



PALESTRINA AND HELL

Scaffolding, PVC membrane, water, lights,
8 sub-woofers, 4 speakers, 2 CD players.
Electronic music by Ian Boddy (U.K.).
Curated by Eva Jacob.
Johanniterkirche, Feldkirch, Austria, 2003.

Existing internal space of church before the installation.



PALESTRINA AND HELL

Project management by Protozone Art Support, Feldkirch, Austria.

Timber platform, supplied and constructed by Wucher Holzbau, Feldkirch, Austria.

Waterproofing lining manufactured by Gordon Low Products, Bedfordshire, U.K. and supplied by Attard Farm Supplies. Attard, Malta.

Electronic equipment supplied by Olimpus Music Ltd., Msida, Malta.

Ian Boddy's music assisted and made possible by Paul Gilby of Relative Media, Harrogate, U.K.

Funded by Land Voralberg, Amelfisch, Druckerei Wenin KG, Erste Bank, Goldschmiede Rudolph Kleinert, Helfe Labor, Hotel Alpenrose, Impulsestifung, Kollmann Versicherung, Optiker Muller, Red Zac Lampert and Sparkasse Feldkirch.

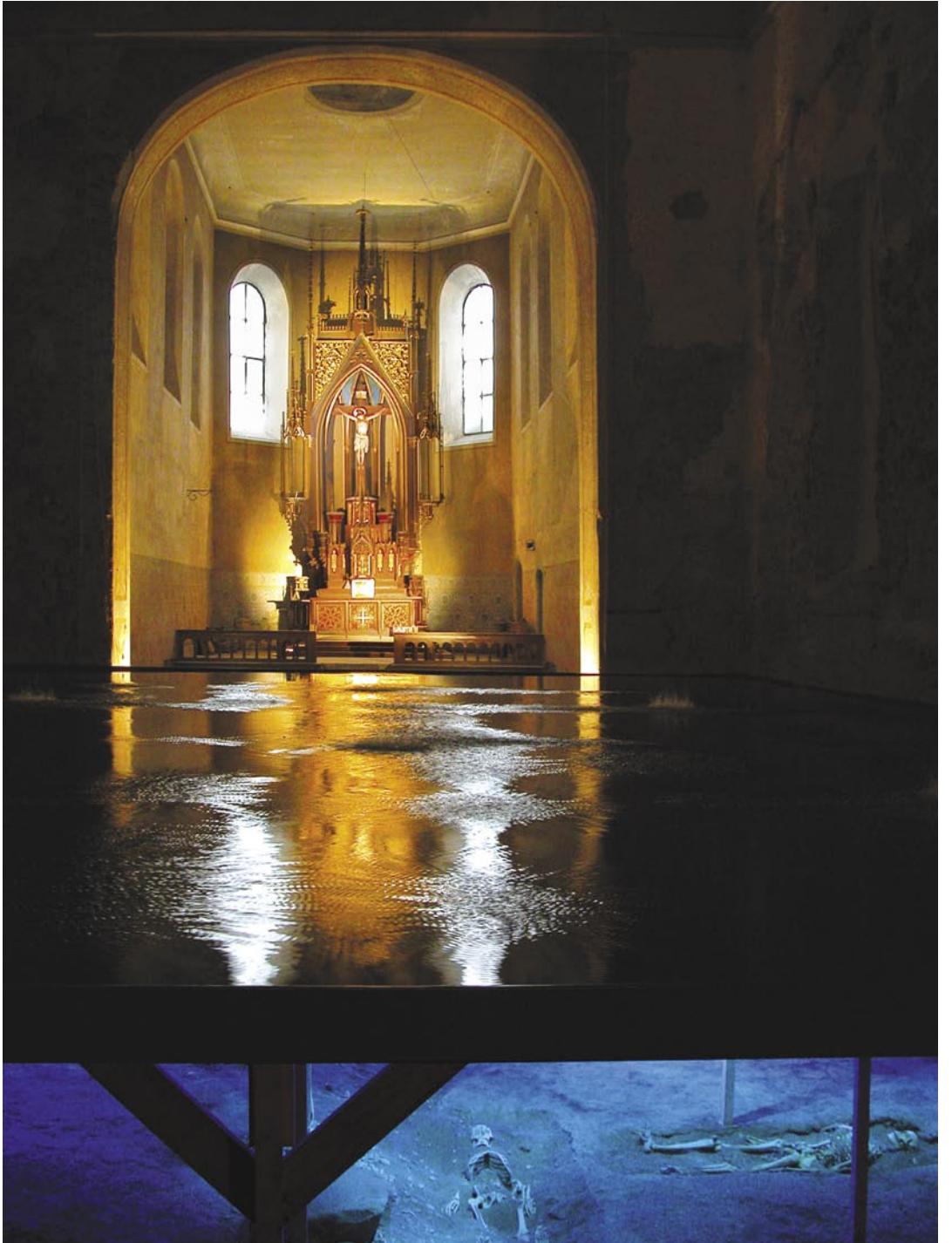


Ian Boddy composing the music for Palestrina and Hell, assisted by Paul Gilby at the artist's studio in Gozo.



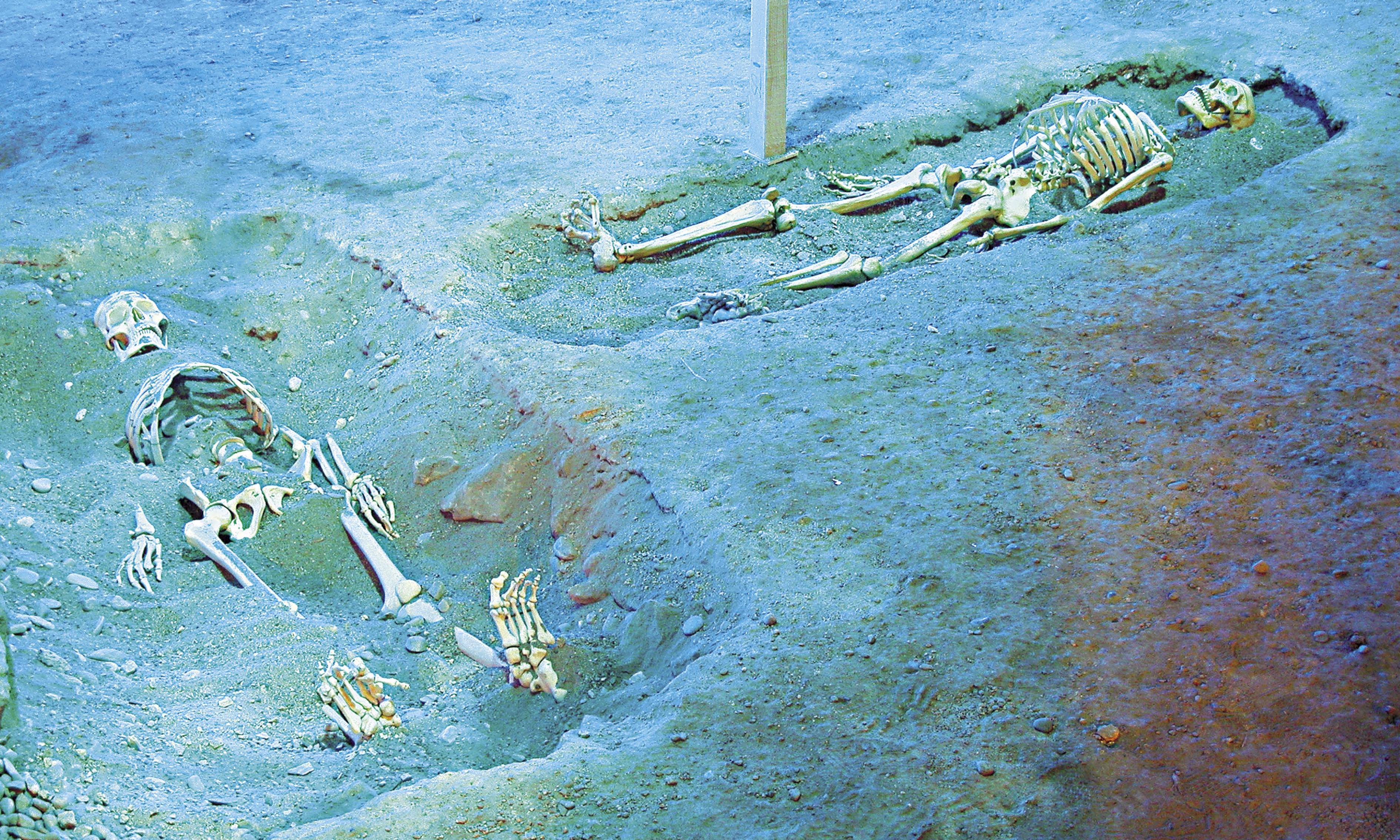
Construction stages of installation.





Water is the catalytic element motivating the installation: it is the purifying, baptismal agent that “segregates” and at the same time, “fuses” the extreme poles of the upper and lower “chambers” of existence. There is a split between what is beatic and peaceful and what is sinister and foreboding. Water is introduced as a mirror to extreme realities but also as a refractory conductor that splits space and truth. Is this a moment of extreme existential anxiety or a moment of spiritual reconciliation? Is this an uncompromising visitation to a season in hell or a deliverance through water? And are we objective viewers or are we intertwined in this manifestation of dual extremes? The very act of watching and listening seems to make us all accomplices...

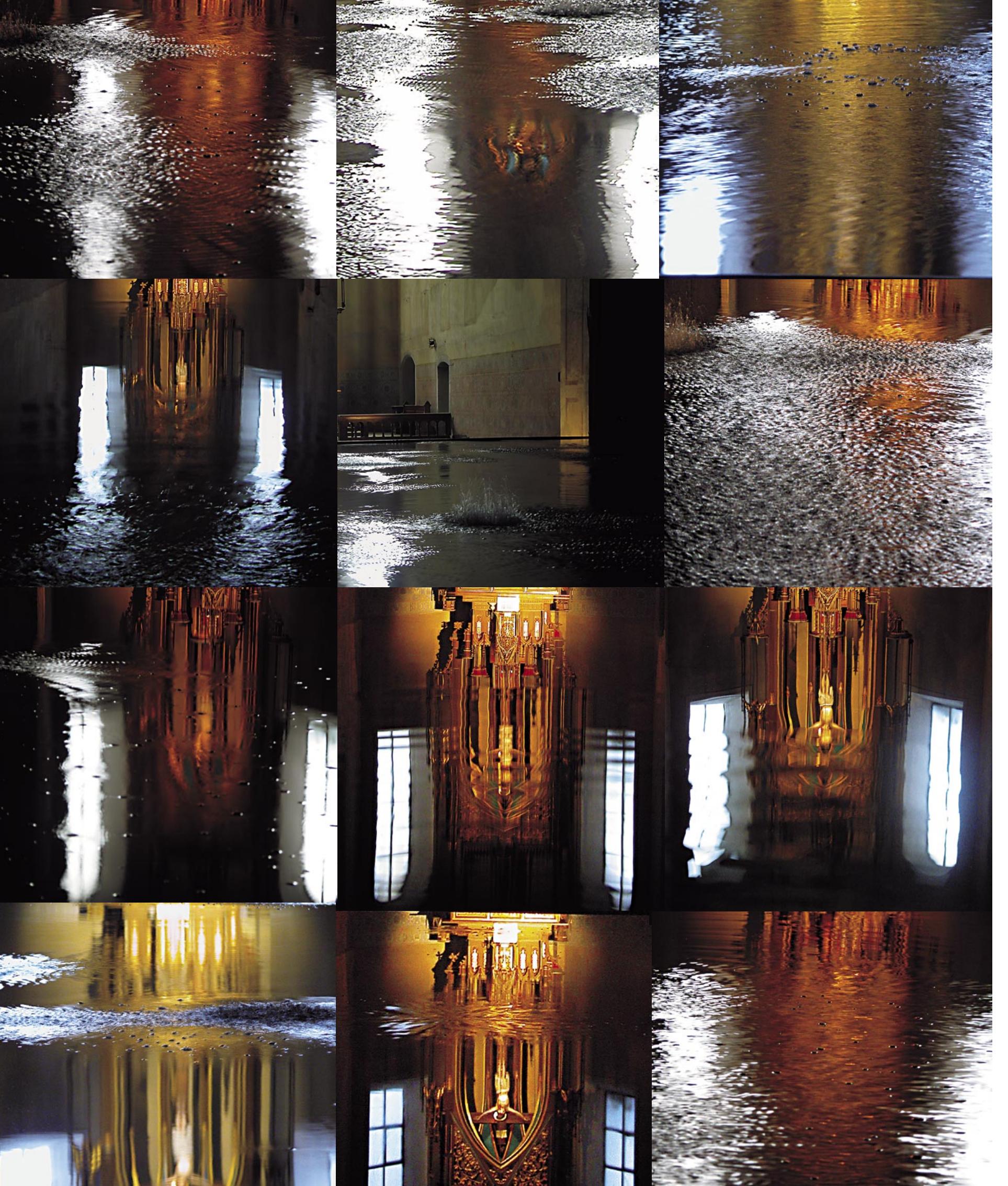
MARIO AZZOPARDI





The remarkable thing is, that beside this flat standpoint of the axial center of almost being insular and standing in front of and looking at it, you are also simultaneously looking at something else. You are concurrently seeing two levels at the same time. Seeing above the water everything looks like the promise of heaven with the baptism-scene on the ceiling picture and reflected in the water, mirrored, the reality and the reflection doubles in a promising way what you see – in total silence and calmness at first. And you see at the same time, and that it is very contemporary, because simultaneous vision is what the modern picture program of the 20th century actually established as paradigm shift to see the world with new eyes. This simultaneity, this multiple-perspectivity. You see simultaneously the lower zone, representing the death if you want, additionally dramatised by Attard in the way, that he positioned the skeletons within the space of the excavation and hence

– I don't want to exaggerate, because in that case the effect possibly sounds too dramatic, even though, I have to admit, it actually is very dramatic – below the water level is this mystery that is menacing, a threat, a feeling of injury, warning danger – I do have to say it - quasi the hell represented. Now one has to ask, what function is fulfilled by this opus in the church. Beside the fact, that he [Attard] succeeded in a very precise manner, to unify his work in space and time – and the picture program of this baptism into this entire work one could perceive this water layer in a very special way. Yes, I spoke yesterday with him, and he supposes the thesis that there is a sort of duality. He says that the water layer segregates, and at the same time, fuses the upper and lower zones, the two chambers of "existence". Water is such an element that separates and unites as an element of nature. It's an abstract layer that is introduced.



. It seems that I have the odd duty to refuse you admission to paradise. By this I mean that I must express everything with a different approach as I am in a situation where I am talking about something that you have not yet seen and therefore have to imagine in some way. First of all, I assume that you know this historic place. You know this wonderful church with its peculiar long depth of the apse, with the excavation, which lies like an exposed wound in the nave and this small entrée, which – like a balcony – opens the view to the room of the church. You know at the same time, that you have the altar in the focus in the axis in the depth of the room and you remember the two side-altars, left and right. That's the basic condition. Not a simple task for an artist, because when – and he [Attard] confirms this – an artist deals with this kind of place, he then has of course to respect the specific, historic and architectural situation of the location. I do believe, as you will see later, that Attard has done exactly this. Who, on the other hand, as an artist, does not do so, has actually lost already.

One not only realises that – as I just heard him mention – the fact that he visited this place on five separate occasions in the last three years, thus he really dealt with this location, but also because certain realisations and changes took place during the process of time, particularly with the curious field of graves, which exist there as historic wound, with this huge depth, this perspective, and with this peculiar ceiling fresco of the Holy Baptist who performs the baptism. And with the keyword baptism, the next aspect is brought up. Attard succeeds in the church with a sharp concept, i.e. a water layer, to synthesise the church therewith to a new dimension. On the one hand he succeeds with this huge water layer in separating the upper zone and the lower zone from each other. This means that you see reflected in this water layer everything that is above water level. And under this water layer you look onto this excavation, dramatically illuminated with blue light quasi like a visualisation of the drama of death. One has of course to ask, what is the special achievement of Attard in the way he shaped this existing space. I believe that he succeeded to link the spiritual meaning of this place - even if it is always present as church on a daily basis – with an opus which has a precise concept which is brought to the point. This conceptual opus explains itself a little bit through his biography. Attard, born 1951, has worked almost 20 years as an architect. You will see that he, with the greatest comprehension, positioned this cross-sectioned layer like a sharp cut into the architecture of the building. He designs this shallow basin of water so that it works like a mirror, so you don't get the impression that there is any three dimensional depth and by putting the whole construction on stilts, establishing a completely clear simple construction. Hence, there is an abstract quality to this work and possibly a double meaning as well.

And then there happens another thing which is remarkable. I said already that the special thing about this church is that one is moved in terms of scale of the space. When you enter the room the feeling of distance is increased due to the difference in floor levels. It is not possible to walk through this excavation but the awaiting promise of the altar image and the apse is within a certain distance, moved into the depth of the room. With the mirror surface, which is directly arranged over the excavation, Attard drags the entire depth of the room towards the front onto the flat mirror surface. You stand axial in this room and you have the flanks of the apses with the two altars and the main central altar, specially illuminated again [by Attard] to emphasise the depth of the room. You stand in this room and you have the entire installation in front of you. For a modern observer, this is a remarkable position for viewing this work. It is rather, the one-dimensional point of view as we know it from the mediaeval picture, i.e. the frontal confrontation with that what is taking place as the program of the picture, as narration, as metaphor, as symbol, as promise, quasi on the transformed level, for example of the painting. Basically this is a little bit the point of view which he [Attard] discloses for the observer. But one has also to be aware of other things.

The remarkable thing is, that beside this flat standpoint of the axial center of almost being insular and standing in front of and looking at it, you are also simultaneously looking at something else. You are concurrently seeing two levels at the same time. Seeing above the water everything looks like the promise of heaven with the baptism-scene on the ceiling picture and reflected in the water, mirrored, the reality and the reflection doubles in a promising way what you see – in total silence and calmness at first. And you see at the same time, and that it is very contemporary, because simultaneous vision is what the modern picture program of the 20th century actually established as paradigm shift to see the world with new eyes. This simultaneity, this multiple-perspectivity. You see simultaneously the lower zone, representing the death if you want, additionally dramatised by Attard in the way, that he positioned the skeletons within the space of the excavation and hence – I don't want to exaggerate, because in that case the effect possibly sounds too dramatic, even though, I have to admit, it actually is very dramatic – below the water level is this mystery that is menacing, a threat, a feeling of injury, warning danger – I do have to say it - quasi the hell represented. Now one has to ask, what function is fulfilled by this opus in the church. Beside the fact, that he [Attard] succeeded in a very precise manner, to unify his work in space and time – and the picture program of this baptism into this entire work one could perceive this water layer in a very special way. Yes, I spoke yesterday with him, and he supposes the thesis that there is a sort of duality. He says that the water layer segregates, and at the same time, fuses the upper and lower zones, the two chambers of "existence". Water is such an element that separates and unites as an element of nature. It's an abstract layer that is introduced.

I want to expand on this idea further. I rather believe that it is a threefold concern. I think, and there I see the special achievement of his opus, that this work represents a very particular attribute of a work of art in general. If you want, it is the aim to re-establish spirituality in the room by having the layer of the opus itself clearly expressing that a work of art is capable of transforming pure matter, pure material into a spiritual, mental or intellectual state. In other words, that everything that initially is only stone, soil, light, wood, painted surfaces, etc., is more than mere materiality, physicalness, but can have a certain meaning, which comes true to the observer by contemplating his own existence, vis-a-vis the reflection of the room, the reflection of the history of the room within this ensemble and in the reflection – mentally viewed – of his own existence. And thus, one should complement the idea of duality with the three-dimensional approach, because only through these links, I consider this an interesting idea relating to the position, which works of art can adopt at all: That works of art, if I can formulate it very generically, basically can be like links for what happens between the spirit and the real world in a transformation which not only refers to material things, but rather on a spiritual and mental level.

I knew it would be difficult to talk about things, which haven't yet been seen. I want to cut short this introduction but first I still have to point out one more important thing, otherwise I would leave out an essential aspect of this work. You are going to experience something very remarkable. When you are in the room you will hear something, because there is the sound of electronic music. And you will in addition experience, that this sound not only establishes a spatial depth – that is the beautiful thing about music, that it creates in the abstraction a spatial depth – but that it has created a real depth, a real space, because technically, within the expanse of the flat water surface – now I have to disclose the secret – there are speakers (sub-woofers) installed underneath the water surface so that the sound waves affect the water by moving the water surface and the reflection or mirror image is broken in a way which is adjusted to the timbre and rhythm of the music. If you want, virtually an interference and disruption, a decomposition of the very same unity which I tried to characterise previously.

ECKHARD SCHNEIDER Director of Kunsthaus Bregenz, Bregenz, Austria.





NORBERT FRANCIS ATTARD

9, BIRBUBA STREET, GHARB, GRB 1435, GOZO, MALTA.

TEL: +00356 21560016

FAX: +00356 21559098

MOBILE: +00356 79041051

EMAIL: norbert@norbertattard.com

WEBSITE: www.norbertattard.com