



Project Description

Klemens Wihlidal

Schieflage (Karl Lueger 3,5°, 2026)

The monument to Mayor Karl Lueger (1844–1910) erected in 1926, was redesigned to reflect its historical context. Titled “Schieflage (Karl Lueger 3,5°)” [Askew (Karl Lueger 3.5°)], the creative redesign was conceived by the artist Klemens Wihlidal. For decades, Karl Lueger was honored as an eminent figure in Viennese politics, while a veil was drawn over his role as a founding father of populist antisemitism in Austria. Now, the public no longer accepts this uncritical appraisal of Lueger’s legacy.

The City of Vienna embraces the debate over how to engage with the monument and its meaning in a way that is appropriate today. A forum with experts from politics, academia, the municipal administration, and representatives of civil society was held in the ceremonial room at City Hall in 2021. It emerged that the city government needed to send a strong signal reflecting critical perspectives in society on history, antisemitism, and responsibility in the present.

The result was a decision to contextualize the monument, and artists were invited to submit proposals for a permanent redesign. The Vienna-based artist Klemens Wihlidal’s proposal won the support of the diverse jury of artists, scholars, administrators, and political decisionmakers.

Dr. Karl Lueger

Karl Lueger, who was born in 1844 and served as mayor of Vienna from 1897 until his death in 1910, is still regarded as one of the city’s most popular as well as most controversial politicians. With his active support, a personality cult formed around him in his lifetime. The public knows him as a great innovator who, at the dawn of the twentieth century, led Vienna into the modern age with major projects that expanded the city government’s role.

The primary addressee of Lueger’s political ideas were the city’s petit bourgeois, who had been hit hard by the stock market crash of 1873 and often saw themselves as losing out in the period’s wrenching societal and economic changes (“the common man”).

Deftly employing heated rhetoric, taunts, and targeted demagoguery, he succeeded in gaining the support of large sections of the public. To do so, he also resorted to antisemitic prejudices and

narratives about Jews that remain potent today. He is often quoted to have remarked, “I decide who’s a Jew!” Above all, his largely populist political program was instrumental in spreading and entrenching antisemitic attitudes in Austria. Like Georg von Schönerer, he became an important source of inspiration for another politician’s budding anti-Semitism: Adolf Hitler.

Contextualization through art

Art that contextualizes historic monuments offers contemporary audiences an opportunity to reflect on the situations in which these tributes to important figures were erected and their historical contexts. It encourages critical and astute reflections on their significance for our past, the political advancements to which we owe democracy and the rule of law, and our present.

The historic monument

The monument to the former mayor of Vienna and leader of the Austrian Christian Social Party Karl Lueger is a bronze sculpture on a marble pedestal. It was designed between 1913 and 1916 by the sculptor Josef Müllner, who would later be controversial due to his role during the Nazi era. The original plans called for the monument, which was funded by donations from a broad swath of society, to be erected in front of City Hall. After delays caused by the First World War, it was installed at the Stubentor in 1926.

Growing criticism

Beginning in the 1990s, a new awareness of Austria’s role in National Socialism and a rising wave of criticism of historic monuments all over the world increasingly prompted questions about the monument to Karl Lueger. A first public challenge was brought by the artist VALIE EXPORT with a film installation in 1973. But it was not until after 2009 that the debate picked up momentum, with a wide variety of voices weighing in.

Wanted: a redesign

The question of what to do about the monument was explored again when ideas for a redesign were solicited in a competition held by the University of Applied Arts Vienna in 2009. The competition was won by the student Klemens Wihlidal. However, no dialogue involving all stakeholders ensued, and no shared initiative was taken to realize Wihlidal’s proposal. In 2010, as fraught historic monuments all over the world sparked controversies, the city government added an explanatory panel that also addressed Lueger’s political stances.

Most recent protests

In 2020, the global controversy rekindled a lively debate over Lueger and his monument in the community and in political and academic circles. In the wake of the protests, this broad-based discussion left visible marks on the monument in the form of several acts of vandalism, interventions, and attempts to coopt it. The City of Vienna responded with a participative dialogue process and subsequently announced a competition to contextualize the monument with a permanent redesign.

The competition

The invitation to submit proposals in 2022 was based on extensive scholarly and technical preparations. In collaboration with the responsible divisions of the city government, the district, and the Federal Monuments Office, the organizers compiled a detailed report on the technical requirements and possibilities, also with a view to protecting the plane tree growing on the square, a listed natural landmark. Fifteen Austrian and international artists were invited to participate in the competition. Klemens Wihlidal's proposal was again found to be the most compelling.

Competition Jury

(without titles)

- Iris Andraschek, artist
- Aleida Assmann, Anglistin, scholar of English literature, Egyptology, and literary and cultural studies (professor emerita of English and literary studies, University of Konstanz)
- Katharina Blaas, art historian and curator of art in public settings
- Markus Figl, chair/Lucia Grabetz, vice chair, District Council, 1st District of Vienna
- Felicitas Heimann-Jelinek, Jewish and art studies scholar, curator
- Sonja Huber, art historian (head, Visual Art and New Media Division, MA 7—Department of Culture, City of Vienna)
- Franz Kobermaier, architect (director, MA 19—Architecture and Urban Design)
- Hanno Loewy, literary and media scholar, journalist (director, Jewish Museum Hohenems)
- Herbert Posch, historian (senior scientist, Department of Contemporary History, University of Vienna)
- Eva-Maria Stadler, curator (professor of art and knowledge transfer, University of Applied Arts Vienna)
- Thomas D. Trummer, curator and art historian (director, Kunsthaus Bregenz)
- Herwig Turk, artist
- Heimo Zobernig, artist (professor emeritus of sculpture, Academy of Fine Arts Vienna)

The art project “Schieflage (Karl Lueger 3,5°)”

The creative redesign “Schieflage (Karl Lueger 3,5°)” [Askew (Karl Lueger 3.5°)] tilts the monument to the right by 3.5 degrees. With this simple creative gesture, the artist visually unbalances the

statue and pedestal, producing the image of a structure on the edge of falling over. The symbolic iconoclasm strips the monument of its gravitas and grandeur, an incongruity that is meant to encourage an ongoing public critical discussion of what to make of Karl Lueger's legacy in Vienna. Realization of the project and construction work.

After all necessary preparations and calls for tenders were completed, construction work to realize "Schieflage (Karl Lueger 3,5°)" began on the square in January 2026. During the construction work, damaged parts of the sculptures and reliefs were restored and the layers of paint and bitumen on the monument left from the protests removed.