

Katrin Hornek — Latent Soils

Opening, September 30, 2021, 7 pm

Exhibition, October 1 – November 5, 2021

Katrin Hornek's work is embedded in the manifold entanglements that govern life in the Anthropocene. Departing from concrete places and substances, she combines their stories with found material and immaterial forms. The inextricable ties between culture and nature, human and non-human actors, between long-term processes and momentary events become potentially tangible. In her previous works, for example, she investigated the diverse transformation processes of mineral oil and translated them into performative settings, which treat different perspectives and temporal scales on an equal level. Hornek searches for artistic strategies to capture the gigantic scale of the capital-driven displacement of geological material since the beginning of the 21st century. In the framework of the research project *The Anthropocene Surge* (2018–2022), she traces the transformation of physical samples into datasets and thus the corresponding multitude of connections and interdependencies between analog and digital sediments. For Kunstraum Lakeside, the artist will explore other human interventions in the Earth's body, creating dense and concrete images of possible pasts, presents, and futures.

The exhibition *Latent Soils* revolves around the modified, artificial soil of Vienna, which has been a subject of scientific research for quite some time now. Eduard Suess, for instance, published a geological map of Vienna in 1862, which featured the city's natural geological layers but also the massive accumulations owed to its two thousand years of settlement history. Around 140 years before the term Anthropocene was coined to describe the age when humans began to dominate the geological, atmospheric, and biological processes on planet Earth, a survey of the Viennese "debris" by the founder of the Vienna geological school visualized human influence on the shape of geological layers for the first time.

The starting point for Katrin Hornek's installation is data obtained for research purposes, stored in diverse archeological and geological archives. While they provide insights into the past, they never give a general overview of the status quo, as the scientific assessment of Viennese soil usually prepares for its transformation: The Municipal Department of Urban Archaeology is called into action, for example, when remains of human activities surface during construction work, or when geological drill cores are probed to inform builders about necessary static measures and to provide security in the event of damage. The artist conceives this extensive collection of selective information as "data landscapes", which unfold parallel to the phenomena they capture. The soils themselves also store, like instruments, their own modification. They serve as recordings of urban transformations involving a wide variety of different agents—be it human, faunal, weather dependent factors, or those of the technosphere.

Latent Soils is an attempt to chart "the potential of practices based on sensory experience", notes Katrin Hornek. The objective is not only to "rationalize the emerging archives of the Anthropocene" but to create formats that enable recipients "to imagine, feel, and connect with them". The artist strives to "lend this rather inaccessible, complex, and everchanging artificial urban soil a body". This spatiotemporal entity manifests in the reception of the *Latent Soils* exhibition, whose individual sections grant different access points and approaches.

The sounds of words like "bones | concrete surface | interstratified limestone | gel | light gray | remnants of roots | colorful | turf | edged | rust brown | leftover brick | brittle | glass shards | round) | 100 mm | pieces of wood | light-brown green | earthy | solid | stiff | nan | metal | domestic waste | 50 mm | 5.00 % | clayey" permeate the exhibition space and can be read parallel in a video installation. They are all the words used thus far in the city's drill core register to document human modifications to the soil of Vienna since 1831. The 87,963 material entries were ordered—including errors, description variants, abbreviations, and combinations with punctuation characters—according to their frequency and read in by performer Sabina Holzer in an eight-hour session. The long list of terms and the gradual tiring of the voice make the extent of the human interventions tangible. Moreover, the different spellings of certain terms remind us that the drill core register is owed to the efforts of a great number of people over a long period of time, and thus to collective authorship. The most frequently used word is "brick", a crucial anorganic building material for the city since the Roman times. Second place goes to "concrete", even though it has only been common in Vienna since the 19th century—another hint about how the transformation of the Earth's surface has accelerated as of late.

While the video installation is exclusively dedicated to words, five monitors lying on the floor show image footage taken from the databank of Vienna's Department of Urban Archaeology. These original photos document the constant restructuring of the urban soil and thereby spur visual apprehension of the implicit large-scale transformation processes. The artist fed thousands of images from the city's archeological archive into the StyleGAN generator on the Runway platform, which then produced new images from the material. Browsing through seas of data, Style Generative Adversarial Networks (StyleGAN) learn the parameters of various image

typologies to create new imagery. In this way, photographic documentation of real people or landscapes turn into new representations with a highly persuasive visual power. Hornek uses these Deep Learning algorithms to devise images of what does not exist (yet). Strung together into films, the perpetually altering imagery helps us to perceive the ground beneath our feet as something instable and shaped. Unlike the material stored in the city archives, the StyleGAN images do not capture something from the past; rather, their recombinations open up a space of possibilities and cast a glance at one of countless possible futures.

Katrin Hornek transfers this potential back into the analog space: Digital objects derived from the synthetic image production process assume analog shapes as sculptures. *Latent Soils* at Kunstraum Lakeside enables visitors to *grasp* the formation of the soil, as the artist puts it, "on molecular and planetary scales, through a multitude of agents and forces in an interplay of human and non-human influences". In this context, *grasping* has less to do with a rational conception, rather a *sense* for dimensions and timeframes.

Katrin Hornek (b. 1983 in Austria) lives and works in Vienna.
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Image Captions

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Katrin Hornek, *Latent Soils*, 2021, installation view, Kunstraum Lakeside, Klagenfurt | photo: Johannes Puch