



Press release

Book launch: 15 September 2006, 5 to 10 pm,
Studio Bellerive, Kreuzstrasse 2, 8034 Zurich.

RELAX monograph

RELAX (chiarenza & hauser & co) – we save what you give, ed. by Irene Müller, Ilka and Andreas Ruby, Emanuel Tschumi, Susann Wintsch, Zurich / Nuremberg, a project of edition fink in Verlag für moderne Kunst Nürnberg, 2006

Marie-Antoinette Chiarenza (*1957, Tunisia) studied art and philosophy at the Sorbonne/Paris, the Massachusetts College of Art/Boston and Pasadena City College/Pasadena. Daniel Hauser (*1959, Bern) studied for a teacher's degree in history, German and French language and literature at Bern University and in Paris. The collaboration between the two began in the 1980s in Paris at the squatter-occupied Giraud-Phares factory. Several years later in 1988, they moved to a studio in Biel-Bienne, where they were active until 2003 with some interruptions. Since the beginning of the 1990s they increasingly worked on projects in public space, respectively art-on-architecture projects. During their 1997-2001 collaboration with the city-and-landscape planner Daniel Croptier (*1949, Biel-Bienne), they changed their name to RELAX (chirarenza & hauser & croptier) Since 2003 the artists have lived and worked in Zurich; their works and projects trade under the name RELAX (chiarenza & hauser & co), whereby the "co" stands for partners who change according to the project. Many exhibition projects, but also lectures and workshops, take the artists abroad, among others, to Berlin and Winnipeg (1993), San Francisco (1994), Hanover/USA (1999), Venice (2000), Helsingborg, Berlin, New York (2003) and Munich (2006).

In its works, RELAX occupies an artistic position that since the 1980s has sought out in-between spaces, infiltrated them, posed irksome questions as to economic connections and their cultural impact and examined social links and patterns. The research the artists instigated, their intense coming-to-grips with societal, political and social questions, their stand vis-à-vis the art system per se and the prevailing theoretical discourses are all transformed into photography, installations, drawings, video works and performances. The small, installation-like assemblages produced from their first years of collaboration were directed at questions on three-dimensional space and their adequate materialization. Thus RELAX consciously uses "poor" materials and industrial semi-products to direct our gaze to the spatial and site-specific contexts, i.e., the works' statement. This position becomes, so to speak, paradigmatic for the artists' way of working; it leads to works and projects in which the thematic level and situation-related aspects are always given precedence over purely aesthetic approaches and art-immanent queries. It is the site as the place of concrete realization, but above all also as the mental category, the mirror of a social (activity) space, the territory for different interactions and interventions that, in the 1990s, became



a central aspect of RELAX's art. The artists arrive for an exhibition, for projects in a public place, without any predetermined ideas or intentions, as it were; they do not bring along finished works already conceived and produced, but develop their works on the spot, mostly with the assistance of residents or colleagues.

The present publication *RELAX (chiarenza & hauser & co) – we save what you give* is quite explicitly neither an artist's book nor an exhibition catalogue, but a kind of standard work. After in-depth analysis of the works of RELAX and lengthy conversations between the artists and the editors, a concept emerged that, on the one hand, corresponds with a claim of scholarliness and an overview but, on the other, gives the artists' way-of-working its due. Texts and photos, as well as the filmed audio-visual sequences on the DVD, compile and examine the artists' works, approximately 200 of them. Over 500 illustrations allow an in-depth look into a rigorous artistic production; over two hours of video material offer a comprehensive survey of the artists' numerous video works. The volume of texts is comprised, among other things, of four essays, in which scholars and curators follow the media-specific character of the works, as well as survey and reflect on RELAX's artistic position and works against the background of theoretical models. Thus two contributions are devoted to central questions on the public forum and its three-dimensional space, of participation and subversive strategies, of system critique and political art. Another text throws light on the artists' video works for the first time, examining the presentation forms the artists use and their media-specific way with images. In addition the text volume contains an oeuvre catalogue of the works, which includes a differentiated list of materials, as well as a deeper commented look into select pieces. The result is that important aspects, as well as relationships within the team's works or their materialization, have for the first time been subjected to exact research and made accessible. Thus from the chronological sequence we learn of the back link to older works; the detailed list of materials allows a more exact idea of the works than is otherwise usual from reproductions and descriptive texts alone. This compilation in the field of contemporary art, however, also makes an attempt to arrive at categories of scholarly reappraisal and adds to the texts and illustrations an apparatus of rigorously researched and detailed information. Its fundamental essays, the oeuvre catalogue and the carefully selected picture material – and not least of all its conceptual stringency – makes this publication **the** definitive work on RELAX.

A fact that enlightens us as to the way RELAX functions should not go unmentioned: the title of the publication quotes a contribution entry to a competition that was, however, never realized. But during the course of the approximately two years work on this publication, the sentence was transformed into a great deal more. It became the motto of a collective work ethic that expressed the standpoints of all the participants, in which academic goals and artistic wishes were in confrontation with one another just as much as were design concepts and naked facts. *we save what you give* can be read in many ways – as



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a promise the artists make to the public, as an assurance the editors give to the artists, as a strategy of seduction and a metaphor for memory. And this beseems a publication quite nicely.

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Irene Müller, Ilka and Andreas Ruby, Emanuel Tschumi, Susann Wintsch (Eds.)

Text contributions by Irene Müller, Ilka and Andreas Ruby, Katharina Schlieben and Sønke Gau, Philip Ursprung, Susann Wintsch (German, French, English)

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