



**Vitra Design Museum**

Charles-Eames-Straße 2  
Weil am Rhein/Basel  
[www.design-museum.de](http://www.design-museum.de)

PRESS CONFERENCE  
27 September 2018, 2 pm

OPENING  
28 September 2018, 6 pm  
Opening Talk with Jan Boelen,  
Lucy Orta, Alison J. Clarke  
and Amelie Klein

PRESS DOWNLOADS  
[www.design-museum.de/press\\_images](http://www.design-museum.de/press_images)

**Victor Papanek: The Politics of Design**

29 September 2018 – 10 March 2019, Vitra Design Museum

**With the exhibition »Victor Papanek: The Politics of Design«, running from 29 September 2018 to 10 March 2019, the Vitra Design Museum will present the first large retrospective focussing on the designer, author, and activist Victor J. Papanek (1923–1998). Papanek was one of the twentieth century’s most influential pioneers of a socially and ecologically oriented approach to design beginning in the 1960s. His key work, »Design for the Real World« (1971), remains the most widely read book about design ever published. In it, Papanek makes a plea for inclusion, social justice, and sustainability – themes of greater relevance for today’s design than ever before. The exhibition includes high-value exhibits such as drawings, objects, films, manuscripts, and prints, some of which have never before been presented. These are complimented by works of Papanek’s contemporaries from the 1960s to 1980s, including George Nelson, Richard Buckminster Fuller, Marshall McLuhan, or the radical design initiative »Global Tools«. Contemporary works from the areas of critical and social design provide insight into Papanek’s lasting impact.**

Faced with Nazi persecution in Austria, Papanek escaped to the United States in 1939. After pursuing a career as an industrial designer, during the 1960s he developed a critique of consumerism that would make him well known around the world. This position is also reflected in his designs, which he often developed together with his students or collaborators, including televisions and radios for African countries, electric vehicles, as well as the »Fingermajig«, an

object designed to stimulate the sense of touch (1965–1970), and the »Living Cubes« series (1973), user-assembled furniture that could be modified to meet different needs.

Papanek's true impact, however, is to be found in his work as an author and arbiter of a new and critical understanding of design. He lectured in universities around the world, inspiring generations of students, and tirelessly promoted a wider social debate about design. For example, beginning in 1961 he moderated a television series about design that was broadcast throughout the USA. Alongside his »Design for the Real World«, which has been translated into over twenty languages, additional books such as »How Things Don't Work« (1977) or »Design for Human Scale« (1983) cemented his reputation as a pioneer of alternative design. In them he used pointed language and humour to criticize a blind belief in consumerism and adapt the ideas of the generation of 1968 to address practical issues of everyday life for a great number of people.

»Victor Papanek: The Politics of Design« is organized into four sections offering an in-depth look at Papanek's life and work. The exhibition begins with an introductory, large-format media installation presenting the designer's ideas in a contemporary context and follows with a biographical overview tracing Papanek's life from his escape from Europe to his international success. For the first time, organizers were able to draw upon materials of the Papanek estate held by the Papanek Foundation at the University of Applied Arts Vienna, which includes a number of documents that have never been exhibited, including notebooks, letters, furniture, pieces from Papanek's collection of ethnological objects, as well as over thousands slides that the designer used for his lectures.

Two other sections focus on the main themes of Papanek's work, including his fundamental criticism of consumerism and his engagement with social minorities, his commitment to the needs of what was then known as the »Third World«, ecology, sustainability, and »making« culture – creation and production using one's own resources – which had its origins in the 1960s do-it-yourself movement. Visitors can also view a wealth of designs by Papanek, his students, and other collaborators, including those by the Danish designer Susanne Koefoed, who as a student of Papanek developed the first International Symbol of Access in 1968.

The exhibition is supplemented with around twenty carefully selected contemporary works that transport Papanek's ideas into the twenty-first century by designers including Catherine Sarah Young, Forensic Architecture, Jim Chuchu, Tomás Saraceno, Gabriel Ann Maher, or the Brazilian collective Flui Coletivo and Questtónó. They, too, deal with complex themes such as global climate change, fluid gender identities, consumer behaviour, or the economic realities of migration, meaning they reflect the continuing resonance of the questions Papanek was already addressing in the 1960s. At the same time, they break out of the white, Western, and male-dominated world to which Papanek was bound despite all his efforts to the contrary.

»Victor Papanek: The Politics of Design« is thus both a retrospective as well as a themed exhibition. By focusing on Papanek the person, we can better understand a larger theme, namely the significance of design as a political tool. After all, what was revolutionary for Papanek's time is now generally accepted: design is not only about giving form to something, it is a tool for political

transformation that must consider social and ethical points of view. This is reflected by the fact that today's debates over themes such as social design and design thinking draw upon Papanek's ideas as a matter of course. The exhibition seeks to rediscover Papanek as a pioneer of these debates – and as one of design's greatest forward thinkers – for the twenty-first century. At the same time, it examines how Papanek's socially engaged design is changing our world today – as well as how it can make the world a better one.

This exhibition is a cooperation between the Vitra Design Museum and the Barcelona Design Museum, in collaboration with the Victor J. Papanek Foundation, University of Applied Arts Vienna, and is funded by the German Federal Cultural Foundation.

### **#VDM Papanek**

Please share your photos and impressions of the exhibition using the hashtags #VDM Papanek and #vitradesignmuseum on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram.

## Publication to the exhibition



### **Victor Papanek The Politics of Design**

Editors: Mateo Kries, Amelie Klein,  
Alison J. Clarke

Design by Daniel Streat, Visual Fields

Date of publication: October 2018

Softcover, 19 x 25 cm

400 pages, Approx. 500 illustrations

ISBN 978-3-945852-26-2

German retail price: 59,90€ (incl. VAT 7%)

The designer, author, and design activist Victor J. Papanek (1923 – 1998) anticipated an understanding of design as a tool for political change and social good that is more relevant today than ever. »Victor Papanek: The Politics of Design« gives an encompassing overview of Papanek's oeuvre, at the heart of which stood his preoccupation with the socially marginalized, his commitment to the interests of areas then called the »Third World«, as well as his involvement in the fields of ecology, bionics, sustainability, and anti-consumerism. Alongside essays and interviews discussing Papanek's relevance in his own era, the book also presents current perspectives on his enduring legacy and its influence on contemporary design theory. Original Papanek family photographs, art and design work, drawings, correspondence and countless materials from the Victor J. Papanek Foundation archive, University of Applied Arts Vienna are reproduced here for the first time, alongside work by both Papanek's contemporaries and designers working today.

Text by Jan Boelen, Alison J. Clarke, Elizabeth Guffey, Orit Halpern, Jamer Hunt, Amelie Klein, Felicity Scott, Cameron Tonkinwise, Alice Twemlow and others.

## **TALKS / DISCUSSIONS / SPECIALS**

### **Can Design Save Us?**

**OPENING TALK (EN) | 28 September 2018**

**6 pm, Fire Station**

Can design really make our world a better place and offer solutions to global problems? To kick off the exhibition, Jan Boelen, Head of department Social Design at the Design Academy Eindhoven, Lucy Orta, artist, fashion designer, and Chair of Art in the Environment at the University of the Arts London discuss with Alison J. Clarke, director of the Victor J. Papanek Foundation and co-curator of »Victor Papanek: The Politics of Design«, as well as Amelie Klein, co-curator for the exhibition for the Vitra Design Museum.

Free admission

### **Alison J. Clarke – Design Revolution:**

**Victor Papanek, His Time and Why It All Still Matters**

**TALK (EN) | 22 November 2018**

**18:30 pm, Vitra Design Museum**

The 1960s and early 1970s weren't just the era of hippies and student revolt. It was also a time when the role of design was critically reassessed and its political and social purpose redefined. While designers like Victor Papanek called for a holistic view of design, initiatives such as the Italian group »Global Tools« propagated more radical and experimental approaches. In her talk, Alison J. Clarke, co-curator of the »Victor Papanek« exhibition, examines the era's tendencies and protagonists and reflects on their continued relevance today.

Free admission

### **Sedia Uno – Furniture with a Mission**

**SPECIAL WORKSHOP (DE) | 24 November 2018**

**10:30 to 5:30 pm, Vitra Schaudapot**

In 1974 the Italian designer Enzo Mari published 19 do-it-yourself furniture designs in his book »Autoprogettazione?« CUCULA, a Berlin-based project, today produces the »Sedia Uno« chair from this series together with refugees, who in the process learn important career skills. In a cooperative workshop with CUCULA, participants will not only build their own Sedia Uno, but they also learn more about the connection between politics and design.

€ 85.00 per person, registration: [info@design-museum.de](mailto:info@design-museum.de)

### **Uta Brandes – Gender in Design**

**TALK (DE) | 6 December 2018**

**6:30 pm, Vitra Design Museum**

Famous designers and architects are always men, and on the shelves of Western shops we find angled black products of steel for men and small, soft, and rounded items for women. For years the design expert Uta Brandes has investigated the theoretical and practical significance of gender in design. In her talk she discusses how gender should play a fundamental role in the design process and presents examples of design projects.

Free admission

**Shaping the World? How Design is Rediscovering Society**

**SPECIAL (DE) | 13 December 2018**

**7 pm, DRIVE, Volkswagen Group Forum Berlin**

Design has become political. Ever more designers are developing projects that go beyond questions of aesthetics to examine complex themes including sustainability, digitalization, identity, and inclusion. For the exhibition »Victor Papanek: The Politics of Design«, a panel discussion with co-curator Amelie Klein will be held in DRIVE, Volkswagen Group Forum Berlin. The panel will discuss why today's design must address the great questions society faces and how design truly can make the world a better place.

**The Organic Special – Tour and Dinner**

**SPECIAL (DE) | 13 December 2018**

**6 pm, Vitra Design Museum**

Victor Papanek is considered a pioneer of sustainable design. During this exclusive tour, participants gain insight into Papanek's work with regard to sustainability and social design. Afterwards, a chef's introduction to the Slow Food philosophy will be followed by a shared dinner of regional organic products.

€ 58.00 per person including dinner, registration: [events@design-museum.de](mailto:events@design-museum.de)

**Forensic Architecture – Investigative Architecture as a Tool for Political Intervention**

**TALK (EN) | 31 January 2019**

**6:30 pm, Vitra Schauddepot**

Forensic Architecture is an interdisciplinary association of researchers at London's Goldsmiths College whose members include designers, architects, and scholars. Founder Eyal Weizman, architect and professor of Spatial and Visual Cultures, talks about the group's radical research methods focusing on the examination and visualization of human rights violations whose novel combination of design and politics is causing international furore.

Free admission

**Dieter Landenberger – The Myth of the Bulli**

**TALK (DE) | 7 February 2019**

**6:30 pm, Vitra Schauddepot**

The arrival of the Volkswagen Transporter, known as the »Bulli«, in 1950 marked the beginning of a new era in Wolfsburg. A workhorse of Germany's economic miracle, this pop-cultural icon was colourfully painted and converted to a camper, making the models T1 and T2 into true cult objects among alternative cultures. Dieter Landenberger, director of Volkswagen Heritage, discusses the history of the Transporter and explains how it became a symbol of our desires and wanderlust.

Free admission

**Anab Jain – Superflux**

**TALK (EN) | 14 February 2019**

**6:30 pm, Vitra Design Museum**

Superflux, founded by Anab Jain and Jon Ardern, is a design studio working in London (GB) and Ahmedabad (IN). In its experimental work, Superflux analyses design's impacts and combines real designs with »Design Fiction« – narrative and speculative elements offering a glimpse into our future daily lives. Artificial intelligence, robotics, intelligent materials, and renewable materials are just some of Superflux's themes. In her talk, Anab Jain discusses the political power inherent to this approach to design.

Free admission

**Alice Rawsthorn – Design as an Attitude**

**TALK (EN) | 7 March 2019**

**6:30 pm, Vitra Design Museum**

While the world and life itself are becoming ever more complex, design as a means of influencing society is garnering increasing attention. In »Design as an Attitude«, author and design critic Alice Rawsthorn talks about how design can help us to navigate today's tumultuous changes. Rawsthorn describes an eclectic and empowering vision of design that really can make a difference.

Free admission

## Fact Sheet

Title:	Victor Papanek: The Politics of Design
Curators:	Amelie Klein (Vitra Design Museum) Professor Alison J. Clarke (Victor J. Papanek Foundation, University of Applied Arts Vienna)
Advising Curator:	Jan Boelen (Z33 House for Contemporary Art, Hasselt, Belgium, and Design Academy Eindhoven, Netherlands)
Assistant Curator:	Erika Pinner (Vitra Design Museum)
Press conference:	27 September 2018, 2 pm Zaha Hadid Fire Station
Opening:	28 September 2018, 6 pm Zaha Hadid Fire Station
Duration:	29 September 2018 until 10 March 2019
Opening hours:	daily 10 am – 6 pm
Press images:	<a href="http://www.design-museum.de/press_images">www.design-museum.de/press_images</a>
Press contact:	Vitra Design Museum Lara Schuh, Head of Communications T +49.7621.702.3153 E <a href="mailto:communications@design-museum.de">communications@design-museum.de</a>
	BUREAU N Sören Zuppke T +49.30. 62736.104 E <a href="mailto:soeren.zuppke@bureau-n.de">soeren.zuppke@bureau-n.de</a>

An exhibition by the Vitra Design Museum and the Barcelona Design Museum  
in collaboration with the Victor J. Papanek Foundation, University of Applied Arts Vienna

**di:angewandte**  
University of Applied Arts Vienna  
**Papanek Foundation**

Museu del Disseny  
de Barcelona

Funded by

Global Partner

Sponsor

**KULTURSTIFTUNG  
DES  
BUNDES**

The German Federal Cultural Foundation

**VOLKSWAGEN**  
GROUP

**■ GEBERIT**