

to display, to support, to care

Exhibition duration

15/02/2024 – 06/04/2024

Artists

Jason Dodge, Philipp Gehmacher, Friedrich Kiesler, Simon Lässig,
Joanna Piotrowska, Johannes Porsch, Nicole Wermers

Curated by Vanessa Joan Müller

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Frederick Kiesler (1890–1965), architect, stage designer, artist, designer and advocate of the applied as a principle that interweaves disciplines, created exhibition displays that transform spaces into complex situations: places for people and artworks as well as their interaction. His exhibition concepts were geared towards spaces of possibility beyond an infrastructure of the decorative. They displayed art, constructed affective relationships and produced correspondences. Kiesler's ideas anticipate displays made to serve artworks, as well as supporting structures that make the exhibition space into one of experience, as well as a place of encounter and exchange – all of which influence the field of curating significantly today.

to display, to support, to care takes as its starting point a selection of design sketches by Frederick Kiesler in order to explore the relation of space, art and viewers, as well as the applied as art's equal. What happens when the display is transformed from a means of showing into an affectively charged structure? Into a form of support that does not just refer to the room's parameters and the pragmatic demands of the work? Selected contemporary positions continue to think about these questions. They depart the field of exhibition design to find new resonances in an interstitial space – between display and gesture, affect and structure, the institutional and its administration. In turn, the rooms of the Heiligenkreuzerhof, itself once living space, become the framing structure.

Friedrich Kiesler

Study for a staging of paintings for Peggy Guggenheim's gallery-museum *Art of This Century*, 1942, ink on paper, 21.5 x 27.7 cm

Study for a staging of paintings in the "surrealist gallery" of Peggy Guggenheim's gallery-museum *Art of This Century*, 1942, pencil on paper, 21.3 x 27.7 cm

Study for the rope tensioning of various picture hanging systems in the "Abstract Gallery" of Peggy Guggenheim's gallery museum *Art of This Century*, 1942, pencil on paper, 27.6 x 37.6 cm

Study for a flexible wall covering for the presentation of paintings in Peggy Guggenheim's gallery-museum *Art of This Century*, 1942, pencil on paper, 14 x 21.5 cm

Study for the interior view of the "Surrealist Gallery" of Peggy Guggenheim's gallery-museum *Art of This Century*, 1942, pencil on paper, 21.30 x 27.50 cm

Scheme A, Scheme B, study for moveable picture hanging systems for Peggy Guggenheim's gallery-museum *Art of This Century*, 1942, ink on paper, 21.4 x 14 cm

View of a room with a hanging for the exhibition *Bloodflames 1947*, 1947, ink on paper, 25.9 x 35.4 cm

Study for a multi-picture hanging system for Peggy Guggenheim's gallery-museum *Art of This Century*, 1942, pencil on paper, 14,9 x 22,8 cm

Study of picture hanging at the *Salle de Superstition* at the *Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme*, 1947, pencil on paper, 13.8 x 21.4 cm

Study for a hanging at the *Salle de Superstition* at the *Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme*, 1947, pencil on paper, 13.8 x 21.4 cm

Study for the free hanging of paintings for Peggy Guggenheim's gallery-museum *Art of This Century*, 1942, ink on paper, 37.65 x 27.65 cm

Study for the presentation of Alberto Giacometti's sculpture *Projet pour une place* at Peggy Guggenheim's gallery-museum *Art of This Century*, 1942, gouache and ink on paper, 26.2 x 36 cm

Sketch for the lighting system of the "Surrealist Gallery" of Peggy Guggenheim's gallery-museum *Art of This Century*, 1942, pencil on paper, 21.5 x 27.8 cm

Study for the various functions of the "correalist furniture" for Peggy Guggenheim's gallery-museum *Art of This Century*, 1942, pencil on paper, 21.5 x 28 cm

Study for the layout for the "correalist furniture" of the *Art of This Century* Gallery in the magazine *VVV* for Peggy Guggenheim's gallery-museum *Art of This Century*, 1942, pencil on paper, 21.5 x 27.5 cm

Study for the presentation of objects in the "Surrealist Gallery" of Peggy Guggenheim's gallery-museum *Art of This Century*, 1942, gouache and ink on paper, 27.8 x 35.8 cm

View of a room with a hanging for the exhibition *Bloodflames 1947*, 1947, ink on paper, 25.85 x 35.35 cm

Sketch of a "correalist furniture" for the presentation of objects in Peggy Guggenheim's gallery-museum *Art of This Century*, 1942, gouache and ink on paper, 26.3 x 36 cm

Study for a presentation unit for paintings in the "Daylight Gallery" of Peggy Guggenheim's gallery-museum *Art of This Century*, 1942, gouache and ink on paper, 26.5 x 36.2 cm

Study for a table and pedestal construction for Peggy Guggenheim's gallery-museum *Art of This Century*, 1942, gouache and ink on cardboard, 26.3 x 36 cm

Study for pedestals for the *American Architecture Exhibition* in Moscow, 1945, ink on paper, 27.6 x 37.6 cm

Study for the wall panels of the *American Architecture Exhibition* in Moscow, 1945, ink on paper, 27.6 x 37.6 cm

Design for the wall panel of the *American Architecture Exhibition* in Moscow, n.d., gouache and ink on paper, 27.65 x 37.6 cm

Study on the *Salle de Superstition* at the *Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme*, Galerie Maeght (Paris 1947), 1947, gouache and ink on paper, 25.3 x 33.3 cm

Sketch for the wall panels of the *American Architecture Exhibition* in Moscow, 1945, ink on paper, 27.6 x 37.6 cm

Photo: K.W. Hermann, *Art of This Century*, Abstract Gallery

Friedrich Kiesler's designs for exhibition architectures, his proposals for the hanging of paintings and presentation of sculptures, do not employ classic devices for display; they are space-changing installations into which the artworks are integrated.

The radical approach of his designs for Peggy Guggenheim's private museum *Art of This Century* in New York, opened in 1942, set new standards. Works of art were shown as an ensemble of related objects, detached from the walls. The intention of this staging was to transpose the works' ideas into space. Paintings from Peggy Guggen-

heim's collection – works by Max Ernst, Francis Picabia and Fernand Léger, among others – were removed from their frames and inserted into special hanging systems. *Art of This Century* consisted of two main rooms, one reserved for the presentation of abstract works and the other for surrealist art. In the "abstract gallery", a billowing, bright-blue textile covering was fixed in front of the walls. In the space itself, a system of ropes reaching from the ceiling to the floor orchestrated the presentation of the works, which were attached directly to them. This enabled a view of the paintings from both front and back. Correalist, i.e. organically shaped, seating mo-

dules served as armchairs but also as plinths: pedestals for art and for situating visitors within the space. The "surrealist gallery", on the other hand, was characterised by concave wooden wall sections attached in front of the actual walls. Cantilevered "arms" with flexible hinges at the ends were used, so that the paintings attached to them could be viewed from different angles. Correalist items of furniture functioned as both seating and as plinths here, as well.

The drawings shown in this exhibition are sketches for hanging systems, furniture, lighting and other elements that Kiesler conceived for *Art of This Century* and other exhibitions. The designs reveal the way that form is often founded on the polyvalence of its inherent possibilities. Frequently, he derived it from human gestures or patterns of movement – the hand that holds out a picture frame towards the viewer becomes the hanging device used in the "surrealist gallery" of the Guggenheim display, for example. Intertwined hands become the hinges connecting the walls' concave sections. The positioning of feet, in turn, develops into pedestals for the *American Architecture Exhibition*.

Kiesler did not see museums as places for contemplation or even visual education; he believed they were atmospherically charged spaces to trigger dialogue with the works on show. His interior design sought to radically redefine the public's expectations of interaction with contemporary art and leave behind any fixed notions of place and time. *Art of This Century* made use of theatrical elements to achieve this: e.g. the lighting was choreographed to illuminate the artworks on each side of the "surrealist gallery" alternately, so impacting on the viewer's sense of space and its stability. Kiesler's "stage directions" for the museum also included the playing of background noises, like a train travelling through the room.

Kiesler regarded both the artworks and their viewers as actors on a stage of his design, part of a vocabulary shift towards a totality of sensory experience. If the paintings were mounted on the wall, they would belong to a different space and place. Being part of a spatial staging that is

perceived as on an equal footing, they can enter into a symbiosis with it. As a designer of the art of his era, Kiesler thus questioned established notions of the viewer's separate "self", abolished the safe distance between the artwork and the viewer's body, and transformed the latter into an element of the exhibition: the transformed act of seeing, according to Kiesler, is what leads to a new, holistic awareness.

Jason Dodge

An accumulation of fire extinguishers draws attention to the institutional infrastructure, which is always part of any exhibition but never truly belongs to it. In an exhibition context, fire extinguishers and other aspects of building security usually become a kind of functional, contextual decoration that causes no further irritation.

However, Jason Dodge utilises them to add something to the space, something that undermines the separation of the works and their environment without appearing subversive. Together with other additions, instead he accentuates or outlines the existent – through things that are present with a congenial matter-of-fact quality. Spatial readymades, yet without the distinctive character they tend to bring along with them.

To describe his works, the artist chooses to refer to the sonnet form, whose structure resembles architecture. In turn, his work resembles the volta – the turning point within the sonnet in the sense of a rhetorical change, or a turnaround of ideas and/or emotions. This would be a literary way to address the work, which, as always with Jason Dodge, has no title and is not labelled with a year or any other information about materials, size, etc.

This work is not a confrontational gesture; it is a dialogue with the world comprising the other works on display, the room as an exhibition space, and us, the viewers – the world from which these things come and for which they stand. The work is improvised, not predefined in advance; instead, it emerges from the encounter and the place

where it happens. Ultimately, it is an artistic gesture making the boundary between inside and outside partially permeable – the everyday flows in and spreads out, the atmosphere changes, and so finally, this reconfiguration of all the protagonists also highlights our behavioural conventions in the exhibition space.

Philipp Gehmacher

Untitled, 2019/2024, mixed media, 140x200 cm

Untitled, 2019/2024, mixed media, 75x130 cm

Untitled, 2019/2024, mixed media, 90x90 cm

Textile that stretches to form a space within a space, held by other materials and volumes. A surface that is delimiting and yet establishes a relationship with the surrounding area: Philipp Gehmacher's works are driven by a desire to "organise and understand a structure, a collection, an entanglement and a ramification."

"There are no purely interior spaces, no absence without presence," he wrote in the context of these works' first presentation. Just as the coordinates of objects in exterior space influence those who move through that space, just as material and function relate to each other, the interaction of things occupying different categories also plays a part in these sculptural arrangements. The things and their materiality are placeholders, markers, but also empty spaces. At the same time, the possibility of a pedestal, a projection surface or a container is inscribed into them.

Plaster and wax casts, plywood and metall shapes, wrapped items – the objects support each other, unfolding a system of relations representing extended forms of affinity. They mark places, surfaces, and thus potential space without adopting a spatial dimension themselves. Ultimately, they remain representative of something that is not there. In their materiality and form but also in their dialogue, they suggest imaginary references to works by other artists without establishing a direct reference system.

Their presence in the space, their dialogue with its coordinates and resonances, is about the inbetween that a built space always creates – the way it separates the private and the public and yet creates zones in which the two merge. Our physical presence, our physicality, is part of this space spanned by things; it is a measure and a sphere of experience.

Simon Lässig

2:23 minutes from: Anyaság, 1974, As I watch Anyaság (Motherhood) from 1974, I come to know again how one learns to look through other people, how we take in, adapt, and alter their thoughts, views, and feelings. And if the rest of the film speaks about how we mimic and repeat—about how we are conditioned—then these stretched 2 minutes and 23 seconds remind us of the opposite: Of a moment in which we look out into the world and do not see ourselves reflected back. A reality comes into being that is closed off and something I've seen before repeats itself. 2022

Courtesy of the artist, Felix Gaudlitz, Vienna, and LC Queisser, Tbilisi

The film's long title outlines the emotions Simon Lässig experienced while watching Ferenc Grunwalsky's 1974 documentary *Anyaság* (Motherhood). In *2:23 minutes from: Anyaság, 1974*, he doubles the length of an excerpt from the film in which a person can be seen turning on a tap in a bathroom. This take shows the action of the person's hands, then pans away and across various details of the room until it finally returns, viewing the person from waist height – the position from which a child would watch an adult. At the end of his chosen title, Lässig describes the film material as "a moment in which we look out into the world and do not see ourselves reflected back".

Here, an excerpt from an existing film is alienated, as well as being made more intense for the viewer. Simon Lässig frames a scene, condenses the action, and yet remains at a distance. The "again" in the title expresses his fundamental interest in social relationships, in conditioning and standardisation through the act of imitative learning and adopting exemplary behaviour – in order to emphasise the very aspect that differs in this case. The precise observation of the gesture, the scanning of the surfaces, and the immediacy of the sound create a height-

ened proximity to the figure shown. However, this maintains a cinematic texture; the person, turned away from us and absorbed in a world of everyday gestures, seems to remain outside somehow. It could be a scene of failing attention, but also a moment at which the child's self-essence finds its own space. The child remains a blank, their imaginary presence evoked solely by the camera perspective. And yet they are an object of identification, their unreturned gaze shared by the viewer.

Joanna Piotrowska

Untitled, 2017, Silver gelatin hand print, 120 x 95 cm

Untitled, 2016, Silver gelatin hand print, 21.6 x 27.2 cm

Untitled, 2019, Silver gelatin hand print, 21.6 x 27.2 cm

Untitled, 2017, Silver gelatin hand print, 95 x 120 cm

Untitled, 2017, Silver gelatin hand print, 120 x 95 cm

Untitled, 2015, Silver gelatin hand print, 21.5 x 16 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Phillida Reid, London

Joanna Pietrowska invited people to construct a dwelling-place within their homes – to surround themselves with certain objects and so create an environment inside which they feel comfortable and safe. The resulting sculptural structures are made from items of furniture, fabrics and domestic items: they are places of retreat and shelter, but also imaginative sectors inside familiar surroundings. Some of the sculptural dwellings seem shut off; others resemble stage sets or frames to "display" their inhabitants.

Michael Foucault included such temporary "other places" within the everyday sphere, such "local utopias", in his broader theory of heterotopia: spaces with the potential to interrupt the temporal-spatial continuum, to highlight the precarious state of reality and so undermine its permanence.

As topographies of the familiar and habitable spaces within a home, some of the arrangements seem to reflect their occupants' emotional states. At the same time, they offer insights into real living areas. Often seen only from behind, with

their eyes closed or turned away from the camera, the protagonists may seem to want to remain invisible – after all, the photographs invite us to enter an intimate, private situation and so violate it. Apparently, the most immediate thing these dwellings protect people from is their own domestic space, which they compare with an "other space".

However, the tense and even uncomfortable posture of some individuals also highlights an ambivalent – at the very least – attitude towards the self-imagined space-within-a-space. Piotrowska emphasises this connection between body and dwelling on a photographic level by using flash, which flattens the images. Thus, an additional psychologisation is created between the human figure and the surrounding architecture of furniture and textiles.

Johannes Porsch

NOT AN ORIGINAL / Works for Demonstration Purposes, 2023/2024

1*, 3 easels, natural spruce, sticky tape *LIDL Security Tape*, each 4.5 x 5.5 x 200 cm

1*, 3 drawings, 1c/ red ink-jet print on paper, sticky tape *LIDL Security Tape*, each 21 x 90 cm, mounted on cardboard, chipboard, acrylic glass casing

1*, Drawing, 1c / red ink-jet print on paper, sticky tape *LIDL Security Tape*, 42 x 29.7 cm, acrylic glass box 43.3 x 31.3 cm

Letter of Agreement, Factography, 4-sided folded sheet, 1c / red laser print on paper, 21 x 29.7 cm

Letter of Agreement, Autofiction, 95 text pages, 1c / red laser print on paper, each 21 x 29.7 cm

Letter of Agreement, Automatism, 395 text pages, 1c / red laser print on paper, each 21 x 29.7 cm

N.N., Video projection, dimensions variable

Etc., etc., after: Ris-Paquot, Dictionnaire encyclopédique des marques & monogrammes, chiffres, lettres initiales, signes figuratives, etc., etc. contenant 12 156 marques, Paris 1893, 2 brochures, 353 pages / 282 pages, 1c/ black laser printing on paper, 21 x 29.7 cm

The *Dictionnaire encyclopédique des marques & monogrammes, chiffres, lettres initiales, signes figuratives, etc.* from 1893 is a list of all the monograms used by French arts and crafts practitioners to mark their products, the signatures of applied art. Johannes Porsch integrates

the historical catalogue into a reflection on such signatures authenticating authorship. Once part of the work, their presence or absence over the centuries has denoted a difference between fine and applied art.

Having been commissioned to recreate a sculptural work by a deceased artist based on sketches from his estate, a contract was drawn up between Johannes Porsch and the institution exhibiting the work. This stipulates meticulously that his contribution, the fresh iteration, is not an original work but that it will become the property of the museum following the exhibition, nonetheless. The contractually agreed renunciation of artistic authorship on the part of the one who makes the repeat work, and the insistence that it is not a work of art but will still be treated as such, result in a paradoxical shift: the stronger the emphasis on this not being an artwork, the more it appears as such in light of the necessary negations. Johannes Porsch locates his interventions in this productive zone of indeterminacy.

On the one hand, he presents an anonymised version of the contract and alienating adaptations of its text; on the other, the readymades he has produced allude to the repetition of the original as negotiated in the contract, which can be read as a reduction and a generalisation of the ultimately realised form, and express it visually as sections of movement. In particular, in their graphic abstraction and sprawling scope, the freely composed updates of the contract text entitled "Autofiction" and "Automatism" show the administrative negotiation of visual and "applied" art, in this case the concrete realisation of an existent design.

In turn, the video projection *N.N.* presents a supposedly static, yet empty signature characterised by minimal glitches, which enables the monogram that has disappeared from production logic to reappear as a placeholder. *N.N.* stands for *Nomen Nominandum* ("the name is (still) to be named"), but also for *Nomen Nescio* ("I don't know the name"), *Nomen Nullum* ("the person in question is known, but is not being named for security reasons") or *Numerius Negidius*, a term from Roman law and its basic

principle of dispensing justice without regard to standing or the individual, and therefore anonymising their name.

The various components of *NOT AN ORIGINAL / Works for Demonstration Purposes* are distributed across the exhibition rooms as a loose arrangement of text, material, form and objecthood. They converge at certain points, concentrating and developing new aspects and meaningful constructs. In its gesture of showing things, some of which are not intended for the public, the commissioned work becomes an expression of the tense relationship between applied and fine art, which is voiced not only in claims to autonomy and authorship, but also in the ways that they are implemented in reality; how they are realised materially and discursively.

Nicole Wermers

Dishwashing Sculpture #5, 2013, ca. 160x60x70 cm

Dishwashing Sculpture #6, 2013, ca. 160x60x70 cm

Dishwashing Sculpture #8, 2013, ca. 160x60x70 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Herald St., London

Dishwashing Sculpture #14, 2020, ca. 160x60x70 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York / Los Angeles

Nicole Wermers' *Dishwashing Sculptures* are latently instable piles of crockery, glasses and kitchen utensils arranged in modified dishwasher baskets and then set on standardised white plinths. A simple, everyday activity is turned into a sculptural act; positive and negative forms are wedged together, piled up, jammed into each other, and presented at eye level. Arranging crockery to dry after washing the dishes is transformed into a formal composition of anti-que porcelain, exquisite design, cheap ceramics, and eccentric kitchen utensils. The choice of elements is led by statics as well as the aesthetic. At the same time, the *Dishwashing Sculptures* combine male concepts of architecture and construction with connotations of housework and the domestic sphere: the tectonic-sculptural meets materialised forms of female, reproductive work.

Nicole Wermers is interested in forms of display in everyday life, in the way that functional elements adopt an ornamental form, and role models inscribe themselves into objects. In her works, she emphasises decorative aspects by stripping things of their utility value, exposing the genealogy of design, and focusing on the sculptural in the profane. Her works play with syntax, semantics and materiality suggestively, thus accentuating the shape of those gestures attached to things. Although our everyday activities using the object have been suspended and the design is now mere ornament, the triggered connotations remain.

Social structures are reflected in the disparate, finely balanced elements of the *Dishwashing Sculptures*, evident in their differentiation between utilitarian form and decor. Concepts such as class, taste and identity adhere, virtually, to the sculpturally displayed objects and their design, just as interior design as a whole has been turned into a staged showcase of the self. At the same time, the dishes are so carefully balanced that each object supports the others. It is a display that exhibits but also presents itself as a gesture of supportiveness: a being-there-for-others that brings out the complexity of its seemingly obvious structure.

Colophon

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Floorplan

