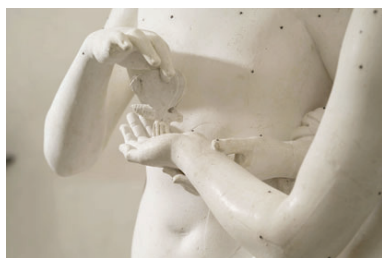


# MARTIN BECK DANS UN SECOND TEMPS



JULY 06 - OCTOBER 21, 2018

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Unfolding as a composition, this exhibition features recent works by the Austrian artist Martin Beck who, at 49 Nord 6 Est-Frac Lorraine, presents his first major show in France.

Works on paper, photographs, sculptures, and videos... the artist chooses his medium depending on the subject matter addressed. *Flowers*, for example, consists of sets of photographs that document the arrangement of a so-called Dutch flower bouquet. The images reveal both the methodical work of a florist and the fragility of the material she handles. Gestures and forms are gathered in altogether 36 different constellations that do not follow a sequential order.

Temporality is an essential component of Beck's work. The research supporting the making of his works often spreads over several years before it culminates in a physical manifestation –the first element of *Last Night* took four years to develop– or is a part of continuous long-term effort –in recent years Beck produced one US letter-size document a day for certain durations, completing each year a new stage of *working forwards*, a diary-type art work.

In this exhibition, the geological time of conglomerates –sedimentary, instable rocks made up of various clasts that have remained separated despite the passage of millennia– runs alongside regular time, such as the artist's everyday work, or ephemeral time, such as the music played at the last seminal Loft party at 99 Prince Street in New York in 1984, which brought together diverse communities, revisited in a film that follows its total 13-and-half hour duration.

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**FREE ADMISSION**

Tuesday-Friday : 2-6pm,  
Saturday-Sunday : 11am-7pm

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Open during school and bank holidays.  
Closed Mondays

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1- Antonio Canova, Amor and Psyche, plaster model, late 18th century, Gipsoteca Museo Canova, Possagno, Italy, 2017.  
2- Flowers, 2015 (détail)  
Courtesy Martin Beck & 47 Canal, New York

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The 49 Nord 6 Est - Frac Lorraine is supported by the Region Grand Est and the DRAC Grand Est at the Ministry of Culture  
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*Dans un second temps* brings together, in the space of the exhibition, a selection of Beck's artworks that take their cues from countercultural narratives, social dynamics, and the forces of labor. While referencing their historical impact, Beck, in the words of critic and artist Yuki Higashino, "explores how to maintain integrity, complexity, and intellectual/aesthetic strength in today's media-social spaces. In his hands, this involves synthesizing private affections and public knowledge, analytical acuity, and deep emotivity—at once." At Frac Lorraine, composition is used as a tool to reorganize their underlying social and spatial structures as well as their accompanying hierarchies, be they visual, economic, or community-related.

# Pictures available

Valérie Guelton / [communication@fracloiraine.org](mailto:communication@fracloiraine.org)



MartinBeck\_AmorPsyche-1.jpg



MartinBeck\_Flowers1.jpg



MartinBeck\_Flowers2.jpg



MartinBeck\_Last\_Night1.jpg



MartinBeck\_Last\_Night2.jpg



MartinBeck\_to\_establish\_motives1.jpg



# Martin Beck

Born in 1963, Lives between New York and Vienna, where he teaches.

## SOLO EXHIBITIONS

(selection)

### 2018

- *Dans un second temps*, Frac Lorraine, Metz, FR
- *Last Night*, Bergen Kunsthall, Bergen, NO

### 2017

- *rumors and murmurs*, Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig, Vienne, AUT
- *Last Night*, The Kitchen, New York, US
- *what follows may have produced what went before...*, Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst, Leipzig, DE

### 2014-16

- *Program*, Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts de l'Université d'Harvard, Cambridge, US

### 2015

- *Alienation and Charisma*, Archiv, Zurich, CH
- *The thirty-six sets do not constitute a sequence*, 47 Canal, New York, US

### 2014

- *Approx. 13 Hours*, castillo/corrales, Paris, FR

## GROUP EXHIBITIONS

(selection)

### 2017

- *Publishing as an Artistic Toolbox: 1989-2017*, Kunsthalle Wien, Vienne, AUT
- *Seleccion natural*, Centre Cultural LLibreria Blanquerna, Madrid, ES

### 2016

- *We are the Center*, Center for Curatorial Studies Bard Hessel Museum, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY, US

- *Givens*, AA | LA, Los Angeles, US
- *Putting Rehearsals to the Test*, Leonard & Bina Ellen Art Gallery, Montreal, CA
- *DIS-PLAY/RE-PLAY*, Austrian Cultural Forum New York, New York, NY, US
- *WEtransFORM*, Neues Museum, Nuremberg, DE

### 2015

- *afterlife*, Buchholz Gallery, New York, US
- *A Proposal to Call*, Kunsthalle Exnergasse, Vienne, AUT
- *International Photography exhibition Gjon Mili 2015*, National Gallery of Kosovo, Prishtina, KO

### 2014

- *The Social Factory: The Tenth Shanghai Biennale 2014*, Power Station of Art, Shanghai, CN
- *Projecting Landscape*, Neue Galerie, Innsbruck, AUT
- *Afterlife: A Constellation*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, US

## PUBLICATIONS

2017 *rumors and murmurs. An Organized Systems of Instructions*

2013 *Last Night*

2012 *The Aspen Complex*

2007 *About the Relative Size of Things in the Universe*

## Discussion with the artist

49 Nord 6 Est - Frac Lorraine: What comes first, the work or the exhibition?

Martin Beck: Work and exhibition are always intertwined. The conditions of a work's display are an integral part of how it can be understood, therefore I find it difficult to think of a before and after. What interests me in regard to this relation, however, is how changing the presentational conditions (other spaces, viewing conditions, relations to changing adjacent work, etc.) can change the meaning of a work.

What makes you select specific works for a specific location? The exhibition at FRAC is your first project since the retrospective of your work at MUMOK. How did you approach this project?

The exhibition includes artworks from different bodies of work made over the past eight years. The selection was made in dialogue with Frac Lorraine's director, Fanny Gonella. As it is the first substantial show I am doing in France we wanted to show the range of topical engagements that is integral to my practice, but also to compose an exhibition that is cohesive in its aesthetic and topical ambition.

Looking backwards in order to working forwards?

Time is an important factor in my work. History and its relationship to the present are driving forces and I am interested in the process of how they mutually construct each other.

The loop as a way to suspend the flow of time?

That is a tricky one because the loop is based on repetition. My interest in time is focused more on transformations and difference, the relationship between closeness and distance.

This brings to mind the way you appeal to the private space of the studio in your work even as you examine the public space of the institution, both spatially and in terms of the discourse the institution is a vehicle for. How do you view the relationship between artists and institutional structures?

They are mutually dependent—artists do not exist in a vacuum. The relationship, of course, is not always an easy one and it needs to be questioned and challenged continuously. The relationship of art and its institutions (studio, gallery, magazines, museums, collections, art history, discourse, etc.), however, is always one of mutual productivity.

Your interest in working processes often lays the ground for the work themselves. Why do you think a closer study of our relation to work is worth it?

Over the past three decades, the way work is conceptualized, organized, managed and remunerated has changed contemporary society dramatically –and not always for the better. So, bringing to the foreground and making visible how these transformations of labor impact aesthetic production is part of a politics that runs through my work.

How do you relate to improvement?

Improvement, seen through the lens of contemporary economies and body politics is a twisted concept. The imperatives of (self-)improvement, life-long learning, etc. put enormous pressure on the subject and its relation to itself—pressure that results in economizing, optimizing, quantifying every aspect of our lives. But then, who doesn't want to become better at things? Who doesn't want better world?

Your work is polymorphous. To which extent are you interested in technique(s)?

I have long been fascinated by a quote from John Cage who, in a 1954 lecture, said, “I have no time for technique because I must always be making one: any technique can be discovered after any technique is forgotten.”

Your contribution to numerous publications attests to theoretical research that goes beyond your work as an artist. Could you tell us more about your theoretical work and writing?

Writing is a painfully slow process for me. So, I often dread it. I write as part of my art practice and, sometimes, use language as a way to think through certain relationships within and to the references that appear in my work. Recently, this type of writing has been closely related to actual artworks or, in the case of two recent text-based presentations were written as actual works (at the Carpenter Center, 2016, and the Renaissance Society, 2017). In the past I have also done a little of what one could call academic, research-based writing. But even then the writing was, topically, relating to issues I was working on at that time and was done in support of the work.

Counter-culture is quite much reflected in your work. What led you to get interested in it?

That's hard to explain without either telling my whole life-story or saying something banal. So, you have to forgive me if I don't answer this question.

## Works

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### *to establish motives, 2018*

Color coupler prints, framed.

85,9 x 76,2 cm

53,8 x 66 cm

63,8 x 61 cm

The atmospheric dimension is essential in this exhibition of Martin Beck's work. Both the structure of the whole and the individual works are built around nuances of shadow, light, and color. From behind a curtain, which sends a subtle quiver through space as it ripples, emerges a photograph of exploding crystals. The photograph comes fully into view only later, when the curtain is drawn. The background of the image is of particularly deep black thanks to the specific printing process. The paper has a singular texture which brings out the contrasts and underscores the transparent nature of the crystals. The high precision of the image lends it the kind of intensity that allows the gaze to focus on forms randomly dispersed in space. An anti-composition recorded with an almost excessive accuracy, the image presents crystals as objects literally possessed of many facets.

The title, "to establish motives," refers to defining a motif (as a recurring form) and to speculate about reasons why things are being done in the way they are. It foregrounds the paradoxical nature of the image which is a result both of chance and of detail-oriented investigation. The image sits at the intersection between natural form and intentional form. More akin to the cabinet of curiosities than to scientific rationalism, the work insists on the capacity of forms to be a gateway to knowledge—or the result thereof. It thus brings us back to Martin Beck's reflections on how structures, whether social or natural, come about and become visible, and on the elements at our disposal to help us find our bearings in space.

### *Desirable, 2010*

Give-away offset prints (endless copies). Plexiglas dispenser.

27,9 x 21,3 cm

The sentences printed on the sheets of paper describe different types of behavior leading to a positive experience and considered as “desirable” in a group setting. The work draws on research conducted by Martin Beck on American rural communes formed in the 1960s and '70s, at the height of youth-led protests and counterculture movements. For *Desirable* the artist distilled and reproduced a segment from an essay about conflict resolution, leaving the idiosyncracies of its layout intact. He transcribes the views and proposals concerning behavior and aiming to improve the interactions between the members of one of these communities. “Asks for my opinion and seems to respect it ... Has humility ... Is cooperative; offers to help ...”—statements such as these speak to the desire to create a non-hierarchical society in which every individual would have his or her place and where everyone’s voice would be heard. By examining their rhetoric, the artist delves into the foundations of communal spaces. He examines the role played by a repertory of words and forms in the construction of an image, of an identity.

The artist extracts these fragments from their specific history and, in the form of an artwork, inserts them into the present: “History and its relation to the present are the driving forces in my work, and I’m interested in the process of their mutual construction.” Visitors can help themselves to a printout, and keep it or pass it on. By circulating them, we are able to connect these statements, which evoke forms of exchange and cooperation based on respect, with our own experience. The intentional vacuum of the exhibition room encourages us to look at the work in its relation to space and at the social interactions it generates. The extracted statements, originally jotted down to improve the situation in the community, show the persistence of certain preoccupations as well as attest to the power that words, available to everyone, have over us. The ability to slow down, take a second look at the conditions in which we interact with others, and question the techniques of communication and how they influence our relationships—some issues that come up again and again in Martin Beck’s practice.



*Index, 2012*

30,5 x 30,5 cm, framed.

Index (1340 Miles), Silkscreen  
 Index (Apollo 11), Pigment print  
 Index (Design Module), Silkscreen  
 Index (Food Chart), Woodcut  
 Index (Incomplete Parts),  
 Silkscreen

Index (Love Density Effect),  
 Silkscreen  
 Index (Multi-Headed Animal),  
 Drawing  
 Index (Polygon), Silkscreen  
 Index (this time we'll keep it a  
 secret), Silkscreen t collage

*Index* reflects Martin Beck's long-term interest in the history of American rural communes of the counterculture of the 1960s and '70s. A collection of books, newsletters, and pamphlets from the period served as the artist's source material.

Beck's interest lies in the way that new social entities and utopian communities were formed and represented. His focus is on the published record from various contexts rather than first person narratives, in the information communards disseminated. Beck zooms into various forms of representations and rhetorics; he focuses on structural aspects in order to abstract the internal dynamics of these emergent social entities. Beck specifically looks at how form(s) and the social interrelate in the context of finding new forms of togetherness.

The free-form diagram of *Index (Polygon)*, for example, extends a drawing in Steve Baer's publication *Dome Cookbook* that illustrates a model for an anarchic geometry which would allow to erect living structures not confined by the rectilinear logics of conventional construction. Partly inspired by the domes designed by architect Buckminster Fuller, the resulting dwellings attest to an anarchic ideal of living together and a call for reflection about the way architecture shapes social exchanges. *Index (1340 Miles)* refers to the driving distance between San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury district and Drop City, one of the first hippie communes.

*Index (Love Density Effect)* stems from a sociological diagram made to chart the patterns of sexual interactions between the members of a specific, but unnamed commune. *Index (Apollo 11)* presents a segment from a gridded NASA photo of the moon's surface, taken during the Apollo 11 mission in July 1969—the first one to land on the moon.

***Antonio Canova, Amor and Psyche, plaster model,  
late 18th century, Gipsoteca Museo Canova,  
Possagno, Italy, 2017***

4K video on flat-screen 4K OLED monitor on stand, color, sound.  
17 minutes, looped.

In order to meet popular demand for his work, the Neoclassical Italian sculptor Antonio Canova (1757-1822) perfected a technique to make exact duplicates of his marble sculptures. This included affixing numerous lead nails into the works' gypsum models, the heads of which were used as measuring points. These models are now mostly housed in a neoclassical building adjacent to his former house and studio in Possagno, Italy, and a late 1950s addition by the architect Carlo Scarpa. The gypsum model of Amor and Psyche, was used to create two almost identical marble sculptures, one on view at the Louvre, the other at the Ermitage in Saint Petersburg. Beck's interest in this particular work was triggered by experiencing the exquisite rendering of skin in Canova's sculptures, and the tender exchange of a butterfly that this version of *Amor and Psyche* articulated.

Beck's video work focuses on the plaster model, and specifically on the connectivity between the two figures. The close up framing on the figures' hand gestures as well as the 4K video quality allow us to gaze with full intensity at the refined gypsum surface of the model which, in its fragile tenderness, becomes laden with affect. This palpable sensuality is frustrated by the presence of the black dots visible here and there on the bodies, introducing the uncertainty of the protagonists to be ridden by a tragic disease. The tight framing makes both, Amor and Psyche, appear almost androgynous and makes it unclear who is offering the butterfly to whom. (Ovide, in his *Metamorphoses*, describes the butterfly as a symbol of Psyche's soul, which she offers to Amor.)

Throughout the seventeen minute video, the camera does not move. The only change—more palpable than visible—is the gently shifting light on the sculpture, shifting from warm to cold and back as, out of frame, clouds move over the building's skylight.

### *Le problème, 2018 \**

HD video on a flat-screen TV, color, silent.  
19 min 54 sec, looped.

*Le problème* shows alternating images drawn from various public-domain online databases and advisement phrases excerpted from a guide to creative problem-solving, entitled *The Universal Traveler*, published in 1971. The chosen text segments describe the various stages of engaging and resolving problem situations in a rational way. In the video, the phrases are ordered randomly and interspersed with ultra-sharp and vividly colored stock photographs of nature, work situations, and leisure activities.

*Le problème* reflects Martin Beck's interest in questions of productivity enhancement and the organization of time in late capitalist societies. These themes are also present in working forwards. The artist looks at how the world of personal development is used today to boost our professional efficiency and well being. His reference book, *The Universal Traveler*, is an early and emblematic example of how, at a certain point in time, countercultural aesthetics, self-help philosophies, and consulting rhetoric followed similar goals. Whether in advertising, self-help manuals or management books, what is at stake is our desire to "work on ourselves" in order to be in sync with the demands of an ever accelerating capitalism.

\* *Le problème* was originally produced in English as *The Problem*, 2018). This French version presented was made specifically for the presentation of the work at 49 Nord 6 Est - Frac Lorraine.

### *Flowers (série 1), 2015*

Set of three (3) color coupler prints, framed.

Image # by serie: 4, 9, 20

# 4 --> 100,3 x 69,6 cm

# 9 --> 154,6 x 108,9 cm

# 20 --> 117,8 x 82,2 cm

### *Flowers (série 17), 2015*

Set of two (2) color coupler prints, framed.

Image # by serie: 3, 3

# 3 --> 117,8 x 82,2 cm

# 3 --> 100,3 x 69,9 cm

Two sets of photographs are displayed in adjacent rooms. They are part of a selection of 24 images documenting the process of creating and dismantling a floral bouquet. The images—each printed in an edition of five in different sizes—were then grouped into unique 36 sets that don't follow a chronological order. The labor of arranging the bouquet and taking it apart is revealed in bits and pieces while the individual sets challenge the production of a continuous narrative. The two sets presented at FRAC show two extremes: photographs of an almost complete bouquet and photographs of empty vases, emphasizing the wealth of forms and rhythms that may be contained in a series.

The composition of the bouquet is inspired by seventeenth-century Dutch still lifes, which presented a great variety of flowers, often sourced from a variety of geographic regions across the globe. One of the still life's ambitions was to show off the prosperity and extent of the Dutch colonial empire. The choice of delicate species with different annual blooming seasons reflected in turn (painting's) technical mastery over nature. The tallest European flowers, symbols of the most powerful nations in the eyes of the patrons, were placed in the center. Beck reflects on the very function of a bouquet in the present tense. More than mere decorative objects, bouquets are still used to convey an image of prestige in the service of economic interests. Imposing floral arrangements placed in the hallways of corporations testify to this. Pursuing his exploration of forms that combine elements of various origins he speaks to the globalisation of contemporary economies with their rapid delivery schedules. The artist underscores the political and economic dimension of a composition, but also their impact on aesthetic experience.

### *Irritating Behaviors, 2010*

Give-away offset prints (endless copies).

Plexiglas dispenser.

27,9 x 21,3 cm

*Irritating Behaviors* is a companion piece to *Desirable* exhibited at the ground level. *Irritating Behaviors* contains descriptions of behaviors observed among a group of individuals, who are identified by name (Jim, Sally, Matt, Bob). While the first work brought together descriptions of supportive attitudes, the second is a glimpse into tensions, whether in relation to someone who doesn't show enough concern for the group or provoked by someone who is monopolizing the discussion.

Like *Desirable*, *Irritating Behaviors* draws on research into American rural communes in the 1960s and '70s, specifically so-called encounter sessions. The artist analyzed the written traces left by these communities in order to grasp the relational structures developed between their members. The problems of cohabitation and the complexity of human interconnections are here summed up in a few lines that evince shifting relationships. Reading these statements, we get a glimpse into the way these communities functioned as well as evaluate them in light of the present, by comparing them to other social groups operating today. The behaviors considered to be negative may in fact be found in many current situations, for example in the workplace or in political parties, as well as in private life.

Increasingly quantified and optimized, human relationships tend to be evaluated in a reductive, binary manner. Social dynamics are often viewed in terms of punishment and reward dispensed to individuals depending on whether they are considered toxic or beneficial, leaving out any nuances, complexities, and paradoxes that make relationships rich and fulfilling.

### *Conglomerate, 2018*

Conglomerate rocks.

Variables dimensions.

The rocks in *Conglomerate* are relatively imposing and yet fragile, their building blocks easily coming apart, making the rocks unstable. Despite the constant pressure conglomerate rocks are subject to over millennia, their clasts don't intermingle or get fused. Assembled through the principle of sedimentation, conglomerate rocks vary in terms of composition depending on the region where they were formed—those presented here are from Alsace. Placed at FRAC on the bare floor, with no plinth, like intruders into the exhibition, the rocks do not blend in with their environment, they remain independent.

This type of sedimentary rock bears the same name as a collective economic entity, the conglomerate. A conglomerate is made up of corporations operating in very different sectors of production, having no necessary connection with one another; the heterogeneity of their activities, however, doesn't prevent them from coming together into a single economic unit held together by financial interest. Likewise here, the artist underscores the connection between natural forms and forms produced deliberately, whether for economic, social, or political reasons. Beck approaches the frameworks we inhabit and share through their structural and metaphorical qualities. He thus carries on his reflection on assemblages of elements that do not require, in order to constitute a whole, transformation, assimilation, or uniformization—it is the instability of formal structures that interests him.

*working forwards (July 17 – August 24, 2016), 2016*

Pigment prints (39 elements) - 27,9 x 21,3 cm each.

*working forwards (September 10 – October 3, 2017), 2017*

Pigment prints (24 elements) - 27,9 x 21,3 cm each.

In 2014, in order to have a record of his activity, Martin Beck began a practice of producing one US letter-size document per day for extended time periods. This rhythm and predefined format are the basis of present works, which have taken shape over time and examine the effects of steady productivity. In 2016 he made document for every day throughout the year. After a few months' hiatus, the artist returned to this rhythm in the summer of 2017, and, with another interruption, is currently engaged in it again. The linear, chronological order anchors the work in the temporality of the artist's practice and everyday life and allows us to get up close and personal with the work process. This activity is a way for Beck to record his reading, looking, writing and thinking process and introduces something ephemeral into his practice. Elements derived from external sources, such as books or record covers, coexist with forms produced by the artist, such as graphic experiments and drafts of exhibition layouts. The work is akin to a diary; it is also an archive of the sources of inspiration and reflection that Martin Beck can take along on his travels. To use his own words, the work is a "mobile workshop"—a necessity for an artist whose other bodies of work often require long periods of research and preparation.

The two featured segments have been selected by Frac Lorraine, which Martin Beck saw as an opportunity to bring in a fresh pair of eyes into his creative process. "The relationship between the artist and the institution must always be questioned and challenged. However, that relationship is also one of mutual productivity." The location, with its possibilities and constraints, is always a factor in how Beck presents his works. Here, the number of exhibited documents is determined by the length of the display cases, which are in turn sized in a proportional relation to the exhibition space. Crossing art, design, architecture, popular culture, and history, Beck is interested in how forms come about and in the rules governing that process. The precision of his works, as well as the way in which they are exhibited, emphasize experience within the exhibition space and its relationship to time.

## *Last Night, 2016*

HD video with sound, 16:9 aspect ratio  
13 heures 29 minutes

*Last Night* is based on the 118 songs played by David Mancuso, the pioneering host of New York's seminal Loft party, at the last iteration of the party on June 2, 1984, at the 99 Prince Street location of the Loft. The parties began in 1970, on Valentine's Day, under the heading "Love Saves the Day." The Loft, accessible by invitation only, and with no commercial agenda, was a weekly party hosted by Mancuso in his home in downtown Manhattan. The parties were known for their intimate atmosphere and high quality sound. Closely immersed into the countercultural moment of the time, the civil rights struggle, and the gay rights movement, David Mancuso wanted to create an inclusive and empowering meeting place, free of class, gender, or racial discrimination. He believed in the social potential of music and dance to create new forms of interaction based on tolerance and shared quest for freedom. The Loft became a legendary blueprint which many nightclubs and discos tried to emulate.

Beck's film is a poetic construction showing each record being played from beginning to end in the sequence Mancuso played them. The 118 songs add up to nearly thirteen-and-a-half hours, which defines the length of the film. The records play on a vintage Thorens turntable in a domestic atmosphere, suggesting that someone is listening to these records at some point in time after the actual party happened.

On view is also an artwork in the form of a book (*Last Night, 2013*) in which Beck lists all the songs together with their production information. The book is accompanied by multiple Errata documents, in which Beck corrected the information on the songs as it became available to him over time.

The installation of the *Last Night* film encourages viewers to linger and to immerse themselves into an intimate sonic journey. It opens up and encloses a space where personal experience meets collective memory.