



MAK

Press Release

JOSIAH MCELHENY: The Ornament Museum

In collaboration with John Vinci

Press Conference	Tuesday, 26 April 2016, 10:30 a.m.
Opening	Tuesday, 26 April 2016, 7 p.m.
Exhibition Venue	MAK Permanent Collection Contemporary Art MAK, Stubenring 5, 1010 Vienna
Exhibition Dates	27 April 2016 – 2 April 2017
Opening Hours	Tue 10 a.m.–10 p.m., Wed–Sun 10 a.m.–16 p.m. Free admission on Tuesdays from 6–10 p.m.

The Ornament Museum, Josiah McElheny's remarkable new installation—developed especially for the MAK—reinterprets the historical design language of Viennese Modernism, finding within it a set of new questions about art and psychology. For his first solo museum exhibition in Austria, the New York-based artist has created a museum-within-a-museum—comprised of an architecturally scaled pavilion made of painted wood and glass, and installed in relation to the MAK's permanent collection of Viennese objects from around 1900.

Well known for his use of glass with other materials, *The Ornament Museum* continues McElheny's exploration of a material that can encourage the very act of looking, employing large window panels printed with ornamental patterns to both see through and look at. The exhibition also includes a life-size portrait photograph and a performance, which introduce us to *The Ornament Museum* itself, and sketch out a model of a modernist institution.

The pavilion was designed in collaboration with Chicago architect and exhibition designer John Vinci. Its structure and proportion recall Josef Hoffmann's design for the Austrian pavilion at the *Exposition internationale des Arts décoratifs et industriels modernes*, which took place in Paris in 1925 and helped to spark a new modernist vision. Intended as a temporary piece of architecture and a display system for objects, Hoffmann fashioned the original pavilion out of ornamented wood, clear glass panels and electric lighting. The overall aim of Hoffmann's pavilion was to point towards his ideal of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*—or total work of art—a concept in strong opposition to the purely functional evolution of design of others, such as Adolf Loos, during aesthetic battles in Vienna around 1900. The intricate geometric and floral painted elements that

adorned Hoffmann's construction were diametrically opposed to the language of industrial materials put forth by many of the other national pavilions.

In McElheny's pavilion, visitors are invited to enter and look out through the landscapes created by the ornamental motifs on its windows. The ephemeral structure has a height of three meters and a floor space of six by five meters, and supports over 100 individual glass panels overlaid with seven different ornamental motifs designed by McElheny. Produced in collaboration with a specialized glass school using a traditional silkscreen printing technique, these delicate black drawings attempt to translate a number of Koloman Moser's studies for ornamental form, as in the edition *Flächenschmuck* (Ornament for flat surfaces), published in *Die Quelle*, in 1902. Their ornamental geometry achieves a unique quality by the interplay of graphic shapes and the virtually invisible, shimmering glass surfaces.

The title of the exhibition is borrowed from Paul Scheerbart's poetic fable about an ornament museum, published in the magazine *Die Gegenwart* (Berlin, 1911). While obviously inspired by the intensive debates on the aesthetics and meaning of ornament involving Adolf Loos, Josef Hoffmann, and Koloman Moser as well as the art historian Alois Riegl, the project's dreams are about a different historical confluence as well.

McElheny also hopes to demonstrate a connection to the development of modern psychology in Vienna by Sigmund Freud and others. The ornament of Viennese Modernism was superimposed onto all types of surfaces and media, such as paper, textiles, jewelry, furniture, walls, and architectural elements. As such, it represented the psychology of the society at that time, but it also changed the psychological state of the people inhabiting these almost psychedelic rooms.

The exhibition opens with a text panel, which speaks about the underlying psychology of modern ornament. This language is brought to life through performances in which the actress Susanne Sachsse (Berlin) as the curator of ornament offers visitors individual tours of the pavilion, pointing out the hidden visceral meanings of the patterns.

The performer wears a fantastical dress, a reconstruction of a 1908 design by Emilie Louise Flöge, the dress becoming an animated ornament itself, connecting the performer's body, the architecture and multiple, overlapping forms of ornament. This performative approach reflects McElheny's dynamic ideas about the body's relationship to looking and to objects, as well as his notion that physical perception is a kind of narration.

Josiah McElheny's intensive artistic and theoretical focus on the avant-garde of the early 20th century can be seen in many aspects of his oeuvre and has had a complex influence on his exhibition project at the MAK. Meticulously thought through in terms



of its craft and its architecture, the exhibition highlights the continuing inspirational force of Viennese Modernism for today's contemporary fine artists.

Press images are available for download at MAK.at/press.

Press Data Sheet

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Curator	Bärbel Vischer, Curator, MAK Contemporary Art Collection
Performances	with Susanne Sachsse, Actress, Berlin Tue, 26 April 2016, 7 p.m. Tue, 17 May 2016, 7 p.m. Tue, 13 Sept 2016, 7 p.m. Tue, 18 Oct 2016, 6 p.m. Sat, 19 Nov 2016, 5 p.m. Tue, 24 Jan 2017, 7 p.m.
Curator-Guided Tours	with Bärbel Vischer Tue, 10 May 2016, 6 p.m. Tue, 7 Jun 2016, 6 p.m.
MAK Admission	€ 9.90 / Reduced € 7.50 / Family Ticket € 13 Free admission for children and teens under 19
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Vienna, 26 April 2016