

White Gold

Masterpieces & Material Design



8. Juli–
23. September
2026



The Institute for Material Design of
the University of Art and Design Offenbach
as guest at the Cathedral Museum



8 Heinrich Carl Brandt: Portrait of Archbishop Johann Friedrich Karl von Ostein, oil on copper, 1761, Mainz (?), Inv.-Nr. M00215

Masterpieces and Material Design

A Foreword

The porcelain bearing the wheel mark is familiar to many people, yet few make the connection between the porcelain from Höchst and the city of Mainz, which carries the wheel in its coat of arms. For today, Höchst is a district of Frankfurt, located in the state of Hesse and, from a Catholic perspective, belonging to the Diocese of Limburg. Exactly 280 years ago, the boundaries were different: the then modest town of Höchst, with fewer than one thousand inhabitants, belonged to Electoral Mainz. At its head stood Friedrich Karl von Ostein (r. 1743–1763), a ruler aligned with Enlightenment thinking who pursued a fundamental modernization of city and state. This included the reform of

Mainz civil law and economic policy measures, such as improvements to infrastructure through road construction, the acquisition of new merchant vessels, and the elevation of the merchant class above all guilds. With the establishment of a commerce commission to promote the city's wholesale and foreign trade in 1746, and trade fairs to be held three times a year in Mainz, Ostein demonstrated emphatically that he wished to compete not least with the economic rival of the Free Imperial City of Frankfurt. That in the same year he granted the privilege to found a highly innovative porcelain manufactory—furnishing it with customs exemptions for raw materials and finished goods, and situating it in Höchst, directly at the gates of the Imperial City—was an act of economic policy.





3 SILIKAT 1746, complete module, manufactured using traditional mold-making techniques and 3D printing.

Chapter Hall and Chapter Room

Representative of the countless masterpieces from Höchst, a selection of works from the manufactory's first three decades is on display in the historic Chapter Room of the Episcopal Cathedral and Diocesan Museum. The Chapter Room and the adjacent great Chapter Hall have been used as event and exhibition spaces since the museum's founding one hundred and one years ago. Previously, they served the cathedral chapter for centuries as assembly rooms, and are therefore still referred to by their former function as the "Chapter Room" and "Chapter Hall." The great Chapter Hall is currently undergoing renovation. The museum's special exhibition space is being made more accessible and upgraded with contemporary technology in a manner befitting its listed status. During the presentation "White Gold. Masterpieces and Material Design," it is accessible to visitors for the first time in around thirty years without exhibition architecture – one of the few surviving secular medieval spaces in Mainz, which moreover survived the Second World. Its history of over six hundred years is the subject of building research. The small Chapter Room, where the Höchst porcelain masterpieces are presented, is likewise situated within a late-medieval structure dating back to Archbishop Berthold von Henneberg (r. 1484–1504). The museum's "best parlor" presents itself not in a medieval guise but with a historic interior ranging from the Baroque to Classicism. This atmosphere makes it a special event space in which exhibitions are not otherwise held. In the past, episcopal elections took place at this distinguished venue. Visible testament to this rich history is the portrait series of archbishops that defines the room, from Albrecht von Brandenburg (r. 1514–1545) to Karl Theodor von Dalberg (r. 1802–1803). The largest painting shows Archbishop Johann Friedrich Karl von Ostein at life size. The throne chair placed beneath it, with its elaborately gilded ornament, conveys an impression of the late-Baroque court ceremonial of the Elector of Mainz. Now, in this atmospherically dense space, selected masterpieces from Höchst are temporarily gathered around "their founder."

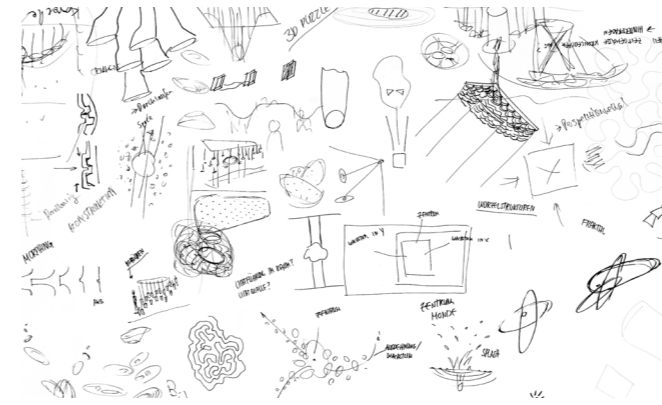


Porcelain

Since the Middle Ages, porcelain imported from East Asia had been regarded as the ultimate luxury good. From the first encounter with this white-gleaming, slightly translucent material, Europeans sought to discover the arcanum—the secret behind its recipe and technique—in order to produce it themselves. During the Renaissance, works in White Gold were indispensable items in the *Kunstkammern* (Cabinets of Curiosities) and *Wunderkammern* (Cabinets of Wonder) of princely residences. These chambers and their treasures demonstrated the wealth, cosmopolitan outlook, and not least the knowledge of their collectors. In these rooms, the latest artistic developments and discoveries in the natural sciences and technology were put on display in tangible form, making them open to discussion. In Ostein's day, the fields of art and natural science had not yet been differentiated: knowledge was gained through the observation of nature, and expertise in natural materials and innovative manufacturing techniques brought progress. The boundary between knowledge and belief in the eighteenth century was fluid. Alchemy formed the foundation from which the modern natural sciences gradually developed. It was only in the eighteenth century that porcelain could be produced in Europe.

SILIKAT 1746

An Intervention



1 Initial concept sketches at the beginning of the project, SILIKAT 1746, project meeting, IMD 2024

All of the historic masterpieces in the square Chapter Room are oriented towards the center of the space. There, winding across the centrally placed table and at the foot of the throne chair, is an eleven-meter-long, space-encompassing installation. It is disconcertingly foreign within this ensemble, to which it nevertheless clings with many joints. One's first association raises the question of whether it might be a historic relic: a skeleton, a spine, or a fossil? Perhaps from one of the Cabinets of Curiosities and Cabinets of Wonder mentioned above, in which artworks and natural objects were displayed together with curiosities, and in which no sharp distinction was drawn between artefacts and specimens of nature. Yet the work is not a historic collector's piece but one of the most recent works from the Institute for Material Design (IMD) at the University of Art and Design Offenbach (HfG). It is made from biscuit porcelain—fired twice and left unglazed. In daylight it unfolds its appealing matte sheen. The material is the connecting element between the delicate masterpieces and the voluminous installation SILIKAT 1746. Its title reveals that it is linked to the history of the Höchst manufactory. Since its re-establishment in 1947, the manufactory has struggled with the same economic difficulties as two hundred years before, for the production of porcelain remains equally labor-intensive. In 2022 the State of Hesse acquired the manufactory's assets in order to preserve this venerable heritage. Since 2023, a partnership has existed between the manufactory and the University of Art and Design Offenbach. From there, the Institute for Material Design—led by Prof. Dr. Markus Holzbach—has relocated to Höchst, offering national and international students highly attractive conditions for study.

12 Das Projekt SILIKAT 1746 wurde am IMD Institute for Materialdesign and Advanced Material Studies entwickelt und in Zusammenarbeit mit der HPM Höchstler Porzellanmanufaktur realisiert.

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 Aufbau: Emil Navid Kirchgessner, Simon Hanke
 Projektleitung IMD: Prof. Dr. Markus Holzbach mit Dipl.-Des. Valentin Zhou Brück und Dr. Ziyu Zhou Brück
 Mitarbeit HPM: Steffen Taubhorn, Andre Haase und Sylke Bosse
 Formenbau: Michael Weidenfeller

SILIKAT 1746 is the visible expression of a special collaboration: designed with a team of students under the direction of Professor Holzbach, the geometric basic modules were produced in collaboration with the manufactory and production manager Steffen Taubhorn and his team using traditional mold-making and casting processes. The "porcelain blossoms" of SILIKAT 1746, by contrast, were created in the specially developed area for 3D-printed porcelain.

In the Chapter Room of the Cathedral Museum, the presentation "White Gold. Masterpieces and Material Design" brings together not strangers but kindred objects from different eras—different in format and mode of expression, alike in material and similarly fragile. SILIKAT 1746 is modular in construction, made from a precious material that can be reproduced any number of times. How the installation is to be interpreted remains deliberately open. Formally, the modules are reminiscent of organic and inorganic structures—perhaps blossoms, or perhaps vault keystones? The audacious assembly and construction impress: rigid and brittle material strung like beads on a chain. Suspended, it might perhaps call to mind a strand of DNA, capable of movement. To try this once in a church interior is the shared aspiration of all those involved in the project.



**BISCHÖFLICHES DOM-
UND DIÖZESANMUSEUM**

DOMSCHATZKAMMER

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OPENING HOURS

Tue–Fri: 10.00–17.00

Sa, So: 11.00–18.00

ADMISSION

(includes permanent exhibition)

Regular: € 5

Reduced: € 3

Family ticket: € 10

PHOTO CREDITS

**Bischöfliches Dom- und
Diözesanmuseum Mainz**
(Images: Marcel Schawe)

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**GDKE – Direktion
Landesmuseum Mainz**
(Images: Ursula Rudischer)

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**Institute for Materialdesign
and Advanced Material Studies
HfG Offenbach University
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(Images: Bernd Schuster / Mazda)

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