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Anton Kusters, *One Thousand and Seventy-eight Blue Skies, The Blue Skies Project*

I enter the room.. it's dark. The walls are painted an inky grey.. the colour of slate roof tiles. Above me.. approximately nine spot lights are attached to two tracks in the middle of the ceiling... they run the length of the room and shine down on what is in front of me.

I can hear sounds playing. The sound is an audio piece by Ruben Samama ... it plays a single tone ... a soft ping ... followed by another single sound ... another soft ping. The sounds are pre-programmed on an audio program. The pitch of this single sound changes depending on pre-defined factors. The pattern that the sounds play at is irregular. For example .. there is not one sound, followed by a three second gap... then another sound ... and a three second gap etc. The sounds are more like a light rainfall hitting a tin roof. Organically irregular.

Each sound represents a victim who lost their life at one of the former Nazi run concentration or extermination camps across Europe during WWII. The piece recreates in sound and length, the period between 1933 and 1945 when the concentration or extermination camps were operational ... that's 13 years or 4432 days. The piece itself is called *The Tracking of One Thousand and Seventy-eight Blue Skies*.

In the middle of the room there is a plinth... the plinth is 466.5cm in length, 260.6cm in width and 90cm in height. The length is around the same length as an estate car. The width... is wider than the width of a car. ... I would say it was more the width of a London Routemaster bus. The height of the plinth is the same height as an average kitchen work surface.

On top of the plinth ... displayed in meticulous order, there are 1078 polaroid images. The plinth is painted in the same colour as the walls of the room ... so it feels almost as if the polaroids are floating in the middle of the space.

A grid of 22 rows of 49 polaroids cover the top of the plinth. Each one perfectly spaced at one centimetre from its neighbour. Each polaroid at the edge, perfectly spaced at one centimetre from the edge.

The polaroids are all identically rectangular in size .. each one measuring 8.6cm in width, and 10.8cm in height. Around the same size as a small greetings card... with a border of the same width at each side. Kusters has used a simple analogue photographic process of peel-apart instant film... and these ones are reproductions of the originals. They are not what immediately comes to my mind when I think of the polaroids that I am familiar with.

All of the images show an upward view of a blue sky ... each one shot at the last known locations of the former Nazi run concentration or extermination camps across Europe during WWII. The resulting images have then been blind-stamped with the number of victims at that site and its GPS coordinates.

I'm going to describe a couple of the polaroids now.

The first polaroid is framed with a thin white border which is equal in depth all the way around the image. Within the white border... there is a black rectangle. The majority of the rectangle is filled with the upshot of the sky. Almost as if a fish eye lens has been used... the corners of the rectangle are black, and the actual colour part of the image is roughly circular in shape. The sky within this circle is a bright summer's blue sky... the blue almost looks like the blue of pair of light denim jeans. To the upper right of the sky, a collection of clouds swirl around one larger cloud on the right. This cloud seems to be bleached white as it shields the sun behind it.

The bottom of the polaroid is black where it has been blind-stamped with a series of numbers. This one reads: 0000021 ... the estimated number of victims at the camp ... followed by the GPS coordinates: 54.136070,

19.008740. That's Neuteich... a former Nazi run concentration or extermination camp in the town Nowy Staw in the very north of Poland.

The second polaroid is again framed with a thin white border which is equal in depth all the way around the image. Within the border... there is a black rectangle. The majority of the rectangle is filled with the upshot of the sky. Like the last image ... the corners of the rectangle are black, and the actual colour part of the image is roughly circular in shape. The sky within this circle is dark. It looks sort of unnatural. Almost like when there is about to be a thunder storm and the sky turns an unusual dark shade of blue. Spreading across the right side of the image is a network of thread-like wisps of clouds that seem to all be joined together by thin strands and misty areas. The clouds themselves are so papery that they appear to be lighter versions of the sky in colour.

Again... the bottom of the polaroid is black where it has been blind-stamped with a series of numbers. This one reads: 0294,455 ... the estimated number of victims at the camp ... followed by the GPS coordinates of the camp: 51.021529, 11.24897. That's Buchenwald... a former Nazi run concentration camp in central Germany ... now a memorial. It was one of the first and the largest of the concentration camps within the country.

Once again framed with a thin white border, equal in depth all the way around the image... there is a black rectangle within the border of the third polaroid. The majority of the rectangle is filled with the upshot of the sky. Unlike the last two polaroids I have described, the blue of this sky is so dark that it fills the majority of the rectangle... making it impossible to decipher the edge of the black circle that frames the last two polaroids. The inky blue seamlessly merges with the black. There are no clouds in this sky. It looks like it was taken at dusk, or perhaps even later. The blue is so concentrated that it when I look at it .. it reminds me of looking into a blue fountain pen ink cartridge.

The bottom of the polaroid is black where it has been blind-stamped with a series of numbers. This one reads: 0000050 ... the estimated number of victims at the camp ... followed by the GPS coordinates of the camp:

47.827194, 12.154291. That's Thansau... a former Nazi run concentration or extermination camp in the very south of Germany.

The final polaroid I'm going to describe is once again framed with a thin white border that is equal in depth all the way around the image. Within the border... there is a black rectangle. The majority of the rectangle is filled with the upshot of the sky. Almost as if a fish eye lens has been used... the corners of the rectangle are black, and the actual colour part of the image is roughly circular in shape. The sky within this circle is again an inky blue ... lighter than the last one ... almost the same colour as dark denim, but unmistakably an image of the sky ... due to the very faint wispy clouds across the top of the photograph ... like flour dusted on a kitchen work surface. At the bottom left of the sky area ... a smaller ... more concentrated area of white cloud in the vague shape of a triangle.

The bottom of the polaroid is black where it has been blind-stamped with a series of numbers. This one reads: 0028,000 ... the estimated number of victims at the camp ... followed by the GPS coordinates of the camp: 51.178257, 22.061046. This one is Ponirtowa ... a former Nazi run concentration or extermination camp in south eastern Poland.

There is enough space between the walls and each side of the plinth to walk around. As I move around the space and try to take in the vast spread of polaroids... I am struck by the intensity of the Project. 1087 Polaroids is a lot of photographs. And although visually the subject is simple... conceptually there is so much to take in. This sea of 1087 blue rectangles, each one representing a place of trauma, with each one recording the number of victims of each concentration camp. ...The sheer vastness of it ... combined with the sound piece ... which to me ... begins to feel like an assault of noise as I consider that each sound represents a victim. History comes very close.

Here Kusters provides space, for the audience to consider their own place in history and engage with the evolving dialogue around trauma, genocide and human rights.