

Coming Up. Or: the Other Passage

Julie Hayward's design of a pedestrian underpass between river and urban space in Vienna

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Usually "abgetaucht" (down under) could be used to describe someone entering an underpass or moving towards it. And then you pass through it as quickly as possible, coming out on the other end. Underpasses usually do not inspire one to reflect on (one's own) passage through them. Things might be a bit different with the underpass designed by Julie Hayward, which leads from the Vienna Danube Channel (under the feeder road leading to the airport freeway) to Löwengasse, or vice versa. First, a sign mounted above the channel-side entrance signals in a friendly way that after walking into the tapered, funnel-like underpass the path will soon lead up hill. "Coming up" can be read here in large hand-written letters. And then, coming up on the river level, we find ourselves moving into the slightly higher elevated sea of buildings. Intermittently, it doesn't get as dark as in usual underpasses. Two illuminated stripes direct us through and up, not by lighting themselves but by reflecting the strong blue in which the walls and the ceiling of the underpass are bathed. Going in the opposite direction, the inclination leads down towards the river but now without the help of letters and only with the assistance of pictorial language. Passing through and out from the city the passersby see an "aquarium". On closer scrutiny, inside the underpass, it can be recognized as a large-format light box with a photo. However, it is not entirely clear what is depicted here – a creature swimming away to the right or coming up to the surface, most likely not a human being, but if it's an animal then what kind? One continues in this blue space, seamed by illuminated bands. Those coming from the opposite direction enter it first. For those moving towards the river this blue proves to be a tone that is related to the watery color of the aquarium picture. From here they also encounter a piece of real nature as a point-de-vue: at the end of the tunnel a tree appears radiantly in natural or artificial light depending on the time of day or night.

Here Julie Hayward works in a similar way as in her sculptures, drawings and photographs, i.e., she attempts to create an "equilibrium", i.e., compensating, offsetting (and addressing) states of tension between physical and psychical nature. She uses "found pieces of reality" alongside images surfacing up from the unconscious, employing all of this to create "drifting states, a juxtaposition of contradictory forms in which the human eye creates associations." (Eva Meyer) A means that seems suited to negotiating anxieties and aggressions in public space as well.

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