

Peche Pop. Tracing Dagobert Peche in the 21st Century



by Bruno Manfredini

The exhibition *Peche Pop. Tracing Dagobert Peche in the 21st Century*, curated by Claudia Cavallar and Anne-Katrin Rossberg, is on view from December 11, 2024, to May 11, 2025, at MAK, Wien. Catalog in German and English, with texts by Claudia Cavallar, Brigitte Felderer, Rainald Franz, Sebastian Hackenschmidt, Lilli Hollein, Gabriele Kaiser, Kathrin Pokorny-Nagel, Anne-Katrin Rossberg, Nikolaus Schaffer, Janis Staggs, and Lara Steinhäuser, is published by MAK, Vienna/Walther König, Cologne.

Decorator and designer Dagobert Peche (1887-1923) was one of the most unorthodox members of the Wiener Werkstätte, the manufacturing community founded in 1903 by Josef Hoffmann and Koloman Moser. It was Hoffmann himself, commemorating him after his untimely death, who called him an “ornamental genius”. Seen from today’s perspective, Hoffmann’s words are not only a eulogy, but also an admission that there is a close relationship between decoration and design. If the two concepts sometimes seem so far apart, it is due more to a linguistic betrayal, a substitution of ancient for modern vocabulary, than to any actual incommunicability. This alone is enough to recommend those who have the opportunity to visit the current *Peche Pop* exhibition at the Museum für Angewandte Kunst (MAK) in Vienna.

Spanning the crucial years when Art Nouveau, historical avant-gardes,

Metaphysics and Return to Order were passing the baton, Peche's career is an anthology of reckless inventions that distanced the Wiener Werkstatte style from all rationalist temptations, projecting it into wondrous, polychromatic imaginary worlds, between neo-rococo, exoticism and literary escapism. The seven sections of the exhibition tell the story of Peche's work by juxtaposing it with film set design, postmodernism and the latest artistic and design trends. From silver to glass, ceramics to leather, jewelry to wallpaper, never losing sight of furniture and furnishings, Peche imagined objects as protagonists and extras in a perpetual spectacle.

Although Art Deco had its birthplace in France (the occasion was the *Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels* held in Paris exactly one hundred years ago, in 1925), it must be said that before he died, at the age of only thirty-six, Peche had already experienced the entire range of this still gestating style. Not only that: he had also foreseen its future offshoots, contaminations, revivals. *Peche Pop* deals with these offshoots, contaminations and revivals, tracing them to the present through a series of comparisons, admittedly not always convincing, with today's artists and designers. On the other hand, Peche's "ornamental genius" is not afraid of juxtaposition. If anything, it is those who are placed next to him who suffer from the comparison, for Peche's plastic, iconographic and coloristic wisdom is a very difficult challenge to sustain.

Homepage: Dagobert Peche, bolt of fabric "Rainbow", 1919, silk (photo credits MAK).

Below: a glimpse of the current "Peche Pop" exhibition at MAK Vienna (photo credits MAK/Christian Mendez).

