

Press information

Konstantin Grcic – Panorama 22 March – 14 September 2014

Vitra Design Museum, Weil am Rhein

Concept and background

The exhibition »Konstantin Grcic – Panorama« is divided into four sections, each addressing a key theme in design. The first section – Life Space – shows an experimental living environment that reflects human habitational needs in the twenty-first century. The second section – Work Space – presents the fictional studio of a designer and documents the working processes of Konstantin Grcic himself while posing fundamental questions about contemporary design. The third section – Public Space – investigates the public sphere and transports the visitor to a monumental cityscape of the future. The fourth and final section – Object Space – examines the work of Grcic via a plethora of objects, inspirations and references.

Commenting on the conceptual basis of the exhibition, which took several years to realise, Vitra Design Museum Director Mateo Kries explains: »In our discussions, Konstantin Grcic and I kept coming back to the question of how design could regain greater artistic and social relevance, how it could cope with the huge creative challenges ahead of us. The specialization of designers is important, yet to meet these foremost challenges and conflicts of our time – thus was our working hypothesis – it must also rediscover the programmatic power of individual vision«. From these deliberations, an exhibition concept emerged that not only presents Konstantin Grcic's designs and working processes but also examines his intense engagement with the visual culture and motifs of our time. The exhibition surveys themes such as quality of life, new technologies and sustainability as well as the personal moments of utopia and fiction that mark the beginning of each new design. »Konstantin Grcic – Panorama« intertwines a deeply personal narrative with scientific research and a focus on precise details of our everyday lives with the bigger picture.

The exhibition shows how the designer's perception of the world shapes new objects – and how these objects in turn inspire new perceptions.

1. Life Space

The first section of the exhibition features a seemingly anonymous space situated in front of the back-drop of an airport, where a stage-like platform demarcates a living area. This structure, called Life Stage, consists of a novel material called Acrodur and can be moved using carry handles. The Life Stage is a technical aggregate that supplies electricity, WLAN, heating and air conditioning while establishing a link between the personal objects and furniture arranged therein and the architecture of the surrounding space. The platform is both refuge and stage – it creates a zone of privacy and serves as a tool for life in a perpetually connected world. »Does anyone live here? If so, who? And anyway, what does it mean to 'live' somewhere?« Konstantin Grcic asks in the accompanying exhibition text. He also suggests a possible answer that recurs again in subsequent parts of the exhibition. »You surround yourself with those things that are important to you. Your space, your things, this is you«. Some of the objects within Life Space were designed by Konstantin Grcic, among them the light »OK« (2013), the chair »Waver« (2011), the chaise »Karbon« (2008) and the table »Pallas« (2002). These objects are supplemented with nameless everyday objects such as an Oriental rug, so that – despite its futuristic aesthetics – this interior appears strangely familiar. Konstantin Grcic's Life Space can be viewed as a new interpretation of a central theme in design history: the minimal living space. It conjures associations with famous predecessors of this genre, such as Le Corbusier's minimal house »Cabanon« (1952), the multifunctional »living machines« of the 1960s and 1970s or even the »smart homes« of the last two decades. However, Grcic's living space eludes classification according to schematic labels – it embraces technical innovation and simultaneously imparts an almost meditative calm – it is mobile, but not disembodied. It facilitates communication and networking, but also retreat and concentration. Unlike his predecessors, Grcic resists the designer's fantasy to single-handedly design a complete and hermetic living capsule that promises to provide a solution for everything. In doing so, he reflects how human beings in the twenty-first century perceive their habitational needs.

2. Work Space

The second section of the exhibition shows a design studio that appears as a hybrid of model workshop, secret cave and future laboratory. On a long metal table, some of Grcic's objects and prototypes are displayed. One wall is clad in artificial rugged rock and illuminated in purple fluorescent light. The opposite wall serves as a projection screen for a film providing glimpses of a typical work day in Grcic's Munich studio; files are opened and objects are modelled on a computer, everyday objects are examined, music is selected, prototypes are cut, a 3D printer is at work. The film illustrates how ubiquitous

many of the celebrated »new technologies« have become in the working life of a designer. However, the camera repeatedly pans over plain everyday objects scattered throughout his studio – be it an inspiring book about Marcel Duchamp, an old teapot or a piece of perforated sheet metal. This demonstrates the central importance of such encounters to Grcic's work as a designer; they create frictions with the past that may result in those unpredictable moments of inspiration and intuition that lead from a meditation-like process of research, experimentation and failure to the birth of a truly new and innovative design.

The contrast between cave and high-tech illustrates the enthusiastic view of the future that has dominated the design discourse in recent years. Such discourse has revolved around novel production methods and simulation techniques, new economic models such as crowdsourcing, sharing trends or mass customization, but also the fragmentation of markets and consumer groups, which will have an inestimable influence on the work of designers.

The space is permeated by questions of the role designers play in contemporary society and the field of tension in which they operate. Are they turning into servants of a post-industrial, digital society – or are they coming closer to achieving the profession's longtime dream of improving the world? Work Space does not offer easy answers; rather, Grcic creates visual images that emphasise the urgency of these questions.

3. Public Space

The third section of the exhibition is surrounded by a monumental picture in the round, 30 metres long and 4.5 metres high. Produced in collaboration with Neil Campbell Ross, a concept artist who creates digital backdrops for large film productions, the image appears as a large panorama of the current state of our world. It shows urban wasteland and Arcadian landscapes, city traffic and coastlines, but also favelas and bizarre science-fiction constructs. The impression is enhanced by an acoustic collage of natural sounds, city noises, snippets of music and other auditory stimuli. Several furniture objects including »Landen« (2007), a few models of »Chair_One« (2004) on concrete bases and a large luminaire are situated in the space. The picture is separated from the central part of the gallery by a tall chain-link fence, which Grcic addresses in the accompanying exhibition text: »The fence offers security. It gives you protection from the world – at the same time protecting the world from you.« In contrast to the preceding exhibition sections, visitors are encouraged to use the objects. Within this setting, the visitor becomes an actor in this film-like space and is transported into the mindset of the designer. In

Grcic's perception, public space is not formed exclusively by designers, but by a multitude of participants: architects, urbanists, investors, politicians, passers-by, local residents, entire societies and utopias of the past but also by many coincidental aspects of daily life. Consequently, this exhibition does not feature contributions to urban design in the classic sense but confronts the visitor with a libertarian, chaotic vision of urban space where traces of all conceivable ideologies of public life co-exist – the proximity of an idyllic natural setting, the historical remains of old town centres, the ruins of the functionalist city, the postmodern Disney metropolis, wastelands in the shrinking cities of the industrial age, the juggernaut of proliferating megacities and suburban row houses. Through Grcic's eyes, the visitor witnesses the concurrence of city and landscape, old and new buildings, utopia and dystopia that is characteristic of present-day reality and has been captured in the panoramic image that gives the exhibition its name.

4. Object Space

In the fourth section of the exhibition, Grcic turns away from the big issues addressed in the first three sections to focus on the concentrated work that goes into the design of new objects. A long, meandering display case shows a multitude of his designs, drawings and prototypes. This is complemented by a selection of works by other designers, found objects, design classics and books that have served as sources of inspiration for Grcic. The artefacts are part of Grcic's personal collection he has accumulated over the years, which is of essential importance to his daily work – as a tool, as inspiration and as a kind of physical memory. The arrangement of the objects follows a simple logic: an object tells a story that leads to the next object, which in turn relates to the narrative of the following object, and so on. This principle offers insights into Grcic's working processes and is reminiscent of a display cabinet that might be found in an antiquated science museum where artefacts are arranged in the order of their evolutionary development. Just as natural evolution is not linear but marked by gaps, leaps and dead ends, Grcic's work is not presented here as a linear progression but as a process in which interconnections, accidents and coincidences, surprising variations and mutations play a role. »Inspiration comes from the dynamic interaction of things. The vitrine is a cosmos of knowledge and ideas. Taken as a whole, it represents a part of my biography,« states Grcic. At the end of this »evolution of things«, the visitor is thus challenged to imagine the continuation of this development.

The exhibition concept was developed in collaboration between the curators of the Vitra Design Museum and the office of Konstantin Grcic. The exhibition was co-curated and coproduced by Z33 –

House for contemporary art in Hasselt, Belgium. W.I.R.E. – Web for Interdisciplinary Research & Expertise at ETH Zurich was a major scientific collaborator.

Events programme / catalogue

»Konstantin Grcic – Panorama« is accompanied by a comprehensive events programme consisting of talks, discussions and workshops with renowned designers, artists and scientists. Featured guests include Hans Ulrich Obrist, Richard Sennett, Elizabeth Diller, Matthias Horx, Stefan Diez, Phillipe Rahm, Snohetta, Raumlabor and many others.

The exhibition is accompanied by a 320-page catalogue that comprises a catalogue raisonné of Grcic's work as well as essays by such authors as Richard Sennett, Peter Sloterdijk, Paola Antonelli, Mario Carpo and others.

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