

What's the next NEXT course?

What's the best forum for fixing the world? And having some fun while you do it? Well, the dining table is a good place to start, especially when it's in a well-appointed restaurant. But we are living through a time when face-to-face conversations are interrupted by calls to stay at home and when digital debate is rarely that – people fear being called out for not toeing the line and any attempt at wit is lost in the ether. There is nothing that beats coming together over food. *Konfekt* wants to keep the conversation going and each issue we will gather interesting voices at a dining table to cover a key topic. First, we go to Zürich to discuss the simple question, what next?

Photographer — Jagoda Wisniewsk

THE HOST



The journalist (and 'Konfekt' compère)
Juliet Linley

I moved to Zürich a year ago from Rome, where I reported for networks including CNN. I'm a regular on Monocle 24 radio and a proud contributor to *Konfekt*.

THE GUESTS



The environmentalist
Elise Van Middellem

I started my career at Louis Vuitton. Since 2008 I've had my own practice, which focuses on creative brand strategies. In 2018 I wanted to invest in nature and plant trees. So I founded SUGi, which allows anyone anywhere to restore themselves and our world by planting biodiverse forests.



The gallerist
Frédérique Hutter

I'm a gallerist, artist's agent, art educator and exhibition-maker. A year ago I launched Frédérique Hutter Art Concept.



The researcher
Florian Egli

A trained economist, I work at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zürich [ETH] on the interplay of climate change, sustainability and finance. I co-founded a grassroots foreign policy think-tank in Switzerland called Foraus.



The curator
Gianni Jetzer

When I was a kid I wanted to be a farmer but all I got is an art history major and a master of art. I've been a curator for over 20 years. I'm curator-at-large for the Hirshhorn Museum in Washington. I write texts and have been curator of Art Basel Unlimited for eight years. I also publish books.



The artist
Martina von Meyenburg

A half-Swiss, half-Swedish sculptor, I have a studio in a factory in Harlesden, London. I mainly work with used and materials and I like playing with their connotations. I also do drawings and work with photography.



The venue:

The Hotel Kindli sits in the center of Zürich next to Lindenhof park and has a long tradition of hosting. The Haus zum Kindli was first mentioned in 1474. "According to historic sources, wine was served in the Kindli more than 600 years ago and by the mid-15th century it had become a proper inn," writes economic historian Bernhard Ruetz. Today the hotel is owned by Gisela Lacher and its cosy rooms and apartments feature handmade Hästens beds, soft lighting, elegant antiques and fine white linens. The panelled restaurant serves traditional dishes such as *Zürcher geschnitzelte* and rösti potatoes as well as tasty veal ravioli and royal zander (pike) with champagne sauerkraut. Thankfully, there's no shortage of starched table linen and even the odd well-placed doily.
Pfalzgasse 1, 8001 Zürich; +41 4 3888 7676; kindli.ch



Gallerist Frédérique Hutter



Juliet Linley

Good to see everyone – does everyone have a full glass? Great. Now, with an artist, a gallerist and a curator at the table, it makes sense to start our “what’s next” conversation in the art world. Martina, what’s changed for you in recent months?

Martina von Meyenburg

One positive side effect of the pandemic is that some artists and creatives have had a liberation from the rigid and hierarchical system in the art world. As an artist, it felt a bit like the German word *Narrenfreiheit*: “It doesn’t matter if it doesn’t work out. So I’ll just try.”

Juliet Linley

Do you think we learn from that and carry that sentiment forward?

Martina von Meyenburg

I hope so; I think it also needs support. A lot of artists and creatives have suffered because they fell through the cracks and didn’t really get direct support from their governments.

Juliet Linley

Gianni, have you reassessed the importance of art at this time?

Gianni Jetzer

I mean, if you think of public art you have to think about public space first and that’s been a battlefield for the past 50 years or so.

What is public space and how can you open it up for creation or for the display of ideas? And how can it be influenced and altered by people? I think art can be so many different things. Art can certainly contribute to reviving public space and public life.

Juliet Linley

And what about museums now? One of your fields, Gianni.

Gianni Jetzer

Loans between museums are at risk. Insurance costs are very high. The prices have gone up tremendously when it comes to transport for overseas shipping. I don’t think that the kind of exchanges we had in the past will come back very soon.

Frédérique Hutter

I talked to the director of a Swiss museum this morning. I asked him about the new museum and he said it’s a challenging situation. Everything is on hold. He told me that in the US, it’s even worse than in Europe. In Switzerland, the museums are just delayed – things will be shown in two or three years’ time because they are supported by the state and cantons.

Gianni Jetzer

In the US, fundraising has been frozen. There’s a lack of income for the museums. And then on top of this there are culture wars, a little bit like at the start of 1990s. The race issue is huge, which sometimes creates really interesting solutions. David Zwirner [the commercial gallerist] has announced that he’s going to open a gallery in Manhattan with an all-black staff and with a black director. Is that the solution? To segregate? And then, of course, there are several issues within the left and the cultural left. There’s a lot of crossfire from all these issues. You can get attacked. Just now, the Philip Guston Retrospective has been postponed in the National Gallery of Art in Washington because Guston, as an anti-fascist, painted the Ku Klux Klan. It was a symbolic gesture. He was fully aware and has a long track history of being leftist and being anti-fascist. But still, just to expose, or to exhibit, those images would have triggered an explosion that you cannot control anymore.

Juliet Linley

So they just put it on ice?

Gianni Jetzer

For four years, which is more or less the same as cancelling.

Florian Egli

But part of this is also good. If art moves back into centre stage, back into these societal conflicts, that’s a huge opportunity. For me, art is a means of communication; it can serve to bring together, or perhaps also divide, people. It has a function to

play in society. Art can prevail. It can be there in dire moments, which is absolutely crucial.

Juliet Linley

Art is part of the solution and part of the problem then.

Florian Egli

So, I had this discussion with a good friend of mine about a week ago where we spoke about how the US began rebuilding Germany after the Second World War. One of the first things they did was put culture back on. For example, the philharmonic in Munich played a concert when everything else was still shattered. They didn’t have a concert hall; it was some of the first action to be taken to rebuild society.

Juliet Linley

It was a healing moment.

Florian Egli

A lot of the discussions that I’m hearing, at least in public policy, are proposing cuts to culture. And I think it’s a very simple mistake because it’s hard to put an economic value on culture but there is a huge social value that we’re risking.

WHAT’S NEXT FOR ART FAIRS?

Elise Van Middeltem

Well, I have another question. I mean, we’re all art-passionate but art fairs?

Juliet Linley

What do you think?

Elise Van Middeltem

It’s a big question. Look, I do think they were too big.

Frédérique Hutter

Too many and too big.

Elise Van Middeltem

With all my respect to all those who work in the field, honestly, how many art fairs were there? Almost every week you could be either at a biennale, an art fair or a triennale. It was unbelievable. And if you think about the environmental impact of that: the crates and the shipping. You know in some ways, Earth is taking a breather. But how do you find that right balance? Because it was a great window for a lot of galleries to show to new crowds.

Frédérique Hutter

It will come again; it will just be more focused and less will be more.

Elise Van Middeltem

I hope so.

Frédérique Hutter

I guess so because you can’t think of the art world without the art fair, where you can see the work physically.



Pictured, from far left

1. *Konfekt*’s compère and conversational driver, journalist Juliet Linley
2. Environmentalist Elise Van Middeltem
3. Food for thought
4. Economist and researcher Florian Egli



Elise Van Middeltem

Yes, it’s a must, you know, physical is important. You have to feel the work.

Frédérique Hutter

Some big galleries are starting to put big stories and studio visits with artist interviews online. One website features artworks and if someone looks at a piece for more than 60 seconds, a chat is opened up and you can talk to someone about it. But what I don’t like is when you’re always looking at a screen. It’s so unsexy.

Elise Van Middeltem

It is exhausting.

Juliet Linley

It’s exhausting enough to have constant on-screen video calls.

Elise Van Middeltem

You’re already online for the whole day. It used to be so nice to go to see art and then come home again.

Juliet Linley

Invigorated and inspired, and not tired.

Elise Van Middeltem

It’s like going to the forest. Going to see good art is like going to the forest.

Florian Egli

What’s the one art fair you would preserve?

Elise Van Middeltem

Yes, I was going to say: think about those really old Art Basel days without the whole circus. That was so beautiful.

Gianni Jetzer

I think what is very important is that income is diversified in the future. Artists cannot rely only on the art market because then only artists who are successful can survive. Otherwise, they can maybe teach and that’s it. I think that we need other revenue models. We need to be able to secure a more diverse biotope of these artists so that they can really create and innovate, and keep on doing things without the aim of selling.

Martina von Meyenburg

This whole principle of “the winner takes all” is in every industry; in the sports industry, in the financial industry, in the art industry.

WHAT’S NEXT FOR HEALTH

Juliet Linley

I also want to talk about happiness, wellbeing, health, looking ahead.

Elise Van Middeltem

We need lots of trees.

Juliet Linley

What do you think are our challenges, Elise?

Elise Van Middeltem

I mean, put coronavirus to one side: where I lived in California there are places that are burned to the ground. Really, we’ve got to turn now. This is the time in our lives to make that change. And honestly, I don’t want to go back to normal. What is “the norm”? I hope there is a new normal.

Juliet Linley

It requires awareness doesn’t it?

Elise Van Middeltem

It really does. I think there is a need for action: let’s go do it.

Gianni Jetzer

One of the stories that I read, which influenced me to become a vegan, was an interview with hotel entrepreneur André Balazs. He had this big estate in upstate New York that he bought from Bob Guccione, who was this kind of soft-core erotic photographer who became very successful. And so Balazs wanted to raise chickens for all his hotels. He had a study done, which said the chickens would take over the whole property and it would be destroyed after 10 years. And it kind of opened my eyes, this whole idea of the happy chicken in 99.9 per cent of the cases is just not true.

Juliet Linley

So you’re saying there needs to be an awareness to consume less.

Gianni Jetzer

I was raised in the 1980s. I love the 1980s. We were always told to switch off the lights. I love it, it's so poetic. But then I understood: if you don't eat the chicken, you can let that light burn all your life.

Juliet Linley

Happy, unhappy, just don't eat the chicken.

Florian Egli

One thing that I tried to do is have zero-franc or zero-dollar days. Just 24 hours where you don't spend a cent. Nothing.

Frédérique Hutter

Not even your Netflix subscription?

Florian Egli

No, that's OK.

Elise Van Middeltem

You mean like going out?

Florian Egli

You know, there are some days you cook the food that you have at home. You don't buy chewing gum. You don't take the tram. You don't get your takeout coffee; you bring your own lunch.

Frédérique Hutter

How many days?

Florian Egli

I don't do it consciously but every now and then I realise it's five o'clock and I haven't spent anything. I try to make a note whenever I have such a day.

Gianni Jetzer

You know what the crazy thing is? I totally understand the idea. And what really alarms me is that I think it's kind of sexy not to spend a franc, you know, for 24 hours. Like going vegan, it's contemporary living.

CONNECTING WITH NATURE

Juliet Linley

Is this a moment to unplug and reconnect with nature looking ahead? Oh, they're discussing chocolate mousse.

Florian Egli

There's some strong competition here.

Juliet Linley

This is the moment when perhaps we'll look back and it'll have been a watershed. In terms of your company SUGi, how is that working out, Elise?

Elise Van Middeltem

The benefits of reconnecting with nature doesn't need scientific analysis. During lockdown or semi-lockdown, everyone tried to find a patch of green to reconnect with. Think about even the stories you sought out. We all gravitated towards articles about the healing garden, how good it is to garden, how it is good to reconnect with land and to go barefoot. Everyone started to do a little planting and potting outside on their terraces. So in that vein, SUGi was something that I created out of a personal need. Because the issue of climate change is so big. But even more so, the pleasure of diversity, biodiversity, is a celebration of life.

Juliet Linley

So you were looking for something you could do specifically?

Elise Van Middeltem

Yes, and I found it through my friend in India, who had reversed completely degraded land through the application of the Miyawaki method, which is this Japanese technique to plant on a plot as small as 3 sq m an ultra dense, tiny forest. So you could basically do them anywhere in cities. And they're highly biodiverse because you only plant native species. We first start with the soil. See, that's another thing: you don't put a tree in the ground and then just let it be, no, you start with the soil, you bring it back with 100 per cent natural ingredients and then you nurture it. And then from there in two to three years you have a maintenance-free, biodiverse forest. Look, this winter we're actually creating a one-hectare, 30,000-tree forest in London.

Martina von Meyenburg

Where?

Elise Van Middeltem

In Barking and Dagenham. It's in a park that has no trees, nothing. So we're going to bring life back to it. These urban forests are great for people to just come and visit, to gather, to cool down. I mean, all of our cities are heating up. But what is really nice is that what I see in places from Lebanon and Cameroon to Pakistan is that wherever we plant, people come back together. They want to be a part of it all – it gives hope.

Martina von Meyenburg

Can I help?

Elise Van Middeltem

Yes, please. Anyone anywhere can help.

Juliet Linley

Martina has already joined your team.

Elise Van Middeltem

Great. Thank you for helping to build biodiversity.

Juliet Linley

That's just fantastic. Because it is important to come together.

Elise Van Middeltem

And to your question, you know, funnily enough SUGi is based in Zürich but we have not yet created an urban forest here because...

Everyone

... there are so many forests.

WHAT'S NEXT FOR CITIES?

Gianni Jetzer

I think what is really exciting is that, despite coronavirus, there's a big revolution going on. There is really something happening. People have moved out of these American cities, the larger American cities started to shrink in 2015. It was already a trend.

Florian Egli

Because they're not liveable places.

Gianni Jetzer

Yes, yes. Right.



Pictured, from top

1. Curator Gianni Jetzer
2. Martina von Meyenburg

Florian Egli

But in the end, you realise that actually the ancient, older structures are liveable communities. For instance, pedestrian zones in older Italian cities where you have narrow streets enable street life and connections. The space is just so much more habitable compared to two-, three- or four-lane streets where you barely have the space to walk or cycle. It's just anything that allows interaction because driving doesn't.

Juliet Linley

I guess we're a bit privileged [here in Zürich]. But do you think there is going to be a mass movement out to the countryside away from the cities? Again, I think it's a privilege to be able to do that.

Florian Egli

It depends on the city.

Gianni Jetzer

In America, it's already happening.

Juliet Linley

But permanently or just in this period?

Florian Egli

I don't think it's going to happen in Europe; the cities are different.

Elise Van Middeltem

I don't know how it is for you but we have a lot of friends in the art world in New York. They left in March and have not gone back.

Juliet Linley

But have they gone to their country houses, or have they sold up and left?

Elise Van Middeltem

Country houses. But San Francisco, for example, many have moved back to their parents' [houses] in more rural places.

WHAT'S NEXT FOR DESIGN?

Juliet Linley

What are the next issues surrounding ecology and will 2021 herald a new approach in each of your realms of work? Let's talk about design.

Frédérique Hutter

Maybe we can also talk about fashion. For example, a friend of mine is reusing and working with old kimonos. And she's created a new collection.

Juliet Linley

So vintage is the future?

Frédérique Hutter

This is upcycling. Perhaps it is the future; you have fewer clothes but more clothes with a story. And, of course, they are all unique pieces.

Juliet Linley

You're not going to go to dinner parties and someone else is wearing the same clothes.

Frédérique Hutter

Everything is different, because there's only one kimono in this fabric.

Juliet Linley

Gianni do you have any thoughts on the future of design?

Gianni Jetzer

I think there should be incentives.

Juliet Linley

Give us examples, someone might hear you.

Gianni Jetzer

[For instance,] if you renounce your own car, you get something.

Juliet Linley

So they give you a bike instead. Or they give you a tax rebate?

Gianni Jetzer

I think there should be incentives to just push things not to forbid things or be taxed: you get benefits if you do something that is beneficial for society.

Elise Van Middelme

I hadn't thought of that, but it is amazing.

Gianni Jetzer

Maybe it could work for design too. A design should also be beneficial in some way.

Juliet Linley

And be sustainable as well.

Gianni Jetzer

Yes, sustainable, it could secure clean water. More and more, as I get older, things like trees, pure air, sunlight, swimming in clean water – this is my notion of luxury.

Florian Egli

It's funny that you mention water because Switzerland is known for its waterways. Everything is clean everywhere: rivers, lakes – it is crazy. Now, go back to the 1950s, even the 1960s, that was not the case at all.

Frédérique Hutter

In Switzerland?

Florian Egli

There were no sewage systems in a lot of places in Switzerland. And then all of a sudden, we decided to change.

Frédérique Hutter

What happened?

Juliet Linley

Who cleaned Switzerland up? Who was the driving force?

Florian Egli

The government. It was a decision. It was like "OK, do we want to clean waterways? Yes or no?" It's again an example of decide and do it. And it works.

ASPIRATIONS

Juliet Linley

I want to know what your hopes and dreams are for next year and beyond. How about that for a very, very simple question. You're looking at me, Gianni, go on.

Gianni Jetzer

I mean, that's a very personal question. It's kind of a personal wish but I really wish that racial injustice could stop. Especially after what I've seen in the US, I think there should be a fairer system, you know. It's been going on for so long, it has to stop.

Juliet Linley

Beautiful. Elise?

Elise Van Middelme

Mine is nature-related, of course. I'm thinking about how I had the opportunity to go out with a backpack and be in nature and in the wild. My dream is for a collective reconnection with nature leading to restoration and rebuilding.

Juliet Linley

Nice. Martina.

Martina von Meyenburg

Well I obviously agree with both of you. But I come back to what I said before, I think, for me, what I find frightening is the "winner takes it all" principle. I think we need solidarity. When I think of this one per cent, the economic divide and this acceleration of inequality – the social pact needs to be stronger. I think the whole system needs to be more fluid and more creative, more open and more just.

Frédérique Hutter

Do you know the expression "*Reculer pour mieux sauter*"? It means "take one step back to see the big picture". My hope is that this pandemic was a chance to step back and that in 2021 we can take a running jump at the big themes which were there before the pandemic like CO2.

Florian Egli

In terms of wishes, my one wish is that we manage to disconnect value or appreciation from monetary success. I think that's so ingrained in our brains and it doesn't make sense. But I just thought, when all of you spoke now, that this conversation is super encouraging to me because we set off discussing a lot about art and design – the general beauty of things. And then the conversation moved to inequality and how do we treat ecology? What is nature? What is its actual value for us? I think that's extremely encouraging because if the conversation takes place in these circles, then for me that is an absolute sign of hope.



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MITTELEUROPA MEASURES UP

Tucking in with Rier



3.

CONTENTS

WEEKEND. Off to the mid-Atlantic for a mid-winter dip

HOSTING. An Alexandria family invites us to join a Coptic Christmas celebration

MENUS. In a Zürich kitchen for a lesson in cosy classics

LOOKS. Hefty knits, toasty coats and evening wear for the holidays

DISCUSSIONS. A Swiss roundtable on liberalism, plus liberal doses of wine and pudding