

## Press Release

Frankfurt am Main, 13.5.2026

### **Positions on Freedom. Design and Its Boundaries the thing Fellowship 2026 14 May – 28 June 2026**

Press conference: Wednesday, 13 May 2026, 11 am  
Exhibition opening: Wednesday, 13 May 2026, 7 pm

Is design a tool of liberation, oppression, or both at once? From 14 May to 28 June 2026, the Museum Angewandte Kunst in Frankfurt addresses this question with the exhibition *Positions on Freedom. Design and Its Boundaries*. The exhibition treats its title as a method and unfolds the topic as a spectrum across three interconnected formats: a group exhibition developed through an open call and in collaboration with the museum, newly commissioned works by invited designers (fellows), and a reader featuring theoretical contributions and conversations.

Between aesthetics and norms, designers create tangible objects that define what appears possible. In doing so, they not only produce solutions, but often also exclusions and new forms of normality. Through a wide range of works and formats, *Positions on Freedom* approaches freedom from multiple perspectives. What emerges is a complex concept that can only be grasped, if at all, through its plurality. The projects presented in the exhibition span political and spatial freedom, as well as artistic and intellectual freedom. They render these questions tangible through barriers, representations of identity, and engagements with violence and surveillance.

A central observation runs throughout the exhibition: freedom is inherently ambivalent. It can only be understood in relation to its limits and constraints, whether spatial, social, or individual. Design makes these tensions visible and tangible, as well as the consequences of unfreedom.

While the exhibition deliberately approaches freedom as an open concept, it is grounded in a curatorial angle that does not define freedom as the dominance of the strongest, but as a concept based on universal human rights and an ethic of care, both between people and in relation to the planet we inhabit.

#### **The Exhibition in Detail**

the thing Fellows × USM

Drawing on the industrial modular system USM Haller, invited designers Fatma Cankaya, Mawuto Dotou, and Johanna Seelemann develop new works at the intersection of critique, material, and intervention. Fatma Cankaya's *Frankfurter Schrank* reflects a material culture shaped by post-migrant perspectives as well as meme and internet culture. The object performance *Wert* by Mawuto Dotou examines the social mechanisms that shape value and questions the relationship between the value of objects and that of people. In her work

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*Semiotische Ergänzungen* Johanna Seelemann approaches freedom through material, blurring the boundaries between natural and cultural spheres.

### Group exhibition

A group exhibition brings together over 20 positions from transdisciplinary and applied perspectives. The works emerge from an open call with around 200 submissions as well as a collaboration with the museum's curators. The show is curated by the exhibition's initiator Anton Rahlwes and design critic Vera Sacchetti. The exhibited projects address topics ranging from drone interfaces and practices of intimacy to protest and questions of identity.

### Reader

The reader *Positions on Freedom. Design and its Boundaries* brings together essays and conversations by contemporary design theorists and practitioners and functions as an independent intellectual extension of the exhibition. It addresses topics such as racism in design, freedom in education, ableism, and democracy. Published by *the thing Magazine*, it includes contributions by Anoe Melliou and Anne-Lise Agossa, Anton Rahlwes, Antônio Frederico Lasalvia, Barbara Lersch, Charlotte Rohde, Djamal Elangui Okoko, Inga Krumme und Jamer Hunt, Kelly Walters, Mara Recklies, Mio Kojima, Serena Dokuaa and Vera Sacchetti. The reader can be purchased at the Museum Angewandte Kunst or at [thethinggallery.com](http://thethinggallery.com).

The exhibition is an official project within the framework of *World Design Capital Frankfurt RheinMain 2026* and was realised as part of *the thing Fellowship*, an initiative of *the thing Magazine*. Developed in partnership with USM and the Fondation USM, the exhibition also explores how freedom can be negotiated within the tension between institutional structures and entrepreneurial frameworks.

Anton Rahlwes is the initiator and artistic director of the project. In addition, the scenography, designed by Anton and Lotti Defant, forms a further position on freedom, structured around the metaphor of a "thinking architecture". The visual identity, developed by Autostrada Studios, likewise constitutes an independent contribution to the exhibition's exploration of freedom.

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## Director

Prof. Matthias Wagner K

## Location

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## Information

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[www.museumangewandtekunst.de](http://www.museumangewandtekunst.de)

## Opening Hours

Mon closed, Tue, Thu–Sun 10 am – 6 pm, Wed 10 am – 8 pm

## Admission

14 Euro, reduced 7 Euro

Admission is free for Museumsufer (MUF) card holders, children and young people under the age of 18, students of Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main, Frankfurt University of Applied Sciences, Frankfurt University of Music and Performing Arts, Städelschule and Hochschule für Gestaltung Offenbach.

## Press Contact Museum Angewandte Kunst

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## Press Downloads

[www.museumangewandtekunst.de](http://www.museumangewandtekunst.de)

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