



MAK

Press Release

FREDERICK KIESLER: Life Visions

Press Conference	Tuesday, 14 June 2016, 10:30 a.m.
Opening	Tuesday, 14 June 2016, 7 p.m.
Exhibition Venue	MAK Exhibition Hall MAK, Stubenring 5, 1010 Vienna
Exhibition Dates	15 June – 2 October 2016
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.

Frederick Kiesler (1890–1965) not only fascinated his contemporary generation of artists and architects with his revolutionary, utopian ideas. The transdisciplinary contributions made by this Austrian-American artist, designer, architect, set and exhibition designer continue to influence the European and American avant-garde through today. Realized in cooperation with the Austrian Frederick and Lillian Kiesler Private Foundation, the MAK retrospective *FREDERICK KIESLER: Life Visions* (MAK Exhibition Hall, 15 June – 2 October 2016) illuminates this trend-setting visionary's fascinatingly complex body of work, his out-of-the-box thinking, his theory of Correalism, which he used to thematize the relationship between artwork, human, and environment, as well as his activities as an architect and exhibition designer.

Following the sweeping retrospective *JOSEF FRANK: Against Design*, this reappraisal of Kiesler's oeuvre is integral to the MAK's efforts to take another look at the great visionaries of Viennese Modernism. Born in Chernivitsi, a multicultural city (then in Austria-Hungary, now in Ukraine), Kiesler began studying architecture and painting in 1908 at the University of Technology and at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna, but did not graduate. He celebrated his first big successes with theater and exhibition projects in Berlin, Vienna, and Paris. In 1926, in the hopes of being able to realize his visions, he traveled to New York, where he stayed for the rest of his life. The years he spent in Vienna surrounded by people like Otto Wagner, Josef Hoffmann, and Adolf Loos—and also to a significant degree the idea of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*—were key influences on all of his artistic and theoretical endeavors.

Since the beginning of the 21st century, the perception of Frederick Kiesler has shifted from a primarily architectonic reception to an artistic interest in his holistic concept. This includes the fusion of artistic and scientific insights and modes of presentation,

and particularly his goal of doing away with the separation between autonomous art and real life. Kiesler innovatively grappled with the newest developments in film and television, just as much as with curatorial concepts and their radically new, pioneering design.

During his time in Vienna, Berlin, Paris and his early years in New York, Kiesler was already working on a thoroughly broad range of design possibilities. His intellectual interests found expression in his theory of Correalism, which he developed in the 1930s, building upon what at that time were fresh applications of systems theory to the biological sciences. Kiesler's empirical scientific deliberations about the sustainable design of the human-nature-technology relationship and its experimental implementation in artistic practice are exceedingly topical nowadays.

Design serves to promote health, and thus the wellbeing of society, is how Kiesler explicated his aesthetic intentions in his essay "On Correalism and Biotechnique. A Definition and Test of a New Approach to Building Design" (1939). By way of example, Frederick Kiesler developed his vision of the *Endless House*, which he regarded as the "nucleus" (similar to a designer's "stem cell") of architectural planning based on the human being.

In developing the concept of the *Raumbühne* [*Space Stage*] (1924) on the occasion of organizing and setting up the *International Exhibition of New Theatre Techniques* in Vienna, he ultimately dissolved the spatial separation between the spectators and the actors and integrated both in a unified space. At the beginning of the performance, the audience circled around a floating stage. This "correalistic" instrument signaled a radical shift to a biomorphic language of form. By allowing object and person to interact in a shared "living space" and co-developing the concept of environment, Kiesler also radically severed the separation between human being and work of art.

The thematically structured MAK exhibition *FREDERICK KIESLER: Life Visions* affords a view into the complexity of Kiesler's work from the 1920s to the mid-1960s. The objects—stemming mainly from the extensive holdings of the Frederick and Lillian Kiesler Private Foundation, some of which have never been shown before—span the range from art projects, architectural visions, and exhibition design to store planning, furniture design, and media concepts, and also include poster and book jacket designs. Numerous archival documents give insight into his theoretical deliberations and innovative inventiveness.

Frederick Kiesler proposed a model for the city of the future with his *Raumstadt* [*City in Space*] (1925), which he developed for the Austrian theater section of the *Exposition*

internationale des Arts décoratifs et industriels modernes in Paris upon Josef Hoffmann's invitation. Representing the central object of the *FREDERICK KIESLER: Life Visions* exhibition, a true-to-the-original reconstruction of this futuristic model of a hovering city will be mounted in a space darkened with black curtains at the center of the MAK Exhibition Hall. After its initial presentation in Paris, the installation was used time and again as a display for innovative theater projects and stage set models. Furthermore, analogous to a historical photograph that Kiesler enhanced for a presentation about De Stijl, individual surfaces have been accented with color.

Kiesler continued the practical implementation of his correalistic theory ("biotechnique") in the late 1930s and early 1940s in the Laboratory of Design Correlation he founded at Columbia University in New York. With the concept of the *Vision Machine* he developed between 1938 and 1942—and which is also presented in the MAK exhibition—Kiesler visualized the process of art perception. "The Vision Machine," explained Kiesler, "will enable us to classify the plastic creations of man. Since the Vision Machine tries to demonstrate the different constituents of seeing and imagery, it should facilitate the analysis and understanding of the various psychophysiological sources which are the origin of plastic arts."
(lebbeuswoods.wordpress.com)

Kiesler's characteristic "unity of the arts," invoked in Vienna by Theo van Doesburg already in 1924, reached its zenith in 1947 in the total ambiance of the *Salle de Superstition* [Room of superstitions] in the exhibition *Le Surréalisme en 1947* mounted by him in the Galerie Maeght in Paris. There, aspects of the "magical" were given a heretofore unknown dimension in Kiesler's work.

His vision of the relationship between art, space, and spectator is illustrated in no small part in *FREDERICK KIESLER: Life Visions* through *Galaxies*, wherein he included surroundings in a visual composition. Through this group of works he created in the 1950s and 1960s, Kiesler brought about a synthesis of painting, sculpture, and architecture based on the principles of Correalism. In their entirety they resemble the structure of planetary and stellar systems, which is why Kiesler dubbed them *Galaxies*.

His artistic and theoretical musings serve as multi-faceted inspiration for contemporary interpretation through the fine arts. For the exhibition *FREDERICK KIESLER: Life Visions*, six Austrian and international artists were invited to react to Kiesler's ideas and approaches. Leonor Antunes, Céline Condorelli, Verena Dengler, Lili Reynaud-Dewar, Apolonija Šušteršič, and Rirkrit Tiravanija will develop temporary and permanent interventions in the exhibition and in public spaces, in part through interdisciplinary and institutional collaboration.

Accompanying the exhibition *FREDERICK KIESLER: Life Visions* will be an eponymous catalog published by the Birkhäuser Verlag (edited by Christoph Thun-Hohenstein, Dieter Bogner, Maria Lind, and Bärbel Vischer, German/English, ca. 180 pages with numerous full-color illustrations, MAK Vienna/Birkhäuser Verlag, Basel 2016) with contributions by Dieter Bogner, Peter Bogner, Almut Grunewald, Barbara Lesák, Maria Lind, Megan Luke, Vanessa Joan Müller, Spyridon Papapetros, Christoph Thun-Hohenstein, Bärbel Vischer, and Gerd Zillner.

As part of the supplemental program around the exhibition, the MAK has launched an innovative, participation-based outreach project with Viennese schoolchildren, with the goal of thematizing their connection to their surroundings and their perception of space as an environment that can be actively transformed. These adolescents will engage intensively with Kiesler's universal body of work and create contributions to be shown in the MAK exhibition. The idea for this supplemental program conceived by the MAK is based on the exhibition *Frederick Kiesler: Visions at Work Annotated by Céline Condorelli and Six Student Groups* (11 February – 3 May 2015) at the Tensta Konsthall, Stockholm.

A collaborative effort focused on Kiesler's revolutionary spatial conception commenced in November 2015 with an integrated class at a local vocational school for stylists and make-up artists [Berufsschule für Frisur, Maske und Perücke]. The project was initiated by the MAK in cooperation with KulturKontakt Austria in the framework of "Programm K3—Cultural Education with Apprentices." The mediation team toikoi has taken responsibility for the conception and implementation of the content. In February 2016, a project funded by KulturKontakt Austria (through the "culture connected" initiative of the Federal Ministry of Education and Women's Affairs) was started with students attending the Bundesgymnasium Wien 9 (Wasagasse 10, 1090 Vienna), as well as another with students at the BORG for music and art (Hegelgasse 12, 1010 Vienna) funded through the Ministry's 2015/16 cultural budget for federally funded public schools.

Press images are available for download at MAK.at/press.

Press Data Sheet

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Curator	Bärbel Vischer, curator, MAK Contemporary Art Collection
Guest Curators	Dieter Bogner and Maria Lind
Publication	<i>FREDERICK KIESLER: Life Visions</i> , edited by Christoph Thun-Hohenstein, Dieter Bogner, Maria Lind, and Bärbel Vischer, German/English, ca. 180 pages with numerous full-color illustrations, MAK Vienna/Birkhäuser Verlag, Basel 2016.
Supplemental Program	In preparation
MAK Admission	€ 9.90 / Reduced € 7.50 / Family Ticket € 13 Free admission for children and teens under 19
MAK Press and PR	Judith Anna Schwarz-Jungmann (Head) Sandra Hell-Ghignone Veronika Träger Lara Steinhäuber T +43 1 711 36-233, -229, -212 presse@MAK.at www.MAK.at

Vienna, 9 March 2016