

Press Release

Christoph Thun-Hohenstein Assumes Direction of the MAK

Former managing director of “departure” to begin immediately with the task of further developing the MAK as a “world-class museum of applied arts”

Today, 1 September 2011, sees DDr. Christoph Thun-Hohenstein assume direction of the MAK – Austrian Museum of Applied Arts / Contemporary Art, with the objective of “visibly positioning the MAK as a world-class museum of applied arts in the 21st century.” Above all, Thun-Hohenstein views the quest for the appropriate balance between applied art, design, architecture and contemporary art, as well as the facilitation of standard-setting contributions to the quality of cultural production, as essential for the further development of the MAK as “one of the most fascinating museums of all, by virtue of the broad range of content which it represents.”

The longstanding museum’s reorientation is to be preceded by a process in which the sweeping concept of applied art in its present-day meaning shall be subjected to intense examination. “The nearly 150-year history of the MAK, originally founded as the Museum of Art and Industry,” would suggest that “a broad-based survey be made of the museum’s institutional memory.” This process of research and evaluation will be conducted in a way that is entirely new, being “freely accessible and featuring the deliberate inclusion of a highly interested public.”

The initiative, which is planned to formally begin in October, is to provide a basis for decision-making in all those areas where Thun-Hohenstein senses a need to innovate: “the object is—based on what has proven itself in the past—to sharpen the MAK’s conception of art, to accord previously neglected themes significantly more space, to optimize interfaces, to strengthen discourse overall, and to formulate rigorous criteria for use in the selection of special exhibitions. The MAK must develop new orientations for the future.”

Furthermore, the new MAK Director intends to more strongly address questions of art and other creative areas which are now being posed by the 21st century. Thun-Hohenstein comments that “in terms of how it is set up, the MAK is *the* museum for dealing with sociopolitically relevant themes by means of applied arts, contemporary art, design, and architecture, as well as for the development of interdisciplinary and inter-creative approaches.” This also goes for educational work, in the interest of which the new MAK director intends to “provide moments for inspiring encounters using presentations that are state-of-the-art.”

Both his professional training and his career to date have equipped Christoph Thun-Hohenstein (51) with wide-ranging qualifications and competencies,

which he will now bring to bear on the direction of the MAK. Thun-Hohenstein studied law, political science, and art history at the University of Vienna, where he also worked as an assistant. In 1984, after having completed doctorates in political science and art history, he began working for The Austrian Foreign Ministry, for which he held posts in Abidjan (1985), Geneva (1986–90) and Bonn (1991–93). From September 1999 to August 2007, he was Director of the Austrian Cultural Forum New York—and thus responsible in 2002 for opening the spectacular new Forum building designed by architect Raimund Abraham, as well as for programming the content which the Forum presented; he additionally served as editor-in-chief of the online publication “austria.culture.” Under his aegis, the Austrian Cultural Forum pursued a trailblazing concept which led it to become an internationally well-known and highly regarded location of art and culture. From November 2007 to August 2011, he served as managing director of “departure,” the creative agency of the City of Vienna, which is known Europe-wide as a successful model for supporting innovation in the fine arts, design, graphic art, fashion, architecture, multimedia and numerous other areas within the creative industries. Christoph Thun-Hohenstein has edited publications dealing above all with European integration and topics of contemporary culture and art, and has held numerous lectures on such topics. He has also curated exhibitions of contemporary art, and he serves regularly in selection juries.

Details on Christoph Thun-Hohenstein’s plans for the MAK and its future program, as well as concerning the ongoing evaluative survey of the museum’s activities, will be announced during autumn 2011.

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