

# Five Essays on Women's Art and Perception in Interwar Austria

**by Hans Ankwicz-Kleehoven** (1883–1962),

**Wolfgang Born** (1893–1949),

**and Liane Zimbler** (1892–1987)

Translated by Acer Lewis

## **Abstract**

The essays translated in this collection are representative of debates and views about women in art in Austria in the 1920s and 1930s. The texts are reviews of exhibitions of work by women artists, as well as discussions of ideas of design and gender by women critics. They also include contemporary reviews of the so-called Elida Prize of 1928, for the 'Most Beautiful Female Portrait.' The texts are accompanied with an Introduction that puts them into context, considering evolving ideas of women as designers and as artists. The Introduction demonstrates that while the focus of most research on gender and culture in the interwar period has been on the rise of the idea of the 'New Woman,' there were other, more conservative ideas of female identity.

## **Keywords**

Women artists; interior design; New Woman; Elida Prize; Austria; Wiener Frauenkunst; exhibitions

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## Introduction

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The appearance of the 'New Woman' belongs firmly to our understanding of the 1920s and highlights the expanding role of women in society that emerged between the wars. However, as recent debates have shown, the concept and its visual representation showed less the reality of women than a fictional, if not utopian, image of the future.<sup>1</sup> The concept was so influential that it narrowed a much richer body of conceptions and theories surrounding women and their perception. The texts collected here by Hans Ankwicz-Kleehoven (1883–1962), Wolfgang Born (1893–1949) and Liane Zimmler (1892–1987) participate in the process of diversifying women's viewpoints beyond the mere mention of the so-called 'New Woman', by looking at the achievements, chances, and problems of women's art in interwar Vienna. This selection is later accompanied by two texts on the so-called 'Elida' competition for the most beautiful Austrian woman's portrait, which the successful Czech cosmetics company Schicht organised in Austria in 1929. The innumerable entries of portraits of women by Austrian painters show a surprising cross-section of taste at the time, but also the re-assertion of a conservative image of women. All five texts provide a closer look at women's art and the perception of modern woman in interwar Austria, which has received increased attention in recent years but has so far been accessible only sporadically in English sources.<sup>2</sup> This has been addressed more in recent years, but the topic is usually overshadowed by the view of the 'New Woman' in the Weimar Republic and the metropolis of Berlin; however, in central Europe the idea took on a slightly different form that would benefit from a closer look.<sup>3</sup>

In keeping with its role as a new Secession or splinter group, *Wiener Frauenkunst* (Viennese Women's Art) the shortened name of the Association of Women Visual Artists and Artisans of Viennese Women's Art (Verband bildender Künstlerinnen und Kunsthandwerkerinnen Wiener Frauenkunst), exemplifies the opportunities and challenges of women artists faced in interwar Austria. Following disputes about artistic direction, several members left the Association of Women Artists of Austria (Vereinigung bildender Künstlerinnen Österreichs, VbKÖ) in 1926

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1) Rüdiger Graf, 'Anticipating the Future in the Present: "New Women" and Other Beings of the Future in Weimar Germany,' in *Central European History*, 42: 4, 2009, 647–673.

2) Megan Brandow-Faller, *The Female Secession: Art and the Decorative at the Viennese Women's Academy*, University Park: Penn State University Press, 2020. Stella Rollig, ed., *Stadt der Frauen. Künstlerinnen in Wien 1900–1938*, Munich: Prestel, 2019. Julie Johnson, *The Memory Factory. The Forgotten Women Artists of Vienna 1900*, West Lafayette, Purdue University Press, 2012. See, for English primary sources, focused on contemporary art: Bojana Pejic, ed., *Gender Check: A Reader: Art and Theory in Eastern Europe: Art and Gender in Eastern Europe Since the 1960s*, Cologne: Walther König, 2011.

3) Marsha Meskimmon, ed., *We Weren't Modern Enough: Women Artists and the Limits of German Modernism*, London: Tauris, 1999 and Katharina von Ankum, ed., *Women in the Metropolis. Gender and Modernity in Weimar Culture*, Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1997.

and staged exhibitions that went beyond the claim of simply promoting 'women's art' and the artistic genres with which it had usually been associated. These exhibitions were organised by artists such as Helene Funke (1869–1957), Fanny Harflinger (1873–1954, the director of *Wiener Frauenkunst*), Stephanie Hollenstein (1886–1944) and Broncia Koller (1863–1934), as well as female members of other associations, including the Wiener Werkstätte, who often faced financial hardship at the time. This process of separation included the question of the supposedly typical role of women in the arts and crafts and design, as well as that of the nature of a specifically female creativity. The VbKÖ, founded in 1910, suddenly looked out of date. However, with the increasingly conservative climate of the early 1930s and the cultural policy of the authoritarian corporative state of 1934–38 led by Engelbert Dollfuß (1892–1934) and Kurt Schuschnigg (1897–1977), the development of the *Wiener Frauenkunst* group and of female artists in general noticeably came to a halt. The sexual politics of the Dollfuß regime, especially its endorsement of Catholic social theory about the traditional family, was perhaps most decisive within the various conservative currents.<sup>4</sup> At least, that's how it seems when one listens to voices in the press.

The first text here appeared in 1928 and concerns a review of the first exhibition of the *Wiener Frauenkunst* group, which was staged at the Austrian Museum for Art and Industry (now the Museum of Applied Art) in Vienna.<sup>5</sup> Most of the group's exhibitions took place in the museum, highlighting its openness towards contemporary design and applied arts. The art critic Hans Ankwicz-Kleehoven, who had close connections to the museum as well, uses this occasion to address the separation of the group from the older VbKÖ. Ankwicz-Kleehoven describes the position of women's art in Viennese art life and outlines the fiercely competitive atmosphere within its secessions. Despite the fact that many women artists had common goals, there were soon differences over questions of principle and financial concerns because of the rising competition between them. Ankwicz-Kleehoven was born in 1883 and studied art history in Vienna and Berlin from 1903 to 1906. In 1906 he received his doctorate in Vienna. His subsequent entry into the civil service led him to the post of librarian at the Austrian Museum of Art and Industry in 1925, which linked him more directly to *Wiener Frauenkunst* and their exhibitions in the museum. He was a tireless reporter on countless Viennese art exhibitions and galleries and an exponent of modernism.<sup>6</sup> Forced into retirement in 1939 because of his Jewish origins, he regained his position as a librarian at the Academy of Fine Arts after 1945. Between 1920 and 1938 he worked as an active reporter for art in the *Wiener Zeitung*, the newspaper in which the article translated here appeared. The *Wiener Zeitung*, founded as early as 1703, soon experienced a decline in importance as the official newspaper of the Austrian state after the First World War, but retained its influential *feuilleton*. From 1925 onwards, Ankwicz-Kleehoven edited a regular section on women's art exhibitions, which may testify to the public's general interest in the subject.

4) Irene Bandhauer-Schöffmann, *Hausfrauen und Mütter im Austrofaschismus. Gender, Klasse und Religion als Achsen der Ungleichheit*, in *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*, 27: 3, 2016, 44–70.

5) *Katalog der 1. Ausstellung der Wiener Frauenkunst, Österreichisches Museum für Kunst und Industrie: Mit Kollektionen aus Prag und London*, Vienna: Jahoda und Siegel, 1927.

6) See the entry on 'Hans Ankwicz-Kleehoven' in the *Lexikon zum Literatur- und Kulturbetrieb im Österreich der Zwischenkriegszeit*, Klagenfurt: Alpen-Adria University, 2014–18. Available online at: <https://litkult1920er.aau.at/litkult-lexikon/ankwicz-kleehoven-hans/> (last accessed: 11 May 2022).

Ankwicz-Kleehoven notes that women have made great progress in the fields of theatre, music and literature.<sup>7</sup> It was only in the arts that they were not yet taken seriously and had no chance of joining a male-led artists' organisation, he argued, a problem which is today perceived as an important structural inequality in the arts of the interwar period in Austria.<sup>8</sup> Ankwicz-Kleehoven praises the progressive character and pioneering spirit of the new Secession, singling out works by well-known figures such as Helene Funke or Stephanie Hollenstein, but also mentioning work by women who are completely unknown today such as Emmi Goldschmid-Schur (1890–1939) or Lydia Schütt (1891–1961). The review is surprising in the large number of different artistic positions adopted by women artists it mentions, and reminds the contemporary reader that much work still needs to be done on exploring them. Ankwicz-Kleehoven describes Funke and Hollenstein in detail and then lists most of the lesser-known female artists in quick succession. In some places he gives a little more description, as, for instance, when he talks about Funke's 'firework of colours' or her 'pointillist spray'.<sup>9</sup> In keeping with the character of a short exhibition review in the daily press, there is no lengthy critical discussion – only short notes on the quality of the work and on whether the exhibition space is well designed; after describing some transitions to the decorative arts the article concludes by mentioning English prints and Czech women artists such as Božena Jelínková-Jirásková (1880–1951) or Pavla Rousová-Vicenová (1884–1939). In exhibitions (and their reviews) in Austria between the wars, the discussion often followed a specific sequence, from painting and fine arts to applied arts. Art from abroad was often only an afterthought, but the reference here to artists from outside of Austria is noteworthy and might have reflected the aspirations of *Wiener Frauenkunst*. By extending its reach to artists in neighbouring countries, in a manner similar to the Hagenbund, which had numerous connections to artists from the former territories of Austria-Hungary, the *Wiener Frauenkunst* group was showcasing its international solidarity and inclusivity, something they would have wanted to encourage in Viennese circles. Overall, Ankwicz-Kleehoven stresses in his review that Viennese women's art responded to the challenge of a new secession with a broad assortment of quality positions that 'unites all the fermenting, forward-pushing elements and leaves nothing to be desired in terms of modern mindedness'.<sup>10</sup> He did not raise the question as to whether these women artists were as important as their male counterparts, but rather, focused on which position they inherited within the field of women's art after parting ways with the older VbKÖ. As Sabine Plakolm-Forsthuber has pointed out, some critics saw the exhibition as an expression of the extreme left wing of women's art because of its modern approach and progressive attitudes.<sup>11</sup>

Political denigration was accompanied by sexual prejudice. The prominent Viennese art critic Arthur Roessler (1877–1955), himself once an outspoken supporter of Egon Schiele (1890–1918), criticised the expressive modern style of the paintings on display and stated that

7) Ankwicz-Kleehoven, 'Viennese Women's Art,' 124–125.

8) Only as extraordinary members, as with the Hagenbund for instance, see Johnson, *The Memory Factory*, 247.

9) Ankwicz-Kleehoven, 'Viennese Women's Art.'

10) Ibid, XXX. See also Megan Brandow-Faller, *The Female Secession: Art and the Decorative at the Viennese Women's Academy*, University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2020, 2.

11) Sabine Plakolm-Forsthuber, *Künstlerinnen in Österreich 1897–1938: Malerei, Plastik, Architektur*, Vienna: Picus-Verlag, 1994, 75.

women's art only gave birth, but was not truly creative.<sup>12</sup> With such statements, he disputed the value of women's art, and by means of such biological metaphors Roessler, along with other contemporaries repeatedly reduced women to their gender, regardless of any analysis of artistic merit. In comparison, Ankwicz-Kleehoven strove for an assessment that was as neutral as possible. It is against this background that one must view the comprehensive listing in his report.

The second text, by the art critic Wolfgang Born, touches on the question of a specifically female creativity, and it was related to a *Wiener Frauenkunst* exhibition in 1930.<sup>13</sup> The title of this, the third exhibition of the group, was *How Do Women See?* (*Wie sieht die Frau?*), chosen, presumably, so that the group could make its aspirations clear.<sup>14</sup> Before we come to Born's text, it is necessary to highlight the long history of the debate over female creativity, especially in the context of Vienna, where many prominent women artists such as Elena Luksch-Makovsky (1867–1967) or Teresa Feodorowna Ries (1874–1950) had resided since the turn of the century. The main issue for women artists, unsurprisingly, was that of legitimization and of how they could find the same recognition as their male peers. One concern was that if they achieved any success, it was often only seen in relation to their status as female artists, rather than as artists in general. As the art historian Erica Tietze-Conrat (1883–1958) noted in 1910, there was a danger in the growth of women's art organisations, since women artists by no means wanted to be isolated in them, as if art by women existed as 'something apart in a closed biotope.'<sup>15</sup> In other words, they wanted to avoid competing only with other women artists while being perceived as irrelevant to the wider art world.

Women artists emerged in the late nineteenth century out of the dilettantish world of bourgeois arts and crafts.<sup>16</sup> They quickly organised and professionalised themselves. This multi-layered development, which always involved struggles for recognition and legitimization, culminated in the founding of the aforementioned *Association of Women Artists of Austria* (VbKÖ) in 1910. The goal of the Association, led by the painter Olga Brand-Krieghammer (1867–1948), was the 'elevation of artistic and economic conditions.'<sup>17</sup> Its first major exhibition was *Art by Women* (*Die Kunst der Frau*, 1910), which started to establish a separate history of women's art. The exhibition showcased many historical works by women artists such as Angelika Kauffmann (1741–1807), Berthe Morisot (1841–1895), Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun (1755–1842) and is perceived as a landmark achievement in initiating an artistic legacy from a female perspective.<sup>18</sup> However, that also raised the question as to whether there is a certain female creativity in general that distinguishes women artists from men and their art – not an easy question to answer and a problem that was taken up many times later. The period before the war is not dealt with in

12) Arthur Roessler, 'Wiener Frauenkunst,' cited in Plakolm-Forsthuber *Künstlerinnen in Österreich*, 75.

13) *Wie sieht die Frau? Katalog der III. Ausstellung der Wiener Frauenkunst, Neue Burg, Terrassensäle, Wien*, Vienna: Verband Bildender Künstlerinnen Wiener Frauenkunst, 1930.

14) Brandow-Faller *The Female Secession*, 4.

15) Erica Tietze-Conrat, 'Die Kunst der Frau. Ein Nachwort zur Ausstellung in der Wiener Sezession,' in *Zeitschrift für bildende Kunst*, N.F. 6, 1910, 146–148.

16) Plakolm-Forsthuber *Künstlerinnen in Österreich*, 23–26. See also Rebecca Houze, *Textiles, Fashion, and Design Reform in Austria-Hungary before the First World War: Principles of Dress*, Farnham: Ashgate 2015.

17) Cited in Plakolm-Forsthuber, *Künstlerinnen in Österreich*, 65.

18) Julie Johnson, 'Schminke und Frauenkunst. Konstruktionen weiblicher Ästhetik um die Ausstellung "Die Kunst der Frau" 1910,' in Lisa Fischer, Emil Brix, eds, *Die Frauen der Wiener Moderne*, Munich: Oldenbourg 1997, 167–178.

our selection of primary sources, but in the late 1920s *Wiener Frauenkunst* tried to follow up on this long debate. It was thus the desire on the part of the *Wiener Frauenkunst* group to rephrase the question about female creativity that culminated in the exhibition *How Do Women See?* staged at the International Women's Congress in Vienna in 1930.

Before discussing the review itself it is worth considering both the author, Wolfgang Born, and the magazine, *Österreichische Kunst*, where it was published. Born in 1893 to a Jewish family in Breslau, he first studied fine arts in Munich and Paris from 1919 to 1923 before settling in Vienna in 1923. He worked there as a lecturer at the School for Adult Education (Volkshochschule), organised exhibitions and wrote for several art magazines. Between 1928 and 1931 he studied art history with Josef Strzygowski (1862–1941) and Oswald Menghin (1888–1973) at the University of Vienna and received his doctorate with a dissertation on northern Russian book illumination. He continued working in Germany but after the Nazis came to power, he lost many commissions and finally emigrated to the United States in 1937. There he taught at various New York colleges and also worked as a professor at Louisiana State University until the end of his life. He died in New York in 1949.

*Österreichische Kunst* was published between 1929 and 1938 as a monthly journal for fine and performing arts, architecture and arts and crafts. The articles, which were accompanied with high-quality illustrations, presented mostly Austrian artists such as Herbert Boeckl (1894–1966) or Clemens Holzmeister (1886–1983), but also granted broad space to current questions in art and exhibition reviews. With an established cast of art critics, the magazine, was eager to present contemporary art and recent developments. Born was a liberal art critic who was a proponent of decorative art and supporter of women's artists. At that time, decorative art did not only refer to design or arts and crafts per se, but more generally to the question of how many ornaments and decorations were desirable for modern art. This harkened back to debates about the overloaded styles of historicism in the nineteenth century, which flared up again and again and had often to do with questions of good taste and the state of modernisation in society. At first, the innovators tried to burn the bridges to the old art and condemned excessive decoration in art and architecture. The architect Adolf Loos (1870–1933) pioneered the fight against decoration and saw it as detrimental to the development of taste. Through his pamphlet 'Ornament and Crime,' originally delivered as a lecture in 1908, this attitude developed a life of its own and was taken up by many art critics and representatives of functionalist architecture.<sup>19</sup> In response, however, there were soon advocates of the decorative again. Born was one of them and therefore against 'cold' functionalism, which soon dominated the new pure architectural language. Yet, this also brought him into conflict with critics of the Wiener Werkstätte, Adolf Loos and Arthur Roessler. Both saw the products of the Wiener Werkstätte in the 1920s as one of many signs of a crisis in taste and design, which they originally associated with the misguided use of decoration. For them, one of the main reasons for the decline in the quality of design was the increasing influence of women designers in the workshop.<sup>20</sup> Since women were usually associated with arts and crafts, they were, as a gender, held to be naturally inclined towards the decorative. Debates over their role continued as

19) Alina Alexandra Payne, *From Ornament to Object: Genealogies of Architectural Modernism*, London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012.

20) Anne-Katrin Rossberg, Elisabeth Schmuttermeier, Christoph Thun-Hohenstein, eds, *Die Frauen der Wiener Werkstätte / Women Artists of the Wiener Werkstätte*, Basel: Birkhäuser, 2020.

a major point of contention. Born and others defended the decorative as valid in art, and he defended women designers and artists.

Born notes that women predominate the field of decorative arts and crafts, but then goes on to acknowledge the high quality of the work in the exhibition. He particularly singles out the architect Liane Zimbler (1892–1987), who designed the exhibition and whom we will revisit as an author of another of our selected texts. Born's list reads like a who's who of women artists in Vienna. He mentions the multi-layered milieu of the time that included women painters, for him already 'classical' representatives of the Wiener Werkstätte such as Maria Strauß-Likarz (1893–1971), Mathilde Flögl (1893–1958), Erna Kopřiva (1894–1984), and the sisters Kitty Rix-Tichacek (1901–1951) and Felice 'Lizzie' Rix-Ueno (1894–1967), as well as graphic artists and designers who have only gradually been rediscovered in recent years. Only in a few places does he make critical comments. The fact that, at the end of his reflections, he cannot refrain from suggestively interpreting the answer to the question 'How do women see?' in terms of a traditional image of women, namely the depiction of a nursery as thematically suitable for their everyday life, shows that old stereotypes persisted even amongst supposedly liberal supporters. The art critic Walter Dessauer also spoke disparagingly of the art of the housewife, a striking illustration of the conservative sexist tone of the time.<sup>21</sup> Only a few critics were wholly appreciative or neutral.<sup>22</sup> Despite its problematic assumptions, Born's article, like again that of Ankwicz-Kleehoven, is useful for its relatively non-partisan view and its itemised discussion of individual women artists who are otherwise hardly known.

The third text, 'The Modern Apartment,' showcases Liane Zimbler's response to the question of a specifically female creativity. In 1926, in the magazine *Moderne Welt* ('Modern World'), she commented on the character of the design of the modern flat. We might read her observations in light of the fact that later she worked as an exhibition designer for *Wiener Frauenkunst*. Zimbler was born in Přerov (now in the Czech Republic) in 1892 and studied photography and graphic arts at the Graphische Lehr- und Versuchsanstalt (now the Higher Federal Institution for Graphic Education and Research) in Vienna from 1911 to 1913.<sup>23</sup> Later she transferred to the Vienna School of Applied Arts, where she increasingly attended architecture classes. She was a product of an institution that, under its director Alfred Roller, employed teachers such as Franz Čížek (1865–1946), Josef Frank (1885–1967) or Oskar Strnad (1879–1935). Many later female artists of the Wiener Werkstätte, the 'Kunstgewerbe-Weiber,' as many disparagingly called them, emerged from this environment, as did Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky (1897–2000), architect and inventor of the Frankfurt kitchen of 1926, usually regarded as the first modern fitted kitchen design. When Adolf Loos launched into his famous diatribe 'Vienna's woes' ('Wiener Weh') in 1927, by which he meant the woes of the Viennese art world and the Wiener Werkstätte in particular, he offended this young generation of female designers.<sup>24</sup> He was

21) Walter Dessauer, 'Die Schöne Wand,' *Neue Freie Presse*, 28 March 1933, 4.

22) Hans Ankwicz-Kleehoven, 'Frauenkunstausstellung "Die Schöne Wand"', *Wiener Zeitung*, 14 April 1933, 10.

23) Ursula Prokop, *Zum jüdischen Erbe in der Wiener Architektur. Der Beitrag jüdischer ArchitektInnen am Wiener Baugeschehen 1868–1938*, Vienna: Böhlau, 2016, 197–201.

24) The lecture took place in a lecture hall of Wiener Musikverein: Adolf Loos, 'Das Wiener Weh (Wiener Werkstätte). Eine Abrechnung! Mit Lichtbildern von der Pariser Ausstellung, 20 April 1927.' Published in Loos, *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Adolf Opel, Vienna: lesethek Verlag, 2010, 665–74. See, too, Markus Kristan, ed., *Ich warne Sie vor Josef Hoffmann! Adolf Loos und die Wiener Werkstätte*, Vienna: Metroverlag, 2014, 53.

especially critical of their contribution to the International Exhibition of Decorative Arts held in Paris in 1925, which, he argued, gave a false representation of modern design from Austria. This criticism of women in applied arts must be taken into account when we view the activities of *Wiener Frauenkunst*, for its members often identified themselves with this role or showed solidarity towards women in Wiener Werkstätte. This negative commentary on women in design, even though they increasingly made up a majority in the profession, shows the persistence of attempts to marginalise them, but the growing presence of women designers also reveals that some, at least, were fulfilling their professional ambitions. This dichotomy was evident in Liane Zimbler's career, first as a graduate of the Vienna School of Applied Arts and, later, as a successful architect and interior designer.

After the First World War, Zimbler began working for the Bamberger furniture factory and later for the Rosenberger design studio. She specialised in the design of one-room flats and studios, an expanding field for the middle-class. She thus coined the concept of 'better living,' by which she meant making comfortable living spaces even when room was restricted. Sensible spatial solutions could also have an emancipatory effect, as she represented one of the few modern Austrian designers who never fully submitted to the demands of functionalism, preferring, instead, 'Gemütlichkeit' (cosiness). This latter approach was championed by Josef Frank, who advanced a different reading of modern design that more strongly addressed human needs.<sup>25</sup> Zimbler also undertook a number of prestigious projects in Vienna; in 1922 she was commissioned to renovate the Ephrussi Bank, originally built between 1872 and 1873 by Theophil Hansen (1813–1891).<sup>26</sup> Through her work as a designer and her interest in questions of space she was appointed to undertake the interior designs for the 'Beautiful Wall' ('Schöne Wand') Exhibition, which was the final *Wiener Frauenkunst* exhibition, staged in 1933, once again at the Austrian Museum of Art and Industry.<sup>27</sup> She also began to deliver lectures on sociological and artistic aspects of living, some of which were also published.<sup>28</sup> In 1938 she became the first woman in Austria to be licensed as an architect, but in the same year she had to flee to the United States, where she continued to work as an interior designer and remained active in publishing. She died in Los Angeles in 1987.

Zimbler begins her article with a statement of principle. After decades of poor housing conditions (a major topic that drove the concern of the Social Democratic council of Vienna after the war with the ambitious 'Red Vienna' housing projects) now is the time, she contends, for balanced design. By 'balanced' she means a position that avoids either reverting to the overloaded interiors of the nineteenth century or embracing unadorned functionalism. She then informs the reader in detail about the most important details of good interior design, i.e., the latest trends and good taste. The examples of Zimbler and Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky, along with Friedl Dicker-Brandeis (1898–1944), another Vienna-based artist specialising

25) Christopher Long, *Josef Frank: Life and Work*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002.

26) See also Sabine Plakolm-Forsthuber, 'Loos remodeled: Zum Umbau der Wohnung Leopold Goldman durch die Architektin Liane Zimbler 1936,' in Elena Shapira, eds, *Design Dialogue: Jews, Culture and Viennese Modernism*, Vienna: Böhlau 2018, 263–280.

27) *Katalog der VI. Ausstellung der Wiener Frauenkunst veranstaltet mit der Genossenschaft der Maler*, Vienna: Österreichisches Museum für Kunst und Industrie, 1933.

28) See, for example, Liane Zimbler, 'Die elegante Frau und die bescheidene Wohnung,' *Österreichische Kunst*, 12, 1934, 15–17.



in design, show how women found an important professional field in interior design, that allowed them to re-channel the general artistic interest in colour and spatial effects of reform movements of the time such as that of the original Viennese Secession.<sup>29</sup> Being emancipated not only meant a tidy and orderly way of living but exploring and defining space on their own terms. Large exhibitions such as that staged in Stuttgart by the Werkbund in 1927, also played a major role in development of ideas of enhanced and more flexible living; Mies van der Rohe, organiser of the Werkbund exhibition, commissioned Lilly Reich (1885–1947), with whom he worked for over a decade, to design its central hall.<sup>30</sup> Zimmler improved the artistic level of interior design, but also regarded it as a field in which gender-specific spatial relations were negotiated. For her, good design meant that questions of practical living for women were not limited to the realm of the housewife; women had an important general contribution to make to concepts of design went far beyond this traditional categorization. All this becomes even more apparent in the context of the later exhibitions by *Wiener Frauenkunst*, which followed on from the discourse of improved design, living and spatial awareness. In 1929 they organised the exhibition ‘The Image in Space’ (‘Das Bild im Raum’) at the Austrian Museum for Art and Industry; it was not a conventional art exhibition but was, rather, a series of artistic arrangements presented in combination with interior design. Canvases and crafts appeared in designed living and working spaces and visitors saw how this organic unity expressed the purpose of the space. As librarian of the Museum, Hans Ankwicz-Kleehoven had given the exhibition a very positive review in the *Wiener Zeitung*.<sup>31</sup> The director of *Wiener Frauenkunst*, Fanny Harlfinger, formulated the aspiration that the pictorial decoration of a room should be combined with the furniture to form an organic unity.<sup>32</sup> We can see the 1929 exhibition of the *Wiener Frauenkunst*, in which the female artists designed several exemplary living spaces in the context of these developments, as their first publicly successful show. Many of the *Wiener Frauenkunst* artists took on the role of interior designers and designed furniture and complete interiors because it provided a source of income and was close to their training as artists. The exhibition attracted a positive response throughout and showed the great quality of the artists’ association via its tasteful execution.<sup>33</sup> From this reflection on living or on spatial concepts, something like a speciality on the part of *Wiener Frauenkunst* developed. The group became more and more concerned with the pictoriality of spatial presentation and with spatial effects, a question that continued until the *The Beautiful Wall* exhibition. As Fanny Harlfinger explained, the aim was to lend the arrangements a pictorial quality that clearly showed their function.<sup>34</sup> While it may have continued to be understood as typical for women to design interiors, these theoretical issues outweighed a solely gendered reading. They wanted to go beyond mere questions of the housewife and their living conditions. Many members of

29) Sabine Plakolm-Forsthuber, *Moderne Raumkunst: Wiener Ausstellungsbauten von 1898 bis 1914*, Vienna: Picus-Verlag 1991.

30) Magdalena Droste, ‘The Creative Pair. Lilly Reich and the Collaboration with Mies van der Rohe,’ in Christina Budde, Mary Pepchinski, Peter Cachola Schmal, Wolfgang Voigt, eds, *Frau Architekt: Over 100 years of Women in Architecture*, Tübingen: Wasmuth, 2017, 104–111.

31) Plakolm-Forsthuber, *Künstlerinnen in Österreich*, 77.

32) *Ibid.*, 76.

33) Karl Maria Grimme, ‘Das Bild im Raum: Zur Ausstellung der „Wiener Frauenkunst“ im Österreichischen Museum,’ *Die Österreicherin*, 2: 4, 1929, 4–5.

34) Plakolm-Forsthuber, *Künstlerinnen in Österreich*, 76.

Viennese women's art understood modern living as a complex interplay of the fine and applied arts and Zimmler played a decisive role in this with her essay of 1926, even if she only describes the latest trends of living in greater detail. In this sense, however, the way of life had a greater influence on the image of women. A well-designed space should accommodate emancipated individuals and vice versa. This would naturally include the 'New Woman,' whose appearance profited from the modern living worlds of the 1920s.

The last two texts included here are reports on the Elida Prize competition for the most beautiful Austrian portrait of a woman, which was organised in 1929 by the Bohemian company Georg Schicht, based in Ustí nad Labem in north-western Bohemia. The name comes from a soap company originally based in Vienna that Schicht bought in 1916. The reviewers we encounter, Wolfgang Born (once more) and an author known only as H.S., could not be more different. While Born talks about the social situation of artists and the benefits of a well-funded competition, H.S. strongly criticises the quality of the competition. At second glance, however, Born's text provides some revealing observations about the image of women in the Austrian capital. Since a similar competition had also been held in Germany shortly before, the winner being the Berlin painter Willy Jaeckel (1888–1944), the Elida Prize inspired comparisons. Born refers to the so-called 'Sporting Girl,' an aspect of the wider concept of the 'New Woman' that failed to gain much traction in Vienna. Instead, other female stereotypes prevailed in Austria. It was often argued that the Elida Prize in Germany and Austria highlighted a distinctly conservative view of women, in which traditional types of women and the portrait format dominated, well outside the practices of the avant-garde of the time.<sup>35</sup> This conservatism can be attributed to popular taste, to which the advertising material of a cosmetics company at the time sought to come as close as possible. Charming, pretty, depictions of women adorned product packaging in an attempt to attract shoppers. This way, women were being served a commodified image of female beauty, as it became more and more a part of mass culture. The new female stars in the cinema or in dance revues of the 1920s complemented the new beauty industry and generated great interest, but also revealed the artificiality of their appearance. A crisis of portraiture and representation paralleled this process in high art. Traditional portrait painting no longer met the demands of the new age, especially in competition with photography.<sup>36</sup> In general, the question was whether it was still possible to find an accurate image of an individual in the fast-moving sphere of the metropolis. People disappeared into the masses; a leisure culture perceived as cultureless in the broader context of Americanisation.<sup>37</sup> It is symptomatic of the latter, perhaps, that there emerged during the interwar period an obsession with typologies, so that the new roles could be captured next to the typical worker or businessman. This was no different for women. Many saw the 'New Woman' as a barometer for the dawn of the new age. Whether it was the sexually ambiguous 'Garçonne,' the 'Sporting Girl' or the softer 'Gretchen' type, the typologies branched out quickly and her different images dominated the magazines.<sup>38</sup>

35) Susanne Meyer-Büser, *Das schönste deutsche Frauenporträt: Tendenzen der Bildnismalerei in der Weimarer Republik*, Berlin: Reimer, 1994.

36) *Ibid.*, 83–89.

37) *Ibid.*, 92.

38) Lynne Frame, 'Gretchen, Girl, Garçonne? Weimar Science and Popular Culture in Search of the Ideal New Woman,' in Katharina von Ankum, ed., *Women in the Metropolis: Gender and Modernity in Weimar Culture*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997, 12–40.

Ever present in popular journals such as *Moderne Welt*, they demonstrated the latest fashions and served as role models for the new modern lifestyle. It was this slightly superficial typology that fixed women to certain characteristics and had little to do with reality. The fact that the Elida competition showed a more traditional image of women, a typical Viennese woman, may be seen as a backlash against this form of commodification. Yet, it also highlights the problems of emancipation, when a projected goal doesn't meet with the population's desire for traditional gender identities.<sup>39</sup>

H.S.'s text makes it clear that there is also a problem of artistic quality behind the portrayal of contemporary women. The winning picture, by Sergius Pauser (1896–1970), showed a 'Slavic type' that did not correspond to the expected image of a beautiful Austrian woman. The ultimate goal for many art critics was to link both worlds, i.e. to gain a true representation of a genuine Austrian woman, which the artist then would execute to a high artistic level. However, no one questioned why this version of a Viennese woman was the right one. And neither was the fact that better media had long been available in the form of photography and magazine illustrations. And so, to this day, the Elida Competition is regarded as a failed event that only confirmed the conservative taste of the time and failed to promote progressive art. This sense of a displaced representation of women became increasingly apparent in the early 1930s, and this changing atmosphere contributed to the inability of women artists in Vienna to gain widespread acceptance and success. The texts collected here give an impression of the opportunities, departures and limits of female artmaking and its perception in interwar Austria before 1934. With the German Anschluss in 1938, Nazi officials renamed the VbKÖ the Artists' Association of Viennese Women (Künstlerverband Wiener Frauen) and reintegrated *Wiener Frauenkunst* into it. Its exhibitions were then devoted to art that conformed to the Nazi system.

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39) Katharina von Ankum, 'Introduction,' in von Ankum, ed., *Women in the Metropolis*, 1–12.

**Hans Ankwicz-Kleehoven**

## Viennese Women's Art

Originally published as 'Wiener Frauenkunst,' *Wiener Zeitung*, 1 January 1928, 7–8.

Translated by Acer Lewis.

While women have already succeeded in achieving complete equality with men in the areas of politics, economics and science, and there has long been no doubt about their equality with the opposite sex in the fields of theatre, music and literature, their achievements in the visual arts are still not taken seriously enough to be allowed to join the major artists' associations. This forces them to form their own organizations, whose main purpose is to mount exhibitions. One would think that the many difficulties faced by women artists would force them to unite, but this is not the case; they too, like their male colleagues, are in fierce competition with each other. Recently, a strong group has separated from the Association of Austrian Women Artists (Vereinigung bildender Künstlerinnen Österreichs) and has opened its first exhibition as the Association of Women Artists and Artisans (Vereinigung bildender Künstlerinnen und Kunsthandwerkerinnen) under the title of *Viennese Women's Art* (Wiener Frauenkunst) in the new building of the Austrian Museum.<sup>40</sup> In other words, a female 'Secession' that unites all the fermenting, forward-pushing elements and leaves nothing to be desired in terms of modern mindedness. Admittedly, one must sometimes 'take the good will for the deed' and forgive any technical deficiencies due to the ideal artistic vigour. But on the whole, thanks to the successful way it has been arranged, the impression of the exhibition is a very favorable one and the debut of the new association thus quite promising.

In Room I, Helene Funke has set off a veritable firework of colours in a collection of 30 oil paintings, watercolours, and drawings, whose pointillist spray pours in equal measure over figural compositions, portraits, and still lifes, condensing into larger areas only in the landscapes. One may call this somewhat intrusive technique affected, but in any case, it is personal and of the utmost liveliness, two qualities that are not all that common in women in particular. Vorarlberg's Stephanie Hollenstein, who displays southern landscapes and floral pieces in Room II, is much more concentrated and forceful in colour. She has shown admirable energy and indomitable drive in difficult personal circumstances, such as when, during the war, she enlisted as 'Soldier Stephan' in the Tyrolean Rifle Companies (Standeschützen). These characteristics are demonstrated in the generosity and unity of her compositions, and in the certainty with which she brings an interesting section of nature onto the canvas. In rooms III, VI, VII, and VIII, Anni Schröder-Ehrenfest, Margarete Hamerschlag, Emma Schlagenhausen, Valerie Petter, Marianne Seeland, and Herta Strzygowski have exhibited more or less expressionistically-oriented graphics. In room IV, Christa Deuticke's 'Firehouse' and Sylvia Koller's portrait of an Englishwoman are remarkable. In the adjoining room (V), Broncia Koller's collection of excellent portraits and still lifes. Helene Taussig's colorful drawings

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40) This is referring to the Austrian Museum of Industry and Design in Vienna (now the Museum of Applied Art).

testify to in-depth study of the Japanese. Louise Merkel-Romee is visibly under the influence of the Young French. Fanni Harlfinger (Room IX) has worked out an original scheme for her landscapes, which, however, does not deny its origins in the decorative arts.

Her village and townscapes, mostly painted on a dark background, do not fill the entire surface encompassed by the frame, but rather take up only the center of the image, leaving part of the background free all around, which now appears like a wide border and thus gives the whole the character of a cracked plate. Honest skill and the striving for an unadorned reproduction of nature speak from the works of Elfriede Miller-Hauenfels (Room X), who only emphasizes the expressive moment in her figural compositions to a greater extent – and even there without exaggeration. Room XI is shared by Emmi Goldschmid-Schur, Elisabeth Schima and Paula Ulrich, all of whom are represented with capable portraits, as well as Katharina Wallner, who has already achieved great virtuosity in the depiction of mighty mountain massifs, and the flower painter Grete Wilhelm, Lydia Schütt, whose dreamy Laxenburg park motifs strike an entirely new red in their planar stylization, and Gertrude Schwarz, whose whimsical Prater painting reveals not only unusual compositional talent but also a most peculiar sense of humor. Anna Lesznai's gouache paintings, inspired by colorful Hungarian folk art and often reminiscent of *Mandlbogen* (traditional Viennese cut-out sheets), then lead on to the decorative arts, which are probably quantitatively, but by no means qualitatively inferior to the works of 'free' art exhibited here.

In the passage to Room XII, which Hilde Jesser-Schmid has decorated with amusing murals, Fini Skarica-Ehrendorfer shows exquisite samples of applied artistic writing and Bettina Biedermann has furnished an entire showcase with tasteful fabrics and upholstery. Luise Spannring and Maria Cyrenius, both based in Salzburg, show ceramics and enamels as well as pretty graphics, and Dina Kuhn, now working in Neutitschein, has sent in a rich collection of her ceramic creations (Room XII a). Gabi Lagus-Möschl brings painted silk scarves, Elfriede Berbalk in association with Dorothea Tilgner gold and silver utensils, Hilde Jesser-Schmid a whole series of costume sketches, and Hilde Wagner-Ascher very distinctive embroidered bags, tulle doilies and masks. From the workshop of Susi Singer [in] Grünbach am Schneeberg come various charming ceramics; Fanni Harlfinger has contributed all kinds of colorful Christmas tree decorations and a small nativity scene, Herta Bucher beautifully shaped glazed clay vessels and figures. Finally, the textiles of Zoe Munteanu, the enamels of Mitzi Otten-Friedmann and Herta Jirasko, the handicrafts of Annie Weil-Kuhn and the lighting fixtures from the studio of Evelyne Raffay should be remembered, and it should be added that the exhibition is also enriched by a collection of excellent English prints and works by Czech women artists. Among them, besides the paintings of Božena Jelínková-Jirásková, Minka Podhajská, Božena Solarová and the woodcuts of Pavla Rousová-Vicenová, we were especially struck by the characterful sculptures of Karla Vobišová.

Dr. Hans Ankwicz-Kleehoven.

**Wolfgang Born**

## The World of Women's Art

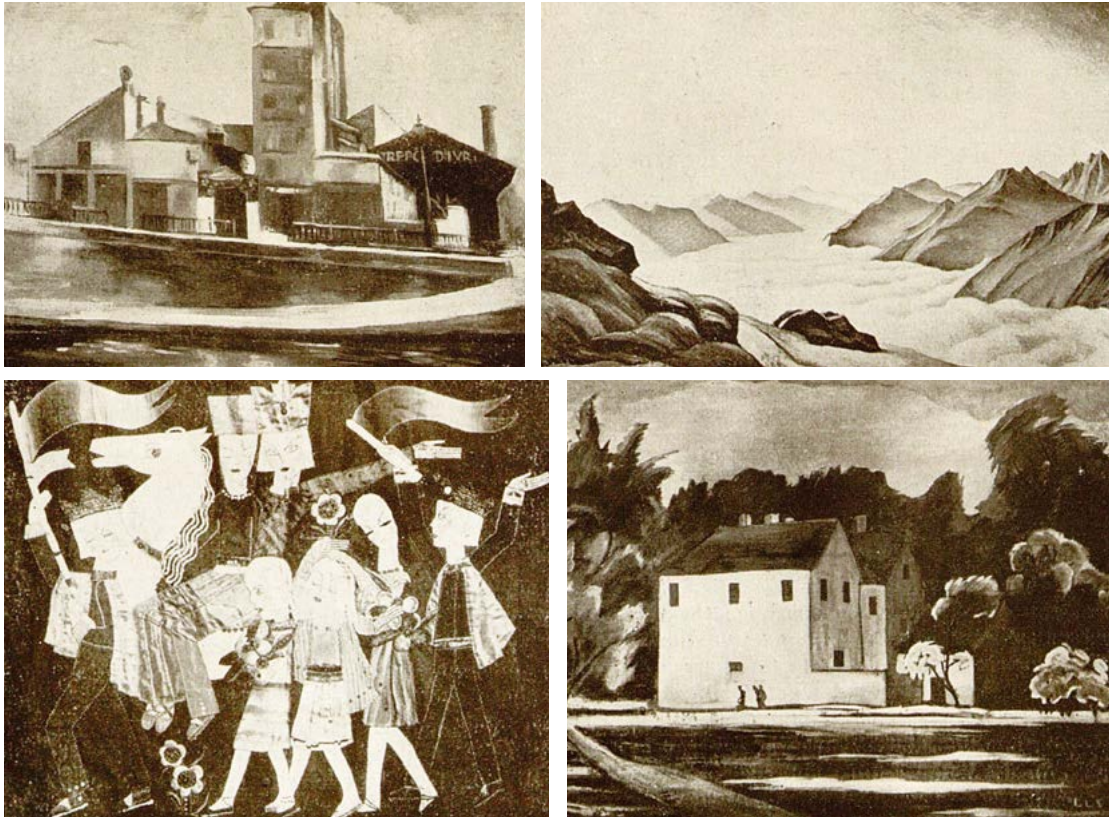
Originally published as: 'Weibliche Kunstwelt,' *Österreichische Kunst*, 8, 1930, 13–17.

Translated by Acer Lewis.

The third exhibition of the Viennese Women's Art Association Wiener Frauenkunst bears the title 'How Do Women See?' and thus sets itself a program that can be sure of general interest as it is implemented. The point of view was chosen from the beginning in such a way that the emphasis is on independent creation and not on the absorption of impressions, which thus allows the applied arts to be included in the event. This is all the more important because women, by design and tradition, are at home in the decorative and applied arts, and it is precisely here that they develop undisputed dominance. It is the [natural] course of modern progress that the path has led from domestic industry to the workshop and points from the small to the large. Thus, first of all, in full recognition of her achievements, mention should be made of the architect Liane Zimmler, who adapted the inhospitable terrace hall of the Hofburg with fine taste. The strip along the window wall is very nicely furnished as a winter garden (designed by Paula Fürth) and provides an excellent setting for the sculpture placed there. The main piece, *Eva*, by Irma Rothstein, is a work of strong expression and pleasing unity of construction. The opposite corner of the hall is arranged as a rest room. Here Mrs. Zimmler worked in association with Maria Strauss-Likarz, from whom come the inlays of the furniture and wall panels executed in batik. The result of the collaboration is a winning unity. The charming figurative decoration is tactfully subordinated to the delicate mood of the whole. The ceramic parts (the fireplace in the arbor, the fountain basin in the garden) were created by Hertha Bucher. A sense for the possibilities of the material as well as ornamental invention characterize these pieces in equal measure.

The final narrow wall of the room is occupied by a stage intended for lectures and fashion-shows. It is made of orange curtains and, for all its simplicity, has a strong effect as a scenic frame. Along the whole length of the main wall there is a display case for arts and crafts. There are, in addition to the, to some extent, already classic circle of the Wiener Werkstätte with Maria Strauß-Likarz, Mathilde Flögl, Erna Kopřiva, and the sisters Kitty and Lizzi Rix, independent artists with creations of individuality and high quality. Above all, Emmy Zweybrück-Prohaska, who has successfully developed fabric patterns as her specialty, Herta Sladky, whose figurative embroideries are filled with young grace, Ena Rottenberg, by whom there are precious cut glasses to see, Hilde Wagner-Ascher, a creator of tasteful needlework and Susi Singer, a lively ceramicist. The names Ehrenhofer-Skarica (calligraphy), Berbalk (silverwork), Munteanu (fabrics), Otten-Friedmann (enamel) should not be omitted, so that the good work is mentioned in its entirety.

The graphic arts are represented by Anni Schroeder, with her strict style. Her woodcuts are consistently developed from material and technique and are very impressive in their

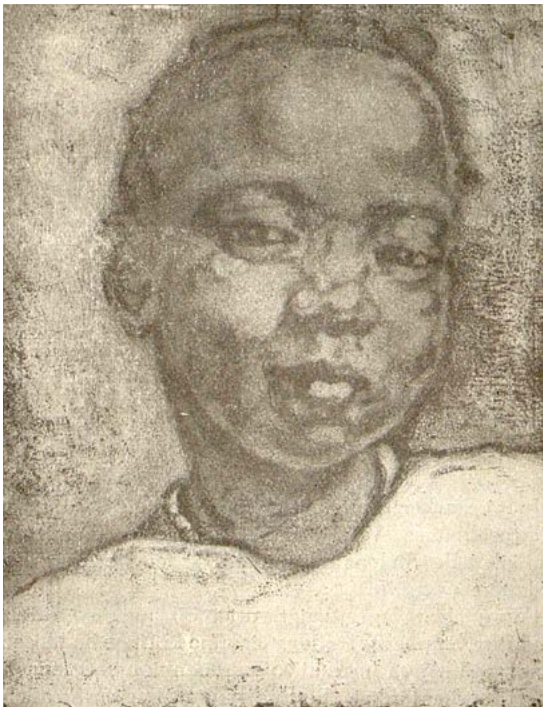
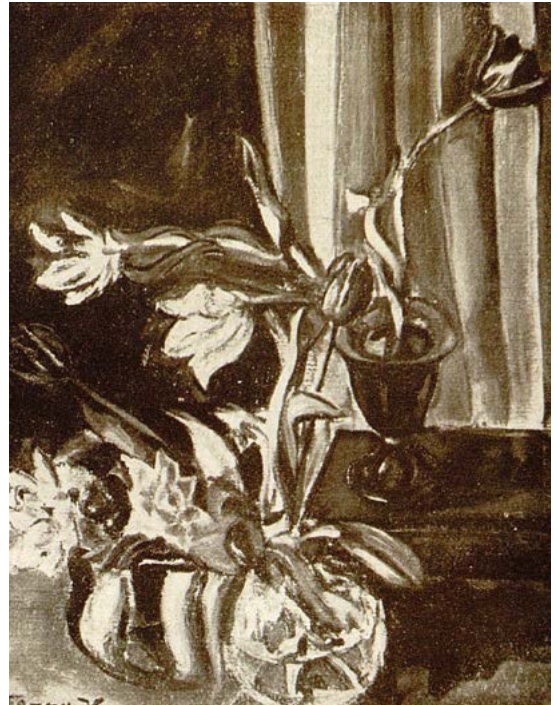
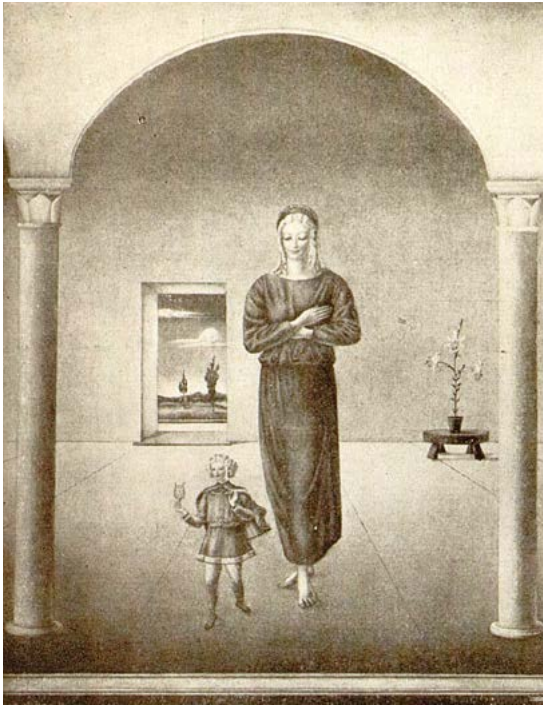


**Figure 1:** Works by Franziska Zach, Hertha Strzygowski, Herta Sladky and Lydia Schütt.

Source: 'Weibliche Kunstwelt,' *Österreichische Kunst*, 8, 1930, 14.

austere linear language. The *vernis-mou* ('soft-ground') etchings by Pepi Weixlgärtner, broad and generous, do gratifying justice to the plastic force of the subject (heads from Sudan). Marietta Lydis has absorbed the exoticism of Foujita from Paris and works it in a virtuoso manner into graphic paraphrases of the female body; she circumscribes her strangely gliding figures with refined outlines. The greatest imaginable contrast to her in spirit is the highly sensitive Sascha Kronburg, but in their means of expression they also have occasional connections. She, too, thinks in a linear manner. But what her delicate calligraphic pen creates is a pious, fairy-tale, world populated with images. It is also possible to see good pastels by Marianne Seeland and Elfriede Mayer, watercolours by Frieda Salvendy and Freidl Biegler. The terracottas and wood carvings by Hilde Leitich-Uray are interesting.

Among the oil paintings, Herta Strzygowski's landscapes stand out as a captivating attempt to construct the experience of the high mountains in freely composed images, roughly in the spirit of the German Romantic Caspar David Friedrich, but with modern means. Lydia Schütt sticks closer to nature in her deep-toned water and forest paintings. Elfriede Miller-Hauenfels uses strong color contrasts to solve problems of light, and Valerie Petter-Zeis deals with the brightness of the south by resorting to strong local colors.



**Figure 2:** Works by Sascha Kronburg, Fanny Harflinger and Pepi Weixlgärtner.

Source: 'Weibliche Kunstwelt,' *Österreichische Kunst*, 8, 1930, 15.



Fanny Harlfinger shows original cut-out *vedute*, Stephanie Hollenstein a powerful Lake Constance landscape, Anna Lesznai folk scenes of convincing originality. Bettina Bauer's Parisian street paintings and her still-lives of very ordinary things testify to an artistic will that is not easily satisfied. This young talent deserves attention, Franziska Zach brings works from her recent period of development in Paris, but at the same time she also brings earlier things. One can clearly see which path she is taking: having been brought up on Cubism, she seeks to gain a new disinhibition before nature. A graceful portrait of a girl above all shows the success of her logical and healthy approach.

Two decorative compositions stand out on their own: Erna Piffl's cartoon for a garden fresco and the large tempera painting *Jungle* by Gertrud Schwarz-Helberger. Both are documents of resolute personalities and solid proficiency -- in temperament, however, as different as one can imagine. Erna Piffl paints a solemnly striding group of women, Gertrud Schwarz unfolds a colourfully bubbling nursery fantasy. These two works illustrate the poles between which the art world of women lies spread out, and already contains a good part of the answer to the question of the exhibition program.

Liane Zimbler

## The Modern Apartment

Originally published as: 'Die moderne Wohnung,' *Moderne Welt*, 7: 20, 1926, 24–25, 35, 40, 41.

Translated by Acer Lewis

In the home of 30 years ago, the only thing that mattered was the appearance of the reception rooms; hygiene was totally neglected, and adjoining rooms were almost non-existent; it is said that in the best families it happened that the servants were made to sleep on table-beds in the kitchen. Today, the adjoining rooms and the utility rooms are fully entitled to stand alongside the living rooms and perhaps may give an even better picture of the cultural level of their inhabitants. It is no longer the guests but the housewife who has become the centre of the house, to which everything is adapted and subordinated, and the housewife refuses to be the slave of her home, of which she is now the appointed mistress.

Just as Paris has always been the source of inspiration in the field of fashion, so the English house has always remained the model of continental domestic culture.

A modern apartment is not necessarily that which many people imagine under this designation: Constructivist household goods, on bare walls some meagre expressionist paintings. It is true that modern interior design, in reaction against the rampant overgrowth of decor, has produced such excesses; the idea of the new apartment is not affected by it. It is good taste that will keep the golden mean between the overloaded splendour of the Makart period and the bare functional space.

The essence of the modern home is the great practicality in its overall design and craftsmanship. In Vienna in particular, the modern art movement has had a far-reaching educational effect under the artistic guidance of small tradesmen who have always been outstandingly skilled in their crafts.

How do these achievements affect the details?

In an effort to make the rooms appear larger, the walls are usually kept bright. In order to make better use of space in small rooms, cabinets are built when possible, gaining the space above the normal cabinet height as a storage place for rarely used things. Visually, a room with an overly large wardrobe looks smaller than the same room with an entire wall of cabinets. Also, in rooms with hardwood furnishings, especially in bedrooms, people like to make such closet walls from soft wood, which is light or painted.

The washstand has disappeared from the modern bedroom. One either uses the bathroom or builds the washing facility in a corresponding section of the closet wall, painted with oil inside.



**Figure 3:** Interior in a country house and an apartment living room.

Source: 'Die moderne Wohnung,' *Moderne Welt*, 7: 20, 1926, 24.



**Figure 4:** Woman's bedroom and boudoir.

Source: 'Die moderne Wohnung,' *Moderne Welt*, 7: 20, 1926, 25.

## Wolfgang Born

# Who is the Most Beautiful Woman in the Country

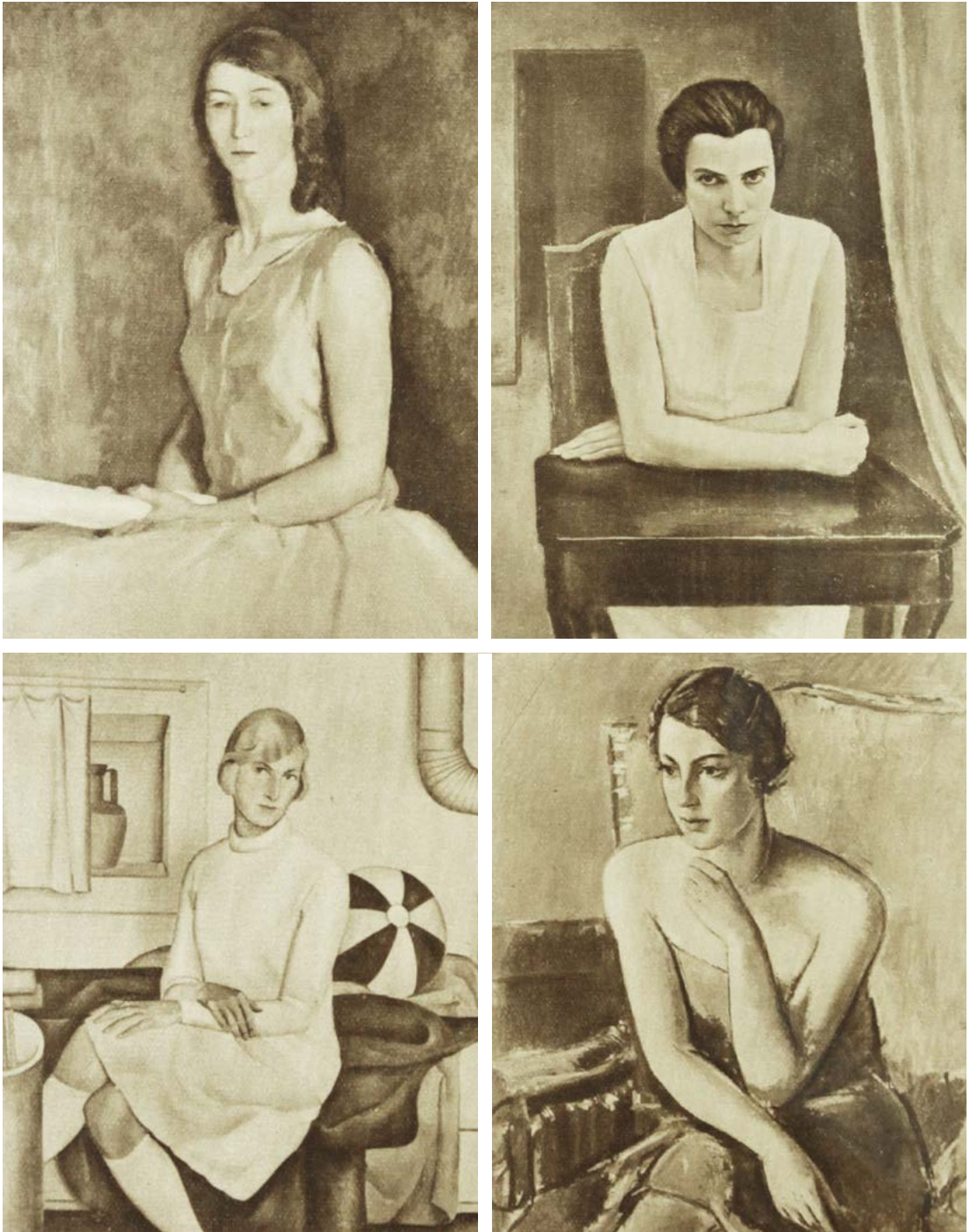
Originally published as: 'Wer ist die schönste im ganzen Land? Zum Preisausschreiben für Frauenportraits.' *Die Bühne*, 214, 1928, 48–49.

Translated by Acer Lewis

This time, the question of the fairy tale was not directed at the mirror nor asked by an evil queen. Instead, it was from an art-loving industrialist, Georg Schicht, to the painters of Germany and Austria, but not without providing solid finances to get the answer. In an epoch which has enough words for art, but little money, doubly commendable! The prize was divided: the sum put up for Germany was given to Willi Jaeckel; for Austria the award-winner was Sergius Pauser.

An exhibition of about thirty of the shortlisted works that were submitted to us is currently on view at the Künstlerhaus and provides a welcome opportunity to trace the thought process of the judges. There is no doubt that in Vienna a conception of the female was adopted that was as far as possible from the typical kind of sports girl one sees these days, and from the familiar style of presentation. In opposition to the internationally polished formula stands the personal and unique experience of a sensitive artist. The jury's verdict can be sure of the most general approval. The art reports of *Die Bühne* have emphatically pointed out the young painter's talent since he surfaced in the Secession.

It should not be forgotten that the decision was by no means easy. The paintings that, up to the last moment, stood in the close competition with each other, have been exhibited along with the main work for comparison. Among them is one by Anton Faistauer, and, as was to be expected, this is a work of sovereign skill and captivating charm. No one will be able to claim that his painting is inferior to that of his younger colleague. It can only have been that recognized mastery hardly needed any more confirmation. As Goethe says, a budding soul will always be grateful. A growing mind (according to Goethe) will always be grateful! Let us hope that this example of well-appointed patronage will be soon and abundantly imitated. It cannot be repeated often enough, seeing how tragic the situation of the artistic and creative individual is in an epoch that is cold and dismissive towards him. In these circumstances every material sacrifice for living and authentic art is an act of culture.



**Figure 5:** Paintings by Heinrich Krause, Sergius Pauser, Stefan Hlava and Anton Faistauer, submitted to the Elida Competition, illustrated in Wolfgang Born.

Source: 'Wer ist die Schönste im ganzen Land?' in *Die Bühne*, 214, 1928, 48.

The painting by Pauser was the competition winner.

H.S.

## The Elida Prize Show

Originally published as: 'Die Elida-Preisschau,' in *Freiheit!* 14 December 1928, 6.

Translated by Acer Lewis

At the same time as the granting of the German Schicht Prize, the Elida Prize for the most beautiful Austrian portrait of a woman was awarded in Vienna. In Germany a racy, modern portrait of a woman by Willy Jaeckel emerged as the prize winner, but in Austria, tastelessness was the victor.

A tour of the Elida prize show, which opened yesterday at the Künstlerhaus in Vienna, shows with shocking clarity what Austrian artists consider beautiful.

There were two opinions about the purpose of the competition. One could define beautiful in a purely painterly sense: the sense of being artistically perfect. But one could also examine 'beautiful' from the point of view of pure female beauty. A union of both beauties would have been the ideal. An unattained ideal, which none of the 34 submitted pictures managed to satisfy.

There remains only the choice of one side or the other.

Instead, the judges chose a third way; one which would have been impossible according to aesthetic sensibilities, that is, if judgments had in fact been made according to any aesthetic sense. This tasteless winner was Sergius Pauser's portrait: a piece which although in technical terms may be certainly labelled a portrait, depicts an interesting woman and not a beauty. In the opinion of the jurors, Austrian beauty presents itself in the form of a bony-cheeked Slavic type in a house dress.

Did the jury consist entirely of senile old men, all of them already beyond any sense of women's beauty? Or was the verdict based on the fact that Sergius Pauser has recently become 'modern,' a salon darling of a social class that wants to appear interesting at any price, even for the sake of good taste?

Among the other 33 portraits that came away empty-handed in this prize competition, one finds some that would have been much closer to the beautiful Austrian than the portrait of the Slav that won the prize.

For example, the portrait painted by Friedrich Jadler, or the one that Alfred Gerstenbrand threw on the canvas with verve. Robert Streit has produced a portrait of a young Viennese girl, one of the most charming pictures seen in recent times. It does not depict a beautiful Austrian woman, just a Viennese 'süßes Mädel' type (sweet little girl), but at least it gives a sight to rejoice in. Erich A. Lamm brought a sports girl to the competition, which, if Felix Harta's portrait of a girl had not been there, would certainly have deserved the prize. Erhard A. Dier's racy Russian girl is beautiful, but also not in the sense demanded, and it is Igo Pötsch's painted woman who most nearly fulfils the idea of the beautiful Austrian woman.

But precisely the prize-winning portrait does not meet all expectations, and thus this 'Elida competition' can be dubbed the Award of the Impotent Negation of All Female Beauty. These words are not even the harshest judgement one may make.

The panel of judges included Ferd. Andri, Rud. Zacher, the poet Ginzkey, Hanns Kropff, Artur Rößler (who must have been appalled by the decision himself), Otto Schönthal and Fritz Silberbauer.

H.S.



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