

Edition Patrick Frey

Press Release

Georg Keller
Georg Keller x Manor



“A brand like a friend” is the motto of Georg Keller Unternehmungen (GKU). Through this dummy concern, the artist Georg Keller infiltrates and reflects on economic cycles. In 2016, after receiving the renowned Manor Art Prize, Keller set about plotting a friendly takeover of Switzerland’s biggest department store chain.

What looks at first glance like a corporate history from below turns out to be the intertwining of an artistic one-man enterprise with a Swiss retailer that turns over roughly CHF 3 billion with a workforce of over 10,000 staff. Interviews with employees at various levels of the corporate hierarchy form the first thread of the narrative. The second, visible only when the day’s work is done, delves into Georg Keller’s creative work. So these are two books in one, two stories, each of which stands alone and yet sheds a revealing light on the other.

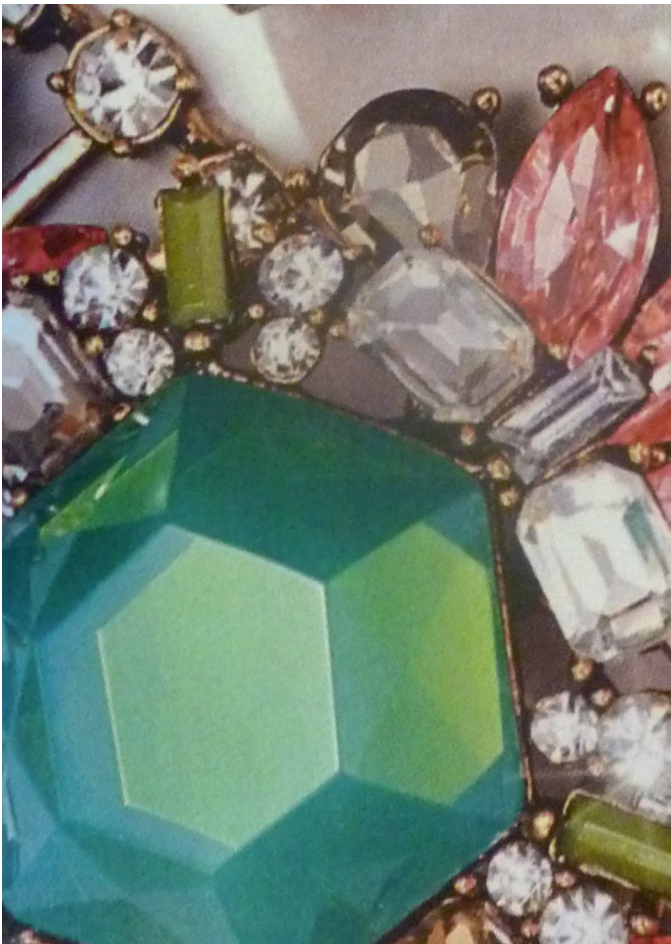
Keller’s projects question and lay bare the workings of economic structures, scrutinizing the mechanisms of globalization and their impacts on mankind and the environment. His earnest approach to these explosive subjects is coupled with a reduced aesthetic and a pinch of humor. With the aid of GKU he exposes elements of economic narration and staging, using all sorts of different media, including installation, sculpture, video and performance, and developing works in artistic and theatrical contexts and in public spaces. All his works come together under the umbrella of GKU to form a total artwork.

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Position at Manor: Director
Name: Felix Thöny

How long have you been working at Manor?
In November 2016, it will be 40 years.

What are the specifications of your job as the director of the department store?
Basically I'm responsible for the performance of Manor Lucerne. And for implementing concepts on the sales floor. If sales aren't satisfactory, I have to adjust expenses and think about what we can do to offer customers better services to increase the revenue.

Do you have the chance to take entrepreneurial initiative yourself? How much freedom do you have? How much is prescribed?
Basically there is quite a lot that can be done on the floor, although some specifications are given. And there is a certain amount of leeway to take independent action in adjusting spatial parameters.

Is there competition between the different branches at Manor?
I compare myself pretty much with the department store in Fribourg. My colleague there also runs a city branch but he has a built-in parking house. That helps in all kinds of ways. We are extremely dependent on the weather in Lucerne. Sales are much better when it's good than when it rains. Then our neighbor in Emmen is better off.

That means you can compare sales on a daily basis?
Hourly, at five minute intervals. You can hear click click every five minutes as soon as you start up the program that keeps track of sales. We can also compare ourselves with other relevant businesses and see where they're doing well and where we're not doing so well. We can also compare the top ten sellers.

Please describe an ordinary day at work.
I start at seven thirty in the morning and stay until six or six thirty in the evening. I'm usually still here at closing time, at six forty-five. We, that is the three managers, also eat together at work. I print out the previous day's sales first thing in the morning.

How much did we make the previous day? How much has accumulated this month? Just a quick look to get an idea. Then I take care of pending correspondence. Afterwards we have a coffee or make the rounds. We have various meetings: once a week an executive briefing in a small group; once a month a larger briefing where we study the results. We have weekly meetings and briefings with the POS managers to look at the numbers of their checkout terminals and also of the floor. There is a lot of administra-

tive work, managerial meetings, staff evaluations, etc. Next week we have an official visit: Mr. Maus himself comes once a year with the entire executive team from Basel. Then we have to explain and justify the numbers. Everything has to be in order. That requires a little bit of preparation. The goal is to spend about sixty percent of my day on the floor. That would be ideal; it varies in practice. There is always administrative work to be done. Thursdays I'm on the floor for a long time. But Saturdays too, last Saturday I spent about eighty percent of my time on the floor.

Why should you spend sixty percent of your time on the floor?
To keep an eye out. And the management should also be around to say hello to customers and talk to them; we call that the concierge role. We also make sure that employees react the way they should and do their jobs properly, and that they're attentive. That means coaching employees. It's important that sales personnel is focused on the customers, especially because we don't have as many people in sales anymore.

Are customers aware of your position?
It doesn't say 'director' on your name tag?

No, but you can tell. (laughs) What defines the spirit of a good department store or of Manor?
That's actually the staff. In my mind, not much happens without personnel. That's why it's important to do everything to ensure a good atmosphere and to make sure that the salespeople are committed to working for Manor.

How does your clientele change? Do you have a general public, specific target groups, regular customers?
There are different kinds of clientele. In Lucerne we depend a great deal on tourism. The Chinese aren't coming at the moment. That's a problem for Lucerne. We're suffering from the attacks in France and Brussels. Tourists from China—that market has slumped. We need things to calm down a little so they start coming again. But there are also a lot of local customers that I see every day, and I like to greet them personally.

Who opens up in the morning and locks up at night?
In the morning it's the goods receiving department and in the evening security.

What do you like especially about your job and what not so much?
I've been at Manor for 40 years in different capacities. That's interesting, exciting, now at Manor Lucerne as well: the opportunity to go from sales to becoming a regional director. I really enjoy contact with customers but with staff as well.

The time passes so quickly and there are new things to take care of every day. There is always something to do. Is it still possible to be promoted from sales to director nowadays?
I can't tell you that.

At 70 department stores there used to be 70 directors who had started out at Manor at some point as salespersons or department managers. For the past five or six years there have been more newcomers coming from outside.

What would happen if your position at Manor didn't exist?
You need someone to make certain decisions. And these are made by the management and by me. There are a lot of things that have to be decided. Special issues always come up, not just simple things like: do we take this item back although the customer doesn't have a receipt? And who would be giving this interview now?

For further information on picture usage or if you wish to receive a review copy, please contact: Gloria Wismer, Edition Patrick Frey.

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