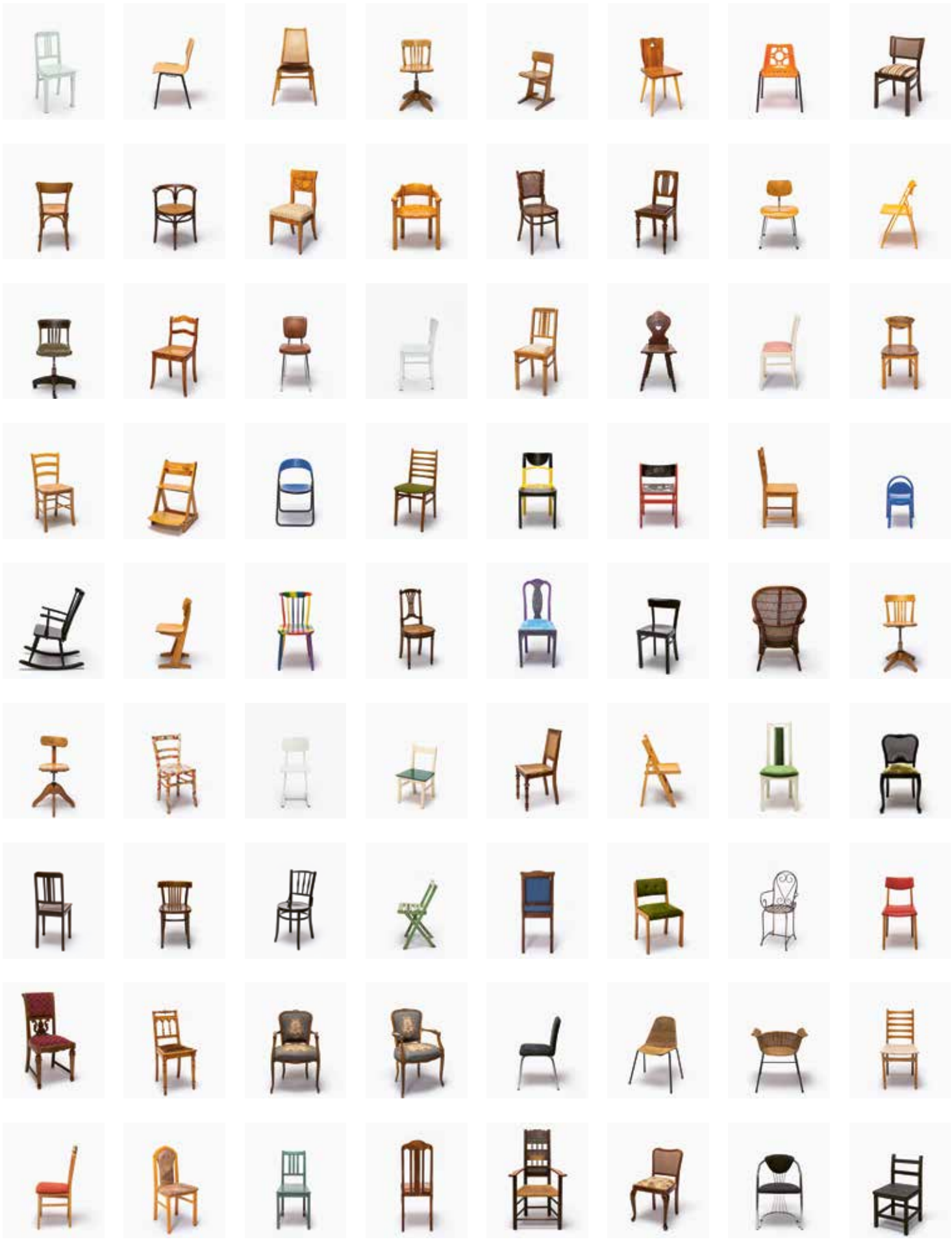
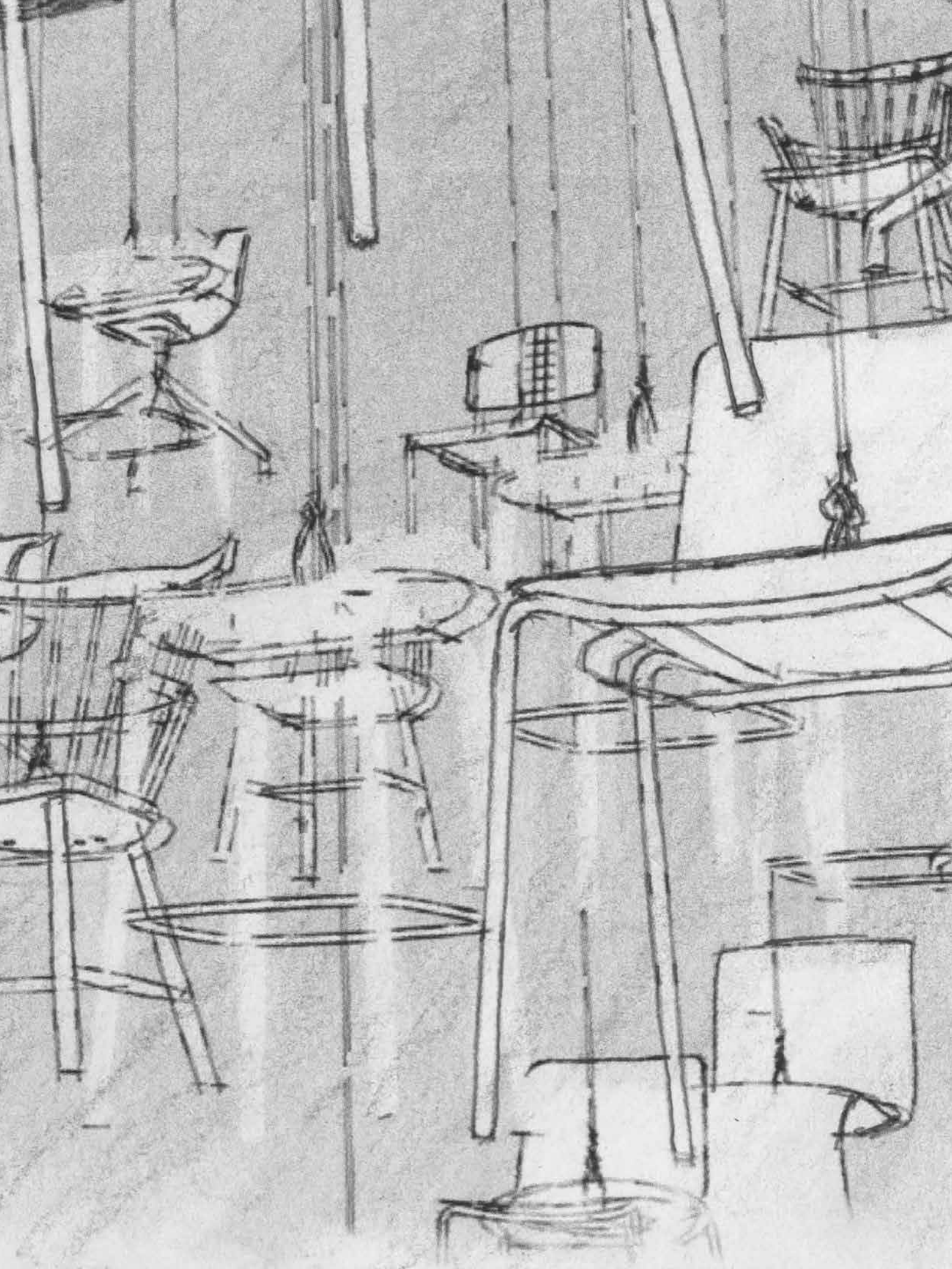
MAGAZINE

# the final bid

## Michael Pinsky





# editorial

In 2017, the Draiflessen Collection became a nonprofit organization. Ever since, I have spent considerable time thinking about what this nonprofit status can mean for a museum. We ultimately integrated the whole team in this process, formulating our 2021 museum mission statement from all of the ideas and results of two rounds of discussion. The conviction that the “nonprofit” in our corporate designation is not merely a legal phrase, and most certainly not a hollow one, was met with great approval. It is instead associated with strong social responsibility: “In addition to mediating art- and cultural-historical contents, it is our aim to ask questions and to raise awareness of differing viewpoints. It is our conviction that in the process, works of art and historico-cultural objects can take on the function of mediation or translation, encouraging people to

think and to discover new ways of seeing, and promoting and supporting a critical look at themselves, the world around them, and society."[1]

In accordance with this self-conception, our focus is placed again and again on trying to reflect the "big issues" of our time in our exhibitions, in which we confront current discourses and challenges. This is often best achieved by taking a playful approach to complex and abstract contexts, making them perceptible through the senses wherever possible, and thus both physically and rationally experienceable.

In Michael Pinsky we have found an artist who succeeds in working at this very juncture. He involves people in his installations and interventions in a very natural way, with the aim of pointing something out or educating them. For us, this is an enormous stroke of luck. For one, we are presenting his POLLUTION PODS over a period of four weeks at the beginning of the exhibition, which the artist developed in 2017 to simulate the air and climatic conditions of different places in the world, thus making them directly tangible. Moreover, here at the Draiflessen Collection we are hosting the first showing of his installation THE FINAL BID. In this work, Pinsky vividly conveys the idea of reducing our ecological footprint and the circular economy, but also goes a step further to directly address each participant. He thus clearly demonstrates how easy it actually is to become active and make a contribution that benefits everyone personally, while simultaneously bringing about change on a larger scale.

We are living in times of crisis. Global warming is happening right now, not at some point in the future. And it is progressing much more quickly than we had imagined possible. So what are we waiting for? Isn't it more obvious to counteract this process by pressing ahead with even the smallest of personal actions toward change than to be forced to do so by disaster? At the same time, this means becoming aware of our obligation to society and to future generations, and confronting the economic, ecological, and social challenges of our present head-on—not least through appropriate, sustainable museum operations.

Thus concludes my musings on conviction and theory.

The development of THE FINAL BID at our museum has truly been a multilayered experience for everyone involved, requiring incredible motivation and great stamina, as the realization of this wonderful idea has also proved to be a major challenge. As I write this editorial—several weeks before the opening of our real and virtual auction platform—nowhere near all of the issues have been settled. And yet—in full awareness of the power, professionalism, and wealth of ideas and solutions of all the individuals involved—I firmly believe that, with this exhibition, we are contributing to the notion

that the best way for us to evolve as human beings is to use the knowledge and all the possibilities already available to us.

Warm gratitude is extended first and foremost to the artist Michael Pinsky and to the two curators Birte Hinrichsen and Nicole Roth, who together have brought this project to fruition at our organization with so much energy, heart, and thought.

Without the willingness of countless people who made their chairs available to us, and who also manifested their interest and support in so many diverse and helpful ways, it would not have been possible to carry out THE FINAL BID. New friends of the Draiflessen Collection, who first discovered us through the call for chairs, and cherished long-time visitors—never have we experienced such active participation in one of our projects so early on and with such gusto. We are all thrilled!

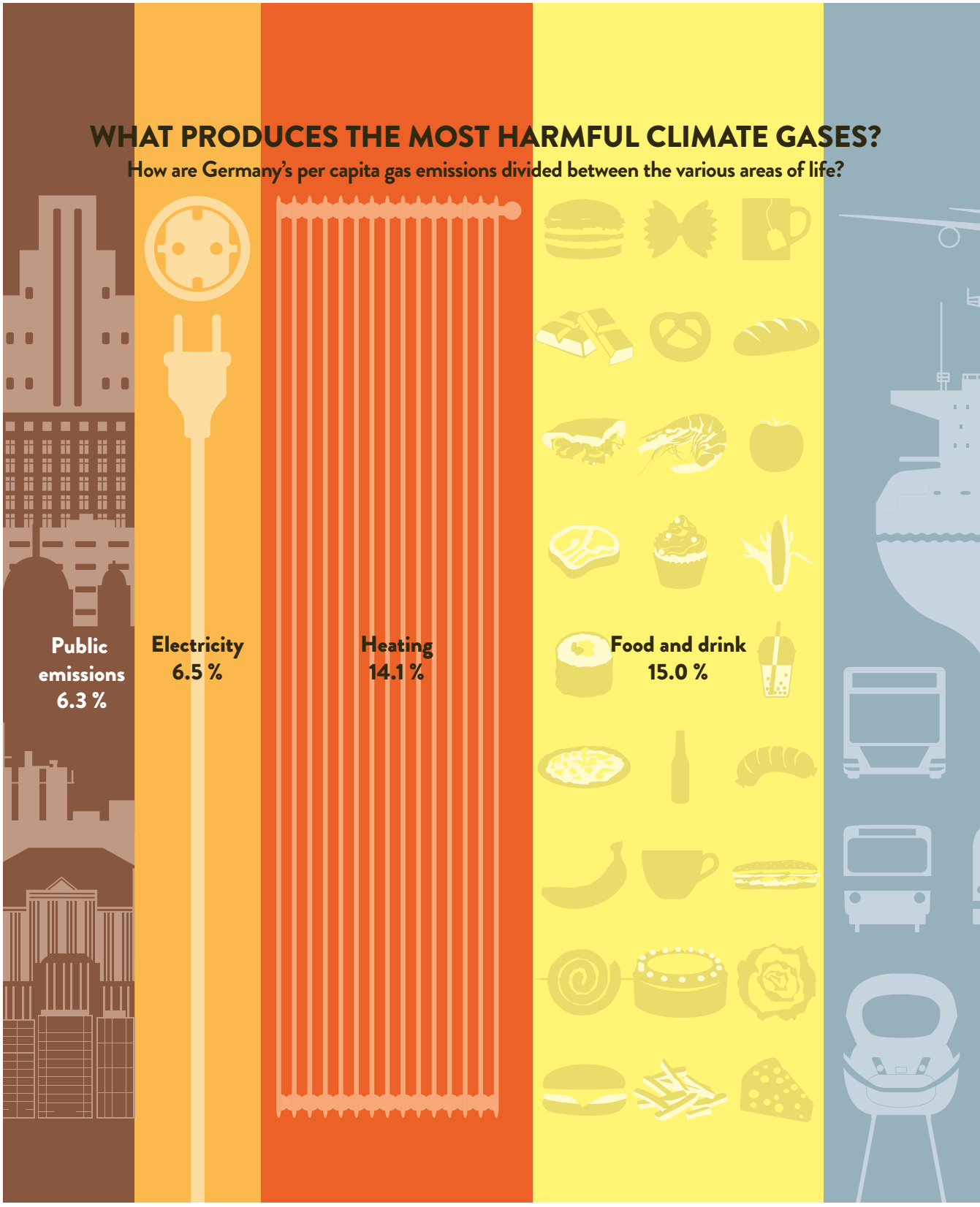
The graphic design and the booklet accompanying the exhibition put the icing on the cake, and sincere thanks are expressed to all involved.

The best projects are those that ultimately never reveal how complex the challenges were. The technical, scenographic, programming, and artisan departments have worked tirelessly and successfully to turn THE FINAL BID into a visual experience and hopefully great fun for all visitors. Very special thanks, therefore, go to these individuals, to all of our external and internal specialists.

Corinna Otto
Director
Draiflessen Collection



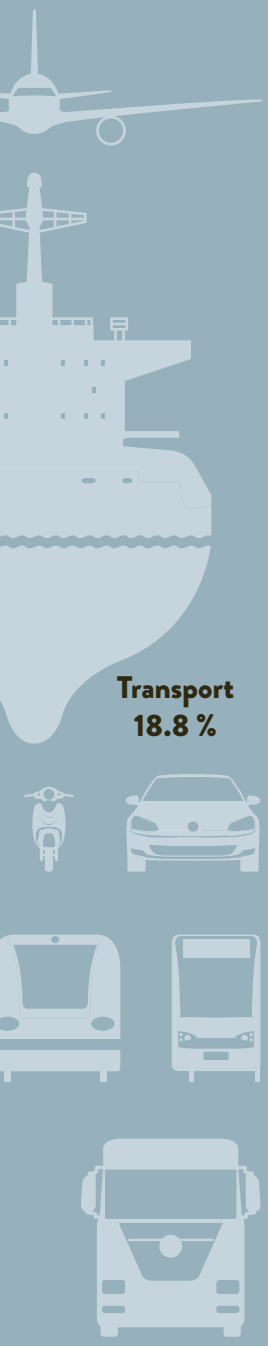
1 Excerpt from the "Mission Statement of the Draiflessen Collection," https://www.draiflessen.com/articles/1008?locale=en (accessed in September 2022).





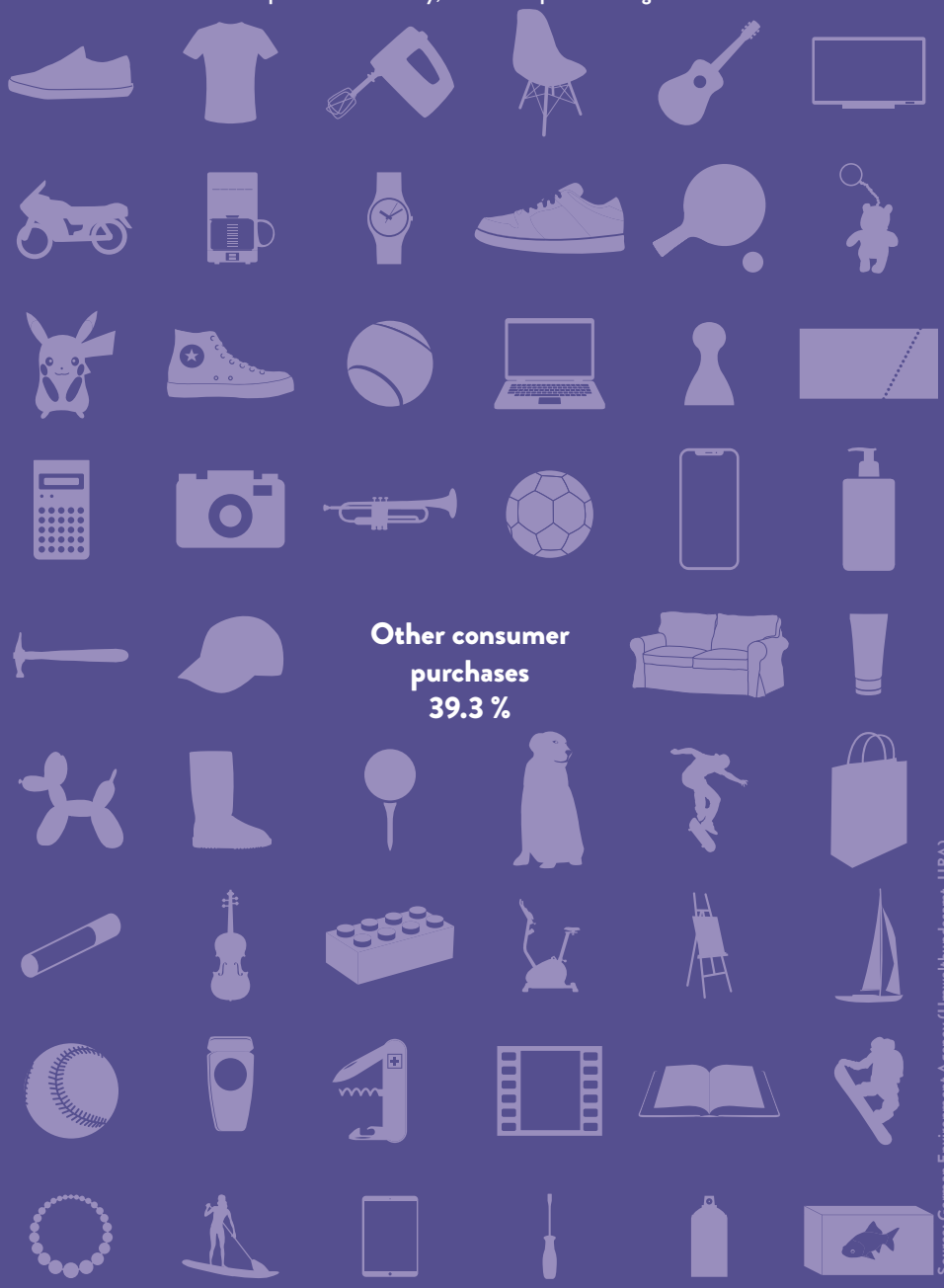

From: *Wie viel Regenwald passt auf dieses Brot? Erstaunliche Grafiken über Klima und Umwelt*, 

What produces the most harmful climate gases? Everyone probably first thinks of motor vehicles and airplanes. But in reality, the consumption of things is most harmful.



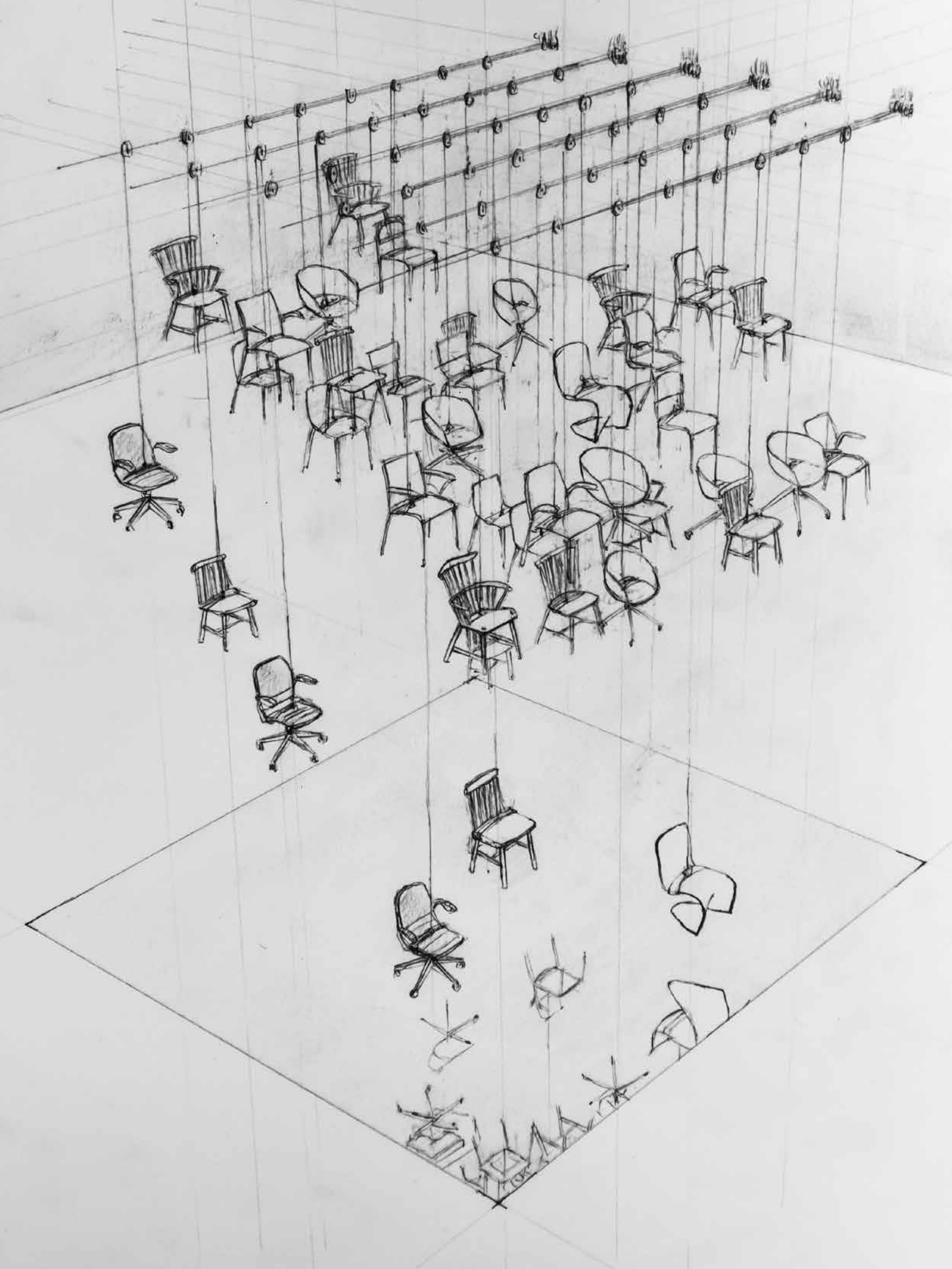
**Transport**
**18.8 %**





**Other consumer purchases**
**39.3 %**

Source: German Environment Agency (Umweltbundesamt, UBA)



Birte Hinrichsen and Nicole Roth

# the final bid

Sustainability is a subject that we cannot afford to ignore today. But the word is used in so many different ways that it is in danger of deteriorating into an empty sound bite, and of triggering a sense of overwhelming challenge rather than motivation. Many people wonder if they can make any difference at all, and what possible measures they might take.

British artist Michael Pinsky (b. 1967) makes this the starting point for his processual installation THE FINAL BID, which he is premiering at the Draiflessen Collection. In his works of art, Pinsky explores the geopolitical impact of humanity on its environment—an impact that can encompass the ecological footprint of each individual, but also the ways in which humans interact. He thereby challenges the status quo, and, through artworks often aimed at participation and exchange, critiques our throw-away mindset and insatiably consumerist lifestyle, which not only place excess strain on the environment but, in the long term, also threaten our very existence.

Rather than simply pointing an admonishing finger, however, the artist is concerned with developing a dialogue and engaging in joint, solution-oriented action—because we cannot just carry on as before and expect things to change.

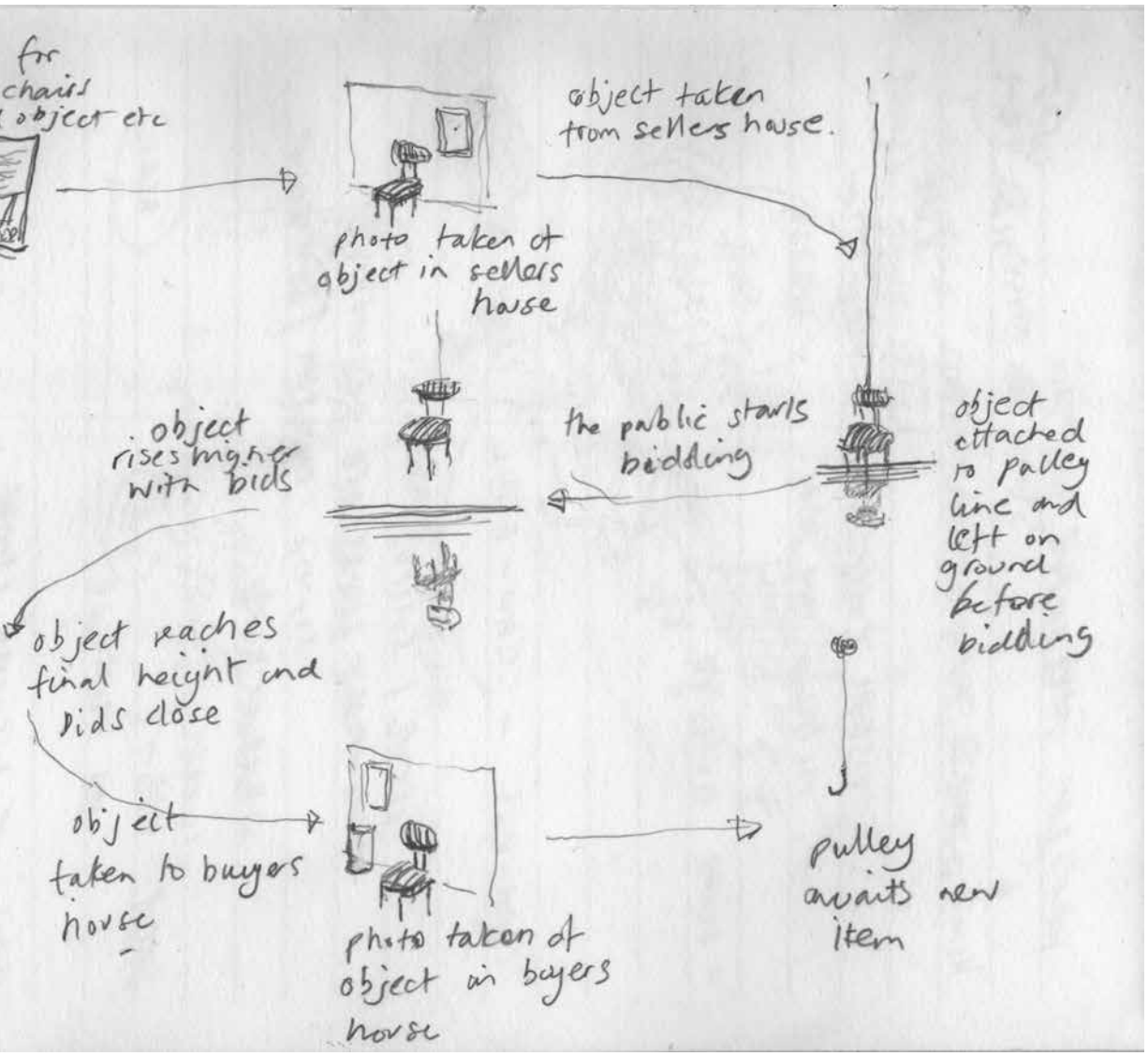
What makes up the largest portion of our average greenhouse gas emissions here in Germany is not air travel, energy consumption, or food, but—at about 4 tons per person—the consumption of manufactured goods such as furniture, clothing, and appliances.[1] Such manufacture of goods is particularly energy intensive, and even much-vaunted recycling represents no real alternative, since only a portion of materials can be reused, and the recycling process, too, consumes energy.

In a playful way, Pinsky invites people to take an active step and interrupt the never-ending flow of new goods in a symbolic action. For this he has chosen the iconic object of the chair. Everyone needs at least one chair. Indeed, countless numbers of chairs already exist. Such an everyday object as a chair passes through different life cycles. First, various raw materials are needed to make it. Then it stands in the furniture store, is purchased by us and transported home. Over the years, it is used in multiple ways—it is sat on and even stood on when we don't have a ladder close by. At some point, it might simply become somewhere to stack magazines or place potted plants, or it may go down into the basement as a spare chair. Whereas furniture in the past remained in service for decades, nowadays we are quick to buy a new chair and throw away the old one.

Instead of always purchasing new ones, the artist proposes that we reuse the chairs we already have and thus practice a mindful use of resources.

To this end, he has transformed the museum into a sales platform and has asked that no-longer-needed chairs be brought to the museum. Inside the exhibition space, well over a hundred used chairs—contributed to the art project by residents from the surrounding region—become part of an installation, which is quite literally set in motion by an auction process. Bids for the chairs can be made both during a visit to the museum and on the website of the Draiflessen Collection. Arising out of the interplay of the bids is a constantly changing sculptural ensemble, which dissolves again at the end.

THE FINAL BID plays with the idea of collecting artifacts, and with the value these objects gain when they are placed in a museum context. While some of the chairs may have great sentimental value, they are generally worth little from a commercial point of view. In the tradition of the ready-made, they are momentarily taken out of their functional context and become a sculpture to be looked at, rather than being pieces



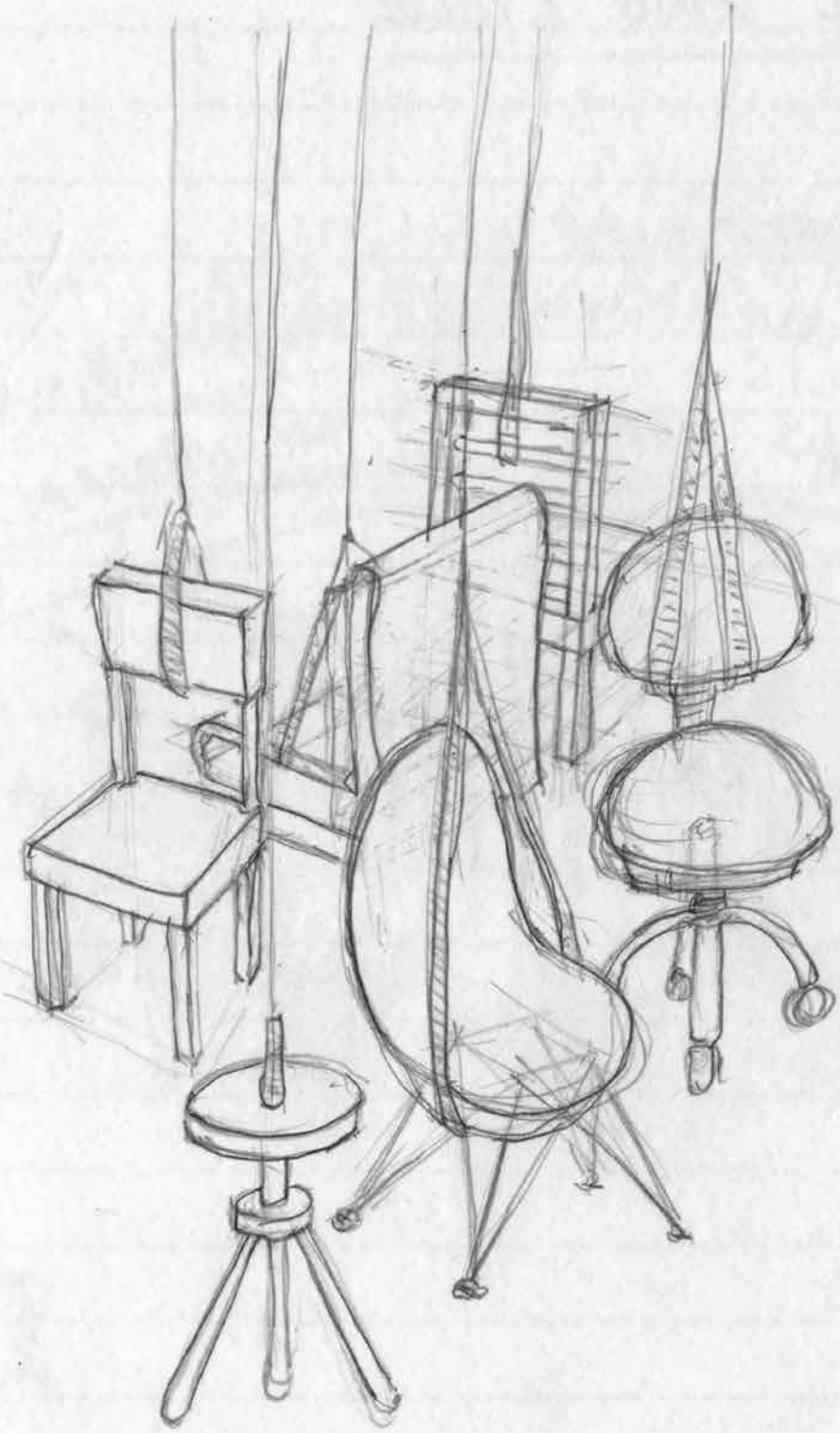

Michael Pinsky, *The Final Bid* (2022), project drawing, pencil on paper, 148 × 210 mm

of furniture to be sat upon. Their existence as part of an art installation enriches their respective life cycles with a new phase. After their purchase, however, the chairs return to their previous function.

Through his project, Michael Pinsky is creating an extensive network of exchange, but he is also offering us the opportunity to reexamine objects we have previously taken for granted.



1 See the graphic rendering by the German Environment Agency, "Treibhausgasausstoß pro Kopf in Deutschland nach Konsumbereichen (2017)," https://www.umweltbundesamt.de/bild/treibhausgas-ausstoss-pro-kopf-in-deutschland-nach (accessed in September 2022).



Cluster.

Michael Pinsky in Conversation with
Birte Hinrichsen and Nicole Roth

# interview

BH: Michael, we are delighted to talk to you today in more depth about your exhibition THE FINAL BID and to explore the themes and artistic considerations behind the work lending the show its title. Would you like to tell us how the idea for this large-scale installation came about?

MP: I first started to conceptualize the project THE FINAL BID whilst I was undertaking a residency in Norway with a group of environmental psychologists.[1] I developed about fifteen ideas at the time, in response to conversations with the psychologists who were studying how art can change people's perceptions of climate change. I then whittled these ideas down to just two. One was the POLLUTION PODS, which was essentially a dystopian idea, exploring how air pollution affects our everyday life and how the causes of air pollution are very similar to the causes of climate change (fig. 1). I used air pollution as a back door into discussions around climate change and how we could change people's lifestyles.

At the same time, I was trying to think of positive ways of encouraging lifestyle change. I started to think about the supply chain and the difference between recycling and reuse. Recycling—like net zero—is a bit of an excuse. The principles supporting net zero allow us to continue life as normal, mitigating travel by plane through planting trees, for example. Recycling is the same. When your purchases come in lots of recyclable packaging, you think, "Okay, that's fine." But recycling takes an enormous amount of energy, mostly supplied by fossil fuels, and this leads to a massive carbon output. So, we need to be thinking about how to reduce our consumption of goods at source, which means that we don't need to recycle them. We should either use things for a long time because they're well made, or reuse them, encouraging a circular rather than a linear economy. This is where the core concept for THE FINAL BID started to develop. I wanted to encourage people through an artwork to purchase goods secondhand and put the things that are sitting around them every day into the marketplace, so they can be

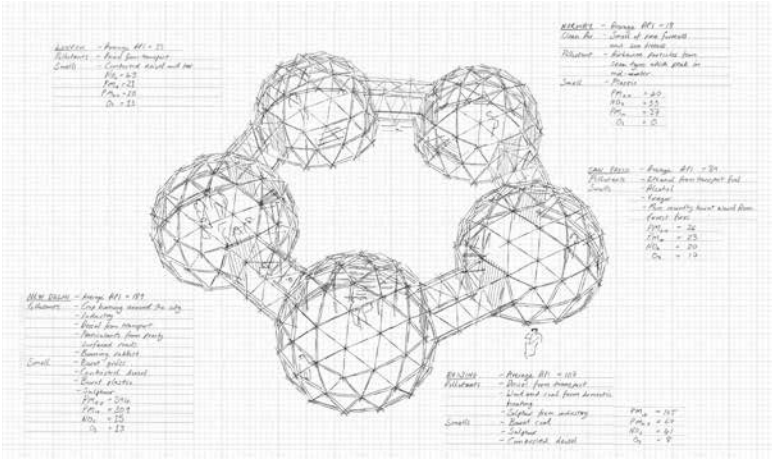


Fig. 1:
Michael Pinsky,
*Pollution Pods*
(2017), project
drawing, pencil
on graph paper,
420 × 594 mm

reused. We have lots of things around us that we don't use, yet at the same time, these things are being produced from scratch using raw materials.

BH: In one of our first conversations about THE FINAL BID, you discussed how materials like wood, when taken out of the supply chain for a while, actually increase in market value. How did you get involved with this aspect? And can a connection to THE FINAL BID be drawn here?

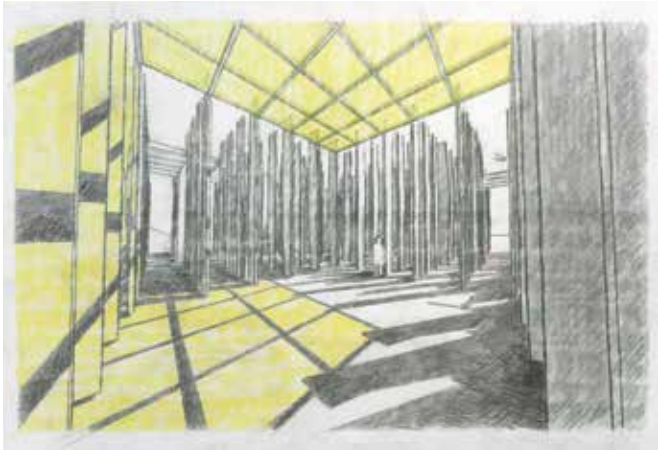


Fig. 2:
Michael Pinsky,
*Making A Stand*
(2022), project
drawing, colored
pencil and pencil
on paper,
420 × 594 mm

MP: At the moment I'm working on a project that explores the supply chain of wood in the city of Leeds, England. I am diverting the wood out of the supply chain after its first rough cut, and then putting it back in the supply chain after it has aged for a year and gained value as weathered wood (fig. 2). I recently presented this work to Leeds Beckett University, a partner in this project. They had just moved from their old art college, which was full of furniture, to a new building, and every single bit of furniture in the building was brand new. I was looking at all these new chairs which were made from plastic, chrome, steel, and padding fabric, all combined into one piece of furniture and incredibly difficult to recycle. The tables were all made from laminates with various types of plastic and had steel legs with plastic wheels on the bottom. Again, incredibly difficult to recycle. So, I asked the question: "Who made this decision? You have moved into a new building, which I can understand, as you have probably sold the old building, but what happened to the furniture? Did anyone think, 'Shall we take this old furniture with us?'" There wasn't a person in the room who could say what had happened to the old furniture. Is it now in a landfill? Was it sold?

The supply chain is the poor cousin of the climate change debate. We think about transportation, we think about energy, to some extent we think about insulation, but we don't think about the massive impact that buying new goods has on the environment. Why do we buy new chairs when our old ones might not be the most fashionable but are perfectly functional?
So, returning to Norway, we had this moment in a room with these environmental-psychologists, and we were around a table. There was a huge argument about which of the two ideas we should pursue. Instinctively, I wanted to develop the POLLUTION PODS, the dystopian work mentioned above (fig. 3). I think it was appropriate at the time. But I still wanted to try a utopian approach.

BH: The exhibition THE FINAL BID now explores this utopian idea. We are delighted that you have decided to realize this idea at the Draiflessen Collection. But the great thing is that in November visitors will even have the opportunity to experience both ideas—the utopian and the dystopian—as we will also be showing the POLLUTION PODS on our premises for a few weeks. But tell us a bit more about your installation THE FINAL BID.

MP: With THE FINAL BID, I am thinking about longevity in terms of every item we buy and about using the product until it completely falls apart. This is part of the style of the object. We often wear clothes until they look a bit worn, a bit tired, and then they go into the recycling chain. Textile recycling has a huge carbon footprint. But if it was stylish to wear everything until it was threadbare, our clothing could last for decades. We are addicted to buying clothes. In the United States, people buy on average one new item of clothing every five days. And yet I, in turn, still wear clothes I bought fifteen years ago. I wear them until they completely fall apart. Obviously, I'm not going to wear them to a fancy party, but if I'm working from home or gardening, they are fine. I have a hierarchy of clothes where they get more and more worn out until they are completely unusable. And again, furniture can last for decades and decades, possibly centuries. So, why are we still buying furniture? Perhaps we don't even need to buy furniture anymore.

NR: To take a more concrete look at your art installation THE FINAL BID: people were asked to bring chairs that they no longer use or want to the museum. Museum visitors, as well as Internet users, can bid on these chairs in an auction that takes place throughout the duration of the exhibition. Through the bids, the chairs are pulled up into the exhibition space and form a moving installation. Was the original idea exclusively focused on used chairs?

MP: My original idea was to have a single hanging structure which would host objects that would change every month. So, it could be chairs for one month, then bicycles the next month, followed by curtains, and then lights. Each month, the host organization would advertise a request for particular products, by type, color, or shape. However, the proportions of the Draiflessen Collection necessitated another approach, with a number of these hanging structures rather than a single one. My first thought was to have each hanging structure support a different type of object, but after some conversations with the Draiflessen team I decided to focus on the chair, which could symbolize any of our unwanted and unused goods.

BH: It is fascinating to see the points of reference that the object of the chair offers. On the one hand you have this very normal use of a chair—you sit on it, and you can typically use it for a very long time. Despite this, or maybe precisely because of this, it became kind of a trend—obviously pushed by marketing in big furniture stores—to refurnish your home every year and decorate it in a different style each season. On the other hand, the chair is a very iconic object that designers and artists have dealt with again and again. But which aspects are of particular interest to *you* in this art project or as an artist—not just in the object "chair," but in the handling of everyday objects in general? Art-historical references like the readymade or the objet trouvé come to mind. In your opinion, does THE FINAL BID suggest an alternative way of dealing with objects of consumption in our everyday lives?

MP: The concept of the ready-made is key to this project. Take Marcel Duchamp's urinal (*Fountain*, 1917), for example (fig. 4). If the artist's intention is that it's art, then it's art. The reversal of the urinal removes its original functionality. You can't use it as a urinal in the museum. You can only look at it as a form in its own right, as a sculpture. But what happens when you take Duchamp's urinal and stick it in a men's toilet? Is it still an artwork, or is it just a urinal?

Fig. 3:
Michael Pinsky, *Pollution Pods* (2017), Norway, mixed media installation, ø 18.03 m (overall)

Herein lies the fluid and somewhat ambiguous framing of our chair; we are removing it from its everyday context. It's suspended. You cannot sit on it. You can't even touch it. It is shown in the context of a museum. That is why the Draiflessen Collection is so relevant. It is not a contemporary art gallery, but a museum, which lends the chair a certain "gravitas." However, once it is bought, the buyer has the option to show the chair as a sculpture or sit on it again. So, the object has only a temporary existence as a sculpture. It is fun to play with this ambiguity. In Joseph Kosuth's *One and Three Chairs* (1965), there is a chair on the wall which you can't use (fig. 5). There is a photograph and a text, all exploring the value systems between the mediation of the chair, the object itself, and the function of language. Which has more importance? The word *chair*, the actual chair, or the photograph of the chair? The chair has already been used to develop fundamental conversations around conceptual art and semiotics, so it is a great object to reference. A bicycle doesn't have the same resonance. It doesn't ebb in and out of the art world. Neither do curtains.

THE FINAL BID depends entirely on the process of commercial exchange. It is certainly interesting that the historical affluence of Mettingen, Germany, was built upon its residents' ability to buy and sell. Originally a farming community, only the youngest in each family could inherit the farm, leaving the siblings to find other sources of income. This meant they needed to travel to Holland to work as farm laborers. However, over time they realized they could earn much more by selling cloth. By the nineteenth century, an incredible 70 percent of the working population in Mettingen were salesmen, including Clemens and August Brenninkmeijer who founded the company C&A.

BH: You already mentioned that you are interested in the shift in function of objects when they are removed from their previous home, temporarily transferred to a museum, and ultimately given a new home through the auction process. The fascinating thing is how value is attributed to objects that are not receiving much love and attention anymore. The museum is not actively making the chairs more valuable, since they are not refurbished, but because of the change of location people see them with different eyes, and suddenly a chair just standing in the basement becomes interesting again. Therefore I am particularly looking forward to observing the various forms of interaction with your work and the exhibition—not only the act of bidding on chairs, but especially the way visitors

interact with individual objects and how they ask questions and hold conversations. For example, true or invented stories can be told about the individual chairs. The exhibition thus adds a new stage to the chairs' "object biography." Every object goes through different stages—almost like life stages: from the idea, development, and production to the sale, use, and disposal. To what extent do these various stages play a role in THE FINAL BID?

MP: The stories associated with the chair are important. There are two different narratives I have in mind. There is a generic story of production. The raw materials being pulled out of the ground, the trees being chopped down, the chairs being designed, engineered, marketed, bought, and sold. Then there is a specific story for every chair. Which house did it come from? How old is it? Was it your grandmother's chair? Was it used for many years and then put in the basement? Has it got little scratches and nicks that tell a story? There's the journey from the domestic context to an institutional scenario. And the future journey of the chairs onward, back into a domestic environment, or another institution. This is something we will draw out in the installation. The first thing you see will be the work itself, a kinetic sculpture with objects going up and down. Then the second phase of the visit will explore the histories that travel with the chairs. This is equally important to me. When you start to pull out those narratives and think about what they mean. Most of the chairs entering the museum are unwanted and unloved. So, the question is: "At what point did they become unloved and why?" Probably because a slightly more modern, thus more fashionable, chair came to replace it. Or perhaps somebody died and you just inherited it with a whole load of furniture you haven't yet got around to selling.

**Fig. 4:**
Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain* (1917, replica 1964), porcelain, 360 × 480 × 610 mm, Tate, purchased with assistance from the Friends of the Tate Gallery 1999

I am interested in systems and superstructures. For this installation, I'm not making a sculpture out of chairs; I'm conceiving a framework in which chairs can be shown. A system of reuse. There are, of course, auctions real and virtual, but if they were truly effective, we would buy fewer new products. This is a question of both systems and culture. When I was a child, the dustman would collect your unwanted furniture, put it on the top of the dustbin lorry, and bring it back to their yard to sell it. The money they made from sales was put toward their union to subsidize worker's holidays. Then the Scouts used to come around door to door to pick up any unwanted goods for their jumble sales. Today, both selling and buying secondhand furniture is difficult unless you own a van. Often people buy new goods, just because they are delivered to their door the next day. There also used to be shops that sold

**Fig. 5:**
Joseph Kosuth, *One and Three Chairs* (1965), wooden folding chair (82 × 37.8 × 53 cm), photographic copy of a chair (91.5 × 61.1 cm), and photographic enlargement of a dictionary definition of a chair (61 × 61.3 cm), The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), Larry Aldrich Foundation Fund

your secondhand goods on commission, so you could actually make money from them. In Britain, such things hardly exist anymore. As we move toward ecological collapse, we hear lots of talk about what we're going to do, but the reality is that we consume more and reuse less. The systems of reuse I took for granted in the 1970s don't exist anymore. There will be similar stories in Germany that are both positive and negative, but I am sure that the ease of reuse has got much worse in every country over the last fifty years. We need to make it really easy for people to buy secondhand goods, and also to give away or sell secondhand goods. That means taking the goods from their door. How can someone who is old and frail get rid of their furniture or even their clothes? We don't want them to drive for miles, because that negates any value gained by reuse in the first place.

NR: I think it is obvious that for you the artwork is a way of bringing people into action, of activating them. The installation will only work if people bring us their chairs, and if they want to buy chairs. It is all about people becoming involved.

MP: This is true, and this is why this project is risky. When you build a sculpture, you can control its appearance. With THE FINAL BID, we don't know what chairs will be offered, so we don't know how the installation will look. As with John Cage's *systems of chance*, we have no idea how the arrangement of chairs will be *composed* (fig. 6). It's entirely dependent on the public, both to supply the exhibition and to engage with it, and this is unpredictable.

My ambition with THE FINAL BID is to encourage visitors to change their lifestyles by creating new habits. This is only symbolic at this point, but the installation demonstrates that new habits are possible. You establish new patterns of behavior through action, not by talking. Using David Kolb's learning model, firstly you experience the work, then you reflect on its form, then you consider the systems which underpin the work, and finally you actively engage in the process. Only at the point of action do you embed the learning. This relates to a project that I'm curating in King's Cross, called *The Natural Cycle*, by the artist Roadsworth (2022, fig. 7). It is a mini-village of roads which helps young children to learn how to cycle. It lets them build a sensibility around the roads; where you give way, how you cross the road, how you turn right, how you turn left, and how you deal with zebra crossings. It familiarizes them with the whole vernacular of the street, the road signage and markings, before they cycle on a real street. If you build certain habits as a child, you tend to keep those habits for the rest of your life. If you're used to being driven to school every day as a child, you will probably continue to drive. That's your norm. But if you cycle to school, you are likely to cycle as an adult. Thus, it is essential to establish those habits with children when they are young. This will have a significant impact on our climate. So, *The Natural Cycle* establishes patterns of behavior through action at a really young age.

In a similar way, THE FINAL BID helps children to reevaluate the assumption that new is good, and to consider whether new should be bad and old is good. I want children to ask their parents, "Why are you buying new chairs? The ones we have look perfectly alright to me. Are you buying new chairs just to show off to your friends?" Whether we buy old or new is a cultural, not a practical, decision.

BH: There again, the marketing aspect plays a big role. Nowadays, many products are labeled as sustainable and "green," and

at the same time the question arises as to what this actually means and according to which criteria the sustainability of products is evaluated. In many cases, one can certainly speak of greenwashing, that is, giving products an environmentally friendly and responsible image. After all, hardly anyone is aware that our daily consumption of products accounts for the largest share of our personal carbon footprint—and that does not include food, but only products such as clothing, decorative items, and technical devices. From this point of view, it is important not only to create an awareness of the ecological consequences of our daily consumption, but also to establish easily accessible information and assessment criteria so that everyone can make up their own minds. Basically, it's about doing the right thing and being clear about what the right thing is in order to preserve resources in the first place, right?

MP: Yes, the fundamental principles are to reuse and repair rather than buy new. Let us imagine your fridge breaks down and you need to get it repaired. It costs a hundred pounds to get it repaired, so you think, "Oh, it's an old fridge, it's not very efficient. I can get a triple A star fridge and feel really good about my carbon footprint. It's really easy to buy on Amazon and I don't need to deal with rogue tradesmen." The problem is that no one is thinking about the carbon cost of making the fridge from scratch and disposing of the old one. My guess is that the carbon cost of making a fridge outweighs the energy savings throughout its entire lifetime.

BH: This is an interesting example, as I recently saw on Instagram that it is supposedly better to buy a new fridge if the used one is very old. But how do I know that's true, and how can I take all factors into account and not just electricity consumption?

MP: We have the same dilemma with electric cars. People buying electric cars feel really good about themselves, but if that means making a new car from scratch, how many years do you need to run that car before its lower carbon footprint in terms of fuel consumption outweighs the carbon cost of its production? We were subsidized by governments to move from petrol cars to diesel cars due to the lower carbon output, only to find out later that we had been deceived by companies such as Volkswagen about their cars' toxic emissions. Then everybody switched back to petrol cars. All new cars, great for the car manufacturers creating massive new markets. Now we are transitioning to electric cars. Again, everyone is disposing of old cars and buying new cars, again fantastic for car manufacturers. The option of getting rid of the private car altogether is rarely considered. It is bad for the market. It is bad for capitalism. It is the same with computer monitors and TVs. Everyone replaced them with the flat-screen ones, and the "fat" old ones got thrown out even though they were still working. I've got speakers in my studio that I bought secondhand thirty-five years ago, and they still work perfectly. Technology is one of these areas where people have to buy again and again, as the software stops being supported and the interconnecting plugs become redundant. The manufacturing industry maintains a market where they actively make existing technology obsolete to sell new gadgets.

BH: And creating a sense of lack or need is obviously a big part of it, isn't it? That constant feeling of need. You need something, and you especially need something new. This feeling is not only conveyed through advertising and trends, but the need is artificially created by products—especially technical ones—breaking down after a certain time. I'm sure you know what this built-in limit is called . . .

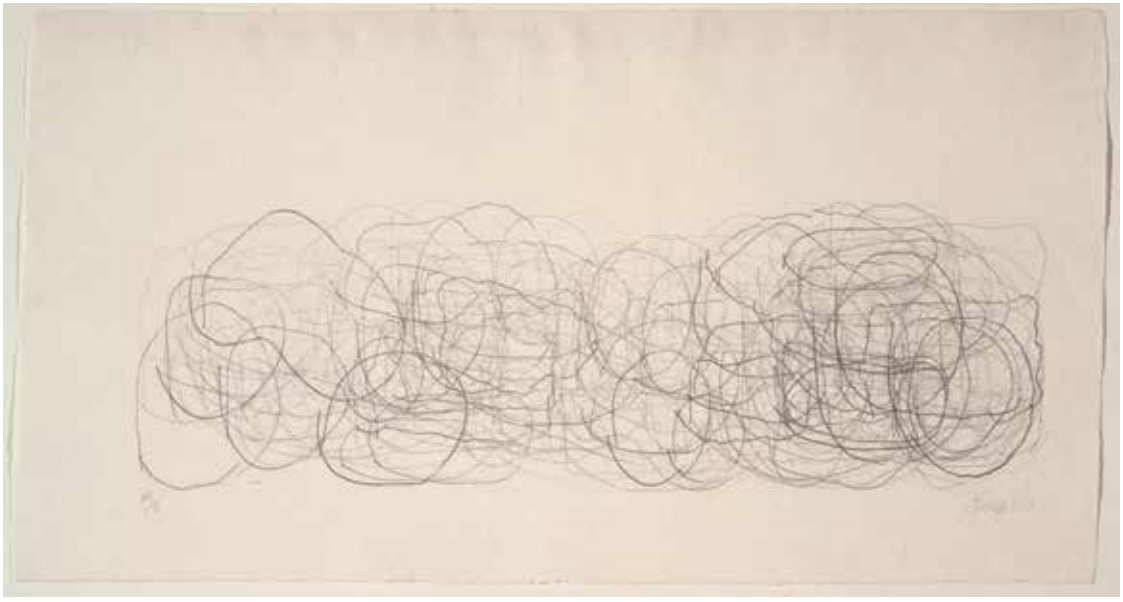


Fig. 6:
John Cage, *13 R/11 (where R = Ryoanji)* (1987), pencils on handmade Japanese paper, 255 × 488 mm, Städel Museum, Frankfurt am Main

MP: Built-in obsolescence.

BH: Yes, exactly. This also keeps consumption and the exchange of goods at a constant level, because people are forced to buy a new device when the old one doesn't last for decades but breaks down after a few years. But still, it's not easy to find information about the carbon footprint of the production—and also dismantling and recycling—of products like furniture. It is not that there is none—the demand for such information and data is actually growing—but there's really a gap in easily accessible information here. When talking about consumption, primarily food and living costs are considered in studies and surveys of $CO_2$ emissions. I find it interesting that everyday objects like furniture hardly get any attention.

MP: It is because these are not regular monthly purchases; people don't factor environmental impact into their thinking. However, these products are the low-hanging fruits in the carbon story. Obviously, we can change our diet, but we still need to eat. We can try to fly less and use public transport, but the system is geared against this. Flying is massively subsidized because airlines do not pay taxes on fuel, and many places are inaccessible without a car because public transport is so poor. However, keeping our old furniture or not remodeling our kitchen has no impact on the quality of our lives. We have control over this. We can buy secondhand. We can repair things rather than get rid of them. This is easy to do and significantly lowers our carbon footprint.

NR: And what about art? Are you convinced that artworks can bring people to change their habits?

MP: I'm doing what I can do within my profession as an artist. I won't have as much impact as a politician or a CEO of a big manufacturing company, but my art can symbolically demonstrate principles. Art is shown in a privileged framework. People go to galleries and museums to think and reflect. You're not grabbing them on the street, you're not in a newspaper full of adverts, you're not in a Twitter feed. The opening of the mind that happens in a gallery or museum is a unique moment that artists have access to. During these reflective moments, people can genuinely absorb information in a creative way, and

rethink how they are living their lives. So, artists do have an important role in terms of changing the culture around consumerism, because our currency is our culture.

BH: That is a very important point and an intriguing analogy. From a curatorial point of view, our approach from the very beginning was to pursue a thematic issue for the exhibition. The Draiflessen Collection is currently dealing intensively with questions of sustainability and thus also with the ideal of a green museum. The issues you explore in your work naturally fit in very well with this. Would you like to tell us more about which themes and questions are important to you and what interests you as an artist?

MP: Even as a child I took a keen interest in the environment before I knew anything about climate change. When I was about eight years old, the local museum hosted an exhibition sponsored by Scottish nuclear power. It was a pseudoscientific exhibition about nuclear reactors, demonstrating how good they were and how they gave us "free" energy. I was adamantly opposed to nuclear energy at that age. There were no sustainable solutions around waste disposal, and there still aren't. So, I visited the show with my friends and kept on asking the tour guides difficult questions. We must have looked incredibly precocious at the time, and we ended up getting thrown out. However, we kept on returning until they wouldn't even let us in the exhibition.

I was astutely aware, even as a child, that this exhibition was greenwashing nuclear power. Since then, I have continued with this activism. As an art student, my work was very much in the vein of British Land Art. I was inspired by artists such as Richard Long, Andy Goldsworthy, Kate Whiteford, and David Nash. My work focused on the countryside. But when I moved to London, I started to feel that this approach was a romantic irrelevance. The everyday environment in which most people live is urban, not rural.

I found it bizarre that people drove everywhere in London in cars. This was at a time when the Conservative Party had destroyed the public transport infrastructure. So, I started to map out central London by recording the time it took to drive, cycle, walk, take the bus and the Tube. I designed temporal maps comparing the modes of transport to show how long it took to drive and how ridiculous it was (fig. 8). I showed these hybrid map/prints in a gallery within The Economist building in central London. The exhibition led to a lively discourse around why the existing communications systems promoted the use of the car and the Tube, rather than walking and cycling. In the center of London, riding the Tube can take longer than walking, because you need to descend far underground just to get to the platform. To make the right choices we need to have the right information. At that time there was no data about how long it took you to get from A to B. There were simply conventional maps in a book, the A to Z, or the Tube map which disregards both time and distance. Of course, Harry Beck's Tube map is a fantastic piece of design and is easy to use, but it is also a potent and deceptive marketing device (fig. 9).

I explored whether we could change the way people behave with a new data stream based on time. Nowadays we have GPS on our phones, so we can make those comparisons really easily, but back in 1998, this was really difficult to do. Even with GPS, it is only recently that Google and Apple maps have included the bicycle as an option, and this option is hidden so far behind the car, public transport, and taking a taxi that you have to scroll left to

see it. Why is the car always the first option when it is such a dysfunctional way to travel through the city? Wouldn't it be better if they listed the options in terms of speed, with the fastest option first? In the city, the bicycle would leave all the other options well behind.

BH: Absolutely. An exciting thought—especially as a cyclist.

MP: The GPS systems only show you how long it takes to drive from A to B, but not how long it takes to park. With all the data they collect in the cloud, this would be easy to provide.

BH: I find it interesting that people are unaware of how much time is actually spent looking for a parking space, although there are even statistical surveys on this. In Germany, drivers spend an average of forty-one hours a year looking for a parking space—that's almost two days![2]

MP: This shows again how all of these things are interlinked. The data exists, but the data is manipulated or obscured to encourage consumption. So, we need art to provide the counternarratives. We live in a neoliberal economy that promotes consumption. Governments are always trying to increase their gross domestic product. Art offers a rare opportunity to counteract that political force, because the narrative that economic growth is good is being sold to us every day. Governments will not promote degrowth, and of course manufacturers will not support this, as they see it as economic suicide. So, who's going to do it? Institutions such as museums need to host artists who question this current "consume until you eat yourself" crisis that we're in.

BH: And there we are again with the change in human behavior and the need for a sustainable lifestyle. Because at the moment, Germans are consuming the resources of almost three earths on a global scale. Anyone can see at a glance that this is too much: we only have one earth. It is as simple as that.[3] Obviously, a participatory aspect is an important part of your artistic practice. Instead of just researching data for your works of art, you are pursuing a more collective way of working with people; maybe you raise a question that frames an art project, but people will create the data while interacting within your framework. So it's more like creating a new narrative together in a way.

MP: It is. People are implicit in this narrative; whether I can change things or not is another matter—one can only try. Some of the visitors to my show at The Economist told me that they would return home a different way from the way they had arrived. That is behavioral change, which is something that is really important in my work. It is behavioral change through action. Firstly, you have to change people's perceptions; then they need to change their behavior through changing their actions. This is one of the goals of my work. But, of course, I never want to undermine the aesthetic qualities of my work. I am playing that very fine line between something that is visually arresting and important within the cannon of art history, and something which changes people's behavior. The work could easily slip off the line and become solely propaganda. Maintaining a strong visual sensibility is essential to carrying the narrative of the artwork. It is the powerful visual moment that engages people in the first place. It is what lures people in. Then the narrative is revealed.

BH: To conclude our conversation, allow me to ask a somewhat heretical question: What is actually the artwork in this exhibition? Is it the idea or the installation? And what about the visitors' additions?

MP: The framing of the installation within the museum space clearly articulates it as an artwork. This question is more challenging when my installations are in the public realm, where the context is more ambiguous. *Engaged practice* and *relational aesthetics* are familiar terms within the sphere of professional art, but not for the general public. However, the journey to the exhibition space at the Draiflessen Collection—through the garden, down the ramp, through the shop, up the steps—provides an expansive threshold which is telling the visitor, "You are going to see an artwork." So, by the time they get up those steps, they are primed to experience art, even if they are looking at their old chair which was in the cellar a couple of weeks before. Again, this goes back to Duchamp, the framing of the object and the intention of the artist. I have no doubt that this is an artwork. For me, what makes THE FINAL BID intriguing are the engagement and narrative aspects of the work, beyond its physical manifestation. Just hanging a bunch of chairs on wires isn't interesting to me. It's everything else that makes the artwork compelling.

Fig. 7:
Roadsworth, *Natural Cycle* (2022), in-situ installation, stencil technique and paint on asphalt, 50 × 30 m, King's Cross, London

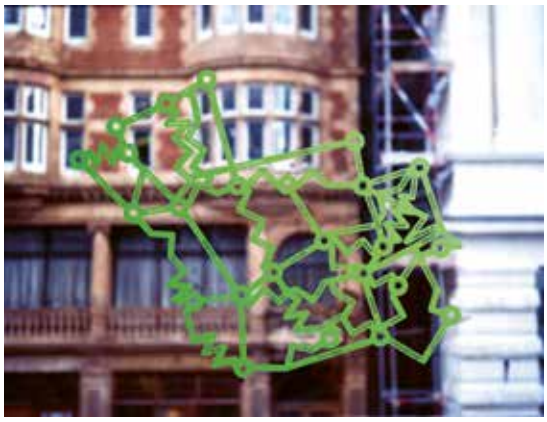


Fig. 8:
Michael Pinsky, *In Transit* (Bike Map) (2000), vinyl on glass, 180 × 100 cm

Fig. 9:
Henry ("Harry") C. Beck, *Pocket Underground map* (1933), paper, 128 × 155 mm, London Transport Museum

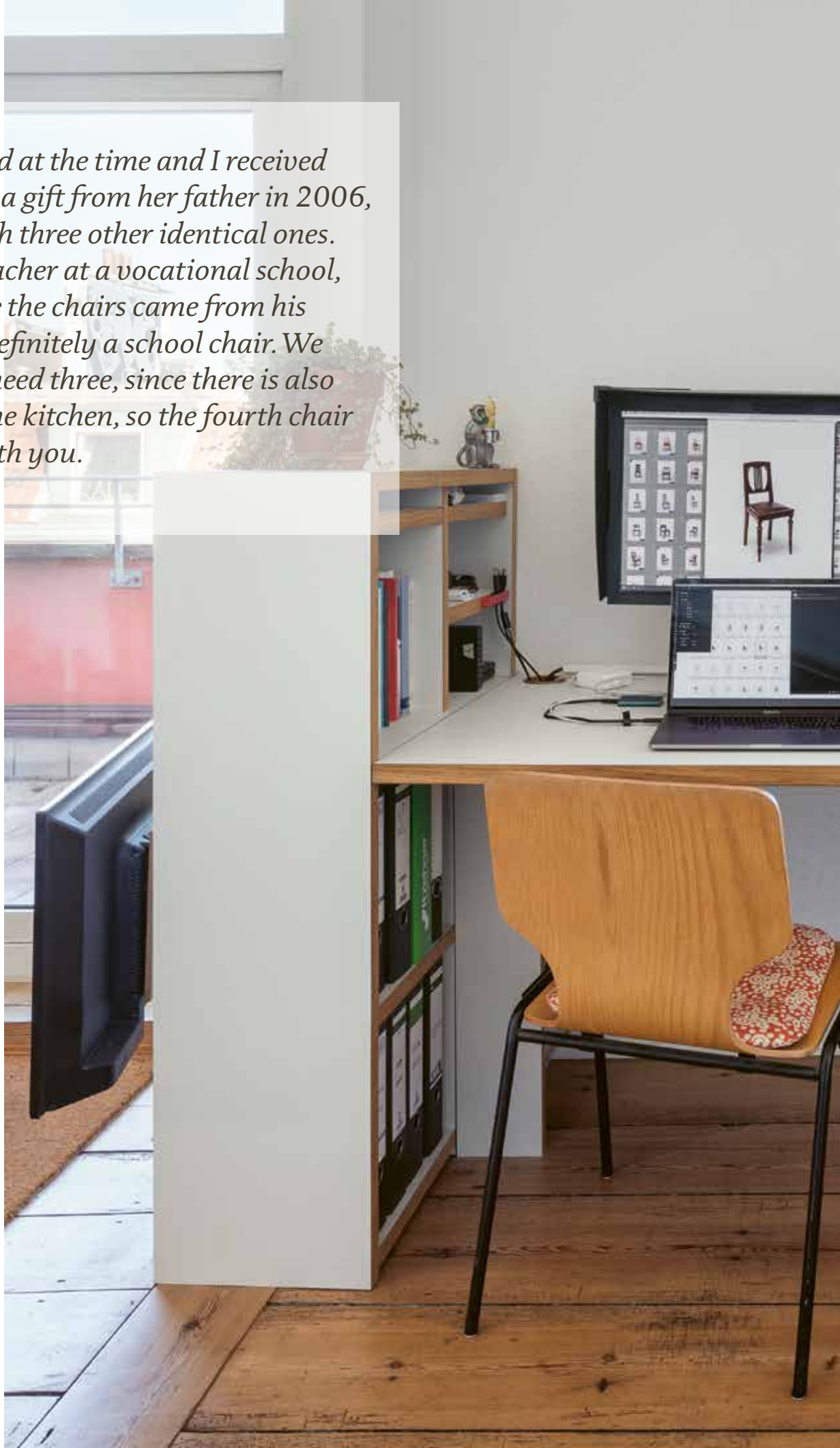


1 Climart, https://www.climart.info/ (all URLs accessed in August 2022).

2 Hedda Nier, "So lange sind die Deutschen auf Parkplatzsuche," *Statista*, August 2, 2017, https://de.statista.com/infografik/10532/so-lange-sind-die-deutschen-auf-parkplatzsuche/.

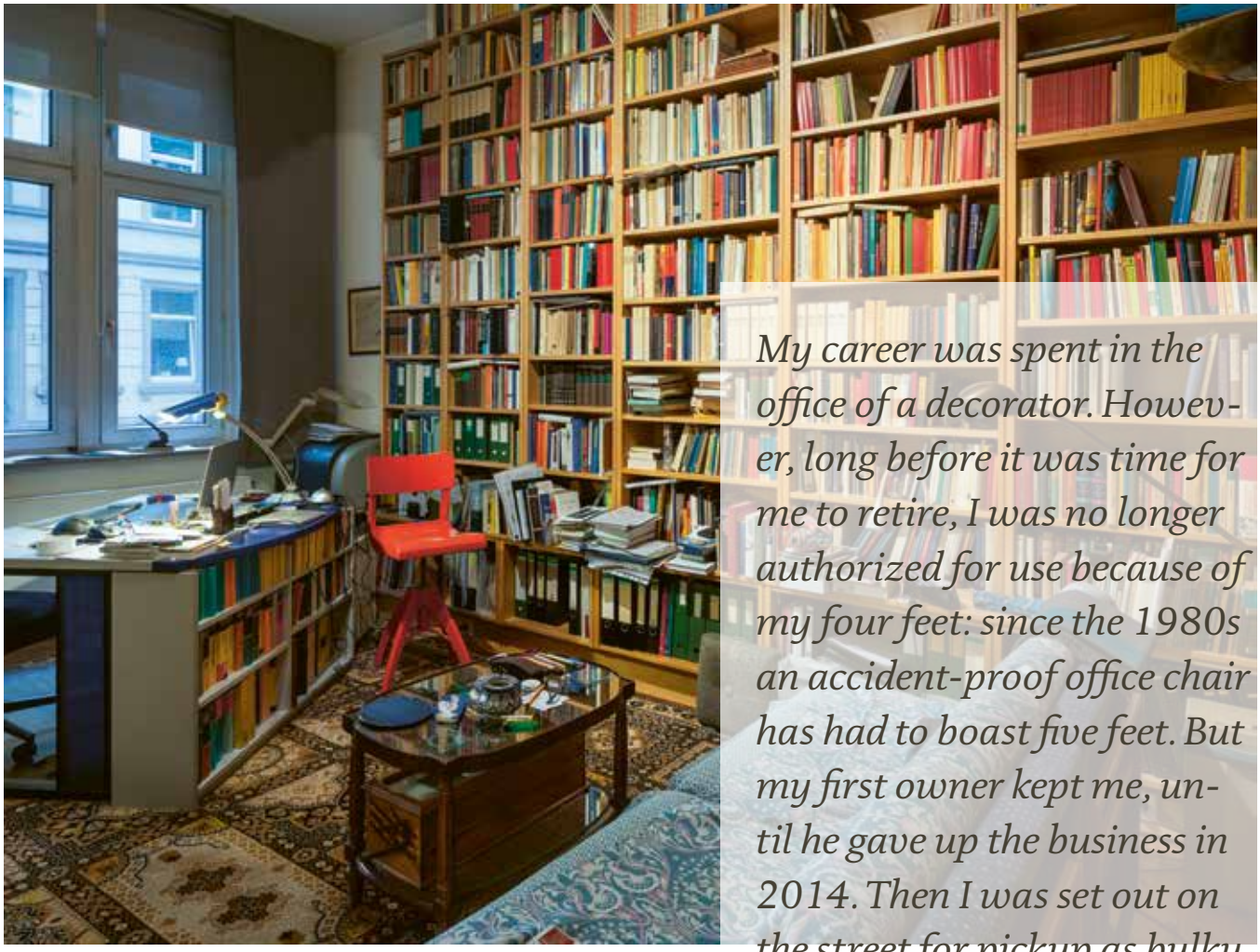
3 "UNICEF-Bericht: Deutsche verbrauchen fast drei Erden," *Tagesschau*, May 24, 2022, https://www.tagesschau.de/ausland/unicef-ressourcen-verbrauch-101.html.

*My girlfriend at the time and I received this chair as a gift from her father in 2006, together with three other identical ones. He was a teacher at a vocational school, and I believe the chairs came from his school. It's definitely a school chair. We only really need three, since there is also a bench in the kitchen, so the fourth chair ended up with you.*



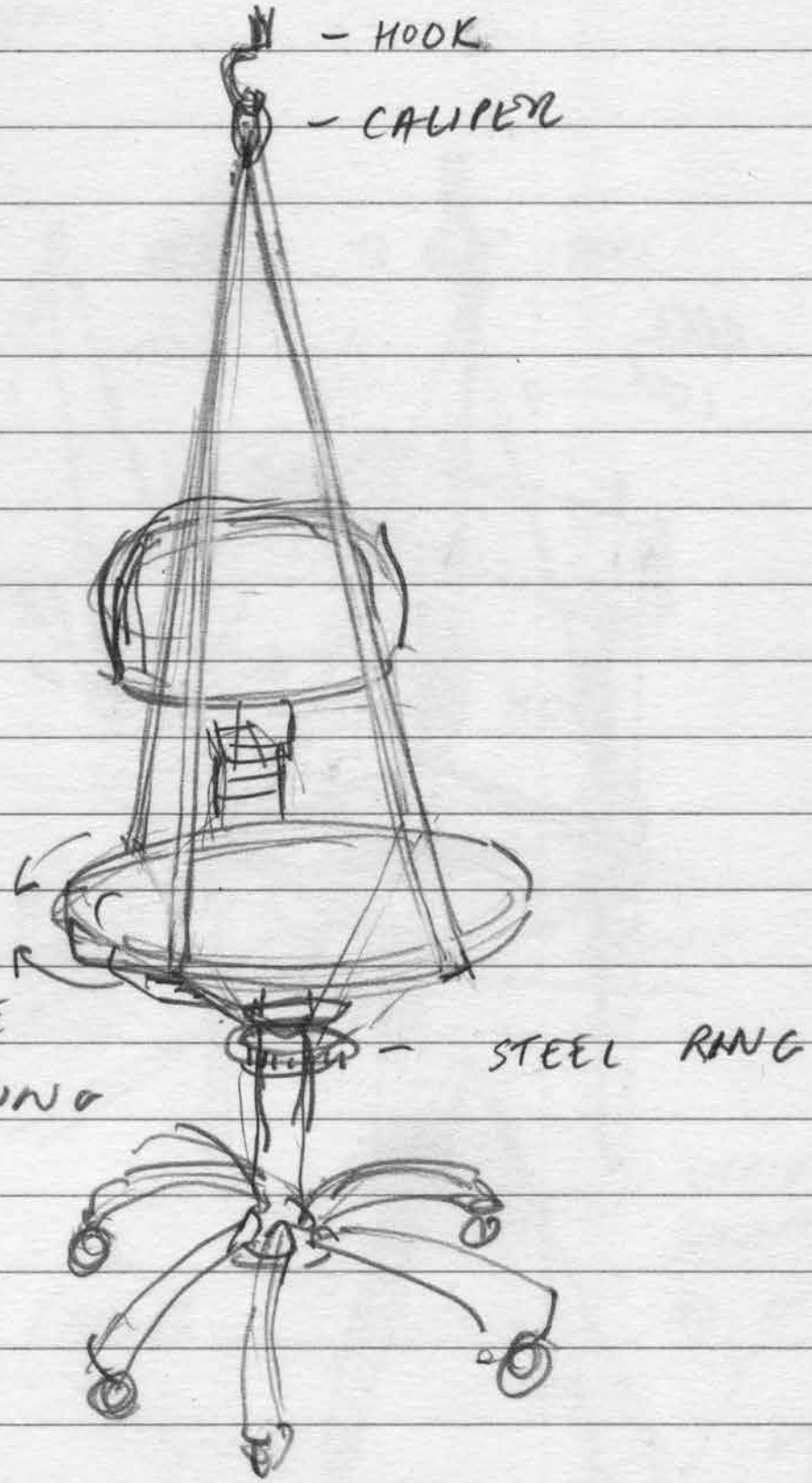
*The chair used to be in the dining room, together with other chairs. I've had it for so many years. I think we've owned these chairs for 30 or 40 years at least. It was the first suite we bought back when the kids had just left home. I think we had six of these chairs back then, and also a large matching bench—so there was plenty of room for the whole family when they stopped by for a warm meal on the weekend, or let's say on Sundays. I still have two of these chairs; one was sitting next to the old stove and the other is upstairs in the guest bedroom.*

*This chair was found in the eBay classifieds, purchased in Wallenhorst in 2018, and then used for guests.*



*My career was spent in the office of a decorator. However, long before it was time for me to retire, I was no longer authorized for use because of my four feet: since the 1980s an accident-proof office chair has had to boast five feet. But my first owner kept me, until he gave up the business in 2014. Then I was set out on the street for pickup as bulky waste. A friendly neighbor rescued me and decided to give me a coat of red paint. The master painter took his job very seriously and delivered a masterpiece.*


*About the green chair we can tell you that it was one of our kitchen chairs around the mid- to late 1970s. There were no real "fitted kitchens" back then, but rather individual cupboards, a stove, and a free-standing refrigerator. This chair was always positioned next to the fridge. Every morning at 11 a.m. my grandpa would come into the house from working in the garden, sit down on this chair, and drink a dram of his Langemeyer grain schnapps. After a little break, he would keep gardening until it was time for a warm lunch.*




OFFICE CHAIR

Stefan Spitzer

# what is a chair?



I asked 100 people: What is a chair? Seventy-six said a chair is a seat. Twelve said a chair is a status symbol. Five designers said a chair was a sketch in their drawer, and four people said a chair can also make good firewood in hard times. The remaining three people told me to mind my own business.

You might have guessed it—I didn't really ask 100 people. I'm not Steve Harvey, after all, and this isn't the American TV game show *Family Feud*. Nevertheless, I imagine the results of a survey of 100 people on the subject of chairs to be something along these lines. Each of us has our own thoughts on what exactly constitutes a chair. And your ideas probably coincide largely with mine. If we disagree, we can always consult the Cambridge Dictionary. It describes a chair as "a seat for one person that has a back, usually four legs, and sometimes two arms."[1] Wonderful! Finally a definition! But this, too, can rapidly reach its limits, as becomes clear, for example, when we look at the *Panton Chair* (1960) by the Danish designer Verner Panton (fig. 1). We would probably all agree that it is a chair, even if it doesn't entirely meet the criteria of the Cambridge Dictionary. So what is a chair? Is it really just a piece of furniture to sit on, or does it serve other purposes?



**Fig. 1:**
*Panton Chair* (1960/68), design by Verner Panton, varnished plastic, 82 × 50 × 55 cm, Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe Hamburg

From *form follows vanity* to *form follows intended place of use*, and from *form follows comfort* all the way to *form follows cruelty*—for every idea there is a corresponding chair design.

Let's start with *form follows vanity*. In 1645, when high-ranking delegations from the parties to the Thirty Years' War met in Osnabrück and Münster to negotiate the end of this terrible conflict, it was first necessary to satisfy all the egos in attendance before the search for a European solution could begin. This required a newly developed diplomatic protocol. The principal envoys of the Electors were thus allowed to sit in armchairs, while the secondary envoys had to content themselves with chairs or benches with backrests.[2] As this example from history makes clear: sitting is power!

Over the centuries, the act of sitting—even on unusual furniture—has become more and more democratized. Today you can even have a lavish and comfortable throne designed and built for you, without needing to hold a God-given office to do so. It is a consideration that seems quite logical given the amount of time we spend seated. On average, Germans spend 7.5 hours a day sitting.[3] Is the worry that we will give up our upright gait in the future, and develop into *homo sedens*, therefore justified? Things are probably not quite that bad yet. Nevertheless, sitting is a cause of concern for health-care systems around the world. Hence, we find ever more practical guides which promote physical exercises that we can do—surprise, surprise—while sitting down.



**Fig. 2:**
Otto Wagner, *Armchair for the Austrian Postal Savings Bank "Model No. 6516"* (1905), directorate, beech, aluminum, velour cover, 79.5 × 56 × 55.5 cm, Vitra Design Museum, Weil am Rhein

But let's move on to the idea that *form follows intended place of use*. In the early twentieth century, the Austrian architect Otto Wagner designed not only the new headquarters of the Postsparkasse (Postal Savings Bank) in Vienna, but also all of its interior furnishings. He thereby made conscious use of materials to define hierarchical structures within the building. The standard chair designed by Wagner for the Postsparkasse was manufactured by Thonet as model no. 6516—a model, by the way, that can easily cost several hundred euros today, even in its plainest specification. By means of changes in the materials employed, Wagner created subtle but significant hierarchical gradations between the chairs. Thus, the chairs in the directors' suites were made of dark-stained beech wood, with aluminum fixtures and sleeves on the arms and feet, and a seat upholstered in velour. By contrast, the basic version for the back offices, although it likewise featured the aluminum fixtures and sleeves, had an unpadded seat of perforated plywood (figs. 2, 3).[4] In this case, too, we can say that sitting illustrated power.

In our own day, the maxim *form follows comfort* is increasingly important. While our forebears spent their days searching for food and water or laboriously tilling the soil, in today's industrial societies more and more people have office jobs. In 2018, office workers made up 36.7 percent of the German labor force.[5] All of these people need chairs. It is not surprising, therefore, that the office furniture market represents the most important area of chair design.[6] In order to minimize the health issues that result from sitting for extended periods, the designers of office chairs endeavor to arrive at an ergonomically ideal solution that provides the spine with the best possible support. Such a chair should of course still be soft—and is therefore available in the desired padded upholstery.

We shall close with the notion that *form follows cruelty*. In 1888, Harold P. Brown, Frederick Peterson, and Alfred Southwick developed the electric chair. It was used for the first time in August 1890, and the three men won acclaim for their *chair design*. Indeed, this invention was considered a humane, civilized, and above all modern means of executing prisoners. So you can even die sitting.

All of the chairs mentioned above, including this macabre example, make one thing clear: design processes are dependent on external factors. What at one period in the past may have been considered a sensible solution can appear exactly the opposite to us today. Design is thus always a mirror of the society associated with it, and of that society's needs. Some would even go so far as to say that a chair's design reflects the designer's world view and their notions of an ideal society.[7] So what is a chair? Why not have your own go at finding an answer to this question and take a look around our exhibition space. Perhaps your ideal chair is awaiting you there?

**Fig. 3:**
Otto Wagner, *Armchair for the Austrian Postal Savings Bank "Model No. 6516"* (1905), beech, aluminum, plywood, 77.5 × 55.5 × 56 cm, Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe Hamburg



1 See the definition of "chair" in the Cambridge Dictionary, https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/chair (all URLs accessed in August 2022).

2 Niels F. May, *Zwischen Fürstlicher Repräsentation und Adliger Statuspolitik: Das Kongresszeremoniell bei den westfälischen Friedensverhandlungen* (Ostfildern: Thorbecke, 2016), p. 167.

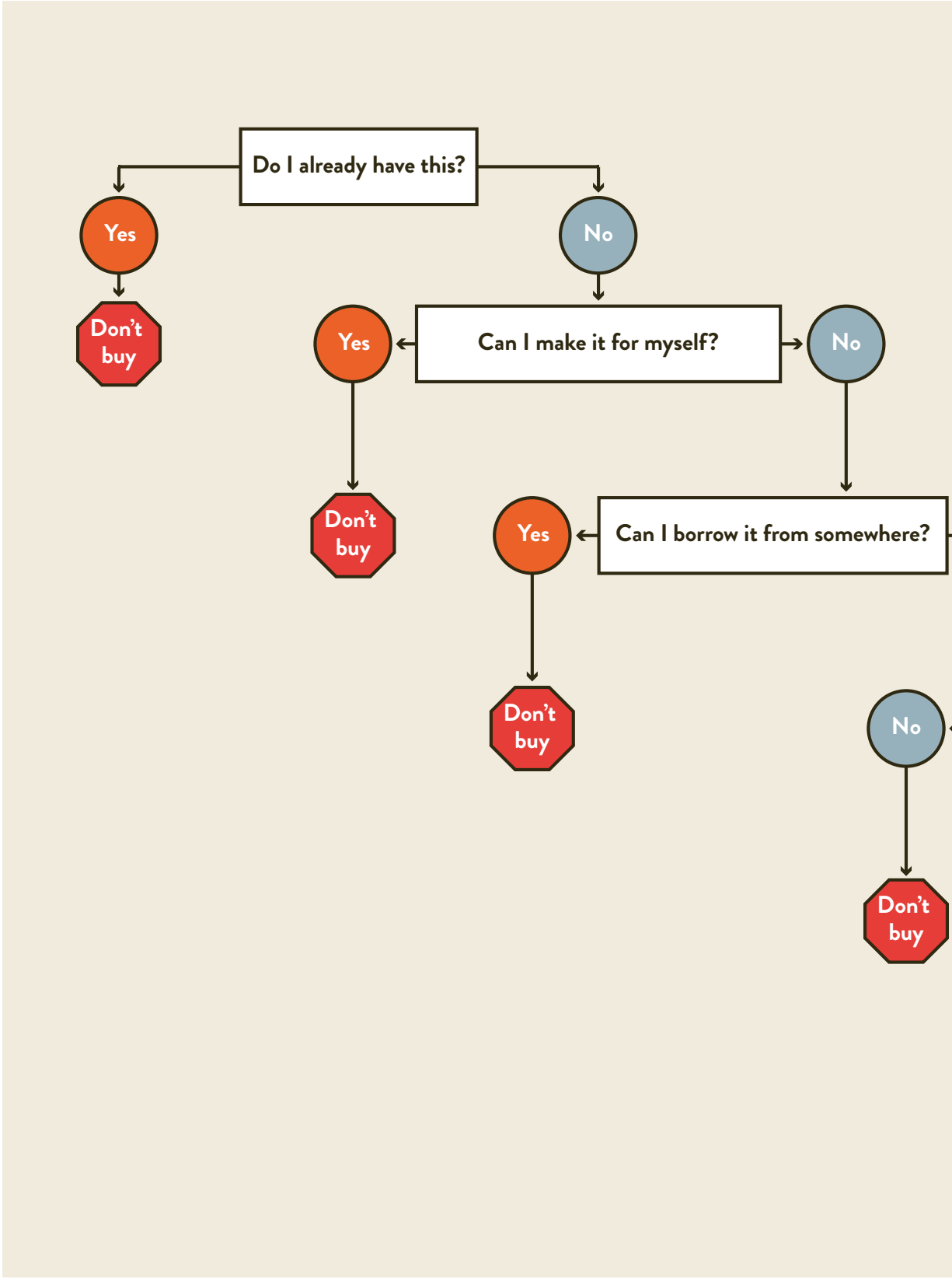
3 Egbert Maibach-Nagel, "Sitzen geblieben – DKV Gesundheitsreport 2015," *Deutsches Ärzteblatt* 112, no. 5 (2015), p. 1.

4 See the press pack issued by the former WAGNER:WERK museum upon its opening in 2005, pp. 15–16, https://web.archive.org/web/20070927040834/http://www.bawagpsk.com/__Contentpool/UeberUns/Presse/Presse__Aktuell/Pressemappe__WagnerWerk__pdf,property=Data.pdf.

5 Andrea Hammermann and Michael Voigtländer, "IW-Trends 3/2020: Bürobeschäftigte in Deutschland," *Vierteljahresschrift zur empirischen Wirtschaftsforschung*, vol. 47 (Cologne: Institut der deutschen Wirtschaft, 2020), p. 66.

6 Charlotte Fiell and Peter Fiell, *1000 Chairs* (Cologne, 2010), p. 9.

7 Ibid.

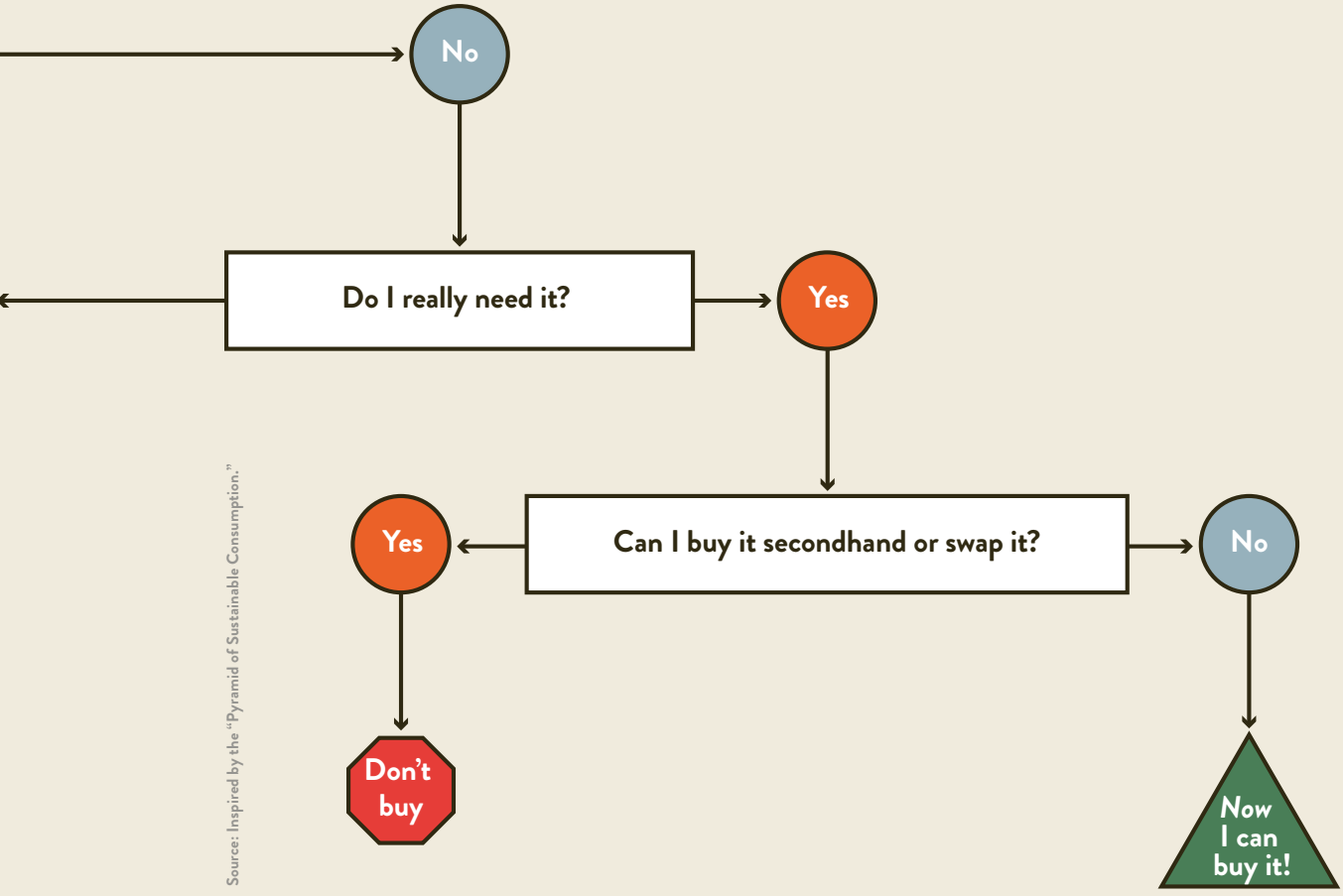



From: *Wie viel Regenwald passt auf dieses Brot? Erstaunliche Grafiken über Klima und Umwelt*, Copyright © 2021 TESSLOFF VERLAG, Nuremberg

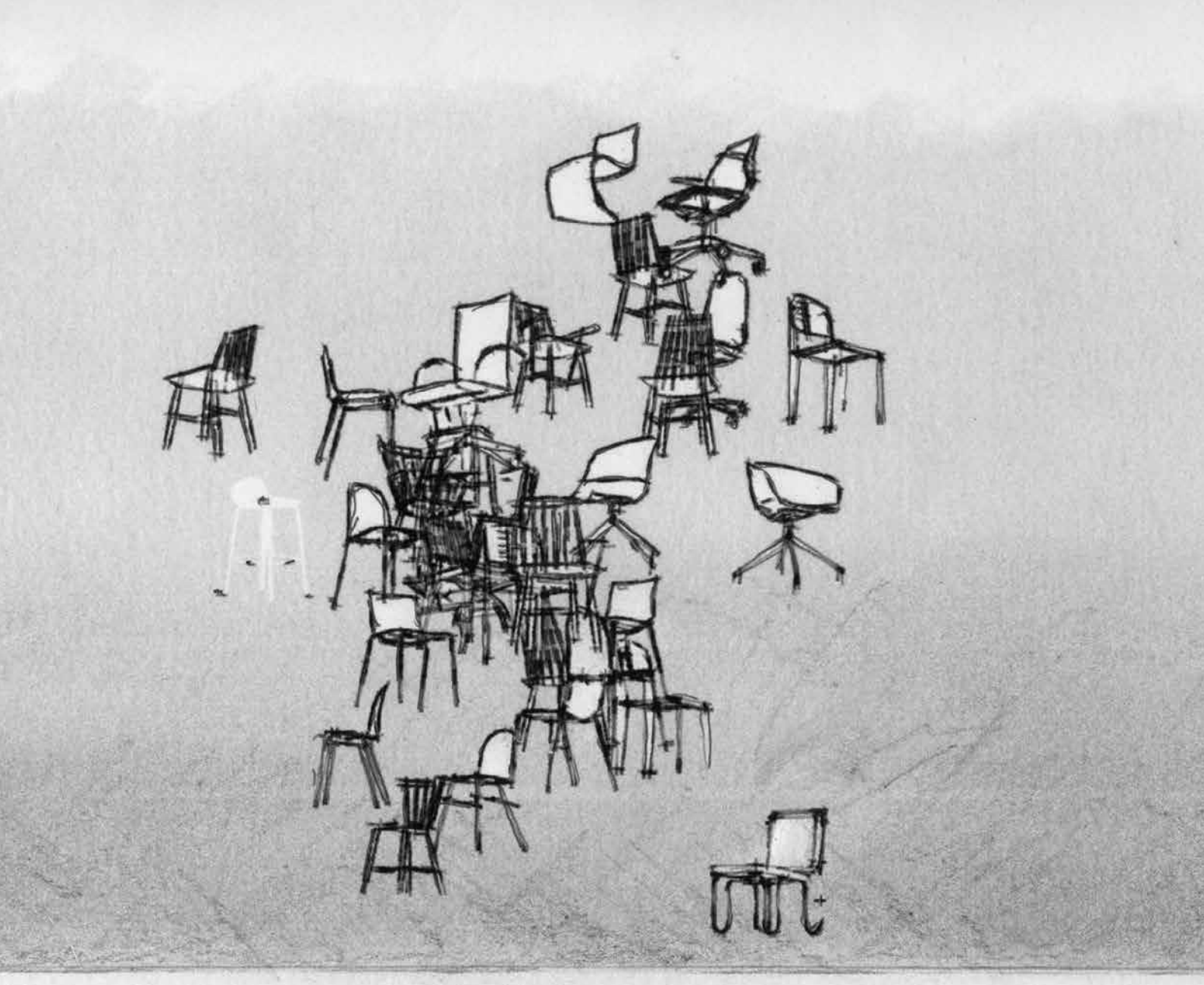
# FIRST, THINK ABOUT IT, *THEN* GO TO THE CHECKOUT

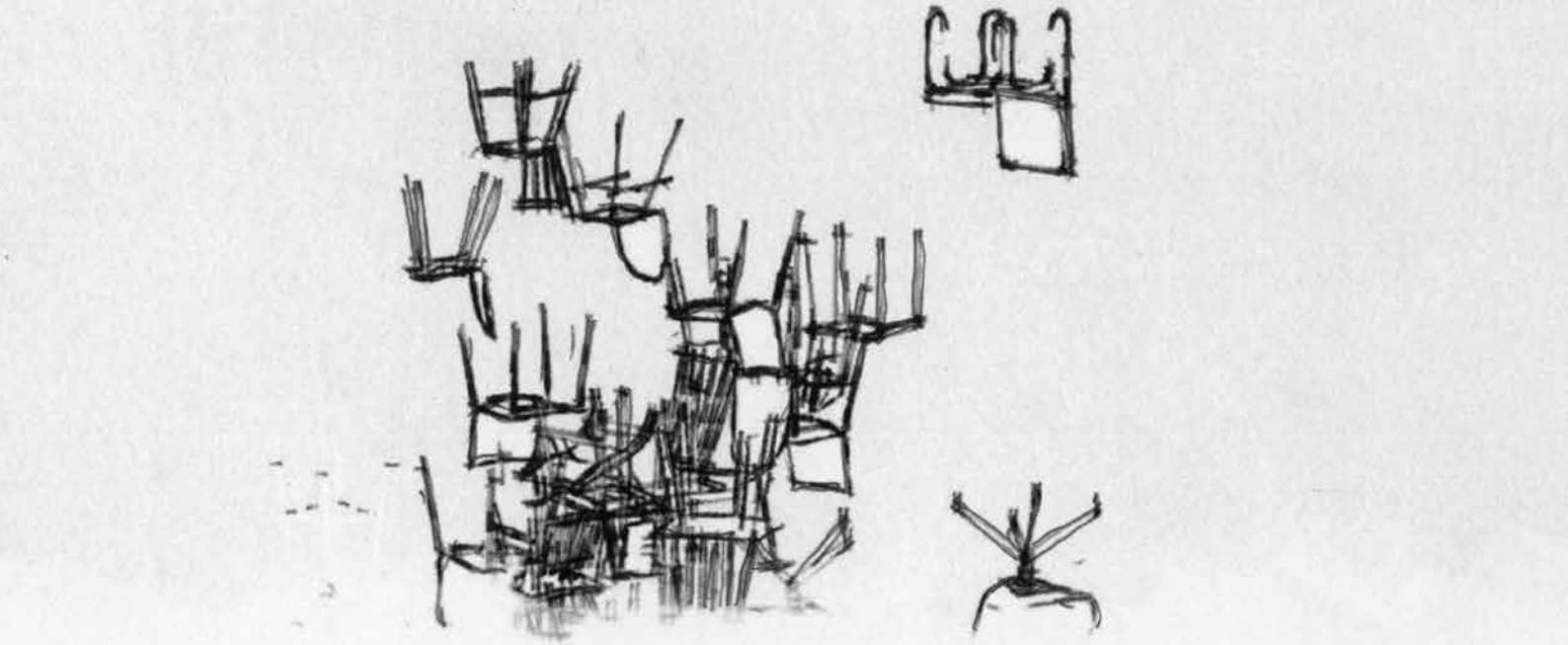
## Before you buy something new, ask yourself these five questions.

It's such fun buying new things with your pocket money or birthday money! But you often buy things you don't really need. So when you're in a shop, or when you're logged on to an online store, it's always good to ask yourself these questions before you go to the checkout; it saves money and protects the environment. And remember, a lot of things you buy new make you happy for a short while at first, but a few days later they are often lying unused in a corner. If this has never happened to you, you should have a medal for intelligent shopping!




Source: Inspired by the "Pyramid of Sustainable Consumption."





Florian Andrews and Laura Sommer

# the cycle of things



## Introduction

Art can interrogate society and challenge the status quo. Today's environmental and climate-change art,[1] which has its origins in the Land Art and Earth Art of the 1960s and 1970s[2] and shares the same concerns, takes up themes such as environmental pollution, the use of land and soils, and the impacts of political decisions. Well-known representatives of this movement then and now include Helen and Newton Harrison, Joseph Beuys, Agnes Denes, Olafur Eliasson, and the art collective Cape Farewell.[3] These artists have had a political agenda, and a wish to effect, through their art, a change in society. To this end, they often choose natural materials, play with the tides, seasons, and natural decay of their artworks, and assign the public an active role.

Joseph Beuys, who was himself a founding member of Germany's Green Party, went particularly far when it came to public involvement. In Beuys's understanding, anything that could be molded and shaped to convey a message—including felt, fat, and words—was "material."[4] This led him to declare as art all everyday activities and all participation in democratic processes that shaped society. With the concept of "social sculpture," he described the development of our society as a great, ultimate, but never-ending "ecological *Gesamtkunstwerk*," to which every citizen could contribute as an artist.[5]

Michael Pinsky's new work can likewise be considered from the perspective of social sculpture. The involvement of the public in the process is imperative and demands psychological skill, which Pinsky has woven artistically into his work. Within the framework of THE FINAL BID, people supply chairs for which spectators can place bids. Through their bids, the sculpture not only takes on physical shape but also assumes an enhanced significance. The bidders increase the value of the individual chairs and in so doing alter their position in the display. This generates a dynamic movement, which in turn leads to chairs rising to prominence and being seen in a new light. By involving the chairs in the installation, the artist awakens a (fresh) desire for objects that, for various reasons (of fashion or need, for example), are never or rarely used by their owners, or have been kept merely as accessories. This desire brings us to a concept playing a steadily growing role in the contemporary discussion around the ecological and social transformation of our current models of production and consumption: the circular economy.

**The Economy Discovers Circularity**

Grandpa's armchair or the bench in grandma's kitchen—many of us may recall such objects when we think back to the seating furnishing the homes of older generations. These items are made special by the fact that they are closely bound up with personal memories and experiences, and with people and families. Should the question then arise of what to do with the armchair or bench when its owner has gone, emotion always plays a part in the answer: if at all possible, they should remain in the family as a reminder of that individual.

Surely what works in the case of objects handed down within families should also be possible elsewhere? Specifically, passing on products and objects for further (or changed) use. That would indeed be good—but it is not the case. Globally speaking, less than 10 percent of all the materials and resources we use, and the products we manufacture,[6] experience a second or third life cycle.[7] That is too little. Especially given that the planet's resources are finite and that we are repeatedly overshooting the amount the Earth is able to regenerate.[8] Nor, sadly, are these findings new: warnings have been sounded by research, society, and business for more than fifty years.[9] Fifty years—that's almost two generations of business leaders, scientists, politicians, decision-makers, et cetera, who could have *flicked the switch*. But that hasn't happened.

When answering the question of why that is, we quickly come to realize that planning and designing more than a single life cycle for things is not so easy. There are many reasons for this, of which perhaps the most obvious is: Who is actually responsible for recycling an object so that it can embark on a second life cycle? Is it the manufacturer? Or the owner? Or even a third party or institution?

In the case of private cars, for example, the procedure is clear: the owner sells the vehicle either to a dealer or on the used car market. The tasks involved are defined: first offer and sell, then officially transfer ownership and hand over. The same applies to bottles with a deposit on them: empty bottles are either returned to a deposit-refund machine or put outside for curbside collection.[10]

In both instances, not only are there clear rules as to who should take what action and how, but another crucial dimension to the transition to a second life cycle is also present: a financial incentive. Although this incentive may be low in the case of a

Fig. 1:
Joseph Beuys planting the first tree of the *Action 7,000 Oaks* at the edge of Friedrichsplatz in front of the Museum Fridericianum on March 16, 1982, documenta archiv, Kassel

Fig. 2:
View of Bodelschwinghstrasse after the trees were planted in 1983, documenta archiv, Kassel

Fig. 3:
View of the outdoor artwork *7,000 Oaks* by Joseph Beuys (d7) in 2021, documenta archiv, Kassel

deposit on a bottle, it is an integral part of everyday life (and often even of daily routine). When it comes to selling a car, the financial incentive is high, but one-off. To put it another way, if the recycling route is not clearly regulated and is not backed up by a financial (or other) benefit, the situation quickly turns into a game of Old Maid: get rid of the responsibility as fast as you can. The result: products and materials that are far too good to throw away end up in garbage cans or gather dust at the back of the garage. Michael Pinsky's exhibition starts from this point, too. With THE FINAL BID, he creates a particular form of incentive to fetch such objects back out again: through their participation, the chairs can—but do not have to—be elevated to *art*.

If the Draiflessen Collection can do this, then cannot other stakeholders, such as commerce, economics, politics, and so forth, also do the same? What is the situation in businesses, in the retail trade, in industry, and in the manufacturing and processing sectors? What stimuli are triggering changes in companies in favor of circularity? What is causing the move from a linear to a circular economy? There are three main driving forces, which in practice are not always clearly distinguishable.

Firstly, companies make internal decisions to develop or establish cycles. Often prompted by a mixture of cost considerations and engineering ingenuity, such solutions are frequently characterized by a focus on the company's own strengths and areas of expertise. The Schoeller paper mill in Osnabrück, for example, invested in closed-loop water cycles as early as the 1970s and 1980s.[11]

Secondly, and this is by no means uncommon, there is an *intrinsic* motivation to do business in a sustainable manner. With a view to the planet and the related bleak

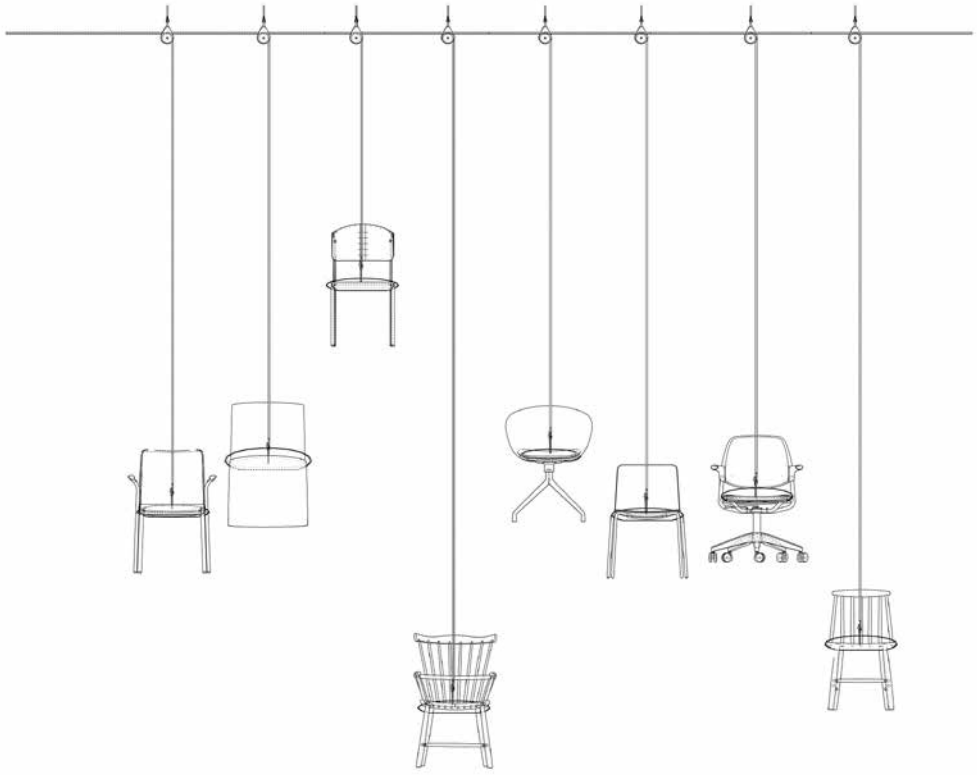


Fig. 4:
Michael Pinsky, *The Final Bid* (2022), digital drawing

future scenarios, senior management decides that it wants to contribute in its own way toward a world worth living in. The company takes the initiative by itself and only then informs its customers. One example is the Hellmann logistics company, which began measuring $CO_2$ emissions in its transport chain at a very early date. It has now developed a system with which it can calculate the exact $CO_2$ footprint of each shipment, whether a container or an individual consignment, and at least offset these emissions.[12]

The third driver of change comes from outside, in the form of external pressure from the market and consumers, and as a result of new legislation.[13] Pressure from the market means: consumers are demanding more sustainable goods and services. They expect, for example, that products can be repaired—an option that Apple has recently introduced with its Self Service Repair program.[14]

The most effective lever for transformation within business, however, remains legislation. And with regard to facilitating the transition to a circular economy, these legislative measures are very extensive. The European Commission is working on a raft of projects to introduce Europe-wide legislation,[15] and numerous initiatives to standardize the field of the circular economy in manufacturing and commerce are underway in Germany and abroad.[16] Companies are thus seeing the arrival, from multiple directions, of requirements that will impact the processes of the linear economy at times very extensively.

**What Does a Circular Economy Mean for the Economy and for People?**

The exhibition THE FINAL BID shows a conventional model of how products and objects (or materials) enter upon a second life cycle: at the end of their first life cycle, chairs are passed on to new households

or institutions via an auction or other platforms. Chairs are gratifying products in this context,[17] because they are robust, stable, and easy to use, and because we can usually see immediately what purpose and *service* we can expect them to fulfill—a desk chair is plainly not the same as a reading chair. For the exhibition, the chairs were simply spruced up with a duster; they did not need to be refurbished or taken apart and reassembled.

The situation is more complex when it comes to objects or products that cannot be assessed so clearly and whose operation cannot be judged *from the outside*, as in the case of electrical appliances. Is the item still in good working order? How much life does it have left? And, will my requirements be met if I take over a device, such as a computer, secondhand? To this end, the economy is starting to respond with initiatives and offerings. Common to these is the fact that they answer the question of how to ensure future uses for their products right at the start of the development phase. In other words, at the moment when decisions are made about the design of products and offerings, the focus falls upon what features are necessary for further life cycles.[18] Hand in hand with this goes the question of which business models suit these future-use design features.[19] It is one thing to sell chairs at auction to new owners. Putting technical products into new hands, however, is much more complex and thus a completely different affair. Who is responsible for ensuring that the device is in the best possible condition? When is the right time for this? And if a used computer needs an overhaul or upgrade, who finances this? These are all issues that very quickly lead us to ask whether the current system of *supply—demand—purchase—transfer* can meet these new demands at all. Do we not need new agreements between manufacturers and buyers?[20] And likewise between businesses? The answer is "yes," and they are already being discussed.[21]

### The Circular Society as a *Gesamtkunstwerk*

If all businesses developed cycles, and if customers accepted these new offerings, would the goal be achieved? Would we then be living in a circular economy? The question arises because companies operate in mutual competition and, to be able to offer circularity, need expertise, processes, and partnerships that in many cases are simply not available. For customers, too, the circular economy will demand more than simply separating their household waste or feeding empty containers into deposit-return machines.

Businesses can rarely implement their cycles single-handedly. Redistribution and reprocessing, for example, are costly: technically difficult and often hard to calculate in financial terms, they are fraught with uncertainties. Where we are currently pursuing a linear economy, therefore, and companies are making decisions driven purely by revenue, we need a new conceptual approach that transcends the bounds of individual companies. This approach must also include consumers, so that the sustained, long-term value of materials and products becomes part of daily life. If we are to achieve a circular economy, we must fundamentally change the way in which we currently produce and consume today. The circular economy requires networks, collaboration, and a priority focus on the value of materials and products.[22] It also has to be appropriately embedded in society, in order to make the actions required as easy and accessible as possible for individual citizens.

The fact that politics can place constraints on citizen engagement is something that

Joseph Beuys was obliged to experience firsthand. For his 1982 art installation *7,000 Eichen: Stadtverwaldung statt Stadtverwaltung* (7,000 Oak Trees: City Forestation Instead of City Administration, figs. 1–3), he invited the citizens of Kassel, Germany, to reforest their car-dominated city with 7.000 oak trees, each with a basalt stone erected beside it. He made the trees available for collection in front of the documenta 7 building, with the idea that people would plant them all over the city. Public participation was hampered, however, by Kassel's bureaucratic regulations, which stipulated where it was permitted to plant trees and where not.[23] The social sculpture of which Beuys dreamed made only halting progress. In the end, the artist did not live to see the completion of *7,000 Eichen*; in 1987, his son Wenzel finished the project in his name for documenta 8.

To what extent citizens will participate in THE FINAL BID (fig. 4), and in so doing inject the artwork and its theme with the desired dynamism, remains to be seen. What the circular society, the social sculpture, and THE FINAL BID all have in common, however, is the need for everyone to contribute: the circular society and the social sculpture must be shaped.[24] For without people, there is no movement, no coming together, no attribution of value or value creation—and no art.

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# colophon



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An exhibition by the Draiflessen Collection

Draiflessen Collection gGmbH
represented by the managing directors
Dr. Corinna Otto,
Martin Rudolf Brenninkmeijer
Georgstraße 18
49497 Mettingen
t +49 5452 9168-0
info@draiflessen.com
www.draiflessen.com



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**PUBLICATION**

**Editor**
Draiflessen Collection

**Authors**
Florian Andrews, Birte Hinrichsen, Dr. Corinna Otto, Michael Pinsky, Nicole Roth, Laura Sommer, Stefan Spitzer

**Concept**
Birte Hinrichsen and Michael Pinsky

**Coordination**
Birte Hinrichsen

**Copyediting**
Dawn Michelle d'Atri (EN), Merel Dijkhuizen (NL), Katrin Günther (DE), Renette Niekerk (NL)

**Translation**
Dawn Michelle d'Atri (DE–EN), Alexandra Titze-Grabec (EN–DE), John Wheelwright (DE–EN, infographics), Karen Williams (DE–EN), Thea Wieteler (EN/DE–NL)

**Catalogue Design and Typesetting**
Shorena Baliashvili

**Image Editing**
Birte Hinrichsen

**Production**
LUC GmbH, Greven

**EXHIBITION**

**Idea**
Dr. Corinna Otto, Michael Pinsky

**Concept**
Michael Pinsky with Birte Hinrichsen and Nicole Roth

**Overall Management and Curators**
Birte Hinrichsen and Nicole Roth

**Project Assistance**
Ole Bröring

**Loan Management**
Dr. Julia Cwojdzinski (Collaboration), Ruth Rasche

**Exhibition Architecture**
Astrid Michaelis (Michaelis Szenografie, Münster)

**Exhibition Technics and Media**
Project development and management:
Edwin Bartnik (zone4, Cologne)
Programming auction platform:
Fabian Zavodnik (zone4, Cologne)
Technical conception and realization:
235 media, Cologne

**Translation**
Dawn Michelle d'Atri (DE–EN), John Wheelwhright (DE–EN)

**Graphic Design and Print Media**
Shorena Baliashvili, Gudrun Gehlhaar

**Press and Public Relations**
Julian Heitkamp (Traineeship), Tanja Kemmer

**Educational Program**
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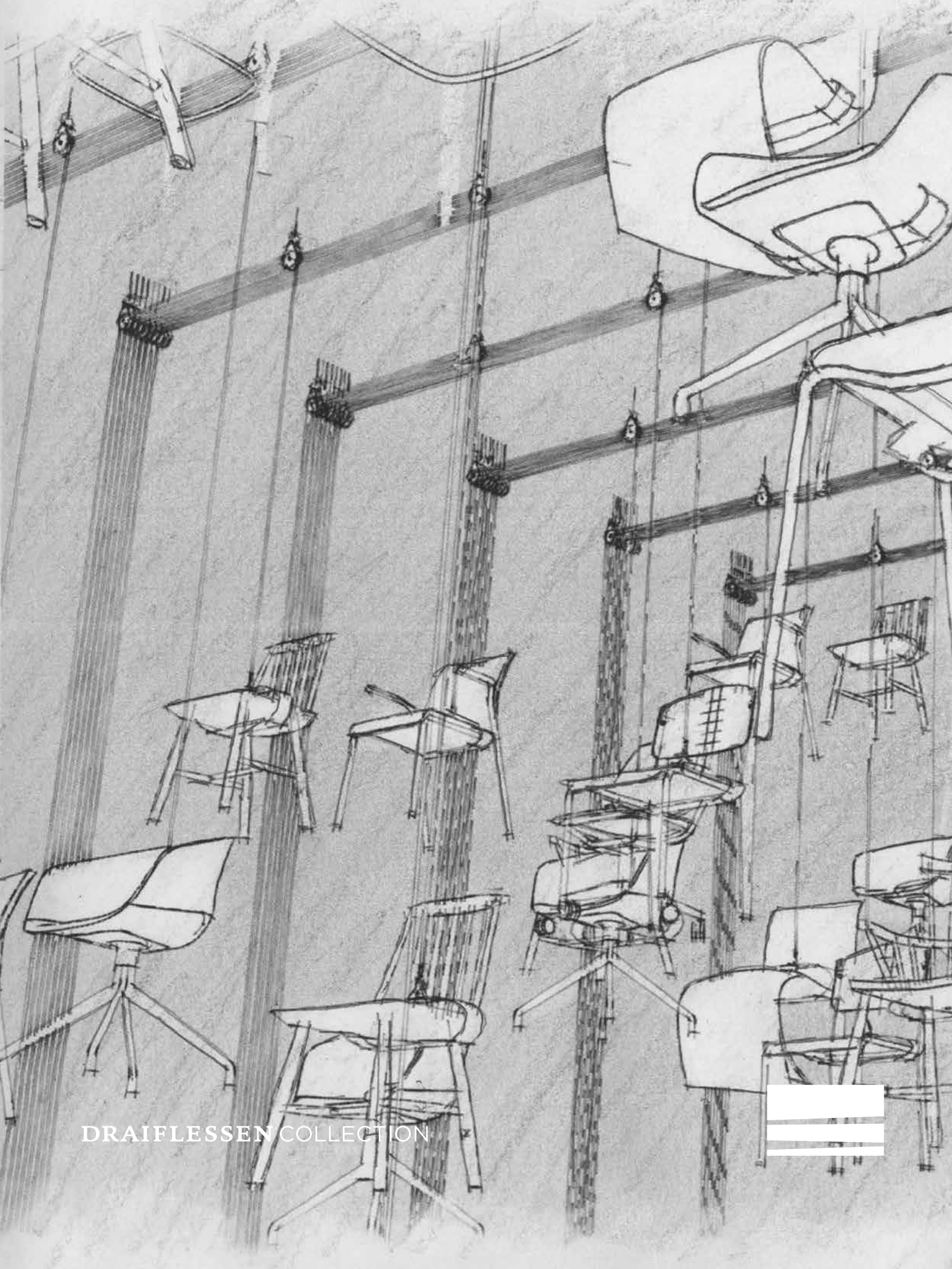
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