Ladies and Gentlemen, I would like to take a moment to wish you a warm welcome. I am pleased to be here today and I have thought long and hard about the topic of my speech, "leading diversity agendas". I would like to begin by telling you about my own experiences with diversity. I studied Education and Psychology at the University of Klagenfurt in Carinthia and went on to finish my theoretical training for Psychotherapy. My thesis on the topic of „Schizophrenia, Art and Art Therapy" lead me to the House of Artists in Gugging, where I have been working since September 1 1997.

I am in charge of the Gallery, am the acting director of the museum and curator of the museum exhibitions. My present work has little to do with my academic training—in the last 10 years I learned and developed alongside of the Art / Brut Center.

Since one of our topics today is that of difference, it can be said that those receiving psychiatric care are, because of their behavior, often regarded as being different or „other." At the turn of the 20th century in Europe and much of the Western world, psychiatric hospitals were built outside of cities to house and treat the mentally ill. Treatment and care were stressed so long as it was done far enough away so that it did not distress the so-called normal people. But that is not to say that psychiatry has only been interested in the care and protection of those that are different. It has also helped to develop and motivate their talent. The story of Adolf Wölfi, who was a patient at the "Irrenhaus Waldau", and his psychiatrist Walter Morgenthaler is a case in point. Morgenthaler's monograph "Ein Geisteskranker als Künstler" which first appeared in 1921, documents the Swiss artist's extraordinary artistic talent. One year later, Hans Prinzhorn, a German psychiatrist, published his influential work “Bildnerei der Geisteskranken,” or “Artistry of the Mentally Ill”. Although this book was intended for psychiatric and academic readers, it took on canonical status for Parisian Sureaualists such as Max Ernst, Dali, Klee and Picasso. The artworks that
Prinzhorn assembled are today housed in the Prinzhorn Collection in Heidelberg, Germany.

In 1969 Arnulf Rainer’s extensive private collection of art was shown in the Vienna Secession, which included also works by the Gugging artists. Their work was a sensation but even then no one could have imagined that these psychiatric patients would have their own museum 37 years later. In 1986, psychiatrist and sculptor, Johann Feilacher took over the Center for Art-Psychotherapy which was founded by Psychiatrist Leo Navratil and renamed it the House of Artists. Its new name was meant to highlight the talent of its residents and their artistic endeavors rather than their psychiatric conditions. Feilacher was convinced that the Gugging artists should have the same chances on the art market that other artists did and founded the Gallery of Gugging Artists, a cooperative Gallery run for and by the artists, in 1994. Like the exhibitions of the 1970s, the gallery was a success and in 1990, the Gugging artists were awarded with the Oskar Kokoschka prize for their contributions to contemporary art.

The gallery remains an exceptional enterprise where, despite their conditions, the artists maintain ownership through their trustees. Even today it is seldom to hear of people with chronic psychiatric illnesses earning their own money and paying taxes. The House of Artists, in which the artists live and work, once housed the Gallery. Space was limited. In 1995, the nearby children's clinic was closed and remained empty. We made the decision to turn this 3000m2 empty building into a place where the artists could better present their work. In December 1997 we completed restorations. With the help of interns from Luxembourg, Belgium and Germany we created a place where framing, storing, photographing, and most importantly exhibiting the work of the Gugging artists was possible. At that time we did not have a lease; we were essentially squatters, possessing an urgent wish to find a space for the artists to work. Our goal was not only to get a lease for the building from the government of lower Austria, but to renovate the space completely. We wanted to make sure that from that
point on the important works by the Gugging artists were always on view and accessible to the public.

In 2000 we secured a lease and, with the help of two social projects which help to provide work for individuals with psychiatric illnesses and mild physical disabilities, we began restoring the 3000 m² building. It was out of this project that the Integrative Culture Center Gugging was to develop. Due to our limited funds, we organized the majority of architectural planning and building ourselves. In 2003 the private foundation for the artists of Gugging was granted which secured the creation of the Museum Gugging. After the first floor of the building was properly restored, the new gallery, the largest Art/Brut gallery to date, was opened and alongside of it the Open Studio Gugging. The Studio is open to all visitors and allows them the chance to engage in art making. The materials are free to use and the overseer acts as a middle man between material and maker. The Studio has become a place where new talent is discovered. The overseer, once an intern at the House of Artists, is trained as an art therapist. Although his background comes into play since the Studio is used primarily by people with a history of psychiatric experiences, it is by no means the driving force behind the support he provides in the gallery. Two young artists who visit the Studio regularly have shown such great talent that we recently showed their work at a well-attended New York art fair. This exemplifies how important cooperation between the different spheres at Gugging is, for the overall and continuous growth of the project.

In the summer of 2006 the Museum Gugging opened its doors for the first time with the exhibition “Blug—4 Decades of Art from Gugging”. The title of the show “Blug”, is the title of a work by Franz Kernbeis. It is a neologism for the German word Pflug, meaning Plough. For over four decades, the artists have ploughed their field to make the Art/Brut Center a reality. After the opening of the new gallery, our small team began to consider how to create a better marketing technique with the resources we had. Our team consisted of Johann
Feilacher; Psychiatrist, sculptor and director of the House of Artists; Florian Reese, art therapist, director of the Open Studio; Gerti Hacker; secretary, archivist, photographer, and customer service assistant, and me. We decided to change our name from the Integrative Culture Center Gugging to the Art / Brut Center Gugging. Although our ideology has not changed, the name better expresses our goals.

Besides hosting the Museum Gugging, the Art / Brut Center also accommodates the Gallery of the Gugging Artists, the Open Atelier, an event hall known as the Villa, and, since December 2006, a museum store. It goes without saying that the House of Artists is an integral part of the Art / Brut Center Gugging and in the near future the center will be completed with the addition of a Cafe/Restaurant.

Through their artwork, the artists have created jobs for many people. They are from a wide spectrum of educational backgrounds. A team of 5 care givers make sure that the artists are well looked after. The daily organisation is discussed at the morning meeting, in which Johann Feilacher, Florian Reese and I partake in as well.

During the construction of the Art / Brut Center, trained professionals worked with those from the integration project. The former intern from Belgium, an art historian, began to work in the museum as an exhibition organizer. The shop was taken over by an experienced store manager - who I became acquainted with as he is also a collector.

We were able to take over two workers from the social projects – one electrician and a caretaker, who also helps us with the technical setup of the exhibitions. We work with an interdisciplinary team and a lot of tasks are outsourced.
The overall goal of our team is to establish the Gugging artists on the art market. The works of the Gugging artists are classics examples of Art Brut, a concept created by French artist Jean Dubuffet in the 1940s, which describes art created by those outside the traditional art world. Art Brut has certainly been a part of contemporary art but not one that is very well known. Both Art Brut and its creators were only taken seriously on the fringes of society. True Art Brut comes from an inner need for the artist to express him or herself and it is free from the influences of trained techniques. Quite often the Art Brut artists are people who are not accepted in so-called normal society. In English Art Brut is often translated as outsider art, which is very telling. Our goal is to integrate the Gugging artists and their work into the mainstream art market. This has come to pass through worldwide exhibitions in important galleries and museums such as the Setagaya in Tokio, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Vienna Museum of Modern Art, as well as through the sales of the art in the gallery through which the artists earn their own money. For many people with a history of psychiatric treatment, that is not always possible. When a work is purchased the artist receives 50% of the earnings in his bank account. The artists not only earn enough to take care of their daily expenses but also to go on vacations. It is important to us that they are able to enjoy their successes during their lifetime.

Through the Art / Brut Center and the museum this has come to pass. The artists are able to enjoy their own museum and they help shaping the museum, which is a work in progress. Johann Garber often changes his second room in the museum and likes to lead visitors through „his world“.

The artists have lots of contact with museum visitors at exhibition openings, as well as everyday. The House of Artists cannot be visited, to protect the private sphere where the artists live and work. But the artists also work in the Open Atelier and in my office, which doubles as their Atelier. We attach great importance to the artists’ on-site presence and their contact with visitors as it offers visitors a chance to confront the pre-conceived notions they might have about people with psychiatric illnesses.
The Gugging Museum is different from the „Collection de l’Art Brut“ in Lausanne because the „Collection de l’Art Brut“ follows the conditions of Jean Dubuffet very strictly. It can only lend works to specific museums and it only admits Art Brut artists in their exhibition program. The Museum Gugging has a more open-door policy. We see Art Brut as an intrinsic part of art and we therefore organize exhibitions, in which Art Brut is presented together with other types of art. The museum is divided into four exhibition sections. The main section is known as the „gugging classics“. It is a permanent show of Art from Gugging. The works are from the Gugging Artists’ Private Foundation as well as from loans from other collections. Art from Gugging is the main motivation for most of the international visitors who visit our museum.

It is also an important task of the museum to present the Gugging Artists in a way that they get the recognition they deserve. Representation has an impact on the acceptance of the works themselves, regardless the personal history of its makers. Real interest in the artworks is taking the place of voyeurism. In the seventies for instance, most of the visitors were merely interested in the maker’s personal history, namely his mental illness and diagnosis.

Art, as it exists in the House of Artists and in the Art / Brut Center is integral part of life, not something that stands on a pedestal. Art is there for everyone. The motto “Living in art” is best expressed by the exterior of the House of Artists, painted by the artists up to the roof. The chairs in the museum, painted by Johann Garber, are meant to sit on.

The Art / Brut Center Gugging positions itself as the worldwide Competence Center for Art Brut and has therefore very specific goals. Nevertheless it opens itself up in an artistic sense. The Villa is not only a place for symposia, but also for concerts, lectures, dance and theater. The Open Studio is what the name says and everyone is welcome there. In addition to specialized literature, the museum shop also offers design objects and toys for kids. Everyone can find something he or she likes.

The slash between Art and Brut in the Center’s name indicates the openness of
our multi-medium cultural project. Hopefully, this will be perceived by the public and those in our surroundings. In order to create a better understanding of Gugging for our neighbors we are hosting a Cultural Festival in September. The farmers and craftsmen from our area will come together on the museum grounds and offer their products and services. As the museum sees itself as a part of its environment this will be a good opportunity to get and give support from those living in the Klosterneuburg area. Because most of our visitors are international or from other parts of Austria this also gives us a chance to encourage the local population to understand more about what we do at the Art / Brut Center Gugging.

When the center is completely finished it will be possible to spend and entire day here. After a museum visit one can visit the gallery, eat in the restaurant, and then perhaps see a concert in the villa.

Since I have been working with the Gugging artists, much has changed. I have been with the project “Art / Brut Center Gugging” since the beginning and I will continue my work into the distant future. There are still several additions that are required and the Museum Gugging will also have an academic Institute under its roof. Our plan is for the Art / Brut Center to become the largest organization sponsoring Art / Brut worldwide while maintaining our openness to other artistic practices. Not only do our open-minded policies lead to interesting exhibits but it also allows us to reach a wider range of visitors. The Art / Brut Center Gugging is a place where there is dialogue between the team and their diverse interests, the artists, and the visitors. It has also given a new meaning to what was once a forgotten psychiatric building and made it a place where art and culture are on the forefront. When the clinic Gugging is closed in September 2007, we will still be here, alongside the new Elite University, ISTA (Institute of Science and Technology Austria). We will then be a part of the campus and we look forward to the dialogue with the university. The dialogue, in fact, has
already begun. The Art / Brut Center Gugging is really a place of learning. It breaks down barriers and is a wonderful example for what a visionary idea can become when the right people are there to implement it.

Galerie der Künstler aus Gugging
Museum Gugging

Haus der Künstler
Walla ‘86
Tschirtner, 1998