

Press Release

Level the fragile balance of utopia

A mischer'traxler studio installation at the MAK

Exhibition Venue MAK GALLERY
MAK, Stubenring 5, 1010 Vienna
Exhibition Dates 21 June – 1 October 2017
Opening Hours Tue 10 a.m.–10 p.m., Wed–Sun 10 a.m.–6 p.m.
Free admission on Tuesdays from 6–10 p.m.

Can a kinetic installation symbolize an abstract idea? With *Level—the fragile balance of utopia*, mischer'traxler studio prove that an object at the interface of design and art can make even a complex theory sensually and emotionally intelligible. Based on a luminous mobile, the design duo visualize utopia as a complex construct and fragile system in a constant balancing act between the ideals and desires of the individual and those of society. The tiniest breeze suffices to disrupt the stasis of the expansive installation and induce movement. Metaphorically, however, it achieves its greatest radiance only in that ideal moment when it is wholly in balance. Conceived as the Austrian contribution for the London Design Biennale 2016, *Level—the fragile balance of utopia* by mischer'traxler studio will be presented in Austria for the first time in the framework of the VIENNA BIENNALE 2017.

Katharina Mischer and Thomas Traxler define utopia as “an ideal system, in which personal freedom is juxtaposed with collective dependency, where ownership and responsibility are in balance, and where transparency and privacy are in equilibrium.” The designers refer to a dilemma described in *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930), Sigmund Freud's critique of civilization: “A great part of the struggles of mankind centers round the single task of finding some expedient (i.e., satisfying) solution between these individual claims and those of the civilized community; it is one of the problems of man's fate whether this solution can be arrived at in some particular form of culture or whether the conflict will prove irreconcilable.”

The poetically playful concept of the installation mirrors an essential and ever more important design quality: that of an intercultural mediator. The translation of its abstract topic into an object that may be experienced emotionally and sensually facilitates individual sociocultural approaches

to utopia (or dystopia)—irrespective of the age and provenance of the audience—without falling into the trap of condescension.

The balancing act of the object *Level*, which functions as a mobile and chandelier simultaneously and reacts to every movement in the space—through visitors, drafts, or tremors—is accomplished beyond this at the level of the designers' handcraftsmanship and workmanship: both technological as well as artistic-aesthetic demands are in consonance.

Level—the fragile balance of utopia was developed by mischer'traxler studio in collaboration with the MAK (curator: Thomas Geisler) as the Austrian contribution for the London Design Biennale 2016. Commissioned by the Arts and Culture Division of the Federal Chancellery of Austria, *Level—the fragile balance of utopia* was organized by Austria Design Net and supported by the Austrian Economic Chamber and the Austrian Cultural Forum London.

Press Contacts

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Vienna, 30 March 2017