

ARTS

An artist searching for a new language

Klára Hosnedlová has created a disorienting, beguiling world with her sculptural installation in Berlin. She talks to Kristina Foster

Strange forms have taken root in Berlin's Hamburger Bahnhof. In the contemporary art museum's vast hall, monumental hanging "tapestries" loom like a forest from a distant planet. Their organic, shaggy appearance falls somewhere between mossy undergrowth and matted animal fur. Long tendrils unfurl across the floor in near-monstrous fashion.

Yet what might seem alien to us is for Berlin-based Czech artist Klára Hosnedlová deeply familiar. In her sculptural environments, Hosnedlová entwines autobiography with the broader history of her homeland, mashing up architecture and textiles into unwieldy landscapes that make us question what time period we're in. These giant flax and hemp structures, for instance, nod to Bohemian craft traditions, which the artist brings into stark contrast with the industrial setting of the museum — a former train station.

"The architecture is very masculine and I wanted to work against that with some very soft and fragile material," Hosnedlová says as we walk through the installation, titled *embrace*. She speaks enthusiastically, eager to explain the stories behind the array of materials she uses. "These colourful details are melted glass, which is a technique that was always used during socialism," she says pointing at what look like extraterrestrial ribs ensconced in archaic-looking reliefs flanking her tapestries — forms that appear both futuristic and fossilised. "The glass comes from the only factory in the Czech Republic still using this technique."

Hosnedlová has worked on a grand scale since her student days at Prague's Academy of Fine Arts, and says she always dreamt of bringing her colossal



Clockwise, from main: Klára Hosnedlová with her new Berlin installation, 'embrace'; performers move through the show prior to its opening; images embedded in the hanging fabric
Vital Gelwich, Zdeněk Porcal

creations to this cavernous space — the erstwhile stage for several sprawling works by Tomás Saraceno, Anne Imhof and Katharina Grosse. That opportunity came when she was awarded the inaugural Chanel Commission, a three-year partnership between the Chanel Culture Fund and the museum that aims to support an annual immersive installation in the hall.

Yana Peel, global head of arts and culture at the fashion brand, describes the initiative as the fund's "most ambitious partnership in Europe" and a continuation of its aim to support "avant-garde

and unexpected projects". But the collaboration also marks a turning point for the state-owned museum.

Sam Bardaouil, co-director of Hamburger Bahnhof, sees the partnership as a necessary response to a shifting cultural landscape. "New types of alliances have to be forged that move beyond the dichotomies of the past: the private and the public; the commercial and the non-commercial," he says. "For us, it was important to give the space to a new voice that is taking monumental sculpture and bringing a different twist to it."

Hosnedlová isn't the first artist to bring an epic spin to textile, but she has developed a unique interdisciplinary approach that has thrust her into the spotlight in recent years. In each of the environments she creates, she embeds hyperrealist embroideries depicting magnified views of bodies, which she bases on photographs or films of closed performances undertaken at past exhibitions before they open to the public.

The imagery in *embrace* harks back to her solo outing at Basel's Kunsthalle last year, titled *Growth*. Performers wearing ethereal mesh garments moved through the gallery, touching and altering the works. Although these figures are never present during the actual exhibitions, Hosnedlová believes the after-effects of their presence enhance her installations. "I like the feeling that they were just there and then left," she says. "They leave marks on the floor, the walls, and pieces of clothes."

Preserved as carefully stitched portals into the past, these private stagings become delicate fragments that together form the wider narrative of the



artist's output. Hosnedlová has already documented a performance at *embrace*, which will yield imagery for her next exhibition. "The thread of embroidery is not only a physical thread but a temporal thread where every time Klára looks back on the work that she did before," says Bardaouil. These stitched elements invite reflection on the knotty concept of time: the entangled threads of history, or the disparate memories

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that, woven together, shape the overall arc of our lives.

Hosnedlová herself grew up surrounded by the weight of history. Born in 1990, just before the fall of the Soviet Union, she was raised in rural Moravia, where the visual and socio-economic traces of communism still remain. "Where I am from, on the one hand you have beautiful nature, but on the other hand there are also many factories where some of my family members still work for very little money," she says.

This post-socialist terrain is reflected throughout the installation: a floor laid with grey concrete tiles, once standard in Soviet-era buildings, stretches out in a drab, utilitarian expanse. But its uniformity is disrupted by patches of soil brought from the artist's village and what seem to be puddles of water (actually transparent epoxy resin). These

earthy interventions cast a post-apocalyptic pall over the scene; the utopian promise of communism transformed into a vision of an uncertain future.

"Brutalist architecture versus nature is something that Klára uses poetically to deal with this question of shifting political structures," says Bardaouil. "There is architecture as a form of ordering the world, which was very much part of fascist and Soviet architecture, but then there's nature that comes in and subverts that rigidity and logic".

Much like the place she grew up in, Hosnedlová's work lives in the borderlands between nature and civilisation, past and present. These tensions emerge through precise contrasts: fine embroidery meets cold steel and cast glass, craft traditions collide with industrial processes. But it wasn't always easy for the artist to be so bold with her materials. "When I was studying in Prague, no one was working in textiles as it was thought of more as applied art," says Hosnedlová. "I painted through embroideries and fibres, but for the teachers it wasn't very acceptable." She recalls feeling pressured from male studio heads to create large-scale canvases — what they deemed as "good" paintings. "With embroidery I didn't feel that pressure. It gave me a lot of freedom and the process was more meditative."

Since then, Hosnedlová has only grown more confident in her world-building, tackling everything from clothes and performances to furniture and sculptures.

Now, for the first time, she is experimenting with sound, blending Moravian folk songs, church bells and verses in Czech delivered by rapper Zvonimír in a soundscape designed to further enhance the installation's temporally ambiguous atmosphere. In Hosnedlová's words: "When you are here, you are not sure if you are really in the past, present or future."

With their dreamlike atemporality, her environments form a mirror of our times — when not just history, but also fashion, culture and architecture appear caught in endless cycles of repetition. "Sometimes it seems like we're repeating the past," Hosnedlová says. "However, I'm not trying to think too much about history, but rather trying to find a new language."

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