

Administrative detention of asylum seekers

2001© Franz Wassermann

Asylum seekers held in administrative detention pending deportation are not criminals; their only crime is their failure to meet the arbitrary criteria imposed by the system. Pre-deportation detention is a form of imprisonment in isolation. Four human beings are locked away in a cell measuring 12 sq.m. – for between 24 hours and six months. Each cell has four beds, four chairs and one table, all screwed to the floor. There is one washbasin and one toilet, with a curtain in between. Twice a week detainees are permitted to use the showers. The explanation given for immobilising the beds, chairs and table is to prevent acts of self-mutilation. Anyone who offers resistance is placed naked in solitary confinement in the correction cell, a padded cell without a window.

Poster campaign

A holiday with friends

I visit asylum seekers in prison awaiting deportation and take new clothes to exchange for what the detainees are wearing. I put their clothes on and photograph myself. In the photos I integrate quotations from original letters in which detainees explain their reasons for flight and transform them into reasons for imprisonment: “I am in administrative detention because I was tortured and raped”, “I am in detention because I am a Christian”, etc. In this way I turn pre-deportation detention inside out.

As a kind of counterpoint to these portraits, I also photograph motifs from newspapers, television, the Internet, and also everyday scenes and situations, and combine them with advertising slogans based on such concepts as home, liberty, friendship, etc. The juxtaposition gives them a certain energy, a new twist, the power to make you stop and think: “A holiday with friends!”, “The taste of freedom – the President!” etc. The photos and texts are then combined to produce posters for the public space.

Exhibition in an art gallery

Made in Austria

In addition to these activities for art in the public space, we are planning to go to an art gallery with a pre-deportation detention exhibition, with installations employing the detainees' clothes, lockers, videos, photos and tents.

Mobile home

Austria. Holiday. Break away!

Holidays as a form of escape from everyday life. A mobile home – the symbol of leisure, holidays, independence, freedom – is consecrated and thus assumes the status of a church. It becomes a mobile asylum, a sanctuary from persecution, expulsion, rape, murder, imprisonment, abduction, unemployment and the poverty trap. As a safe haven legitimated by history, the sanctuary is off-limits to the public authority and offers asylum seekers protection from persecution.

The taste of freedom – the President!

The flight for survival as everyday life. The consecrated mobile home becomes a subversive monument with the mobility to come to the help at any time and in any place of human beings threatened by expulsion or deportation because they cannot meet the arbitrary criteria of the system.

Installation at Feldkirch



29.08-01.09.2002

Installation at Brenner



06.12.2001

Press Conference



07. - 31.12.2001

Poster Campaign



08.12.2001 Performance Sandwichbords



14.12.2001 Art Gallery Squat (Sit In)



22.12.2001 Consecration of a Mobile Home as a Church Sanctuary



22.12.2001-31.01.2002

Performance with the Mobile Home as a Church Sanctuary



22.12.2001-31.01.2002

Performance with the Mobile Home as a Church Sanctuary



22.12.2001-31.01.2002

Performance with the Mobile Home as a Church Sanctuary

