



Virtual Residency

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Virtual Residency - an international media art project

Virtual Residency is being organized by the project group Monika Bohr, Claudia Brieske, Leslie Huppert and Gertrud Riethmüller in close cooperation with the *Gallery Biala* in Lublin (PL), the *Gallery Faux Mouvement, Centre d'Art Contemporain* in Metz (F), the *BWA Gallery* in Breslau (PL) and the *Casino Luxembourg Forum d'art contemporain in Luxembourg* (L).

The *Virtual Residency* is being supported amongst other sponsors by the *ZKM* in Karlsruhe, the organizers of the *Luxembourg and Greater Region European Capital of Culture 2007* project, as well as the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Saarland, the office of the plenipotentiary of the Federal Republic of Germany (Saarland) and other sponsors and partners.

The project executing organization is the *HBK Saar - School of Fine Arts*, Saarbrücken.

International call for a virtual migration to the model house Europe

Europe is expanding. Europe is becoming seclusive. Master-minded by the media artists Monika Bohr, Claudia Brieske, Leslie Huppert and Gertrud Riethmüller, the multimedia and exhibition project *Virtual Residency* is inspired by the overwhelming transformation and migration processes that Europe has been experiencing for over fifteen years now. During a three-year period the project group will conduct an experiment involving an appeal calling on artists worldwide to embark upon a communal virtual migration. The resulting ideas, concepts and pictures will then be provided with a provisional abode.

Residency, residence, resident - habitation, life, resident in, residence permit, apartment, domicile, to stay...

...clearly an extensive topic - what will happen before and after a stay or the issuing of a residence permit?

Who (or what) entitles a person to settle down somewhere else and what motivates people to do so?

Migration of individuals, or: "virtual migration"

The project group considers the individual to be the smallest particle in the collective migrational stream. It interprets the individual's pictures or motifs as the actual dynamic power behind communal relocation. Hopes, fears, dreams, coercion, poverty, the need for movement or change: migration is always characterised by emotions in a state of personal and general destabilisation; it can be regarded as creative transit moving towards a vanishing point of pictures and concepts flowing in the migrational current. The individual images exemplify migrational motifs; they are samples or models thereof.

Migration of individuals

Here virtual space is considered a "non-place", a utopia in the real sense of the word (a non-existent or unreal place), a window to the data stream. Intimate and bold pictures prevail in the minds of the "virtual migrants", although they may appear vague and unclear to others. Via the project's virtual projection site, the Internet platform, they acquire a direction and become visible. These patterns, which would otherwise remain obscure, are entered into the Internet platform and take shape there.

The creative coding of the migrants' ideas, pictures and concepts eclipses their personality, biography and physicality. Ergo the collective data stream will be able to glow in all its individual or trans-individual facets. Focusing on the migrants' own personal artistic picture language unties ethnocentric, national or cultural-historical bonds. The project group considers the parameters of these bonds, which are in a state of flux anyway, to be of secondary importance.

Rather, it is the destabilising momentum that is interpreted as the catalyst of a creative process, as the source of inspiration, as an opportunity. Phases of (alleged) stability are always followed by periods of change, of revolution, which in turn may be followed by new eras of balance, and so on. History, especially European history, reflects this process of ebb and flow. Therefore the group consciously concentrates on the concept of mass migration. It implies violence, power, energy, chaotic change, insecurity, but analogously also new structures, new political, social and creative processes. New aesthetic forms, discourses and content are generated.

VOID

VOID

The Virtual Residency: Internet platform and model house

Within this context the Internet is considered an amorphous crossroads for constant artistic migrational flux. The *Virtual Residency* Internet platform forms the heart of the project as a whole. Functioning like a transmitter it will use the World Wide Web as a medium to challenge all artists on earth to take part in a creative journey, a virtual mass migration. New data streams will emerge, take shape and be attracted. The Internet platform will offer this migration a virtual "refuge". The ideas of the individual migrants will occupy the *Virtual Residency*; their designs will become virtual residents. They are to reflect the desire for a place to stay and deal with themes such as homeland, foreign lands and the unknown, travel, roots, hope, departure, loss, emptiness, stimulus, etc.

In a second step, the project group will make it possible for some of the virtual residents' ideas and concepts to materialise in real space. Due to the "model character" of the concepts submitted to the *Virtual Residency*, the group has decided to transform some of the blueprints into real installations in so-called "model houses". Implicit in the idea of the model house is the collective vision of paradise. It is a pure place, a white place, a vessel and simultaneously a void, a blank space, i.e. a place without identity or personality. It is situated in a gap in the present, without any past, but in constant anticipation of a lively and individual future. Thus the model house is the ideal projection site for migrational motifs.

1. The projection site "model house" will be set in real places in Germany, France and Poland. The concepts and works that are initially situated in "liberated" space are reconfronted with the tension of existing political, social and cultural contexts, and exposed to real space and time in various settings in Europe.
2. Due to their manifestation in a real place, the works of art become haptic/tangible.

3. The project group and the virtual migrants discuss the possibilities of transforming the existing concepts into installations in real places. The artistic works can be further developed during this communication process. They may even be altered to such an extent that the borders of authorship overlap. (**The project group experimented with these aspects of creative communication in co-operation with other artists in their 2001 project Gegenort - The Virtual Mine*).

4. The partner institutions in France and Poland are developing their own approach to the theme "virtual mass migration", and each one will choose its own focal point. They will then host exhibitions that will concentrate on their chosen sub-theme in the model houses in the countries concerned. They will select those entries from the constantly expanding *Virtual Residency* database that, in their opinion, express important aspects of the theme in question.

The model house represents a temporary and spatially-limited manifestation of virtual migrational streams in the material world. The model houses stemming from the Internet will be redigitalised and reconducted to their place of origin via webcams: pictures from the real place, i.e. the model house, will flow back to the Internet platform. Via this closed circuit, the *Virtual Residency* will become a laboratory in which virtual and realised migrational motifs will meet, overlap and generate new artistic impulses.

The model house is hence a concept or a metaphor on the one hand, and on the other a real place - real rooms, houses or even outdoor spaces will become model houses inhabited by select artistic concepts.

** During the realisation process the concepts of the multimedia installations by Fatima Lassay / Jorge Antonio, Puati Little Flower, Nanostate, James Clark Ross and Daniel Herskowitz were further developed in tight co-operation and creative dialogues with Bohr, Brieske, Huppert, Riethmüller and Konuk via video-conferencing, chats and emails (see www.the-virtual-mine.net and the catalogue "Gegenort - The Virtual Mine", 2001).*

The model house – Handwerkerergasse Völklingen

The model house will be realised in the Saarland towards the March of 2007. The exhibition will be held in various connected houses in the so-called "Handwerkerergasse" (craftmen's alley), which is part of the **World Cultural Heritage Site "Völklinger Hütte"** (Old Ironworks) - **European Centre for Art and Industrial Culture** and also a branch of the Hochschule der Bildenden Künste Saar (Saar Art School). The *Virtual Residency* project group run by Bohr, Brieske, Huppert and Riethmüller will launch the exhibition series here by realising an outstanding selection of concepts.

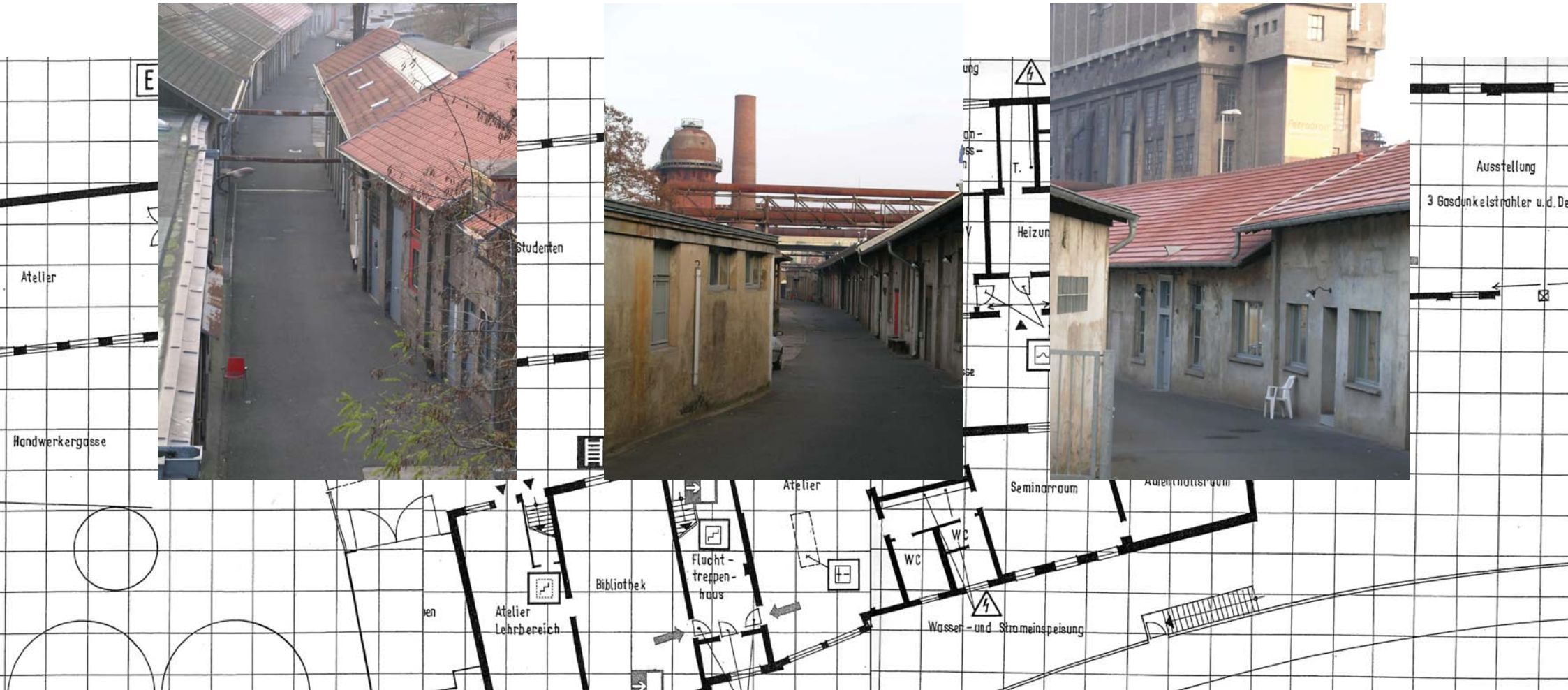
The central theme will be dominated by the history of the venue, which is the site of a disused iron and steelworks.

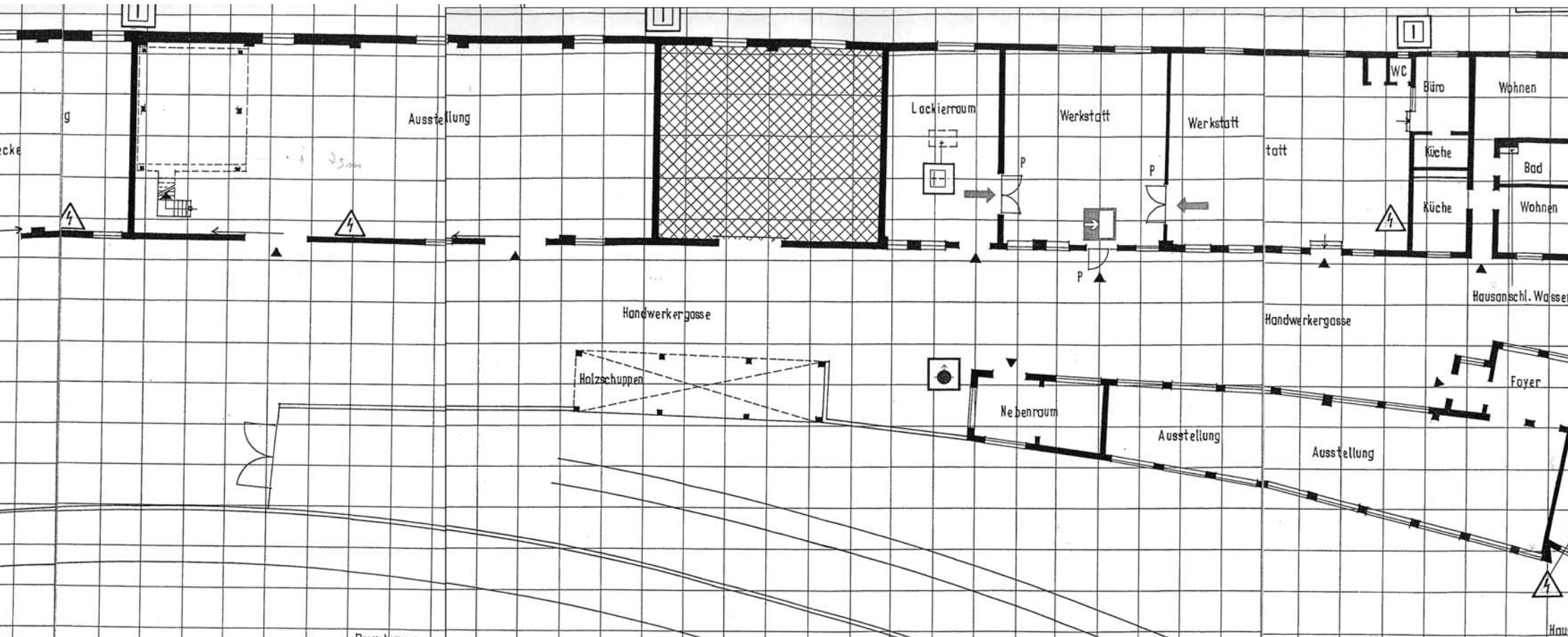
Völklingen and the Völklingen ironworks have witnessed decades of European migrational movements: beginning with the industrial revolution, through the forced labour during the rule of the National Socialists up to the fact that today Völklingen has a high percentage of first and second generation Turkish immigrants.

The project group has chosen the key concepts of foreign workers, *host/s and web hosting* as their "sub-theme", and will explore the subject of migration and identity in the context of technological development.

The thoughts behind these approaches were also influenced by David Morley's* media theory (*Hometerritories - Media, Mobility and Identity*, published by Routledge, London, 2000). Amongst other things, he explores how the influence of the Internet, and in particular satellite TV, on the Turkish community in Germany can serve to generate various forms of "hybrid identities", i.e. individuals who partake in two separate cultures with the aid of this technology.

The model house - *Handwerker-gasse Völklingen*





What is special about the *Virtual Residency* ?

- Migration is considered to be and visualised as a creative process leading to destabilisation and stabilisation.
- Focusing on individual pictures, ideas and concepts as self-propellant components of the collective data stream, or the virtual migrational flow. The almost complete abandonment of ethnocentric approaches to the concept of migration broadens the spectrum of the theme to allocate a new artistic angle.
- The virtual traversal of borders while new borders are being drawn in the real world will lead to an expansion of the political discourse.
- The temporary and spatially-limited materialisation of a virtual interface in real space and the redirection thereof back into virtual space via webcams.
- During discussions about sub-themes and personal exhibition concepts with the co-operation partners, the project will be undergoing constant growth and remain infinitely mutable due to its flexible structure and the communication possibilities involved. This will lead to a multifaceted and lively dissection of the general theme.
- The project group will set up a forum on the *Virtual Residency* Internet platform where the partner institutions involved will be able to communicate directly on all matters concerning content and organisation.

How will we proceed?

1. Internet appeal to artists worldwide to partake in an artistic virtual mass migration. Themes: creative processes caused by personal and collective destabilisation, for example the longing for a fixed place of abode, homeland, foreign lands, travel, provenance, hope, departure, loss, emptiness, impulse, etc.
2. Transmission of artistic concepts to the *Virtual Residency* Internet platform, populating the database with ideas, pictures, videos, sound material and concepts.
3. Selection of various concepts from the database, which will then be realised by the project group in the first model house. For the subsequent exhibitions in other Europe regions the responsible parties from the partner institutions involved will select the concepts they consider best suited to their chosen sub-themes. The database will be reopened prior to each consecutive exhibition and the current discussion status will be conveyed in the context of a new appeal.
4. Launch of a dialogue between the project group and the authors of the selected concepts.
Aim: realisation of the concepts by means of a creative communication process and a lively dialogue.
5. Implementation of the final drafts of the concepts as multimedia installations in the model houses that have been chosen as exhibition venues.
6. Exhibition in the model house:
Supporting events are planned and dependent upon the exhibition location.
Each European partner institution will choose and concentrate on one particular theme pertaining to the general subject.
7. All submitted concepts will be presented in the model house in the form of a video documentation.
8. The exhibitions will be observed by webcams, thus transferring the action back to the *Virtual Residency* Internet platform and into the World Wide Web.

Sustainability and long-term goals

1. A number of higher education institutions in Germany and France have expressed considerable interest in the *Virtual Residency* project. Our European partner institutions and numerous participants of the previous project *Gegenort - The Virtual Mine* are directly involved with universities and art schools.

Together with the project partners, the group thus plans to probe the possibility of an international co-operation amongst higher education institutions. This will ensure that the project attains long-term viability and will allow its planning and realisation processes, as well as its varied content and results, to be applied in a didactic context.

2. The complete *Virtual Residency* project, its complex Internet platform, and the ensuing exhibitions in model houses, will develop an "organism" or a "network" of temporary abodes for artistic migrations in various European regions.
3. Considerable interest has also been expressed in the possibility of broadening this network beyond 2007. For example, the project partner at the easternmost border of the European Union (the Galeria Biala, Centrum Kultury, in Lublin, Poland) has connections to Ukrainian cultural institutions which can also be included in the *Virtual Residency* discourse, so that further model houses can be realised from the growing database in that region too.

4. The *Virtual Residency* project is also an artistic statement on the current political situation. Globalisation processes will lead to an increase in migrational movements and the database will continue to serve as a constantly updated forum for artistic reactions to this theme.

The *Virtual Residency* project is composed of an intricate, interconnected and multiple-layered structure, the complexity of which can only be fathomed at second glance. It is a lively media and communication artwork, becoming infinitely mutable, disseminated, and transgressing time and space due to the influence of the partner institutions and the participating artists.

The group and its foreign partners are confident that this project can channel a means for art to contribute dynamically and significantly to European and international co-operation.

The *Virtual Residency's* European Partners

(For now) the *Virtual Residency* project group is to work with the following 5 partners, who are all actively involved in the contemporary art scene:

Galeria Biala, Centrum Kultury

Curators: Anna Nawrot, Jan Gryka
Lublin (Poland)

BWA Wroclaw-Galerie Sztuki Współczesnej

Director: Marek Puchala
Breslau (Poland)

Faux Mouvement, Centre d'Art Contemporain

Director : Maryse Jeanguyot
Metz (France)

Open Graphic Art Studio

Curator: Suzana Milevska
Skopje (Macedonia)
(for an exhibition in 2008)

And additionally:

Casino Luxembourg, Forum d'art contemporain

Artistic director: Enrico Lunghi
Luxemburg (L)

which is to co-operate with the project group to organise and host a final presentation at the end of 2007, or to run an ongoing presentation of the project via a terminal and webcams installed in the Casino Luxembourg.

With the support of the Center for Art and Media **(ZKM)** in Karlsruhe, Germany.

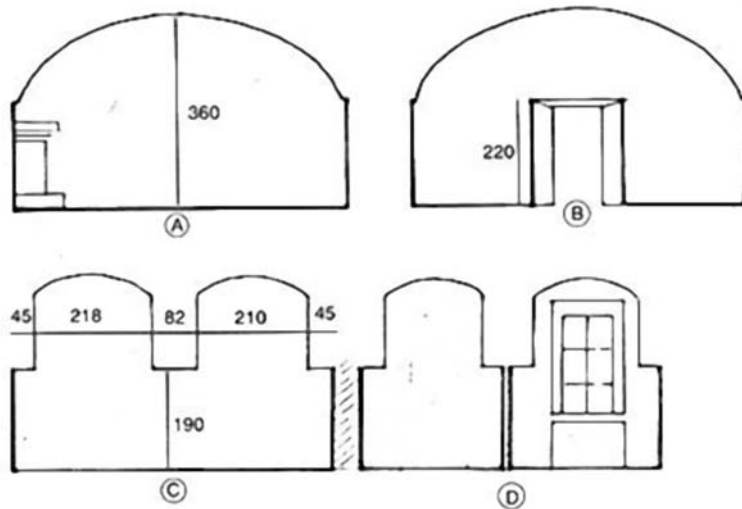
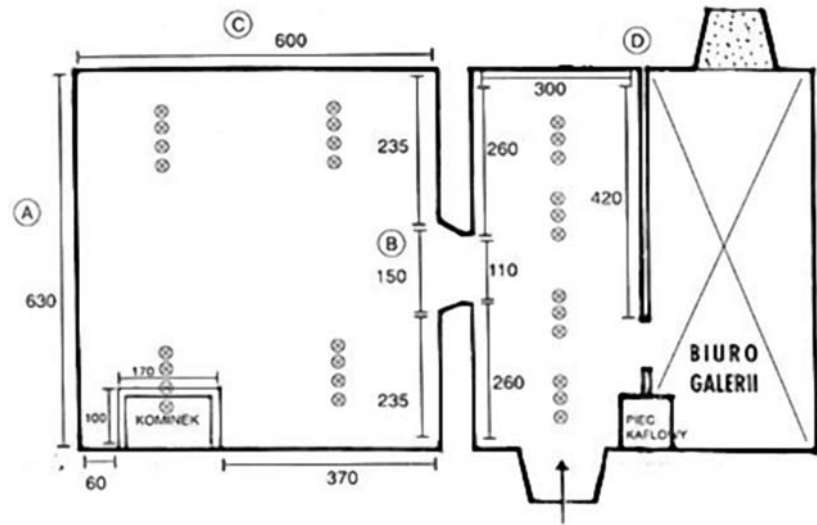
The following institutions and organisations have agreed to support the *Virtual Residency* project on an ideological, organisational or financial basis, or are considering doing so:

Ministerium für Bildung, Kultur und Wissenschaft des Saarlandes (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science of the Saarland), DRAC Lorraine, Instytut Adama Mickiewicza (IAM)/ Adam-Mickiewicz-Institut, and the project "Kulturhauptstadt Europa 2007" (European Cultural Capital 2007) Luxemburg and the greater region (the final presentation, provisionally speaking, of the whole *Virtual Residency* project will be held in Luxemburg at the end of 2007 in the context of the "Kulturhauptstadt Europa 2007" event programme. Since the theme of this event is "migration", the responsible parties in Luxemburg have expressed particular interest in the *Virtual Residency*).

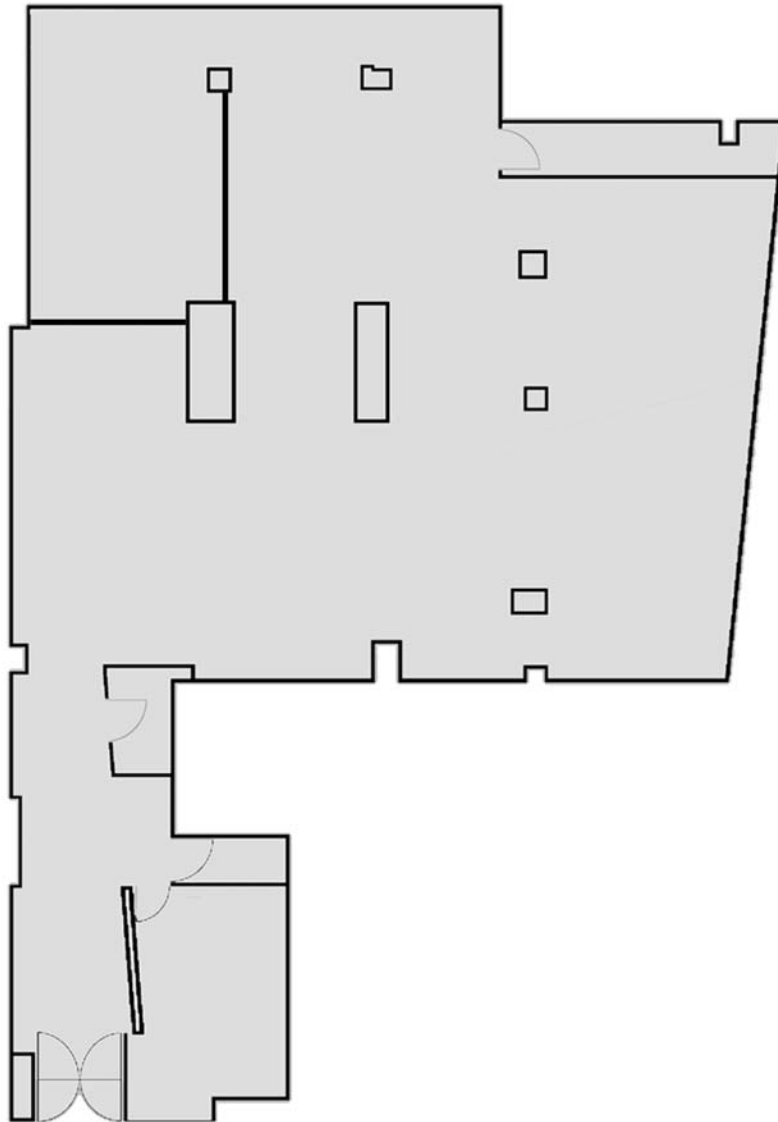
The selected partner regions in the Saarland, Lorraine and Poland are all border regions, or "threshold districts", rather than renowned centres of contemporary art. The project group and its partners intend to form a so-called "organism" or "network" of border regions that have been moulded by cultural history due to their peripheral position, thus lending them a remarkable character. All these European regions are concerned with the theme of migration in disparate aspects. The utopia of a model house can be very different depending upon which country it is situated in, since the "friction" between the artistic concepts from the virtual space of the database and the materiality of each individual place concerned will always be completely different. The art project hopes to visualise these various aspects comprehensibly at each selected venue.

The content of the entire project is thus dependent upon a tight co-operation with the individual partners. Along with the virtual migrants' different approaches, each partner institutions' perspective of the subject plays a significant role.

The model house - *Galeria Biala, Centrum Kultury*

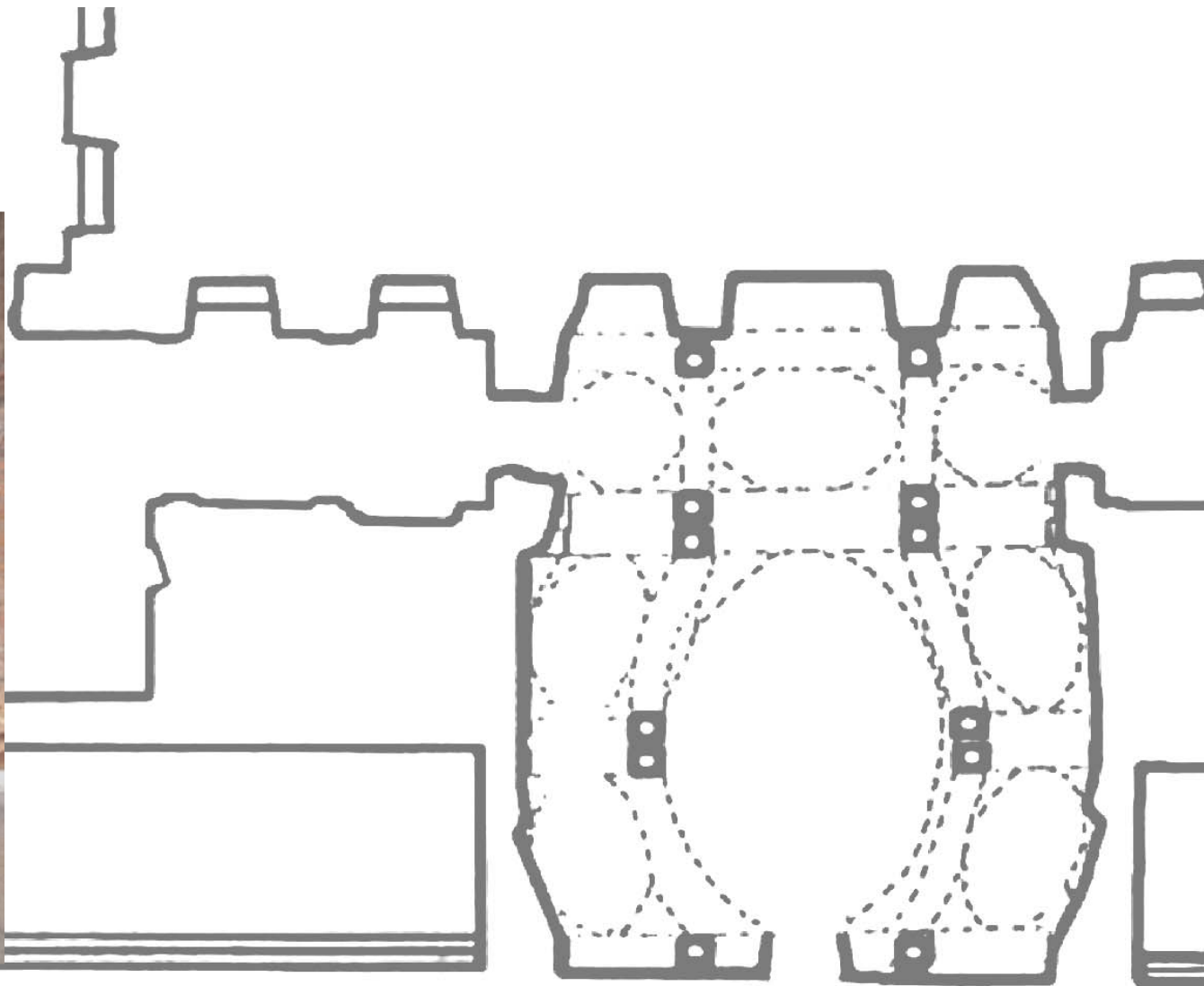
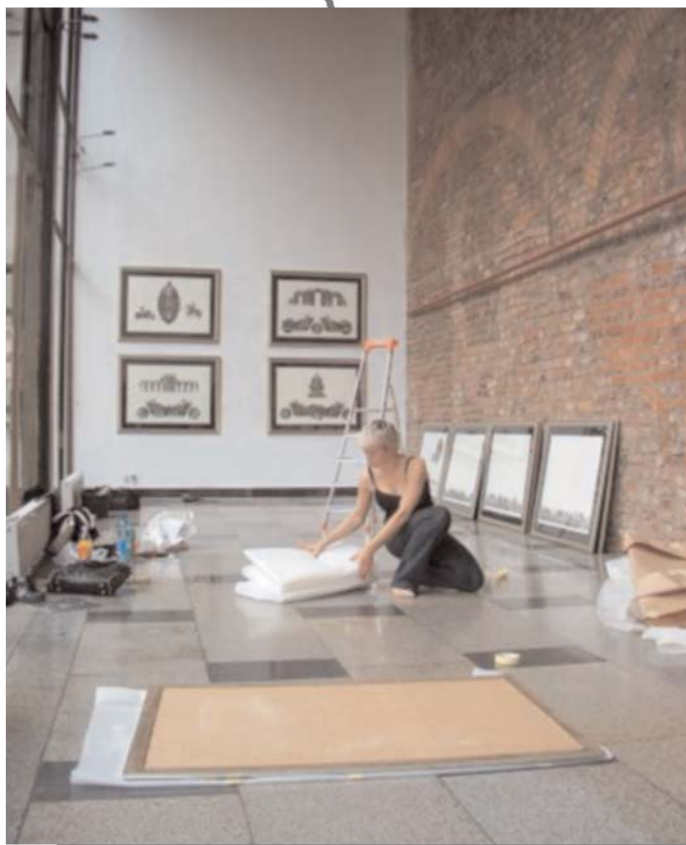
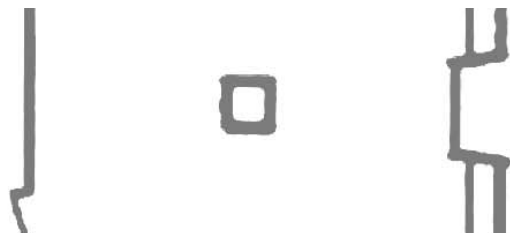


The model house - *Faux Mouvement*, Centre d'Art Contemporain





The model house - *BWA Wrocław-Galerie Sztuki Współczesnej*





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