

Press Release

## **SAGMEISTER & WALSH: Beauty**

An exhibition of the MAK, Vienna, and the Museum Angewandte Kunst, Frankfurt am Main

Press Conference    Tuesday, 23 October 2018, 10:30 a.m.  
Opening              Tuesday, 23 October 2018, 7 p.m.  
Exhibition Venue    MAK, Stubenring 5, 1010 Vienna  
Exhibition Dates    24 October 2018 – 31 March 2019  
Opening Hours      Tue 10 a.m.–10 p.m., Wed–Sun 10 a.m.–6 p.m.

With their fascinating exhibition project *Beauty*, Stefan Sagmeister and Jessica Walsh make a multimedia, highly sensory plea for us to take delight in beauty. Almost throughout the 20th and 21st centuries, beauty (has) had rather negative connotations in the design discourse. Sagmeister & Walsh counter this antipathy with convincing arguments and make it possible to experience beauty as a key and functional aspect of appealing design. Spreading across the entire MAK on Vienna's Stubenring, the exhibition taps into all the senses and clearly demonstrates that beauty is more than merely a superficial strategy.

In the MAK Columned Main Hall, the MAK DESIGN LAB, the MAK GALLERY, the MAK Works on Paper Room, and the MAK Permanent Collection Contemporary Art, a combination of installations produced especially for the exhibition and examples from product design, city planning, architecture, and graphic design encourages visitors to see, smell, and feel. Supported by findings from the field of psychological aesthetics, Sagmeister & Walsh offer evidence that beautifully designed works stimulate human perception and are hence more effective.

Divided into six thematic areas—"What Is Beauty?," "The History of Beauty," "In the Eye of the Beholder," "Experience Beauty," "Transforming Beauty," and "The Beauty Archive"—some 70 groups of objects stimulate an aesthetic discourse on beauty as the paradigm of high-quality design.

As a centerpiece of the exhibition, the *Sensory Room*, jointly designed with Swarovski, taps into the visitors' entire range of senses. A sensuously designed white cube invites visitors to enter. The outer shell of this installation in the MAK DESIGN LAB was de-

veloped in close collaboration with the creative team at Swarovski: thousands of Swarovski crystals sparkle in ornament designed by Sagmeister & Walsh, endowing the room with a special charm. Inside, the visitors—shrouded in fog—encounter the ever-changing colors of the sunset. Scents that are considered “beautiful,” like citrus, and an acoustic backdrop of the song of the Malaysian tree frog facilitate an unparalleled experience of beauty. When you leave this room in the MAK exhibition, you feel calm and peaceful.

Bearing projections, the spectacular smoke screen *Fog Screen* transforms the main entrance to the MAK on the Stubenring, immediately leading visitors to ponder the fundamental question: “What is beauty?” Discussed by countless philosophers and scientists, the question of what makes something beautiful is answered with facts by Sagmeister & Walsh: beautiful things have a direct effect on our dopamine receptors and on our feelings, meaning that beautiful design can indeed be perceived as effective.

Sagmeister & Walsh define symmetry as a universal component of what we find beautiful. They corroborate this thesis with several installations: among other things, visitors can generate symmetrical structures with an interactive app and then order a tote bag with that structure printed on it via the app. A flock of birds projected onto a large screen whose density and speed can be controlled proves that there tends to be a preference for balanced patterns.

Beauty has always been a defining factor in the choice of mate, reproduction, and evolution. We experience positive emotions when we see beauty. In the exhibition area “The History of Beauty,” examples from all eras of human history leave no doubt about our desire for beauty. What we find sexually attractive is not just physical beauty, but also the ability to create beautiful things. That was already true in the prehistoric period: there was no justification for sharpening stone axes symmetrically, yet with their eye for symmetrical design and their fine motor skills, the attractiveness of the producers of these tools increased. The negation of beauty is also addressed comprehensively in the context of this exhibition area.

Aesthetic preferences are less subjective than generally believed. In the chapter “In the Eye of the Beholder,” remarkable similarities are detected in various cultures and periods. Just how universal our understanding of beauty is, is illustrated among other things by visualizing research by Chris McManus, psychologist at University College London: 85 percent of study participants can instantly differentiate between a work by Piet Mondrian and a slightly altered forgery. Here, Sagmeister & Walsh once again invite visitors to interact: there are coins stamped onto the admission ticket, which visitors can use to vote for their favorite forms.

Color perception is the subject of *The Color Room*. Coated in intense blue and pink patterns, at regular intervals this room is lit with a special light, which makes certain color hues appear gray. Colorfulness is generally considered more beautiful.

Beauty has the transformative potential to improve the world, as becomes clear in the exhibition area “Transforming Beauty.” Among other things, the installation *From Garbage to Functional Beauty* shows how the unconventional French designer Thierry Jeannot works with Mexican garbage collectors to make stunning chandeliers out of waste plastic.

*Beauty* concludes with a “Beauty Archive” curated by Sagmeister & Walsh featuring the MAK’s officially most beautiful exhibits: a best-of of objects that have been declared beautiful by the museum.

*SAGMEISTER & WALSH: Beauty* is already the third exhibition project jointly realized by Stefan Sagmeister and the MAK. In 2002/03 the MAK dedicated *Handarbeit* to Stefan Sagmeister, his first solo show in a museum. In 2015/2016 Sagmeister descended on the MAK with *The Happy Show* (28 October 2015 to 28 March 2016) and invited the public to take part in his captivating search for happiness.

Following the premiere at the MAK, *SAGMEISTER & WALSH: Beauty* will be shown at the Museum Angewandte Kunst, Frankfurt am Main (10 May to 22 September 2019).

Press photos are available for download at [MAK.at/en/press](http://MAK.at/en/press).

Cooperation partner:

**museum angewandte kunst**

*di:'angewandte*

PREMIUM PARTNER:

**SWAROVSKI**

Associated Partner:



Press Data

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Curator	Kathrin Pokorny-Nagel, Head, MAK Library and Works on Paper Collection/Archive
Publication	The exhibition is accompanied by the publication <i>Sagmeister &amp; Walsh: Beauty</i> by Stefan Sagmeister and Jessica Walsh, English, 280 pages with 377 color illustrations, Published by Phaidon, London 2018. Available at the MAK Design Shop and at MAKdesignshop.at for € 40.
Supporting Program	The supporting program on the exhibition is available for download at MAK.at/en/press.
MAK Admission	€ 12 / Reduced € 9 / Family Ticket € 15 Every Tuesday 6–10 p.m.: admission € 5 Free admission for children and teens under 19
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Vienna, 1 October 2018