

Press Release

## WOMEN ARTISTS OF THE WIENER WERKSTÄTTE

Opening Wednesday, 5 May 2021, 10 a.m.–6 p.m.  
Exhibition Venue MAK Exhibition Hall  
MAK, Stubenring 5, 1010 Vienna  
Exhibition Dates 5 May – 3 October 2021

The MAK exhibition *WOMEN ARTISTS OF THE WIENER WERKSTÄTTE* directs visitors' attention to the hitherto underappreciated women designers who significantly broadened the Wiener Werkstätte's creative spectrum. The accomplishments of the male artists of the Wiener Werkstätte (WW, 1903–1932)—principally Josef Hoffmann, Koloman Moser, and Dagobert Peche—enjoy global fame. In contrast, the women artists of the WW have met with only sporadic interest to date. Gudrun Baudisch, Mathilde Flögl, and Vally Wieselthier are well known. But who were Martha Alber, Rose Krenn, and Anny Wirth? Over 800 exhibits provide an insight into the almost unknown and at times radical work of women designers in Vienna between 1900 and 1930, which helped to establish the WW's prominent position between Art Nouveau and Bauhaus.

This impressive exhibition testifies to the women designers' inventiveness and their instrumental involvement in the development of Viennese arts and crafts. Arranged both chronologically and thematically, the MAK show traces the women artists' path from their training to their reception in the 1920s. The MAK accomplished a pioneering feat while conducting the research for *WOMEN ARTISTS OF THE WIENER WERKSTÄTTE*: About 180 women artists were identified as employees of the WW, several biographies were updated or rewritten for the catalog.

### Training and the “Wiener Kunst im Hause” Association

Work by about half of the women artists is featured in the show. They worked in all areas of arts and crafts and the majority of them had studied at the Vienna School of Arts and Crafts, which admitted female students from the very beginning. They were initially trained in flower and decorative painting, later in the specialist studios for enamelwork and lace drawing—in other words traditionally “female” fields. The spectrum expanded under the director Felician von Myrbach, who was appointed in 1899. He also engaged the Secession artists Hoffmann and Moser as heads of the architecture and painting schools. In line with the idea of the Gesamtkunstwerk—or total work of art—they extended their teaching to all aspects of decorative art and included their female students in their collaborations with producers.

Many of the resulting works have been incorporated in the exhibition, including sets by Jutta Sika and Therese Trethan, executed by the porcelain manufactory Josef Böck, and fabric patterns by Else Unger, executed by Joh. Backhausen & Söhne. Unger also designed furniture, Gisela von Falke striking ceramics. Together with Marietta Peyfuss and five fellow students, they founded the association “Wiener Kunst im Hause” (Viennese Art in the

Home) in 1901, a direct precursor of the Wiener Werkstätte.

### **First Works for the Wiener Werkstätte**

The MAK exhibition opens with the earliest works by the women artists of the WW, such as designs for postcards sold by the WW from 1907. Their subjects are congratulations, cityscapes, landscapes, children's games, and predominantly fashion. Mela Koehler and Maria Likarz were particularly creative in this regard, and they would have a formative influence on the commercial graphic design of the WW until its closure.

In 1910 the WW opened its fabric department, which was followed in 1911 by the fashion department. The extensive fashion designs are documented by the portfolio *Mode Wien 1914/5*, produced in large part by women artists of the WW. In the major fashion exhibition at the Austrian Museum of Art and Industry (today's MAK) in 1915, they attempted to assert themselves in the face of the French competition. This show in the middle of the First World War already featured all the names that commonly come to mind when the women artists of the WW are mentioned: Mathilde Flögl, Hilda Jesser, Fritzi Löw, Reni Schaschl, Felice Rix, and Vally Wieselthier.

### **The Artists' Workshop**

In 1916 the WW established its own Artists' Workshop, which attracted the attention of the press. "An enameling furnace, a sewing machine, a little repoussé table for metalworking, pastepots, batik equipment [...] a cabinet full of mysterious jars like in a sorcerer's kitchen, between them a gaggle of laughing young girls and very rarely an occasional male: this is what it looks like inside the Artists' Workshop," was the report printed by the *Neues Wiener Journal*, for example. In part due to the war, there were indeed predominantly women working here at first. As a "laboratory of ideas" the Artists' Workshop provided the opportunity for unlimited experimentation, with the results being bought or rejected by the WW. The production ranged from decorated papers, beadwork, and painted glasses to embroidery, jewelry, and toys to expressive ceramics and sensational fabric designs.

Working on a larger scale was made possible by the decoration of the WW branch at Kärntner Straße 32, which was opened for the sale of lace, fabric, and lamps in 1918. The walls and ceilings were painted with natural and scenic motifs inter alia by Lotte Calm, Lilly Jacobsen und Anny Schröder; their photographic documentation is on display in the MAK exhibition.

### **Between Acclaim and Criticism**

The exhibition concludes with the reception of the "female" WW art in the 1920s. Over the course of the First World War the economic situation had necessitated women entering the workforce and this gave rise to a new kind of woman: independent and confident. In contemporary literature she is symbolized for example by the short-haired, smoking, and extravagantly dressed "decorative artist." This profession entailed a certain elitism: it did not guarantee a secure income and was therefore the preserve of women of considerable means. Adolf Loos saw in them bored upper-class daughters who "call themselves 'artists' because

they can do batik.” This criticism culminated in the expression “Viennese broads’ decorative art” by the graphic artist Julius Klinger.

This defamation was juxtaposed with their acclaim in major interwar exhibitions, such as the *Deutsche Gewerbeschau* [German Trade Show] in Munich (1922) or the *International Exposition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts* in Paris (1925). Designed by Gudrun Baudisch, Mathilde Flögl, and Vally Wieselthier, the catalog for the 25th anniversary of the Wiener Werkstätte in 1928 again demonstrated their graphic and sculptural skills.

The exhibition is accompanied by the publication *WOMEN ARTISTS OF THE WIENER WERKSTÄTTE*, edited by Christoph Thun-Hohenstein, Anne-Katrin Rossberg, and Elisabeth Schmuttermeier, with contributions by Megan Brandow-Faller, Elisabeth Kreuzhuber, Anne-Katrin Rossberg, Elisabeth Schmuttermeier, Lara Steinhäuber, and Angelika Völker. German/English, 288 pages with numerous color illustrations. MAK, Vienna/Birkhäuser Verlag, Basel 2020. Available at the MAK Design Shop and online at [MAKdesignshop.at](http://MAKdesignshop.at) for € 44.95.

Press photos are available for download at [MAK.at/en/press](http://MAK.at/en/press).

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Press Data

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Exhibition Dates	5 May – 3 October 2021
Opening Hours	Tue 10 a.m.–6 p.m. (until further notice) Wed–Sun 10 a.m.–6 p.m.
Curator	Anne-Katrin Rossberg, Curator, MAK Metal Collection and Wiener Werkstätte Archive
Guest Curator	Elisabeth Schmuttermeier
Exhibition Design	Claudia Cavallar
Publication	<i>WOMEN ARTISTS OF THE WIENER WERKSTÄTTE</i> , edited by Christoph Thun-Hohenstein, Anne-Katrin Rossberg, and Elisabeth Schmuttermeier, with contributions by Megan Brandow-Faller, Elisabeth Kreuzhuber, Anne-Katrin Rossberg, Elisabeth Schmut- termeier, Lara Steinhäuber, and Angelika Völker. German/English, 288 pages with numerous color illustrations. MAK, Vien- na/Birkhäuser Verlag, Basel 2020. Available at the MAK Design Shop and online at <a href="http://MAKdesignshop.at">MAKdesignshop.at</a> for € 44.95.
MAK Admission	€ 14 / Reduced € 11 / Family Ticket € 15 Every Tuesday 6–9 p.m.: admission € 6 Free admission for children and teens under 19
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Vienna, 15 January 2021