

PRESS RELEASE

Thomas Grünfeld

Chatham House Rules

29 May – 04 July 2026

Hamburg, Germany — Hidde van Seggelen is pleased to announce *Chatham House Rules*, a solo exhibition of works by Thomas Grünfeld. This presentation marks a continuation of a collaboration that began with the artist's first exhibition at the gallery's former London space at 2 Michael Road.

Grünfeld is known for his play with the boundaries of domesticity, privacy, and the "uncanny" (*das Unheimliche*). For *Chatham House Rules*, the gallery's architecture and atmosphere have been rearranged. The large front window, which normally provides an unrestricted view of the space from outside, is obscured by a glass curtain. In front of this voile, one of Grünfeld's small Misfit sculptures, *Misfit (Pekingese/boar piglet)*, sits on a wooden bench. At night, obscured by this veil, silhouettes of objects within the space appear indistinct and suggestive.

Installed on the wall behind the veil is a metal-framed work consisting of small leather seats and round mirrors. Titled *Station 5*, this piece references the carnival game known in English as a "high striker" (or *Hau den Lukas* in Germany). However, it also alludes to the traditional Christian devotion known as the Stations of the Cross (or *Via Crucis*), which commemorates Jesus Christ's last day on Earth.

A recent work, a large *Misfit (cow/ostrich)* from 2024, stands momentarily frozen in the room. In the vicinity is a printed image titled *Margaret*, depicting a woman smoking, standing, and contemplating while holding a log—a reference to the Log Lady from David Lynch's *Twin Peaks*. However, the woman depicted here is Ms. Eiting, from the studio that has been crafting and fabricating Thomas's fabric objects for over four decades. This work, an edition issued by the late John Morgan studio, is printed and engraved on aluminum, evoking the look and feel of a name panel at the entrance of an apartment building. Small clouds of smoke emit from the panel.



Margaret, 2017, anodized aluminium, 54 x 48cm

Movement through the gallery is further restricted; to provide access to the rear space, the artist has created a small gap in the back wall. In this area, the viewer encounters photographic images of posing women from the artist's *Heimspiel* (1999) series. Comprising 12 dye-transfer prints, the images bear titles such as *Towel*, *Cat*, and *Ball*.

Grünfeld's beautiful, existential puzzles destabilize how we define the world around us. When we look at art through an ontological lens, we are stepping away from what the artwork means or how it makes us feel, and instead asking a much more fundamental question: What is the nature of its being? What kind of "thing" is it?

The tension between the observed and the hidden is central to the contradiction between the natural and the artificial—a theme in Grünfeld's work that was examined by the late art critic Stuart Morgan in his collection of writings, *What the Butler Saw*. Analyzing Grünfeld's Misfits, Morgan sees a "perverse" quality that disrupts the stability of biological reality. By presenting the artificial with a disturbing, almost sentient plausibility, Grünfeld highlights the fragility of the categories used to define "life" and "nature."

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By synthesizing the formal language of design with the disruptive logic of Surrealism, the work prompts a reflection on the phenomenology of life and the inherent contradictions of the human condition. His sculptures—ranging from the hybrid Misfits to his tactile "felt" and "cushion" works—serve as formal apparatuses that challenge the boundaries between the natural and the artificial, the utilitarian and the aesthetic, between attraction and repulsion.

About Grünfeld's career emerged within the Cologne art scene of the 1980s, a period when the city served as a primary axis of international art discourse, defined by the convergence of high-concept sculpture and a subversive approach to materiality. His work is situated within a lineage of 20th-century object-making, citing the furniture-based conceptualism of Richard Artschwager and the staged, voyeuristic aesthetics of Carlo Mollino.

Institutional History and Collections Grünfeld's exhibition history is deeply rooted in Hamburg, beginning with a series of pivotal early solo exhibitions and presentations at the city's XPO Galerie in 1987, 1988, and 1990 (including his acclaimed presentation *Paroli*). Most notable was his inclusion in the landmark exhibition *Einleuchten* (1989–1990) at the Deichtorhallen, curated by Harald Szeemann. Parallel to the *Einleuchten* exhibition, Grünfeld showed his first taxidermy MCC at the Übersee-Club, organized by the Kunstverein in Hamburg. His radical conceptual strategies also drew the ongoing engagement of distinguished curators such as Zdeněk Felix, who curated the groundbreaking exhibition *Home Sweet Home* (1997) at the Deichtorhallen, for which Grünfeld created *Polsterraum* (1997).

Thomas Grünfeld's works are held in numerous prominent public and private collections globally, including the Nationalgalerie in Berlin, Akademiegalerie in Düsseldorf, Sammlung Falckenberg in Hamburg, Sprengel Museum in Hannover, Museum Morsbroich in Leverkusen, Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, Kunstmuseum Stuttgart, Sammlung Landesbank Baden-Württemberg in Stuttgart, and Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg in Germany. In France, his work is included in the collections of the Centre Pompidou in Paris, Frac Lorraine in Metz, Château d'Oiron, and Les Abattoirs in Toulouse.

Additional European collections featuring his work include the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen in Rotterdam and the Museum Voorlinden in Wassenaar, the CAL CEGO Collection in Barcelona, and the Museu Coleção Berardo in Lisbon. Further afield, his work can also be found in the 21c Museum Hotels collection in Louisville, United States, and the Museo Universitario Arte Contemporáneo in Mexico City.

Preview and opening on Thursday 28 May at 7 pm.
The artist will be present.

For further information and images, please contact the gallery at mail@hiddevanseggelen.com