

NEUE AUFTRAGGEBER

Invitation to press conference

THE NEW PATRONS OF MÖNCHENGLADBACH

Opening of the sculpture ensemble

Ruth Buchanan *A garden with bridges (spine, stomach, throat, ear)*

On May 7, 2023, a new kind of public artwork will be unveiled on Abteiberg hill in Mönchengladbach. The artwork, created by New Zealand artist Ruth Buchanan, is an ensemble of walkable steel sculptures located in the center of the city. The sculptures serve as bridges, providing access to a garden that will now be open to the entire urban community. This is the first artwork commissioned by the Rhineland chapter of the New Patrons program, a network that enables civil society groups to undertake forward-looking art projects. The ensemble was commissioned by staff and visitors of the Arbeitslosenzentrum Mönchengladbach e.V., a nonprofit association that supports the unemployed, as well as students and teachers from the nearby Stifisches Humanistisches Gymnasium, a secondary school. After four years of collaborative planning, the group has accomplished its goal: Mönchengladbach has a socially conscious work of art that challenges divisive social hierarchies.

Press conference on Friday, May 5, 2023, 11 am
Arbeitslosenzentrum Mönchengladbach e.V. (Garden)
Lüpertzender Str. 69, 41061 Mönchengladbach

Commissioning patrons, contributors, and artist Ruth Buchanan will be in attendance.

Being in relation means being in motion, being alive to transition, being tolerant of ambiguity.

RUTH BUCHANAN

Ruth Buchanan has retrospectively described *A garden with bridges* as “one of the most challenging and rewarding projects” of her career to date. Unlike most public projects, the artist did not respond to a call for proposals. Instead, the project emerged as part of a mediation process facilitated by the New Patrons program. In this process, civil society groups articulate their concerns and then engage an international artist through a mediator.

The commissioning group in Mönchengladbach and its numerous contributors and supporters – attended by mediator Kathrin Jentjens – were motivated by the desire to promote greater social and spatial inclusiveness in their city. The project was designed to draw attention to the social roots of Mönchengladbach.

Buchanan’s proposal responded with a site-specific artwork that can be experienced physically. Sculptural elements in the Arbeitslosenzentrum e.V. garden are named after parts of the body: spine, stomach, throat, ear. They refer, among other things, to the meaning of the garden as a living organism and to the experience of the self in relation to the built environment.

The sculptures enclose a garden area that can be configured by its users. Physical installation of the sculptures was preceded by a series of workshops conducted as part of the project. These workshops created opportunities for initial encounters and enabled participants to explore relationships between our inner selves, our physical bodies, our homes, our workplaces, and our sense of value in society. Through a range of activities, from gardening to dance to film screenings, the artist engaged participants in discussions about the project’s central themes of

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work, care, and corporeality.

A garden with bridges has already been the catalyst for a wide range of partnerships and the bringing together of different actors in urban society. The Kunststiftung im Museum Abteiberg, an anchor point for the New Patrons program, oversaw its realization. The project was supported by private patrons, foundations, sponsors, and the Ministry of Culture and Science of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia; the Mayor of Mönchengladbach provided patronage, and the City of Mönchengladbach also contributed extraordinary financial and professional resources.

Starting in May, Mönchengladbach will have a new space that “has unwaveringly demonstrated how art can bring together people who normally have no connection to each other,” as Buchanan put it, noting that the project allows individuals to “gently encounter each other and, in doing so, meaningfully change the way they navigate the world.” Writing for Artblog Cologne, Andreas Richartz recently highlighted the ways in which the project also comments on the history of Mönchengladbach in order to derive new paths for the future. The concept explores bodily rituals “in social space” and the “mentality history” of the physical, which “corresponds very well with the idea of reconciling urban space and garden landscape with the inglorious history of the Arbeitslosenzentrum e.V. building, which was once as a home for Hitler Youth.”

The central urban garden with the ensemble of sculptures will be open to the public at regular times after the opening and be integrated into educational activities at the school.

A joint project of the Kunststiftung im Museum Abteiberg, the Stiftisches Humanistisches Gymnasium and the Arbeitslosenzentrum Mönchengladbach e.V. as part of the New Patrons program.

The conceptual phase was funded by the German Federal Cultural Foundation, while public funding agencies, companies and foundations, as well as numerous individuals, continue to support the project through donations, contributions in kind, and work. We are deeply grateful to all of them, including those who wish to remain anonymous.

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The program: New Patrons

The project was developed within the framework of the New Patrons program, an innovative approach to commissioning public art, where civil society groups can initiate and commission artworks with the support of a mediator and an artist. This program has been active in France and Europe since 1992 and has been operating in Germany for almost 15 years.

The project with Ruth Buchanan in Mönchengladbach is the first New Patrons project in the Rhineland region.

The association New Patrons has been awarded the 2021 Future Prize for Cultural Policy KULTURGESTALTEN on behalf of the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media (BKM).

www.neueauftraggeber.de

Project commissioners: Arbeitslosenzentrum e.V. and Stiftisches Humanistisches Gymnasium.

Arbeitslosenzentrum e.V. is a non-profit organization that has been providing job counseling services for 40 years. The organization actively seeks dialogue to reduce neighborhood fears and address younger generations interested in cultural offerings. The Abteiberg serves as a cultural and educational campus with various public functions, but it also has gaps in its capacity as a public social space. The lunchtime visitors at the unemployment center wish to have more free leisure activities both in the building and the garden. In a health project, the center is seeking ways to prevent the link between unemployment and illness while promoting health.

It is noteworthy that the Stiftisches Humanistisches Gymnasium and the Arbeitslosenzentrum have partnered for this project, given their different backgrounds. The Gymnasium, which is located just a few hundred meters away, is the oldest school in the city and owes its establishment to a private foundation over 150 years ago. Notably, the philosopher Hans Jonas was one of its most distinguished alumni, and in 2014, the Gymnasium recommitted itself to Jonas's "principle of responsibility" by establishing its own foundation and encouraging students to participate in cultural and social activities through a foundation prize.

The community garden project is intended to combine scientific research, project responsibility, and neighborhood engagement for the school. As such, it will serve as an active participant in the new social structure of the neighborhood, and it will allow the Gymnasium to play a vital role in supporting the local community.

www.arbeitslosenzentrum-mg.de | www.huma-gym.de

The artist: RUTH ELIZABETH RAWINIA BUCHANAN

Born 1980 Ngāmotu New Plymouth, Aotearoa Neuseeland Pākehā, Te Atiawa, Taranaki, Based in Berlin and Auckland, New Zealand, she was recently appointed Artistic Director of Aotearoa Artspace Auckland.

Ruth Buchanan's work focuses on the interplay between body, force, language, and archive.

Typically, she starts her process by conducting an in-depth study of history, using case studies, artifacts, or sites as a launchpad to scrutinize art as a discourse that arranges, narrates, and complicates our lived experiences. A crucial aspect of her work is the formation of the public sphere, which she sees as a deliberate effort to foster interaction. Her work has recently been the subject of a comprehensive exhibition at the Museum für Gegenwartskunst Basel.

www.studio-ruthbuchanan.net

The anchor point: Museum Abteiberg

The Museum Abteiberg serves as the anchor point for the Rhineland pilot project of the New Patrons. The museum boasts an impressive collection of art since 1960 and features award-winning, city-conscious architecture by Hans Hollein, including the Stiftisches Humanistisches Gymnasium and Hans-Jonas-Park. For many years, the museum's program has been expanded by art installations in the sculpture garden and public spaces throughout the city.

www.museumabteiberg.de