



## FRAU\* schafft Raum

Memorial and platform against violence in Vienna

Spazio commemorativo e piattaforma contro la violenza sulle donne a Vienna

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**The brutal femicide of a young woman in Vienna marks the starting point for a memorial against gender-based violence. In 2022, after a won open call, the city of Vienna and UNIOA decided to finance the FRAU\* schafft Raum project, which envisages the transformation of the small business premises, the scene of the crime, into an exhibition and meeting centre as a platform against gender violence.**

**The architectural project transforms the micro-environment into a flexible space in communication with the city. Light, industrial materials contrast with the heavy masonry of the historic building. A velarium reinterprets the memory of the tragedy without completely erasing its traces: a circle in the plaster lets the signs of the dark past emerge, resonating with the outside through a glass oculus. A sloping metal wall conceals service spaces and extends to the street like an invitation. The severe balance of the elements defines a new place with multiple levels of meaning, from symbolic to communicative and artistic. FRAU\* schafft Raum is now an innovative space of 'active memory' and social prevention against violence against women.**

Il brutale femminicidio di una giovane donna a Vienna segna il punto di partenza per un memoriale contro la violenza di genere. Nel 2022, dopo un concorso pubblico, la città di Vienna e UNIOA assicurazioni decidono di finanziare il progetto FRAU\* schafft Raum che prevede la trasformazione del piccolo locale commerciale, scena del delitto, in un centro di mostre e incontri come piattaforma contro la violenza di genere.

Il progetto architettonico trasforma il piccolo ambiente in uno spazio flessibile in comunicazione con la città. Materiali industriali e leggeri entrano in rapporto con le pesanti murature dell'edificio storico. Un velario purifica la memoria del dramma senza cancellarne del tutto le tracce: un cerchio nell'intonaco lascia emergere i segni cupi del passato, entrando in risonanza con l'esterno attraverso un oculo vetrato. Una parete inclinata in metallo nasconde gli spazi di servizio e si prolunga fino alla strada come un invito. L'equilibrio severo dei segni definisce un nuovo luogo con livelli plurimi di significato, da quello simbolico a quello comunicativo e artistico. FRAU\* schafft Raum è oggi uno spazio innovativo di "memoria attiva" e monumento dinamico di prevenzione sociale contro la violenza sulle donne.

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Entrance on  
Nußdorfer Strasse 4.  
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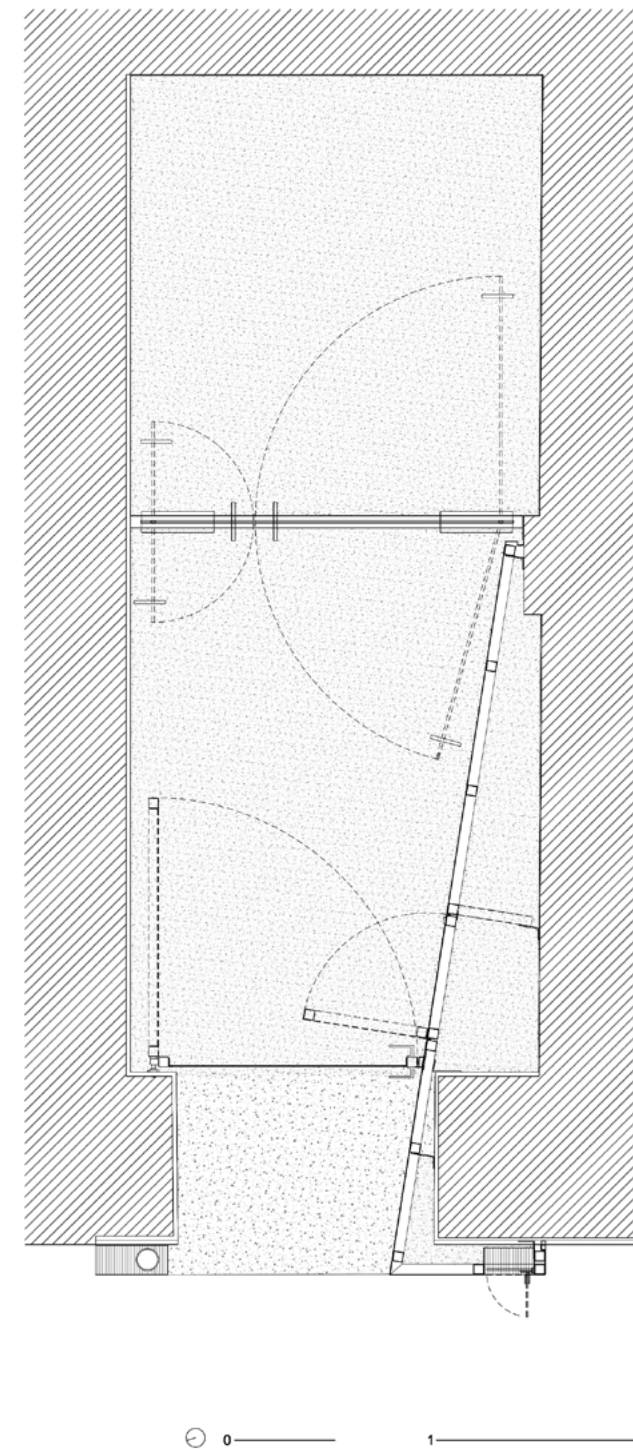
A late 19th-century building overlooking one of Vienna's main thoroughfares, Nußdorfer Strasse, became a witness to a crime so heinous that it deeply shook the Austrian capital. On March 5, 2021, a 35-year-old woman was burned alive by her ex-partner inside the small tobacconist shop she owned and worked in. A femicide of such brutal savagery left its mark on the modest shop, with the charred remains bearing silent testimony to the tragedy. Almost immediately, residents of the neighborhood began leaving candles and flowers on the sidewalk, organizing protests, composing improvised poetry, and writing messages to commemorate the woman's life—a life that symbolized the suffering and plight of women everywhere.

Months later, political representatives of Vienna's 9th district, Alsergrund, made a bold decision: rather than erasing the traces of such a horrifying crime, they chose to transform the space into a public place of memory, prevention, and gathering. Their aim was to draw attention to the issue of femicides and, more broadly, to violence against women. Although Vienna is renowned for its exceptional quality of life and extensive social services, it remains, unfortunately, one of the European cities with the highest rates of violence against women.

The project FRAU\* schafft Raum ("Women Create Space") emerged as an innovative initiative of "active memory," transforming the site of a murder into a space for communication and art, dedicated to and managed by women. It is part of a social platform that seeks to prevent and combat all forms of gender-based violence. This modern monument has no statues, plaques, or inscriptions. Instead, it exists as a public space directly open to the city and linked to a network that provides advice and support to women in need. The initiative has garnered the support of



01.  
Old aluminium handle.  
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02.  
Floor plan.  
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03.

Metal-clad wall.  
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numerous organizations, associations, artists, and intellectuals, united by their determination to fight against gender-based violence. FRAU\* schafft Raum is therefore a living monument, capable of transforming a space marked by unimaginable violence into one of remembrance, social support, and preventive action for women.

The project's realization was made possible thanks to critical support from UNIQA, the insurance group that owns the building. In addition to offering the space, UNIQA also provided financial assistance to create the memorial. The city of Vienna further supported the initiative by launching a public funding call, allocating additional resources to finance the cultural and exhibition program for the first three years. FRAU\* schafft Raum, which won the won open call, fosters collaboration across various creative disciplines, including architecture, art, and photography. Its program includes at least four exhibitions per year, with each exhibit exploring themes related to violence against women. Changing every three months, these exhibitions make the small space a dynamic hub of urban art and collective debate, promoting dialogue and solidarity among women and with society at large. The square outside the building was also renamed "Ni-Una-Menos-Platz" in honor of the South American feminist movement, broadening the initiative's perspective to a global scale from this modest urban setting.

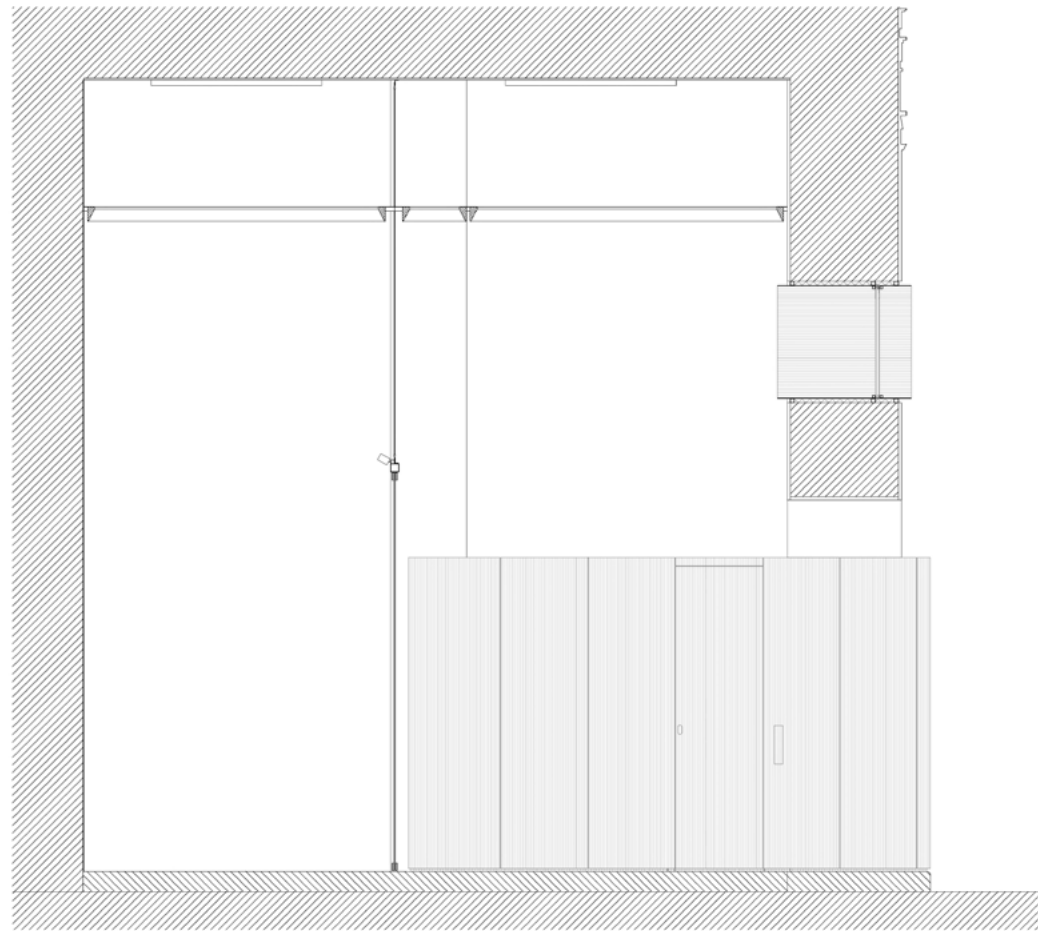
The architectural design blends historical elements, such as brick walls, stucco decorations, and a classical façade, with contemporary features like steel profiles, glass panels, and white fabric. The stark abstraction introduced by the modern materials aim to transfigure the tragedy of the site, shifting collective focus toward visual and symbolic expression. The simplicity of the surfaces softens the echoes of violence, offering a purified volume—a blank canvas for artistic installations and creative expression. The theme of memory was particularly challenging in the architectural design due to the harrowing nature of the events and the necessity of

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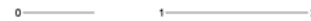
Traces.  
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05.



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West longitudinal section.  
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Interior.  
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maintaining an appropriate emotional distance. Upon re-entering the space after the fire, the atmosphere was overwhelming. The blackened walls still carried the smell of burned gasoline and charred materials. The space felt less like a room and more like a dark, shapeless void devoid of compassion. Yet the project sought to reclaim this void, infusing it with positive value.

Most of the blackened marks left by the fire, both inside and on the façade, have now been removed. This was necessary to restore visual balance and make the space usable. However, one poignant trace of the past remains: a small circular cavity in the plaster, exposing a fragment of the original wall as it appeared immediately after the fire. This painful act of memory is confined within a perfect geometric form—a circle—both to clearly delimit the memory and to create a new resonance with the city. During renovations, the removal of the shop's exterior cladding revealed a historic oculus window hidden beneath layers of alterations. By bringing the oculus back into view and connecting it with the interior circular mark, a dialogue was created between the interior and exterior, projecting light and elements of the exhibition space outward into the city and vice versa.

Once freed of its oppressive traces, the space revealed its modest proportions: a narrow, elongated structure with an exaggerated verticality. The project focused on rebalancing this



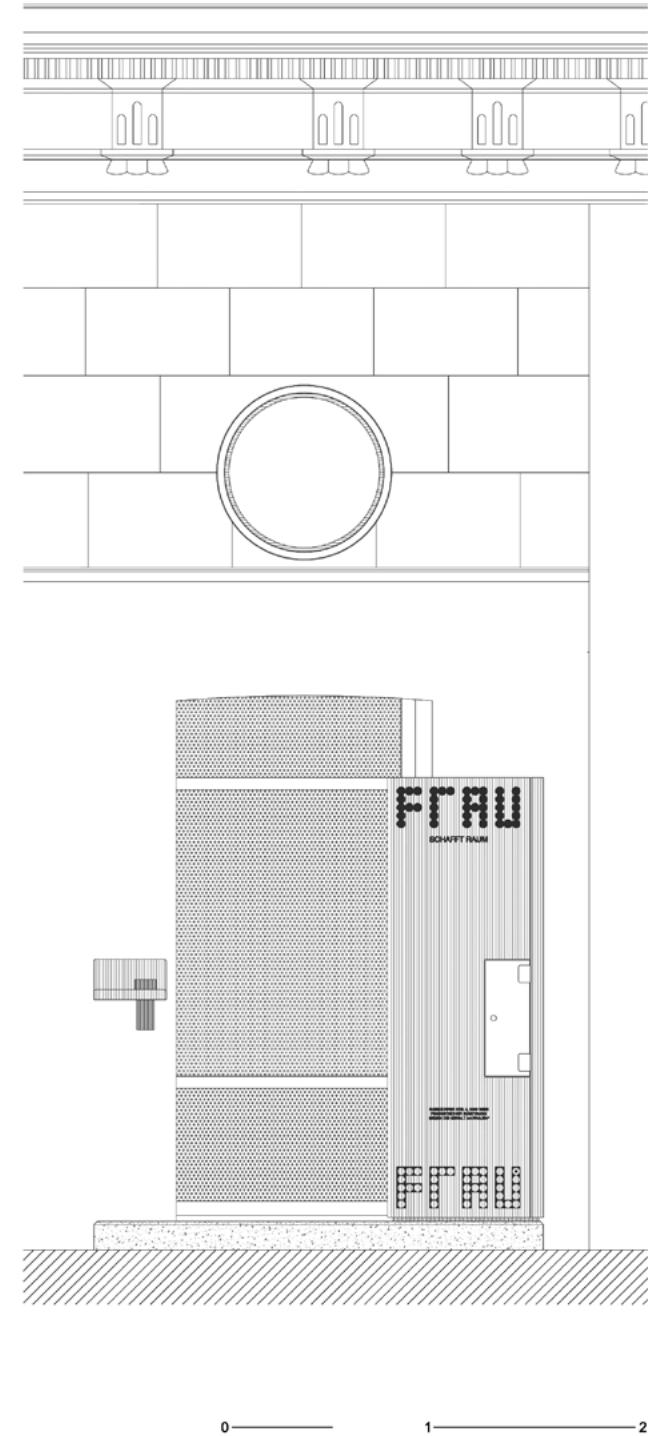
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The velarium.  
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fragment of space. A translucent white fabric screen, mounted on metal supports, lowers the ceiling, transforming it into a luminous canopy that diffuses light softly throughout the interior. This gentle glow serves as a gesture of reconciliation, sublimating the pain embedded in the walls. The design prioritizes expressive simplicity, foregoing embellishments or color to achieve clarity and visual serenity. A frameless glass door separates the interior from the street, while a delicate white cord mesh above prevents birds from entering. The space flows seamlessly onto the street, with a steel wall extending onto the sidewalk, signaling the space's presence while maintaining visual harmony. This steel wall, neutral in its gray texture, conceals small service compartments to preserve the overall balance of the design.

Despite its small scale, FRAU\* schafft Raum carries profound collective meaning, operating on multiple levels. Socially, it offers a flexible space for testimony and dialogue. Historically, it preserves the continuity with the original building while embracing contemporary forms. Symbolically, it inscribes the memory of violence into the plaster, reframing it as a call to action. Visually, it balances the weight of 19th-century masonry with the lightness of modern interventions. And in its urban context, it reveals its presence through the steel wall that extends onto the street like an outstretched hand, inviting passersby in. The steel wall also displays a hotline number for women in distress, as well as a small showcase highlighting the work of the artist currently exhibited inside.

FRAU\* schafft Raum does not close in a traditional sense; it is a pocket of resilience that expands from the street into the base of the 19th-century building—a space suspended between interior and exterior. It remains accessible even when its doors are shut. The black metal façade is micro-perforated, allowing passersby to glimpse the interior and keep the memory alive during closures. Seeing, pausing, reading, and meeting are actions the architecture invites and encourages. The black steel entrance door reuses the square aluminum plate that once served as the handle of the old tobacconist shop—a heavy, scratched plaque bearing the marks of countless hands that once touched it. These marks, left by customers and friends of the woman who ran the shop, and by strangers, remain as silent witnesses to a tragic past.



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Street facade.  
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On the building's exterior, opposite the glass showcase, a small steel shelf offers passersby the chance to place a candle or a flower in a printed glass vase—delicate symbols of a memory that is still very much alive in the neighborhood. Amid the bustling commercial activity of Nußdorfer Strasse, FRAU\* schafft Raum stands out for its reserved facade, which, in the chaos of urban signage, becomes a striking exception. The light filtering through its layers of materials and surfaces allows everything to be seen—down to the smallest detail—even for those rushing past to catch a tram.

FRAU\* schafft Raum is not only an innovative model of architectural remembrance but also a fragment of collective memory and the soul of a city. It is a testament to urban resilience and the ongoing effort to promote inclusivity and combat violence against women. Above the sidewalk, the oculus window casts light, drawing attention to the works exhibited inside or, at times, to the empty space awaiting its next story. This subtle sense of anticipation transforms FRAU\* schafft Raum into more than an art gallery or a gathering place: it is the hushed echo of memory reverberating within those walls and the quiet promise of change—a change built slowly, day by day, by those who pass by and step inside this small but powerful space of active memory.



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Frau schafft Raum\* as part of the Vienna Architecture Summer School 2024 under the theme "(un)building Architecture?", a workshop led by Marlene Wagner.

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#### PROJECT SHEET

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**Funding:** Peter Hanke, councillor for finance, economy, labor, international affairs, and Wiener Stadtwerke of the City of Vienna; INNOVATION MANAGEMENT with the DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMY, LABOR, AND STATISTICS of the City of Vienna; René Knapp, board member of UNIQA INSURANCE and responsible for human resources and sustainability

**Supporters:** Kathrin Gaál, deputy mayor and councillor for social housing, urban renewal, and women of the City of Vienna; Christoph Wiederkehr, deputy mayor and councillor for education, youth, integration, and transparency of the City of Vienna; Veronica Kaup-Hasler, councillor for culture and science of the City of Vienna; Shams Asadi, head of the HUMAN RIGHTS OFFICE of the City of Vienna; WOMEN'S SERVICE of the City of Vienna – MA57

**Project and Construction:** 2022–2023

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**Architectural Photography:** Christoph Kleinsasser (Vienna)