



MAK

Press Release

TIMELESSLY ELEGANT: VIENNA 1900 at the MAK

MAK opens permanent exhibit on Design / Arts and Crafts from 1890 to 1938 and presents icons of applied art as a close-up feast for the senses

Press Preview	Monday, 16 September 2013, 10:30 a.m.
Opening	Tuesday, 17 September 2013, 7 p.m.
Exhibition Venue	MAK Permanent Collection Vienna 1900 MAK, Stubenring 5, 1010 Vienna
Exhibition Dates	permanent
Opening Hours	Tue 10 a.m.–10 p.m., Wed–Sun 10 a.m.–6 p.m. Free admission every Tuesday, 6–10 p.m.

The MAK Permanent Collection *Vienna 1900. Design / Arts and Crafts 1890–1938*, which opens in September 2013, invites visitors on a sensuous journey back through time to the aesthetic elegance of Viennese Modernism and its epochal applied arts output. Viennese designer Michael Embacher has created an atmospherically restrained exhibiting environment that serves as the ideal stage for art historian and curator Christian Witt-Dörning's selection of around 500 objects representative of Viennese applied art from the period between 1890 and 1938. This new core exhibit of the museum makes the unmistakable quality of the MAK Collection's holdings pertaining to Viennese Modernism directly accessible to visitors in the appropriate substantive depth.

The section of the MAK Permanent Collection entitled *Vienna 1900* features the first truly comprehensive culture- and art-historical analysis of objects from five decades. Highlighting the role of arts and crafts and design as discussed between the diametrically opposed standpoints of Adolf Loos and Josef Hoffmann, it also devotes considerably more space than was previously the case to this momentous cultural epoch, which is one of contemporary design's central source of inspiration. As a prelude to this reinstallation project, which is meant to do justice to the MAK's role as an international center of competence on Viennese Modernism, a three-room presentation of the substantive concept of the MAK Permanent Collection Vienna 1900—a presentation that, for the first time, made visible the enormous density of the MAK's holdings on this topic—was mounted between November 2012 and June 2013.

“This initial showing convinced us that, in order to allow the MAK’s quality as a center of competence for Viennese Modernism to be experienced adequately, the Permanent Collection’s Vienna 1900 exhibit would have to be of commensurate depth. For this reason, we decided to invite an ‘applied’ artist to design the permanent presentation of *Vienna 1900*. In Michael Embacher, who had already assisted us in the initial phase, we found the ideal designer to collaborate closely with curator Christian Witt-Döring in order to re-present Viennese applied art from between 1890 and 1938 as a dense narrative filling three rooms. For Embacher, the focus is clearly on the displayed objects, which are to be experienced in all their exceptional quality, elegance and richness,” explains MAK Director Christoph Thun-Hohenstein.

In keeping with Witt-Döring’s curatorial concept, the spatial design focuses on the uniqueness of the collection objects. The exhibition display positions the objects on generous platforms of a restrained appearance; the design of these platforms makes its presence felt unobtrusively, rather than acting as scenic embellishment. Exhibition designer Michael Embacher explains: “The point was to present these objects of applied art within an exhibition architecture that appeals to the senses but blends into the museum’s spaces using an entirely natural language of materials and forms. Well-crafted, high-quality materials and subtle treatment of the rooms’ surfaces afford the objects a subtly supportive environment that is perceived as an atmospheric background.”

The content-based grouping of numerous collection objects into coherent thematic modules makes it possible to put them on display in a spatially generous manner. These new presentation islands make use of classic forms of exhibition design, underlining the expansiveness of the museum’s spaces. The collection’s unmistakable elegance is thus embedded harmoniously in the historical galleries of the museum, with the exhibition architecture acting as a holistic connector.

In his highly ambitious curatorial approach, Christian Witt-Döring has succeeded in putting a spotlight on the cultural significance of the exhibited objects and the seminal importance of turn-of-the-century Viennese applied arts output. To this end, he has worked together closely with the institution’s collection curators to concentrate on three important areas of Viennese Modernism. Chronologically speaking, the first area is the 1890–1900 decade, which witnessed the emancipation from Historicism in search of a modern, Austrian style. Beginning with Otto Wagner’s propagation of a style that was both modern and utilitarian, space is given to the Secessionists, who were inspired by output from countries to the west and from Japan and advocated the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or total work of art. This thematic focus concludes with the

anti-Secessionist counter-movement of Adolf Loos and his call for the advent of a “modern man.”

Witt-Dörning’s second major focus serves investigation of how a specifically Austrian style eventually developed: this was in reality a Viennese style, driven forward by artists from the Vienna School of Arts and Crafts and the Wiener Werkstätte on the basis of the formal and stylistic concept of Modernism originated by the Secessionists. The objects on display here document the pronounced stylistic break that emerged in 1897, stemming from the Secession’s efforts to arrive at an independent Austrian style. Based on Koloman Moser’s Japanese-influenced decorations for flat surfaces, as well as on classic Biedermeier-era and domestic folk art heritage, this new style first encountered the public in 1900, at the 8th exhibition of the Secession. The spectrum of objects exhibited here ranges from the provocatively geometric and abstract early forms of the Wiener Werkstätte and the formal language dominated by classicistic elements and a refined, plant-derived ornamental culture that emerged in 1906/07 to the rococo-tinged, a-tectonic creations of Dagobert Peche.

The exhibit’s third area traces the development from the Viennese Style to the International Style. Created between the onset of World War I and the National Socialists’ seizure of power in Austria, the objects exhibited here show just where the search for a modern style in Vienna led. Here, too, in the interest of in-depth contextualization, Viennese products by figures including Josef Frank and Oskar Strnad are juxtaposed with international objects from the De Stijl Movement and the Bauhaus.

The new Permanent Collection rooms housing the exhibit *Vienna 1900. Design / Arts and Crafts 1890–1938* constitute the essential foundation for a new, broader understanding of the development of a Central European Modernism through the exchange between Vienna, the metropolises of Europe, the USA and the crown lands of the Dual Monarchy. The mutually influential creative relationship between Vienna, Bohemia, and Moravia that had already begun in the Historicist period continued to bear fruit during the era of Viennese Modernism as defined by Secessionism and Jugendstil. Gifted graduates of the Viennese educational institutions who originally hailed from Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia—including Josef Hoffmann, Leopold Bauer, Joseph Maria Olbrich, and Jan Kotera—went to work as architects and as designers for the arts industry, playing an important role in the dissemination of modern design not only in Vienna, but also in their home regions. It was upon this foundation that “Viennese Modernism” became a concept in its own right.

The MAK will be communicating this new approach outside its own walls, as well: with support from the EU, the museum will be spending the next few years developing a Central European cultural route between Vienna and Brno entitled “Traces.” This route will link the region’s most influential modern-era buildings and also include locations of significance to Viennese intellectual life around 1900. In order to accomplish this, the MAK will be using its cooperative relationship with the Moravian Gallery at the Josef Hoffmann Museum (run jointly since 2006) in order to promote new recognition of the greater cultural region of Moravia–Lower Austria–Vienna as an influential source of modernist impulses.

During the process of *Vienna 1900*’s reconception, Los Angeles-based artist Pae White, with whom discussions were held on an artistic intervention, provided important impulses. White took her exhibition *Others*, which she curated and designed as part of the first stage of the *Vienna 1900* project, as an opportunity to deal with works that cannot be definitively categorized and have thus far received scant attention in the context of the MAK Collection. In October 2013, White will be opening a new series of contemporary art exhibitions, which—situated in immediate proximity to the Permanent Collection—will reflect on the *Vienna 1900* theme using new works of contemporary art. Her exhibition *ORLLEGRO* (MAK Permanent Collection *Contemporary Art*, 9 October 2013 – 12 October 2014) will facilitate a diverse range of dialogs with applied art and design from around 1900.

To accompany the reinstallation of its *Vienna 1900* exhibit, the museum will present a publication entitled *MAK/GUIDE VIENNA 1900. Design / Arts and Crafts 1890–1938*, edited by Christoph Thun-Hohenstein and including contributions by Rainald Franz, Sebastian Hackenschmidt, Barbara Karl, Peter Klinger, Kathrin Pokorny-Nagel, Elisabeth Schmuttermeyer, Christoph Thun-Hohenstein, Johannes Wieninger, and Christian Witt-Döring; German/English, 224 pages with ca. 100 color illustrations, MAK Vienna / Prestel Verlag, Munich 2013. Available for € 9.90 at the MAK Design Shop.

Showcase MAK – Patrick Rampelotto / Wien Mitte – The Mall

Inspired by the new installation of the MAK Permanent Collection *Vienna 1900. Design / Arts and Crafts 1890–1938*, the designer Patrick Rampelotto has designed a piece of seating furniture evoking Adolf Loos’s well-known but never realized design of a villa with black-and-white striped marble façade for the “scandalous” Josephine Baker. For her dance performances in her scanty banana outfit Baker had been acclaimed since 1926 in the Folies Bergère in Paris as “the Black Venus”; but in Vienna

her solo appearance planned for the Ronacher Theater was cancelled at short notice; eventually she was prohibited from appearing in Vienna and several other European cities. Adolf Loos and his contemporaries saw the opposing polarities of Modernism united in the American dancer; with her attitude she stood for contemporary America and elements of the cosmopolitan, of untamed nature, and of art.

With the intervention *Patrick Rampelotto: Josephine* curated by Marlies Wirth and on show starting Tuesday, 1 October 2013, a designer is taking the stage for the second time in “MAK on Display” in Wien Mitte – The Mall. The curtain went up first on Marco Dessí with his interpretation of a salon cabinet by Dagobert Peche (1913).

Press materials and photos are available for download at MAK.at/press.

Press Fact Sheet

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Curator	Christian Witt-Döring
Exhibition Design	EMBACHER/CO
MAK Admission	€ 7.90 / reduced: € 5.50 / family ticket: € 11 Free admission for children and teens up to age 19
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Vienna, 16 September 2013