

steirischer herbst '21—Summary , Review

As a festival with a long history of engagement with public space, steirischer herbst '21 was all about searching for *The Way Out*—literally, by going outdoors, as well as metaphorically in the context of crises, the pandemic, and art. For more than four weeks, around 35 artists and collectives ventured out of safe white cubes and black boxes, into the outside world, the real, everyday, and the popular.

Chance encounters and easy access conditions were also a focus this year. The Way Out picked up where the previous edition, *Paranoia TV*, left off and once again explored different distribution channels and spaces of encounter for artworks beyond the usual institutional framework. This year, public places could be experienced as spaces of art through installations and posters, city strollers could become part of street interventions, park visits and even one's own mailbox held surprises that were not always immediately recognizable as "art." In addition, following the *Paranoia TV News* of 2020, a new video format was created. These Situation Reports, which were even more firmly in the hands of artists, dealt with current events in Graz (such as the *Aufsteirern* folk festival, the city council elections and the EuroSkills competition) as well as the history of the city. Online lectures, the Ö1 festival podcast, and livestreams of various performances complemented the on-site programming and offered the audience opportunities to participate in the festival far beyond the Styrian borders.

"With this edition, we have once more consistently and uncompromisingly pursued the task of enabling new and specially commissioned art productions, developing new audiences, strengthening international networks, and bringing a wide variety of artists to Graz and Styria," director and chief curator Ekaterina Degot notes. "At the same time, however, it has—as always—been a special concern of ours to also include local actors and partners and to offer new collaborations and projects a place in the festival, as part of *The Way Out* or in the parallel program."

Visits and other contacts

As with the previous edition, *Paranoia TV*, this year's festival experience was not limited to Graz and Styria and reached audiences in Graz, Styria, Austria, and worldwide through a wide variety of channels. Last year's strategy of commissioning special online content and finding unusual distribution channels that give the festival a larger international presence and at the same time make it locally accessible was consistently developed further. It was thus also possible to reach people who could not attend events in person.

In total, the following audience contacts were collected for visits to the programs in Graz and Styria, online visits, and other accesses and interactions during steirischer herbst '21:

Almost **46,000 visits** to the artistic interventions and works of *The Way Out*, the parallel program with many new initiatives and artists, the **conference** at Forum Stadtpark, the festivals-within-the-festival **STUBENrein** in Murau and **Out of Joint** at Literaturhaus Graz, and the **musikprotokoll** events were counted in Graz and Styria.

93,000 love letters by Paul B. Preciado were sent to households in Graz.

Over the nearly five-week duration of the festival, the **artist posters were seen an estimated 44,800 times at 140 locations** in the extended urban area of Graz.

The Way Out's online content, including the artist videos commissioned by the festival as documentation, was accessed and **viewed 27,300 times** and from **113 countries** on the festival's website. Most online visitors come from **Austria**, followed by the **USA, Germany, China, the United Kingdom, Italy, the Netherlands, Slovenia, Switzerland, and France**.

The ten-part **Ö1 festival podcast** on steirischer herbst '21 entitled *The Way Out*—a collaboration between the festival and Ö1—also made a major contribution to informing about the program and artistic content of steirischer herbst '21. Per episode, the program on the radio and the podcast on oe1.ORF.at recorded **45,000 listeners**—so in the end, the series will have been heard **450,000 times**. The special teasers for the **ORF versions of Stefanie Sargnagel's *Situation Reports*** have so far been viewed **57,000 times** on ORF's social media channels—the full-length videos on ORF.at and on the TV station ORF III will have reached many times more viewers.

Visitor survey

As part of a visitor survey, the structure, program, educational offer, and visitor service of the festival were evaluated by the visitors using a questionnaire (random sample during visit). The **first interim result** from 7 October shows that an **overwhelming 97 percent** stated that they **would visit steirischer herbst again** after their experience at this year's festival, and **99 percent** stated that they **would recommend steirischer herbst** to others.

The respondents also gave **top marks to the visitor service and the educational offer**, followed by **particularly good ratings for the art projects in public space**.

While **45 percent** of the respondents were **regular visitors**, almost **40 percent** stated that they had either **visited the festival for the first time** or had done so rather irregularly in the past. The expansion of the audience has thus also been successful in this edition of steirischer herbst.

90 percent of the festival's **visitors** came from **Austria**, followed by guests from **Germany, Slovenia, Croatia, the USA, Greece, Poland, and Switzerland**. **77 percent** of

the visitors to steirischer herbst were **under 55**, with the largest group of visitors being those up to 35 years of age.

The creation of the questionnaire and the visitor survey were professionally accompanied by FH-Prof. Dr. Astrid Oberzaucher from the CAMPUS 02 University of Applied Sciences Graz.

herbst Education

The 14 education formats implemented for *The Way Out* have reached around **1,700 visitors**—a number that **will reach 2,000** by the end of November due to the festival dates being brought forward and school projects being delayed as a result.

In workshops on poster creation, bicycle tours, walks, guided tours with artists, and “Eat and Greets”—audience discussions over dinner—the free education program of steirischer herbst offered many ways to immerse oneself in the festival and its themes. In addition, around 300 students were able to look behind the scenes of the festival at a multi-day workshop entitled *Kunst ist mein Alltag* at HBLA Ortwein. Special thanks also go to the print shops Traumwerk and Druckzeug for installing a temporary printing studio on the premises of the Visitor and Press Center.

International response

Despite the still difficult travel conditions, steirischer herbst '21 once again attracted a great deal of interest from international media representatives and professional visitors. *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, for example, called this edition a “prime example of committed art” (17.9.21), and the Swedish daily *Aftonbladet* noted: “If one considers steirischer herbst in its entirety with its many side projects, there is no question that the festival is a beacon for cities that want to take art seriously in an increasingly controlled public space” (29.9.21). Outside Europe, for example, the US magazine *Forbes* devoted an extensive article to the festival, titled “Cutting Edge 54th Annual Contemporary Arts Festival Shakes Up Graz, Austria,” and judged that steirischer herbst “transformed the picturesque Austrian city of Graz into an exciting stage, with an imaginative, wide-ranging series of events.” (10.3.21). Other announcements, reviews, interviews, and portraits have already appeared in, among others, *An-Nahar* (Lebanon), *artmap* (Germany), *Artreview* (UK), *Athinorama* (Greece), *Beaux Arts Magazine* (France), *Biennialfoundation* (USA), *blok* (Poland), *C&* (Germany), *Damn Magazine* (Belgium), *Delo* (Slovenia), *Deutschlandfunk* (Germany), *Dnevnik* (Slovenia), *Designers Digest* (Germany), *Kunstforum* (Germany), *Monopol* (Germany), *Morel* (Slovenia), *Outsider* (Slovenia), *RTV SLO* (Slovenia), *STIR* (India), *taz* (Germany), and *The Art Newspaper* (France).

Outlook

The last weekend of the festival still has a lot to offer. Artist **Hiwa K** comes to Graz for the two final performances of *Cooking with Mama* on Saturday, 9.10., to engage with the participants and the audience about food and its hidden political dimensions, about traditions and family in an artist talk after the second performance. This week's cooking takes place at YAP—Young Active People (Youth Center of the City of Graz): at 12:30 **Endah Ebner** prepares Indonesian dishes, and at 15:30 **Omar Khir Alanam** introduces Syrian cuisine. The performances and the talk will also be available as a livestream on the steirischer herbst website.

This weekend is also be dedicated to **Theater im Bahnhof**, which hosts a two-day indoor flea market with stories and a gala as the festival's finale. Under the title *Bares für Wahres* (You Tell, We Buy)—inspired by a popular reality show—the Graz-based group creates space for stories behind discarded objects, bringing their sentimental value to the fore. Visitors can attend both a flea market interspersed with narrative and theatrical interventions and the subsequent gala, which in a sense is a direct parody of the TV format—satirical and poetic at the same time. Flea market: 9.10. and 10.10. from 14:00 to 18:00. Gala: 10.10. from 18:00 at Helmut List Halle.

In the spirit of Giovanni Boccaccio's *Il Decamerone*, **Out of Joint**, the literary festival within steirischer herbst is being held for the second time in collaboration with the Literaturhaus Graz. Under the title *Was schreiben? Was lesen? Was tun?* (What to write? What to read? What to do?) authors were invited to present texts that are the right ones now, at this very moment. The show *Roboter mit Senf* (Robots with Mustard) closes the literary festival today, 8.10., at 20:00 at Theater im Bahnhof.

In addition, until 10.10. one can still experience the **ORF musikprotokoll 2021**—on stage, on air, and online. In its 54th edition, the festival within the festival expands the boundaries of music and the borders between genres. In the nomadic search for an *in-between*, composers, performers, and top national and international ensembles will explore sound fragments, animated scores, composing in space and the musical potential of an aquarium in more than thirty world and Austrian premieres. The ambitious program of *nomadic sounds* is framed by lectures and discussions.

From tonight up to and including 10.10., various lectures can also be attended as part of the **Conference for Practical Criticism** at Forum Stadtpark. While the term *transformation*, to which this year's conference pays tribute, once served primarily as a tool for analyzing historical social change, today it stands for a forward-looking discourse on fundamental processes of change in social systems of various kinds. The fourth edition of the Conference for Practical Criticism will not only examine the concept of transformation and the strategies associated with it in terms of their usefulness but will also discuss them with local actors and activists in regard to central social issues such as the economy (and economic planning), climate change, digitalization, mobility, and work.

This weekend, the **Parallel Program** also still has a lot to offer: *Aus aktuellen Anlass: Delphine in Triest* by Theater am Lend / uniT can still be seen until 9 October. In addition, numerous projects of the Parallel Program will continue after the official end of the festival on 10 October, including the exhibitions *nothing more human than humanoid* at **esc medien kunst labor** or *The Actress* by Aimée Zito Lema and Becket MWN at **Grazer Kunstverein**.

Even after the festival has ended, steirischer herbst remains present. On the one hand, some works such as the **Situation Reports**, the **Ö1 festival podcast**, and **project documentations** remain available online, while on the other hand, works that premiered this year as part of the festival celebrate further runs. **Žiga Divjak's** haunting performance on climate change, *Vročina / Fieber*, for example, will be shown in **Ljubljana at the Mladinsko Theater** from 12.10. to 15.10.

In addition, as last year, **two publications** for the 54th edition will appear in 2022: a lavishly designed **catalog** with images of the individual works, artist texts, and project descriptions, as well as a **reader** in English, which deals with the festival themes in depth and, in addition to texts on this year's discourse program, also contains newly commissioned essays.

Next week, steirischer herbst will also present a new, comprehensive **website** dedicated to the festival's rich history, which opens its restructured **archive** to the public, students, and researchers. In addition, a **program in close cooperation with Austrian universities** and the **steirischer herbst fellowship program** will be presented.

The press conference on this will take place on **Friday, 15 October at 11:00 at Palais Attems**. It will be followed by the first workshop with students from various Austrian universities.

steirischer herbst '22 will take place from **22 September to 16 October**.

Press photos from the entire festival period are available in the press section of our website. If you have any questions or need further information, please feel free to contact us at any time.

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