

significans.maybe today

**Dimensions of waiting during the asylum procedure,
movements in open space**

An installation by *significans* projects in the lobby of the Museum of World Culture in Gothenburg. The opening of the exhibition will coincide with the conference "Coming From Afar" organised by the Swedish National Thematic Network "Asylum Seekers" under the EU Community Initiative *Equal*

Exhibition: October 25 until November 27, 2005-10-10

About waiting...

A refugee that, despite the odds, manages to reach the shores of an EU Member State to apply for asylum can find themselves facing a long and worrying period of having to wait, yet not knowing how long they will have to wait and not knowing what will come of the waiting. Sweden, a member of the European Union, is a waiting room for many asylum seekers. In September 2005 there were just over 30,000 asylum seekers registered in the Swedish Migration Board's reception system. The average waiting time for a decision is 598 days. Many of those have, in fact, waited much longer. Having to wait such a long period disconnected from the new society around them leads them to live a diffuse existence where the concept of having a normal life disappears with time as does running water down an open drain.

"Having to wait like this is like being out in the middle of the ocean and not knowing if you will survive or not. You have no idea where you will touch land, or indeed if you ever will see land again."
(quote from a young male asylum seeker from Afghanistan).

The period immediately following an asylum seeker's arrival on the new territory is characterised by visits to government agencies, of being interviewed, checked and having their identity controlled. Thereafter comes a long period of waiting for a decision on their asylum application. Trapped in a maze of rules that appear unclear and arbitrary, one tries to understand what is going on by speaking with other refugees.

Some manage to find themselves and make their way towards structuring their lives by undergoing training, taking on odd jobs, learning the new language and exploring their new environment. Others, however, don't manage so well at all. Having to wait so long under such circumstances robs them of their energy and ability to take own initiative. Waking up everyday and having to confront the insecurity they are living in often leads to both psychological and somatic illness.

significans project's exhibition aims to create a forum for a new theme and a new question in the Museum of World Culture in Gothenburg, namely - what are the implications for refugees and asylum seekers of living under such insecurity for so long? Their experience of waiting is about standing on the doorstep to a new home but not being let through the door. For them, the museum lobby is not a place open to all but rather just a waiting room.

The exhibition has been made possible through co-operation with the Swedish National Thematic Group Asylum under the EU Community Initiative called EQUAL (www.temaasyl.se). *significans* projects' wishes to thank the National Thematic Group and Jan-Paul Brekke of the Institute for Social Research in Oslo, Norway for their support and information.

The artistic group *significans* is based in Berlin and works since 1999 with projects on the cutting edge between art, culture and political action. *significans* focuses on the control systems that burden especially immigrants and asylum seekers and which give rise to different forms of discrimination.

www.significans.de Christiane Hamacher, Carolina Kecskemethy, Barbara Meyer and Hanna Sjöberg

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While we are waiting. Jan-Paul Brekke, Norwegian Institute for Social Research (ISF), Oslo 2004.