

PROTEST/ARCHITECTURE

Barricades, Camps, Superglue

An exhibition of DAM – Deutsches Architekturmuseum, Frankfurt am Main, Germany, and MAK – Museum of Applied Arts, Vienna, Austria

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MAK – Press and PR

presse@MAK.at

Press Release

Vienna, 13.2.2024

Press Conference

Tuesday, 13.2.2024, 10 am

Please register via presse@MAK.at

The exhibition *PROTEST/ARCHITECTURE: Barricades, Camps, Superglue* explores the spatial aspects of protest cultures. At its heart are political movements that found expression in public spaces and that gave rise to specific architectural or design objects. From protest camps to protesters using their own bodies, the spectrum of protest architecture that our research brought to light is ambivalent, often utopian, and at times high-risk: from the fights on the barricades during the July Revolution of 1830 in Paris all the way up to the present day.

“Protests have to be disruptive to be effective. When these disruptions move into public space and take root there, blockading, defending, or seizing these spaces, they produce protest architecture,” as Oliver Elser, project leader and curator, DAM, and Sebastian Hackenschmidt, curator, MAK, describe the architectural and spatial aspect of protest. A plethora of models and photos, as well as a 16-minute film installation produced especially for the exhibition by the Frankfurt-based director Oliver Hardt, convey the uniqueness of each protest. An original suspension bridge from Hambach Forest, an over four-meter-high tensegrity structure from Vienna, and the tip of a monopod from Frankfurt show the surprisingly sophisticated aspects of engineering and architecture used in protest structures.

The exhibition focuses on 13 protests from Egypt, Brazil, Germany, Hong Kong, India, Austria, Spain, Ukraine, and the USA between 1968 and 2023. Each of them gave rise to protest camps of varying duration that comprised very different architectural structures: A square in Madrid’s city center was

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covered in plastic sheeting in 2011, tent cities popped up in Hong Kong and during “Occupy Wall Street” in New York, a highway blockade in Delhi using farm vehicles converted into houses lasted some 16 months, and in Austria the “LobauBleibt!” movement occupied various strategically important sites for eight months between 2021 and 2022 and erected several protest camps.

Some of these protest movements were able to achieve their aims, such as overthrowing the government (Tahrir Square protests during the Arab Spring, Cairo, 2011; Maidan Uprising in Kyiv, 2013–2014), advancing the construction of subsidized housing (MTST Homeless Workers Movement, Brazil, since 1997), and stemming an open-pit lignite mine (occupation of Hambach Forest, since 2012).

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The architecture they created often played a significant part in enabling the protesters to achieve their aims. The Maidan Uprising’s encampment in Kyiv, Ukraine, increasingly developed into a fortress during the two and a half months of often brutal conflicts. By contrast, the Brazilian MTST protest camps are delicate structures and thanks to precise advance planning, they can be erected overnight by thousands of homeless people.

The 13 case studies in particular demonstrate that with limited resources temporary experimental buildings for unusual communities can emerge in diverse sociopolitical contexts. What is unendingly fascinating is the protesters’ energy, passion, and willingness to take risks in each case.

The installations, furniture, and mesh panels in the exhibition are mostly reused exhibition materials from the MAK. On the one hand, this reflects the principle of protest architecture, according to which everything must be cheap and available spontaneously. On the other, it was important to the curators to work sustainably, and as a result not to be “too protesty.”

More detail on the protests featured in the exhibition can be found in the publication that accompanies the exhibition, which is much more than just a catalog: in the form of an encyclopedia, its references and connections ramify widely, from 1830 to 2023, from A for Arab Spring to Z for Zwentendorf.

Having launched at the DAM (16 September 2023 – 14 January 2024), the exhibition will be on display at the MAK’s Exhibition Hall from 14 February to 25 August 2024.

Press photos are available for download at [MAK.at/en/press](https://www.mak.at/en/press).



HIGHLIGHTS OF THE EXHIBITION

Detailed models, built in cooperation with Prof. Andreas Kretzer at the Technical University of Munich and the Hochschule für Technik Stuttgart, show protest camps from the Resurrection City of 1968 to the “LobauBleibt!” movement of 2021/22. 40 “ground-based structures” from Lützerath, mostly stilt houses, were documented by Rokas Wille (HfG Karlsruhe) using photographic paper models.

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A 1:10 hanging model of the Beechtown barrio, on loan from the artist Stephan Mörsch, shows a tree-house village from Hambach Forest. Furthermore, the display includes loans from the Kriminalmuseum in Frankfurt am Main related to the “Startbahn-West” protests against Runway 18 West at Frankfurt Airport.

Film installation *Protest/Architecture*, 16:23 mins., 2023

To capture the atmosphere of protest movements, the director Oliver Hardt developed a short film, which is played on a big screen in the center of the exhibition. It shows a compilation of documentary recordings from eight different protest camps (see the credits). The film is available on the DAM’s YouTube channel (<https://youtu.be/Zxgqs9q59s8>).

Film by Oliver Ressler *The Desert Lives*, 55 mins., 4K, 2022

On 6.9.2021 construction vehicles were obstructed at Vienna’s Hausfeldstraße subway station in a bid to stop the construction of the Lobau highway and the so-called “Stadtstraße” (city road). When the City of Vienna stood by the proposal even after the plan to build a tunnel under the Lobau was rejected by the Ministry for Climate Action, the building site—known as the “Wüste” (desert)—was occupied by the “LobauBleibt!” movement. This film follows the protest movement for five months and is divided into three rounds of talks with the activists. “LobauBleibt!” was subjected to various forms of repression—as is most evident in the conversations in the three-story wooden pyramid, probably the most iconic building of the Lobau protests. On 1.2.2022 all the buildings were evacuated and destroyed by the police. 48 activists were arrested.

Short film by media artist Christoph Schwarz, 30 secs., 2022

Oliver Ressler’s film on the “Wüste” is supplemented by a 30-second video clip by the media artist Christoph Schwarz that won a prize in a short film competition. The iconic images of the occupied “Wüste” building site being cleared and the destruction of the so-called pyramid undergo an ironic reinterpretation.

Suspension bridge, Oaktown, Hambach Forest, 2018–2023

This Y-bridge with three, four-meter-long spans hung in Hambach Forest at a height of approximately 16 meters until May 2023. Connected with other bridges, trusses, and climbing nets, a barrio called Oaktown developed between the tree houses. The suspension bridge has now been dismantled by



the same activists who had installed it after the first Oaktown barrio was cleared in 2018.

Top of a monopod, Fechenheim Forest

Monopods comprise up to ten-meter-long tree trunks on which platforms are mounted and which are tied to the ground with cables. They are a type of delaying architecture designed to protract the clearance of the protest camp by the police. Unlike tripods, which stand on three legs, monopods rely on their anchors: if the police were to untie or cut one cable, the monopod would topple and the person occupying the structure would be injured.

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Lützerath wish list

Shortly before Christmas 2022—and hence approximately three weeks before the foreseeable evacuation of Lützerath—a list of objects needed in the protest camp was published. Colleagues at the DAM collected the objects with the support of friends and family. It appears to be a protest architecture tool kit, though some of the objects seem quite puzzling.



CASE STUDIES

13 protest movements presented in detail in the exhibition, nine of them with specially built models. (In parentheses: the length of each protest)

1968 Washington, DC, USA

Resurrection City (6 weeks)

In May 1968 an authorized protest camp was set up on the National Mall in Washington, DC, as part of the Poor People's Campaign, which was organized by Martin Luther King Jr. Its aim: "to make poverty visible." (John Wiebenson, architect of Resurrection City, 1969)

The majority Black protesters spent a total of 42 days living in 650 shelters they had built themselves. The camp and the A-frame houses had been designed by a group of socially engaged architects. The shelters were prefabricated by volunteers and then put together with their inhabitants, who soon developed their own approach to the planners' instructions and adapted the modules. The A-frame structures were painted, moved, and reorganized around courtyards. Even multistory structures were built. Everyday life in the protest camp was difficult: the top-down organization of the campaign led to many conflicts. When the six-week permit expired on 24 June, the camp was cleared by the police.

1980 Gorleben, Federal Republic of Germany

Free Republic of Wendland (33 days)

In May 1980 antinuclear activists occupied a site near Gorleben where deep drilling was going to be conducted for a planned nuclear waste dump. They established the "Free Republic of Wendland," a protest camp with 800 people living together in a utopian alternative enclave for 33 days. Two weeks before the camp was cleared, a 12-meter-high tower structure on stilts was built in the hut village. The question of defending the tower made it particularly evident that the members of the movement were split between those who were "nonviolent" and those who were "militant." When in 2020 the Gorleben salt stock was ruled out as a permanent repository for nuclear waste, four decades of protest finally came to a successful end. "If everyone sits on the ground, an evacuation can be carried out in short order. With a tower you can make things more difficult for the police." (Sigurd Elert, occupier)

1980–1981 Frankfurt am Main, Federal Republic of Germany

"Startbahn West" (17 months)

Southwest of Frankfurt am Main a protest camp was set up on the building site of "Runway 18 West" from May 1980. The protesters were opposed to the clearing of 129 hectares of forest and the already considerable noise pollution coming from the aircrafts. "Although the start of winter [...] led to a 'functionalization' of the structures, creative diversity finds expression here; a sensory aesthetic approach to the material is palpable and gives rise to ornament by using things imaginatively." (Ulrich Cremer, architect) In early November 1981 the police evacuated the hut village, which they referred to as the "logistical center" of the "violent criminals." (Police activities, 1984) The protests continued beyond the completion of the runway in 1984, only ending



in 1987 when two police officers were shot dead at a demonstration marking the sixth anniversary of the camp's clearance. Near Frankfurt Airport the rebuilt hut church is a reminder of the resistance to Runway 18 West.

2011–2013 Cairo, Egypt

Tahrir Square (Arab Spring) (18 days/2.5 years)

From 2011 to 2013 Tahrir Square, a traffic circle that is otherwise full of cars, in the center of Cairo repeatedly became the site of mass protests and protest camps. The first wave of protests in February 2011 was opposed to the regime of President Muhammad Husni Mubarak. Hundreds of thousands of people called for him to resign, for political reforms, better living conditions, and more social justice. Violence erupted again and again during the 18-day revolution in early 2011, resulting in several hundred fatalities. Despite the high number of people killed, many occupiers perceived the "Republic of Tahrir" as a utopian microcosm where a festival atmosphere often abounded. To avoid being attacked by the police and military, as well as people who supported the regime, activists set up a safe zone protected by barricades and carried out entry controls.

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2011 Madrid, Spain

Movimiento 15-M (4 weeks)

The Movimiento 15-M ("15-M Movement," named after the day it began, 15 May 2011) was a coalition of numerous initiatives in Spain that were opposed to the effects of the debt crisis (as a result of the financial crisis of 2008). "The idea of occupying the city's central square and setting up a protest camp there [was] [...] directly inspired by the numerous revolutions that had just begun in the Arab world." (Julia Ramírez Blanco, protester and art historian) A protest camp emerged on Puerta del Sol in Madrid that lasted for four weeks. Over 300 occupiers covered the entire square with a tent roof comprised of ropes and tarpaulins tied between streetlights and supports they built themselves.

2011 New York, USA

Occupy Wall Street (60 days)

In the fall of 2011 the Zuccotti Park in New York City's financial district was occupied for 60 days. The protesters were taking a stand against the effects of the Global Financial Crisis and against the dominance of large businesses. As using a megaphone in public spaces in New York requires a permit, the "human microphone" was developed: the entire general assembly repeated in chorus what the speakers said sentence by sentence, thereby making their words audible to everyone. Modeled on Occupy Wall Street, it grew into a global movement in some 90 countries, with most of the iterations lasting much longer than the initial spark in New York. The dome tents that were so widespread during Occupy that they became what it was known for, were nowhere to be seen in Zuccotti Park at first. The occupiers wanted to avoid the privatizing effect of tents so initially slept in the open. Only once it got cold in late October did the number of individual tents grow rapidly.



2012–present

Hambach Forest, Federal Republic of Germany

“Hambi-bleibt!” Protests (12 years so far)

In Hambach Forest climate activists have been building several generations of tree-house settlements since 2012 to stop the forest being felled for the expansion of the Hambach open-pit lignite mine. Rarely had protest camps comprised so many and so large tree houses connected in such a complex way by means of trusses, bridges, and nets. The use of ropes to secure the structures protects not only the trees themselves but also makes it easier to remove and reuse many of the construction materials. The clearing of the forest occupation in October 2018 was the largest police operation in the history of North Rhine-Westphalia. The regulatory authorities had argued that the tree houses were “buildings or structures” that constituted an acute fire hazard due to the fact that some of them contained kitchens and electrical cables.

2013–2014 Kyiv, Ukraine

Maidan Uprising (3 months)

The number of protesters who occupied the highly symbolic Maidan Nezalezhnosti (Independence Square) in Kyiv in December 2013 was limited at first. In the weeks that followed, a broad protest movement emerged that was supported by various political groups and centered around a protest camp with thousands of occupiers. Many of them lived in the over 200 tents and huts that were built on Independence Square, often together with people from the same region. High barricades of car tires, plywood, cobblestones, and sandbags were erected at the entrances to the protest camp. Just a few days after the demonstrators had toppled the government of Viktor Yanukovych in February 2014, Russia invaded the Crimean Peninsula.

“When the police then attempted to clear the occupation on Independence Square, the character of the protest camp changed and it became a fortress with sophisticated defense tactics.” (Sergey Ferley, protester and architect)

2014, 2019–2020 Hong Kong

Umbrella Movement 2014 (3 months) and 2019 protests (1 year)

In 2014 Hong Kongers’ universal suffrage was to be restricted, in 2019 the Beijing-friendly municipal government planned an extradition bill that would send criminals to China. The movements used the urban space in diverse ways as the policies of repression had intensified dramatically between 2014 and 2019. During the Umbrella Movement of 2014, activists occupied the vibrant business district and set up three utopian protest camps. The majority of those living in the largest protest camp in the Admiralty district were students. By contrast, in Mong Kok a camp was built by laborers and freight handlers where conflicts with the police were frequent. The tactics of the 2019 protest were inspired by a quotation by the Hong Konger and martial arts artist Bruce Lee: “Be water, my friend!” Unlike the site-specific strategy of 2014, the principles were: decentralized leadership, spontaneous actions, and avoiding confrontations with the police. Information could be shared quickly and anonymously between smartphones via Bluetooth chains. Whereas the



symbol of the Umbrella Movement of 2014 was rather defensive, the movement of 2019 opted for the more aggressive laser pointer and miniature barricades made of bricks.

2020–2023 Lützerath, Federal Republic of Germany

“Lützi-bleibt!” Protests (2.5 years)

Lützerath is one of several villages that were scheduled for demolition to enable the expansion of the lignite mine at the Garzweiler II site. The starting point of the protest camp that lasted from summer 2020 to January 2023 was the farm of Eckardt Heukamp, the last resident of Lützerath. A characteristic feature of the Lützerath protest camp was its combination of tree houses and ground-based structures. At least 2.5 meters high, these ground-based structures constituted a new type of delaying architecture: for every operation at this height and above, the police have to deploy special forces.

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2020–2021 Delhi, India

Farmers’ Protest (13 months)

In November 2020 kilometer-long protest camps emerged on three important feeder roads into Delhi. Tens of thousands of farmers from various regions of India drove their tractors into the capital to protest against three controversial agricultural laws. If they had been implemented, the guaranteed minimum prices for grain would have been abolished and their trade liberalized. Streets that were usually filled with traffic became the site of a dense settlement of tents, huts, and tractor trailers converted into houses. The farmers ended their protest and returned to their home villages after over a year when Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi finally withdrew the bill in November 2021.

2021–2022 Vienna, Austria

“LobauBleibt!” Protest (8 months)

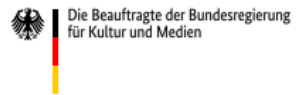
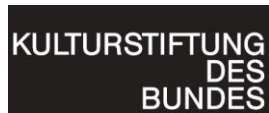
A riparian meadow region on the north bank of the Danube to the east of Vienna that has officially been declared worthy of protection, the Lobau has been threatened by Austrian transport policy plans for decades. When the construction of a highway feeder road began in August 2021, the “LobauBleibt!” movement occupied various strategically important sites and erected several protest camps. At first, these protest camps were made up of camping tents, but they were soon consolidated with more elaborate structures and community facilities. When they built a wooden pyramid, the demonstrators succeeded in creating an iconic piece of protest architecture. The City of Vienna had the police violently clear and demolish two of the camps in February and April 2022.



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Press Conference

Tuesday, 13.2.2024, 10 am
Please register via presse@MAK.at

Opening

Tuesday, 13.2.2024, 7 pm
Free admission to the opening of the exhibition

Exhibition Venue

MAK Exhibition Hall, upper floor
MAK, Stubenring 5, 1010 Vienna

Exhibition Dates

14.2.–25.8.2024

Opening Hours

Tue 10 am–9 pm, Wed to Sun 10 am–6 pm

Curatorial Team

Project leader, curator DAM: Oliver Elser
Curator MAK: Sebastian Hackenschmidt
Curatorial assistant DAM, research: Anna-Maria Mayerhofer
Scientific trainee DAM: Jennifer Dyck
Assistance MAK: Judith Huemer

Exhibition Design

Something Fantastic (Elena Schütz, Julian Schubert, Leonard Streich)

Scenographic Support

Vera Gärtner

Publication

Protestarchitektur. Barrikaden, Camps, raumgreifende Taktiken 1830–2023, edited by Oliver Elser, Anna-Maria Mayerhofer, Sebastian Hackenschmidt, Jennifer Dyck, Lilli Hollein, Peter Cachola Schmal, published by Park Books, Zurich 2023, German/English, paperback, 528 pages, 230 color and 84 b/w illustrations, format 10.8 × 16.8 cm, 13 case studies, 68 protests, 176 dictionary entries from A to Z, ISBN 978-3-03860-334-4. Available at the MAK Design Shop and via MAKdesignshop.at for € 19.

Supporting Program

Details at MAK.at/protestarchitecture

MAK Admission

€ 16.50/15.50*; reduced € 13.50/12.50*; every Tuesday 6–9 pm: admission € 8/7.50*

Free admission for children and teens under 19

*Ticket price online



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