

## 'Huis Clos' for the IG BILDENDE KUNST, Vienna

Anyone who visited the IG BILDENDE KUNST in the Gumpendorfer Strasse in Vienna's 6th district between 18 and 26 April 2005 saw the gallery's display window veiled in a casually applied coat of paint. A projection screen that echoed curious glances, reflecting light and movement, creating a relationship of tension between inside and outside. 'Huis Clos' ('Private Society', based on J.P. Sartre) was written on a sign that hung on a golden chain at the entrance. A total of 41 people from Vienna's art scene accepted the invitation sent privately or publicly via member journals or posters to an evening meal and curatorial experiment.

The project was designed especially for the 'position' of IG BILDENDE KUNST, which is located between the museum quarter, the 'gallery mile' and the art academy, and took a stand on the content of its programme and its work. IG BILDENDE KUNST is one of several representative bodies for artists in Austria. It seeks to promote greater consciousness for their structural needs and strives to actively influence decision processes that affect their social or economic situation. Additionally, it provides information and advice for its members. 'Huis Clos' challenged the institution to examine the criteria of its cultural work. IG BILDENDE KUNST is often identified with only the exhibition room; the other rooms are not visible and are thus not perceived as belonging to institution.

'Huis Clos' came about at a time of upheaval within the institution; its new committee was striving for a greater extension of its activities into the social and political arenas. This reorientation was what made our experiment possible, which in turn revealed weak spots. Various ideas from committee members, the current situation and the exterior perception of IG BILDENDE KUNST collided on the subjects of art standards, acceptance within the scene, member activity and political assertion.

In the place where exhibitions normally take place ROOMER's SIGHT installed an 'experimental laboratory'. Research topic: Vienna's art scene. Which motifs substantiate the realisation of contemporary art exhibitions, the selection of artists, the themes, formats and contextual references? Normally, these factors are not visible in the gallery's rooms; the experiment was to reveal to what extent they can be brought to light. The joint dinner that traditionally follows the opening of an exhibition, and is normally intended for cultivating social contacts, underwent an adaptation in 'Huis Clos' (Part I): it became the starting point of an 'exhibition' still unknown and yet to be carried out (Part II) that would develop from the processes of the six evenings. The gatherings made a performance of themselves as culinary and sensory events. The soirees were sponsored by a wine merchant and by local speciality restaurants. On one particular evening the chief chairperson herself did the cooking. The exquisite catering for the guests symbolically enhanced both the location and the very meaning of coming together.

The way each evening evolved, the nature of conversations and the whole atmosphere were all determined by the guests, their interaction and their reactions to the art around them. ROOMER's SIGHT made a deliberate point of limiting itself to the role of the host. On the floor works by 28 artists were on display set up on foam pads and propped against the walls in alphabetical order. The works were taken from our 'private collections'. Most of them were in return for curatorial services, speeches or texts.

With this special presentation we incited not only the trial of real and fictive presentations but also discussions surrounding the work of exhibiting. Core themes emerged that are known to play a dominant role in the art business such as power, contacts, social background, conditions of production and distribution, economic relations, strategies of artists or curators, the role of the media and of culture policy, medial tasks, a need for sponsor systems, the influence of the art market, obsessions, fears and a passion for collecting.

Most guests were faced with the problem of revealing their assessment criteria and selection methods. The lack of an external presenter was repeatedly sensed as a feeling of insecurity, as were the microphones that were set up to record the discussions. The idea of taking part in a playful experiment whose course was to be determined by those taking part provoked a variety of reactions. The mood of the evenings greatly depended on the guests' professional self-conceptions and individual characters since they were simultaneously participating recipients, sought-after specialists and test subjects under observation. They corresponded to the expectations and clichéd roles allocated from 'outside' such as that of the predominant manager curator in charge of all, the disappointed artist abused by the art business or the culture-policy networker in just the same way that they upheld group or gender-specific behaviour patterns. Those not certain about their 'roles' showed their mistrust with a tendency to feel exploited and robbed of creative resources. Safety was sought by returning to the rehearsed level of discussion and to the behaviour of the 'scene'.

The concept of 'Huis Clos' was therefore rated in varying manners. ROOMER's SIGHT had few well-known and rather more prominent names from Vienna's art scene on the public invitation card for the final presentation and had not received confirmations from all. Some saw this as a 'cool strategy' in order to latch into a particular society; others saw it within the context of the alternative ambience of IG BILDENDE KUNST as a 'cheap trick' intended to enhance its own status or as an 'inadmissible manoeuvre' aimed at enhancing its control. The criticism expressed by artists, authors or curators on the violation of the unwritten rules of the game demonstrated how strategically the 'scene' behaves, its degree of concern about the preserving its (individual) interests, its elitist and authoritarian behaviour and the extent to which it is influenced by fears, be it fear of functionalisation or fear of its competitors.

In the assortment of guests that encountered each other completely unprepared it also became clear that the so-called 'art scene' breaks up into individual heterogeneous fragments and, as a community, knows little about its members. The opportunity to spend an evening in constellations not of personal choice opened up unsuspected avenues of exchange.

In Sartre's stage play 'Huis Clos' ("No Exit") three people have to rot metaphorically in hell. Each is at the agonising mercy of the other two. They are neither dead nor alive; they are themselves to blame for being trapped in habits that depend on the reflection and judgement of others, unable to determine their own existence. Those subjected to post-modern society on the other hand do not shy away from constant changes to, renewal and recombination of the elements of its identity concept. The opportunity to furnish oneself in a variety of covers was embraced by guests confessing a persuasion towards an open, rather pan-genre concept of art. When the role-play was consciously perceived and applied, coalitions formed; demarcation and convergence were perceived as a positive reinforcement of personal positions. Under these circumstances the guests used the free space available for thought or concrete experiments, using ROOMER's SIGHT rather like a service facility – as a platform for its own projects.

Subsequently, the 'results' of the soiree were on display from 29 April to 25 May 2005 in a public exhibition intended to be seen, heard and explored. This second part of the experiment involved highlighting the social processes of soirées and placing them in an adequate relationship to the exhibits.

Rather like the very nature of the soirees, the exhibition did not comply with what is normally expected. To begin with, the 'opening', which was situated between Parts I and II, took place simultaneously at two locations: in the gallery room and in the café of the music shop next door where ROOMER's SIGHT invited people to a personal conversation parallel

to the official speech. Twenty-eight artists supplied works; works by four artists remained in the gallery combined with documentation material, relics from the soirees and artistic work and curatorial ideas stimulated by the guests. The other artwork was removed since the thematic link to the private collections was no longer given.

The material gathered during the six soirees was processed in an exhibition: 'menus' on empty tables gave information on core themes. The sound recordings could be listened to in their full original length on earphones. A slideshow added photographs taken during the evenings. The sequence of the evenings could thus be reconstructed; rapports between the spoken word, exhibits, people and artwork shown in the slideshows could be reproduced. Like all of our projects, 'Huis Clos' is in large parts an ephemeral event. It also looks at the question of its presentability and the divergence between art and the practice of holding exhibitions. This opened up further scope for action: new artwork and projects emerged during the experiment and were integrated as a performance into the presentation of Part II at the vernissage. Thought processes were transferred to real space and exemplarily localised both in the gallery and in external exhibition locations – the 'men only' bar 'The Golden Mirror' and the office of one of the guests. 'Huis Clos' showed itself to be a social process and a paradigmatic one – not only for Vienna's art scene. This process transformed it into an 'open exhibition', leaving behind it the question: Where does an exhibition begin? Where does it end? With the invitation, at the museum's ticket stall, in the curator's head, in the artist's studio, on the back page of the exhibition catalogue, on the way to a restaurant after the vernissage or in the visitors' memories?

'Huis Clos' was created and performed in collaboration with Marisa Lehrmann, Karlsruhe (project and exhibition design) and Tatia Skhirtladze, Vienna (sound and picture documentation).

During six soirees works were shown by: Norbert Becwar, Eva Bertram, EVA & ADELE, Gor Chahal, Simone Demandt, Peter Dressler, Katja Eckert, Lukas Einsele, Christine de la Garenne, Sabine Gross, Peter Hauenschild, Axel Heil, Indra., Alexander Krause, Oleg Kulik, Sabine Laidig, Uli Langenbach, Via Lewandowsky, Jutta Obenhuber, Melanie Richter, Lois Renner, Georg Ritter, Christof Röser, Andreas Rost, Tinka Stock, Vivan Sundaram, Loes Swart, Nives Widauer.

Guests of the soirees were: Rüdiger Andorfer, Barbara Aschenbrenner, Max Böhme, Eva Brunner-Szabo, Dieter Buchhart, Sinje Dillenkofer, Claudia Ehgartner, Katrin Fessler, Andreas Fogarasi, Susanne Gamauf, Robert F. Hammerstiel, Bettina Henkel, Dagmar Höss, Judith Huemer, Ulrike Johannsen, Martin Krenn, Gerda Lampalzer, Hans BIWI Lechner, Franziska Maderthaler, Nina Maron, Gerald Matt, Vesna Muhr, Alexander Ostleitner, Catherine Pandora, Lisl Ponger, Elisabeth Priedl, Reinhold Rebhandl, Natalija Ribovi, Marie Ringler, Gabriele Rothemann, Roland Schöny, Walter Seidl, Lorenz Seidler, Tim Sharp, Alicia Ysabel Spengler, Karin Sulimma, Vitus H. Weh, Sebastian Weissenbacher, Nives Widauer, Andrea Winklbauer.

**Venue:** IG BILDENDE KUNST, Vienna, [www.igbildendekunst.at](http://www.igbildendekunst.at)

**press:** - Walter Seidl: Galerie IG Bildende Kunst: Huis Clos - Über die Grenzen der KuratorInnenschaft, in: [artmagazine.cc](http://artmagazine.cc), 24.05.2005  
<http://www.artmagazine.cc>  
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<http://sof.fhv.at/node/showStation.php/666st24>,

**Special thanks go to:** Franziska Maderthaler, Dagmar Höss from IG BILDENDE KUNST, Vienna, all guests, artists Wissenschafts- und Forschungsförderung der Stadt Wien, Magistrat 7 and sponsors

**Sponsors:** Wissenschafts- und Forschungsförderung der Stadt Wien, Magistrat 7, the Vienna restaurants Bar Italia Lounge, deli, Douan and Acer, KENT, ram'ien and Weingut Ing. Manfred Ebenauer, Poysdorf, ARTEX Art Services, Wien, Rahmen Heinz Frank, Vienna.