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Elements in Japanese Art and Crafts which influenced the development of Western Art and Design in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

by
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ILLUSTRATIONS.

INTRODUCTION

Japan has been recognised as the source of much inspiration in Western visual arts and crafts for well over a century. It's influence has touched a huge variety of areas; furniture, interior design, jewellery, ceramics and printing. But what is it exactly that proves so inspirational? What did Japanese artists and craftspeople have that eluded their Western counterparts until it's ports were opened to the world?

By the late nineteenth century, industrialisation and mass mechanisation seemed to have drained the age of creative energy. Artists and craftspeople were desperately searching for a new source of inspiration. They found this inspiration in Japan. Japanese art has a very clear style and a strong sense of identity. This strength was picked up on and eagerly adopted by European artists who, in the midst of the turmoil of the industrial revolution which was seen as causing a divided society, welcomed the sense of unity and harmony found in Japanese art.

Japanese art differs from Western art in style, format and also the fact that they have a deep-rooted spiritual appreciation of artistic beauty which they carry through into every aspect of their lives. Also, in Japan there is no distinction between the applied arts and fine art, both are respected equally.

At first, artists were deeply influenced by the delicate and restrained quality of Japanese art but gradually an awareness developed of the type of format they made use of in all types of artwork. The use of the circle, square or rectangle as a framework for a motif predominates throughout Japanese art, from seals on prints, arrowheads and swordguards to marks on porcelain.

Using an abstract motif or an image to convey either a piece of art or the identity of the person who created it, was prevalent in Japanese art. The motifs were developed to such a degree that they became artworks in themselves. When an artist or designer signs a piece of work, he or she, is marking the piece so that it

can be immediately identified as their own. Without this signature the piece has no identification, no history and therefore is worth only what it's estimated age and materials make it worth. A signature in the West is usually one's Christian name and surname. Some choose to use their initials or just their surname. Companies and organisations often have logos which are instantly recognisable and easily identified as theirs. Crests and seals have been used world-wide for centuries as an indication of the tribal or social status of an individual or family. The crest usually depicts the motto of the family or an image particular to them. The seal has varied in shape and size depending on the rank or status of the person or institution. For centuries artists have identified their works with their signature. With the increasing influence of Japan on the West in the late nineteenth century, it became popular to be identified by a monogram. This can be an abstract design within a frame or an image created using the individuals initials.

Monograms, I feel, are more personalised and more artistic than

the signature, although not necessarily more decorative. Indeed, a common factor of stamps and seals throughout history is that they are generally quite simple, relying on the strong visual power of the line. The designing of monograms and logos was a particular passion with turn of the century artists. These insignia often replaced the conventional signature on works of art. Take for example the monograms of the artists involved in turn of the century movements such as Art Nouveau and the Weiner Werkstatte. These monograms have an undeniably Japanese style. It is, in my opinion, the visual impact of the Japanese characters themselves and the exotic layout which greatly inspired the very graphic art of these designers.

CHAPTER 1

As the turn of the century approached, the world of the arts found itself in creative turmoil. There was a general understanding among artists and crafts-people that something new was needed in order to mark the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century with optimism. New stimulus and a new vocabulary were urgently called for. This stimulus was provided by an unexpected source, from which the whole field of modern art drew its most regenerative strength. The source was Japan.

Although Chinoiserie in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had whetted the appetites of inspiration hungry artists in Europe, its influence was minor in comparison to that of Japan in the nineteenth century. On the 31st. of March 1854, Commodore Perry of the U. S. Navy opened the ports of Japan to the world. After two centuries in isolation, trade agreements were reached with the U. S. , France, Russia, Great Britain and the

Netherlands. Economic and cultural exchanges began. The art of the Japanese bore no relation to the styles of the European past. It was the direct expression of a very ancient culture which had developed without the influence of the West. The 1860's saw a flood of Japanese artifacts into Europe. Within only ten years, a constant flow of books and articles explored and popularised them.

In 1862, Samuel Bing opened a shop on the Rue de Rivoli in Paris, the first in western Europe to stock Japanese porcelain and woodcut prints. James McNeill Whistler (1834 - 1903), one of Britain's most eminent artists at the time, was an eager patron of Bing's Rue de Rivoli shop, buying 'blue-and-white' china and Japanese prints and returning with them to London. The prints, in particular, inspired a large number of his artist friends, among them William Rossetti, (1833 - 1887);

> It was through Whistler that my brother and I became acquainted with Japanese woodcuts and colourprints. This may have been early in 1863. He had seen and purchased some specimens of these works in Paris, and he heartily delighted in them, and showed them

> to us; and we then set about procuring other works of the same class. I hardly know that anyone paid any attention to Japanese designs prior to this. (Wichmann, 1981, p.8.)

The influence these woodcut prints had on painters and designers was unprecedented. Their techniques and style were to filter rapidly into the artistic consciousness of those European artists who were working towards what was to become known as Art Nouveau.

There was a huge swing away from the realism of photographic-type painting. Dark modelling and sombre tonal values were abandoned in favour of shadow free areas of flat colour. Eastern art showed that the western illusion of perspective depth was not integral to pictorial composition. Astonishing new angles of vision were introduced; the object could be viewed from above, from below and the planes were separated by strong diagonal lines. Another inspirational method of composition used truncated foreground shapes to frame the piece.

By studying Japanese hanging scrolls and pillar pictures, Western

artists saw how the Japanese tall narrow format suggested new ways of organising the picture plane. Seemingly arbitrarily placed objects cutting across the field of vision created a new pictorial perception and revolutionised composition. The French Impressionists were among the first to experiment with the tall narrow format. In some areas of Art Nouveau art and design, however, this format came to constitute the very nature of the painting.

Whistler himself went from being the inspired to inspiring others. Between 1876 and 1877, Whistler decorated a room at 49 Prince's Gate, London, for the shipowner F. R. Leyland. The panelling in the *'Peacock Room'* (fig.1), is influenced by Japanese woodwork, and Whistler used decorative motifs he had seen in Japanese prints and textiles, along with the peacock, the archetypal symbol of the Aesthetic Movement. His paintings and designs for the `Peacock Room` had tremendous effect on painting and illustration. His work developed from using Japanese models and cluttering his canvas with an enthusiastic use of Japanese props, to a deeper

Fig. 1.

understanding of the aesthetics of Japanese art.

Whistlers work in the late 1860's and 1870's depicts extremely elegant, simplified silhouettes, his compositions boldly asymmetrical and his pictorial space composed of a collection of flat planes superimposed on one another. Whistler strove to master the art of Japanese calligraphy and often included inscriptions on his paintings based on Far Eastern models.

In 1891, a young English artist named Aubrey Beardsley (1872 - 1898), visited Whistlers *'Peacock Room'* in London, which incorporated the latter's painting, `La Princess de la Pays de la Porcelain`, 1864. Beardsley, although greatly impressed with the painting, was searching for something more graphic;

> I am anxious to say something somewhere on the subject of lines and line drawing. How little the importance of outline is understood by some of the best painters. . . the moderns seem to think that harmony in colour is the only thing worth attaining. Could you reproduce a drawing purely in line? (Reid, 1991, p. 11)

Beardsley found the answer to his question in his study of

Japanese woodcuts. Within a year, he had this to say,

> "I struck out at a new style and method of work, which was founded on Japanese art but quite original. . . (the drawings) were extremely fantastic in conception but perfectly severe in execution. " (Reid, 1991, p. 13).

Although his short career spanned only six years, Beardsley produced a wealth of artistic works in which undulating outlines and broad, toneless surfaces are the dominating elements (fig. 2). Both Whistler and Beardsley looked to Japanese prints for inspiration with regard to format, subject matter, and general style, but another common factor was the discarding of their respective signatures in favour of monograms.

Whistler chose the image of a butterfly as his monogram (fig. 3), and it shows how well he understood the Japanese use of space and outline. By placing a few lines against an area of tone, the insect is created, with character and movement. Beardsley's monogram, (fig.4,5,6) although not a figurative motif, has strong sexual connotations. The design has a number of subtle variations, though all maintain the suggestion of penetration. The most frequently used

Fig. 2.

Fig. 3.

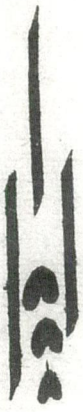


Fig. 4.

Fig. 5.

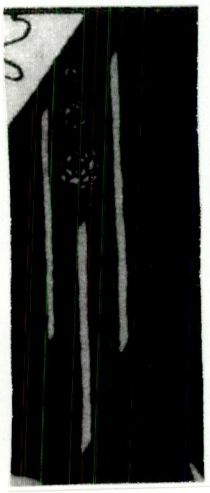


Fig. 6.

motif consists of two parallel vertical lines, between which are three hearts, in descending order of size. The hearts are placed beneath a third vertical line which is of equal length to the lines on either side. The variations include the hearts being replaced by dots, or by an abstracted floral motif.

One of the greatest influences of Japanese printing was its restriction of colour, producing strong graphic images using black and white. Obviously not every artist adhered to this restriction, but those that did are now recognised to have produced some of the most visually effective graphic art in the history of printing.

Aubrey Beardsley was one of the best known advocates of this colourway. After Beardsley, Swiss artist Felix Vallotton made consistent use of the effective contrast between black and white (fig. 7). In 1890, Vallotton turned to graphic art, particularly woodcuts. There is a wealth of expressiveness to be found in his prints which seems to be lacking in his paintings. He gave very sharp characteristics to the object being depicted by representing them in outline or silhouette form. The monogram of Felix Vallotton is

Fig. 7.

very simple, with no pictorial element. It consists of a rather small square in either bottom corner of the print, usually white, framed by a black border and containing the joined letters F and V.

Apart from those already discussed, there are a number of artists whose work clearly shows the influence of Japan, an influence which I believe, was, in many cases, the principle behind the use of monograms. I would like to refer to some of them briefly, in order to show the extent of the impact of Far Eastern woodblock prints on Western poster and graphic design at the turn of the century.

The French artist, Eugene Grasset (1841 - 1917), moved to Paris in 1871 to study. His graphic work used the combined printing techniques of lithography and wood engraving (fig. 8). He was very interested in Japanese art and the fact that poster design became a popular area of artistic activity is generally attributed to him. Grasset's monogram are the initials E and G in a stylised form, its

Fig. 8.

style reflecting the artists admiration for the art of Japan.

Walter Crane (1845 - 1915) is probably best known as the founder of the English Art Workers Guild and of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society. Crane established a framework for the aesthetics of Art Nouveau in his theoretical works. He was a respected book illustrator (fig. 9), adapting features of the Japanese colour prints which so greatly influenced him.

Two artists whose work I find particularly interesting are French artist Gaston de Latenay (1859 - 1911) and the Vienna Secessionist Emil Orlik (1870 - 1932). De Latenay was well known as a landscape painter, but his book illustration which never received the acclaim of his landscapes, showed obvious Japanese influence, to the point where many could easily be mistaken for Japanese woodcuts. His renderings of waves, trees and clouds have virtually no suggestion of a Western treatment (fig. 10). De Latenay also enclosed texts in boxes, often using recognised Japanese motifs, such as the iris, as a background decoration. This boxing of texts was also a tradition of Oriental

Fig. 9.

Fig. 10.

printmakers. He marked his prints with a very subtle framed stamp, featuring his initials and the year of it's execution.

Emil Orlik travelled to Japan in 1900 and spent time studying with masters of the woodcutting technique. His work is only distinguishable from original Japanese models by his slightly simpler compositions and by the fact that his chosen motifs filled a larger surface area than those of the Japanese masters. He illustrated Lafcadio Hearne's 19?? book Kwaidan (fig.11), using variations and repetitions of various Japanese motifs. Although Orlik did not have a specific monogram, his work has such a strong Japanese style that I feel he cannot be excluded from discussion.

Two English designers, James Pryde (1873 - 1936) and William Nicholson (1872 - 1949) designed under the pseudonym 'The Brothers Beggarstaff'. Their posters influenced graphic art in Europe in the late nineteenth century and primarily made a decisive contribution to the development of English poster design. Their design The Chinaman (1894) shows obvious

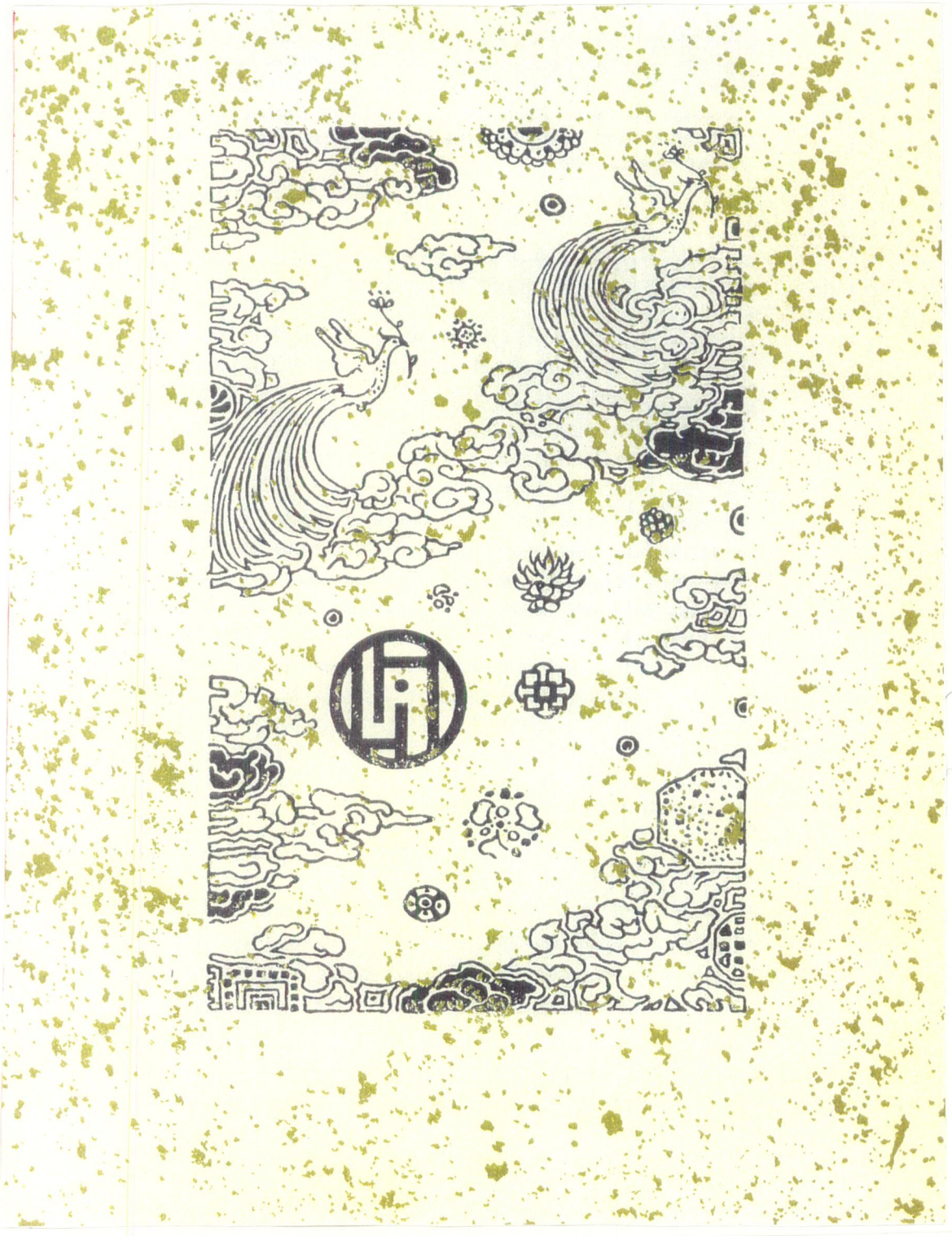


Fig. 11.

Japanese influence and in the same year was used in a poster for the English musical comedy 'A Trip To Chinatown' (fig. 12). Its simplified design, using pure colours, and in particular the positioning of the rectangular panel in the upper right-hand corner, are reminiscent of similar traits in Japanese prints. An interesting note about this poster is that Pryde and Nichloson felt that their design had been 'mutilated' by the addition of the "idiotic imitation of Chinese lettering" (Campbell, 1990, p.39) by the printers, after the design had left the Beggarstaff studio. Obviously the designers were more interested in conveying a sense of the formal aspect of Japanese art, rather than this brash, in-your-face display of Oriental influence.

Henry van de Velde (1863 - 1957) is one of Art Nouveau's best known artists and a prime example of an artist whose work was strongly affected by Japonisme. He began his career as a painter, basing his work on Japanese wood engravings. He then decided to concentrate on the arts and crafts, becoming a member of Les Vingt (established 1884), 'The Belgian Society of Twenty'.

Fig. 12.

He became internationally known when Samuel Bing asked him to furnish and decorate four rooms of his 'Art Nouveau Shop' in Paris. Van de Velde was remarkable in that he designed everything from posters to book covers, jewellery and furniture, while utilising the same decorative elements throughout. These decorative elements derived from the curve, the reverse curve and by covered and plain surfaces, were particularly effective in book decoration as they gave the text and illustration a closer relationship. In my opinion, Van de Velde was one of the most versatile designers of our time. Many of his vignettes (fig. 13) show the influence of Japanese characters. Van de Velde rarely used pictorial illustrations and as a result, the majority of his designs have a purely decorative element. They are simply black and white lines and curves. There is nothing narrative about them; they are just strong visual images, as are Japanese characters to most Westerners.

Unlike Van de Velde, Otto Eckmann (1865 - 1902) used plants and organic forms to create his stylised shapes. He was one of

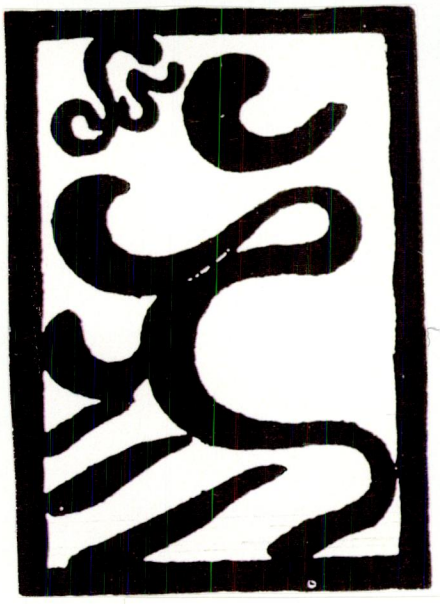


Fig. 13.

the most important exponents of floral Art Nouveau. From studying the masters of the Japanese woodcut very closely, Eckmann adopted their principle of free and naturalistic representation of plants and animals. The silhouette of the swan became one of his favourite motifs. Eckmann noted how the Japanese had proven that the most visually effective design was often the most simple (fig. 14). Although his book decorations are identified by the delicate colours he used, Eckmann is better known for his innovative type design, which was another direct influence of Japan. Within months of beginning to work in the graphic arts in (1896), he made his first studies for a brand new type face, completely unlike anything that had been done before.

The influence of Japanese woodcuts not only affected Art Nouveau artists, but they were perhaps the largest body of designers who, across Europe from late nineteenth to early twentieth century, looked to the East for inspiration and found it. Although printing and poster art owes much to the Japanese woodcut prints, many painters were also influenced. The

Fig. 14

influence had various effects. Some became interested in printing, abandoning painting; others concentrated on more graphic images, dismissing realism and others reproduced works of Japanese masters.

Vasily Kandinsky (1866 - 1944), is perhaps best known for his wonderfully vivid use of colours in his paintings, but his graphic work, his prints from 1902 to 1911 in particular, follow the Japanese method of woodcut printing very closely. The traditional European method of printing involves using a separate block for each colour, printing them on top of one another. Kandinsky on the other hand, would use only two blocks, one for the lines and one for the colours, printing by hand with watercolours. He graduated his colour tones, fusing one colour gradually with another, rubbing the block to weaken the colour and adding pigment to intensify it. His vignettes have a strong oriental appearance (fig. 15,16,17), looking very like the Japanese mon. Mon is the name given to the traditional rendering of motifs or characters, adopted as an heraldic crest and will be discussed

Fig. 15.

Fig. 16.

Fig. 17.

Fig. 18.

in greater detail in Chapter 2. Kandinsky's vignettes have very simple two dimensional surfaces which have the strong graphic impact of Japanese motifs.

Of all Kandinsky's prints, I personally find *'Composition II'* (1911) (fig. 18) the most striking in its great resemblance to ancient Japanese sword guards. Apart from its circular form, *'Composition II'* has a centre piece with what looks like a clip through which a sword might be placed and held in position. In *'The Veil'* (1907), Kandinsky made use of the tall narrow format of Japanese hanging scrolls. The style of the clouds in the print is also reminiscent of Japanese woodcut prints.

The influence of the East on Western painting and printing continued throughout the twentieth century. It was inevitable that at some stage artists in the West would attempt to recreate the spontaneous forms of Japanese calligraphy. In the sixties, many artists recognised that these black and white images were perfect for their time. There was a flood of paintings based on Japanese calligraphy, and though some artists struggled to deal with the

forms as carriers of meaning, the majority created effects of pure visual impact. Franz Kline (1910 - 1962), is among those who chose to recreate the art of Japanese calligraphy while maintaining a modern feel.

The Japanese treatment of the line and their recognition of it's decorative value, provided the Japanese with their particular style. An acute understanding of the power of the line is predominantly found in their calligraphy.

CHAPTER 2

Culturally, all Western countries are united by a common alphabet. Though the majority of European countries speak their own language, they write this language using the same method of writing, that is, left to right in a horizontal line using the alphabet. This common alphabet does not offer an understanding of the language with which it is written, but the letters are recognisable from country to country. Central, Middle and Far Eastern countries did not all use this alphabet or it's writing methods. Many used ancient scripts which had changed little over centuries. These scripts were often derived from hieroglyphics, the earliest forms of written communication and as a result are more descriptively iconographical.

Calligraphy is an acknowledged art form in Japan, masters of the art of Japanese brushwriting have for centuries been recognised as respected members of a community. Personally, I have no understanding of the Japanese language, nor do it's characters

mean anything to me in a literal sense. My introduction to Japanese crests through the study of universal porcelain marks however, made me question how this seemingly incomprehensible text could have such a profound visual impact on me, an ignorant Western observer. Japanese ideograms, when contained within a square or circle create a remarkably graphic, almost pictorial image, emphasising the power of the lines within a frame.

In Japan, potters' marks, seals and heraldic crests are presented in this form and have been for hundreds, indeed possibly thousands of years. These ideograms, with their square or circular frames play an integral part in many areas of Japanese design and could possibly be the source of the Western fascination of Japanese arts and crafts.

The circle, in Japan has a number of religious and symbolic meanings and consequently was used more often than the square as a frame for crests and seals. The circle is never- ending, symbolising the limitlessness of time and space. According to

Wichmann, it is also thought to represent the 'Wheel of Life'. A circle divided vertically by a line can mean a combination of God and man or be the image of creation (Wichmann, 1981, p. 295). An S- shaped line within a circle signified the polarity of the Universe, recognised by Westerners as a symbol of Yin and Yang, the dark receptive female principle and the bright creative male principle. In Japan, families often had a motif rather than calligraphy in their crest. This chosen motif was particular to that family, often a stylised rendering of a natural object, and took on an appropriate emblematic significance. The crest containing a motif is known in Japan as a mon (fig.19).

The mon can be found as a decorative motif on a variety of surfaces, from laquerware, woodcut prints, textiles to roof tiles. The symbols of the mon appear on the haori or coats which were worn over the kimono. They were either embroidered on, or left white by using a resist process during dyeing. The mon was traditionally placed on the haori five times, on the front of each sleeve, on either side of the chest and between the shoulder

NAME	CREST	NAME	CREST
*Arashi Hinasukè		*Iwai Hanshiro	
Arashi Otohachi		Kataoka Nizayemon	
*Arashi Sanyemon		Matsumoto Kōshiro (2 forms)	
Bando Hikosaburo			

Fig. 19.

blades. The kimono was similarly decorated.

Crests are an integral part of Japanese textile design. The repeated form, integrated into the surrounding material was a fundamental device in Katagami printing, that is, where paper stencils are used by dyers. As I have indicated, the mon was more often than not depicted in a circular form, anything that looked even remotely capable of being depicted in a round form could be, and indeed was, contained in it. The mon was often combined with secondary motifs, a stylised landscape background being among the most popular. This decorative combination was found on the more ornate haori and kimonos.

It would appear that one cannot discuss the Japanese crest without considering the traditional ornamental swordguard or tsuba (fig.20). The concise representational style of the mon suited the tsuba, another circular form, as the former had proven that a wealth of information could be expressed with just a few visual elements. The same applies to the yano-nae (fig. 21) or arrow-heads.

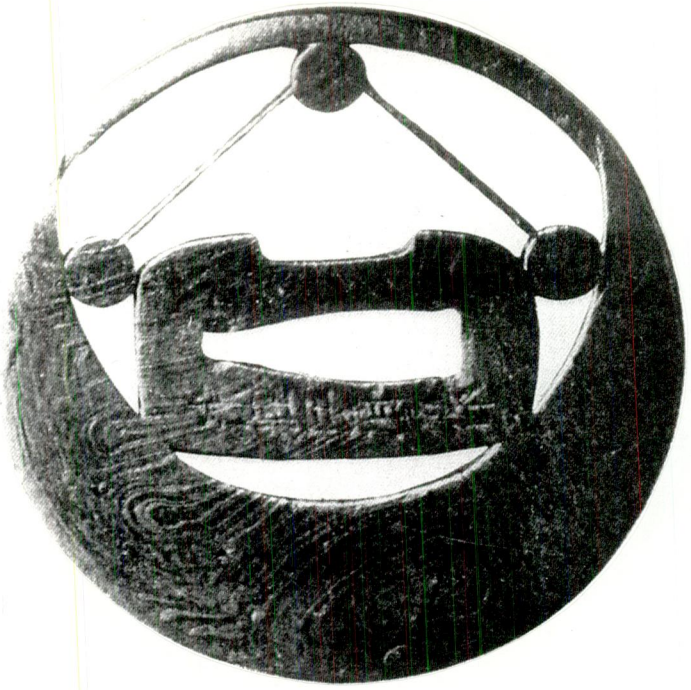


Fig. 20.

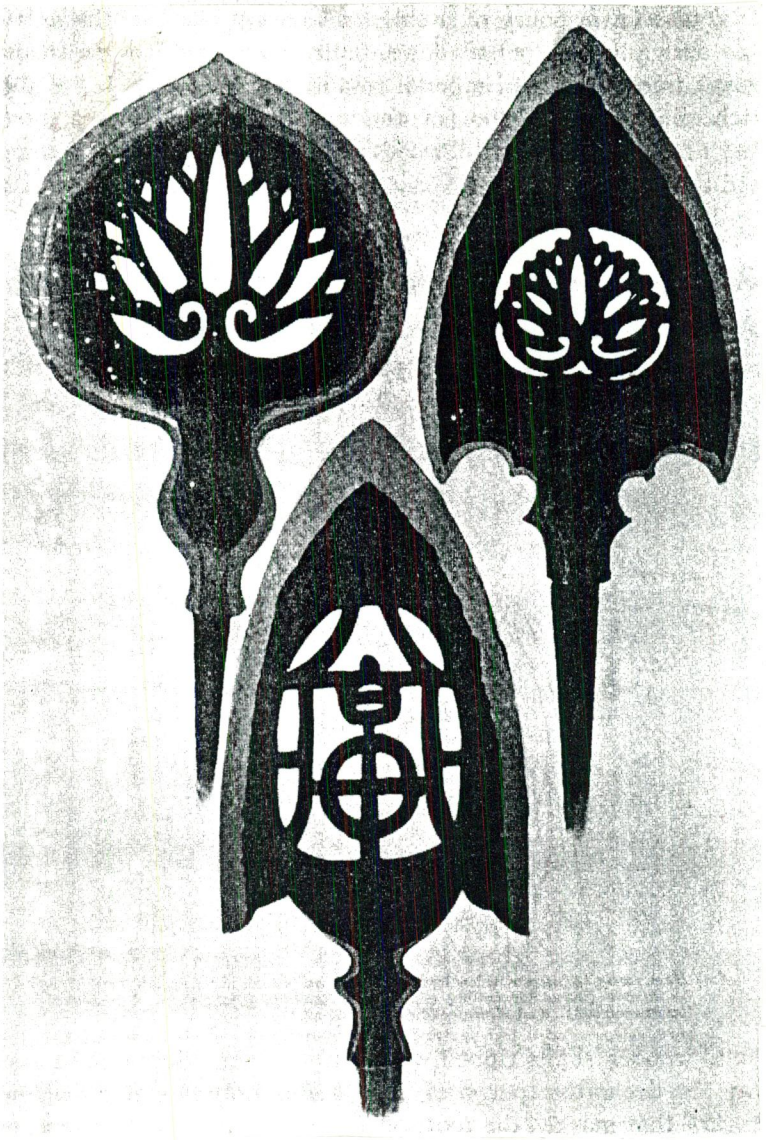


Fig. 21

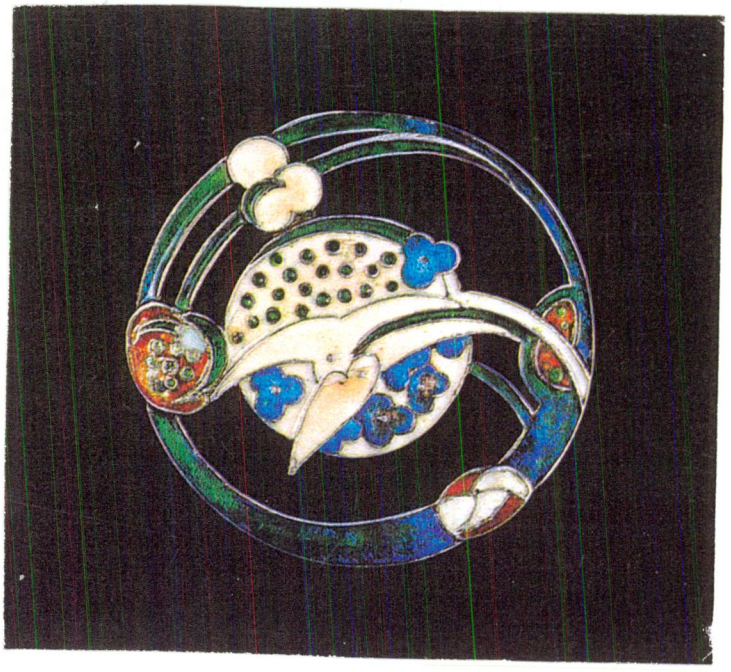


Fig. 22.

By researching examples of Japanese swordguards and arrowheads from various periods, one can decide the extent of the impact of Japanese mons and characters as a source of fascination for the West. Sword guards are usually of high artistic merit. The first known swordguard is dated somewhere between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries. They were generally made out of iron by tsuba-shi, specialised craftsmen. The iron was treated as a precious metal and numerous alloy techniques were experimented with. Gold and silver inlay was sometimes used, along with a variety of other of other decorating methods, including engraving, embossing, relief, fine chasing and for the most delicate effects, piercing. The combination of different materials, iron, silver, gold, bronze and brass, gave beautiful results, and had a huge influence on Art Nouveau and Wiener Werkstatte jewellers (fig.22).

The whole concept of tsuba must have seemed like a wonderfully wrapped gift to nineteenth century jewellers. There is so much in Japanese art from which to draw inspiration - a wealth of proven effective designs, featuring subject matter provided by

nature, abstraction of the subject matter, a variety of symbols, colourful alloys and examples of practically every possible treatment of metals. Until the Japanese ware became known, nineteenth century jewellery had tended to be vulgar. The industrial revolution had resulted in a materialistic society, where jewels inevitably became mere status symbols. Expensive jewellery indicated that the pursuit of technical perfection had driven out creative design. They also demonstrated the stale, derivative parade of patterns borrowed from history. With the influence of the tsuba all that changed.

The Akasaka masters (fig.23), of the seventeenth century, were renowned for their delicate piercing techniques and had a profound effect on the Vienna Secessionists who reproduced this type of surface decoration. The Maru-bori tsuba (fig.24) are distinguished by their pronounced relief work. Perhaps the most important motif in this genre was the design of a ring of plant stems which enhanced the circular outline of the guard. This plant stem design was also one of the most popular motifs in heraldic crests.

Fig. 24.

Fig. 23.

The yano ne, or ornamental arrow-heads, are considered to be the least valuable of the Samurai weapons by the world's collectors. The kaburaya appears more often than any other form. This is a purely ornamental arrow, one among thirty others carried by the Generals and horse-back Samurai for ordinary use. This particular arrow was only released if the battle was lost, it's discharge signifying defeat for the Commander and resulting in his honourable suicide. The majority of arrow-heads were, like the sword guards, developed from natural forms, depicting flowers- in particular irises, leaves, butterflies, birds and various other symbols. The stencil-like effect of these arrow-head motifs make them even more simplified and visually effective than the tsubas. The more pictorial pieces remind me very much of stained glass windows (fig. 25), with the thick black lines of iron separating sections of pattern, but I see them primarily as very strong graphic images.

The influential strength of the design of the circle and square as decorative motifs is easily shown by the interior design work of

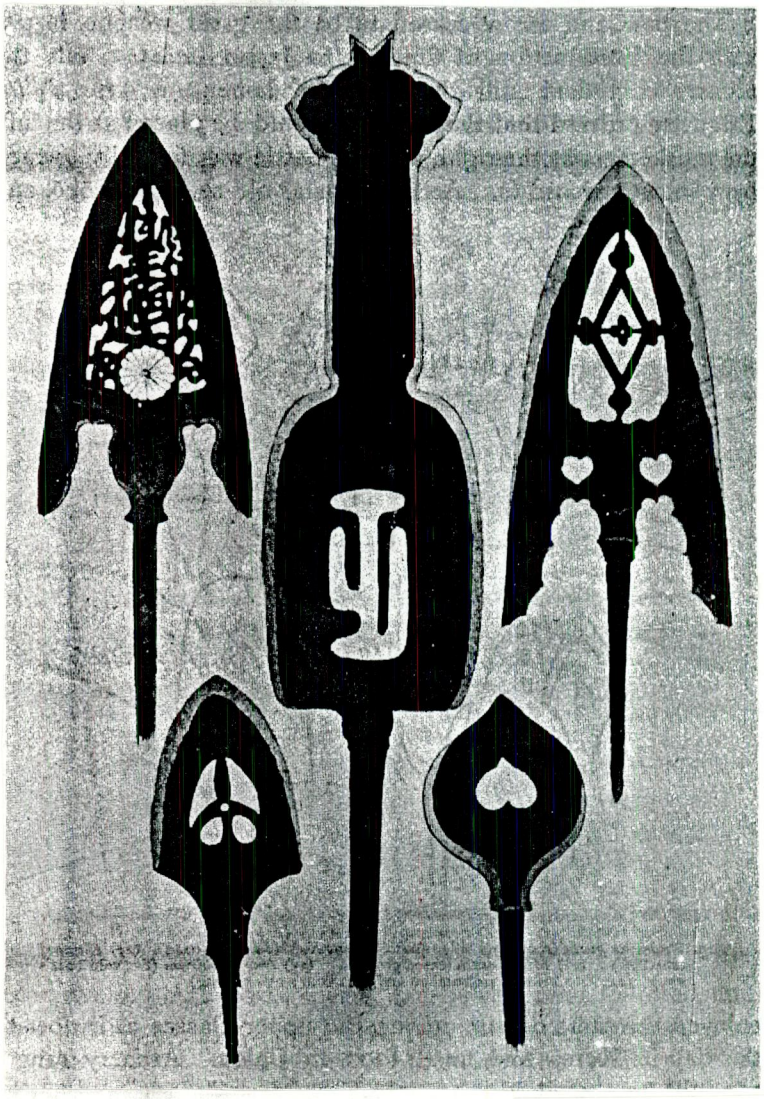


Fig. 25.

the Wiener Werkstatte. The foundation of the Wiener Werkstatte in 1903 brought together a group of artists and craftspeople who were all inspired by the Japanese approach to interior design and the applied arts. The craze for Oriental art and artifacts was matched by a growing interest in the customs and way of life of the Chinese and Japanese. Josef August Lux describes a friend's encounter with one custom,

> While telling us about his travels, a gentleman who knows Japan well described a tea ceremony at the end of which the empty teapot was passed from hand to hand and the delicacy of it's work admired by the guests. This appreciation of artistic beauty formed the high point of the ceremony. . . Apparently, there is nothing unusual about this, it is an everyday habit to pay special attention to the quality of an object and the artistic work which is an inseparable part of it. To the European of today, such things sound like pure fiction. (Fahr-Becker, 1995, p. 18.)

Virtually every turn-of-the-century artist, not just those in Vienna, was affected in some way by the Japanese aesthetic mode. There appear to be three main reasons why Europe welcomed Japanese art so enthusiastically. First, the 1870's saw a huge increase in

industry. This industrial expansion created new consumer wealth and exotic luxury items were in great demand. Secondly, many people in this increasingly industrialised society found themselves alienated from nature and sought a new spirituality to counteract this effect. Finally, designers, artists, craftsmen and architects were desperate for fresh motifs and forms. The artist Walter Crane explains,

> There is no doubt that the opening of Japanese ports to Western commerce, whatever it's after- effects - including it's effect upon the arts of Japan itself - has had an enormous influence on European and American art. Japan is, or was, a country very much as regards it's arts and handicrafts, with the exception of architecture, in the condition of a European country in the middle ages, with wonderfully skilled artists and craftsmen in all manner of work of the decorative kind, who were under the influence of a free and informal naturalism. Here at least, was a living art, an art of the people, in which the traditions and craftsmanship were unbroken, and the results full of attractive variety, quickness and naturalistic force. What wonder that it took Western artists by storm and that it's effects have become so patent. (Wichmann, 1981, p.8.)

The Wiener Werkstatte members believed, as the Japanese had always done, that the 'higher' fine arts and the 'lower' applied arts should enjoy equal status. Josef Hoffmann (1870 - 1956) was a book illustrator and founding member of the Wiener Werkstatte who wanted to transfer the vision of beauty in Japanese art to his own work. Hoffmann's work and the work of fellow Secessionist, Koloman Moser (1868 - 1918) is characterised by the seemingly contradictory components of floral arabesques and squares (fig. 26), also characteristics of Japanese design, where geometric and floral motifs are combined harmoniously. In England, at the same time, William Morris and the Arts and Crafts movement were enjoying the success of their trademark ornate style. However, Hoffmann and the Secessionists wanted completely new elements for their designs. Hoffmann stated,

> It was for this reason that the pure square and the use of black and white as dominant colours specially interested me, because these clear elements had not appeared in former styles. (Tschudi-Madsen, 1976, p. 70.)

Just before 1900, when Hoffmann had already made his wonderful illustrations for Ver Sacrum, the journal of the

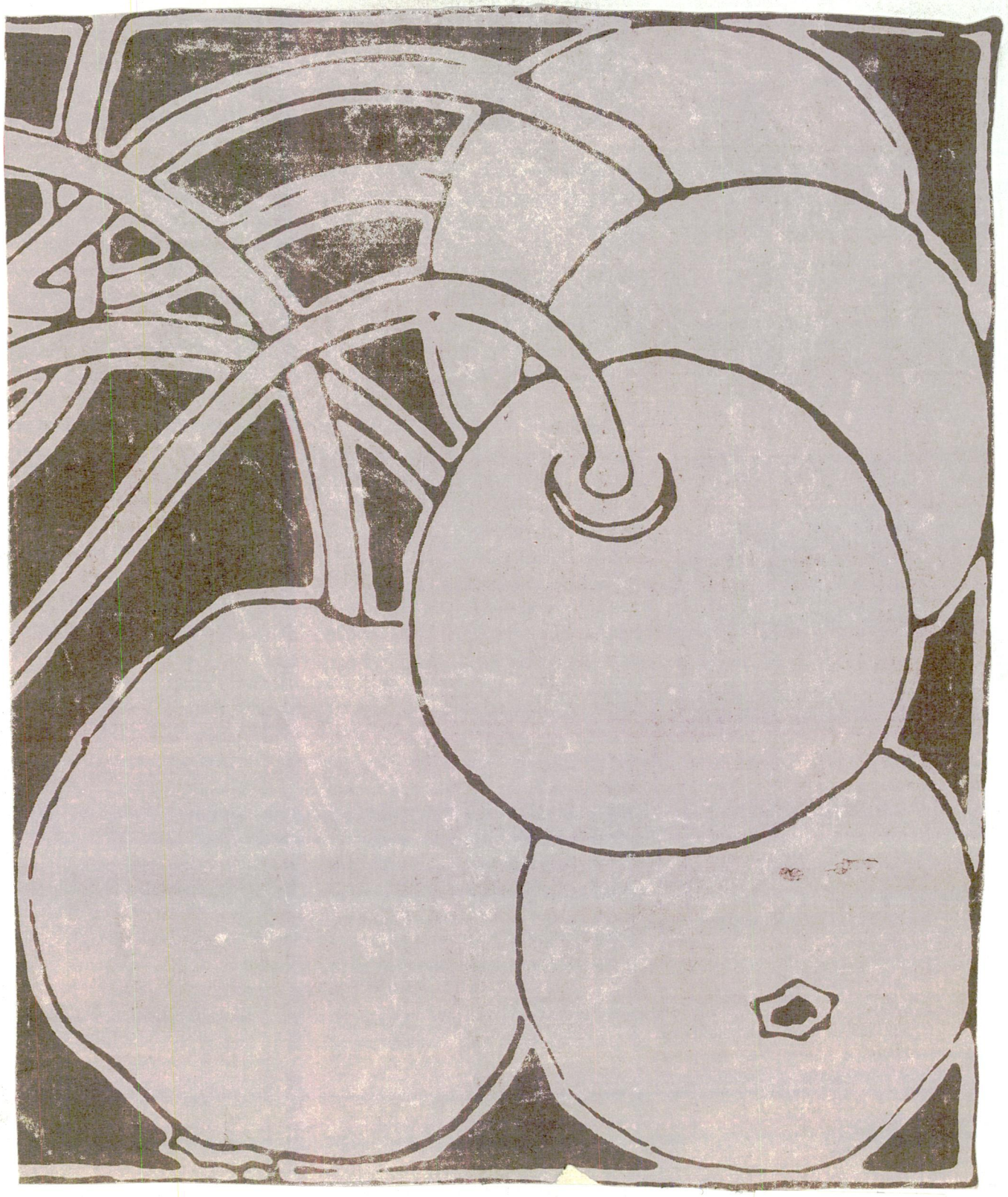


Fig. 26.

Viennese Secessconists founded in 1897, he began to develop his designs in black and white vignettes. It would appear that it was here that his now characteristic ornamentation was formed. His vignettes are remarkable for their lavish use of squares, their straight lines and intersecting curves. As an illustrator, Hoffmann also learned the art of placing his ornament to best effect, learning from the Japanese who were masters of composition. When he added his squares and straight lines to furniture design (fig. 27), the transition to large scale, three dimensional design was not in any way difficult, as the Japanese style was already well known and highly regarded.

As the nineteenth century drew to a close, the square had been firmly established as Hoffmann's favourite motif. The square dominated Hoffmann's early work with the Wiener Werkstatte, the motif becoming incredibly popular in Vienna and indeed in many parts of Europe. For over a decade the square found itself on mouldings and inlay work, as a single brick or in groups of three placed in the centre of a facade, on walls, in horizontal or

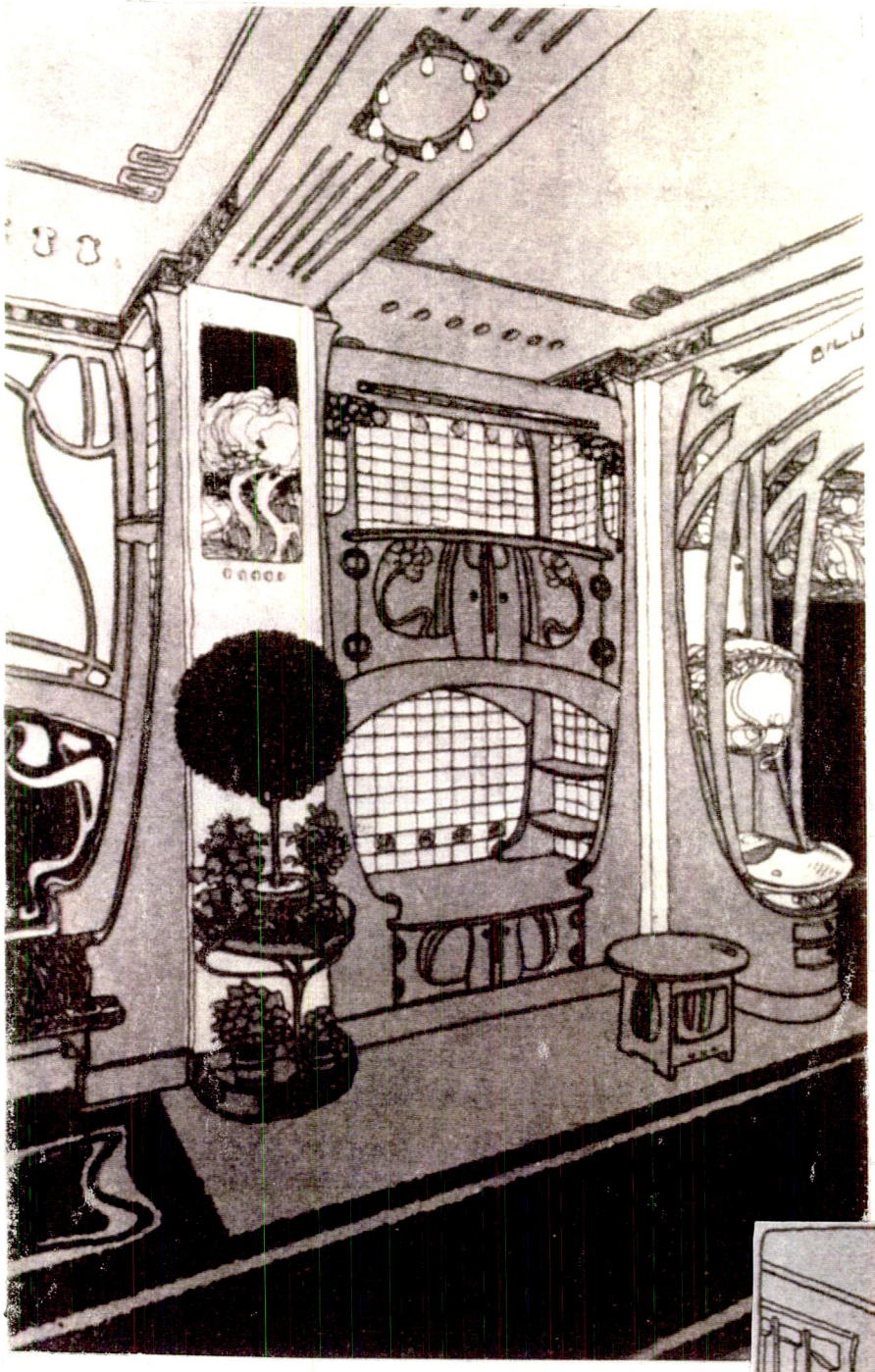


Fig. 27.

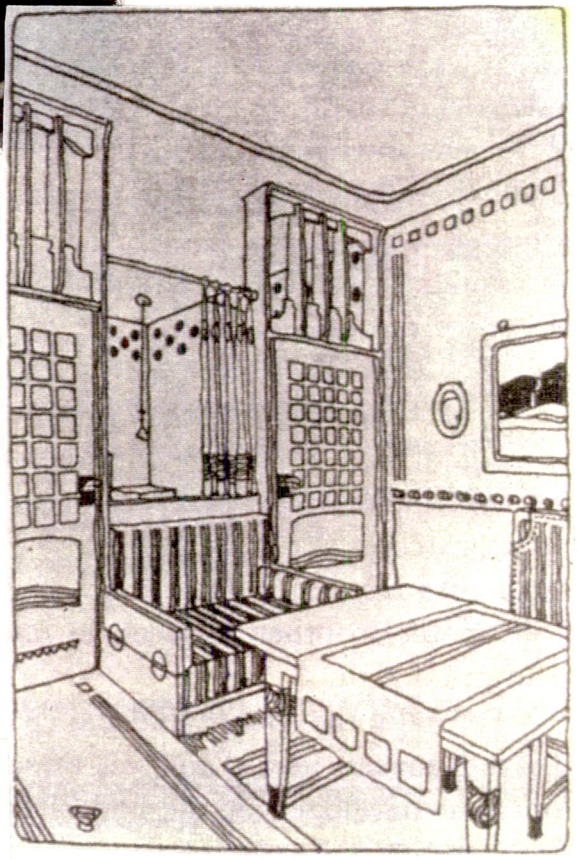


Fig. 28.

vertical rows, on windows, doors, floors, ceilings, fireplaces, furniture and fabric (fig. 28). The continuous use of the revered motif earned Hoffmann the nickname, "Quadratl - Hoffmann" - "Little Square Hoffmann".

Fellow Secessionist, Joseph M. Olbrich (1867 - 1908) began his career, like Hoffmann, as a book illustrator. Olbrich chose the circle as his motif - it's arrangement and placement being of utmost importance, in rows, in clusters, oriflame and monochrome. Circles did not gain quite the same attention as the square did, and remained a secondary motif. It was however, often used in conjunction with the square. These simple geometrical shapes were Hoffmann's and Olbrich's solutions to a search for an entirely new form. They desperately wanted to escape from historical styles. They both used their experience as book illustrators, giving ornament in their designs the same function as in a book - that is quite simply as an effective vignette. By using rational and constructive principles and elegantly placing geometrical ornaments in an entity consisting of

simple planes, they achieved their aim.

Although a substantial number of Art Nouveau designers had distinctive monograms, they were rarely contained within a frame, Henri de Toulouse Lautrec (1864 - 1901) being one of the exceptions. They did however, generally use naturalistic flowing forms, in keeping with the arabesque lines of Japanese art. Many Art Nouveau artists got quite close to the graphic element of crests and seals in many of their vignettes (fig. 29) and in particular the type designs of Otto Eckmann, as referred to in Chapter 1. The ornamentation of Eckmann's alphabet and the purely decorative quality of black and white vignettes, show the attraction for simplistic yet visually effective designs at the turn of the century.

The trademark of the Wiener Werkstatte (fig. 30) possesses more than a hint of the influence of Japanese woodblock prints with regard to it's format. The Wiener Werkstatte monogram (fig. 31) and the monograms of various designers (fig. 32)relate strongly to heraldic crests and seals, by the fact that they are contained within similar

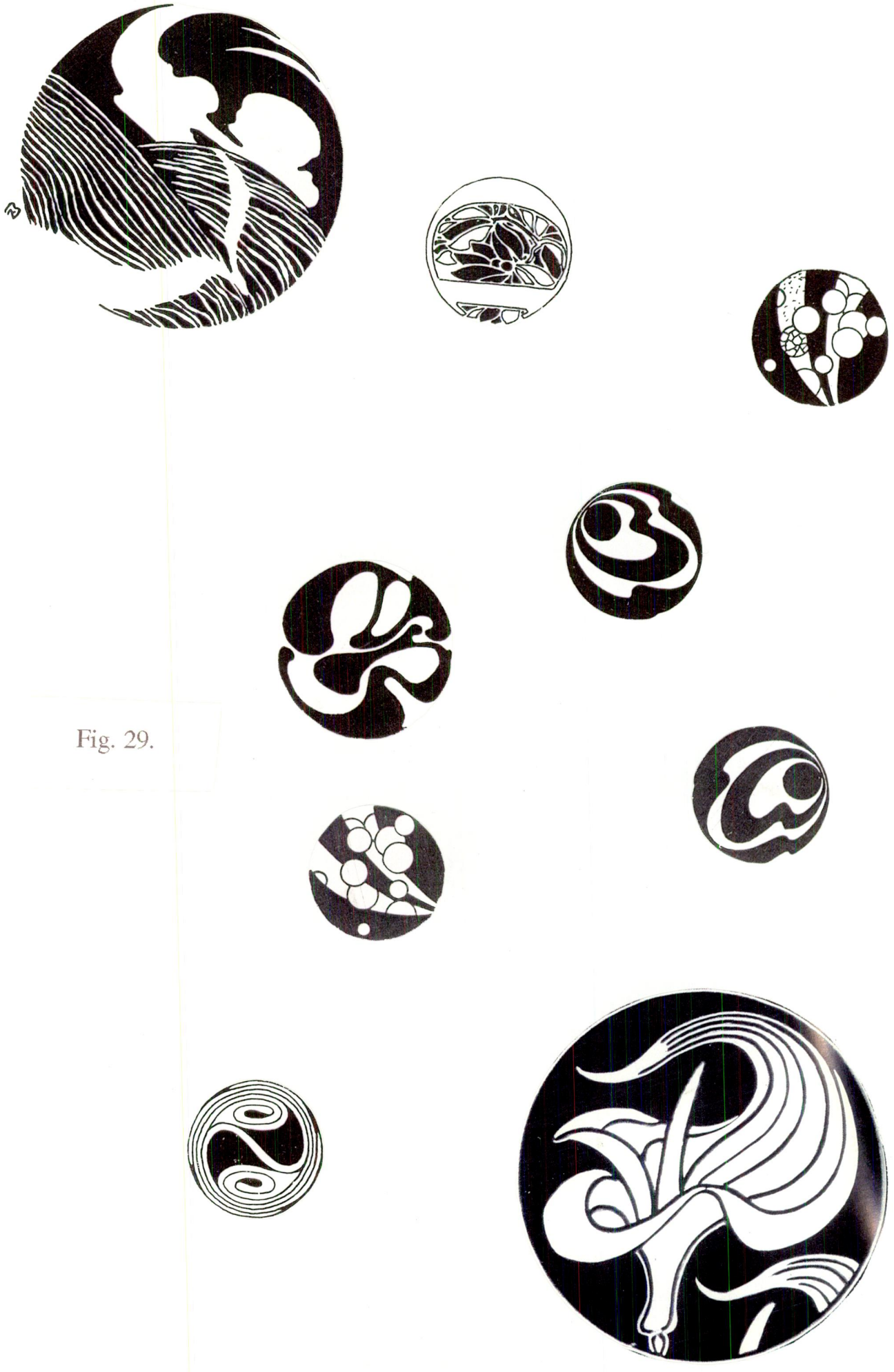


Fig. 29.

Fig. 30.

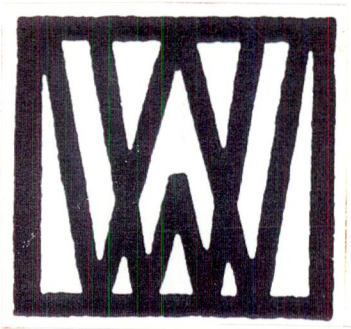
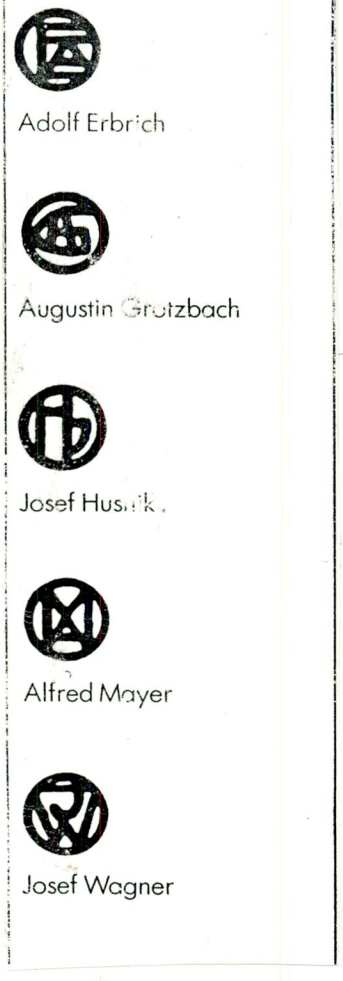


Fig. 31.

Fig. 32.

Fig. 33..



formats and make use of the strong graphic quality of line. The monograms of the Werkstatte artisans (fig. 33) have, in my opinion been directly inspired by the Japanese mon, with stylised lettering contained within a circle.

We now know that Japan has influenced Western art in a number of ways. One of these ways is the containing of decorative elements within a circle or square. The placing of personal motifs, in the form of letters or symbols, representational or abstract, within geometric frames gives an impression of the framed element being a complete motif in itself - an independent entity.

CHAPTER 3

A potter's mark must be a great many things for it to be entirely successful. It must be clear, distinguishable, original, easily identifiable, simple and of course visually effective. Throughout civilisation man has been impelled to leave his marks on the vessels or forms he has created. At first, these were crude scratchings, but over the centuries, the marks, like the forms, have developed along with man's artistic sensibilities. However, it is obvious that potters have a restricted space (traditionally the base of the piece) on which to place their marks. Therefore, the Western potter often forfeits the act of signing his piece with his full signature, that is his Christian name and surname, favouring instead the use of just his initials, or perhaps a symbol or image particular to him. Indeed, it could be said that some potters had reverted to the 'crude scratchings' that were the first markings on clay, for the majority of potters, of both this and the last century, have opted for a more simple and compact mark with which to identify their pieces, leaving the larger manufacturing companies

to use more ornate decorative marks.

From around the 1860's, the use of monograms and motifs overflowed from the area of ceramics into virtually all areas of design. Craftsmen, painters and graphic designers were united by their discovery of vital new source material, the arts and crafts of Japan. Marks similar to those the potter had used for centuries were stamped on any piece requiring a signature, be it furniture, a painting, a poster or jewellery. The Japanese characters which made up the marks on Oriental pieces provided inspiration for the Western potter's marks. The sharp graphic images of these characters induced such an effective visual impact for Westerners that many adopted single Japanese characters, adapting them, making them into their own particular marks.

In May 1888, the first issue of Le Japon Artistique was published. It contained an introductory article by Samuel Bing, the man mainly responsible for the great flood of Japanese art

into Europe. In it he wrote, "This art is permanently bound together with ours. It is like a drop of blood that has been mingled with our blood, and now no power on earth is able to separate it again." (Wichmann, 1981, p.12.)

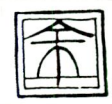
It is necessary to look at both Japanese and Western marks in order to compare and contrast them. Studying the marks on the Far Eastern pieces, however, is not as straight forward as looking at the Western pieces they surely inspired. Japanese porcelain in particular, has a rather complex marking system. Marks are not a guarantee of the antiquity of a piece, nor do they give an indication of it's quality. In fact, the most valuable pieces are often unmarked. The editors of Japanese Porcelain suggest that " ... the best way to look at marks in general, is probably to consider them as part of the design, as a sort of decorative motif in themselves" (P.L.W. Arts, 1983, p. 155). This is an interesting statement when one considers that is exactly what Western artists did in the late nineteenth century. The Art Nouveau movement and the Wiener Werkstatte, in particular, were as I discussed,

unabashed 'borrowers' of Japanese styles, concepts and marks.

In Japanese porcelain there are five discernible classes of marks to be found on the base of the pieces. These are: Chinese date marks, emblems, Marks of Commendation, Marks of Felicitation and finally, potters and geographical names. Chinese date marks, or nien hao, have been copied by the Japanese for centuries. Although it appears that even the Chinese potter marked his work with the nien hao of an earlier classical reign, regardless of whether or not it was decorated in the style of that period. This seemingly dishonest act was a result of the Oriental reverence for antiquity. The Japanese admired the porcelain produced by their Chinese counterparts and, consequently, also marked their work with these nien hao. The nien hao usually consisted of six Chinese characters showing the reign and name of the Emperor. The most popular of the Ming Emperors nien hao - those of Ch'eng-hua, Chia-ching and Wan-li, were copied on mainly blue and white porcelain and on polychrome pieces of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The usual form of these date marks

consists of two three-character columns. The Japanese however, often chose to leave out the two characters indicating the dynasty, occasionally omitting the period characters. In genuine Chinese ware, the nien hao are contained within a double circle. On Japanese porcelain, on the other hand, the nien hao are either enclosed in a single circle or not enclosed at all.

Marks of Commendation are Chinese symbols, ideograms which indicate the quality of the piece and are often used to compare it's value to another important and precious substance:



kin:- meaning gold. This mark can be found on Okawachi ware of the eighteenth century and is associated with the work of Kakiemon IV (1641 - 1679). Kakiemon IV, came from a family of enamellers who became potters in the seventeenth century. Kin also appears in Arita ware from the Hizan province of North West Kyushu,

the island north of Japan, after 1679.

tama:- meaning jade, pearl or precious stone, can be found on Tamagawa ware of 1850.

ho:- meaning precious, is found on Arita ware around 1700.

fu:- is one of the 'Twelve Ancient Ornaments'. As an inscription it reads 'richly decorated'.

These ideograms are based on a representation of the thing itself or a symbol of an idea, not, as in a phonetic system, on the sounds which make up a name. It is not very difficult to consider these little symbolic pictures as part of the design or as decorative motifs in themselves.

Marks of Felicitation seem to have an even more 'motif-like' quality. Personally, I feel that the square and sometimes circular outline framing these quirky shapes and lines give them a stronger

visual impact. This would greatly influence nineteenth and early twentieth century designers like Josef Hoffmann, who would repeat the same motif over and over again, making slight yet effective variations. There are four main marks in this category, but as I will show, slight yet effective variations produce a wealth of designs. The most commonly used marks are:

fuku:- meaning good fortune. This is the most important and most regularly used mark. It was first introduced by Kakiemon VI, while Kakiemon VII supposedly introduced a double square frame around the fuku. The mark was commonly found on Kutani porcelain, from the island of Honshu, Japan's main island. It has a variety of styles ranging from a simplified form to a more elaborate version.

roku:- meaning prosperity, was

stamped on Hirado ware of the eighteenth century. It can also be found on Arita ware and on various Old Katuni pieces.

ju:- meaning long life, was usually found in seal form.

ka:- meaning happiness, found on Kutani porcelain.

ta:- meaning great, found on the hallmarks of the Chinese Ming and Ch'ing Emperors.

I have chosen a selection of Western potters from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, who have adapted graphic motifs or stylised calligraphic forms for their marks. The pictorial results of which indicate the influence of Japanese porcelain marks and their immediate visual impact. Rolf Weber

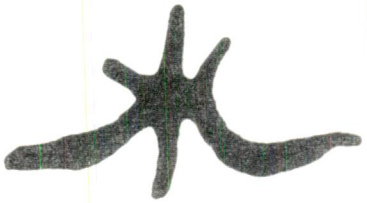
(1907 - 1986) the German studio potter, for example, developed a mark consisting of four lines arranged to form a stylised 'W'.  This is quite similar to the ta mark. Artus van Briggle, an American potter (1869 - 1904) and his wife Anna, used a double 'A' in a rectangle, or in an incised trapezoid as their stamp. These marks are not unlike sections of the fuku found on Arita ware. 

Emblematic ornaments are often found as porcelain marks on the bases of Japanese porcelain. It appears that Chinese potters used these symbols more frequently than the Japanese. They include the stork, the quail, symbolising courage, the chidori bird, symbolising strife and storm and a number of other religious symbols. These symbols were incorporated into a variety of Japanese art forms, in particular woodblock prints and textile designs, and featured regularly in the mon.

Western potters at the end on the nineteenth century were inspired by the mon's more figurative mark. It seems to me that many Western potters combined emblematic ornaments with

Japanese characters, similar to those in the Felicitation marks, often producing cartoon-like symbols. For example:

Otto Meier, the German potter, created a mark with a strong suggestion Japanese influence.

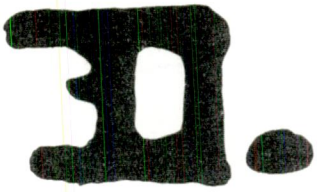


Arnold Emil Krog (1856 - 1931), a Norwegian potter working in Denmark, decorated his porcelain with underglaze colours with patterns inspired by Japanese stencils, whose influence is certainly apparent in his mark.

Gerhard Marcks (1889 - 1953), another German potter, shows a strong Japanese influence. It is interesting to note that Marcks also made woodcuts suggesting further Oriental influence.

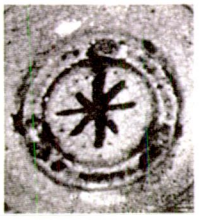
Otto Lindig (1895 - 1966) trained under Gerhard Marcks and studied under

Henry van de Velde, so it is little wonder his monogram should have Oriental connotations.



Emile Decour (1876 - 1953) was a French ceramist who also showed appreciation for Japanese graphics in his mark.

The Japanese ceramist Rosajin (1883 - 1959) was producing ceramics at the same time as his aforementioned Western counterparts. He has an impressive array of symbols, ranging from calligraphic marks to stamps with strong pictorial elements. The style of his marks further support the argument that Western potters at the turn of the century were greatly influenced by the graphic quality of Japanese porcelain and potter's marks.



These potters marks continue a long tradition of man personalising the form he has created. The expressive quality of

the Japanese line, which results in the iconographical appeal found in Japanese crests and porcelain marks, can be seen reflected in the marks of Western potters in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

CONCLUSION

I have outlined the various effects Japanese art and design has had on the West since the middle of the nineteenth century. These effects range from the dramatic use of line and spontaneous flowing movement which were employed by the Japanese, to the containment of graphic images within geometric frames, in particular the square and circle. The pictorial element of Japanese calligraphy from a Western perspective, has been integral to the development and acceptance of the practice of adapting letters and motifs for the creation of monograms.

Western artists who looked to Japan for inspiration were in desperate need for stimulating source material. The East held a wealth of craft and design techniques which had, up until the ports of Japan were opened in 1854 eluded the West's artistic community. The industrial revolution had stunted the creative flow of European artists and they required stimulus to regenerate their design talents. Western designers had no desire to directly

reproduce the design work of another culture. They merely needed a starting point from which to develop their own style. According to Tschudi-Madsen, the influence of Japanese art was on the line of inspiration and not of imitation. (Tschudi-Madsen, 1976, p.205.)

The influence of Japanese prints, their use of flat colour, bold black line and toneless areas effectively resulted in the style of Art Nouveau, which proved to be the stepping stone between Renaissance style painting and the more abstract form of design which has become the basis for much of twentieth century art.

The remarkable design ability of the Japanese artists is proven by the fact that the majority of Japanese prints from the sixteenth century onwards, would not look out of place in a contemporary setting. Over hundreds of years they have maintained a remarkable visual impact.

Japan did not simply set the precedent for twentieth century art, it changed the aesthetic view which had prevailed for centuries.

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