

BARBARA PFLAUM Showcases of Everyday Life

1

MAK – Press and PR

presse@MAK.at

Press Release

Vienna, 14.4.2026

Press Conference

Tuesday, 14.4.2026, 4 pm

From 15 April, the MAK dedicates a solo exhibition to Barbara Pflaum (1912–2002), a pioneer of Austrian press photography, in the MAK Works on Paper Room. With her extraordinary powers of observation and outstanding sense of form, Pflaum counts among the trailblazers of Austrian photojournalism in the 1950s. For over two decades, she helped shape the visual style of the Austrian weekly magazine *Wochenpresse*. Aged 40, divorced and a mother of three, Pflaum began studying at Vienna's Academy of Applied Arts (now the University of Applied Arts Vienna) where she discovered photography and devoted herself to it with passion from then on. The exhibition at the MAK shows more than 100 photographs from the late 1950s and early 1960s, revealing an aspect of her work as yet little known: thoughtful, often humorous observations of everyday life in Vienna.

Pflaum received her first camera from her then-partner, the traveler, writer, and photographer Herbert Tichy in the early 1950s. At first, she mainly photographed her children and friends. These portraits caught the attention of the photo lab owner where she had her films developed. He encouraged her to submit her work to a magazine. As a result, Pflaum worked for the *Wiener Illustrierte* between 1954 and 1958. At the same time, she met the renowned Japanese-American photographer Yoichi Okamoto, head of the photo department at the US Information Service. Okamoto trained young photographers in modern photojournalism. Pflaum's collaboration with Okamoto had a decisive influence on her style and led to her first publications in the *Wiener Kurier*.

Equipped with her classic medium-format camera, Pflaum had been photographing for the *Wochenpresse* since the mid-1950s, and was a regular presence at theater and opera premieres, art exhibitions, political gatherings, and social events. She captured heads of state, party leaders, and

M

A

K

international artists, and documented parliamentary debates, receptions, conferences, and cultural highlights. Many of her portraits of prominent figures appeared on the weekly magazine's front cover—photographs of which she was particularly proud and which she repeatedly exhibited during her lifetime.

She consolidated her position as a photographer through her work in the press and exhibitions at Vienna's Konzerthaus, as well as through her own publications. In addition to official commissions, she tirelessly documented everyday life in Vienna: people in coffee houses, at markets, in parks or at parades, passers-by, street vendors, children at play or people in public spaces. Of especial fascination for her was the city's transformation: old neighborhoods undergoing renovation, demolition, new construction, or the beginning of gentrification.

2

Many of these photographs were taken, as it were, *en passant*—personal observations, some of which found their way into her 1961 picture volume, *wie ist Wien?* Most, however, remained unpublished, lying in the photographer's archive for years. Today, these photographs offer a view of the city and its inhabitants that is as lively as it is humorous. They depict scenes of everyday life, as well as street protests, Christmas markets, and neighborhoods about to be demolished. At the same time, they document an urban atmosphere undergoing gradual change in post-war Vienna.

Most of the prints on display in the exhibition come directly from Pflaum's own archive, which is now held by brandstaetter images. These are prints she made herself, some of which bear clear signs of wear—revealing their use as working materials.

A key element of Pflaum's photographic style has to do with her camera of choice. She worked with a Rolleiflex, a large twin-lens camera for 6×6 cm film. This technique required a deliberate and considered approach: the film had to be changed after every twelve exposures, and the image was composed in a square format. For publication in the press, which usually required rectangular image formats, the photographs had to be cropped later during enlargement. The Rolleiflex was held at hip height as the image was projected onto a ground glass screen on the top of the camera, meaning it could only be viewed from above.

Many of Pflaum's photographs are characterized by their strong, multi-layered composition: often, a blurred foreground area structures the image, with the spatial context of the scene unfolding behind it. Only on a third level does the actual action take center stage—a fleeting moment, an encounter, a gesture. This pictorial structure imbues the photographs with a sense of dynamism, steering the viewer's gaze towards the essence of the image.

Pflaum's gift for observation, her ability to "lie in wait" and capture the right moment, are remarkable, as is the originality of many of her compositions. Whether dealing with common photographic subjects such as markets or



leisure activities, or with current events such as demonstrations, Pflaum always took care to draw attention to the people, ensure a dynamic energy in the image, and evoke associations. In this way, she was able to create a sense of narrative.

What emerges is a multi-layered photographic portrait of Vienna from more than half a century ago. Barbara Pflaum's photographs also demonstrate the wealth of possibilities contained within even a fleeting moment on the street—provided it is observed with attentiveness, patience, and artistic sensitivity.

3

Karolina Ziębińska is a curator and art historian specializing in photography. From 2021 to 2025, she was director of the Museum of Warsaw. Prior to that, she was a curator at the Centre Pompidou in Paris from 2014 to 2020; Ziębińska also worked for ten years at Zachęta—National Gallery of Art in Warsaw. In 2008, she co-founded the Archaeology of Photography Foundation. Karolina Ziębińska has curated over 50 exhibitions and edited numerous publications on photographers of note.

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



Press Conference

Tuesday, 14.4.2026, 4 pm

Opening

Tuesday, 14.4.2026, 7 pm

Free admission to the opening of the exhibition

Exhibition Venue

MAK Works on Paper Room

MAK, Stubenring 5, 1010 Vienna

Exhibition Dates

15.4.–16.8.2026

Opening Hours

Tue 10 am–9 pm, Wed to Sun 10 am–6 pm

Guest Curator

Karolina Ziębińska

Supporting Program

Details at [MAK.at/en](https://www.mak.at/en)

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

