



Wiener Linien and KÖR Kunst im öffentlichen Raum Wien Commission French Artist L'Atlas to Paint a Monumental Public Art Mural

In collaboration with Wiener Linien, Austria's largest public transport network operating some 180 underground, tram and bus lines, and KÖR Paris-based French artist L'Atlas launches an ambitious permanent public art project that will see him paint a colossal mural measuring 170 m x 7 m on a publicly-accessible retaining wall east of Hadikgasse 312, located next to the Hütteldorf station on Line U4 of the Vienna U-Bahn in the 14th district, Penzing. At the exit of the West Autobahn and running alongside the Wien River, the new cultural landmark for the city is scheduled to be activated on 16 August 2020, thereby metamorphosing the urban landscape and reshaping contemporary experience through the transformational quality of art.

Born in 1978 in Toulouse, L'Atlas aka Jules Dedet Granel started tagging in the streets of Paris in 1990, but instead of painting figurative characters, it was the letter that fascinated him. His style has since evolved beyond graffiti, as he fuses the optical, abstract, minimalist and geometric art movements with his research on writing and calligraphy to produce an original typography. Aiming to invent a universal pictorial language, he has successfully embedded the history of writing into the history of art and brought optical art inside graffiti. Known for the giant ground compass he created for the plaza of Paris' Centre Pompidou and the death-defying mural he painted on the façade of a 35-metre-tall building in Paris where his name in geometrical form appears from afar, he has designed the logo for Rihanna's fashion brand Fenty, was the face of Jimmy Choo's Urban Hero fragrance ad campaign, launched capsule collections with Agnès b. who organised his first gallery show, and collaborated with Perrier to decorate 200 million cans and bottles. Today, he works not only on canvas and paper, but has been exploring the properties of wood, steel, marble, ceramic and neon.

Proposed by Barbara Wolffer and selected by the five-member 2014-2016 jury of KÖR, which manages art projects in Vienna's public space, L'Atlas was commissioned in January 2017 to leave his mark on the Wiener Linien wall. Now over a two-week period this August, he and his team of six assistants will accomplish a technical feat, tackling a surface that is inclined, striated with long lines hollowed out every metre and located on a bypass with heavy traffic. He will be inscribing the phrase "Underground systems will never die!" on the wall, flanked by his stylised "L'Atlas" signature on either side. A play on words, his use of the term "underground" celebrates not only the Vienna subway, but also the underground art movements that will always continue to exist outside of the mainstream.



L'Atlas himself originated from the underground art of graffiti, which was born in the United States and arrived in France in the 1980s. Street art arose from the historical continuity of this movement via the likes of Keith Haring, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Andy Warhol, Futura and Rammellzee in New York, which then crossed the Atlantic thanks to artists such as JonOne. Today, underground movements including Calligraffiti or urban exploration see groups trespassing on Parisian sites like St. Sulpice Church, the Grand Palais, the catacombs and metro tunnels. "It's to develop the subversive side of my thinking that I use the word designating the place on which I work," L'Atlas says. "Through this, I consider myself an in situ artist like Daniel Buren who plays with the surrounding space, Gordon Matta-Clark who converts a place into a state of mind or Christo who transforms a site by wrapping it while retaining its architectural strength."

In contrast to the chaotic colours of the city streets, L'Atlas' letters based on vertical and horizontal lines will appear in attention-grabbing black and white. The aim is to become visible in the public space in an unorthodox and optical manner to ensure people stop to take the time to read and contemplate his writing. Believing that colour is anecdotal and narrative, while radical black and white speaks of purity and the essence of the idea, embodying the notion of reflection, he hopes to encourage viewers to linger and meditate on his message and the world around us before disappearing into the streets again.

"What I like about outdoor public commissions is the idea of becoming eternal and participating in the history of the city," L'Atlas concludes. "It's good to sell pieces that are going to be in collections, but there is something stronger in the street because you don't need to pay to see it: it's free. They're totally different energies. In the studio, it's more like meditation. When you're in the street, it's like an extreme sport such as rock climbing, or a war zone: there are a lot of people speaking to you, there's traffic, the vertical platform lift is really dangerous to use. You wonder why you're doing it, but sometimes you need this energy to come back to the studio. It's a performance, something extraordinary that suddenly gives life meaning, something heroic almost because you risk your life. This idea of risking your life to be eternal is a myth that I really like."

Y-Jean Mun-Delsalle (August 2020)