Museum für
angewandte
Kunst

Museum of
Applied Arts

Stubenring 5
1010 Vienna, AT

MAK.at/en

BEFORE DARK
Anna Viebrock Stages Viennese Interior Design in the Interwar Period for the MAK

MAK – Press and PR

presse@MAK.at

Press Release
Vienna, 21.10.2026

Press Conference
Tuesday, 15.12.2026, 10 am
Please register via presse@MAK.at

The New Viennese Domestic Culture of the interwar period captured the spirit of a new beginning: A central role on the path to a democratic social order was played by affordable housing and individual furnishings. In retrospect, however, despite being a pioneering moment in cultural history, this ambitious undertaking was built on the brink: after just a few years it was brought to a halt by Austro-Fascism and then lost forever when the many Jewish architects, designers, and clients involved in Viennese Domestic Culture where expelled and murdered in the Holocaust. The MAK exhibition *BEFORE DARK: Viennese Interior Design in the Interwar Period* seeks to remind visitors of this context and literally gives a stage to the still little-known phenomenon of Viennese Living between 1918 and 1938: In her presentation, the German scenic designer Anna Viebrock, who is famous for stage sets that are as detailed as they are unsettling, encourages a collective reckoning with unresolved chapters of history.

Viebrock's rooms make the traces of time and decay visible and often give rise to dreamlike and uncanny parallel worlds. Theater and opera stages are the most important "workplaces" for the internationally famous and multi-award-winning scenic and costume designer, who for several years has also been a successful director and exhibition designer.

The MAK has an extensive collection of pieces from the First Austrian Republic (1918–1934), the Austro-Fascist Ständestaat (corporative state, 1934–1938), and the period when Austria was part of the Nazi German Reich (1938–1945). It also includes some of the most significant works when it comes to exemplifying the domestic culture of the time. The major exhibition

BEFORE DARK is the first time that some 350 exhibits from the museum's own holdings will be shown together at such scale.

Anna Viebrock was invited to stage *BEFORE DARK* in spring 2024 by the MAK's General Director Lilli Hollein and immediately immersed herself in the MAK Collection in preparation for the exhibition, which is curated by Sebastian Hackenschmidt. With her characteristic "psychic alteration" approach, based on the process developed by the artist Gordon Matta-Clark, she guides visitors onto the right track when contemplating the past: They enter a seemingly habitable installation that actually contains subtle shifts and intentional perplexities that approximate to the psychological state of an epoch that is facing its own demise. Viebrock's presentation does not prescribe any specific route through the thoroughly heterogeneous atmospheres of the exhibition's rooms and spaces but allows visitors to choose their own path.

At first glance, Viebrock's spaces seem to resemble real historical models; it is only at second glance that one notices elements that are uncanny, absurd, or surreal, as well as interwoven references to art and film. For instance, the atmosphere of a bedroom furnished with pieces by Eduard Wimmer-Wisgrill recalls Alfred Hitchcock's film *Rebecca* (USA, 1940) and contains two complete sets of furniture. By contrast, the kitchen in the exhibition is not a room at all but rather is threaded along the wall of a corridor. A massive oak chest of drawers from the Nazi era transforms another corridor into a dead end that Anna Viebrock calls "Nazi alley."

In a dining room inspired by that in the Beer villa, which was built by Josef Frank and Oskar Wlach around 1930, the dining room suite made by Haus & Garten is joined by a second set designed by Oswald Haerdtl for the World's Fair in Paris in 1937. Furthermore, in an inversion of interior and exterior, the glass curtains in this room hang on the "wrong" side of the window.

A living room that alludes to an interior design by Hugo Gorge for the exhibition *Einfacher Hausrat* [Simple Household Goods] (Austrian Museum of Art and Industry, today's MAK, 1920/21), is given an imaginary axis of symmetry by the positioning of the same or similar pieces of furniture opposite one another in a way that appears to duplicate the space. In another room, this time reminiscent of Martin Kippenberger's installation *The Happy End of Franz Kafka's "Amerika"* (1994), movables are stood so close together as to obstruct their use.

In a study that revisits Viebrock's set design for Elfriede Jelinek's play *Wolken. Heim* that premiered at the Deutsches Schauspielhaus in Hamburg in 1993, four symmetrically arranged desks are furnished with bulky fauteuils in such a way that it would be impossible to work there. Movables stored in an attic are entirely inaccessible—just as they are on the upper floor of the exhibition—though they can be looked at by climbing steps to a viewing platform.

In two places the installation presented in the central area of the Exhibition Hall protrudes into the lateral ambulatories. The juxtaposing pairs of furniture here—largely from the MAK Collection—illustrate the impressive typological spectrum and high artistic quality of interwar Viennese Domestic Culture.

Historical photographs are grouped around these exhibits that were mostly published in the major magazines of the interwar period: alongside specific interior designs—from such iconic buildings as the Wassermann villa (Oskar Strnad, 1914) and the Beer villa (Josef Frank, Oskar Wlach, 1929/30)—they also show numerous mock-up rooms that were displayed in national and international exhibitions and designed by the likes of Josef Hoffmann, Hugo Gorge, Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky, Ernst Lichtblau, and Oswald Haerdtl.

A leading role in the domestic culture of the interwar period was played by Jewish architects like Josef Frank, Oskar Wlach, Hugo Gorge, Oskar Strnad, Viktor Lurje, Walter Sobotka, Fritz Gross, and Ernst Schwadron. This explains why there tended to be less focus on grandeur and more on the formally much more radical Modernism of the turn of the century: a reserved and distinguished understatement enabled their Jewish clients to integrate themselves in Viennese society.
In addition to the designers named above, the representatives of the New Viennese Domestic Culture included Adolf Loos, Ernst Plischke, Otto Prutscher, and Dagobert Peche—and for the first time women designers like Ella Briggs, Friedl Dicker, Jutta Sika, Liane Zimbler, Maria Likarz, Felice Rix-Ueno, Vally Wieselthier, and Gudrun Baudisch.

Anna Viebrock
Anna Viebrock studied scenic design at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf and has shaped the international theatrical and operatic landscape as a stage and costume designer. Her many years of collaborating with Christoph Marthaler and Jossi Wieler/Sergio Morabito have taken her among other places to the Opéra national de Paris, the Theater Basel, the Salzburg, Bayreuth, and Vienna Festivals, and the Schauspielhaus Zürich, where she was a member of the leadership team until summer 2004. Since 2002 she has successfully turned her hand to directing. Her works have been shown in numerous international exhibitions, and for some years she has also designed exhibitions herself: including *The Boat is Leaking. The Captain Lied.* (2017) at the Fondazione Prada in Venice with Alexander Kluge, Thomas Demand, and the curator Udo Kittelmann, in 2024 the installation *HEUTE DEMNÄCHST ENDE* at the Skulpturenhalle Neuss, and in 2026/27 *Terminal Piece* at the mumok, Vienna. Until 2021 she was a professor at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. Anna Viebrock has been voted stage designer or costume designer of the year 17 times and has won the Berlin Theater Award, the Cultural Award of Hesse, and the Zurich Festival Prize.

The exhibition is accompanied by a publication of the same name whose 51 essays shine spotlights on the principal topics of interwar domestic culture. Together with the exhibition, it offers a broad panorama of New Viennese Living and the sociopolitical conditions of the era:

BEFORE DARK: Viennese Interior Design in the Interwar Period, edited by Lilli Hollein and Sebastian Hackenschmidt, with texts by Thomas Demand, Rainald Franz, Sebastian Hackenschmidt, Lilli Hollein, Michael Huey, Michelle Jackson-Beckett, Markus Kristan, Inge Podbrecky, Kathrin Pokorny-Nagel, Anika Reineke, Anne-Katrin Rossberg, and Lara Steinhäußer, designed by Willi Schmid. German/English, 272 pages with numerous color illustrations. MAK, Vienna/Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther und Franz König, Cologne 2026. Available at the MAK Design Shop and via MAKdesignshop.at/en for € 55.

Press photos of the exhibition are available for download at MAK.at/en/press.

Exhibition Partner

OESTERREICHISCHE NATIONALBANK
EUROSYSTEM

Press Conference
Tuesday, 15.12.2026, 10 am
Please register via presse@MAK.at

Opening
Tuesday, 15.12.2026, 7 pm
Free admission to the opening of the exhibition

Exhibition Venue
MAK Exhibition Hall (ground floor)
MAK, Stubenring 5, 1010 Vienna

Exhibition Dates
16.12.2026–2.5.2027

Opening Hours
Tue 10 am–9 pm, Wed to Sun 10 am–6 pm

Curator
Sebastian Hackenschmidt, Curator, MAK Furniture and Woodwork Collection

Artistic Concept
Anna Viebrock

Technical Coordination
Gerhard Veigel

Graphic Design
Willi Schmid

Publication
The exhibition *BEFORE DARK: Viennese Interior Design in the Interwar Period* is accompanied by a publication of the same name, edited by Lilli Hollein and Sebastian Hackenschmidt, with texts by Thomas Demand, Rainald Franz, Sebastian Hackenschmidt, Lilli Hollein, Michael Huey, Markus Kristan, Michelle Jackson-Beckett, Inge Podbrecky, Kathrin Pokorny-Nagel, Anika Reineke, Anne-Katrin Rossberg, and Lara Steinhäußer, designed by Willi Schmid. German/English, 272 pages with numerous color illustrations. MAK, Vienna/Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther und Franz König, Cologne, 2026. Available at the MAK Design Shop and via MAKdesignshop.at/en for € 55.

MAK Admission
€ 19/18*
reduced € 15.50/14.50*
every Tuesday 6–9 pm: admission € 9.50/8.50*
Free admission for children and teens under 19
* Online ticket price

MAK Press and PR
Judith Anna Schwarz-Jungmann (Head)
T +43 1 71136-213, judith.schwarz-jungmann@MAK.at

Sandra Hell-Ghignone
T +43 1 71136-212, sandra.hell-ghignone@MAK.at

Marylise Larunsi
T +43 1 71136-210, marylise.larunsi@MAK.at