

Press Release

## WOMEN ARTISTS OF THE WIENER WERKSTÄTTE

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| Press Conference | Tuesday, 20 April 2021, 10:30 a.m.                    |
| Opening          | Tuesday, 20 April 2021, 7 p.m.                        |
| Exhibition Venue | MAK Exhibition Hall<br>MAK, Stubenring 5, 1010 Vienna |
| Exhibition Dates | 21 April – 3 October 2021                             |
| Opening Hours    | Tue 10 a.m.–9 p.m., Wed–Sun 10 a.m.–6 p.m.            |

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, Vally Wieselthier, and Mathilde Flögl are well known. But who were Martha Alber, Karoline Fink, and Paula Lustig? Over 600 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*: 180 women artists were identified as employees of the WW, and the first biographies of some 140 of them have been written.

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

Work by some 100 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 drawing lace—in other words traditionally “female” fields. Appointed in 1899, the director Felician von Myrbach finally granted women access to architecture and sculpture classes. 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**

One focus of the MAK exhibition is 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 fabrics 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, including Lotte Frömel-Fochler and Rosa Krenn. In the major fashion exhibition at the Museum of Art and Industry 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, Hilde Jesser, Fritzi Löw, Reni Schaschl, Felice Rix, and Vally Wieselthier.

### **The Artists’ Workshops**

The specialized Artists’ Workshops founded by the WW in November 1916 were viewed somewhat derisively by the press due to their inclusion of the women artists. “An enameling furnace, a sewing machine, a little metalworking table, pastepots, batik equipment [...] a cabinet full of mysterious jars like in a sorcerer’s kitchen, in between them a gaggle of laughing young girls and very rarely an occasional male—that is what the inside of the Artists’ Workshops looks like,” 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’ Workshops provided the opportunity for unlimited experimentation, with the results being bought or rejected by the WW. Their production ranged from decorated papers, beadwork, and painted glasses to embroidery, jewelry, and ivory carvings to toys and figural ceramics.

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 by Hilde Jesser, Reni Schaschl, and Felice Rix and 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 con-

temporary 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 good income and was 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 radical criticism was juxtaposed with their acclaim in major interwar exhibitions, such as the Deutsche Gewerbeschau in Munich (1922) or the Art Deco exhibition 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 *WOMEN ARTISTS OF THE WIENER WERKSTÄTTE* will be accompanied by a publication of the same name, which will contain biographies of the women artists as researched by the MAK.

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

Press Data

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| Curator                           | Anne-Katrin Rossberg, Curator, MAK Metal Collection and<br>Wiener Werkstätte Archive   |
| Guest Curator                     | Elisabeth Schmuttermeier   |
| Exhibition Design                 | Claudia Cavallar   |
| Catalog                           | The exhibition will be accompanied by a comprehensive catalog.   |
| MAK Admission                     | € 14 / Reduced € 11 / Family Ticket € 15<br>Every Tuesday 6–9 p.m.: admission € 6<br>Free admission for children and teens under 19                                  |
| MAK Press and<br>Public Relations | Judith Anna Schwarz-Jungmann (Head)<br>Cäcilia Barani<br>Sandra Hell-Ghignone<br>Veronika Träger<br>T +43 1 711 36-233, -212, -229<br>presse@MAK.at<br>www.MAK.at/en |

Vienna, 9 December 2019