

## Quick Bird: Hanna Roeckle's Project for the New Village Center in Schaan

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To design a central plaza in Schaan was a great challenge not only for the architects but also for the public art project commissioned in connection with it. On one hand, it was an opportunity to make a vital visual impact that would exert a lasting influence on the life of the town, on the other, the brief called for the plaza to remain largely unencumbered.

Nonetheless, the situation offered unusual conditions for an integrated design since the underground parking garage beneath the square was to be incorporated in the planning. With her project Quick Bird, Hanna Roeckle proposed a congenial solution to a demanding brief and won first prize in the international competition. The striking quality of Roeckle's project lies in the fact that she devised a purely visual response to the complexity of the brief. The solution she suggested was not invasive and also makes subtle reference to historical models of urban design, tied in with an attractive optical quality that simultaneously refrains from setting accents of the kind conventionally pressed into service for such projects.

Quick Bird consists of a systematic pattern, a grid that covers the middle of the new plaza. At first sight it looks like a chessboard in light blue and anthracite, on the long side of which is a lateral distortion of every dividing line, somewhat like the stripes created by interference on a TV or damaged tracking on a video recorder. The pattern was created by adding pigment to the extremely durable slabs of concrete that cover the plaza. On taking a closer look, especially from above, one realizes that Roeckle's decorative layout resembles patterns already known in antiquity and also popular in late-Renaissance Italy. As it turns out, the pointed "distortions" reinforce the optical illusion of regularly arranged bodies in space. At one moment they look as if they were lying down; a second later they are suddenly perceived to be standing—perception varies depending on which lines the viewer uses for orientation. Nor can one tell whether the volumes extend up (into the air) or down (into the ground). This effect of perceived changes in direction is typical of illusionist design. Its presence on the plaza in Schaan becomes a subtle metaphor for the multifunctional role the plaza is meant to play in the life of the town. The artist deliberately opted for a large pattern so that the illusionist aspect of the work would barely be perceptible from a pedestrian's perspective. A certain distance is required to get a larger picture that allows one to read the structure as a whole. Roeckle has actually succeeded in obscuring the town center, specifically the middle of the plaza, by turning it into a diffuse zone with an order that all those who use it have to work out for themselves.

Quick Bird by Hanna Roeckle is intimately attuned to its location, to the distinctive features of the space it occupies. This may come as a surprise since her design consists exclusively of "planes." How can a work of this kind also reflect the third dimension? References to antiquity in the Renaissance offer useful insights. Architects and artists of the early sixteenth century were fully aware of the potential of visually designed surfaces to exert a suggestive influence on the perception of space. Effects that were not an architectural option because of structural engineering, other technical issues, or a limited budget could be generated in two dimensions. In Roeckle's work, the investigation of space has been a crucial concern for many years, though obviously not in competition with architects. Rather, it is her aim to intensify the experience of space through constructive uncertainties. This is also the consummate achievement of Quick Bird. While the artist has converted the center of the town plaza into a zone that eludes a clear-cut grasp, compelling users to look twice and take a clear stand, the murals in the underground garage lend a vibrancy to the banal functionality of the garage that cannot be ignored. Once again viewers are compelled to perceive space consciously and deliberately.