

A PORTABLE, OPEN-TOPPED OBJECT WITH A HANDLE

AN ATTEMPT TO DEFINE A JUG USING THE EXAMPLE OF FOUR SITE-SPECIFIC INTERVENTIONS AT KUNSTQUARTIER GMUNDEN

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THE JUG; CYLINDRICAL,
BELLIED, OVAL, ROUND,
ANGULAR, EMPTY...

The outward appearance of a jug and its material, haptic, and practical properties are extremely diverse. With this in mind, it seems to me that trying to provide an airtight definition or generally applicable description of this object is an impossibility. Similarly, the difficulty of distinguishing a jug from other vessels such as a can shows that any definition of an object will be characterized by some fuzziness. Some jugs are for drinking, while others are for transporting or storing liquids. Still others exist exclusively as three-dimensional repositories of artistic narration, eking out their touchless existence in display cases without ever performing another function. Then there are those that serve as disposables in our modern habit of fast-paced consumption.

They all have one thing in common: this seemingly inconspicuous everyday object is charged with a range of cultural meanings and has a high symbolic value. Heinrich von

ABBILDUNG 57 Workshop: Einführung in das Thema „Krug“, Prozessdokumentation, TU Wien, 2024 (Foto: Gregor Titze, CC BY-SA)

FIGURE 57 Workshop: Introduction to jugs, process documentation, TU Wien, 2024 (photo: Gregor Titze, CC BY-SA)



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Kleist's famous comedy demonstrates this in the form of a broken jug¹, as does the town of Gmunden and its history of ceramic production, for which the Viennese shape jug² from the Gmunden Keramik factory with its playful green decoration is a widely known cultural flagship.

STORER AND DISPENSER

Generally, a jug is a portable object whose purpose is the temporary storage and dispensing, generally of liquids. For example, it can be filled with a drink before pouring it into glasses. The holding capacity of this hollow body depends on its dimensions and the thickness of the material used to make it. There are hardly any prescriptions for the use of a specific material. Jugs are made from a variety of materials, including glass, ceramic, wood, plastic, and many others. In principle, a jug could be made of virtually any material imaginable. When it comes to the traditional jug, wall impermeability seems an especially important property by preventing the uncontrolled loss of the vessel's contents. However, the occasional use of unglazed jugs shows that slight material permeability can be used productively. (Sentance, 2004, p. 167)

In his project *Been here a while. Take me with.* Marcel Schmitz questions how one material can become a means of storage and transportation for another. The starting point for his interrogation is salt mining, which has a centuries-long tradition in the Salzkammergut region. Starting in the 16th century, brine was transported 40 kilometers between Hallstatt and Ebensee via a wooden pipeline (Oswald, 2009, pp. 18–19). The brine was then evaporated in saltworks to form crystalline salt. For his



ABBILDUNG 58 *War lange da. Möchte mitgenommen werden.* von Marcel Schmitz, Intervention im Kunst-Quartier Gmunden, 2024 (Foto: Gregor Titze, CC BY-SA)

FIGURE 58 *Been here a while. Take me with.* by Marcel Schmitz, intervention at KunstQuartier Gmunden, 2024 (photo: Gregor Titze, CC BY-SA)

1 *The Broken Jug*, a comedy by Heinrich von Kleist, first complete printed version from 1811.

2 Gmundner Keramik Viennese shape jug. https://www.gmundner.at/shop/en/krugwienerform-0104krwf10.html?visitor_source=Related%20Products.

intervention at KunstQuartier Gmunden, Schmitz arrives with six glass vessels. They contain cotton cloths knotted into simple sacks that have been soaked in a salt solution for an extended period. At three-minute intervals, Schmitz removes the six textiles from the solution and scatters them throughout the park on found tree limbs. Still wet, the textiles are largely covered and permeated with salt crystals. Each of the sharpened limbs runs through a large piece of paper with handwritten fragments of a text. Once all six actions have been completed, the viewer can make out the entire text, which contains Schmitz's fictional account of the journey of salt through its various aggregate states.

AN OPEN (-TOPPED) SHAPE

In order to fill a jug, it must have at least one opening. Gravity constrains the position of this opening to the top of the object. The shape and size of the opening are directly related to the properties of the material to be filled into the jug. In order to subsequently pour the contents from the vessel, the filling opening can be used; or the jug may feature an additional spout for this purpose. Often, the spout will taper. This lip, which can be more or less protruding and sometimes has the shape of a tube, is used to control the emptying of the jug.

In Jan Wucherpfennig's project *Synchronized Water*, the distribution, pouring, and refilling of a liquid is a central motif. During a three-hour performance, Wucherpfennig constantly moves in a circular choreography through an inside room in the former Gmunden municipal parks department. His movements are accompanied by a sound collage that loops layered sounds of dripping water. By raising and lowering a centrally positioned canister, he moves dyed water through transparent hoses. Three-legged ceramic vessels that are arranged in a circle are filled and emptied. First



ABBILDUNG 59 *Synchronisiertes Wasser* von Jan Wucherpfennig, Intervention im Kunst-Quartier Gmunden, 2024 (Foto: Siri Dacar, CC BY-SA)

FIGURE 59 *Synchronized Water* by Jan Wucherpfennig, intervention at KunstQuartier Gmunden, 2024 (photo: Siri Dacar, CC BY-SA)

clear, then rust-red, and finally pitch-black, the liquid sputters through the hoses, fills the dishes before again disappearing into the hoses. In some places, the liquid quickly exceeds the filling capacity of the ceramic objects to drain through the gravelly soil. In a sequence of movements that resemble a ritual, Wucherpennig carries the vessels through the room. At the end of this precisely timed process, the dyes drawn into the surface of the material leave permanent traces, a kind of legible documentation of this action in the vessels themselves.

WHAT IS INSIDE?

Whether a jug is empty or full can usually be determined with a quick look through an opening or, if the material used to carry the contents is

transparent, through the object itself. Swirling or vigorously shaking an opaque vessel will yield meaningful information to experienced users only. In his lecture “Das Ding” (English: The Thing), Martin Heidegger describes the jug as a “holding” vessel. Heidegger notes that not the physical impermeable material from which the jug is made is that which holds. Rather, it is the emptiness, the jug’s nothingness, which makes it a holding vessel. According to Heidegger, the individual making a jug actually shapes this emptiness. In this way, the distinguishing quality of a vessel is not defined by the material it is made of, but by its holding emptiness. Heidegger questions whether a jug can ever be empty, since, even without having been intentionally filled, it is already filled with air. Heidegger continues: “In scientific terms, filling a jug is actually replacing one content with another.” (Heidegger, 1954, pp. 41–42)

In her project *to and from*, Laura Lieb places two cylindrical, transparent objects at Stadtgarten. These partly freestanding, partly hanging forms can be understood as a documentation of two spatial



ABBILDUNG 60 *ab und um* von Laura Lieb,
Intervention im KunstQuartier Gmunden, 2024
(Foto: Gregor Titze, CC BY-SA)

FIGURE 60 *to and from* by Laura Lieb, interven-
tion at KunstQuartier Gmunden, 2024
(photo: Gregor Titze, CC BY-SA)



explorations that the student carried out during the semester. Following a pathway she had sketched out beforehand, Lieb visited various locations on the TU Wien campus and at Stadtgarten Gmunden. Interesting surfaces encountered along the way she cast with a plastic sheet with hot air. She then disrupted the linearity of the paths she had taken by placing the deformed sheet, rolled into a cylinder, in a vertical position. Viewing these cast objects simultaneously entails looking through them. The resulting structures layer on top of each other and blend into their surroundings.

THE HANDLE, A PLIANT JOINING

Diametrically positioned across from the spout, there is usually a handle. Jugs with two or three handles are the exception. The size of this handle, which usually protrudes markedly from the body itself, is derived from the size of the human hand, in accordance with its purpose. Versions with one or more extremely small or visibly stunted handles excuse the assumption that in such cases the handle is merely decorative. Generally, the

ABBILDUNG 61 *Der Rest, in die Hand!* von Aleksandar Klopić, Intervention im KunstQuartier Gmunden, 2024 (Foto: Gregor Titze, CC BY-SA)

FIGURE 61 *Take the rest!* by Aleksandar Klopić, intervention at KunstQuartier Gmunden, 2024 (photo: Gregor Titze, CC BY-SA)

user will hold a jug by its handle, entering into a physical connection with the object. It acts as a counterpart to our hand. In his essay “Der Henkel” (English: The Handle), philosopher Georg Simmel describes this feature as a “mediating bridge” and as a “pliable joining” (Simmel, 1919, pp. 116–124).

Aleksandar Klopić’s project *Take the Rest!* visualizes this mediating function of an object. In his interventions, he produces a wide variety of objects. By simply reaching into clay, he creates intuitive shapes that are reminiscent of worry stones, fragments of prehistoric tools, or handles. Klopić makes some of his objects in Vienna, where he fires them in a traditional kiln. Most of his objects are created at the location, where he fires them in a pit. Still others he leaves as greenware. On the day of the exhibition, Klopić scatters them widely across the premises in installative constellations. During the exhibition, he hands out artifacts to visitors, proactively engaging them in dialog.

He asks them about the possible uses of the objects, offering that he himself uses them among other things as tools to collect small objects from the ground. But he refrains from giving clear instructions or assigning a purpose to the objects. Rather, Kłopić allows visitors to define their own individual purpose for the objects that are now pliantly joined to their hands.



ABBILDUNG 62 *ab und um* von Laura Lieb, Intervention im KunstQuartier Gmunden, 2024 (Foto: Gregor Titze, CC BY-SA)

FIGURE 62 *to and from* by Laura Lieb, intervention at KunstQuartier Gmunden, 2024 (photo: Gregor Titze, CC BY-SA)

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