

UN CITIES



UN CITIES explores the architecture and visual language of the United Nations—not as a series of monuments, but as a functional infrastructure and interconnected network. A kaleidoscope of internationalism—an ever-shifting landscape of negotiation, where architecture becomes an organic threshold between openness and control, the global and the local, idealism and bureaucracy.

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“Everything will be all right - you know when?
When people, just people, stop thinking of the United Nations
as a weird Picasso abstraction and see it as
a drawing they made themselves.”

Dag Hammarskjöl (UN Secretary-General, 1953-1961)

Concept



1958 UNESCO House
Paris, France
Headquarters of UNESCO.
Designed by Marcel Breuer and others.



1952 UN Headquarters
New York, USA
New York City was selected as the site for the United Nations headquarters. Completed in 1952, the building became a landmark of the emerging International Style in architecture. The design team included renowned architects such as Oscar Niemeyer and Le Corbusier.



1966 UN Office at Geneva
Geneva, Switzerland
Originally League of Nations (1936); became a UN office in 1946



1966 UN ECLAC
Santiago, Chile



1974 UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA)
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia



1979 UN Office at Vienna
Vienna, Austria

The Vienna International Centre, home of the United Nations, is commonly known as UNO-City in Vienna.



1976 UN ESCAP
Bangkok, Thailand



1996 UN Office at Nairobi (UNON)
Nairobi, Kenya
HQ of UNEP and UN-Habitat; only UN HQ in the Global South



2004 UN House, Brasilia
Brasilia, Brazil



2015 UN House, Abuja
Abuja, Nigeria



1996 UN House, Beirut
Beirut, Lebanon

UN CITIES brings together the architecture and vision of the United Nations across the globe, turning its many sites into a network of spaces where global ideals take form. UN CITIES stands for cities within cities, the whole world in many places at once.

According to official terminology, the UN headquarters are not located within their respective host countries, but are merely surrounded by them. The United Nations maintains headquarters in New York, Geneva, Vienna, and Nairobi, along with numerous UN sites across the globe. These places tell stories of crises and solutions, of negotiations and progress, of the search for cohesion in a world full of differences. They stand for cooperation, diversity and a common desire for understanding and embody internationality at its core.

Although this vision is almost 80 years old, its aspirations are more relevant than ever. How can these initial ideas be revitalized in a time that needs them more urgently than ever before?

For many, the United Nations will remain an abstract figure in 2026. What once began with optimism and a grand vision has lost some of its brilliance over the decades. The architecture of these places is symbolic: intended as a sign of openness and dialog, they often appear hermetically enclosed. Their secure structures - high fences, guard posts, concrete barriers - reflect the fragility of the vision. This contradiction raises questions: How can an open dialog be made possible under such conditions? How visible and approachable is the idea of the international community?

What role does architecture play in the perception of global institutions? And how could a reorientation of architecture convey the right message?

This is where the UN CITIES project comes in. It explores the architecture of UN buildings as the visual language of an international community. It addresses the question of how architecture itself can be a form of international dialog and cultural synthesis. Although these buildings undeniably carry a touch of retro-futurism, they embody an idea that goes far beyond international style.

What makes these places so special? Is it the architecture itself that makes us think with its monumentality? Or is it the invisible narrative inherent in these buildings - the hopes associated with them, the forces that shake them? How can a place reflect the dynamics of world politics? And what role does its architecture play in the way we perceive these institutions? How does a building reflect a collective mindset? What is the true value of a place in the global age?

UN CITIES makes the architecture of the UN tangible in a new way: In a multi-channel video installation, the UN headquarters are deconstructed and merged into a visual and conceptual synthesis. The montage of fragmented views creates a new, hybrid structure - an image in motion. The composition resembles a mosaic that consists of many individual parts, but only comes together as a whole through the viewer's perception: Each individual constructs their own image of the UN and relates their own perspective to the big questions of our time.

UN CITIES is a reflection on the role of architecture as a carrier of ideologies, as a projection surface for hopes and as a silent witness to a changing world order. It is an attempt to make the invisible DNA of these places visible and to understand them as dynamic, living entities. The United Nations is not a static construct, but an ongoing movement, an organic network of visions, ideas and actions.

At a time when global challenges are more urgent than ever, UN CITIES calls for the architecture of the United Nations to be seen not as untouchable symbolism, but as a space that affects us all - and in which we can all participate. The project is not a nostalgic look back,

but a plea for a renewed vision. It invites us to see the UN not as a distant institution, but as a shared project - a visual reflection on a world in transition and an idea that can grow with it.

Even if UN CITIES ultimately remains as abstract as a Picasso painting, it offers essential insights into the world of the United Nations. Like a kaleidoscope, it brings together fragments from various UN sites to form a constantly shifting visual composition - one that invites each viewer to construct their own interpretation. In the end, it's not the images that remain, but the idea on which they are based: the bigger picture.

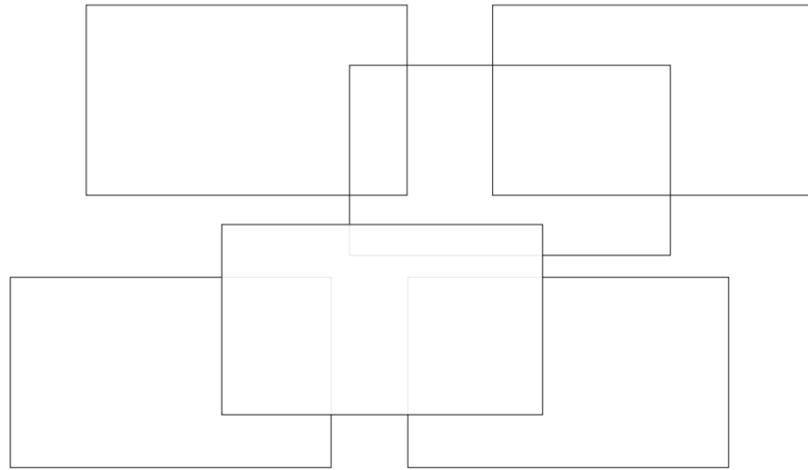
Multi-channel Moving Image Installation

UN CITIES explores the architecture and visual language of the United Nations—not as a series of monuments, but as a functional infrastructure and interconnected network.

A kaleidoscope of internationalism unfolds: an ever-shifting landscape of negotiation in which architecture becomes an organic threshold between openness and control, the global and the local, idealism and bureaucracy.

Combining images from major UN headquarters and offices worldwide, UN CITIES takes the form of a multi-channel moving-image installation.

Fragmented perspectives dissolve into a hybrid experience. Viewers become co-architects, assembling their own image of the UN through shifting layers of space, form, and narrative.



Through algorithmic composition, ever-shifting visual formations emerge—an image in motion, a continuously renewing structure that, like the United Nations itself, operates as a living organism.



Exhibition draft: UN CITIES, 6 Screen Video-Installation, The Barracks, Lahore, Pakistan, 2026

Status Quo/Timeline

- 01–06/2025: Research and concept development
 - Ongoing discussions and coordination with the UN Communications Department, the Austrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and other project participants
 - Project planning with Anne Thomas, Laura Skocek, and Irene Hoeglinger (UN Information Service Vienna)
 - Initial funding commitment from the BMWKMS – IV (Arts and Culture)
- 08–11/2025: Filming for the pioneering project “UNO CITY – Vienna International Centre”
- 11/2025: Video editing / test screening / UN feedback and approval
- 01/2026: Final version UNO CITY, 3 Screen-installation, 12:00 Min.

Production/Travel Plans 2026

- 02/2026: Securing financing and signing of legal agreements for filming in selected UN buildings
- 05/2026: Exhibition “UNO CITY – Vienna International Centre” in the Rotunda of the UN VIENNA – still tbc

04–09/2026:

- Filming for the UN CITIES art project at selected UN headquarters (worldwide) – all locations still to be confirmed except UNOV
 - UN Office at Vienna (UNO City), Austria (including UNODC, UNIDO, IAEA)
 - UN Headquarters, New York, USA (designed by Le Corbusier and Oscar Niemeyer, among others)
 - UN Office at Geneva, Switzerland (originally the Palace of Nations, 1936; UN headquarters since 1946)
 - UN Office at Nairobi (UNON), Kenya (headquarters of UNEP and UN-Habitat)
 - UNESCO House, Paris, France (UNESCO headquarters, designed by Marcel Breuer, among others)
 - UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
 - UN ESCAP, Bangkok, Thailand (originally ECAFE, since 1974 ESCAP)
 - UN ECLAC, Santiago de Chile (originally ECLA, ECLAC since 1984)

Exhibitions/Presentations 2026

- 09/2026: Editing and post-production UN CITIES
- 11/2026: Exhibition of UN CITIES at THE BARRACKS, Lahore, Pakistan
- 12/2026: Screenings and exhibition of UN CITIES in Vienna



Conceptual sketch: UN CITIES, Multi-Screen-Video-Installation



Conceptual sketch: UN CITIES, Multi-Screen-Video-Installation

Architecture photography meets moving images – presented as a multi-screen installation. Fragmented perspectives dissolve into a hybrid experience. Viewers become co-architects, assembling their own image of the UN through shifting layers of space, form, and narrative.

UNO CITY – An Extraterritorial Landmark in an Interconnected World

3-Screen Video Installation, 2025/2026



UNO CITY is the starting point of the broader UN CITIES project, focusing on a single site while keeping all others in view. It examines the Vienna International Centre – widely known to everyone as UNO-City.

Officially extraterritorial, yet unmistakably part of Vienna’s urban fabric, the UNO-City functions as a “city within a city” and exists in a constant state of negotiation – an open dialogue – between inside and outside, sovereignty and cooperation, openness and restriction. Its position is ambivalent: physically embedded in the city yet politically apart from it; locally situated yet globally operative; public in purpose but private in access. Its form speaks without words, standing for something greater, while inside, the steady work of diplomacy unfolds: the careful choreography of governance, the subtle balance between neutrality and influence.

The architecture of the UN building in Vienna resists monumental gestures. It doesn’t monumentalize unity or peace but instead translates these ambitions into spatial logic – through a radial layout, modular offices, and repetitive forms. This is architecture as system, not spectacle. The building’s very form embodies the tension between universal ideals and localized implementation – a kind of translation machine positioned between the global and the immediate.

Like other UN headquarters around the world, UNO-City speaks the architectural language of

multilateralism – characterized by abstraction, efficiency, and aesthetic neutrality. In Vienna, this global infrastructure is situated within a specific urban and cultural landscape. Fenced, surveilled, and bureaucratically regulated, the UNO-City is at once a tool for worldwide coordination and a stranger in its own neighborhood.

UNO CITY approaches this condition cinematically – not by documenting the building as a static object, but by activating it as a site of layered contradictions, navigating between ideals and constraints, access and denial, the visible and the hidden. The 3-screen-installation fragments and reassembles the architecture and its surroundings, revealing how global values are choreographed through material and form.

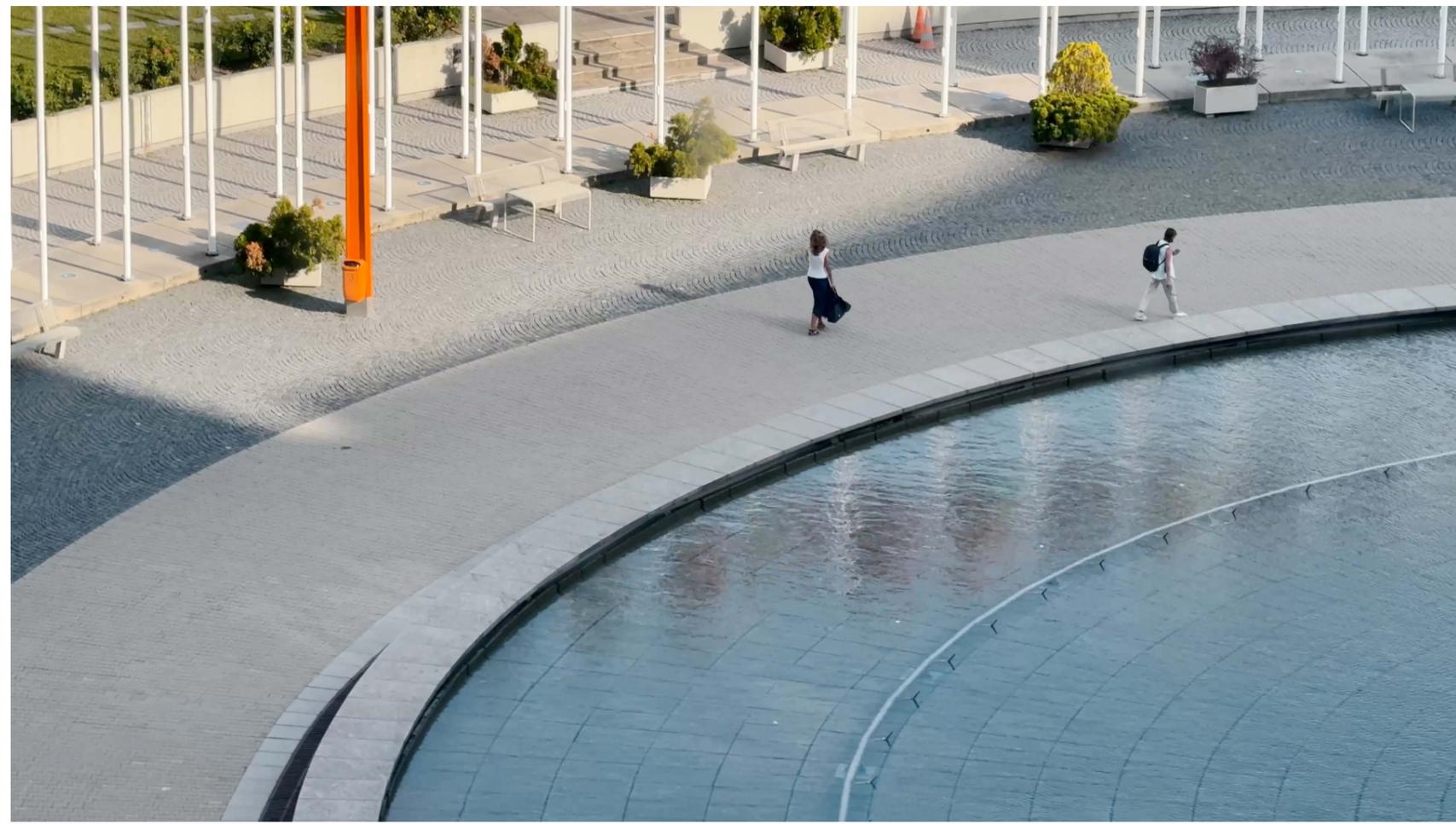
How local can an international style truly become – especially through the eyes of those living alongside it? Can a building speak both the abstract language of diplomacy and the specific dialect of place? Might we see global institutions through the lens of local internationalism – not as sealed, standalone structures dropped into cities, but as active parts of the communities they inhabit? Can such architecture belong to both – everywhere and somewhere – at once?

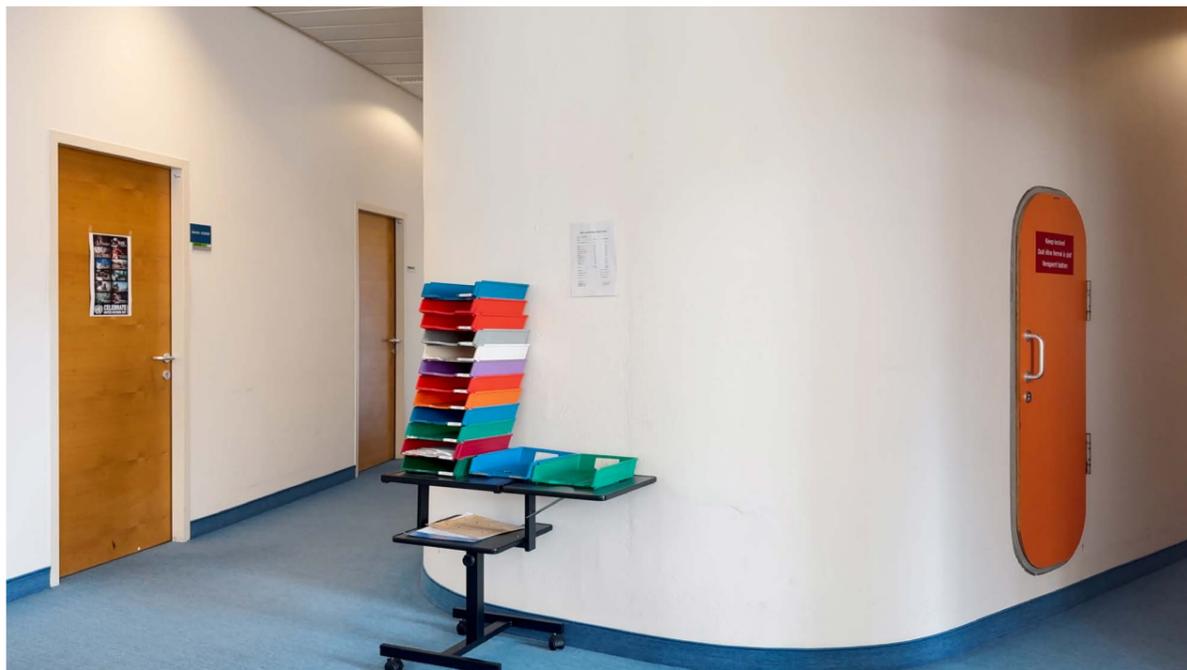
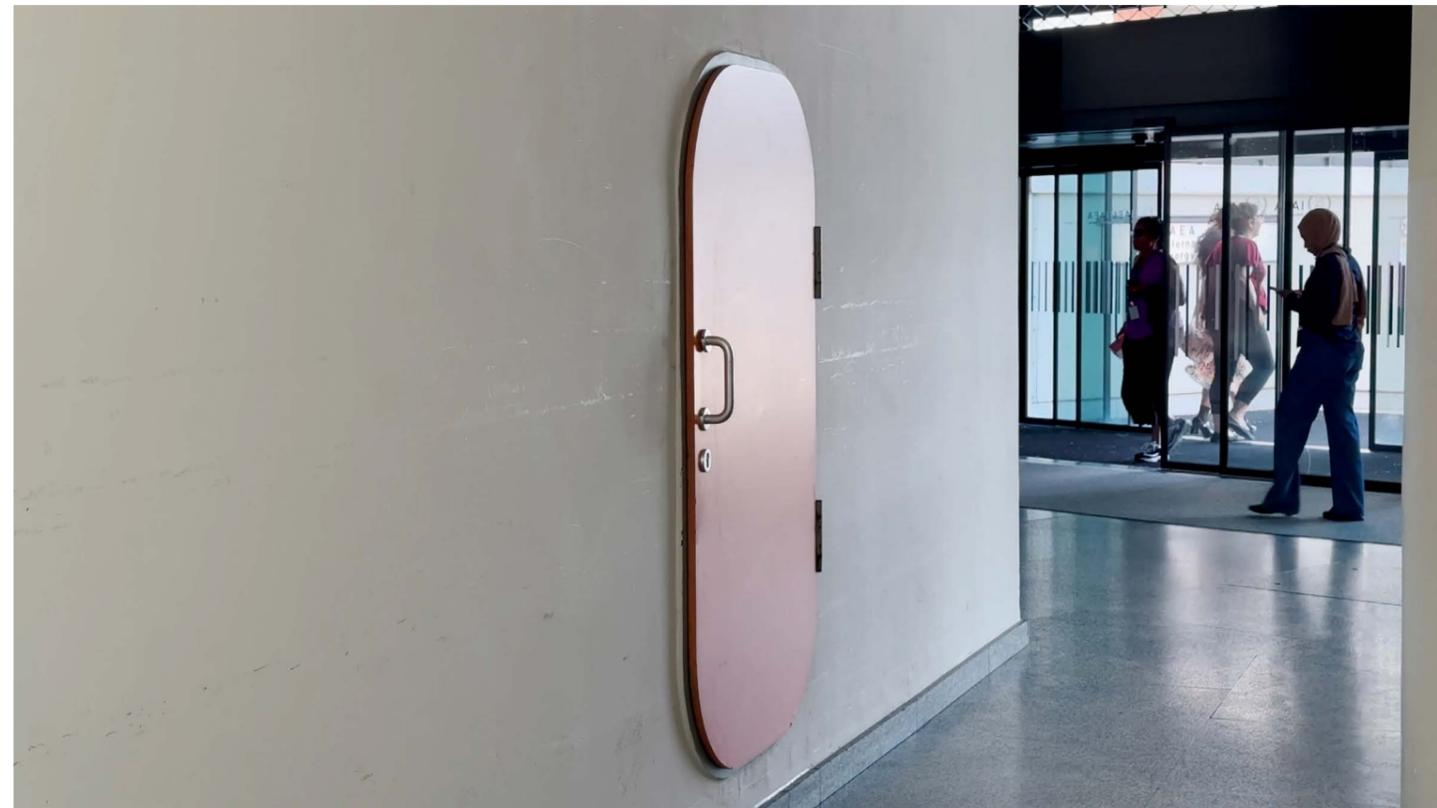
UNO CITY offers no fixed conclusion. It invites a way of viewing United Nations’ visual identity through the International Style of architecture – not as a statement, but as a negotiation: ongoing, unfinished, and deeply grounded.



Exhibition draft: UNO CITY – 3 Screen installation, 12:00 Min., UN Vienna, Vienna International Centre

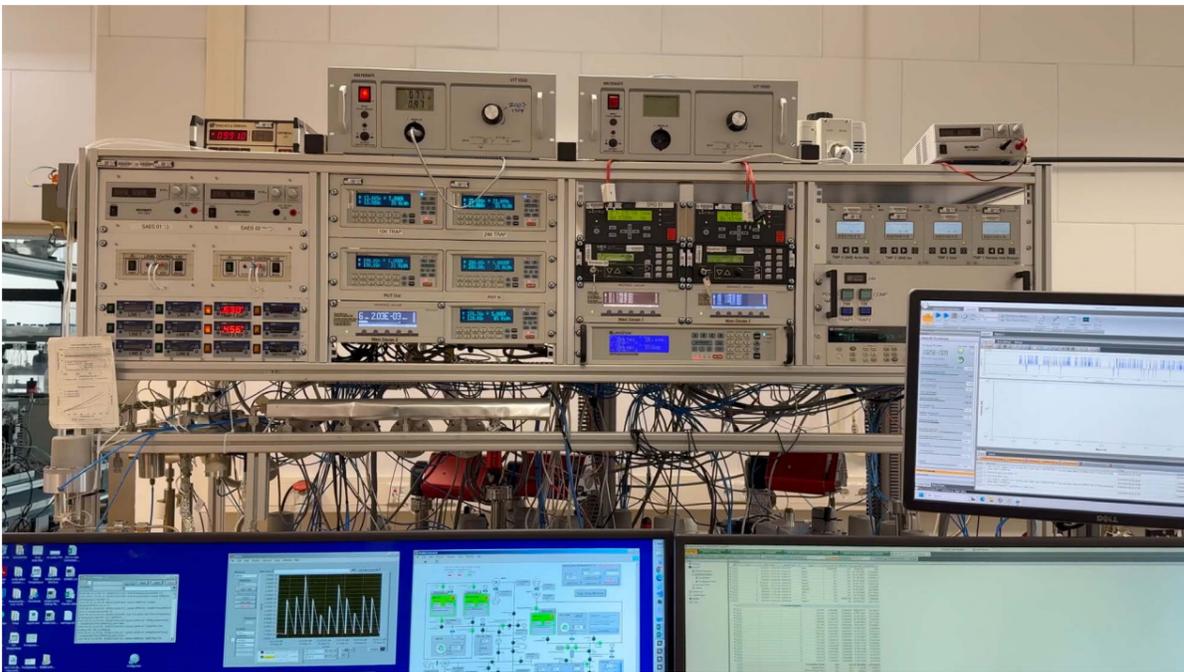
Video Stills

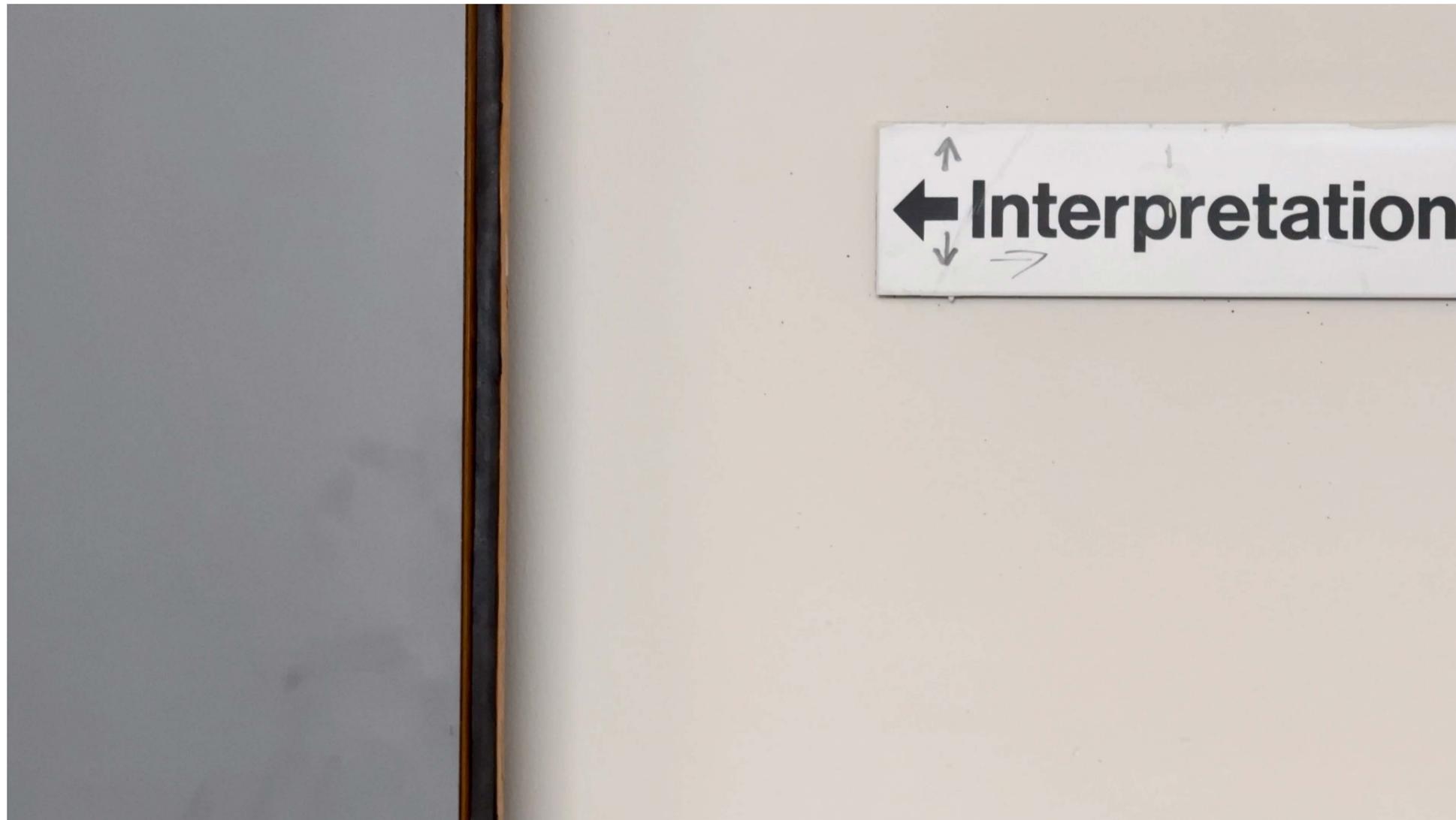






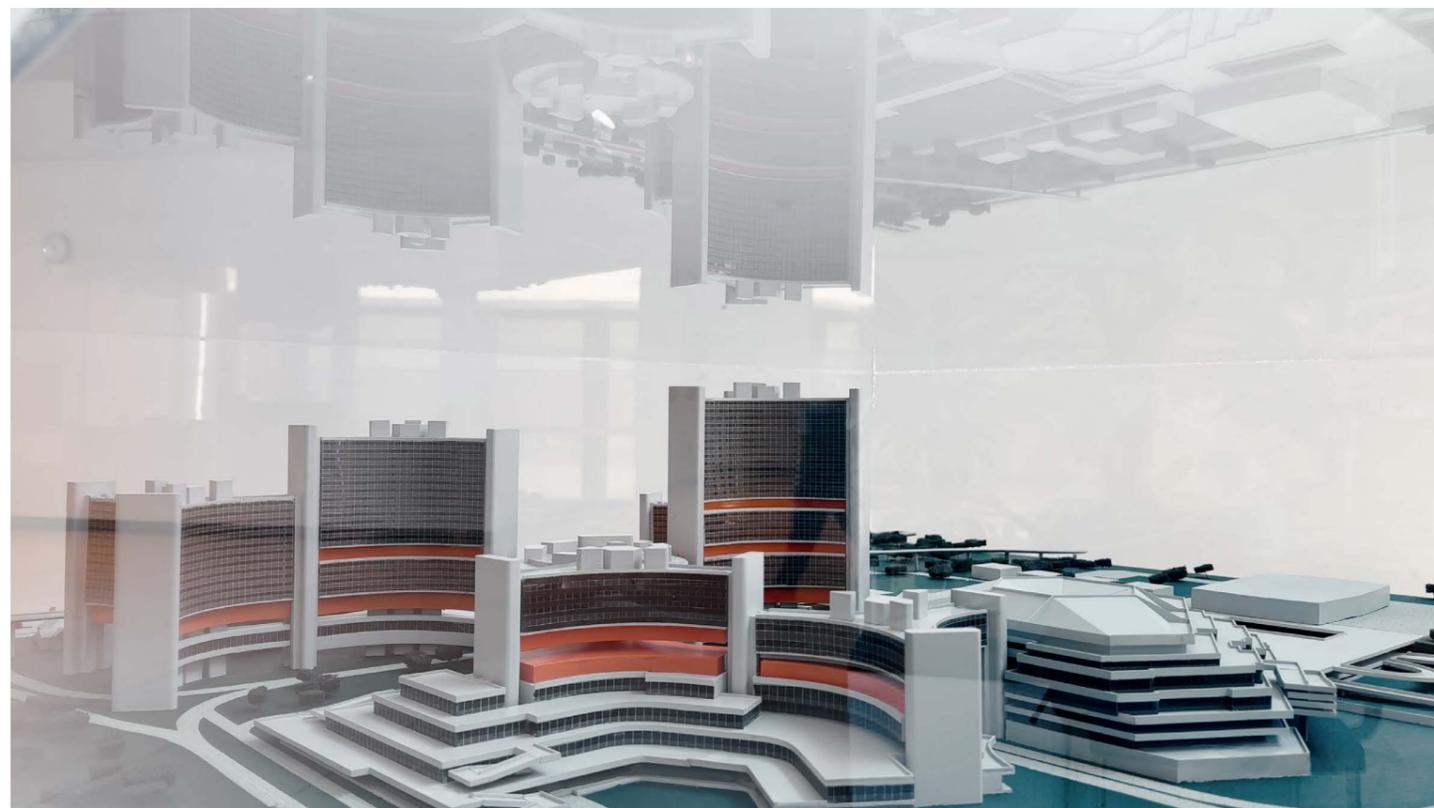
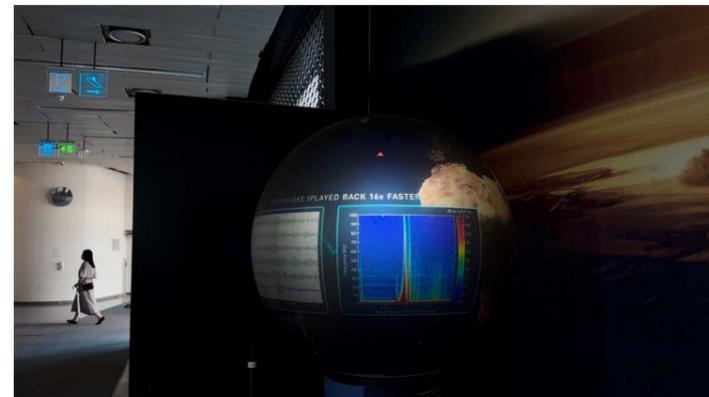












Wolfgang Lehrner / Bio

The observation and visualization of local determined characteristics of cities, the spaces between them, and the resulting global transformability run through Wolfgang Lehrner's works. Cosmopolitan in his investigations, the artist responds to the change and the importance of seemingly insignificant similarities, as well as the opposition of urban areas, cities and their networking in the cultural, socio-economic, historical and metaphysical sense.

In his way of working Lehrner consciously uses coincidence to determine the direction of aimless drifting, headed by the respective routes, squares, streets and places. The resulting cinematic portraits of everyday urban life are essentially results of the search for the particular.

www.wolfganglehrner.com