

Co-founded by Josef Hoffmann and Koloman Moser, the *Wiener Werkstätte* (1903–1932) branded itself as a luxury goods producer specializing in finely-crafted objects that would create a harmonious fusion of art, architecture and design.<sup>1</sup> While the firm was continually dogged by condemnation of its elitist pretensions, the socio-economic crisis following the Great War prompted a shift in conceptualizing and critically assessing WW luxury. In the postwar era, the WW marketed luxury less on the precious, unadorned materials that had defined its early years, but a ‘feminine’ ornamental style shaped by the women flooding the workshops during the war, as well as an engagement with the creative possibilities of inexpensive materials. Even as designs remained rooted in functionalism, the *Kunstgewerbeweiber* (applied arts gals) dominating the WW created decorative objects conveying an expressive *Formwille* (will-to-form) beyond objects’ ostensible function: bold experimentations in the expressive possibilities of craft. But growing critical sentiments that expressive objects and the broader decorative arts movement were nothing more than frivolous luxuries rooted in the feminine drive to ornamentation framed expressionist ceramics as wasteful outlays of useful material; the modernist ‘living-machine’ demanded functional tools, not everyday objects masquerading as art. Critics such as Hans Tietze, Armand Weiser and Arthur Roessler agreed that it was ‘pampered, feminine hands’ responsible for the lighthearted useless trifles dominating applied arts exhibitions in times of utmost crisis.<sup>2</sup> So entwined was the association of feminine luxury with the firm’s corporate identity that one of its detractors re-branded the well-known ‘WW’ logo as the ‘*Wiener Weiberkunst*’ (Viennese Wenches Art): a gesture opening the floodgates to Adolf Loos’s slanderous ‘*Wiener Weh*’ (Viennese Woe) lecture of April 1927. Loos famously attributed the WW’s proliferation of frivolous luxuries to its ‘painting, embroidering, ceramic-making valuable material-wasting dilettante daughters of senior civil servants [...] who regard craft as a way of making pocket change before walking down the aisle’.<sup>3</sup>

This essay examines the nexus of gender, luxury and frivolity in criticism surrounding WW expressionist ceramics. The roughly-modeled, unevenly glazed and brightly painted ceramic vessels and sculptures created by WW female artists were interpreted by critics as lighthearted frivolous diversions from the privations of the postwar period. Despite the inexpensive earthenware used, critics indexed the new ceramics as luxuriously forsaking utility for personal expression. Of particular attention to critics were the unusual sculptural *Frauenköpfe* (women’s heads) created by artists like Vally Wieselthier (1895–1945) and Gudrun Baudisch (1907–1982). Exploiting the expressive possibilities of clay, the heads were notable for their formal asymmetries and imperfections; unevenly

applied bright glazes and applied decoration; and painted decoration of the faces as to look artificially made-up, in an almost child-like fashion. Such ceramic sculpture met with much ambivalence by critics for using vessel-based methods of construction to create luxurious objects that were neither wholly functional nor artistic, and, much like women's fashions, doomed to obsolescence. Occupying an uneasy no-man's land between art and craft, widespread hostility surrounded such attempts to transport female «craftiness» into the realm of fine art. As one male critic concluded; «ceramic sculpture can not really be a bearer of ideas [...] playing with the forms of plastic expression [...] is no different than the moods of a beautiful woman».<sup>4</sup> Yet it seems that the joke may have been on the critics, for such ceramic sculpture provocatively blurred the boundary between the decorative and the meaningful, the useful and ornamental, and the trivial and monumental. To their female creators, expressionist ceramics were hardly a luxury but an essential way of expressing their discontent with a discourse that viewed their production, as Loos suggested, as a frivolous diversion from women's true calling as wife and mother. In the spirit of the interdisciplinary «turn to the object» – a movement applying the same methods of theoretical and formal analysis routinely employed on painting and sculpture to objects whose material status has precluded them from study – this essay frames the WW's feminine vessels as sites of feminist resistance.<sup>5</sup> Freed from utility, expressionist ceramics conveyed subversive commentaries on the artificiality and fragility of views of women as luxurious decorative objects precluded from artistic originality and professionalism. The WW *Kunstgewerbeweib* defended the luxury of expressionism in craft against critics striving to collapse her work with the long-held trope of women/luxury/ornament: or, as Thorstein Veblen surmised, the idea of woman as chief ornament of the household she beautifies through conspicuous consumption.<sup>6</sup>

### The WW as Luxury Brand

The explosion of expressionist ceramics in the postwar period, along with the WW's Neo-Rococo ornamentalism, is commonly viewed by design historians as a feminized negation of the masculine functionalism of the WW's early purist phases: the celebrated *Quadratstil* (little-square style) characterizing projects like the Purkersdorfer Sanatorium (1904–06) and early Hoffmann/Moser metalwork designs. Indeed, reflecting its intellectual origins in the philosophies of the English Arts and Craft Movement and the model of C. A. Ashbee's Guild of Handcraft that Hoffmann and Moser toured in 1902, the idea for the Vienna Workshops (established in May 1903) was initially limited to metalwork, but by October expanded to encompass leatherwork, bookbinding, cabinetmaking and an architectural office. Hoffmann and Moser explained in the WW «Working Program» of 1904 that principles of *Material-* und *Zweckmässigkeit* (suitability of material and purpose) were paramount for modern design; decorative elements were to be derived from constructive principles, only appearing when not precluded by material or form. Thus, against the grain of what Moser termed «the Makart-Style with its trinkets, false imitation and dusty bouquets», the WW's visually-arresting style appealed to haute-bourgeoisie clients seeking to increase their intellectual and cultural capital through consumption of objects bearing the firm's WW trademark.<sup>7</sup> Curator Siegfried Mattl summarizes the meaning of

the firm's stylized 'WW logo' and pioneering role in creating a distinct corporate identity by means of unified design principles in exhibition design, graphics, showroom furnishings, and advertisements (even down to invoices and packing paper) as symbolizing «a magical aura [...] artificially created in the world of consumer goods».<sup>8</sup> Exemplified by such *Gesamtkunstwerk* marketing principles, the distinct aesthetic appeal of WW objects lay in quality design, materials, and painstaking craftsmanship bearing not the stamp of the machine but the spirit of their creator. That WW objects bore the monograms not only of the artist-designer but executing craftsman constituted a revolutionary measure speaking to its founders' social aims of spiritualizing handwork and leveling the boundary between art and craft.

Yet the cross-pollination of ideas between Vienna, London, and Glasgow remained artistic; the WW's founders were hardly committed to the radical socio-democratic ideals of Ruskin, Morris and Ashbee. Rather, the WW's social reforms were limited to improved working conditions such as pleasant, hygienic workshops in which scolding and cursing was forbidden, extended benefits and fairer pay; and a symbolic, if not socio-economic, equality between craftsman and artist. It was the WW's commitment to quality craftsmanship which anchored the firm within the tradition of Viennese luxury handcraft, making its products far beyond the means of those who produced them. The luxurious, elite character of artistic production was determined not by material alone, for the WW advocated the use of less-precious materials such as semi-precious stones in jewelry-making, but by meticulous, time-consuming craftsmanship.<sup>9</sup> As critic and Werkbund protagonist Joseph Lux summarized its working philosophies in 1905; «Better to work on an object ten days than to produce ten objects in a day».<sup>10</sup> In this regard, the firm remained, in the words of art historian Heather Hess, «unapologetically elitist».<sup>11</sup> The WW distrusted the anonymity of serial production *a priori*; throughout its history it emphasized artistic ambition at the expense of socio-economic practicality. The idea that «w[e] cannot and will not compete with cheapness» aptly summarizes its founders' attitudes towards luxury consumption.<sup>12</sup>

The example of postwar expressionist ceramics calls into question the conventional periodization between the WW's early and later phases in which postwar output was condemned for its frivolous decorative qualities, functioning to meet the insatiable luxury demands of women and war profiteers. Readily absorbed in the secondary literature, the implication is that both groups – the latter, given the WW's largely Jewish clientage, likely referring to stereotypes of the Jewish male profiteer – are to be blamed for the sudden proliferation of ostentatious luxury goods during a period of material shortages. That the new luxuriousness demanded by the postwar nouveau-riche somehow betrayed the more discerning tastes of its original client base, succumbing to a decorative 'false luxury' little better than the historical imitations Moser condemned, is misleading on many fronts. The WW had positioned itself as a luxury goods producer from the onset despite its democratic aims of solving the 'social question' of labor. Moreover, despite the fact that its early geometric style appeared more functional, the WW's early brand of 'inconspicuous' conspicuous consumption was every bit as indicative of the artistic ambitions of both maker and consumer as in the interwar period. Such apparent incongruities, added to Hoffmann's proclivity for formal invention, contributed to architectural historian Friedrich Achleitner's



1 Vally Wieselthier, *Vase*, earthenware, ca. 1926, *DKD* 1926/27, vol. 59, p. 60

description of the WW's history as «proceeding by paradox», an appraisal aptly describing the «essential» nature of feminine luxury.<sup>13</sup> That is, while the clean masculine lines of the WW's early period stood in stylistic opposition to nineteenth-century historicism and the sinuous *Jugendstil*, «in detail it was even more artistic, pretentious, and exclusive» and routinely included non-functional decorative elements that expressed designers' «artistic attitude[s]».<sup>14</sup> Hence, even as aesthetically, a Wieselthier Vase [Fig. 1] from 1926, revealing an exuberant engagement with the process of making and spontaneous application of glaze, represents a radical departure from the cool restraint and geometricity of early Hoffmann design, there is much more in common between these two phases of the WW's output than design historians have traditionally been willing to concede: namely, the WW's undying commitment to individual creative expression in the

applied arts. That the particular character of Viennese handcraft lay not in serial mass production, e. g. the standardization advocated by the German Werkbund, but in a unique language of form reflecting the individual character of the maker is an aspect of the *Werkstätte's* philosophy that is often suppressed in favor of fitting the WW's early designs into the canon of an International Modernism focused on formal simplification and functionalism. Hence, as the creative possibilities of the geometric style were exhausted, Hoffmann's embrace of individual creative expression in the applied arts set the stage for a postwar expressive *Formwille* manifested most profoundly in a field pioneered by women: the New Viennese Ceramics.

### **Feminine Vessels: The New Viennese Ceramics**

Part and parcel of its postwar ornamental style, expressionist ceramics represented a particularly female innovation within the WW. Indeed, while bitterly divided on the propriety of such ceramics to the postwar crisis, critics agreed that «the female element» defined this uniquely Viennese movement.<sup>15</sup> These «feminine vessels» encompassing both functional objects and small-scale figural sculpture, were characterized by formal irregularity and asymmetry, spontaneous processes of design and brightly-colored glazes, and frequent discordance between form and exuberant surface decoration conveying energy and movement. The New Viennese Ceramics' use of willful, playful and dynamic surface decoration on unusual forms, in addition to the frequency of contemporary and classicized female subjects in figuration, elicited frequent critical allusions to a Rococo aesthetic, in which, as one critic observed, «woman was unfailingly and exclusively the goal of all activity».<sup>16</sup> As another reviewer described the specifically feminine, Rococo attitude towards the material that eschewed the potter's typical concerns for smooth finish and polished form: a «free voluptuous handling [of clay] is the known specialty of the New Viennese Ceramics. The connection to the formal language of the Rococo is not coincidental, for they share the same uninhibited, playful, sensuous spirit».<sup>17</sup> Yet unlike the 18<sup>th</sup> century, woman was both object and subject, creator and destroyer of the fragile female image. Such feminine vessels' cultivation of surface embellishment and playful Rococo themes destabilized the discursive formula by which critics neutralized these startlingly-innovative objects as merely superficial playthings. Here, the sentiments of critic Armand Weiser exemplify this trivializing formula: «[t]hat it is female hands who create these amiable playthings, just as almost all ceramics in Vienna comes from women, takes the sting off such artistic production».<sup>18</sup> The critical nexus of gender, luxury and frivolity surrounding expressionist ceramics reveals critics' broader stances not only on utility and expressionism in the applied arts, but the possibility that these «feminine vessels», with their pretensions to pure artistic expressionism on par with painting or sculpture, could shatter the women's art stereotype as a negative against which male artists sustained their dominance.

The fruits of the WW's new ceramics workshop debuted at its 1917 Christmas Exhibition. A reviewer for Viennese daily *Neue Freie Presse* observed how «a group of young artists [...] have achieved something astonishing; nothing schoolish holds back their work, they have developed a uniqueness of their own».<sup>19</sup> The reviewer alluded to the movement's roots in the progressive teaching methods,

e.g. the interdisciplinary workshop principle experimentation and truth to materials, of the Austrian *Kunstgewerbeschule* (KGS). With few exceptions, WW *Kunstgewerbeweiber* trained with Hoffmann, Moser, and Michael Powolny: the ceramic artist responsible for the Secessionist renaissance of ceramic figuration around 1900. Yet, unlike Powolny's sentimentalized putti and nostalgic crinoline figures catering to conventional tastes, his female students' works were emotionally charged and formally provocative. Critically linked to the KGS and WW Ceramics Workshop were the *Künstlerische Werkstätte* [KW, founded 1913], which Wieselhier later called of Hoffmann's «most genial ideas».<sup>20</sup> Attracting women in large numbers during the war, the KW offered young artists the chance to experiment freely in various materials, unencumbered by concerns of utility or commercialism. Significantly, the KW constituted a female space in which an atmosphere of collegiality and creative exchange prevailed. One KW member reported that her colleagues' violent rejection of their bourgeois upbringings – manifested in their masculine habits of smoking, drinking and «having as many sexual experiences as possible» – was crucial to understanding the figurines' erotic and lesbian undertones.<sup>21</sup> The same individual interpreted the frivolous themes of wartime craft, i. e. proclivities for «things graceful, towards cheeriness and lightness», as an escape from wartime privations.<sup>22</sup>

The new ceramics received wider press at the Museum for Art and Industry's 1919/20 Winter Exhibition and the 1920 *Kunstschau*, famously called «a commemoration of the dead and a celebration of the living».<sup>23</sup> Dominated by the WW, above all by Dagobert Peche and the ceramicists, the 1920 *Kunstschau* provided a panoramic overview of contemporary arts and crafts in the spirit of the 1908 *Kunstschau*. Viewed as provocatively flirting between artifice and expression, the decorative and the meaningful, function and utility, the new ceramics took center stage at the 1920 show. The central issue for most critics was, to quote Viennese art historian Hans Tietze, whether «applied arts is a phenomenon that stands on equal terms next to high art, only differentiated through materials and technique, or a perverse connection of art and industry, neither one nor the other in essence».<sup>24</sup> Given the gravity of the postwar socio-economic crisis, reviewers remained at odds. Tietze found the exhibition's lighthearted «ornamental soap-bubbles» to be the product of an «unhealthy hothouse environment» divorced from the social spirit of the present.<sup>25</sup> The idea of non-functional, autonomous handcrafts trumped even the decadence of fin-de-siècle *l'art pour l'art* and bespoke a broader crisis in Austrian art: namely, the entire exhibition was a blasphemous *schwarze Messe* (black Sabbath) paying cult to the ghosts of the past rather than the future. Socialist critic Arthur Roessler concurred with Tietze that it was time that Austrian handcraft proceed along more rational, standardized lines: everyday objects should be functional and masculine rather than representational and feminine. To ignore the democratic spirit of the present demanding affordable objects for the working classes, he insinuated, wasted precious material and intellectual effort. He proceeded to condemn the frivolity of the applied arts and ceramic section as «hav[ing] hardly any intellectual value to the present, certainly none the future: however appealing and pretty, playfully whimsical and wittily they have been formed, they are altogether overburdened by lavishness and ostentation»<sup>26</sup> But not all critics unanimously panned free expression in the applied arts. Ludwig Steinmetz, a crucial supporter of the

expressive possibilities of clay, praised young artists' work in inexpensive materials like paper, wax, and clay as an innovative response to material shortages. Expressionist ceramics spoke to the idea that «not only is the brush the muse-hal- lowed tool of high art [...] wood, clay, glass, and mosaic are capable of artistically embodying an idea».<sup>27</sup> Even as female ceramicists' destabilization of the border between the fine and applied arts was heralded by progressive critics like Steinmetz, their feminine vessels riled misogynist critics like Roeßler and Weiser: women and their work were meant to be decorative and domestic, not monumental and meaningful.

It is only fitting that the critical controversy peaked at an exhibition synony- mous with the luxury debate: the 1925 *Exposition Internationale des Arts Déco- ratifs et Industriels Modernes* in Paris. WW ceramicists received pride of place in Hoffmann's designs for the Austrian Pavilion; this, on top of the WW's predomi- nantly female exhibitors, was a situation that WW critics exploited. The critical fallout surrounding the Austrian Pavilion was a crucial flash point for shifting defi- nitions of luxury in the interwar era: how the very notion of decorative art in- creasingly came under fire as a superfluous, retrograde luxury that should yield to rational, functional objects engineered for the modernist «living machine». Weiser's scathing review assailed the pavilion for sacrificing practicality in favor of a Don-Quixote-esque «striving-to-be original-at-any-price».<sup>28</sup> Hoffmann's dis- play cabinets – impractically tall floor-to-ceiling showcases behind primitively- painted paneled-glass frames – were crammed so full of goods that the objects became a background for the ornamental frames: in an ironic reversal of modern- ism's suppression of the decorative, the decorative frame became essential and the artwork secondary. But worse yet were the goods displayed. «Unfortunately, one only sees things here that are classified as luxury, a luxury [...] that has long become exorbitant and wasteful to us [...]».<sup>29</sup> Playing on deep-rooted stereotypes of female desire for luxury consumption, in no uncertain terms does Weiser hold women, both as makers and consumers, responsible for these frivolous goods «which could only belong to a lady's boudoir».<sup>30</sup> The architect called for a return to «simple, clear and strong masculinity guided by purpose» in place of the «tainted fantasies» of «spoiled women's hands».<sup>31</sup> In another review chastising the Viennese aversion towards «hard-nosed functionalism, strict sobriety and pure construction», Roeßler likewise summoned the engineer to produce func- tional, affordable objects for the working classes: not an effeminate «false luxury» de-sexing robust male workers.<sup>32</sup> Questions of gender, consumption and the new expressionist ceramics were central to broader debates on Viennese applied arts and whether its traditional strength in finely-crafted luxury objects was relevant to the times. Here, it deserves emphasis that the luxurious nature of the ceramics shown in Paris was found less in precious materials or excessive expenditure of labor but an over-exaggerated artistic freedom that critics believed suffocated functionality; e. g. in Wieselthier's elaborate X-shaped ceramic oven which was judged wholly unsuitable to the purpose of heating. To critics like Roeßler and Weiser, favoring the sort of modernist «living machines» within reach of all classes, decorative arts and artistic ceramics embodied a logical fallacy: the mod- ern artifact was a rationally-engineered tool, neither decorative nor artistic.

The capstone of the debate on luxury and the applied arts was Loos's infam- ous «Wiener Weh» lecture, held in Vienna's Musikverein in April 1927. Sympto-

matic of how deeply the Viennese were invested in the *Edelarbeit* (luxury handcraft) question, the lecture drew large, boisterous crowds in a heated atmosphere where «it seemed likely that the Loosians and the WWers might pull each other's hair out».<sup>33</sup> Accompanied by slides of works shown in Paris, reportedly including ceramic vases, between the shouts and catcalls of the audience Loos sounded off what he had been «speaking into the void» for over twenty years: that the entire *Kunsth Handwerk* (arts-and-craft) movement was an impure mixture of art and craft and that pretentious artist-designers prostituted the eternal work of art by making it useful. «Poor is the rich man who, at every moment, must walk on «art», must hold «art», must lie and sit on «art»».<sup>34</sup> Like Weiser and Roeßler, Loos held the WW's female designers – whom he castigated, as on page one, as «valuable material wasting dilettante daughters» – responsible for the rise of frivolous luxury goods.<sup>35</sup> Yet, despite the fact that all three viewed the decorative arts movement as a form of impure luxury, Loos opposed it on different grounds: namely, whereas Weiser and Roeßler opposed luxury goods on principle, Loos strove to save quality Austrian *Edelarbeit* from the clutches of women, who, he believed, would taint the craftsman's honest products through their in-born drive to ornamentation. That he reportedly voiced the idea that «[t]he modern spirit is a social spirit, modern objects cannot be produced only for a snobby elite, but for everyman» reveals the characteristically contradictory nature of Loosian thought.<sup>36</sup> That is, while simultaneously serving as chief architect of Red Vienna's socialist housing project (*Siedlungsamt*) from 1921 to 1924, Loos never aimed to banish luxury from modern architecture in the root-and-branch way that Weiser and Roeßler did. Rather, as true luxury was found in «[unornamented] quality materials and solid workmanship», Loos believed the highly-gestural surfaces of expressionist ceramics made a mockery of true luxury and honest craft.<sup>37</sup> Despite their differing stances on the appropriateness of luxury to the postwar crisis, all three critics similarly regarded expressionist ceramics as an impure mixture of art and craft and, by unnecessarily integrating art into everyday artifacts, a frivolous expenditure of time and material. But what these male critics necessarily regarded as a frivolous luxury was viewed by their female makers as an essential and autonomous work of art.

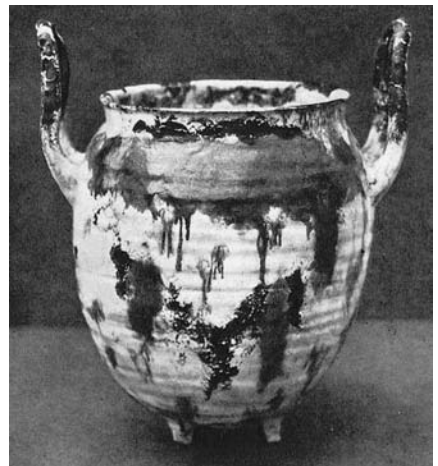
In spite of Loos's crusade, the New Viennese Ceramics and their expressive *Formwille* were defended by critics favorably inclined to the applied arts movement. To critics who viewed them as conceived by the same elevated sensations undergirding painting, expressionist ceramics resisted characterization as luxury. In fact, by 1923, even the initially-skeptical Tietze moderated his views to describe the new ceramics as «arresting [...] in which women command a very remarkable language of form [...] and extraordinary rhythmic momentum».<sup>38</sup> This dynamic formal language, referencing both the high Rococo and primitive folk art, was animated by an expressive will-to-form, or *Formwille*, analyzed by pro-WW critics like Steinmetz and Leopold Rochowanski. In an article accompanied by an illustration of an earthenware display vase (Fig. 1) made by Wieselhthier, Steinmetz argued that ceramic objects, when animated by intense yet abstract feelings and sensations, had the capacity to aspire to monumentality. The expressive possibilities of clay depended on the intensity of an expressive impulse which, while simultaneously fulfilling an object's function, was not conceived out of «cold reason» or «pure geometrical construction» but «born of an exhilarating, im-



aginative conception imprinted on the object that lives on eternally as an animated energy in the obtained form».<sup>39</sup> Yet this organic will-to-form was not pure fantasy but bound to the willfulness and spontaneity of the material. Wieselthier, often regarded as the most innovative of the WW ceramicists, admitted that «only when I feel what can be built at the wheel can I design a form».<sup>40</sup>

The display vase in Fig. 1 exemplifies Wieselthier's privileging of gesture, spontaneity, and a sense of Rococo playfulness: altogether, an apt example of a *Formwille* that was functional, expressive and seen to be redolent of its maker's femininity. Excitement about process and spontaneity lends the object an effervescence that is characteristic of her work. Much of the object's visual interest is found in the tension between its formal classicizing shape (a baluster shaped vase on a tapered conical base) and the seemingly casual, even accidental nature of its painted surface decoration and overglaze. Typical of her work from the period, the artist interrupts the vase's unitary surface through the staccato rhythms of a fragmentary abstract ornament, adding further tension through curlicued and dolphin-form handles that were more aesthetic than functional: the light, playful Rococo flourishes which delighted – and horrified – critics. Underlining all of this was gestural bravura: the characteristic nonchalance with which brightly colored glazes were applied and left to drip down the vase's surface. As she explained, «I lay absolutely no weight on a smooth, monochrome glaze, free of hairline-cracks, rather I mix glaze in all possible combination and let the fire reign».<sup>41</sup> What functionalist critics regarded as a frivolous luxury – expressivity in craft – Wieselthier defended as an essential form of art-making. Considering the *Frauenköpfe*'s subversive thrust, it is all the more ironic that contemporary sales catalogues marketed them as «delivering everything for outfitting the house and adorning the lady».<sup>42</sup>

Drawing inspiration less from the Rococo than rustic archaic forms, similar tendencies toward formal and gestural expressivity can be observed in Hertha Bucher's work, as illustrated in a vase [Fig. 2] whose form «seemed to be born of the waves [...] and [...] weep the vivid colors of the deep».<sup>43</sup> Like Wieselthier, the expressivity enlivening Bucher's pots situated them as luxury handcraft: or, as Loos had it, unnecessarily artistic. The disturbed, gestural surface of the green



2 Hertha Bucher, *Original Ceramic*, earthenware, ca. 1928, *DKD*, 1928, vol. 62, p. 403



3 Hertha Bucher, *Broken-Through Flower Pot*, earthenware ca. 1925, *DKD*, 1925, vol. 56, p. 348

sea-foam vase, a loose interpretation of Greek forms crowned with lyriiform-horned handles evocative of Minoan palace society, was unusual within Bucher's oeuvre. Whereas a tense dialogue between form, surface ornament and glaze enlivened Wieselthier's output, in Bucher's work formal concerns trumped color and ornament to emphasize objects' plasticity. Typical of Bucher, who specialized less in figuration than architectural ceramics, was integration of form and ornament in her strongly-rhythmic «broken-through» style pottery [Fig. 3]. As Wolfgang Born noted: «[t]he artist loves to break through the surface, like a net [...] dissolving into ornamental weaving».<sup>44</sup> The subtle asymmetry of

Bucher's «Broken-Through Flower Pot» expressed the musicality of a syncopated rhythm that ebbed and flowed like the pounding of a wave. The strong sense of movement driving Bucher's work bears the stamp of her studies with Franz Cizek: the famous discoverer of «child art» whose pedagogy explored the expressive use of ornament. Synthesizing developments in Expressionism, Cubism, and Constructivism, Cizek's Ornamental Forms course at the KGS became the nexus of Viennese Kinetism: an attitude of creative experimentation in which students produced applied arts designs conveying feelings and sensations of simultaneity, dynamism and automatism. In an abstract, non-representational manner, Bucher's formal language reflected a dynamic energy capturing the momentum of contemporary life. The artist's signature style, with its earthy tones and solid construction, troubled critical tendencies to collapse the new ceramics with feminine frivolity. So strong was Bucher's mastery of form and composition that critics expressed discomfort with the sharp lines and crude finish of her pots, instead preferring the daintiness of her porcelain designs. Weiser recommended porcelain, with its smooth finish and delicate opaque glaze, as «the correct means of expression for her tender [...] coquettish ideas».<sup>45</sup> Vexing male critics with its masculine strength, Bucher's cubist-inspired style set her work apart from her colleagues' feminine, Rococo-inspired aesthetic. Yet all shared the commonality of questioning a discourse which categorized women and their expressive pots as impure and frivolous creatures of luxury.

### Wiener Weiberkunst: WW Rebranded

By way of conclusion, I turn to the unique *Frauenköpfe*: undeniably the most provocative objects emanating from the Ceramics Workshop. Frequently portraying contemporary but also mythological female archetypes, *Frauenköpfe* were first produced after the war by WW ceramicists: notably, by Wieselthier and her protégé Gudrun Baudisch, who joined the WW in 1926 as Wieselthier's apprentice. Individual approaches varied, but the heads tended to be linked by certain formal characteristics: elongated necks and long, languid faces with almond shaped eyes and stylized eyebrows; garish painted «makeup» applied in a haphazard, child-like manner; light clay slips and overglazes revealing the red earthenware below; and applied hand-modeled decorations, e.g. stylized hair and fashion accessories. With short bobbed hair and boyish appearances, the *Köpfe* portrayed the interwar flapper while referencing the light fashionability of the Rococo; to WW critics, such decorative baubles epitomized narcissistic feminine luxury. Notably, the heads were made using the Viennese style of «inside out» modeling: formed from within to without using vessel-based techniques at the wheel. Fig. 4 illustrates two characteristic examples by Baudisch which carry Wieselthier's stylistic tendencies to an extreme in terms of their exaggerated elongation; the faces' languid, vacuous expressions; stylized abstract surface and three-dimensional decoration; and, most strikingly the heads' cropped plasticity (or abrupt vertical slicing lending the heads a mask-like quality). Even as they were fascinated by the heads' turbulent formal choppiness, seemingly on the verge of «bringing out of a certain mental expression», critics were puzzled by the meaning of these provocative, seductive objects with no function beyond pure aestheticism.<sup>46</sup> Not coincidentally, press articles compared the heads to fashion mannequins. Were such heads superficial play without deeper meaning,



4 Gudrun Baudisch, *Heads*, earthenware, ca. 1929, *DKD*, 1929, vol. 64, p. 187

just as hollow as the Rococo was to Diderot and Rousseau? Did such heads feed the all-consuming luxury of a class of women secretly hoping to imitate the likes of eighteenth-century tastemakers like Mme. de Pompadour? Or was the expressivity of such objects nothing more than a trick «playing with the forms of expressive creation [...] like the moods of a beautiful woman»?<sup>47</sup>

Although Bucher rarely made such heads, it is necessary to return to the discussion of the materiality of Bucher's «masculine» style to unravel the preceding question. Weiser found Bucher's porcelain designs preferable to her earthenware work because the dainty elegance of porcelain better suited its maker's gender. As literary scholar Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace has argued, porcelain was a precious luxury material loaded with gendered connotations during the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>48</sup> Like the women who frequently coveted this «white gold», porcelain was graceful, delicate and flawless: the epitome of polished aesthetic perfection and a trope for femininity. Yet, like socio-cultural gender ideals, porcelain was valueless until molded into shape and only then a valuable but fragile commodity. Invoking the material connotations of the heads' red earthenware, typically used for objects of domestic consumption, Baudisch and Wieselthier sought to undermine a discourse that viewed women as frivolous and fragile creatures of luxury: that, as Veblen noted, their ultimate function was to ornament themselves and

the house. That the heads were heavily «made up» and insisted on their own material status as clay troubled overlapping discourses of art making, femininity and Rococo artifice: the heads' declarative artificiality (uneven, heavy-handed orange-and-blue «makeup») was a self-reflexive gesture playing with notions of the Rococo face painting and the feminine arts of appearance. Indeed, in satirizing and, like Baudisch, visually shattering, such images of feminine artifice, the *Frauenköpfe* can be best understood in the tradition of ceramic caricature: parodying Rococo superficiality by which such objects and their makers were dismissed as mere ornament. That, for many critics, the heads seemed to engage in playful antics, remaining entirely at the level of surface, was a destabilizing tactic which served to undermine conventional definitions of women's art as necessarily reproductive and derivative of what men created. That the peak of *Frauenköpfe* output came at a time when the WW was facing increasing attacks for producing luxury objects that, in the words of Julius Klinger, were «affected, overdone, mannered, titillating, false, inauthentic [...] in a word [...] *Wiener Weiberkunst*» was not accidental.<sup>49</sup> Rather, as critics like Roeßler were more interested in «what women are, than what they make», the *Frauenköpfe* played on critical expectations that women's strongest artistic talent lay in fields in which she decorated herself.<sup>50</sup> Rebuffing Roeßler's ideas that women artists needed men for creative insemination, the WW's provocative feminine vessels pushed the boundary between the masculine and feminine; decorative and meaningful; and the limits of art and craft. At a time when the very notion of the decorative arts was equated with frivolous feminine ornamentation, the WW's feminine vessels staked out as essential what critics disparaged as luxury.

## Notes

- 1 WW will be used as an abbreviation for Wiener Werkstätte.
- 2 Armand Weiser, «Der österreichische Pavillon», in: *Neues Wiener Tagblatt*, 2 July 1925, p. 7.
- 3 Karl Grimme, «Keramiken von Gudrun Baudisch», in: *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration [DKD]*, 1929, vol. 61, p. 310.
- 4 Adolf Loos, «Ich- der bessere Österreicher», in: *Kontroversen*, ed. by Adolf Opel, 1985, Vienna, p. 100.
- 5 Michael Yonan, «Towards a Fusion of Art History and Material Culture Studies», in: *West 86<sup>th</sup>*, 2011, vol. 18, no. 2. p. 232–248.
- 6 Thorstein Veblen, *Theory of the Leisure Class*, 1899, New York.
- 7 Koloman Moser, «Mein Werdegang», in: *Koloman Moser: 1868–1918*, ed. by Oswald Oberhuber, Vienna 1979, p. 9.
- 8 Siegfried Mattl, «Style as a Market Strategy», in: *The Wiener Werkstätte and the Stoclet House*, ed. by Peter Noever, 2006, Vienna, p. 16.
- 9 The key document to understanding the firm's stance on luxury production stems from the pen of Fritz Waerndorfer, the wealthy industrialist who served as the firm's financial backer until 1914, in which he forwarded Charles Rennie Mackintosh's sentiments on the venture. Waerndorfer reported that Mackintosh found the Viennese scheme to establish metal workshops most excellent and that its finely-crafted products should bear a «distinctive mark of individuality, beauty and exacting execution». While the workshops could initially focus on commission-based production for the elite, after the workshops had proven successful financially and artistically, the venture should transition to production for the masses; Mackintosh optimistically forecasted that such tasteful well-designed everyday objects would not only be within the means of the average worker, but that his hypothetical worker would be forced to purchase such objects, as tasteless mass-produced goods would be driven out of the market. Fritz Waerndorfer to Josef Hoffmann, 17 March 1903. Archiv der Universität f. angewandte Kunst, Wien, Inv. Nr. 3999.
- 10 Joseph Lux, «WW», in: *DKD*, 1905, vol. 15, p. 8.
- 11 Heather Hess, «The WW and the Reform Impulse», in: *Producing Fashion: Commerce, Culture and Consumers*, Regina Blaszczyk, ed., 2009, Philadelphia, p. 111.
- 12 «Arbeitsprogramm der WW», in: *Hohe Warte*, 1904, vol. 1, p. 268.
- 13 Friedrich Achleitner, «The Österreichischer Werkbund», in: *Werkbund: History and Ideology 1907–33*, ed. by Lucius Burckhardt, 1980, New York, p. 104.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 Otto Pelka, *Keramik der Neuzeit*, 1924, Leipzig, p. 195.
- 16 Weiser, «Zu den Keramiken Vally Wieselthier», in: *Die Kunst*, 1925, vol. 52, p. 179.
- 17 L.F. «Wiener Werkstätte», in: *DKD*, 1926/1927, vol. 59, p. 259.
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 «Kunstaussstellung der WW», in: *NFP*, 4. Dezember 1917, Nr. 19141, p. 8.
- 20 Vally Wieselthier, «Biography of Miss Vally Wieselthier» [Manuscript], p. 3.
- 21 Marianne Leisching, *Berichte über die WW*, 1959, Amsterdam, p. 26.
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 Hans Ankwicz-Kleehoven, *Ausstellung von Arbeiten des Modernen. Öst. Kunsthandwerks*, 1923, Vienna, p. 25.
- 24 Hans Tietze, «Wiener Kunstschau 1920», in: *Kunstchronik u. Kunstmarkt*, 1920, vol. 35, p. 893.
- 25 Ibid.
- 26 Arthur Roeßler, «Kunstschau, Kunstgewerbeschule, WW und Öst. Werkbund», in: *Die Wage*, 2 October 1920, p. 15.
- 27 Ludwig Steinmetz, «Wiener Kunstschau 1920», in: *Kunst u. Kunsthandwerk*, 1920, vol. 23, p. 199.
- 28 Weiser, «Der Österreichische Pavillon», p. 7.
- 29 Ibid.
- 30 Ibid.
- 31 Ibid.
- 32 Roeßler, «Österreichs Kunsthandwerk in Wiener Künstlerhaus», in: *Österreichs Bau- und Werkkunst*, 1927, vol. 3, p. 79.
- 33 «Eine kunstgewerbliche Massenversammlung», in: *Kontroversen*, p. 90.
- 34 Ibid.
- 35 As fn. 2.
- 36 «Eine kunstgewerbliche Massenversammlung», p. 90.
- 37 Loos, «Hands Off!» in: *Trotzdem*, 1982, Vienna, p. 134
- 38 Tietze, «Unser Kunsthandwerk», in: *NWT* 30 Sept. 1923, no. 269, p. 9.
- 39 Steinmetz, «Neue Kunstwerke der WW», in: *DKD*, 1926/27, vol. 59, p. 61.
- 40 Wieselthier, «Der Reiz der Keramik», in: *Innendekoration* 1925, Vol. 36, no. 4, p. 151.
- 41 Ibid.
- 42 WW Verkaufskatalog, 1928, Wien, n. p.
- 43 Wolfgang Born, «Hertha Buchers Keramische Arbeiten», in: *DKD*, 1928, vol. 62, p. 398.
- 44 Ibid., p. 397.
- 45 Weiser, «Zu den Arbeiten von Hertha Bucher», in: *DKD* 1925, vol. 56 p. 330.
- 46 Grimme, 1929, p. 175.
- 47 Ibid.

- 48** Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace, *Consuming Subjects: Women, Shopping and Business in the Eighteenth Century*, 1997, New York, pp. 52–69.
- 49** Julius Klinger, «Ein angenehmer Gast», in: *Das Tribunal* 12 May 1927, no. 140, p. 10.
- 50** Roeßler, «Die Frauen u. die Kunst», in: *Sticker-Zeitung u. Spitzen-Revue*, 1914, vol. 17, no. 7, p. 179.