



In Schloss Hollenegg's ballroom, where ceilings painted in the 18th century by Philipp Carl Laubmann crown geometric tiled floors laid in the Renaissance, Liechtenstein has created a new, verdant interior landscape for newly commissioned works of 21st-century design. Photo: Courtesy of Schloss Hollenegg for Design

Exhibition

This 12th-Century Austrian Castle Is Embracing Its Wild Surroundings

Nature is at the center of a new digital exhibition staged by Alice Liechtenstein at Schloss Hollenegg

By Hannah Martin

May 8, 2020

When Italian design curator [Alice Liechtenstein](#) moved with her family in 2014 to [Schloss Hollenegg](#), a rambling 12th-century castle in Austria that was her husband's ancestral home, she was confronted with something new: nature. Not the idyllic, wildflowers-from-my-country-house kind of nature. It was something messier, less romantic, and a little out of control.

“In the summer there are the insects and the butterflies and the flies and the vines and the bats at night,” says Liechtenstein, a lifelong city-dweller who had previously worked as an exhibition designer in Milan. “When I first moved in we had a tiny mouse. I was like, this is too much.” But, with time, she surrendered to her wild new surroundings, admitting, simply, “You can’t fight nature here—you have to embrace it.” In “Walden,” a digital design exhibition at Hollenegg opening Saturday, May 9, she has asked some of today’s most radical designers to do just that.



A wallpaper by Charlap Hyman & Herrero and Calico Wallpaper, inspired by the insect-covered vines that spill down from covered walkways, staircases, and towers around the castle’s exterior, is applied to a previously blank wall and ceiling in the Gobelin Room.

Photo: Schloss Hollenegg for Design

Become an AD PRO Member

Buy now for unlimited access and all of the benefits that only members get to experience. →



The palace is filled with relics of every era: a Renaissance-style courtyard, a ballroom painted by [Philipp Carl Laubmann](#) in the 18th century, and a Baroque chapel. In some

rooms, items from different periods were cobbled together into a historical mishmash. “Every room is full, every drawer is full,” Liechtenstein says, thanks to “several generations of people who liked hoarding.” It was her turn to add a timestamp on the place. So in 2015, she set up an artist’s residency on the premises, inviting a handful of individuals to live each year at the castle, make work inspired by the property, and leave it there (in most cases), as a relic of the 21st century for the generations to come.

Each year, Liechtenstein gives the designers a theme. And for 2020, her ideas returned to those wild surroundings she observed upon moving to the palace. Ideas about nature and sustainability—[“Broken Nature” at Milan’s Triennale](#) and [“Nature,” the Cooper Hewitt Design Triennial](#)—were hovering in the design world’s collective consciousness. And Liechtenstein wanted to keep the conversation going, taking care not to fall into the usual tropes.





Klemens Schillinger's electric lamp, which can only be charged by physical exercise, in the office. Photo: Courtesy of Schloss Hollenegg for Design

“A lot of the conversation is politicized and guilt-ridden,” she explains. “It’s always about renouncing something—I have to stop flying, I have to stop eating meat, I have to stop buying. It’s always about giving up something. I think we have to try to appreciate nature in a different way.” The designers she invited to Hollenegg did just that—[Crafting Plastics](#) worked with scientists to develop a new bioplastic that could be used to create a colored, translucent window pane; [Marlene Huissoud](#) made rugs that resemble swarms of insects with [cc-tapis](#); [Klemens Schillinger](#) created what Liechtenstein calls an “off-the-grid lamp” that can be manually recharged with physical exercise; and design firm [Charlap Hyman & Herrero](#) and [Calico Wallpaper](#) brought those vines and insects that had once so maddened Liechtenstein inside in the form of a fanciful printed wallpaper, derived from an oil painting.

“We wanted to distort the distinction between the decorated interior and the wilderness beyond,” Adam Charlap Hyman explains, “while referencing the presence of numerous historical landscape wallpapers throughout the castle.” Liechtenstein commissioned 18 other firms (not in residence) to make works on the same theme, with plans to bring them all together in the “Walden” exhibition. (Beyond the obvious meaning of the title, Liechtenstein explains that *wald* is the German word for forest.)





The vine-encased façade of Schloss Hollenegg. Photo: Courtesy of Schloss Hollenegg for Design

Of course, when the [coronavirus](#) pandemic hit in February, and shelter-in-place regulations were implemented, things changed. The show was canceled for visitors, though its opening (with a special tour by Liechtenstein herself at 7 p.m. CET) will take place on Saturday, May 9, on Instagram Live. Schloss Hollenegg's [website](#) will host a 3D realization of the exhibition that viewers can walk through like a video game, requesting information about the objects they see. Hopefully they will engage, for the contents have, arguably, gained a new relevance. As Calico Wallpaper's Rachel Cope explains, "Any moment that we are able to be outside right now feels like a true privilege, and that is very humbling."

In the exhibition, nature seems to literally invade the castle—its grand rooms filled with verdant foliage and piles of dirt—an almost hyperbolic realization of that feeling Liechtenstein had when she first moved in. They brought in moss and earth from the surrounding forest, as well as Mediterranean flora in a nod to an orangery that used to exist on the property. All of the commissioned works are tucked into the new interior landscape. "All the works have one thing in common," says Liechtenstein. "They try to bring a little wilderness into everyday life."