

„490 Knitted houses, lest we forget“

The Knitting Machine Contra Forgetfulness – an installation by the artist Stephanie Rhode in Gunzenhausen

During the first months of 2011, women and men from the local area and from everywhere in Europe knitted 40 cm high woolen houses, and so created new homes for the displaced and forgotten lost souls of Gunzenhausen's Jewish community. The white walls of the 490 hundred houses are delicate and translucent, ready and waiting to accommodate the souls. But the foundations are solid, as strong as the determination of the artist to fill these houses with life, to present the forgotten souls with a shelter in the here and now. They are worthy homes too: laid on a base of gold leaf and with a framework of metal built from the artist's designs for this piece. The house as the giver of form, as the provider of meaning: the house as the trade mark of Stephanie Rhode.

The 490 knitted houses were on the market square of the town which gained a solemn fame under National Socialism: as the citadel of racism and hatred of the Jews, as the first Bavarian town in which a pogrom took place – four years before the so called 'Night of Broken Glass'. But Stephanie Rhode did not come to Gunzenhausen to point an accusatory finger or to cast judgment. Instead, she wanted her 490 knitted houses on the market square to commemorate all the Jewish people who, for centuries, had their homes here until the last of them were herded by the Nazis into the extermination camps.

A time to knit – a time to reflect. As if the knitting itself looped and weaved itself into our memory of the many men and women of Gunzenhausen who were once content to go about their lives within the Jewish faith, contributing to life within this little town on the banks of the river ' Altmühl' . They knitted themselves into memory; releasing the chains of the forgotten past with every stitch. So too do they broke the threads of false ways of thinking.

Stephanie Rhode has a way of getting her artworks to interact with us on different levels and this one did it too:

“My subjects are all about reflecting our present, about reflecting the society we live in. It's an interaction between what I see around me and the response I get from my environment. The faster and more hectic everything is, the simpler and calmer my pieces are. It's all about giving back, reflection and reduction. I'm always working with

contrasts and opposites: motionlessness and movement was, for example, the theme of my installation of 3000 houses made of sand in the summer of 2007/2008.”

Interaction is also brought to mind in the knitted house project: between the artist, her ideas and the knitted objects on the one hand, and between the objects and the Jewish citizens on the other. Throughout the one day installation, the artist’s knitted works told of her view of the history of her town, her home - or simply stories about knitting. The different places where the events took place are vividly documented. And through the placement and display of the 490 knitted houses another bridge is built: between those who come to view the exhibition and the former Jewish inhabitants of Gunzenhausen.

Even though the project is a one off, what’s past should remain with us as something tangible. That was the intention of the sand art project. Motionlessness and movement is what the artist wanted to symbolize and, at the end, with the coming of the tide, life’s transience. Just as the knitted houses make us see this same transience in the perspective of our awareness of things past, so the golden plots of land brought to the cobblestones of the market square should remind us of the houses of the 490 immortal souls for a long time to come.

Dates: 4th and 5th June 2011 Installation/ Marketplace Gunzenhausen

www.stephanierhode.nl

