

A BODY OF WATER

Waschkaue Ewald/Schlägel & Eisen II

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CONNECTED CITIES

Kunstprozesse im urbanen Netz

***Wilhelm Lehmbruck Museum Duisburg und
ausgewählte Standorte der Industriekultur im
Ruhrgebiet***

Bergwerk Ewald/Schlägel & Eisen II Herten

20. Juni bis 1. August 1999

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Waschkaue Ewald/Schlägel & Eisen II

A Body of Water is an installation occupying three locations: Firstly a chroma-key room at the Wilhelm Lehmbruck Museum in Duisburg, secondly the coal miners changing room, or Waschkaue, at the disused Ewald/Schlägel und Eisen coalary in Herten, and thirdly the shower room at the Ewald/Schlägel und Eisen Waschkaue in Herten.

The audiences in Herten and Duisburg are connected in the following way: A video camera in Duisburg captures images of the audience standing in front of a chroma-key blue backdrop - this image is sent to Herten via an ISDN video conferencing link. The image is received in Herten and chroma-keyed together with a camera image of the audience standing in the Waschkaue changing room. The chroma-key mixed image is then video projected onto a fine wall of water, sprayed from high pressure shower heads in the Waschkaue shower room. A camera situated next to the projector captures an image of the projected image and feeds it to three monitors in the changing room space in the Waschkaue, and back via the ISDN video conferencing link to three video monitors surrounding the chroma-key space in Duisburg.

The water wall, or screen, is located in the centre of the shower room and has two different images projected onto it simultaneously from either side. The audience in the shower room are able to walk around the water screen and experience the images changing from a telematic link with Duisburg to black & white documentary footage of miners showering in the original Waschkaue. Floating independently on each side of the water wall, the two images are not mixed and appear as completely different scenarios from either side of the water screen.

This installation simply wouldn't exist without the water interface. It transports the public interaction and at the same time it reflects the urban area of the Ruhrgebiet as a network of rivers and waterways. The shower room forms the heart of the installation, all the visual and conceptual layers meet here, referring to the present changes of industrial culture in the region: On the one side the viewers are confronted by the new era, the interactive platform of networked communication - a possible future ? - yet on the other side they discover the ghostlike shadows of the past miners showering in the water - a flashback to the abandoned space and its former working culture.

The Ewald/Schlägel und Eisen coal mine in Herten, and its impressive shower and changing rooms, locally referred to as the Waschkaue, have been closed down since 1997. Over one thousand miners were using the Waschkaue daily. It was once one of the largest coal mines in Europe, employing over 7000 miners. A Body of Water is an installation that draws an analogy between the disappearance of heavy industry with the disappearance of the human body and its telepresent reappearance in the digital network.