

‘Shut Up and See What Happens’

Artist Susanne Kessler and architect Petra Eichler used paper to make a singular statement: ‘Shut up and listen to the silence.’

Text by Eva Schaap
Photography by Herbert Cybulska and Martin Bott

I can't see the forest for the trees any more. You created a woodland of paper in an old building in Frankfurt for the sake of silence?

Everybody's in a hurry all the time. We wanted people to stop and hear the silence, as they would in a real forest. It's good to shut up once in a while and see what happens around you.



But it's not completely silent. I hear birds.

Well, as American composer John Cage put it, ‘Silence is not the absence of sound. It's about the ability to open up to that omnipresent sound of silence.’

And that's something you can do with paper?

Paper is an interesting material. It's simple and poetic, and it has the same magical quality a real forest has. When we thought about how to make people shut up and how to create silence, we felt we had to design a fragile space. Because when people have to be careful not to damage anything, they're often silent as well. The first design featured dandelions and butterflies, but animal welfare and transportation problems forced us to find a material that would be equally fragile, simple and natural – but not actually alive. If you want to design a space that works with the silent strength of the fragile, paper is the only option.

So you bought a roll of newsprint and went to work.

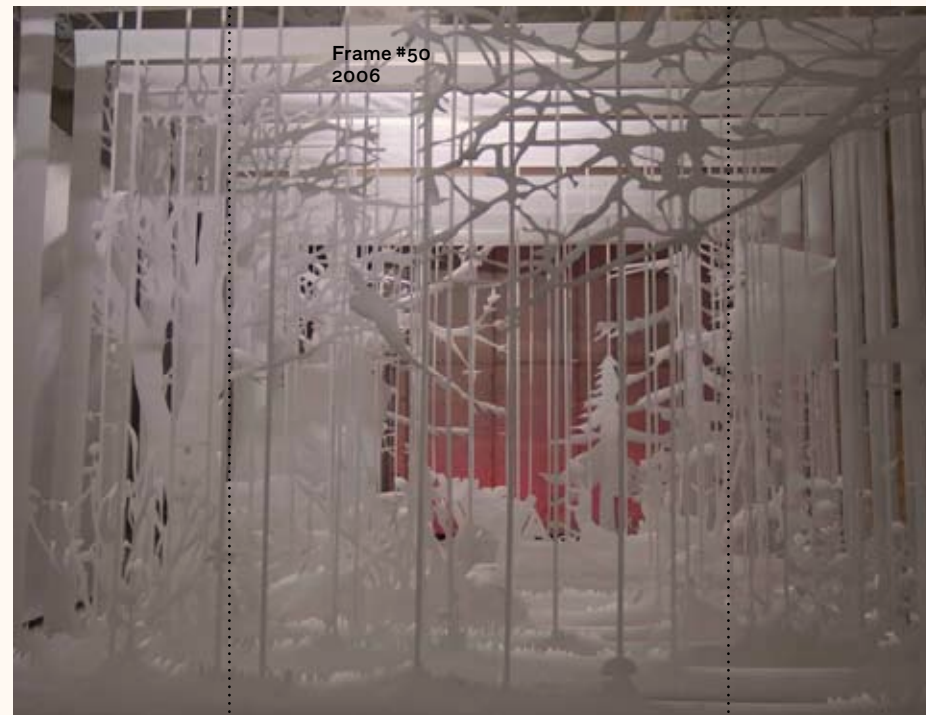
Well, not exactly. First, we spent 24 hours in a real forest doing the same thing that rangers do: watching animals pass by and taking pictures. The forest was obscure and magical but also silent in its own way. Because we wanted those visiting the installation to have the same sort of experience, we needed a kind of paper

that looks fragile.

But not so fragile that it can't take the wear and tear caused by human

activity.

After several tests, we decided to use Dupont's Tyvek paper – made with polyethylene fibres – since it not only looks fragile but also is tear-proof and water-resistant. The



Frame #50
2006

Installation composed of eleven 4-x-6-m sheets of paper in wooden frames suspended from the ceiling.

paper is coated, so we were able to print Susanne's drawings of forest scenery directly on its surface.

Okay. At that point you had 11 sheets of paper covered in unique patterns that had to be cut out.

Just picture us on our knees – for days on end – wearing socks and gloves to try to keep the paper clean. Three to four people cutting out the prints with scalpels. A difficult and exhausting job. My knees still hurt. But each day we saw the forest grow, and that was amazing.

You fell silent?

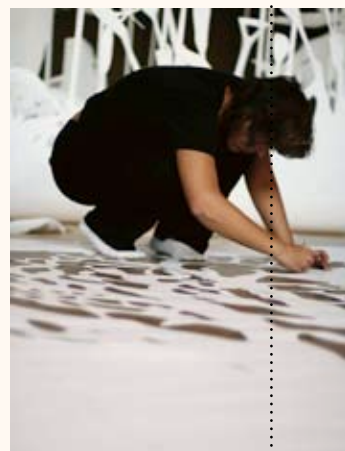
Uhhh . . . well, yes.

And the people who visited the paper forest?

Because the paper appeared to be so fragile, they were not only silent but also very surprised. They didn't expect a paper installation this big.

Do you have any other ideas involving paper?

We made this installation for the Droog Design stand at the furniture fair in Milan as well. We built an even bigger one there – it was 16 m long – whereas the installation in Frankfurt is 7 m long. For Droog we also used another type of paper, because the forest scenery was water-cut. As for the future, we'd love to make an underground installation out of paper.



This installation is on display in a building on Weissfrauenstrasse in Frankfurt until the end of July 2006.

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