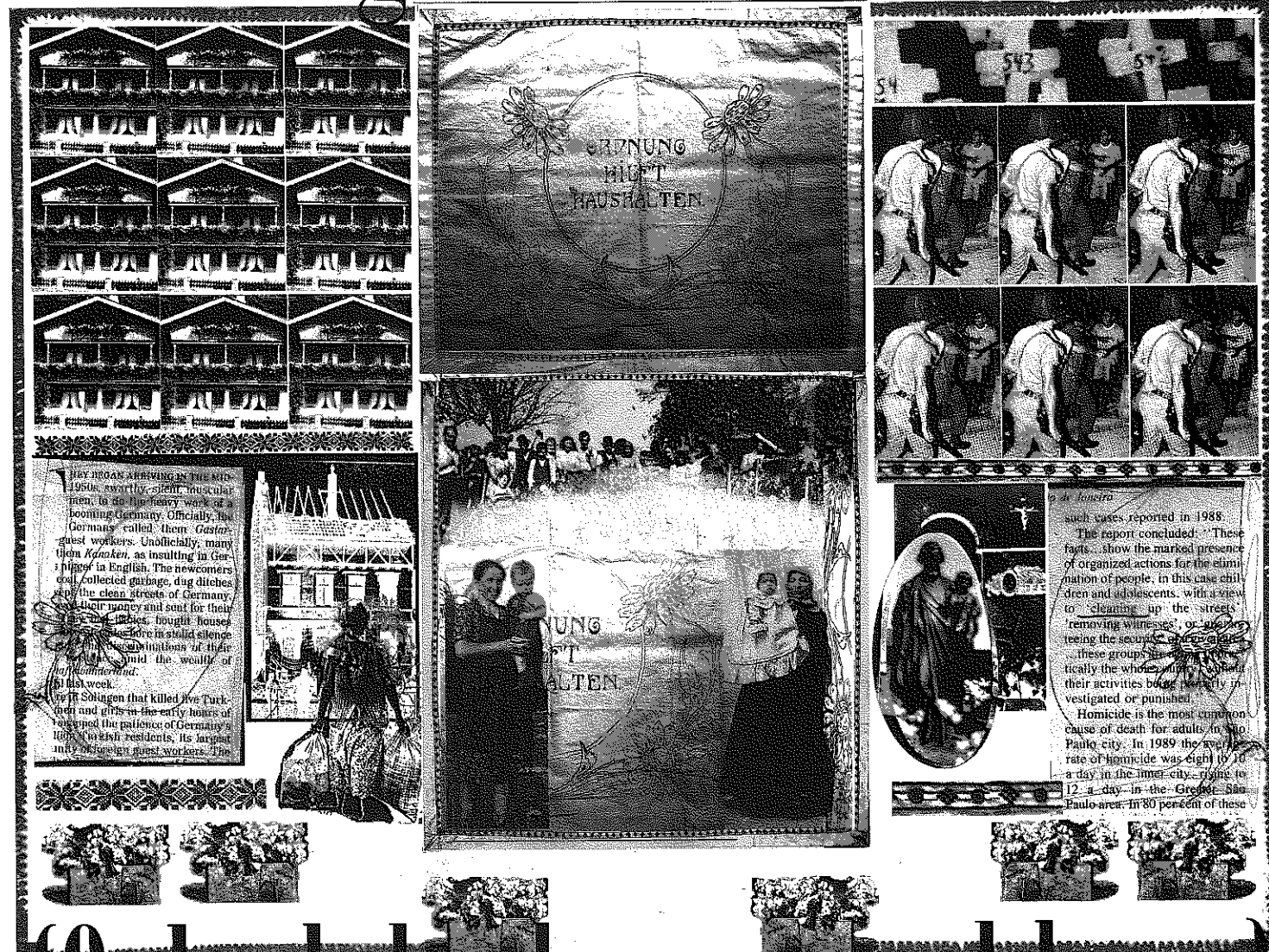


Ordnung Hilft Haushalten!



(Order helps keep a good house)

BY INGRID MAYRHOFER

The idea for this large size billboard project originated in an attempt to deconstruct concepts and aesthetics of "order" in personal (home) and political (state) relations. Dealing with issues arising from my family's experience, the work eddies around my grandmother's obsession with cleanliness, her fear of God and submission to His will. Imagery of my grandmother's life, as an infant, peasant, mother, refugee, inevitably surfaced. The work also follows my family from Croatia to Austria, Germany and Brazil.

During my last visit to Austria in 1993 I found the countryside inundated by propaganda images of an orderly, clean, pure, authentic, folkloric homeland whose inhabitants are sympathizing ever more with the exclusionist politics of the neo-fascists and their charismatic leader, Jörg Haider. His anti-asylum slogan is "Austria is not Canada." Hundreds of thousands of Austrians had signed Haider's petition against accepting refugees (asylum seekers, foreigners). Among those who signed was my father, an ex-communist party member, who at the same time is providing free lodgings to a young Bosnian family in his small farm house. The contradictions inherent in my father's actions reflect a confused nation under pressure to define its identity. Neo-fascist cultural aspirations look backwards to an unspecific Golden Age; they willfully ignore historic changes in the ethnic make-up of the nation-state and its Slovenian, Slovak and Hungarian minorities. They also seem unaware that diversity of class and geographic regionalism are reflected in architecture and folklore.

In my Upper Austrian village, the present trend to build Tyrolian style model homes, complete with balconies and flower boxes, started around twenty years ago when Tyrol was pocketing most of the foreign tourist currency. When my foreign-born mother attached flower boxes - like the ones they had in her native Croatia - to the proletarianized peasant family Häußl 45 years ago, the villagers unanimously decided that she was wasting time. Now she has planters on the original structure, balconies with flower boxes on the addition, a mowed lawn in the front, and she can't keep up with the new neighbours. Balconies and flower boxes, together with a resurgent popularity of traditional dress, present an image of a generic Austrian identity which may be as successful in attracting tourists as in ostracizing foreigners. It seems that when it comes to the market, the trend can dispense with authenticity. When I left Austria 20 years ago, Germany had started to bastardize Austrian designs, and then sold mass-produced dresses back to Austria.

My grandmother, herself an ethnic German (Volksdeutsche) refugee after WW2, lived according to a profoundly regulated hierarchy of Catholic ethics and social ranking. In the course of searching for a biblical explanation for my grandmother's belief system, I came across a hint at ethnic cleansing: "...I shall pour water over you and you will be cleansed; I shall cleanse you of all your defilement and all your idols..." says God (Ezekiel 36:25) in the context of gathering His people "...from all the foreign countries, and bring you home to your own land."

The biblical intent to reunite a people that had become dispersed over centuries was given a new and sinister meaning during WW2. Rather than returning the ethnic Germans who had settled centuries ago throughout Central Europe to a smallish Weimar Republic, Hitler intended to expand his Reich to include all territory that contained pockets of Germanic language groups. Areas such as Siebenbürgen and the Banat-German peasant settlements since the Middle Ages: were in turn occupied by the Ottoman empire, the Hungarian kingdom and the Austro-Hungarian empire; they also went through numerous religious conversions.

My grandmother's homeland had once been part of the Carolinian Empire and was resettled after Prince Eugen's victory against the Ottoman Empire. Never having quite adjusted to Serbo-Croatian society, the Donauschwaben of the kingdom of Croatia, along with those in Siebenbürgen, Banat, Poland, etc. were more than supportive of the war that guaranteed them their language and other rights, and would bring them "home." "Heim ins Reich" was Hitler's slogan. (The cost of millions of human lives, more recently defined as collateral damage, was not mentioned.) Toward the end of the war, they realized that the Reich was not going to come to them after all, and millions fled to Germany, Switzerland and Austria, where they were not welcome. Of those who did not want to give up their lands, over one hundred thousand perished in Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Rumania and Poland after the war.

Some of my mother's family members went directly to Germany, where they quickly joined a prospering working class (later propped up by foreign "guest" workers) and received good compensation packages from the government. Austria was less generous. The refugees spoke a different dialect and wore 18th century style clothing; the women covered their heads and foreheads. Bus drivers had the legal right to refuse them passage. Having been landed peasants in Croatia, my grandparents became unpaid servants for a large farmer in Pettenbach, a village in Upper Austria. When my grandfather died, his family was moved to a refugee camp. My mother started working in a restaurant kitchen in the village where she met my father, then a young peasant son who had just returned from a USSR prison camp.

Ordnung Hilft Haushalten decorated many of my grandmother's

embroidered kitchen towels. Another slogan, *poor but clean*, was held up to us in my mother's family in order to set us morally apart from the majority in my father's village, where *'refugee'* was an insult similar to *gypsy* and, at present, *foreigner*. My grandmother's Austrian-born neighbour suggested that my Oma's habit of changing her underwear daily might give people the impression that she was dirty. She herself only hung out one pair of underpants on the clothesline per week. In turn, my grandmother did not approve of the neighbour's habit of changing fathers for each of her children. They were both dirt poor, but my grandmother obviously had the upper hand; she was always clean, honest, hard-working, god-fearing and knew her place. Unfortunately for me, my city college typing teacher did not know the family motto and stereotyped me in with the other "stinking peasant girls."

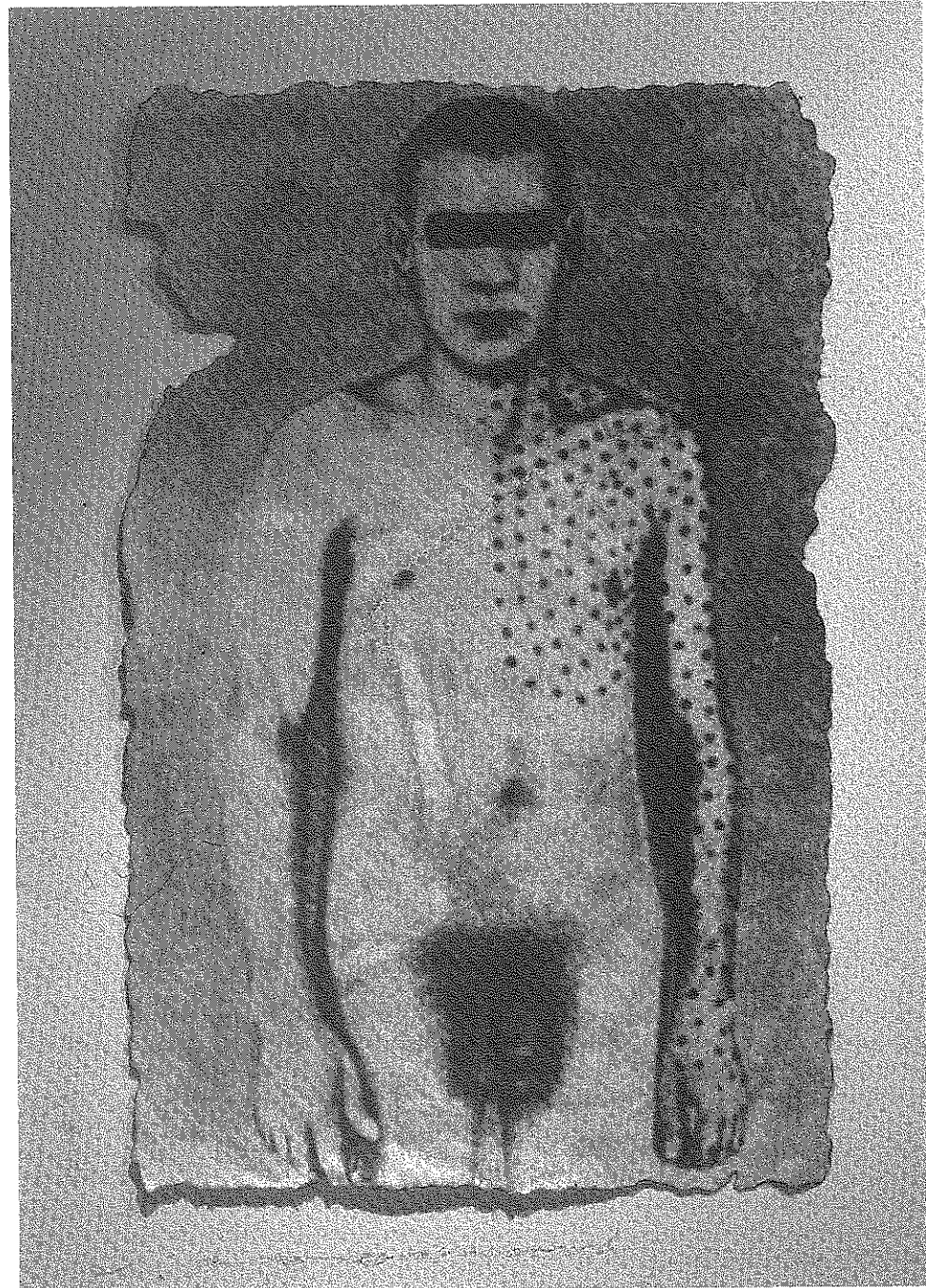
My uncle's young family was resettled in Brazil as part of an international effort in the late forties to alleviate Austria's *refugee problem*. My uncle was murdered by his brother-in-law over the down payment of a farm, his wife became a servant in Sao Paulo and the children were mistreated in an orphanage run by German nuns. They were our *"poor"* relatives, *"poor but clean,"* and loyal to their Catholic Church because what the nuns had done to them "...wasn't God's fault." Our cousins in Germany sent their handed down clothes to Austria; we sent care packages to Brazil.

The only one of my cousins who married a Brazilian moved away from the German settlement of Victoria in Guarapuava, where the natives now live in hovels on the outskirts of the village. Brazilian graves are kept separate from those of German settlers because the natives don't keep their graves clean. My relatives do not believe Amnesty International reports of over one thousand street children murdered because they presented an eyesore and threat to business as part of the 1992 "street cleaning" campaign. German settlers believe that they were given unoccupied land. They consider themselves Austrian and consequently superior to the native population.

Working on the billboard, aiming at readability and intimacy at the same time - remember, this is my family I am dissecting - I came to the conclusion that the issues of refugees and displacement have not changed much since the exodus, nor have human attitudes. People leave their homelands because of famine, drought, deluge, war, repression. "The land which I gave your ancestors" is often claimed by more than one group. In the process of resettling 1.3 Mill Jews in 1948, 1.2 Mill Palestinians became displaced. Religious and historical accounts of migrations trace just about every tribe to another place. Mythologies also refer to the previous occupants as somehow less human, less clean, less chosen.

In its final state, the billboard returns to its original purpose: it presents order. Orderly houses in Austria are good for tourism; they show foreigners what is decent. My grandmother cleaned with soap and water; Germany's neo-nazis use arson to "cleanse" their territory of the unwanted. "Order and progress" is the motto of the Brazilian flag and the police are paid bonuses for assassinating homeless children who present a threat to profit. The separation of the settlers' graves from those of the natives allows for the established social order to continue uncontaminated into eternity.

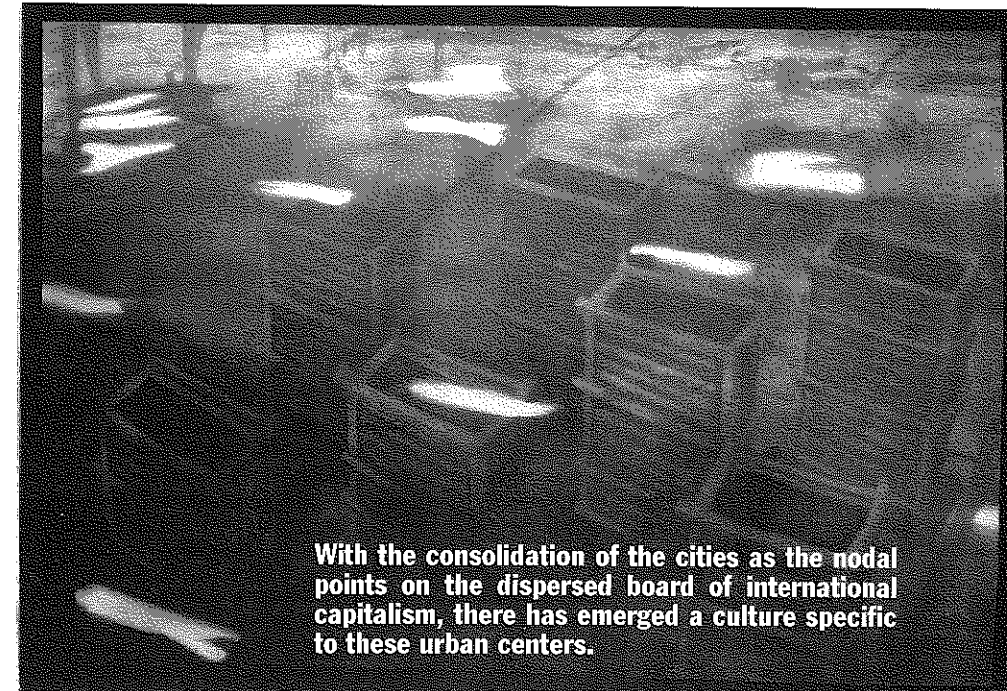
Ingrid Mayrhofer is a visual artist and member of Red Tree, a collective whose artistic and curatorial practise is based in cross-cultural and multi-disciplinary collaboration. The 9' x 12' billboard will be in Vancouver in February as part of Basic Inquiry's The Spectacular State: Fascism and the Modern Imagination.



"Let's Start Again," Andrew Olcott. From his show entitled "On Architecture and the Body," Gallery 44, Toronto, November 1994.

The International Urban Elite and the Culture of Instant Transmission

The
Nation-State
is passé,
the mega-city
is omnipotent.
Alex Ferentzy
studies the
implications of
this shift.



With the consolidation of the cities as the nodal points on the dispersed board of international capitalism, there has emerged a culture specific to these urban centers.

What Stepford and Strange in *Rival Firms: Competition for World Market Shares* call a "privileged transnational business civilization," is not merely a passive recipient of social pressures, but is actively engaged in a process of creating culture; simultaneously delineating its identity and establishing barriers to deny entry to outsiders. While many such barriers are spatial and economic, others present themselves as the site of an invasive enterprise at cultural definition. In order to understand these endeavours, we have to clarify the changes and continuities between current practices and those that were apparent in earlier periods. In this way we will be able to specify what is new, what is an exaggeration of previous trends and what assumes a different form in relation to what some have called the informational mode of production.