Haegue Yang
VIP’s Union
This exhibition guide is published on the occasion of the multi-part exhibition project

**Haegue Yang**
VIP's Union
23.06.2017–02.04.2018

Kunsthaus Graz
Universalmuseum Joanneum

VIP's Union at Kunsthaus Graz consists of two phases: In Phase I, the furniture pieces will be on show in the entire Kunsthaus. In Phase II, an exhibition at Space02 and a catalogue of the artist will form the conclusion of the project. The objects will then change their status of (useable) furniture to exhibit.

VIP's Union – Phase I
June 23, 2017 – January 28, 2018

VIP's Union – Phase II
February 16, 2018 – April 2, 2018

4 Invitation letter to the selected VIPs
6 Loan agreement/questionnaire
8 Genealogy of VIP's Union
14 Related works
16 List of lenders
20 Images of loans

Barbara Steiner
26 VIP's Union at the Kunsthaus Graz

Katrin Bucher Trantow
32 Generosity, the Common Good and Lending

Doris Psenicnik, Stephan Schikora, Barbara Steiner
40 A Preliminary Data Review

44 Biography Haegue Yang

45 Accompanying programme

46 Imprint
Universalmuseum Joanneum
Kunsthaus Graz

Graz, 16. Februar 2017

Sehr geehrte Damen und Herren,

... auch wenn das Anliegen ungewöhnlich anmuten mag: Wir, das sind die Künstlerin Haegue Yang und die Leiterin des KunsthauBes Graz, bitten Sie um ein Möbelstück wie einen Tisch oder einen Sessel ihrer Wahl für einen „VIP Room“. Anlässlich der Einzelausstellung VIP’s Union von Haegue Yang wird ein Möbelstück Teil einer Kunstraumausstellung, wobei jedes in seiner Ausdrucksform verschieden ist und die Gabe auf der Großzügigkeit der Beteiligten basiert, hierfür treten wir an verschiedene Persönlichkeiten aus Graz und der Steiermark mit der Bitte um eine Leihgabe hinan und hoffen auch auf Eurer Einverständnis, dass diese von den Besucherinnen und Besuchern des KunsthauBes genutzt werden kann.


Möglicherweise fragen Sie sich, nach welchen Kriterien wir unsere Auswahl getroffen haben, denn es ist nicht einfach zu klären, was eine „very important person“ auszeichnet. Nach sittlicher Überlegung ist das Team des KunsthauBes zum Schluss gekommen, dass für die Institution wichtige Personen eingeladen werden sollen – also Menschen, die für das KunsthauB in der Vergangenheit wichtig waren, gegenwärtig Bedeutung haben oder mit denen wir uns künftig verbunden wollen. Diese subjektive, aber optimistische Wahl ist ebenso Teil der Arbeit wie der Aspekt, dass die eingeladenen sich entscheiden müssen, ob sie teilnehmen, und wenn ja, welches Möbel sie verleihen möchten. Was uns gemeinsam an Herzen liegt, ist eine Form des kollektiven Ausdrucks im Sinne der Gäste. Großzügigkeit anbieten zu können, trotz unserer unterschiedlichen Lebensformen, visuellen Vorlieben und unseres individuellen Geschmacks. Somit wird VIP’s Union zwar eine reichlich hybride Landschaft werden, aber auch einen Raum der Gemeinsamkeit aufmachen.


Haegue Yang
Barbara Steiner
<VIP's Union> Leihvereinbarung für Möbel

Leihgeber/Leihgeberin, Kontakt- und Lieferdaten

Name: ____________________________
Adresse: ____________________________
Tel.: ____________________________ E-Mail-Adresse: ____________________________

Leihzeitraum

01. Juni 2017 – 15. April 2018 (gesamter Leihzeitraum)

Objektdaten

Anzahl Tische:
Maße: (Höhe) x (Länge) x (Breite) cm
Material: Holz ☐ Metall ☐ Glas ☐ Sonstiges ☐

Anzahl Stühle:
Maße: (Höhe) x (Länge) x (Breite) cm
Material: Holz ☐ Metall ☐ Glas ☐ Sonstiges ☐

Versicherungswert (€): Optional: originaler Kaufpreis (€):
☐ Ja ☐ Nein
- Die Künstlerin wünscht sich nach Möglichkeit Möbel, die die Besucher/innen benützen dürfen. In den vorangegangenen Ausstellungen haben nur ca. 7 % der Leihgeber/innen das Benützen ihres Möbels durch die Besucher/innen nicht erlaubt.
- Wenn „Nein“ gekreuzt wird, wird das Objekt mit „nicht zu benützen“ gekennzeichnet.

Angaben zur Leihgeber/Leihgeberin
☐ Name: ____________________________
☐ Verbindung zum Kunsthauises Graz: ____________________________
☐ Tätigkeitsbereich: ____________________________

Objektfotografie
☐ Künnten Sie uns eine Aufnahme des Objekts in Ihnem Umfeld bei sich zu Hause zukommen lassen? Bitte senden Sie ein jpg (max 300 dpi) via E-Mail an: ____________________________
☐ Darfen wir gegebenenfalls das Objekt bei Ihnen zu Hause fotografiert lassen?
☐ Darfen Ausstellungsmachten für den Katalog und die Öffentlichkeitsarbeit zur Ausstellung (Folder, Presse, Internet etc.) verwendet werden?

Transport
☐ Sollten wir Ihr Objekt bei Ihnen abholen?
☐ Möchten Sie Ihr Objekt selbst im Kunsthauises Graz antreffen?
Wir kontaktieren Sie in jedem Fall zur Koordination der Termine für die Anlieferung und den Kundentransport Ihres Objektes.

Verpackung
☐ Verpackung
☐ Vom Leihgeber/in verpackt ☐ Vom UBOJ zu verpacken

Abholadresse des Möbels, Kontaktperson
☐ und Telefonnummer (wenn abweichend von obiger Adresse)

Rückgabeadresse (wenn abweichend von obiger Adresse)

Ort, Datum: ____________________________
☐ Unterschrift, Liefernehmer/in ____________________________

Ort, Datum: ____________________________
☐ Unterschrift, Leihgeber/in ____________________________
Genealogy of VIP's Union

1. Design commission for the VIP Lounge at the Art Forum Berlin, Berlin, Germany
   October 3–7, 2001

2. The Sea Wall: Hoega Yang with an Inclusion by Félix Gonzalez-Torres, Arnolfini, Bristol, Great Britain
   July 16 – September 4, 2011

3. Don’t You Know Who I Am? Art After Identity Politics, Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst Antwerpen, Antwerp, Belgium
   June 13 – September 14, 2014

4. Follies, manifest: Gabriel Lester - Hoega Yang, Bonn Kunstverein, Bonn, Germany
   September 23 – November 23, 2014

5. Shooting the Elephant Thinking the Elephant, Leeum, Samsung Museum of Art, Seoul, South Korea
   February 12 – May 10, 2015
1. Design commission for the VIP Lounge at the Art Forum Berlin, Berlin, Germany
   October 3–7, 2001

2. The Sea Wall: Haegue Yang with an Inclusion by Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Arnolfini, Bristol, Great Britain
   July 16 – September 4, 2011
3. Don’t You Know Who I Am? Art After Identity Politics, Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst Antwerpen, Antwerp, Belgium
   June 13 – September 14, 2014

4. Follies, manifold: Gabriel Lester - Haegue Yang, Bonner Kunstverein, Bonn, Germany
   September 23 – November 23, 2014

5. Shooting the Elephant: Thinking the Elephant, Leeum, Samsung Museum of Art, Seoul, South Korea
   February 12 – May 10, 2015
Related works

1. Furniture Objects – Students’ Union Satie
   2000
   Found objects: ensemble of three pieces of furniture: coffee table, bench, chair and three accompanying texts
   75 × 60 × 52 cm
   45 × 100 × 35 cm
   72 × 36 × 36 cm
   Haubrok Collection (part of Storage Piece), Berlin, Germany

2. Social Conditions of the Sitting Table
   2001 (detail)
   C-prints, printed text, framed
   10 pieces, each 42.3 × 52.5 cm
   Courtesy of the artist

3. Street Modality
   2001 (detail)
   3 colour photographs, framed
   each 25.5 × 38.5 cm
   Courtesy of Galerie Barbara Wien, Berlin, Germany

4. What I’d Love to Have at Home
   2001
   4 sets of metal shelving manufactured by Otto Kind AG, and a sofa, designed by Egon Eiermann, 1968
   Courtesy of Galerie Barbara Wien, Berlin, Germany
   Installation view, Self as disappearance, Centre d’art contemporain – La Synagogue de Delme, Delme, France, 2010
List of lenders

The lender categories are defined by the VIPs’ professions and activities. Some lenders have been assigned to more than one category. The categories chosen by the curators and artist are politics, culture, education, social commitment, media, economy, health, religion.

1 Anonymous
White chest, with toys
Education

2 Anonymous
Metal chair
Economy, culture

3 Anonymous
Wooden folding chair with cushion
Culture

4 Anonymous
Soren Georg Jensen, ‘Kubus’ rocking chair for Tønder Mobelvaerk
Norway, 1958
Economy, culture

5 Anonymous
Bedside table from the 1940s
Economy, culture

6 Ilse Bartens
Farmer’s chair typical of the region
Economy

7 Johann Baumgartner
Four black Thonet chairs with matching round table
Culture, cultural education

8 Ute Baumhackl
Chair and stool
Media

9 Barbara Baur-Edlinger
Yellow seating
Culture, social commitment, economy

10 Martin Behr
Cat’s scratching post, made by Georg Ruckli
Culture, media

11 Barbara Binder
Red cushion ‘sitting point’
Education, cultural education

12 Ingrid Böck
Giancarlo Piretti, ‘Sessel 11 DSC Axis 106 Dinner Chair’, designed for Castelli [undated]
Education

13 Markus Bogensberger
Bar stool by BENE
Culture, cultural education

14 Reinhard Braun
Chair, painted white
Culture, cultural education

15 Christine and Bertrand Conrad-Eybesfeld
Mathis Esterhazy, ‘The last chair’, 1995
Economy, culture

16 Leonora Czerny
Metal table with glass top
Culture

17 Wanda Deutsch
Cushion
Cultural education, media

18 Christopher Drexler
Two cinema chairs
Politics, culture

19 Helga and Sandro Droschli
Two Thonet chairs, restored
Culture, cultural education

20 Günter Eisenhubt
Art deco table from Graz: armchair from the estate of Herbert Eichholzer, c. 1930; Arnold Reinisch, ‘Fetisch’ [fetish] from ‘adjective furniture’ series, 2006
Culture, economy, cultural education

21 Hermann Eisenkock
Love seat and table with original Herbert Brandl Culture, economy

22 Sabine Flach
Chair
Education, culture

23 Christian Fleck
Couch, artificial leather and wood
Education

24 Konrad Frey
Round table and two black folding chairs
Culture, economy

25 Christine Frisinghelli and Manfred Willmann
Stool
Culture

26 Leopold Gartler
Valet stand (clothes rack)
Economy

27 Elisabeth and Manfred Gaulhofer
Poufs: red cuboid, grey cube, made of foam
Economy, culture

28 Volker Giecke
Volker Giecke, two tables, 1983 (prototypes for later productions); Hans Coray, ‘Landi chair’, 1938
Culture, economy

29 Hermann Glettler
Coffee table
Religion, culture

30 Peter Grabensberger
Crafted bar stool
Culture, politics

31 Cajetan Gril
Josef Johann Gril, standard model armchair ‘Rikki’, 1956
Culture, economy

32 Barbara and Bernhard Hafner
Old deckchair with new cover
Culture, Economy

33 Franz Harmoncourt-Unverzagt
Large, old winged chair
Economy, culture

34 Manfred Herzl
Wicker winged chair
Economy

35 Johanna Hierzegger
Wooden bench, pink
Culture

36 Arno Hofer
Leather cantilever chair, turquoise-green
Cultural education

37 Peter Gerwin Hoffmann
Peter Gerwin Hoffmann Bench, 1975, and chair/ladder, 2016
Culture, education

38 Reni Hofmüller
Concha Jerez, folding chair, ‘interference unit’, 1993
Culture, social commitment, cultural education

39 Clemens Hollerer
Clemens Hollerer, An encounter, 2016 and an Ytong block, part of the ‘Wall’ by Sol LeWitt shown at Kunsthaus Graz, 2004
Culture

40 Irmi Horn
Irmi Horn, ‘The 13th Chair’, folding chair from the stage set of ‘DIE LASSINGOPER’, 2000/01
Culture, Cultural education

41 Kate Howlett-Jones
Two cinema seats and a small table
Culture

42 Helinde and Eilfried Huth
Two wooden folding chairs [design 1950–54]
Culture, education
43 Markus Jeschaunig
Markus Jeschaunig, ‘Dancing chair’, 2011
[from the ‘Hausstoppelographien’ project]
Culture

44 Gudrun Jöller
Heavy, old swivel chair
Cultural education, culture

45 Christiane Kada
Mosaic table
Culture, politics

46 Kamdem Mou Poh à Hom
Wooden chair, upholstered
Social commitment, education, cultural education

47 Veronica Kaup-Hasler
‘Herbst hammock’, designed by glückslabor
Culture, cultural education

48 Renate Kicker
Comfortable pink office chair
Education, culture

49 Orhan Kipcak
Guitar amp
Education, culture

50 Alois Köbl
Two chairs from the 1960s
Religion, culture, education, cultural education

51 Helmut Konrad
Rocking chair and small table
Education, culture, cultural education

52 Karla Kowalski
Child’s folding chair, about 100 years old
Education, culture, economy

53 Richard Kriesche
Table and two café chairs
Culture, education

54 Karl Albrecht Kubinzky
Art deco chair
Education

55 Astrid Kury
Thinking break sofa from Akademie Graz
Culture, cultural education

56 Iris Laufenberg
Antique chair
Culture, cultural education

57 Eugen Lendl
Two benches covered with fabric, by Wittmann
Culture, economy

58 Margarethe Makovec and Anton Lederer
Little bench (with lid) and side table
Culture, social commitment, cultural education

59 Claudia Mayer-Rieckl
Old three-legged cobbler’s stool from a flea market
Health, culture

60 Johannes Messner
Two chairs
Economy, culture

61 Hermann Miklas
Beautiful wooden chair
Religion

62 Wenzel Mraček
Mart Stam, cantilever chair ‘S 34’, 1926
Culture, media, cultural education

63 Siegfried Nagl
Office chair from the town hall
Politics

64 Peter Pakesch
Mathis Esterhazy and Franz West, ‘Chair [Villa Arson, Nizza]’, 1990
Culture

65 Heidrun Primas
Sock chair
Culture, social commitment, cultural education

66 Johannes Rauchenberger
(chair, second hand)
Culture, religion, cultural education

67 Michaela Reichart
‘Wolf’, a stool covered in synthetic fur on three stump legs
Media

68 Resanita [Anita Fuchs and Resa Pernthaller]
Tree stool
Culture

69 Günter Riegler
Josef Hoffmann, bentwood chair with arms (undated)
Politics, culture

70 Margret and Hans Roth
Chair with/without cover
Economy, culture

71 Lisa Rücker
Grey armchair
Politics, culture

72 Johannes Rumpl
Metal table and metal cantilever chair
Economy

73 Petra Schilcher
Peter Kogler, ‘Untitled’, 2005
Table with silk screen (ed. Edition Artelter, Graz 2005);
Peter Kogler, ‘U-shaped table with u-shaped stool’ (ed. Edition Artelter Contemporary, Graz 2010);
Manfred Wolff-Plottegg, ‘Rocker No 12’ (ed. Edition Artelter Collection, Graz 2008)
Culture, economy

74 Ralph Schilcher
Office chair
Culture, economy

75 Nora Schmid
Chair by Moritz Schmid for Möbel Pfister (CH)
Culture, cultural education

76 Colette Schmidt
Armchair ‘The good piece’
Media

77 Patrick Schnabl
Turquoise child’s chair belonging to Rosa Schnabl
Politics, culture

78 Christa and Gerald Schöpf
Table mirror, silver-plated, Jugendstil
Education, social commitment

79 Eberhard Schrempf
Walter Knoll, ‘Drift Chair’; ‘Light Cube’ by Viteo
Culture, economy, cultural education

80 Werner Schrempf
Modern chair, joined wood
Culture, cultural education

81 Michael Schunko
Wooden bar stool by Zeitraum
Economy, politics

82 Wolfgang Skerget
Office chair with green seat cushion
Culture, politics

83 Andrea Stadlofer
Red artificial leather chair from the 1950s
Social commitment

84 Alfred Stingl
Kitchen chair and cuddly toy sheepdog
Politics, social commitment

85 Karl Stocker
Wooden chair
Education, culture

86 Helmut Strobl
Chair, painted by Bruno Toja, Congo; chair, painted by Enks – Emanuel Nikrumah
Ghana
Culture, politics, social commitment

87 Erika Thümmel
Erika Thümmel, a plant stand made into a television stand, 1985;
four wooden chairs, probably 1950s, covered in African wax print
Culture, education

88 Walter Titz
Robust swivel chair
Media

89 Milica Tomić
Coffee table, two chairs, standard lamp (lent), at her home
See programme on p. 45 of this publication!
Culture, education

90 Stefan Tschkof
Upholstered sofa with metal legs
Economy

91 Sophia Walk
Egon Eiermann, ‘SE 68’, 1950
Education

92 Florian Weitzer
Metal trunk containing engraving by Viktor Zach, ‘Schlechte Zeiten’, 1923
Economy

93 Andrea Winkler
Two old school desks
Education

94 Herbert Winterleiter
Plant container and stool with metal legs
Social commitment

95 Manfred Wolff-Plottegg
Manfred Wolff-Plottegg, five ‘Vorläufer’ (forrunners), 2010;
‘Rocker’, 1967
Culture, education, economy

96 Erwin Wurm
Erwin Wurm, ‘Möbel 3’ (furniture), 2010
Culture

97 Klaus Zausinger
Reading chair with floral pattern
Economy

98 Gertrud Zwicker
Wooden chair with pink velvet cover
Politics, social commitment

99 Egon Eiermann, ‘SE 68’, 1950
Education

100 Florian Weitzer
Metal trunk containing engraving by Viktor Zach, ‘Schlechte Zeiten’, 1923
Economy

101 Andrea Winkler
Two old school desks
Education
VIP’s Union at the Kunsthaus Graz

Barbara Steiner

The starting position: ‘Very important persons’ (VIPs) are asked to lend a table or chair of their choice. And yet the difficulties begin immediately: who counts as a VIP? Heads of state, politicians, actors, football stars? How is the social meaning of VIPs defined? These are some of the questions posed by Korean artist Haegue Yang in her work VIP’s Union. Started in Berlin in 2001, further VIP’s Union followed in Bristol, Antwerp, Bonn and Seoul. This is a conceptual piece that changes as it is produced in a new way at each site.

Within the framework of the series, the question as to who is an important person, and in what context, was answered differently from place to place, from institution to institution. In 2001, at the Art Forum Berlin, VIPs were, unsurprisingly, collectors and important political and social representatives of the German capital.1 The Arnolfini in Bristol chose figures who had achieved something important in their particular professional field (culture, politics, the economy, etc.) The curatorial team at the Kunsthaus Graz, on the other hand, decided to invite people who are important for the institution—that is, people who have had or have a close relationship to the Kunsthaus in very different ways or who will in the future play a greater role. This includes providers of subsidies and representatives of the establishment’s regulatory bodies, members of the Universal museum Joanneum’s board of trustees and supervisory board as well as political decision-makers such as the mayor of the city of Graz, the state minister for culture and the city councillor for culture. But it also includes artists, collectors, cooperation partners and private supporters with a connection to the Kunsthaus, of whom some are almost or even completely unknown to the public.

The request was made in a letter signed by the artist and me.2 An attached questionnaire asked whether the recipient would like to take part, and if so, whether they would like to be named, and whether they would allow their furniture to be used. The loans comprise farmhouse furniture, office chairs, table and chairs from the turn of the century, mass-produced articles, modern and contemporary design; some have been built or restored by the lenders themselves. In the case of some pieces it is difficult to work out their exact function, while other loans—such as the cat’s scratching post—disregard the original request for tables and chairs. The decision of one participant to invite visitors of the Kunsthaus into their own home to share in the everyday use of their furniture takes the project beyond the boundaries between public/half-public and private space.3 Behind each item of furniture and its choice there essentially lies a personal story that is to do with the owner, be it their experiences of migration, the Jugendstil chair they restored themselves, the child’s chair that their own children have grown out of, or the death of a beloved cat.

In 1979, the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu published Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste, a study that deals with the analysis and context of lifestyle and social class.4 The taste we base our choices on is—according to the results of his investigations— shaped less by individual than by social influences. Bourdieu claims that there is a connection between taste, social position and economic possibilities, meaning that objects and activities are chosen according to one’s social position. This reinforces one’s affiliation to a particular group, while also serving to maintain differentiation from other classes.5 Although Bourdieu’s approach of the ‘habitus’ theory has repeatedly been subject to critical revision since then, one aspect appears to me to be of particular interest in connection with VIP’s Union: as individual as the reason for choosing a certain piece of furniture might at first appear, this choice always goes beyond the individual, and also tells us about the relationship of individuals to one another. Applied to VIP’s Union, this would mean that these personal decisions say a lot about each of the lenders, their lifestyle, their self-presentation and also their affiliation to a specific social group. This knowledge was—at least, according to my speculation—probably also the reason why, for most of the participants, the choice of the pieces in question took a considerable amount of time and was made with a high degree of deliberation. In the awareness that one is exposing oneself—that is, being conscious of the [critical] judgment of others—the social context is already anticipated in the choice.

Within the context of VIP’s Union a great variety of different objects come together, producing a rather hybrid ‘furniture landscape’: one could also say that this is the convergence of very different tastes, expressed in a downright clash of styles, materialities, colours and shapes. This fulfils Haegue Yang’s interest in social structures, diversity, different modes of expression and how these relate to one another. In this way, the tables and chairs gathered within the context of VIP’s Union, together with all of the deliberate deviations and transgressions, map a social context.  

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1 The VIPs to be addressed were selected by the art fair organisation and participating galleries. According to information provided by the artist, she received only a few pieces from the VIPs, so she instead asked her friends from the art world to lend her their furniture.

2 Writing letters is a form of communication that Haegue Yang also uses in other works, in order to establish a personal level between her and the addressee.
structure—be it in Bristol, Antwerp, Bonn, Seoul or now Graz. That Haegue Yang primarily asked for tables and chairs is due to the normality these items embody for her. Within this context Yang talks of ‘true-to-life qualities’⁶, which essentially for her also include traces of use. These qualities create a private-seeming, living atmosphere, which stands in a remarkable and sometimes even bizarre contrast to the generally uniform furnishings found in art institutions, and beyond this also subverts the expectations we have of carefully designed VIP rooms.

The combination of furniture generates a hybridity produced by its different sources and which is accepted as a quality in the installation made by Yang. Unsurprisingly, a book that is of importance to Haegue Yang is that of philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy: *La communauté désœuvrée* (The Inoperative Community).⁷ He differentiates between community as a work to be realised, i.e. a conception that flows into uniformity, and a community which, although also based on togetherness, refuses to merge and thus prevents fusion. Nancy’s ‘être-en-commun’ (‘being-in-common’).⁸ can certainly be applied to VIP’s *Union*. In principle, Haegue Yang’s work also explores the possibilities of community today, if this is neither reduced to a group of individuals nor tied to a collaborative essence. She proposes a ‘we’ in the sense of a plurality, open to different ideas and articulations.

With VIP’s *Union*, the Kunsthaus Graz takes a radical step in replacing all of the building’s furniture with loans for the duration of the project—whether this is in the entrance area, in the exhibition spaces or in the so-called ‘Needle’ of the building. This exclusivity—that is, not using any other furniture in the building—ultimately also means that the institution is entrusting itself to the lenders. Their choices and generosity essentially help to shape the appearance of the institution. In this way, a collective portrait of the Kunsthaus and the Styrian cultural landscape is built gradually, assembled from many different individual positions/elements. In a figurative sense, VIP’s *Union* speaks of an understanding of community that permits the differences described above—in this case demonstrated in a strikingly visual form. Instead of seeking uniformity, community is understood on the basis of difference, diversity and a removal of barriers, as a shared experience of otherness.

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⁸ In English, Nancy’s ‘être-en-commun’ is widely translated as ‘being-in-common’.
Generosity, the Common Good and Lending

Katrin Bucher Trantow

Graz, April 2017: For several days now, a constant stream of people has been arriving at the Kunsthaus with furniture. Cars pull into the delivery area behind the building, while others come by foot and bring their pieces of furniture into the lobby, so that they can hand them over to us personally. Time and again, as the loan is given up in return for a signed receipt, as hands are shaken and the object is viewed, we are told some small story about the piece of furniture that has been chosen for us from the lender’s personal surroundings. There are things that the owners associate with us in some way: chairs or tables with traces that have life inscribed in them, self-designed, items that are interesting in terms of their craft or art. A man delivers an office chair because it speaks of his official relationship with the Kunsthau. Other pieces of furniture have an individual, thoroughly personal story. Quite a few of the objects can be read as sources and are linked to (supra)regional art and cultural life. They have perhaps been used as props at the theatre, or come from an important institution, or are of outstanding or striking design. Some, on the other hand, are notable for their ordinariness; they are functional and extremely robust. In one way or another, they are all appropriate temporary gifts, which we as an institution are receiving for us and our public.

If we assume that loans are temporary gifts, then these are associated with aspects of generosity and affiliation, for example; of hospitality, and also gratitude. An essential basis for theories about gifts in western societies is in the absolute gift (of God), which is imparted to everyone unconditionally and stems from Judeo-Christian tradition. Closely linked to this is the gift of charity, if it occurs without expectations and without calculation or advantage to the giver. Jacques Derrida, among others, questions the presence of such a pure, selfless gift. In his 1993 book Given Time: 1. Counterfeit Money, he expresses fundamental doubts about altruistic giving. He is, on the contrary, convinced that every gift carries in itself a motive as its purpose—be it a direct or indirect maximisation of profits, or even just appeasing a personal sense of guilt—and therefore cannot be pure. On the other hand, at the beginning of the 20th century French sociologist Marcel Mauss had already described the gift as a contradictory instrument of social cohesion, which carries with it both an altruistic and a selfish motive. In his research into the gift in archaic societies, he argues that it is a universal ‘bedrock’ of community life that holds together systems beyond the exchange of goods and values or bargaining. A gift is—in accordance with the relevant social protocol—(voluntarily) given, accepted and reciprocated. Its function is to make individual actors into a single entity, to establish a common basic structure of social orders, meaning that it operates not as a value, but rather as a relationship tool. Mauss claims that a piece of the giver remains in the gift until it finds its way back—through reciprocation, for instance. Hence a relationship is created between the giver and the recipient, forming a tie between the two parties for a certain period of time.

In Haegue Yang’s work VIP’s Union, the selection of the circle of lenders and the granting of an object likewise generates a group consensus about a social togetherness, involving aspects of emotional or spiritual charge in the objects as well as prompting relationship questions of affiliation and communality, beyond geographical or cultural traditions. It is significant that the work and its objects, as an extended living room and workroom of nearly 100 ‘partners’, revolves around the question of the function of personal giving as a tool that supports society. Shifted to the cultural institution and its role as a dialogue partner, research facility and memory, today the important question arises as to how far personal investment is still necessary in times of state funding, neo-liberal economy and virtual networks? And, consequently, the rather polemical question as to whether and why then it is at all appropriate for an establishment conceived for the whole of society to be sustained by personal, reciprocal relationships?

‘I received your favourable letter of the 20th and, on behalf of the Styrian Landesmuseum founded by me, I accept your beautiful gift with deep gratitude.’

So wrote Archduke Johann on February 24, 1818 to the Count of Saurau, thanking him for the portrait of the count, whom he praised as an important pioneer of the institute and its site. Seven years old at the time, the Joanneum—whose youngest offshoot is the Kunsthaus—had been founded by Archduke Johann, the emperor’s younger brother, in 1811. As a research institute, he also made it into a training institution for higher adult education and for broader excellence in research created especially for young people, which was to radiate far into the provinces. At the age of just 29 years old, he transferred his mineral and rock collection—prepared by the great mineralogist Carl Friedrich Mohs—together with the rest of his natural science collections to the supposedly safer location of Graz, in order to protect them (from the enemy). ‘The arrival of
the enemy (in Tyrol) had shown me what can happen [...]. To send everything away at every sign of danger? And where to? These considerations led me to give everything to a German mountain area that has remained Austrian, and by giving it to the collections of the state, to make it permanent [...]."

Many museums were created on the basis of generosity; a willingness to share was in most cases connected to a passion for collecting, a desire for representation and a belief in social responsibility as well as a desire for collective identity-building and further education in a development shaped by progress. In Basel, for example, the origins of the famous art museum go back to the private collection of the Amerbach family. As early as 1661, through a connection to the university library, the collection opened up the Humanist age to a wider public, and was one of the first to be looked after by the civic community. The foundations of museums were often passionate donations made by educated rulers, merchants or citizens: names such as the Smithsonian Institute, the Albertina or the Guggenheim Museums refer to their founders, whose collections, in a generous act of coupling private means and public interest, laid the cornerstone for today’s professionalised exhibition spaces and collections. Many museums—including the Joanneum—were founded after the French Revolution out of an Enlightenment attitude and with an awareness of the necessity of a general popular education for the benefit of the emerging early industrial state.

‘It is our destiny to be active, indeed active in any useful manner which fosters and extends knowledge in all its branches to the benefit of the social environment [...]. We wish to preserve at all times this [research] and strive in cordial harmony to achieve through joint collaboration that which would be impossible for individuals."

As founder and protector of the Styrian agricultural society, the Styrian insurance company for farmers and foresters and many charitable organisations such as the Graz reading club, the forest association and the choral society, the founder of the museum did indeed energetically cultivate his broad network in diverse areas of the knowledge and memory of Styria. With his appeals—such as those for the submission of Austrian traditional songs—he significantly helped to ensure that a wide range of contributions were made to the growing museum. He repeatedly urged participation and in doing so spoke of our Joanneum, just as Styrian governors like to refer to it today.

In a connected world, generosity of knowledge-sharing is considered as normal in some areas. When, in his 2010 book Cognitive Surplus: Creativity and Generosity in a Connected Age, the American Internet guru Clay Shirky argues that social networks are promoting a more democratic, more generous world of open group thinking away from state rules and norms, this ties in with the concepts of a global village offered by Marshall McLuhan, just as it also coincides with the idea of wanting to share as a fundamental human quality according to Jeremy Rifkin’s idea of an empathic civilisation (2010). In fact, many people readily share their knowledge with others, giving it freely and opening it up—both in real and virtual space. In recent years, private collections have been transferred, such as the large donation given by the modest-seeming art collector Helmut Suschnigg to the Neue Galerie Graz. The newspapers all called it a generous donation and quoted Suschnigg: ‘Since I have had a lot of luck in my life, I decided to place the collection at the disposal of the public.’

Well-deserved admiration and thanks are assured for the collector due to this act of a ‘pure’ seeming donation, all the more so when, in a certain sense, he recognises it as his responsibility to give back the gift of luck and wealth to the community, and does not make any demands in terms of how frequently they are exhibited, publication or other gifts in return, but instead links his donation with a trust in the power of what he has given.

Such personal stories written by life have a special, emotional power, not only for the readers of newspapers and blogs, but also for the public of the museum. Thus it is logical that, in her and our collection of generous loans to the Kunsthaus Graz, Haegue Yang also includes the stories attached to the objects. After VIP’s Unions in Berlin, Bristol, Antwerp, Bonn and Seoul, they are collected here for the first time and weave an extended carpet of qualities constituting the community of furniture and their representatives.

One of these stories takes us to the home of Milica Tômić. Originally from Belgrade, the artist and professor at the Institute of Contemporary Art at the TU Graz has lived in Graz since 2015, and nearly all of the furniture she has is on loan from friends. For this reason, her response to the request is an invitation: instead of loaning the furniture that she needs for work, she invites the museum and its visitors to her home, for a conversation on the furniture—as a logical spin-off to her own artistic strategy of an oeuvre based on discourse that also builds on the concept of group formation.

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4 From the speech at the 21st meeting of German natural scientists and doctors, which first took place in 1843 in Graz and at the Joanneum, in: Theiss, 1981, p. 94.
5 e.g. in a letter to Styrian governor Ferdinand Graf Attems, idem, p. 147.
7 ‘Be a guest of Milica Tomic’ takes place on September 29, 2017, see accompanying programme, p. 45 in this publication.
'It is not ideas, but emotions that move the world. Deliberations and decisions that are not made emotionally can have no significant, long-lasting effects on our daily lives and experience,' says Michael Musalek, who comes up in another story between handover and signature. The important thing is the joy of giving; because a real experience is produced by the enjoyment and emotional experience and can be split into three temporal periods: prologue, dialogue and credits. The process, then, is made up of anticipation and the collection of ideas; implementation; and, finally, a celebratory wrapping-up. Claudia Meyer-Rieckh tells me this story as she hands over an exquisitely made shoemaker's footstool, which she once found at a flea market with her former husband, and chose for us as a reference to her connection with the 'leather and shoe' family. Using the three-step concept established by psychiatrist and addiction expert Michael Musalek, she describes the VIP’s Union project from the perspective of the lender in such a way that the prologue is combined with the moment of choosing an appropriate object, and for her probably took place mainly at home. As a dialogue she sums up all of the important conversations and experiences within the context of the exchange and loan.

For the epilogue we have, independently of this conversation, planned a ‘Union Meeting’ at the Kunsthaus in the exhibition. This brings together not only the objects, but also all of the lenders for a discussion in the building. As a group of people and ideas, of different associations with the place and its function, identity creators of the Kunsthaus come together. Through the objects and their functional, historical, aesthetic or also socio-critical relationships with the contemporary Kunsthaus Graz and its representatives, we will also find that further stories are added to the ones we received here at the beginning, which continue and further evolve the idea of personal networking.


9 ‘Union Meeting’ takes place on February 14, 2018, see accompanying programme, p. 45 in this publication.
A Preliminary Data Review

Doris Psenicnik, Stephan Schikora, Barbara Steiner
May 10, 2017

130 persons and couples were asked to lend furniture, of whom 39 were female, 82 male and 9 were couples.

The vast majority of participants are from a cultural (65) and/or economic professional background (28). 20 of these are active in both the cultural and economic sectors. Beyond this, within the cultural sphere there are 7 intersections with politics, 5 with social affairs, 12 with education and 4 with the Church. 1 person is associated purely with politics, 4 people solely with education.

32 people refused (23 men and 9 women), 98 agreed (7 couples, 43 women, 60 men).
5 people have chosen to remain anonymous, 93 agreed to be named.

A total of 69 seats and 12 tables were contributed. 16 items are neither seats nor tables (miscellaneous objects). The most unusual object is a cat’s scratching post. 26 people gave more than one object. 3 people had not chosen a specific piece of furniture at the time of the survey.

60 people have permitted use of their items, 3 have refused. 39 people had not supplied information at the time of the survey. 1 person meticulously restored a chair themselves, 4 people chose their office chair, 2 contributed an art object. 3 offered chairs designed by artists, 2 offered tables created by artists, 1 person contributed a table with an original artwork, 2 chairs are painted. 2 chairs have been provided with an added instruction, one on the condition that the current edition of the newspaper be laid on it every day, another with a teddy bear that is to be donated to a children’s organisation at the end of the project. 2 pieces are from Ikea, 4 are items of farmhouse furniture and 13 date from the turn of the century. 2 items of pre-war and 12 of post-war modernism appear alongside 21 contemporary pieces.

1 person has issued an invitation to their home, in order to share their private space and the everyday use of furniture with guests.
Haegue Yang

Haegue Yang’s oeuvre examines the emotional power of materials: her works blur attributions between the modern and pre-modern. They operate out of a vocabulary of visual abstraction, where industrial production merges with craftsmanship. Yang’s research reveals constant references to art history, history, literature and political biographies, while employing hidden social structures that repeatedly evoke forms of different communities, and refer to recurring themes such as migration, post-colonial diaspora, forced exile and social mobility.


Accompanying programme

Tue, 19.09.2017, 7 pm
Dark Matters: The Art of Giving
Concept: Oliver Hangl, guests invited by Katrin Bucher Trantow

Sun, 24.09.2017, 12.30 pm and Fri, 06.10.2017, 3.30 pm
Meeting at the Kunsthaus lobby
Thematic guided tour with Christof Elpons

Fri, 29.09.2017, 4.30 pm
Meeting at the Kunsthaus
Be a guest of Milica Tomić

Tue, 05.12.2017, 7 pm
Stories from the VIP Lounge
Barbara Steiner in conversation with VIPs

Wed, 14.02.2018, 6–7.30 pm
Introductory lecture and dialogue: Nav Haq, Haegue Yang and Barbara Steiner
8 pm
Union Meeting in the exhibition space (lenders only)

Further information:
www.kunsthausgraz.at
**Imprint**

This exhibition guide is published on the occasion of the multi-part exhibition project.

**Haegue Yang**

VIP’s Union – Phase I
In the entire Kunsthaus
Opening: Thurs, June 22, 2017, 7 pm
June 23, 2017 – January 28, 2018

VIP’s Union – Phase II
Space02
Opening: Thurs, 15.2.2018
February 16, 2018 – April 2, 2018

The Kunsthaus Graz is a joint venture between the Province of Styria and the City of Graz within the context of the Universalmuseum Joanneum.

**Kunsthaus Graz**

Universalmuseum Joanneum
June 23, 2017 – April 2, 2018

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Doris Psencnik

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Cover: Cat’s scratching post: Martin Behr (No. 10); ‘Kubus’ rocking chair: anonymous (No. 4); child’s folding chair: Karla Kowalski (No. 52); ‘The last chair’: Christine and Bertrand Conrad-Eybesfeld (No. 15); armchair and ‘Fetisch’ (fetish): Günter Eisenhut (No. 20)

p. 30: Yellow seating: Barbara Baur-Eddinger (No. 9); armchair ‘Rikki’, Cajaet Gril (No. 31); Art deco table: Günter Eisenhut (No. 20); wooden bench: Johanna Hierzegger (No. 35); chair/ladder: Peter Gerwin Hoffmann (No. 37)

p. 38: Guitar amp: Orhan Kipcak (No. 49); chair: Johannes Messner (No. 60); love seat: Hermann Eisenkno (No. 21); part of television stand: Erika Thümmel (No. 87); armchair: Lisa Rücker (No. 71)

p. 41: View of the storage room at Kunsthaus Graz

p. 42: Armchair ‘Rikki’, Cajaet Gril (No. 31); television stand: Erika Thümmel (No. 87), chair/ladder: Peter Gerwin Hoffmann (No. 37)

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Leeum, Samsung Museum of Art: pp. 12, 13 [bottom]
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Kunsthaus Graz

Universalmuseum Joanneum