

EXHIBITION REVIEW

Peter Zumthor

Curator: Thomas Durisch

Film Installation: Nicole Six and Paul Petritsch

Kunsthhaus Bregenz

29 September 2007 to 20 January 2008

The largest piece in the Peter Zumthor exhibition at the Kunsthhaus Bregenz this winter was, of course, the museum itself, built by Zumthor between 1994-1997 at the lakefront on Lake Constance. The outside of the four-story cube is covered in overlapping glass shingles; light enters the large exhibition spaces horizontally above the bare concrete walls and is refracted down evenly via its translucent ceilings. The building's stark interior spaces proved perfect for the occasion of showing Peter Zumthor's buildings and projects from 1986 to 2007 with their emphasis on materiality and architectural essence.

Models on the ground floor of the museum included the Kunsthhaus Bregenz, the Bruder Klaus Chapel, and an impressive cast concrete model of the addition to the Cologne Kolumba Museum, complete with a little wooden stair that allowed visitors to stick their head inside the model at eye level, in order to experience its lighting and spatial complexity.

The darkened first and second floors were entirely devoted to film presentations by Nicole Six and Paul Petritsch on six large floor-to-ceiling screens—a fitting and highly convincing tribute to the master's work, and the part of the exhibition that left the most lasting impression. Each group of six screens presented a corresponding group of six High Definition videos which played for forty minutes; the groups of videos were each devoted to one of twelve selected Zumthor buildings, which, in turn, had each been filmed by six stationary cameras on the interior and exterior. The cameras did not move and thus each film presented a continuous still view of a corner or a detail. The position of the six large translucent screens precisely recreated the spatial configuration of the six cameras that had filmed the building, sometimes showing another camera calmly standing in the space, recording. The distance between screen and projector recreated the original distance between

Peter Zumthor
Model Swiss Sound Box, Swiss
Pavilion, EXPO 2000 Hanover, 2000
Model Kolumba Art Museum,
Cologne, Germany, 2007
Model Zink-Mine Museum Alman-
najuveit, Sauda, Norway, 2003-
(from left to right)
Installation view ground floor,
Kunsthhaus Bregenz
© Peter Zumthor, Kunsthhaus Bregenz
Photo: Markus Tretter



Peter Zumthor
Bauten und Projekte 1986 - 2007
Film installation by Nicole Six and
Paul Petritsch
Installation view 1st floor,
Kunsthhaus Bregenz
© Nicole Six and Paul Petritsch,
Kunsthhaus Bregenz
Photo: Markus Tretter



camera and building and represented the view in a scale close to a 1:1 representation of reality. This elaborate setup meant that the future position of the screens in the gallery spaces had informed the precise location of the cameras when the filming took place, thus grafting one spatial configuration onto another. Film and architecture hardly ever intersected more meaningfully.

This calm, unyielding gaze at a part of a building turned out to be a very efficient means of giving the visitor a feel for the powerful presence of Zumthor's structures, which are aimed so much at authenticity of architectural experience. A slight movement of the grass in the wind, slowly tracking clouds and occasional visitors were the only signs of life in these images that evoked the century-old dialogue between the still and the moving image.

On the high-ceilinged third floor Zumthor had assembled working models, material samples, drawings and occasional photographs of twenty-nine projects on long tables that gave the space the feel of a workshop. They made apparent what Peter Zumthor meant when he described his own approach to architecture as characterized by "a particular thoroughness in solving tasks." The sections on the creative process leading to each building document an exhaustive search for the essential, most profound response to each functional, spatial and material challenge, and thus for the essence of architecture. Among the projects were his well-known baths in Vals, Switzerland (1996) with their sequence of spaces carved out from walls of dense layers of local granite, his own house and atelier in Haldenstein (1986, 2005), the Swiss pavilion at the Hannover Expo 2000 or the small oval Sogn Benedetg Chapel (1988) high in the Graubünden mountains. More than most contemporary architects, Zumthor has the ability to reach for one simple, essential idea in each project, an idea that is then carried out with utmost clarity and determination.

The exhibition provided rich insights into the creative process in Zumthor's studio and, through the film installations by Six and Petritsch, succeeded—as architecture exhibitions hardly ever do—in offering a convincing and moving encounter with the presence of the actual buildings.

Dietrich Neumann
Brown University

Peter Zumthor
Bauten und Projekte 1986 - 2007
Film installation by Nicole Six and Paul Petritsch
Installation view 2nd floor, Kunsthaus Bregenz
© Nicole Six and Paul Petritsch,
Kunsthaus Bregenz
Photo: Markus Tretter



Peter Zumthor
Model Kunsthaus Bregenz, 1997
Partial model Kolumba Art Museum,
Cologne, Germany, 2007
Model Mountain Hotel Tschlin,
Graubünden, 1999 - 2002
(from left to right)
Installation view 3rd floor,
Kunsthaus Bregenz
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Photo: Markus Tretter

