

M A K

Museum of
Applied Arts

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Donation Project

CARL OTTO CZESCHKA'S
COSTUME DESIGNS

Artwork	Costume design for Richard Wagner's opera <i>Tristan und Isolde: Tristan</i>
Design	Carl Otto Czeschka, Vienna, 1907
Material	Tempera on paper and canvas
Measurements	Hight: 203 cm Width: 92 cm
MAK Inv. No.	LHG 186
Artwork	Costume design for Richard Wagner's opera <i>Walküre: Wotan</i>
Design	Carl Otto Czeschka, Vienna, 1907
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Highlights of Art Nouveau

Costume Design

The costume designs by Carl Otto Czeschka for Wagner's operas enrich the MAK Collection on Viennese Modernism and are among the highlights of the Permanent Collection Vienna 1900. As part of its comprehensive provenance research, the MAK was able to trace the heirs of these works, which had been placed on permanent loan to the museum in the 1930s by Lili Waerndorfer.

The rightful descendants of Lili Waerndorfer have now expressed their willingness to sell the works to the MAK at a reduced estimated price of € 80,000. This unique opportunity enables the MAK to secure these important works for its collection on a permanent basis and to continue making them accessible to the public.

Carl Otto Czeschka's costume designs provide a fascinating glimpse into the world of the Viennese Secession. Originally created for planned performances of *Tristan und Isolde* and *Die Walküre*, they represent the epitome of scenic art of Art Nouveau and reflect Czeschka's love for ornamentation and the symbolic language of ancient mythology. Alongside his design drawings for Franz Keim's *Nibelungen* (1908), these works are among Czeschka's masterpieces. The figurines are large-scale, poster-like costume images for planned performances of Wagnerian operas, but they were never staged.



Carl Otto Czeschka in the bookbinding workshop of the Wiener Werkstätte, Neustiftgasse 32–34, 1070 Vienna © MAK

Historical and Artistic Importance of the Works

Carl Otto Czeschka was born in Vienna in 1878. From a very young age, he showed strong artistic talent, which would later make him one leading figures representatives of the Viennese Secession and the Art Nouveau movement. As a child, he was fascinated by military scenes and parades, an interest that nurtured his passion for depictions of armor, weapons, and traditional costumes. This early fascination later found expression in his stage and costume designs, many of which draw on Nordic and Germanic mythology. Czeschka studied at the Viennese School of Arts and Crafts and joined the Wiener Werkstätte in 1906, where he worked alongside artists such as Gustav Klimt and Koloman Moser. There, he developed his unique style.

The designs for Wagner's operas *Tristan und Isolde* and *Die Walküre* exemplify Czeschka's deep engagement. They show influences of ancient Germanic decorative art as well as clear inspirations from Klimt's flat ornamentation. In these large-scale costume images, the figures stand without dimensional depth and present a noble elegance that lets them appear as ideal figures. These works are iconic examples of Czeschka's application of Art Nouveau ornamentation in scenic creations.

Detailed Analysis of the Works

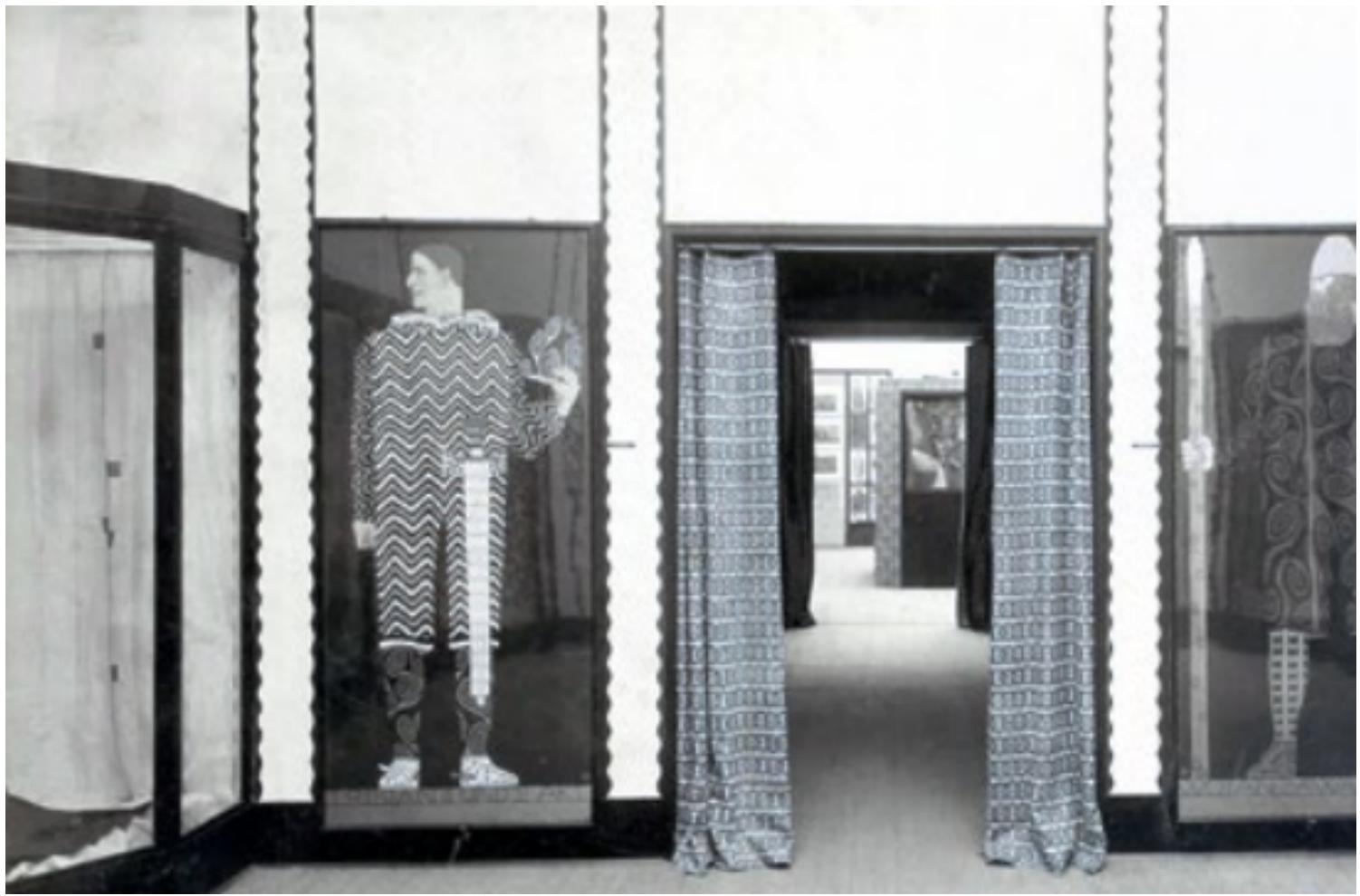
The colorfulness is reduced, the image mostly goes without spatial depth, the figures are stripped of all three-dimensionality, and large free space is contrasted with intricately ornamented forms. In the preciousness of their garments, the figures remain aloof as if posing: precisely like templates for future costumes. The reduced color palette and the ornately designed, sharply profiled figures grant the designs a sacred and elitist aura. Despite their weapons, the fighters appear peaceful, more like ideal figures of a mystical world than real warriors—a fundamental Secessionist aspect. Czeschka's figurative interpretation is a key example of the artistic conception of that era, which opposed realistic representations and centered on the symbolic impact of the figures.

Cultural and Art Historical Significance of the Works for the MAK

The figurines are among Czeschka's most significant works and belong to the highlights of his creative career, alongside his illustrations for the *Nibelungen*. With their striking large-scale and highly stylized representation, they create a remarkable connection between art and theater, thus enriching the Art Nouveau Collection of the MAK with significant works that would otherwise remain hidden from the public. The artist's close relationship with the Library and Works on Paper Collection further underscores the relevance of these works for the Collection. Czeschka's decades-long engagement with arms and ornamentation made the MAK both an artistic retreat and a source of inspiration for him.

Provenance

The financier and co-founder of the Wiener Werkstätte, Fritz Waerndorfer, promoted Czeschka and supported the presentation of his designs together with the *Nibelungen* illustrations at the Vienna Kunstschaus in 1908. There, the two gouaches were publicly exhibited for the first time, displayed in the theater art room designed by Alfred Roller. Waerndorfer purchased the works in 1909 for his wife Lili, who loaned them to the International Art Exhibition in Rome in 1911. After the Waerndorfers' divorce in 1930, Lili kept the works and offered them to the MAK for purchase in 1934 and 1937. Due to financial difficulties, the purchase was not realized, but the works were acquired as permanent loans.



Exhibition view, Vienna Kunstschaus 1908 © MAK



Left: Costume design for Richard Wagner's opera *Walküre*: Wotan Design: Carl Otto Czeschka, Vienna, 1907 Tempera on paper and canvas, Inv. No. LHG 185 © MAK

Right: Costume design for Richard Wagner's opera *Tristan und Isolde*: Tristan Design: Carl Otto Czeschka, Vienna, 1907 Tempera on paper and canvas, Inv. No. LHG 186 © MAK

TWO DESIGNS. ONE LEGACY.

Help secure their place in our permanent collection.

CONDITION

For the redesign of the Permanent Collection Vienna 1900, the works were extensively restored in 2012/13: They were cleaned, strengthened, re-stretched, and framed with UV-resistant museum glass. Both are in excellent condition; slight abrasions on the paint layer were intentionally not retouched.

YOUR SUPPORT

Following an expert report, the owners are offering the MAK to purchase the works for € 80,000. The MAK Collection would be significantly enriched by this support and the MAK's standing as an international center for the Wiener Werkstätte and Viennese Modernism would be emphasized. Making this purchase possible would not only secure the preservation of these exceptional masterpieces but also make them available to a wide audience as important testimonies of Viennese Modernism. These works offer exciting opportunities for exclusive educational programs, events, and innovative educative formats, which would make your commitment highly visible. We invite you to become part of this unique initiative and join the MAK in preserving this significant cultural heritage as a highlight of our Collection. With your contribution, you will strengthen the museum's cultural profile and provide impressive support for art and culture.

**HELP US SECURE TWO EXCEPTIONAL COSTUME DESIGNS
FOR GENERATIONS TO COME.**

OUR DONATION ACCOUNTS

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The MAK – Museum of Applied Arts is one of the three most important museums of applied arts in the world. It stands for the connection between the past and the future, which can also be felt and experienced when visiting its extensive collection, its spacious showrooms, and its themed special exhibitions.

Founded in 1863, the MAK is one of the most magnificent buildings on Vienna's Ringstrasse and the second oldest museum of applied arts in the world. A special feature are the exhibition rooms designed by some of the most important contemporary artists, such as Donald Judd and Jenny Holzer.

The MAK collection comprises over 900,000 objects and printed works from five centuries—outstanding examples of artistic creation in applied arts, design, architecture, fashion, and contemporary visual and digital art, including the famous Thonet bentwood furniture and furniture designs of Viennese Modernism.

MISSION STATEMENT

The MAK is the second oldest museum of applied art in the world. Founded in 1863 as the Imperial Royal Austrian Museum of Art and Industry with the aim of serving as both a sample collection and an educational and training institution, it represents the fruitful combination of past and future, of applied and fine art. Ranging from the Middle Ages to the present day, our collection's outstanding examples of artistic creativity run the gamut from applied art, design, architecture, and fashion to contemporary fine and digital art.

WE BELIEVE IN THE POWER OF CREATIVITY.

The MAK approaches its core missions—collecting, researching, and educating—the context of the forward-thinking and sustainable development of our society and environment. Our narrative revolves around the impact and power of art and design, and how our understanding of history can enable us to tap into this in response to the challenges of both the present and the future.

WE STAND FOR DIVERSITY, INCLUSION, AND SUSTAINABILITY.

With our wide range of topics and educational formats we aim to start a socially relevant and lively dialogue with a broad and diverse public, whom we welcome to our museum. We encourage reflection related to everyday life, with the aspiration that every time visitors come to the MAK they find enrichment, inspiration, and guidance.

To this end, we are in constant communication with the most interesting creatives of our age, at home and abroad, visionary and interdisciplinary. We want to keep an open mind about the future and make these ideas accessible to all.