

press release

KUNSTHAL ROTTERDAM



Press release, 25 June 2026

A Chair and You

26 September 2026 until 31 January 2027

Chairs like you have never seen before: in the exhibition *A Chair and You*, these everyday objects have become the stars of an immersive performance. From 26 September, Kunsthall Rotterdam is presenting a major retrospective based on one of the world's most important private collections of chairs, brought together by collector Thierry Barbier-Mueller and staged by Robert Wilson. Offering visitors a multisensory experience, this total installation in HALL 2 highlights the significance and almost theatrical power of chairs.

The presentation of around 150 chairs by 124 designers from the collection of Thierry Barbier-Mueller (1960–2023) was entrusted to the American director, set designer, and artist Robert Wilson (1941–2025). Inspired by the performing arts, Wilson used light, sound, and scenography to create four themed environments around these chairs. They vary from a space with organic shapes and unexpected materials to an environment evoking a sense of tranquillity and order, with clean lines and soft colours referencing modernist architecture. Wilson's impressive set designs for *A Chair and You* immerse visitors in layered scenes, transforming chairs into the protagonists of a theatrical experience.

The Thierry Barbier-Mueller Collection

At the end of the 1990s, Geneva-based entrepreneur and collector Thierry Barbier-Mueller started collecting chairs with a sculptural quality that reaches far beyond traditional approaches to chair design. Spontaneous discoveries and personal encounters resulted in a collection consisting of more than 650 pieces, spanning a period from the 1960s until now. The selection for the exhibition at the Kunsthall features 150 extraordinary chairs by artists, designers, and architects like Ettore Sottsass, Ron Arad, Martino Gamper, Maarten Baas, Donald Judd, Niki de Saint Phalle, Lawrence Weiner, and Franz West.

Bright Space

In the *Bright Space*, the first section of the exhibition, visitors will feel like they have stepped into a Jackson Pollock painting. Paul Reeves' track *Happy Chappy* serves as the catchy soundtrack to this playful and colourful environment. Bathing in bright light, islands of expressive chairs make up a lively landscape. The chairs were intuitively divided into groups around themes like animal prints, contrasts, unusual shapes, humour, and technique. For *Hairy Chair* (2011), Belgian designer Charles Kaisin (1972) covered a found chair in strips of shredded paper, resulting in a soft, almost animal-fur-like surface. For his *Classroom Chair* (1971), German designer Stefan Wewerka (1928–2013) bent a simple, red school chair into a circular construction. Having lost its original function, the chair appears to be rebelling: the object arches its back, thereby pushing up its user, who will eventually slide off.

Medium Space

The *Medium Space* is characterised by tranquillity, minimalism and geometry. Its clean lines and neutral colour palette were inspired by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's Barcelona Pavilion. The mechanical sounds visitors hear in this open space enhance the architectural quality of the chairs that enter into a dialogue with the minimalist scenery. This section includes the *Amadeus Chairs* (1991), a series of chairs Robert Wilson designed for a production of the opera *The Magic Flute*. The steel objects with elegant lines resembling branches tie in with a forest-like set design.

Dark Space

The changing spotlights in the *Dark Space* section showcase alternating designs, thereby making it seem as if the objects are afloat in the darkness, like stars in a planetarium. Wilson guides visitors past a selection of remarkable chairs. For *Redesigned ZigZag* (1978), for instance, Alessandro Mendini (1931–2019) reinterpreted an iconic chair by Gerrit Rietveld to create a playfully distorted object that challenges the 'rules' of design. Fascinated by metal, for *Second-Hand Rose*, designer Ron Arad (1951) wrapped an existing chair in copper and stainless steel plates. He thus created a second layer inviting spectators to experience the object in new ways.

Kaleidoscope

With a soundtrack courtesy of Lou Reed's electric guitar, the sculptural, metal chairs in this mirrored cube appear to endlessly vanish into this reflective space. With its silver-coloured surface, Philipp Aduatz's (1982) *Melting Chair* (2011) almost seems to dissolve in its surroundings. The chair appears to be melting, while at the same time remaining fully functional.

Collaboration

The exhibition is realised in close collaboration with Fondation Musée Barbier-Mueller in Geneva. The first venue was realised in coproduction with mudac – Museum of Contemporary Design and Applied Arts in Lausanne in 2022.

Press preview and opening

The press preview of *A Chair and You* will take place on Friday 25 September 2026 at 11:00 hrs attended by Kunsthall curator Shehera Grot and guest curators Chantal Prod'hom (director of mudac 2000–2022) and Charlotte Savolainen-Mailler (Fondation Musée Barbier–

Mueller). For attending the opening and/or press preview, members of the press can apply for accreditation via communicatie@kunsthall.nl, specifying the media outlet they work for.

Photo captions from left to right:

1. Stefan Wewerka (1928-2013, Germany) *Classroom Chair*, 1971. Red lacquered wood. Edition 17/40 © c/o Pictoright Amsterdam 2026. Photo ©Patrick Goetelen. Collection Thierry Barbier-Mueller
2. Bright Space in A Chair and You. Grassi Museum, Leipzig. Foto/ Photo © Luca Girardini, 2024
3. Charles Kaisin (1972, The Netherlands) *Hairy Chair*, 2011. Wood, glue, paper strips. Edition 8/20. Each work is unique. Photo ©Patrick Goetelen. Collection Thierry Barbier-Mueller

→ For more press information and/or photographic material, please contact Kunsthall Rotterdam's communication department: Caroline van den Boomgaard +31 (0)6-10901348 +31 (0)6-42507763; Sabine Parmentier t. +31 (0)10- 4400321, +31 (0)6-52636232; communicatie@kunsthall.nl
→ In case of publication please mention: info +31 (0)10-4400301, www.kunsthall.nl, opening hours: Tuesdays – Sundays 10:00 – 17:00 hrs.

About Kunsthall Rotterdam

Kunsthall Rotterdam is one of the Netherlands' leading cultural institutes, situated in the Museumpark in Rotterdam. Designed by the renowned architect Rem Koolhaas in 1992, the Kunsthall has seven different exhibition spaces. The Kunsthall annually presents a varied programme consisting of over 20 exhibitions. As visitors are always able to visit multiple concurrent exhibitions, the Kunsthall offers them an adventurous journey through different worlds and art movements. Culture for a wide audience, from modern-day masters and contemporary art to overlooked cultures, photography, fashion, and design. The exhibitions are accompanied by an extensive programme of activities. Follow the Kunsthall on www.kunsthall.nl | [Facebook](#) | [TikTok](#) | [YouTube](#) | [Instagram](#)

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