

## **THE 1873 VIENNA WORLD'S FAIR REVISITED** Egypt and Japan as Europe's "Orient"

1

MAK Press and PR

presse@MAK.at

### **Press Release**

Vienna, 27.6.2023

### **Press Conference**

Tuesday, 27.6.2023, 10 am

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

On the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the 1873 Vienna World's Fair, the MAK sets out to explore a critical aspect of this prestigious international show: the "Orient" as a construct of 19th-century Orientalism. Drawing on Egypt and Japan as examples, which in the contemporary worldview were often thought to be part of the region referred to as the "Orient," the exhibition *THE 1873 VIENNA WORLD'S FAIR REVISITED: Egypt and Japan as Europe's "Orient"* explores Orientalism from various angles.

The Vienna World's Fair of 1873 had a considerable impact on the history of the MAK Collection. It marked the first time that Japan was formally invited to participate as a nation, and it seized the exhibition as an opportunity to present itself through a kaleidoscope of artworks. Many of these were subsequently given as presents by the Japanese government to European museums, including the Imperial Royal Austrian Museum of Art and Industry (today's MAK). The MAK possesses a key collection on the Vienna World's Fair, and 80 percent of the objects selected for *THE 1873 VIENNA WORLD'S FAIR REVISITED: Egypt and Japan as Europe's "Orient"* are being exhibited in Austria for the first time.

The exhibition explores a range of questions: Who were the actors that conceptualized and designed the country pavilions for the 1873 fair? What was the political, cultural, and discursive setting that informed aesthetic decisions? Through which aesthetic and symbolic practices and cultural policy approaches did participating countries negotiate their Orientalist worldviews, and how did these worldviews shift after 1873?

**M**

**A**

**K**

The exhibition opens with portraits of two key European figures: the Austrian-Czech architect Franz (František) Schmoranz Jr. (1845–1892) and the German chemist Gottfried Wagener (1831–1892). Commissioned by the Khedive of Egypt, Schmoranz was tasked with designing the Khedivate’s pavilion, while Wagener was assigned to draft the Japanese complex. Both men enjoyed relative autonomy in deciding on how to present the respective countries.

One of the exhibition highlights is the presentation of the “Arab Room” designed by Schmoranz. It was permanently installed at the Austrian Museum of Art and Industry from 1883 to 1931 and has not been accessible to the public in its entirety since. Schmoranz’s draft draws on architectural elements used for the Egyptian pavilion at the world’s fairs in Vienna (1873) and Paris (1867). For the current exhibition, large segments of the room have been reconstructed and fitted with existing items from the MAK Collection including ceramics, textiles, glass, and metal objects. Also on display are the watercolor sketches of the Arab Room by Le Corbusier (Charles-Édouard Jeanneret-Gris, 1887–1965), which he produced while visiting Vienna in 1908.

Further exhibits include drafts of the entire Egyptian ensemble, historic photographs, and a broad selection of Japanese and Egyptian items from the MAK Collection, alongside Lobmeyr glasses designed by Schmoranz as well as excerpts of his tile collection that is kept at the MAK.

For its theoretical grounding, the exhibition draws on recent postcolonial critiques of Edward Said’s canonical research on Orientalism. While often reduced to a catch-all concept used to decry Western practices of othering, the MAK understands Orientalism as an intricate fabric of dynamic negotiation processes that also draw attention to “Oriental” practices of self-othering, resistance, or complicity.

This helps the exhibition to look beyond Said’s binary opposition of Orient and Occident. In this context, Schmoranz’s and Wagner’s diverging opinions on what constitutes a “representative” national style are documents that merit particular interest. Their interactions with Egyptian and Japanese representatives reflect the complex entanglements shaping late 19th-century Viennese Orientalisms.

These added layers of Egyptian and Japanese experience enrich the context surrounding the Vienna World’s Fair and help to decipher inherent mechanisms as well as strategies in the fields of aesthetics and cultural policy. Further questions will shed light on the—in retrospect biased—criteria used to select participating countries and explore the “inner workings” of popular Oriental enthusiasm.

The MAK Library and Works on Paper Collection embarked on an extensive project to identify all catalogs and reports published by the 35 participating countries in the context of the Vienna World’s Fair. The resulting searchable



35,000-page corpus will be accessible online with the opening of the exhibition. Comprising 222 publications, it will complement the online archive released several years ago and capture the work of all 26 groups that were showcased during the Vienna World's Fair exhibition program.

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



**Press Conference**

Tuesday, 27.6.2023, 10 am

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

**Opening**

Tuesday, 27.6.2023, 7 pm

Free admission

**Exhibition Venue**

Central Room, MAK Design Lab  
MAK, Stubenring 5, 1010 Vienna

**Exhibition Dates**

28.6.–22.10.2023

**Opening Hours**

Tue 10 am–9 pm, Wed to Sun 10 am–6 pm

**Curator**

Mio Wakita-Elis, MAK Asia Collection

**Scientific Adviser**

Johannes Wieninger

**Exhibition Design**

Christine Schwaiger, Christa Stürzlinger

**Graphic Design**

Büro Perndl

**Accompanying Program**

For regular updates, 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**

Judith Anna Schwarz-Jungmann (Head)

T +43 1 71136-213, [judith.schwarz-jungmann@MAK.at](mailto:judith.schwarz-jungmann@MAK.at)

Sandra Hell-Ghignone

T +43 1 71136-212, [sandra.hell-ghignone@MAK.at](mailto:sandra.hell-ghignone@MAK.at)

Ulrike Sedlmayr

T +43 1 71136-210, [ulrike.sedlmayr@MAK.at](mailto:ulrike.sedlmayr@MAK.at)

