

Arena for a Tree – A walk-in art intervention by Klaus Littmann, presented by the Kulturstiftung Basel H. Geiger | KBH.G

Criteria for the tree selection by Enzo Enea

For Klaus Littmann's 2019 project *For Forest – The Unending Attraction of Nature* in Klagenfurt, Austria, landscape architect Enzo Enea arranged 299 trees in the 30,000-seat Wörthersee Stadium to create a European mixed forest. In the project in Basel, Switzerland, a single tree is the central attraction in an arena that seats fifty. This tree, the focus for all eyes and thoughts, is an appeal, a memorial, and a proxy for the forest, for nature, and for the urgent importance of their preservation.

The selection criteria

After the successful collaboration between artist and landscape architect in Klagenfurt, it was clear that Enea was the ideal person to select and raise the tree for Basel. But what kind of tree should it be? Which tree is majestic enough all on its own to attract all eyes to the center of the arena, the kind of attention often denied that same tree in an environment that is replete with stimuli but lacking in vegetation? The joint decision-making process was based both on the requirements stipulated by Littmann and the Basel municipal gardening department and the expert knowledge of Enea, whose decisions always show respect for local conditions. This was not an easy task, considering the commanding symbolic power that would be invested in the lone tree. The tree would have to be strong both literally and figuratively because, after the temporary art intervention has departed the Münsterberg, it will remain in Basel and be integrated into the urban tree population at a location still to be determined.

The tree of the future

Enea ultimately chose the Persian ironwood tree, *Parrotia Persica*, a member of the witch hazel family. The slow-growing ironwood tree, which can reach a height of up to ten meters, is, as its name suggests, made of very dense, hard wood, so heavy that it is one of the few types of wood that does not float on water. In autumn its leaves display a spectacular array of colors ranging from yellow to red. Originally from Persia and the Caucasus, which also have a continental climate, the ironwood tree is accustomed to distinct seasons. It likes warm weather but is also hardy and tolerates the urban climate particularly well. Enea finds that this robustness, which also includes high resistance to pests and diseases, makes the stress-resistant ironwood tree the perfect candidate for the project, one that is also ideally equipped to deal with the effects of climate change: "For me, the ironwood tree is the tree of hope and the future par excellence and as such a positive symbol for climate protection, which we humans must actively promote. Because nature does not need us, but we need nature."

The tree keeper

The internationally successful landscape architect Enea has pursued his great love for trees for over twenty-five years. This passion is at the heart of all his garden and landscape projects. Enea is not only a tree specialist but also a tree keeper. Wherever possible, he rescues trees destined for felling from construction sites, private gardens, or parks and allows them to live on in his Tree Museum at the company's headquarters. In this way, a wide variety of trees, including old, gnarled, and weather-beaten specimens, are given a new lease on life and can display their own unique beauty as solitaires on the rambling museum grounds. Littmann's intention for his *Arena for a Tree* is very similar.

About Enea Landscape Architecture

Enea is an international landscape architecture and horticulture company with offices in Zurich, Miami, and New York. The staff of approximately 200 people comprises a multi-disciplinary team of professionals with backgrounds in landscape architecture, architecture, interior design, technical design, engineering, construction, and botany. Founded in 2010, the unique Tree Museum at the company headquarters in Rapperswil-Jona demonstrates the harmonious integration of landscape, architecture, art, and design.

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