

## **the MAK and peter noever**

The year 1986 represented a historic break for the tradition-steeped, sleepy Austrian Museum of Applied Arts: the process of de-musealization, de-bureaucratization and reanimation with contemporary art that followed soon gave rise to today's MAK—a trailblazing institution representing a unique crossover between art, applied art, architecture and design. In the years since then, the MAK brand has been established worldwide. The MAK now numbers among the few modern art institutions which operate successfully on an international scale, and the pioneering potentials and strategic resources of the MAK have by now become irreplaceable—especially for the Austrian art, architecture and design scenes.

Practical museum work as done by the MAK is rooted in comprehensive reflection on the possibility or impossibility of the museum as such. In order to prevent the classic missions of a museum (collecting, preserving, researching, exhibiting and educating according to scholarly criteria) from reverting to the conservational and conservative, the MAK has engaged in constant experimentation with its own time-honored traditions, such as the dissolution of the barriers between applied and fine arts. In experimental continuation of the original idea behind the museum's establishment, and based on its unique collection, the MAK develops the most varied perspectives for the confrontation between—and/or the connection of—applied and contemporary art. The dialectic interlacing, coexistence and opposition of tradition and experimentation, as well as of collecting and intervention, characterizes the MAK's unmistakable identity. The past demands present-day answers, and tradition represents the starting point for radical transformation. Selected artists are regularly invited to involve themselves deeply with the MAK Collection, making that which is well-known accessible to new approaches—and bringing that which is unknown to light. In this context, the self-image of the museum institution as a societal archive receives repeated scrutiny.

“The present still has to be fought for” are the words adorning the banner under which the MAK strives daily to assure the freedom of art, art's creation in Austria, and the independence of art museums. The MAK has consistently refused to bow to (non-artistic) imperatives of the state or the market. This “museology of resistance” stands in opposition to postmodern arbitrariness, art's commercialization and banalization, business-oriented thinking according to which museums are evaluated like enterprises, the omnipresent blockbuster monoculture, mega-events, joint ventures and mergers; as a consequence, the MAK opposes the common obsession with maximizing visitor statistics. For the MAK, it has always been—and continues to be—about art. Wherever it is necessary to defend the diversity of the (domestic) museum landscape, the MAK is there. The MAK has unceasingly demanded from the political world a clear commitment to contemporary art on all levels (such as in 2006, with the manifesto “GegenwartsKUNST IN DIE REGIERUNG” [(Getting) Contemporary Art Into the Government], an art initiative launched in concert with the University of Applied Arts Vienna. The MAK strives to point out and itself exemplify the fact that art is not just some “expenditure,” but rather an investment in the future—future in action. The MAK constantly works to build today that upon which tomorrow will be based.

The MAK's profile is unmistakable: as an experimental laboratory for multiple practices in the fields of art, architecture and design, as a platform of cultural, interdisciplinary scholarly discourses, as a place for the research of societal knowledge, as a lively, high-profile forum for scholarship (including the project to make the MAK Collection accessible online), literature, film and music. Visionary pioneers from the fields of art, architecture, design and the humanities are frequent guests.

One characteristic of the MAK is its specific definition of art. In the MAK's understanding, art

experiments against the so-called real or established, that which is taken for granted; art should question answers, decode solutions and shift perspectives. In keeping with this idea, the MAK operates experimentally, uncompromisingly, radically—no risk, no art. It thus works to protect art that is critical, on the fringe, not directly marketable, and/or avant-garde. The MAK is a place where art is born. The ideas of the artist and the intention of the artwork are done justice—and if necessary, they are defended. MAK exhibitions seek to pose questions, not to answer them prematurely. For the MAK, it has been and continues to be about artistic statements, about art. Neither the duration nor the size of an exhibition is decisive. We have consistently realized exhibitions that are provocative, controversial. Because the MAK operates as a workshop for artists, giving them the opportunity to do things in a form that would be impossible elsewhere, it is no wonder that world-renowned artists are frequent guests (these have included: Jenny Holzer, Donald Judd, Vito Acconci, Chris Burden, Magdalena Jetelová and many others). Such an identity gives rise to a special way of working with artists, and this has resulted in close networking with leading visual artists, architects and designers from all over the world. At the MAK, the end of an exhibition is never really the end—on the contrary, what follows is permanent contact and exchange. For the most part, MAK exhibitions are developed in direct collaboration with the participating artists. Artists' interventions form the basis for the conditions at hand: this is a constant at the MAK. The MAK often plays a pioneering role in its exhibitions, in turn providing inspiration to artists, designers and architects. Although some projects and themes are at first ill-understood, the years that ensue see them taken up by other institutions, as well.

The flooding of the MAK with contemporary art is based on the conviction that it is only an open museum that can do justice to artworks which explode the idea of the self-contained work and dissolve the borders between genres. Only a museum rich in complexities can function as a contact point for a diversity of artistic stances. The experimental re-design and innovative presentation of the display collections via artistic interventions—in cooperation with the curators—represented the world-renowned core of the general renovation project (which was conducted from 1989 to 1993 under the artistic direction of Peter Noever). This made it possible to stage preservation-worthy holdings as part of an entirely new sort of interplay between artistic heritage and contemporary interventions by artists (including architectural contributions). Here, for the first time, it became possible to experience with one's senses what was meant by the fruitful collision between traditional holdings and current artistic movements. The general renovation and alteration involved selected architects but was deliberately not outsourced to any external firms.

Between 1991 and 1993, the MAK Terrace Plateau in the museum garden was constructed according to a design by Peter Noever. Noever's tenure as director also saw other significant improvements to the MAK's architectural substance, such as James Turrell's permanent exterior installation "MAKlite" of 1994, which communicates to the outside world the complex processes underway in the museum.

This is joined by another MAK-mainstay: artistic interventions in the public space (such as by Donald Judd in the Stadtpark, by Philipp Johnson on Schottenring and by Franz West on the Stubenbrücke).

1986 saw the establishment of the Collection of Contemporary Art, which has emphasized works by those artists who are directly associated with the MAK via exhibitions and other events. The collection has since come to include several of the works created specifically for MAK exhibitions (including Anish Kapoor's "Shooting into the Corner").

1994 saw the addition of the Arenbergpark Flak Tower as a new MAK branch; this facility has since then been serving the public as a depot for contemporary art. In order to effectively oppose the combined market forces of private collectors and speculators, it is imperative that state-run museums invent intelligent collecting strategies. Despite the lack of funding for acquisitions, the MAK has worked out targeted initiatives and solutions to this end: donations by the MAK Art Society, sponsors and artists have laid a strong, clearly visible foundation. Relationships with artists working in the field of whole-room

installations, many of which have existed for decades now—such as with Vito Acconci, Chris Burden, Walter Pichler, Matthew Barney, Ilya Kabakov, Hans Kupelwieser and Franz West—form a solid foundation upon which to establish an uncompromising collection.

Peter Noever joined forces with Sepp Müller and Michael Embacher to design the CAT – Contemporary Art Tower project for the Arenbergpark Flak Tower, on which the MAK has been working since 1995. This MAK strategy provides a suitable, solution-oriented model for the demands of contemporary art production that goes beyond traditional museum work: an artists-in-residence program is to give rise to an international “Collection of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century” with an unmistakable identity; the artists will put their ideas into practice in dialog with the public, while also taking into account the historic backdrop. This project is meant to turn the Arenbergpark Flak Tower into an international center for contemporary art. This building, a “monument to barbarism,” will be infused with contemporary architecture and given a trailblazing program to become an essential contemporary art location in Vienna. It is here that the cultural heritage of tomorrow is being created, an equally necessary and convincing solution which represents a vital investment in the future and in the self-image of our country. Here, on location, domestic and foreign artists will realize unshakable works of contemporary art while making reference to the location’s history. This combination—including the location’s monolithic architecture—is possessed of a truly unique potential. The transformation of a place so burdened by its history—a monument to National Socialist terror and to total war—into an open, lively center of contemporary art is a project unequalled anywhere in the world. Jenny Holzer and James Turrell have produced artistic installations specifically adapted to the Flak Tower, and the degree to which these permanent installations reflect the interior of the structure towards the outside is equal to the sensitivity with which the installations react to their urban environment.

The MAK defines itself as a central interface of global communication that overcomes any and every sort of boundary, encouraging dialog that transcends specific times and locations. Again and again, it turns up worlds both far removed from the art market and beyond “western” art and architectural trends—such as in “Cine Art. Indian Poster Painters at the MAK” (1999), “Architecture Again. The Havana Project” (1997), “Tyrrany of the Beautiful. Architecture in the Age of Stalin” (1994), “Art and Revolution. Russian and Soviet Art,” 1919–1932 (1988), and “Global Lab. Art as a Message. Asia and Europe, 1500–1700” (2009). A constant mission—alongside collaboration with the artists—is to advance intercultural transfer and networking with foreign arts institutions.

The museum is the ultimate translating apparatus, a thing which can communicate to the present and to the future across generations and all manner of boundaries. The MAK thinks and plans for the long term, overcoming geographic, political, intellectual and other types of borders. While some museums model themselves into global art corporations, the MAK does not. The MAK much rather stands for an international movement of critical and experimental art. The MAK’s program bids welcome to the world without falling prey to globalized mediocrity or randomness. In this way, there has arisen a unique MAK-network-in-progress which covers the most diverse fields: from city planning to artisan handwork to industrial design.

1994 saw the beginning of the MAK’s cooperative relationship with the MUAR – Schusev State Museum of Architecture, the renowned museum in central Moscow. This museum’s archives include a nearly complete collection of Russian avant-garde architectural designs. The institution enjoys great popularity among the Moscow public thanks to its unusual, uncompromising exhibitions. In contrast to many western institutions, the MUAR shows clear traces of its past. Its raw room structure, displaying the charm of a run-down Czarist palace, is conducive to enthusiastic experimentation and adaptations via artistic interventions. The cooperative relationship between the MAK and the MUAR has been manifested in joint exhibitions including “Heaven’s Gift” (2001) and “Aleksander Rodtschenko. Raumkonstruktionen [...Spatial Constructions]” (2005).

Since early 2006, the birth house of Josef Hoffmann—a personification of Viennese modernism and one of the most influential designers and architects of the 20<sup>th</sup> century—in Brtnice, Czech Republic, has been run as a joint branch by the Moravian Gallery (Brno) and the MAK. This institution serves to raise public awareness of Hoffmann's life and works, to maintain his presence in the discourse, and to facilitate critical evaluation of Hoffmann's works. Every summer features an exhibition having to do with Hoffmann. "Josef Hoffmann. Architekturführer / Architecture Guide" represents the first-ever catalog of all his buildings, presenting far more than just highlights. It is of central importance that Hoffmann's complete oeuvre be presented, unclouded by the mythical aura that surrounds him, for rendering individual building blocks as something absolute invariably narrows the horizon in question. Alongside designs for novel spatial configurations, there are also works which—though not masterpieces—by no means deserve to be treated disrespectfully. In dealing both historically and critically with Hoffmann's architectural oeuvre, the MAK perceives a source of inspiration and impulses that remains immanently relevant to present-day developments. The 2009 opening of a permanent exhibition on Hoffmann's life and works in Austria and the Czech Republic coincided with the release of the annotated Selbstbiografie [Autobiography] of Hoffmann for the first time as an independent publication.

It was back in 1994 that the MAK established the MAK Center for Art and Architecture, Los Angeles at the Rudolph M. Schindler House and the MAK-Schindler Residency Program at the Mackey Apartment House. The MAK Artists and Architects-in-Residence Program was launched in October of 1995. In doing so, the MAK facilitated the intense transfer of cultural information and knowledge between Los Angeles and Vienna, thus catalyzing the Austrian arts scene by hotwiring it to new trends and interdisciplinary developments in the areas of fine art and architecture. Today, the MAK Center occupies three of the most important buildings designed by Austro-American architect Rudolph M. Schindler: the Schindler House, the Pearl M. Mackey Apartment House and the Fitzpatrick-Leland House; the third of these structures was purchased in 2008 thanks to a generous gift (estimated value: 2.5 million dollars). With this, an Austrian cultural institution of a widely noted format was created on the West Coast of the USA; with regard to its program, it is most certainly unique in the context of its surroundings. The fascinating, multi-layered personality of Schindler—whose experimental thinking oscillated constantly between architecture and art and led the way for the modern understanding of architecture in California—represents a challenge. As with the Josef Hoffmann Museum, this project is not about a new "house museum" as such, but rather about carrying Schindler's spirit onward into the future. Here, as well, the MAK provides support to artists: the MAK Artists and Architects-in-Residence Program—one of the most sought-after scholarships worldwide—grants six-month scholarships for architects and visual artists; recipients are selected by an international jury consisting of individuals from the fields of art, architecture and theory. This is meant to allow artists to deal intensively with contemporary art and architectural currents. Furthermore, it has since given rise to another forward-looking program: the MAK Urban Future Initiative (UFI), a fellowship program of the MAK Center at the Fitzpatrick-Leland House, gives interdisciplinarily active theoreticians, urban planners, architects, sociologists, futurists, economists and others from developing and emerging nations the opportunity to spend three months in Los Angeles developing new strategies for today's constantly changing urban phenomena. The thematic focus is on a clear orientation towards experimentation in the overarching fields of art and architecture.

In an era of insufficient purchasing budgets, the MAK supports artists and thereby makes an important contribution to this country's culture. The MAK provides its support above all to up-and-coming but still relatively unknown artists via a wide range of events, which have come to be a source of international recognition: MAK NITE, for example, offers young artists—including architects, designers, musicians and fashion designers—the unique opportunity to introduce and further develop their current projects. Every Tuesday from 8 p.m. to 12 midnight, MAK NITE transforms the MAK into a laboratory for current artistic statements and presentations. Alongside tours through the MAK and the current exhibitions, architects and designers, artists, musicians and fashion designers also present their projects. Among these activities, a special focus is on artistic interventions making a theme of the location's and space's complexity. These activities provide a way to further the careers of young (Austrian) artists.

With ÖSTERREICHER IM MAK, an entirely new restaurant concept for Austria was launched under the artistic direction of Peter Noever in 2006. Though positioned internationally, it relates to a specifically Austrian quality of life and is connected both with the city and the museum. This artistic idea is implemented in all areas, including design, architecture, and the relationship between cuisine and design, thereby corresponding with the clear positioning of the MAK between tradition and experimentation. Four-toque chef Helmut Österreicher transforms Austrian traditions into a gastronomic phenomenon of the present. The restaurant's architecture was entrusted to eichinger oder knechtel, one of Austria's most prominent architectural design teams.

At the MAK, design is understood to be thought, intervention, and a strategy with which to change the environment, as a central, comprehensive and creative category that brings together architecture, art, science and many other areas in order to catalyze holistic approaches. A new design strategy is to do this concept justice, a strategy resulting—both architecturally and in terms of content—in a whole series of projects in “concrete utopias.” Hardly any other institution seems better-suited to the establishment of an innovative design platform (designers, artists, architects and urbanists) than the MAK. As a new type of research facility, MAK is the ideal institution for contemporary design research. Its free and flexible structure is defined above all by outstanding universalists who work in a context of increasingly complex social and economic structures. MAK defends the freedom to experiment. It opens up new spaces and different perspectives. MAK is based on the MAK's material, ideal, and human resources and strengthens the existing international network. The MAK Design Camp is the complementary counterpart to the MAK Center for Art and Architecture, Los Angeles; the MAK Artists and Architects-in-Residence Program and the Urban Future Initiative (UFI) for urbanists and city planners find a second base here with regard to structures and subject matter, situated in Vienna but acting globally. In worldwide cooperation with think tanks, universities and research institutions of international importance, MAK is to develop scenarios for the future, provide impulses for industry and examine design innovations as to their feasibility. MAK is to become a unique research facility which makes possible boundary-crossing projects, deals with issues of our times and develops today that upon which tomorrow will be based. MAK gives the field of design what it so desperately needs: a laboratory for visions with a broad horizon.

2009 witnessed a collaborative study by Peter Noever and Christian Rapp (rapp&wimberger Kultur- und Medienprojekte, Vienna) to determine the profile and strategy of the Design Research Center; a feasibility study is currently in progress.

The project “MAK over Vienna” is an architectural master plan meant to prepare the MAK for the decades ahead. Alongside necessary maintenance and restructuring, new spaces are to be created for the exhibition of the collection and artistic interventions: a center for architecture, an expanded space for the Collection of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries, and the innovative establishment of a display depot where the Wien River meets the Danube Canal. With the MAK Terminal/Schaulager [Terminal/Depot], the MAK embarks on a new path in art mediation and brings art to where the people are. Adjacent to the museum, an entirely new urban surface over the Wien River is to arise at the Stubenbrücke Bridge: the MAK Platform. The Platform will lend the MAK an unmistakable aura, and the general public will be given a new location which functions as an elemental connection of the urban axis running between the Inner City and the Wien Mitte neighborhood.

2009 saw the publication of a study for this overall plan entitled “MAK over Vienna. Feasibility Study. Repair, Intervention and Expansion,” edited by Peter Noever and Michael Embacher.

The better is never the enemy of the good.