

WATER PRESSURE. Designing for the Future

An exhibition by the MAK in cooperation with the
Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe Hamburg (MK&G) and
Jane Withers Studio, London

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Press Release

Vienna, 20.5.2025

Press Conference

Tuesday, 20.5.2025, 10 am

Water scarcity, droughts, pollution of rivers, lakes, oceans, and groundwater, flooding, disrupted water cycles, and the loss of biodiversity: The global water crisis has many faces, some with dramatic consequences. Although access to water is a human right, according to the United Nations about two billion people worldwide have no access to clean drinking water, and 3.5 billion live without basic sanitation. The careful management of this essential resource is one of humanity's greatest challenges. As one of the first large-scale museum explorations of this urgent topic, *WATER PRESSURE. Designing for the Future* showcases the versatile element of water and the role of design in shaping a sustainable water future.

The multidisciplinary project—a cooperation between the MAK, the Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe Hamburg (MK&G), and Jane Withers Studio, London—brings together art, design, architecture, and science with the shared goal of contributing visionary concepts for the conservation, sustainable use, and equitable distribution of water. A broad range of innovative objects and installations show ways to resolve the global water crisis and to radically change the current situation, with many of the solutions relying on principles from nature.

In Vienna, the exhibition is expanded to include videos and installations by contemporary artists and designers, historical objects from the MAK and other local institutions, and statistics that address Austria-specific challenges.

The exhibition's striking introduction at the MAK is Julian Charrière's monumental video work *And Beneath It All Flows Liquid Fire* (2019), which reinterprets the traditional fountain by replacing water with flames—a reminder that water vapor, generated by magma from the Earth's core, contributed to

the formation of the first oceans. Another central piece in Vienna comes from the design collective Dutch Invertuals, which presents a new version of their installation *Flow*. This immersive work traces the journey of a single water droplet across various terrains made from naturally water-repellent materials like sheep's wool.

Before entering the exhibition, visitors can experience firsthand the importance of water conservation. In the MAK's glass atrium, a specially designed installation by the Vienna-based design studio *EOOS* allows visitors to test a hygienic handwashing system that uses minimal water. The *SafeTap* project is designed for schools in the Global South and enables hand hygiene in places without running water.

Many of the crises highlighted in *WATER PRESSURE* may initially seem distant from a prosperous, water-rich city like Vienna: For more than 150 years now, exceptionally clean drinking water has been flowing from the taps thanks to a high-quality pipeline system bringing water from mountain springs high up in the Eastern Alps. After centuries of recurring flood disasters in districts built on the former riverside meadows, the city has also taken significant steps to improve its flood protection in the form of the 21-kilometer-long New Danube as well as the Danube Island, a popular recreational area. Yet the crisis can very quickly hit us again as shown all too clearly by the flooding in fall 2024, when the Wien River hit a millennium-record high-water level just steps away from the MAK.

We are all contributors to the water crisis, whether through the consumption of energy, food, and consumer goods, the production of which accounts for the bulk of global freshwater use. *WATER PRESSURE* explores these complex interconnections in a multifaceted exhibition that offers a variety of perspectives on a substance considered to be the elixir of life. Water is the only element on Earth that exists in nature in all three states of matter: in a liquid state as water, in a solid state as ice, and in gaseous form as vapor. This unique property influences our climate, the water cycle, and living conditions for all creatures – because water is life.

In *WATER PRESSURE*, five thematic chapters are each dedicated to a different aspect of the global water crisis:

Water Stories offers a diverse collage of ideas and examples from different epochs and cultures telling the story of the cultural importance of water, aiming to reawaken a connection to water and an understanding of its place in the ecosystem. The chapter also features many indigenous strategies and practices that can serve as inspiration for prospective nature-based solutions today. In her mural *The Time on the Lachlan River* and her visual essay *The Rights of a River*, for example, Slovenian artist Marjetica Potrč draws our attention to the rights of rivers and the political struggles to protect them. A chronology of water expands beyond the typical Western-centric narratives and aims to encourage global perspectives on water. The timeline presents



selected milestones to outline the cultural history of water, from ancient civilizations to the near future.

Bodily Waters explores the water's molecule and its intimate connection to human and non-human bodies. The focus here is also on the global inequalities in access to clean water. Art projects like Rose-Lynn Fisher's *The Topography of Tears*, a photo series on the different microstructures of tears, are juxtaposed with practical solutions, e.g., wastewater monitoring to identify diseases such as SARS-CoV-2. The focus here is on the global inequalities in access to clean water. Alternatives to conventional wastewater management systems are shown in exhibits such as the campaign *Death to the Flushing Toilet*, presented in 2023 in the Finnish pavilion at the Venice Biennale of Architecture, and many other innovative sanitary solutions. At the MAK, *GLASS-works Matter*, a design initiative by the Makkink & Bey studio, presents a collection of drinking glasses that together can hold 40 liters of water, symbolic of the average volume of water in a human body.

Thirsty Cities presents innovative solutions to the water crises in international metropolises such as Chennai, Copenhagen, Lagos, London, and Mexico City addressing water scarcity, pollution, and flooding. In the course of the last decade, several cities have been heading for "Day Zero," the day when the taps run dry: The *City of 1000 Tanks* project by OOZE Architects in Chennai, India, revitalizes the city's traditional water tanks, reservoirs, and temple ponds, integrating them into a decentralized water management system. In Lagos, Nigeria, the Makoko Floating School, a floating architecture by NLÉ Architects, was designed to provide education for local children who live on the lagoon. At the MAK, which also has a satellite in Los Angeles, the chapter is complemented by Björn Segschneider's video *LA River* (2014), who documented the 77-kilometer-long Los Angeles River with poetic video sequences and specially composed soundscapes, capturing the river's changing landscape and urban subcultures.

Invisible Water addresses the water footprint of agriculture and industry and highlights new ways to reduce water consumption and pollution. Circular water models or those inspired by nature are being explored as a means of initiating systemic change. For example, unlike the customary chemical dyeing procedures, the *Colorifix* biological process for dyeing textiles entails no water pollution. Alternative strategies sourcing building materials in a way that regenerates ecosystems question current construction industry standards, an example being the *Paludiculture* project by Material Cultures and Bauhaus Earth, for which regenerative materials are cultivated in peatlands.

Ecosystems presents alternative approaches to restore the balance between humans and nature. Human intervention through regulating river courses, dams, draining wetlands, and extracting groundwater destroys ecosystems, biodiversity, and the water cycle. Some of the solutions showcased also integrate local and indigenous knowledge. The *Living Breakwaters* project by *SCAPE Landscape Architecture* in New York, for example, involves



underwater structures designed to break waves, reduce shoreline erosion, and create habitats for marine life. *CloudFisher*, an innovative system for harvesting water from fog, provides at least 12 liters of drinking water per day for 1,300 people in Morocco and thus also enables girls, who are often responsible for collecting water, to attend school instead. Spanish artist Cristina Iglesias has created a special edit of her film *Estancias Sumergidas (Mar de Cortés)* for the MAK. In *The Seas Are No Longer Dying*, Superflux portrays a future in which humans cooperate to make regenerative use of marine resources.

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An advisory board of experts in various disciplines provided scientific input for the *WATER PRESSURE* exhibition, which, after presentations in MK&G Hamburg and Museum für Gestaltung Zurich, has now been adapted for the MAK and enhanced to include additional projects.

The exhibition design was conceived by the Belgian design studio *51N4E*, utilizing a carbon-negative material derived from eelgrass that is produced with minimal water consumption by the manufacturer Søuld. At the MAK, the display is extended by drainage pipes from wienerberger's brand Pipelife, that can be returned into the material cycle and reference our water infrastructure systems.

The exhibition includes works by: 350.org; Amazon Sacred Headwaters; Andrew Esiebo; Anna-Lülja Praun / Franz Josef Altenburg; Arthur Guilleminot; Arup; Atelier LUMA; AusBlau Studio; Bauhaus-Universität Weimar; Bernd und Hilla Becher; Bjoern Segschneider; Cannupa Hanska Luger; Colorifix; Cristina Iglesias; Diana Scherer; Dutch Invertuals & Edhv; EOOS; Epic Cleantec; Fee Schlapper; Fernando Laposse; Goldeimer; H+N+S Landschaftsarchitekten; Hamam magazine; Hamburg Wasser; Hydraloop; Isla Urbana; Jack's Solar Garden; Jane Withers Studio; Julia Watson; Julian Charrière; Kari Korkman; Karl Troels Sandegård; Katsushika Hokusai; Klarenbeek & Dros; LaToya Ruby Frazier; LAUFEN GmbH; Lawrence Weiner; Leonard Koren; LIXIL; Luisa Jane Charles; Lumo Inc.; Margarida Mendes und Pedro Neves Marques; Mari Yamazaki; Marjetica Potrč; Material Cultures mit Bauhaus Earth; Meridel Rubenstein; MIT – Massachusetts Institute of Technology; Morna Livingston; NLÉ; Oliver Niewiadomski; OOZE Architects and Urbanists; Pauline Hafsia M'Barek, Pnat, Potters for Peace, raumlaborberlin; Regierung Tuvalu; Rose-Lynn Fisher; Sanivation; SCAPE Landscape Architecture; Second Sea mit Accept & Proceed; SOURCE; Studio Makkink & Bey; Sungai Watch; Superflux; Synchronicity Earth; TAHMO – Trans-African Hydro-Meteorological Observatory; Taller Capital; The Dry Collective; The Monkeys; The World Around; Tom Hegen; TREDJE NATUR; University of Cape Town; Utagawa Hiroshige; Utagawa Kuniyoshi; Veditum India Foundation (Shridhar Sudhir); waiwai Research & Design Agency; WASHKING Limited; WasserStiftung; Werner Bischof; Wilding Radio; Wirtschaftsministerium der Republik Fidschi in Zusammenarbeit mit der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ); Wura-Natasha Ogunji.



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

Partner

wienerberger



Press Conference

Tuesday, 20.5.2025, 10 am

Please register via presse@MAK.at

Opening

Tuesday, 20.5.2025, 7 pm

Free admission to the opening of the exhibition

Exhibition Venue

MAK Exhibition Hall, upper floor

MAK, Stubenring 5, 1010 Vienna, Austria

Exhibition Dates

21.5.–7.9.2025

Opening Hours

Tue 10 am–9 pm, Wed to Sun 10 am–6 pm

Curators of the traveling exhibition

Jane Withers Studio (Jane Withers, Ria Hawthorn), Erika Pinner (MK&G Hamburg)

Curator of the MAK exhibition

Marlies Wirth, Curator, Digital Culture and MAK Design Collection

Exhibition Design

51N4E (traveling exhibition), Philipp Krummel (MAK)

Graphic Design

Visual Fields (traveling exhibition), Theresa Hattinger (MAK)

Supporting Program

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

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

* Online ticket price



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