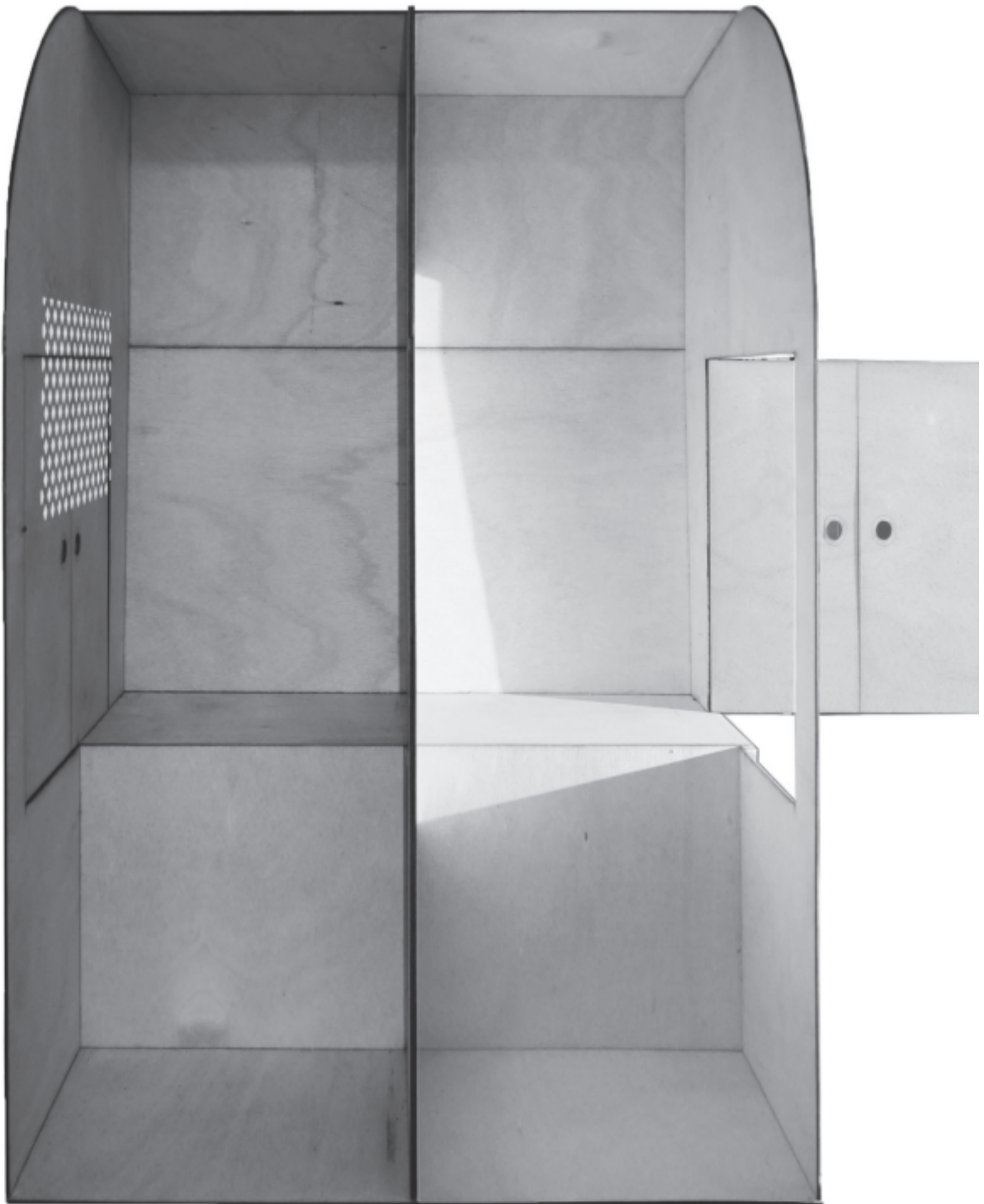


TALKING HOUSE



MAKE IT REAL

Hinnerk Utermann

Installation of the Artistic Research Project MAKE IT REAL by HINNERK UTERMANN

Talking House is part of the series Make it Real, an artistic research project by Hinnerk Utermann. A PhD thesis at the University of

Applied Arts Vienna, Make it Real investigates minimal settings that allow for an encounter between two people even in a narrow space.

Talking House is the third fieldwork of this project, providing an environment for a conversations. As a minimized cabin, it offers two compartments with two doors — one for each visitor. Designed as a portable building, it can be put up indoors and outdoors. Currently under construction in Tel Aviv, I will host guests during March to chat about various topics, before returning to Europe. Fieldtrips to the dessert of Negev and Sinai will allow me to experience solitude, and to research hermitages and ancient forms of monkhood. Due to its specific nature of singularity and duality, Talking House creates and studies independent spatial experiences between solitude and friendship.

MAKE IT REAL

What sparked Make it Real is my deep fascination with the artwork Cellules by the French-Israeli artist

Absalon. Without knowing the exact reason for my initial fascination, the process of researching and creating began and has become a journey with changes and sidesteps.

The shift from Absalon's precedents to my own spatial work occurred when I built a first cabin, Space Compartment One, a first exploration to better understand the construction and formal aspects of the Cellules. My subsequent spatial settings, the so-called Hochsitz and Talking House, continue to

become increasingly independent from his work. First I intended to align my thesis with Absalon's work, yet soon began to emancipate myself, producing my own spatial settings. A role of Absalon's art for my own PhD project remains. Space Compartment One deepened my understanding of the Cellules, and I realised its hermitic character. As my personal experiences resonate with Absalon's ascetic life style, I came to better understand the purpose of his cells. He constructed a solitary confinement for his own.

While the Cellules promote seclusion, my own spatial practise turned out to focus on dual settings. Both aspects relate to my own needs of individual freedom and forms of interaction and encounters with others. Because of that I decided to explore spaces for singular uses, and to create spaces for dual gatherings. Constructing settings and performing talks gives me the opportunity to learn about the impact of space, the interrelation of humans, and the correlation between the two. This complex provides a foundation for a spatial practise at the intersection of architecture, craftsmanship, and art, to create environments for convivial confrontations.

SOLITUDE

Inspired by Absalon's work, I started researching forms of solitary confinements, like hermitages and cellular imprisonment. Solitary confinements are compressed spaces with specific effects on its occupants, throwing into sharp relief the dependency of a human being to its surrounding.

An ancient example of a hermetical life can be found in early Christianity, the so-called Desert Fathers/ Dessert Mothers. Establishing the practise of the Anachoresis—a retirement from the world—they left their villages and

communities to move into the dessert. Hosted in caves, tombs, and hermitages, these Christian ascetics lived a miserable life free from the world of Jesus Christ's suffering. The desert also saved them from the Roman tax system and the military service. Soon after the beginnings of the third century AD, more and more pilgrims followed the pioneers to the deserts of Egypt. In the peak time, ten thousand of loners were left

alone in their solitude. Holiness became a contest about whose sufferings and loneliness was the most insufferable. But not everyone could stand these extremes: the excessive lifestyles and the reduction of sensual stimulations caused damages, physical as well as mental. The monotony of the environment excruciates the hermits. Acedia—the illness of the monks—is a sort of listlessness or depression that obsessed the loners. A few of them committed suicide. What the hermits caused is today known as white torture. The reduction of stimulation generated by solitary confinement cells together with the reduction of social interactions effect physical and mental illnesses, such as hallucinations, absence of menstruation, loss of the self to self-mutilation and suicide. Where short-term solitary confinement can be used for meditation and self-awareness, long term uses concern prisoners (Supermax, US and Stuttgart Stammheim—for the worst of the worse) and can be found amongst various secret services to break the inmates' spirit (Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo).

TALKING HOUSE:

The idea for Talking House arose right after Space Compartment One, the first work of Make it Real, was disassembled. I had recorded some of the conversations held inside. After listening to them, I was very disappointed by my own voice. The recorded voice differed from the one I was familiar with in my own head while talking, because of the bones' missing resonances. Hearing just this recorded, airborne sound, made me realise that all my moods and feelings are embedded in my own voice; everything I am is present. This presence is not part of the content of what is being said though, but it lies in the tone of how something is said. Every undertone and pause became even more relevant than the utterances themselves. Through these recordings, I became aware of the overlapping and distortional structure of the senses. What is more, I was impressed by the information density of the voice and its expressive quality. I decided to design a space focusing on the auditory, on listening and speaking. To highlight the auditory, the other senses had to be muted. The primacy of vision in particular had to be reduced. But not only the senses but also the need for movement had to be restricted in order to raise an awareness for the auditory. Due to the logic of the senses the range of hearing is far smaller than that of vision. And moreover, the range of human hearing is comparatively smaller than that of vision, yet at the same time it is very sensitive, and can also detect whispering. To transform that into a spatial setting, a maximum of

proximity between two people is needed. By designing Talking House, I became aware of its box-like structure, akin to a confessional, an aspect that disturbed me, but also one that showed me the spatial logic of my origin.

ISRAEL:

Since the beginning of my PhD I was determined to make a trip to Israel.

Investigating Absalon's origins seemed to be a key for a better understanding of his artwork. His shelters, white and cubic as well as his ascetic lifestyle, seem to have many references to his homeland, such as the white city of Tel Aviv, with its Bauhaus style buildings and the rich history of asceticism in Christianity and Judaism.

Despite the fact that I decided to put aside the research on Absalon, and instead to focus on my own spatial settings, my expedition plans to Israel remained. I wanted to experience the desert with its misanthropic character, the former environment of the Desert Fathers, as

well as to bring my installation space to the homeland of Absalon.

TOOLS, MATERIAL AND TRANSPORTATION: I took the material for Talking House as well as all the necessary tools with me on the plane (plywood, wooden strips, screws, screwdrivers, saw). Israel is a land surrounded by desert and wood is hard to come by and expensive. Buying it beforehand gave me the opportunity to get exactly what I needed, and to start the construction directly after arriving. Taking the material with me made me more independent on site, but required more planning in advance. Furthermore, I found the idea of a construction kit interesting. I bought the material at Holz Possling, a big wood shop in Berlin and brought it to the BBK, a factory for artists, where I cut it into travel sizes. Afterwards, I made a package out of it and wrapped it all over with translucent foil. Everything was visible through the plastic. A tie down straps, which I could use as a handle, held the package together. With that package, 32 kilograms of wood and 32 kilograms of tools and mounting material, I went to the airport, with some fear and childlike curiosity. How would one handle this peculiar piece of luggage? To my surprise, unlike last time, I was not interviewed, nor had I any problems with my package. Suddenly, I arrived in Tel Aviv and decided to take the train to my new home. The luggage was extremely heavy and I could only carry it for 10 meters before putting it down again. I dragged it in micro steps from the airport to the train station down the staircase along the rail. Reaching the nearest train station to my new place, I had to carry it for another kilometer, from the station over a bridge through a shopping mall down to a street, where I

took a taxi, which brought me the last two kilometers to my new home. With that hassle I had to pay back for the easygoing border control.

CURRENT:

Since the arrival in Israel on Monday, 17 February 2020, I live more or less in a sort of conclave. Situated in an apartment in Frishman Street, Tel Aviv I established a strict daily routine that entails my correspondence, social media, supervising a construction site in Berlin, daily physical exercise, as well as the construction of Talking House. I have provided for two weeks of assembling it, and piece by piece it is built together. In so doing, the day is packed and every night I fall asleep very late. As this work takes all of my time, my interaction with the city of Tel Aviv is pretty limited. Without any social life, I live in solitude besides the calls I occasionally make to Germany. I am looking forward to launching Talking House, the moment when I'm ready to walk around, invite guests, and foster social interactions.

