

The Museum of Modern Art

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WALTER PICHLER: PROJECTS

WALL LABEL

Pichler's beautiful drawings and seminal projects have been the pervasive influence behind many of the most recent products of the Austrian and Italian architecture and design avant-garde. His intricate cross-hatching technique, carefully composed axonometrics, and melancholy monochromatic washes are the intensely ascetic means by which Pichler evokes the lonely spaces of an architectural landscape of the mind. The large pessimistic underground mega-structures he caustically proposed a decade ago have turned into the archaeological remnants of his earlier, more mundane existence. Since then, Pichler has undergone a profound transformation. One of his main concerns for the last years has been the architecture of the primeval house; the place where man's irreducible solitude dwells.

In Pichler's iconography, a roof and four posts define a sacred area. To furnish that holy place, he designs, or rather conjures up, sacred artifacts for the performance of daily rituals. These artifacts are intended to serve as mediators between his fearful desires, and his vision of God's raging indifference. Designs such as his "Chair for a Suicide," "Bed," and "Cross in a Wooden Hut," among others, might be seen as the peace offerings a lucid challenger presents to the One he knows to be the ineluctable victor. The hidden purpose is that such objects, rather than act as mediators, be taken as surrogates of himself. But the underlying hope is, perhaps, that in choosing the ideal object over the real one God will reveal His human nature.

Birth, love and death are the underpinnings of tragedy's classic structure, an edifice contemporary poetic sensibility perceives as reduced to its constituent

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elements, like a cloud of dust which can take any shape, but assumes none.

Pichler, a devout Catholic, sees life as a fugitive passage towards another abode, but every agony of facing yet another morning are for him the reassuring signs that the voyage still goes on. Pichler's basic instinct is to work, his quest not for survival, but for salvation.

Close to fifteen years ago, when he was 25, Pichler made a sculpture he called Old Figure. It has never left him. One can imagine him at night, laying it down horizontally; in the morning putting it up vertically. With one gesture he opens the day, with the other he initiates the evening. By means of analogy he replicates the archetypal acts of life; through irony he lucidly acknowledges the ultimate sentence.

Wall label for small room where Pichler's St. Martin project is hung

The drawings in this room illustrate some projects Pichler plans to build on land he bought a few years ago, near the Hungarian border. It is a long-neglected farm house with ten acres of ground he acquired very cheaply because it is on a steep slope that cannot be worked by agricultural equipment.

He has remodeled the house and rebuilt the stable to make a workshop. In the meadow below the house, Pichler will build the concrete silo which is to house his Wagon and the Old Figure. The tracks for the wagon will run from an underground chamber, which can be locked, through the open silo to a wooden gallery outside. The wagon will be moved by hand with a windlass. In the front, on a stand made of metal and granite, there will be a two-part sculpture which Pichler made in 1962 as a rough sketch model for a sacred building.

The constructions he plans constitute, in essence, a citadel of childhood memories. The wagon is a surrogate for the one his father built and pulled around the town; the aqueducts and cisterns are a re-elaboration of those which brought water to the town where he was born; the Cell is a place to hide and, as when he was a child, wait to be discovered.

Emilio Ambasz, Curator of Design