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WochenKlausur

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Art and Sociopolitical Intervention

The artist group WochenKlausur has been conducting social interventions since 1993. The concept of intervention, whose usage in art has undergone an inflationary trend in recent years, is often used for any form of change. In contrast, WochenKlausur, at the invitation of art institutions, develops and realizes proposals - small-scale but very concrete - for improving sociopolitical deficits.

In the context of many twentieth-century artists who understood how to actively take part in the shaping of society, WochenKlausur sees art as an opportunity for achieving long-term improvements in human coexistence. Artists' competence in finding creative solutions, traditionally utilized in shaping materials, can just as well be applied in all areas of society: in ecology, education and city planning. There are problems everywhere that cannot be solved using conventional approaches and are thus suitable subjects for artistic projects.

Theoretically, there is no difference between artists who do their best to paint pictures and those who do their best to solve social problems with clearly fixed boundaries. The individually selected task, like the painter's self-defined objective, must only be precisely articulated. Interventionist art can only be effective when the problem to be solved is clearly stated.

The Group

It all started in the winter of 1992. At the invitation of the Viennese Secession, which is a well known exhibition hall for contemporary art, eight artists decided to work on solving a localized problem. Within the normal time span of an exhibition, the group was to work in closed session to develop and realize a small but concrete measure to improve conditions for homeless people. This first project succeeded in making medical care available to this group. Since then, a mobile clinic has treated more than seven hundred homeless people per month free of charge.

An invitation from the Zurich Shedhalle followed, where WochenKlausur - in a new line-up - developed a pension for drug-addicted women. A year later, the group established a social center with bocce court for the older residents of the Italian community Civitella d'Agliano. In Graz, seven immigrants were assisted in obtaining legal residency in Austria. Interventions in Salzburg, Berlin, Venice and Fukuoka followed. A total of twelve interventions have been successfully conducted in recent years by alternating teams that have involved a total of over forty artists.

Wolfgang Zinggl led WochenKlausur until 1997. Since then, interventions have also been organized by Stefania Pitscheider, Katharina Lenz and Pascale Jeannée. Now the association WochenKlausur comprises four members (Pascale Jeannée, Stefania Pitscheider, Erich Steurer and Wolfgang Zinggl) who have all participated in multiple projects.

WochenKlausur's office is housed in a former storefront at Gumpendorferstrasse 20 in Vienna. It is responsible for conceiving and organizing new interventions, recruiting local artists from the

communities where projects are to be held, and supporting professional implementation and follow-up work. Furthermore, it also serves as an information center for activist art.

Working Principles

The prerequisite for every intervention is the invitation of an art institution, which provides WochenKlausur with an infrastructural framework and cultural capital. The exhibition space itself serves as a studio from which the intervention is conducted.

The name WochenKlausur could be translated as "weeks of closure". The German word Klausur is related to the English words enclosure, seclusion and cloister. The group's projects are collective efforts that take place in the concentrated atmosphere of a closed-session working situation. A strictly limited timeframe - usually eight weeks - gives rise to an unusual concentration of the six participants' energies, allowing the planned interventions to be realized very quickly.

The issue to be addressed is usually established before the project begins. Rarely have art institutions approached WochenKlausur with a specific request. It is up to the group to inform themselves about local political circumstances and propose corresponding interventions before the project's start. After extensive research, the group makes a final decision concerning what is in fact to be accomplished.

Through its work, WochenKlausur would like to show that certain human living conditions do not necessarily have to be the way they are. Many people have no lobby: Of their own accord they can do little to make themselves heard or improve their situation. In the industrial society, with its highly developed division of labor, it is

practically unquestioned that the right specialists are assigned to solve every problem. Still, many problems cannot be so easily delegated and demand new and unorthodox approaches.

Realization of the projects thus often requires cunning strategies and trickery. In Ottensheim, a small town in Upper Austria, WochenKlausur developed a model for involving residents in communal political decisions. One part of the strategy for realizing this concept was the construction of a skater ramp for the local youth. The group thought that a youth sport facility would not have any opponents at all. That was true, but agreement among political parties with regard to the location of the skater ramp could not be reached. Without hesitation, WochenKlausur set up the wooden ramp in the town's historic center so as to bring about a decision. Three days later, the mayor announced its permanent location on the banks of the Danube.

Clever maneuvering was also called for in the first project, when it came to covering the running costs of paying a physician to staff the mobile clinic for the homeless. The intervention was already coming to an end, and the city councilor responsible for such expenditures had not yet approved the subsidy. The decisive turn of events came thanks to the support of a correspondent from the magazine *Der Spiegel*, who did not want to write a report but nonetheless agreed to approach the councilor as if he were researching. Believing that *Der Spiegel* would otherwise report unfavorably, the city councilor decided to cover the expenses for the doctor from her budget.

WochenKlausur works toward concrete goals. When a project has been completed, it is possible to observe how many of its objectives have been achieved. It is then the task of the critic to compare the

intention with the result.

Projects

1993 Vienna Secession
Intervention to Provide Healthcare to Homeless People
The project created a mobile clinic that provides healthcare free of charge to more than 700 patients monthly.

1994 Shedhalle Zurich
Intervention to Aid Drug-Addicted Women
In Zurich a shelter was created for drug-addicted women who earn their money through prostitution.

1994 Progetto Civitella d'Agliano
Intervention to Establish a Community Center for Seniors
In the Italian community of Civitella, a communication center for the elderly with an adjoining bocce court was opened.

1995 steirischer herbst
Intervention in Immigrant Labor Issues
As a means of circumventing strict legislation concerning foreigners, seven immigrants were commissioned in Graz to produce Social Plastics. The project assured the participants legal residency in Austria.

1996 Vienna University of Applied Art
Intervention in a School
In cooperation with pupils, the group redesigned two classrooms in a Viennese secondary school.

1996 Salzburger Kunstverein
Intervention to Improve Conditions in Deportation Detention

A coordinating agency was created to provide social services to inmates detained pending deportation at the Salzburg Police Detention Center. It ensures basic standards of humane treatment.

1997 festival der regionen
Intervention in Community Development
In the Upper Austrian town of Ottensheim, interest groups were founded to realize community improvements. A youth center, a market and a skater ramp have since been established.

1998 NGBK, Kunstamt Kreuzberg
Intervention in the Job Market
In view of Berlin's labor market problems, the group created a Workstation that helps unemployed people find occupational opportunities.

1998 European Culture Month
Intervention to Upcycle Discarded Products
An upcycling cooperative was founded in Linz, Austria. Waste materials that are disposed of by industry provide designers with a starting point for the development of new products.

1999 Venice Biennial
Intervention to Establish Language Schools in Kosovo
In the wake of the war in the Balkans, the group set up eight language schools for refugees in Macedonia and Kosovo.

1999 Museum City Project
Intervention in Japanese Schools
An agency for coordinating project teaching was conceived in Fukuoka. From a catalog, schools can select experts that work together with classes to accomplish specific tasks.

2000 Danube University and Kunsthalle Krems
Intervention to Facilitate Civic Participation
The redesign of the parish church square in Krems, Austria was the context of a civic participation process that gave decision-making power to all of those people who got involved and informed themselves.

2000 Institut für moderne Kunst Nuremberg
Public Debate
In three pavilions, parties in conflict met during a two-week-long period for discussions to which the public was denied access.

2001 Seven Austrian Cultural Initiatives/Community Consulting
Five scientists and three artists visited seven communities to point out and discuss its positive and negative aspects.

http://wochenklausur.t0.or.at