

Short Guide

Konstantin Grcic (*1965 in Munich) is today one of Germany's most renowned industrial designers. After training as a carpenter at the John Makepeace School in Dorset, England, and then studying at the Royal College of Art in London, he founded Konstantin Grcic Industrial Design (KGID) in 1991 in Munich, where he still lives and works. He can be credited for all kinds of designs, from furniture to everyday products and lamps, made for leading manufacturers both at home and abroad. Some of his objects, such as *chair_ONE* or the *Mayday* lamp are now classic designs and can be found in important collections of designer objects, such as the one at the Museum of Modern Art in New York or the Neue Sammlung in Munich. From time to time, Grcic has also conceived exhibitions, such as *Design Real* at the Serpentine Gallery, London, 2009; *Black2* at the Istituto Svizzero in Rome, 2010; and *Panorama* at the Vitra Design Museum in Weil am Rhein, 2014.

For the Kunsthalle Bielefeld Grcic has developed an exhibition concept whose theme is the pedestal as the starting point for the presentation of his objects. As both a museum and sculptural element, the pedestal has a long tradition. In nineteenth-century art it was mainly regarded as a challenge to the design of monuments. By the early twentieth century it had become an integrated component of artworks. In the work of Auguste Rodin or Constantin Brancusi, for example, the pedestal or plinth is a conceptual part of the sculpture. In the 1960s and 1970s sculptures were "knocked off their pedestals." Artworks were presented without pedestals, without any distance between them and the ground, thereby intensifying the aspect of interactivity between the viewer and the sculpture. Today, the pedestal is still a theme in the art discourse. Whenever artists utilize pedestals, they are conscious of the pedestal's significance and function. Grcic not only employs pedestals in his exhibition at the Kunsthalle Bielefeld, but he also examines the function of the pedestal, making use of it as a theme. When a work of art is presented on a pedestal, it awakens an aesthetic reception in viewers that would not occur without the pedestal. In the exhibition space Grcic's industrial products become museum objects, and their interplay with the pedestals allow aspects of their design to be questioned.

Grcic has designed a pedestal for Auguste Rodin's sculpture, *La Douleur* (before 1904), which is located in the entrance hall of the Kunsthalle Bielefeld and is part of its collection. In Rodin's sculpture, the figure and the pedestal are one; Eleonora Duse's pain-filled face arises out of the "uncut" marble pedestal, while at the same time sinking back into it. Grcic's pedestal is made of industrial shelving elements. Its light weight stands in contrast to the heaviness of the marble block. It defines a space for the sculpture, giving it room, as well as limitations. Like every pedestal, it also allows for comparisons between the viewer's real space and the presentational one. Grcic's famous *chair_ONE* is also positioned in relation to the pedestal. With its open, grid-like shell set on top of a heavy concrete foot, the chair itself is practically a sculpture on a pedestal, and an inversion of Rodin's heavy sculpture on its light pedestal.

In Room A Grcic has reversed the pedestal's traditional function. The pedestals don't elevate the objects; rather, they are open boxes, with the objects placed inside of them. On every pedestal, two objects face each other, some of them on different levels. This kind of presentation makes their aesthetic qualities obvious. The gaze is drawn to material characteristics, the color, the interplay of positive and negative forms, and the contrast between external lines with material qualities. The objects can't be perceived as a whole; looking at them from above takes them to yet another level of abstraction. On the open staircase, a view of the futuristic lamp *Lunar*, as seen from the *Clerici* bench, also provides evidence that the show

is about “seeing” the objects. Viewers are invited to see the lamp outside of its functional context, even though it could also be a functional object in this location, too.

Comprising a humorous nod to the designer’s tasks are the *Dirty Olds* on the wall next to the staircase. Grcic has drawn them throughout the years, adding a new cartoon from time to time. The protagonist is a man in a hat, who observes the world and everyday life as if from a distance—open to the world, but a stranger to it, at the same time. He is surprised at it, yet is surprised at nothing, as well. From this distance he develops ideas, going back to prior experiences and the achievements of cultural history, while also being progressively oriented and keeping an eye on the future.

Room B shows that Grcic’s industrial products are three-dimensional creations standing in an environment; they are set against it, imbedded in it, and arise out of the exploration of it. On its pedestal the yellow *Sam Son* almost looks like a throne. Alone, it stands on the pedestal in front of a landscape with a pond, in which Grcic’s containers, *2Hands*, float like water lilies. Resembling a serene monolith, it is outlined in front of the natural environment. The case is different with the wooden chairs, the hat stand, and the ladder on the opposite pedestals. The wallpaper, featuring a section of Le Corbusier’s Secretariat building (1962) in Chandigarh, India, allows the objects to emerge out of the administration building’s rhythmically structured façade, almost as if one were looking at them in 3D. For Grcic, both nature and urban space are starting points for design. Yet, in works such as the revolving *360° Container* on its pedestal or the various views of the *Coup* bowls in framed prints, one can see that each product is ultimately also an autonomous work of art with its own spatial dimensions.

In Room C object and pedestal become one. In *Pallas* Grcic put two tables upside down on top of each other, and this mirroring makes the sculptural qualities of the table clearly evident. The table is simultaneously object and pedestal. *Hieronymus* is also object and pedestal at the same time. The seating element, named after St. Jerome and based on the legendary furniture in the study of St. Jerome, is like an accessible sculpture and can only be understood when it rests on the ground, just like the *360° Stool*, whose characteristics include motion and mobility in space and on the ground. *Chaos*, on the other hand, is concealed in a Styrofoam pedestal. Like packaging, the pedestal contains a negative mold of the object. The characteristic qualities of this apparently unwieldy, upholstered chair, with its narrow seat and angular back, which looks uncomfortable, are almost ironically underscored by the Styrofoam shell surrounding it. Both the two *Pallas* and the wallpaper from the exhibition *Small Talk* in 2007 at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris show that communication takes place wherever two objects face each other. Here, twin pedestals formed the basis for an intriguing dialogue between one of Grcic’s objects and a work from the Paris museum’s collection.

In Room D the objects are once again in three-dimensional settings shaped by the interplay of wallpaper and pedestals. This creates an impression of two interiors, as if Grcic’s furniture had found its natural place here in the Kunsthalle Bielefeld. One expanse of wallpaper continues the view into the Kunsthalle Bielefeld’s sculpture park by presenting a prospect from a window in Mies van der Rohe’s Villa Tugendhat in Brno, Czech Republic (1929/30). Even though there is no picture of the steel skeleton of this famous villa set on a hillside—only a view of the garden—Grcic’s knowledge of this icon of modern architecture is apparent in the lightness of *Traffic*’s thin steel support. The LED lamp *OK*, with a metal ring on a steel wire, represents a further development of an idea for a lamp by the designer Pio Manzù from the 1960s. Here, too, Grcic displays his familiarity with the history of design, which he updates according to his own notions. Similarly, *Tuffy* and *Keyboard* can also be associated with tradition. They

stand in front of a view of the *Black2* exhibition at the Istituto Svizzero in Rome in 2010. Here, Grcic conceived of an exhibit on the theme of the black square. The fascination that the square has exercised over human design from time immemorial can also be seen in, for instance, Josef Albers's study for *Homage to the Square* (1967) from the Kunsthalle Bielefeld's collection.

In Room E Grcic has designed nearly traditional pedestals for his objects. His famous *Diana* series is set on pedestals he himself designed. The "folded" end tables made of sheet iron become sculptures when placed in a museum-like space. Their interplay of open and closed sides, as well as of horizontal and vertical surfaces and edges is emphasized by the pedestals, which precisely match the outlines of the *Dianas*. Interior views, exterior views, and views through openings in the tables are made easier by the elevated presentation and even create a relationship in the broadest sense to Philip Johnson's architecture of Kunsthalle Bielefeld. The pedestals structure the space and define the viewer's movement through the room. For the German Pavilion at the 2012 Architecture Biennial Grcic used pedestals to guide visitors through the space: flood crossings, so-called *passarelle*, elevated the viewer, as a pedestal would, while pointing out a pathway. The wallpaper provides an impression of this.

A precursor to the *Diana* pedestals, as well as to the entire exploration of the pedestal as the theme of this exhibition, was Grcic's commission for a pedestal for Constantin Brancusi's sculpture, *L'Oiseau dans l'espace* (around 1930; posthumous edition from the 1980s). In 1992 the sculpture's owner commissioned the then-twenty-seven-year-old Grcic to create the pedestal. For Brancusi's polished bronze sculpture on a marble pedestal the young designer created a three-legged, wooden, rectangular substructure whose simplicity and simple material qualities seem modest underneath the famous sculpture. Grcic's pedestal beneath a pedestal carries on Brancusi's concentration on a clearly defined, vertical axis and the rhythm of the bird's vertical, upwards motion, respecting and continuing its aesthetic clarity and lightness. The wallpaper features Brancusi's studio, where the artist creatively looked for the right forms and materials for his pedestal.

Room F shows examples of Grcic's work methods. The space is completely outfitted in particleboard, so that it resembles the interior of one of the particleboard pedestals in Room A. Here, viewers enter the pedestal, which provides some insight into the offices of Konstantin Grcic Industrial Design. Skilled craftsmanship and technology are in the foreground, along with the manufacturing process, functional testing, and the real utilization of the objects. The *Champion* table frame is sunk into a particleboard pedestal, as if it were being worked on. Grcic's drawings show moments from the design process. They are necessary steps in communication on the path toward his industrial products.