



SPITTELAU HEATING PLANT

Friedensreich Hundertwasser

Austrian, 1928-2000

Architectural Redesign, Vienna, Austria

Spittelau Heating Plant
2000 J. Harel, Vienna

About the Artist

Artist Frederich Stowasser (**Freduh ric Sto** vassuh) was born December 15, 1928 in Vienna, Austria and died February 19, 2000 at sea. In the late 1940s, the artist changed his last name, and throughout the intervening years continued to change or add other names to better reflect his evolving ideas about art and ecology. At his death, his complete name was Friedensreich Regentag Dunkelbunt Hundertwasser. An English translation and pronunciation of the artist's names are:

- Friedensreich - **Freed** enz rike - abundance of peace
- Regentag - **Ree** gen tak - rainy day
- Dunkelbunt - **Doonkel** boont - dark, multi-colored
- Hundertwasser - **Hoondert** vassuh - hundred water(s)

The Slavic name *Stowasser* means about the same as *Hundertwasser*. In Slavic and German *sto* and *hundert* both mean *hundred*, while *wasser* in both languages means *water* or *waters*. Therefore, Hundertwasser's original and changed names are similarly translated to mean "hundred waters," showing the artist's own love of water and concerns about the ecology of the planet. Much the same as Japanese artist Hokusai, who changed his name each time he found a new residence, Hundertwasser changed his name to match his art and philosophy at different times.

When Hundertwasser was but one-year old, his father, a technical engineer who had served in the Austrian military, died during an appendectomy. Following his father's death, Hundertwasser's mother Elsa became their sole support. It is not surprising that Hundertwasser and his mother developed a strong bond that continued until her death in 1972.

Hundertwasser's first artistic expressions were made when he was about five years old. By the time he was eight, Elsa enrolled her son in Vienna's Montessorri School where he could pursue his artistic interests. The school, however, was expensive and did not seem to be preparing Hundertwasser for his adult life in the workforce. Within a year, Elsa withdrew her son from the school, but he continued to draw.

Hundertwasser was born to a Protestant father and a Jewish mother. After his father's death, his mother reared the artist in her family's Jewish traditions, a circumstance that during World War II placed his life in peril. In 1938, the German army entered Austria, and life dramatically changed for the Jewish citizens there. Elsa's sisters, brothers, and many other relatives were killed by the Nazis. Throughout WWII, Elsa and Frederich lived in fear that they would be discovered as Jews and killed. It was during this stressful time that Hundertwasser began to deliberately draw from nature. His pictures show only beautiful scenes, almost fairy-tale like, and totally ignore the horrible circumstances that were truly around him at the time.

Elsa and Frederich survived World War II, and in 1948 Hundertwasser passed his "school leaving exams." He quickly enrolled in the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts and almost as quickly withdrew in favor of travel to Italy and France, places that strongly influenced his later art and architecture. In the late 1940s, the artist was exhibiting his artwork in both Paris and Vienna. He soon changed his name from Stowasser to Hundertwasser.

By the 1950s, Hundertwasser was exhibiting his artwork worldwide and winning awards, which in turn was a springboard for visual display of his ecological philosophy. It was also during this decade that Hundertwasser wrote and published the first in a series of "manifestos against rationalism in architecture." These proclamations attacked modern architecture (such as that produced by the Bauhaus) as unconcerned with nature and thereby unconcerned with the condition of humankind. Emphasized in all the writings is Hundertwasser's own aesthetic theory that architecture should be one or "in harmony" with nature. According to Hundertwasser, buildings in much the same way as forests, should live and regenerate their selves while providing shelter unique to each inhabitant. Moreover, like nature, Hundertwasser makes clear that straight lines should be avoided in order to create harmony with the natural environment; thus, much of Hundertwasser's artwork and architecture is based upon curved lines. Hundertwasser's drawings, prints, and paintings identify ecological problems and on occasion suggest solutions. His architecture is the solution.



Detail of the Spittelau Heating Plant, Interior
2000 J. Harel, Vienna

Shortly after the fire damaged the Spittelau Heating Station, Mayor Helmut Zilk (Hel moot Silk) approached Hundertwasser about redesigning the plant's facade. As a staunch advocate of the avoidance of waste altogether, the artist initially declined the mayor's offer. After consulting with an environmentalist, however, Hundertwasser reconsidered the mayor's proposal. Hundertwasser decided that the redesign commission could be an opportunity to change the multi-purpose municipal plant into a work of art that was also environmentally sound.

Hundertwasser agreed to undertake the redesign project without pay if the city of Vienna in turn would outfit the heating plant with the latest and most environmentally acceptable technology. The city agreed and today the Spittelau Heating Plant is a model of environmental propriety, producing less than one gram of dioxin per year, about the equivalent of a grain of sand in a train car filled with sand. Just as important, the heating plant is an imaginative architectural achievement that attracts tourists from around the world. Testimony to the popularity of the heating plant is daily guided tours and video presentations of the facilities for tourists, environmentalists, and school children.

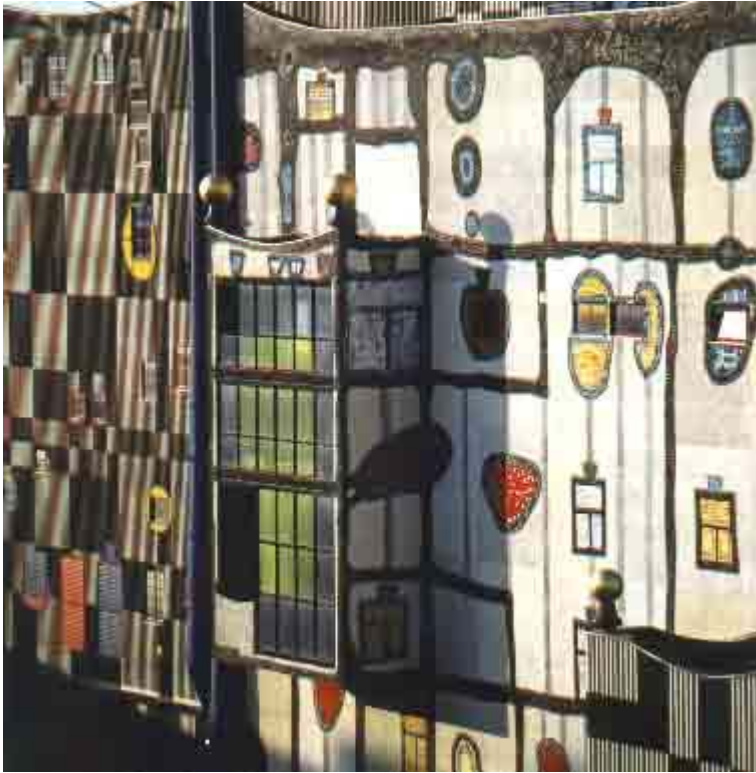
Elements of Art and Principles of Design

Hundertwasser used conventional building materials for the Spittelau Heating Plant: concrete, steel, glass, ceramic tiles, and enamel (no paint on the exterior). Significant to the character of the redesign, the materials are used in an artistic manner that makes the heating plant a shimmering and playful jewel of the Vienna skyline.

The redesigned Spittelau Heating Plant is unique. Shunning conventional architectural concepts such as straight lines and uniform window shapes, the plant is instantly recognizable as a Hundertwasser building. Architects with traditional training, however, often denounce these very design elements.

Roughly square in its overall form, much of the outer skin of the Spittelau Heating Plant is made of corrugated metal sheets and concrete; both surfaces divided into an irregular checkerboard pattern of black and white. Vertical rooflines are saddleback arches while vertical corners are blue pillars capped with gold spheres. Windows of varying sizes and trimmed in a variety of colors are scattered across the plant's surface. It is in much the same vein of Simon Rodia's *Watts Towers*. Broken bits of ceramic tile are inlaid in asymmetrical patterns around the base of the smokestack conglomerate around

many of the windows. It is not surprising to discover that Hundertwasser admired the *Watts Towers* and considered Rodia's artwork as exemplary and healthful.



Detail of the Spittelau Heating Plant
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The windows are of metal-coated glass in hues of blue, red, gold, silver, and copper. Some windows are transparent, and others are made from milk glass. All parts that point towards the sky are blue. Yellow is used as an accent color particularly on the oil tanks and on the building's lower portions.

A large golden sphere has made the plant a landmark visible from miles away. Placed atop a blue and red-tiled tower, the sphere is functional and actually shelters measuring mechanisms within the plant. More than 300 feet above the ground, the sphere itself is

about 58 feet tall with a surface area of more than 3,600 square feet covered with 1,150 gold enamel plates. At night the sphere is illuminated with fiber optics. At the top of the tower, kestrels are allowed to nest and have become favorites of the people who work at the plant.



Detail of the Spittelau Heating Plant
 © 2000 J. Harel, Vienna

Above the entrance where garbage trucks unload refuse, a fish-shaped banister surrounds a deck that has been planted with trees. Other areas that can support soil have trees and greenery planted. Soon, large trees will grow on the deck and in other concrete expanses of the plant. In a bit of whimsy, the cover of the ventilation shaft was designed to resemble Hundertwasser's trademark visor cap.

Symbolism

Hundertwasser carefully chose the colors and design elements of the Spittelau Heating Plant. Each shape, form, and color symbolizes various ideas regarding Vienna or ecology:

- Black and white are the typical colors of the Viennese Secession (an early twentieth-century art style characterized by the work of Viennese artists Gustav Klimt and Egon Schiele among others). Hundertwasser also suggests that the opposite colors can symbolize contrasts among coal, incineration, ashes, light, and darkness.
- Multicolored enameled ceramic pieces seen around windows and the smokestack represent swirling pieces of garbage and are placed on the exterior to give people outside an idea about what is going on inside the plant.
- Colored windows symbolize the wealth as well as the twilight (fading) of contemporary society.
- The irregular checkerboard pattern is the main motif of the Spittelau Heating Plant and represents the struggle against a uniform grid system in architecture.
- Blue symbolizes the sky, clean air, and clean water.
- Yellow represents fire.
- Gold is symbolic of the future with humankind in peace and harmony with nature.