

Media release
Zurich, 4 March 2021

Kunsthhaus Zürich presents 'Hodler, Klimt and the Wiener Werkstätte'

From 21 May to 29 August, the Kunsthhaus Zürich presents paintings, drawings, furniture, jewellery and design objects from the heyday of the Vienna Secession. The presentation focuses on works by Josef Hoffmann, Ferdinand Hodler and Gustav Klimt as well as the creations of Dagobert Peche. Peche was the artistic director of the Wiener Werkstätte branch that opened on Zurich's Bahnhofstrasse in 1917, and whose history is being examined by scholars for the first time as part of the exhibition.

The presentation includes some 160 exhibits. It is curated by Tobias G. Natter, former Director of the Leopold Museum in Vienna and author of the catalogues raisonnés of the paintings of Gustav Klimt (2012) and Egon Schiele (2017). The exhibition sheds new light, from a Viennese perspective, on Ferdinand Hodler (1853–1918), who was at the time already seen as Switzerland's 'national artist'. It reminds us that Hodler owed his international breakthrough to the triumph of his participation in the Vienna Secession exhibition of 1904, which brought him the social and financial success he had long craved. Hodler's time in Vienna also brought him into direct contact with the philosophy of Viennese 'Jugendstil'.

'HIGH AND LOW'

Of the artists Hodler met in Vienna, he reserved the greatest admiration for Gustav Klimt (1862–1918), and in particular 'the decorative element' of his art. Yet while known as a peerless exponent of colour, eroticism and ornament, Klimt was more than just the leading figure in Viennese Stilkunst. He played a pioneering role in breaking down the traditional distinction between the 'high' art of painting and sculpture and the 'low' form of applied art and championed a new definition of the artist: one which also embraced those able to 'experience the work of art in emotional terms'.

These various ideas were energetically pursued by the Wiener Werkstätte, a pilot project of modern design history that was launched in 1903. Klimt was close to its founding members Josef Hoffmann (1870–1956), Koloman Moser (1868–1918) and the financier Fritz Waerndorfer (1868–1939). Hodler, too, met them in person.

Koloman Moser, for example, designed the Hodler exhibition at the Vienna Secession, with its avant-garde white cube aesthetic.

The fascination with the 'total work of art' is exemplified in the exhibition at the Kunsthaus Zürich by the domestic surroundings of Hermine and Moriz Gallia. Klimt painted a portrait of Hermine Gallia in 1904; on loan from the National Gallery in London, it is a highlight of the exhibition. There are also photographs depicting the interior of the Gallias' apartment designed by Josef Hoffmann.

HODLER AND THE 1904 SECESSION EXHIBITION

When the Vienna Secession invited Ferdinand Hodler to take part in its 19th exhibition, it was to 'enable a wider audience to appreciate Hodler's greatness'. Its pioneering and ambitious aim was to demonstrate 'that Ferdinand Hodler is not only the greatest Swiss artist, but one of the greatest ever'. Hodler was able to show all the main works he had completed up to that time. The response was overwhelming. The exhibition gave the Swiss painter everything an artist could hope for from the public: lavish praise, a good press, and important sales. Overall, the show in Vienna was a milestone in the reception of the artist, who was aged 51 at the time. Those whom Hodler met in the Austrian capital included the industrialist and art enthusiast Carl Reininghaus, who acquired all the main works from the exhibition, including the large-format allegories 'Youth Admired by Women' and 'The Truth'. It was not until many years later that these key works entered the Kunsthaus Zürich. Their return 'home' is a fascinating example of how Hodler's early international success was subsequently 'repatriated'.

FURNITURE FROM HODLER'S LAST APARTMENT

Towards the end of 1913 Ferdinand and Berthe Hodler moved into a luxurious apartment at Quai du Mont-Blanc 29 in Geneva. Berthe took responsibility for the interior, which she wanted to provide a suitable setting for receiving guests. She and Ferdinand both recollected their time in Vienna and their encounters with the Wiener Werkstätte. Back then, they had been offered private accommodation in the newly built villa of industry magnate Friedrich Viktor Spitzer in the 'Hohe Warte' artists' colony in the Vienna district of Döbling. It was here that they first saw at close quarters the architecture of Josef Hoffmann and the design universe of the newly established Wiener Werkstätte.

Hoffmann was commissioned to design the reception rooms, and as well as creating the furniture he also altered architectural details of the apartment on Quai du Mont-Blanc. The exhibition at the Kunsthaus presents both the furniture and numerous utilitarian objects designed by Hoffmann for the Hodlers' apartment, including a table clock, chandelier, flower stand, cupboards and seating.

DAGOBERT PECHE AND THE WIENER WERKSTÄTTE IN ZÜRICH

Hodler's choice of Josef Hoffmann to design his apartment made him an important ambassador for the Wiener Werkstätte in Switzerland. In 1917 it even opened a branch in the country, which was neutral in the ongoing First World War. The exhibition at the Kunsthaus Zürich includes outstanding works from both the early period of the Wiener Werkstätte and the time of the Zurich branch. They underscore the importance of the Wiener Werkstätte as arguably Austria's most important contribution to 20th-century design history, and reveal the breadth of its range, from the early, provocatively geometrical and abstract designs to the playful works of Dagobert Peche. A full-time employee of the Werkstätte from 1915 onwards, Peche ran its Zurich branch from its opening in 1917 until it closed in 1919. He designed the store on Bahnhofstrasse together with Josef Hoffmann and made bold new forays into product positioning. In Zurich, unconstrained by the wartime restrictions that were already starting to bite in Austria, he was able to give free rein to his creative imagination. Turning the 'form follows function' mantra on its head and elevating decoration over purpose, he accomplished the transition from Jugendstil to Art Déco, as the many designs created in Zurich that feature in the current exhibition vividly demonstrate. The numerous exhibits – from initial design to finished object – span the arc from furniture and utilitarian objects to jewellery and textiles of extraordinary diversity and powerful allure.

PUBLICATION AND GUIDED TOURS

The exhibition is accompanied by a catalogue published by Scheidegger & Spiess (224 pp., approx. 250 ill.) with essays from current research into Hodler, Klimt and the Wiener Werkstätte by Rainald Franz, Niklaus Manuel Güdel, Monika Mayer, Tobias G. Natter and Elisabeth Schmuttermeier. It is available in German from the museum shop and bookstores, price approx. CHF 48. Visitors are also invited to discover the exhibition on public guided tours (in German): Saturday 29 May, 1 p.m., Thursday 3 June, 3 p.m., Sundays 20 June and 4 July, both at 1 p.m. For dates and conditions, see the online events calendar at www.kunsthhaus.ch.

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GENERAL INFORMATION

Kunsthaus Zürich, Heimplatz 1, CH-8001 Zurich

Tel. +41 (0)44 253 84 84, www.kunsthhaus.ch

Fri-Sun/Tue 10 a.m.–6 p.m., Wed, Thu 10 a.m.–8 p.m. For public holiday opening see www.kunsthhaus.ch.

Admission: CHF 16 / CHF 11 (concessions and groups).

Combination tickets including the collection and exhibition CHF 26 / CHF 19.
Admission free to visitors under the age of 17. Information subject to change.
Advance sales: Kunsthaus Zürich online, with numerous additional events and products related to the exhibition: www.kunsthhaus.ch/en/besuch-planen/tickets/.
Zurich Tourism, tourist information office in Zurich main railway station, tel. +41 44 215 40 00, info@zuerich.com, www.zuerich.com.

INVITATION TO EDITORS

The media briefing, with guest curator Tobias G. Natter from Vienna in attendance, takes place on 20 May 2021 at 11 a.m. If events for more than 20 people are not permitted at the time, we invite you to an individual preview from 10 a.m. to 12.30 p.m., without a central introduction. The guest curator will be available to answer individual questions during this time. We would be pleased to welcome you. Registration is not required. This media release and illustrations are available for download at www.kunsthhaus.ch/en/medien-bereich/media-corner/.

For further information, contact:

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