

ORDEN POUR LE MÉRITE
FÜR WISSENSCHAFTEN UND KÜNSTE

REDEN UND GEDENKWORTE

VIERUNDDREISSIGSTER BAND

2005 – 2006

WALLSTEIN VERLAG

BERICHT VON DANI KARAVAN

DANI KARAVAN

WAY OF HUMAN RIGHTS

In 1988 I was asked to participate in a competition for creating an environmental sculpture intended for Kartausergasse, which is actually a passageway found between the old wing and the new wing of the Germanisches Nationalmuseum in Nuremberg. Usually I do not participate in competitions, but this time I let Prof. Brockhaus, director and chief curator of the Wilhelm Lehmbruck Museum in Duisburg, persuade me. In this competition participated also the artists: Sol LeWitt, Richard Serra, Günther Uecker, Claus Bury and Otto Herbert Hajek. Serra and LeWitt did not stay in the competition because they suggested existing projects.

The Kartausergasse is a narrow passageway for pedestrians surrounded by buildings from different historical periods, built in different styles, forms and from different materials. I was looking for a way to harmonize both sides of the street without hiding the façade of the buildings. I chose to use columns, which optically create a wall along the passageway but pedestrians who walk here can still see in between the columns the façade of the different buildings. Now I had to decide how many columns to build. At that time, the French celebrated the 200th Jubilee of the »Declaration of Human Rights«

in the French Revolution. This declaration consists of 17 articles so I thought about dedicating each column to an article in the declaration, but 17 columns were not enough to create the effect I wished for. Following the same line of thoughts, I turned to the »Universal Declaration of Human Rights« adopted by the UN in 1948 that consists of 30 articles. The number 30 suited my project. I divided the columns along the street and I found out, to my surprise, that these columns »grew out« of existing columns found under the street and support the bridge over the underground passage connecting the old wing with the new wing of the museum.

I decided to build a gate at the northern side of the street opposite the old gate. The gate was built out of contemporary materials, white concrete, the same material used in casting the columns. I then found out that I must leave a passage for emergency cars near the old gate. Consequently I decided to bury one column in the ground and leave only its upper end exposed. The wall and the building forced me to determine the heights of the columns to no more than 8 meters and the diameter to 80 centimeters.

The first column is positioned near the gate at the northern side, then 27 more columns form a line down to the southern end interrupted by one tree, an oak tree (instead of column 21) and stone slabs (instead of columns 24 and 30).

Each of the 30 elements in the line-up is inscribed with a brief version of one of the Universal Declaration's articles. The inscription is in German and in other language. The additional 30 languages are those spoken by nations or people who suffered from or fought against the Third Reich as well as nations, which throughout history suffered from suppression. They start with Article 1 on the first column in the north and end with article 30 in the south. All languages are arranged in the order of the distance of the corresponding countries from Nuremberg. The only exception is article 1 inscribed in Yiddish, the language spoken by the Jews who lived in Nuremberg.

The western end of the gate bears the Hebrew writing for the commandment »Thou shall not kill« (»LO TIRZACH«).

I was not asked to create in Nuremberg the »Way of Human Rights«. This was not one of the competition's conditions. It was the place itself that called for it, the city Nuremberg known as the city of the Nazi Party Rallies and the city in which the criminal National Socialist Race laws were declared.

During the work process I encountered many problems and more than once I thought about stopping the project and leaving Nuremberg.

Only when the work was completed and inaugurated in an impressive ceremony in 1993, the city mayor said to me: »Now I understand what you have done for Nuremberg. With the help of your work I want to turn a page in the city's history and announce our intention to give a human rights award every 2 years. This prize will not only be a sum of money but also a part of your work – a small model of the »Way of Human Rights.« I could not believe it. It sounded like a paradox: a human rights award in Nuremberg? Nuremberg was declared by the UN as the city of human rights in 2000 and for 10 years now, every 2 years, a human rights award has been given to human rights fighters who put their life in danger for this cause. I did not dream then that my work, my environmental sculpture, would cause the turn of a page in the city's history but today Nuremberg is indeed a city conscious of human rights. The citizens take care of the sculpture. Young and old people stop by from time to time and read the engraved articles.

They are probably disappointed as I am, that mankind does not always respect the words in the articles.

In the last ceremony that took place in 2005, the prize was given to a bereaved mother from Uzbekistan, a human rights fighter who put her life in danger. After the ceremony I was asked by teachers from a local school to meet with children aged 8-9 who wanted to show me their idea to create the way of children rights in Nuremberg.

Maybe, in spite of everything, art has the power to prevent violence and encourage the recognition and respect for every human being's rights.