

Gustav Klimt, the MAK, and Immendorf Castle: Burnt, Destroyed, Vanished?

An exhibition of the MAK in cooperation with the Klimt Foundation, Vienna

MAK – Press and PR
presse@MAK.at

Press Release
Vienna, 2.7.2025

Press Conference
Tuesday, 15.7.2025, 10 am
Please register via presse@MAK.at

8 May 1945 not only marks the end of the Second World War and of the Nazi regime, but also stands for one of the greatest losses in cultural assets in Austrian history, triggered by a devastating fire that ravaged Immendorf Castle in Lower Austria. The 80th anniversary of these events occurs in 2025, reason enough for the MAK and the non-profit Klimt Foundation to mount an exhibition on the subject of *Gustav Klimt, the MAK, and Immendorf Castle: Burnt, Destroyed, Vanished?* Even today, the events surrounding the fire in the country seat of the Freudenthal family, which served as a valuable and seemingly safe art storage depot in the Second World War, have not been fully clarified. The exhibition offers profound insight into the sheer scale of the disaster.

First mentioned in the 13th century, the castle was used from 1942 onwards as a place to store works of art in need of protection from the effects of war. The owner at the time, Baron Rudolf von Freudenthal, made rooms available for this purpose. Some sources suggest that the castle was deliberately set on fire by German troops—presumably the SS—in May 1945 in order to deprive the Red Army of the stored art objects. However, there is still no clear evidence of this to this day. Nor is it proven that Soviet soldiers were involved. Similarly—based on the facts as they stand—the occasional statements that individual Klimt paintings may have been removed from storage before the fire cannot be confirmed.

In addition to the three faculty paintings for the Main Ceremonial Hall of the University of Vienna with the corresponding composition designs, the works that were burned include the overdoor paintings *Music* (1897/98) and *Schubert at the Piano* (1899) from the Palais of Nikolaus Dumba on Vienna's Ringstraße as well as the paintings *The Golden Apple Tree* (1903), *Farm*

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Garden with Crucifix (1912), *Portrait of Wally* (1916), *Women Friends* (1916/17), *Garden Path with Chickens* (1916), and *Leda* (1917) from the expropriated collection of August and Serena Lederer.

The State Arts and Crafts Museum in Vienna (now the MAK) lost to the flames: the *Laxenburg Room* stored in Immendorf Castle, various East Asian and Islamic objects, arts and crafts from the early modern period, over fifty pieces of furniture, leather wallpaper, twelve carpets, and the *Möchling Tomb*, a wooden shrine carved in the shape of a Gothic church from the 15th century.

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Alongside original plans and a new architectural model of the castle, the exhibition will show a new film documentary on the events at Immendorf Castle with interviews with witnesses of the period. The film was directed and written by Peter Weinhäupl, Director of the Klimt Foundation, Vienna, and Stefan Kutzenberger, art historian and author. The film was made by the Danish filmmaker Rikke Kutzenberger. "Masterpieces of Reproduction Art," which come from the valuable Klimt portfolios published in 1908–1914, 1917/18, and 1931, illustrate, partly in color, the inestimable loss of several original Klimt paintings. The Klimt Foundation is making available these and other loans from its collection. Original documents such as recovery lists kept at the MAK and valuable archive material from the Austrian Federal Monuments Office, the archive of the Künstlerhaus Vienna, and the Lower Austrian Provincial Library provide further profound insights into the events surrounding the supposedly safe rescue site of Immendorf Castle and enable an overall picture based on facts.

The exhibition is accompanied by a comprehensive program of guided tours, discussion events with specialist researchers in provenance, art historians, as well a screening of the ORF (Austrian Broadcasting Corporation) culture documentary on *The Riddle of Immendorf* in the MAK Columned Main Hall on 2 September 2025.

The MAK dedicates the exhibition to the memory of its provenance researcher Leonhard Weidinger († 2023), who rendered outstanding services in the reappraisal of the MAK's rescue history, also as it concerns Immendorf Castle. The exhibition is based on his research and texts.

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

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www.klimt-foundation.com
www.klimt-database.com



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Please register via presse@MAK.at

Opening

Tuesday, 15.7.2025, 7 pm

Free admission to the opening of the exhibition

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Exhibition Venue

MAK Forum

MAK, Stubenring 5, 1010 Vienna

Exhibition Dates

16.7.–21.9.2025

Opening Hours

Tue 10 am–9 pm, Wed to Sun 10 am–6 pm

Guest Curator

Peter Weinhäupl, Director, Klimt Foundation, Vienna

Curator

Rainald Franz, Curator, MAK Glass and Ceramics Collection

Curatorial Assistance

Sandra Gradisnik, Laura Erhold, Barbara Marx

Supporting Program

Details can be found at MAK.at

MAK Admission

€ 16.50/15.50*; reduced € 13.50/12.50*;

every Tuesday 6 pm–9 pm: Admission € 8/7.50*

Free admission for children and teens under 19

* Online ticket price

MAK Press and PR

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