

MUSIKDORF ERNEN*

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Zur frohen Aussicht — All Eyes on the Visual Arts

Curated this year by Josiane Imhasly for the third time, Ernen's annual "Zur frohen Aussicht" summer exhibition takes prizes for originality and imagination. As a series of installations around the village, the featured artworks are defined by, or clearly consider, their relationship to their inhabited space, neighboring buildings and/or landscape. Some explore new tactile materials; others examine questions of modern perception. The duration of its summer run from 7 July to 29 September means that visitors to Ernen can discover eight artistic positions, each one backed by a clearly defined purpose and rationale.

On opening day July 7, a group of some 40 interested people—some local, some from farther afield—joined the curator and the eight represented artists on a tour through the historic village to view the highly diverse installations. Some were more visible than others. Some, one almost stumbled across unexpectedly. But without exception, the tour gave insights into the thinking processes behind each position and gave it three-dimensional substantiation. What's more, an up-close and personal encounter with each of the artists was both a unique opportunity and its own reward.

Although she lives and works elsewhere in Switzerland, project initiator Josiane Imhasly is native to Ernen and still has close relatives here in the village. On the morning after the tour, she explained over an espresso that she had spent her early youth here, but that it was only in her twenties that she came to appreciate the rich heritage of her Walliser roots, and came to treasure the village as an inspiring place. Later on, as a trained curator, she thought it would be rewarding to see what like-minds, combined with artistic talent, might generate to exhibit here, both indoors and out. It was an ambitious beginning.

Meanwhile, her own gallery contacts and exhibition visits in many regions of the country led her a host of young artists, many of whom, she believed, had messages deserving of more widespread exposure. Once her fledgling project for Ernen was approved, the year's selected artists—then as now—were invited to the village to get "the lay of the land" and consider what work might lend itself to optimal installation and where. By terms of her agreement, half of the artists chosen to show were to have a relationship of one sort or another to the canton of Valais; and one among them should have a strong connection to Ernen itself. In this year's show, Emil Michael Klein, was born here, and while better known as a painter, he installed a huge fabric drape, a velvet "curtain" for the house chapel of the historic Kaplanei house.

The installations are sprinkled around the village, and all are deserving, but I found three particularly suggestive and/or imaginative. Christoph Eisenring (b. 1983, Frauenfeld)'s sleek and minimalist contribution consists of three delicate and lyrical works in lacquered aluminum plate that are attached flush to the walls of important sites in the village: the church, the Rathaus, and a grain storage or "Spycher" in the upper part of the village. On the side of that structure, two scythes make a kind of parenthesis on the outside wall, citing both to the hard labor the scythe represented in an alpine rural community, but also alluding to the scythe as a symbol of death. Sonja Lippuner (b. 1987, Thurgau)'s *Leere Dichte* (Empty density) is housed in another "Spycher" at the lower end of the village, and it mesmerizes the viewer with a great "density" of applications and textures in these rich textile works, one layer slipped or stitched over the other. Aurélie Strumans' *Allitérer, reflet affleuré* (Alliterate, flush reflection) is perhaps the most politically charged of the works shown. It consists of five stone blocks placed inconspicuously on benches around the village, each stone able to cite vocal murmurs generated and mixed by the artist. Collectively, the "benchwork" alludes to modern man's disregard for his precious resource and exhaustible asset, nature. As such, it is a discouraging statement about aspects of loss in the face of modern technologies, but a very accurate one.

Notable is that in Ernen's past history, the adage "Zur frohen Aussicht" once had an altogether different connotation. Two or three generations ago, and good 40-minute hike above the village, an enterprise of that name was at once mountain retreat, dance locale, and place to meet a sweetheart. Sadly, that building is more or less a ruin today. But that a younger generation of aspiring artists has redefined it as an annual artistic endeavor, is a gesture that represents both a positive impulse and an eye to the future. And, that curator Josiane Imhasly, come fall, will also be welcoming groups of school children to "Zur frohen Aussicht" and workshops around it is equally promising.

Note: A program of performances slated for 24 and 25 August is also part of Ernen's "[Zur frohen Aussicht](#)" summer offer.

Sarah Batschelet, 8 July 2019

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