

INNOCENT QUESTIONS © ARNOLD DREYBLATT

Oslo | Norway
2006

OPENLAB COMPANY



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Permanent installation
sandblasted glass, LED displays, 2006

'Innocent Questions' was the winner of a closed competition initiated by the The National Foundation for Art in Public Buildings, Oslo (Utsmykkingsfondet for offentlige bygg) in 2004 for a permanent artistic work in front the Villa Grande, a villa occupied by Vidkun Quisling from 1941-1945. The Villa is currently the site of the "HL Senteret", The Center for Studies of Holocaust and Religious Minorities.

In developing a concept for an artistic intervention for the Villa Grande I preferred not be limited by the particular historical circumstances associated with this site. I have chosen rather to focus on the use of the 'personal questionnaire' in population registration systems as the defining element that thematically connects the Holocaust in Norway with other genocides of the twentieth century and with the administration of foreigners and other minorities in contemporary society.

The winter snow and the dramatic approach up the hill to the site call for a vertical installation as a transformation of the imposing and grotesque historical building facade. In renovating and reconstructing the 'Villa Grande,' fire and safety regulations required an external stairwell to be fixed on the facade to the left of the main entrance. I proposed to utilize the structure of the stairwell in order to physically support the installation of 'Innocent Questions.'

Attached to the structure of the stairwell is an array of twelve panel-boxes, mounted within a steel frame. These panels are designed to form one unified image (size: 8330 x 4070 cm.), which is perceived in three distinct optical layers:

"Non-Reflective Image": Sandblasted onto the hardened surface of the outermost glass layer of each panel is a reconstruction of a historical 'punch card', representing the reduction of the individual to number and category. This image is perceived as non-reflective, creating a heightened contrast to the reflectivity of the underlying mirrored surface.

"Reflected Environment": The work functions as a mirrored wall that reflects the natural environment: the trees and sky, and the visiting public. The face of the historical building is thereby opened and partially erased.

"Illuminated Texts": Mounted onto the rear of each panel within the punch card image, are words and phrases written in fixed light-emitting diodes (LED's).

The words and phrases appear and disappear within a slow and randomly generated temporal composition perceived within the virtual punch card image.

Because the appearance of illuminated words and phrases is continually changing, new combinations of words and phrases arise, igniting unexpected associations from the questionnaire entries as one passes the work.

During the hours of daylight, the mirror glass reflects the trees and sky. The information layers (non-reflective image, reflected environment and illuminated text) are clearly visible. In the hours of darkness, artificial side lighting illuminates the non-reflecting sandblasted surfaces of the outer glass layer, which would otherwise be imperceptible.

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