

## FINANCIAL TIMES

The city is hoping a programme of public art installations will help to win tourists back from Berlin



'Han' (2012), an installation by Elmgreen & Dragset

The Mandarin Oriental in Munich, perhaps the most polished of the city's five-star hotels, publishes a booklet called *10 Reasons to Visit Munich*. It's a curious mix of attractions: BMW World gets the number-one spot, followed by Ludwig II's castle at Neuschwanstein. The Oktoberfest gets a look in, as does Munich airport ("the best in Europe", apparently). But with the exception of the Alte and Neue Pinakothek, the city's remarkable art galleries are overlooked.

It is a puzzling oversight, especially at a time when, as the hotel's general manager, Lars Wagner, told me, the city is losing out to Berlin when it comes to tourism. In the first half of 2012, more than 5m people visited Berlin, up 13 per cent on the previous year. Munich drew 2.8m during the same period. "We are a conservative city in comparison," he says, "but we do have fashion; we do have art. Yet all anyone talks about now is Berlin. Even the film industry has moved back there."

No wonder then that Munich city council is anxious to counter the prejudice that for all its wealth, beauty and heritage, it's a *bürgerlich*, backward-looking city of the baroque, and to reassert its reputation as a centre for contemporary culture. To that end, it has commissioned Elmgreen & Dragset, the Scandinavian artist partnership, to create and curate a year-long programme of installations across its main squares.

"We hope the art will become a reason for people to come to Munich," says Michael

"Han" was unveiled in June, and by the end of August the area had registered a 5 per cent rise in overnight visitors. And though Dorte Killerich, director of the local tourism office, is reluctant to attribute this conclusively to "Han", she brims with enthusiasm for it. "We are very, very happy with it," she told me. "It's brought us a lot of attention, and overseas visitors who might only have gone to Copenhagen are now coming to Helsingor too. Once," she adds, "I saw him blink. It felt very special; I felt lucky for the rest of the day."

Helsingør's mayor, Johannes Hecht-Nielsen, says he can't yet put a figure on the extra income brought in by those additional visitors, but his research already points to the positive effects of funding the project.

"We commissioned a survey to see whether our decision to focus on culture was the right one, and it indicates that if the media exposure it generated was converted into advertising, that would have been considerably more expensive than the cost of the art," he says.

Munich has committed €1.2m to its project, "A Space Called Public" (translated euphoniouly if not quite literally from the German name, *Hoffentlich Öffentlich*). The first work, to be unveiled on January 29 in Wittelsbacherplatz, will be by the British artist Stephen Hall – a piece called "Phantom" that replicates the Fourth Plinth in London's Trafalgar Square, the once empty granite block that has since 1999 supported a succession of contemporary sculptures (currently, as it happens, Elmgreen & Dragset's immense boy-on-a-rocking-horse bronze, which is there until April).

Like London's Fourth Plinth, it will be placed in opposition to an existing statue, this time of the elector Maximilian I on a horse. "It's basically recreating the situation that existed in London before they started putting new works on the Fourth Plinth," says Trondheim-born Ingar Dragset. "It's there to raise questions, to make people wonder if a sculpture is going to appear on it." (It won't.)

Munich, he says, is actually nothing like as "conservative, polished and ordered" as they'd assumed when they accepted the commission. Rather, they say, it's already full of thought-provoking art: in the Haus der Kunst, the Kunstverein, the Pinakothek der Moderne. The city has no qualms about funding "things that are not upfront popular – the world just needs to know about them".



The roster of artists with whom they're working includes the Icelander Ragnar Kjartansson, who is planning a performance-based collaboration with one of Munich's four orchestras. Malaysian-born Han Chong is constructing a giant reclining Buddha figure that will lie in Viktualienmarkt, the city's photogenic central marketplace. Nearby, in the fashionably boho area around Deutsche Eiche, the Danish artist Henrik Olesen will be creating a memorial to the late film director and Munich resident Rainer Werner Fassbinder. But not everything will be new. "We're hoping to have some sculptures by [the late] Martin Kippenberger in the Marienhof," says Dragset, referring to the square behind the *Rathaus*, or town hall. "But dealing with estates is often more complicated than dealing with artists themselves."

Elmgreen & Dragset will also contribute two of their own "temporary art interventions". One will be a "tourist office" within the *Rathaus*, staffed by art students, and where all the literature will be their own work. More controversial promises to be a performance piece called "It's Never Too Late to Say Sorry", which will be familiar to residents of Rotterdam, where it's been running in front of city hall since May 2011.

Essentially, says Elmgreen, it consists of "a glass cabinet on a granite base that contains an old-fashioned stainless-steel megaphone. In itself it's an almost abstract object, especially lit up at night. Everyday at noon, a performer comes, unlocks the door, takes the megaphone and shouts once: 'It's never too late to say sorry.'"



'It's Never Too Late To Say Sorry' (2011) by Elmgreen & Dragset

In Rotterdam, it's bellowed in English, as it was when it ran for six months outside New York's city hall last summer. In Munich, however, it will be in German. They're working on the precise phrasing, fully aware that here it may be perceived as having "a completely different, much stronger meaning because of the historic context". Not that they want to be perceived as making too clunking a point. "It's a universal statement: we all have something to say sorry for," says Dragset. But its location on Odeonsplatz will surely be seen as pointed, for

Hitler not only held rallies here but installed a shrine to the martyrs of the failed Beer Hall Putsch, which passers-by were expected to salute. To avoid this, refuseniks would bypass the square, using instead a little alley, Viscardigasse, their brave opposition commemorated with a winding pathway of golden cobblestones.

Even so, the installation likely to cause most outrage will be Kirsten Pieroth's "Berliner Pfütze", or Berlin puddle, a pool of rainwater harvested in Berlin that will be pumped out on to Munich streets every day for a month.

"We thought: what does Munich need?" says Dragset, who lives in Berlin. "Some bad weather. A little bit of Berlin dirt."

It's already made the front page of the German tabloid Bild-Zeitung. "They hardly ever write about art," he adds, "so it was great they wrote about it at all. And actually they were quite positive." In any case, perhaps it is what Munich needs: a bit of Berlin edginess, attitude and controversy to bring in more of the 10m or so visitors who flock annually to the German capital.

*'A Space Called Public' runs from January 29, see [www.aspacecalledpublic.de](http://www.aspacecalledpublic.de) and [www.muenchen.de](http://www.muenchen.de)*