

PRESS RELEASE



An era of work and (artistic) creativity intrinsic to the Sculptors' House, the home of the 'Symposium of European Sculptors', is coming to an end!

KARL PRANTL (1923-2010), the doyen of abstract sculpture and founder of the globally renowned symposium concept of St. Margarethen, whose exemplary 'Sculptors' House', the home of the association, is under threat ...

In August, the 'Symposium of European Sculptors' (SEB) was deprived of its home – the exemplary Sculptors' House on the hilltop in St. Margarethen in Burgenland. An eviction notice brought by the Esterhazy Holding (under its General Director Dr. Stefan Ottrubay), which required that the 'property' should be immediately handed over to Esterhazy, the landowner, was confirmed by the OGH, Austria's Supreme Court.

The judgement exclusively addressed the Sculptors' House as a rental object and ignored the real substance – the unique symbiosis of art, architecture and the natural environment. Embedded in the complex sculptural oeuvre that graces the hilltop in St. Margarethen, which was created in several phases after 1959 and gave rise to an ongoing, international movement, the Sculptors' House is a place of communication and a 'think tank' whose impact continues to be felt far beyond the confines of St. Margarethen.

STATEMENT **FRIEDERICKE MAYRÖCKER**

..... "there are countless examples of people being turned into stone. Thus, at midday, at certain hilly places in the region, a breeze is said to blow, whose breath immediately transforms entire herds to stone. The stones will scream"

(Aus einem Stein entsprungen: Aus einem Verwandtschaftshimmel: on Karl Prantl's work in stone)

STATEMENT **FRIEDRICH CERHA**

The ensemble of stones on the hilltop in St. Margarethen created under the aegis of the Symposium of European Sculptors, which was founded by my friend Karl Prantl in 1959, is the most conspicuous documentation of a movement for renewal in our cultural life that was established during this period on the initiative and under the responsibility of Austrian artists in every field (the founding of the ensemble "die reihe" in music and "Forum Stadtpark" in literary and intellectual matters) and that opened the door to international cultural circles.

The entire complex of stones in this natural setting exudes the collective formative will of its creators and, aside from the artistic value of the individual elements, represents a significant piece of Austrian cultural and contemporary history. Leaving these in their present form and allowing them to be experienced in a way that does justice to their spirit appears to me to be the inescapable duty of those responsible for conservation in Austria.

The issue at the heart of the court proceedings was the recurring problem of how to deal with the reciprocal rights and, hence, the right to have a say, of the diverse owners of listed objects. The courts failed to take advantage of the opportunity to draw up a general rule that could be applied to this right to have a say and left it to the owners to resolve the demoralising daily disputes about who is responsible for what and who has to agree to which measures involving the object that they jointly own, in this case a protected ensemble. The urgent need for a ruling in such matters is demonstrated by not only the stone sculptures of St. Margarethen.

In the constant conflict between economic and artistic interests it is probably assumed that the association, with its exclusive commitment to artistic ideals, will eventually run out of steam in the face of the economic power of the Esterhazy Foundation. Have we in Austria, in line with the general trend, also now arrived at a new crossroads at which "the rights of the more powerful are confirmed"?

Establishing this contentually demanding connection between 'Social Sculpture & Nature' (Joseph Beuys) would have been an extremely interesting legal challenge! But it appears, does it not, that this isn't an issue in Austria? That non-profit is unceremoniously converted into profit in the interests of the landowner? That the contemplative home of an association is to be degraded to a foyer of 'The New'? We are from the new Austria!

Such particularly challenging situations as this, in which freely-accessible artistic and natural environments have encouraged this synergy for decades in a wide variety of ways – supported by great public interest and public money – appear too complex to understand, even for an Austrian judicial system whose role is to defend the rule of law.



Now the stone sculptures, which still belong to the SEB, are 'hovering' in a 'listed space' and are increasingly being appropriated by the 'Esterhazy Opera Empire' in line with the demands of the market and with the new logo 'PIEDRA'. The artists and creators of St. Margarethen would turn in their graves!

In an age of kitsch, profit and folksy patriotism, a process such as that which is currently taking place in St. Margarethen represents an irretrievable loss of autonomy in terms of both artistic creativity and communication. It lacks any sort of (art) historical factual justification and can only be described as a 'hostile act' of authorship that runs counter to the symposium concept.

Over the course of the past few years, a wide range of valuable symposia and events took place in the Sculptors' House, triggering a wider debate on the 'matter in hand'. These included the 'International ChoreoLab Austria,' the 'Literaturraum im Bildhauerhaus', cross-media workshops and conclaves organised by prominent universities in the areas of art and architecture, all of which found the location conducive to the generation of new ideas about communicating knowledge.

As Chairperson of the association the choreographer Sebastian Prantl (the son of the sculptor and founder) now faces the difficult task of countering the appropriation of the sculptures – in the form of a misplaced ‘museum-like optimisation’ – by a private holding with its own marketing interests. (The newly operating car park on the hillside does not bode well for the future.)

A total of 120 international artists created over 150 sculptures from the special calcareous sandstone in St. Margarethen in the years after 1959. Seen as a whole, this is an art historical work which is beyond comparison. Today, around 50 of the sculptures can still be found where they were created, distributed across the south-western slope of the hill.

OBJECTIVE

- A superordinate and yet to be created ‘AUSTRIAN ART TRUST’ (together with an upgraded AUSTRIAN FEDERAL MONUMENTS OFFICE, IMAGE RIGHTS.... and the AUSTRIAN GALLERIES as partners and guarantors...) would provide a solution that could follow a discussion between equals.
- The Province of Burgenland and the Federal Government are urged to work with the SEB to ensure that this unique artistic and natural environment remains freely accessible to the public as part of the ‘Neusiedlersee UNESCO World Heritage Site’.
- The ‘European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018’ was proclaimed by the European Union (EU) as a year of awareness of European history and identity. Its objective is to highlight to society not only the role of cultural heritage but also the importance of preserving and protecting this and ensuring that it remains accessible. St. Margarethen would be a prime example of substantive art-historical and multi-generational reappraisal and sensitisation!
- Should not the quarry of St. Margarethen – as the ‘cradle’ of and material depot for Vienna – have long since been reserved as the exclusive source of stone for St. Stephen’s Cathedral and the Ringstraße (in the same way that, for instance, Milan Cathedral also has its own quarry in order to guarantee any future restoration work)?



CHRONOLOGY

1957/58 Karl Prantl works on 'Boundary Stone' – a commission by the Province of Burgenland for the Hungarian border in Nickelsdorf – in the idyllic quarry of St. Margarethen. The barbed wire of the 'Iron Curtain' is countered by an artistic statement about freedom! The stone is currently located at Mitterberg in Pötsching on the former imperial border between Lower Austria and Burgenland.

1959 Establishment of the Symposium of European Sculptors in the quarry in St. Margarethen. Karl Prantl initiates the sculptors' symposium together with Friedrich Czagan and Heinrich Deutsch: Eleven sculptors from eight different countries spend three months working and living together in the quarry. Thereafter, Karl Prantl devotes each winter – alongside his artistic work – to the preparation of the sculptors' symposia, the first of which takes place in St. Margarethen. This is followed by further symposia – held together with colleagues – in Eastern and Western Europe and also, eventually, in America and Asia. The concept of a sculptors' symposium that facilitates autonomous, sculptural activity – mostly in the open air in the vicinity of the quarry – sparks great interest and is very well received. This enables Karl Prantl and his international colleagues, working in a spirit of collective exchange, to realise their first monumental sculptures, which fit into specific rural and urban contexts, and to engage in striking cultural political discussions that open up new perspectives for artistic creativity. In the light of the then division of Europe the early contributions of Eastern European protagonists are of particular political (and aesthetic) significance. Karl Prantl realises 'Five Appeals' (which was destroyed by a blast in the quarry and subsequently restored and is now located in the 'Pötschinger Feld').

1961 At the suggestion of Karl Prantl the St. Margarethen Passion Play is set in the Roman quarry whose ambience eventually gives rise to the opera festival.

1962 The German Critics' Prize (in the field of fine arts) is presented to the 'Symposium of European Sculptors' with special mention being given to Karl Prantl as the initiator of the symposium at the 'Berlin Wall', which is in the process of being erected.

The statement of the jury: *'The idea of accomplishing free 'sculptural work' in the open air and of combining a feeling for modern form with an earlier, craft ethos has been taken up around the world. The international impulse given by the symposium concept is one of the most convincing proofs of the unwavering creative energy of modernity.'*

1963 Expansion of the sculptural activities from the quarry to the hilltop in St. Margarethen with the aim of creating new artistic perspectives and experimenting with a broader range of materials (Land Art). Karl Prantl realises 'Stone of Meditation' from psephite (current location: 'Pötschinger Feld').

1965 Work finally starts on the construction of the Sculptors' House on the ruins of the former canteen at the entrance to the ravine leading to the quarry (the former railway line to Vienna). After many years of planning (together with the sculptor/architect Jacques Moeschal from Belgium and Barna von Sartory from Hungary) the final design is the work of the architect Johannes Gsteu. Karl Prantl completes 'Stone for Joseph Mathias Hauer', which was created over a period of two years and whose materials evoke the surrounding area – Land Art (located on the hilltop in St. Margarethen).

1967 Completion and inauguration of the Sculptors' House and award of the First Client Prize of the Central Association of Austrian Architects to Karl Prantl and the SEB.

1968 Karl Prantl receives the Prize of the City of Vienna for Sculpture

1969 Double Symposium: Uta Peyrer-Prantl organises the parallel 'International Painters' Weeks' in the Orangery of Schloss Esterhazy in Eisenstadt. The participants include pairs of prominent artists such as Kenneth Campbell (sculptor) and Pat Sloane (painter) from the USA. Karl Prantl realises the 'Table' in front of the east façade of the Sculptors' House (Location: Pötschinger Feld).

1970/71 The sculptors devote themselves to specific topographical aspects of the hilltop in St. Margarethen: 'Japanese Line' – an exemplary Land Art manifesto by Makoto Fujiwara, Makio Yamaguchi, Tetsuzo Yamamoto, Takao Hirose and Satori Shoji marks the entire hilltop from the quarry. Other works include Kengiro Azuma's 'Stone Garden' and Heinz Pistol's '3 Positions'.

1972 The SEB holds its International Convention at Constantin Brancusi's 'Table of Silence' in Tirgu Jiu, Rumania – in order to make it easier for artists from the Eastern Bloc to attend. The meeting provides the impetus for a realignment of the symposium concept: more sculptural interventions in urban contexts and a concrete engagement for the remodelling of St. Stephen's Square in Vienna.

1975/76 End of the Symposium's local activities following the abandonment of the project for St. Stephen's Square in Vienna, which had sought to redevelop and remodel the square in the heart of the capital after the construction of the underground railway and had been a research commission for the SEB from the City of Vienna.

1977/78 Karl Prantl and his family live and work in New York.

1986 Karl Prantl represents Austria at the Biennale in Venice.

1989/90 Karl Prantl dedicates himself to fighting the suppression of 'the deed and its setting' in Rechnitz in Burgenland. Having long been aware of the cover-up regarding the 'scene of the crime' Karl Prantl was finally able to firmly establish the 'Kreuzstadl' as a 'place of remembrance'. This act of active reminiscence (disclosure) is both an anchor and a perfect example of Karl Prantl's lifelong engagement: providing 'remedies' in a wide range of contexts, creating symbols in stone and establishing 'places of meditation'. This applies in particular to the subject of the Second World War which he himself only narrowly survived ('Nuremberg Stations of the Cross' (1985-91) – consisting of 14 granite panels, which were produced by concentration camp inmates for the route of the huge Nazi parades in Nuremberg, 'The Road to Kawasaki' Expo Osaka 1968, the memorial stone for the teachers and pupils expelled from the Akademische Gymnasium on Heumarkt in Vienna...). Thanks to Karl Prantl's persistence and the support of Marietta Torberg, the 'Kreuzstadl' property is finally acquired (for 250,000 schillings). SEB then restores the ruins and places the sculpture created in St. Margarethen by the Israeli sculptor Kosso Eloul (1920-1995) in front of the building. (In 1960 Kosso Eloul created the 'Yad Vashem' ('eternal flame') memorial, the most significant place of remembrance for the Holocaust in Israel). SEB ceremonially hands over the 'consecrated ground' to Vienna's Jewish Community in 1993.

1993 Final transfer of sculptures from the quarry to the hilltop.

1993/2007 Artist's residencies of several years for international sculptors in the Sculptors' House.

1999/2000 Karl Prantl discovers the location of Mitterberg in Pötsching on the former imperial border between Austria and Hungary (now between Lower Austria and Burgenland) and, together with Irene Izmeny (the former mayor of Pötsching), organises the repositioning of the boundary stone which had lost its impact as a result of the remodelling of the border at Nickelsdorf. Further sculptures from the Symposium are moved to Mitterberg from unsuitable locations in Burgenland.

2004 Publication of the book: 'Gehen von Stein zu Stein' in Passagen Verlag, Vienna, by Katharina Prantl, Design: Walter Bohatsch (State Prize for the 'Most Beautiful Book 2004').

2006/2007 Due to the expansion of industrial quarrying operations and the resulting threat to the artworks 18 further one-off pieces are transferred from St. Margarethen to Mitterberg with the organisational help of Ursula Pasterk (Vienna's former Executive City Councillor for Cultural Affairs). Together with the 'Boundary Stone', these form a new, meaningful artistic landscape at Mitterberg. (Four further sculptures owned by the Province of Burgenland which are located at unattractive road junctions: Herb George – USA, Milos Clupac – Czech Republic, Oleg Truszyński – Poland ...) should also be transferred to Mitterberg.)

2008 Karl Prantl receives the Grand Austrian State Prize.

2009 The 50th anniversary of the founding of the SEB is celebrated in the Sculptors' House in the presence of Federal President Dr. Heinz Fischer, Minister of Culture Claudia Schmied, Provincial Governor Hans Niessl and Provincial Councillor Helmut Bieler ... a 'Public Private Partnership' solution for the cultural and natural environment of St. Margarethen should be found.

2010 Karl Prantl dies in the family home in Pötsching. No solution is in sight for the situation facing the total work of art of the 'Symposium of European Sculptors' on the hilltop in St. Margarethen.

2011/17 Revitalisation and partial refurbishment of the Sculptors' House by Sebastian Prantl (Chairperson of the SEB) together with the architect Johanna Rainer and with the help of EU funding and Burgenland's Department of Culture. Clearance of some woodland from the hilltop and restoration of individual sculptures. Regular guided tours, conclaves organised by international universities in the areas of art and architecture and events organised by the Sculptors' House: 'International ChoreoLab Austria', 'Literaturraum im Bildhauerhaus' in cooperation with Beatrice Simonsen: 'Art & Literature' and 'Trans Art Works'...

2015 Publication of the book: 'Outdoor Art – extraordinary sculpture parks and art in nature' by Silvia Langen, published by Prestel Verlag (Munich-London-New York).

2015/17 The legal dispute and the ultimatums presented by the Esterhazy Holding to the SEB intensify. The lawyer Dr. Robert Mogy, the architects DI Dr. Renata Hammer and Mag. Johanna Rainer and Sebastian Prantl represent the SEB in its negotiations with the Esterhazy Holding, which is not prepared to permit cooperation as equals and refuses to acknowledge the association's expertise.

2018 Austria's Supreme Court decides in favour of the Esterhazy Holding. The Sculptors' House is cleared by the 'Symposium of European Sculptors' under intense time pressure (a deadline of 14 days) in the sweltering August of 2018.



Sebastian Prantl, Chairperson, SEB – Artistic Director, TAW

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