

**The journey – Changing places  
Christoph Baumanns**

**Like all the texts in this catalogue, this one rides on the energy of a work in progress. The space it refers to doesn't even exist yet – at least not as a space we can see, hear, smell, feel or enter on foot, on crutches or in a wheelchair. In the spring of 2022, what exists of Poem of Pearls so far is the 3D, animated digital images produced by the artist Birthe Blauth, a plethora of varied information – from descriptions of the artistic concept to art-history and theological background – and the first few materials for fitting out the space: wood, fabric and paint. Also in our storeroom already are the almost 100,000 pearls and the large basin in which these 'pearls of our souls' will be presented. Another part of Poem of Pearls that we already have is words. Definitely more than 100,000 of those. Not to mention thoughts. Or the countless 'conversations about...'. Or the texts in various shapes and forms... The only thing we're still missing is the Poem-of-Pearls space itself. We know what it's about; we can picture it, feel it in our gut, in the boom-boom-boom of our hearts; our voices are ready in our throats, and we even have the scent in our noses whenever we think about it.**

**A great many people have already been in this place – in their mind's eye. But the actual space is the result of a long and arduous journey. The organising committee started by exploring questions around contemporary art and its current state, and the issues that move both the artists and us. We also invited experts to talk to us about issues such as creators of public art (Dr Ulrike Lorenz)**

**and 'Aesthetic Practices as Work in the Perceptible' (Prof Dieter Mersch). Then, from these deliberations and discussions emerged the starting points for our journey, such as the idea that:**

**The most pressing issue of our time – and therefore of contemporary art – is the destruction of habitats and ecosystems. How did we come to violate them so recklessly? And where did we get such an arrogant, devil-may-care attitude? (...) Art must respond to the idea of man-made, artificial nature.  
(Meinrad Ladleif)**

**Based on these starting points, the organising committee put forward their personal proposals, developing from them a 'longlist' that became the subject of intense discussions. Whittled down, it culminated in seven artists being invited to develop ideas for the Church of St Elisabeth in Kassel. Five of them took up the invitation: Aljoscha, Michael Sailstorfer, Sineumbra, Lisa Stertz and Birthe Blauth. On 13 March 2021 they came to Kassel to present their ideas in the church itself. Owing to the pandemic, it was a hybrid event, with the artists, organisers and selected guests on site and the public invited to watch via video link. Finally, the organising committee chose Birthe Blauth's Poem of Pearls – for three main reasons: "Birthe Blauth's proposal is truly captivating as it presents the interior of the Church of St Elisabeth in a completely new light. Her art intervention triggers a wealth of thoughts and inner visions that take us into the depths of the tradition of Christian iconography while at the same time enabling a journey to our own selves."**

**And the rest, as they say, is (organisational) history: Birthe Blauth went on to further develop her original idea to include the words 'My Precious Pearl from Paradise' in illuminated letters on the façade of the church, overlooking the square, Friedrichsplatz. The preparations for this art project were dominated by questions around which materials to use – from the best screws for attaching the letters to the concrete façade of the post-war structure, to the quality of the REACH-standard artificial lawn – but also detailed plans for the installation of the artwork as well as financing, communications and last but not least, plans for talks, discussions and concerts to accompany the work and stoke curiosity.**

**When an envisioned space finally becomes a reality that we can enter, linger in, and maybe even feel comfortable, secure and free in, 'a bit like being in paradise', it's a moment of huge, not to say existential significance. Often, we fail to notice when we 'go into' a new space or 'change place'. We do it unconsciously, almost like breathing. We anticipate quite naturally the moment of 'walking in', of 'changing place'. And that's what's happening here: our thoughts and senses are racing ahead, and the next leg of the journey is about to begin. Anyone familiar with the Church of St Elisabeth in Kassel will approach it with their own expectations, while those entering for the first time might have**

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**a certain stereotypical church space in mind. But all of them will come with expectations of Birthe Blauth's participatory art installation. It is this aspect of participation that makes the transformed church an experienceable space.**