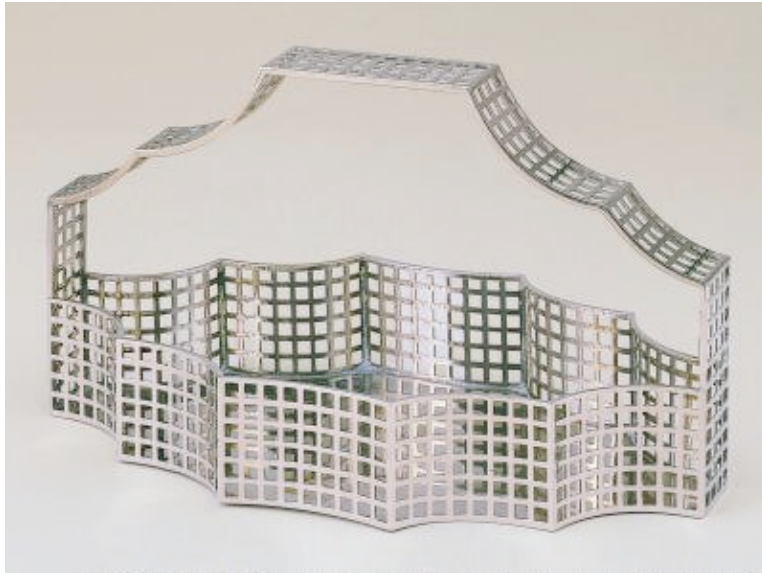


Hoffmann, Josef, Basket, Acc. #98.276.65

c. 1905-1910 Europe, Austria G378



Current Label:

Josef Hoffmann, a founder of the Wiener Werkstätte (Vienna Workshops) in 1903, developed designs for various household objects made of gitterwerk, or gridwork, such as the basket and storm lantern (see photo below) in this case. The gridded sheets of base metal were thus the structure of the objects as well as their decoration. Affordably made, they were often nickel- or silver-plated for added attractiveness. The pervasiveness of simplicity and geometry in Hoffmann's designs during this period can be seen in his Wasserfall textile nearby, as well as his designs for furniture in this gallery and in Gallery 379 nearby.

Josef Hoffmann

Josef Hoffmann, architect and designer, began studying architecture in 1887 at the "Höhere Staatsgewerbeschule" in Brünn (now Brno, Czech Republic). Between 1892 and 1895 he continued his studies in Vienna under Otto Wagner and Karl von Hasenauer at the "Akademie der Bildenden Künste". He went on to teach at the Viennese "Kunstgewerbeschule" from 1899 to 1936.

In 1897 Josef Hoffmann joined Koloman Moser, Joseph Maria Olbrich, Otto Wagner, and Gustav Klimt to found the "Viennese Secession", a group of artists and architects who sought to establish a "new art" for the new century. In 1900 Hoffmann went to Great Britain, where he met exponents of the British Arts and Crafts movement and familiarized himself with their work. Contact with the Scottish architect and designer Charles Rennie Mackintosh especially exerted a formative influence on his work.

Josef Hoffman is acknowledged as among the first of Viennese form-givers to evolve a new modernism at the turn of the century, one based initially on reductivism (the

elimination of unnecessary ornament) and on geometry. Spanning a 50-year career, however, Hoffmann's work is far too diverse to be easily classified. His forms range from an austere linearity to the baroque. As a master assimilator, intuitive and endlessly inventive, Hoffmann produced a wide variety of styles which confirm his eclectic genius.

Hoffmann sought to develop a quintessentially Viennese modernist decorative idiom based on simplified shapes and an honest use of materials. His early designs to this end were comprised of slender architectural forms with unbroken surfaces, which between 1903-06 underwent the transition to a more sophisticated stylization in which geometric patterns, including the checkerboard matrix, became his preferred form of decoration for a host of household accessories. Hoffmann's persistent use of the grid pattern in his designs led to the nickname *Quadrat*, or little square, coined by his colleagues. Designed for the wealthy, the silver gitterwerk were intended to harmonize with luxurious interiors and often were one-of-a-kind.

When applied as adornment to silver or painted metal objects produced by the Wiener Werkstätte, the centers of the squares in the checkerboard matrix were perforated to form a screened pattern (gitterwerk). At once utilitarian and decorative - and an instant success with customers - the checkerboard matrix became the most identifiable image associated in the public's mind with the workshops, its repetition of tiny squares combining clarity with a diaphanous pattern of voids and solids. Perceived as an entirely new form of design adaptable to mass-production, it was reproduced on daily appliances such as vases, lamps, jardinières, baskets and trays.

Weiner Werkstätte - 1903-1933

Weiner Werkstätte: (VEEN-er VERHK-shtet-teh) (German for "Vienna Workshop")

In 1903 Josef Hoffmann joined Koloman Moser and the banker Fritz Wärndorfer in founding the "Wiener Werkstätte", which was modeled on British craftsmen's associations, in particular Charles Robert Ashbee's Guild of Handicraft. Josef Hoffmann and Koloman Moser were joint heads of the "Wiener Werkstätte". The "Wiener Werkstätte" embraced all fields of the decorative and applied arts; moreover, designers it employed worked under very humane conditions that were progressive for the time. The objects produced at the "Wiener Werkstätte" not only bear the designer's mark but also that of the craftsman who executed the design. This shows that the "Wiener Werkstätte" made a serious attempt to place fine art and the applied arts on an equal footing. The Wiener Werkstätte strove to provide a wide range of well-designed, often handmade products for a sophisticated audience, and indeed could supply everything from an architectural setting to the smallest decorative accessory. The renown of the company was such that by the early 1920s they had opened shops in Paris, Zurich, and New York.

In addition, Josef Hoffmann ran an extremely successful architecture practice on the side, which planned a great many buildings and urban villas. In 1904 Josef Hoffmann designed the building and the interior of the Convalescent Home in Purkersdorf; between 1905 and 1911 he designed the Palais Stoclet in Brussels, and, in 1907, the

Cabaret Fledermaus in Vienna.

In 1908 Josef Hoffmann designed the "Seating Machine", followed by numerous other designs for furniture and crafts objects. Josef Hoffmann's clear formal language, reduced as it was to essentials, and his innovative use of materials exerted a paramount influence on the following generation of designers.

Josef Hoffmann is rightly regarded as a leading exponent of Viennese Jugendstil, whose ideals he played a major role in articulating. In 1907 Josef Hoffmann was a co-founder of the Deutscher Werkbund and was head of the Österreichischer Werkbund from 1912 until 1920.

Possible Tours:

Mostly Modern

Decorative Arts

"Cutting Edge" Design

Containment (as in containers)

From Vienna to the Prairie, or House Beautiful (showing different styles of architecture and furnishings designed to compliment each other)

Discussion Questions:

- What are some words to describe these pieces?
- If you had this basket in your home how would you use it?
- How is this basket different from other baskets you've seen?
- Do you think the basket and the storm lantern are decorative pieces or meant to be used? What do you see that makes you say that
- How are the pieces in this gallery similar to the ones in the Prairie Home Gallery (or pick your period room)? How are they different? What do you see that makes you say that?
- Of all of the rooms/furnishings we've seen on our tour today, which one(s) would you most like to life in?

I suggest you look at ArtsConnectEd and in Galleries 378 and 379 at the wide range of Josef Hoffmann's work. The Alastair Duncan book listed in Sources, below, is a great resource regarding all of Hoffmann's works in our collection.



Sources:

Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History, The Metropolitan Museum of Art
Arts ConnectEd
Modernism, Modernist Design 1880-1940, Alastair Duncan
Class Handouts

Submitted by Lin Stein
September, 2011