

# ALONG THE LINES

Train passengers as an art audience  
PhD art research by Natalia Irina Roman



## WHAT

Making art means for me creating spaces of (new) possibilities. Illustrating this train of thought, *Along the Lines* is an art practice making space along frequently travelled train tracks, in an otherwise impossible context, changing our daily train travels and illustrating the transformative power of art.

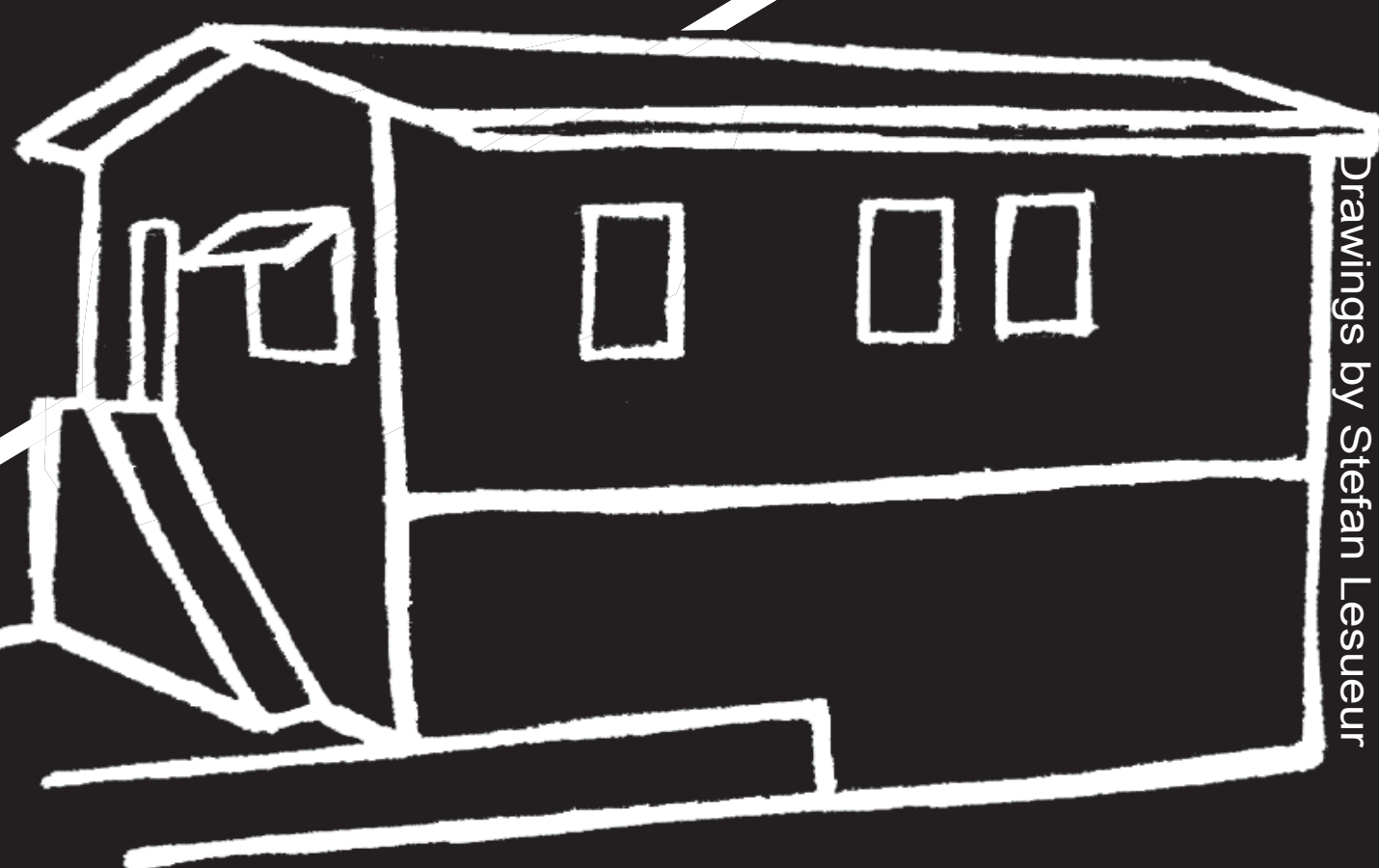
*Along the Lines* is the vision of a platform for art in a public space transforming interlocking towers along the tracks for train passengers. I have kicked off the initiative in Berlin with art connecting different towers on the Circle Line (Ring Bahn) and S-Bahn Line 3, funded by the prestigious Capital Cultural Fund (Hauptstadtkulturfonds).

*Along the Lines* focuses on the unexplored potential of disused (listed) railway infrastructure, and has grown into a self-initiated artist in residency with the German Railway (Deutsche Bahn). The context of cooperating over many years and creating art with a bureaucratic organization connects *Along the Lines* with Mierle Laderman Ukeles' residency with New York City's Cleaning Services (New York, 1970s) and Barbara Steveni's *Artist Placement Group* (London, 1965–).

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#gesternstellwerk



Drawings by Stefan Lesieur

## HOW

Central for *Along the Lines* is the gaze of passengers through the train windows. I have turned the towers' close proximity to the tracks from a disadvantage into an advantage by installing art for the passengers, to be seen from the trains and from the train platforms. I have worked with light, because this medium has allowed me to create works at the border between the possible and the imaginary. The art installations have activated disused interlocking towers, and in so doing they have highlighted the potential of otherwise empty spaces, through a silent critique. As such, the time in between the stations has gained a different meaning: one experiences public art instead of a solely functional ride, the traveller becomes an art viewer.

Through public talks, *Along the Lines* connects creatives with employees of Deutsche Bahn and creates an intangible space for discussions about the potential of the eclectic railway architecture, the roles of Deutsche Bahn and artists in our societies. Transformed into art spaces, the former towers not only gain a new life through their adaptive reuse, but they cater as such to a new art audience, the railway travellers. The vision of *Along the Lines* can be understood as a critical spatial practice (Jane Rendell, *Art and Architecture: A Place Between*, London, 2007), implemented through space-making, the "architecture" made out of my cooperation with the Deutsche Bahn, exhibitions, discussions, and university classes.

Gaston Bachelard's *Poetics of Space* (Boston, 1992) has been inspiring in terms of his reference to the fascination of closed drawers as opposed to any treasure entirely revealed. The towers stayed closed to the visitors during the exhibitions, who were only able to witness them from the outside, looking at art through the windows of the towers – an invitation to further imagine. The art installations revealed only so much, in order to make the viewers curious.

Miwon Kwon's *Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, 2002) has been relevant in terms of anchoring the art of *Along the Lines* in a wider socio-political context, responding to surroundings and the need in Berlin for art spaces.



## WHY

In the process of automatizing and centralizing the railway, the interlocking towers have been losing their former function around the world. The complexity of the railway network required interlocking systems, to prevent collisions, but after losing their initial function, the towers currently face a similar conflict: they are too close to, sometimes in between the tracks, which makes it unlikely to be repurposed, due to security concerns.

Feedback collected from creatives and train travellers shows a great interest in the transformation of these spaces. Nearly 200 artists responded to an Open Call inviting them to work with the towers. Early results of this artistic research practice point towards the transferability of the working methods, so allowing the transformation of towers into art spaces in other regions, nationally and internationally.

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