

29. October:

Dr Sebastian Hackenschmidt, MAK – Museum für angewandte Kunst, Vienna

Prolonging the Magic: Vienna 1900 in Post-Production

Viennese Modernism has long since become a successful brand of international cultural historiography. For more than five decades, myriads of international exhibitions and publications have strived to create a differentiated picture of the cultural life of the modern metropolis. Consequently, Vienna 1900, as this period is often labelled, plays a central role not just for the MAK – Museum of Applied Arts in Vienna but also for the design collection displays in many other international museums of the decorative arts.

In my talk, I would like to reconsider the emergence of Vienna 1900 as an art-historical phenomenon and its manifestation into an internationally renowned brand. On the one hand, I am interested to investigate recent efforts of bringing Viennese Modernism up to 21st-century standards of discourse, inclusivity and cultural diversity. Based on the experience of preparing for the MAK's new show collection—due to open in January 2026—I would like to critically reflect on the attempt to include different and more nuanced narrative approaches into the display of the decorative arts.

On the other hand, I would like to examine how the MAK has been trying to cement the significance of Vienna 1900 in recent decades by collecting and exhibiting works of art and design from this period—and of more recent objects relating to it: Design since the 1960's has often made explicit reference to Vienna 1900 and thus allows for a complex interaction of historic and contemporary objects. The juxtaposition of such objects not only enables us to address changes in modes of production and content orientation but also to challenge entrenched notions of originality, quality, style, and taste.

In order to raise the question of how design objects and interiors can be displayed today, I would like to propose the term postproduction, borrowed from the art historian Nicolas Bourriaud: Meant to describe the mode of production of the art of the 1990s with artists remixing, selecting, and repurposing pre-existing cultural works and forms rather than creating new ones, the concept of postproduction could prove valid as an operating principle for contemporary museum displays today.

29. October:

Dr Leena Svinhufvud, Architecture and Design Museum, Helsinki

***Shifting Baseline Syndrome and the Museum Collection.
Displaying the Story of Finnish Architecture and Design for the 2030s***

On 11 September, 2025, the result of the architecture competition for the AD Museum in Helsinki, set to open in 2030, was published. The organisation for the new museum was formed through a merger of the Museum of Finnish Architecture and the Design Museum Helsinki, both ranking among the world's oldest museums in their fields. The collections range from early examples of industrial arts to art nouveau and from modernism to contemporary design innovations, including works from approximately 5,500 different designers or design groups.

In the new building, the collection exhibition will present the story of Finnish (and Nordic) architecture and design highlighting their world-wide impact in shaping more equal societies. As the competition brief for the new museum building (2024) stated "the AD Museum's collection is a journey through Finnish design heritage – from Aaltos to Angry Birds, baby boxes to bold prints, from Nokia to nanocellulose, Saarinen to Suuronen and from Vuokko to Vaarnii". (<https://2030.admuseo.fi/competition>)

After the successful launch, it is the task of the museum professionals to define what kind of stories will be framed in the new museum. The questions are, for example, what we eventually have in the collections, what we want to tell, how and with whom.

Looking back at the history, the motivations behind collection displays have varied and so have the stories. Applied arts collections were formed in the 19th century to boost capitalist industries of nation-states whereas in the 20th century, iconic examples of good design and architecture have promoted an expert-centered global industry and attracted increasing audiences. What are the stories of the man-made environment that are worth preserving and displaying in the time of falling democracies, climate crisis and loss of biodiversity?

Shifting baseline syndrome is a theory used in ecology, to describe how we tend to perceive the "normal" or original state of the nature – how it should be preserved – based on our personal experience which is irretrievably limited. What if the collection display could help us understand the bigger picture: the multiple pasts and various impacts of design and architecture?

As users, we all are best experts of design and architecture. This presentation will discuss possibilities of creating dialogues around the collection displays and engaging audiences to share their own stories. When the museum object acts as a platform for inquiry and interpretation the diverse histories of architecture and design and the museum collections can be respected.

30. October:

Marco Magni, founder and chief architect, and Maria Cristina Rizzello, architect and partner, Guicciardini & Magni Architetti, Florence

Designing at the National Museum. Specific installations for global themes.

The museum that we want is a place of knowledge, exchange, integration, learning, and interaction but also of play, socializing, and sharing. In sum, a place that is unrepeatably, the location for the engagement that is created between visitors and the works on display and through which a heritage of collective values is assimilated and transformed into an individual experience.

The essential task of museography is to create a collective social imaginary around a corpus of works and the places that host them. All museums are unique; an attentive interpretation has to vary its expository techniques in the service of works with different meanings, and in relation to different spaces. The works themselves speak different languages, have different provenances, and different creators. The task of a museum exhibition design is to construct a narrative for all concerned by elaborating these data.

The exhibition design project for the permanent collection galleries of the National Museum began in 2016 in parallel with the definition of its curatorial contents.

The development of the main visitor experience is centered around two principal nuclei. Decorative arts and design are on the ground floor, while the fine arts (painting, sculpture, and some reflections on architecture) are on the first floor.

We encountered numerous challenges in creating this new museum. How could we design a permanent exhibition spanning 11,000 square meters that would provide visitors with an interesting and engaging experience? How could we display objects from different eras while respecting their cultural significance? How could we adapt the design of the exhibition in relation to the different historical contexts? How could we create an exhibition that would engage different audiences and generations? And how could we communicate in a universal way while avoiding the risk of superficiality?

To answer so many questions, we focused on listening, starting with the creation of an interpretative dialogue with curators, conservators and experts in education and communication. We tried to apply our listening methods to the objects and the stories they convey, using simple and universal languages, but developed in a specific and varied way, adapting to the diversity of contexts and their cultural values.

We have tried to provide stimuli and opportunities for cultural exploration through material, visual and sound suggestions that have been conveyed through multimedia solutions placed along the route as a sort of comfortable support for the needs of a contemporary audience.

30. October:

Corinna Gardner, Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Designing for a better future: intent and purpose in the twenty-first century collections display

Taking the V&A's 2021 redisplay of its twentieth and twenty-first century design collections as a starting point, this talk will reflect on lessons learnt in the near five years of welcoming visitors to these South Kensington galleries, and look to the new modes of engagement at V&A East Storehouse, to ask what next for display, and what next for the museum.

For design collections and institutions, the proposition is two-fold. Firstly, what is the value of encountering the everyday in the context of the gallery? Does familiarity enable new and different ways of approaching the complex – be that questions of making, materials and the planet, social, economic and political disruption, or design's capacity to shape our present and future for good and bad?

Secondly, creating collections displays with intent, purpose, and an open invitation to participate, necessarily requires an embrace of the digital. Contemporary design is digital, important and yet difficult to collect. Exhibiting it even more so. Our visitors wake up in the twenty-first century, and so this paper also considers how we rise to the dual challenge of enfranchising new modes of creativity and consumption, and how we better tell stories fit for our digital age. In a world ever-more driven by an attention economy, how can we reflect and build on the museum as a place of collective encounter?