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Kunsthhaus Graz A Friendly Alien

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'Up into the unknown' - a balance sheet with a perspective

'Up into the unknown!' was written on one of the first rough drawings for the Kunsthhaus Graz. After over seven years of exhibitions, the Friendly Alien is not just here to stay. It has long since established itself as an internationally recognized center for contemporary art.

The architectural challenge: a dialogue between space, exhibition and city

The architecture poses over and over a challenge facing the Kunsthhaus Graz. The exhibitions of the early years yielded very instructive insights into how to handle the place and the exhibition spaces.

BIX media façade, or: a high interest in low resolution

The BIX façade is a unique medium of urban communication. Its inventor realities:united even managed to land Deutsche Telekom's Inspire award for it.

Max Neuhaus: Time Piece Graz. A Moment for the Kunsthhaus

The acoustic sculpture of American sound-artist Max Neuhaus is a firm feature of the Kunsthhaus Graz. There is a similar work in Beacon in upstate New York.

Programme 2012

The Kunsthhaus Graz's interest lies with recent and the very latest art: in 2012 the personal aspects of Styrian artist Michael Kienzer and the Danish artist Sofie Thorsen, resident in Vienna, form the overture to an exciting and ambitious exhibition year, while the group exhibition *Project Cittadellarte* is devoted to the city of art of the same name founded by Michelangelo Pistoletto. Styrian media art and subversive painting are also on the agenda for 2012.

Up into the unknown!

A balance sheet with a perspective

Graz, 27th/28th September 2003: the Kunsthaus Graz opens its doors as the architectural finale of Graz's year as European City of Culture. Six years later, the Friendly Alien is not only an essential feature of the urban landscape of the city of Graz but also a point of attraction for those interested in art and culture, from all over the world.

In a high-wire balancing act between high art and popular appeal, 43 exhibitions – including projects of such interesting content and media focus as *Sol LeWitt: WALL* or *China Welcomes You*, and crowd-pullers such as *Moving Parts. Forms of the Kinetic*, *Model Martin Kippenberger. Utopia for Everyone*, *Warhol Wool Newman. Painting Real* or *Ai Weiwei. Interlacing* – had attracted 740.049 visitors up to the end of 2011. That is impressive proof of the lively interest in a profound, close encounter with contemporary art.

The successes of the first years were based on a clear programmatic concept and international positioning at the highest level in terms of content. A variety of well-coordinated measures in the field of marketing, advertising and PR have ensured that the public are kept well-informed about the Kunsthaus Graz. Evidence thereof is the enormous interest on the part of the media, which is by no means confined to the Central European area. Thanks to the media, the culturally minded public not only in Slovenia, Croatia, Italy, France, Spain, Holland, Sweden, Bulgaria, Britain and Russia but also in Taiwan, Australia, Saudi Arabia, Japan, India, Mexico and the USA were able to keep up-to-date with events at the Kunsthaus Graz. Visitor figures also impressively prove that awareness of the programme and architecture of the Friendly Alien goes well beyond Austria's frontiers. 15.95% of all visitors come from Germany, another 14.46% from neighbouring Italy and approximately 4.42% of all visitors make the long trek from Asia.

The international reputation of the Kunsthaus Graz reflects not only its singular architecture but also how well the events it puts on (i.e. the exhibitions) travel. Apart from the *Moving Parts* kinetic art exhibition, which went on to the Museum Tinguely in Basel, the solo show of the prematurely deceased Michael Majerus curated by Peter Pakesch and Günther Holler-Schuster subsequently toured Amsterdam, Hanover and Hamburg before opening the 2007 City of Culture year in Luxemburg. The internationally highly-regarded exhibition *Chikaku. Time and Memory in Japan* moved on from Graz to MARCO (Museo de Arte Contemporánea) in Vigo/Spain and the Taro-Okamoto Museum in Kawasaki/Japan.

The architectural challenge

A dialogue between space, exhibition and city

The Kunsthaus Graz is radically different from traditional exhibition spaces, whose rooms follow the conventional idea of the 'white cube'. The prevailing specific spatial situation makes particular demands on the work of curators that call for a creative dialogue process involving the projected content of the exhibition, the spatial implementation and the technical feasibility. The experiences of the early years proved instructive as to how the two Space01 and Space02 exhibition areas should be handled. One thing became especially clear: a singular building of this kind with an idiosyncratic if also hermetic exhibition situation requires constant redefinition of the interior space. Widely differing projects and installations were the result, and guidelines have been drawn up.

It turned out for example that the lower level (Space02) allowed new forms of presentation of large-format pictures, but also suited multimedia and video installations. The best examples of this to date have been the John Baldessari exhibition (*Life's Balance. Works 84-04*) and the Aleph project featuring works from the Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary collection or *Screening Real. Conner Lockhart Warhol*, where, thanks to the flexible structure of the rooms, a particularly strong dynamic was set up between the exhibits and the setting. The level directly beneath the distinctive nozzles, Space01, is just right for large sculptural and three-dimensional works. Works such as Diana Thater's large-format video installation *gorillagorillagorilla*, Sol LeWitt's monumental work *WALL*, and the space-related works of Liz Larner and Michael Majerus, drew attention to the three-dimensional potential of this domed area and its exhibition space, which was initially the subject of much heated discussion. An exemplary use of this space was the exhibition design for *M City*, produced by the Spanish architectural duo ReD, which was awarded the *Feidad 2005* architectural prize. Another was the exhibition architecture designed by artist Heimo Zobernig for *Inventory*, which confirmed once again the Kunsthaus Graz's role as an architectural laboratory. Zobernig waded into the debate about traditional exhibition systems with guns blazing, and his deconstruction of the interior not only impressed press representatives but surprised visitors as well.

The urban-development aspects and benefits of the Friendly Alien have also been more significant than originally expected. Today, the Kunsthaus Graz occupies a privileged location in the city, the area having undergone a tremendous upturn since 2003. Architects Peter Cook and Colin Fournier thus came up with an urban-planning solution that has had a positive influence on everyday life in this part of the city, and is not only closely attuned to the historic architectural fabric of Graz but also constitutes a clear symbol of the great architectural tradition of Graz.

BIX media façade, or: High interest in low resolution

The Kunsthaus Graz's BIX media façade constitutes a unique fusion of architecture and media technology, and is based on a concept evolved by Berlin architects realities:united. In January 2005, the brains behind realities:united, brothers Jan and Tim Edler, were awarded Deutsche Telekom's €50,000 *Inspire award* for the design of the façade. Even today, this work and the approach underlying it have lost none of their relevance.

Since November 2010, BIX has been represented at MoMA by an early prototype of a pixel that realities:united used as an object of study in the design process, to investigate the light effects and controllability of the installation.

The BIX media façade appropriates the Plexiglass skin on the east side of the building facing the river and the city, and comprises an outsize urban screen that acts as an instrument for artistic productions. Like the acoustic sound installation by Max Neuhaus, the BIX media façade also represents a special kind of communications channel, which not only projects the programmatic content of the Kunsthaus Graz from the hermetic exhibition situation into the public arena, but also defines and leaves its mark on the immediate environment. In addition, the 'communicating skin' also offers a possible work platform for art projects thematising the dialogue between the media and (public) space.

Built into the 900m² skin are 930 ordinary commercial ring-shaped 40W fluorescent light tubes, which can produce continuously variable light values between 0% and 100%. Every light ring acts as a pixel that can be controlled by a central computer. This means grainy symbols, texts and film sequences can be developed that are widely visible in the city, turning the Blue Bubble of the Kunsthaus Graz into a low-resolution screen of urban dimensions.

Various individual projects – for example, *Plot:Bach* by Thomas Baumann and Michael Klaar, *The Sky is Thin as Paper Here ...* by Cerith Wyn Evans – have provided invaluable experience of using this unique medium, in turn contributing a whole range of useful input into current projects.

Max Neuhaus

Time Piece Graz. A Moment for the Kunsthaus

In 2003, American sound artist Max Neuhaus designed an acoustic installation for the opening of the Friendly Alien called *Time Piece Graz*, which the Kunsthaus Graz and the surrounding area has had the benefit of ever since, so that it is now an established feature of the city.

The acoustic sculpture *Time Piece Graz* is a unique sound composition. A scarcely audible, slowly swelling sound spreads in and around the Kunsthaus Graz, only to break off abruptly at its peak to generate a moment of stillness. Related works are found at the Dia:Beacon in upstate New York, Times Square in Manhattan and outside the former synagogue in Stommeln, North-Rhine Westphalia.

The 'open face' of the Kunsthaus Graz as a place of communications is apparent not only in the content of its exhibition programme and its architecture, but also in the BIX media façade and the *Time Piece Graz* acoustic installation. Both of the latter address the surrounding area more directly than the architecture does. Basically, they complement the unique position of the Friendly Alien, broadening its communication with the immediate and nearby environment and thus jointly with the exhibition building setting their stamp more effectively on the newly developing urban area.

In abruptly breaking off the slowly swelling sound, *Time Piece Graz* constitutes an alarm clock of stillness – it enables a pause for reflection amid the hectic urban hustle and bustle and therewith a 'moment for the Kunsthaus Graz'.

Daily from 9 am to 9 pm, 10 minutes before the hour.

The 2012 programme

The internal spectrum of the Kunsthaus Graz is focused on recent and present-day art, from the 1960s on. This positioning has historical reasons that are closely bound up with the development of art and architecture in Styria. Says Peter Pakesch, Artistic Director of the Universalmuseum Joanneum, 'Graz and Styria have no tradition of modernism in the classic sense. But from the 60s there was a strongly experimental, avant-garde trend with an art-theoretical overlay. You only need think of the architectural concepts of the Graz School, the Forum Stadtpark or the Styrian Autumn festival. The achievements of art and architecture over the last 40 years thus provide plausible content and an art-historically comprehensible starting point for the development of individual activities.'

Michael Kienzer

Logic and Self-Will

Space01

Opening: March 2, 2012

Duration: March 3-May 6, 2012

Curator: Katrin Bucher Trantow

The Styrian artist Michael Kienzer is concerned with viewing habits: he breaks them, reduces them to absurdity, and thereby takes the public on a journey to the apparently fixed constructions of common knowledge. In an exhibition for Space01, he will make direct reference to space, and in his new works take a close look at the unfamiliar.

Sofie Thorsen

Cut A-A'

Space02

Opening: March 2, 2012

Duration: March 3-May 6, 2012

Curators: Katrin Bucher Trantow, Katia Huemer

Cooperation with the *Diagonale 2012*

Vienna-based Danish artist Sofie Thorsen is a precise observer of culturally shaped forms. In her filmic, photographic and drawing oeuvres, formulated in a formal, highly precise way, she dedicates herself to the city and its history, depicting space as built history in its political, social and art-historical context.

Project Cittadellarte

Space01

Opening: June 1, 2012

Duration: June 2-Aug 26, 2012

Curator: Katrin Bucher Trantow, Paolo Naldini

Created by Michelangelo Pistoletto, *Cittadellarte* is an open network which divides into work, upbringing, communication, art, nutrition, politics, spirituality and economy, and, like a glass microcosm, shifts production and common inspiration to the foreground of an economically functioning art system that avoids rigid divisions by area. The exhibition in the Kunsthaus Graz becomes a utopia, very much alive, turning the art system into an open supermarket, and so creating the idea of a modern, constructed city that works according to market-based rules

Styrian Media Art Collection

Space02

Opening: June 15, 2012

Duration: June 16-Feb 3, 2013

Curator: Günther Holler-Schuster, Katrin Bucher Trantow, Katja Huemer

The Neue Galerie owns an outstanding photo and video collection. These collections were first shown on a large scale in the exhibitions *Flashback* (2007) and *Rewind/Fast Forward* (2009). Here the emphasis was also on quantity so as to show the vast collecting activity of this institution. *The Styrian Media Art Collection* (2012) is devised to show another exhibition from this highly diverse collection in the Kunsthaus premises. This time the idea is to have installation works from both areas. This starts off with overdimensional formats which open up the picture in the direction of the room, to the point of three-dimensional arrangements that in part depend on the participation of the public. These days especially, when the most varied image-based media are employed and have altered reality so much that we generally have the feeling of being relocated to a virtual image-space, discourse on the transformation of image to image-space becomes a key theme. Forms of extended reality and virtuality are firm elements of everyday life. Art reflects this on the one hand, yet on the other it goes several important steps further, thus contributing once again to changes in perception. Through its sculptural character that goes beyond orthogonality, the architecture of the Kunsthaus supports these ideas, and so becomes an additional dimension.

Subversive Painting (Working title)

Space01

Opening: Sept 21, 2012

Duration: Sept 22-Feb 3, 2013

project in collaboration with the *steirischer herbst*

An exhibition with various artistic positions has been devised for the *steirischer herbst* festival that raises thematic questions that the festival will tackle. In this way the notion of the subversive within the medium of painting will be discussed.