

STARS, FEATHERS, TASSELS
The Wiener Werkstätte Artist Felice Rix-Ueno
(1893–1967)

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MAK – Press and PR

Press Release

Vienna, 21.11.2023

presse@MAK.at

Press Conference

Tuesday, 21.11.2023, 10 am

Please register via presse@MAK.at

With her highly poetic, independent style, Felice Rix-Ueno established herself as one of the most remarkable artists of the Wiener Werkstätte (WW). She produced hundreds of design drawings for the WW, primarily for fabric patterns but also for wallpapers, embroideries, works in enamel, fashion and home accessories, toys, and commercial graphic design. In her second home of Japan, she found success as a university professor and founded her own design institute. In the year when this unique designer would have celebrated her 130th birthday, the MAK is proud to host her first solo show outside Japan: with some 200 objects the exhibition *STARS, FEATHERS, TASSELS: The Wiener Werkstätte Artist Felice Rix-Ueno (1893–1967)* presents a broad cross section of her oeuvre.

“Lizzi,” as she called herself, was born in Vienna on 1 June 1893. Her Hungarian-born grandmother, Wilhelmine Rix, invented the famous beauty product “Pasta Pompadour.” Her father, Julius Rix, was a businessman who wore many hats before becoming branch manager and then managing director of the WW, which had been founded in 1903. Felice Rix and her three younger sisters were raised in an upper-middle-class, liberal Jewish household in which creative entrepreneurship and artistic creativity went hand in hand. After a year at the private Streblov painting school she attended the Graphic Teaching and Experimental Design Institute before moving on to the School of Arts and Crafts.

Around 1914 Rix designed her first pieces for the famous Wiener Werkstätte (WW). At that time she was studying under Josef Hoffmann, who had founded the WW together with Koloman Moser and Fritz Waerndorfer and frequently

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invited his students to collaborate with the company. Influenced by the Japanese stylistic idiom, which was taught at the School of Arts and Crafts e.g., using the example of stencils (katagami), Rix developed her own distinctive style.

She remained one of the WW's principal designers until its closure in 1932. In the course of decorating a branch of the WW on the Kärntner Straße in 1918, she set her hand to mural painting for the first time. She would go on to produce outstanding designs in this field until the very end of her career.

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First, however, the artist developed a broad repertoire of fabric patterns. Both her geometric and her floral motifs are characterized by a particularly fine line and subtle color combinations. Her inspiration here was not only the aforementioned katagami, but also fabric patterns from Vienna's Biedermeier period. Her affinity with Japan is also evident in the titles of her WW fabrics, which were given names rather than numbers to make it easier to differentiate between them: for example *Japanland* [Land of Japan] or *Tokio* [Tokyo], which she produced in response to the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923.

In 1925 Rix married the Japanese architect Isaburo Ueno, who was working as Josef Hoffmann's assistant, and soon moved with him to Kyoto. She regularly returned to Vienna to continue designing for the WW. For instance, in 1928 she created a fantastic wallpaper collection with four patterns in numerous, at times unusual color combinations. These wallpapers are currently being rereleased by the Japanese company Linden and produced in England with the aid of a 150-year-old printing press.

In Japan Rix-Ueno often worked in partnership with her husband: he designed the buildings, she the interiors. One of their first joint projects was the extravagant Star Bar in Kyoto, which she decorated with murals and ceiling paintings. The bar was presented in the famous *Modern Architecture* exhibition at New York's MoMA in 1932—though only under Isaburo Ueno's name. In 1936 the couple moved to Takasaki with the aim of breathing new life into the region's decorative arts together with the German architect Bruno Taut. 1939 was spent in Manchuria, where Rix-Ueno explored the medium of picture scrolls. Over the next ten months she lived in San Francisco where she met her former colleague at the WW, the ceramicist Susi Singer.

Back in Japan Rix-Ueno was employed as a technical advisor to the Kyoto Municipal Textile Research Institute and designed fabric patterns for the Japan Textile Designers' Association, as well as works in enamel using the popular cloisonné technique. Finally, she was appointed to the Kyoto City College of Fine Arts, where she taught the class "Color and Composition." After retiring as a professor in 1963, Felice Rix-Ueno and Isaburo Ueno jointly founded the International Design Institute, where she continued her teaching.

That same year saw the realization of the most important work of the artist's late period: the decorative painting of the Actress restaurant in the Nissay



Theatre in Tokyo. Upon the invitation of the architect Togo Murano, she created a literally sparkling atmosphere: a room lined in aluminum foil formed the backdrop to her poetic flower and plant compositions. It has been possible to preserve part of the murals from the former restaurant; they can now be found at the University Art Museum in Kyoto, whereas the Rix-Uenos' estate is housed at the city's Museum of Modern Art.

The exhibition *STARS, FEATHERS, TASSELS: The Wiener Werkstätte Artist Felice Rix-Ueno (1893–1967)* also features works by Rix-Ueno's youngest sister Kitty Rix (1901–?). A ceramicist, she was a fellow woman artist of the WW and designed practical objects like vases, lamp bases, bookends, and cactus stands. The latest research expounds the history of the Jewish entrepreneurial and artistic Rix family, which is characterized above all by emigration: prior to and during the persecution of the Jews, the sisters dispersed across the globe—in addition to Japan, they ended up in Israel, South America, and Australia.

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Felice Rix-Ueno's unique style remains as fascinating today as it was during her lifetime. Albert Kriemler, creative director of the Swiss fashion house Akris, who is famous for his passion for art and his cooperation with exceptional artists, was so excited by Felice Rix-Ueno's fabric patterns on a visit to the MAK in spring 2023 that he decided to take inspiration from her designs for his spring/summer 2024 collection.

The exhibition is accompanied by a catalog edited by Lilli Hollein and Anne-Katrin Rossberg with texts by Michael Hölters, Yuko Ikeda, and Anne-Katrin Rossberg.

Press photos are available for download at [MAK.at/en/press](https://www.mak.at/en/press).



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Tuesday, 21.11.2023, 10 am
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Opening

Tuesday, 21.11.2023, 7 pm
Free admission to the exhibition opening

Exhibition Venue

MAK, Central Space MAK DESIGN LAB
MAK, Stubenring 5, 1010 Vienna

Exhibition Dates

22.11.2023–21.4.2024

Opening Hours

Tue 10 am–9 pm, Wed to Sun 10 am–6 pm

Curator

Anne-Katrin Rossberg, Curator, MAK Metal Collection and
Wiener Werkstätte Archive

Exhibition Design

POLKA designstudio / Marie Rahm, Monica Singer

Catalog

STARS, FEATHERS, TASSELS: The Wiener Werkstätte Artist Felice Rix-Ueno (1893–1967), MAK Studies 30, edited by Lilli Hollein and Anne-Katrin Rossberg, with articles by Lilli Hollein, Michael Hölter, Yûko Ikeda, and Anne-Katrin Rossberg. German/English, 192 pages with numerous color illustrations. MAK, Vienna/Birkhäuser Verlag, Basel 2024. Available at the MAK Design Shop and via MAKdesignshop.at for € 39.

Supporting Program

Details at MAK.at/en/felicerixueno

MAK Admission

€ 15, reduced € 12, every Tuesday 6–9 pm: admission € 7
Free admission for children and teens under 19



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