

Active with art : arts programmes as branding tools

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SAMUEL HERZOG AND SIMON BAUR

Active with art

Arts programmes as branding tools

Arts programmes do more than merely attract more attention to a company's brand. Such programmes are effective in a variety of ways – fortunately not only for the company, but also for art and the public.

Even today, when a company becomes involved with art, regardless of the sector in which it operates, when it assembles an art collection, enters into a cultural sponsorship commitment or initiates an arts programme, it is generally due to the dedication of only a few members of the company. Nonetheless, the situation has changed dramatically. Twenty years ago, sponsoring art was perceived as patronage and sometimes even sneered at. Today, however, companies are becoming increasingly aware that they can also communicate their corporate philosophy or culture through art. Commitment to art, it would seem, almost always has a positive effect on a company's reputation.

On the one hand, there is something primeval about art: through art, we feel linked to the oldest rituals of mankind, to the fears and hopes of the cave-dwellers, which are basically also our own fears and hopes. At the same time, since the beginning of the modern age, art has been a instrument with which we can approach a future that is generally full of promise. But even the hippest high-tech video is directly related to Raphael's *Stanze* in the Vatican or the cave paintings of Lascaux – because it is art, and art is imbued with a specific spirit that is innate to all artists, for all eternity. And this is precisely what rubs off on a company committed to art: a company can thus express both the fact that it is rooted in a specific culture and its forward-looking attitude. And it must also represent both these aspects in order to be successful.

As consumers and anxious human beings, we trust the traditional and the familiar more than the innovative, the new, the unfamiliar. Yet we do not really feel alive if we remain all too obviously in an area that is always the same. Companies must react to the paradoxical demands of their clients: they must offer something innovative in which the traditional is practically invisible – and yet noticeable for everyone.

They must offer something that is unfamiliar, but that should be comfortably familiar at a certain level. We can openly admire innovation – but if the implicitly familiar aspect is missing, our fear of the unknown will prevent us from opting for the product or service on offer.

Due to the dual orientation described above, art is almost perfectly suited to symbolizing the contradictory image that helps a company to be successful.

Of course, there are products whose form alone symbolizes both a forward-looking attitude and long-standing tradition. The Coca-Cola bottle is a prime example of this – representing as it does a perfect synthesis of the ‘Willendorf Venus’ and the body of a space rocket. By contrast, the ‘Virgin Cola’ bottle evokes only feminine forms – perhaps a reason why this brand simply cannot assert itself in the market.

Through the shape of a bottle or a car, computer, etc., a product can be visibly positioned between the opposite poles of the traditional and the new. But how can such an aspect be convincingly represented in the case of a product such as an insurance policy or a service? You guessed: with the help of art.

As the slogan once went, ‘A Mars a day helps you work, rest and play’, the claim could be made today in several cases: ‘Active with art’ – as art appears suited to illustrate how skilfully a company manages to achieve the complex balancing act between being rooted in tradition, offering a pragmatic range of products for the present and orientation towards the future.

Occasionally, of course, art can also help to camouflage unpleasant facts. Walter Grasskamp talks about this in *Kunst und Geld* (Art and money). In his opinion, financing art should be seen as ‘merely a goodwill campaign of the public relations department, which would like to associate positive feelings with the brand’s image in order to manipulate public opinion and to consign unpleasant facts concerning the origins of the company’s profits to oblivion’.¹

But is it really the ‘only’ concern of every company? On the one hand, let us hope that other aspects are also considered. After all, these companies are always staffed by people – and although people can be manipulated, this is often only possible to a certain extent. On the other hand, one could bring the accusation against Grasskamp that, unlike many companies, he does not believe that art is up to much: art can do more than camouflage; it can associate an abstract product with content and emotions; it can, to a certain extent, make sense of things that appear meaningless. We have attempted to outline the reasons for this above. The way individual companies handle art will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

In the vast majority of cases, companies can only benefit from art. Conversely, the extent to which art can benefit, but also the risks it runs, depends on the managers and their projects. Creating collections the way National Versicherung (National Insurance Company) or Ricola do holds just as many risks and opportunities for art as a challenging arts programme.

However a company commits itself to art, and whatever benefits it draws from that commitment, it always deploys its own funds, some of its profits, to finance it – in other words, funds that could be spent otherwise. And this is definitely an advantage for art – regardless of how welcome individual strategies and objectives may be. Art has never drawn a consensus, and never will. For this reason, in principle, the existence of a broad range of possible links between art and business is desirable. This text aims to represent the merits and problems associated with the activities of specific companies in the area of so-called ‘arts programmes’.

We shall be taking a look at companies in Europe attempting to implement challenging arts programmes – usually with the aim of being considered innovative companies both in the cultural sector and in their own sectors as a result of these commitments. But how do the individual companies communicate these concepts?² What objectives and budgets do they have? How are their concepts structured? What does a concept say about the strategies that lie behind it? How important are arts programmes for the employees of a company? Are they intended to encourage the positive identification of staff with their company? And how is this communicated? How can and should an interested public benefit from such arts programmes? How do other art institutions, gallery-owners and critics react to these additional ‘arts services’?

Different categories can also be identified among the arts programmes as far as the structure of the company’s internal departments dedicated to art projects is concerned. Of course, in the context of an analysis of this kind it is not possible to illustrate even a fraction of the many forms such commitments can take. For this reason, we have selected some individual cases that we consider to be exemplary. We have focused on Mercedes-Benz, Red Bull, and Würth AG in general, and Siemens and Generali in particular.

How do these companies perceive art? In order to survive, as a rule, companies today must be highly oriented towards market requirements – and at times react fast. This is equally true of their commitment to art. With the exception of a few, usually smaller companies that assemble curious collections, today’s companies are largely oriented in their collecting activities and arts programmes towards the market – the art market, to be precise. They take advice from experts, employ specialists and fre-

quently display great flexibility in following or reacting to changes in that market.

And of course, this market is not only determined by the galleries. As the market value of an artist is hardly distinguishable from his value as a subject of discourse, the market is also influenced just as strongly by the museums, curators, art historians and critics. Companies must react to all these aspects if they want to exploit art successfully for their own purposes. However, this also means that a company enters into the discourse surrounding art by means of its arts programme, becomes part of that discourse – and thus also influences the market value of the artist. It can even happen that the support of a certain arts programme can have just as positive an effect on an artist's reputation as an exhibition at a good gallery, an appearance at a museum or being mentioned by a well-known critic.

The Siemens Arts Program and the Generali Foundation

'Founded in 1847, Siemens AG is a global corporation active in electronics and electro-technology with 430,000 staff (status 30.9.2004), of whom approximately 164,000 work in Germany. As a technology company with a long history, Siemens AG is innovation-oriented and accustomed to introducing fundamental processes of social change through progressive products and pioneering developments, and to exercising a decisive influence on the direction these changes take (Global Network of Innovation).'³ In its corporate mission statement, Siemens AG explicitly embraces its social responsibility and formulates the claim to being a recognized member of society and to performing the function of a role model. 'We are highly committed to promoting dialogue with our staff and integrating corporate units into their social environment.'⁴ The Siemens Cultural Programme was founded in 1987 and renamed the Siemens Arts Program on 1 October 2001.

Generali is an Italian insurance company that was founded in 1831 as Assicurazioni Generali Austro-Italiche in Trieste, and employs 58,000 staff worldwide (status 30.12.2004), of whom 10,000 work in Austria. Since 1988, Generali has permitted itself the luxury of its own museum – the Generali Foundation in Vienna, which remains unique in Europe. This institution helps not only to improve the image of the company, but, as we shall see, increasingly performs tasks that until now have been the province of state museums.

The objectives

From the very beginning, the Siemens Arts Program sought to satisfy the demands of a wide range of conflicting interests. On the one hand were the demands of cultural politics, which called for greater commitment from private enterprise. On the other,

were the reservations of cultural organizations and a certain mistrust on the part of the public towards private initiatives – generally speaking, one way or another, a fear of a loss of independence.

Siemens's programmatic decision to become involved only in experimental and contemporary art coincides to a large extent with the intentions of Generali. The original concept of the Generali Foundation was to assemble a collection of contemporary Austrian sculpture. In parallel, it intended to acquire works on paper by young Austrian painters, which, due to their character, would be especially suitable for display at the company's new headquarters. However, Sabine Breitwieser, head of the Generali Foundation, did not think much of nationally oriented concepts. This resulted in an expansion of the concept to include international art in the early 1990s.

In its early years, the Generali Foundation entered into partnerships with other institutions – Sabine Breitwieser curated two large-scale exhibitions at the Viennese Secession, for example, where Generali was principal sponsor. Various scenarios for the future envisaged either loaning the collection to a public institution or moving to a building located in central Vienna. Generali ended up by opting for the latter. This allowed the Generali Foundation really to come into its own. Moreover, the concept of a museum of contemporary art with an international exhibition programme, as the Generali Foundation was intended to become at its new address, satisfied a real need in Vienna at the end of the 1980s.

Strategies of the institutions

The Generali Foundation occupies a special position in Vienna. It is an institution financed entirely by private funding, enjoys a fine reputation and the image of an art gallery, but in fact operates like an art museum. In other words, the Generali Foundation links the topicality of an art gallery with the goals, tasks and tools of a museum.

On the one hand, the Foundation's core activities include three exhibitions a year. These are all, without exception, the organization's own productions, and are accompanied by events such as lectures, performances or film shows. On the other hand, the focus remains on enlarging the collection, which now comprises more than 1,500 works, among which the media of film, photography, installation and video occupy a special status.

'The exhibition programme is largely conceived as a dialogue with our collecting activities, which means that the exhibitions are used as an instrument with which the collection is developed and handled. In addition, projects with artists of the younger generation explore current themes that take into account the international discussion on contemporary art production and criticism. Renowned museums frequently

take over exhibitions organized by the Generali Foundation.⁵ The Generali Foundation has also published an impressive series of books, including several substantial standard works, which, however, focus less on documenting the organization's own activities: instead, Generali publishes influential works on contemporary art that are directed mainly at a specialist readership. In parallel with these activities, an archive and a library have been systematically assembled, and, like the extensive video collection, are open to the public in the Generali Foundation's study-room.

The core of the Siemens Arts Program's work is the initiation, conception and realization of topical art and cultural projects, usually in co-operation with public institutions. However, Siemens also initiates or helps to organize conferences, festivals and symposia, or is involved in them by means of events that are developed separately. Grants and commissions are awarded to young artists in the context of theme- and location-based competitions. Besides exhibition catalogues and documentary volumes, the Siemens Arts Program also publishes event-related books, primarily on social topics.

As far as possible, the Siemens Arts Program strives to intensify the international orientation of its projects – by co-operating with foreign partner institutions and divisions, or by arranging projects and travelling exhibitions abroad, for example. Apart from realizing individual projects, the Siemens Arts Program tries constantly to initiate longer-term project series and partnerships. The Siemens Arts Program does not continuously promote any one artist; nor does it provide any purely financial support for training, for students or for post-graduate students, or provide pure sponsorship of external projects. The Siemens Arts Program website distinguishes among the following categories: 'Visual Arts', 'Performing Arts', 'Music', 'Contemporary Culture' and 'In-house Projects.'

Anyone looking at the current projects in the 'Visual Arts' section will soon see that Siemens offers a broader programme than that of the Generali Foundation. For the year 2005, for example, the Siemens site lists: 'Return to Space', an exhibition at the Galerie der Gegenwart (Gallery of the Present) in the Kunsthalle in Hamburg; 'Kiss – Culture in Schools and Universities', a grant programme for prospective art teachers; 'The X Factor: Contemporary Art in Munich', a publication; 'Collective Creativity', an exhibition at the Kunsthalle Fridericianum in Kassel; and 'Academy: Teaching Art, Learning Art', an exhibition at the Kunstverein Hamburg.

A look at the figures

For our context, a look at the figures is also revealing. The Siemens Arts Program's budget is redefined each year. A total of Euro 1.8 million is available for the 2004/5

financial year – the figure has remained unchanged against previous years. Approximately one-third of this sum goes towards staff and project costs; the remaining two-thirds are used for the projects themselves. The six project managers thus have an average budget of Euro 175,000 for each project at their disposal. Approximately Euro 150,000 are available for press and public relations work.

The Generali Foundation has Euro 1.5 million at its disposal for 2005 – an additional Euro 180,000 are available for acquisitions. The figure has also remained unchanged compared with previous years.

A dose of creativity for staff

In the context of arts programmes, it is frequently claimed that such commitments also mean a dose of creativity for employees. It is very difficult to ascertain the truth of such statements. As it would be extremely difficult to conduct an independent staff survey, one is primarily dependent on the information provided by the senior management or the curators of the arts programmes. And, of course, in order to strengthen their own position, the latter have a vested interest in emphasizing the positive effects of what they do.

Asked about the effect of its commitment to art, Generali was rather reserved. It was probably one of the most delicate questions, we were told – and finally we were referred to the Managing Director of the Generali Foundation, Dr. Sabine Breitwieser.

Reactions at the Siemens Arts Program were more relaxed. We immediately received the following response to our e-mail enquiry: 'Please find attached two files with anonymous e-mail reactions to "Culture Times" events staged by the Siemens Arts Program.' During this business year, a student of the European Business School wrote her doctoral thesis on the subject of 'The Influence of Art Experience on Human Resources Perception' – taking the Siemens Arts Program as an example. Her activities included interviewing Siemens staff participating in events offered by the Siemens Arts Program.⁶ 'The result of "Culture Times" can be summarized in a single sentence: the exploration of art and culture is perceived as a necessary balance to working life, which besides providing relaxation also generates knowledge and trains people's communications skills. "Culture Times" lowers the entry barriers to the frequently difficult exploration of (contemporary) art. The satisfaction of staff with "Culture Times" is expressed in the high registration and participation figures, the enthusiasm for the range of events designed to make art accessible (guided tours, lectures by experts, the opportunity to conduct discussions, etc.), the frequency of repeated participation and the fact that most participants accept the offer to bring someone along. The latter shows that "Culture Times" can also make a contribution

towards external corporate communications.⁷ The close involvement of staff is part of Siemens's philosophy. To illustrate this, here is a quotation from the above-mentioned concept paper, point 3.6.: 'Making contemporary art accessible to the staff of Siemens AG is central to the Siemens Arts Program, and one of its most exciting tasks. Exclusive events, special offers and projects conceived especially for specific business locations allow staff interested in art to participate intensively in cultural life, and encourage openness towards contemporary art and culture. By establishing direct contact with artists, their work and tools, and making artistic processes comprehensible, inhibitions can be reduced and fears of the new, the unknown or allegedly incomprehensible can be dispelled.'⁸

The 'Culture Times' events mentioned in the e-mail are particularly popular, it would seem. The programme includes a visit to a Gerhard Richter retrospective at the Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen (North Rhine-Westphalian Art Collection) in Düsseldorf or a discussion group on art theft in the presence of two experts.⁹ Two reactions among many prove how well the Siemens Arts Program is received by those staff interested in art: 'I am delighted that our company invests money in these cultural projects for its staff, despite the difficult economic situation. We appreciate this and look forward to further tours', or 'I also really enjoyed the visit to art Karlsruhe 2005; the guided tour by the art historian in particular opened up new perspectives. I would like to take part in other encounters with art in future, and am already looking forward to the next event. [...] Generally, I am very pleased that such an institution has been set up at Siemens, especially at the present time, when the cost-benefit ratio is seen as the most important thing.'¹⁰

All in all, everything sounds very positive. However, it is difficult to decide how representative such statements are. After all, it can be assumed that staff who consider the Siemens Art Program a waste of money are unlikely to have their say. Generally, the public reacts very diffidently to educational programmes offered by institutions on contemporary art – and there is no reason why this should be different at Siemens.

The Generali Foundation also offers staff guided tours of the Foundation; newcomers are also given an introduction to the entire organization, including the Generali Foundation. Staff also have the option of borrowing works for their offices, a model that is also operated by the Swiss National Versicherung (National Insurance Company). In addition, in 1994 the American artist Andrea Fraser was commissioned to conduct a survey to determine whether contemporary art is a component of corporate culture, or should become one in the future. This is one of the socially critical aspects in the Generali Foundation concept about which numerous staff mem-

bers were asked to give their opinion.¹¹ Between May 1994 and January 1995 the artist conducted fourteen interviews with individual members of the Executive Committee, the Board and the Art Advisory Board, as well as with staff of the Generali Foundation and members of the Generali staff association. Additional material was gathered from Communications and Market Research, Human Resources and Training, Accounting, and General Internal Administration of the Generali Group Austria, and from the Foundation's archive itself. At the end of April 1995, the first phase was completed with a report by the artist on the results of her investigation, which besides articles by Andrea Fraser also includes statistical charts, material and documentation of the interviews. This report was primarily for internal use. The 'Brochure for companies' points out that activities that companies undertake to assemble collections of contemporary art can frequently cause internal conflicts – an experience that the Generali Group Austria and the Foundation were not entirely spared.

Benefits and risks for art

Generally speaking, it is not easy to talk about benefits or risks for art in connection with arts programmes. A consensus on the subject is highly unlikely – as there are enormous differences of opinion as to what is beneficial for art and what is not. Who could seriously claim that the work of the Generali Foundation is detrimental to art? And who would voice the opinion that artists could do just as well without the financial support of the Siemens Arts Program? A further aspect is the fact that the two organizations discussed here are run by a professional management team and a strict controlling office that is both vigilant and anxious to eliminate negative factors in the interests of branding. Generali is thus constantly in quest of new ways to make art accessible, and the Siemens Arts Program documents public reactions to its projects. The rate of return of the press information dispatched allows conclusions to be drawn about reactions to a project, as does the development of visitors' figures and catalogue sales.

More sophisticated management tools for consistently monitoring effectiveness are not used because it is practically impossible to measure effects like the improved image of the company brand. The Siemens Arts Program's position statement asserts: 'Aiming to achieve a positive "image transfer" with unconventional work and by importing positions that are considered "inaccessible" is in any case a difficult undertaking – particularly as the majority of these positions does not yet have any transferable "image" at all.'¹² We attempted to outline why this is not entirely true at the beginning of this essay: a work of art may be 'inaccessible'; it may even be completely incomprehensible – but a 'positive image transfer' still takes place.

Both the Generali Foundation and the Siemens Arts Program enjoy an excellent reputation in cultural and artistic circles. Specialists refer respectfully to the institutions' innovation, solidity and willingness to take risks. This is certainly also due to the fact that Generali collaborates with an art committee and that the Siemens Arts Program has six project managers who are responsible for ensuring a broadly based and well-founded strategy. Collaborating with recognized curators or appointing a committee of specialists serves not only as a quality guarantee, but also ensures that these arts programmes become part of the artistic debate as a matter of course.

In principle, programmes such as the Siemens Arts Program appear to be predominantly beneficial. Co-operative partnerships have proven to be positive for all those involved, as they significantly increase the effectiveness of project work. The involvement of the Siemens Arts Program relieves public cultural institutions both financially and in terms of staff; the latter thus have the opportunity to realize projects that would be too complex and expensive without such support. Problems arise only when the arts programmes are used on a political level as an argument for reducing the budgets of public institutions or to manipulate the museums' orientation in terms of content (for example, when the involvement of an arts programme is cited as a benchmark for the quality of a project).

By providing the opportunity for presentation in appropriate institutions, an arts programme can help to create the first, basically receptive audience for young artists or challenging art projects. Co-operating with non-local partners frequently offers cultural institutions their first opportunity to become involved outside their own region, and attracts nationwide attention.

However, of course there will always be criticism, as expressed, for example, in the context of the 1998 exhibition entitled 'The Making of' – a show about how to resist the tendency towards being monopolized by institutions. Comments were made such as, 'In the case of institutions like the Generali Foundation, which has now absorbed institutional criticism into its corporate identity, artistic criticism can only improve its image.'¹³ Or, 'The most recent Generali production definitely toes the party line.'¹⁴

As far as the risks for art are concerned, a distinction should be made between whether there is a risk for art in general or for artists in particular. The latter are quick to scent the threat of interference in their independence, and therefore frequently resist monopolization – even of a theoretical nature.

The extent to which the activities of such an arts programme can appear ambivalent is demonstrated by the arts programme launched by Red Bull only in 2005. The 'HangART-7 – Edition 1' exhibition in the Red Bull Hangar-7 at Salzburg Airport was presented to the 'public as a new platform for young artists. The HangART-7 pro-

gramme provides innovative access to the question of art promotion with topical exhibitions. Hangar-7, already conceived during its inception as a place that combines creativity and technology, will make exciting work by artists of the present day accessible to a wide audience in a series of exhibitions under the motto Air & Art.¹⁵ Lioba Reddeker of basis wien curated the exhibition. She put together a show that was intended to demonstrate the vision and openness of the new support programme. Lioba Reddeker said: 'This exhibition is the beginning of a series that should be seen as part of a research programme, an experiment.'¹⁶ The initiative of Dietrich Mateschitz, owner of Red Bull and Hangar-7, is intended to establish itself as an effective stepping-stone for artists.

Besides art, the Red Bull boss is also interested in old, still operational aircraft. His collection of such aircraft is also presented at Hangar-7 – which also contains a restaurant, a bar and a café so that gastronomy and culture can be combined. 'Hangar-7' and 'Air & Art' are thus aspects of the Red Bull brand, whose logo (two fighting bulls) not only appears on every single one of the aircraft, but is also embossed onto the cloth cover of the exhibition catalogue.

There is no objection to be raised, but the exhibition should initially have been entitled 'where will you spend eternity', after a picture of the same title by one of the artists involved. However, the title was rejected by Red Bull's management – 'Art & Air' was the right answer, which is perfectly appropriate to the company's otherwise airy image. It is clear that Red Bull aims to use its new arts programme to strengthen its own brand and the company's reputation as an innovative enterprise. At the same time, we by no means question the fact that all those responsible were probably motivated by a more or less pronounced interest in art. However, the way this is staged and the somewhat showy positioning of the company logo at the 'HangART-7, Air & Art' exhibition provide food for thought. Anyone who has visited the exhibition in Salzburg or perused the accompanying documentation cannot help but feel a certain unease, as it seems that the primary focus of the exercise is on the company and its products, while art is only a secondary priority. However, such a subservient role cannot be in the interests of the artist or of the company in question.

Companies do not benefit from using artists or art all too directly for their own ends. Exploited artists are no longer of any use as tools for branding – particularly not for a company whose brand is always associated with a hint of freedom and obstreperous effrontery, and whose products are claimed to 'give you wings'.

Benefits for the public

In financially difficult times, state institutions have to reduce the services they provide. The resulting gap can be filled by arts programmes: they can complement state services or enrich them by providing alternatives. In the preceding pages we have attempted to indicate when and how such commitments become problematic.

Yet analysing the actual benefits for the public remains a difficult undertaking – at least in the case of Siemens, because Siemens does not obviously pursue aggressive strategies in terms of corporate identity or branding, and is, moreover, also reliant on the analysts of the arts institutions involved in its co-operation projects.

As far as the Generali Foundation is concerned, these benefits are easier to measure, as the Foundation merely operates an arts institution whose structure is also clearly designed to make art accessible. That is certainly the impression that anyone will gain from reading the objectives of the library and archive formulated on the institution's website: 'Extensive and otherwise scarcely accessible material is available in the reference room to all those whose curiosity has been aroused, or to those wishing to enhance their knowledge of contemporary art', is one of the statements to be seen on the site. The main focus is on the documentation of the Foundation's exhibitions and projects, as well as on the works and artists in the Generali collection. During the preparations for exhibitions or acquisitions, research is conducted into the artists and topics involved, and extensive material is collected thanks to exchange with international archives. Approximately 8,500 monographs, catalogues and theoretical works make up the core of the library, which also contains all current and some rare historical art magazines. The comprehensive media library offers films (on video) and videos of the collection as well as an extensive archive of works in sound dating from the 1970s for study on site. Entry to and use of the reference room are free of charge, but visitors are asked to cite the Generali Foundation as the source of their research when presenting their research results. One copy of the completed academic paper is also requested.

According to a media release of 6 May 2005, the Generali Foundation has thought up another service for the public: making art accessible through 'living labels' – meaning that art historians approach visitors to the museum and offer to share the experience of the exhibition with them and, on request, to provide explanations and interpretations.

For Wilhelm Kittel, Chairman of the Board at Generali Insurance, it was clear from the very beginning that his company should commit itself to providing this service: 'Service is the basis of our success. That is why we are constantly in search of special services. We came into contact with this way of making art accessible [...] and

were immediately convinced that this is a way that is perfectly suited to an insurance company. After all, we approach people to dispel their insecurities.¹⁷ In this context, the definition of branding given by Thomas Bürgi, Head of the International Business Management Department at the Faculty of Economics at the University of Applied Sciences of the Two Basles (FHBB), is revealing: ‘Branding describes a process by which an object (or a group of objects) is to a large extent conspicuously taken into ownership and “branded”. A brand is created through branding. The charged object, the brand, is attributed with characteristics that signalize uniqueness and desirability by means of appropriate communications and marketing measures. The object is emotionally charged and becomes an object of desire. The generation of a name and a logo is part of this process. The longing of a potential group of buyers refers to the participation in the brand, to a spillover of the object’s desirable aura through appropriation, in other words purchase. This appropriation and participation endows identity; the brand becomes an identity-forming place. The buyer reinvents himself; by appropriating and exhibiting the brand as part of himself he assumes a new role.’

The significance of branding

Why should a company like Generali support the visual arts of all things, when music or theatre promise greater popularity and attention? Sabine Breitwieser comments: ‘The visual arts meet several criteria for an insurance company. Firstly, they give an insurer, which deals with the non-visual product “protection”, a “face”. The visual arts have an image value that an insurance company like Generali lacks: innovative, modern, open-minded, communicative, etc. [...] What matters is uniqueness, a profile. But that of course will not be very successful if too little notice is taken. I certainly don’t run a ratings-oriented programme at the Foundation. [...] However, Generali’s decision-makers have recently directed me increasingly towards “more publicity” – a goal that I certainly share with them and to which I also aspire.’¹⁸

The Würth Group, which specializes in assembly and tools, has run the Kunstmuseum Würth (Würth Art Museum) at the company’s headquarters in Künzelsau since 1991, and the Kunsthalle Würth in Schwäbisch Hall since 2001. In addition, the company has numerous exhibition spaces in its branches outside Germany, most of which take over the exhibitions conceived at headquarters. Frequently works from the company’s own collection are shown; staff are offered lunchtime art tours as well as ‘art experience afternoons’ on Saturdays. However, the crest-like Würth logo and the registered trademark symbol feature prominently in all printed matter. The emphasis is thus on the brand, which haunts the visitor everywhere at the exhibitions.

Mercedes-Benz communicates its brand identity by means of a comprehensive international concept for the architecture of its various Mercedes-Benz dealerships. In combination with a series of rules and regulations governing the details of construction and (interior) architectural solutions, this has resulted in a characteristic brand architecture that invests all forms of Mercedes-Benz dealerships worldwide with a recognizable, standardized image with equal opportunities for communication and orientation. The buildings offer cogent solutions to the requirements of distribution and brand presentation. The aim is to translate the brand's quality standards, independently of format, into aesthetically pleasing and highly functional architecture.¹⁹ At Mercedes-Benz, the 'Brand Gallery' is the institution that is most comparable with the activities of an arts programme. 'The Brand Gallery is the place where stories are told, where people communicate on an emotional level – and where the brand image is formulated in an emotional way. At the Brand Gallery, the interests of sales and distribution fade into the background. The public is not here to gather information in order to make a buying decision – it should "immerse" itself without restraint in the brand, and enjoy doing so: Mercedes-Benz clients, clients of other brands, sympathizers of the brand, the curious [...].'²⁰ Potentially fascinating messages are communicated in the Brand Gallery. The range of topics that can be staged with public appeal include design, safety, legendary cars, brand history or 'brand-compatible' external exhibitions in the areas of art, fashion and science. This allows the company to 'stage social events that attract new audiences'.²¹

The internet is a preferred communications platform for all the companies discussed in this essay. This is demonstrated by the fact that the home pages of these companies provide a precise overview and guide visitors quickly to the relevant information. The importance of arts programmes for the individual companies is already demonstrated by the fact that the arts programmes often occupy a prominent position on the home pages of these companies. Branding with the help of arts programmes thus appears to be a worthwhile investment for companies, and the advantages for the public probably predominate. However, it is to be hoped that branding measures and strategies will remain in the background so that art can still play the central role. On a political level, it is also to be hoped that the existence of arts programmes will not lead to reductions in the budgets of public institutions. Supporting art remains primarily a government responsibility. If not, one day we might reach the stage when parents can only give their children brand names – as Jürgen Häusler and Wolfgang Fach see it: 'Chanel has pinched L'Oréal's doll, Armani is looking for his skateboard, Infinity is beating up Porsche, Obsession is picking his nose, Nivea is crying because Pepsi is playing with Fanta, Timberland has to go to the loo.'²²

- 1 Walter Grasskamp, *Kunst und Geld, Szenen einer Mischehe*, Munich, 1998, p. 29.
- 2 For further information, visit the websites in question; see also the chapter entitled 'The significance of branding'.
- 3 From Michael Rossnagl and Rea Triyandafilidis, *Siemens artsprogram, Partner für die Kultur: Das Siemens Arts Program*, typescript, 2001, p. 6.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Information from <<http://foundation.generalist.at>> ('exhibitions' and 'shop').
- 6 E-mail to Simon Baur of 17.5.2005.
- 7 From e-mail from Karolin Timm-Wachter, Siemens Arts Program, 19.5.2005, Executive Summary, Dr. Denise Sumpf, 19.5.2005, p. 2.
- 8 From Rossnagl and Triyandafilidis 2001 (see note 3), p. 15.
- 9 See information flyer, Kulturzeiten NRW, 6.3.2005/6.4.2005.
- 10 From anonymous feedback from staff on events in the 'Culture Times' series.
- 11 See Birgit Sonna, 'Unartige Räume besetzen. Die Sammlung der Generali Foundation in München', *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 6.5.2005.
- 12 From Rossnagl and Triyandafilidis 2001 (see note 3), p. 15.
- 13 Vitus H. Weh, *Der Falter*, 7/98, quoted after: Yvonne Volkart, 'Die andere Seite (der Kritik)'. Simon Leung, Dorit Margreiter, Nils Norman, Mathias Poledna, Generali Foundation Wien, *Texte zur Kunst*, December 1998.
- 14 Johanna Hofleitner, *Die Presse*, Vienna, undated, quoted after Volkart 1998 (see note 13).
- 15 From a HangART-7 advertising leaflet, Air & Art, Edition 1.
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 Generali Versicherungen media release of 6.5.2005 <http://www.generalist.de/docs/wirueberuns_presse_pressemitteilungen_livinglabels>.
- 18 See 'Privatmuseum mit öffentlichem Auftrag. Marius Babias im Gespräch mit Sabine Breitwieser, Generali Foundation Wien', *Kunstforum International*, vol. 145, May–June 1999, p. 421.
- 19 See *Mercedes-Benz Brand Places. Architecture and Interior Design*, text by Christian Marquart, Stuttgart, 2004, p. 41.
- 20 Ibid., p. 58.
- 21 Ibid., p. 61.
- 22 Jürgen Häusler and Wolfgang Fach, 'Branding', in Ulrich Bröckling, Susanne Krasmann and Thomas Lemke, eds., *Glossar der Gegenwart*, Frankfurt am Main, 2004, p. 36.

Summary

Besides those companies that permit themselves the luxury of more or less sizeable art collections, there are increasing numbers of companies who invest funds in so-called arts programmes. Two prominent examples, which have played a highly conspicuous role in the art world over the past ten years, are the Siemens Arts Program and the Vienna-based Generali Foundation. While the Siemens Arts Program supports specific projects in the domain of, for example, contemporary art, the Generali Foundation has its own building in Vienna that functions like a gallery, or even an art museum.

According to those responsible, arts programmes are intended to increase staff creativity and to encourage work satisfaction and positive identification with employers. Moreover, arts programmes increase the attention paid to a company's brand – they even help to make a product appear simultaneously traditional and innovative. Arts programmes sometimes also help to give rather abstract products such as services or insurance policies a 'face'. Arts programmes are effective in a variety of ways – fortunately not only for the company, but to a certain extent also for art and the public. This of course also involves certain risks – namely when politicians use arts programmes as an excuse to reduce the budgets of public arts institutions.