



## WALTER PICHLER: ARCHITECTURE-SCULPTURE

---

The summer of 2022 marks the 10th anniversary of the death of the Austrian artist Walter Pichler. Pichler was born in 1936 in the Ega Valley in Alto Adige and arrived in Austria as a child with his family following the South Tyrol Option Agreement. This forced move was a traumatic experience for him. Walter Pichler is one of the greatest anti-conformists of contemporary European art. His first works are in the field of utopian architecture, a movement that emerged in Vienna in the 1960s and attracted international attention due to its attempt to free architecture from the limits of physical implementation.

What characterises Pichler's work is the way its combination of drawing, sculpture and architecture form a continuum with fluid transitions. His exhibitions at MoMA in New York and important European museums and institutions, including Documenta in Kassel and the Venice Biennale are indications of the international acclaim for his work. He is what can be described as an artists' artist, in that, he is a 'total artist', admired, above all, by other artists (and architects).

To mark the 10th anniversary of his death, Museion is exhibiting eleven drawings from its collection that are part of Pichler's "Haus in der Schlucht" cycle (1991) in its Passage exhibition space. What makes these works special is that they are architectural drawings, but also artworks in their own right with a clear tension between the precision of construction and an underlying archaic tone. These drawings develop the dream long cultivated by the artist to build a tower in the low, wild part of the Ega Valley, in which he lived during his visits to Alto Adige. In line with the drawings, the building is lit from above as the gorge is so narrow. The 1991 drawings exhibited at Museion are the groundwork for the "Haus neben der Schmiede" (House next to the Smithy) that was completed at Ponte Nova in 2002. The tower later became a low building with a semi-basement structure also lit from above. The artist built this house together with his South Tyrolean cousins that run a steel construction company in Bolzano. The house was designed to be a refuge for the artist and a place for his family to meet.

The old smithy in Ponte Nova has belonged to the Pichler family for generations. The last person to run it was the artist's uncle and before that, his grandfather. So, the place is strongly linked to the artist's family history. He once said that one of the most important materials the House next to the Smithy is made of is memory. The old smithy, the house and a platform overlooking the river, originally designed along with them, but only completed in 2015, create a unique whole.

Not only the building, but also the furniture in the House next to the Smithy was designed in detail by Walter Pichler and hand-crafted according to his meticulous instructions. Here, Pichler's craft approach and the most advanced technology are fused together with the utmost precision. This is an example of complex cultural heritage in which centuries-old craft traditions, high technology, art, and architecture blend together in an extraordinary way.

Pichler's sculptures find their ideal location, not in a museum or art gallery, but in St. Martin in Burgenland, where the artist's house is also situated. Every sculpture has its own architectural shell, specifically designed and handmade by the artist.



The fact that it is not easy to see Walter Pichler's sculptures is what makes the Ega Valley so special. The presentation at Museion aims to draw attention to this ensemble.

In agreement with the Pichler family who own the House next to the Smithy, the ensemble will be open to the public for three Thursdays, on the 30th June, 28th July and 1st September (reservations are required and can be made by contacting Museion at 0471/223413). On 16th July, the Ega Valley Bildungsausschüsse (Further education committees) will also hold a party at the house for residents of the valley.

**Andreas Hapkemeyer**