

# Universalmuseum Joanneum Press

Universalmuseum Joanneum  
Mariahilferstraße 4, 8020 Graz, Austria  
www.museum-joanneum.at

presse@museum-joanneum.at  
Telephone +43-3168017-9214; -13

## Kunsthaus Graz A 'Friendly Alien'

Kunsthaus Graz, Lendkai 1, 8020 Graz, Austria

### **Up into the unknown! Looking back, looking forward**

'Up into the unknown!' can be read on one of the first drafts for the design of the Kunsthaus Graz. After more than fifteen years of running exhibitions, the 'Friendly Alien' has certainly landed, and more besides – having long since established itself as an internationally recognised centre for contemporary art.

### **Architecture as stimulus. On the dialogue between space, exhibition and city**

Time and again the architecture of the Kunsthaus Graz is faced with challenges both artistic and curatorial. The exhibition rooms are unusual, with no right angles and no white walls, only hanging points into which displays can be affixed. Yet precisely these circumstances allow for out-of-the-ordinary exhibition stagings, something that has been repeatedly and impressively demonstrated over the years by a series of artists.

### **BIX media façade or: high level of interest in low resolution**

The BIX media façade is a unique medium of urban communication. Their inventors realities:united received the Deutsche Telekom 'Inspire Award' for this in 2005.

### **Max Neuhaus. Time Piece Graz. A moment for the Kunsthaus Graz**

The acoustic sculpture by American sound artist Max Neuhaus is a fixed element of the Kunsthaus Graz – a similar work can be found at Dia:Beacon in Upstate New York in the USA.

# Up into the unknown!

## Looking back, looking forward

Graz, September 27<sup>th</sup>/28<sup>th</sup>, 2003: the opening of the Kunsthaus Graz was timed to be the architectural conclusion to the 'European Capital of Culture Graz 2003'. Ten years later, the 'Friendly Alien' is an indispensable feature of the city's appearance, a drawing-point for art and cultural devotees from around the world.

The international appeal of the Kunsthaus Graz is evidenced not only in its exposed architecture, but also in how much its 'contents', meaning the exhibitions, take off and travel: besides the project *Bewegliche Teile. Formen des Kinetischen*, which was also on show in the Museum Tinguely in Basel (Switzerland), the solo show of the artist Michel Majerus, who passed away early, was exhibited in Luxembourg in 2007 to mark the opening of the European Capital of Culture for that year, too; previously, the show had toured in Amsterdam (the Netherlands), Hannover and Hamburg (Germany). Moreover, following its presentation in the Kunsthaus Graz, the internationally acclaimed exhibition *Chikaku. Zeit und Erinnerung in Japan* was also to be seen in the MARCO (Museo de Arte Contemporánea) in Vigo (Spain) and in the Taro Okamoto Museum of Art in Kawasaki (Japan). The exhibition *Taumel*, an artistic research project in cooperation with the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna, travelled to the Ujazdowski Castle Centre for Contemporary Art in Warsaw (Poland). *Graz Architektur* and *Auf ins Ungewisse* could be seen in modified form in the MSU (Museum of Contemporary Art) in Zagreb (Croatia) and *Congo Stars* was recently showing at the Kunsthalle Tübingen (Germany) (09.03.-30.06.2019).

# Architecture as stimulus

## Dialogue between space, exhibition and city

With its blue, organically formed shell, the Kunsthaus possesses not only a unique exterior, but also differs from typical exhibition rooms inside. Peter Cook and Colin Fournier developed a spatial system which integrates the spatial and functional changeability of the building for the production of the most varied exhibition scenarios from the outset. Space01 and Space02 in the Kunsthaus were designed by the architects as platforms and correspondingly have no solid walls. Their interior is kept in dark grey. The rooms, or better said, spatial zones, are accessed via movement, whereby shifting, unpredictable views and connections open up to the eye. The spaces are not only designed for a highly specific function; they also already contain the possibility of their permanent reinterpretation.

The Kunsthaus directors and curators feel particularly indebted to the architectural heritage. In the programme and exhibitions, ever-new, specific artistic and curatorial solutions to these unique rooms and to the BIX façade are worked out – not unlike conditions in a laboratory. Thus, the architecture becomes, so to say, the ‘sparring partner’ of artists, curators and exhibition designers, not least for the visitors, too.

Since the Kunsthaus opened in 2003, the BIX façade by realities:united has served artists, and curators, too, as a means of communicating and interacting with the surrounding city. On account of the deliberately created design-related limitations (coarse pixel grid, fluorescent tubes, low frame refresh rate), the BIX façade is not suited to commercial purposes. However, it does lend itself to unusual, art-design projects.

The ground floor is accessible from several sides; here, too, a range of possibilities to access the building present themselves. Views from the room-high windows on to the street and the neighbourhood embed the architecture in the urban setting, entering into dialogue with it. Conversely, passers-by are granted glimpses into the building and its operations. The café, presentations of art and design, free WIFI, and the shop: all are on view to all.

The urban planning aspects and functions of the Kunsthaus Graz have developed more powerfully than originally expected. The building’s surroundings have experienced a great upturn since 2003. Thus, the architects Peter Cook and Colin Fournier succeeded in setting a tone in urban planning that has had a positive impact on daily life in this district of the city, thereby not only connecting with the historical building stock of Graz, but also sending a clear signal for the city’s great architectural tradition.

## **BIX media facade or: High level of interest in low resolution**

The BIX media façade of the Kunsthaus Graz represents a unique fusion of architecture and media technology and since its completion in 2003 has been regarded as one of the most important reference projects in media architecture. The installation is based on a concept of the Berlin architects realities:united (Jan and Tim Edler). Since November 2010 the BIX media façade is represented in the MoMA collection through an early prototype of a 'pixel', which served realities:united in the planning process as a study object for investigating the effect of light and the controllability of the installation.

On an outer shell of 900 m<sup>2</sup>, 946 standard, ring-shaped 40-watt fluorescent tubes are integrated, with which light values between 0 % and 100 % can be continuously controlled. Every light ring functions as a pixel, which can be operated via a central computer. In this way coarsely gridded signs, texts and film sequences can be developed, which radiate far out into the city space, thus turning the 'blue bubble' of the Kunsthaus Graz into a 'low-resolution screen' of urban scale.

The BIX media façade thus represents an over-sized urban screen, which serves as an instrument for artistic productions. Like Max Neuhaus' acoustic sound installation, the BIX media façade represents a special kind of communication, which not only brings Kunsthaus Graz programmes from the hermetic exhibition situation into public space, but which also defines and shapes the immediate surroundings. Moreover, the 'communicating shell' offers a possible platform for art projects, too, which take as their theme the dialogue between media and the (public) space. The BIX media façade is expressly not used for commercial purposes, but rather serves for realising artistic projects.

# Max Neuhaus

## Time Piece Graz. A moment for the Kunsthaus

For the opening of the 'Friendly Alien', the American sound artist Max Neuhaus (09.08.1939–03.02.2009) devised an acoustic installation titled *Time Piece Graz*, which has remained intact for the Kunsthaus Graz and its surroundings as a fixed element of this urban space.

The acoustic sculpture *Time Piece Graz* is a unique sound composition: a barely audible, slowly swelling sound spreads out in and around the Kunsthaus Graz, when, at its peak, it abruptly stops, thereby creating a moment of silence. Related works can be found at Dia:Beacon, Upstate New York, at Time Square in Manhattan (US) and in the synagogue in Pulheim-Stommeln (Germany).

In its abrupt breaking-off of the gradually swelling sound, *Time Piece Graz* represents an 'alarm clock of silence' – enabling a pause to take place in the hectic hubbub of the city, and thus a moment for the Kunsthaus.

**Daily from 9 am to 9 pm, 10 minutes to every full hour**