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### **... what about art?**

Art informs cultural identity, it unfolds cultural diversity and thus is an integral part of modern society. Art is a mouthpiece of revolutionary ideas and a revealer of erroneous social beliefs; it makes visions visible and – once established – is cherished as cultural heritage. Works of art are celebrated and preserved for their beauty and preciousness.

What is rarely seen, notably here in this country, is that art is more than the completed object and that each work of art derives from a complex process of artistic creation. In fact, it is increasingly glossed over. A policy of lavish blockbuster shows that nostalgically celebrate well-established luminaries from art history, enshrining them in a pleasantly prestigious museum ambience, threatens to stifle any serious confrontation with art to the point of stagnation.

Economic restraints oppressively circumscribe the scope of action for art institutions. This is something that cannot simply be washed away. Still, even in struggling for sheer survival, it would be fatal to lose sight of ongoing developments in art. In spite of all the rigor, the MAK lives up to a clearly defined vision of making the museum a place where art is not only exhibited, but actually facilitated and practiced, a place where society meets art. This vision has been gradually filled with life ever since the organizational restructuring of the institution in 1986. And it will continue, perhaps with reduced means, but consistently none the less.

Living up to its tradition as a vital art institution, the MAK has always had an interest in the accessibility, in the “palpability” of art. The MAK produces exhibitions, creating new contents in spite of the risks that this involves, and generates unprecedented situations. The MAK seeks communication with artists and active participation in the process of art production. This vision also crucially involves the museum visitor. The opportunity of a confrontation with art in public institutions must not be reduced to the reception of the accomplished work of art, but has to be of a more integrative nature. At present, this vision finds convincing and surprisingly autonomous manifestation in the wake of radical interventions by, for example, Magdalena Jetelová, Vito Acconci, Chris Burden or Donald Judd. Under the title of “Barefoot on White-Hot Walls”, the MAK makes a presentation of the work of architect Peter Eisenman an experience that radically breaks up, and breaks with, conventional exhibition formats. Eisenman created a temporary building inside the MAK building, a building that perplexes and affords visitors an entirely new spatial experience, confronting them with the unfamiliar; a building which, one may assume, might not have been possible to realize elsewhere, except at the MAK.

This is a position that the MAK will not withdraw from although it seems unlikely from the current financial perspective that it will soon be possible to realize another project of such scale.

Developing new strategies and formats, the MAK will nevertheless consistently continue on its path of advancing quality through close cooperation with artists and confrontation with their positions. “ATELIER VAN LIESHOUT. The Disciplinator” (June 22 – Sept. 18, 2005) will be the first exhibition of a series entitled “Factory Presentation” which marks a new conceptual approach. Two large-scale bodies of work of the Atelier Van Lieshout, which practices the removal of the distinction between art object and useful object, between design and architecture, will be shown at the MAK – an unadorned and raw presentation of a work in progress. With this

workshop-style approach, the MAK takes account of the process nature of art and reaffirms its mission.

New conditions also open up new time horizons. "MAKlite", a façade installation by the American artist James Turrell, which was mounted on the MAK building in fall 2004, goes far beyond the horizon of usual museum work. The project, which James Turrell had developed on the occasion of his 1998 exhibition "the other horizon", was prepared for no less than six years. "MAKlite" posed a considerable technical and, above all, financial challenge. Implementation was only made possible through the commitment of the Italian Targetti lighting company. The outcome of this unparalleled cooperation is an ideal interplay of art, technology and architecture, and opens a time window on what is not usually contained in museum presentations: permanence. This permanent and yet intangible work of art reflects the significance of the museum as a place of enlightenment on the exterior of the museum building, reaching out into the urban environment to visualize its mission of communicating artistic production across boundaries and generations to contemporary and future epochs.

A diametric opposite, MAK NITE©, a series of events which also marks a departure from usual museum schedules, has gained a firm footing in the local art scene. In a succession of weekly one-night events every Tuesday, the MAK provides young artmakers who are not yet given a chance of longer-term exhibitions in established art institutions with a platform for presentations, events, or performances.

The contribution to contemporary art in its historical context that this platform makes was comprehensively documented for the first time in a 2004 publication, edited by the MAK ART SOCIETY (MARS) and entitled "Superkünstler MAK NITE©", surveying all the MAK NITE©s of the past four and a half years.

Incorporating the unique museum collections in the lively contemporary process is an essential element of the institution's visionary strategy. New aspects – "Tradition meets experiment" – were opened up through the redesigning of the MAK permanent exhibitions; a path that is further pursued in a number of relevant projects. "UKIYO-E RELOADED. The MAK Collection of Japanese Colored Woodblock Prints" (Nov. 30, 2005 – March 26, 2006) will present the art of colored Japanese woodblock prints as a phenomenon of urban mass culture. A selection of about six hundred of the four thousand ukiyo-e prints in the MAK collection will give a vivid impression of what makes the fascination of the graphic art of ukiyo-e. Exhibition projects of this kind are made possible only through careful maintenance of the collection and years of research which eventually provide the basis of a survey of almost unparalleled comprehensiveness.

Aside from these highlights, the MAK has once again successfully drawn up an exhibition schedule for 2005 which offers a varied program of presentations in the MAK Gallery, the MAK Works on Paper Room, and in the Study Collection. The much-acclaimed series of lectures entitled "changing architecture" will continue with eminent architects such as Peter Eisenman, Günther Domenig, Lebbeus Woods, and Rem Koolhaas. The MAK 2005 activities will, as always, be informed by topical relevance, the consistent engagement of the specific qualities of artists, theoreticians, and architects presented and by an understanding of art that focuses on the creative process and its development. "... what about art?" will be the guiding question that I will keep raising, and if necessary, also to the artists themselves.

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