp. 90-91.

¹⁰³ D. Couper, *25th Biennale Exhibition, Venice*, in: “The Burlington Magazine”, Vol. 90, No. 547 (Oct. 1948), pp. 290, 293, 296.

¹⁰⁴ D. Couper, 1948, p. 293.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid..

¹⁰⁶ L. Alloway, 1968, p. 134. Many of the works of the chosen artists had not been very accessible up until then. Egon Schiele and Kokoschka were shown in the Austrian Pavilion, Chagall, Rouault and Braque in the French, Paul Klee in the Italian and Great Britain showed the statues of Henry Moore as well as paintings by Turner.

¹⁰⁷ Letter from. E. Hanfstaengl to R. Pallucchini, 12. November 1947, Venezia, Archivio Storico delle Arti Contemporanee della Biennale di Venezia (ASAC), Fondo storico, b. 3, folder 3; P. Joch, 2007, p. 89.

ideals concerning degenerate art.¹⁰⁸ It was now in his hands to officially reintroduce the German Pavilion of the new Republic to the Venice Biennale.¹⁰⁹

For the centre of the exhibition, he chose to show art by the group *Blauer Reiter* (Blue Rider), including works by August Macke, Gabriele Münter and particularly those of Wassily Kandinsky and Franz Marc.¹¹⁰ Additionally, he selected artworks by Berlin Expressionists such as Emil Nolde and Max Beckmann, as well as a few by the younger generation of abstract artists.¹¹¹

Hanfstaengl was exceedingly aware of the pavilion's recent history and so aimed to create an exhibit that would offer a distinctive thematic contrast to the ones constructed by his predecessors. Kandinsky's fantastical Bavarian landscapes and Marc's animal paintings seem to do just that when compared to the glorifying and naturalistic appearances of the propaganda exhibits.¹¹² Instead of focusing on the human form, the subject moved to nature and animals, all depicted in a more abstract way. Some of Kandinsky's works show no form of traditional composition or motives. Nolde's selected paintings portrayed landscapes, people and objects in a colourful expressionistic style. The choice of including the artist's work is particularly interesting, as while his paintings were labelled "degenerate", the man himself had initially been a supportive member of the National Socialist party.¹¹³ There is no mention of this unfavourable connection in Hanfstaengl's letters, as Nolde made sure to play down his political role and emphasise his persecuted art.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁸ L. Alloway, 1968, p. 92.

¹⁰⁹ After not having been implicated in Nazi crimes after the end of the war, he was appointed director of the Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen ("Bavarian State Painting Collections").

¹¹⁰ E. Hanfstaengl, *Padiglione della Germania*, in: *Biennale di Venezia. Catalogo: XXV Esposizione biennale internazionale d'arte*, Venice: C. Ferrari, 1950, pp. 300-301.

¹¹¹ P. Joch, 2007, p. 92.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ M. Goggin, "Decent" vs. "Degenerate" Art: The National Socialist Case, in: "Art Journal", Vol. 50, No. 4, 1991, pp. 84-92, p. 88.

¹¹⁴ C. Hickley, *Stripping Away Lies to Expose a Painter's Nazi Past*, in: "The New York Times", 10. April 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/10/arts/nolde-nazi-exhibition-berlin-merkel.html>, [last accessed 15. September 2023].

Undoubtedly, all the presented artworks depict styles that would have never been shown in the German Pavilion during the Nazi rule. This demonstration of modernism would further highlight the country's connection to European history through its shared cultural heritage, and further strengthen its war-weakened ties.

Joch notes, however, that while the choice of works offered a clear contrast to the previous wartime Biennales, it was the way the artworks were placed within the architecture itself which at first glance seemed to be slightly problematic.¹¹⁵ The rooms of the pavilion had been constructed with perfect symmetrical alignment in mind. Instead of creating some distance from this arrangement, the works were once again displayed according to the principles established during the Pavilion's Nazi era. Especially the use of the central apse, which had previously housed the Third Reich's most prized Breker statues and now hosted paintings by Kandinsky and Marc, seemed rather unobservant. The controversy was solved by connecting the landscape paintings to the spirit of German culture.¹¹⁶ Together they were meant to represent a sense of tradition, as well as innovation and individualism through their abstract form. This aspect of spirituality was highlighted by the special placement within the apse as an architectural element often associated with sacral buildings.¹¹⁷ Furthermore, the emphasis on abstract art should once again strengthen Germany's connection to Europe. The intrusion of Nazi ideals had erased individuality from the art world and detached the country from the rest of the continent.¹¹⁸ Just as Palluchini with the Biennale, Hanfstaengl wanted to rebuild the cultural community of the pre-war years. To further counter the pavilion's past, Hanfstaengl presented a few statues by Ernst Barlach.¹¹⁹ It was not the first time the artist was asked to participate at the Biennale: Hanfstaengl's had exhibited his works in 1934. Only a few years later his works were

¹¹⁵ P. Joch, 2007, p. 94.

¹¹⁶ F. Tanzer, *European Fantasies: Modernism and Jewish Absence at the Venice Biennale of Art. 1948–1956*, in: "Contemporary European History", 31, 2022, pp. 243–258, here p. 252.

¹¹⁷ P. Joch, 2007, p. 94.

¹¹⁸ F. Tanzer, 2022, pp. 252-253.

¹¹⁹ P. Joch, 2007, pp. 94-95.

deemed “degenerate” and banned.¹²⁰ His Christian statues presented at the 1950 Biennale depicted various suffering and repenting figures, creating a strong contrast to Breker's glorified heroes of the previous exhibitions. As a symbol of atonement, they were meant to embody Germany's spirit of reflection, as well as the new mentality of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*.

Altogether, Hanfstaengl aimed to create an exhibit that would showcase Germany's willingness to embrace the future and help rebuild the old ties that had been weakened or even broken during the war, which he makes clear in his contribution to the 1950 catalogue¹²¹. It was important to also show their awareness of the role they had played and all the harm that had been done.

The overall reception of the first German participation of the post-war era seems to have been positive. In his summary of the 25. Biennale, Bernhard Degenhard writes about the copious amount of displayed art and artists.¹²² He particularly admires the enormous wealth and diversity of the culture presented at the Venice Biennale.¹²³

It is clear, that the returned commissioner thought it of utmost importance to not ignore the wrongs of the past while also helping move the German art world into a better future. By using the apse as a stylistic means and so integrating the architecture into his exhibit, he started a movement that has steadily grown over the following decades and is still relevant today.

As time passed, the problem of the tarnished pavilion would gain more and more momentum. It did not take long before the first demands for a new design were made.¹²⁴ As soon as 1951, the first plans were drawn up and in 1956 the committee for Foreign Art Exhibitions of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs started debating a possible reconstruction in Venice. Various architects were contacted for the possible redesign, among them well-known and established artists such as Ludwig Mies van der Rohe,

¹²⁰ P. Joch, 2007, pp. 94-95.

¹²¹ E. Hanfstaengl, 1950, pp. 300-301.

¹²² B. Degenhard, *Die 25. Biennale in Venedig*, in: “Kunstchronik. Monatsschrift für Kunstwissenschaft, Museumswesen und Denkmalpflege”, Bd. 3 Nr. 10, 1950, pp. 190-196.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 195-196.

¹²⁴ A. Lagler, 2007, pp. 58-60.

Hans Scharoun and Egon Eiermann. Arnold Bode in particular felt very strongly about the reconstruction of the pavilion and believed it was of utmost importance for the German image abroad that the building be replaced as soon as possible.¹²⁵ In a letter from 15 January 1958 addressed to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs the architect presents his affliction with the current state of the German Pavilion:

As a cold, antihuman “representation”, this building is a typical epigone of the Nazi system and arouses the insurmountable aversion of the visitor, especially the foreign one. It’s interior, which is out of proportion and, moreover, totally, inappropriate and impractical for its purpose, oppresses the visitor and demeans the exhibited works. It contradicts all humanitas, which the Federal Republic wants to demonstrate with the shown works of art¹²⁶.

To Bode, the pavilion represented nothing more than the inhuman ideals of the Nazi regime and so stood in stark contrast to everything post-war Germany was trying to establish itself as.¹²⁷ Bode included his own suggestions for a possible new, more modernised design of the Pavilion in his letter (Ill. 14). His reconstruction would have changed the layout Nazi pavilion by increasing the rounded shape of the apse and adding a staircase leading to a second floor with a glass roof. The most notable change, however, would have been to the outside of the building, with its monumental columns being replaced by an asymmetric limewashed façade made from brick. To Bode, the

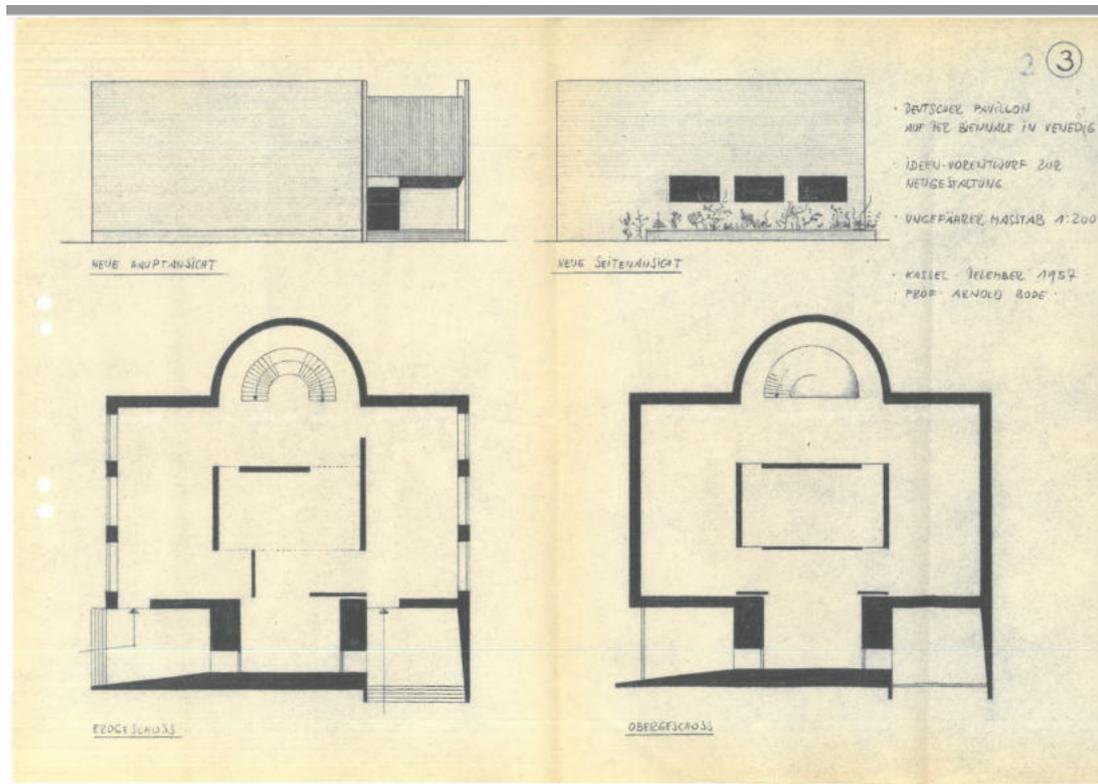
¹²⁵ L. Radine, *Nazibau in Venedig. Woran die Neugestaltung des deutschen Pavillons scheiterte*, in: “Monopol”, 17. December 2021, <https://www.monopol-magazin.de/deutscher-pavillon-venedig-neubeginn>, [last accessed 26. July 2023].

¹²⁶ Letter from Arnold Bode to the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 15. January 1958, Berlin, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts, B95 IV6 768 (605).

“Mit seiner kalten, antihumanen “Repräsentation” erweckt dieser typische Epigonenbau des Nazisystems die unüberwindliche Aversion des Besuchers, insbesondere des ausländischen. Sein maßstabsloser und außerdem für den Zweck völlig verfehlt und unpraktischer Innenraum bedrückt den Besucher und erniedrigt die Ausgestellten Werke. Er widerspricht aller humanitas, die die Bundesregierung mit den gezeigten Kunstwerken beweisen möchte.”

¹²⁷ A. Lagler, 2007, pp. 58-60.

Bauhaus-style redesign would have been a much more fitting representation of the new image Germany was trying to establish for itself.



Ill. 14: Draft for the redesign of the German Pavilion by Arnold Bode, 1957, in: *Germania. Die deutschen Beiträge zur Biennale Venedig 1985-2007*, edited by K. Reich, Köln: DuMont-Literatur- und-Kunst-Verl., 2007, p. 61.

The country's representation in the art world was an important subject to him.¹²⁸ In 1955, he established the documenta in Kassel, a contemporary art exhibition that takes place every five years. His initial goal was to reconnect the war-torn country to the international art scene and offer the people the opportunity to view works that had been deemed “degenerate” during the Nazi era.¹²⁹ The very first documenta was a retrospective show of important past movements such as Expressionism, Futurism and Cubism among others. The event's immediate success showcases the culturally deprived population of Germany, who were fascinated by the variety of styles depicted

¹²⁸ A. Lagler, 2007, pp. 58-60.

¹²⁹ S. Oelze, *Die Geschichte der bedeutendsten Ausstellung der Welt*, in: “Die Deutsche Welle” 9. June 2012, <https://www.dw.com/de/sieben-jahrzehnte-documenta/a-15971904>, [last access on 16. September 2023].

at the exhibition. Just as with the pavilion at the Biennale, Bode wanted to rehabilitate the country's art sphere and reintroduce Germany as a valuable part of the international scene.¹³⁰

Furthermore, an interesting connection can be made between the structure of the Fridericianum, in which the documenta is housed, and Bode's plans for the pavilion in Venice. Built in 1779, it is one Europe's oldest museum structures and today has become almost synonymous with the documenta.¹³¹ When Bode decided to use it for his plans, the building was greatly depreciated, as it was not the focus of any post-war reconstruction work at the time. Just like the Nazi building, the old museum in Kassel had a rounded central area, the half rotunda. Along its curved wall runs the staircase to the upper level and during the very first documenta, the area was also used as an exhibition space.¹³² Bode's design plans for the German Pavilion show a similar characteristic in the transformation of the apse. His desire to add a glass roof could also be inspired by the rotunda, which did not have a ceiling at the time of the first documenta, allowing the space to be illuminated by natural lighting. In the end, after multiple discussions, his idea for the Venice Biennale as well as the previous suggestions by other architects could not be implemented due to financial problems.¹³³

The period of retrospective exhibitions would last until 1964 when Eberhard Hanfstaengl retired from his position and Eduard Trier was chosen to take his place.¹³⁴ The new commissioner brought with him his experience from the documenta 1959 and 1964, which helped overhaul the existing exhibition format in the pavilion.¹³⁵

¹³⁰ S. Oelze, 2012.

¹³¹ D. Schwarze, *Fridericianum bleibt Kunsthalle*, in: "Kunstforum International", Vol. 136, 1997, p. 476, <https://www.kunstforum.de/artikel/fridericianum-bleibt-kunsthalle/>, [last access on 16. September 2023].

¹³² The description was provided by the documenta-Bauhaus project and the online documenta archive: <https://www.documenta-bauhaus.de/en/raeume/635/room-25>, [last access on 16. September 2023].

¹³³ L. Radine, 2021.

¹³⁴ Letter from E. Trier to the office of the Secretary General of the Biennale, 28. May 1963, Venezia, Archivio Storico delle Arti Contemporanee della Biennale di Venezia (ASAC), Fondo storico, b. 123.

¹³⁵ A. Lagler, *Museum. Historischer Ort. Medium der Inspiration. Die westdeutschen Beiträge zur Biennale 1964-1990 und die Rolle des Pavilions*, in: *Germania. Die deutschen Beiträge zur Biennale Venedig 1985-2007*, edited by K. Reich, Köln: DuMont-Literatur-und-Kunst-Verl., 2007, pp. 109-135, here p. 109.

In order to create more distance between the historical shows of the last decade and his modernized concept, his first measure was to repaint the yellow façade grey, claiming it to be more “Washington” than “Munich”¹³⁶. The biggest change, however, was made to the central room of the pavilion. Trier chose to present only two artists, a painter and a sculptor in order to focus more on quality than quantity.¹³⁷ To Trier, both artists represented the contemporary German art world and would help advance the country’s artistic identity abroad.¹³⁸ To perfectly present Norbert Kricke’s *Große Raumplastik*, Trier requested the light canopies on the ceiling to be taken down and the wall separating the first room and the central apse to be removed, in order to create



Ill. 15: Große Raumplastik, Norbert Kricke, fitting with in the German Pavilion, 1964, image taken from “ASAC Dati”, <https://asac.labiennale.org/attivita/arti-visive/annali?anno=1964>.

¹³⁶ *Hauptsache: Sehenswert! Gespräch über die Biennale von Venedig mit Eduard Trier*, in: “Artis”, Vol. 18, No. 6, 1966, p 14., cited from: A. Lagler, 2007, p. 109.

¹³⁷ E. Trier, *Germania*, in: *Catalogo della XXXII Esposizione Biennale Internazionale d’Arte Venezia*, Venezia: La Biennale di Venezia, 1964, pp. 218-223, here p. 218.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 218-223.

a spacious main hall (Ill. 15).¹³⁹ This should not only establish the much-needed space for the enormous structure, but also break the architecture and atmosphere of the sacral hall that within the Nazi exhibitions had been intended for their most prized statues of the Reich.¹⁴⁰ The strong symmetry of the building together with Kricke's abstract almost ceiling-high statue must have offered a quite peculiar sight to any visitors used to Hanfstaengl's retrospective work. The contrast between the old architecture and the modern figure was sure to have induced feelings of awe and pensiveness in its observers. The dynamic movement of the sculpture made it appear as if it was trying to break free of its rigid surroundings, turning the architecture into a "restrictive corset"¹⁴¹. Trier used the architecture of the pavilion to symbolise the past, presenting Kricke's work as an embodiment of the future that was trying to escape and move on from its burdening history. Once again, the pavilion becomes part of the exhibition. Without the structure providing such a dynamic contrast, the exhibition's meaning and interpretation would be changed completely.

Additionally, paintings and drawings by Joseph Faßbender, depicting abstract line patterns were hung on the walls around the sculpture. Meant to imitate and allude to elements of spatial imagination, they further emphasized the relationship between the space and exhibition.¹⁴²

It appears that after taking some years to distance oneself from the war, the reality of representing the art of the still-young German Republic in a structure built by a country they were trying to leave behind, was not the easiest task. The differences between the new national identity and the significance of the pavilion were starting to become more visible. After the brief intermission of historical exhibitions, the time had come to confront the problematic architecture of the pavilion. Seeing as there were no means to support its redesign, the only other solution seemed to be to address the pavilion's history through art.

¹³⁹ Letter from E. Trier to G. A. Dell'Acqua, 23. January 1964, Venezia, Archivio Storico delle Arti Contemporanee della Biennale di Venezia (ASAC), Fondo storico, b. 123.

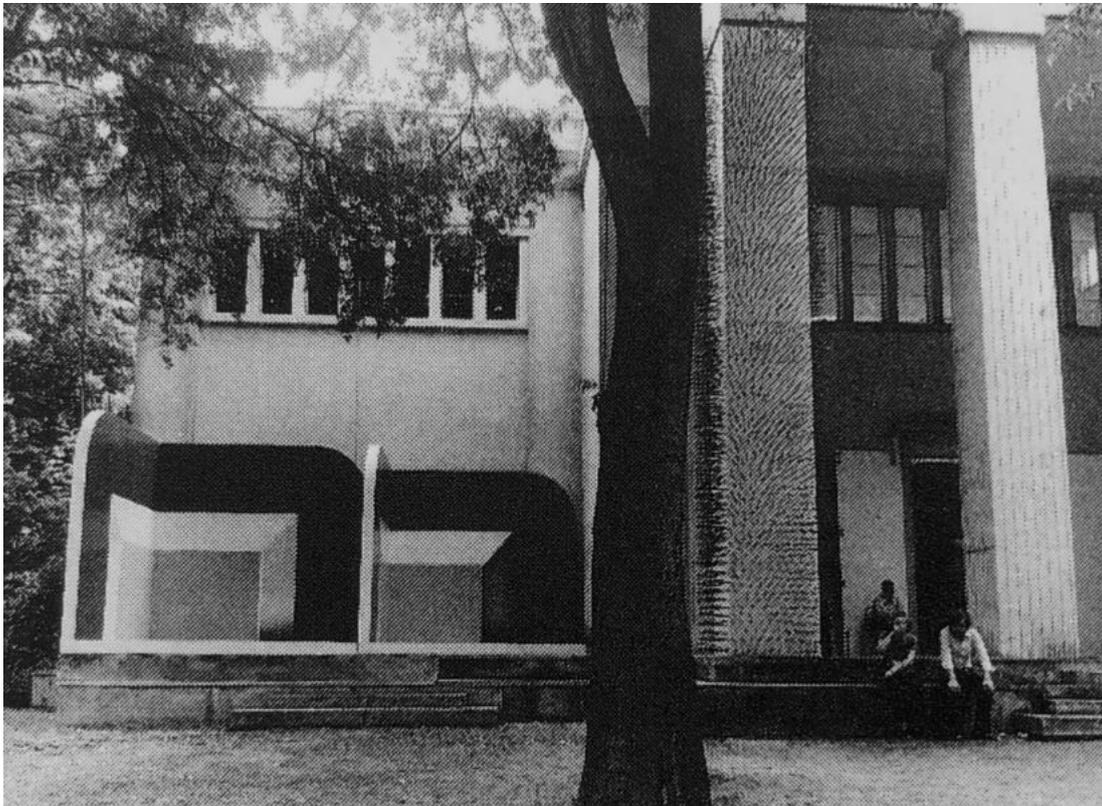
¹⁴⁰ A. Lagler, 2007, p. 111.

¹⁴¹ Ibid..

¹⁴² Ibid..

The Biennale of 1970 marked another important step in the exhibition history of the German Pavilion. The new commissioner Dieter Honisch invited the artists Thomas Lenk, Georg Karl Pfahler, Heinz Mack and Günther Uecker to participate in the *Arte e società* (Art and Society) themed installation. Together they exhibited works related to the topics of society, politics and utopia.¹⁴³

Most interesting for the analysis of the relationship between the pavilion's architecture and the exhibit is the work of Günther Uecker. For the 35. Biennale, the artist created a series of eleven nail artworks for the pavilion, as well as an installation for the outside, an area that had previously not been used in any exhibitions.¹⁴⁴



Ill. 16: Sculptures by Georg Karl Pfahler (left) and Günther Uecker's Nail Art (right), Germany Pavilion, 1970, image taken from "Institute for Foreign Cultural Relations (ifa)": <https://www.deutscher-pavillon.org/de/pavillon-1909-2019/>.

¹⁴³ A. Lagler, 2007, p. 111.

¹⁴⁴ D. Honisch, *Germania*, in: *Catalogo della 35 Esposizione Biennale Internazionale d'Arte Venezia*, Venezia: La Biennale di Venezia, 1970, pp. 36-43, here pp. 41-43.

For this space, he framed the left column of the building's entrance with wood which had been painted to have the same colour as the others. The artist then hammered hundreds of long nails into its surface, drastically changing the appearance of the outside of the pavilion (Ill. 16). By only using one of the four columns, Uecker broke the strict symmetry of the Nazi architecture and bestowed a feeling of aggression, violence and even peculiarity upon the building. In her contribution to "Germania. Die Deutschen Beiträge 1995-2007" Anette Lagler describes how this redecorating of the pillar symbolises the instability of the structure's foundations, as well as the fragility of the building that rests upon it.¹⁴⁵ Overall, the act was meant to taunt and ridicule the pavilion and the perceived power its conceivers believed it would bring them. Although no violent force was used on the actual structure, the aggression of the message seems clear.

Using nails in his works has been characteristic of Uecker since the 1960s, yet here the placement on the structure, instead of his usual use of canvas on wood or furniture, is a testament to the artist's feelings towards the pavilion.¹⁴⁶

A very different approach was taken in the following Biennale by Gerhard Richter. For the 1972 instalment of the event, Commissioner Honisch decided to only present one artist for the first time in the pavilion's history.¹⁴⁷ The centre of the exhibit was made up of a series of 48 black and white portraits which were placed along the walls of the centre room in a continuous row at a height of three meters (Ill. 17).¹⁴⁸ All photorealistic paintings depicted well-known individuals from the areas of science and humanities, in particular writers, scientists, composers and philosophers.¹⁴⁹ As inspiration for his artworks, he chose photographs from encyclopaedias and repainted

¹⁴⁵ A. Lagler, 2007, p.115.

¹⁴⁶ G. Adamson, *Günther Uecker Nails It Again*, in: "Frieze", 15. November 2019, <https://www.frieze.com/article/gunther-uecker-nails-it-again> [last accessed on 30. July 2023]; D. Honisch, 1970, pp. 41-43.

¹⁴⁷ Information taken from ASAC Dati: <https://asac.labiennale.org/attivita/arti-visive/annali?anno=1972>, [last accessed 15. September]; Website of the German Pavillon: <https://www.deutscher-pavillon.org/de/pavillon-1909-2019/>, [last accessed 15. September].

¹⁴⁸ A. Lagler, 2007, p. 117.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid..



Ill. 17: Gerhard Richter, 48 Portraits, German Pavilion, 1972, image taken from “Institute for Foreign Cultural Relations (ifa)”: <https://www.deutscher-pavillon.org/de/pavillon-1909-2019/>.

them in the same shades of grey. All were slightly blurry and had the same format.¹⁵⁰ By doing so, Richter tried to omit any possible reference to their historical relevance, making the depicted person harder to identify. The gaze of each of the 48 men was planned and executed with their location within the room in mind: the closer to the centre of the apse the more frontal their position was. In a very counter-intuitive way, Richter did not place the portraits in any chronological order, but rather displayed them according to formal differences and quality.¹⁵¹

At first glance, the exhibit might seem like nothing more than a celebration of great men. The artistic choice of painting after photographs also influences this assessment by giving the exhibit an air of prestige. The strict symmetry and equal distribution of their placement, together with the almost sacral atmosphere of the building would indeed give any visitor the feeling of viewing a holy monument meant to glorify the achievements of the past. However, if one considers the history of the pavilion, the

¹⁵⁰ O. W. Fischer, *In the Shadow of Monumentality*, in: “Log“, Fall 2010, No. 20, Curating Architecture (Fall 2010), pp. 117-123, here p. 118.

¹⁵¹ D. Honisch, *Zu den Arbeiten Gerhard Richters*, Venezia, Archivio Storico delle Arti Contemporanee della Biennale di Venezia (ASAC), Fondo storico, b. 185.

portraits start to tell a different tale. Although Richter chose the traditional genre of portraiture, he challenges and weakens the subjects' historic meaning by making them all appear similar and almost indistinguishable from one another.¹⁵² The grey colouring was chosen by Richter to represent the lack of an opinion, further devaluing their meaning.¹⁵³ Placing them in a building that is not only haunted by the wrongdoings of the past, but whose very architecture itself is a constant reminder of the regime that constructed it, turns the exhibit into a commentary of the hero-worshipping propaganda shows of the Nazi years.¹⁵⁴ Instead of a celebration of history, it becomes a critique of national representation in "a former Nazi temple"¹⁵⁵. Richter purposefully chose not to include any artists or politicians in the series, to make sure there would be no association with the exhibitions of the Third Reich which glorified and promoted their politicians.¹⁵⁶

Additionally, the fact that the compositions culminated with the portrait of Franz Kafka at the very centre of the apse was meant to reference the Jewish writer's novel *The Trial* as well as emphasize the topic of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*.¹⁵⁷ By placing him at the centre, the hall is transformed into a courtroom.¹⁵⁸ Instead of the visitor judging the art, the portraits seem to judge their observer. Amplified by the Nazi architecture, this symbolized the powerlessness towards a dictator regime. As Hanno Reutser's discussion of the 35. Biennale explains, Richter's "48 Portraits" was frequently misunderstood by contemporary visitors and was seen as an act of "artistic simplicity and political indifference"¹⁵⁹.

¹⁵² O. W. Fischer, 2010, pp. 120-121.

¹⁵³ P. Sager, *Gespräch mit Gerhard Richter*, in: "Das Kunstwerk", Vol. 25, Nr. 4, July 1972, pp. 16-27, here p. 27.

¹⁵⁴ D. Honisch, *Germania*, in: *36 Esposizione Biennale Internazionale d'Arte Venezia*, Venezia: La Biennale di Venezia, 1972, pp. 70-73.

¹⁵⁵ O. W. Fischer, 2010, p. 121.

¹⁵⁶ B. Buchloh, *Divided Memory and Post-Traditional Identity. Gerhard Richter's Work of Mourning*, in: "October", Vol. 75, Winter, 1996, pp. 60-82, here p. 73; D. Honisch, 1972, p. 72.

¹⁵⁷ O. W. Fischer, 2010, pp. 120-121.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*.

¹⁵⁹ H. Reutser, *36. Biennale in Venedig*, in: "Das Kunstwerk", Vol. 25, Nr. 4, July 1972, pp. 14-15, here p. 15.

Richter's contribution is a testament to his conflict with representing national identity in the national socialist architecture. Growing up during World War II, fleeing from East Germany months before the construction of the Berlin Wall and then building a life in the new Federal Republic, the artist had struggled with the idea of national identity and representation throughout his life.¹⁶⁰ The historically burdened pavilion offered a fitting environment to address such topics, giving his artworks a moral responsibility.¹⁶¹ It questions the legitimacy of presenting the art of a country which itself is still in the process of redefining and rebuilding its own identity, in a building constructed by the very regime it is trying to overcome.

A more direct approach was taken at the Biennale of 1980. The commissioner Klaus Gallwitz invited Georg Baselitz and Anselm Kiefer, who were both part of the *Neue Wilde* (New Wild Ones) to exhibit for Germany. In the middle of the main hall in front of the infamous apse, Baselitz's first sculpture *Model für eine Skulptur* (Model for a Sculpture) was placed (Ill. 18). Even with the incomplete finish of the wooden sculpture, its intended reference is obvious. The figure seems to be sitting on the stone floor of the pavilion, mouth slightly open as if ready to shout orders. The dark-painted hair and the slight shadow above its lips make the allusion to Hitler even more obvious. The right arm is raised above its head in a position reminiscent of the Nazi Salute. However, instead of a flat hand, the figure seems to be pointing right at the centre apse with its index finger. Considering the important role of this location within the structure of the Nazi architecture and their exhibitions, the gesture appears almost like a threat or maybe even more so, a warning.

In addition to the works of Baselitz, consisting of 18 oil paintings and his statue, Kiefer presented a number of paintings meant to confront the topic of national socialism in a more provocative style.¹⁶² Using history and mythology, as well as the symbolism of

¹⁶⁰ B. Buchloh, 1996, p. 70.

¹⁶¹ P. Sager, 1972, p. 27.

¹⁶² K. Gallwitz, *Germany*, in: *La Biennale di Venezia. Section of Visual Arts. General Catalogue 1980*, Milano: Electa Editrice, 1980, pp. 116-119.



Ill. 18: Modell für eine Skulptur; Georg Baselitz, German Pavilion, 1980, image taken from “Institute for Foreign Cultural Relations (ifa)”: <https://www.deutscher-pavillon.org/de/pavillon-1909-2019/>.

Nazi ideology, he created artworks that dealt with German history in an unapologetic way.¹⁶³

The press reviews at the time were more than shocked about the German exhibition. Instead of seeing a warning or a critique of the building, it was interpreted as a return to fascism. The exhibit was described as depicting “brutality, fear and violence”¹⁶⁴ not with the intent to criticise, but rather to celebrate. Other articles described the pavilion

¹⁶³ K. Gallwitz, *Helden der Geschichte*, in: *Anselm Kiefer. Verbrennen, Verholzen, Versenken, Versanden*, Stuttgart: Cantz], 1980, pp. 3-4.

¹⁶⁴ P. Kippstoff, *Die Lust an der Angst – der deutsche Holzweg*, in: “Die Zeit”, Nr. 24, 6. June 1980, <https://www.zeit.de/1980/24/die-lust-an-der-angst-der-deutsche-holzweg/komplettansicht> [last access on 02. August 2023].

“Aber auch bei Baselitz werden Angst, Brutalität, Verletzung zitiert, nicht um sie zu denunzieren, sondern um sie feiernd zu perpetuieren”.

(But Baselitz also cites fear, brutality, violence, not to denounce them, but to perpetuate them in celebration).

as depicting a return to Germany's past.¹⁶⁵ Overall, the reaction could not be described as positive or even understanding. Combined with the works of Kiefer, the exhibition was viewed as a rather troubling political positioning. The press however completely neglected to consider the history of the architecture and how the exhibit itself was connected to the building in their interpretations. The artworks themselves were seen as concerning, their placement within the historically burdened pavilion emphasised their worries.¹⁶⁶ Instead of seeing them as a warning or as a critique of the building, they were described as a celebration of Germany's past that was more than misplaced within the Nazi architecture. The press particularly criticised the image of the exhibition painted of Germany, a country still working hard on rebuilding its reputation.¹⁶⁷ Especially on such an international stage as the Biennale, it was seen as a thoughtless act that was harmful to the country's representation abroad, while the critique at home saw it as a complete misrepresentation of their national identity.

Compared to the contributions of Uecker and Richter, the 1980 exhibition offered yet another way of criticising the existence of the German Pavilion. Baselitz's approach appears more aggressive and direct, challenging not only the architecture but also its observers with his sculpture. Although he connects his artwork to one of the building's centre points, the apse, its violence seems to have overshadowed any other interpretation attempts. Too overwhelmed by the bold display, the connection to the historic structure was overlooked.

There are of course many examples of instances in which artists chose to confront the pavilion in an artistic way and use the architecture itself to give meaning to their artworks.¹⁶⁸ However, the contributions of 1970, 1972 and 1980 were some of the more compelling with respect to their individual interaction with the building. The

¹⁶⁵ B. Brock, *Avantgarde und Mythos. Möglichst taktvolle Kulturgesten vor Venedigheimkehrern*, in: "Kunstforum International", Bd. 40, 1980, <https://www.kunstforum.de/artikel/avantgarde-und-mythos/>, [last accessed on 02. August 2023].

¹⁶⁶ Ibid..

¹⁶⁷ H. Müller, *Biennale Venedig 1980*, in: "Das Kunstwerk", Vol. 33, Nr. 4, April 1980, p. 58- 69, here p. 58.

¹⁶⁸ Another interesting exhibit was presented at the 1988 Biennale, in which Felix Droese renamed the German Pavillion Haus der Waffenlosigkeit (House of Weaponlessness). A. Lagler, 2007, pp. 133-134.

three described exhibits offer an interesting overview due to their rather different approach to the same problem: representing Germany's national identity in a structure defined by the country's horrific past. While Baselitz chose a more disagreeable way to reflect on German history, Richter criticised the building and showed his own struggle with representing national identity. Using the building's unique atmosphere to create a space in which to reflect upon the very idea of glorifying a country's past while also addressing the important topic of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in a parody of the Bavarian Walhalla. Uecker was the first to depict an act of violence towards the pavilion. Although he did not harm the structure itself, the intention seems clear. By destroying the strict symmetry of the entrance with his work, he not only creates an obvious symbol of aggression but also destroys the core ideals of the Nazi construction.

The national exhibitions had come a long way since Germany's first post-war participation. While the country's contributions in the 1950s focused on reconnecting themselves to the European art sphere, the true meaning of doing so in the Nazi structure was only starting to appear. With more and more years between the war and the present, the topic became less taboo and appeals for a better process of dealing with the past were getting stronger. Just as in German society, the art world felt a growing urge to process and come to terms with the past, while at the same time struggling to represent the still-developing national identity on the international stage of the Biennale.

4. The *Leitmotiv* of Deformation in the German Pavilion

The sheer monumentality of the German Pavilion's architecture was often enough to influence many of the artists presenting in the building in the decades following the end of the Second World War. Although a number of them interacted with the pavilion directly by using its history to give meaning to their exhibits and in doing so questioning the structure itself, others used the overall atmosphere of the building to

induce certain emotions and reactions in its visitors.¹⁶⁹ It seems there is just something about the building that encourages the contributors to incorporate it into their creations in various ways and forms.

The burdened history of the Pavilion has caused many artists to struggle with their contributions to the Biennale. Its very architecture is a constant reminder of the Nazi regime and the tragedy of the country's past. Over the past decades, the invited artists have confronted the problem the pavilion presents in different ways. While not all chose to interact with the building, some special cases have integrated the structure and its history into their exhibit. Similar to Uecker in 1970, some chose artistic forms of violence towards the pavilion. However, unlike Uecker, who seemingly only depicted an act of aggression without truly harming the structure, some chose to infringe upon the integrity of the architecture itself. Others have confronted the pavilion by ignoring its existence and only using it as a shell to present their art, completely erasing its meaning. While these exhibits represent a minority of those presented in the German Pavilion at the Art Biennale, their regular reoccurrence turns the topic into an interesting phenomenon.

In order to gain a comprehensive overview of the struggle for national identity and its representation in the Pavilion, this chapter will analyse and discuss the six German contributions that demonstrated different forms of interaction or even interference with the structure and the appearance of the national building. By doing so, each exhibition will be studied and explained in detail while also examining the critical reception of their work at the time.

In the end, an in-depth overview of the six relevant German contributions will be acquired which will further help in gaining a comprehensive understanding of the struggle with national identity and the challenge the national pavilion presents.

¹⁶⁹ A. Lagler, 2007, pp. 122-123. The author explains, how multiple exhibitions used the appearance and sacral atmosphere of the pavilion to enhance their exhibitions. For instance, at the 1978 Biennale Dieter Krieg and Ulrich Rückriem used the monumentality of the building to create an almost meditative space that should encourage visitors to turn inwards and reflect on the relationship between nature and humankind.

4.1 Joseph Beuys - *Straßenbahnhaltestelle* – 1976

At the 37. Biennale, the German participation was commissioned by Klaus Gallwitz. For the event, which had been themed *Ambiente, partecipazione, strutture culturali* (“Environment, participation, cultural structures”) Gallwitz invited Jochen Gerz, Reiner Ruthenbeck and Joseph Beuys to exhibit for West Germany.¹⁷⁰ In their contribution, all three artists dealt with and questioned the idea of the exhibition space by including the architecture of it in their work.

Jochen Gerz presented his construction in the two rooms on the right side of the pavilion. Called *Die Schwierigkeit des Zentaurs beim vom Pferd Steigen* (The centaur’s difficulty when dismounting the horse), the main component of his work was an enormous wooden centaur that was spread out over both rooms. Due to its dimensions, it seemed to be bursting out of the building, allowing the observers to mainly view its underside.¹⁷¹ Additionally, he set up the final part of his series *Griechische Stücke* (Greek Pieces) which were meant to elude to the way culture, here in the form of Greek mythology, is consumed today.¹⁷² For this, the artist had placed a number of desks beneath the 9-meter-tall hollow horse. Upon them, he scattered a series of texts written in reverse that could only be deciphered with the help of mirrors. For Reiner Ruthenbeck’s installation *Doorway*, the artist used the two left rooms of the pavilion. A construction of multiple black rubber bands was stretched between the two rooms through the connecting doorway, from one wall to the other. By doing so, the artist symbolised the relationship between the two rooms and how the small doorway simultaneously connected the space but also separated the two rooms from each other.¹⁷³

¹⁷⁰ A. Lagler, 2007, p. 119.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., p. 121.

¹⁷² K. Nowald, *Die Schwierigkeit des Zentaurs beim vom Pferd Steigen*, in: *Beuys; Gerz; Ruthenbeck. Deutscher Pavillon, Biennale 76 Venedig*, ed. K. Gallwitz, Stuttgart: Cantz, 1976, p. 69.

¹⁷³ I. Nowald, *Doorway*, in: *Beuys; Gerz; Ruthenbeck. Deutscher Pavillon, Biennale 76 Venedig*, ed. K. Gallwitz, Stuttgart: Cantz, 1976, pp. 111-112.

Most relevant for this analysis, however, is the work of Joseph Beuys. His installation *Straßenbahnhaltestelle* (Tram Stop) was presented in the centre room of the pavilion and was made up of three separate parts: a sculpture, a borehole and railroad tracks.



Ill. 19: *Straßenbahnhaltestelle*, Joseph Beuys, German Pavilion, 1976, image taken from: *Joseph Beuys, Strassenbahnhaltestelle*, 1976; 1 of 3 original photographs from the portfolio “*Re-Object/ Mythos*”, photographed by K. Nowald.

Placed in the middle of the room, the sculpture (Ill. 19) consisted of multiple different parts all made almost entirely out of iron.¹⁷⁴ Its main feature was the barrel of a field cannon placed so that its snake-shaped opening faced the ceiling, surrounded by four unequally sized mortar bombs.

¹⁷⁴ C. Tisdall, *Straßenbahnhaltestelle*, in: *Beuys; Gerz; Ruthenbeck. Deutscher Pavillon, Biennale 76 Venedig*, ed. K. Gallwitz, Stuttgart: Cantz, 1976, pp. 25-28.

Both these elements were casts made from a monument in Kleve, Beuys' hometown, but had been changed in their size and surface constitution making them appear rougher than the original. Into the barrel of the cannon, Beuys placed the iron head of a man, which he had created a few years prior in 1961 with this project in mind (Ill. 20).¹⁷⁵ The man's facial expression seems to be distorted in pain and suffering, giving any observers the feeling that the rest of his body is tightly constrained within the thin barrel of the cannon.



Ill. 20: Head of the sculpture *Straßenbahnhaltestelle*, Joseph Beuys, 1976, image taken from “Mandarte”: <https://www.mandarte.nl/mzmk/532-joseph-beuys-strassenbahnhaltestelle>.

The original sculpture in Kleve had been set up in 1653 by Johann Moritz von Nassau, the earl of Nassau-Siegen, as a celebratory monument at the end of the Thirty Years' War.¹⁷⁶ It had been made out of old remnants of the war and instead of being adorned by a head, it had originally been crowned by a little figurine of cupid.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁵ C. Tisdall, 1976, p. 27.

¹⁷⁶ A. Lagler, 2007, p. 119.

¹⁷⁷ The figure of Cupid had been lost soon after the sculpture had been set up. Only old drawings remain of its complete appearance. See A. Lagler, 2007, p. 119, or <https://www.mandarte.nl/mzmk/532-joseph-beuys-strassenbahnhaltestelle>, [last accessed on 10. August 2023].

Right next to the vertical monument, Beuys embedded one half of train tracks within the floor of the pavilion (Ill. 21). As can be seen in the image, instead of running perfectly horizontally, both ends of the track curve slightly into the ground, giving the impression that they continue deep into the earth, connecting to form a circle underground. In contrast to the monument, which had a rather rough and weathered surface, the track was completely polished, giving the iron a shiny and new appearance.¹⁷⁸



Ill. 21: *Straßenbahnhaltestelle*, left: train tracks, centre: cannon sculpture, right: rubble and Beuys next to the drill hole; Joseph Beuys, German Pavilion, 1976, image taken from: “Der Spiegel”, No. 45, 1977, p. 265.

Immediately behind the sculpture, a hand-sized hole was drilled into the ground through the flooring and foundation of the pavilion, 25 meters deep, reaching the Venice lagoon below. Into it, Beuys lowered 24 metal rods all attached to one another. At the point where the metal enters the pavilion, it is first bent horizontally and then vertically, protruding into the room near the centre of the apse. Illustration 16 depicts

¹⁷⁸ C. Tisdall, 1976, pp. 25-26.

the thin iron rod right next to Beuys, who is standing just to the right of the small borehole. If one stood directly above it and looked inside, the water of the Lagune could be seen at the bottom.

Behind the canon-statue, the pile of rubble that had been dug out in the creation of the borehole was placed. Most of it had been part of the old Campanile of San Marco, which had collapsed in 1902 and had then been used to create the landscape of the Giardini by Napoleon.¹⁷⁹ At first sight, Beuys' installation must have offered a rather bewildering and unkempt scene. To fully understand its meaning and his message, one must uncover the story behind his creation.

Growing up in Kleve, the original version of the monument had been part of Beuys' everyday life. Positioned right next to a tram stop called *Der Eiserne Mann* (The Iron Man), the artist frequented the location on his way to school from a very early age.¹⁸⁰ As a child, he didn't know of the sculpture's past, but was fascinated by its undeniable history.¹⁸¹ He believed there to be a connection between it and the tram stop, even though they were undoubtedly from very different times, one shiny and new, the other old, rusted and weathered.

When Nassau erected the statue in the 17th century, it was meant as a symbol of peace at the end of the Thirty Years' War.¹⁸² The cupid on top represented the union of Mars and Venus, war and peace. He believed that such a union on a spiritual level could bring happiness to the world, so he put up the statue to signify these values and the coming of more peaceful times.

During Beuys' childhood, the monument had become slightly crooked and was half buried in dirt. To his young mind, the statue embodied something mystical, like a relic from a long-forgotten time.¹⁸³

¹⁷⁹ A. Lagler, 2007, p. 119.

¹⁸⁰ C. Tisdall, 1976, p. 26.

¹⁸¹ H. Bastian, *Die Straßenbahnhaltestelle von Joseph Beuys*, Berlin: Nationalgalerie, 1980, without page numbers.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*; A. Lagler, 2007, pp. 119-120.

¹⁸³ H. Bastian, 1980, without page numbers.

However, it is Beuys' own experience during World War II which gives his installation a more personal undertone and allows a deeper analysis of the meaning of national identity and representation in his exhibition. The artist's childhood was spent between two world wars. When he was fifteen years old, he joined the Hitler Youth and later became part of the German Airforce in 1941.¹⁸⁴ Trained as a radio operator, he later proclaimed to have been shot down above Crimea in 1944 and rescued by a nomadic tribe of Tartars.¹⁸⁵ This life-changing experience left its mark, and when he finally returned to Germany after the end of the war, he was faced with the task of dealing with his own past. Determined to atone for his choices, he set out to rehumanise the mangled and compromised artistic landscape.¹⁸⁶

As with many of his other artworks, the key to making any meaning of his exhibit in Venice lies in his life story. His creation *Schlitten* (Sled), for instance, was created in 1969 and dealt with the artist's recovery after his crash during the war.¹⁸⁷ To save him from freezing to death, his rescuers slathered him in a layer of fat and blankets. Beuys' *Schlitten* is made up of a classic wooden sled with a folded felt blanket, an old flashlight and a slab of animal fat placed upon it, all together revealing the artwork as an artistic representation of his experience.

With the knowledge of this aspect, the installation was given a more personal, as well as historic, characteristic. In the same way that something historic came together with something new at the tram stop in Kleve, so it should again be in the old pavilion.

Just like the 17th century sculpture, Beuys' installation was meant to symbolise peace and a better future.¹⁸⁸ However, considering Beuys' personal experience with the realities of the war in National Socialist Germany, the monument also offers a warning

¹⁸⁴ S. Reber, *Joseph Beuys. Revolutionär der Kunst*, in: "SWR Kultur", 26. May 2021, <https://www.swr.de/swr2/wissen/joseph-beuys-revolutionaer-der-kunst-swr2-wissen-2021-05-12-100.html>, [last accessed on 10. August 2023].

¹⁸⁵ S. D'Alessandro, *History by Degrees: The Place of the Past in Contemporary German Art*, in: "Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies", Vol. 28, No. 1, 2002, pp. 66-81, 110-111, here p. 69.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid..

¹⁸⁷ A. Rudnick, *Review. Joseph Beuys's Multiples for the Masses*, in: "Art in Print", Vol. 5, No. 2, 2015, pp. 34-35.

¹⁸⁸ H. Bastian, 1980, without page numbers.

or even an appeal to caution. Placed within the Nazi-built pavilion, it transforms into a reminder of the recent past and an invitation to work through history for every observer. Placing the head of a suffering man into the mouth of the cannon can be seen as another reference to this.¹⁸⁹ Together, the cannon and head seem to merge into one grotesquely thin and long body, further emphasizing the figure's suffering. Within the Nazi architecture, this invokes haunting memories of the still recent war and the horrifying acts of violence committed in the name of the country's inhuman ideology. Stuck in a never-ending scream, the head seems to embody the realisation of these horrors and the feeling of hopelessness.¹⁹⁰

The deep hole leading down to the lagune seems to be his attempt to restore the relationship between the German Pavilion with the original values of the Biennale and break the negative aura surrounding the building by reconnecting it with the soil and water of Venice.¹⁹¹

The pile of Campanile rubble next to the drill hole is meant to symbolize the laying bare of the foundations of not only the German Pavilion, but the whole Biennale.¹⁹² It should clarify that Beuys' monument for a better future is built upon the aftermath of history, positive and negative, that needs to be confronted in order to move on.¹⁹³

As seen in both illustration 14 and illustration 16, during the Biennale of 1976 the pavilion was in a rather dilapidated state. For his contribution, Beuys had chosen not to change anything about the condition of the pavilion itself. Having remained empty since the closing of the previous Biennale, the building showed a fair amount of weathering, with paint peeling off the walls and mould beginning to grow in some areas. When he first viewed the pavilion in 1975, he was fascinated by the atmosphere the time of neglect had created inside the monumental building.¹⁹⁴ Additionally, the

¹⁸⁹ A. Lagler, 2007, p. 119.

¹⁹⁰ H. Bastian, 1980, without page numbers.

¹⁹¹ O. W. Fischer, 2010, p. 119.

¹⁹² A. Lagler, 2007, p. 121.

¹⁹³ K. Gallwitz, *Journal*, in: *Beuys; Gerz; Ruthenbeck. Deutscher Pavillon, Biennale 76 Venedig*, ed. K. Gallwitz, Stuttgart: Cantz, 1976, pp. 3-20.

¹⁹⁴ H. Bastian, 1980, without page numbers.

artist decided to keep some of the remains of Gerhard Richter's exhibition of 1974, such as the nameplates of Franz Kafka and Albert Einstein. To him, the decay was a further symbol of the passing of time, the names a reminder of the fleetingness of the art exhibited in the pavilion¹⁹⁵.

Beuys' further attempted to undermine the architecture of the pavilion through his placement of the sculpture. When viewed from the outside of the building, its thin and long column stands in stark contrast to the four monumental pillars at the entrance. As one of the key aspects of the National Socialist design, their might seems to have been overthrown by the rusty cannon visible in between them.¹⁹⁶ Together with the trunnion in the centre of the cannon, the figure seems reminiscent of a cross. This Christian symbolism ties in with another main feature of the pavilion: the apse. This area of the architecture, which had been a prized position during the times of the Nazi exhibits, was left completely untouched in Beuys's installation.

To Beuys', the rebuilding of his childhood memory was the rebuilding of a part of history. Klaus Gallwitz describes how the artist worked hard, together with the Biennale helpers, to build his installation in the pavilion.¹⁹⁷ Particularly, the tearing up of the floor to place the tracks seemed to have cost many hours, causing a strain both physically and mentally. Yet Beuys called it "*Die harte Arbeit der Erinnerung*" (the hard work of remembering) and saw it as a necessary part of creating such a meaningful exhibition.¹⁹⁸

All three participating artists presented different ways of dealing with an exhibition space. Ruthenbeck, in a simple way, created an environment that uses the pavilions composition to reflect on the structure of the rooms themselves. Gerz used the space to fabricate a playful environment, involving the observers in his work. Beuys, however, was the only one who did not only integrate the building itself, but also its history.

¹⁹⁵ K. Gallwitz, 1976, pp. 3-4.

¹⁹⁶ A. Lagler, 2007, p. 120.

¹⁹⁷ K. Gallwitz, 1976, pp. 16-18.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid..

It was the pavilion's National Socialist past that gave a specific form of meaning to his installation and allowed it to be interpreted in the way it has been. His rather violent interference with the structure, by tearing up part of the floor to place the tracks and drilling a deep hole through its very foundations, was a novel act in the pavilion. While many artists have confronted the building's shameful origin and the regime the architecture represents, none before him have taken the step to harm and disfigure the building in any way. By actively destroying parts of the structure, as well as embracing the existing decay, the artists' true feelings towards the pavilion become perceptible.

Over the course of his life, Beuys seemed to struggle immensely with his Nazi past.¹⁹⁹ While he is still celebrated by many for his contributions to the art world, his history has not been forgotten and has caused many discussions in recent years.²⁰⁰ His willingness to let the decay of the structure continue, reflect his personal struggle, as well as his feelings towards the Nazi architecture. When it was constructed, the building was meant to represent the predestined greatness of Hitler's Germany, a monument built to last for eternity. To counter this claim, Beuys embraced the rotting walls and the peeling paint. He included the remnants of Richter's exhibition in his own and inflicted violence upon the architecture to prove that the pavilion was not what Hitler had dreamed it to be.²⁰¹ Just as the art exhibited inside, the Nazi architecture is temporary and not untouched by time.

Considering his personal struggles with his past, one could see how exhibiting his art inside such a structure would cause feelings of conflict. In this instance, the urge to inflict a form of violence upon the building itself seems like an act of proving himself to his audience and maybe even himself. The promise of peace erected by Nassau becomes his own promise, constructed within a previous Nazi temple. In that moment, he represented Germany's national identity by not denying its history, nor his own, but

¹⁹⁹ S. Reber, 2022.

²⁰⁰ U. Knöfel, *Debatte über Jahrhundertkünstler Joseph Beuys. "Ich hielt ihn für links, das war wohl das größte Missverständnis"*, in: "Spiegel Kultur", <https://www.spiegel.de/kultur/joseph-beuys-hoert-auf-mit-dem-scheinheiligen-getue-a-1017581c-8f67-4ff2-a00c-94e82d0db8d6>, [last accessed on 10. August 2023]

²⁰¹ O. W. Fischer, 2010, p. 119.

by acknowledging it. He creates a connection between his past and the present, as well as the pavilion's history and its current existence.

At the time of the Biennale, the German Press seemed to have mixed feelings about the national exhibition. In her review of the Biennale, Barbara Catoir commends the different ways the three artists found to interpret the event's topic.²⁰² However, the descriptive language the author uses to explain Beuys' installation is notably aggressive. The phrases “*eine in den Boden gerammte Straßen-bahnschiene*” (a tram track rammed into the ground) and “*kahlköpfig, hohläugig, den Mund vor Entsetzen halb geöffnet*” (bald, hollow-eyed, mouth half open in horror) are a testament to the emotions that were felt when first entering the pavilion and viewing the exhibit. While Anton Henze harshly criticises aspects of all three artists' contributions, he also praises their well-coordinated artworks, explaining how they not only go well together within the pavilion, but also appear quite fitting within the topic of the Biennale as a whole.²⁰³ Beuys' work he labels “grotesk”, but seemed to enjoy the biographical aspect and the understandable messaging it presented once the background story is revealed. Overall, he described the German contribution as worthy of the attention it received. Yet another contemporary journalist, Gottfried Sello from *Die Zeit*, remarks on the complexity of Beuys' autobiographical installation.²⁰⁴ He questions the need for additional information in order for the viewer to understand the artists' intentions and if it should not be inherently comprehensible. In contrast to the other reviews, he seems to examine the necessity of destroying parts of the building by drilling a hole into the Lagoon to properly convey the message.

All authors share their enthusiasm for the way the artists interpreted the Biennale's theme, as well as the way all three artworks fit together in the building. While most

²⁰² B. Catoir, *Biennale Venedig 1976*, in: “Das Kunstwerk”, Vol. 29, No. 5, 1976, pp. 23-47, here p. 23.

²⁰³ A. Henze, *Kunstkritisches Tagebuch XLIX*, in: “Das Kunstwerk”, Vol. 29, No. 5, 1976, pp. 48-50, here p. 48. The author especially criticises the American, Dutch and Japanese contributions.

²⁰⁴ G. Sello, *Das Mirakel von Venedig*, in: “Die Zeit”, No. 31, 23. July 1976, <https://www.zeit.de/1976/31/das-mirakel-von-venedig/komplettansicht> [last accessed on 10. August 2023].

deem Beuys' installation a worthy contribution, there was some trepidation about the extent to which he went to complete his project²⁰⁵.

Nevertheless, while all realized the connection between his work and his personal history, it is important to note, how none of the authors mentioned the importance of the German Pavilion itself. As the placement within the historic building plays a vital role in the interpretation of the project, the fact that is not mentioned in any of the summaries is notable. Just as with the previous exhibitions discussed in Chapter 2 that included the Nazi architecture as a part of their meaning-making, the actual history of the building is not considered in any of the reviews and explanations. It seems, that German history is still too recent to be talked about so openly in the press. Even within the exhibitions catalogue, there is no mention of the pavilion's burdened past, although it has proven to be a key factor in the analysis of Beuys' contribution to the 37. Biennale.



Ill. 22: Disassembled *Straßenbahnhaltestelle*, Joseph Beuys, Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo, image taken from "Kröller-Müller Museum": <https://krollermuller.nl/en/joseph-beuys-tram-stop>.

After the Biennale of 1976 came to a close, Beuys viewed his installation as finished. The work had quickly been bought by the Dutch Kröller-Müller-Museum.²⁰⁶ Although

²⁰⁵ G. Sello, 1976.

²⁰⁶ *Loch zur Lagune*, in: "Der Spiegel", No. 30, 1976, <https://www.spiegel.de/kultur/loch-zur-lagune-a-1059b8b8-0002-0001-0000-000041210906> [last accessed on 10. August 2023].

it was still exhibited, the artist required it to never again be presented in its assembled and upright form (Ill. 22).

4.2 Hans Haacke - *Germania* - 1993

The year 1989 marked a turbulent year in Germany's history. After almost 41 years under the influence of communism, the German Democratic Republic was beginning to crumble, and the Berlin Wall came down. On 3 October 1990, the five East German states re-joined the Federal Republic of Germany in a process known as *Die Wende* (The Turning Point). The impact the Reunification had on the country and its people was immeasurable. Its influence on society and culture could be felt throughout all aspects of life with many of its repercussions still being present today.

The Biennale of 1990 was to be the final German participation as a separated nation in the Pavilion. The German commissioner, Klaus Bußmann, invited the artists Bernd and Hilla Becher, as well as Reinhard Mucha, whose work *Das Deutschlandgerät* (The Germany Device) took on a new meaning under the current political situation. Mucha's exhibit depicted part of the device that was used to lift and rerail trains during the times of the German Empire. If not originally intended, the German Press found his presentation remarkably fitting given the circumstances.²⁰⁷ While the general excitement towards the unification was great, there was no denying that it would be associated with a great number of struggles and challenges.

While the two countries had been alienated from each other over the last decades, their artistic developments had also moved in separate ways, strongly influenced by the

²⁰⁷ J. Hohmeyer, *Unheimlich nach oben drücken*, in: "Der Spiegel", No. 21, 20. May 1990, <https://www.spiegel.de/kultur/unheimlich-nach-oben-druecken-a-a99b05b6-0002-0001-0000-000013500195>, [last accessed on 12. August 2023].

different regimes and post-war atmospheres.²⁰⁸ The first East German contribution was hosted at the Biennale in 1982.²⁰⁹ To avoid any confusion with the German Pavilion, in which West Germany was depicting the works of Hanne Darboven, Gotthard Graubner and Wolfgang Laib, the building received the new label “Bundesrepublik Deutschland” on the left and “Repubblica Federale di Germania” on the right side. Although the GDR had hoped to present their artists in the Central Pavilion, they were instead placed in the Venetian Pavilion on the other side of the *Giardini*. For their first participation, they presented works by Sighard Gille, Heidrun Hegewald, Uwe Pfeifer and Volker Stelzmann.²¹⁰ Until the 1970s, there had been no exhibition of the country’s art abroad, but with the successful presentation of GDR artists at the documenta 6 in 1972 an important step was made towards cultural reconnection.²¹¹ The Biennale of 1990 would see the last artistic contribution by the GDR and when the event closed its doors towards the end of the year, the two estranged countries had been unified once more.

The 45. Biennale was postponed from 1992 to 1993, so that the following edition would coincide with the event’s 100-year anniversary in 1995.²¹² It would be the first contribution of the newly connected Germany since the end of World War II. Much had changed since those times and this year's exhibit would reflect on the new German national identity.

Exactly 17 years after Joseph Beuys tore into the structure of the German Pavilion, the building should once again experience an exhibition that would choose to violate its controversial architecture. For the country’s participation in 1993, Bußmann chose to

²⁰⁸ C. Sachrendt, *Die Kunst als Botschafterin einer künstlichen Nation. Die DDR auf der Biennale von Venedig*, in: *Der Deutsche Pavillon. Ein Jahrhundert nationaler Repräsentation auf der Internationalen Kunstausstellung “La Biennale di Venezia” 1912-2012*, edited by J. May and S. Meine, Regensburg: Schnell + Steiner, 2015, pp. 117-126, here pp. 117-120.

²⁰⁹ M. Flügge, *Die Beiträge der DDR zur Biennale Venedig*, in: *Germania. Die deutschen Beiträge zur Biennale Venedig 1985-2007*, edited by K. Reich, Köln: DuMont-Literatur-und-Kunst-Verl., 2007, pp. 137-145, here p. 137.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 138.

²¹¹ C. Sachrendt, 2015, p. 121.

²¹² E. Di Martino, 2005, p. 78.

invite Hans Haacke and Nam June Paik.²¹³ Both artists confronted the topic of national identity and their place in the world in different ways.

Nam June Paik created an “electronic superhighway”, as well as a “data highway”, reaching from the inside of the pavilion to the outside area. With multiple video installations in the two side rooms, as well as noisy robot-constructions, the artist tried to convey the invasion of technology in culture and communication. The connecting cables throughout the pavilion represented the important role technology has in our global communication and how it helps in overcoming international boundaries in a way that had previously not been possible.

By giving his robots the face of historical figures such as Kathrin the Great, the Korean-born Paik wanted to draw attention to the way technology is not only bringing us into the future but has also made the past more accessible.²¹⁴

The centre hall of the pavilion was taken over by Hans Haacke. Next to the futuristic sculptures of Paik, any observer of the German Pavilion would have probably taken a step back on their way to entering the building. Above the entrance, in the exact place and on the same bracket where during the Nazi era the enormous Imperial Eagle and Swastica adorned the façade, the artist placed an enormous *Deutsche Mark* coin made from plastic (Ill. 23).²¹⁵ To obscure the view to the inside, Haacke put up a dark red wall right behind the entrance, the colour eerily reminiscent of the blood-red colour of the National Socialist insignia.

However, the most terrifying and likely concerning sight must have been the blown-up black-and-white photograph of Adolf Hitler placed on the wall, clearly visible even to those standing more than a few meters away from the pavilion. The picture was taken during Hitler’s visit to the Biennale of 1934, in which he toured the event together with Mussolini and later decided to remake the pavilion to conform to the

²¹³ A. Osswald and K. Reich, *Nach der Wende. Die Deutschen Beiträge 1993-2007*, in: *Germania. Die deutschen Beiträge zur Biennale Venedig 1985-2007*, edited by K. Reich, Köln: DuMont-Literatur-und-Kunst-Verl., 2007, pp. 147- 163, here p. 147.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 148-149.

²¹⁵ W. Grasskamp, *No-man’s Land*, in: *Hans Haacke. Bodenlos. Biennale Venedig, 1993, Deutscher Pavillon*, eds. K. Bußmann and F. Matzner, Stuttgart: Cantz, 1993, pp. 51-63, here p. 57.



Ill. 23: The German Pavilion at the Venice Biennale 1993, with a view of the exhibition of Hans Haacke, image taken from “Paula Cooper Gallery”: <https://www.paula-coopergallery.com/artists/hans-haacke#tab:thumbnails>.

Nazi ideals (Ill. 24). The bold black lettering “LA BIENNALE DI VENEZIA 1934” beneath, corresponded with the equally black frame, further reminding the viewer of the reference to the Nazi flag. There was no other way into the pavilion than to walk past Hitler's image. The red wall blocked the direct entrance, directly confronting the visitors with the pavilion's Nazi background.²¹⁶

Once one moved beyond the red screen and into the main hall of the pavilion, one was met with an image of destruction. The marble tile flooring of the pavilion had been torn open, creating a scene similar to that of a warzone. The broken stone was arranged in a way that made it appear almost like shattered shards of ice (Ill. 25). Visitors would walk over the ground and hear the stone crack beneath their feet, the sound echoing in

²¹⁶ A. Osswald and K. Reich, 2007, pp. 148-149.



Ill. 24: Entrance to the German Pavillion 1993, with a Deutsche Mark above the entrance and a photograph of Hitler visiting the Biennale, image taken from “Frieze”: <https://www.frieze.com/article/gregor-muir-hans-haackes-germania-pavilion-45th-venice-biennale>.

the monumental structure of the pavilion. Together with the surroundings of the monumental architecture, it must have created quite an eery and unnerving atmosphere.

Above the destruction, in the centre of the apse, Haacke placed the word “GERMANIA” in simple black letters, repeating the exact same font as above the pavilion’s entrance. In the way it is positioned, the word appears almost like a statement.

Haacke laid the ground, and with it, the history of the pavilion bare, exposing the realities of the past for all to see. The word Germania did not only stand for the Italian

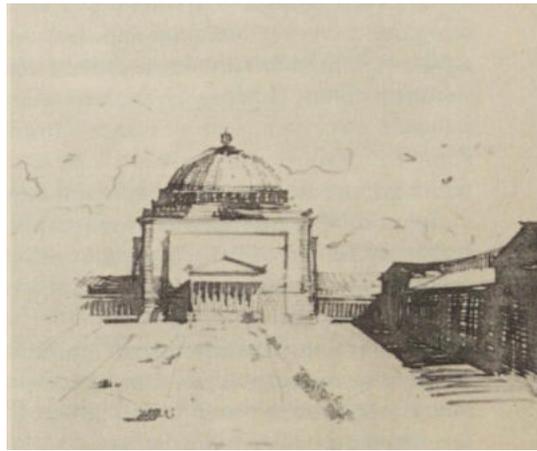


Ill. 25: Bodenlos, Hans Haacke, German Pavilion 1993, image taken from “Britta Kadolsky”: <https://brittakadolsky.com/der-deutsche-pavillon-in-venedig/>.

translation of “Germany”, but also referenced the plans Hitler had had for Berlin.²¹⁷ After the Nazi victory, he envisioned Berlin, then to be renamed Germania, as the capital of the conquered world, a *Welthauptstadt* (World Capital). The remaining plans for this transformation, show a city fully conformed to the National Socialist ideals of aesthetics.²¹⁸ Looking at the symmetrical architecture and monumental structures, it does not take any imagination to see how the German Pavilion was part of the realisation of Hitler’s dream. As a sketch by the *Führer*’s own hand proves, the design of his planned city would be structured around monumental neoclassical structures meant to outshine the works of the ancient Greeks (Ill. 26).

²¹⁷ F. Spotts, *Hitler and the power of aesthetics*, London: Pimlico, 2003, pp. 351-385.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*.



Ill. 26: Sketch of the Volkshalle, Adolf Hitler, 1925, image taken from: F. Spotts Hitler and the power of aesthetics, p. 358.

The writings' similarity to the one outside, draws attention to the fact that it is not only a simple translation, but a word that in the context of German history has a much more sombre connotation.²¹⁹

Haacke named his installation *Bodenlos* (Bottomless) referring on the one hand to the literal destruction of the ground, while on the other it could also suggest an alternative meaning of the word in the German language, used to describe an action that is without any equitable reason. In the context of the exhibition, this could refer to the unjustifiability and unnecessary of the country's past. For the visitors walking upon the battlefield of the pavilion, it might have seemed like it.²²⁰ A horrifying reminder of German history that could never be erased and should never be forgotten.

The placement of the lettering with the apse was another allusion towards the building's origin. With his contribution, he took the space conceived by Hitler and his architects in 1938 and demolished its very ground and meaning. Even the wall that was put up at the entrance appeared flimsy from the back, as it had been constructed in a hurry, further amplifying the atmosphere of a field of destruction (Ill. 27). So, while some visitors might have upon first glancing at Haacke's contribution felt

²¹⁹ F. Meschede, *Die Symbolik des Ortes. Ein Gespräch mit Hans Haacke*, Venedig 12. June 1992, in: "Neue Bildende Kunst", No. 4, 1993, pp. 22-24, here p. 22.

²²⁰ A. Osswald and K. Reich, 2007, pp. 148-149.



Ill. 27: Back of the entrance wall, Hans Haacke, German Pavilion, 1993, image taken from “Imaginary Empires and a Matter of Class”: <https://operacreep.wordpress.com/2012/06/16/imaginary-empires/>.

apprehensive of the exhibit hosted in the pavilion, once they passed the threatening picture of Hitler, the message would have become clearer.

Furthermore, the *Deutsche Mark* above the entrance was meant to symbolise the change from the ideological purpose of art towards an economical one.²²¹ Grasskamp points out in his essay, the absurdity of keeping the bracket that once held the *Reichsadler*, as if they were “at a loss as to what could possibly be hung in place of the Nazi Eagle”²²². The placement of the coin should allude to the connection between cultural representation and economic power.²²³ Additionally, with the unification of East and West Germany, the brightly illuminated coin dated to the year 1990 should represent this merger, as the former GDR adopted the West German currency among other economic aspects.²²⁴

A noticeable difference between the 1993 exhibit and all previous ones, is the openness with which the artist himself talks about the topic of Germany’s social nationalist past. Considering that there have been other contributions that dealt with the country’s

²²¹ W. Grasskamp, 1993, p. 57.

²²² Ibid., p. 53.

²²³ A. Osswald and K. Reich, 2007, p. 148.

²²⁴ F. Meschede, 1993, p. 22.

history and the pavilion, there has never been such a direct approach, nor this level of confrontation. While Beuys used the pavilion to give his installation meaning, that aspect was never mentioned in either the 1976 catalogue nor the relevant press articles. Until now, it seemed almost like a taboo subject, something no one yet dared talk about for fear of confronting the horrifying truth.

Haacke's work leaves no way of not talking about it. His contribution to the catalogue of 1993 starts with the story of Hitler and Mussolini's relationship, confronting the past head-on.²²⁵ He described Hitler's trip to Venice as if it were a vacation, using language that trivialises the event and its outcome. By referring to Hitler as a "tanned vacationer"²²⁶ and a "postcard painter"²²⁷, as well as describing Arno Breker's statues as performing an "impressive burlesque number"²²⁸, he downplays his visit to the Biennale, almost making it seem like a short story written for entertainment. His retelling takes a more morbid turn when he draws attention to the fact that Breker, in spite of his contribution to the Third Reich's artistic ideologies, was able to have a successful career after the conclusion of World War II.²²⁹

Haacke's essay further clarifies his unfavourable opinion on the connection between art and politics or art and economics, and the way he sees it reflected in the tradition of the Venice Biennale.²³⁰ He speaks of the event in an almost derogatory way, describing it as an occasion to make business connections, a place to see and be seen. His disdain for the Biennale and the pavilion seems undeniable.

Commissioner Bußmann himself notes that Haacke and his art are not suitable for the German Pavilion.²³¹ As an artist, he did not seem like the right choice to represent the

²²⁵ H. Haacke, *Gondola! Gondola!*, in: *Hans Haacke. Bodenlos. Biennale Venedig, 1993, Deutscher Pavillon*, eds. K. Bußmann and F. Matzner, Stuttgart: Cantz, 1993, pp. 27-36, here pp. 27-32.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 32. Haacke points out that only a week after the opening of the Biennale, an exhibit about the art collection of Irene and Peter Ludwig hosted in the Germanic National Museum opened their event with multiple portraits painted by Arno Breker.

²³⁰ H. Haacke, 1993, pp. 32-35.

²³¹ K. Bußmann, *Preface*, in: *Hans Haacke. Bodenlos. Biennale Venedig, 1993, Deutscher Pavillon*, eds. K. Bußmann and F. Matzner, Stuttgart: Cantz, 1993, p. 5.

country, especially not in the strict architecture of the pavilion. Born in Cologne, Haacke moved to the US to complete his studies, settling in New York in 1961 where he has remained since.²³² Over the course of his career, he has instigated and been involved in multiple projects of a more political nature, many of them pushing the boundaries with his direct and confrontational nature. His first international solo exhibition, which was to be held at the Guggenheim Museum in New York in 1971, was quickly cancelled after his plans were revealed. He had intended to exhibit two artworks which investigated the networks of real estate ownership in New York, together with visitor polls concerning problematic political topics such as the Vietnam War. His 1974 exhibition idea for a Manet painting in the Wallraf-Richartz-Museum in Cologne, was also abandoned after he proposed to hang it opposite a series of texts revealing the artwork's history of ownership. His plans would have exposed an existing connection between the painting's donor and the Nazi Party.²³³ Overall, his work has been described as an “institutional critique²³⁴”, more than being called Political Art. The same can be seen regarding his contribution to the Venice Biennale. No previous artist had violated the pavilion's architecture in such a way, nor had any of them attacked the building's admittedly already fragile integrity to such a degree. In an interview with Maria Eichhorn, Haacke admits to wanting to present the real state of the German nation, destroying the floor as a symbol of its current conditions.²³⁵ His life in New York gives him a more distanced stance on certain political topics, but it also raises the question whether the artist is a suitable choice to represent the nation at the Biennale. Haacke positions himself in a unique in-between spot.²³⁶ Growing up in Germany allowed him to experience the political and economic circumstances, as well as the country's development first-hand. Moving to the US as a young adult

²³² K. Hileman, *Romantic Realist: A Conversation with Hans Haacke*, in: “American Art”, Vol. 24, No. 2, 2010, pp. 74-93, here p. 75.

²³³ W. Grasskamp, 1993, p. 56.; K. Hileman, 2010, p. 75.

²³⁴ K. Hileman, 2010, p. 77.

²³⁵ M. Eichhorn, *Fragen an Hans Haacke zu seinem Beitrag GERMANIA im Deutsche Pavillon 1993*, in: *Relocating a Structure. German Pavilion 2022, 59th International Art Exhibition, La Biennale di Venezia*, ed. Yilmaz Dziewior, Köln: Walther König, 2022, pp. 19-118, here pp. 138-139.

²³⁶ K. Hileman, 2010, p. 88.

offered an exposure to different opinions and perspectives. His regular visits to Europe permitted him to stay in touch not only with the culture, but also with the mindset on current topics. A similar question could be asked about Nam June Paik, who while living and teaching in Germany for most of his life, was born and raised in South Korea. For the 1993 Biennale, Bußmann invited two artists who were both not fully connected to Germany in the way their predecessors had been. As it turns out, this choice would work in their favour and create an exhibit in the pavilion that would reflect positively on the Federal Republic.

The political and social atmosphere in particular in the newly united Germany of 1993 was tense. The decades-long divide within the country, as a long-lasting aftermath of the war, was finally coming to an end, surely generating the feeling of moving a step further away from the past. Yet, it was also a time in which the way Germany represented itself was more important than ever. Many countries had felt uneasy about the impending Reunification, fearing that such a move could lead to destabilisation within Europe and an economically overpowered Germany.²³⁷ The dissolution of the Soviet Union and the Kurdish-Turkish-Conflict led to uncertainty across all Europe starting in the 1990s. Germany experienced a wave of immigrants from both areas, which was met with distress and unhappiness across the nation. As a result, the cases of right-wing violence intensified, culminating in the worst attack since the end of the war. On May 29 1993 five Turkish immigrants were murdered when a group of young men set fire to their house.²³⁸ It was quickly revealed that their actions had been racially motivated, turning the case into an international news story. Many turned an anxious eye towards the new Germany, fearing a return to the ways of their past.²³⁹

In these uncertain and troubled times, Haacke's and Paik's contribution was met with enthusiasm. Suddenly, the Korean-born artist and the New York resident seemed the

²³⁷ *In Angst vor der Einheit*, in: "Der Spiegel", No. 51, 1989, <https://www.spiegel.de/politik/in-angst-vor-der-einheit-a-e4ca8615-0002-0001-0000-000013497885>, [last accessed on 14. August 2023].

²³⁸ kurz & knapp, 29. Mai 1993: *Brandanschlag in Solingen*, in: "Bundeszentrale für Politische Bildung", <https://www.bpb.de/kurz-knapp/hintergrund-aktuell/161980/29-mai-1993-brandanschlag-in-solingen/>, [last accessed on 14. August 2023]

²³⁹ F. Medsche, *Schlachtfelder. Der Deutsche Pavilion 1993*, in: "Neue Bildende Kunst", No. 4, 1993, pp. 20-21, here p. 20.

perfect choice for the national representation of the country. On behalf of the German government, they presented a pavilion that promised that the horrors of the past were not forgotten. It was a “lucky” coincidence, seeing as the social unrest occurred at a time when Haacke had already torn apart the building's ground, but the exhibition's message was clear, especially to the non-German visitors of the pavilion.²⁴⁰

In an interview with Friedrich Meschde, Haacke admits his reluctance in accepting Bußmann's invitation to participate in 1993.²⁴¹ Presenting his work in a building that had the word GERMANIA written on its entrance, while also knowing its meaning and its history would represent a challenge. The artist himself did not identify with the architecture and the message he feared it would send if he were to exhibit his art within. Indeed, the very act of national representation at any kind of event, seemed incomprehensible to him. The Biennale, an event focused on the idea of national representation and celebration, seemed designed to do nothing but present the ideals of a country, especially the German Pavilion.²⁴² As such, Haacke's solution was to attack the pavilion itself, creating the same battlefield he was witnessing in the reunified Germany, as well as within himself. By embracing the building's past instead of ignoring it, he used it to communicate the German reality to the world. By destroying the very base of the hated pavilion, he also aimed to demonstrate that one could “no longer trust the democratic ground beneath your feet”²⁴³. He took on the task of representing the nation, however interpreted the assignment in a different way. The placement of the *Deutsche Mark* in the same place as the Imperial Eagle was his way of highlighting the fact that art can never be free of ideologies. Just like the Nazi emblem, the coin is a way of identifying the pavilion for what it is.²⁴⁴

To further emphasise how radical Haacke's intervention in the Pavilion's architecture was, it is interesting to note that neither he, nor Commissioner Bußmann, had asked

²⁴⁰ F. Medsche, 1993, p. 20.

²⁴¹ Ibid., p. 22.

²⁴² M. Jordan and J. J. Haladyn, *Disrupting Utopia: Hans Haacke's Germania or Digging Up the History of the Venice Biennale*, in: *Charged Circuits: Questioning International Exhibition Practices* [Symposium], 2008, pp. 1-5, here p. 2.

²⁴³ F. Medsche, 1993, p. 23.

²⁴⁴ Ibid..

for any permission from the German Federal Foreign Office, who officially owned the property, to destroy the structure.²⁴⁵ This led to multiple unexpected costs and created the problem of what to do with the now-ruined floor after the end of the exhibit.

It was later decided to fully renovate the German Pavilion, in order to get it back into shape and represent the country at the Biennale's 100-year anniversary.²⁴⁶ It was here that the building was repainted yellow once again.

As previously mentioned, the German Press felt rather strongly about Haacke's and Paik's presentation at the Biennale. In an article published in *Die Zeit*, the author Petra Kipphoff, described Haacke's *Bodenlos* as an "artistic act of cold, brutal enlightenment for which there is nothing comparable either in Haack's work or at the Biennial"²⁴⁷. His catalogue essay is labelled a "good, bad essay"²⁴⁸, referring to the honest and direct way in which Haacke retells the story of Hitler's visit to the pavilion and the conception of the current structure. Werner Spieß composed a summary for the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* in which he proclaims Haacke's work a masterpiece created through destruction and brutality.²⁴⁹ Yet another article in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* praised the exhibit as a "spectacular way of coping with history"²⁵⁰.

The opinions were not fully positive, however. Peter Iden remarks that while Haacke's work is one of the best at the Biennale, his "monstrous installation"²⁵¹ would convey nothing but a gloomy and hatred-soaked vision of Germany, especially to all its international viewers. Lastly, almost a year after the opening of the Biennale, Florian

²⁴⁵ Letter from the Federal Foreign Office to Klaus Bußmann, 5 October 1993, Berlin, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts, B95 ZA 201406 (602-630).

²⁴⁶ M. Eichhorn, 2022, here p. 138.

²⁴⁷ P. Kippendorf, *Bodenlos in den Gärten der Kunst*, in: "Die Zeit", No. 25, 1993, https://www.zeit.de/1993/25/bodenlos-in-den-gaerten-der-kunst?utm_referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2F, [last accessed on 14. August 2023]

²⁴⁸ Ibid..

²⁴⁹ W. Spies, *Kopfbewegungen. Bodenlose Biennale*, in: "Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung", No. 133, 12. June 1993, p. 25.

²⁵⁰ L. Glozer, *Schauprozesse in den Giardini*, in: "Süddeutsche Zeitung", 17. June 1993, p. 13.

²⁵¹ P. Iden, *Der Einfall der Nomaden*, in: "Frankfurter Rundschau", 12. June 1993, p. 8.

Matzner took another look at the German exhibition.²⁵² He commends how Haacke handled the enormous task of creating and representing a vision of Germany in the light of what the world was being shown at the time.²⁵³ In the before mentioned interview with Maria Eichhorn, Haacke explains how the German ambassador refused to speak to him during an official dinner, unhappy with the way the artist represented the country.²⁵⁴ The reception abroad however, as he describes in the discussion, was mainly positive, with the artist receiving many compliments from other participating artists during the time of the Biennale.

Years later, the impression of the exhibition of the 45. Biennale has not changed. Haacke's work is regarded as an intelligent, multidimensional contribution that perfectly embodies the spirit of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*.²⁵⁵ It has become clear that the exhibition conceived by Paik and especially Haacke will not be forgotten soon. The international jury seemed to believe the same and awarded the German pavilion with the Golden Lion for the best national contribution at the 45. Biennale.²⁵⁶

The turbulent and uncertain times of the Reunification might have seemed like the perfect time to rethink the design of the German Pavilion. However, no such endeavours were made to get rid of the Nazi architecture.²⁵⁷ Instead, Haacke created an exhibit that made the pavilion's past undeniable. The direct and unavoidable confrontation with the realities of Germany's past seemed like the perfect response to the social difficulties and unrest the country was facing. While Haacke might initially not have seemed to be a good fit for the first real Biennale of the reunited nation, his and Paik's work was a worthy contribution for the struggling country. As Klaus

²⁵² F. Matzner, *Hans Haacke. Ein Künstler im Öffentlichen Dienst*, in: "Kritische Berichte", Bd. 22, No. 3, 1994, pp. 22-29.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

²⁵⁴ M. Eichhorn, 2022, p. 139.

²⁵⁵ T. Kliemann, *Hans Haackes Beitrag für die Biennale stimmt nachdenklich, Germania im Trümmer-Meer*, in: "General-Anzeiger Bonn", 31. December 1999, https://ga.de/feuilleton-hanns-haackes-beitrag-fuer-die-biennale-stimmt-nachdenklich_aid-40565205, [last accessed on 14. August 2023].

²⁵⁶ A. Osswald and K. Reich, 2007, p. 147.

²⁵⁷ W. Grasskamp, 1993, p. 56.

Bußmann explains in his introduction to the 1993 catalogue, no one would have been suited to represent Germany in its current situation.²⁵⁸

Haacke's conflict with national identity and exhibiting in the historically burdened pavilion turned out to be exactly what the world wanted to see. The 1993 participation offered a view into the German struggle of overcoming while at the same time never forgetting or erasing the past. It allowed the international audience to observe the country's efforts in dealing with the complicated and sensitive topic of their history, as well as the problems the Nazi architecture caused in trying to represent their national identity.

4.3 Gregor Schneider - *Totes Haus u r* - 2001

The Biennale of 2001 offered a very different spectacle in the German Pavilion. For the events 49th occurrence, Commissioner Udo Kittelmann invited a single artist to exhibit in the Pavilion. For the first Biennale of the new millennia, Gregor Schneider created a highly controversial show, transforming the building into the house of his youth. It was made up of multiple different rooms, spread out over two floors, all transported to Venice from the borough of Rheydt in the German city of Mönchengladbach, the artist's hometown.²⁵⁹

His exhibition was called *totes Haus u r* (Dead House u r). The "u r" stood for the first and last letter of the original house's street name "Unterheydner Straße".²⁶⁰ However, the letters could also be derived from the words *Umgebauter Raum* (Converted Room)

²⁵⁸ K. Bußmann, 1993, p. 5.

²⁵⁹ Letter from U. Kittelmann to D. Ventimiglia, 28. February 2001, Venezia, Archivio Storico delle Arti Contemporanee della Biennale di Venezia (ASAC), Fondo storico, b. 747; A. Osswald and K. Reich, 2007, pp. 156-157.

²⁶⁰ A. Osswald and K. Reich, 2007, pp. 156-157.

or the German meaning of the word *ur* (origin).²⁶¹ The original house in Rheydt, the artist simply named *Haus u r*, adding the *totes* (dead) to signify that his work had left its original environment and had been cut off from its artistic source.²⁶²

For the Biennale, a total of 24 rooms were shipped in 100 packages shipped to Venice from Rheydt. Overall, the whole exhibit weighed over 150 tons.²⁶³ Once it arrived, the complete construct from the Unterheydner Straße was rebuilt inside the German Pavilion, supported by steel scaffolding to hold the rooms massive weight.²⁶⁴

The inside of Schneider's house, however, was not a normal one. While some rooms were labelled in ways every visitor would understand, others had names that did not identify them as an area anyone would have in their home. Places such as *Flur* ("Hallway"), *Windfang* (Porch), *Schlafzimmer* (Bedroom), *Küche* (Kitchen), *Abstellkammer* (Storage Cupboard), *Atelier* (Studio), *Kaffeezimmer* (Coffee room) and *Klo* (Toilet) were rooms that most people would recognize from their own houses.²⁶⁵

If one headed deeper into the house, however, one would find some more unusual and even disturbing installations. *Das letzte Loch* (The Last Hole), *Das kleinste Wichsen* (The Smallest Wank), *Der Puff* (The Knocking Shop), *Das große Wichsen* (The Largest Wank), *Das Ende* (The End), *Im Kern* (At the Core) and *Liebeslaube* (Love-Nest), were all rooms that must have seemed more than strange to any visitors expecting to see a perfect replica of a post-war German home.²⁶⁶

On top of the unusual constellation, Schneider further confused the viewer by adding elements such as fake doors and windows, windows that led to other windows, rooms without windows and narrow crawl-throughs instead of proper doors. Some parts even

²⁶¹ W. Davidts, *Home Improvement and Studio Stupor. On Gregor Schneider's (Dead) House ur*, in: *Hiding Making. Showing Creation. The Studio from Turner to Tacita Dean*, eds. R. Esner, S. Kisters, A. Lehmann, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013, pp. 209-225, here p. 213.

²⁶² A. Osswald and K. Reich, 2007, pp. 156-157.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*.

²⁶⁴ Letter from U. Kittelmann to D. Ventimiglia, 22. January 2001, Venezia, Archivio Storico delle Arti Contemporanee della Biennale di Venezia (ASAC), Fondo storico, b. 3, folder 3.

²⁶⁵ U. Kittelmann, *Haus ur, Rheydt versus Totes Haus ur, Venedig*, in: *Gregor Schneider. Totes Haus ur. La Biennale di Venezia 2001*, ed. U. Kittelmann, Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz 2001, pp. 11-30, here p. 23.

²⁶⁶ U. Kittelmann, 2001, p. 23.

have lamps to simulate the feeling of daylight or hidden ventilators to give the allusion of a small breeze passing through the building.

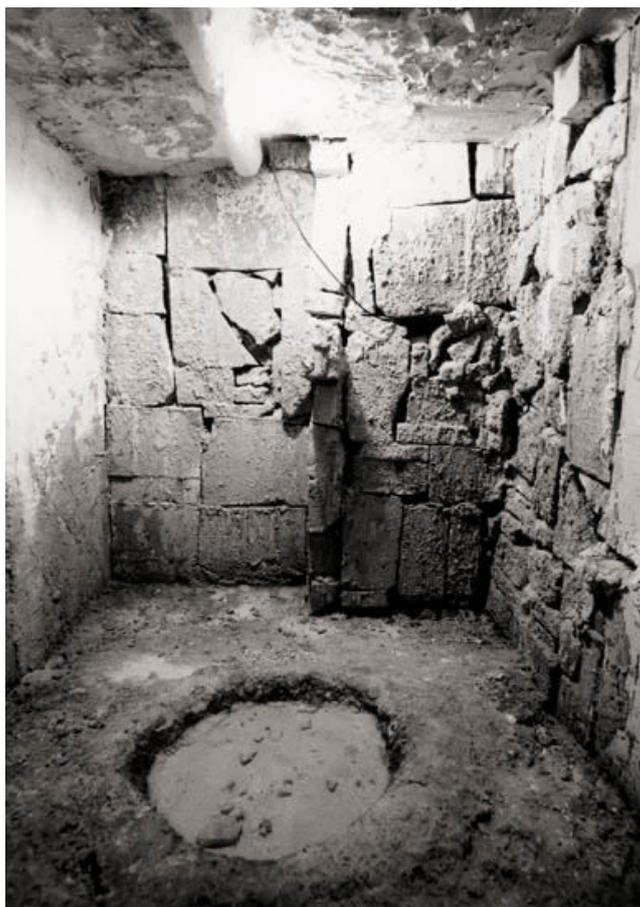
Even for the more “normal” rooms, the artist tried to give them unusual attributes or added small details which make the room feel slightly out of place, giving the observer an uncomfortable feeling.²⁶⁷ Additionally, the rooms were rather sparsely decorated, with only a small number of objects identifying them for what they were, such as the simple mattress with sparse bedding in the *Schlafzimmer* (Bedroom) (Ill. 28).



Ill. 28: *Schlafzimmer* (Bedroom), detached, ca. 30-50cm distance from the outer room, Totes Haus ur, Gregor Schneider, German Pavilion, 2001, © Gregor Schneider / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn.

If one dared to explore deeper into the construction, one would stumble upon some of the more unusual rooms. *Das letzte Loch* (The Last Hole), for instance, was nothing but a small, cramped space that looked like the ruin of a long-forgotten building sight (Ill. 29). Abandoned, dirt-covered, damp walls, as well as a muddy hole, were sure to have brought up feelings of disgust and deep-seated unease in any viewers.

²⁶⁷ A. Osswald and K. Reich, 2007, pp. 156-157.



Ill. 29: Das letzte Loch (The Last Hole), room within a room, Totes Haus u r, Gregor Schneider, German Pavilion, 2001, © Gregor Schneider / VG Bild-Kunst Bonn.

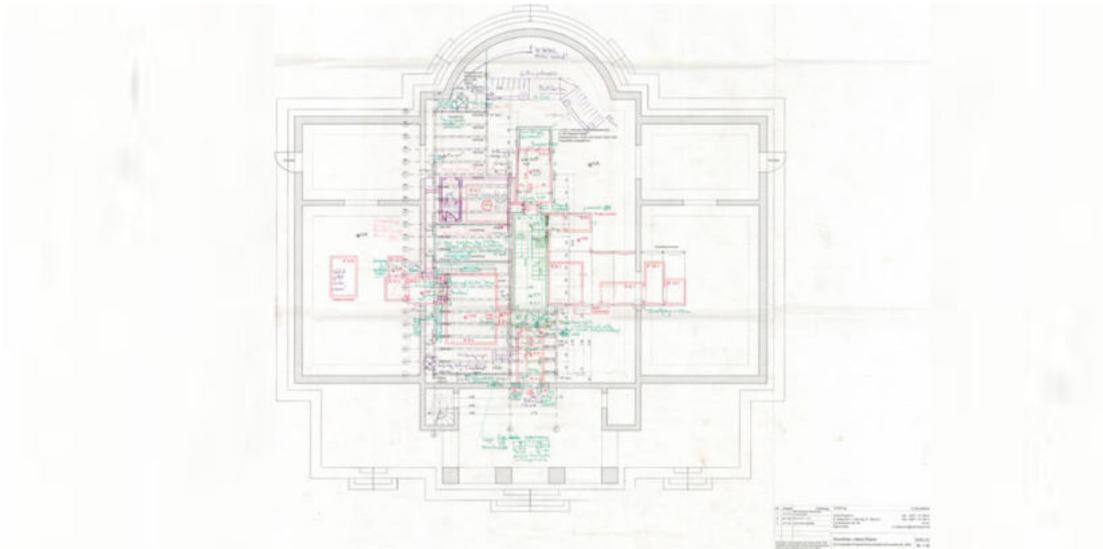
Some rooms are decorated with old furniture, instruments and artworks, others hold nothing but trash or are left almost completely bare. Only a few objects, such as family pictures, give the construction an almost disconcerting personal touch.²⁶⁸ To further disorientate its visitors, some rooms had mechanisms that allowed them to have moving ceilings, sporadically changing their height, others were built upon wheels, constantly rotating around their own axis.²⁶⁹

Overall, the artist created a small but complicated labyrinth within the German Pavilion. Altogether, it must have been a logistical challenge to transport and

²⁶⁸ E. Bronfen, *Kryptopien. Gehime Stätten / Übertragbare Spuren*, in: *Gregor Schneider. Totes Haus ur. La Biennale di Venezia 2001*, ed. U. Kittelmann, Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz 2001, pp. 33-59, here p. 43.

²⁶⁹ P. Auslander, *Behind the Scenes. Gregor Schneider's "Totes Haus ur"*, in: *"A Journal of Performance and Art"*, Vol. 25, No. 3, 2003, pp. 86-90, here p. 87.

reconstruct (Ill. 30).²⁷⁰ The floorplan of the exhibition shows the intricate and complicated planning process that went into the project's realisation. With different colours depicting all the rooms on the first floor, the image clearly illustrates the way the simple German house was rebuilt into the structure of the pavilion, fitting almost into the entire space of the main hall.



Ill. 30: Floorplan of the exhibition (first floor), *Totes Haus u r*, 2001, German Pavilion, © Gregor Schneider / VG Bildkunst, 2021

Gregor Schneider started working on his *Haus u r* as a teenager in 1985.²⁷¹ The house in the Unterheydner Straße 12 belonged to his family and had been abandoned for years due to its proximity to an industrial plant.²⁷² The three-storey building was the picture-perfect example of the architecture of middle-class post-war West Germany and from the outside, looked like every other structure of its kind, plain and unsuspecting (Ill. 31).²⁷³ No one walking by would be inclined to think that there was anything unusual going on inside its walls.

²⁷⁰ Letter from U. Kittelmann to D. Ventimiglia, 28. February 2001, Venezia, Archivio Storico delle Arti Contemporanee della Biennale di Venezia (ASAC), Fondo storico, b. 747.

²⁷¹ A. Osswald and K. Reich, 2007, p. 156.

²⁷² H. Jocks, *Von der Zeit, da das Immobile Haus Mobil wurde*, in: "Kunstforum International", Vol. 186, 2007, pp. 246-279.

²⁷³ J. Zaaiman, *Gregor Schneider. Haus u.r./Totes Haus u.r. (1985-today)*, in: "Medium", 30. June 2021, <https://medium.com/counterarts/gregor-schneider-haus-u-r-totes-haus-u-r-1985-today-22755f918fb5>, [last accessed on 10. August 2023].



Ill. 31: Exterior of the Haus u r, Unterheydner Straße 13, Rheydt, Mönchengladbach, image taken from: “Medium”, <https://medium.com/counterarts/gregor-schneider-haus-u-r-totes-u-r-1985-today-22755f918fb5>.

It offered the perfect site for the young Schneider to create his vision. After moving into the house to get some distance from his parents, he started working in one room and then slowly made his way through the entire house.²⁷⁴ Reconstructing the entire interior, splitting rooms into smaller ones and building rooms within rooms so he could add fake windows and doors which would lead to nowhere. He joined some spaces through narrow corridors, a few of which could only be accessed by crawling. Using a plethora of different substances including lead, glass wool and sound-proofing material to drastically reduce any noise from the outside, he created a maze within the abandoned house. It was soon shown to curious neighbours and acquaintances who left the house feeling equally amazed and disturbed.²⁷⁵

²⁷⁴ H. Jocks, 2007, pp. 246-279.

²⁷⁵ U. Kittelmann, 2001, pp. 12-13.

In Daniel Birnbaum's contribution to the 2001 catalogue, he describes the unusual feeling of apprehension, curiosity, and unease, as well as a sense of almost childish excitement that he felt at the prospect of exploring the construction.²⁷⁶ In his youth, the thought of discovering hidden tunnels and secret rooms had fascinated him, but Schneider's house offered a level of intensity that he hadn't been prepared for. The artist quiet comment expressing how he would like to trap people inside from time to time did not help his growing anxiety towards the building.²⁷⁷

Schneider's project is never-ending. As soon as a room is finished, he moves on to remake the next, constantly changing and evolving his own work, reusing every single material and transforming it into something new.²⁷⁸ Even the artist himself could at some point not identify his work from the original interior structure, nor could he remember the exact sequence of his process.²⁷⁹

His motivation is not the aesthetic appearance of the rooms but rather, their perception and the diverse range of emotions his creation evokes in his visitors.²⁸⁰ Although at first glance all appears normal, one can immediately sense that something is wrong. The focus of his house-sculpture is the effect it has on its viewer. It should be approached from an emotional standpoint instead of from a rational one.²⁸¹ Furthermore, his creation cannot be understood by merely looking at everything meticulously, but rather by analysing the emotions and figuring out what precisely causes them.²⁸² He believes that everything within a room has an effect, even the things one can't see. It is his goal to create a space that evokes certain feelings without the visitors even knowing why.

²⁷⁶ D. Birnbaum, *Vor und nach der Architektur. Unterheydner Straße 12, Rheydt*, in: *Gregor Schneider. Totes Haus ur. La Biennale di Venezia 2001*, ed. U. Kittelmann, Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz 2001, pp. 62-87, here p. 69.

²⁷⁷ Birnbaum, 2001, p. 69.

²⁷⁸ U. Kittelmann, 2001, pp. 12, 21.

²⁷⁹ E. Bronfen, 2001, p. 43.

²⁸⁰ U. Kittelmann, 2001, pp. 23-24.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

²⁸² *Ibid.*.

Overall, Schneider created a house of self-understanding and discovery, in which his visitors could explore their reactions and emotions. The interior is the embodiment of the artist's own inner reflection or, as Kittelmann puts it “Gregor Schneider is building is his soul a house”²⁸³. Auslander describes the artist’s creation as “an architectural representation of a psyche so turned in on itself that the journey into it leads to dead ends, hazards and conundrums [...]”²⁸⁴. He compares it to the Stanislavskian style of acting, in which the audience does not know the story actors have built themselves to fully embody their character. It is about what is not shown to the audience but is known by the actor.²⁸⁵ In the same way, the contents of the house are known only by Schneider as he creates a performative environment that relies not on its aesthetic, but on its subtle messaging in order to leave its impact on any visitors.

Throughout the years of building and rebuilding the inside of *Haus u r*, the artist left the façade of the house completely untouched (Ill. 31). In the same way, the outside of the German Pavilion has remained unchanged for his exhibition. At the end of the three-month construction period, there was nothing to show for the hard work that went into completing the *Totes Haus u r*, at least from the outside. The only change was made to the entrance to the pavilion. To finalize his work, Schneider replaced the building's wooden double doors with the typical middle-class door of a post-war row house (Ill. 32).²⁸⁶ When one entered the building this time, instead of being met with the light-flooded halls of the pavilion, people stepped into a small corridor with a narrow staircase, appearing to everyone as if it had always been there. The illusion seemed to immediately transport the visitors to the little house in Rheydt, leaving the turbulent atmosphere of the Venice Biennale behind.

Schneider’s work has brought up varying emotions for most people. Interesting for the analysis, however, is its relationship to the German Pavilion. Unlike the previously discussed artists, Schneider did not harm the structure in any way, he simply ignored

²⁸³ U. Kittelmann, 2001, 17.

²⁸⁴ P. Auslander, 2003, p. 86.

²⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 87.

²⁸⁶ A. Osswald and K. Reich, 2007, p. 157.

it. For him, it is a means to an end: the outside “second skin”²⁸⁷ his work needs to become the *totes Haus u r*. Only his own architecture is relevant for his creation.



Ill. 32: Entrance to *Totes Haus u r*, Gregor Schneider, German Pavilion, 2001, © Gregor Schneider / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn.

In an interview with *Kunstforum International* held during the Biennale, Schneider speaks about exhibiting his work in the Nazi architecture.²⁸⁸ From the beginning, the appearance of the German Pavilion did not really interest him, his only concern was how his work would fit into it. He believes that it is good that people forget they are in the Pavilion once they enter the building. Someone looking for the fascist architecture will see it from the outside, but otherwise, it cannot be found. Furthermore, he remarks on the absurd parallels between his work and the leader of the cultural program of the Nazi regime, Joseph Goebbels, who was in charge of the

²⁸⁷ U. Kittelmann, 2001, 21.

²⁸⁸ A. Haase, *Metaphern des Alltäglichen*. “Man baut, was man nicht mehr kennen kann“ *Ein Gespräch mit Gregor Schneider vor der Eröffnung vom “Toten Haus U R“ in Venedig*, in: “Kunstforum International”, Bd. 156, 2001, pp. 288-303.

exhibitions held in Venice during those times.²⁸⁹ Just like his *Haus u r*, Goebbels was born in the Rheydt district of Mönchengladbach.

On the whole, Schneider's main exhibition goal when moving his house, is to prove that it is irrelevant where it is exhibited.²⁹⁰ By reconstructing the *Haus u r* inside of the pavilion, Schneider robs the Nazi architecture of its atmospheric power. The well-thought-out and planned characteristics conceived by Hitler's chosen architects become void in the presence of *totes Haus u r*. The artist did not need to destroy a single aspect of the structure to completely enabled its effect and erase every aspect of Nazi monumentality from the inside of the building. He simply built his own interior, making the pavilion irrelevant.

The immersion started from the moment one opened the small door. Only fifteen people were allowed to enter at a time.²⁹¹ Once shut, the soundproofed house erased all contact with the bustling *Giardini*. The artificial lighting coming from the fake windows additionally cancels out the feeling of time passing, while the strong smells of paint, dirt and damp air erase all memories of the surrounding Biennale. To some observers, the decor and simplicity of the first "normal" rooms evoked the oppressive atmosphere of post-war Germany, reminding them of the struggles of rebuilding a damaged society.²⁹² The fact that it is housed in the historically burdened pavilion can be read as a self-critical or even ironic observation of Germany as a nation.²⁹³

Schneider did not confront the architecture head-on in the way Haacke did, or even use it to give more meaning to his exhibit like Beuys, he simply ignored it in a rather passively aggressive way. Looking at the critical reviews of his exhibition at the Biennale, it quickly becomes obvious that the hosting pavilion is not talked about at all. The main focus lies on Schneider's unusual installation. Its offbeat strangeness, as

²⁸⁹ A. Haase, 2001.

²⁹⁰ Ibid..

²⁹¹ A. Osswald and K. Reich, 2007, p. 157.

²⁹² P. Von Becken, *Kunst-Biennale in Venedig: Die Innenwelt der Außenwelt der Innenwelt*, in: "Tagesspiegel", 19. July 2021, <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/kultur/kunst-biennale-in-venedig-die-innenwelt-der-aussenwelt-der-innenwelt-814195.html>, [last accessed on 18. August 2023].; A. Osswald and K. Reich, 2007, p. 157.

²⁹³ A. Osswald and K. Reich, 2007, p. 157.

well as the definite fear and horror factor fascinated its visitors and let them leave its doors with mixed emotions.

Peter von Becker calls his presentation “grotesque and surreal”²⁹⁴ remarking on the unusual absence of any noise in the exhibition. Together with the sparse decoration of memorabilia scattered throughout the rooms, to him, the house appears just like a house of death or a forgotten crime scene.

A few commentaries compare his house to Bates Motel from Hitchcock’s *Psycho*.²⁹⁵ In particular, the ever-present air of secrecy which bestows an uncanny, even sinister atmosphere upon the exhibition seems to be reminiscent of the famous movie hotel. Susanne Boecker describes her visit as an experience that awakens primal human instincts, closing her review by stating “You’ll be glad when you’re out again”²⁹⁶. Additionally, she and other authors remark on his artistic ignorance of the pavilion.²⁹⁷ Commissioner Udo Kittelmann himself, describes Schneider’s work as his most “disturbing contribution”²⁹⁸ so far. Berlinda Gardner speaks highly of her experience but warns any future visitors to be prepared for a rather draining event, both physically and mentally.²⁹⁹

For his contribution to the Biennale 2001, Gregor Schneider received the Golden Lion for the best national pavilion.³⁰⁰ With the limited number of visitors allowed at one time, huge queues formed in front of the building, causing further unrest and

²⁹⁴ P. Von Becken, 2001.

²⁹⁵ W. Volz, *Das schwarze Loch von Rheydt*, in: “Der Spiegel”, No. 13, 2001, pp. 192-195, here p. 193; E. Bronfen, 2001, p. 33.

²⁹⁶ S. Boecker, *Deutschland. Gregor Schneider, Kommissar Udo Kittelmann*, in: “Kunstforum International”, Vol. 156, 2001, pp. 242 – 251.

²⁹⁷ S. Boecler, 2001; *Zuflucht oder Kerker” Gregor Schneider “tote Haus u r”*, prod. by J. and R. R. Jung, 2001, Booklet Companion, pp. 18-19, here p. 18. https://www.gregor-schneider.de/places/2007hamburg/schneider_booklet_end.pdf.

²⁹⁸ B. G. Garner, *Der Mensch als Haus, ein Thema, dass die Kunst beschäftigt*, in: “Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung”, 11. June 2001, <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/kunstbiennale-der-mensch-als-haus-ein-thema-dass-die-kunst-beschaefigt-122355.html>, [last accessed on 18. August 2023].

²⁹⁹ Ibid.. Physically not only because of the climbing and crawling required inside the installation but also due to the long lines in front of the pavilion.

³⁰⁰ *Deutscher Pavillon mit Goldenem Löwen ausgezeichnet*, in: “Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung”, 11. June 2001, <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/kunstbiennale-deutscher-pavillon-mit-goldenem-loewen-ausgezeichnet-121142.html>, [last accessed on 18. August 2023].

trepidation amongst the gathering crowd.³⁰¹ It is the unpredictable emotions and feelings triggered by a visit to his house which are the goal of Schneider's work. The private, almost autobiographic approach he bestows upon his house by the very nature of his work adds to the feeling of unease. Particularly the placement inside such a public building like the state-owned pavilion, the contrast seems to add another layer of apprehension. Moving from the crowded Biennale into the suddenly eery quiet of the house was sure to confuse the senses of any visitors. No thought is lost on the architecture of the German Pavilion itself once one enters the narrow hallway. Distracted by the different smells, sounds and emotions, any visitor would have immediately forgotten which building they are currently in. The artist has erased any connection between his contribution and the Nazi architecture, deeming it irrelevant. It robs the house of its political meaning and reduces it to nothing but a shell in which to house his creation.³⁰²

Schneider offers an interesting approach to the confrontation of the problematic structure of the pavilion. He neither embraces it, nor does he use it to make new meaning. He simply lets it be, using it as nothing but a house for his house. In a time in which the struggle of reuniting two estranged countries is still felt throughout the nation, this approach was an interesting way of dealing with history. Instead of holding on to the general idea of overcoming the horrors committed during the war by dealing with them, embodied through the movement of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, he shows no interest in confronting the past. After the turbulent years of the Reunification, which brought with them a renewed vigour to work through the recent past, known as *Doppelte Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (doubled struggle of overcoming the past), there was a growing countermovement of weariness within the nation.³⁰³ In this context, the artist's work might have been a fascinating alternative to a rather weary country. His goal is to rouse emotions and feelings in his audience, creating an unusual experience

³⁰¹ Telefax from Dario Ventimiglia to Udo Kittelmann, 5. September, Venezia, Archivio Storico delle Arti Contemporanee della Biennale di Venezia (ASAC), Fondo storico, b. 747.

³⁰² A. Osswald and K. Reich, 2007, pp. 157.

³⁰³ J. Danyel, *Die geteilte Vergangenheit. Zum Umgang mit Nationalsozialismus und Widerstand in beiden deutschen Staaten*, Berlin: Akademie Verlag 1995, p. 107.

that leaves his visitors agitated and questioning what they have seen. In the process, the history of the German Pavilion is momentarily forgotten, its monumental interior temporarily erased.

4.4 Christoph Schlingensief - curated by Susanne Gaensheimer - 2011

In 2011, the German contribution to the Biennale presented another rather unusual show. Curating the event for the first time, Susanne Gaensheimer had chosen to host a solo exhibition inside the pavilion. After some consideration, she decided to invite Christoph Schlingensief, an artist known for his provocative work as a movie director and performance artist, as well as for his political actions.³⁰⁴

For his initial plans, the artist created a project built around the idea of an African wellness centre.³⁰⁵ The *Deutsche Zentrum für Wellness und Vorsorge* (German Centre for Wellness and Preventative Actions) was meant to be a fully functioning Spa, including a swimming pool, sauna and hammam, as well as the possibility for visitors to receive treatments and massages. Additionally, he planned to set up a booth where one could discover more about one's ancestry via a saliva test. The whole pavilion would be decorated with various exotic plants and have movie recordings depicting the daily/yearly changes of the Burkina Faso countryside playing on repeat.³⁰⁶ The footage was meant to be beamed onto all walls of the pavilion so that the visitors would constantly be surrounded by the African landscape. Furthermore, every 24th image should be quickly substituted with a very different one, a starving child or a child soldier for instance.

³⁰⁴ O. W. Fischer, 2010, pp. 117-118.

³⁰⁵ S. Gaensheimer, *Vorwort*, in: *Christoph Schlingensief. Deutscher Pavillon, 2011, 54. Internationale Kunstausstellung, La Biennale di Venezia*, ed. S. Gaensheimer, Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2011, pp. 19-25, here pp. 20-21.

³⁰⁶ S. Gaensheimer, 2011, p. 20.

On top of that, Schlingensiefel had planned to include a few other elements meant to increase awareness of the reality of life in Africa. For the swimming pool, he wanted to mix the water with a black dye, turning the skin of any participant dark. Another idea was a Closed-Circuit-Installation in which the visitors would see themselves with black skin.³⁰⁷

Overall, his project would create a space stuck between reality and installation. He wanted to show the beauty of the African Continent, while also criticising the romanticised Western image of African life. The focus on wellness should be seen as a commentary on the Western attempt to counter and prevent any unforeseeable health conditions as well as protect oneself from any harm.³⁰⁸ Lastly, for the outside area of the pavilion, the artist planned a construction of multiple cages in which African actors should depict various everyday tasks and professions. These so-called *Kuriositäten* (Oddities) were meant to be a reference to the world exhibitions of the previous centuries, from which the Biennale took its inspiration for the national pavilions.³⁰⁹ In general, his vision was to transform the outside appearance of the German building into something that could have been found at an old-fashioned funfair or carnival.

Schlingensiefel's concept took inspiration from his personal life and experiences, as well as his engagements with the topics of racism, nationalism and eurocentrism. His fascination for the African continent started in 1993 when he visited Zimbabwe to record footage for his movies.³¹⁰ To him, life there seemed more real, more direct, and rough. Being there, made him feel like he had been lost and was finally finding himself again.³¹¹ In 2008, he started the ambitious project of building an opera village near Ouagadougou, the capital city of Burkina Faso. *Remdoogo*, as the new village is called,

³⁰⁷ S. Gaensheimer, 2011, p. 20.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

³⁰⁹ In particular, he wanted to create an association with the World Exposition in Brussels in 1958, in which the country celebrated the anniversary of their government takeover in Kongo by hosting an enormous ethnological exposition. S. Gaensheimer, 2011, p. 21.

³¹⁰ C. Schlingensiefel, *Rede von Christoph Schlingensiefel anlässlich der Grundsteinlegung des Operndorfes am 8. Februar 2010*, in: *Christoph Schlingensiefel. Deutscher Pavillon, 2011, 54. Internationale Kunstausstellung, La Biennale di Venezia*, ed. S. Gaensheimer, Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2011, pp. 101-126, here p. 102.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*.

is made up of an opera house in the centre surrounded by a school, artist workshops, an infirmary, guest houses, flats as well as multiple wells and solar panels.³¹² Together with the native architect and activist Diébédo Francis Kéré, he wanted to create a space for cultural encounters and exchanges, as well as theatre performances and film screenings.³¹³ It was his mission to promote and encourage the people of Burkina Faso, especially the children, to learn about and create art, and in turn, use it to inspire others.³¹⁴

Schlingensiefel's introduction into the art world happened through movies. From a very early age, he started recording and editing short movies with his father's hand-held camera.³¹⁵ As a young man, he created various different productions for the *Volksbühne* (People's Theatre) in Berlin.

In her introduction to the 2011 catalogue, Elke aus dem Moore describes how Schlingensiefel was interested in what moves humanity and everything that could be achieved when people join to work together.³¹⁶ To him, the relationship between people was the highest form of art, which was now being shunned and forgotten in the egocentric Western world. Hence, he made it his mission to reconnect people with each other through art. With his *Remdoogo* project, he tried to initiate the exchange of ideas, creating social energies that could lead to the creation of a village that could meet all the needs of its residents.³¹⁷

³¹² S. Kraft, *Remdoogo. Ein Festspielhaus für Afrika*, in: "Architektur Zeitung", <https://www.architekturzeitung.com/architekturmagazin/88-architektur-design-kunst/1017-christoph-schlingensiefel-remdoogo-ein-festspielhaus-fuer-afrika>, [last accessed on 20. August 2023].

³¹³ S. Hegenbart, *Schlingensiefel's Traum*, in: "Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 06. December 2015, https://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/schlingensiefels-traum-sein-operndorf-in-afrika-wurde-schule-13948848.html?printPagedArticle=true#pageIndex_2, [last accessed on 20. August 2023].

³¹⁴ C. Schlingensiefel, 2011, p. 103.

³¹⁵ K. Biesenbach, *Ich wollte alles in Bilder fassen. Christoph Schlingensiefel im Gespräch mit Klaus Biesenbach*, in: *Christoph Schlingensiefel. Deutscher Pavillon, 2011, 54. Internationale Kunstausstellung, La Biennale di Venezia*, ed. S. Gaensheimer, Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2011, pp. 139-154, here pp. 140-144.

³¹⁶ E. Aus Dem Moore, *Grusswort*, in: *Christoph Schlingensiefel. Deutscher Pavillon, 2011, 54. Internationale Kunstausstellung, La Biennale di Venezia*, ed. S. Gaensheimer, Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2011, p.15.

³¹⁷ E. Aus Dem Moore, 2011, p. 15.

The artist's plans for the 54. Biennale were never realized, however, as on August 21 2010, Christoph Schlingensiefel passed away after a long battle with lung cancer.

Together with Aino Laberenz, Schlingensiefel's wife and long-term colleague, Gaensheimer decided that they would not follow through with the artist's envisioned project for the German Pavilion.³¹⁸ In a press release from October 13, she stated, "A project by Christoph Schlingensiefel cannot be realized without Christoph Schlingensiefel"³¹⁹. Instead, they collaborated with a number of Schlingensiefel's closest and most trusted friends and co-workers to create a comprehensive overview of his work. The exhibit should include the areas of Theatre, Film/Video as well as the topic of Africa, which had been close to the artist's heart at the point of his passing, having just initiated the Remdoogo project at the beginning of the year.³²⁰ As a committee, they believed that all of the selected materials should represent the spirit of what he had originally planned for the pavilion.³²¹ Together, they curated an exhibit of the artist's existing works and productions.

In the main hall of the pavilion, the stage of Schlingensiefel's Fluxus oratorio *Eine Kirche der Angst vor dem Fremden in mir* (Church of Fear vs. The Alien Within) was set up (Ill. 33). It had originally been created for the Ruhr Triennale of 2008 together with two other pieces. The installation transformed the main hall of the pavilion into the interior of a simple church with five double rows of dark wooden pews facing the back of the pavilion. Between them, a bright red carpet runs from the entrance to the back of the stage. There, raised above the rest of the pavilion by multiple steps, stands a simple altar above which a screen has been hung showing various video projections (Ill. 34). The back of the stage follows the rounded shape of the pavilion's apse and is adorned with five backlit, ceiling-high church windows.

³¹⁸ M. Müller, *Press Release of the German Pavilion*, 5. May 2011, https://cdn.deutscher-pavillon.org/Pressemitteilung_DeutscherPavillon_050511.pdf, [last accessed on 20. August 2023].

³¹⁹ M. Müller, *Press Release of the German Pavilion*, 13. October 2010, https://cdn.deutscher-pavillon.org/Pressemitteilung_DeutscherPavillon_201010.pdf, [last accessed on 20. August 2023].

³²⁰ M. Müller, 5. May 2011.

³²¹ M. Müller, 13. October 2010.



Ill. 33: A Church of Fear vs. the Alien Within. Stage installation of the Fluxus-oratorio by Christoph Schlingensiefel in the German Pavilion, Altar view with film projection, 2011, Photo: Roman Mensing, artdoc.de.

Visitors to the German pavilion could sit facing the altar, just as in a church, and watch the projections, contemplating the life and work of Schlingensiefel. To the left of the altar, a whiteboard was placed and hung with multiple medical X-ray images (Ill. 34). All the walls were littered with photographs and quotes from the artists' life, creating a small cross-section of relevant moments while also depicting the inevitable circle of life and his fear of death.

Schlingensiefel created the Church of Fear right after having his left lung removed and completing months of chemotherapy.³²² The organisation dealt with the spreading of fear and terror by institutions such as the state or church and encouraged its members to learn to embrace their personal fears.³²³

³²² S. Gaensheimer, 2011, p. 23.

³²³ C. Hegemann, *Egomania. Kunst und Nichtkunst bei Christoph Schlingensiefel*, in: *Christoph Schlingensiefel. Deutscher Pavillon, 2011, 54. Internationale Kunstausstellung, La Biennale di Venezia*, ed. S. Gaensheimer, Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2011, pp. 199-210, here p. 202.

The original version of this project had first been presented at the 2003 Biennale. For more information see the organisation's website: <https://www.church-of-fear.net>.



Ill. 34: A Church of Fear vs. the Alien Within, Stage installation of Christoph Schlingensiefel's Fluxus-oratorio in the German Pavilion 2011, altar panel "Tolerance belt", Photo: Roman Mensing, artdoc.de.

The work presented at the 2011 Biennale embodies Schlingensiefel's fight against cancer and the fear of facing his own mortality.³²⁴ The installation is made in the image of the church of his youth, in which he used to serve as an altar boy and that would later also host his funeral service.³²⁵ Growing up in a primarily catholic area of Germany, religion influenced many of his works, reaching its peak in his *Kirche der Angst*.³²⁶ In this context, the installation can also be interpreted as the artist's

³²⁴ M. Müller, 5. May 2011.

³²⁵ S. Gaensheimer, 2011, p. 23.

³²⁶ M. Cornish, *Art Is Magic/It Cannot Succeed. Christoph Schlingensiefel's Via Intolleranza II*, in: "TDR (The Drama Review)", Vol. 56, No. 2, 2012, pp. 191-197, here p. 192.

representation of his own struggle with religion, faith and the guilt of developing doubt when faced with his own suffering.³²⁷

In the rooms to the right of the pavilion, a small cinema was built, showing six of Schlingensief's movies selected from different eras of his artistic development.³²⁸ Together, they were meant to offer the international audience a comprehensive overview of the artist's work, as well as provide an insight into his rather individual, B-Movie aesthetic.³²⁹

The rooms to the left should document his creation of the opera village near Ouagadougou as well as his final movie "Via Intolleranza II", which he had also recorded in Burkina Faso.³³⁰

Lastly, the bold lettering GERMANIA above the entrance to the pavilion was replaced by the word EGOMANIA, by painting over the first three letters with black paint (Ill. 35). The writing appears aggressive, almost like an act of vandalism. It is not only a reference to one of his movies but also an act of exposing Western society for its self-centred and ignorant way of life.³³¹

Susanne Gaensheimer believed that it was not only Schlingensief's work that made him the best candidate for the 2011 Biennale, but also his personal opinion towards the German Pavilion.³³² In her selection process, she identified that it would be important to find someone who could adequately handle the political as well as the historical aspects of the building. It was her goal to work with the space in a way that

³²⁷ S. Gaensheimer, 2011, p. 23.

³²⁸ M. Müller, 5. May 2011. The movies shown were: *Menu Total* (1985/86), *Egomania* (1986), the Germany trilogy of *100 Jahre Adolf Hitler* (100 Years of Adolf Hitler, 1988), *Das Deutsche Kettensägenmassaker* (The German Chainsaw Massacre, 1990), and *Terror 2000* (1991/92) as well as *United Trash* (1995/96).

³²⁹ S. Gaensheimer, 2011, p. 23.

³³⁰ M. Müller, 5. May 2011.

³³¹ E. Aus Dem Moore, 2011, p. 15.

³³² H. C. Martens, *Christoph Schlingensief Kuratiert von Susanne Gaensheimer. Kunst als Antrieb von Veränderung*, in: *Auf Wasser gebaut. Venedig, ein Album. Der Deutsche Pavilion 2009-2022*, München: Schirmer Mosel, 2022, pp. 165-192.

would open up the topic to a new level of discussion about the relevance of the pavilion and its meaning for the German national identity.³³³



Ill. 35: Egomania written on the façade of the German Pavilion, 2011, image taken from “BauNetz”: <https://www.baunetz.de/biennale/2011/beitrag.php?bid=23>.

After deciding to only exhibit a single artist in 2011, Gaensheimer organised talks with potential candidates. Her conversation with Schlingensief and what he had to say about the German Pavilion was so compelling that she immediately asked him to participate.³³⁴ In his approach to all his projects, she saw the courage and outspokenness needed to confront the problematic architecture directly.³³⁵ Furthermore, his interest in current political and social topics as well as the way he tackled them in his work seemed more than relevant within the context of the

³³³ H. C. Martens, 2022, p. 180.

³³⁴ Ibid..

³³⁵ D. Schäfer-Noske, *Eine grobe Idee habe ich schon. Christoph Schlingensief im Gespräch mit Doris Schäfer-Noske*, in “Deutschlandfunk”, 03. May 2010, <https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/eine-grobe-idee-habe-ich-schon-100.html>, [last accessed on 21. August 2023].

Biennale.³³⁶ The topic of national identity during times of globalization was important to her and should be represented in the Pavilion in some form.³³⁷ His recent work and experience in Burkina Faso were also of interest as she hoped he could contribute a postcolonial aspect to the exhibition.³³⁸

When Schlingensief passed away before his plans for the Biennale could be completed, Gaensheimer was left with the difficult task of creating an exhibition that would not only honour his work, but also send the same message both she and the artist had originally intended. His *Eine Kirche der Angst vor dem Fremden in mir* seemed the most fitting for the situation. Not only did it fit well within the shape of the main hall, with the apse aligning almost perfectly with the pavilion's architecture, it also represented the artist's long struggle with illness and mortality.³³⁹ In her introduction to the 2011 catalogue, the curator states that she believes that his social concerns in particular would have allowed him to create an exhibit that would have erased the monumentality of the historic pavilion in a way that would allow it to be experienced without its burdened past.³⁴⁰

Schlingensief himself was excited about his invitation to the Biennale.³⁴¹ After having first introduced his “Church of Fear” in 2003 as part of the “Utopia Station” in Arsenal, he felt honoured by the prospect of being able to present in the pavilion alone.³⁴² Nevertheless, he was aware of the reality of exhibiting in the Nazi architecture and the impact his choices would make in the context of its history.

³³⁶ H. C. Martens, 2022, p. 180.

³³⁷ D. Schäfer-Noske, 2010.

³³⁸ H. C. Martens, 2022, p. 180.

³³⁹ Ibid., p. 183.

³⁴⁰ S. Gaensheimer, 2011, p. 19.

³⁴¹ D. Schäfer-Noske, 2010.

³⁴² Ibid..

Initially, the choice of Schlingensief was met with surprise and even disappointment in Germany.³⁴³ He had never previously been associated with Susanne Gaensheimer, nor was he seen as a part of the inner circle of the German art scene. The curator reveals that it was precisely for that reason that she chose the artist.³⁴⁴ She wanted someone who would not be frightened of presenting in the pavilion and Schlingensief seemed to have an almost neutral perspective on the building. When the debate about tearing down the pavilion and building a new one arose again in 2010, he argued to keep the monumental structure.³⁴⁵ He believed that simply erasing the pavilion would be just like deleting history and an act reminiscent of totalitarian regimes.

Due to the building's notoriety, Gaensheimer believed the question of proper representation was especially important.³⁴⁶ As an artist of her own generation, she had identified with many of Schlingensief's projects. Just like him, she believed that Germany's history didn't end with the Second World War and wanted the pavilion to represent the change that had happened in the country. Specifically, his work in Africa brought a very interesting transnational dynamic into the pavilion, highlighting the relationship between a globalized Germany and other countries and cultures.³⁴⁷ By including these projects, she hoped to create a space that was not only relevant to German identity but also to a global one.

Schlingensief's death brought with it a high degree of uncertainty regarding the exhibition's future. When the Biennale opened its doors, the German contribution was met with mixed reviews. The jury of the Biennale, however, awarded the exhibition

³⁴³ Gerhard Richter described Schlingensief's selection as the downfall of art in Germany, criticising the choice of a performer over a "real" artist. *Schlingensief soll Biennale-Pavillon bespielen*, in: "Der Spiegel", 02. May 2010, <https://www.spiegel.de/kultur/gesellschaft/internationale-kunstaussstellung-schlingensief-soll-biennale-pavillon-bespielen-a-692568.html>, [last accessed on 22. August 2023]; D. Schäfer-Noske, 2010.

³⁴⁴ U. Thon, *Interview with Susanne Gaensheimer*, in: "Art Magazin" 1. June 2011, in: "schlingensief.com": <https://www.schlingensief.com/projekt.php?id=biennale&article=art>, last accessed on 22. August 2023].

³⁴⁵ C. Schlingensief, *Sofortiger Abriss Venedigs!*, in: "Schlingenblog", 23. June 2010, uploaded on "Deutscher Pavillon 2011": https://2011.deutscher-pavillon.org/de/cs_blog-abriss-pav.html, [last accessed on 22. August 2023].

³⁴⁶ U. Thon, 2011.

³⁴⁷ Ibid..

with the Golden Lion for the best national participation, praising Gaensheimer for her curatorial accomplishment in establishing Schlingensiefel's work in the international art world.³⁴⁸

Despite this, quite a few critics felt differently about the presentation in the pavilion. Some found the unwilling retrospective exhibition of the artist unfitting, calling out the curator for portraying the artist's personal struggle with his illness.³⁴⁹ Others believed that the church construction with all its surrounding props seemed almost like a deception, making the artist's absence all the more noticeable.³⁵⁰ In his review of the German contribution, Christopher Schmidt identifies two main problems with the exhibition.³⁵¹ Firstly, he is convinced that Schlingensiefel himself would have deeply despised a retrospective show of his work in such a way. Secondly, he believes the unplanned exhibition returns the criticised Nazi structure back to its original function of celebrating great German artists. This had originally been a trait that many artists before had tried to break and Schlingensiefel, as well as Gaensheimer, had aimed to further dismantle.

Nevertheless, the praise for the pavilion is just as loud. It is seen as a worthy celebration of the recently deceased artist, offering a well-curated overview of his work throughout the decades.³⁵² While the portrayal of his illness is seen as an uncalled-for presentation by some, others see it as a show of vulnerability that makes the artist even more understandable. In his article about the exhibition, Georg Diez

³⁴⁸ N. Kuhn, *Goldener Löwe posthum für Schlingensiefel, Deutscher Pavillon siegt bei Biennale in Venedig*, in: "Tagesspiegel", 04. June 2011, <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/kultur/deutscher-pavillon-siegt-bei-biennale-in-venedig-6725197.html>, [last accessed on 22. August 2023].

³⁴⁹ K. Vahland, *Gutgemeintes Pathos*, in: "Süddeutsche Zeitung", 1. July 2011, <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/kultur/schlingensiefel-und-die-biennale-gut-gemeintes-pathos-1.1104059>, [last accessed on 22. August 2023].

³⁵⁰ N. Kuhn, 2011.

³⁵¹ C. Schmidt, *Doppelter Schaden*, in: "Süddeutsche Zeitung", 20. October 2010, <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/kultur/biennale-schlingensiefel-doppelter-schaden-1.1014254>, [last accessed on 22. August 2023].

³⁵² G. Diez, *Tot in Venedig*, in: "Der Spiegel", 29. June 2011, <https://www.spiegel.de/kultur/tot-in-venedig-a-24c82464-0002-0001-0000-000078689665>, [last accessed on 22. August 2023].

describes his surprising conclusion after his visit, stating that “only Schlingensiefel without Schlingensiefel reveals the true Schlingensiefel”³⁵³.

It is obvious that although Schlingensiefel’s initial plan for the pavilion might have sent the message both he and Gaensheimer had hoped for, the changes instigated by his death greatly impacted the exhibition's original meaning. Instead of criticism of the Western view on African culture and the idea of “wellness” as well as the creation of a communal space meant to bring people closer together, the pavilion transformed into a shrine. The focus of the exhibition changed and with it its message. But even so, Gaensheimer managed to break the monumentality of the fascist architecture with her retrospective celebration.³⁵⁴ By destroying the unmistakable GERMANIA above the entrance and then creating a church inside the pavilion, many felt the atmosphere of the building was once again broken.³⁵⁵ The curator used the already sacral character of the Nazi architecture to her advantage and created a space in which to celebrate the departed artist. The structure is transformed in atmosphere and meaning. Similar to the contribution of Schneider in 2001, the centre hall of the pavilion was modified in a way that changed not only its appearance but also its essential character. Due to the ambience created by the church construction, the audience could momentarily forget the building and its history.

Gaensheimer’s exhibition seems closer to the one of Gerhard Richter in 1972. Yet, while his exhibition seemed to criticise the tradition of celebrating German artists inside the halls of the pavilion, she did precisely that. Nevertheless, one can assume that her intent was not to return to the ways of the past, but to honour an artist whom she greatly admired and whose untimely death had affected her deeply.

Her message of an international and globalized Germany can still be understood in the exhibition, but the reality of it transforming into a show celebrating the life’s work of Schlingensiefel is undeniable. To the curator, he embodied the social and political

³⁵³ G. Diez, 2011.

³⁵⁴ H. C. Martens, 2022, p. 184.

³⁵⁵ Ibid..

journey of her generation in Germany. It almost seems, that no matter what he had shown, to her he would have perfectly represented the country's national identity.

4.5 Anne Imhof - *Faust* - 2017

At the 57. Biennale, Anne Imhof was the artist chosen for the German Pavilion in another solo exhibition. With her contribution at the Biennale, the artist found yet another way to confront the history of the National Socialist construction and give a new purpose to the controversial architecture.

For the performance exhibition *Faust* (Fist) Imhof decided to block the main entrance of the pavilion, making it only accessible from the rooms at the side of the building. The columns of the entrance area were closed off by a pair of over two meters high, bullet-proof glass walls which formed a narrow corridor to the original entryway (Ill. 36). Just as with Schneider's exhibition, the wooden double doors were removed. In its stead, Imhof placed another glass wall allowing the viewers to observe the inside of the structure. Next to the columns, in the outside space in front of the side rooms, a metal mesh fence was attached to glass walls, creating two caged-off spaces in the exterior area. A group of menacing-looking Dobermanns were placed inside and would prowl around the front of the pavilion like guard dogs.

In the main hall, a raised double glass floor was placed about one meter above the marble ground. This not only elevated the visitors wandering through the show but also changed the spatial proportions of rooms as the doorways suddenly became smaller and the ceilings lower (Ill. 37).³⁵⁶ Small, slightly downward-tilted glass platforms were attached to some of the walls in each room. The rounded apse at the back of the main hall was closed off by another glass wall stretching from one end to the other. The new see-through flooring was slanted upwards slightly behind the wall before stopping abruptly, leaving the ground of the apse bare.

³⁵⁶ S. Pfeffer, *In a Solipsistic Choir*, in: *Anne Imhof. Faust. Katalog zur Ausstellung, Deutscher Pavillon, Venedig-Biennale 2017*, ed. S. Pfeffer, Köln: Walther König, 2017, pp. 9- 10, here p. 9.



Ill. 36: *Faust*, Anne Imhof, Outside of the German Pavilion, 2017, image taken from “Contemporary Art Library”: <https://www.contemporaryartlibrary.org/project/anne-imhof-at-german-pavilion-venice-2586/2>.

In two of the side rooms, the ground was lowered, and water piping installed, allowing them to become flooded like small basins, if needed. The water would then flow to the outside of the pavilion, drenching the stairs on the side (visible in the right of Ill. 36). The side rooms were separated from the centre hall by slightly mirrored glass walls, allowing viewers to see themselves but also the interior. Inside, they would see a glass table, sink and more platforms attached to the walls. Additionally, one of the side rooms had a big bathtub. The other two rooms exhibited screen and oil paintings, as well as metal plates all in monochrome grey colouring. The same works could also be seen on the outside of the pavilion. Across the area, a seemingly random assortment of objects was scattered underneath the glass floor: handcuffs, an electric guitar, chains, a water hose, as well as mattresses and lighters among other things.³⁵⁷

³⁵⁷ Anne Imhofs “*Faust*“ im Deutschen Pavillon . Biennale Venedig 2017, in: “Kulturraum NRW”, <http://www.kulturraum.nrw/ausstellung/anne-imhof-faust-deutscher-pavillon-biennale-venedig-2017.html>, [last accessed on 22. August 2023].



Ill. 37: *Faust*, Anne Imhof, Inside of the German Pavilion, 2017, image taken from “Contemporary Art Library”: <https://www.contemporaryartlibrary.org/project/anne-imhof-at-german-pavilion-venice-2586/2>.

A key factor of Imhof's work, however, were her performers. In total, a number of 10 people would perform in the pavilion for five and a half hours every day over the course of the 7-month event.³⁵⁸ All participants were from very different backgrounds, including philosophy, dance, music and even law.³⁵⁹ They would spread out over the pavilion, acting in groups or alone. Sometimes singing, sometimes screaming, they wandered about all parts of the building, including the roof and the outside space. Sometimes behind the glass, sometimes fully exposed. All were either dressed in dark, colourless, baggy clothes or partially naked, their forms close to androgynous. They would perform sequences of movements, either alone, in pairs or as a bigger group. Parts of their act had been predetermined in rehearsals, such as carefully planned and choreographed dances, movements as well as physical fights, others were improvised

³⁵⁸ S. Pfeffer, *In Faust*, in: *Auf Wasser gebaut. Venedig, ein Album. Der Deutsche Pavilion 2009-2022*, München: Schirmer Mosel, 2022, pp. 121-122, here p. 121.

³⁵⁹ H. Jocks, *Anne Imhof. Der Anfang und das Ende des Anderen*, in: “Kunstforum International”, Vol. 247, <https://www.kunstforum.de/artikel/anne-imhof-2/>, [last accessed on 22. August 2023].

by the performers.³⁶⁰ Most of their actions were dictated by Imhof herself, who blended in with the audience and sent instructions via SMS to her performers.³⁶¹

Another important part of the performance exhibition was the audience. They were free to wander around the main hall of the pavilion and get as close to the actors as they wanted, frequently invading their personal space. Often, the wraith-like figures would crawl underneath the glass floor of the building, lying on the floor, writhing, singing, or just sitting apathetically with a crowd of dozens standing right above them (Ill. 38).



Ill. 38: *Faust*, Anne Imhof, View from the Floor of the German Pavilion, 2017, image taken from “Contemporary Art Library”: <https://www.contemporaryartlibrary.org/project/anne-imhof-at-german-pavilion-venice-2586/2>.

³⁶⁰ A. Imhof and S. Pfeffer, *Anne Imhof and Susanne Pfeffer in Conversation*, in: *Anne Imhof. Faust. Katalog zur Ausstellung, Deutscher Pavillon, Venedig-Biennale 2017*, ed. S. Pfeffer, Köln: Walther König, 2017, pp. 13-23, here p. 15.

³⁶¹ M. Novotny, *Auf doppeltem Boden. Anne Imhofs Faust und die Architektur der Macht im deutschen Pavillon in Venedig*, in: “Arch+”, 23. May 2017, <https://archplus.net/de/auf-doppeltem-boden-anne-imhofs-faust-und-die-architektur-der-macht-im-deutschen-pavillon-in-venedig/>, [last accessed on 23. August 2023].

The connection between the performers and the audience was crucial for the effect of the exhibition.³⁶² Because the performance took place over the course of several hours, the spectators were free to come and go as they pleased, giving them an element of freedom the actors did not seem to have.³⁶³ In addition, visitors could often view them from multiple angles, especially in the space of the main hall, walking around them to view them from every side, similar to a statue in a museum. Sometimes, the actors would walk around the room at a hurried pace, forcing audience members to quickly move aside and make space.³⁶⁴ Other times, they would be rolling around on the floor, immersed in a fight and not paying any notice to their surroundings. Their tangled bodies would be squished together against the glass, offering the audience an unrestrained view of their struggle, rough and raw, almost inhuman.

In the age of the smartphone, it is self-evident that the majority of the audience was recording the show. The unresponsiveness of the actors generated a sense of unrestricted possibilities within the crowd, allowing them to interact with the performers as if they were mere works of art, and not people. As a whole, it enabled them to get closer to the performing strangers than they would ever dare to in any other situation, further objectifying the artists.³⁶⁵ Susanne Pfeffer, the pavilion's curator, saw the use of the cell phone as a way to break the tension in the room.³⁶⁶ Instead of directly experiencing the performance, many chose to view it through their screens, creating some distance between themselves and the actors who were moving and behaving in ways that might have pushed the viewer out of their comfort zone.³⁶⁷

The show was never the same, meaning that every time the visitor would return, they would experience something else. The performance took place all throughout the building, completely surrounding the viewers in a three-dimensional experience.

³⁶² S. Pfeffer, 2022, pp. 121-122.

³⁶³ A. Imhof and S. Pfeffer, 2017, pp. 14-15.

³⁶⁴ To get a better overview of the performance as well as the atmosphere the following video can be viewed: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zNQ7ZILuuM>.

³⁶⁵ S. Pfeffer, 2022, p. 121.

³⁶⁶ Ibid..

³⁶⁷ Ibid..

Above them on a narrow ledge, below their feet, in the side rooms as well as in the outside area and on the roof, the actors and architecture created a fully immersive exhibition that would leave the visitor feeling as though they had experienced something mysterious and uncanny in nature.³⁶⁸

Imhof also chose to add music to her performance. The soundtrack was created by her and her team, as well as the musician Billy Bultheel.³⁶⁹ The mixture of musical pieces was made up of different segments, including harsh drum compositions and electric guitar songs, as well as lyrical pieces sung by the performers themselves. When played during the exhibition, they influenced the audience as well as the actors, creating an eerie atmosphere in the enormous halls of the German Pavilion.³⁷⁰ All musical pieces had a melancholic undertone in common, which gave the show a darker, more threatening energy.³⁷¹

To complete the performer's sombre appearance, their facial expression remained completely neutral throughout the timespan of the exhibition. While their bodies reacted to each other or the music, their gaze and faces were indifferent, further playing into the uncanny, mysterious atmosphere of the pavilion.³⁷²

Altogether, it is apparent that the unequal relationship between the viewer and the viewed is one of the focal points of Imhof's exhibition. Power and suppression, resistance and freedom become key elements of its interpretation, embodied by the two participants.³⁷³ The audience stands in the middle of the performance, has the freedom to leave and the power to document, while the actors are passive towards

³⁶⁸ The narrow ledge can be seen in the top left of illustration 31. For their safety, the performers were attached to hooks to prevent any accidents.

³⁶⁹ D. Schons, *Anne Imhof Album. Faust aufs Ohr*, in: "Monopol", 24. September 2019 <https://www.monopol-magazin.de/anne-imhof-faust-album?slide=1>, [last accessed on 23. August 2023].

³⁷⁰ J. Rebentisch, *Dark Play. Anne Imhof's Abstractions*, in: *Anne Imhof. Faust. Katalog zur Ausstellung, Deutscher Pavillon, Venedig-Biennale 2017*, ed. S. Pfeffer, Köln: Walther König, 2017, pp. 25-33, here pp. 29-30.

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*.

³⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 25.

³⁷³ Ä. Seidel, *Performance "Faust": Im Gespräch mit Susanne Pfeffer*, in: "Deutschlandfunk" 10. May 2017, <https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/performance-faust-der-bezug-zur-gegenwaertigkeit-ist-sehr-100.html>, [last accessed on 23. August 2023].

them, subjected to their stares and cameras, their every movement exposed and visible to all. The performers themselves look bruised and pale, their loose clothing making them appear fragile, further adding to the idea of the power hierarchy and imbalance. The depiction of victimisation and victimhood is prevalent in Imhof's presentation.³⁷⁴ The performing bodies do not only fight with each other, but the "victor" often stands on the defeated performer's back. They are rough with one another, stepping on limbs or tearing each other's clothes. In these actions, there is no obvious person to blame. They all fight and win at some point, making them all victims within this recurring cycle of violence and the never-ending fight for dominance.³⁷⁵

The viewer is additionally brought into a space of discomfort by the distortion of certain, usually well-known motion sequences. The foot that is about to stamp on a hand suddenly slows down, crushing it in visible slow motion, or the pair wrestling on the floor suddenly lies still, softly embracing. These small changes lead to a defamiliarization with the process of victimisation.³⁷⁶ The objectification reached its peak when the performers started touching themselves, openly masturbating on the ground of the pavilion underneath the glass floor. Their blank expressionless gaze further alienated the visitors and turned their actions into a form of sexuality purely occurring for visual consumption.³⁷⁷

Overall, Imhof created a strong connection to our contemporary reality. By invoking the overuse of cell phones, she reflects on the relationship between technology and the individual, as well as society as a whole.³⁷⁸ The modern willingness to post anything and anyone on social media and the power it has over our lives is made obvious in the behaviour of the audience. Their reaction to watching two people engage in a physical fight or seeing someone pleasuring themselves, is not to intervene, but rather to document it with their phones.

³⁷⁴ C. Wagner, *Anne Imhof. Faust. Venedig Biennale 2017. Deutscher Pavillon*, in: "Journal für Kunstgeschichte", Vol. 22 No. 1, 2018, pp. 5-15, here p. 7.

³⁷⁵ Ä. Seidel, 2017; C. Wagner, 2018, p. 9.

³⁷⁶ C. Wagner, 2018, p. 9.

³⁷⁷ S. Pfeffer, 2017, p. 9.

³⁷⁸ Ä. Seidel, 2017

Imhof's glass construction creates an unusual atmosphere that further adds to the idea of victimization and objectification.³⁷⁹ On the whole, it could be viewed as a cage or a stage, in which only the audience has the privilege of moving freely, giving them the impression of power. There is no hiding from their curious gaze, every single movement is exposed and recorded. The audience has the power to view everything. Even people from the outside can watch from the glass entrance. However, this freedom also invokes a sense of invading something private, something that one should not have been allowed to witness. The visitors are transformed into inspectors and supervisors, without ever having any control over the observed actions.³⁸⁰

In the side rooms connected to water, the performers carry out cleaning rituals. Using a bar of soap and a hose, they scrub themselves or each other, as well as the glass walls, the floor and the room as a whole. In this action, Christoph Wagner identifies the symbolic cleaning of the pavilion.³⁸¹ Together, they wash off its historical burdens and remove the stain of its National Socialist past until nothing remains but a structure to house art.

Imhof uses the strict architectural language of the pavilion to her advantage.³⁸² On the outside, she complements the building's symmetry with the construction of the glass walls and cages, adding to the structure's rigid and forbidding appearance. Together with the imposing Dobermann's and the yellow warning signs attached to the mesh wall, the pavilion is given an almost dystopian atmosphere. The glass walls separate the building from the rest of the Biennale. The official entrance is blocked off and the watchdogs stand guard in front of it, transforming the structure into the image of a danger zone or even a prison.³⁸³

Instead of working against the architecture, the artist decided to work with it, using its cold and unadorned appearance to create an uncanny atmosphere for her performance. It becomes part of her stage in a way that gives the building a new purpose. While on

³⁷⁹ C. Wagner, 2018, p. 9.

³⁸⁰ Ibid..

³⁸¹ C. Wagner, 2018, p. 9.

³⁸² S. Pfeffer, 2017, pp. 9-10.

³⁸³ C. Wagner, 2018, p. 10.

the one hand, the pavilion's hardness was a challenge to her, she also saw it as an opportunity to give it a new appeal.³⁸⁴

Her choice of using glass to build a second floor was meant to create a contrast to the monumental architecture due to its association with fragility.³⁸⁵ At the same time, she viewed glass as a powerful material. Using both together, "related two architectures of power to each other"³⁸⁶. Additionally, the idea of raising everyone entering the pavilion above the original ground, allowed them to see the pavilion from different angles and in a new light. The people walking upon it would appear less small in comparison to the building itself and in turn, feel less overwhelmed by the powerful architecture, allowing them to fully experience the performance.³⁸⁷ By choosing glass as her main construction material, the building is transformed into something new while at the same time, its original structure remains completely visible.³⁸⁸

Lastly, Imhof's choice of name for her contribution reveals an interesting perspective on the show's interpretation. With *Faust* meaning fist in English, it is on the one hand a symbol of resistance that developed as one of the main movements during rehearsals.³⁸⁹ On the other hand, it can be seen as a reference to the German classic novel by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. In her contribution to the 2017 catalogue of the German Pavilion, Juliane Rebentisch calls the performer's behaviour *faustisch* (Faust-like).³⁹⁰ She compares their restless behaviour to that of Goethe's Dr. Faust, constantly seeking the highest and lowest aspects of human existence. This rather gloomy attitude she is then associated by the author with the idea of *Weltschmerz* (World-Weariness), which she sees as a circumstance of contemporary times. Just like in Goethe's Faust, Imhof's performers portray a certain melancholy and apathy towards their world, going through the motions and barely reacting to any outside

³⁸⁴ A. Imhof and S. Pfeffer, 2017, pp. 18.

³⁸⁵ Ibid..

³⁸⁶ Ibid..

³⁸⁷ H. Jocks, 2017.

³⁸⁸ M. Novotny, 2017.

³⁸⁹ H. Jocks, 2017.

³⁹⁰ J. Rebentisch, 2017, pp. 28-30.

stimulus.³⁹¹ The performers themselves described the energy of the shows as a constant feeling that nothing ever happened and simultaneously it always felt like any second something might.³⁹²

From the first day the Biennale opened its doors, the crowds gathered in front of the German Pavilion.³⁹³ The restricted access of 150 people at a time led to the formation of large queues, often waiting for hours, not all of them patiently.³⁹⁴ The outside appearance with its massive walls and powerful structure created a fascinating image. The menacing Dobermann's together with the wraith-like figures patrolling on the roof or sitting near the fence seemed like a promise of the experience that was awaiting them inside. The German Press compared the crowds in front of the pavilion with the masses queuing to get into Berlin's infamous nightclub Berghain.³⁹⁵

The actions and emotions experienced in the German Pavilion were seen by many as transformative. In his opening speech for the Biennale, Germany's former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sigmar Gabriel, praised the exhibitions confrontational character, appealing to the necessity to see beyond one's own borders to create a successful dialogue of cultures.³⁹⁶ Hanno Rauterberg from *Die Zeit*, calls it the artwork of the century.³⁹⁷ He feels the German Pavilion has been given a new meaning. The glass floor reminds him of an archaeological site, laying bare the history of the pavilion in a way that almost makes it seem like the building itself is the centre of the exhibition. A house of power with the aesthetics of an Apple Store. Others, such as Art Historian

³⁹¹ J. Rebentisch, 2017, p. 29.

³⁹² F. Aigner and E. Douglas, *Franziska Aigner and Eliza Douglas in Conversation*, in: *Anne Imhof. Faust. Katalog zur Ausstellung, Deutscher Pavillon, Venedig-Biennale 2017*, ed. S. Pfeffer, Köln: Walther König, 2017, pp. 47-53, here p. 47.

³⁹³ C. Padtberg, *Diese Pavillons müssen Sie gesehen haben*, in: "Der Spiegel", 13. May 2017, <https://www.spiegel.de/kultur/gesellschaft/kunstbiennale-in-venedig-diese-pavillons-sind-die-highlights-a-1147512.html>, [last accessed on 25. August 2023].

³⁹⁴ H. Rauterberg, *Der stille Aufbruch*, in: "Die Zeit", 3. July 2017, <https://www.zeit.de/2017/27/anne-imhof-biennale-venedig-faust-performance/komplettansicht>, [last accessed on 25. August 2023].

³⁹⁵ D. Schons, 2019.

³⁹⁶ Speech by Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel at the opening ceremony of the German Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, 10 May 2017, <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/newsroom/news/170510-bm-biennale/289934>, [last accessed on 25. August 2023].

³⁹⁷ H. Rauterberg, 2017.

Daniela Gregori, see a connection between the pavilion as an old centre of power to our modern versions, such as banks.³⁹⁸ A place of pretended transparency that demonstrates immense power. The Nazi Pavilion seems to be the perfect place for the rather anticapitalistic message Imhof is trying to send.³⁹⁹ Exhibiting the artistic call to structural resistance in a building constructed, financed and owned by the state, which used to symbolise the country's power, turned out to be rather fitting in the eyes of Boris Pofalla.⁴⁰⁰ The Pavilion's past strengthens the exhibition's meaning. Lastly, Donna Schons compares the building's fortified appearance, with its guard dogs and bulletproof walls, to a fortress.⁴⁰¹ To her, in a year in which the right-wing political party AfD known for their conservative views on immigration and Euroscepticism has moved into the German parliament, Imhof's pavilion offers an intriguing sight.

All in all, the German contribution of 2017 seems to have captivated the international audience with its relationship between the audience and the apathetic performers, as well as the transformation of the pavilion. For her contribution to the 57. Biennale Anne Imhof received the Golden Lion for best national participation.⁴⁰² Her performance overwhelmed the audience visually, acoustically and especially emotionally.

Curator Susanne Pfeffer had chosen the artist for her way of depicting the rough reality of contemporary life, a characteristic that can clearly be seen in her contribution to the

³⁹⁸ D. Gregori, *Widerständige Körper und Bildgewalt*, in: "Goethe-Institut Magazin", August 2017, <https://www.goethe.de/ins/cd/de/kul/mag/21038292.html>, [last accessed on 25. August 2023].

³⁹⁹ B. Pofalla, *Einigkeit und Recht und Zombies*, in: "Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung", 14. May 2017, https://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/kunst-und-architektur/biennale-von-venedig-einigkeit-und-recht-und-zombies-15014344.html?printPagedArticle=true#pageIndex_2, [last accessed on 25. August 2023].

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid..

⁴⁰¹ D. Schons, 2019.

⁴⁰² S. Trauner, *Goldene Löwe für deutsche Künstler*, in: "Der Spiegel", 13. May 2017, <https://www.spiegel.de/kultur/gesellschaft/biennale-in-venedig-goldener-loewe-fuer-anne-imhof-und-franz-erhard-walther-a-1147517.html>, [last accessed on 25. August 2023].

Biennale.⁴⁰³ Just as she had wanted, the pavilion and its history became secondary in the presence of her work, focusing instead on the future and the reality of contemporary existence.⁴⁰⁴ While the original architecture of the building remains visually completely unchanged, her construction added to it in a way that gave it a new meaning and purpose. It became a stage for her production, the strict symmetry and monumentality highlighting the uncanny atmosphere, as well as the almost dystopian energy.

Her appeal to resist the current structure and to dismantle the borders of society and culture, reflect her new ideal of national identity. Similarly to many of the artists asked to present Germany in the pavilion, she questioned what it would mean to represent a nation in such a way.⁴⁰⁵ In the same way as plenty of her predecessors confronted the architecture, she too feels it is important to do exactly that, in this particular case. She believes that embodying the nation in this structure makes it impossible to ignore its history. By involving it, one is ultimately representing a vital aspect of German identity, *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. Her goal was not to hide the building and its burden, but to keep it transparent, explaining that “there’s a brutality to the architecture that I can respond to”⁴⁰⁶. Her fusion of the existing space with her glass construction created a place that did not hide the pavilion's past, but instead used it to bring value to the present.

⁴⁰³ Anne Imhof für den Deutschen Pavillon, in: “Der Spiegel”, 27. October 2016, <https://www.spiegel.de/kultur/gesellschaft/biennale-in-venedig-anne-imhof-fuer-den-deutschen-pavillon-a-1118495.html>, [last accessed on 25. August 2023].

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid.; H. Jocks, 2017.

⁴⁰⁵ C. Padterg, *Nur die Anmut ist Unantastbar. An Interview with Anne Imhof*, in: “Spiegel Online”, 16. April 2017, <https://www.spiegel.de/kultur/gesellschaft/biennale-kuenstlerin-anne-imhof-neue-arbeit-in-venedig-a-1140607.html>, [last accessed on 25. August 2023].

⁴⁰⁶ A. Imhof and S. Pfeffer, 2017, p. 18.

4.6 Maria Eichhorn - Relocating a Structure - 2022

For the Biennale of 2022, the curator, Yilmaz Dziewior, invited Maria Eichhorn to present in another solo exhibition for the German Pavilion.

The artists' initial plans would have been the most drastic transformation of the Pavilion so far. Instead of ignoring the structure or integrating it into her exhibition, she wanted to physically erase the building. For this enormous venture, Eichhorn had chosen the technique of translocation, a method commonly used to displace buildings or move historic monuments to a different location either in order to mine resources, preserve the structures or keep them out of harm's way for various reasons.⁴⁰⁷ In order to execute her plans, she consulted with specialists, who suggested two different possible methods.⁴⁰⁸ One would have been to completely disassemble the pavilion into multiple small pieces and transport them to a safe storage location for the duration of the Biennale. The other option was to sever the building from its foundations in one piece and use a special heavy-lift crane to transport the pavilion as a whole via a ship to a temporary warehouse. Both options would have been possible for the 1500-tonne heavy structure, however, each would have faced various difficulties related to rules of budgeting and historical preservation.⁴⁰⁹

The result of this relocation would have been a Biennale with one less pavilion. Illustration 39 shows an edited picture of the *Giardini* hill with the roof of the British and Canadian Pavilions and most noticeably, a vacant spot where the German one would be. With this idea, Eichhorn wanted to analyse the effect on the surrounding

⁴⁰⁷ D. Andrei, *Interview mit Adrian Iordăchescu*, in: *Relocating a Structure. German Pavilion 2022, 59th International Art Exhibition, La Biennale di Venezia*, ed. Yilmaz Dziewior, Köln: Walther König, 2022, pp. 226-231.

⁴⁰⁸ Y. Dziewior, *Zeigen, was da ist. Maria Eichhorn und der Deutsche Pavilion 2022*, in: *Relocating a Structure. German Pavilion 2022, 59th International Art Exhibition, La Biennale di Venezia*, ed. Yilmaz Dziewior, Köln: Walther König, 2022, pp. 11-14, here p.13.

⁴⁰⁹ Y. Dziewior, 2022, p. 13.



Ill. 39: Concept Study for the Relocation of the German Pavilion: M. Milan, S. Manfrinato, L. Artioli, Milan Ingegneria S.p.A. Venezia, 2021, Foto Giovanni Pellegrini © ifa, additional image editing: Alexander Romey; image taken from “Relocating a Structure. German Pavilion 2022, 59th International Art Exhibition, La Biennale di Venezia”, p. 110.

environment of the Biennale once the pavilion was removed.⁴¹⁰ The artist was interested in how it would change the perception of space in the garden, as well as how the other national pavilions would be viewed with more space surrounding them. The act would increase the undeveloped area of the *Giardini*, letting nature recapture the land and freeing up space for visitors to reflect and wander in the garden which was once meant to be a public park.⁴¹¹ Additionally, she wanted to investigate the change in status a possible relocation could cause. Would the building still be the same if it were taken apart and put together again? Would the removal put the German contribution on the same level as countries that were not participating, or would the act of relocating be enough to constitute as a participation?

During the process of planning and debating the temporary removal of the pavilion, a thorough investigation of the structure had to be done. In order to properly understand

⁴¹⁰ M. Eichhorn, *Relocating a Structure. Deutscher Pavilion 2022, 59. Internationale Kunstausstellung La Biennale di Venezia*, in: *Relocating a Structure. German Pavilion 2022, 59th International Art Exhibition, La Biennale di Venezia*, ed. Yilmaz Dziewior, Köln: Walther König, 2022, pp. 129-140, here p. 131.

⁴¹¹ M. Eichhorn, 2022, pp. 130-131.

how to best proceed, the artist and her team first needed to understand its condition and construction. In the course of this examination, the various different layers of the structure started to emerge. While removing the old coats of plaster, the multiple places where the building had been changed were revealed. In the wake of this discovery, Eichhorn decided to change her initial plan and focus her exhibition on the history of the German Pavilion instead.⁴¹²

For her contribution to the Biennale, the artist uncovered important sections of the pavilion that exposed the different forms the building had had since its original construction in 1909. It started with revealing the Bavarian Pavilion, which was renamed the German Pavilion only a few years later in 1912 with slight alterations made to its façade and interior. The 1938 reconstruction under Nazi rule brought with it the greatest changes, which were all uncovered by Eichhorn. During her examination of the pavilion, she exposed multiple intersections between the original structure and the fascist extension, giving an overview of where the two structures were unified. By removing multiple coats of old plaster, she made different doorways, windows and extensions visible, allowing the visitors to imagine the pavilion in its original state.

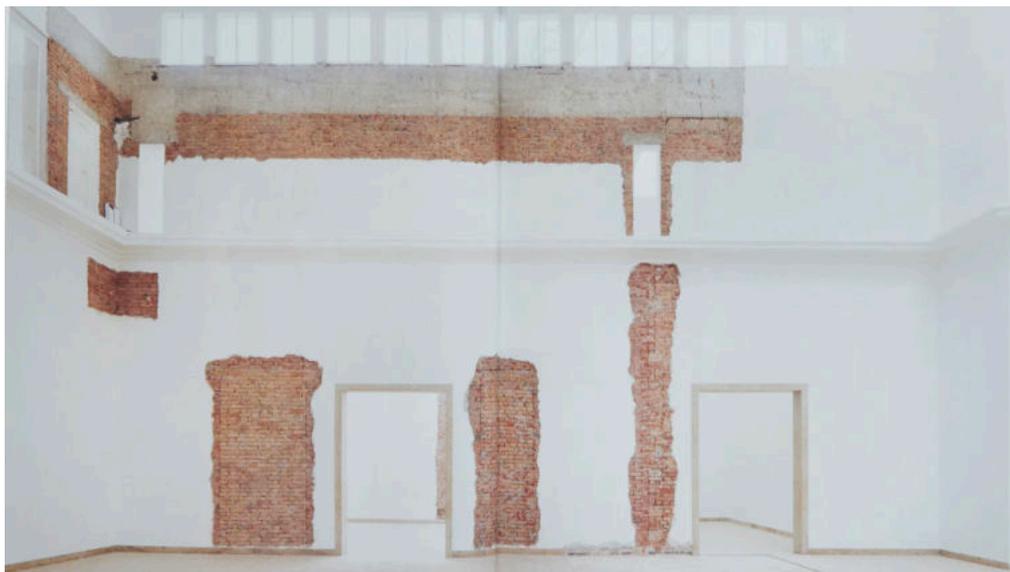
Illustration 40 depicts how the artist laid bare the groundwork of the structure, exposing the brick beneath. The image shows an intersection between the original building of 1909 and the one from 1938. On the left, an old doorway to the side room becomes visible, recognisable by the slightly different appearance of the brick that was built up inside it to cover the opening in 1938. To the right of the current doorway, another old opening is viewable, this one boarded up in 1928.⁴¹³ Additionally, the upward extension constructed during the Nazi era becomes visible, the exposed brick giving a good idea of the height that was added in comparison to the original structure. When overlaying the longitudinal section from Illustration 10 (Ch. 1) with the view of the left wall, the extent of the multiple renovations becomes clear. Illustration 40 depicts the remaining building parts of the Bavarian Pavilion in black and the ones that were removed in 1938 in yellow. The image offers a good understanding of not only

⁴¹² M. Eichhorn, 2022, p. 13.

⁴¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 26-27.



Ill. 40: View of the left wall of the main hall, Relocating a Structure, Maria Eichhorn, German Pavilion, 2022, Photo by Jens Ziehe, image taken from “Relocating a Structure. German Pavilion 2022, 59th International Art Exhibition, La Biennale di Venezia”, pp. 26-27.



Ill. 41: Longitudinal section drawing, left wall of the main hall, Arno Løbbecke; coloured lines depicting the transformation, image taken from “Relocating a Structure. German Pavilion 2022, 59th International Art Exhibition, La Biennale di Venezia”, pp. 82-83.

the aforementioned increase in height, but also the substantial increase in size towards the back of the building.

To further help the communication of the pavilion’s transformation to the audience, Eichhorn provided a simple description of the different modifications next to the



Ill. 42: View of the centre apse with the exposed foundations of the Bavarian Pavilion, Relocating a Structure, Maria Eichhorn, German Pavilion, 2022, image taken from: “Contemporary Art Daily”: <https://www.contemporaryartdaily.com/project/maria-eichhorn-at-german-pavilion-venice-23107>.

excavated areas. The text was written in a slightly off-white colour, making it only visible from certain angles when focusing on it. This allowed the observer to take in the laid-bare architecture to its full extent, without being distracted by any signs.

Furthermore, the artist removed the marble flooring and ground towards the back of the building (Ill. 42). This laid bare the foundations of the Bavarian Pavilion, as well as the original back wall and interior wall before the extension. Due to its construction in 1938 and never having been subjected to any restoration work, the area of the centre apse remained completely untouched by Eichhorn’s actions.

The second part of the exhibition was the accompanying catalogue.⁴¹⁴ The work tied together all the research she and her team had compiled during their planning, first of

⁴¹⁴ *Relocating a Structure. German Pavilion 2022, 59th International Art Exhibition, La Biennale di Venezia*, ed. Yilmaz Dziewior, Köln: Walther König, 2022.

the initially planned relocation and then of the conducted exposure of the structure in over 350 pages. It offers a detailed overview of the project, including archive materials, edited images for the translocation preparation, as well as interviews with experts and essays on political, social and artistic matters.⁴¹⁵ In order to fully experience her exhibition, multiple editions of the catalogue were placed on tables outside of the pavilion, allowing the visitors to review her extensive research.

Adding to this, Eichhorn exposed the realities of Venetian life during the Second World War in a short essay.⁴¹⁶ This contribution focuses on the melting pot the city became in the wake of multiple waves of immigrants of various backgrounds merging together and creating a space where German Troops, Fascists, Partisans, and victims of political persecution, came together. Part of the artist's work in the Biennale was establishing twice weekly tours around the city, visiting places of resistance and remembrance, such as the Jewish Ghetto, Santa Lucia Station, the Prison of Santa Maria Maggiore and the Monument to the Partisan Women near Giardini. In total, ten places could be visited in three separate tours all organised with the help of the *Istituto veneziano per la storia della resistenza e della società contemporanea* (Venetian Institute for the History of Resistance and Contemporary Society).⁴¹⁷

Maria Eichhorn not only wanted to expose the German Pavilion, but also its broader context. Her combined work for the Biennale shows her desire to finally uncover the history of the building and its connection to the city.

Her original idea of physically removing the structure from the Biennale would have surely had an enormous impact on the visitors, particularly those used to the presence of the German Pavilion on top of the hill. Moreover, its absence would have raised the

⁴¹⁵ J. Declercq, *Field Notes. Relocating a Structure, German Pavilion, 59th Venice Biennale*, in: „e-flux”, 2. September 2022, <https://www.e-flux.com/announcements/486174/field-notes-jef-declercq-on-maria-eichhorn-relocating-a-structure-german-pavilion-59th-venice-biennale/>, [last accessed on 28. August 2023].

⁴¹⁶ G. Bobbo, *Places of Remembrance and Resistance*, in: *Relocating a Structure. German Pavilion 2022, 59th International Art Exhibition, La Biennale di Venezia*, ed. Yilmaz Dziewior, Köln: Walther König, 2022, pp. 333-362.

⁴¹⁷ A. Russeth, *A. Russeth, Structural Review: Maria Eichhorn Exposes the German Pavilion's Foundations at the Venice Biennale*, in: “ARTnews”, 20. April 2022, <https://www.artnews.com/art-news/news/aria-eichhorn-german-pavilion-review-1234625925/>, [last accessed on 28. August 2023]; *Ibid.*, p. 362.

interesting question whether there even was any contribution to begin with, seeing as there would be nothing to see. At the same time, the displacement would have been an act of giving the area back to nature as well as to the visitor of the park, who could use the new free space to gain a new perspective on their surroundings.⁴¹⁸ With it removed, the view to the Venice lagoon would have once again been free, allowing an unobscured panorama of the blue waters surrounding the city.

Her exposure of the very structure of the controversial pavilion, however, brought to light a different aspect of the building. By unravelling its construction, she uncovered and made visible the fact that it was actually made up of two buildings. Revealing the various parts of the building's history allowed the visitors to reassess their understanding of it. It is no longer just a structure reflecting the Nazi ideals in its architecture but a building that shares the same origin as many of the other pavilions in Giardini, such as the British and the French ones. Eichhorn shows that the German participation at the Biennale did not start in 1938.

By carefully taking apart the structure, she counters the Nazi ideal of the eternal architecture and reveals that it is not as steadfast as the unifying plaster made it out to be.⁴¹⁹ The newly unveiled places where old and new were joined in 1938 give away the hastiness of the construction and destroy the image of monumentality that was so crucial to the Nazi design.

The visitors could now get an idea of what the original Bavarian Pavilion used to look like. Compared to the monumental size of the current structure, the exposed limits of the old building offered a much more refined picture. The lower ceilings, as well as the significantly smaller space, would have been less overwhelming and overpowering to its guests.⁴²⁰ By looking at the pictures of the original pavilion in the supplied catalogue's, the visitors could grasp the vast differences in atmosphere the two different structures would have offered. It would also provide an opportunity to view

⁴¹⁸ H. Jocks, *59. Biennale, Gespräche. Yilmaz Dziewior*, in: "Kunstforum International", Vol. 282, pp. 242-249, <https://www.kunstforum.de/artikel/yilmaz-dziewior-2/>, [last accessed on 28. August 2023].

⁴¹⁹ D. Müller, *Tectonic Autopsy. The German Pavilion at the 59th Venice Biennale*, in: "Spike Art Magazine", 26. August 2022, <https://www.spikeartmagazine.com/?q=articles/tectonic-autopsy-german-pavilion-59th-venice-biennale>, [last accessed on 28. August 2023].

⁴²⁰ Y. Dziewior, 2022, p. 13.

the original entrance, allowing a new understanding of the building's previous aesthetic.

In an interview with Yilmaz Dziewior, the curator explains his decision process for choosing Maria Eichhorn for the 59. Biennale.⁴²¹ At first, due to his own internationality (having a Turkish first name and Polish last name, while feeling German), he considered inviting an artist who had a similarly diverse background. In the end, he decided to ask Eichhorn in the wake of her previous works, as well as his own curiosity to see what she would create for the German Pavilion.

Many of the artists' earlier works show the same dedication to research, as well as a goal of bettering social, personal and environmental aspects of life.⁴²² Her project "Rose Valland Institut" for instance, researched and documented the expropriation of the Jewish population in Europe and its aftermath.⁴²³ Named after the art historian, Rose Valland who kept secret lists of Nazi-looted art during the German occupation, the institute is dedicated to investigating rightful ownership of artworks and other assets stolen during the war.

Overall, Dziewior believed that Eichhorn's commitment to the politics of restitution, as well as her inclination to dig into the context of the exhibition space, made her almost "predestined" to deal with the German Pavilion.⁴²⁴ Particularly her interest in German history and its long-lasting repercussion, would make her a compelling addition to the 2022 Biennale.⁴²⁵

⁴²¹ H. Jocks, 2022.

⁴²² C. Christov-Bakarijev, *Notes on some Works by Maria Eichhorn*, in: "Afterall. A Journal of Art", Context and Enquiry, Issue 1, 1999, pp. 27-45, here p. 30.

⁴²³ More information on the topic can be found on the Institutes website: <http://rosevallandinstitut.org/ueber.html>.

⁴²⁴ H. Jocks, 2022.

⁴²⁵ *Maria Eichhorn Bespielt den Deutschen Pavilion in Venedig*, in: "Monopol", 17. February 2021, https://www.monopol-magazin.de/ maria-eichhorn-bespielt-den-deutschen-pavillon-venedig?utm_source=monopol_Newsletter&utm_campaign=manuel&fbclid=IwAR3Fy2ctuBRBY8MY6ozZmqpe74JEzbi6glOJlrkdSDSg2VHgFq0E6d8s4Q, [last accessed on 28. August 2023].

Her goal was to understand every facet of the building, not just the architecture but also its history and finances.⁴²⁶ This makes the research process the core of Eichhorn's artistic work. The result shown in the pavilion is only the “tip of the iceberg⁴²⁷” and needs the accompanying catalogue to be truly understood.

In an interview with Eichhorn and the German Press Agency (DPA), the artist reveals her opinion on representing nationality and the principle of the national pavilions.⁴²⁸ To her, words such as “national” have increasingly less meaning. In a country where every fourth person has a migration background, the concept starts to become less significant. Her wish was to create a comprehensive overview of the different aspects of the German Pavilion and display it in a way that would make it accessible to international visitors, as well as those who are not as familiar with its history.⁴²⁹

By making the subject presented in the German Pavilion, the Pavilion itself, the artist has represented the very core of the idea of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, a topic that is still present and highly relevant in current times. Her subject choice makes the connection to German identity undeniable, as it embodies a mentality that has grown within the country's social sphere since the end of the Nazi era.

Nevertheless, both Eichhorn and Dziewior believe that their project goes beyond the boundaries of the national. It was not just the Pavilion's National Socialist past that Eichhorn wanted to uncover. While researching its history she went even further back to also confront the country's colonial history.⁴³⁰ The Biennale as an institution which has been working for over 100 years, has seen its fair share of participating countries with a morally dubious past. While the German Pavilion's architecture is a tell-tale

⁴²⁶ S. B. Vogel, *Wir wollen die Geschichte des Pavilions verstehen. Y. Dziewior im Gespräch mit S. B. Vogel*, in: , in: *Auf Wasser gebaut. Venedig, ein Album. Der Deutsche Pavillon 2009-2022*, München: Schirmer Mosel, 2022, pp. 67-90, here p. 87.

⁴²⁷ Ibid., pp. 87-88.

⁴²⁸ G. Roth, *Gerd Roth im Gespräch mit Biennale-Künstlerin Maria Eichhorn*, in: „Monopol“, 29. December 2021, <https://www.monopol-magazin.de/interview-maria-eichhorn-kunst-bleibt-anarchisch-und-widerstaend-ig?slide=0>, [last accessed on 28. August 2023].

⁴²⁹ Ibid..

⁴³⁰ S. B. Vogel, 2022, p. 86; M. Eichhorn, 2022, pp. 133-136.

symbol of its past, the surrounding buildings such as the British and the French were built in a time and by a government thriving under colonialism.⁴³¹

By stripping away the white plaster the artist removed the unifying layer of the structure revealing the very foundations of the Pavilion's complicated history. Instead of adding to the structure by displaying something, she has taken its shell away and laid it bare for all the world to see. After multiple contributions confronting and using the fascist architecture, she decided to uncover its reality, showing the visitor the truth behind the decades of conflict and confrontation.

The presentation of Eichhorn's contribution to the Biennale of 2022 was met with admiration and approval by the German Press. When considering the atmosphere of uncertainty and trepidation the war between Russia and the Ukraine had brought to Europe, the exhibition was seen as a welcome reminder of the power of resistance and the importance of questioning political structures.⁴³² The way the artist subtly unveiled the poor quality and haste with which the Nazi expansion was constructed in 1938, seemed to bring a definite feeling of pleasure with it. The knowledge, that the eternal architecture, meant to intimidate visitors with its tremendous appearance, might not be so powerful after all, prompted a sense of satisfaction in many viewers. The exposed areas of the structure are compared with "gaping wounds", taking away from the monumentality by exposing the fragility beneath.⁴³³

Many articles compared her work to that of Haacke's *Germania* in 1993, seeing the dismantling and destruction of the architecture as an homage or even a logical continuation of his work.⁴³⁴

⁴³¹ S. B. Vogel, 2022, p. 86; M. Eichhorn, 2022, pp. 133-136.

⁴³² N. Maak, *Auf Welcher Seite Steht Jetzt Wer?*, in: "Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung", 23. April 2022, <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/kunst-und-architektur/surrealismus-und-krieg-die-kunst-biennale-in-venedig-17975226.html>, [last accessed on 29. August 2023].

⁴³³ S. Trinks, *Surrealismus der Nächsten Generation*, in: "Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung", 21. April 2022, <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/kunst-und-architektur/biennale-in-venedig-darf-man-trotz-ukraine-krieg-kunst-geniessen-17973300-p2.html>, [last accessed on 29. August 2023].

⁴³⁴ U. Knöfel, *Unsere Frau in Venedig*, in: "Der Spiegel", Nr. 17, 2022, <https://www.spiegel.de/kultur/maria-eichhorn-bei-der-beiennale-in-venedig-die-aufdeckerin-a-65ac3d24-5fe3-44c5-b6a2-998b2b3ac991> [last accessed on 29. August 2023].

Furthermore, an article published in *Welt*, describes her work as a “masterpiece of sustainability⁴³⁵”, praising the way the artist has turned the pavilion into art without having to ship any works to the Biennale (which would have of course not been the case with her original idea).

Overall, the reception of the German Pavilion seems to have been a positive one. Especially her multidimensional approach of including the whole context of the Biennale as well as that of the hosting city was praised as an exemplary initiative.⁴³⁶ Just as she had hoped, her deconstruction of the interior stimulated the discussion of its history and encouraged visitors to remain outside the pavilion to study her catalogue.⁴³⁷ While there were no crowds gathering in front of the building as was seen with artists such as Gregor Schneider or Anne Imhof, they were also not expected. Despite this, the response to Eichhorn’s contribution would have most probably looked very different had she been able to proceed with her original plan. No doubt the removal of the Pavilion would have led to more drastic and most likely more controversial headlines in the German Press.⁴³⁸ While her original idea could not be realised, Eichhorn still wanted to share her research of the topic in her catalogue. By doing so, she in a way also accomplished her goal of stimulating the thought of what it would have been like to erase the Nazi pavilion, if only for a short while. The plan has been presented and now the idea has been planted in the visitor’s mind, for everyone to contemplate on their own.

While the artist herself did not see her work as a representation of national identity, the very nature and subject of her exhibit made it into one. By perfectly representing the idea of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, she reflected on the very core of German post-

⁴³⁵ B. Pofalla, *Der Deutsche Pavillon Schafft Sich Ab*, in: „Welt“, 21. April 2022, https://www.welt.de/kultur/article238260195/Die-besten-Pavillon-der-Biennale-in-Venedig-2022-und-warum-der-deutsche-Pavillon-leer-bleibt.html?fbclid=IwAR1nLbSFpfxTBZeCi8eFpVDctVR2d_nZjA9q-X1cvZ1XbunoUBZR4AE5TfU, [last accessed on 29. August 2023].

⁴³⁶ Deutsche Presse Agentur, *Positive Deutsche Biennale-Bilanz*, in: “Weltkunst News“, 25. November 2022, <https://www.weltkunst.de/ausstellungen/2022/11/biennale-maria-eichhorn-deutscher-pavillon>, [last accessed on 29. August 2023].

⁴³⁷ *Ibid.*.

⁴³⁸ H. Jocks, *Maria Eichhorn. Die Plötzliche Abwesenheit*, in: “Kunstforum International”, Vol. 282, 2022, pp. 238–224.

war identity which has been increasingly gaining momentum in the last decades. The history the Pavilion embodies is as problematic as ever. Its continued existence only further emphasizes the irony of a country, which has been trying to move on from the past for over half a century, but has been internationally celebrating and presenting itself in a Nazi structure. With her work she laid bare the reality of the architecture, revealing its core through her undeniable research, not only exposing an essential aspect of German national identity, but also encouraging visitors to consider the history of other participants.

5. A Look into the Future – The Concept of National Representation

Times have changed since the Biennale first opened its doors at the end of the 19th century. What started as a small art exhibition with only a few non-Italian participants, has turned into an international phenomenon. At the 2022 Biennale, a total of 80 national participations were counted at the event, with less than half of the countries having a pavilion located in *Giardini*.⁴³⁹ The remaining nations hosted either in Arsenale or in other chosen areas around the city. While most of the exhibition spaces throughout the city have many visitors, the *Giardini* are still seen as the centre point of the event, giving the pavilions situated there an air of prestigiousness and power.⁴⁴⁰ The rising global awareness of the interconnectivity of our world and the consequent blurring of borders over the last few decades has led to a number of countries questioning the principle of national representation. It is no longer seen as a certainty to choose an artist who was born and raised in the country to participate in national contribution. Just as Klaus Bußmann invited Nam June Paik, who had spent all his youth in South Korea before moving to Germany, and Hans Haacke, who had moved

⁴³⁹ Official Website of the 2022 Venice Biennale: <https://www.labiennale.org/en/art/2022/national-participations>.

⁴⁴⁰ A. Vettese, 2015, p. 152.

to the US as a young adult, other countries are seeing the value of bringing different national backgrounds into their exhibitions. In 2007, Commissioner Nicolaus Schafhausen invited the British artist Liam Gillick to present in a solo exhibition in the German Pavilion.⁴⁴¹

Unlike Haacke and Paik, Gillick had no connection to the country. The commissioner had worked with him on previous occasions and believed his work to be well-suited for the pavilion. His selection, as well as his contribution *Wie würden Sie sich verhalten? Eine Küchenkatze spricht* (How are you going to behave? A Kitchen Cat Speaks), was highly criticised at the time. Gillick thoroughly prepared himself for the task of representing in another country's pavilion, reading up on its history, holding lectures and researching Arnold Bode's idea of reconstructing the Nazi building.⁴⁴² His first step while developing his idea was to create an architectural model of Bode's design plan.⁴⁴³ Many had high hopes that the English artists could help further break the monumentality of the massive structure.⁴⁴⁴ However, in the end, his exhibition seemed to disappoint with its non-confrontational approach.

For the German Pavilion, he created a minimalistic version of a classic *Frankfurter Küche* (Frankfurt Kitchen), a style of kitchen developed in 1926 that is today seen as the forerunner of the modern-day fitted kitchen. The simple pinewood construction extended into all the building's rooms, its light colouring capturing the brightness of the pavilion (Ill. 43). The only oddity in his design was the small taxidermied tabby cat on top of one of the cupboards that would speak to the visitors in English.

⁴⁴¹ N. Schafhausen, *Vorwort des Kurators*, in: Liam Gillick. *Wie würden Sie sich verhalten? Eine Küchenkatze spricht. How are you going to behave? A kitchen cat speaks. Deutscher Pavillon*, 53. *Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte, La Biennale di Venezia 2009*, Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2009, pp. 11-13.

⁴⁴² N. Schafhausen, 2009, p. 12; A. Melchert and L. Pilz, *Die Katze ist aus dem Sack*, in: "Die Zeit", 10. June 2009, <https://www.zeit.de/online/2009/24/biennale-deutscher-pavillon?utmreferrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2F>, [last access on 30. August 2023].

⁴⁴³ S. Boecker, *Deutschland. Liam Gillick*, in: "Kunstforum International" Vol. 198, 2009, no page numbers.

⁴⁴⁴ A. Melchert und L. Pulz, 2009



Ill. 43: Wie würden Sie sich verhalten? Eine Küchenkatze spricht, Liam Gillick, German Pavilion 2009, image taken from: “Kunstforum International“, <https://www.kunstforum.de/artikel/deutschland-liam-gillick/>.

With his exhibition, Gillick wanted to make a connection to the everyday aesthetic of German life and culture.⁴⁴⁵ As a symbol of modernity and progress at the time, the kitchen should offer a contrast to the architecture of the old and outdated Pavilion. The act of putting these two ideas against each other was to be seen as an antifascist gesture.⁴⁴⁶

Though some found it unsuitable to invite a British artist to the German Pavilion, most celebrated the act of selecting an international artist and saw it as a long overdue decision.⁴⁴⁷ Nevertheless, his contribution was met with confusion and disappointment. Many disagreed with the fact that the whole communication about the

⁴⁴⁵ L. Gillick and N. Schafhausen, *Wie wir uns verhalten werden*, in: *Auf Wasser gebaut. Venedig, ein Album. Der Deutsche Pavilion 2009-2022*, München: Schirmer Mosel, 2022, pp. 191-215, here pp. 212-213.

⁴⁴⁶ *Ibid.*.

⁴⁴⁷ P. Richter, *Die Katze über dem Astloch*, in: “Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung“, 4. June 2009, <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/kunst-und-architektur/kunstbiennale-venedig-die-katze-ueber-dem-astloch-1817150.html>, [last access on 30. August 2023].

pavilion, including the German ambassador's opening speech, was conducted in English.⁴⁴⁸ Especially the commentary of the small cat figure, whose voice would echo about the pavilion, was met with resistance by the visitors.⁴⁴⁹ Altogether, it can be said that his presence in the pavilion was celebrated, his contribution, however, was deemed underwhelming and did nothing to push the boundaries of the burdened architecture. The artist himself believes his choice of subtleness turned out to be too soft for the audience to pick up on immediately.⁴⁵⁰ Even though the artist was very interested in contemporary German culture and thoroughly researched the pavilion's history, it seemed he missed the mark on what was expected of him. The audience had anticipated a new and maybe even ground-breaking approach that only an international artist could provide. Instead, they were left with an almost confusing exhibition that did not fulfil what its announcement had promised.⁴⁵¹ In the end, the construction represented a part of German history and with it, in its own way, its identity, but to most visitors it was not the satisfying portrayal of the nation they had hoped it would be.

Only a few years later, in 2013, another interesting approach to the idea of national representation was taken. Acting with the German and French Offices of Foreign Affairs, the curators Susanne Gaensheimer and Christine Macel decided to initiate an exchange of their pavilions. The swapping of the two national buildings had already been considered for the previous event, but due to a shortage of time, they had not been able to proceed in doing so for the 2011 Biennale. It was then decided, to commence with the plans in 2013, which would also coincide perfectly with the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Élysée Treaty.⁴⁵² To exhibit their work in the French Pavilion,

⁴⁴⁸ W. Spies, *Denglisch*, in: "Frankfurter Rundschau", 11. June 2009, <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/kunstbiennale-denglisch-1817189.html>, [last access on 30. August 2023].

⁴⁴⁹ The unhappiness about this fact was so great, that in a later rendition of his exhibition in the *Bundeskunsthalle* in Bonn the cat was changed to speak German to its visitors.

⁴⁵⁰ L. Gillick and N. Schafhausen, 2022, p. 213.

⁴⁵¹ S. Boecker, 2009.

⁴⁵² P. Schaefer, *GERMANIA. Italienische Kritik der deutschen Beiträge seit 1990*, in: *Der Deutsche Pavillon. Ein Jahrhundert nationaler Repräsentation auf der Internationalen Kunstausstellung "La Biennale di Venezia" 1912-2012*, edited by J. May and S. Meine, Regensburg: Schnell + Steiner, 2015, pp. 127-140, here p. 137.

Gaensheimer invited four artists to the 55th Biennale. The Chinese-born Ai Weiwei, Santu Mofokeng from South Africa, Dayanita Singh from India, as well as Romuald Karmakar, who was born in Germany but had a French mother and an Iranian Father. Together, they offered the most international exhibition the country had ever invited. Coupled with their presentation in the French Pavilion, their contribution was to be symbolic of the cultural exchange of both countries as well as the embodiment of transnationality in the art world.⁴⁵³ A key part of their exhibition was the panel discussion held on May 31 2013 *And who are you? Nationale Repräsentationen in der Kunst* (National Representations in Art), in which the artists debated the importance of not being labelled by their respective nationalities, but instead being simply seen as artists, detached from any type of such labels.⁴⁵⁴ In the official press statement, the importance of international cooperation in the art world is stressed, affirming the belief that communication between cultures should have a greater influence on art than any national borders.⁴⁵⁵

Jointly, the artists created an exhibition that examined the notion of cultural identity.⁴⁵⁶ Ai Weiwei's main contribution was the immersive sculpture *Bang* made out of 886 traditional Chinese three-legged stools that were meant to represent the cultural shift of the country over the recent decades, as well as the relationship between the individual and the system of our postmodern world.⁴⁵⁷ Karmakar, presented a number of his short films examining victimisation in post-war Germany and questioning existence within a social system that is under the influence of external guidelines. Singh exhibited a photographic series that dealt with the idea of the national identity

⁴⁵³ E. aus dem Moore, *Preface*, in: *Ai Weiwei, Romuald Karmakar, Santu Mofokeng, Dayanita Singh. German Pavilion 2013, 55th International Art Exhibition, la Biennale di Venezia*, Berlin: Gestalten, 2013, pp. 48-49; P. Schaefer, 2015, p. 138.

⁴⁵⁴ E. aus dem Moore, 2013, p. 48.

⁴⁵⁵ M. Müller, *France and Germany Exchange Pavilions. Press Release*, 16. November 2012, https://2013.deutscher-pavillon.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Frankreich-und-Deutschland-tausche-n-die-Pavillons_2305_en.pdf, [last access on 31. August 2023].

⁴⁵⁶ *Press Kit for the Opening of the German Pavilion at the 55. Biennale*, 29. May 2013, https://2013.deutscher-pavillon.org/wpcontent/uploads/2012/11/PressemappeDP_elektr_Versand_en_Master.pdf, [last access on 31. August 2023].

⁴⁵⁷ *Ibid.*.

of an individual who doesn't seem to belong to any social structure. Lastly, Mofokeng also displayed a photographic series. His images depicted the spiritually important landscapes of South Africa that are being destroyed to gain economic resources and the effect it has on the population's identity.

The resulting exhibition was received with mixed opinions by the German Press. Many reviews agreed that while the exchange and the chosen artists were a well-meant gesture, it did not offer the well-rounded contribution they had hoped for.⁴⁵⁸ Particularly the participation of Ai Weiwei, who could not attend the Biennale himself due to the confiscation of his passport by the Chinese government, was put under much scrutiny. It was believed, that his works would outshine the other creators and that his space should have been given to another international artist, who did not have his level of popularity.⁴⁵⁹ Gaensheimer however, defended her decision, stating that it was a testament to Germany's national development that it has become a country in which persecuted artists can find new opportunities.⁴⁶⁰ It was important to her, that all artists had a personal connection to Germany in some way, although none of them held the country's passport, as she wanted to show their unique approach to the idea of national representation.

The switching of the national buildings was a first in the long history of the Biennale.⁴⁶¹ With the anniversary of the treaty, which solidified the friendship between France and West Germany, as a fitting occasion, the trade was meant to be seen as a symbol of this longlasting bond. Yet, the pavilion exchange between the two neighbouring countries was met by many visitors with a certain level of uncertainty. The respective names of the countries remained on top of the buildings with only a

⁴⁵⁸ N. Maak, *Was zeigt der Deutsche Pavillon 2013?*, in: "Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung", 19. September 2013, <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/kunst-und-architektur/unser-ai-in-venedig-was-zeigt-der-deutsche-pavillon-2013-11895646.html>, [last access on 31. August 2023]; E. Metz, *Der Deutsche Pavilion im Französischen Haus*, in: "Feuilleton Frankfurt", 30. June 2013, <https://www.feuilletonfrankfurt.de/2013/06/30/55-biennale-arte-venedig-2013-6/> [last access on 31. August 2023].

⁴⁵⁹ K. Schulze, *Wo „Francia“ draufsteht, ist „Germania“ drin*, in: "Der Spiegel", 24. May 2013, <https://www.spiegel.de/kultur/gesellschaft/biennale-von-venedig-frankreich-und-deutschland-tauschen-pavillons-a-901231.html>, [last access on 31. August 2023].

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid..

⁴⁶¹ E. aus dem Moore, 2013, p. 48.

banner on the side signalling the exchange to its visitors (Ill. 44). As the switch was not the direct topic of the exhibitions, many seemed confused by the act.⁴⁶² The challenge of international boundaries and the question of national identity seemed misunderstood by many. Still, the popularity of the artist, in particular, Ai Weiwei ensured a great amount of interest in the 2013 contribution.



Ill. 44: The German contribution to the 2013 Biennale inside the French Pavilion, 2013, image taken from “Kulturraum NRW”: <https://www.kulturraum.nrw/ausstellung/biennale-venedig-2013-nation-giardini.html>.

The French exhibition in the German Pavilion was created by Anri Sala, who was born in Albania and now lives in Berlin and Paris. The sound of his three-part video installation Ravel Ravel Unravel echoed through the otherwise empty halls of the Pavilion. The artist saw the building as a source of endless possibilities. While his work does not connect to its history, he was still interested to see the effect its background would have on the atmosphere of his exhibition.⁴⁶³ Although the

⁴⁶² K. Schulze, 2013.

⁴⁶³ S. Cernuschi, *55th Venice Biennale. Anri Sala at the French Pavillon*, in: “Mousse Magazine”, 7. June 2013, <https://www.moussemagazine.it/magazine/55vb-french-pavilion/>, [last access on 2. September 2023].

contribution was well received, Karin Schulze mentions in an article written for “Der Spiegel”, how the exhibition seems to have no connection to its presentation space, further contributing to the slight confusion surrounding the switch.⁴⁶⁴

The question of national representation is not only relevant to the German Pavilion but is also a subject that has spread to many of the participating countries over the last decade. Does it make sense, in a world so connected by modern technology, to represent single countries in a format inspired by the world expositions more than a century ago? The examination of representation within the context of the country pavilions has become a recurring theme within the Biennale in recent times.⁴⁶⁵ As the world becomes more and more intertwined, there is a growing need for artists, curators and visitors alike, to disrupt cultural boundaries and not limit themselves to the borders of one's own nation.

In 1995, the Greek Pavilion invited Panayiotis Vassilakis to represent the country at the anniversary Biennale. For his contribution, the artist decided to completely close off the national building and present his sculptures in the area in front of it (Ill. 45). The three large-scale iron artworks created musical sounds and vibrations and were meant to spread the message of a world without borders.⁴⁶⁶ The banner blocking the entrance proclaims his nickname “Takis” in bold letters, with the artist's intentions written underneath, proclaiming himself a citizen of the world. With this gesture, Takis aimed to dismantle the idea of borders in the art world and detach himself from the idea of national representation.⁴⁶⁷

⁴⁶⁴ K. Schulze, 2013.

⁴⁶⁵ A. Vettese, 2015, p. 152.

⁴⁶⁶ M. Marangou, *Takis and the Origin*, in: *Takis. 46. Biennale di Venezia 1995*, 1995, no page numbers.

⁴⁶⁷ P. Schneemann, *Die Biennale von Venedig. Nationale Präsentation und internationaler Anspruch*, in: “Zeitschrift für schweizerische Archäologie und Kunstgeschichte“, Vol. 53, No. 4, 1996, pp. 313-322, here p. 314. The banner reads in Italian:

“lo scultore Takis annulla lo stand greco esponendo all'aperto / la sua decisione è coerente con l'ideologia dei "Cittadini del mondo" / che annullano le frontiere dell'arte, desiderando uno spazio unico dove esporranno tutti insieme senza sentire il bisogno di identificarsi.”

(The sculptor Takis cancels the Greek stand by exhibiting outdoors / his decision is consistent with the ideology of the 'Citizens of the World' / who cancel the frontiers of art, desiring a single space where they will all exhibit together without feeling the need to identify themselves)



Ill. 45: Takis, Panayiotis Vassilakis, Greek Pavilion, 1995, image taken from “ASAC Dati”, <https://asac.labiennale.org/attivita/arti-visive/annali?anno=1995>.

In 2003, the artist Santiago Sierra confronted the national representation of the Spanish pavilion in a similar, yet more forceful way. Instead of closing off the building with a banner and a message, he constructed a solid brick wall inside the entrance (Ill. 46). The identifying “España” above was covered with dusty trash bags. Any visitors had to circle around the building to the back door and were only allowed to enter the exhibition when they presented a Spanish passport to the guards. Inside they found nothing but the remnants of the previous exhibition, giving it the atmosphere of a construction site. With this act, Sierra wanted to raise awareness for the power structures behind the idea of the country pavilions, as well as their significance in relation to what a nation is.⁴⁶⁸ In an interview with Teresa Margolles for “Bomb Magazine” the artist states: “A nation is actually nothing; countries don’t exist. [...]”

⁴⁶⁸ M. Hübel, *Spanien. Santiago Sierra*, in: “Kunstforum International”, Bd. 166, pp. 236-239, <https://www.kunstforum.de/artikel/spanien-santiago-sierra/>, [last access on 31. August 2023].

They are political constructions, and what’s inside a construction? Whatever you want to put there.”⁴⁶⁹

Both exhibitions depict how the presence of the national pavilion was used by the artists to represent the conflict they felt when showing their art within the limitations of the Biennale’s country structures. Each turned their building into a demonstration of their opinion concerning the topic of national identity.

Nevertheless, while some countries yearn to be free of the national boundaries at the Biennale, the structure of the national pavilions allows those artists to exhibit who might otherwise have never received the opportunity to do so. As all participating countries have the free choice of artist and mostly select artists from their own nation,



Ill. 46: Blocked entrance of the Spanish Pavilion, Santiago Sierra, 2003, image taken from: “Rosa Martinez”: <http://www.rosamartinez.com/new/50-exposicion-internacional-bienal-de-venecia-pabellon-espanol/>.

⁴⁶⁹ K. Hegarty (translator), *Santiago Sierra by Teresa Margolles*, in: “Bomb Magazine”, 1. January 2004, No. 86, <https://bombmagazine.org/articles/santiago-sierra/>, [last access on 31. August 2023].

they sometimes decide on presenting lesser-known creators, helping them achieve an international recognition they might have not attained otherwise.⁴⁷⁰

Still others have used their space at the Biennale to give a voice to those, who did not have a pavilion of their own. In 2022 for instance, the Netherlands was the first country to fully give up their national building.⁴⁷¹ The 1953 structure was given to Estonia for the duration of the event, while their exhibition was held in a church in Cannaregio. In a ceremony symbolising the cultural exchange for 2022, Eelco van der Lingen, the host of the event, announced the country's appreciation of the Estonian art world.⁴⁷²

In the same year, the Nordic Pavilion, which usually houses the art of Sweden, Norway and Finland, with the curatorial responsibility shifting between the countries, decided to host indigenous artists. The Sámi, Europe's only indigenous people were represented by three artists Pauliina Feodoroff, Máret Ánne Sara and Anders Sunna. Katya García-Antón, the commissioner of the pavilion, called it a "historic moment of decolonization"⁴⁷³, stating that they wanted to bring awareness to the struggles the Sámi People face today.

By giving away their pavilions, both the Netherlands and the Nordic countries gave a voice to those who, until then, did not have the chance to express themselves artistically on such an international stage. It offered them the opportunity to present their national identity and be seen by thousands of visitors over the course of the Biennale. While The Netherlands chose to move their exhibition to a smaller venue removed from *Giardini*, the Nordic countries invited the Sámi People to present in their stead, embracing them as part of their nations and their culture. Both countries

⁴⁷⁰ Christoph Schlingensiefel can be seen as a good example of this, as he had almost no international recognition prior to his presentation at the Biennale and had not been included in Germany's inner artistic circle either.

⁴⁷¹ *Dutch hand over Rietveld Pavilion to Estonia for Venice Art Biennale*, in: "Dutch News", 18. November, 2021, <https://www.dutchnews.nl/2021/11/dutch-hand-over-rietveld-pavilion-to-estonia-for-venice-art-biennale/>, [last access on 31. August 2023].

⁴⁷² N. Lucarelli, *L'Olanda cambia location a Venezia 2022, e affitta il Padiglione Rietveld all'Estonia*, in: "Artribune", 18. November 2021, <https://www.artribune.com/arti-visive/arte-contemporanea/2021/11/lolanda-cambia-location-a-venezia-2022-e-affitta-il-padiglione-rietveld-allestonia/>, [last access on 31. August 2023].

⁴⁷³ E. Fullerton, *With Sámi Pavilion, Three Indigenous Artists Hope to Highlight the Ongoing Struggles of Their People at the Venice Biennale*, in: "Art News", 18. April 2022, <https://www.artnews.com/art-news/artists/sami-pavilion-2022-venice-biennale-1234625607/>, [last access on 31. August 2023].

decided to detach themselves from the idea of their national representation for the 2022 Biennale, choosing to let others shine instead.

Keeping this in mind, for some countries, having a national pavilion to present their artistic landscape is seen as a great achievement, as well as a privilege. The most recent addition to the *Giardini*, the Pavilion of South Korea was added in 1995. They had previously exhibited in the Central Pavilion in 1986, 1988 and 1993 until the Korean government took a closer interest in the event. Their rapid economic growth and desire to be recognised abroad led to an increase in the country's art budget and with it a strong aspiration to plant their artistic roots in the *Giardini*.⁴⁷⁴ Their new exhibition space was built between the German and the Japanese Pavilions, and was meant to be a display of their economic power, as well as a demonstration of their cultural significance and tolerance.⁴⁷⁵ To them, establishing themselves near some of the very first structures of the Biennale such as Germany was of great importance and crucial for the representation of their national identity.

Another interesting example is that of the Vatican participation. The Holy Sea joined the Biennale in 2013 with a pavilion in *Arsenale*. Its unique position as a state, but not a nation, offers an intriguing perspective on the idea of national representation. The curator, Micol Forti, saw their participation at the Biennale as an opportunity to share their voice with others and create a new dialogue.⁴⁷⁶ To her, it was not important what faith the selected artists had, their works needed to be meaningful. Their contributions examine the themes of creation while taking inspiration from the first eleven chapters of Genesis, and are meant to encourage a conversation between faith and art.⁴⁷⁷

⁴⁷⁴ *The History of the Korean Pavilion at the Venice Biennale and Its 2024 exhibition*, in: "K-ArtNow", 3. April 2023, <https://k-artnow.com/the-history-of-the-korean-pavilion-at-the-venice-biennale-and-its-2024-exhibition/>, [last access on 31. August 2023].

⁴⁷⁵ A. Vettese, 2015, p. 152.

⁴⁷⁶ C. Higgins, *Vatican goes back to the beginning for first entry at Venice Biennale*, in: "The Guardian", 31. May 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2013/may/31/vatican-first-entry-venice-biennale>, [last access on 31. August 2023].

⁴⁷⁷ R. Donadio, *Church Plans Art Pavilion At Biennale*, in: "The New York Times", 15. May 2013, Section C, p. 7.

This brief overview of the struggle of national representation in the German Pavilion, as well as the experiences other countries have had, offers a good idea of the general question the Biennale has been facing related to the structuring of art by individual countries. The more the world tries to overcome its social and cultural borders, the more the idea of the pavilions as strongholds of an artistic representation of national identity seems to become obsolete or, at the very least, a hindrance to what art is trying to achieve.

On the other hand, it allows many different participants to share their culture with a broad spectrum of people. In the case of Estonia and the Sámi People, their artists may have never had the resources to share their work on such an international stage as the Biennale. The exposure not only increases their influence and reputation but also helps them spread awareness of their existence, their stories and their identities. The joining of the Holy Sea shows the immense power a participation at the Biennale is believed to have.⁴⁷⁸ All the pavilions sprinkled across the city of Venice, turn into small embassies of the country they represent, transforming the Biennale itself into a platform for cultural diplomacy.⁴⁷⁹

Since the Biennale first opened its doors, multiple large-scale art exhibitions around the world have come into existence. While some other events such as the *Bienal Internacional de Arte de São Paulo* (International Biennial of Art of São Paulo) at first copied the structure of presenting artists by their country, it started moving away from this organisational approach from the 1980s onward.⁴⁸⁰ Instead, a chief curator is selected to choose all artists and artworks for the event. This evolution in structure enabled them to adapt to the changing artistic and global atmosphere and helped them grow into the second-largest Biennale today.⁴⁸¹

⁴⁷⁸ A. Vettese, 2015, p. 156.

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid..

⁴⁸⁰ I. Whitelegg, *The Bienal Internacional de São Paulo. A concise history, 1951-2014*, in: "Perspective", No. 2, 2013, pp. 380-386.

⁴⁸¹ K. Mazzucchelli, *The São Paulo Biennial and the Rise of Brazilian Contemporary Art*, in: "Contemporary Art Brazil", ed. Hossein Amirsadeghi, High Holborn: Thames & Hudson, 2012.

The documenta, which was founded by Arnold Bode in 1955 and takes place in Kassel, took a very different approach to the Biennale. The event takes place every five years and was created to show contemporary art, especially that which had been deemed “degenerate” during the war, to the German population. It was also conceived as a way of helping them overcome the aftermath of the Nazi era.⁴⁸² Instead of the division into countries, the artistic landscape is created by the events *Künstlerischer Leiter* (Artistic Director) who is meant to design an overview of the current contemporary art world.⁴⁸³ The five-year period between exhibitions offers a longer planning time, allowing for more intricate shows.

As it stands, the Venice Biennale remains the largest art event of its kind, the separation into national pavilions having become one of its most recognisable characteristics. The debate around this fact has been growing increasingly stronger over the last decades, with artists actively searching to confront the boundaries which have been set since the event's conception. Since many of the pavilions constructed in the *Giardini* go back more than half a century, the space for new participants is limited. Even with the expansion into other districts of Venice, there is no denying that the countries housed in the Biennale Gardens have a stronger presence than the others.⁴⁸⁴

Yet, while many seem to agree that it is an outdated system, there are also those who have, and still do, benefit from this structure. For one, it helps artists, who would not otherwise be able to present their work, to be seen by a diverse audience. Additionally, it gives all visitors the opportunity to view and experience the art and culture of countries they might have never thought to explore otherwise. With its organisation into country pavilions, the internationally renowned Biennale has grown out of the European context and attracted artists and art lovers from around the globe, enabling a cultural exchange of unimaginable magnitude.

⁴⁸² D. Schwarze, *Wir sind blass vor Neid*, Online documenta Archive, <https://www.documenta-archiv.de/de/documenta/91/1>, [last access on 31. August 2023].

⁴⁸³ S. Oelze, 2012.

⁴⁸⁴ A. Vettese, 2015, p. 165.

The multiple participations from different countries that have been described above, show that it is not only Germany that struggles with the idea of national identification at the Biennale. Yet for no other country has it been such a commonly reoccurring theme as for the German Pavilion. The horrors of history, which are rooted deep within the building's architecture, seem to prohibit the artists from moving on, with many choosing to include the structure in their exhibitions. Together with the fundamental mentality of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* which is still growing strong in the country's society, the building seems destined to be a battleground of historical confrontation. In March 2023, the Institute for Foreign Relations announced Çağla Ilk as the new curator for the German Pavilion at the 2024 Art Biennale.⁴⁸⁵ The architect and curator was born in Istanbul and completed her studies in her birthplace as well as in Berlin. She currently lives in Germany, where she is the co-director of the *Staatliche Kunsthalle Baden-Baden*. After her election, Ilk stated:

At a time when wars, man-made natural disasters and authoritarianism are increasingly revealing the crisis-ridden nature of our societies, it is more important than ever to question our previous way of life, which has been shaped by nation-state thinking [...] I can't think of a more suitable place for this than the German Pavilion, because it stands for a critical examination of German history as well as for a long tradition of ground-breaking artistic works⁴⁸⁶.

With her international background and interest in societal issues, as well as German History, it seems the German Pavilion might once again present an exhibit that confronts the representation of national identity within the halls of the Nazi structure.

⁴⁸⁵ Press Release of the Institute of Foreign Affairs, *Çağla Ilk im Deutschen Pavillon. Biennale 2024*, 1. March 2023, <https://www.ifa.de/pressemitteilung/cagla-ilk-im-deutschen-pavillon-biennale-2024/>, [last access on 5. September 2023].

⁴⁸⁶ Press Release of the Institute of Foreign Affairs, 2023.

“In einer Zeit, in der Kriege, menschengemachte Naturkatastrophen und Autoritarismus die Krisenhaftigkeit unserer Gesellschaften immer deutlicher offenlegen, ist es wichtiger denn je, unsere bisherige, von nationalstaatlichem Denken geprägte Lebensweise zu hinterfragen [...]. Dafür kann ich mir keinen geeigneteren Ort vorstellen als den deutschen Pavillon, denn er steht für eine kritische Auseinandersetzung mit der deutschen Geschichte, wie auch für eine lange Tradition wegweisender künstlerischer Arbeiten.”

6. Outlook and Conclusion

The work presented in this thesis aimed to give a concise overview of the conflict between the architecture of the German Pavilion and the different exhibitions hosted within. Even though the building's origins in the Giardini are similar to other national structures of the Biennale, such as the French, British or Belgian ones, its story took a turn after the reconstruction in 1938.

The journey through the past by means of the chosen exhibitions examined above does not only depict the changing mentality of the artists, but also their deep-seated struggle with the country's past which the architecture undeniably symbolises. Over the course of over half a century of exhibitions within the pavilion since the war, artists have tried to come to terms with representing their art in the tarnished building.

The first German contributions after the war represent the general European attitude of artistic recovery. By hosting retrospective exhibitions and displaying "degenerate" art, one tried to re-establish everything that had been lost during the rule of Nazi ideologies. This approach slowly started to change in 1964. As contemporary art once again started to flourish at the Biennale, the German artists gradually developed conflicted feelings towards not only the pavilion, but also their nation's burdened past. The works of Uecker (1970), Richter (1972) and Baselitz (1980) show the growing awareness of the exhibition space and reflect the flourishing movement of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*.

The evolution of this mentality in German society can clearly be seen in the previously discussed exhibitions. Just as the topic of the war and the country's role was not to be spoken of in the first decade and a half, the same is reflected in the West German contributions. It was around the time of the 1968 demonstrations, that things started to shift. While they were a worldwide phenomenon, the protest had a unique aspect in West Germany. Among other factors, it was the generational conflict between the parents that had been raised during the Nazi era and their post-war children.⁴⁸⁷ Multiple

⁴⁸⁷ M. A. Schmitdke, *Cultural Revolution or Cultural Shock? Student Radicalism and 1968 in Germany*, in: "South Central Review", Vol. 16, No. 4, 1999, pp. 77-89, here p. 78.

student movements sought to change the perceived authoritarianism of the regime and demanded the immediate removal of any government official or other high-ranking positions with known former Nazi connections. The awareness of recent history was growing and with it the need to create an adequate system of overcoming and making amends.

Although Uecker's nailed column already represents the intent to harm the Nazi architecture, the first real act of violence towards the structure was the intervention of Beuys in 1976. His destruction of the Pavilion's floor by creating the drill hole and placing the train track was unprecedented at the time. His personal struggle with his own past is reflected in his work for the Biennale and he uses the symbol the building represents to give his installation meaning.⁴⁸⁸ His feelings towards the structure are further emphasized by his complete disregard towards its weathered state. In comparison to other artists, he asked for the building to not be renovated for his use, preferring its depreciated condition. This also reflects his attitude towards the Pavilion, his statement "*verschimmeln lassen*" (let it mold) is a testament to his opinion.⁴⁸⁹

Haacke's contribution in 1993 coincides with another important moment in German history. He shows the battlefield that he perceives the newly unified country to be and uses the pavilion to connect it to German history. The exhibition is at the same time a warning and a promise, showing the world the real state of the country, as well as its awareness of the past. His direct confrontation of the topic would have been unimaginable in the decades prior and reveals *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (in this case also *Doppelte Vergangenheitsbewältigung*) as an essential aspect of German national identity.

The later contributions show a very different approach to criticising the pavilion. Schneider, by erasing its interior completely, took away the power of its monumentality. The exhibition of Schlingensiefel's work did something similar. While it did not fully conceal the inside of the building, it played into its inherent atmosphere by creating a small church. By doing so, the sacral feeling of the central hall had

⁴⁸⁸ A. Henze, 1976, pp. 48-50.

⁴⁸⁹ Cited from: O. W. Fischer, 2015, p. 144.

nothing to do with the Nazi architecture, but appeared to be invoked by the chapel construction. Schlingensief's initial plans would have offered an interesting perspective on a more globalized Germany that wanted to show its interconnectivity to the rest of the world. At the same time, it would have also been a statement on colonialism and maybe even a call to other countries to confront their own past.⁴⁹⁰ By directly referencing the ethnological shows of the World Exhibitions, he would have additionally remarked on the origin of the Biennale itself.

Imhof turned the pavilion into a fortress of resistance in 2017. Instead of working against the architecture, she made it an important part of her performance. It's cold appearance and monumentality influenced the atmosphere of the exhibit and emphasized the message she wanted to convey. Her contribution involved the pavilion by not covering up the totalitarian regime it represents and then contrasting it with a show that portrayed the importance of defiance and freedom. Her aim was not to hide the offending architecture, but to keep it transparent by building upon it without erasing it.

Lastly, Maria Eichhorn's contribution once again evokes the idea of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. Her exploration of the structure revealed the building's origins and dismantled the idea of the eternal architecture its Nazi constructors had in mind.

Overall, the contribution from the 1970s onward provides a good cross-section of the development of national identity in Germany and shows how the topic of World War II was viewed and processed over the decades. The German Pavilion offers an interesting stage for exhibiting art, as its history pushed many artists to directly confront the idea of national representation.

A recurring phenomenon can be observed in connection with the building's apse in a few of the discussed contributions. Constructed as an area to present the Third Reich's most praised statues, it held a special place within the architecture. Many of the exhibitions commented on this in different ways. While some integrated it into their work, others pointedly ignored it and even went out of their way to exclude it. Beuys

⁴⁹⁰ S. Gaensheimer, 2011, pp. 19-25.

for instance, who had the whole centre room to himself, decided to place none of his installations in the apse, even though the area could have offered a good location to place his drillhole. The layout of Schneiders *totes house u r* inherently didn't intrude into the apse and Eichhorn did not include it due to the fact that it had not been touched for any redesigns since the Nazi era. While Imhof used the whole space of the building, she did not extend the raised glass platform into the apse area, choosing to not include it at all (Ill. 31). The only two artists to use this space were Haacke and Susanne Gaensheimer in her exhibition of Schlingensief. The latter used the similarity to sacral architecture to emphasize the presentation of the church. Unfortunately, it will remain unknown, if and how, the artist himself planned to use the space of the apse. Haacke, however, integrated it into his installation by adorning it with the daunting GERMANIA, reminding his visitors of the reason behind the country's current social and political state. Similarly, both Richter and Baselitz used the architecture to emphasize their message. Richter, by placing the portrait of Franz Kafka in the very centre, and Baselitz, by positioning his wooden sculpture in front of the place where once Breker's hero statues would have stood. Furthermore, his figure seemed to be pointing at the area, making its meaning obvious and turning his work into an aggressive nudge to the past. The special role the apse played during the Nazi regime seemed to be a constant reminder to many of the contributing artists over the years, and turned the space into a special area either to be consciously used or pointedly ignored.

The analysis of the exhibitions has shown that many of the artists feel strongly about the architecture and considered and planned their contributions in accordance with the building's history.

When the discussion for the renewal of the pavilion was once again brought up in 2010, some of the contributing artists shared a very different opinion than Beuys' statement in 1976. Sighart Schmid, the president of the Federal Chamber of German Architects, demanded the old building to be demolished and a new, more modern

version constructed in its place.⁴⁹¹ He believed that, apart from its misrepresentation of the democratic Germany, the structure itself was unsuitable to exhibit in. The dark and gloomy building should be replaced by a newer design which could also use the prime location in the *Giardini* to its advantage.

Christoph Schlingensief, who was preparing his participation at the time, reacted strongly to the idea. Although it had been reported he previously stated that he wished he could just erase the pavilion with a “push of a button”⁴⁹², the artist proclaimed in his personal blog that the demolition would be the act of a totalitarian state.⁴⁹³ Destroying the building would be like overwriting history and an unhealthy way of dealing with the past. Haacke seemed to agree with this sentiment. In an interview with *Deutschland Funk*, the artist proclaimed that “this is not the way to deal with history”⁴⁹⁴. There was no denying that the pavilion had an unsettling story, yet it was not the only structure of such kind at the Biennale. If one were to consider any building constructed by a regime that does not have the values of the modern Western world as outdated, then there would be quite a few candidates who should consider a redesign. Both the British and French Pavilions were established at a time in which the countries held multiple colonies overseas. The British Pavilion was built in 1909, the French One in 1912. The architectural style of both national buildings reflects this period of their history, yet the debate does not appear to be the same for them.⁴⁹⁵ The confrontation with history is important even though Haacke did believe that not every single artist should make their exhibit about the Nazi structure.⁴⁹⁶

⁴⁹¹ Deutsche Presse Agentur, *Architekten-Chef für Abriss des Biennale-Pavillons*, in: “Welt”, 23. June 2010, <https://www.welt.de/kultur/article8151195/Architekten-Chef-fuer-Abriss-des-BiennalePavillons.html>, [last accessed on 7. September 2023].

⁴⁹² C. Schlingensief, cited from: Deutsche Presse Agentur, *Abriss des Deutschen Pavillons?*, in “Süddeutsche Zeitung”, 23. June 2010, <https://www.stuttgarter-zeitung.de/inhalt.biennale-venedig-abriss-des-deutschen-pavillons.f7b0027d-16db-4df4-b3a4-c76312322b97.html>, [last accessed on 7. September 2023].

⁴⁹³ C. Schlingensief, 23. June 2010, uploaded on “Deutscher Pavilion 2011”.

⁴⁹⁴ C. Schmitz, *Gespräch mit Hans Haacke. Auf diese Weise geht man nicht mit der Geschichte um*, in: “Deutschland Funk”, 25. June 2010, <https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/auf-diese-weise-geht-man-nicht-mit-der-geschichte-um-100.html>, [last accessed on 7. September 2023].

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid..

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid..

Nevertheless, Sighart Schmid believed it of utmost importance to construct an adequate building to represent Germany at the Biennale. In his request, he particularly referred to the suboptimal exhibition space the building offered and its integration into the surrounding area.⁴⁹⁷ He believed a modern version would be more fitting to represent the country's ideals and also be an easier place for artists to exhibit their work in.

In 2014, in honour of the 25-year anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, the *Deutsche Werkbund* (German Association of Craftsmen) commissioned the exhibition "This is Modern" for the 14. Architecture Biennale, inviting 25 German architectural firms to come up with ideas for a redesign of the pavilion.⁴⁹⁸ The presented proposal



Ill. 47: Concept for the redesign of the German Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, GRAFT Gesellschaft von Architekten mbH, 2014, image taken from "Competition Line" <https://www.competitionline.com/de/news/ergebnisse/this-is-modern-deutsche-werkbund-ausstellung-venedig-2014-170754/prizegroup/teilnahme-56488.html>.

⁴⁹⁷ R. Stimpel, *Ein ungeeigneter Bau. Interview mit Arno Sighart Schmid*, in: "Deutsches Architektenblatt", 30. September 2010, <https://www.dabonline.de/2010/09/30/ein-ungeeigneter-bau/>, [last accessed on 7. September 2023].

⁴⁹⁸ Deutscher Werkbund, *Press Release "this is modern" Deutsche Werkbund Ausstellung Venedig 2014*, March 2014, http://www.werkbund-berlin.de/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Venedig_Pressemitteilung-3_14.pdf, [last accessed on 7. September 2023].

offered an interesting variety of approaches towards both the history and the location. Some ideas distance themselves fully from the current structure, completely reinventing the pavilion (Ill. 47). The concept by GRAFT Gesellschaft von Architekten mbH seems radically different from the Nazi building. The see-through design would act as a symbol of community and transparency, as well as open up the view to the waters of the lagune, which are not visible from the 1938 construction.⁴⁹⁹ Other participants did not completely demolish the old structure in their ideas. The design of RKW Architektur+ for instance, thought it important to not erase and forget the history the pavilion represented. Their idea was to expand the back of the existing structure, opening it up to the lagune and so, integrating the location into the architecture (Ill. 48). The style of the extension would be adapted to the existing one using the same materials and characteristics, albeit updating them to a more modernised version. Lastly, the building should become accessible by boat, allowing



Ill. 48: Concept for the redesign of the German Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, RKW Architektur+, 2014, image taken from “RKW Architektur+” <https://rkw.plus/de/projekt/deutsche-biennale-pavillon/#>.

⁴⁹⁹ GRAFT Gesellschaft von Architekten mbH, *Explanatory Text of the Exhibition*, <https://www.competitionline.com/de/news/ergebnisse/this-is-modern-deutsche-werkbund-ausstellung-venedig-2014-170754/prizegroup/teilnahme-56488.html>, [last accessed on 7. September 2023].

for visitors all year round. Their main focus was on updating the German Pavilion to be more representative of the country's ideals, all without completely forgetting the pavilion's history.⁵⁰⁰

Today, the future of the pavilion remains unclear, the debate appears never-ending. While many see the demolishing of the structure as the only solution, the fraction that argues against it is just as strong. Many view the act of simply building a new one as deleting a vital piece of history that does not deserve to be forgotten so easily. The whole situation is further complicated by the building's protection as a historic Italian monument, making any possible redesign plans even harder to implement.⁵⁰¹

Nazi structures remain scattered all across modern-day Germany and have been cause of a constant debate about what to do with them.⁵⁰² Some buildings have kept their original purpose, such as the previously mentioned *Haus der Deutschen Kunst* (Haus of German Art) in Munich which after the war was simply renamed and still functions as a museum today. Similarly, the Olympic Stadium in Berlin, which was originally built in 1936, is still used today. However, it was almost entirely reconstructed in 2002 and now bears no resemblance to the Nazi structure.⁵⁰³ Other buildings, such as the *Führerbau* (The Führer's Building), in which over 650 looted paintings were kept towards the end of the war, was first used by the US military as a central collection point for stolen artworks⁵⁰⁴. Today, it houses the University of Music and Performing Arts in Munich. Most of its students are aware of the building's past but believe they are giving it a new purpose that can ultimately cleanse it from its burdened history.⁵⁰⁵

⁵⁰⁰ RKW Architektur+, Explanatory Text for the Exhibition, <https://rkw.plus/de/projekt/deutsche-biennale-pavillon/#>, [last accessed on 7. September 2023].

⁵⁰¹ M. Eichhorn, 2022, p. 138.

⁵⁰² G. D. Rosenfeld, *The Architects' Debate: Architectural Discourse and the Memory of Nazism in the Federal Republic of Germany, 1977–1997*, in: "History and Memory", Vol. 9, No. 1/2, 1997, pp. 189–225, here p. 190.

⁵⁰³ TipBerlin Redaktion, *Olympiastadion in Bildern. Die Geschichte von Hitler bis heute*, in: "tipBerlin", 26. July 2022, <https://www.tip-berlin.de/stadtleben/geschichte/olympiastadion-berlin-fotos-geschichte/> [last accessed on 7. September 2023].

⁵⁰⁴ K. Beck, *Böse Bauten II. Hitlers Architektur. Spurensuche in München und Nürnberg*, in: "ZDF", 30 July 2018, <https://www.zdf.de/dokumentation/boese-bauten/boese-bauten-in-muenchen-und-nuernberg-108.html>, [last accessed on 7. September 2023].

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid..

The debate about what to do with Nazi remnants is still ongoing and has even reached new levels in a time where suddenly many of them are starting to require fundamental renovations.⁵⁰⁶ On the one hand, there is a deep-seated unhappiness about spending taxpayers' money on maintaining buildings of the Nazi era. On the other hand, tearing them down could be seen as an attempt to forget the wrongs of the past. The structures act as a constant reminder of what was and should never be again. For this reason, many oppose the removal of such buildings, believing their continued existence to be a part of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*.

The same debate can be seen concerning the German Pavilion. Just as with some of these mentioned buildings, it kept its original appearance and purpose (although its use could have hardly been changed in the context of the Biennale). An important difference seems to be its key role in representing the country on an international stage. To those not familiar with the national consciousness of working to overcome the past, seeing the structure at the Biennale could indeed be a rather intimidating sight and stimulate the question of why Germany is still hosting their exhibits in an obvious Nazi structure. Sighart Schmid argues that although the building is undeniably a relic of the Hitler era, it was not one of the regime's central buildings and so should not be held to the same rules.⁵⁰⁷ He believes that “The pavilion must serve the future German contributions to the Biennale, not the Biennale the history of the pavilion”⁵⁰⁸.

The official website of the German Pavilion explains the history and controversy of the building, making the debate visible to the interested public. The beginning of the page starts with multiple quotes by visitors, reaching from “It’s a fantastic, monumental space!” and “There is no such thing as Nazi architecture. The building is simply a testament to its times” to “this is really not OK!” or “Aaaaaah, the Führer

⁵⁰⁶ M. Riepe, *Umgang mit NS-Architektur. Das kann weg?*, in: “Tagesspiegel”, 20. August 2021, <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/gesellschaft/medien/das-kann-weg-4271992.html>, [last accessed on 7. September 2023].

⁵⁰⁷ R. Stimpel, 2010.

⁵⁰⁸ *Ibid.*,

“*Der Pavillon muss den künftigen deutschen Beiträgen der Biennale dienen, nicht die Biennale der Geschichte des Pavillons.*”

building”.⁵⁰⁹ At the end of the page, they have created a short questionnaire on the pavilion, asking public opinions about what should be done with the current structure (demolish, remodel, live with it) and if the representation through national pavilions is in step with the times (yes, no, undecided).

These comments, in particular, show that many visitors are aware of what the building symbolises and the burden of history that comes with it. While some react confused by the fact that the Nazi architecture has remained more or less intact, others see the value of remembering the past in the building.

The described exhibitions and artists in this thesis were meant to offer a deeper insight into the problem the history of the German Pavilion has become for many participants. Yet, the work here focuses mainly on the Biennale of Visual Arts. An interesting comparison can be made when looking at its counterpart. Since 1980, the Architecture Biennale has been held every two years, alternating with its Visual Art equivalent. In order to truly grasp the influence the building has on its “inhabitants”, it would be interesting to analyse the event in a similar way. It should be said, however, that the Architecture Biennale has seen a much weaker level of confrontation with its history.⁵¹⁰

The pavilions were included in the architecture exhibition from 1991 onward, coinciding with the first representation of the Reunified Germany.⁵¹¹ At this first event, the participating architecture firms did not include the appearance of the building in anyway, contrary to expectations.⁵¹² Most contributions in the following years seemed to see the structure of the pavilion as an almost “neutral” space, like a white cube, and

⁵⁰⁹ Website of the Institute of Foreign Affairs (ifa), Biennale Stories: <https://biennale-stories.ifa.de/02/en/>, [last accessed on 8. September 2023].

⁵¹⁰ O. W. Fischer, 2010, p. 119.

⁵¹¹ S. Trüby, *Introduction. The German Entries to the Venice Architecture Biennale*, in: *Germania, Venezia. The German Entries to the Venice Architecture Biennale since 1991*, ed. S. Trüby and V. Hartbaum, Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink, 2016, pp. 15-24, here p. 21

⁵¹² *Biennale. Braves aus Deutschland*, in: “Der Spiegel”, No. 37, 8. September 1991, <https://www.spiegel.de/kultur/biennale-braves-aus-deutschland-a-7bbaf0ce-0002-0001-0000-000013491551>, [last accessed on 8. September 2023].

used it to hang and present their various ideas.⁵¹³ The first exhibit to actually include the architecture of the pavilion was the 2006 “Convertible City”. Their focus was on urban redevelopment, presenting different ways to transform existing urban space in Germany. One of their projects included the building of a bright red *altana*, a typical Venetian roof terrace that could be used by visitors of the pavilion. The extension should expand the structure from being merely a shell to house their ideas, to being part of the exhibition itself.⁵¹⁴ The fusion of the old and new architecture turned the building into a perfect example of their idea of convertible architecture. Furthermore, the red addition completely changed the character of the historic pavilion, giving it a new purpose and momentarily erasing its past.⁵¹⁵

In 2014, Alex Lehnerer and Savvas Ciriacidis came up with the idea of constructing the *Kanzlerbungalow* (Chancellor’s Bungalow) inside of the German Pavilion. The plan was, to present a connection between the two historic buildings.⁵¹⁶ The *Kanzlerbungalow*, which had been built in 1964 as the residence and official reception building for the West German chancellor, is located in Bonn, the former capital prior to the Reunification. Just like the pavilion in Venice, it was built with the idea of national representation in mind. With their contribution, the commissioners wanted to bring aspects of German history together, while also examining the idea of national identity and its representation in architecture.⁵¹⁷ It was the first contribution to the Architecture Biennale to directly confront the pavilion and its meaning.

Finally, the 2023 exhibition also offered an interesting insight into the use of the architecture. *Wegen Umbau geöffnet* (Open for Maintenance) deals with the problems of care, repair and maintenance in the construction industry. Instead of starting with a

⁵¹³ O. W. Fischer, 2010, p. 119.

⁵¹⁴ V. Hartbaum, *Making Lemonade from Lemons. A conversation with Armand Grüntuch and Almut Grüntuch Ernst*, in: *Germania, Venezia. The German Entries to the Venice Architecture Biennale since 1991*, ed. S. Trüby and V. Hartbaum, Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink, 2016, pp. 112-115, here p. 112.

⁵¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 113

⁵¹⁶ S. Trüby, *A Conversation with Alex Lehnerer and Savvas Ciriacidis*, in: *Germania, Venezia. The German Entries to the Venice Architecture Biennale since 1991*, ed. S. Trüby and V. Hartbaum, Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink, 2016, pp. 157-163, here p. 159.

⁵¹⁷ U. Hassler and K. Kainz, 2014, pp. 89-107.

clean slate, it was decided to leave Maria Eichhorn's "Relocating a Structure" from the previous year intact. Together with the remnants of over 40 other exhibitions from the 2022 national pavilions, they created a space for reproduction and studying the preservation of the German Pavilion as well as the City of Venice.⁵¹⁸ With this contribution, they not only for the first time forged a connection between the two Biennales, but also continued Eichhorn's mission of spreading awareness of the surrounding city.⁵¹⁹

Overall, these three contributions add another interesting aspect to the conflict surrounding the pavilion. "Convertible City" chose to use the architecture to its advantage by turning it into an example of their subject. Similar to Imhof, the exhibition was built upon the existing structure, expanding its architecture and thereby changing its overall character. The construction of the *Kanzlerbungalow* is almost reminiscent of Schneider's or Schlingensief's work, in which the pavilion is transformed into a different structure. Lastly, "Open for Maintenance" also modifies the buildings atmosphere. The accumulation of trash made up of last year's exhibitions, as well as the remnants of Eichhorn's presentation making the pavilion appear almost like a warehouse. Together with the suggestions for the redesign of the pavilion from 2014, the architecture contributions prove that the confrontation with the building's tarnished legacy is not just a phenomenon to be witnessed at the Art Biennale. The fact that the same desire to interfere, deform and reconstruct, as well as comment on its history exists in all these areas, depicts a recurring pattern which will in all likelihood not come to an end any time soon.

Although the topic of national representation and the artistic struggle with the architecture appears to be less present here, an extensive analysis of these contributions would have added an interesting aspect and maybe an even deeper understanding of the subject matter. Yet even without the conflicting structure of the pavilion being such

⁵¹⁸ A. Femmer and F. Gödicke i.a., *Open for Maintenance. Wegen Umbau Geöffnet*, in: "Arch+. Zeitschrift für Architektur und Urbanismus", No. 252 (Open for Maintenance. Wegen Umbau Geöffnet), 2022, pp. 2-3.

⁵¹⁹ Ibid., p. 2. Eichhorn's tours "Places of Resistance" were also continued during the course of the Architecture Biennale. Similarly, the catalogue of 2023 presents an extensive study of their work for the maintenance of the pavilion and the city.

a recurring topic in the Architecture Biennale, a more thorough examination of the event would have offered an interesting angle on the perception of national representation through architecture. As it stands, the previously analysed exhibitions of the Art Biennale offer an extensive insight into the conflict the building presents.

It remains to be seen, if the contributions of the years to come will also confront the architecture in the ways that have been examined here. The brief discussion on the general problem of renovating and maintaining remaining Nazi buildings in Germany depicts the reality of the country's conflict and the two opposing standpoints on the matter. Does it make sense to spend valuable money on preserving these buildings because they are still in use today, or is their worth determined by the constant reminder of the horrors of the past they represent? The questions are the same for the pavilion in Venice. Does a reconstruction make sense today, or would it appear to the world as if Germany decided the past should be in the past and all actions are finally forgotten?

Had the government decided to demolish and rebuild the pavilion in 1956 when Arnold Bode sent his suggestions to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, no one would have questioned such a choice. Even the first Biennale following the Reunification would have been a worthy occasion to rethink the structure and create an updated building for the newly connected country. But the more time passes, the more the architecture becomes a symbol of Germany's journey of overcoming its past. Abolishing it now, even if its protection under Italian Law would make such actions rather difficult, might seem like an unnecessary or even damaging decision, seeing as how many successful exhibitions its history has inspired. The contributions of Haacke, Schneider, Schlingensiefel and Imhof have all resulted in a Golden Lion for the artists, making the pavilions past a resource, as well as a burden.⁵²⁰

The communal mentality of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* is still as present today as it was in the 1990s when Haacke presented "Germania" and even more so than it was in the first few decades following the war. The review of the pavilion's reception over the years also offers a useful cross-section of the change in the country's perception

⁵²⁰ B. Pofalla, 2022.

concerning the topic. Some of the earlier contributions such as Richter and Baselitz seemed to have been misinterpreted due to any mentions of the war still being frowned upon, especially in the older generations.⁵²¹ The press viewed Baselitz's wooden structure as an insult and feared a celebration of the Nazi regime. The placement within the pavilion wasn't considered a structural critique but a threat of repeating history. Similarly, Beuys' exhibition was not considered with his Nazi past in mind. The topic was firmly ignored in both the catalogue and the press reviews. The shift in mentality can be seen with the 1993 Biennale. Haacke's direct confrontation with the subject of National Socialism makes the discussion of the pavilion's history unavoidable. By portraying Hitler at the 1934 event and creating an installation that clearly depicts the dire state Germany found itself in after the war, he approaches the topic head-on. Especially, the connection he makes to the recent unification of East and West Germany with the placement of the *Deutsche Mark* truly visualizes his presentation of the social and political battlefield the country still was, almost 50 years after the end of the war.

Nowadays, the Pavilions' history seems to be common knowledge. Even reviews about exhibitions that do not confront the architecture mention the building in connection to its Nazi past. In a way, the inclusion of the structure in the contributions for the Art Biennale has become almost expected. With Eichhorn's contribution focusing on the building's history and the new curator, Çağla Ilk, also speaking about the problematic pavilion in her acceptance speech, it appears the story of confrontational exhibitions will not be over any time soon.

The fact that many of the artists happily embraced a violation of the structure in their artistic interventions, further implies a deep-seated distrust of the architecture. Following Uecker's nailed column, Beuys, Haacke and Eichhorn went about destroying parts of the pavilion in different ways. Even the work of Imhof can be seen as partially damaging. Letting the side rooms be flooded with water daily to the point where it spills out of the building, as well as regularly washing its walls, was sure to be harmful to the integrity of the structure. The architecture seems to represent

⁵²¹ M. A. Schmitdke, 1999, p.78.

something cruel and malicious, the embodiment of everything Hitler dreamed his conquered world to be. The aggressive artistic interactions appear to want to counter these feelings by taking it apart again and again.

The contributions of Schneider and Schlingensief take a different approach. In their own way, both erase the monumentality of the building and repurpose its atmosphere. *Totes haus u r* made the pavilion obsolete, using it merely as a shell to house the enormous construction. All emotions towards the Nazi architecture were lost once one entered the house, completely absorbed by its intensity. Similarly, Gaensheimer's presentation of Schlingensief's work changed the atmosphere and created a new space. Both contributions robbed the building of its power, transforming it into nothing but a sheltered space to present art.

Perhaps this is what the Pavilion should have been from the very beginning. Yet, with the spirit of competitiveness that had overtaken Europe at the beginning of the 20th century, it seems almost inevitable that the national pavilions turned into the representational buildings they are today.⁵²² That this perception has changed over the last 100 years is obvious considering the interaction other countries have with their buildings at the Biennale. The contribution of Greece in 1995 and Spain in 2003 proves that the struggle of representing national identity in such an old-fashioned way is not a uniquely German one. As more and more artists and audiences alike call for a world less limited by borders, the concept of the Biennale is under scrutiny.⁵²³ Does such a division by counties still make sense today?

As discussed in Chapter 5, there are both positives and negatives to this organisation. For now, it seems there will be no change in the way the event is structured. It offers an undeniable and unbeatable opportunity for cultural exchange, while at the same time allowing new artists to shine. Even the discourse concerning the value of national representation receives its own platform and can so stimulate new discussions that might otherwise not be possible.

⁵²² A. Hüsich, 2015.

⁵²³ B. Mauk, 2019.

All the analysed exhibitions of Chapter 4 revolve around similar topics. Death, memory and monumentality are recurring themes that reflect the atmosphere of the architecture which the artists experienced.⁵²⁴ The German Pavilion displays a truly unique ambience that is strengthened further by the knowledge of its terrible history. While these characteristics have made it a hard space to work with, it has also inspired multiple exhibitions that allowed for a deeper examination of the topics of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, national representation and the meaning of a country's identity. Overall, it has become clear how the Nazi intervention changed the story of the pavilion. One can only imagine what the German contributions would have looked like had the architecture of 1912 remained unchanged.

During the course of its existence, the pavilion has gone from simply showing the art of Germany (albeit also with a growing aspect of national representation in mind), to being used as a tool to spread propaganda and an artistic way to atone for the past, as well as reintroduce the war-torn Germany into the European community. At last, it has become the house of its own critique.

Artists and audiences alike have struggled in the pavilion's intimidating monumentality, yet it encourages crucial communication time and time again. In a way, the building itself has helped the German art world recover and rebuild after the devastations of the war. Offering itself up as a disruptive construct to present conflicted thoughts and personal struggles in, it has not only been a constant reminder of unforgettable times, but a way to communicate a better future. It seems the only way to disconnect the building from the idea of national identity and its representation of the past, is to accept it. By freeing it from any fault and not using it to reflect on history, maybe one day the pavilion will only be seen as what it was once meant to be: a place to exhibit art.

⁵²⁴ O. W. Fischer, 2010, p. 123.

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