

Press Release

**THOMAS BAYRLE**  
**If It's Too Long—Make It Longer**

Press Conference	Monday, 23 October 2017, 10:30 a.m.
Opening	Tuesday, 24 October 2017, 7 p.m.
Exhibition Venue	MAK, Stubenring 5, 1010 Vienna
Exhibition Dates	25 October 2017 – 2 April 2018
Opening Hours	Tue 10 a.m.–10 p.m., Wed–Sun 10 a.m.–6 p.m. Free admission on Tuesdays from 6–10 p.m.

Oversize! A “superform” comprised of countless iPhones—*iPhone meets Japan* (2017)—in the MAK Columned Main Hall is the central work and at the same time the prelude to the first institutional solo exhibition in Austria by the German draftsman, graphic designer, painter, and sculptor Thomas Bayrle (\* 1937), who celebrates his 80th birthday on 7 November 2017. Under the title *If It's Too Long—Make It Longer*, after a quote by the architect Eero Saarinen (1910–1961), Bayrle—who explores contemporary media—develops a narrative around the interaction between communication design, the individual, and society.

In the framework of the exhibition, Bayrle shines a light on the MAK Collection using the example of objects that have had a formative influence on the conceptual collection of exemplars at this institution, which was founded in 1863 as the Imperial Royal Austrian Museum of Art and Industry. With graphic, sculptural, painted, textile, and installation works, he interweaves several spaces—the MAK Columned Main Hall, **MAK DESIGN LAB**, **MAK GALLERY**, and **MAK Permanent Collection Contemporary Art**—into a projection surface for his interpretation of “social fabric,” the interlacing of society that he relates to the art of weaving.

Weaving, interlinking, repetitions, and the serial principle are all defining aspects of Bayrle’s oeuvre. Having trained as a pattern designer and weaver before studying commercial graphic design and printing, he systematically renders his fascination for machinery in his artistic production. Using the metaphors of dyeing, weaving, and programming, he explores the ambivalence of art, craft, and industry and gives rise to kaleidoscopic shapes—mass ornaments. Influenced by op art (Victor Vasarely, 1906–

1997) and pop art (Andy Warhol, 1928–1987), Bayrle was one of the first to combine manual techniques with the computer-generated art of the Digital Age.

He derives the subjects for his works on paper, photographs, collages, and objects from everyday culture and political contexts. In the interplay of their component parts, his legendary “superforms”—collages made from an endless number of miniature pictures—produce a micro- and a macrocosm. Due to their reproduction of “cells,” images, and ornamental forms of analog and digital dimensions, his works can be read as statements on the masses and mass production, according to the artist.

Bayrle designed the installation *iPhone meets Japan* especially for the MAK. This walk-in stage set in the MAK Columned Main Hall—itself a hybrid between Neo-Renaissance and industrial architecture as well as the center of the museum and the exhibition—reflects a Japanese shunga by Nishikawa Sukenobu (preliminary study from ca. 1720) from the MAK Asia Collection. These explicitly erotic woodcuts evolved into a mass phenomenon in East Asia. Bayrle translates the shunga into a “superform” of iPhones; under the auspices of digital interconnectivity, it oscillates between a couple who briefly indulge in a play of scents, and architectural elements. The viewers find themselves faced with a barrage of images or are called on to take stock of the scene from above, from the gallery of the hall.

As a reference to political, industrial and cultural icons like Jesus Christ, Mao, the highway, the smartphone or the cup, the “superforms” in the exhibition mirror Bayrle’s fascination with the idea of the ornament. He finds his inspiration in the writings of, among others, the sociologist Siegfried Kracauer (1889–1966), associated with the Frankfurt School. In his text *The Mass Ornament* from the collection of essays of the same name (1920–1931), Kracauer compares the ornament with aerial photographs of cities. He draws the masses as the supporters of the ornaments, which are formed by community, whereas the mass ornament reflects our present age and the capitalist production process. Humans as mass particles can draw bodies, define tables, or operate machines—perspectives that also cast a spell over Bayrle.

With Bayrle’s project, the MAK becomes the arena for a newly established interaction between art and craft, artist and weaver. Following a work for the Hartmannswillerkopf memorial site (Alsace) for soldiers who fell there during the First World War, a Viennese tapestry is taking shape, the second large work made especially for the MAK. Drenched in blue, the ornamental image area of the *iPhone Pietà* (2017) has been created using smartphones—simultaneously ornament, apparatus, and adornment—and translates the cultural code of the pietà into an atmospheric portrayal of social and political events. Hand-dyed and woven with various textures and materials, the tapes-

try is being produced by a studio in Aubusson in the Limousin in France, where there is a tradition of weaving collectives dating back six centuries. Shown in the MAK Permanent Collection Contemporary Art, the *iPhone Pietà*, studies, and narrative references such as the painting *Gotischer Schinken [Gothic Daub]* (1980) and the photographic collage *Himmelfahrt [Ascension]* (1988), a later version of which—entitled *Eiserner Vorhang [Safety Curtain]* (2003/04)—was on display in the Vienna State Opera, merge into a symbol of our times. Bayrle translates the ritual of prayer into prototypes of a car tire, which can be set in motion like a prayer wheel.

Weaving as a concept continues in the MAK DESIGN LAB with paintbrush studies, stamp works, pictorial and sculptural intertwining of boxboard and analog Photoshop series, which also illustrate reproduction processes and the use of various materials. This “organigram” of artistic production references Gottfried Semper’s (1803–1879) theories of practical aesthetics. Semper takes as his starting point the materiality of things, which only takes shape through their use and their frame of reference. Bayrle developed the hanging formation *SARS* (2008) as a modular structure; in the exhibition, this spatial figure simultaneously dictates a formal and narrative order. In his relief picture *\$* (1980) made of boxboard in which miniature automobiles drive laps, Bayrle draws the highway interchange as a dollar sign, a symbol not just of economics but also of politics.

With an economic program, the MAK GALLERY oscillates between a cabinet of graphic artworks and a “glam room”: works on paper from the 1960s and 1970s analyze Bayrle’s principle of conceiving of images and graphics like logos and pictograms as a language. For example, in the work *Börsenbericht [Stock market report]* (1972, part of a series) he covers an anonymous portrait of a worker or an employee by minimally shifting the pattern of the data of 8 March 1972. In variations of the work *Potato Counters* (1968), Bayrle explores communist China at the time of the dictator and instigator of the Cultural Revolution Mao Zedong (1893–1976). Bayrle’s patterns were also transferred to fashion that could be purchased or ordered commercially. The ornament—or the algorithm—invents consumption.

As part of the exhibition, a selection of Bayrle’s artist’s books and publications will be presented in the MAK Library.

After training as a pattern designer and weaver, Thomas Bayrle (lives and works in Frankfurt am Main, Germany) studied graphic design at the school of applied arts in Offenbach am Main (now the University of Art and Design) in the early 1960s; he founded the Gulliver-Presse together with Bernhard Jäger (\* 1935) and worked as a printer and publisher of artists’ books. As one of the most significant contemporary

artists and a professor at the Städelschule in Frankfurt am Main for many years (1975–2007), he has inspired generations of artists and to this day he remains a mentor for young artists. In an international context, Bayrle became known among other things thanks to his participation in the Venice Biennale (2003 and 2009) as well as documenta (1964, 1977, and 2012).

The exhibition *THOMAS BAYRLE: If It's Too Long—Make It Longer* is accompanied by the publication *THOMAS BAYRLE: Pattern Designer*, edited by Christoph Thun-Hohenstein, Nicolaus Schafhausen, and Bärbel Vischer, with texts by Spyros Papapetros, Nicolaus Schafhausen, Christoph Thun-Hohenstein, and Bärbel Vischer (German/English).

This exhibition was produced in cooperation with *Phileas - A Fund for Contemporary Art*.

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With the kind support of the  
Deutsche Botschaft Wien

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

## Press Data Sheet

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Curators	Nicolaus Schafhausen, Bärbel Vischer (Curator, MAK Contemporary Art Collection)
Publication	<i>THOMAS BAYRLE: Pattern Designer</i> , edited by Christoph Thun-Hohenstein, Nicolaus Schafhausen, and Bärbel Vischer, with texts by Spyros Papapetros, Nicolaus Schafhausen, Christoph Thun-Hohenstein, and Bärbel Vischer, German/English, 96 pages with numerous color illustrations. MAK, Vienna/Verlag für moderne Kunst, Vienna 2017. Available at the MAK Design Shop and online at <a href="http://MAKdesignshop.at">MAKdesignshop.at</a> for € 24.
MAK Admission	€ 9.90 / Reduced € 7.50 / Family Ticket € 13 Free admission for children and teens under 19
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Vienna, 23 October 2017

