

# COMPOSITION AS A PROCESS

Gregor Titze

“Space is doubt: I have constantly to mark it, to define it. It’s never mine, never given to me, I have to conquer it.” (Perec, 1990, p. 114)

In the context of the visual arts, the composition of physical objects is a complex undertaking that goes far beyond mere production to raise fundamental questions about the relationship between humans, material, and the environment. Similar to Georges Perec’s view of space as something to be conquered, the process of composition is an ongoing struggle with form, significance, and expression.

Against this backdrop, the summer semester 2024 course “Zwischen Henkel und Schnabel” (English: Between handle and spout) provides the context for a broad spectrum of artistic interventions that examine the process of composition as a practice and explore the boundaries between art, design, architecture, and philosophy. The projects by students Aleksandar Klopić, Laura Lieb, Marcel Schmitz, and Jan Wucherpfennig form a multidimensional tapestry of ideas, materials, and spatial references that invite me to provide a detailed observation of the act of composition and to interpret Perec’s “conquest of space” in a variety of ways.

## ADAPTATION FROM VIENNA VIA GMUNDEN TO A PUBLISHED ARTICLE

The projects show the artistic and intellectual development of the participants over the course of the semester. The journey begins with the initial conception at the TU Wien, continues in Gmunden with a public exhibition, and finally undergoes a further transformation as a book article. This exemplifies the multi-layered facets of contemporary compositional practice. The process-heavy emphasis over the end result is also reflected in each (“end”) project. We understand composition as an ongoing experiment,



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as a sequence of attempts and explorations that are not (necessarily) oriented towards a predefined goal but are allowed to unfold and develop over time. As Heraclitus didn't say, "Panta rhei"<sup>1</sup> (English: everything flows), or: the one thing you can count on is change.

## BEGINNING IN VIENNA

This attitude is evident in the early experiments at the TU Wien, where students work with a variety of materials, techniques, and concepts, without prematurely settling on a final form. In a protected space, without the immediate pressure of a public presentation, they experiment with ideas, materials, and techniques in an interdisciplinary approach that integrates technical, compositional, and theoretical aspects and offers a space where mistakes are allowed, boundaries can be explored, and new ideas and concepts can flourish.



## ADAPTATION TO GMUNDEN

While the first pass at the works is still rather akin to the abstract, conceptual setup for an experiment, the transformation of the projects for KunstQuartier Stadtgarten Gmunden reveals a profound reflection on the specific conditions of the location.

This locational specificity leads to a deepening and substantiation of the original ideas. Direct confrontation with the spatial structure, endogenous elements, architectural features, and interaction with the audience challenges students to further adapt their concepts, respond creatively to unexpected circumstances, and continually refine their ideas.

In addition to the physical characteristics of the location, the students also integrate its cultural dimensions into their projects. This ability to adapt ideas from one context to another, while

ABBILDUNG 28 Arbeitsmodell von Laura Lieb,  
TU Wien, 2024 (Foto: Siri Dacar, CC BY-SA)

FIGURE 28 Rough model by Laura Lieb,  
TU Wien, 2024 (photo: Siri Dacar, CC BY-SA)

evaluating and incorporating the specific qualities of the new environment, requires a high degree of compositional skill.

The projects transcend traditional disciplinary boundaries, as the students move freely between the areas of art, design, architecture, and performance. This interdisciplinary approach allows them to view complex topics from different perspectives and to develop innovative solutions.

The confrontation with materiality and the sensual experience of it is common to all the projects: from Marcel Schmitz's salt installations and Jan Wucherpennig's water circulations to Laura Lieb's transparent structures and Aleksandar Klopčić's haptic clay objects – with their intensive exploration of material, all the works invite the recipient to a multi-sensory experience. This can be understood as a counterweight to an increasingly digitalized world (not only in architectural studies) and points to the importance of physical experience in the compositional process. Thus, the body is not merely a tool, but an active part of creative thought, action, and emotion.

The projects share a pronounced sensibility for metamorphosis. The slow crystallization of salt, the circulation of water and pigments, the casting of a route, or an object to be learned—in all these cases, the students consciously integrate temporal dimensions into their works. This integration of the factor of time (and one of its facets, impermanence), which begins during the experiments in Vienna and takes on a new quality in Gmunden, shows the procedural nature of composition and perception. For the most part, the works are not conceived as static, self-contained, finished installations, but as open systems conducive to interaction and through it further change.

This participatory dimension, which is still being tested in Vienna and is thus yet largely theoretical, gains in concreteness and immediacy through direct confrontation with the location and the public. The role of the recipient evolves from a passive viewer to a co-creator. This allows for a deeper

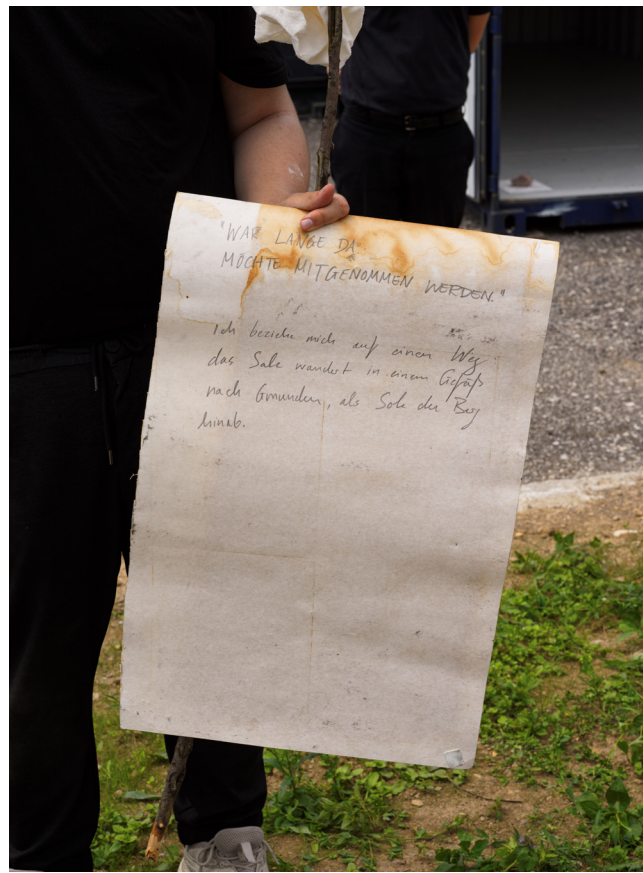


ABBILDUNG 29 Skizze zu *War lange da. Möchte mitgenommen werden.* von Marcel Schmitz, KunstQuartier Gmunden, 2024 (Foto: Gregor Titze, CC BY-SA)

FIGURE 29 Sketch of *Been there a while. Take me with.* by Marcel Schmitz, KunstQuartier Gmunden, 2024 (photo: Gregor Titze, CC BY-SA)



connection to the work, while opening up a social component in which individual perception is influenced by interaction with other participants.

## ADAPTATION TO A PUBLICATION

The adaptation of the works into the form of a book article – i.e. from a physical object or performance into a visual, two-dimensional format – necessitates reflection and abstraction of the projects once more. This demonstrates the ability of the students to articulate their concepts in a variety of media and contexts, and to best leverage the unique properties of the medium in order to tap into new perspectives and meanings within their own work.

The challenge here is to adapt the impermanent, spatial, and sensual qualities of the works to a two-dimensional format. This process is an opportunity to embed the projects in a broader theoretical and discursive context and to further flesh out their conceptual dimensions.

ABBILDUNG 30 Ungebrannte Keramiken von Jan Wucherpennig, Prozessdokumentation, TU Wien, 2024 (Foto: Siri Dacar, CC BY-SA)  
FIGURE 30 Unfired ceramics by Jan Wucherpennig, process documentation, TU Wien, 2024 (photo: Siri Dacar, CC BY-SA)

## COMPOSITION AS A PROCESS

This repeated transformation of the projects goes beyond the development of compositional skills to involve the formation of a reflective approach that integrates theory and practice, concept and materiality, planning and improvisation.

The projects focus not only on the production of objects, but also on the generation of knowledge and experience. They show how composition can serve as a method of appropriating and interpreting the world that includes cognitive, sensory, and social dimensions.

Appropriation can be understood as a branched process in which the individual actively confronts and shapes the world. It is not a passive adoption, but a productive penetration and alteration of the world and the self.





ABBILDUNG 31 Arbeitsmodell von Aleksandar Klopić, Prozessdokumentation, TU Wien, 2024 (Foto: Siri Dacar, CC BY-SA)  
 FIGURE 31 Rough modell by Aleksandar Klopić, process documentation, TU Wien, 2024 (photo: Siri Dacar, CC BY-SA)

Michael Theunissen puts it this way: “[...] I do not need to appropriate what is exclusively my own, and what is exclusively alien I am unable to appropriate.” (Theunissen, 1984, p. 104)

In composition, this process is characterized by constant interaction. The composers shape the object or the situation through their personal ideas and actions, but at the same time are themselves impacted or altered through the properties and resistance of the material or the circumstances.

In this sense, the projects can be understood as a contribution to a broad understanding of composition as a cultural practice. Composition also helps us to understand things and find meaning. When we compose, we access complex issues and gain new perspectives on our existence. The compositional process acts as an epistemic tool, a method of investigation and interrogation, a holistic practice of being-in-the-world (German: Dasein)<sup>2</sup>, as described by Martin Heidegger. The concept of Dasein, which emphasizes the fundamental involvement of the self with its environment, finds a practical application in compositional processes that transcends the notion of an isolated

subject facing an objective world by showing instead how composition is a method for creating meaningful connections and interactions with the world.

In this sense, the projects are a significant voice in the discourse about what composition is and should be in our time – not only as a technical or aesthetic procedure, but as a fundamental way of understanding and acting in the world.

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