

LEO HAZ

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Austrian Contemporary Artist · P21-PETing · Patent No. 509067

BIOGRAPHY

Leo Haz (b. 1981, Braunau am Inn, Austria) is a self-taught artist working in sculpture, light installation, and reliefs. His practice is built on P21-PETing — a thermoplastic process of his own invention, registered at the Austrian Patent Office as the only technical patent in the world for the transformation of post-consumer plastic waste into fine art. Using a heat gun, needle-nose pliers, and a screwdriver, he melts discarded PET bottles into forms that cannot be undone. He calls this process transubstantiation.

Since 2008, Haz has collected post-consumer PET bottles by color and era, building a chromatic archive stored in the Vault. Austria's deposit system, introduced in January 2025, sharply cut the color range of PET packaging on the market to simplify recycling; some colors discontinued before the deposit era can now be sourced only from the Vault. What remains is fixed. The number of units taken from the corpus for each work is documented on leohaz.com/vault and logged in a counter; when a color whose production has been discontinued runs out, it is gone. The archive is the provenance. The provenance is the work.

The material turn happened by encounter. Traveling with the Legionaries of Christ on a humanitarian mission to Montenegro, Haz witnessed a coastal community living on a dumpsite beside the Adriatic. He taught painting and drawing in a makeshift school; shortly before leaving, a child pressed a crushed, sun-bleached bottle cap into his hands as a gift of thanks. He carries it still, placing it on his studio workbench before beginning any new work. Since that encounter, he has worked with post-consumer materials — supplementing or replacing traditional acrylics, opening new forms of expression.

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Haz was born two minutes' walk from the house where Adolf Hitler was born; his studio stands in the same neighborhood. This geographical fact frames the "Machthaber" series (2020–ongoing), in which PET skulls cast from post-consumer waste, gold-leafed replace the faces in canonical portraits of power. "Bone Apart." "Mona Corona." And in the series with "Mein Nachbar," the face born in Braunau two minutes from his studio.

In 2021, a skull from the "Million Dollar Smile" series was acquired through Saatchi Art by a graduate student then studying at Harvard, today a professor in his field. The buyer later proposed a commission: could the PETing technique be combined with activated carbon — the substance industry uses to capture CO₂? Two works emerged: "CO₂ Skult" and "CO₂ Star," each a perforated thermoplastic lattice holding exposed activated carbon. The series is titled "Black Matters."

His work has been presented at the Johannes Kepler University Linz, Schloss Mamling, Casino Bad Füssing, and Galerie K3, and reviewed in Kurier, Passauer Neue Presse, and on ORF1 and ORF2. Works are held in private collections in Austria, Germany, and the United States.