

## **BIRKE GORM** **dead stock**

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MAK – Press and PR

presse@MAK.at

### **Press Release**

Vienna, 31.1.2023

### **Press Conference**

Tuesday, 31 January 2023, 10 am

Please register in advance at [presse@MAK.at](mailto:presse@MAK.at)

The collecting of discarded material is a key aspect defining Birke Gorm's entire oeuvre. The exhibition title, *dead stock* (MAK Gallery, 1.2.–25.6.2023), alludes to the English term for any excess good or material that is broken, obsolete, or no longer fit to be sold and hence deemed to be "dead" material in a capitalist system. By reappropriating domestic work processes—unpaid forms of labor that throughout history have predominantly been assigned to women—the artist highlights the enormous potential embodied in the production and circulation of quotidian items to deconstruct patriarchal gender hierarchies.

A similarly crucial role is assigned to the act of "gleaning": the gathering of "leftovers" as a routine either consciously performed or dictated by need, initially an agricultural term used to describe the collecting of leftover crops from harvested fields. "My exhibition will mainly comprise elements that can be read as such material," says the artist. "Generally, I have been very interested in the act of collecting for quite some time—including from a purely pragmatic point of view, as a method of acquiring material. The materials acquired this way are often thought of as leftovers, waste, or in some way as 'worthless.' Often, I am also looking to find remainders or traces of specific work processes or historic, artisan activities that nowadays are only rarely performed, if at all."

Birke Gorm's exhibition *dead stock* will feature nine handmade sculptures as symbolic representations of the value of material and labor in the context of gender roles and gender equality. Derived from historical representations of the female body as a vessel, the jute bag figures can simultaneously be read

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as containers. The human-sized, anthropoid protagonists convey a determination to protect the things they are wearing. They were created from found and disused “dead stock” that is devoid of economic value, and thus allude back to the act of gleaning. Historically, along with sewing, mending, and other slow-paced and repetitive tasks, gleaning was predominantly performed by women and is associated with periods of economic scarcity.

The installation reflects the crucial role of bags and pockets (on clothing) in the advancement of women’s independence. Since antiquity, pockets and pouches allowed men to carry money, valuables, or small tools close to their body. It was only from the 17th century onward, when purses—worn in combination with or attached to a girdle around the waist—became a common piece of apparel, that women began to participate in society by carrying with them their own possessions. Many decades more passed before clothing with integrated pockets became accessible to women.

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In addition, purses and pockets are metaphors of privilege. According to the political philosopher Silvia Federici (*Caliban and the Witch*, 2004), the emergence of the concept of personal property paved the way for the notion of monogamy—a system that allowed men to earn an income and own and inherit possessions but that excluded women. The impossibility to secure their own livelihood made them increasingly dependent on others.

Accompanying the figures are small sculptures made of scrap metal and electrical wiring, with attached bulbs serving to light the exhibition space. Threaded like pearls or jewelry onto the electrical wiring are scrap metal objects. Here again, it is the transformation of discarded items and an additional historical layer of reference that create the key momentum in Birke Gorm’s work: in rural areas, people frequently reused existing material such as scrap metal—collected from farms or workshops—to make candleholders.

*BIRKE GORM. dead stock* marks the MAK’s latest addition to its exhibition series launched in late 2021 featuring contemporary cross-disciplinary female and non-binary artists in the MAK Gallery.

A booklet containing a text by the artist will be published in conjunction with the exhibition.

**Birke Gorm**, born in Hamburg in 1986, lives and works in Vienna. Following studies in textile design in Denmark, painting at the Hamburg University of Fine Arts, and sculpture at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna, she became an independent artist in 2017, taking part in exhibitions in Vienna, Graz, Berlin, Brussels, Milan, Copenhagen, New York, and Toronto. She is the recipient of the 2020 Strabag Art Award.

Press photos can be downloaded at [MAK.at/en/press](https://www.mak.at/en/press).



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Tuesday, 31.1.2023, 10 am

Please register in advance at [presse@MAK.at](mailto:presse@MAK.at)

**Opening**

Tuesday, 31.1.2023, 7 pm

Free admission starting 6 pm

**Exhibition Venue**

MAK Gallery

MAK, Stubenring 5, 1010 Vienna

**Exhibition Dates**

1.2.–25.6.2023

**Opening Hours**

Tue 10 am–9 pm, Wed to Sun 10 am–6 pm

**Curator**

Marlies Wirth, Curator, Digital Culture and MAK Design Collection

**Accompanying Program**

For regular updates, please visit [MAK.at/en](http://MAK.at/en)

**MAK Admission**

€ 15, reduced € 12, every Tuesday 6–9 pm: admission € 7

Free admission for children and teens under 19

**MAK Press and PR**

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