



Monument Activism as an Important Articulation Tool

My choice of work, my resistance

Debates about monuments today increasingly revolve around the question of who is represented by whom. Until now, the erection of monuments has usually not been preceded by democratic decision or citizen consultations; this is currently changing, as shown, for example, by the projects of the New Commissioners. The question of how to deal with undesirable monuments, because for political reasons their presence in public space is disrespectful or discriminatory towards individual groups, provides for recontextualizations and sometimes leads to the dismantling of monuments. At the same time, the intertwining of hegemonic power, access to public space, and political representation, of visibility and invisibility, must be questioned. A monument is not synonymous with history, even if this rhetoric is repeatedly heard. The influence it exerts on the construction of history through the condensed symbols that are monuments, memorials, plaques, or commemorative rituals is subject to revision, making monument activism and related performances an important tool of articulation.

The invitation by the event „Antimonument Extended“ to re-contextualize monuments whose artists were called “God-blessed” during National Socialism is met by the collective CRAFT with an artistic practice based on intensive research that combines performance with monument activism and virtual reality. Their project „My choice of work, my resistance“ opens up new approaches in dealing with monuments in the public space of the city of Düsseldorf. Her presentation of works and designs at the Wild Palms gallery offers an opportunity to delve even deeper into CRAFT’s oeuvre.

Starting from the resistance during the Second World War and the public presence of women resistance fighters from the communist worker movement, which has been neglected in memorial culture until now, the status of the worker in our present society is questioned. Based on the publication “Women in Resistance 1933-1945, Düsseldorf” by Florence Hervé and Mareen Heying, which gives names and faces and thus a posthumous visibility to women involved in the Düsseldorf resistance such as Maria Ackermann, Lore Agnes, Viktoria Bachmann, Maria Wachter, Else Woiczich, the question of contemporary strategies of resistance is raised. At the same time, the question of what it means to be resistant in a totalitarian regime and which forms of resistance find their way into historical scholarship will be explored.

For this purpose, the performance was conceived for inviting the audience to participate, which runs as a procession to the monument “Bergischer Löwe” (1963) at Graf-Adolf-Platz/Königsallee in Düsseldorf and continues there. The procession as well as the action at the square is accompanied by sound piece by Navid Razavi.

The “Bergische Löwe”, cast in bronze and placed on a granite base, was erected on the occasion of the 675th anniversary of the city of Düsseldorf in 1963. De facto it is a replica, the original of which was created by Philipp Harth in 1942. Initially sympathetic to the Nazi regime, the artist Philipp Harth was counted among the “Gottbegnadeten” (God-in 1944 and thus enjoyed special privileges: he did not have to perform any front-line service or labor, was considered “uk” (indispensable), and was able to continue working in his Berlin studio until his evacuation to Offenhausen. One of his tiger sculptures was used by the Reichsluftfahrtministerium for propaganda exhibitions. In Offenhausen, he was imprisoned by the Gestapo because of his increasingly critical statements about art policy in the “Dritte Reich”. As a result, he distanced himself from the regime.

The figure of the lion is also found in the coat of arms of the city of Düsseldorf. A forerunner of the “Bergische Löwen” by Philipp Harth was realized as a “war emblem” (nail figure for war nailing) larger than life made of wood by the sculptor Johannes Knubel in 1916. The lion was shod with iron and bronze nails as a donation



from citizens. The proceeds from the sale of 800,000 marks in 1917 were used to alleviate the war need for the wounded and surviving dependents. Propagandistically, this was a public display of solidarity with the German Reich and the soldiers. In 1934, the weathered wooden sculpture was taken down. The bronze mask of the lion's head was given to the city museum. In 1937, Johannes Knubel created a new lion made of teak with a swastika, which was severely damaged and removed during an air raid in 1942. The head of the second lion is also in the City Museum. Johannes Kubel distinguished himself as an artist in the Third Reich and was on the list of the "Gottbegnadeten" for four years.

So much for the historical starting point of critical recontextualization. On August 23, there will be a talk with Kathrin Maurer (Professor for Humanities and Technology, University of Southern Denmark). In recent years, the discussion about how to deal with unwanted monuments has gained momentum. "My work choice, my resistance" is a project that aims not only to remove a monument from its otherwise unquestioned presence in public space, but also to address the voids of previously unrealized monuments to women resistance fighters.

The performance walk "My choice of work, my resistance" by the collective CRAFT starts at the "Stehenden Jüngling" monument in Kaiserswerther Str. 137, Golzheim and ends at the "Bergischer Löwen" monument. The dramaturgy of the process is planned in detail. The collective CRAFT talks about the project and the work of the resistance fighters, asks the visitor about their choice of work and about their needs and what role creativity plays in this and what social changes are necessary for the creation of better working conditions and for an ideal state. As a result, the visitors can - if they want to - become the main protagonists of the performance and thus redefine the occupation of public space. For this purpose, they are offered special outfits and masks inspired by "Perchten", Mexican masks and Japanese battle suits, which have been reinterpreted in an abstract way by the collective CRAFT. For this they have developed a special aesthetic of resistance through the use of transparent materials. The application of the materials plays with visibilities and invisibilities.

The outfits consisting of clothing and masks are assigned to specific activities of workers. The selected occupational groupings include fisherman, beekeeper, sex worker, construction worker, tailor, caregiver, newspaper vendor, housewife, hairdresser, or temporary worker. All outfits include a badge with job title, a phrase and space for the participant's name. Phrases that express the desire for empowerment, safe space and the care character in dealing with people are manifest: Slogan-like statements like "my security first, your pleasure second" or "it is my right to be creative" or "I care, if you care" or "your daily news for my fair salary" or "tailoring my own working conditions" express pointedly and demonstratively the right to have a say and demands to improve the work situation.

The outfits are uncomplicated to handle, can be worn over one's own clothes, are size-adjustable and unisex. In the outfit of the sex worker, her social competence is emphasized above all, her willingness to listen, while the nurse-in wears a mattress-shaped hat. The collective CRAFT has made original use of transcultural references: the construction worker's outfit refers to Chineros de Cuautla, and the mask of the temporary worker refers to the theory of a pioneer of the discourse of anti-colonization and decolonization, the psychologist Frantz Fanon. Taken up at the same time is the ritual function of masks, which in different cultures serve to strengthen self-esteem, support identities, create unity and drive away evil spirits. Everyone has the opportunity during the procession to enter into playful dialogue, to talk about their own working conditions, to consider how better working qualities can be achieved and to write these down on boards in order to formulate a joint statement. At the same time, the participating visitors have the opportunity to intervene in and change the monuments with VR glasses and joysticks, through which a 3D version of the monuments is played. For this purpose, the collective CRAFT, in cooperation with the technical partner: VS/VR Lab, University of Applied

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Sciences Düsseldorf, has developed special tools stickers, which were stuck on sculptures. Depending on the desire and intentions, virtual spray cans, pens, brushes and objects can be used to modify the virtual sculptures or radically destroy them with a sword.

Inspired by texts by Hannah Arendt and Elias Canetti about totalitarian controls, power, masses and subjugation, the collective CRAFT succeeds in creating a socio-political project that appeals to fairness in dealing with monument culture, with working conditions and with transcultural, decolonizing emancipation processes. Based on the text "Black Skin, White Masks" (1952) by Frantz Fanon in which he writes about the alienation caused by colonial situations and analyzes the psychological effect of the oppressor on the oppressed with the metaphor of the mask, the collective CRAFT calls for a complete reappraisal of the history of totalitarian and oppressive systems. Their call for a humane treatment of all inhabitants of the planet, which is linked to this, shows parallels to the social movement of the Zapatistas in Mexico.

"My choice of work, my resistance" takes a referential form and underscores the interdependence of real space and public debates. Art and the public histories it co-produces provide not only formal means to make discussions more tangible, but a model that is placed and materialized in ways that lend themselves particularly well to multiple, non-competing ways of understanding and inhabiting public space.

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About the collective CRAFT

CRAFT is an art collective that focuses its reflection on the practice of art as a profession and labor, its collective authorship, social function, the conditions of its workers, its relationship with play or leisure activities, the transformation of matter within labor processes, and the constructed distinction between art and craft, original and copy.

The collective CRAFT are the artists Oscar Cueto and Manuela Picallo Gil, who have been working together since 2019 and have had projects in Austria, Mexico and Germany.