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News from a learning federal authority

„This this“ art project comes to successful close

After more than a year, an art project unique among Germany's federal authorities has come to an end at the Federal Environment Agency (UBA) in Dessau, one whose focus was the ways in which UBA works and the daily lives of children in Dessau. The project that overarched generations and launched by the German-British artist Tino Sehgal helped to overturn hard and fast behavioural patterns and to make personal connections to the city of Dessau. An end-of-project celebration with all participants in the project will take place in Dessau on 17 April 2008 as of 3:00 p.m.

Sehgal's work distinguishes itself through its performative, process-oriented characteristics, as his works encourage people to make unforeseen encounters. Through "This this" Sehgal exposes where art, environment, and education can meet and thus addresses a core UBA mandate. Over the past 12 months 160 UBA staff members have met with pupils from the 5th and 6th classes of three Dessau schools to jointly design a preset situation. Pupils spent the morning at the Agency, and roles were switched in the afternoon with pupils taking the lead and showing what was important to them. "This project has demonstrated that it pays for a public office to be transparent, to depart from set routines and embark on new paths for the sake of raising youth awareness of environmental protection. We have learned that something new can be generated and developed in our society", said Dr. Thomas Holzmann, UBA Vice President.

These encounters with other lifestyles and searching for a common language were unexpected yet of lasting effect. They opened pupils' eyes to their jobs, they discussed climate change, glacier melt, and explained the advantages of energy-saving technologies in the home. Others crafted a "feeling box" filled with treasures from the ocean, visited all the kitchenettes at the Agency and, together with their guests, checked whether lights were switched off, refrigerators were set at the proper temperature, or if waste was separated properly. What surprised staff members most was the children's spontaneity and ease in communication. These children then showed the adults the world through their eyes, taking them to the football pitch, the department store, the zoo, and the natural history museum, as well to theatre workshops, piano lessons, or religion lessons.

They showed staff their school and their model train set, or went to the pet shop to ask for a suitable lead for a pet rabbit. 12-year-old Johanna put it in a nutshell, saying, "I had a look into the life a person whom I had never seen before. I like it and learned something new."

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“This this“ was acquired by the German Federal Art Collection and first loaned to the UBA as part of its *Art and Environment* series. 32-year-old Sehgal attracted international attention at the Venice Biennale three years ago. His work, which has received multiple awards, is exhibited in a number of museums and galleries.

Further audio and visual information is on the Internet at: <http://www.umweltbundesamt.de> and <http://kunstundumwelt.umweltbundesamt.de>