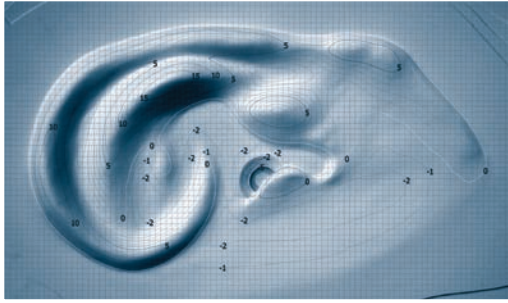




“We were impressed by the sheer size of his idea.”



An aerial photo taken during construction shows just how close to Kozakiewicz’s original rendering (left) the structure is.

Ear to the Ground

An anatomical park rises from the postindustrial landscape of Boxberg, Germany, as a symbol of healing.

A giant human ear has sprung up in the blighted postindustrial landscape around Boxberg, Germany, where lignite strip mines have left a vast scarred moonscape in the borderlands of the former GDR. Chronic respiratory diseases and forest degradation are other grim legacies of the coal industry, which supplied 70 percent of the primary energy needs for the region. After reunification most of the municipal utilities switched to natural gas or oil, and more than 100,000 workers lost their jobs.

In 2003 an international competition was held to seek proposals for the Baerwalder Lake Landscape Park, a section of an immense cultural and recreation area situated on the largest in a chain of 27 artificial lakes created from the aban-

doned coal pits. Although other planned zones are to include conventional recreational activities and museums commemorating the region’s industrial history, this site will host concerts and films as well as the yearly avant-garde light-and-sound festival “Transnaturale,” signifying transition and transformation. The open-ended challenge was to fashion something artistic and physically powerful enough to stand up to the power plant still operating just behind it.

Artist Jarosław Kozakiewicz’s sculptural design containing an amphitheater, the Mars Project, won for its success on those terms and as an agent of rejuvenation. Constructed of 142,170 cubic yards of earth and other recycled detritus left over from the mines, the 1,150-by-820-foot ear enclosing the open-air theater constitutes undulating hills for people to wander on the lakeshore, like Lilliputians scampering around Gulliver’s colossal lobes. “We were impressed by the sheer size of his idea, which accents this wide open, flat landscape,” explains Jürgen Uwe Ohlau, director of the advisory board. “The jury thought the opposition of the gigantic industrial structure on the one hand and this work, which is somehow not dwarfed by it, was very intriguing. People in the area are still making a living from coal mining and using the electricity, so the park is a nexus between industry, tourism, and recreation.”

The highest point of the earlobe forms a panoramic viewpoint, and the amphitheater is located at the ear’s acoustic center in the **continued on page 38**



Though the park’s anatomical shape is unrecognizable to visitors, the artist believes they will subconsciously find the curves familiar and comforting.

“You see just a fragment and then subconsciously recognize that it is a familiar shape.”



continued from page 36 place of an eardrum, a practical yet poetic fusion of function and form. Susanne Altmann, curatorial adviser for the park, sees the enormous auricle as a human signature underlining the man-made nature of the landscape, both the technological presence and the newly planted forests and lakes. “It is conceptually rooted in a notion of earthworks from the 1980s, but I would not dare to call it outdated because it seems the right response to a landscape formed by human intervention.” She adds that the large horizontal form, which acts as a counterpoint to the impressive lake, also works at close range. “The ear is all made of slopes and has a lot of inner structure and space, so it was probably the best solution for that beach.”

Though the shape of the ear itself is indiscernible to visitors, disappearing at ground level and blending naturally with its surroundings, Kozakiewicz believes that we find comfort in spaces that reflect our own contours, echoing the Vitruvian ideal of the human body as the measure for architecture. “People will intuitively feel that the ear shape is friendly, that it is a part of them, an organic form,” he explains. “I wanted it to be as big as possible so you could not see the overall shape; with each glance you see just a fragment and then subconsciously recognize that it is a familiar shape, the way you find certain faces familiar.”

Although Kozakiewicz began by studying traditional sculpture and drawing at the Academy of Fine Arts, in Warsaw, his studies at the Cooper Union in the mid-1980s, under the tutelage of conceptual artist Nicki Logis, inspired him to create what he thinks of as functional sculpture. The 46-year-old artist’s father was a lung surgeon who practiced out of the family’s home, so he grew up surrounded by X-rays, anatomical models, and visiting patients—and much of his work resembles the human body or one of its organs. Playing with

the principles of medieval cosmology, Kozakiewicz projected the orbits of the planets onto the map of Europe. He located the Earth where Copernicus lived, in Frombork, Poland, and associated each of the planets with one of the nine orifices in the human body. Originally the project was purely conceptual, but with the competition for Baerwalder Park he saw an opportunity to realize a structure based on his ideas. Because it was landed along the Mars orbit, Kozakiewicz modeled his design for the park on the orifice associated with the planet, the left ear. “I am interested in finding the right place for the human being in the cosmos, so that people will feel part of something bigger,” he says. “If you feel that nature is a part of you, you treat it differently.”

Kozakiewicz says the design is also a sign of the earth opening up and listening to the loud native silence after 100 years of industrial noise. Rejuvenation is a common theme in his work and is also the rationale behind his commission for a park across the Soła River from the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp. The Bridge of Ghosts—a slender ribbon twisted 180 degrees on its own axis—will provide a metaphorical passageway from the traumatic past to the living present: pedestrians will disappear into a tunnel at the midsection and emerge on a surface that started as the bottom side. “This is the healing of a postgenocide wasteland, like Boxberg is the healing of a postindustrial wasteland,” says Gabriela Switek, curator of Kozakiewicz’s exhibition for the Polish Pavilion at the 2006 Venice Architecture Biennale.

According to Ohlau, the Mars Project is humming with new life even before its grass is fully grown in. “It is a place where people have started to make their Sunday promenade and a sign that they seem to identify with,” he says. “I think it will play a major role in the future development of this landscape.”

—Cathryn Drake