# KEN LUM: PI

## Media Installation
## Westpassage Karlsplatz

kunst
im öffentlichen
raum wien

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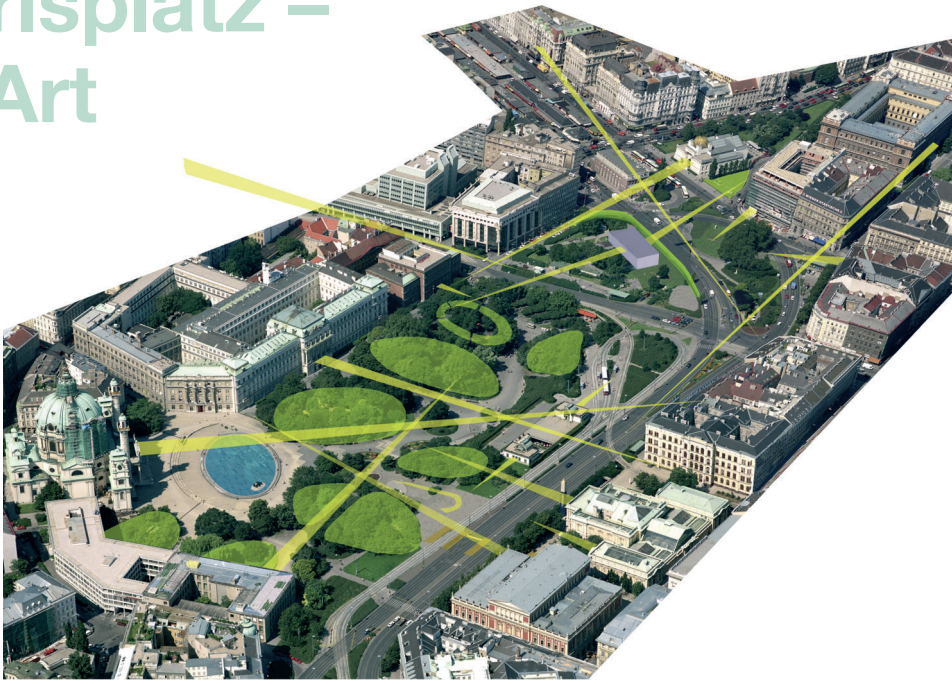
# A Sign for Karlsplatz – A Square for Art



As part of a large-scale planning project, the Vienna Karlsplatz, one of the major art miles of the city, was renovated and enhanced. In the area around the Resselpark and the Rosa-Mayreder-Park at the project space karlsplatz of the Kunsthalle Vienna, open visual axes and logical paths were created to link the various art and cultural institutions and the Vienna University of Technology bordering on this area to the south.

These measures were accompanied by a new lighting concept, an expansion of the cycling paths and the modernization of the entrance area to the underground passage leading from Resselpark to the Staatsoper. A crucial part of the Kunstplatz Karlsplatz project is the expansion and redesign of the Westpassage, which now leads to the immediate vicinity of the Secession and has been equipped with a staircase and elevator. The highly frequented underground passage system surrounding Vienna's largest subway station has been complemented by a passage that now leads directly to the Naschmarkt.

In keeping with architect Karl Schlauss's idea, this passage was to remain largely free of advertisements and was to become a site where art had a significant emblematic effect. As a contribution to a further enhancement of the traffic node Karlsplatz as an attractive cultural zone, the Board of Kunst im öffentlichen Raum Wien (Art in Public Space Vienna) initiated a limited competition in 2004 for the artistic design of the Westpassage. This competition was carried out in 2005 by the Wissenschaftszentrum Wien (Vienna Science Center) in cooperation with the Wiener Linien (Vienna Transport Lines).

According to the brief, the City Light show cases that are normally used for advertising purposes and are big enough for large-format posters are to serve as the main visual elements of a coherent and over-arching artistic design. There were also plans for each of the showcases to have a power supply allowing to lighting them from behind.

After the jury selected the media installation *Pi* by the Canadian artist *Ken Lum*, these conditions together with the know-how of the municipal transport company Wiener Linien GmbH & Co KG rendered it possible to construct a technically elaborate artwork, driven by a computer network, in public space – an artistic concept that was seen as being unique to date. Moreover, a team experienced in art production developed, over a period of several months, the individual details together with the artist and the architect overseeing construction on site. A group of social scientists from the SORA Institute did the groundwork for the digital programming of statistic data sets which are now permanently shown on LED displays. This process initiated in a dialogue with the internationally active artist *Ken Lum* (who also spends a lot of time traveling) and the curators thus required a transdisciplinary communication over an extended period of time within a large, constantly growing production team. Both in this respect and on the technical level as well as in terms of the scientific work done, the media installation Pi can be seen as an extraordinary example of contemporary art production, well suited for setting standards for art in public space.

Ken Lum, Pi, Media Installation, 2005–2006 (detail)

Vienna's City Councillor for Culture Andreas Mailath-Pokorny sees the new design of the Karlsplatz Westpassage by *Ken Lum* as a further step to strengthening the identity of the Karlsplatz art space. "*Ken Lum's* art installation *Pi* is yet another strong sign identifying the Karlsplatz as an art space," he declared on the completion of the *Pi* project. "We have thus again come one big step closer to reaching our goal of transforming the Karlsplatz into a coherent art space. The investments in the individual facilities – from the up-and-coming Wien Museum and the expanded Musikverein to the project space karlsplatz and the Secession – make the Karlsplatz a dynamic place of encounter, an artistic communicative forum with great impact."

As a permanent work for public space at a central location in Vienna, the installation *Pi* by *Ken Lum* is to be always accessible to the general public. "With projects like this one the Wiener Linien (Vienna Transport Lines) show that they do not bring the public to art but art to the public," as Günter Steinbauer, the managing director of the traffic company, said with regard to the implementation of this new art project. "With the Kunstmediator award 2004 sponsored by the IG-Galerien, the Vienna transport company Wiener Linien also received recognition for their commitment to integrating recent visual art in the urban habitat. Heavily frequented areas of public transport are truly predestined for this." At the same time Steinbauer pointed to the construction-related improvement measures: "By installing an elevator at the corner of Friedrichstraße/Getreidemarkt the passage can now be reached without any barriers. The entire passage way has become both safer and more comfortable by the extended, light and well-lit passageway."

Planning City Councillor Rudi Schicker stated euphorically: "With the redesigned Westpassage the pedestrians now have an attractive path leading to the Naschmarkt, the Secession or the Theater an der Wien. Thanks to the exciting installation *Pi* by renowned artist *Ken Lum* the pedestrian passage has become an inspiring cultural path."

Art in urban space brings positions that differ from ordinary patterns of perception into an everyday context. It can promote understanding for global connections and trigger discussions. In this sense the realization of *Pi* is in keeping with one of the main perspectives formulated by the founding board of Art in Public Space Vienna in its basic declaration, i.e. art should not just be grasped in an architectonic but also in a social context.

# Language and its Reference to the World in Ken Lum's Work

*Ken Lum*, born in 1956 in Vancouver (Canada) as the son of Chinese immigrants, has been working since the 1980s mainly in photography and text. In billboard series, he studies the design potential of advertisement. The growing interest in the artistic potential of photography in the past one and a half decades has contributed to *Lum's* greater international recognition. Next to Jeff Wall, he has meanwhile become one of the best known Canadian artists.

Wall has praised *Ken Lum's* work in numerous essays, stressing its references to art history. "*Lum* makes references to the journalistic aspects of Dada, Surrealism and Constructivism, and tries to introduce the experimental idioms of global modernism in the everyday language of cities."

To quote Wall again:

"With the compositions of his signs *Lum* imitates the countless distorted, vaporized visual spaces of the 20th century, thus partaking of abstract painting, working in a playful way with their logos and turning them in a cheerful recapitulation of constructivist, lettristic and conceptualist demands to the everyday life of the urban world."

This art historical development which could in different terms be described as international Modernism is based on a global idiom which *Ken Lum* reflects on in his "Language Paintings" and his later billboard series. *Ken Lum*, for instance, works first of all with differently shaped and turned letters. While his "Language Paintings" are still variations on spatial concepts of painting – from simple and flat compositions to allusive spaces that resemble Kandinsky in some respects –, the artistic works of the later billboards refer to the public languages of advertising and design. The method of reflection is a recombination of textual and pictorial pieces asserting a familiarity with the structures and codes of discursive public media but also formulating collective culture in a new way.

In the billboard series "There is no place like home", portraits of persons from the entire social spectrum are combined with highly personal and emotional texts that can be read as statements made by these persons. In the portrait-billboard series "Schnitzel Company" where, similar to company advertising, the so-called "employee of the month" is presented, a suggestive reality effect is produced. Just naming the names and the given months elicits a curiosity for more detailed biographic details that are expected in the multi-ethnic backgrounds of these employees of a fictive fast-food chain. The globalized world of labor with its sweeping integrative potential raises the question of identity even more dramatically with the serial nature of the pictures and their slight difference.

Ken Lum, There is no place like home, 2001
Billboard project in public space, Innsbruck

In recent years, *Ken Lum* has also turned to the fleeting mirror portrait. At the Documenta11 2002 he combined high-format mirrors with small portrait photographs that were casually stuck in the frames. The use of mirrors together with text in the Westpassage Karlsplatz in Vienna marks a further development in *Lum's* works which revolved around identity and language from the very outset. In his media installation *Pi*, *Lum* deals with the subject of statistics, referring to the world with his numeric details. 14 reflective panels, on to which inscriptions have been etched, have been mounted on the side walls of the passage. Below these dryly formulated statements a LED display has been mounted. The numbers visualized change on the basis of statistic data collected by mean of social scientific methods and on the basis of mathematical prognosis models and related algorithms. *Ken Lum* refers to an example from which he derived his idea: "In New York there is a large countup clock that depicts the public state debt in the USA. The numbers keep jumping upward every single second."

In the underground pedestrian passageway below the Karlsplatz in Vienna, the pedestrians are reflected in the individual panels. While they read the current numeric values on the digital counter, they – the readers – merge with the number in a performative sense.

To communicate on the level of everyday experience in the use of forms of advertising in urban space, *Ken Lum* models his work in their aesthetic. Yet precisely because of their proximity to advertising and given their small deviation from it, these works are to be read as art.

In his work *Pi* for the Westpassage Karlsplatz, *Ken Lum* calls his combination of text and statistic numeric material a "factoid". Factoids can be both countable facts and trivial information which detached from their spatial and temporal contexts only represent an isolated statistically produced numeric formation.

Researched information becomes translated in figures. In the process, various problems of the statistic study of the world result from the categories selected by *Ken Lum*. Either they are precisely collected complex sets of data such as "undernourished children worldwide" or very general assessments and speculations such as "lovers in Vienna today". There are also factoids that have long been the subject of statistic study such as "amount of garbage accumulated in Vienna since January 1" or "world population". Here, too, the difference between local and global references is brought to bear. The factoid "Schnitzels eaten in Vienna since January 1" not only brings to bear the ironic side of statistics, it also picks up the billboard series "Schnitzel Company" supported by Vienna's Chamber of Labor – a project with which *Ken Lum* was present in Viennese urban space already in 2004.

Ken Lum, Schnitzel Company, July – August 2004
Billboard exhibition in "Arbeitswelten" exhibition series organized by museum in progress in cooperation with the Vienna Chamber of Labor in front of the buildings of the Vienna Chamber of Labor, Prinz Eugenstraße 20 – 22 and Plösslgasse 13, 4th district, Vienna.

Ken Lum, Pi, Media Installation, 2005 – 2006 (detail Factoid 2: Viennese in Love Today)

Above the entrance area adjacent to the main passage there is a large-format LED display behind semi-reflective glass. A 14-digit counter continuously displays in a conspicuous way new combinations of numbers, referring here to the central theme of the entire installations.

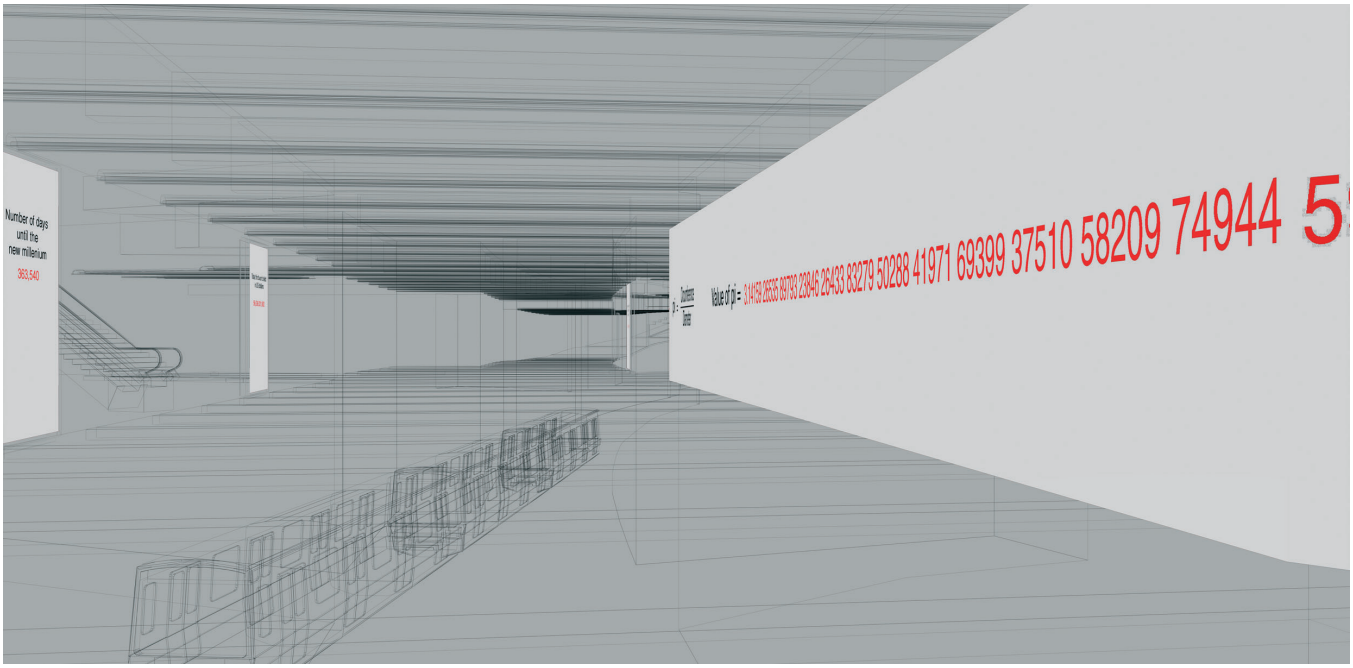
The representation of the number Pi has been placed in the middle area of the pedestrian passage as a symbol for the world. The infinite decimal number is projected with 478 decimal points onto a broad-wall wide-wall format with the last ten recently calculated points played onto a LED display by a computer program.

Further, an exhibition with lexical and statistic manuals on subjects such as demographic development or migration has been placed in a free-standing visible showcase at a location where the passage branches off in the direction of the Secession. Here, similar to the so-called factoids, the mathematical problem of ascription is addressed which in its political dimension in *Ken Lum* corresponds to the global phenomenon of migration as presence, belonging and exclusion.

The minimalism shaped by the use of the mass media and the concept art experienced in using advertising enable *Lum* to effectively formulate socio-political connections in public space.

# Pi – Work Details

**Ken Lum, Pi, Media Installation, 2005–2006**
**7 Mirastar half-mirror elements, size 1,500/2,490 to 2,800 mm**
**7 Mirastar half-mirror elements, size 1,500/2,000 to 2,400 mm**
**15 LED panels with a red 7- to 15-digit display and figures 75 mm high**
**1 LED panel with a red 10-digit display and figures 150 mm high**
**Etched texts and figures**
**1 room showcase made of glass, size 3.2 x 1.3 m**
**(Books, brochures, printed material 1880–2006)**




Ken Lum, Pi, digital animation, video still, competition submission, 2005

**The number** pi (π)

The number pi, after which the project is named, refers to the circle and stands symbolically for the world and its constantly changing appearance. Pi is the ratio of circle perimeter and circumference. The resulting number is written with the Greek letter π (pi), as it cannot be represented as the relation of two integers, i.e. as a fraction. Pi is an irrational and transcendent number with infinitely many decimal places which do not show a repetitive pattern. Since decimal places cannot be counted, pi is of greater mathematical infinity than rational numbers and thus stands allegorically for the entire world. Just as countable numbers contain non-countable numbers such as pi, the world contains the infinitely dense space of the symbolic. Even though the number pi is central for calculating the circle and sphere it has also pervaded statistics through the Gaussian normal distribution. In physics pi plays a role in addition to the movement of circles, mainly in waves, since it is integrated there in the calculations through the sinus and cosine functions. In quantum mechanics, the formula of the Heisenberg uncertainty relation contains the circle number.

The number pi, the over-arching element of the installation, has been etched onto a multi-piece glass wall as a fixed sequence of numbers with 478 places after the comma. The last ten places calculated by the computer appear on a LED display.

Ken Lum, Pi, Media Installation, 2005–2006
(details Factoid 4: Paid Hours Worked by Austrians since January 1
and Factoid 5: HIV Infections Worldwide since January 1)

**14 Factoids**

*Ken Lum's* installation *Pi* is based on statistical data on the basis of which mathematical forecast models were developed. The SORA Institute for Social Research and Analysis was asked to collect and study the data to be used to feed the 14 factoids with constantly updated data. SORA adopted the same approach for each factoid. First, data and data sources were studied and temporal series developed to implement the digital projection and depiction possibilities suggested.

**Factoid 1: Malnourished Children in the World**

Malnourishment interacts in a complex way with resources and health care. Here it describes the number of malnourished children worldwide. This figure shows a slight decrease but there are still more than 120 million malnourished children worldwide.

**Factoid 2: Viennese in Love Today**

The Canadian sociologist John Alan Lee describes six styles of love of which one shows the greatest converges with the everyday understanding of being in love. This style of love ("eros") was also tested in the Marburg Inventory of Attitudes. The results could be applied to the Viennese population to predict the number of persons in love.

**Factoid 3: People Killed in War since January 1**

The number of people killed in war has been retrospectively calculated by the Peace Research Institute at the University of Uppsala. A prediction for the coming years was made on the basis of the values of the past five years.

**Factoid 4: Paid Hours Worked by Austrians since January 1**

More than 5.5 billion hours worked are paid yearly in Austria. This amount refers to the hours worked by employed persons in their main job.

**Factoid 5: HIV Infections Worldwide since January 1**

The number of persons who are becoming infected with HIV every year is on the rise. UNAIDS has predicted 4.3 million new infections for 2006.

**Factoid 6: Amount of Garbage Produced in Vienna since January 1 (in Tons)**

The predictions for the amount of garbage produced are based on data provided by the Viennese Environmental Department (MA 22) which is accessible to the public at www.wien.gv.at/umweltschutz.

**Factoid 7: People Dissatisfied with their Jobs in Austria**

The working climate index does quarterly assessments of the job satisfaction of Austrian employees. It constitutes the basis of these calculations.

**Factoid 8: World Population**

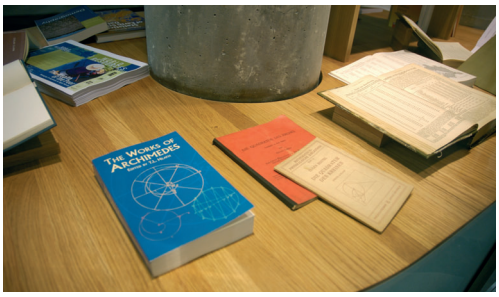
Statistically, the world population is growing by 2,566 per second. The data necessary for the prediction were provided by the German Foundation for World Population and are based on the analyses of the Population Reference Bureau (USA).

**Factoid 9: Growth in the Sahara Desert (in Hectares) since January 1**

The extent of land degradation in the area surrounding the Sahara was taken into account in the scientific data on the desertification process. This information is used to describe the growth of the Sahara.

**Factoid 10: Books Borrowed in Vienna since January 1**

In Vienna more than 8 million books are borrowed a year in public libraries and university libraries. The opening hours were taken into consideration in the calculation.



Ken Lum, Pi, Media Installation, 2005–2006
(room showcase, detail)

**Factoid 11: People Killed or Maimed in Landmines since January 1**
Since 2003 the "Landmine Monitor", published by the international campaign for the ban of landmines, has reported an annual 15,000 to 20,000 landmine victims per year.

**Factoid 12: Schnitzels Eaten in Vienna since January 1**
The AMA questioned persons living in Austria on the number of schnitzels eaten. To obtain a realistic figure, the schnitzels eaten by tourists had to be included in the results.

**Factoid 13: Days until Chernobyl is Considered Safe for Human Habitation**
The half-value time of the alpha-radioactive element Americium-241 – which amounts to about 432 years and 73 days – was used to measure the days until Chernobyl is considered for human habitation.

**Factoid 14: Amount of Money Spent on Military Armament since January 1 (in Euro)**
Predictions were made on the amount of money that will be spent on armament in the coming years on the basis of data from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI).

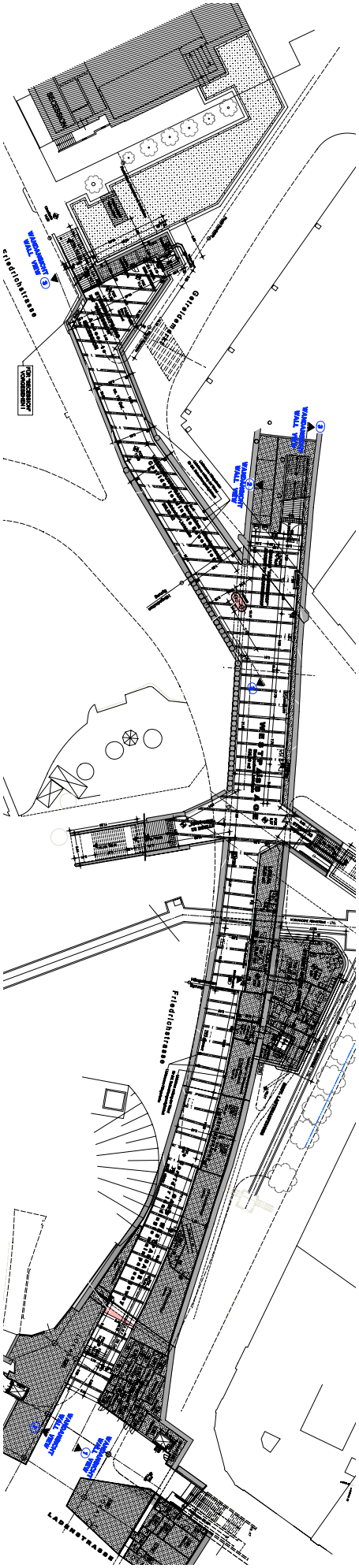
**Room Showcase**
**Books / Brochures / Printed Material from 1888 to 2006**
The design of the showcase reflects a working situation on a library table. Books are arranged in blocks or piles, some of them are open or marked and closed. Archimedes' theory on, which the number pi is based, appears here in the form of a book and as a reference to the historical dilemma of "squaring the circle". Recent standard books on the calculation of statistical and demographic values lead to the more general theme of the showcase. The focal point of the simulated scientific number and data research is the theme of migration. A cross-section of publications from statistics institutes, international inter- and non-governmental institutions suggest reading on studies and demographic surveys for Vienna and Austria and further to Europe and the entire world. Loans of the City of Vienna's Office for Analysis and Statistics lead from the 19th century to the present day. The "International Migration Outlook Annual Report 2006" of the OECD and "World Migration 2005. Costs and Benefits of International Migration" of the IOM are some of the most important international reports presented here.

**General Plan**
**Westpassage**

Secession

Exit Girardipark

Exit Resselpark




Exit Operngasse

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# Jury Argumentation

*Ken Lum* puts the number pi in the centre. Pi mediates universality and expresses the artist's global perception. Pi can be understood as a symbol as well as a real multiplier. It concerns both the circle and history, paying credit to an ancient mathematical knowledge. *Ken Lum's* intentions are understandable through his installations, they need not be rephrased. His communication system uses language and mathematics. It records the world in a manner which expresses space and time in highly abstract dimensions and, at the same time, is very realistic.

*Ken Lum's* work *Pi* intensifies the impression that the whole passageway is a connected transit zone. The artist transgresses the mere designing of show cases – as demanded in the competition text. He combines the architecture of a modern transport building with current media technology. So the passageway becomes subject and stimulates the passenger to a more attentive observation.

Using statistical data in inserted headlines, *Ken Lum* creates an idea of the world outside the underground site. The constant change of data reminds of the situation in a news room, and the passenger can easily understand the symbolic messages because of their simple and clear phrasing and the distances from each other.

*Ken Lum* does not only make hard facts visible, he also brings gossip about the world and the neighbourhood into play. Trivial information – reflecting mentalities and habits – is brought face to face with numbers from social data or inquiries.

By combining this information on a wide screen display, *Ken Lum* expresses the contradictions. He reminds, for example, of the hunger in the Third World, and hints at the Viennese consumption of schnitzel in an ironical way.

At the same time, this artistic project contains a moment of constant change. It offers the possibility of adapting gradually to actual events. Even though the questions remain the same, the changes in life are presented by the changing of numbers. Herein the project shows an ethical element.

In addition to that, an underground building's statics is docked to the outside world's movement. There is movement even when the passageway is empty, for the numbers and the information change continually.

Yet it is not absolutely necessary to decipher the messages. Of course, *Ken Lum's* work has its own unmistakable aesthetic qualities. In contrast to the colourful messages of the advertisements which we are used to see in passages and underground stations, *Ken Lum's* work remains extremely functional and so creates a distinct contrast to the usual sign systems in urban space. Well-aimed, he points the way.

By its international, global references, this work does justice to Karlsplatz, a transfer space for people of most variable origins. Local references link this project to Vienna specifically. The work's memento is high and it contributes to presenting a public space.

Vienna, 26th of September 2005

# Biography

Ken Lum, 2006

**Ken Lum** was born in 1956 in Vancouver, Canada, where he lives and works today.

**Education:** degree in biochemistry from the Simon Fraser University in Vancouver.

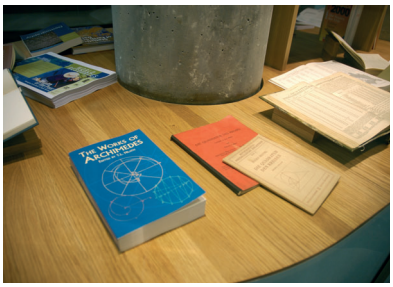
**Exhibitions and projects:** in addition to a number of one-man shows, he participated in internationally important exhibitions such as the Biennials in Venice, Shanghai, Sao Paulo, Havana, and Sydney, the Documenta11 (2002) and the Manifesta in Frankfurt 2002. *Lum* has been commissioned to do both temporary and permanent public art projects in a number of cities, including St. Moritz, Stockholm, Toronto and Vienna. In Austria the Galerie Grita Insam devoted its summer exhibition in 2006 to *Ken Lum*. In 2004, museum in progress showed, together with the Vienna Chamber of Labor, the billboard series "Schnitzel Company". *Lum* participated in the 4th Austrian Triennial for Photography in Public Space in Graz in 2003 and presented his billboard project "There is no place like home" in public space in Innsbruck in 2001.

**Publications:** numerous essays and reviews. Founder and editor of "Yishu Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art".

**Project director** of the influential exhibition "The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa 1945–1994". Recently, he was co-curator of the exhibition "Shanghai Modern: 1919–1945", a show on art and politics in Shanghai at the time of the Chinese Republic and the 7th Sharjah Biennial in the United Arabic Emirates.

**Teaching activities:** since the early 1990s *Lum* has held visiting professorships at the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich, the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, Paris and the China Art Academy, Hangzhou. Since 2000 he is professor at the Department of Fine Arts of the University of British Columbia, Vancouver.

**Photographic Material/Download at**
**www.publicartvienna.at/presse**



kunst
im öffentlichen
raum wien

# Production Credits

**Realization**
Wissenschaftszentrum Wien in cooperation with
Wiener Linien GmbH & Co KG

**Curators**
Edelbert Köb
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Preliminary concept: Paul Petritsch, Scott Ritter

**Project management**
Wissenschaftszentrum Wien

**Production management**
Clemens Haslinger

**Controlling**
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**Scientific conception of Factoids**
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Tina Brunauer, Christoph Hofinger, Christina Kien

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**Editing consulting**
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**Programming**
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Wolfgang Reinisch, Norbert Math, Othmar Gsenger

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Atelier Schlauss

**Planning of Westpassage implementation**
Architectural firm Wech
Josef Zöchling

**Local surveillance of construction**
Wiener Linien GmbH & Co KG
Erich Höchtl, Johann Six

**Implementing companies**
**Steel construction**
SK-Stahlbau

**Glass construction**
KM Spezialglas
Glas Zeman

**Light engineering**
Light-Tech GmbH
Dietmar Unger

**Carpentry work**
Tischlerei Bauer + Kukla

**Electrical work**
Cegelec GmbH

**Painting work**
Schmied AG

**LAN connection**
Wiener Linien GmbH & Co KG
Robert Lackner, Gerhard Slunsky

**Mounting of foil**
Drazen Matic

**Graphics for factoids**
MVD Austria

**Organisation preview**
aigner und österreicher

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Jörg Auzinger

**Stills**
Nick Sully

*Ken Lum's* media installation *Pi* was implemented as an initiative of **Kunst im öffentlichen Raum Wien** in cooperation with the Wiener Linien GmbH & Co KG. The concept for the artistic installation was the product of an international competition.

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kunst
im öffentlichen
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(Art in Public Space Vienna)

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# KEN LUM: PI

The Canadian artist *Ken Lum* conceived the media installation “Pi” for the west passage of Karlsplatz, renovated in 2006, in conjunction with the initiative **Art in Public Space Vienna.** The number pi (π) is used for calculating circle and sphere, and it is unique as an endless decimal number without a repeating pattern. As an elementary constant, pi can be read as a universal symbol for the world. Its visualization forms the center of *Ken Lum’s* work, whereby the last positions calculated by a computer program are respectively represented.

At the same time, the artist relates to real circumstances. Global, regional and local as well as social and political relationships are mathematically numerically described in the form of so-called factoids. Headings on mirror panels name facts with profound consequences for the world and humanity just as trivial everyday topics. The numerical material from scientifically calculated statistics on the individual topics is continuously updated via a digital network.

The showcase quotes a working situation at a library table. It contains a historical reference to Archimedes’ theory of the number pi. Contemporary standard works on statistical surveys and population movements lead to the theme of migration.

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