

BICYCLE & LOBSTER **Sparkling Tree Decorations from Gablonz**

MAK – Press and PR

presse@MAK.at

Press Release

Vienna, 23.9.2025

Press Conference

Tuesday, 23.9.2025, 10 am

Please register via presse@MAK.at

Not long after the first lebkuchen have found their way into the supermarkets, this September the MAK will be embracing the Christmas fever and bringing out its boxes of Christmas decorations! With the exhibition *BICYCLE & LOBSTER: Sparkling Tree Decorations from Gablonz*, the museum is opening the doors of its Works on Paper Room to over 800 intricate artworks made in Bohemia out of glass beads and wire. What makes the Christmas ornaments from Gablonz/Jablonec nad Nisou so special is their surprising connection to everyday life and in certain cases their abstraction: instead of a host of angels, you will find miniature bicycles, airplanes, houses, geometric shapes, and all manner of animals like spiders, butterflies, and lobsters. These miniatures are so well made that they mesmerize even those who do not (like to) celebrate Christmas—which makes the exhibition perfect for a museum date with a Christmas enthusiast but also rewarding when trying to convince a grinch of the magic of the season.

The objects on display tell the history of European design culture while also demonstrating exquisite workmanship and a talent for color and form. They have been selected from the private collection of the art historian and former curator of the MAK Glass and Ceramics Collection, Waltraud Neuwirth. Comprising over 3,000 ornaments, it took her decades to compile the collection that she has now most generously donated to the MAK.

These Christmas tree decorations from Gablonz an der Neisse (now Jablonec nad Nisou) continue to enjoy huge popularity among designers and collectors to this day. What began during the Biedermeier period with apples, sweet treats, and nuts, developed into an important branch of industry in Bohemia during the Habsburg monarchy—originally as a by-product of the rich tradition

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of glass- and jewelry making. Gablonz was the center of this industry and soon became synonymous with this genre of ornament.

The main focus of the exhibition is the period between 1920, when the golden age of Christmas ornament production began, and 1980—hence spotlighting the often overlooked but aesthetically no less fascinating objects created in the postwar decades. With her exhibition design Johanna Pichlbauer has captured the magic of decorating the tree, when the boxes are brought out up from the cellar or out of the attic and their sparkling contents hung in full glory on its branches.

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High-quality materials went into each and every object, the key players being small hollow beads inlaid with silver and gold that were combined with glass bugles, glass rings, and wire to create an astonishing variety of ornate, handmade tree ornaments. Musical instruments, fruit, geometric shapes, figures, and much more were part of the repertoire of these designers whose imaginations knew no bounds.

A richly illustrated catalog to accompany the exhibition has been published by the Buchhandlung Walther und Franz König: *Sparkling Tree Decorations from Gablonz 1920–1980* (German/English, € 42, available at the MAK Design Shop). Not only does it document Waltraud Neuwirth's collection, but it also provides thrilling insights into an as yet largely neglected chapter of decorative art—a must for anyone interested in the history of design and the aesthetics of dazzling festivities.

A selection of ornaments from Gablonz will also be available to buy from the MAK Design Shop.

The exhibition will be supported by an educational program for children and adults featuring guided tours, workshops with sparkling building sets to create your very own Christmas tree decorations, and a digital tool with which you can try your hand at designing festive ornaments.

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



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Opening

Tuesday, 23.9.2025, 7 pm

Free admission to the opening of the exhibition

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Exhibition Venue

MAK Works on Paper Room

MAK, Stubenring 5, 1010 Vienna

Exhibition Dates

24.9.2025–1.2.2026

Opening Hours

Tue 10 am–9 pm, Wed to Sun 10 am–6 pm

Guest Curator

Waltraud Neuwirth

MAK Curator

Kathrin Pokorny-Nagel, Head, MAK Library and Works on Paper Collection/Archive

Exhibition Design

Johanna Pichlbauer

Graphic Design

Theresa Hattinger

Publication

The exhibition is accompanied by the publication *Sparkling Tree Decorations from Gablonz 1920–1980*, MAK Studies 31, Waltraud Neuwirth Collection, edited by Lilli Hollein and Kathrin Pokorny-Nagel, with texts by Lilli Hollein, Petr Nový, Kathrin Pokorny-Nagel, August Ruhs, Nora Witzmann, and an interview with Waltraud Neuwirth. With photos by Christian Mendez and artistic object arrangements by Marlene Mautner. German/English, 224 pages with numerous color illustrations. MAK, Vienna/Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther und Franz König, Cologne 2025. Available at the MAK Design Shop and online at MAKdesignshop.at/en for € 42.

Supporting Program

available at MAK.at/en



MAK Admission

€ 16.50/15.50*; reduced € 13.50/12.50*; every Tuesday 6–9 pm:
admission € 8/7.50*

Free admission for children and teens under 19

* Ticket price when purchased in advance online

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