

The Birth of Expressionist Ceramics

“Crafty Women” and the Interwar Feminization of the Applied Arts

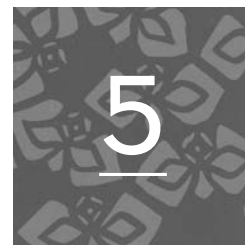
To prefer ornamentation is to put oneself on the level of the Red Indian. But we must seek to overcome the Red Indian within us. The Indian says, “This woman is beautiful because she has gold rings in her nose and ears!” The culturally advanced person says, “This woman is beautiful because she has no rings in her nose and ears.”

—ADOLF LOOS, 1898

I cannot let what has been said for Beethoven’s works apply to girls making paper boxes . . . the applied arts, as practiced in many circles, is a substitute for craft and a substitute for art, an unhealthy and hermaphroditic creature.

—HANS TIETZE, 1920

Klimt prophesized that his comrades would part ways after the 1908 *Kunstschau*.¹ Focused less on *Zweckkunst* than contemporary painting, the next year’s *Internationale Kunstschau* marked the Klimt group’s last major undertaking and was a crucial breakthrough for a younger generation of expressionists rejecting the decorative aestheticism of the secessionist *Gesamtkunstwerk* ideal. Most notoriously, Kokoschka, whom Hevesi likened to the “chief wild man” of 1908’s “chamber of savages,” premiered his expressionist drama, *Murderer, Hope of Women*, an archetypal battle of the sexes portraying the perennial antitheses between male and female, love and violence, and creation and destruction.² Informed by the incised tattooing of Polynesian masks in Vienna’s Ethnographic Museum, Kokoschka painted sinews, nerves, and tendons onto scantily clad actors.³ In opposition to *Murderer*’s misogynistic violence, Klimt’s painting *Hope II* (1907)—a quiet image of an expectant mother whose protruding belly is covered by



a protective ornamental fill of gold and crimson ellipses—also debuted at the 1909 *Kunstschau*, expressing the Klimt group's continued faith in the regenerative powers of women and youth. Yet with its emphasis on painting over decorative art, the 1909 *Internationale Kunstschau* marked “an explosive reassertion of painting as the medium of instinctual truth.”⁴ The younger generation's decisive rejection of the decorative façade and insistence on the supremacy of easel painting amounted to nothing less than a concerted effort by the practitioners and critics of Austrian expressionism to establish clearer boundaries between masculine and feminine artistic practices, the fine and applied arts, and psychic interiority and decorative superficiality.⁵ This chapter reveals how the leading protagonists of expressionist painting represented the most outspoken opponents of the field of Viennese expressionist ceramics: a crucial flashpoint when Viennese modernism turned on its decorative, feminized roots.

The post-1908 antidecorative backlash constituted a reaction against the Klimt group's valorization of feminine decoration and the anxieties surrounding the increased presence of women artists in secessionist Vienna's mainstream institutional landscape, particularly a new breed of *Kunstgewerbeweiber*, trained at the WFA/KGS around the time of the 1908 *Kunstschau*, who generated as much controversy for their primitivizing design influences as for flouting social conventions through their masculine forms of self-presentation. Unlike the more gender-neutral *Kunstgewerblerin* (artist-craftswoman), the term *Kunstgewerbeweib* (literally, artist-craftswoman), was a somewhat pejorative appellation using the archaic *Weib* (woman) to emphasize the base femaleness of its referents. I prefer to translate *Kunstgewerbeweib* as “crafty woman” to emphasize the connotative dissonance surrounding the conceptual fields of woman and artist and specifically to show how these craftswomen's claims to high art entailed a sort of “crafty”—that is, calculated—scheming in the eyes of antidecorative critics. The term was used by antidecorative critics to imply that interwar Austria's applied-arts scene had become regrettably feminized through its predominately female practitioners. Large numbers of these artist-craftswomen joined the WW during World War I to create decorative objects conveying an expressive *Formwille* (will-to-form) beyond the objects' ostensible functions; the artists generated bold experimentations in the expressive possibilities of handcraft aspiring to the pure aestheticism of easel painting. Much like the fictionalized character “Elisabeth” in Joseph Roth's *Emperor's Tomb*—the third novel of a trilogy chronicling the rise and postwar demise of a military dynasty loyal to the Habsburgs—in no uncertain terms did the *Kunstgewerbeweib* and her expressive handcrafts threaten clear-cut notions of gender and sexual difference as expressed in art. According to the critic Tietze, who championed the idea that contemporary art and design should reflect a new spirit of sociodemocratic responsibility, expressive handcrafts were neither masculine nor feminine, neither art nor craft, but “an unhealthy hermaphroditic phenomenon.”⁶

Following the revisionism of Simmons, who connects the rise of expressionist psychological interiority to male anxieties about women's penetration of public art

institutions, and feminist art historians, who investigate the decorative sources of abstract painting, I argue that the post-1908 category of the decorative—which took shape in an interwar ornamental style dominated by “feminine” whimsy, playfulness, and child-art primitivism—was not supplemental but constitutive to the birth of expressionism in the applied arts.⁷ Spotting the postwar explosion of expressionist ceramics, this chapter moves thematically through lesser-known interwar exhibitions of the applied arts, investigating how the sources of child art discovered by artist-designers like Harlfinger-Zakucka at the 1908 *Kunstschau* presaged those exploited by male expressionists at the 1909 *Kunstschau*. The notion that the primitivist vision of non-Austrian artists like Vincent van Gogh and Paul Gauguin decisively influenced the 1909 expressionist breakthrough—the critical moment when, according to Schorske and his followers, a younger generation of expressionists cut through the façade of feminine ornament touted by their mentors to reveal an inner psychological truth—remains firmly rooted in the scholarly imagination.⁸ A series of recent exhibitions has reified this standard interpretation that, as Patrick Werkner puts it, “Van Gogh and Gauguin . . . became the artistic forefathers of the young Austrian painters who . . . broke with the orthodoxy of Viennese Jugendstil.”⁹ The unwittingly paternal role of Van Gogh and Gauguin as sources for the child- and folk-art influences in the work of leading Austrian expressionists reflects the desire of male expressionists to veil their decorative roots through mythologized encounters with the “other.” It also points to an even greater historiographical challenge. The unfolding of the history of art has consistently been formulated as a patrilineal genealogy of transmission or rebellion between successive male generations. To insert the idea of foremothers (or what Lisa Tickner calls a “matrilineal artistic heritage”¹⁰) into these established modes of transmission focused on father-son struggles has proven difficult, if not impossible, for art historians, critics, and artists themselves. As Johnson puts it: “The Secessionists . . . never figured themselves as wrestling with or being heirs to mothers.”¹¹

Expressionist ceramics have been written out of the history of Viennese modernism due to the distinctly unheroic medium of earthenware, a material associated with quotidian domestic usage. Its practitioners, however, drew inspiration from metaphorical notions of childhood in their rebellious attitude to ceramic tradition and liberated themselves from the medium’s historical emphasis on technical mastery. Expressionist ceramics emphasized unlearning of virtuoso ceramic technique in favor of creative spontaneity, inner expressivity, and an intuitive approach to the material. In self-reflexively conveying the maker’s excitement about process through form and color, such expressive ceramic vessels paralleled the emotional intensity of a Kokoschka or Schiele canvas, and they even, in foregrounding surface decoration as a riposte to the post-1908 antidecorative backlash, matched the performative posturing typical of expressionist artists.¹²

I use the term “feminine vessels” to describe the Viennese expressionist ceramics in order to stress how contemporary critics viewed the field in terms of a feminine

aesthetic defined by its predominately female practitioners, the overwhelming majority of whom studied with secessionist educators at the WFA or the KGS (or both) and joined Harlfinger-Zakucka's feminist collective. Featuring roughly modeled, unevenly glazed, and brightly painted ceramic vessels and figures, expressionist ceramics revealed an excitement about the spontaneity of making while wielding a "rococo primitive" design language: ornamental forms and figural subject matter juxtaposing the overly civilized femininity of the rococo with the formal distortions and rough-hewn aesthetic of the primitive. Of particular attention to critics were the unusual *Frauenköpfe* (women's heads) created by WFA graduate Wieselthier, who operated the acclaimed Vally Wieselthier Ceramics Workshops (1922–27) before becoming head of the WW's ceramics department (1927–28) and mentoring female pupils (color plate 24). Drawing on a long tradition of ceramic caricature while eschewing the potter's typical concern for smooth surfaces, Wieselthier's hollow, low-fired heads were thrown at the wheel, much like a vase or pot, in a process that itself satirized women's long-standing connection to domestic pottery.¹³ Featuring a bold use of visible cosmetics, the heads were notable for their formal asymmetries and imperfections, with faces painted so as to look deliberately "made up" in a childlike fashion.

Yet widespread anxiety surrounded the *Kunstgewerbeweib*'s hermaphroditic proclivities to elevate female "craftiness" into the realm of male expressionism. Similar to reviewers who collapsed participants in *Art for the Child* with stereotypes of female diletantism, critics likened the field of expressionist ceramics to a form of crafty seduction that, despite flirting with expressive content, ultimately collapsed back into the decorative.¹⁴ Around the new field of expressionist ceramics, two opposing critical camps drew rank: one (led by pro-WW critics like Eisler, Steinmetz, and Rochowanski) embraced the possibility of individuality in the applied arts and the expressive use of ornament; the other (including Loos, Roessler, Weiser, and Tietze) inveighed against the applied arts' supposed feminization in favor of greater rationality, functionality, and sobriety in everyday objects. In the spirit of the interdisciplinary "turn to the object"—a movement applying similar methods of theoretical and formal analysis routinely applied to painting and sculpture to objects whose material status has precluded them from study—this chapter frames Viennese expressionist ceramics as sites of feminist resistance against emerging modernist discourses on women's impure decorative aesthetics. If, as Loos argued, "to view decoration as an advantage is to stand at the level of the Red Indian," then expressionist ceramics' female progenitors willingly exploited such linkages to explore the expressive possibilities of surface decoration.¹⁵

Feminine Vessels: Viennese Expressionist Ceramics

A new generation of artist-craftswomen trained in the *Mehrfachkünstlerin* ideal pioneered the postwar explosion of expressionist ceramics. Informed by the Klimt group's

attitudes toward individual expressivity and artistic rebellion, the work of Wieselthier, Singer-Schinnerl, Hertha Bucher (1898–1960), and Baudisch explored the expressive possibilities of the decorative surface in a self-consciously feminine style. These “feminine vessels” contained a similar boundary-defying potential to the work of other female modernists that did not adhere to the Greenbergian definition of modernism—for instance, that of Florine Stettheimer (1871–1944), whose frilly, feminine style might have appeared anything but controversial but was loaded with pointed social criticism.¹⁶ Indeed, while divided on the question of expressionism in the applied arts, critics agreed that “the female element” defined a movement reacting against the modernist prohibition of ornament in a design language privileging color, ornamentality, and the decorative.¹⁷ Encompassing both functional objects and figural sculpture, these feminine vessels were characterized by formal irregularity and asymmetry, spontaneous processes of design and application of brightly colored glazes, and tension between form and exuberant surface decoration conveying inner experiences, emotional states, or sensory impressions like movement, as exemplified by Wieselthier’s fruit dish (color plate 25).

Expressionist ceramics’ use of willful, playful, and dynamic surface decoration, in addition to the predominance of contemporary and mythological female subjects and themes, elicited critical allusions to a neo-rococo aesthetic in which, as one antidecorative critic observed, “Woman was unfailingly and exclusively the goal of all activity.”¹⁸ But such inflections of the rococo were filtered through a primitivizing, childlike eye rooted in the unlearning that guided *Art for the Child*. As another reviewer described the self-consciously feminine attitude toward the material eschewing the potter’s typical concern for smooth finish and polished form: “Free voluptuous handling is the acknowledged 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.”¹⁹ Expressionist ceramics’ cultivation of surface embellishment and playful rococo themes destabilized the discursive formula by which antidecorative critics positioned ceramic sculpture as superficial playthings executed in a medium beneath the dignity of serious materials like marble or bronze. Representative of this trivializing formulation are the sentiments of architect and functionalist critic Weiser: “That 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.”²⁰ Expressionist ceramics, with pretensions to pure artistic expression on a par with painting or sculpture but not without strong satirical or humorous elements, threatened to shatter decorative femininity—as theorized by antidecorative critics like Loos, Roessler, and Weiser—as a negative against which male artists sustained their dominance.

Coinciding with the launch of the WW’s in-house ceramics workshops (1917–30), expressionist ceramics debuted to the public at the WW’s 1917 Christmas exhibition. A reviewer for the Viennese daily *Neue Freie Presse* observed, “A group of young artists . . . have achieved something astonishing: nothing schoolish holds back their work; they

have developed a uniqueness of their own.”²¹ The reviewer alluded to the movement’s roots in the self-expressive teaching methods of the WFA and KGS faculty. Adherents were students of secessionist professors like Böhm, Hoffmann, Moser, Friedrich, and potter Michael Powolny, cofounder (with Berthold Löffler) of the Wiener Keramik manufactory in 1906, whose products were sold in WW showrooms and used for important commissions like the Cabaret Fledermaus and Palais Stoclet. Indeed, with the exception of Graz-native Baudisch, who studied with Wilhelm Gösner and Hans Adametz at Graz’s Federal Institute for Architecture and Applied Art from 1922 to 1926, the overwhelming majority of WW ceramicists studied at the WFA, the KGS, or both (as noted in parentheses) and, with the exception of Schaschl, all joined Harlfinger-Zakucka’s radical feminist collective, the WFK: Bucher (KGS 1911–19); Charlotte (Lotte) Calm (1897–? / KGS 1914–18); Jesser-Schmid (KFM 1910–12; KGS 1912–17); Erna Kopriva (1894–1984 / KGS 1914–19); Dina Kuhn (1891–? / KGS 1912–18); Grete Neuwalder-Breuer (1891–1942 / KGS 1914–19); Kitty Rix (unknown); Reni Schaschl (1895–1979 / KGS 1912–16); Singer-Schinnerl (KFM 1909–15); Hedwig Schmidl (1899–? / KGS 1905–12); and Wieselthier (KFM 1912–14; KGS 1914–18/20).

The younger generation of female ceramicists rejected their mentors’ formal and stylistic principles. Largely responsible for the secessionist renaissance of ceramic figuration, a tradition rooted in figurines produced by the *Wiener Porzellanmanufaktur* (Viennese porcelain manufactory) during the rococo and neoclassical eras, Powolny is best known for his allegorical putti and crinoline figures, like those shown at the 1908 *Kunstschau*.²² With his emphasis on smooth surfaces, meticulous glazing, and careful modeling, Powolny’s mold-made ceramic figures were more conventional than innovative despite the modernist stylization apparent in his reductionist color schemes or treatment of floral garlands (reminiscent of Klimtian ornamental fills). In contrast, interwar expressionist ceramics were modeled by the artist at the wheel in combination with hand-forming techniques like pinching and coiling. The expressionists rejected Powolny’s emphasis on technical perfection to emphasize the tactile qualities of the clay, the glazes’ spontaneous fluidity (often left to dribble over vessels’ surfaces), and formal imperfections like finger marks that announced the process of making.

A critical venue for expressionist ceramics was the WW’s *Künstlerische Werkstätte* (KW, Artists’ workshops). Opening in 1916 and equipped with their own kiln and wheels, the KW constituted an overwhelmingly female space in which an atmosphere of informal collegiality, creative exchange, and female collectivity prevailed.²³ Pro-WW critic Eisler described the KW’s purpose as “bringing fresh young talent into the firm and allowing them the possibility of training hand and phantasy.”²⁴ Wieselthier remembered that her colleagues shared “a huge studio, each one of us got a key for himself and we had all the workshops imaginable to our free use. We also had the best-trained foreman and workers and all of the time and material we desired.”²⁵ Attracting droves of female art students during the war, the KW offered “talented beginners,” as Wieselthier recalled, the chance

to experiment with unconventional materials and techniques.²⁶ KW artists enjoyed the freedom to determine their schedules and projects, and they earned commission for the unique works they designed and executed, as well as for models made for serial production. Characterized by free exchange and collaboration in a female-dominated environment (given male colleagues' wartime service), the KW's experimental, creative atmosphere contributed to the formation of a collective feminine and feminist aesthetic among members. As noted by Austrian pop artist Kiki Kogelnik when rediscovering expressionist ceramics in the 1980s, the KW represented a space that was less about individual authorship but operated on a nonhierarchical collective model alien to conventional notions of the solitary, isolated genius.²⁷ Such inclinations toward collaboration and collectivity—prefiguring developments in the better-known feminist collectives of the 1970s—elucidate the shared forms, glazes, and themes, particularly featuring mythological and contemporary female figures, among KW ceramicists.

The KW's experimental approach, in which members experimented with the use of expressionist and cubist decorative motifs, represented a direct outgrowth of the self-expressive rhetoric of secessionist educators like Hoffmann, Böhm, and particularly Čížek. The creative attitudes guiding the interwar Werkstätte overlapped with the principles of the kineticist movement associated with Čížek's ornamental studies class (1917–24) at the KGS, notable for its “seething laboratory atmosphere.”²⁸ Like Böhm, Čížek applied permissive, child-based methods to the training of professional designers, using guided exercises similar to Itten's in the Bauhaus's preliminary course, in what contemporaries likened to “a state school for expressionism.”²⁹ Synthesizing formal developments in expressionism, cubism, and futurism, the predominantly female practitioners of kineticism visualized inner experiences, indefinable emotional states, and sensory impressions like movement through abstract, ornamental forms. As art historian Rae DiCicco argues, the historiographical neglect of this avant-garde movement is due to an enduring double standard in which creative appropriation and synthesis is gendered as feminine and derivative while innovation is gendered as masculine and original.³⁰ The spiritual philosophies of kineticism found a direct continuation in the unorthodox methods associated with the WW *Kunstgewerbeweib*, as is particularly pronounced in the dynamic, ornamental language of ceramicists like Bucher, who studied with Čížek.

Moved by the art of the primitive more than that of the Old Masters, the KW *Kunstgewerbeweib* drew fire for her rebellious attitude toward handcraft technique. Much like Elisabeth in Roth's *The Emperor's Tomb* (the wife of the scion of the von Trotta military dynasty who designed “anything . . . carpets, shawls, ties, rings, bracelets, lights, lampshades”), the *Kunstgewerbeweib* banked on her multitalented versatility.³¹ Her inexhaustible creative effervescence not only reflected secessionist *Mehrfachkünstler/in* idealism but constituted a crucial intervention against notions of female dilettantism in that the dilettante's supposed half-knowledge and flippancy between multiple fields were reclaimed as positive attributes. The most prolific WW ceramicists were renowned



31. Photographs of Maria Likarz-Strauss, Gudrun Baudisch, Vally Wieselthier, and Mathilde Flögl. From *DKD* 62, no. 9 (1928): 201.

for their intermedial versatility in painted glass, textiles, embroidery, jewelry-making, metalwork, enamelwork, and fashion. Jesser-Schmid, WFK member and one of the WW's most versatile designers, admitted: "I make designs for lace, embroidery, printed textiles and tapestries, decoration for engraved and painted glass, porcelain, leatherwear, and applied graphics, engage in ceramic work and paint armoires, wooden boxes, and coffer according to my own designs."³² Such variety in production would have been far less likely from artists of Blau-Lang's generation, who were eager to distance themselves from "amateurish" female handcrafts and dilettantism. The *Kunstgewerbeweib* rarely employed precious materials due to wartime shortages but preferred easily workable, inexpensive materials such as paper, wood, glass, and earthenware in which she wielded a "loose, casual technique . . . working when she was moved to capture capricious ideas."³³ While the predilection for inexpensive materials reflected an atmosphere of postwar privation, as Kallir insists, it was also rooted in secessionist educators' revival of unconventional materials and techniques.³⁴

Sparking debate throughout the interwar period was how the *Kunstgewerbeweib* sought to fuse utility with the representation of transcendent artistic ideas: practices that challenged craft's subordinate, second-class status within modernist value systems.³⁵ Part of the controversy surrounding the WW *Kunstgewerbeweib* related to her unconventional and allegedly unfeminine lifestyle: her proclivity for, as Marianne Leisching (a KW coworker during the 1920s) remembered, "drinking, smoking, and having as many sexual experiences as possible."³⁶ Such unconventional sociocultural practices paralleled her contamination of the male preserve of fine art with domestic female handcraft. When the fictional protagonist of the *Emperor's Tomb* returns from the eastern front after World War I, he is shocked to find that his estranged wife, with newly bobbed hair and clad in a mannish shirt and tie, has traded managing the household for designing outlandish yellow and orange furniture in her newly minted studio, the Atelier Elisabeth von Trotta. Compounding this meltdown of normative sociocultural and artistic values was Elisabeth's affair with her applied-arts mentor, Jolanth Szatmary, an outspoken craftswoman attracted to African

art; this fictional character was loosely modeled on Wieselthier, who was known for her fiery personality and sexual permissiveness.³⁷ Elisabeth's unconventional behavior and appearance found its counterpart in publicity photographs of actual WW artist-designers, who, with the exception of their carefully painted faces, presented themselves in a fashionably masculine-cum-boyish manner, with requisite *Bubikopf* (bob) hairstyles (fig. 31). In no uncertain terms did the *Kunstgewerbeweib* figure to the general public as a desexed hermaphrodite, tainting handcraft with her pretentious, self-consciously feminine efforts and experimental techniques that seemed to reduce art making to childish scribbles.

Wieselthier perhaps best characterized the unconventional working methods and lifestyle of the interwar artist-craftswoman. She was the most acclaimed practitioner of Viennese expressionist ceramics; contemporary critics like Hofmann (editor of the popular journal *Österreichische Kunst* from 1931 to 1938) called her "the strongest and most original" of her colleagues.³⁸ Daughter of Jewish court attorney Wilhelm Wieselthier and Rosa Winkler, Wieselthier had a privileged upbringing that typified the WW *Kunstgewerbeweib*, which she strongly sought to shed via smoking, drinking, and affairs with partners of both sexes.³⁹ In autobiographical texts, Wieselthier fashioned herself as a spirited nonconformist who rejected conventional roles, such as that "a girl has to get married and all that," in order to seize on the masculine habits satirized in Roth's portrayal of Elisabeth, including a preference for male attire and a rejection of the Viennese tradition of hand-kissing (a social nicety expected of gentlemen to ladies).⁴⁰ Excelling at swimming, diving, skiing, tennis, and hockey while making poor marks in school, Wieselthier remembered "scribbling everywhere . . . as soon as I could hold a pencil."⁴¹ The encouragement of a drawing teacher convinced her to follow her ambition to attend art school in defiance of her parents who were eager for their daughter to marry. After a prolonged two-year feud, Wieselthier's parents allowed her to enroll at the WFA from 1912 to 1914, where she studied with Friedrich, and subsequently at the KGS from 1914 to 1918, where she pursued further studies with Hoffmann, Moser, and Čížek (she stayed on from 1918 to 1920 as a special guest auditor with Powolny after receiving her diploma).

Much like her WFA classmate Singer-Schinnerl, it was after Wieselthier's recruitment for the KW in 1917 that Hoffmann discovered her ability in ceramic sculpture. The artist recalled one afternoon at the KW, when "I got by chance a lump of clay" and spontaneously modeled a figure, and Hoffmann declared that "now at last I know that Vally is a sculptor."⁴² Only then did Wieselthier pursue formal studies in ceramics with Powolny at the KGS while continuing work at the KW. Nonetheless, Wieselthier always retained what Edmund de Waal refers to as an "outsider" mentality to the medium enlivened by "liberation from expectation or technical knowledge."⁴³ That the likes of Wieselthier, Singer-Schinnerl, and Jesser-Schmid all had no training in ceramics before joining the KW in 1917 suggests that Hoffmann curated a carefully studied childlike naïveté among KW members. The likelihood of such a possibility is confirmed by Singer-Schinnerl's

confession that Hoffmann sought out “playfulness and humor” for the KW and by the way the WW marketed this “naiveté” in its 1928 sales catalogue with Rix’s and Baudisch’s figurines (fig. 32).⁴⁴ Singer-Schinnerl admitted that she “had never ‘studied’ ceramics formally or even had the soft clay under her fingers” and was recruited by Hoffmann for the KW as an “experiment” of sorts.⁴⁵ While Bucher progressed thorough formal training, having studied from 1915 to 1919 in Powolny’s ceramics workshop during her seven years at the KGS, the artist emulated a similarly raw aesthetic via her study of vernacular folk pottery (*Bauernkeramik*) from the Salzkammergut region. This evidence



32. Figurines in the WW sales catalogue, 1928. Left to right: Model K-335 (Kitty Rix), K-327 (Kitty Rix), K-329 (Gudrun Baudisch). MAK—Austrian Museum for Applied Arts / Contemporary Art, Vienna. Photo © MAK.

of the cultivation of a collective childlike aesthetic among the KW’s talented beginners suggests that the *Kunstgewerbeweib*’s raw aesthetic was not the expression of an essentialized feminine essence but was informed by the avant-garde fashionability of folk- and child-art primitivism.

A direct outgrowth of secessionist educators’ instructive permissiveness, the KW’s experimental atmosphere fostered an intuitive approach to the medium. Wieselthier, the movement’s main theoretical spokesperson, detailed her working process: “I place absolutely no weight on achieving a smooth, uniform surface but mix the glaze in all possible nuances and let the fire reign.”⁴⁶ What critics described as a “free, voluptuous handling” that embraced the unpredictability of glazing and firing resulted in a design language bristling with excitement about making. Dismissing attempts to design ceramics on paper, Wieselthier privileged a process based on similar principles of spontaneity associated with the creative child. As she explained: “Only when I feel what can be formed at the wheel can I design a form. . . . [W]hat I can form with my fingers from clay will never be bad, because the material tells me what I am allowed to do.”⁴⁷ The artist believed a ceramic form, whether a life-size figure or vessel, “must always grow out of the material, i.e. it must be made in the same manner as the pot, hollow inside, worked from within to the outside, not modeled in the round from the lump.”⁴⁸ Wieselthier shunned mold forming and modeling in the round, which limited clay’s expressive possibilities, favoring the hollow molding method characteristic of the Viennese school. Such principles of production lent ceramics the possibility of possessing, in her own words, a “value even apart from their purpose,” a value that could be as powerful as that of a “grand sculpture.”⁴⁹

The status of the decorative arts was hotly debated in criticism surrounding the MfKI’s 1919/20 winter exhibition and the 1920 *Kunstschau*, famously called “a commemoration of the dead [Klimt, Moser, Schiele, Lendecke, and Metzner] and a celebration of the living.”⁵⁰ The 1920 *Kunstschau* provided a panoramic overview of contemporary art and craft and, as in 1908, it was predominated by *Werkstätte Zweckkunst*. Expressionist

ceramics—as represented by Felice Rix (1893–1967), Kuhn, Wieselthier, Schaschl, Schmidl, Kopriva, Neuwalder-Breuer, Jesser-Schmid, Singer-Schinnerl, Bucher, Trude Weinberger, and Mathilde Flögl (1893–1950)—took center stage. Lending credence to Kogelnik’s observations on a collective feminist aesthetic, the ceramics treated similar themes and subject matter (primarily mythological female figures) while privileging a raw, seemingly untutored aesthetic. The creative interchange between KW members is apparent in the formal dialogue between Kuhn’s and Wieselthier’s life-size bacchante figures (figs. 33–34): in the hand-coiled hair and drapery, contrapposto poses, and stylized facial features. By virtue of their size, mythological narrative, and lack of function, such ceramic sculpture aspired to fine-art status despite their construction at the wheel in the manner of vessels.

Likewise debuting at the 1920 *Kunstschau* were the so-called *Frauenköpfe* (women’s heads), a distinct form of expressionist ceramics that parodied the tropes of decorative femininity wielded by misogynist critics, including women’s supposed penchants for vanity, superficiality, and face painting. Wieselthier’s biographer Marianne Hussl-Hörmann argues that a predilection for subject matter featuring “strong women” from history, mythology, and religion may have symbolized the “self-assertiveness and freedom” of the heads’ creators.⁵¹ Kopriva, Schmidl, Neuwalder-Breuer, Schaschl, and Singer-Schinnerl showed no fewer than eight *Frauenköpfe* at the exhibition. The earthenware heads were notable for their conspicuous use of enameled paint suggesting heavily applied cosmetics, a type of surface decoration figuring the ways in which makeup had become “a medium of self-expression in a consumer society where identity had become a purchasable style.”⁵² As detailed below, the decorative *Frauenköpfe* not only related to the ways in which cosmetics emerged as a lightning rod for broader conflicts over women’s societal roles but mocked misogynist critics who collapsed “women’s art” with face painting. In addition to large collections of figural ceramics by Wieselthier and Singer-Schinnerl, the 1920 *Kunstschau* featured artistic toys, painted and etched glassware, enamelwork, embroidery, painted furniture, and reverse-glass painted by other Böhm school *Mehrfachkünstlerinnen* such as Jesser-Schmid, Likarz-Strauss, Löw-Lazar, and Otten-Friedmann. Much like the

33. Vally Wieselthier, *Figur mit zwei Vögeln* (Figure with two birds), 1920. Glazed earthenware. Exhibited at the 1920 *Kunstschau*. From *DKD 47*, no. 12 (1920): 100.

34. Dina Kuhn, *Bacchante*, 1920. Glazed earthenware. Exhibited at the 1920 *Kunstschau*. From *DKD 47*, no. 12 (1920): 100.



ceramic *Frauenköpfe*, the glass- and enamelwork was characterized by an experimental, boundary-defying character refuting handcraft's alleged inferiority vis-à-vis the "fine" arts, a tendency particularly pronounced in the series of large-scale enamel panels, both figural and abstract, made by Otten-Friedmann and other KW collaborators.⁵³

Broached by such ceramic sculpture, the central issue for critics was, to quote Tietze, whether "the 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."⁵⁴ Given the gravity of the postwar socioeconomic crisis, reviewers remained polarized. Through his role as cofounder of Vienna's *Gesellschaft zur Förderung moderner Kunst* (Society for the advancement of modern art) in 1923, which held public lectures and exhibitions, Tietze was known as a critical leading protagonist for interwar contemporary art. He felt that such an art should reflect a new postwar spirit of social democracy in opposition to the elitism he associated with past styles and movements. But despite his enthusiasm for expressionist painting, Tietze was far less generous toward the idea of expressionism in the applied arts, particularly during the immediate aftermath of the war. Assessing the 1920 *Kunstschau*, Tietze found the WW's lighthearted "ornamental soap bubbles" to be the products of an "unhealthy hothouse environment," divorced from the social spirit of the present.⁵⁵ Here, not unlike the 1970s feminist art movement (largely representing the interests of privileged white women), it is important to acknowledge that Wieselthier and her colleagues operated from an advantaged class position that, in part, enabled their commitment to radical feminist handcraft. But to Tietze, the idea of nonfunctional, autonomous handcrafts trumped even the decadence of the fin de siècle sentiment of *l'art pour l'art* and bespoke a broader crisis in Austrian art; he considered the entire exhibition of the 1920 *Kunstschau* as a blasphemous black sabbath that worshipped the ghosts of the past rather than looked to the future. The exhibition's playful neo-rococo ornamentation, Tietze insinuated, only created a new horror vacui, "as if in a historical revival."⁵⁶

Expressionist critic Roeßler, standing reviewer for the socialist *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, 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, mass-produced objects for the working classes, he insinuated, wasted precious material and intellectual effort. He condemned the rococo frivolity of the applied arts as "hav[ing] hardly any intellectual value to the present, certainly none to the future: however appealing and pretty, playfully whimsical and wittily they have been formed, they are altogether overburdened by lavishness and ostentation."⁵⁷

However, the exhibition also featured large collections by the male artist Peche (KW manager, 1916–23), who practiced an equally "feminine" ornamental style drawing on the Austrian baroque and expressionism. He was arbitrarily excluded from attacks

of feminization by critics, so much so that Bertha Zuckerkandl called him Austria's greatest ornamental genius since the baroque.⁵⁸ Eisler's 1925 monograph argued that Peche's ornamental language underwent an inner caesura that suppressed frivolous, formal *Spielerei* (play) to reflect a transcendent "masculine seriousness."⁵⁹ This response brings the uneven manner in which critics endeavored to exonerate male artists from ornamental criminality into high relief. By contrast, the *Kunstgewerbeweib* was not only scapegoated for sacrificing functionality for decorative expressivity, but she was accused of being derivative of (or taught by) Peche when, as one WW coworker remembered, "in no way were they [the KW artist-craftswomen] imitators of Peche."⁶⁰

Not all critics, however, panned the expressive handcraft movement. Pro-WW critic Steinmetz praised the *Kunstgewerbeweib's* work in inexpensive materials like paper, wax, and clay as innovative responses to material shortages. Expressionist ceramics spoke to the idea that "not only the brush is the muse-hallowed tool of high art . . . wood, clay, glass, and mosaic are capable of artistically embodying an idea."⁶¹ In discussing a Kuhn figure (*Spring*, now lost) similar to those shown at the 1920 *Kunstschau*, pro-WW critic Eisler found the work "to breathe the spirit of expressionism" even as Kuhn's flower pots showed a renaissance of folk art traditions.⁶²

Standing by the free expression endorsed by pro-WW exponents, Josef Hoffmann, artistic director of the WW, vindicated the *Kunstgewerbeweib* in an impassioned missive to Tietze, rebutting the latter's arguments that expressionist ceramics were alien to the gravity of the times.⁶³ Maintaining that both art and craft were necessarily *zeitlos* (timeless) and not *zeitlich* (timely), Hoffmann erupted with a laundry list of masterpieces produced in times of crisis (by artists from Boccaccio to Beethoven), with the implication that female art students had every right to the same free expression. He concluded his defense by accusing Tietze of harboring "an inferior evaluation of the applied arts."⁶⁴ But Tietze admitted that he found the 1920 *Kunstschau* uninteresting precisely because the misguided notion of "craft for craft's sake" was the foulest crime handcraft could commit, insisting, in his rebuttal of Hoffmann, that Beethoven's genius was entirely irrelevant to young girls playing with paper boxes.⁶⁵

It is only fitting that the controversy surrounding expressionist ceramics peaked at an exhibition synonymous with the debate on rational (masculine) utility versus individualized (feminine) luxury in art and design: the 1925 *Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes* in Paris, an exhibition intended to demonstrate French supremacy in the luxury handcraft industries while defining a modern style of decorative art. Singer-Schinnerl, Wieselthier, and Bucher received pride of place in Hoffmann's designs for the Austrian Pavilion. This female focus, in addition to the WW's predominantly female exhibitors (ten out of thirteen), was exploited by the antidecorative critics. The critical fallout surrounding the Austrian pavilion was a crucial flash point for how Austria's "feminized" applied arts came under fire as a superfluous, retrograde luxury that should be replaced by rational, functional objects engineered for the sort



35. Wiener Werkstätte display case at the 1925 *Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes* in Paris. UAKS. Photo: Bruno Reiffenstein, Vienna.

lady's boudoir.”⁶⁹ 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,” sentiments echoed by anti-WW critic Max Ermer in inveighing against the “playful, feminine” art dominating Paris.⁷⁰ In another review chastising the Viennese aversion to “hard-nosed functionalism, pure construction, and strict sobriety,” Roeßler summoned the engineer to produce functional, affordable objects for the working classes instead of effeminate “false luxury” goods that used ornamentation to mask cheap materials.⁷¹ He claimed such objects not only threatened to desex robust male workers but excluded working-class women as well, whose socioeconomic position might have led them to similarly favor “masculine” functionalism over “feminine” expressivity.⁷²

In the critical controversy surrounding the Paris *Exposition*, expressionist ceramics were central to debates on the status of the decorative within modernist art and design. A major thrust of the pavilion’s negative reviews was the improvised “feminine” nature of the WW’s luxury handcrafts.⁷³ Antidecorative critics believed that the frivolous nature of the ceramics dominating Paris was found in an overexaggerated expressivity

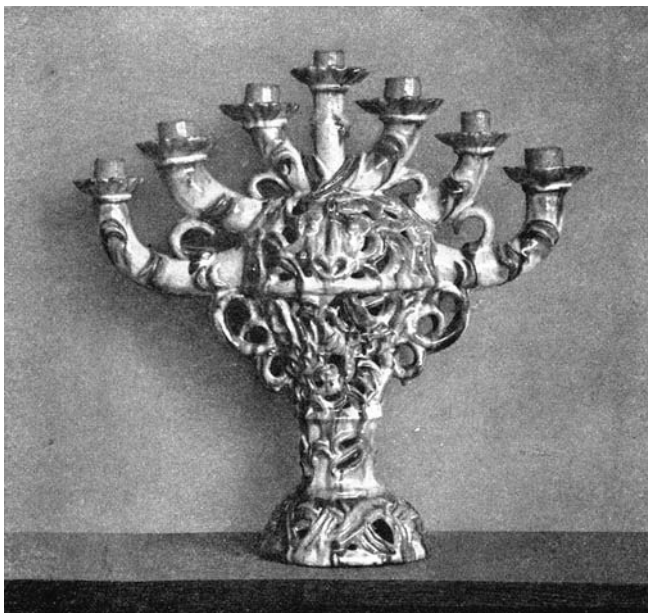
of modernist “living machine” advocated by Le Corbusier, a key disseminator of Loos’s dictum that ornament is crime.⁶⁶ Weiser’s scathing review assailed the pavilion for sacrificing practicality in favor of a quixotic “striving to be original at any price,” while another reviewer disparaged its contents as “sweet, perfumed things, without strength, without energy.”⁶⁷ Hoffmann’s display cabinets—impractically tall floor-to-ceiling show-cases behind primitively decorated paneled-glass frames painted by female art students—were crammed so full that the objects became a background for the ornamental frames: in an ironic reversal of modernism’s suppression of the decorative, the decorative frame became essential, and the artwork secondary (fig. 35).

But worse yet were the goods displayed; as Weiser notes: “Unfortunately, one only sees things here that are classified as luxury, a luxury . . . that has long become exorbitant and wasteful to us.”⁶⁸ Playing on deep-rooted stereotypes of female desire for luxury consumption, Weiser in no uncertain terms held women, both as makers and consumers, responsible for these frivolous goods, “which could only belong to a

that suffocated functionality in favor of overblown individualism. While condemning individual expressivity seemed like a given to male functionalist critics, such judgments disregarded how the educational and institutional playing field funneled female expressivity into the applied arts and not the “fine” arts and, furthermore, how artistic institutions were dominated by privileged, wealthy women.

Such tensions notwithstanding, impractical feminine capriciousness was thought to characterize Wieselthier’s X-shaped ceramic oven, a reinterpretation of rococo design judged unsuitable to the purpose of heating, and her seven-armed candelabra, whose radiating arms converged in a nexus of elaborately twisted coils drip-glazed in boldly contrasting light and dark tones, marked by a quasi-Gothic, distorted expressivity (figs. 36–37). Condemning the pavilion’s “bubbly, nervous, capricious . . . quote-unquote artworks,” Ermer fumed against “the X-shaped oven [!] . . . [leaving] consideration of actual use . . . miles away.”⁷⁴ Quintessentially embodying Wieselthier’s style, both objects played on their intended function. The candelabra’s intricate arabesques applied to its arms and base, for example, deliberately compromised the verticality of the candleholders above. As with Hoffmann’s display cabinets, the decorative was essential, and functionality was supplemental.

Similarly attracting negative comment from critics was the stylized primitivism predominant among the figural ceramics. The childlike design language of Singer-Schinnerl’s glazed earthenware *Akt* (Female nude) (fig. 38) and Flögl’s figural group of a horse and cart were found to be emblematic of the perverse way that “the modernist movement stuck its nose into the nursery.”⁷⁵ Several reviewers alleged that the ceramics’ childlike naïveté was hardly a sign of genius but manifested a schoolish



36. Vally Wieselthier, *X-Form Kachelofen* (X-Shaped ceramic oven), 1925. Exhibited at the 1925 *Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes* in Paris. From *Österreichs Bau- und Werkkunst* 1 (July/Aug. 1925): 34.

37. Vally Wieselthier, *Leuchter* (Candelabra), 1925. Exhibited at the 1925 *Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes* in Paris. From *L'autriche à l'Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes, Paris, 1925* (Vienna: Commission exécutive, 1925), n.p.

sort of imitation hardening into its own form of academicism.⁷⁶ Likewise on view was an extensive collection by Bucher including *Broken-Through Flower Pot* (fig. 39) and a neo-rococo porcelain clock case executed by Augarten. Critics received these works differently, as I will argue below, because of the gendered connotations of the works' materials (delicate porcelain versus the cruder and, by implication, more masculine earthenware).

As at earlier exhibitions, the expressionist ceramics displayed in Paris triggered a critical uproar for using humble materials for sculptural purposes, for sacrificing utility at the expense of artistic ideas, and fundamentally, for creating decorative objects that refused to be decorative. The *Kunstgewerbeweib's* expressive handcrafts were the antithesis of Le Corbusier's program in his celebrated *L'esprit nouveau* pavilion: a model family dwelling composed of industrially produced object types that denied the very premise of the exposition (that, as Nancy Troy argues, "a modern style could be developed through conscious intention") and that called for the abolition of the decorative arts in favor of a design process of anonymous "mechanical selection."⁷⁷ Hence, to critics like Loos, Roeßler, and Weiser favoring the masculine "living machine," the "feminized" decorative arts and artistic ceramics embodied a logical fallacy. The modern artifact was a rationally engineered tool, neither decorative nor artistic; "putting value on the uniqueness of applied-arts objects" only represented misguided, feminine vanity.⁷⁸

The capstone of the debate on expressionist ceramics and the interwar *Kunstgewerbeweib* was Loos's infamous "Wiener Weh" (Viennese woe) lecture, held in the large concert hall of Vienna's Musikverein in April 1927. The lecture drew a large, boisterous

38. Susi Singer-Schinnerl, *Akt* (Nude), ca. 1925. Glazed red earthenware. Exhibited at the 1925 *Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes* in Paris. From *L'autriche à l'Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes, Paris, 1925* (Vienna: Commission exécutive, 1925), n.p.



39. Hertha Bucher, *Durchbrochener Blumentopf* (Broken-through flower pot), ca. 1925. Earthenware. Exhibited at the 1925 *Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes* in Paris. From *DKD* 56, no. 11 (1925): 334.



crowd in a heated atmosphere where “it seemed likely that the Loosians and the WWers might pull each other’s hair out.”⁷⁹ Accompanied by slides of works shown in Paris and between the shouts and catcalls of the audience, Loos sounded off about what he had been speaking into the void for more than twenty years: that the entire *Kunsthandwerk* (arts and crafts) movement was an impure mixture that prostituted the eternal work of art by making it useful. As he said, “Poor is the rich man who, at every moment, must walk on ‘art,’ must hold ‘art,’ must lie and sit on ‘art.’”⁸⁰ Ideally, artists—especially women with their impure, decorative drives—would keep their “hands off” of everyday objects, allowing design to progressively evolve in line with modern industry and handcraft prototypes. While rehashing his long-standing attacks against Hoffmann, the WW, and expressive handcrafts, his 1927 lecture brought the cigarette-smoking, bob-haired *Kunstgewerbeweib* to trial for the first time on charges of savage decorative criminality. In no uncertain terms did Loos hold the *Kunstgewerbeweiber*—whom he castigated as “painting, embroidering, ceramic-making, valuable-material-wasting dilettante *Hofratstöchter* (daughters of senior civil servants)”—single-handedly responsible for the rise of frivolous *Kleinkunst* (minor art) and the Paris *Exposition’s* exhibition’s commercial failure.⁸¹

That this epithet referred to artists such as Wieselthier, Singer-Schinnerl, and Bucher (who hailed from similar *Hofratstöchter* pedigrees, a colloquialism for a privileged milieu of governesses, servants, and high culture) was uncontested in Austrian public opinion. Such attacks provoked a spirited defense of the *Kunstgewerbeweiber* in an “Open Letter to Adolf Loos” by Eugenia Primavesi (1874–1963), the WW’s (unofficial) artistic director after the war in tandem with her husband, Otto, who was the firm’s commercial director from 1915 to 1925. Trained as an actress, Eugenia channeled her artistic ambitions into her role as Klimt group patron, amassing the second most important private collection of Klimt’s works (including the portrait of her daughter Mäda discussed previously) and commissioning an important Hoffmann/WW country estate at Winkelsdorf, Moravia, reflecting her interest in folk-art primitivism. During her period of close involvement with the *Werkstätte*, Primavesi (along with Hoffmann himself) was a staunch defender of the KW and individual expressivity in the applied arts, opposing her husband’s attempts to reorganize the firm along more efficient lines in collaboration with the new business manager, Hoffmann student Philip Häusler.⁸² Häusler’s attempts to “rationalize” the supposedly dilettantish KW—locking its members into fixed hours and promoting serial production over individual expressivity—not only led to fierce opposition from Primavesi and Hoffmann (and the 1925 breakdown of the Primavesis’ marriage) but bitter factionalism within the firm. Protesting Häusler’s policies on the grounds that “our paradise was lost,” Wieselthier’s 1922 exodus from the firm to found the Vally Wieselthier Ceramics Workshops (1922–27) led to a string of resignations from Calm, Rix, and Singer-Schinnerl.⁸³

Loos’s attacks against the feminized WW were preceded by an equally sensationalistic lecture on January 5, 1926, by graphic artist Klinger. Polemicizing against the

“perfumed feminine trifles” dominating the Austrian pavilion in Paris—where the only modern object to be found was a mass-produced fire extinguisher not actually part of the display—Klinger rebranded the WW as the *Wiener Weiberkunstgewerbe* (Viennese women’s arts and craft), using the antiquated and somewhat derogatory terminology to emphasize the makers’ base femaleness in spite of their claims to masculine, high artistic expression. “*Wiener Weiberkunstgewerbe*, who doesn’t shudder at the thought!” Klinger thundered.⁸⁴ In Klinger’s view, the work of Wieselthier and her colleagues stood for all that was “affected, overdone, mannered, titillating, false, and inauthentic” in contemporary design and led to sexual degeneracy among its practitioners.⁸⁵ Branding the ceramicists as “fumbling Maenads,” Klinger implied that expressive handcraft’s overwhelmingly female practitioners had rid themselves of their femininity through their “crafty” claims to (masculine) fine art, a practice he lampooned via their clipped, singsongy nicknames: “Fini, Zoe, Noe, Loe, Ludi, Valy, Lio, Bery, Ly, Dita, Ria, or indeed Mäda.”⁸⁶ Polemics aside, the WW’s overwhelmingly female makeup was undeniable; after 1925 the firm’s only major male designers were Hoffmann and Snischek.

All four critics—Loos, Roeßler, Klinger, and Weiser—similarly regarded the expressionist ceramics dominating the Parisian *Exposition* as forms of impure, superfluous decoration and, by unnecessarily integrating expressionistic currents into everyday artifacts, a frivolous expenditure of time and material. Weiser lamented the proliferation of a childish *Kleinkunst* that was “all form and no soul” while, as before in the time of the rococo, male thinkers were left to wrestle with the great problems of the intellect.⁸⁷ Enjoining Viennese artists to take up greater tasks, Weiser found such ceramic “vitrine pieces overplayed; the joke hiding in them, is of yesterday.”⁸⁸ But what these male critics necessarily regarded as frivolous luxuries challenged simplistic dichotomies of art and craft, the useful and the significant, the comfortable and the provocative, which was all the more challenging due to the ceramics’ insubordinate humor.

In spite of Loos’s crusade, the new ceramics were defended by critics viewing them as inspired by the same elevated sensations undergirding the fine arts. Even Tietze moderated his initially hostile views to describe the new ceramics as “arresting . . . in which women command a very remarkable language of form . . . and extraordinary rhythmic momentum.”⁸⁹ This dynamic formal language, informed by both the rococo and folk art, was animated by an expressive *Formwille* analyzed by progressive critics like Steinmetz and Rochowanski. In an article accompanied by an illustration of Wieselthier’s 1926 earthenware display vase (fig. 40), Steinmetz argued that ceramic objects, when animated by intense yet abstract feelings or sensations, had the capacity to aspire to monumentality. The expressive possibilities of clay depended on the intensity of an expressive impulse that, while simultaneously fulfilling an object’s function, was not conceived out of “cold reason” or “pure geometrical construction” but “born of an exhilarating, imaginative conception imprinted on the object that lives on eternally as an animated energy in the obtained form.”⁹⁰ Yet even as it captured intangible sensations



40. Vally Wieselthier, Vase, 1926. Earthenware, height: 17 ⁷/₁₀ in. (45 cm), width: 11 ⁴/₅ in. (30 cm); depth: 17 ³/₁₀ in. (44 cm), diam.: 9 in. (23 cm). From *DKD* 59, no. 1 (1926): 60.

beyond an object's function, this organic *Formwille* was not pure fantasy but bound to the willfulness and spontaneity of the material. That pots, through form, color, and ornament, could convey emotional states of being lent the new Viennese ceramics a unique expressivity, similar to how expressionist portraiture provided both likenesses of its subjects as well as windows into the artists' psyches.

Wieselthier's display vase privileges gesture, spontaneity, and a sense of rococo playfulness: an apt example of a *Formwille* that was functional, expressive, and redolent of its maker's femininity. Excitement about process and spontaneity lends the object an effervescence characteristic of Wieselthier's work. Much of the object's visual interest is found in the tension between its formal classicizing shape (a baluster on a tapered, conical base) and the seemingly casual, accidental nature of its painted surface decoration. Typical of her mid-1920s work, 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: these light, playful rococo flourishes delighted prodecorative critics. Underlining all of this was the artist's gestural bravura and the apparent nonchalance with which she let brightly colored glazes drip down the vase's surface.

From the same period, Wieselthier's 1927 fruit dish, now in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, illustrates her dialogue with contemporary art and design (color plate 25). Like the vase, the earthenware surface was covered with a white slip, glazed, and overpainted in a manner that demonstrated Wieselthier's self-described primitive working methods that privileged the inconsistencies of the fired clay surface rather than the medium's traditional emphasis on uninflected clarity. With its high-keyed, juxtaposing complementary colors, the fruit dish's overpainted surface lends support to Hörmann's supposition that the artist may have been influenced by Sonia Delaunay's textile designs at the *Boutique simultanée* during the 1925 Paris *Exposition*.⁹¹ In typical Wieselthier fashion, the work pulsates with a syncopated rhythm achieved by the interplay between its dynamic color harmonies and the carefully balanced asymmetry of the dish's handles and broken-through ornamental base, suggesting the artist's exhilaration about process. Other vases and bowls from the same period demonstrate a similar problematization of functionalism in favor of expressivity through the placement of extraneous nonfunctional handles, surface edges that fold inward or outward for no practical purpose, or the transformation of handles, lids, or covers into fantastical animals (like the dolphins mentioned above).⁹²

Drawing inspiration less from the rococo than rustic, archaic forms, similar tendencies toward formal and gestural expressivity can be observed in Bucher's work, as illustrated in a vase whose form, as pro-Werkstätte critic Born put it, "seemed to be born of the waves . . . and . . . drip the vivid colors of the deep" (fig. 41).⁹³ The expressivity enlivening Bucher's pots situated them, as WW critics like Loos and Roessler had it, as unnecessarily artistic, much like Wieselthier's work. The disturbed, gestural

surface of the seafoam green vase, a loose interpretation of Greek forms crowned with lyriform-horned handles, 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. Bucher, who specialized less in figuration than functional or architectural ceramics, typically integrated form and ornament in her strongly rhythmic and "broken-through" style of pottery. As Born noted, "The artist loves to break through the surface, like a net . . . dissolving into ornamental weaving."⁹⁴ The subtle asymmetry of Bucher's *Broken-Through Flower Pot* shown in Paris in 1925 expressed the musicality of a syncopated rhythm that ebbed and flowed like the pounding of a wave (see fig. 39). In an abstract, nonrepresentational manner, Bucher's formal language reflected a dynamic energy capturing the breakneck pace of urban life. Like the flower pot, Bucher's vessels favored jagged edges, sharp corners, and large areas of hollowed-out space not unlike the rough lines of an expressionist woodcut print.

The artist's signature style, characterized by 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, such as the neo-rococo clock house shown at the Austrian pavilion in Paris. Combining figuration with ornamental architectural details, the elegant lines of the clock case were unusual in Bucher's typically rustic design language. Weiser recommended porcelain, with its smooth finish and delicate, opaque glaze, as "the correct means of expression for [Bucher's] tender . . . coquettish ideas" and the appropriate decoration for a lady's desk.⁹⁵ Apparently vexed with her "masculine" strength, however, Weiser was eager to equate her work with rococo frivolity rather than meaningful expression. The angularity and deliberate roughness of Bucher's pots differentiated her work from the self-consciously feminine style associated with KW artists: a situation likely rooted in the fact that Bucher was one of the few ceramicists not associated with the KW; instead she sold her ceramics through the WW on commission.

Of all the WW ceramicists, it was the figural sculpture of Böhm student Singer-Schinnerl, familiar to us from the WW postcard series and the 1908 *Kunstschau*, that was most closely associated with neo-rococo lyricism. One of Singer-Schinnerl's



41. Hertha Bucher, *Original-Keramik* (Original ceramic), ca. 1928. Earthenware. From *DKD* 62, no. 12 (1928): 403.

colleagues called her “the most talented and most original” of the ceramicists whose work, like Wieselthier’s, shaped the KW’s feminine aesthetic.⁹⁶ Unlike Bucher, Singer-Schinnerl’s ceramics were exclusively figural and took inspiration from the thematic repertoire of eighteenth-century Central European porcelain sculpture: fête galante figural groupings, representations of court life and masked balls, and playful interpretations of mythological narratives.⁹⁷ At the 1928 *International Exhibition of Ceramic Art*, a landmark traveling exhibition of contemporary ceramic art originating at New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art and intending to introduce American audiences to the latest trends in European ceramics (in which all four artists profiled here participated), one critic observed that Singer-Schinnerl’s figures “hover[ed] between the veiled arrogance of the eighteenth century and the stressed candor of the twentieth.”⁹⁸ But what this critic termed the “dainty swagger” of Singer-Schinnerl’s signature style was dependent as much on the formal repertoire of the rococo as the deliberate naiveté of a design language masking the virtuosity of its maker. Singer-Schinnerl’s rococo-inspired figures were deliberately simplified to achieve a seemingly untutored, childlike aesthetic, a quality Hoffmann deliberately sought for the KW. In contrast to Weiser’s dismissal of ceramic *Kleinkunst*, progressive art publicist Rochowanski observed that “sculptor” was a more appropriate appellation than “ceramicist” for Singer-Schinnerl, rightly granting her work similar status as that of the great eighteenth-century *Modellmeister* (master modelers) who worked in Dresden, Berlin, and Vienna.

Indeed, works like her *Chinese mit Pferd* (Chinaman with horse) (color plate 26) and her *Akt* (Female nude) (see fig. 38) were found to “possess full sculptural value,” evoking the eighteenth-century heyday of porcelain figural sculpture.⁹⁹ Revealing rather than suppressing the visible effects of forming and glazing, such works were animated by an expressive *Formwille* invoking the playful poesy of the rococo era: a lyrical “creative power remote from our own times” that Rochowanski believed transformed the contemporary era and its fashions into a poetic Arcadian landscape.¹⁰⁰ In *China Man with Horse*, Singer-Schinnerl’s debt to rococo figural groupings is visible in the stylized chinoiserie ornament and the nondescript manner in which the features of the exotic Chinese “other” are rendered.¹⁰¹ Despite such rococo influences, both works are endowed with a seemingly childlike innocence inflected with a sense of melancholic nostalgia.

It is my argument that these allusions to the eighteenth century were entirely deliberate. As Mimi Hellman argues with regard to French rococo decorative objects, this was an era when much “conceptual fluidity [existed] between the idea of the necessary provision and the idea of the decorative accessory”—when the boundary between decorative and fine art was very much in flux.¹⁰² I believe that the intentional evocation of this time by modern female artists served to critique the Loosian discourse on ornament as superfluous, feminine embellishment corrupting the value of objects that it supposedly enhanced. While commanding their own individual design languages, Wieselthier, Bucher, and Singer-Schinnerl all shared the commonality of crafting decorative objects

that resisted their status as decorative, staking out the artist-craftswoman's claims to elevate female "craftiness" into the realm of fine art.

The *Frauenkopf* and the Birth of Austrian Expressionism

We now turn to the most provocative objects emanating from the KW: the ceramic *Frauenköpfe*. Far from mere decoration, the WW *Frauenköpfe* confronted the increasing hostility toward expressionist ceramics and the *Kunstgewerbeweib*'s decorative aesthetics. To understand their subversive charge, we must return to the antidecorative backlash following the 1908 *Kunstschau*, developments bound up in what Simmons frames as Austrian expressionism's "myths of origins."¹⁰³ The predominant heroes of Austrian expressionism—Kokoschka and Schiele—participated in the same applied-arts ventures as female art students and were recruited for the WW's postcard series and other design projects. But both, according to their mythologizing narratives, underwent inner ruptures from surface-bound decorative secessionism toward searing expressionist styles conventionally interpreted as the faithful and spontaneous transcriptions of the artists' inner worlds.¹⁰⁴ Kokoschka's and Schiele's rejection of their applied-arts roots was facilitated by their new mentors—Loos and Roessler—who steered them away from Klimt, Hoffmann, and the WW in favor of, as Schiele put it, "only the fine arts."¹⁰⁵ Loos famously discovered Kokoschka at the 1908 *Kunstschau*, professing that "it was one of the greatest crimes against humanity" that such a visionary talent "was employed by the Wiener Werkstätte . . . with the painting of fans, drawings, and postcards."¹⁰⁶ Insisting that Kokoschka abandon his decorative, commercial roots, Loos promised to provide him with income through portraiture, arranging sittings with members of the Viennese intelligentsia and the architect's own, largely Jewish client base.¹⁰⁷

Much like Loos for Kokoschka, Roessler guided Schiele (employed designing postcards and fashion accessories for the WW) away from the applied arts after meeting him at the Neukunstgruppe's December 1909 exhibition at the Galerie Miethke, a show including Harlfinger-Zakucka and other *Art for the Child* contributors like Podhajská and Otten-Friedmann. Schiele's conversion from his decorative *Jugendstil* roots was facilitated through Roessler's arranging of exhibitions, sales, commissions, and publicity for the rebellious academy student.

Supposedly influenced by the primitivist visions of Van Gogh and Gauguin, both Kokoschka and Schiele presented themselves as experiencing a rebirth after 1909, whereby they recognized that portraiture and self-portraiture not only revealed sitters' personality and inner torments but equally reflected the artist's.¹⁰⁸ As was argued in reference to Schiele, his portraits were "likenesses of his inner self, mirrors in which he saw his own anxieties reflected."¹⁰⁹ The same interpretative framework established by expressionist practitioners has permeated historiography on the topic, especially the body of literature established by Carl Schorske, who interpreted the expressionist

breakthrough as slicing through the secessionists' decorative façade, "drained . . . of its original function—to speak the psychological truth," to represent the unmediated revelations of troubled visionaries.¹¹⁰

But the "birth" of Austrian expressionism has been mythologized in the literature to obscure its genesis in the same primitivizing currents cultivated by female art students like Harlfinger-Zakucka and taken up by a younger generation of interwar artist-craftswomen. Challenging much of the literature's juxtaposition of inner psychological truth and the decorative surface—forces that, as Houze rightly insists, were not necessarily in opposition—it is my hope to highlight uneven disciplinary practices among art historians who have succumbed to the mythical narrative of expressionism's birth established by Loos, Roeßler, and the male artists themselves.¹¹¹ The looming threat of the boundary-defying decorative art predominating the 1908 *Kunstschau* motivated a growing masculine backlash against feminine decoration, pushing male expressionists to forms of art making associated with masculine heroism and functionless aestheticism rather than domestic female craftiness. The critical foundations for Austrian expressionism—typically recognized for its subjective, emotionally visionary style, heightened use of unnatural colors, and portrayal of external reality in a distorted manner related to the artist's emotional state of being—necessarily built on the notion of the "feminized" applied arts as a reverse mirror image. But it was precisely this definition of applied art as mere decoration that the interwar *Kunstgewerbeweib* so insistently confounded, exploring similar ideas as male expressionists through handcraft techniques.

Expressionism's newfound stress on clearer fields of masculine and feminine practice was linked to tensions surrounding secessionist Vienna's rising numbers of female art students and practicing professionals. Women artists achieved notable success showing as guests at Vienna's "Big Three" exhibition houses, at exclusive private galleries, and at the 1908 and 1909 *Kunstschau*, where, as Julie Johnson maintains, Klimt group members like Broncia Koller (who studied with Böhm at the WFA) transmitted influences from French postimpressionism ahead of male colleagues.¹¹² Yet the inclusion Johnson stresses, was entirely informal, as women were barred from regular membership in the major exhibition societies until after World War II and lacked voting, jury, and committee rights. This patently unequal situation led to the establishment of a separatist "women-only" league, the Association of Austrian Women Artists in 1910, which was founded "to prove that being separate was a mistake" and that women should be integrated into mainstream institutions.¹¹³ In Johnson's analysis, when the association organized its landmark historical retrospective, *Die Kunst der Frau* (The art of the woman) (held in the Secession from November 5, 1910–January 11, 1911, and attracting around twelve thousand visitors), it did not harbor ideas of a separate feminine aesthetic but rather "spent a great deal of energy . . . to demonstrate that women had 'kept step' with the men"—although, I might add, predominantly in the *fine* not *decorative* arts.¹¹⁴ Featuring more than three hundred works by "Old Mistresses" such

as Rachel Ruysch, Rosalba Carriera, Angelika Kauffmann, and Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun alongside more recent works by Berthe Morisot, Eva Gonzalez, and Rosa Bonheur, the exhibition constituted a major undertaking, with its spatial layout arranged to culminate in the *Frauenkunst* of the present, as critics noted.¹¹⁵

Misogynist feuilletonists formulated a pejorative gendered aesthetic for *The Art of the Women*, conflating “women’s art” with long-held stereotypes of superficiality, narcissism, and artifice, as Johnson argues.¹¹⁶ A string of reviewers rehearsed points from Scheffler’s *Die Frau und die Kunst* (1908), a standard textbook for misogynist critics stressing women’s artistic inferiority due to their supposed penchant for decoration, imitation, sentimentality, and inability to think in abstract forms. According to Johnson, connections of women’s art to decorative fashionability largely originated with anti-modernist commentators whose negative reviews “ultimately made separating the feminine from modernism a desirable thing” for modernist critics.¹¹⁷ What concerns me here is not to repeat Johnson’s arguments connecting the exhibition’s critical reception—how it was largely misogynist feuilletonists who formulated a pejorative gendered aesthetic linking women’s art to self-decoration and the artifice of the rococo salon—but to add that modernist reviewers like Roeßler and Loos were already separating modernism from the feminine before and during the 1910 retrospective, independent of the anti-modernists.

The expressionist protagonists Roeßler and Loos were responsible for manufacturing the critical discourse linking women’s art to the decorative and self-decoration. Drawing heavily from Scheffler, Roeßler’s review of *The Art of the Woman* left no doubt that “the woman as artist must be inseminated by the man if she is to create” for she, closely rooted in nature, lacked the male capacity to transform nature into culture in an “independent artistic handwriting.”¹¹⁸ Despite arousing “feelings of aesthetic lust” in male visitors through portraits featuring “soft colors flattering the eyes,” the association’s seductive attempts to use the *Frauenkunst* of the past to prop up its own artistic ambitions necessarily failed—for, alluding to women’s narcissistic indulgence for face painting and penchant for imitation, Roeßler claimed, “All these paintings by women are second hand art. . . . *Spiegelkunst* [mirror art]” at best.¹¹⁹ The insinuation was that women’s art lay in a form of art making in which she was both object and subject, painter and sitter: the art of self-decoration as epitomized by the makeup and powders of the rococo era, as Johnson convincingly argues.¹²⁰ Roeßler expanded his arguments on *Frauenkunst* in further articles, observing that “there are very few women who succeed in creating sculpture” that rose above a superficial mood.¹²¹ By contrast, the arts in which woman remained an alluring mystery to man, “the particularly feminine arts of singing, dancing, acting, and make-up . . . [come] natural to women.”¹²² Roeßler suggested that the arts in which woman decorated and made herself up were the best and truest *Frauenkunst*, for “everything that the woman decorates, is . . . a part of herself” and allows her to bank on her “inborn feminine taste.”¹²³ With very few exceptions, a woman was largely condemned to artistic infertility in painting and sculpture as she could only bear

what man planted in her; otherwise she had “nothing other than herself” to express.¹²⁴ Echoing Scheffler’s arguments on women’s “entirely decorative talents” and penchants for “sentimentalizing and scaling down masculine art forms,” Roessler recommended ostensibly *unthreatening* female handcrafts like embroidery as much more valuable than large canvases by women striving to monumental art.¹²⁵

Similarly linking women to the decorative and self-decoration, Loos rooted women’s propensity for self-ornamentation in primordial erotic drives. The very first ornament, according to him, was a cross symbolizing the vertical male penetrating the horizontal female, which primitive man created out of surplus energy.¹²⁶ But Loos maintained that societal progress was synonymous with the gradual “extinction” of ornament from objects of everyday use, insisting that “modern man is no longer capable of producing ornament. The modern producers of our culture have no ornamentation. . . . Only people who were born in the present but actually live in early times—women, the rural population, Orientals (including the Japanese)—as well as people with mutilated brains, such as necktie and wallpaper designers, are capable of creating new ornamentation of equal quality to the old.”¹²⁷

While modern man had overcome such atavistic drives, woman still remained rooted in the savage “urge to decorate one’s face and anything else within reach.”¹²⁸ Here, it is supremely telling that male expressionists’ co-option of primitive ornamentation like tattooing and body painting for fine artistic practices became attached to transcendent psychic interiority, where “the primitive *Drang* (urge) could run rampant.”¹²⁹ But with regard to architecture and design, Loos infantilized, orientalized, feminized, and criminalized the use of ornament in his well-known, if often oversimplified, lecture and essay “Ornament and Crime,” a text traditionally dated to 1908, but which Long has redated to 1909 or 1910.¹³⁰ Synthesizing arguments made since 1898, “Ornament and Crime” drew on Caesar Lombroso’s study of deviancy and Ernst Haeckl’s biogenetic principle that “ontogeny repeats phylogeny” to link criminal degeneracy to the *Ur*-ornament of tattooing; accordingly, the failure to “overcome the Red Indian within us” and subdue infantile urges to “smear walls with erotic scribbles” embodied nothing less than criminal acts.¹³¹ While such decorative drives were understandable in six-year-old children and primitive peoples (who, as we saw in chapter 4, were judged to be at similar levels of evolutionary development), Loos found it degenerate that Western women’s dress clung to anti-modern and delinquent proclivities. As he observed, the most reliable indicator of ladies’ fashion were the paragraphs in the criminal code dealing with prostitution, for the coquette was the ultimate arbiter of women’s fashions.¹³² Women have only, according to Loos, retained men’s affections by transforming themselves into alluring mysteries through dress, simultaneously concealing and flaunting what lies beneath.¹³³ That the *Kunstgewerbeweib* embraced what Loos likened to the “childish” Red Indian within complicated his infantilization of feminine self-ornamentation by reappropriating the decorative as a badge of honor.¹³⁴

Against the backdrop of criticism linking women's artistic abilities to their propensity for self-decoration, KW artists including Wieselthier, Singer-Schinnerl, Calm, Schmidl, and Schaschl first experimented with the *Frauenkopf* form at the 1920 *Kunstschau*, creating roughly modeled heads in the guise of mythological goddesses, nymphs, bacchantes, and vaguely classical figures, as seen in Schaschl's untitled *Frauenkopf* (fig. 42). However, in response to increasing attacks against the feminized applied arts, by mid-decade the heads were shorn of mythological reference and offered as parodic appropriations of the "new women" in contemporary fashion magazines. Collectively, the heads shared formal characteristics such as elongated necks and long, languid faces with almond-shaped eyes and stylized eyebrows; garish painted cosmetics applied in a haphazard, child-like manner; and in sardonic emulation of the perfect "porcelain" complexion, white clay slips that left unpainted earthenware visible beneath.

Among the WW ceramicists, Wieselthier made the *Frauenkopf* her signature. In the interim since Paris, Wieselthier had acquired newfound prestige and financial stability upon selling the inventory of her workshops to the WW in 1927 and accepting a position as director of the WW's ceramics workshop. Wieselthier's low-fired earthenware *Frauenköpfe* were made using her characteristic method of hand-formed hollow modeling, with applied hand-formed decoration, elongated wheel-thrown necks, and fashionably bobbed hair, as worn by WW designers (see fig. 31). From the mid-1920s onward, the Wieselthier *Frauenkopf* flaunted the vermilion lipstick, bold eye shadow, dark mascara, and rouged cheeks of the 1920s flapper: a fashionable yet masklike mode of face painting that "delighted in the display of makeup's artifice."³⁵ A 1928 Wieselthier *Frauenkopf* demonstrates how the artist applied the figure's garish "makeup" in a deliberately childlike fashion, with pronounced orange-red circles denoting rouge and uneven, white slip glaze invoking the imperfect application of face powder (color plate 24). By exposing the artifice behind the illusion, the performance behind the perfect face, the *Frauenkopf* and its frozen, unemotional expression stood as a powerful intervention against critical tropes linking women's art making with decoration and the art of cosmetics. Wieselthier signed her work with hand-modeled, interlocking VW initials in relief, playing with the collapse between object and subject (or ideas of female narcissism readily equated with female self-portraiture) that antedecorative critics anticipated. Lending the form its productive tension was Wieselthier's chosen material of earthenware, a type of ceramic associated with quotidian domestic tableware and notably less refined than stoneware or porcelain. Simultaneously masking and revealing its origins at the potter's wheel, Wieselthier's vessel-based technique played on the convention of equating parts of thrown pots with parts of the female body (proceeding from the "neck" to the "foot"); yet the "neck" of

42. Reni Schaschl, *Frauenkopf* (Woman's head), ca. 1920. Earthenware. From *DKD* 47, no. 12 (1920): 103.



the *Frauenkopf* is in the wrong place, suggesting all the more potently the transgression of creating a pot that was not a pot—a pot masquerading as a glamorous woman.

It is precisely the heads' pretensions to the fine art of sculpture that made them so transgressively boundary-defying; they cannot, like vernacular examples of ceramic caricature in the form of mugs, jugs, etc., be understood as uncomplicated humor. Numerous examples by other WW artists like Kuhn, Schaschl, and Singer-Schinnerl, often designed and executed in multiples, further attest to a collective emphasis on cosmetic artificiality, interrogating how "putting on a face" became a sign of normative female identity. Like Wieselthier, Kuhn and Schmidl often left patches of raw earthenware visible beneath the porcelain-slip complexion and, in the case of several Kuhn heads now preserved in private collections, noticeable smudging of the painted makeup: visual effects that in many cases embraced the accidents of firing in a mutually constitutive, dialectical relationship.

That the heads became noticeably "made up" after the 1925 Paris *Exposition* was not coincidental but constituted a deliberate riposte to antidecorative critics. Compare, for instance, Schaschl's 1920 head (see fig. 42) with Wieselthier's 1928 model (color plate 24). Such heavy-handed painted cosmetics were nothing less than an affront to Roessler's equation of women's art with the art of self-presentation; they gave form to the long-standing link between painting faces and painted faces. As celebrated beauty entrepreneur and WW client Helene Rubenstein summarized, "A beautiful woman sits down before her mirror as an artist in front of his canvas."¹³⁶ Complicating such equations between women's art and the decorative woman was the fact that, in contrast to the naturalistic effects often desired through cosmetics, the heads appeared as unnatural creatures of ceramic artifice. Their masklike qualities were not an uncritical reflection of the visible cosmetics of the 1920s—through which fashionable *garçonnes* (flappers) "shout[ed] their freedom in appearance and behavior"—but critiques of the way society reduced women artists to sexually defined roles that were, in fact, artificially made up.¹³⁷ In deliberately figuring face painting as a throwback to the erotic ornament of primitive women, artists like Wieselthier, Kuhn, and Singer-Schinnerl laid claim to a raw expressionism that Loos prized in Kokoschka's 1909 *Warrior* (a self-portrait bust of painted clay, frozen in a gaping, primordial cry); similarly, the eroticized eyeliner and lipstick of the *Köpfe* stood in for the atavistic sexual drives suggested in the tattooed body painting in Kokoschka's drama *Murderer, Hope of Women*. The way 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: their declarative artificiality (underscored by the uneven, heavy-handed "makeup") was a self-reflexive gesture parodying notions of rococo face painting and the art of the decorative woman.

While many artists took inspiration from Wieselthier's work, it was Baudisch, who had joined the WW in 1926 as Wieselthier's pupil, who created the most sardonic interpretations of the *Frauenkopf*. While clearly indebted to her mentor, Baudisch's

heads of 1929 illustrate how she carried Wieselthier's mannerist tendencies to the extreme with exaggerated elongation; a languid, vacuous facial expression; abstract surface and three-dimensional decoration; and a cropped, abrupt plasticity that lent the head an unambiguous masklike quality (fig. 43). Even more so than in Wieselthier's small-scale work, Baudisch's heads exposed the unnatural masquerade of face painting, particularly with the garish color palette (often orange and blue) and the ornamental markings on the neck. Characteristic of Baudisch's figures, the heads were marked by a turbulent, formal choppiness and unnervingly *sachlich* (matter-of-fact) facial expression that troubled notions of feminine beauty. In their anonymous, generically replicated qualities, Baudisch's and Wieselthier's heads seemed to represent a standardized model of women's appearance.

Antidecorative critics like Weiser and Roeßler were vexed by these seductive decorative objects.¹³⁸ With no function beyond their own beauty, were such heads merely superficial decoration without meaning, feeding the all-consuming luxury of a class of women hoping to imitate eighteenth-century female tastemakers in an era when the consumption of fine ceramics was conflated with sexual desire?¹³⁹ Was the apparent expressivity of such objects nothing more than a trick, as one male critic put it, "playing with the forms of expressive creation . . . like the moods of a beautiful woman?"¹⁴⁰ The critic may have been right, for the heads were precisely the opposite of how Loos envisioned the unornamented modern woman. Whereas Loos located a woman's beauty in an essentiality not enhanced by superfluous ornament or cosmetics—for only the primitive found woman beautiful because of gold rings in her ears and nose—the feminine beauty of the heads was entirely cosmetic and, as Loos would have it, savagely ornamental.¹⁴¹ Yet there was much more to these hollow heads—empty and mysterious as a womb and created in a misogynist climate in which women were believed to be "empty-headed"—than such critics acknowledged.

Ceramics was a medium with strong feminine connotations, and women had a special relationship with it as makers, consumers, and caretakers. Much of the pottery of the world's earliest civilizations was produced by women for food preparation or cultic purposes.¹⁴² In ancient Sumerian literature, ceramic imagery frequently served as a trope for birth and creation, with metaphorical linkages between the female body and clay (with the parallel between vessels/children being born out of the kiln/womb).¹⁴³ Rebuffing expressionist critics' notions that women needed male teachers for creative insemination, the birth of expressionist ceramics was a uniquely female artistic moment,



43. Gudrun Baudisch, *Köpfe* (Heads), ca. 1929. Earthenware. From *DKD* 64, no. 9 (1929): 177.

pioneered and practiced by women in a medium with deeply rooted feminine connotations later exploited by second-wave feminists like Judy Chicago and Hannah Wilke.

That the heads were marked by artifice and an alienating masklike quality, rather like mannequins, was intentional. They are not, as many observers assumed, uncomplicated and uncritical self-portraits of the emancipated *Kunstgewerbeweib*, with her bobbed hair and fashionable self-presentation, as seen in the WW publicity photographs (see fig. 31).¹⁴⁴ On the contrary, using makeup as a mask that confounded rather than conferred identity, the cosmetically enhanced, hyper-feminine *Frauenköpfe* “made up” for the *Kunstgewerbeweib*’s perceived hermaphroditism in cross-pollinating art and craft and in destabilizing masculine and feminine personal behavior. The heads can be interpreted as turning the mirror on Roeßler’s trivializing equations of women’s art with the feminine art of self-decoration: deep-seated notions that women’s reproductive capacities precluded them from originality in painting and sculpture and that true women’s art only concerns the way women decorate and make themselves up. A feminist reading of the *Frauenköpfe* suggests that women’s art was an entirely artificial, made-up category—a sentiment the heads seem to embody.

The subversive thrust of Wieselthier’s and Baudisch’s work is all the more poignant considering the materiality of their creations. The *Kunstgewerbeweib*’s preferred medium was not porcelain—which, as literary scholar Elizabeth Kowalski-Wallace argues, served as a trope for femininity with its smooth, perfect surfaces, delicacy, and fragility—but the quotidian, low-fired earthenware, which was associated more with domestic usage than fine art. Porcelain may have been an obvious choice for the *Frauenköpfe* given its connotations of preciousness, refinement, and rococo femininity, but the artists’ choice of the coarser, more Germanic earthenware lent their forms a creative dissonance contributing to their haughty, even impish senses of humor. Mirroring their artistic ambitions more broadly, the interwar era’s “crafty women” created earthenware that rose above domestic utility, painted clay surfaces that were detached from, but seemed to play on, nineteenth-century stereotypes of amateurish china painting and the decorative woman; their ideas profoundly foreshadowed Judy Chicago’s description of china painting as “a perfect metaphor for women’s domesticated and trivialized circumstances.”¹⁴⁵ Such messages are clearly apparent in Kogelnik’s homage to Wieselthier in a series of ceramic heads and masks of the 1980s, which grappled with similar issues of superficiality and artificial self-stylization in media images of women.¹⁴⁶ Precisely by objectifying her female figures, keeping them entirely at the level of the decorative, did the masklike qualities of Wieselthier’s art frustrate attempts to locate the mysterious feminine essence that Roeßler expected in women’s art.

In satirizing and visually shattering images of feminine artifice, the *Frauenköpfe* can be best understood in the tradition of ceramic caricature and satire: parodying the rococo superficiality that caused such objects and their makers to be dismissed as mere ornament. The fact that many critics took the heads as engaging in playful antics,

remaining entirely at the surface level, was a destabilizing tactic serving to undermine conventional definitions of women's art as necessarily reproductive and derivative of men's art. It was not accidental that the peak of *Frauenköpfe* output came at a time when the *Kunstgewerbeweib* was facing mounting attacks for her degenerate cross-pollination of art and craft as expounded in Loos's and Klinger's lectures.¹⁴⁷ Rather, since 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 talents lay in fields in which she decorated herself.¹⁴⁸ A provocative riposte to antidecorative male critics, the WW's provocative feminine vessels pushed the boundaries between the masculine and the feminine, the decorative and the meaningful, and art and craft. At a time when the very notion of the decorative arts was equated with frivolous feminine ornamentation, the *Kunstgewerbeweib* staked out as essential what critics disparaged as superfluous.

As expressionist ceramics increasingly came under fire for hovering between surface and depth, the minor and monumental, and the very boundaries of art and craft, fault lines emerged between the conservative and radical wings of the Association of Austrian Women Artists. Led by Harlfinger-Zakucka, the association's radical wing championed the Klimt group's philosophies on the equality of art and craft and the provocative idea of a separate feminine aesthetic. The conservative faction opposed the secessionist cross-pollination of art and craft as represented by expressionist ceramics and the threat of feminine decoration. The following chapter examines the emerging split in the association in the 1920s, arguing that tensions surrounding the feminization of the applied arts reflected not only gendered attacks by male critics against the *Kunstgewerbeweib*'s impure decorative aesthetics but also the association's own qualms that its professional standards might be tinged by women's connection to the decorative. Such tensions tore apart the association, as Harlfinger-Zakucka—joining forces with interwar Austria's most radical women painters, architects, and the new generation of artist-craftswomen behind the explosion of expressionist ceramics—strove to define "women's art" on their own terms, unconstrained by the gender dialectic surrounding the Werkstätte's crafty women. What ensued was nothing less than a "female Secession" carrying the Klimt group's spiritual legacy into the interwar years: a counterpart to the 1905 secessionist schism over the relative value of the fine and applied arts that confronted the mounting attacks against women's decorative criminality. The pages to follow detail how, much like the *Frauenköpfe*, Harlfinger-Zakucka's radical new league turned the mirror on its critics to subvert the trivializing stereotypes surrounding decorative women's art and the decorative woman.

