

AIR Traces: Austruweel

Opening September 6th, 4pm

September 7th till October 5th 2014

AIR Traces is a site-specific exhibition in the area where the city of Antwerp changes into the harbour: between the Red Star Line Museum and the Saint John the Baptist Church of Oosterweel. 14 national and international artists present new and existent art works in various locations in these surroundings, connected by a trajectory that can be followed on foot or by bike. The exhibition focuses on the notion of the 'trace' as an element of identity.

The character of this area is known for its ambiguity. It has no clear status or definition and finds itself on the line of fracture between harbour and city. At first sight it seems empty, but in fact it is a magnet of all activities that are forbidden in the city, looking for a place hidden from social control. You can sleep under a tree without being chased away; you can tag your name without risking a fee; litter without guilt. In the same time this place offers a unique perspective on the city and its relation to heavy industry. Although abandoned, it is nonetheless regularly visited and is full of contradictions that are used creatively by its visitors. This environment can be considered as a topographic translation of alienation: the feeling of being in the middle, between two borders and not belonging anywhere. In such a state you can only rely on intuition, superficial signs and traces. It is close to the feeling of being a foreigner.

The status of what is left behind is manifold. The artists depart from all sorts of traces, real as well as fictive. Some use material traces of human presence such as graffiti, litter, a tent or temporary shelter. Others use historical traces found in the immediate environment: the remains of an ancient fortress, drifted boats owned by fishermen who have abandoned them after their retirement, a derelict church in the former village of Oosterweel. All these traces have one thing in common: they suggest a presence of a person or of something that has taken place. Sometimes through time a trace becomes the only souvenir of something, thus gaining an extra-ordinary status that contrasts its everyday character. They are all part of identity: next to a visual presence, they can also exist in a dialect, a translation, habits and traditions.

Alan Quireyns, Artistic Director