

EXHIBITION | SOLACE
Feb 4 – May 25, 2010

Statement by the Director of the Austrian Cultural Forum

Once again, the ACF is presenting an unconventional exhibition and art project. Conceived and prepared in cooperation with the most visionary emerging curators of the Viennese art scene (Severin Dünser, Christian Kobald, Andreas Huber, Emanuel Layr, and Rita Vitorelli), this latest show features an outstanding lineup of first-rate artists from Vienna, New York, and elsewhere.

Against the backdrop of the economic crisis and endemic malaise, the exhibition examines whether and how art responds to the current situation. It attempts to identify how the European and US art scenes grapple with plunging budgets, unemployment, rising inequality, and poverty – both in wealthy countries and in the world at large.

In early talks with the curators, all of whom live and work in Vienna but are intimately familiar with the US art world, we tried to understand how the expressly European social democratic model defines the way artists respond to the crisis.

What we eventually came up with departed significantly from our original considerations. But the change in direction simply confirmed the sincerity and legitimacy of the curatorial research process. We realized that it might be more rewarding to look for answers and positions relating to questions that are asked more rarely.

What distinctive forms of community and socializing do we use to comfort us during the crisis and our ongoing difficulties? In this context, we explored everything from the *Heuriger* wine taverns in Vienna to more trendy forms of conviviality like the Palm d'Or Social Club.

Is the classic Viennese *Heuriger* format with all its morbidity and melancholy really that much different from the modes of clubbing and socializing that have emerged in other urban centers throughout the USA and the world?

But perhaps most pertinently, can the arts truly console us? If so, how?

Art show openings are a social institution of sorts, a place where both the arts and the community come together. Interestingly, art openings are one of the only “art forms” where you not only don’t need to pay admission, but even get a free glass of wine. Communal indulgence in the arts, beauty, and the special mission of the respective show is combined with communal inebriation as a generally accepted form of behavior. Embracing a more recent convention, we also flock to alcoholic after-parties to celebrate the artists and the successful opening.

This exhibition and its parallel events straightforwardly, and with uncomfortable clarity, expose us to our own culture of inebriation and even intoxication as a means to find solace. One of the show's many merits is that it commits to the unoutspoken, to our self-evident rite of art and drinking. In so doing, it almost breaks a taboo. After all, it is generally more acceptable to get physically drunk than to publicly admit it.

The show also introduces "the arts" in the context of "solace," an abstract terrain formerly claimed by religion and philosophy. To give solace was once the domain of priests, and later of philosophers. In a parallel development, as museums seem to be replacing churches as locations of worship, reflection, and indulgence in beauty, galleries, like bars, seem to be taking on the role of the confessional.

Andreas Stadler, February 3, 2010