

Press Release

BAKELITE: The Georg Kargl Collection

Opening	Tuesday, 14 July 2020, from 6 p.m.
Exhibition Venue	MAK DESIGN LAB MAK, Stubenring 5, 1010 Vienna
Exhibition Dates	14 July (opening from 6 p.m.) – 26 October 2020
Opening Hours	Tue 10 a.m.–9 p.m., Wed–Sun 10 a.m.–6 p.m.

As the first genuine plastic, Bakelite revolutionized the everyday culture from the 1920s to the 1950s. With *BAKELITE: The Georg Kargl Collection*, the MAK is devoting a special exhibition to this extraordinary raw material for the first time. 300 objects from the private collection of the Viennese gallery owner Georg Kargl (1955–2018) provide an insight into the material’s versatile possibilities of use and its aesthetic legacy. Bakelite, the first industrially manufactured, fully synthetic raw material based on resins, enabled the cheap mass production of everyday objects in an almost unlimited variety of forms—from telephones to picnic boxes and radios. The MAK exhibition traces the history of Bakelite from its meteoric rise to an icon of modern product culture to its displacement by other plastics on account of ecological considerations.

Bakelite bears the name of its inventor: From 1899, the Belgian chemist Leo Hendrik Baekeland (1863–1944), who had moved to the United States, focused his research endeavors on the development of a low-cost insulation material for the electrical industry as a replacement for natural materials such as shellac and celluloid that had been used until then. In 1907, he was able to take out a patent on his substitute product based on the hydrocarbon product phenol and named the fully synthetic plastic Bakelite. From its market launch in 1920, Bakelite, thanks to its degree of hardness and its resistance to heat and acids, became the material of the hour for the technical and electrical industry in the age of the consumer society and industrial mass production, the “Machine Age.”

As an industrial material that could be used for all purposes, Bakelite successfully forged a bridge between art and industry. “The Material of a Thousand Uses” was increasingly appreciated also for its aesthetic qualities. Major designers used the product technology in their concepts for mass products in the new “streamline design,” which merged elements of vehicle design aimed at reducing air resistance with the Art Deco language of forms.

Georg Kargl’s interest in Bakelite spans several decades. His collection comprises a representative cross section of the artistic design potential of this extraordinary raw material: from high to low, from mass product to designer piece. With its exhibition on Bakelite, the MAK provides a forum for this little-known collection focus of one of the most

important protagonists of the Viennese and international art scene and experts of Viennese Modernism in the field of applied arts.

The exhibition *BAKELITE: The Georg Kargl Collection* encompasses objects from the period between 1930 and 1970, which share an austere aesthetic. This aesthetic results from an intrinsic relationship between expected function, the material's technological properties and possibilities, and available production processes. The objects are presented in fourteen subject groups in an exhibition display specially designed by the artist Mladen Bizumic. On show are, among other things, electrical appliances like fans, hairdryers, coffee grinders, irons and vacuum cleaners, means of communication such as telephones, radio and television sets (the Bush TV set from the UK) and loudspeakers, the iconic Jumo lamps from 1920s France, cameras, car models, as well as the baby monitor designed by Isamu Noguchi.

Accompanying texts deal with the history of a material that was the first plastic to revolutionize production in the early 20th century and unfold a decisive social import. As documents of the aesthetics of the first phase of modern society's full mechanization, Bakelite objects hold an undisputed place in the history of design. The further development of plastics was determined by changing economic considerations and increasingly influenced by ecological issues. A fully synthetic material that is neither degradable nor recyclable, Bakelite only fulfils a niche function today. Just like then, we now find ourselves on the threshold of a new production era. Georg Kargl's Bakelite collection encourages a fundamental reflection on new materials and their significance for social development in a time of radical change.

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

Press Data

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Curatorial Team	Rainald Franz, Gerson Lessa
Artistic Exhibition	Mladen Bizumic
Display	
Technical	Itai Margula
Coordination	
MAK Admission	€ 14 / Reduced € 11 / Family Ticket € 15 Every Tuesday from 6 to 9 p.m.: admission € 6 Free admission on Tuesday evenings until the end of July Free admission for children and teens under 19
MAK Press and PR	Judith Anna Schwarz-Jungmann (Head) Cäcilia Barani Sandra Hell-Ghignone Veronika Träger T +43 1 711 36-233, -212, -229 presse@MAK.at www.MAK.at

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