

Snakes and Ladders
Ilke Gers

Opening Saturday 7 December 19.00 – 22.00
8-12 December, open by appointment

Snakes and Ladders references the vertical game of chance – an installation of ups and downs that can be physically entered. The result of a three-month residency in Bucharest, the project draws together two strands of work; research into physical communication structures in public space, and two dimensional floor works that play with the crossovers between sports field markings and language shapes to resemble playable game surfaces.

The installation is based on the empty billboard structures found in public space, previously in Athens, and in Bucharest. Becoming carriers of information and communication in themselves, without having advertising messages displayed, these dormant structures are a constant reminder of economic turbulence and the conditions of predatory capitalism suffered from while transiting various political systems. Usually hovering over us to broadcast messages from building rooftops, in Bucharest these structures are also found in various forms and constellations on ground level, sometimes even in front gardens as a way to collect rent.

This proximity allows a physical relation to billboard structures, which, as well as their materiality and geometry are reminiscent of jungle-gym-like playgrounds. Playground structures, particularly those built after WWII, before safety regulations came into effect, have visual and technical similarities to billboard structures. They are similar in scale, geometry, and act as a kind of 'support structure' made out of steel, and in relation to the human body. Billboards are made to communicate, direct and control passive viewers however, while playgrounds invite interaction and invention. The simple playgrounds of Dutch architect Aldo van Eyck for example, are specifically built to engage children by opening up possibilities for imagining how they can be used, allowing games, situations and meanings to be made up rather than dictating certain types of movement and behaviour.

Mixing references and playing with the potentials of the overlaps in meanings of these structures, the colour palate of the installation is inspired by the pastels used for renovating former communist housing blocks in Bucharest. While applied with restraint, this aesthetic surface intervention nonetheless breaks the repetition of these standardised architectural forms in the city boulevards, opening up unexpected rhythms and playfulness.

This project is the outcome of a three-month residency with Bucharest AiR.
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