

ART. NOT COMPROMISE

During times such as the present, with society threatening to backslide, one must unflinchingly continue saying that which has already been said a hundred times over, since such things otherwise run a particularly high risk of remaining unsaid or being forgotten entirely. Namely: art that wastes itself on nothing and nobody is art that also never makes compromises. He who allows marketing considerations to whittle away at the uncompromising quality of art effectively sells art down the river, entirely for the worse and none for the better.

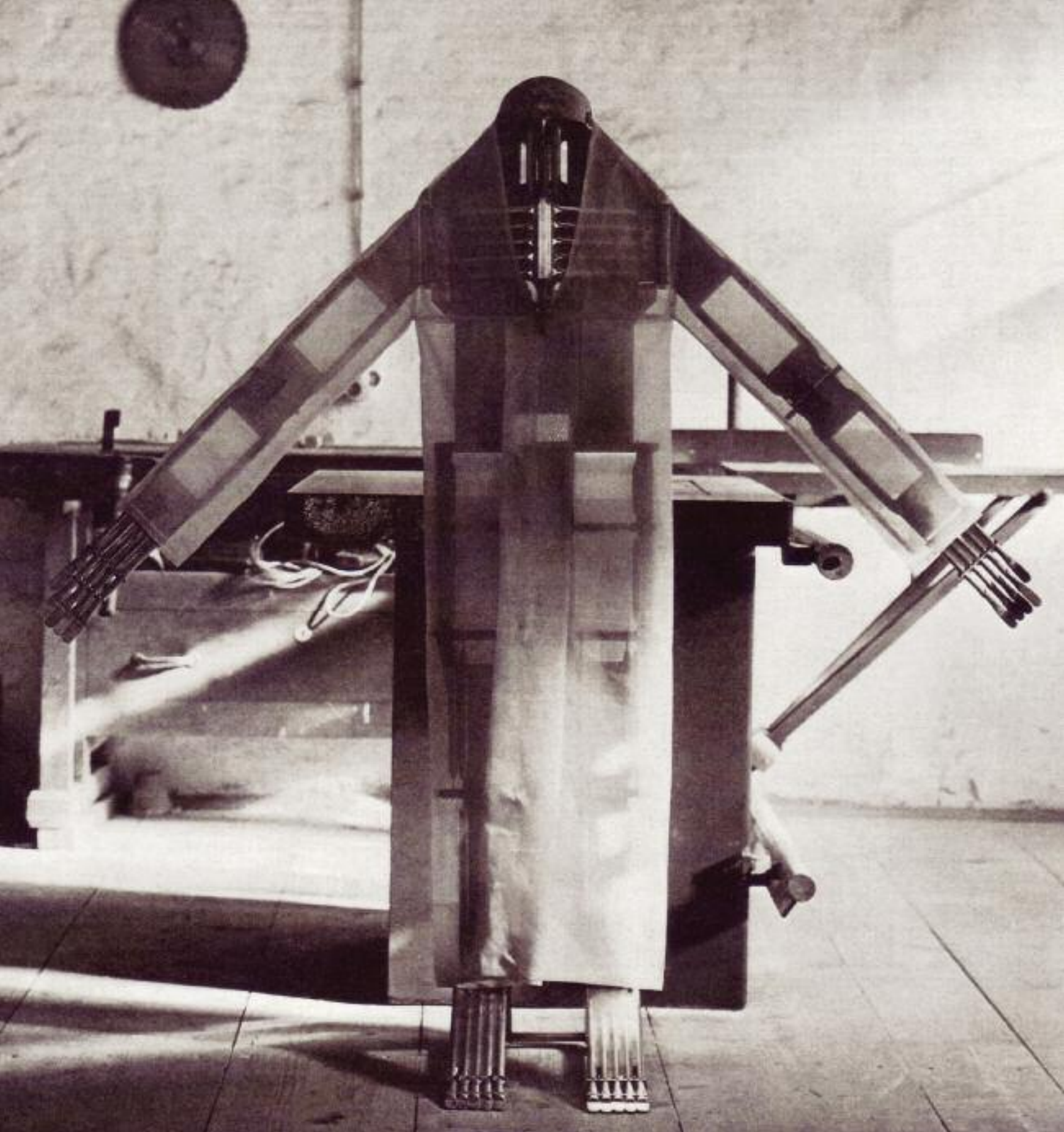
The period from 1989 to 1993 saw the MAK reconfigured via the general renovation of the building and re-presentation of the permanent display collection, with devotion to an uncompromising aesthetic and eschewing beautification and reconstructions while remaining sensitive to tradition. Infusing the preserved past with the spirit of the present without simultaneously destroying it represents the challenge of contemporary museum work; tradition can only be preserved when one experiments with and/or against it. Via the dialectic between past and present, the laboratories of the MAK give birth to the future in action.

Independence is to the art museum what freedom is to art. The “coordination of interests” between commerce and art, on the other hand, always ends up being a “bargain” in favor of financial considerations. Art commits suicide for fear of its own death when it conforms to the imperatives of the market and more or less dies a death of self-effacement in the attempt to avoid starvation. Ultimately, commercialization always leads to banalization. The view that “people prefer the commercial” remains a lie so long as one consciously neglects to educate them about the essence of art as such. Like so many other entities in our society, museums are locked in a Darwinistic struggle of sorts, with visitor statistics supposedly providing an indicator of success and/or failure. But quality is not a function of market share; elevating the latter to an artistic criterion leads one to forget what is actually important. When art ceases to be art and degenerates into an event, and when its sharp contours are smoothed over, society ossifies. A country’s culture cannot be measured in terms of indirect profits from art-related tourism, but rather with reference to the respect which it pays its artists.

Is hundreds of thousands of visitors flocking to museums at all useful to art—which contemporary works, in particular, are always about individually summoning up the subject and challenging it to a personal confrontation? As a sharp contrast to this paradigm, the MAK shows art in its most direct, often most radical form; artists are able to do things here that it would be impossible to do the same way elsewhere. Such creative activity frequently fails to generate spectacular mass appeal. If lost, however, not even millions of visitors could compensate for it.

A nation in which the diversity of the museum landscape is undermined and all the institutions are pressed into the same mould ultimately arrives at something like one big corporate McMuseum Group—with identical franchises, every one of them obsessed with market share. If the museums are not at last understood in their various unmistakable profiles, neo-liberalization will culminate in something like a centrally planned museum economy. It is precisely the differences between the major institutions that embody their advantage; comparing them according to one single criterion—market share in terms of visitors—is not only one-sided, but also wrong-headed. The release of Austria’s federal museums into full independence as separate legal entities was meant to counteract the risk of centralization, at least in principle; in actual fact, however, this only served to reinforce the dictate to follow a profitable program for the masses. There exists growing pressure to use big names to attract large numbers of visitors and to pursue tried-and-true, safe strategies rather than to commit to artistic experimentation. In this respect, the question of just how much sense three-year plans make for all museums must also be critically revisited. For some institutions, such planning methods may indeed be a sensible route to take; but stipulating the use of such frameworks by places of contemporary art, as well, constrains them in their missions and—in the worst-case scenario—freezes them into quiet, icy backwaters in which what takes place, and when and how, is clear ahead of time and constantly monitored; in other words, nothing new!

The future is not taking place in this country—we also see this in the political dismantling of the non-university research institutions which, at the risk of their destruction and in obvious ignorance of their considerable societal utility, have been forced under the tattered umbrella of the universities more or less by decree. With the Bologna Process of higher education reforms, the free university spirit has already been put on the chopping block. The chasm between the general public—including the mass media—and the arts and science is growing increasingly deep. Fatal developments are simply ignored by the public, and nowadays, politicians seem to have lost interest in them, as well. Subsidizing research in areas which give birth to new technologies is one thing. The other thing is examining such technologies’ effects and providing an opportunity to critically reflect on them. In order to do this, it is necessary to have zones of freedom—for science just as much as for art. Science and art seem to embody our last bastions of creative passion and intelligence, and it is all the more traumatic to see them slowly bled dry. A democratic body politic which believes that it can no longer afford art—and hence abdicates its responsibility by blindly transferring authority over art to the “invisible hand” of the free market loses its sense of direction. A system—or even a so-called “cultural nation”—that neither conceives of art as something system-relevant nor understands that art is an investment in the future rather than a charitable sacrifice, is itself irrelevant and frightening. A clear affirmation of art and science on the part of the state is vital to survival, and this purported esteem must ultimately be expressed in budgetary terms.



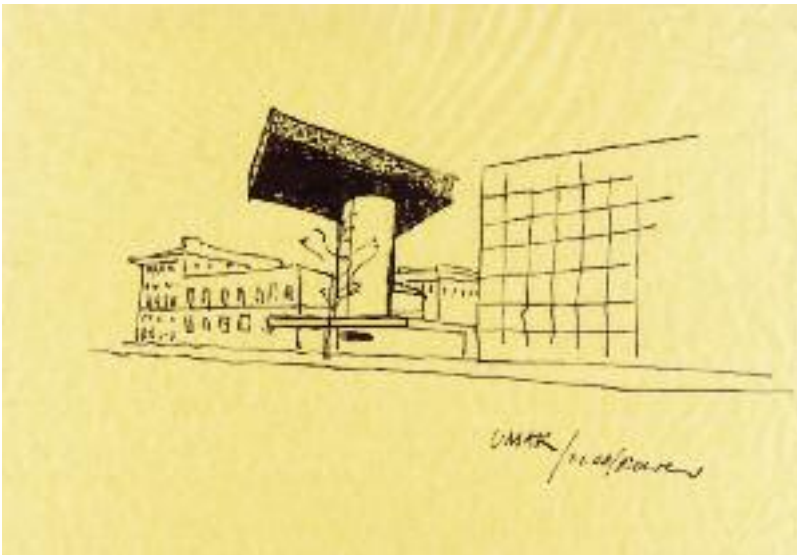
Walter Pichler, Bewegliche Figur, 1981, Skulptur sculpture
Courtesy of the artist

Mit dem MAK verbindet Walter Pichler, einer der bedeutendsten und autonomsten Künstler der Gegenwart, eine produktive Zusammenarbeit quer durch die Geschichte des Museums. Er gestaltete bereits 1990 im Rahmen der Ausstellung „Walter Pichler. Skulptur“ das „Tor zum Garten“, eine künstlerische Intervention und Eingriff in die Architektur des Gebäudes Weiskirchnerstraße, die bis heute dessen Gartenfront prägt. In der MAK-Sammlung Gegenwartskunst ist er mit zahlreichen Arbeiten – Modellen, Skizzen, Zeichnungen, Objekten und Fotografien – vertreten. 2011 präsentiert Pichler im Rahmen der Reihe „Künstler im Fokus“ Skulpturen und Zeichnungen, die teilweise eigens für diese MAK-Ausstellung geschaffen wurden. The MAK and Walter Pichler, one of the most important and independent artists of the present day, have engaged in productive collaboration throughout the museum's recent history. As early as 1990, as part of the exhibition "Walter Pichler. Sculpture," he designed the "Gate to the Garden," an artistic intervention in the Weiskirchnerstraße building's architecture which continues to characterize its garden-facing side. In the MAK Collection Contemporary Art, Pichler is represented by numerous works including models, sketches, drawings, objects and photographs. In 2011, he will be featured in the "Artists in Focus" series, with some of the sculptures and drawings on exhibit having been created specifically for this MAK exhibition.



Projekt „MAK über Wien“: Visualisierung der MAK-Plattform. Die MAK-Plattform – hier mit der Lichtskulptur „Vienna SHINING“ (2006) von Chris Burden – überbrückt die urbane Leerstelle zwischen Stadtpark und Donaukanal, schließt die City mit Wien-Mitte kurz und schafft ein Refugium für Kunstforschung. Mit ihr erhält das MAK eine unverwechselbare Aura und die Öffentlichkeit eine neue urbane Oberfläche.

The “MAK Over Vienna” project. Visualizing the MAK Platform. The MAK-Plattform—here with the light sculpture “Vienna SHINING” (2006) by Chris Burden—bridges the urban gap between the Stadtpark and the Danube Canal, short-circuiting the inner city with the Wien-Mitte area and creating a refuge for artistic investigation. With it, the MAK is lent an unmistakable aura and the publicity of a new urban surface.



Peter Noever, „UMAK“, Entwurf, 2008

Freut Euch! Vorstoß für eine neue Institution, für ein Laboratorium des MAK gemeinsam mit der Universität für angewandte Kunst – UMAK, Vorstudie zu MAK®

Peter Noever, “UMAK”, design, 2008

Be happy! Initiative for a new institution, for a laboratory of the MAK in cooperation with the University of Applied Arts Vienna—UMAK, preliminary study for MAK®



MAK®, 2009

Als Forschungseinrichtung neuen Typs ist das MAK® Design-Research Center die ideale Institution für zeitgenössische Designforschung. Seine freie und flexible Struktur definiert sich vor allem durch herausragende Universalisten, die bei ständig steigender Komplexität sozialer und ökonomischer Strukturen an klaren Zukunftsperspektiven arbeiten. MAK® verteidigt die Freiheit zum Experiment. Es öffnet neue Räume und eröffnet andere Perspektiven. 2011 ist mit „PRO FUTURO: MAK® in progress. Materialien aus dem Forschungslabor“ im MAK DESIGN SPACE erstmals eine Präsentation MAK® gewidmet.

MAK®, 2009

As a new sort of research facility, the MAK® Design Research Center is an ideal institution for contemporary design research. Its free and flexible structure is defined above all by outstanding universalists who work in a context of social and economic structures which are increasingly complex. MAK® defends the freedom to experiment. It opens up new spaces and different perspectives. In 2011, “PRO FUTURO: MAK® in progress: Materials from the Research Lab” at the MAK DESIGN SPACE will represent the first-ever presentation dedicated to MAK®.



MAK Center for Art and Architecture Los Angeles: „Schindler Lab. Round One: Olivia Booth and Thurman Grant“

Im Rahmen des neuen Ausstellungsformats „Schindler Lab“ sollen jeweils ein Künstler und ein Architekt aus der jungen lokalen Szene komplementäre Installationen – einzeln oder in Zusammenarbeit – für das Schindler House konzipieren. Booth und Grant reagieren mit Installationen aus Spiegel und Glas auf die Gegebenheiten. Sie lenken damit den Blick des Betrachters auf die rhythmischen Strukturen des Gebäudes, in dem diese Materialien zu finden sind. Beide Installationen werfen Fragen zu den verwendeten Materialien auf, die, in ihrer Funktion als Verbindung zwischen Innen- und Außenraum, die Verschmelzung des imaginären und realen Raums ermöglichen.

MAK Center for Art and Architecture Los Angeles: „Schindler Lab. Round One: Olivia Booth and Thurman Grant“

“Schindler Lab” proposes an ongoing series that pairs a local emerging artist and architect to build complementary installations in the house as a device for expressing their precise, inventive way of seeing Schindler’s logic and methods. Projects could be collaborative or in tandem. Booth and Grant’s suggested installations redirect the viewer’s experience to the rhythmic structure of the house. The installations provoke questioning about the media of glass and mirror, to sway definitions of the materials as interior/exterior liaisons towards a view of them as devices for conflating imagined and real space.

The MAK intends to embody a free zone for discursive public life and a place of societally relevant reflection—and to be uncompromisingly devoted to art. Where else, alongside numerous other exhibitions (such as those featuring our extensive historical collection), could so many diverse contemporary artistic stances converge on the same place as did in 2010 with those of Hans Weigand, Plamen Dejanoff, Josef Dabernig, David Zink Yi, Eva Schlegel, Andrea Branzi, Sam Jacob, Gregor Eichinger, Ina Seidl, in Brtnice Dorit Margreiter, and in Los Angeles (as part of “How Many Billboards? Art In Stead”) Kenneth Anger, Michael Asher, Jennifer Bornstein, Eileen Cowin, Christina Fernandez, Ken Gonzales-Day, Renée Green, Kira Lynn Harris, John Knight, David Lamelas, Brandon Lattu, Daniel Joseph Martinez, Kori Newkirk, Yvonne Rainer, Martha Rosler, Josh Neufeld, Allen Ruppertsberg, Allan Sekula Susan Siltan, Kerry Tribe, James Welling and Lauren Woods? Likewise in Los Angeles, in “Fractional Systems. Garage Project II,” the MAK Center hosted artists including Franz Graf, Raymond Pettibon, Elke Krystufek, Hernán Díaz Alonso, the next ENTERprise, John Baldessari, Heinrich Dunst, and Peter Kogler at the newly adapted Mackey complex.

MAK NITE® is another important presentation format of our institution, a format which goes far beyond the classic functions of a museum. Every Tuesday, it plunges the MAK into a whirlpool of confrontation, interventions and creative detonations, transforming the museum into a pulsating laboratory for the production of contemporary art. In 2010, MAK NITE® afforded sixty artists¹—many of whom are just beginning their careers—the opportunity to launch and present new types of artistic projects.

The diversity and complexity of the exhibitions at the MAK reflect a form of museum work that actually does aim to support the creation of art in the here and now. Doing such work requires altered conditions. This may not apply to all museums in the same way, but for art laboratories such as the MAK, it doubtless does. The need for different conditions also applies to the project of putting together a Collection of the 21st Century, as we have planned with the project CAT – Contemporary Art Tower. The CAT is the manifestation of a self-assured artistic strategy which is uncompromisingly devoted to contemporary art and is meant to develop free of commercial influences. It seems absurd that a “cultural nation” such as Austria should not be the home of an up-to-date contemporary art collection. The CAT project is an affordable way in which to rectify this deficiency, providing that those responsible for facilitating it financially can finally muster up the courage to take a chance. The mission of the CAT is not just to passively display art, but rather to also actively produce it and put it into action on location in order to allow the growth of a domestic and international Collection of the 21st Century with an unshakable identity. The fact that this future-oriented project—a project which is positioned far beyond all fashionable pretensions—has been put on hold, changes nothing about its purposefulness. Sooner or later, a quality such as it represents must necessarily prevail.

As state, institutional and media irritations—such as those touched off by WikiLeaks—are currently so impressively demonstrating, it is necessary to have institutions with free and flexible structures in order to understand current processes. With the complexity of social and economic structures constantly increasing, decentralized forms of organization are necessary to create future-oriented design strategies for the transformation of our environment. The project “MAK® Design Research Center” developed by the MAK is devoted uncompromisingly to the present, when it happens and where it happens. Quickly and intelligently—such as with “24-hour studies”—it can productively process late-breaking information that has taken everybody by surprise. MAK® upholds and defends the freedom to experiment. It opens up new spaces and reveals different perspectives. In 2011, the MAK DESIGN SPACE will host “PRO FUTURO: MAK® in progress: Materials from the Research Lab,” the first-ever presentation dedicated to MAK®.

In 2011, the MAK DESIGN SPACE is, in general, to be more strongly characterized by research than has previously been the case. In our active design research, we do not allow ourselves to be deterred or distracted from our fundamental dedication to the present. The recent utopian and urbanistic investigations by Sam Jacob, Andrea Branzi and “Project Vienna” are now to be followed by “THE GREAT VIENNESE CAFÉ: a Laboratory”². This research effort, designed in cooperation with the MAK and led by Gregor Eichinger, will aim to establish Vienna as a permanent platform that provides impulses for future-oriented projects which expand the definitions of design.³ The new project is to examine the historically rooted “coffee house” system with regard to its unused, 21st century potentials (going beyond mere tourism and consumption to address its properties as a transit space between the private and the public, leisure and job, and communication and contemplation) in process-oriented design laboratory modules consisting of lectures, workshops, research and work-in-progress presentations. In doing so, it is to produce and publicly present new design approaches in an artistic and scholarly manner.

For quite some time now, the MAK has been working together with Helmut Lang to prepare his first large-scale solo exhibition. “HELMUT LANG. MAKE___HARD” will present Helmut Lang as the artist he has always been. As one of the world’s most uncompromising fashion designers, he has consistently shown himself to be unimpressed by the market and the dictates of the business; now, his sculptural works and large-scale installations will for the first time stand at the center of an exhibition, one which represents a notable experiment both for him and for the MAK.

The uncompromisingly universal design concept of the MAK, which resists the recent trend towards hyper-specialization, is further underlined by the exhibition “RUDOLF STEINER – Alchemy of the Everyday,” which will be the first great retrospective⁴ presentation of Steiner’s oeuvre. This universal thinker Steiner, possessed of an immensely active creativity, personifies the memory of the all-encompassing—and the impulses he generated continue to be influential all over the world today. Not least with regard to the current debate on education, his anthroposophic/organic architectural oeuvre is of special interest: Steiner accorded a significant role to the appearance and shape of school classrooms—in contrast to what can be seen in most of today’s teaching factories, which are constructed as thoughtlessly as they are soullessly; those things which, today, are typically not spared even passing consideration—namely, the conditions under which sensible education can take place to begin with—were done justice by Steiner via an entire matrix of aspects which he fine-tuned to one another; these included architecture, the employment of color, music, rhythm and content.

The institution of the museum, as understood by the MAK, not only bears responsibility for the past, but also shares responsibility for the future. Uncompromisingly committed to art and oriented against commercialization, the task at hand for the museum consists in securing for art both its existence and space within which it can breathe.



DON'T COMPROMISE!
YOU'LL PAY THE PRICE.
Ahmed El Jilali
Essaouria, Marokko Morocco 1998

¹ Korhan Erel, Alexandra Reill, M+M (Marc Weis, Martin De Mattia), Bernd Oppl, Elena Cooke, Anna Haidegger, Krzysztof Kaczmarek, Katharina Wronn, Raymond Pettibon, Hans Weigand, Stefan Bidner, Albert Mayr, „The Fan Man“, Nina Erber, Andreas Hutter, Evelyn Fuchs, Tom Hanslmaier, Mariella Greil, Synes Elischka, Christian Schröder, Wolfgang Becksteiner, Oliver Hangl, Sir Tralala, Erwin Wurm, Lydia Lunch, Mia Zabelka, Christina Nemeč, NOC – Natures of Conflict (Kathrin Lugbauer, Nora Berger), Andrew Standen-Raz, Electro Guzzi (Bernhard Hammer, Jakob Schneidewind, Bernhard Breuer), Stefan Goldmann, Lisa Hinterreithner, Katja Kosi, Vlado G. Repnik, Martina Ruhsam, Hermann Fink, Gisela Stiegler, Patrick Rampelotto, Johanna Braun, Lukas Petr Josef Theofil Válka, Mario Grubisic, Station Rose (Gary Danner, Elisa Rose), Monolake (Robert Henke, Tarik Barri), Alois Huber, Andrea Nagl, Markus Wintersberger, Rosa Roedelius, Hans-Joachim Roedelius, DARKO, Markus Hanakam, Roswitha Schuller, Karin Mihatsch, Stephan Lugbauer, Sabine Aichhorn.

² A project of “design” new strategies” – a cooperation of MAK and *departure*.

³ As a continuation of the lectures and presentations of internationally renowned designers, artistic directors and visionary thinkers (from London, Milan and Vienna) held since 2009.

⁴ An exhibition of the Vitra Design Museum (Weil am Rhein) in cooperation with the art museums of Wolfsburg and Stuttgart.

Helmut Lang, spine, 2010
Gummi, Metall und Farbe Rubber, metal, and paint

Helmut Lang hat sich als einer der kompromisslosesten Designer vom Markt und den Zwängen des Business stets unbeeindruckt gezeigt. „HELMUT LANG. MAKE___HARD“ ist die erste groß angelegte Personale des Künstlers Helmut Lang. Die Schau in der zentralen Ausstellungshalle des MAK versteht sich als konzeptuelle Spurensuche und kreist um das Spannungsfeld von Material und Medium, Form und Umkehrung. Dabei wird die Frage untersucht, wie sich privater und öffentlicher Raum in der Verknüpfung von Ästhetik und Ethik durch minimale Eingriffe und Verschiebungen erzeugen lässt. Im Zentrum stehen erstmals Langs skulpturale Arbeiten und raumgreifende Installationen.

As one of the most uncompromising fashion designers, Helmut Lang has always shown himself to be unimpressed by the market and the dictates of the business. “HELMUT LANG. MAKE___HARD” is to be the first large-scale solo exhibition of the artist Helmut Lang. The showing in the central exhibition hall of the MAK is intended as a conceptual examination and revolves around the tension between material and medium, form and inversion. In doing so, the question will be examined as to how private and public space can be created through the linkage of aesthetics and ethics via minimal interventions and shifts. The focus will for the first time ever be on Lang’s sculptural works and large-scale installations.

