

Press Release

Industrial Furniture – Prototypes of the Modern Era

Press Preview	Tuesday, 24 May 2011, 10:30 a.m.
Opening	Tuesday, 24 May 2011, 8 p.m.
Exhibition Venue	MAK Study Collection Furniture MAK, Stubenring 5, 1010 Vienna
Exhibition Term	25 May–30 October 2011
Opening Hours	Tues MAK NITE® 10 a.m.–midnight Wed–Sun 10 a.m.–6 p.m., Mon closed

The MAK exhibition “Industrial Furniture – Prototypes of the Modern Era” is devoted to a hitherto barely recognized phenomenon of design history. The term “industrial furniture” refers to pieces of furniture designed in factories as devices to aid in certain work processes. They were typically made from screwed-together or welded iron plates, sheet metal, steel pipes and wooden boards, with no regard for aesthetic aspects. These designs “from actual practice for actual practice” represent “elementary design” in the best sense of the term.

Their designs, reduced to the bare essence and for the most part bereft of any ornamental accessories, have caused these pieces of workplace furniture to be viewed as representing the quintessence of functionalism. They are built according to whatever needs arise; their designs are created in a thoroughly ad hoc manner, and are for the most part oriented toward the technical requirements and industrial work processes of a factory. Anything that does not serve productivity is done without.

Since the end of the industrial era, pieces of industrial furniture have increasingly come to be used in the private sphere as fashionable accessories—such as for furnishing urban loft apartments—where they emanate a certain bourgeois chic, signifying an original and individual lifestyle. At the same time, they fulfill a nostalgic need for historical grounding and for the cultural heritage of bygone eras—much as pieces like rococo chairs and Biedermeier secretary desks often do.

In their simple and straightforward construction, they also influenced the classical modernist designers—above all architects—of the early 20th-century. In contrast to the original purpose of industrial furniture objects as functional devices for the workplace, the architects and designers of the modern era were interested in the aesthetics of machines and the industrial style in general.

To this day, industrial furniture continues to see use in factories for specific purposes and activities, and it is still made by the workers and mechanics themselves; such pieces of furniture are meant as nothing more than robust working surfaces and easy-to-organize places to put objects, as well as simple seating and safe storage.

A great number of the pieces shown in the MAK exhibition “Industrial Furniture – Prototypes of the Modern Era” trace their origins back to four Austrian industrial facilities: Vienna’s Kromus factory (which produced metal objects and iron furniture), closed in 2007 and was torn down later; the leading, internationally prominent ironworks in Sulzau-Werfen (which has produced rolls for the steel industry since 1850); the St. Pölten production facility of Glanzstoff Austria (producer of viscose yarns), which was shut down following a major fire in 2008; and the over 100-year-old Vöcklabruck factory of Eternit (where the synonymous fiber cement building material is produced; Eternit became known in the design field thanks first and foremost to objects by Swiss designer Will Guhl). Alongside the furniture from Austrian industrial facilities, several foreign objects from France, Germany and England are also on display.

All press material on this exhibition is available for download at MAK.at/press.

Press Data Sheet

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Curator	Sebastian Hackenschmidt (MAK Curator of Furniture and Woodwork)
Catalog	This exhibition will be accompanied by the publication of <i>INDUSTRIAL FURNITURE – Prototypes of the Modern Era</i> , ed. MAK Vienna, with text contributions by Sebastian Hackenschmidt, Martina Kandeler-Fritsch and Monika Wagner, MAK Studies 20, German/English, 128 pages, MAK Vienna / Verlag für moderne Kunst Nürnberg 2011, € 25.-. Available at the MAK Design Shop.
MAK Admission	€ 9.90 with MAK guide / € 7.90 / reduced: € 5.50 Free admission every Saturday®
MAK Expert-guided Tour	Thursday, 26 May 2011, 5 p.m. with Jakob Gasteiger, artist and collector, and Sebastian Hackenschmidt
MAK Press Office	Monika Meryn (head of press office) Olivia Harrer Christiane Vogl Tel. (+43-1) 711 36-229 Fax (+43-1) 711 36-227 presse@MAK.at www.MAK.at

Vienna, 10 May 2011