

## **New Presentation**

# **MAK PERMANENT COLLECTION TEXTILES AND CARPETS**

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MAK – Press and PR

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### **Press Release**

Vienna, 24.3.2026

### **Press Conference**

Tuesday, 24.3.2026, 10 am

With this new presentation of the permanent collection of textiles and carpets, the MAK is offering a new perspective on precious masterpieces from Europe to East Asia, from late antiquity to the present. The MAK Collection is one of the world's most valuable and extensive museum collections of its kind. One of the most prestigious areas of this part of the collection focuses on unique Mamluk and Safavid carpets from the 16th and 17th centuries. For this redisplay the MAK collaborated with the internationally renowned design studio Formafantasma from Milan. Unlike in the previous permanent presentation that focused exclusively on the high-quality carpet collection, these objects are now contextualized with highlights from the textile collection. With this expanded curatorial concept, the MAK has made it possible for visitors to experience the diversity and riches of this area of the collection.

To display the fragile textiles, Formafantasma opted for delicate accents of color, atmospheric lighting, and large-format glass showcases that enable visitors to look as closely as possible at these exquisite objects without compromising their safety. The objects are mounted on *Forget-Me-Not*, a mother of pearl colored moiré fabric by the long-standing Venetian family business Rubelli, for which Andrea Trimarchi and Simone Farresin, the two founders of Formafantasma, have been working as creative directors since 2023.

Formafantasma: "We have long admired the MAK and the remarkable depth of its textile and carpet collection, among the most important worldwide. This new presentation allowed us to engage with works embodying centuries of exchange, from Mamluk and Safavid carpets to European tapestries and contemporary design, tracing how techniques and motifs traveled across cultures. Rather than isolating masterpieces, we shaped a spatial narrative highlighting connections and layered histories. Through subtle chromatic choices, atmospheric light, and large vitrines we sought to balance intimacy with conservation. This project underscores the role of exhibition design not

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only as a display strategy, but as a form of mediation between past and present.”

In order to comply with the strict conservation requirements of the delicate textiles, the selection of exhibits will rotate regularly from now on. The presentation of certain objects in drawers ensures that they are protected from the light and preserved for posterity but can also be looked at closely.

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This new presentation of pieces from the collection illustrates the way in which cultures are interwoven and reveals fascinating details from their object biographies, about their provenance, and about the history of the museum. The textiles on display are both woven and tapestry-woven fabrics and are shown alongside knotted-pile carpets. All three categories are created using weaving and knotting techniques with which the patterns emerge during their production. Printed, painted, and embroidered works whose decoration is added afterward, fall under the category of decorative techniques.

For the first time since its thorough restoration, the “silk Mamluk carpet” dating back to the early 16th century from the region that is now Egypt will go back on display in the permanent collection. Formerly owned by the Habsburgs, this magnificent piece entered the MAK Collection after World War I. Octagonal and star-shaped elements in shades of red, yellow, blue, and green and arranged like a kaleidoscope are characteristic of carpets of this type. Yet this example is unique: as the only surviving Mamluk carpet in the world whose knots are made of silk, it is one of the absolute highlights of the collection and its prominent position at the beginning of the new presentation celebrates its artistry.

Furthermore, the presentation includes examples of carpets from the Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal Empires, as well as European Savonnerie carpets, that are preserved for posterity in the MAK Collection.

Other highlights in the redisplay include a north Indian prayer rug with a millefleur pattern from the 18th century that was the first carpet to be bought for the museum collection, being acquired from the Mekhitarist Congregation in Vienna in 1868, as well as a “Tintoretto carpet” with a red ground that was created around 1600 in the West Anatolia Region. It bears the typical double niche design, as well as Chinese cloud bands, and harbors a thrilling criminal history: The carpet was stolen during a burglary in 1959 and only returned to the museum a year later; the thief responsible was arrested in Paris after an international manhunt.

Presenting the carpets together with related textiles proves just how closely cultures are interwoven and how widely motifs circulated: A French cashmere scarf depicting Nowruz, the Persian New Year’s Day celebration, alongside the Indian millefleur carpet points to the European fashion for shawls in the 18th and 19th centuries. A saddle blanket from the second half of the 16th century demonstrates that well-traveled motifs like the Buddhist chintamani



pattern found their way into the clothing and furnishing fabrics of high-ranking figures in the Ottoman Empire.

In the selection of objects and accompanying texts, tribute is also paid to famous collectors who had a formative influence on the MAK Collection. For instance, in a section on clothing and liturgical garments and textiles, the legendary collection of the Austrian banker and art collector Albert Figdor is represented by a knitted cardigan from the 17th century into which gold and silver threads have been worked. Known as “Scherenbock” (“scissor buck”), Canon of Aachen Franz Bock has also made his way into the exhibition; he is famous for the textiles he fragmented with scissors that are now spread across numerous European collections. Bock’s aim to create a collection of exemplars for the production of liturgical textiles in Historicism, is reflected in the collection practice of his age—such as in the copies by Philipp Haas & Söhne—and is accorded appropriate recognition in the exhibition.

Among the tapestry weavings worth highlighting is a tapestry fragment depicting “wild men” that is one of the most outstanding medieval tapestries in the MAK Collection. Alongside it are fragments from what is now Egypt that date back to late antiquity and are often—though sometimes erroneously—labeled as “Coptic.”

In the field of embroidery, which is one of the most prominent decorative techniques, the antependium of the Göss chasuble occupies center stage. This almost fully intact Romanesque chasuble from the mid-13th century depicts among other things its benefactress, Abbess Kunigunde II, in a brightly colored silk embroidery on linen. Printing and painting techniques are represented by part of a state bed from Schloss Hof that was owned by Prince Eugene of Savoy. Richly adorned with appliqué work, it shows—in addition to the appliqué Indian textiles—motifs inspired by the fashion for chinoiserie.

A machine-produced designer carpet by Virgil Abloh, released by IKEA in 2019 as part of the limited edition *Markerad*, rounds off the presentation. It is the only piece that is taken not from the textile but the design collection. Putting this mass-produced article on display invites visitors to reflect on the museum’s current or future collection practice in terms of the objects’ classification by material in our globally connected world.

### **Formafantasma**

Formafantasma is a research-based design studio that investigates the ecological, historical, political, and social forces that are currently shaping the world of design. Since founding the studio in 2009, the Italians Andrea Trimarchi and Simone Farresin have advocated a value-driven and holistic approach to design. With studios in Milan (Italy) and Rotterdam (Netherlands), Formafantasma works with a broad range of typologies and methods from product design to interior design through strategic planning and design consultancy. Its projects have been included in many international museum collections, including MoMa and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York,



the Art Institute of Chicago, the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, the Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris, the Musée des Arts décoratifs, and the Centre Georges-Pompidou in Paris, the Maxxi – Museo nazionale delle arti del XXI secolo in Rome, and many more.

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

With the kind support of Rubelli



**Press Conference**

Tuesday, 24.3.2026, 10 am

**Opening**

Tuesday, 24.3.2026, 7 pm

Free admission to the opening of the exhibition

**Opening Talk**

Tuesday, 24.3.2026, 7 pm

Alice Rawsthorn, design critic and author

(in English)

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**Exhibition Venue**

MAK Permanent Collection Textiles and Carpets

MAK, Stubenring 5, 1010 Vienna

**Exhibition Dates**

from 25.3.2026

**Opening Hours**

Tue 10 am–9 pm, Wed to Sun 10 am–6 pm

**Curator**

Lara Steinhäuser, Curator, MAK Textiles and Carpets Collection

**Design**

Formafantasma

**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 teenagers under 19

\* Online ticket price

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