

Ulrike Ulrich – AIR – ARTIST IN RESIDENCE Niederösterreich

It was too short. This time it seemed much shorter to me. It were indeed only 24 days. And being ill on the first weekend, well, it was more like three weeks. Three wonderful weeks it were. Of writing and working with the children and reading and walking along the Danube. There was sun, wind, rain and finally even snow. What can I say? I love this place. I love Stein. In the winter, too. The houses, the places, the cafés. It was so different than last time. My favorite bar was closed. They had no breakfast any more at the Kesselhauskino Café and I had to move to Café Hartl in the morning for my writing sessions. Which was good, because I met the local (German) priest, and the friendly woman with the many newspapers, and the morning drinkers and the very nice waitress, who told me “Ihr Platzl ist frei”, when I came in. To write I need to be alone and not have to many distractions. Stein (more than Krems) is perfect in that regard. It is somewhat puristic to me. Last time I had time for trips and walks in the vineyards. This time I didn't.

Of course it had to do with the Schulhausroman (classroom novel). On six days I travelled to St. Pölten (too early, to be honest: no more appointments in the first hours of Monday, please!! Or the first hours of any day, if the travelling time is 80 minutes) In the afternoon I was always extremely tired (and hungry). The work at the school was great. Well. I am saying that now, that I am finished. It was hard in the beginning. But the children are always great, even when they're not. They can be extremely annoying. But I liked them anyway, some a bit more than others. The gender stereotypes were a bit frightening. Crying and cooking woman. Consoling male inventors. And so on. I tried to address it. (especially as I am writing about that in my personal writing project). But most of all they were very funny and had a lot of ideas (even when some of them thought they'd hat no fantasy at all). And in the end they gave me not only a great funny crazy novel about Ötzi who turns Werewolf in London 2019 and the female Red Knight, who saves the day and falls in love with him, but also the most beautiful anonymous feedback in writing, like: “Stay as you are”, “I will never forget writing a novel with you” or “I never knew, how much fun it is to write and work together!” Mission accomplished:)

Back to my personal project. I was able to make some progress here, too. More text, more thoughts, more insight. (Though it is difficult to work and concentrate with another novel and 25 children in your mind.) But once I even managed to plunge into the universe of my own text for five days in a row. I really liked to prepare the Powerpoint for the presentation in the beginning. And it was fun to present (and listen to the presentations of the others). I just would have preferred to know earlier about this presentation meeting. A bit more information, about who will attend. And I missed someone of my institution. The Literaturhaus. It was a bit weird to be the only one who came without anyone from the inviting institution. And I also would have liked to present to them what I

am working on. The “informal part” afterwards was a bit short for my taste. I would have liked to get to know the people of the other institutions, have a little more time for conversations afterwards.

It was great to meet the other artists there. I appreciated the possibility to get together that early and with that nice “Apéro”, as we call it in Switzerland. Unfortunately because of the classroom novel and my early rising schedule I often wasn’t able to join them, when they met in the evenings. But the times that I did, it was great and the atmosphere up here on the top floor was very nice and relaxed. What I missed: presentations or exhibitions of my fellow artists in Krems. I couldn’t go to Mödling. That was too far and I had to save my last days for working...

Last but not least: I love TOP 22. The view on the Danube. The brightness of the room. It is inspiring, it helps me to work. I can stay at this desk longer than I can stay at my desk at home. The room is big enough and not too big at once. There is everything you need, except the kitchen could be a little bit better equipped, a blender to make soup in the public room would be great, and mashers and graters and some other kitchen stuff in each TOP. I am not a big cook, but even I missed some things... And what I also would have appreciated, especially in the “one-month-TOP”: some essential food like oil and vinegar, pepper, maybe even some pasta to start with, when you arrive late on your first day.

Apart from that tiny detail, I have felt very welcome. By the teams of AIR Krems and the Literaturhaus and most of all by the women of the Schulhausroman team. (Lena even came from Vienna to accompany me to the school on the first very early morning. And we talked a lot about the project and literature and everything during my stay. She and Julia picked me up in St. Pölten in a mere snowstorm and Julia told me, I could call her anytime, which I didn’t have to, but it was a good feeling.) And there was always a coffee and on some evenings also a glass of wine for me, when I stopped by. They were all very helpful and great. And I will miss all of this, when I go back tomorrow.