

AIR Report – Oli Watt

Following questions should be answered in the report:

How was the residency? Advantages and disadvantages of AIR – ARTIST IN RESIDENCE Niederösterreich.

I really only have positive feedback after reflecting on my 4 weeks here in Krems. It has been an excellent experience, and a time in which I accomplished work (both physical and mental) vital to my studio practice and teaching.

Advantages:

The studio apartments are conveniently located on the Kunstmeile, allowing artists to visit any of the surprisingly numerous exhibit halls and museums at almost any given time. AIR staff are right downstairs to address any questions or problems. AIR staff are extremely approachable and friendly (as well as knowledgeable).

The studio spaces are very comfortable with adequate room to execute several projects (2D and 3D) simultaneously. There is a common studio space directly down the hall with power tools and other supplies.

Krems is a beautiful town – it is easy to get out of the studio and walk around the Krems/Stein environment but still remain in “working” mode. In other words, the area is not overwhelming or too distracting. Had this residency been in a larger town, there might be the temptation and anxiety to see all the sights and do all the things. Although I certainly did not see everything Krems has to offer, I have a pretty good understanding of its offerings.

The library in my studio was a special surprise. I enjoyed flipping the catalogues and learning about (mostly) regional artists and Austrian art history.

Having someone clean the studio weekly was nice (although maybe unnecessary in my case—my home studio in Chicago has never been as organized as my space here).

In my case, it was also an advantage to be located somewhat close to Mainz and Munich in Germany. Part of my goals for this residency included setting up an exhibition in Mainz and getting in some quick research in Munich. I was also able to visit Vienna, but did so much more as a tourist.

Disadvantages:

Coming from and returning to Chicago limited the scale, amount and type of work I could accomplish and take with me. This could also be said of the available resources and art materials available locally. However, in my case this was an advantage and I planned accordingly. To some degree, I knew the work I would do in Krems would inform projects I will work on in the upcoming months (maybe years). I covered a great

deal of conceptual and planning territory in these 4 weeks. I learned the lesson that I often emphasize to my students in Chicago: what happens and what can you do when I take away all of your normal resources and fancy materials? What are the essential ideas that grow out of this? Such challenges are rarely presented to middle-aged and older artists who tend to work within their comfort zones.

What did you realize during your residency period?

Although I have a couple days left, I have completed approximately 120 small scale wooden sculptures. Some are carved and some are constructed with wood remnants and glue. Each is no bigger than 8 cm square. Some will be taken back to Chicago, and some will become trash, existing only as process to inform future projects. I also travelled to Mainz to install a small exhibition at Walpodenakademie, and stayed for the exhibition's opening. At the opening, I met many artists as well as a printmaking professor from the university there. I also went to Munich and spent an afternoon in the Karl Valentin and Liesl Karlstadt Museum. Valentin has been an important non-artist/artist in my practice since I first saw his comical objects over 30 years ago.

What did you miss at the residency?

Of course, I missed all of my usual tools for working with wood and my printing press. But I was able to quickly overcome the absence of such comfort. At times I missed social interaction. But working for the first 2 weeks without really talking to anyone for more than 20 minutes was also a great luxury. Eventually I got to meet the other residents, which was great.

What do you appreciate at AIR – ARTIST IN RESIDENCE Niederösterreich?

I especially appreciate the hard work of the board members/staff/AIR organizers. The information packet that was given to me on day one was very thorough in covering almost everything a resident needs to know (shops, supplies, bikes, swimming pools, etc.) It's a very well-done packet and I referred to it on many occasions.

The organized tour of the Kunsthalle with Andreas and Florian was great. The ARTOTHEK event was interesting. I'm looking forward to the trip to the Spoerri space.

Perhaps my favorite and most informative moments of this residency were my discussions with David at the Galerie Stadtpark. The exhibition there currently is beautifully curated and inspired some excellent discussions that covered everything from strategies of exhibition to philosophies of being a parent.