



Over the last several years sculptor Lena Henke (*1982 in Warburg) has created a diverse oeuvre that defies any attempt at formal categorization. Many of her large-scale installations are developed in response to the social and architectural context of a given exhibition space. As a result, her works penetrate deep into the personal space of the viewer. Henke repeatedly addresses the structural organization of urban and rural outdoor space, using her own biography and subjective experiences as part of her exploration.

The modern urban cityscape is not presented as a fixed, discrete entity but as an animated, airy space, which is open for individual contexts of interpretation.

New York City, her home by choice, with its tradition as a place for art and culture and ambiguous status as the “capital of the (western) world,” is often used as a central point of reference in her artistic cosmos.

On the occasion of her solo exhibition **AVAILABLE LIGHT** at Kunstverein Braunschweig, Henke presents new sculptures and installations that markedly alter the sequence in which the rooms of Villa Salve Hospes are usually experienced. Her works extend into the outdoor areas of the building, while also referencing the content of previous exhibitions at Kunstverein Braunschweig.

The starting point for the exhibition is the cast bronze *City Lights (Dead Horse Bay)*, which is situated in the courtyard of the Kunstverein. In this work the artist links the shape of a horse's head with the contour of the island of Manhattan, creating a surrealistic urban landscape on the form. Whereas a tourist's fascination for New York stems from the individual's sense of being dwarfed by skyscrapers that seems to graze the sky, Henke shifts this perspective in a manner that makes the city seem manageable and lends it a playful element. She breaks with what is considered a neutral bird's eye view or central perspective by creating a visual dimension in which things that exist in real life are merged with fragments that have personal significance to the artist. The architectural history of the city of New York, its building landmarks, are enmeshed with items of Henke's personal interest.

Placed side by side with skyscrapers, objects of differing size occupy the architectural constellation of this subjective city model of New York. In Gericault-like density, *City Lights (Dead Horse Bay)* is a three-dimensional self-portrait. The architectural features of communal urban life and society—buildings, streets, and open plazas—no longer appear as the existing infrastructure within which life plays out or as a mere backdrop. Instead, these forms become vital actors that relate both personal experiences and city history, thus weaving—in a dreamlike manner—a dense web of various content and levels of meaning. Animal-like forms become architecture; a swath cuts through the bronze island shaped like a horse's head and it recalls the idea of urban planner Robert Moses, which ultimately remained a utopian concept. In the 1950s and 1960s Moses wanted to have a highway, the LOMEX (Lower Manhattan Expressway), run through the city, and entire blocks in densely populated Soho would need to have been razed for this purpose. It was a bold project, questionable both in terms of architecture and urban policy, and it was finally only hindered by relentless citizen protests spearheaded by activist Jane Jacobs. Cast in bronze and thus captured in solid form are time-based phenomena such as social change, developments in urban space, and personal memory.

Based on her in-depth exploration of the architecture of Villa Salve Hospes, Henke created the encompassing installation *Available Light (After Frank Gehry)*—encompassing in the sense that it envelops the villa from the outside and forces visitors to access the building in a new way. The exhibition title **AVAILABLE LIGHT** and the use of a raised platform are inspired by Lucinda Childs' first major work and its set design, which was created by Frank Gehry. Visitors are led past the entrance and onto a wooden installation that takes them around the building on an elevated passageway. From this vantage point both the interior of the building as well as the surrounding garden are visible in an unaccustomed way. Henke thus continues

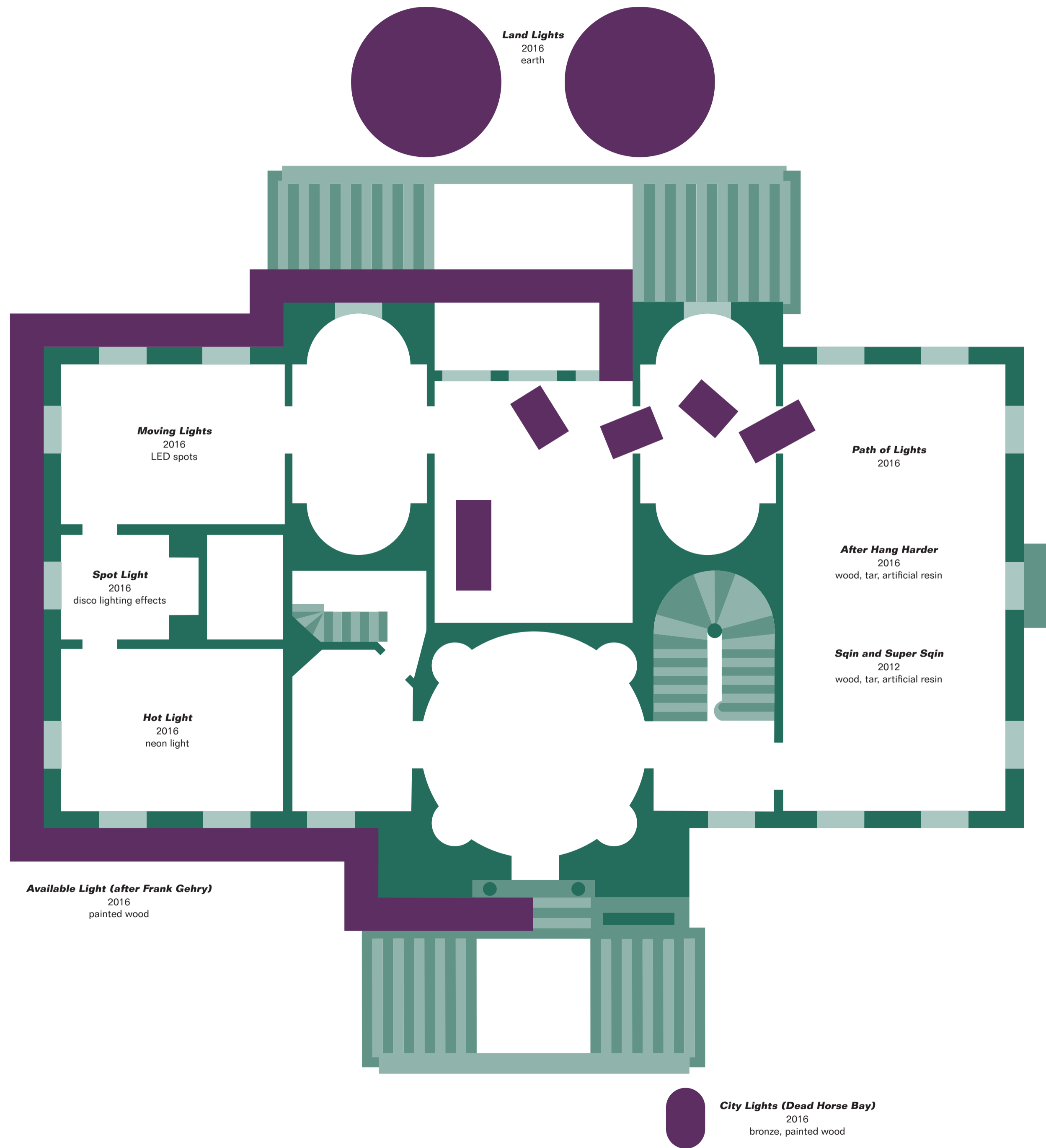
this play of perspectives, initiated with the cast bronze, by artificially raising the viewer's position and shifting it to the outside of the building. The villa thus becomes a kind of dollhouse—and takes on a picturesque appearance, which is underscored by the light installation *Hot Light, Spot Light, Moving Lights* on the building interior. The colors of the outdoor installation recall the work *Deep Purple* by Tom Burr—a wooden wall in the same purple tone erected by the American artist in the garden of the Kunstverein in 2000. His work in turn referred to the legendary steel sculpture by Richard Serra, *Tilted Arc*, which was installed in 1981 in Manhattan and soon generated such virulent protest that it was ultimately taken down. In contrast to the works of Serra and Burr, whose sculptures were used as places of refuge and hiding, Henke's work exposes the visitor. The installation is simultaneously a stage, a catwalk, and an accessible pedestal, thus turning visitors into the performers of *Available Light*. From this elevated position Henke also offers a clear view of her work *Land Lights*: two giant circles, each 12 meters in diameter, drawn in the grass of the Kunstverein by trotting horses before the opening. These earthworks reference the work of Land Art artists, who were largely active in the US in the 1960s and 1970s and who produced their works outside of the white cube in unpopulated natural environments. As the simplest of geometric forms, the circle appears here in the exhibition for the first time and then resurfaces again within the final element of the exhibition, in the mirrored hall. Here, in front of the windows, flat circular shapes in two different sizes are placed in leaning positions on wooden chairs belonging to the Kunstverein as the work *(After Hang Harder)*. Coated with tar, these wooden panels are pieced together from elements of a previous installation, and through their materiality they openly show the various stages of their development. The installation as a whole is titled *Path of Lights*, pointing to, also in a literal sense, Lucinda Childs's stage piece *Available Light* from 1983, which inspired the title: due to their position in front of the windows, the objects regulate the “available light,” making it a limited resource.

Lena Henke views the existing architecture and its surrounding space as material that she can playfully mold with a sculptural gesture, while also bracketing and framing it at the same time. Inverting the interior and the exterior, top and bottom, back and front, she allows warm to follow cold, plays with a worm's perspective and bird's eye view, blocks the source of light in one place and the entry to the building in another, and merges then and now, New York and here. In doing so she does not create one view of things but many. Her work is not concerned with creating intensity but with producing a complex coexistence of perceptions of place and references to the past.

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 The exhibition of Lena Henke has been made possible by:
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 Opening hours
 Tues – Sun 11 am – 5 pm
 Thu 11 am – 8 pm

LENA HENKE Available Light

December 3, 2016–February 12, 2017



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