

PROJECT 16

Gregor Schneider

2007

21 beach cells

28 September – 21 October 2007

Bondi Beach, Sydney

BIOGRAPHY

Since 1985, Gregor Schneider's work has focused on the creation of uncanny architectural environments, cavernous depths and labyrinths that evoke a dark individual or collective psyche. Between 1985 and 1997, from his mid-teens, he compulsively refigured a former residential block next-door to his father's lead factory in Rheydt, Germany, for the work he has renamed *Totes Haus Ur* (*Dead house ur*). Drawing from a place between the seen and constructed experiences of the world and the unseen and unfathomable, Schneider's works activate physical and psychological impulses.

FACTS

- In 1996, Schneider created the German pavilion at the 49th Venice Biennale, for which he was awarded the prestigious Golden Lion.
- Project 16 was realised in 2007 on Bondi Beach.
- According to Schneider, the inspiration for the work was the Cronulla race riots of 11 December 2005.
- *21 beach cells* was constructed from common Australia fencing materials. Each 4m x 4m cell contained amenities for visitors such as an air mattress, beach umbrella and a plastic garbage bag tied shut, its contents unknown.
- Over the course of the project, the cells were often used by beach visitors for relaxation and leisure activities.
- The labyrinthine structure only revealed itself once audiences were inside the artwork, adding to the sense of confusion. Some doors were locked, others open, encouraging audiences to retrace their steps and formulate new paths.
- Schneider's installations often incorporate the space behind and beyond them. They are site-specific, while referring to other sites and structures across the globe.
- In June 2009, the work was recreated on Accadia Beach in Herzliya, Israel, where it was received very differently by visitors, who were often afraid to enter.

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PROJECT OVERVIEW

For Project 16, Gregor Schneider transformed Sydney's iconic Bondi Beach in 2007 with a giant cage titled *21 beach cells*. The 4 x 4 metre cells contained amenities for visitors – an air mattress, beach umbrella and black plastic garbage bag – and were soon inhabited by beachgoers looking for a site to rest and find shelter from the sun. The shadow image of Guantánamo Bay's Camp X-Ray – and Australia's own immigration detention centres – became a site for relaxation. *21 Beach Cells* captured the atmosphere of the time, an environment of global terrorism, detention of illegal immigrants and the recent Cronulla race riots, challenging Australia's egalitarian self-image.

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Drawing from a place between the seen, contained and constructed experiences of the world and the unseen and unfathomable, Schneider's works activate physical and psychological impulses. Clear identification and orientation are denied and visitors are left unsure of where they are and what they are seeing. The architecture of Guantánamo Bay has inspired a number of Schneider's works. *Weisse Folter (White torture)*, 2007, was named after a form of psychological torture and interrogation that leaves no bodily trace and was modelled from images of Guantánamo's Camp V maximum-security facility.

The indeterminate purpose and function of the *21 beach cells* positioned them between comfort and isolation, safety and imprisonment. The work's labyrinthine structure became apparent once people were inside. The transparent walls gave a false impression of expanded vision and orientation. Some doors were locked and required visitors to retrace their steps to the exit; others led into open cells, creating confusing paths and passageways. Schneider stated that the influence for the work was the Cronulla race riots, which occurred on 11 December 2005 when a crowd of around 5000 young Anglo-Australians descended on the Sydney suburb to 'reclaim the beach', leading to violent attacks on people of Middle Eastern appearance. A backlash from the Lebanese community resulted in a pervasive environment of fear and segregation, including a police 'lock-down' of the local area.

In 2009, *21 beach cells* was recreated on Accadia Beach in Herzliya, Israel.

Kaldor Public Art
Project 16: Gregor
Schneider, *21
Beach Cells*, Bondi
Beach, Sydney,
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Photo: Gregor
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