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Frankfurt/Main, 10.05.2019

Sagmeister & Walsh: Beauty
11 May 2019 until 15 September 2019

The exhibition is a cooperation of Museum Angewandte Kunst and MAK, Vienna

Press preview: Friday, 10 May 2019, 11 am

Opening: Friday, 10 May 2019, 7 pm

After his greatly successful *Happy Show*, the graphic design superstar from New York Stefan Sagmeister returns to the Museum Angewandte Kunst. In his new exhibition project *Beauty*, developed in collaboration with his studio partner Jessica Walsh, he provides a very personal and visually compelling plea for the appreciation and enjoyment of beauty. With spectacular interactive installations, the renowned design duo Sagmeister & Walsh take visitors along on a sensually pleasurable quest: What is beauty and why do we feel attracted to it?

With the help of numerous examples from product design, urban planning, architecture and graphic design as well as newly produced installations, they invite the audience to see, smell and touch. All as part of an endeavor to demonstrate that beautifully designed objects stimulate human perception and, ultimately, work better. Supported by insights from psychological aesthetics, history, philosophy and the natural sciences, Sagmeister & Walsh take the view that beauty is more than just a superficial strategy: it influences our everyday life, stimulates our perception and makes the world a better place.

Throughout the entire 20th and 21st century, beauty has increasingly fallen out of favor in the design discourse. Sagmeister & Walsh counter this antipathy with impressive arguments while facilitating the experience of beauty as a central, functional aspect of appealing design. After its premiere in Vienna, the exhibition, created in cooperation with the MAK, Vienna, now permeates the entire first floor of the Museum Angewandte Kunst in Frankfurt/Main. Around 70 object groups and installations, divided into six exhibition themes – “What is Beauty”, “A Short History of Beauty”, “The Eye of the Beholder”, “Experiencing Beauty”, “Transformational Beauty” and “Contemplating Beauty”, spark an aesthetic debate around beauty as a paradigm for high-quality design.

On the way to the exhibition the visitor strolls past neon letters placed along the ramp of the Richard Meier Building that offer a possible definition of beauty: “Beauty is a combination of shape, form, composition, material and texture to please the aesthetic senses, especially the sight.” On further ascent the visitor encounters the interactive installation *One Hundred and Forty-four* by Nils Völker: 144 plastic bags mounted on the wall, each equipped with microcontrollers, fill and empty themselves with air with the help of two fans. The alternating sequences give the impression of lively wafting creatures or of a perfectly choreographed, intelligent swarm.

The first section of the exhibition dives directly into the central subject of inquiry: “What is beauty?” Sagmeister & Walsh answer the question discussed by countless philosophers and

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scientists as to what constitutes beauty with facts: Beauty has a direct effect on the dopamine receptors and on sensation. This way beautiful design can be understood as functional. Sagmeister & Walsh define symmetry as another universal component of the perception of beauty. They substantiate this thesis with several interactive installations: Among other things, one encounters a flock of birds that is projected onto a large screen. Its density and speed can be controlled. It proves that balanced patterns also tend to be preferred by nature. Moreover, visitors can generate symmetrical structures with an interactive app and order a printed tote bag via an app. Once the visitors pass the fog curtain filled with projections they are completely enwrapped in the subject matter.

Examples from all chapters of human history leave little room for doubt of the historical longing for beauty. Physical beauty is not the only aspect that makes an individual sexually appealing, but also the ability to create beautiful things. This hasn't changed since prehistory: There was no explicit reason for smoothly polished symmetrical stone axes. However, the more refined the motor skills of the toolmaker, the more attractive he became. At the same time, the negation of beauty is substantially dealt with in this chapter.

The chapter "The Eye of the Beholder" investigates remarkable similarities in different cultures and eras which make evident that aesthetic perception is less subjective than generally assumed. How universal the perception of beauty is, is demonstrated by the visualization of a case study carried out by Chris McManus, psychologist at the University College of London: 85 percent of the participants were able to instantly tell the difference between a work of a Piet Mondrian and a slightly altered replica. Here, Sagmeister & Walsh invite the visitor to interact once again: The exhibition ticket that the visitor receives at the counter can be used in order to vote on favorite forms, colors and scents. The *Color Room* explicitly deals with the perception of color. The room covered in intense blue and pink patterns is regularly illuminated with a special light that turns specific colors into gray. Colorfulness is generally perceived as more beautiful.

Beauty also has transformational potential to improve the living environment, as the exhibition area "Transforming Beauty" illustrates. The installation *From Garbage to Functional Beauty* is one example of this: French designer Thierry Jeannot works with Mexican garbage collectors to create a beautiful plastic chandelier. With the VR installation *Tyranny of the Tool*, developed by Florian Hönig and Michael Sängler from *Unbound Technologies*, visitors can create their very own sculpture in virtual space.

The exhibition closes in Frankfurt with several new stations that Sagmeister & Walsh have developed especially for the Museum Angewandte Kunst. During the period of the exhibition, instead of the permanent exhibit of *Elementary Parts*, one finds a new combination of museum-owned collection objects that Sagmeister & Walsh have selected exclusively with regard to their formal qualities. This best-of of the Museum Angewandte Kunst, which is introduced in the last chapter "Contemplating Beauty", is not based on the recognizable success of a poster campaign or on the fact that a lamp provides enough light, but on the pleasure and joy one feels when looking at these objects. With *Creating Beauty*, you can not only look over the shoulder of the Swiss graphic artist Martin Woodtli when he creates a poster campaign, you can follow every move in real time. In the next station *Copying Beauty* you can try yourself. Equipped with pen and paper, you are asked to make a drawing of a Thonet chair from the collection and leave your "copy" in the exhibition. Philip Beesley's

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installation *Liminal Architecture* offers the final crescendo of the sensual quest for beauty: Based on years of research of the Canadian architect, with which he interweaves the boundaries between nature and technology, he has created a series of expansive sculptures. He combines contemporary materials and digital manufacturing techniques to create a human whole. The installation hanging from the ceiling in the Museum Angewandte Kunst consists of large, plant-like structures made of glass, polymers and metals.

Sagmeister & Walsh: Beauty is the second exhibition project that Stefan Sagmeister has realized with the Museum Angewandte Kunst. With *The Happy Show*, he shared his rousing quest for happiness with the audience in 2016. The exhibition is a cooperation between the Museum Angewandte Kunst and the MAK, Vienna. It was curated in Vienna by Kathrin Pokorny-Nagel and is coordinated by Peter Zizka at the Museum Angewandte Kunst.

Catalogue *Sagmeister & Walsh: Beauty*

Hermann Schmidt Verlag, German, 284 pages, 377 colour images, 17,1 x 24,1 cm, 39,80 Euro.
/ *Sagmeister & Walsh: Beauty*, Phaidon, English, 280 pages, 377 colour images, 17,1 x 24,1 cm, 35 Euro.

Notebook *Sagmeister & Walsh: Beauty*

nuuna by brandbook, designed by Stefan Sagmeister, 256 pages, 16,5 x 22cm, flex cover with recycled bonded leather, 24,90 Euro.

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Opening hours

Tue, Thu-Sun 10 am – 6 pm, Wed 10am – 8 pm

Admission

12 Euro, reduced 6 Euro (per exhibition), 16 Euro, reduced 8 Euro (combination ticket)

The reduced admission price applies school and university students, persons with disabilities and their escorts and unemployed persons. Valid identification required.

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Press downloads

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