



Twin Powers

The Riklin Brothers

For Frank and Patrik Riklin, art shouldn't be recognisable as such. With their Swiss Atelier für Sonderaufgaben (Studio for Special Works), the two brothers create interventions in everyday life, embedded in the heart of society. It's an approach that has seen them create the Zero Star Hotel concept: an ingenious use for bunkers that have given up on waiting for emergency guests.

text SANDRA HOFMEISTER

It could be a set-up. Like startled fruit waiting for an audience, two rows of orange folding chairs stand facing a white wall. The scene is somewhat overqualified as a visual contrast to the rest of the space – multiple desks and tables all on overload with files and books. A lofty studio with chameleon-like functions, who's behind this keyhole? Actually it's two people, artists Frank and Patrik Riklin, and they adopted the seating for their top floor atelier above a former textile factory after it had been orphaned from its movie theatre 'glory days'. Not that there is any formula for such things, but for some reason it doesn't feel instantly recognisable as a place of artists. The Swiss twins often work with the film footage that documents their artistic ventures and as they show me some recently cut sequences of an upcoming project, we all lounge about in home-from-home cinema mode. Before my visit I was a bit apprehensive, the Riklins are identical twins and from pictures it seemed difficult to distinguish the pair. However, as the conversation unfolds it's clear that mixing up identities is not their drive at all. It's true that sometimes Frank and Patrik appear masters of gender and identity troubles, yet those portraits are the result of something else. 'Art has to have a clear function,' Patrik says earnestly, and

his brother Frank shares that conviction: 'it should be placed in the middle of society, not in the museum! The best art is not perceived as art.'

The Anti Star Hotel

Ten years ago, when the twins were wandering along their individual educational paths at art schools in Zurich, Frankfurt and Berlin, they founded the Atelier für Sonderaufgaben in St. Gallen on the Swiss shorelines of Lake Constance. Since then they have developed artistic interventions in public spaces, video productions, seminars and training courses. Analysing the comfortably coherent from the artist's external point of view, they look for unconventional solutions that conspicuously upend the system's routine functioning. As a result of their interactive methods, people become actors in that process. And after nearly a decade of collaboration, last October saw the pair experience their own overnight fame sensation. Commissioned by the municipal authorities of Sevelen, a place that despite its Swiss Alps location has largely fallen under the tourism radar, Frank and Patrik developed a strategy on how to use the nuclear bunker that sits slap-bang in the middle of the town. With mind-bending meticulousness

Frank and Patrik Riklin
photo: Anke Doberauer





Stadttelefon
photos: Atelier für Sonderaufgaben

Zero Star Hotel (previous spread,
left page, both images)
photos: Atelier für Sonderaufgaben

The Smallest Summit in the
World, 2004
(previous spread, right page,
both images)
photos: Stefan Rohner

Map plotting for the Summit
Atelier für Sonderaufgaben
(previous spread, right page)

in Appenzell, 1795m above sea level. Standing there, some of the guests and the first ladies acted out their feelings. 'I was deeply moved', says the French mayor with tears in his eyes. Later this year the Riklins plan to show the documentary of the project in TV-format. And they have plans for more meetings with the mayors in the future.

Playing jokes

'Basically, we do nothing other than we did as kids, when we were playing in the sand pit,' the Riklins say. 'Our sand pit today is the Atelier für Sonderaufgaben. It was actually founded in our childhood.' I'm not quite sure what kind of children the Riklins were, but leaving space aside for precociousness such 'play' has matured, with the interventions the two artists combine placed in a political and social context that is often laced with an ironic sense of humour. This was the case with the Urban Telephone, which the artists recently installed on the façade of the town hall in Chur, a town near St. Gallen. People can call the public phone - a resplendently shabby example of communication of yore - via a number that is communicated by the local authorities. If they do so and the call is answered by a passer-by, they agree to give a small amount of money as a donation to a local NGO, previously defined for the project. The more calls are answered, the more the donation-total increases. It's an adventure to talk to somebody who accidentally passes when the telephone rings. And in order to make the donation possible, the passers-by are constrained to feel responsible to answer the call. (So that's what kind of kids the Riklins were: those who call randomly and just see who answers. Seymour Buttz anyone?)

During its three month run the Urban Phone in Chur collected more than 500 CHF for deaf people. The brothers plan several further stations for the project. 'It could be a worldwide thing,' Patrik says, and shows the Swisscom protocols that are carefully kept in the studio. One day, there were more than 20 calls, but only five had been answered. It seems that there are a lot of people who are afraid of a conversation with somebody they don't know. Anyway, the twins will persist; art and society is rather like counting grains of sand on the beach, there's little chance of the source material running out.

www.sonderaufgaben.ch, www.null-stern-hotel.ch



GANDIA BLASCO
OUTDOOR FURNITURE

Contact telephone in Belgium +32 (0)38 66 40 66
Gandia Blasco T. +34 902 530 302 www.gandiabrasco.com

