

Vitruvius from Without

Daniel Hill

Born in the U.S., Daniel Hill has lived and worked in Vienna since 2012. Self-taught in digital and film photography, he enhanced that knowledge with a diploma from the Friedl Kubelka School for Artistic Photography and a course with Anna Daučíková at the International Summer Academy of Fine Arts in Salzburg. Hill also holds an MSc in Socio-Ecological Economics and Policy from the Vienna University of Economics and Business. His works have been exhibited in various galleries and off spaces in Austria and abroad, including MuseumsQuartier Wien, Austrian Cultural Forum Berlin, Stadtgalerie Klagenfurt, Fotogalerie Wien, Ostlicht Galerie, and Galerie 5020 Salzburg. His works have also been featured as part of art and photography festivals, including Vienna Art Week, Luxemburg Art Week, Foto Wien, Rotlicht Festival, Off Grid Festival, and European Month of Photography Berlin. Individual works from the project *Queer as a Daffodil* are part of the Collection of the City of Vienna (Wien Museum Sammlung).

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The exhibition *Vitruvius from Without* is part of the *Body of Mere Being* artistic research project that critically interrogates the intersection of architecture, gender, and the human body. Daniel Hill's project takes inspiration from the feminist critiques of scholars like Jane Rendell and Diana Agrest, focusing on the traditionally male-centered history of architecture and urban design.

Set in Klagenfurt, the exhibition reevaluates Renaissance architectural theories, particularly those of Francesco di Giorgio Martini, which in turn were heavily based on the treatises of the Roman architect Vitruvius. These theorists famously rooted their design philosophies in the proportions of the male body, especially exemplified by Leonardo da Vinci's *Vitruvian Man*. Hill's project challenges these ideals, examining how bodies that do not conform to male,

heteronormative standards have been historically excluded or suppressed by architectural traditions.

At the heart of the exhibition is a critique of the Renaissance's anthropomorphic approach. By placing the male body at the center of architectural thought, these philosophies marginalized non-male and non-normative bodies. Agrest's critique, particularly in *Architecture from Without* (1991), which is featured prominently in the exhibition, is central to Hill's reinterpretation. Her feminist lens deconstructs the Renaissance tendency to project male anatomical proportions onto the built environment.

Hill's work also explores the concept of the architect's body as gendered. In Agrest's feminist critique, the traditionally male architect is reimagined in a transsexual operation, where the architect's body becomes

feminine in function—nourishing the city like a womb, rather than dominating it. The male navel, symbolic of the center in Vitruvian terms, is transformed into a site of nourishment, connecting the architect to the city like an umbilical cord.

This idea is explored in *Vitruvius Umbilicus* (found at the entrance), a work that deconstructs the role of the navel and umbilical cord and their connection to gender. Here, the city of Klagenfurt (ca. 1605) transforms into a placenta, reconfiguring the male architect as dependent on the city's nourishment and subverting the traditionally dominant male role in the creation and sustenance of urban space.

Hill's plaster sculptures, such as *Study of the Vitruvian Navel* and *Study of Body and Material*, alongside the photographic work, *Study of Vitruvian Man*, also engage in this critical rethinking. In these works, the artist's own body becomes central, and the supposed divine proportions of Renaissance theory are questioned. The *Study of Vitruvian Man*, for instance, removes the torso and genitals, erasing the symbolic center and disrupting the symmetry and balance considered essential in Vitruvian theory. Meanwhile, the plaster torso places direct focus on the navel through its disembodiment and rough, unfinished edges.

Two research tables are also presented. On the first, the final chapter of Diana Agrest's book, *Architecture from Without: Body, Logic & Sex*, which serves as the framing for the exhibition, is presented alongside annotated notes, research photographs and moving images created during the residency. Behind this table, on the wall, are prints of Francesco di Giorgio Martini's manuscript, *Trattato di architettura, ingegneria e arte militare* (ca. 1482), with Hill's annotations and drawings.

The second table features an extended reference library for the research, including contributions from colleagues, institutions and scholars. The video shows Hill during an extended public intervention at Neuer Platz, every day for a month, reading from one of the reference books. The footage is captured by the City's Webcam located on Neuer Platz.

The exhibition also features prior works from the *Body of Mere Being* project, such as *My Very Flesh Shall Resist Every Stone*, and two video works, *This is My Fortress, Where I Contain My Fears* and *The Body Set Free*. These pieces highlight the tensions between queer bodies and public space, showing how queer identities are not only sites of struggle but also of embodied experience and cultural resistance.