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The Österreichische Werkstätten present Olga Kronsteiner's

The History Encyclopedia

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1903 WW-Wiener Werkstätte ("Viennese Workshops")

A financier was required to implement the idea of an association for arts and crafts. Josef Hoffmann and Kolo Moser found a financier in the banker Fritz Waerndorfer. In 1903 the "Wiener Werkstätte Produktivgenossenschaft von Kunsthandwerkern" ("Viennese Workshops Co-operative of Craftsmen") was established. Its aim was to promote the economic interests of its members

- by training them as craftsmen

by producing crafted articles of all kinds according to artistic designs by members of the

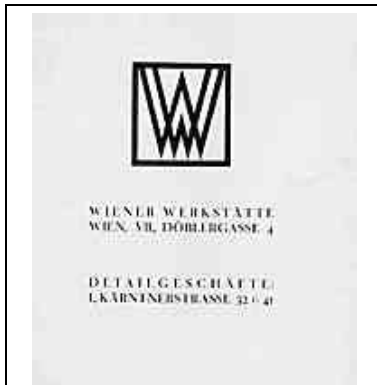
- co-operative
- and by constructing workshops and selling the articles produced

Offices, exhibition rooms and workshops were set up in an empty factory.

Workshops of the WW

The workshops of the "production co-operative" were in the Neustiftgasse in the 7th district. At first (1903) these comprised gold, silver, metal and leather workshops, a bookbinding department, a paint shop, a site office and a joiner's workshop; in 1910 a fashion department followed and in 1916/17 a ceramics department was added.

The work in the workshops was not only restricted to design and execution (also by external firms) of individual objects, but also comprised working out building projects to the last detail (Gesamtkunstwerk). Production was to encompass all areas of home décor and lifestyle – nothing was so insignificant as to be unworthy of artistic attention. In the manifesto, published in 1905 the aims were clearly formulated.



From a catalogue dated 1928 – the spectrum of WW production is documented here.
Photo: Katalog / Olga Kronsteiner

Manifesto of the WW

WW – We want to encourage close contact between the public, the designers and the craftsmen and produce good-quality, simple household utensils.

WW – We assume that usefulness is our priority, our strength should lie in good proportions and in the good treatment of materials.

WW – Where required we will try and decorate but we do not consider decoration compulsory.

WW – The work of craftsmen should be judged in the same way as the work of painters and sculptors is judged.

The equality demanded here is not only expressed in good working conditions but also through the sign of the master craftsman which is consciously placed next to the artist's monogram.

WW ("Viennese Workshops") Gesamtkunstwerke

In addition to a considerable number of fittings for shops and apartments, major building projects were also carried out, which established the fame of the WW and simultaneously documented stylistic developments: the sanatorium at Purkersdorf (1904/05), the Stoclet Palace (1906-11) or the Fledermaus cabaret and theatre (1907).

Due to the magnitude of such projects, the number of WW-employees grew steadily. Artists and former students of the Vienna Schools of Arts and Crafts designed commissioned works or created (from 1913 on in the artists' workshops) commissioned products. Participation in exhibitions in Austria and abroad as well as the extension of the range of products offered and the expansion of the sales and distribution network made the WW better known internationally.

1904/05 Sanatorium at Purkersdorf

The decoration (WW) and the construction of the sanatorium document the climax of Josef Hoffmann's strictly purist phase: Emphasis on the constructive and restriction to a few basic geometric shapes.

While it was being built the sanatorium was considered to be a mixture of a modern hotel and a contemporary hospital. The fittings of the utility rooms – "a white painted or tiled washable world" - was in line with the latest achievements of medical technology. The reading rooms, dining rooms, sitting rooms, games rooms and writing rooms were furnished with exquisite elegance from designs by Josef Hoffmann and Kolo Moser.



A chair designed by Hoffmann in 1904 (made by J. & J. Kohn) for the dining room of the sanatorium at Purkersdorf.

Photo: Christies New York, Masterworks 1900-2000, 8th June 2000

1906-11 The Stoclet Palace

While the sanatorium at Purkersdorf was still under construction, the WW and therefore Josef Hoffmann (as architect) was commissioned to design a palace in Brussels. According to the wishes of the owner Adolphe Stoclet, a Gesamtkunstwerk was to be constructed, for which only the most precious building materials, the most skilful craftsmen and the most inventive artists were to be used. The exterior walls were covered with Norwegian Turili marble, the interior walls panelled with yellow-brown Italian Paonazzo marble. Virtually all the artists and craftsmen in Vienna were entrusted with the interior decoration. After a construction period of five years the epitome of Viennese Art Nouveau was complete.

Quotations about the Stoclet palace

Carl Moll: "Monument to a Viennese cultural epoch"

Stoclet: "The most perfect house in the world"

Max Eisler: "A festival of materials!"

Karl Ernst Osthaus: "A work of such maturity and artistic majesty, incomparable to anything built in Europe since the Baroque era."

1909 Fledermaus cabaret and theatre

The construction of the Fledermaus cabaret and theatre was more a private pleasure than a profitable venture. It was financed with the advance payment from the Stoclet project, and it was the earliest and purest realisation of the endeavour to produce a Gesamtkunstwerk. "Uninterrupted by the customer" Josef Hoffmann was able to realise his dream.

The interior design extended to all rooms of the theatre. The cloakroom, the walls and the bar were covered in a mosaic made of over 7,000 majolica tiles; thousands of them formed an "orbis pictus" with caricatures, portraits, allegories, mythical animals and ornaments – one contemporary called it "a humoristic gabbling."



: A table designed by Hoffmann for the Fledermaus cabaret and theatre in 1906/07 and made by J. & J. Kohn.
Photo: Dorotheum Wien, Jugendstil, 24th May 2000