

narratives of water

Juan Carlos Vértiz Márquez

**Reflecting on privilege and
Human Rights in the
global water crisis**

***Sentiment without action
is the ruin of the soul***

Edward Abby

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Photo credit: Juan Vértiz

The Changing Face of Water Privilege: A Personal Reflection

Water is a precious resource that sustains life, yet access to it is far from equal. In many other cities in the Global North, water is often taken for granted. It flows freely from taps, fills fountains and pools, and relieves our thirst with ease. However, this privileged relationship with water is not shared by everyone, and we cannot ignore the fact that the global water crisis is affecting millions of people every day.

I was born in the south of Mexico City in an average middle-class family. My first memories of water in the city were nothing special. I did not struggle with water, and I could always shower, wash dishes, flush the toilet, wear washed clothes, and even water plants

when asked. Over the years, I saw changes in the city regarding water management. For example, during “Sábado de Gloria” or Easter Saturday, the tradition was to go to the streets to play practical jokes and pranks with friends, almost like a water fight. Water guns, buckets, and hoses were allowed to soak each other. However, that tradition slowly faded due to the lack of water in some city areas.

So, that privileged position changed without any active knowledge. I had to stop because it was in the media, and there was a communal feeling that it was not allowed anymore. This event brought me to realize that something was happening concerning water. The years went by, and I grew up, but those measures got stronger and stronger, to the point that now it is banned and you can even go to jail for wasting water can even go to jail* (Congreso de la Ciudad de México, 2019).

It took me years to know that around 2.2 billion people worldwide lack access to safely managed drinking water services, with many more experiencing intermittent water supply or relying on contaminated sources. These disparities in water access disproportionately affect marginalized communities, exacerbating social and economic inequalities (United Nations, 2022). The problem is that you realize it

* The local government reported that wasting water or improperly using public hydrants carries penalties ranging from \$1,058.42 MXN (€56.89) to \$3,848.80 MXN (€206.89).

However, not only economic sanctions are considered; those who waste water can also be arrested for 13 to 24 hours or be required to perform six to 12 hours of community service.

when you are close to it or live in a situation like this.

Water scarcity is a growing concern in urban areas like Mexico City, where rapid urbanization, population growth, and inadequate infrastructure contribute to water stress. The unequal distribution of water resources deepens socioeconomic divisions, leaving vulnerable populations with limited access to clean and reliable water (Gómez, 2022).

Having also experienced life in Vienna, a city renowned for its abundant water resources and effective management, I became aware of the disparities in water access within and between cities. This realization prompted me to reflect on my past experiences and how they resonated with my current situation. It felt as if I was reconnecting with my former self, but in a different context, amplifying my dedication to unraveling the intricate and interconnected nature of the global water crisis and driving a meaningful conversation on the topic.

By juxtaposing my encounters with water scarcity and privilege, I endeavor to contribute significantly to the ongoing discourse surrounding water equity. I aim to inspire a critical reevaluation of how we value and manage this vital resource. Through this exploration, I also aim to foster a deeper understanding of the complexities inherent in the global water crisis and advocate for equitable solutions that address the urgent needs of marginalized communities.

Living in a Bubble of Abundance



Photo Credit: Alessandro Farzari

I'll be honest, who does not enjoy some comfort? Initially, comfort is something I find desirable and enjoyable. However, as time goes on and comfort becomes a regular part of my life, I wonder if there is something more meaningful or fulfilling beyond simply being comfortable (Maslow, 1954). This introspection often arises when I compare my privileged access to water with the water-related habits of my friends and family. Through this comparison, I have realized that there are diverse approaches to and ways of appreciating water. It awakens a desire to explore beyond my current comfort zone and potentially transcend it.

Being able to go to the tap and drink high-quality water

straight from it started to feel weird. That's when I began researching the global and local situation of water. While researching the topic in September 2022, I read something I could not believe:

‘The Vienna Heat Action plan is an all-round package against the heat. With social and well-considered measures against the heat, Vienna remains a place where people live well and enjoy living despite rising temperatures worldwide.’ (Stadt Wien “Wiener Hitzeaktionsplan.”)

These words are from Vienna's Climate Councillor Jürgen Czernohorszky, published in the Vienna Heat Action Plan**.

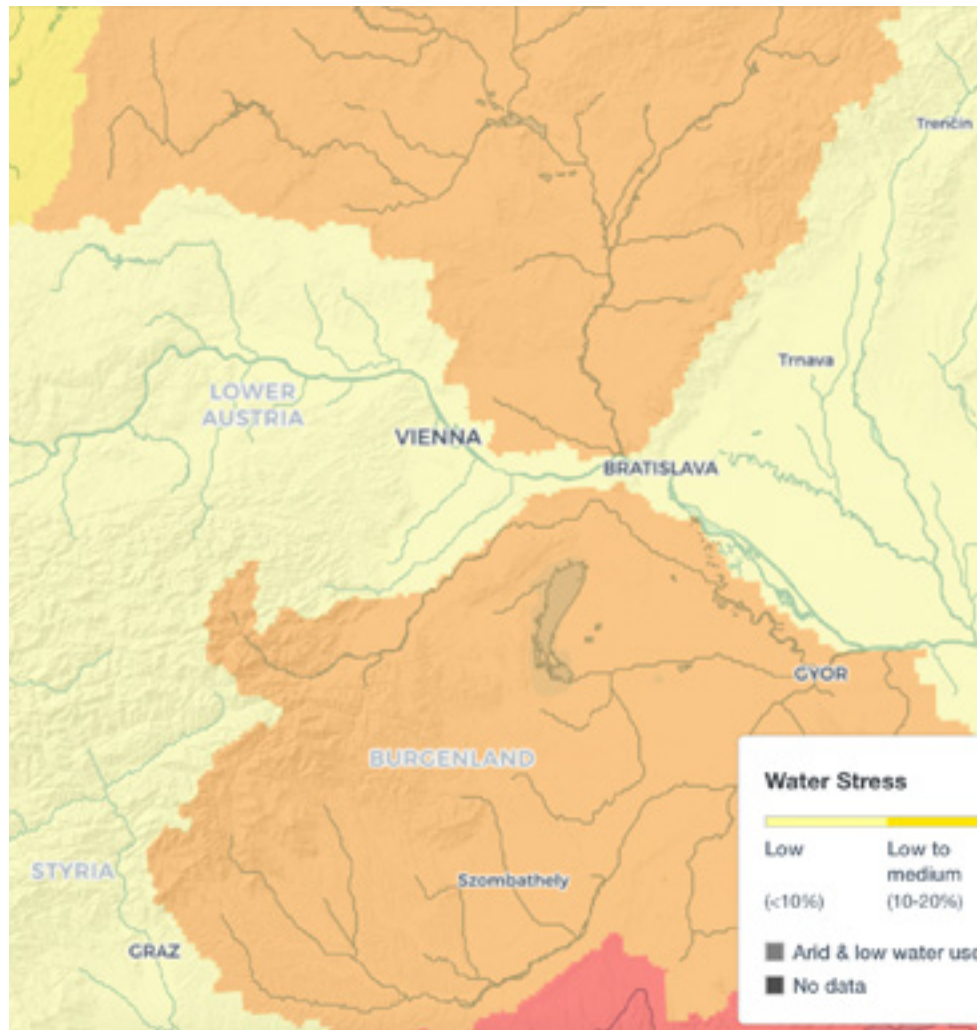
** The Vienna Heat Action Plan is an effort to implement measurements to prevent overheating and manage heat-related incidents. Health, nursing, and care facilities are prepared to address potential emergencies. The primary objective is to safeguard the population from adverse health impacts caused by high temperatures.

This served as a starting point for me, prompting the realization of the need to initiate a dialogue and put things into perspective. It is crucial to engage in discussions with people from various backgrounds, particularly those from the Global South, who bear the brunt of the consequences resulting from the inaction of the Global North.

Vienna, renowned for its high standard of living, has developed an image of an oasis where residents enjoy a comfortable lifestyle. The city's efficient infrastructure ensures access to clean water, reliable sanitation systems, and well-managed resources. However, this seemingly idyllic situation can create a bubble-like effect, shielding residents from the harsh realities many communities worldwide face regarding water scarcity and environmental degradation.

During the early stages of my project, I had informal interviews with people living in Vienna to gauge their perception of potential water issues in the future. The majority responded reassuringly: “No, the water comes from the mountains, so we're safe.” This response underscores a narrow and individualistic vision that fails to consider how natural systems are interdependent and interconnected. It overlooks the intricate web of relationships between water sources, ecosystems, and human activities, which collectively shape the availability and sustainability of this vital resource. This response was typical and effectively conveyed to the citizens by the city's government, almost like water propaganda. It reflects the belief that Vienna's drinking water originates in the Lower Austrian-Styrian Alps, providing a secure and reliable source, regardless of external circumstances

(Stadt Wien, 2023). I ran a projection using the Aqueduct Water Risk Atlas, inputting a pessimistic scenario for 2040 in Vienna (World Resources Institute, 2019). The results indicated that the water stress level was expected to remain low, suggesting that Vienna would be less likely to experience significant water-related challenges or scarcity issues than other regions. Therefore, based on the projection, it can be concluded that the government's message is likely to be true and accurate.



Aqueduct Water Risk Atlas

Water Matters: Examining Historical Narratives and Global Challenges

Water has played a significant role in shaping the histories of Vienna and Mexico City, and their narratives are further enriched by their shared historical and political relationship*. By delving into the historical context of water in these cities, I can contrast their narratives and uncover divergent perspectives on the water as a priv-

*** The relationship between the Austro-Hungarian Empire (now Austria) and Mexico has historical roots dating back to the 19th and early 20th centuries. While Austria-Hungary recognized Mexico's independence in 1822, the direct political relationship was limited. The brief reign of Maximilian of Habsburg as Emperor of Mexico from 1864 to 1867 marked a significant episode in their history. In modern times, diplomatic ties have been reestablished, fostering cultural exchange and economic cooperation. The relationship between Austria and Mexico is characterized by renewed engagement and growing collaboration in various fields.

ilege and its broader societal implications.

In Vienna, a city renowned for its efficient water management and sustainable practices, I witnessed how water is taken for granted more than being seen as a valuable and common resource. Through its reservoirs, treatment plants, and well-managed distribution networks, the city's water infrastructure reflects a proactive approach to ensuring access to clean and abundant water. It is no wonder that Vienna has earned the title of the Most Livable City in the World (2022). Meanwhile, Mexico City's relationship with water has been shaped by its ancient origins. As the capital of the Mexica empire, the city of Tenochtitlan, was built on lakes and canals, emphasizing the historical importance of water in the region. However, the arrival of Spanish colonization significantly transformed Mexico City's water dynamics, leading to the disappearance of natural water bodies and the emergence of engineered water management systems. The historical political relationship between Austria and Mexico adds another layer to the water narratives of Vienna and Mexico City, emphasizing the intricate intertwining of cultures and influences.

As the Narratives of Water (NoW) project expanded, I will provide a more detailed explanation of the project later on,

it became evident that including other geographies was necessary.

It grew organically, involving more people and encompassing a global perspective. While accurate, the discourse about the Global North and Global South fell short as I encountered increasingly challenging situations in the Global North. One case that the NoW team further explored is the town of Trentino in Italy and Innsbruck in Austria.

The historical approach in Trentino focuses on the deep connection between water resources and apple cultivation in the region. The cultivation of apples in Trentino has a rich history spanning several centuries, and water has been a vital element in sustaining the orchards through irrigation systems. Examining the historical development of apple production provides insights into the region's reliance on water and the delicate balance required for agricultural practices. Innsbruck has a prevalent ski culture, and the connection between water and skiing is evident through the reliance on water vapor for snowfall. The availability of snow for skiing has shaped the culture and economy of Innsbruck, attracting tourists and fostering a vibrant winter sports industry. Understanding the historical significance of water in Innsbruck's ski culture offers valuable insights into the region's dependence on water resources for recreational and economic purposes.

By incorporating the historical contexts of Trentino's apple production and Innsbruck's ski culture alongside the narratives of Vienna and Mexico City, I aim to achieve a more comprehensive analysis of water as a privilege and its societal implications. This expanded approach reflects the evolving global nature of water challenges and fosters a deeper understanding of the complexities surrounding water management and access.

Narratives of Water



Photo Credit: Universität für angewandte Kunst Wien

The “Narratives of Water” is an ongoing project driven by a profound duty to bring forth the global water crisis and its multifaceted narratives. In this section, I will outline the progress made so far, starting with the initial research and the subsequent exploration that has shaped the project up to the present moment.

In September 2022, my colleague Paulina Flores and I, from Mexico, co-developed the project after discussing the water-related habits we observed in our surroundings. Later, Paul Chiwona, born in Zimbabwe but raised in Germany, joined us, bringing with him a shared perspective on the challenges individuals face in his home country. This collective perspective nat-

urally propelled us to contemplate the disparities between the privileged Global North and the less privileged Global South.

We focused on capturing personal narratives and gathering information through an open call. We aimed to explore the topic of water through the lens of artistic practices. We launched the Eco del Agua [Water Echo] call to initiate the project. The call attracted participants from UNAM, the Autonomous University of Mexico City. It served as a platform for engaging with local individuals in Mexico who were motivated by a genuine interest in contributing to the discourse surrounding the water crisis and utilizing art as a means of expression. As we embarked on this project, we found ourselves navigating through uncertainty, unsure of the outcome. To address this, we adopted a multidisciplinary approach, actively seeking the involvement of experts who could contribute diverse viewpoints on water. We intended to explore water from three key dimensions: the collective, the artistic, and the political aspects.

Working as a team, the Narratives of Water project created four artworks, each representing a unique perspective on the water crisis. These artworks were the culmination of our collective efforts and the culmination of our exploration. Additionally, we organized the Eco del Agua sessions, which provided a platform for individuals to share their own experiences and insights related to water.

In the following section, I will present each of the artworks and briefly explain their significance. Through these artworks, we aim to evoke

contemplation, spark dialogue, and shed light on the complexities of the water crisis. By encompassing both the creations of the Narratives of Water team and the contributions from the Eco del Agua sessions, we hope to offer a comprehensive and diverse exploration of water and its multifaceted narratives.

130 Liter Container

Is an artwork created by the NoW team, featuring a plastic container that visually represents a Viennese citizen's average daily water consumption. The container is marked with divisions indicating the water consumed per liter for various daily activities.



Photo Credit: Paulina Flores

Riot Shield made from rain barrels

is a reproduction of a plastic container transformed into a riot shield using cords, bolts, and paint. The original object was conceived to be utilized during a protest in Chihuahua, Mexico, where tensions arose due to the government's decision to redirect water from Mexico to the United States. Local farmers in the area took a stand and protested against further water transfers, emphasizing their need for water to sustain their crops.

“Es una guerra [...] para poder sobrevivir, para poder seguir trabajando, para alimentar a mi familia”.

**“It is a war [...] to be able to survive, to be able to continue working, to feed my family.”
– Victor Velderrain, Mexican farmer**



Photo Credit: Excels



Photo Credit: Universität für angewandte Kunst Wien

Highlighting issues of privilege, scarcity, and social inequality, these artworks present a thought-provoking juxtaposition of the divergent water realities experienced by different communities, utilizing the same object.

“Zweiminutendusche” (Two-minute shower)

by Paul Chiwona is a video performance for exactly 02:00 min. In the performance, Paul takes a shower using drinkable water from plastic bottles, symbolizing the high quality of water in Vienna, where even the shower water is suitable for drinking. This video performance visually portrays the amount of water an individual consumes in just two minutes.

Fetching Water

by Paulina Flores is a video performance in which she carries 10 liters of water for 6.3 kilometers in 65 minutes. This performance serves as a visual representation of the daily struggle that many people, particularly women, face in other parts of the world to fetch water for their basic needs.



Photo Credit: Paul Chiwona

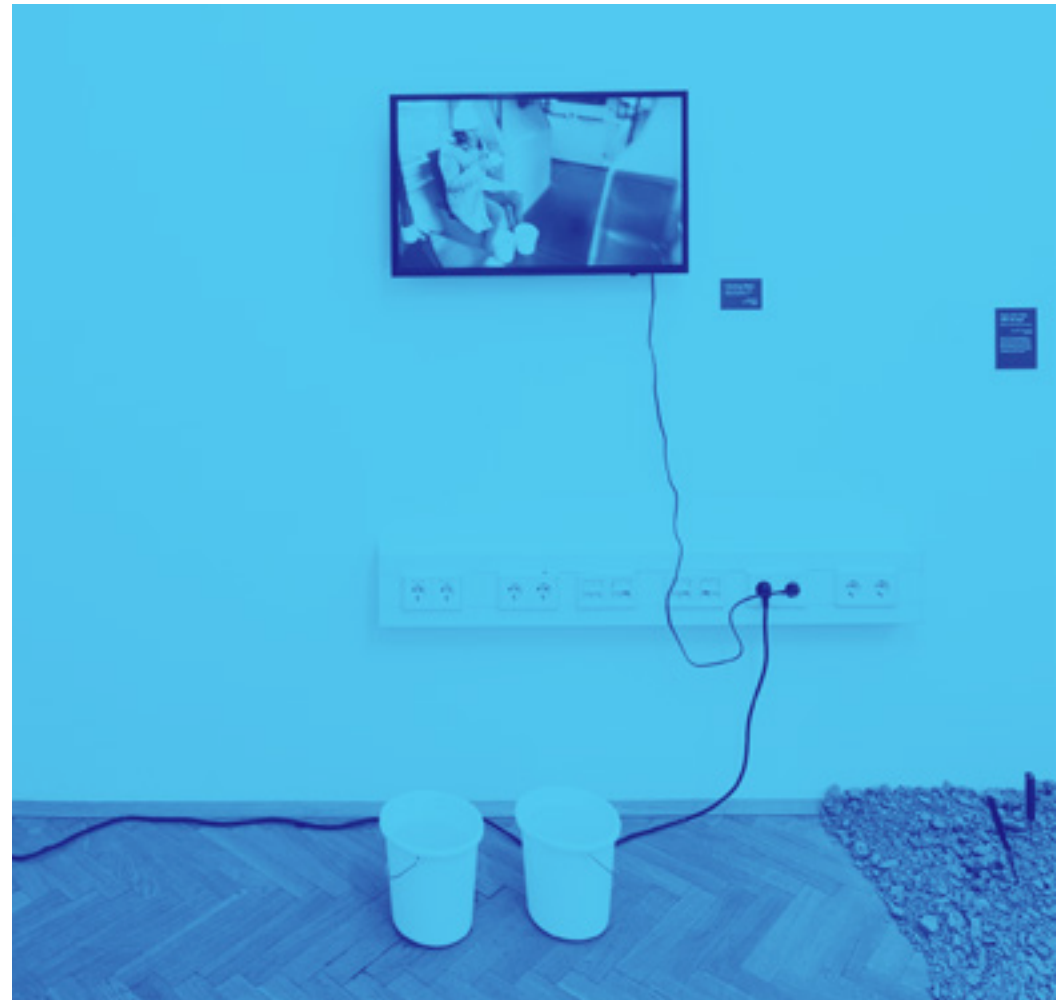


Photo Credit: Universität für angewandte Kunst Wien

Agua del cielo, vete de aquí (Water from the sky, get out of here)

created by myself and Paulina, is an installation made of clay and knives, accompanied by the following text:

“When the first rain cloud appears on a sunny day, some Mexicans still believe in a special ritual: they stick a knife into the ground to prevent the rain from reaching them. This example illustrates the complex relationship with water, where it is not merely seen as a resource or commodity but also feared and revered as a deity.”



Photo Credit: Juan Vértiz

#WienerWasser

by Javier Cervantes is a collection of edited tweets that playfully incorporate the graphic style of the Stadt Wien, using the official account of the Mexico City Water System. This artwork portrays a situation that would be hard to believe could happen in Vienna.

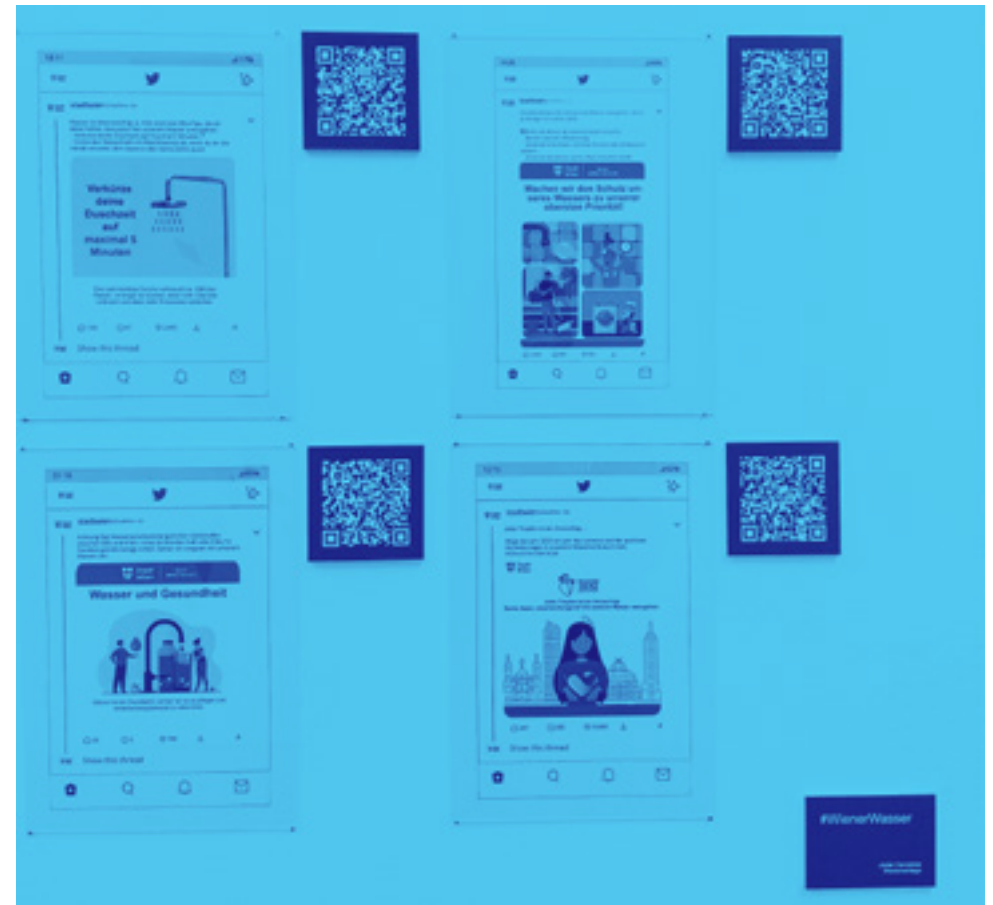


Photo Credit: Paulina Flores

Corte de agua (Water outage)

by Javier Cervantes is a reproduction of posters found in Javier Cervantes' apartment building. The apartment management created the original posters in January 2023

The original posters were created by the apartment management in January 2023.

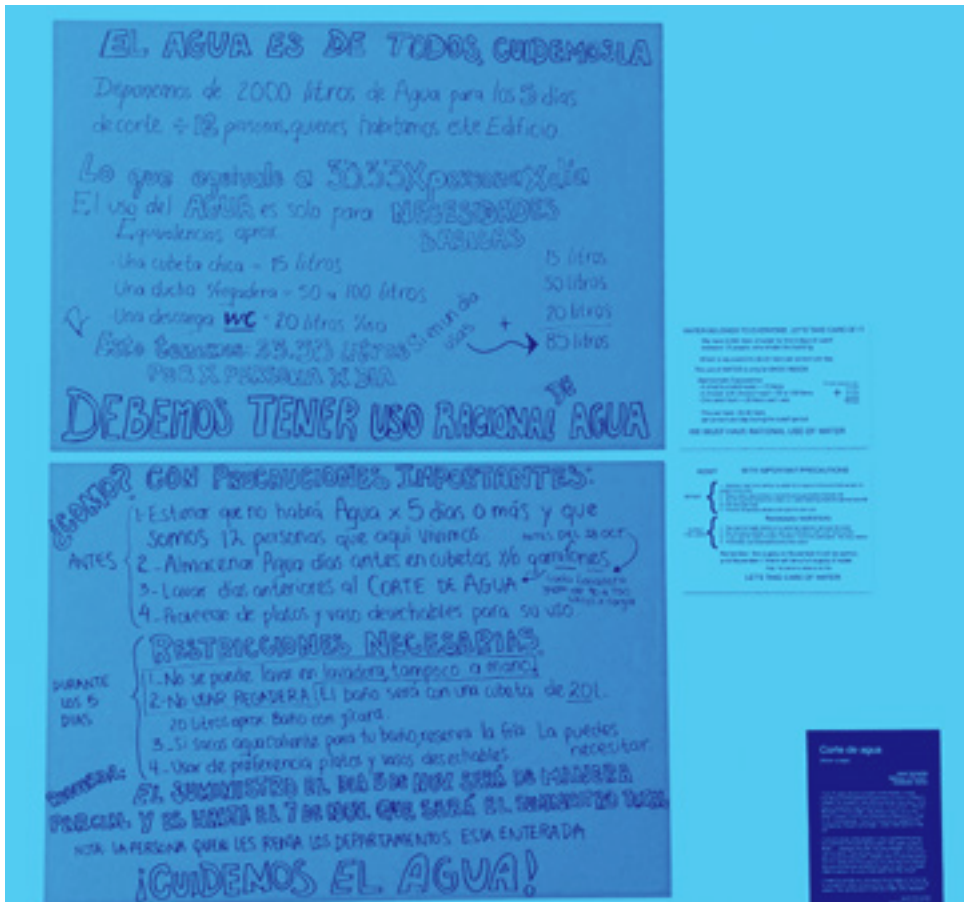


Photo Credit: Paulina Flores

The following text accompanies the artwork:

“I am 29 years old and a student of the Master in Industrial Design at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM). My academic and professional activities provide me with a higher purchasing power than most people in Mexico. Due to this privilege, I can afford to live in one of the areas closest to the tourist attractions of Mexico City. However, even in my circumstances, I have no choice but to adapt to the increasingly frequent and longer water interruptions in the city

I live with eleven other people in a four-apartment building. It is common for the water to suddenly stop coming out while taking a bath because the water supply in our building has been depleted. There are days when the available water is not enough, and we cannot bathe, prepare food, or even flush the toilet in our own apartment. Discussions with neighbors are frequent, as sometimes we blame the lack of water on a particular apartment or person *using more water than they should.*

I share this to make you, who enjoy the privilege of not having to accept this reality, aware that it is real. It is a reality for millions of people. May taking care of water become a habit, not just a necessity.”

Ripples of Impact

The positive response to our exhibition provided validation for our work and opened doors to new opportunities. As a result, the NoW team was invited to participate in various water-related projects. One notable collaboration was with the Wasser Teilen program curated by Regina Hügli from sharing-water.net and onebodyofwater.net. We had the privilege of showcasing our intervention, featuring the aforementioned artworks, at the Volkskundemuseum in Vienna.

This collaboration allowed us to reach a broader audience and contribute to the ongoing dialogue surrounding water.

Furthermore, we were given the unique opportunity to curate, plan, mount, and manage an exhibition at the Alte Schieberkammer in Vienna. This exhibition served as a platform to showcase the captivating artworks created through the Narratives of Water project. Every aspect of the show was meticulously attended to, from carefully selected pieces to the thoughtful design of the exhibition layout. We aimed to create an immersive and cohesive experience for the visitors, inviting them to engage deeply with the subject. The exhibition was challenging, being my first time curating a whole show, so it was a significant milestone in my journey, and I will get back to that later on.

These experiences have catalyzed introspection, prompting me to consider the depth and breadth of the water-related issues I aim to address through art. As I reflect on these opportunities, several questions arise, urging me to delve further into the complexities of the water topic. It is a moment to consider which aspects of the issue still invite further exploration, how I can enhance and amplify my intended message, and how I can be more effective in delivering this message with clarity and impact. This period of reflection allows me to approach my work with a renewed perspective, inviting fresh insights and embracing new possibilities.

Within this process of reflection, I am compelled to confront my own privileged position and contemplate how I can effectively utilize it to amplify my dissatisfaction with the status quo in the place where I live at the moment.

It is essential to critically assess the advantages and opportunities I have and consider how they can be harnessed to elevate and magnify the voices and experiences of those most affected by water-related challenges. By engaging in this introspective journey, I aim to channel my privilege into a force for positive change while remaining open to growth and continuous learning.

In contemplating the contrasting water situations between Austria, specifically Vienna, and the global water challenges, an opportunity arises for critical reflection on our individual and collective responsibilities towards sustainable water practices and equitable water distribution. It is crucial to examine whether the privileged residents of Vienna are unaware of or deliberately choose to overlook the water challenges other regions face. This exploration leads to examining the level of awareness and empathy among the Viennese population regarding global water issues.

Moreover, the abundance of water resources in Vienna raises an important question: How can the people of Vienna, who currently enjoy ample access to water, contribute to addressing water scarcity in other areas? This question prompts us to consider Vienna's potential to tackle water challenges beyond its borders proactively. With its expertise in water management, sustainable practices, and available resources, Vienna has the opportunity to impact regions experiencing water scarcity positively. By leveraging its strengths, Vienna can foster cooperation, address global water inequality, and contribute to sustainable water practices on a broader scale.

Recognizing and acknowledging the geographies that experience water scarcity is of utmost importance when living in a privileged bubble. While Vienna's water situation may not directly contribute to regional water scarcity, it is crucial to comprehend the broader consequences at play. The concern arises from the potential emergence of climate refugees in neighboring countries as a result of water scarcity. This situation has contributed to global conflicts, presenting a substantial challenge to the global order or allocation.

Regions such as the Middle East, India, and the embattled rivers of China serve as examples of where water-related disputes have arisen, underscoring the interconnected nature of water scarcity and geopolitical instability (Shultz, 2016).

This understanding calls for a deeper awareness of the interplay of global water challenges and the urgency to address them, extending beyond Vienna's water supply. Acknowledging the potential displacement and hardships that may arise from water scarcity, leading to climate refugees seeking sanctuary in other areas, is imperative. Therefore, it is not solely about Vienna

running out of water or Austria displaying more empathy towards other regions; it is about recognizing and responding to the possible consequences and supporting those affected by water scarcity and displacement.

“What is Essential is Invisible to the Eyes”

As mentioned, we received an invitation to curate an exhibition at the Alte Schieberkammer in Vienna. Driven by the desire to amplify others' voices and utilize my privileged position, I instinctively accepted, aiming to convey a powerful message. However, I underestimated the project's complexity, leading to a subsequent exploration of the exhibition's purpose and significance.

The Alte Schieberkammer, meaning “Old Valve Chamber” in English, holds great significance as it played a vital role in water management within the city. Situated within the former water reservoir Schmelz, constructed between 1870 and 1873 as part of the Viennese

High-Level Aqueduct, this venue housed critical shut-off valves and a network of pipes. It stored drinking water for Vienna's inner districts, emphasizing the historical importance of water access and management. The architectural design of the Meiselmarkt reflects the construction style of water chambers from that era (Stadt Wien, 2020).

In 1991, due to the need for structural renovation and increasing water consumption, a new reservoir was constructed in Gablenzgasse. This paved the way for the restoration of the Alte Schieberkammer, which now serves as an exhibition and event space. Combining historical significance with current endeavors, it engages visitors in meaningful conversations about water and its impact on our lives.

By situating our exhibition within the Alte Schieberkammer, we pay homage to its history and provide a profound setting to explore the multifaceted aspects of water and its significance to society.

The exhibition, titled "What Is Essential Is Invisible to the Eyes," draws inspiration from the famous quote in "The Little Prince." This deliberate choice aligns with our exploration of water commodification, emphasizing its often overlooked and intangible nature. The quote serves as a reminder to go beyond surface-level observations and recognize the hidden value in things. By selecting this quote as the exhibition's title, our aim is to spark curiosity and introspection, prompting visitors to question the intangible aspects of water that are frequently taken for granted. It serves as a reminder of wa-

ter's inherent value and our collective responsibility to preserve and protect it. Through thought-provoking art pieces, the exhibition invites visitors to reflect on the intangible qualities of water and its significance to human existence. Ultimately,

the title invites us to delve into the hidden depths of water commodification and cultivate a deeper appreciation for this essential resource.

The exhibition explores various layers of water commodification, uncovering profound implications and far-reaching consequences that impact society. We begin by examining basic needs, where water becomes a sellable product, meeting essential human requirements. Compelling narratives and illustrative examples invite reflection on the crucial role of water in sustaining life, underscoring its unwavering importance in our collective existence.

Continuing our journey, we delve into the realm of water in goods and services. Here, water seamlessly integrates itself into the production of goods that fulfill our essential desires. It forms a vital connection between the flow of water and the sustenance of our lives, as it intertwines with the creation and distribution of neces-

sary products.

Lastly, we explore water as leisure, where its transformative power becomes evident through recreation and symbolism. In this captivating domain, we witness the dynamic interaction of water with the creation of leisure goods. It brings us the joys of sports, the allure of fashion, and the resonance of everything that goes beyond mere necessity.

List of Artists

Aki Lee

Title: Sauerknautsch, Speise des Wasserwegs
Installation

Speise des Wasserwegs is a unique pickled recipe made with leaf mustard, fermented without salt. The Hakka people, a subgroup of North Han Chinese residing in Canton, China, discovered this recipe. They are known as “guest people” and have a migratory history since 221 BC. Adapting their diets to different landscapes and climates, they created Speise des Wasserwegs during their settlement process. The Hakka population faced limited access to water and settled in Karst topography and Limestone mountains due to discrimination. They neutralized hard water from mountain springs, preserving food without salt and adapting to shifting climates. The sour taste of this dish reflects their struggles and ingenuity. Hakka Sauerkraut draws inspiration from this recipe, inviting us to experience the unseen aspects. Sauerknautsch represents how guest people adapt to new homes, embodying the fluidity of Taoist philosophy. It reminds us of shared water-related experiences, connecting us. Today, our perception of water expands, emphasizing dynamic flow rather than static origin.

Anne Megier

Title: Silver lining
Performance

A site-specific movement performance takes inspiration from the Schiebekammer, delving into the rich tapestry of Viennese water history. This unique performance incorporates elements such as the soundscape, the art pieces within the space, and the profound knowledge encapsulated in the watery essence surrounding us and residing within our very cells. Through this immersive experience, the performance aims to explore the multifaceted nature of water, encompassing not only its wishes, fears, and instances of abuse and misuse but also its remarkable capacity to connect and sustain life. These concepts are visually represented through the manipulation of a silvery fabric, symbolizing the search for the silver lining within our precarious future. While water commodification may not be explicitly addressed in this text, exploring water’s power and significance in our lives provokes contemplation and deepens our understanding of its intrinsic value.

Cirkuzanti

Title: Torbalon

Readymade Sculpture

“Torbalon” - торба (bag) and балон (water canister) - is both a bag and a reminder.

In Zrenjanin, the drinking water has been polluted since 2004, leading residents to rely on purchased water in plastic bottles. Torbalon repurposes these bottles, incorporating them into a socially engaged fashion concept. It represents the principles of the circular economy, promoting the importance of reusing materials. Beyond its fashion appeal, Torbalon serves as a constant reminder of the ongoing issue of polluted drinking water. Carried in public spaces, it urges action and conveys a sense of urgency. “The Watch” complements the bag, featuring a water canister cap and displaying the hours passed since 2004. This timepiece commemorates the 18-year water prohibition, emphasizing the staggering 157,680 hours without access to clean water. Handmade by Berkesel with design assistance from Filip Nemet, these items bring attention to the critical water situation in Zrenjanin.

Cirkuzanti (Radmila and Nikola Trebovac)

Elisabeth Utz

Title: Es fließt wo anders weiter (It Continues Elsewhere)

Installation

Elisabeth Utz’s work, “Es fließt wo anders weiter” (It Continues Elsewhere), critically examines the ski industry’s continuous growth, shedding light on overlooked aspects. Her journey to Innsbruck in June 2023 allowed her to connect with industry individuals and delve into topics like water consumption, underground infrastructure, and landscape transformation. Through extensive experiences and interviews, Utz gains a comprehensive understanding of the industry’s impact. The visual journal comprising eight chapters serves as a platform to amplify voices and present personal narratives. Utz incorporates quotes from interviews to encourage reflection and dialogue. The chapters cover themes such as local involvement, artificial snow’s water sourcing, environmental degradation, and circumventing regulations. Utz aims to deepen our understanding of the ski industry’s implications through visual installations and personal accounts, initiating critical conversations about its impact on the environment and society.

Felicitas Grabner and Vera Niess

Title: Valbona River, a river in the Albanian alps

Installation

Felicitas Grabner believes that water should remain in the hands of local people to prevent its commodification by foreign investors. As an experienced kayaker, she understands the unique character of waterways worldwide and captures their essence through artistic mediums like cyanotype and analog photography. Collaborating with glass artist Vera Niess, they create sculptures portraying individual rivers. These creative endeavors aim to foster appreciation and connection to the beauty of water beyond economic considerations. Unfortunately, water commodification poses a significant threat, particularly in Albania where Grabner resides. Large-scale hydropower projects prioritize profit over ecosystems and communities, leading to irreversible damage. Safeguarding water from commercialization is crucial for preserving its significance and maintaining a delicate balance. Grabner's work sheds light on these concerns and emphasizes the need to protect water from economic exploitation.

Hybrid Dessous

Title: Wasser tragen: Eine hybride Bademodenkollektion

(Carrying Water: Hybrid Swimwear Collection)

Installation

The daily life of Floridsdorf residents and their relationship with the waters of the Danube shape the role of bathing in their routines. The participatory art project "Carrying Water" explores Floridsdorf's bathing culture through a hybrid swimwear collection that blurs the boundaries between urban life and bathing experiences. These handmade pieces serve as thermometers, reflecting the weather and social mirrors, capturing the dynamics of the community. They symbolize the deep connection between residents and their aquatic surroundings, indicating proximity to water and bathing areas. During performances, individuals adorned in these pieces carry water from the Danube to Pius-Parsch Square, reinforcing the bond between the river and the city. Collaborators include textile artists, social designers, tailors, photographers, and performance artists. This project invites reflection on the changing dynamics of Floridsdorf's bathing culture and the significance of water in their lives. environment and society.

Hybrid Dessous are (Marlene Hübner & Amelie Schlemmer, textile artists, social designers) in collaboration with: Susanne Mariacher (social designer, artist), Simone Körner (tailor, photographer, performance artist), and Joanna Zabielska (social designer, artist).

Into.Wild

Title: Valbona River, a river in the Albanian alps

Film

Michelle Abert and Liam Strasser embarked on a 1000 km journey down the Danube River to raise awareness about water contamination. Their self-built boat, made from recycled materials, represented their commitment to the environment. They collected water samples along the way, analyzing them for microplastics and highlighting the environmental impact of plastic pollution. After their journey, they produced a documentary that presents diverse perspectives on the challenges faced by the Danube and its biodiversity. This comprehensive film features insights from ministries, scientists, experts, and individuals, shedding light on the collective efforts required to protect the river's ecological integrity. Their story brings attention to unseen environmental issues and underscores the importance of heightened awareness and action to address water pollution caused by plastic waste.

Into.Wild (Michelle Abert and Liam Strasser)

Michael Akstaller

Title: Valbona River, a river in the Albanian alps

Audio Installation

In between both floors, Michael Akstaller engages in a captivating performance, manually activating the materiality of the space. This performance is recorded and played back into the room, allowing the mid-range sounds to traverse the space, crawling along the circular ceiling and diffusing throughout the surroundings. Akstaller draws inspiration from the concept of radial pressure distribution in a water reservoir, envisioning the water pressure that once supplied the neighboring apartments as he playfully interacts with the space using his hands. The result is an ethereal blend of non-material but physically perceptible sound, which activates a profound connection to the surrounding neighborhood. As Akstaller's piece intertwines with the constant hum of traffic noise seeping into the building, the venue becomes an evocative setting for meaningful conversations about water and its profound impact on our lives.

Sofia Zorzi

Title: 85% water

Mixed media

The 85% water project challenges the oversimplification that 85% of an apple is water. It explores the complex water requirements throughout the various stages of apple production. Conducted in Trentino, Italy, the project examines the relationship between water and apple cultivation in a region known for its mountainous terrain. Farmers established water resource management cooperatives to overcome agricultural challenges since the 1700s. Interviews reveal concerns about climate change and its impact on apple production, as drought conditions increase vulnerability to fungal diseases, resulting in smaller sizes and lower quality. The project sheds light on the intricate connection between water, apple production, and the challenges faced by farmers in adapting to changing environmental conditions. By delving into these complexities, the 85% water project offers valuable insights into the realities of apple production and the importance of sustainable water management.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the “Narratives of Water” project has successfully achieved its aim of engaging in dialogue and problematizing the global water crisis. By exploring the different dimensions of water commodification, it explored its significance in meeting basic needs, integrating it into producing goods and services, and its transformative power in leisure and recreation. Through this exploration, the project prompted essential questions and fostered a deeper awareness of the interconnected nature of water challenges, emphasizing the urgent need for global cooperation.

Moreover, the project recognized the privileged position of Vienna regarding water resources and

highlighted its potential impact across various dimensions. It delved into the broader implications surrounding water, inspiring a renewed perspective and a commitment to positive change in how water is perceived as a valuable resource. The project team, through introspection, acknowledged their privileged position and actively utilized it to elevate and magnify the experiences of those most affected by water-related challenges, integrating diverse perspectives.

The exhibition showcased at the Volkskundemuseum and the Alte Schieberkammer in Vienna successfully reached a broad audience, sparking meaningful dialogue on water-related issues. Challenging the perception of water as a mere commodity, it emphasized its intangible and essential nature, inviting visitors to reflect on their individual and collective responsibilities towards water practices and equitable water distribution.

In summary, the “Narratives of Water” project has sparked contemplation, fostered dialogue, and illuminated the complexities surrounding water scarcity and commodification. By sharing these narratives and engaging in inclusive conversations, it contributes to a greater understanding of the significance of water and underscores the urgent need for collective responsibility and action to address the global water crisis.

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