Where does the rainbow end?

Katja Loher's art project at Swissgrid's head office in Aarau

swissgrid

Where does the rainbow end?

And where does it start? The artistic rainbow that symbolically runs through Swissgrid's headquarters first took shape in April 2015. The project submitted by the Swiss-New York artist Katja Loher was then selected for realisation.

There's something magical about rainbows. This is also true of Loher's rainbow, on which ants move through the elements water, earth, air and fire and on into a dream world. On seven sections of the 'Videoline' they traverse the colour spectrum of the rainbow. Beginning with red for the element of fire through to violet for the realm of dreams, and the subsequent transformation at the end of the rainbow, the end of the ants' journey. As a symbol of the contrast between nature and culture, the environment changed by man, the ants metamorphose into electrons, the particles that flash through our power grid so that we can lead a life with all modern comforts.

In the videos of the line of ants and the Bubbles, up to 80 layers merge into fantasy worlds. Rainforest of the Amazon. Coastal bays of the Caribbean Ocean. Rice fields of Nepal. The mysterious vapours arising from Peru's boiling-hot Mayantuyacu River. Paso del Angel, a mountain ridge trail in Colombia. And electricity pylons in the Swiss mountains, which, seen through the artist's eyes, are transformed into an abstract net pattern. Through her projects and the travel they involved to places far off the well-trodden tourist paths, Loher comes into contact with indigenous people, shamans and other creators of art. The viewer is invited on a journey through her fantastic miniverses that adds inspiration and a different frequency into everyday life.

While at Swissgrid the 'real world' of electricity is set at 50 Hertz, Loher's ants run at a different frequency. The artist engages with the ecological concerns of our planet in her works, treating themes such endangered flora and fauna, climate change and the fundamentally unsustainable relationship between man and nature. With her work, Loher seeks to sensitise viewers to the beauty but also the vulnerability of nature. The video compositions created for Swissgrid use their magic to highlight modern concerns relating to energy, digital worlds, society and sustainability. The 'Videoline', which appears as an artistic element in Loher's works for the first time, was inspired by the architectural concept and the

The organically shaped Bubbles present a contemplative contrast to the flow and movement of the Videoline.

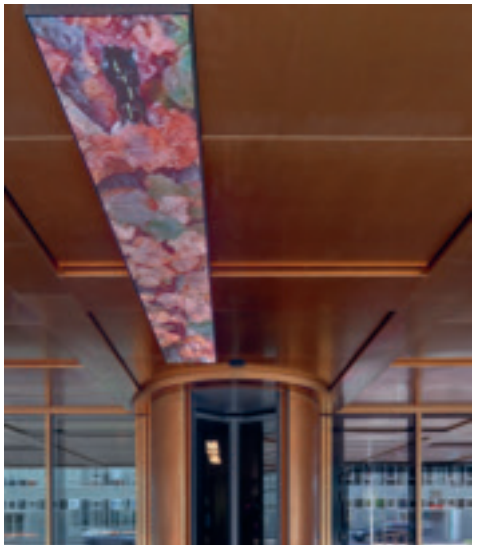
Le soleil produit-il du courant jaune ? Hat Regen Angst, wenn er fällt? Dov'è il cuore elettrico del mondo? Can ants lift our continent? Hat Elektrizität die Kraft zu heilen? Y a-t-il des fleurs électriques ? Come parlano le formiche alla terra? What green shades does energy take? Geht Elektrizität im Wald verloren? Peut-on rêver un rêve commun ? Will the grid become a brain? L'elettricità può pulirci il futuro?

grid, which is depicted in multiple elements. It welcomes visitors under the overhang at the front, and flows through the entrance and market hall to the auditorium. It crosses the entire ground floor in a staccato rhythm. Ants march like flowing current, ultimately metamorphosing into electrons, symbolising the fluidity of the medium of electricity.

Viewers are confronted with enigmatic, philosophical questions that draw them back to the magic of the work on a poetic level in four languages. Ants choreographed by the artist and filmed from above form a video alphabet. The danced letter shapes then form words and these in turn become questions.

Loher's choreography, which embeds these text layers in complex scenarios, found its inspiration in the ant colonies: vast networks, good organisation and division of labour. Each individual is assigned certain tasks. The contribution of the individual boosts the reliability of the system as a whole. "Many individuals" guarantee the security of the system and the efficiency of the work through the division of labour and tasks. The information they exchange enables the ant colony to regulate its collecting activity. The memory of previously visited locations is preserved and makes it possible to choose between locations of varying yield.

"Where does the rainbow end?" is a metaphor for the active interaction of people, born of a synthesis of choreography, dance, costumes and poetry. For Swissgrid, this work of art, closely interwoven as it is with the architecture, is the artistic antithesis to the world of work.



Questions in English, German, French and Italian lead to the magic of the work. As portals into the mysterious silence, they inspire creative action.

Photos: Grazia Branco

The artist

Katja Loher reflects on our world. Beauty as the artistic core statement can be seen everywhere.

Katja Loher was born in Zurich in 1979. She lives and works in New York. Her works are exhibited in numerous solo and group exhibitions worldwide and can be found in important private and public collections on all continents.

The artist has received various awards such as the TPC CreaTVty Award (2004), and completed artist residencies in New York, Berlin, Brazil, Beijing and India. In her work, Loher has been developing various forms of video sculpture for over ten years, where she combines elements of nature and technology. She is being awarded ever more commissions by renowned institutions with "Arts & Archi- tecture" projects in which the viewer is invited into her worlds – miniverses – with fantastic images and philosophical questions.

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A highlight of urban planning

Future-oriented working environment
at Swissgrid's head office in Aarau

swissgrid

The home of the Swissgrid spirit

The building not only stands out for its striking appearance, but also provides an innovative and attractive working environment that offers many different forms of communication and ways of coming into contact with each other.

The district to the south of Aarau railway station is currently undergoing a dynamic development process from an industrial site to a vibrant place to live and work. The demolition of the old production buildings on the former Electrolux site resulted in an attractive, central and well-developed location, ideal for the planned new headquarters of the national grid company, Swissgrid.

With the construction of the new office building, a compact, self-contained structure has been added to the spatially heterogeneous environment which, with its vertical orientation to the linear structure of the street space, assertively takes its place within the existing architectural context and enables greater permeability in the new quarter alongside the station. An elongated green courtyard has been cut out of its centre, inviting the building's occupants to exchange ideas and collaborate in the open air.
It also ensures that all work surfaces are optimally supplied with daylight.

The office building is owned by CSA Real Estate Switzerland, an investment group of the Credit Suisse Investment Foundation. With its five staircase cores accessible from the outside, the simple and flexible basic structure allows the building to accommodate a single tenant or, in the long term, multiple tenants.

Access is from Bleichemattstrasse via an entrance hall connecting to the meeting zones that open out into the green inner courtyard. A lounge area and adjoining meeting and conference rooms, plus the cafeteria with interior and exterior seating, all facilitate many different forms of working, meeting other people and communicating.

The workplaces on the three upper floors are reached via the access cores. The solid cores, arranged at regular intervals in the floor plan, provide a clear structure and orientation, and permit various forms of organisation and work scenarios in the office zones.

At the centre of the building, the Grid Control Centre, the heart of Swissgrid, is supplied with sufficient daylight via generous windows onto the green inner courtyard, but at the same

In the Grid Control Centre, the Swiss transmission grid is monitored around the clock.

The building enables many different forms of working, meeting other people and communicating.

The materials used give the company an inviting appearance.

The working environment is designed in line with the latest findings from research and practice.

time protected from prying eyes and direct sunlight.

The choice of colours and materials takes into account the requirements of a comfortable working environment that caters to modern working habits. Besides the deliberate use of colour, natural materials that exude warmth, warm lighting and informal, cosy furnishings were chosen.

All together under one roof, in an inspiring working environment – this was the intention behind Swissgrid's relocation to Aarau.

The working environment was developed in conjunction with Martin Kleibrink from Smart in Space based on the latest findings from research and practice. The aim of the resulting "business club" concept is to promote better collaboration with internal and external stakeholders. There is a particular emphasis on multiple uses of the available space. Depending on the task at hand and a person's needs, there is a wide range of shared workplaces and work zones to choose from – from the seclusion of a "privacy office", to project workrooms, meeting rooms or team zones, to a buzzing market hall that encourages the spontaneous exchange of ideas, everything is for everyone.

The new kind of collaboration, which is consistently embraced by directors, managers and employees, enhances the interdisciplinary exchange across team and divisional boundaries, and enables task-oriented working.

Photos: Kuster Frey

The architects

Schneider & Schneider identifies needs and translates them consistently into architectural spaces.

Brothers Thomas and Beat Schneider studied architecture at ETH Zurich. After stints working for renowned Swiss architecture firms, they founded the joint architectural office "Schneider & Schneider Architects ETH BSA SIA AG, Aarau" in 1997, which today has 60 employees. In 2005 they were admitted to the Association of Swiss Architects (BSA).

Following successful competitions, the "Kantonsspital Frauenfeld, Project Horizont (2008 – 2020)", the "Laboratory Building of Forensic Medicine and Clinical Research of the University of Bern (2016 – 2020)" and the "Organ Centre Inselspital Bern (2014 – 2018 /2021)" are currently being planned and built.

Other major projects completed include the "Extension and Renovation of the Eye Clinic at Lucerne Cantonal Hospital (2009 – 2016)", the "GastroSocial High-Rise and Office Building" in the new Aeschbach Quarter in Aarau (2012 – 2016) and the new build of the "Cafeteria and Media Centre of the Old Cantonal School" in Aarau (2005 – 2008).

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