

## USEME\*

22.11. – 11.1.2025

## RELAX (chiarenza &amp; hauser &amp; co)

*If you are holding a useme\* in your hands just now, you can use it as you need or wish to. Because it is asking you to use it!*

As part of our collaboration with the collection of the City of Biel/Bienne, we are pleased to present *useme\**—a set of portable pillow-like objects developed by artist collective RELAX (chiarenza & hauser & co) for the 7th Architecture Biennial, at the Swiss Pavillion and Giardini in Venice in 2000. *useme\** highlight the link between physical posture and thought processes, and are designed as “crumple zone” between body and environment.

[...] Dealing with limits or boundary lines has long been one of RELAX's central concerns. They situate their own practice on just such lines, for example the one between urbanist and artistic practice. This, however in no way means that they believe in what is today called “crossover”, that is, the ostensible fusion of the genres and the elimination of boundary lines. On the contrary, they locate these limits with the greatest precision; they even happily provoke their opponents so long till the differences in their interests, say, become clearly visible. It is not by chance that the colors orange and red are among their most important tools. These are the colors that seal off building sites, warn of danger, mark the passage from one terrain or country to another.

Red and, above all, orange are, according to RELAX, also popular colors, such as readily used by department stores, cheap airlines, mobile phone companies or people's parties. Orange as a color suggests that “the price is right”, that it's worth the money. Orange implies a familiar you-and-me basis, contained in the expression “My price is your price”. And at the same time also something of the gratitude that is so readily given instead of money or something of symbolic interest, as when the salesperson thanks you for your purchase or the pilot for choosing his airline. “Vergelt's Gott” [God will repay] was a former saying in Catholic regions, which means so much as “one of these days the value will be appropriate to the price you've paid”.

Among the most beautiful objects that RELAX has up to now produced are the *useme\*s*. They made them available to the visitors of the Architecture Biennale 2000 in Venice for the payment of a deposit and later sold large amounts of them at modest prices. The cozy, easy-care cushions in bright orange served, on the one hand, to articulate the boundaries (for instance, between human body and architecture) and to pad them. On the other, they were the artists' gesture of gratitude to the visitors, who had come a long way and been willing to go to great lengths to get to know new works of art and architecture. While sponsors who give nothing must make do with words, the exhibition visitors receive usable art in return. Because the *useme\*s* are part of an unlimited edition, their value is hard to estimate. As cushions, their price is right. But as artworks?

During each break the comfortable cushion reminds you of RELAX. Are you therefore indirectly – and possibly only regarding yourself – capable of increasing the symbolic value of RELAX? Should you dispose of them after the exhibition? Or rather take them out of circulation and, without having used them, incorporate them, trophy-like, in a collection? Keep them! It is easy to name the price of a work by RELAX. But there can be no doubt that its value will rise."

Text excerpt from "*The Value of RELAX*,"  
Philip Ursprung, 2006

Based in Zurich, RELAX (chiarenza & hauser & co) addresses the intersection between art, society, and politics through installations, actions, and practical objects. Based in Zurich since 2003, RELAX (chiarenza & hauser & co) is a collective founded by Marie-Antoinette Chiarenza (1957, Tunis) and Daniel Hauser (1959, Bern).