

WOCHENKLAUSUR (Vienna, Austria)



The artist group WochenKlausur has been conducting social interventions since 1993. WochenKlausur, at the invitation of art institutions, develops and realizes proposals—small-scale but very concrete—for improving sociopolitical deficits.—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.

It all started in the winter of 1992. For an exhibition at the Vienna Secession Wolfgang Zinggl invited eight artists 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 fifteen interventions have been successfully conducted in recent years by alternating teams that have involved a total of over forty artists.

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.

Wolfgang Zinggl led WochenKlausur until 1997. Since then, interventions have also been organized by Stefania Pitscheider, Katharina Lenz and Pascale Jeannée. Past and current members include Katharina Lenz, Pascale Jeannée, Susanna Niedermayr, Stefania Pitscheider, Erich Steurer and Wolfgang Zinggl. 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.