

## **FOCUS ON COLLECTING 10:** Textile Objects from the Berta and Bernard Rudofsky Collection

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MAK – Press and PR

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### **Press Release**

Vienna, 4.10.2023

The life Berta Rudofsky (née Doctor, 1910–2006), who was from Vienna, and Moravian-born architect, designer, and cultural theorist Bernard Rudofsky (1905–1988) shared also left traces on Bernard Rudofsky's oeuvre, in which he let himself be inspired by Berta in manifold ways. Titled *Textile Objects from the Berta and Bernard Rudofsky Collection*, the presentation at the MAK Forum portrays the parallels and differences between Berta's personal wardrobe and Bernard's designs and theories.

In the context of the series FOCUS ON COLLECTING, the MAK presents a selection of textiles THE BERNARD RUDOFSKY ESTATE VIENNA donated to the MAK from Berta Rudofsky's estate as well as pieces the MAK acquired in the 1990s.

While Bernard Rudofsky spent his entire life in the eye of the public and was successful as a maker and designer of exhibitions, a cultural or fashion theorist, and a textile, sandals, and fashion designer, Berta acted in the background for her husband—for example, as an editor, translator, manager, and model. Furthermore, she also turned Bernard's textile ideas into reality and was responsible for the production of the so-called *Bernardo Sandals*, which were published in the 1960s in *VOGUE* in the USA and were worn, among other people, by Jackie Kennedy. These sandals were supposed to literally "free" the foot and were produced following the legendary first fashion exhibition, *Are Clothes Modern?*, Bernard Rudofsky curated for the MoMA in New York in 1944.

In the 1930s, Bernard worked, among others, for the magazine *DOMUS*, which was founded by architect and designer Gio Ponti from Milan. Together with Ponti, Bernard designed an (unrealized) hotel project for Capri as well as matching clothes for the guests. A textile pattern by Gio Ponti titled *Balletto Alla Scala* (ca. 1950) illustrates the friendship between the Rudofskys and the Pontis in the MAK Exhibition. Berta and Bernard Rudofsky got to know each other on Capri in 1934 and mostly lived in Italy until they relocated to South America after the outbreak of World War II. A small selection of textiles including a costume (ca. 1940) by Berta as well as a series of crocheted and

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knotted patterns (ca. 1940) made in São Paulo, which were intended as interior decoration, are examples from the time in Brazil.

Two pieces of clothing from the 1930s made for Berta in Vienna serve as examples of Bernard Rudofsky's first fashion creations; for them, he used fabric designed by Josef Frank for the furniture store "Haus & Garten." A later group of women's fashion following Rudofsky's ideas are the *Separates*, which were created in the early 1950s. They were not based on complicated cuts but rather on simple forms like a rectangle. Around this time, Rudofsky also designed the textile patterns *si & no* as well as *FRACTIONS* for the US company Schiffer Prints. Both were made with a typewriter. Using the example of the so-called *Bareskins*, the exhibition shows how Rudofsky—a naturalist—positioned himself against the convention of covering the human body for the sake of modesty: For the exhibition, a knitted suit was reconstructed that decorated the cover of the catalog of the MAK Exhibition *Sparta/Sybaris* (1987). The show gave an overview of Bernard Rudofsky's theories and was his last presentation during his lifetime.

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In 1941, Berta and Bernard Rudofsky moved to the USA and taught at the Black Mountain College in North Carolina in 1944. While at the MoMa in 1944, Bernard propagated timeless clothing made of individual panels of fabric with a simple cut, his wife's wardrobe was committed to the changing silhouettes of the decades. Individual pieces of clothing from Berta's estate, for example, a blouse made of Chantilly lace (late 1930s, no label), demonstrate her personal fondness of high-quality and in part elaborately handmade clothing.

A dress (late 1940s) from the department store Lord & Taylor in New York and two dresses by Marimekko from the 1960s represent the time in New York, where the couple lived until old age. These clothes reflect a love of stripes which pervades Berta's wardrobe and which she shared with Bernard. A fabric with mirror embroidery from the Indian state of Gujarat, which was probably purchased in 1985, together with pieces from Japan, refers to the cosmopolitan path of life of the Rudofskys.

Images regarding the exhibition are available for download at [MAK.at/presse](http://MAK.at/presse)



**Exhibition Venue**

MAK Forum  
MAK, Stubenring 5, 1010 Vienna

**Exhibition Dates**

4.10.–26.11.2023

**Opening Hours**

Tue 10 am–9 pm, Wed to Sun 10am–6 pm

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**Curator**

Lara Steinhäuser, Curator MAK Textiles and Carpets Collection

**MAK Admission**

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

**MAK Press and PR**

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