



THE GALLIAS: A MODERN VIENNESE FAMILY

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The building in Vienna's Fourth District was a public assertion of difference, a clear rejection of everything surrounding it. When Moriz and Hermine Gallia commissioned it in 1912, all the other apartment blocks in the Wohlbengasse were historicist, that melange of revivals of the old – Neo-classical or Neo-renaissance, Neo-gothic or Neo-baroque – that was the dominant style across the Habsburg Empire. The Gallias, typically, opted for the modern. Their architect Franz von Krauss had achieved international acclaim for his domestic architecture. In 1907, the British magazine *The Studio* recognised that Krauss's best work included 'modern houses built straight to defy time and weather', free of 'superfluous decoration, culled from all lands and all periods'.¹ The Gallias' prize-winning home was one example.

The Gallias were in many ways typical of the families who were leading supporters of modern art and design in turn-of-the-century Vienna – their wealth a product of industry, their Jewish identity in flux.² But while some families were significant early supporters of this culture and others began relatively late, the Gallias were among the few who sustained their patronage from 1898 until 1918 when the culture was at its peak. The Gallias were also exceptional in how they succeeded in taking most of what they had collected with them when members of the family fled Vienna following the Nazis' annexation of Austria in 1938. Their crates and containers were filled with the best private collection of art and design to escape Nazi Austria.³

Bruno Reiffenstein
Exterior of Wohlhengasse 4
c.1913 gelatin silver photograph
Private collection



The Gallias began by collecting paintings by members of the Secession. While Moriz and Hermine acquired nothing from its first exhibition – which opened at Vienna’s Horticultural Society building in March 1898 – at least one of their paintings by Carl Moll was in the Secession’s next exhibition, that November, held in its sparkling new building on the Friedrichstrasse.⁴ In 1901, they decided to have the entire family painted and commissioned portraits of Moriz and the four Gallia children from one of the Secession’s most promising younger artists, Ferdinand Andri. They also commissioned a portrait of Hermine from Gustav Klimt (p. 30), Vienna’s most successful, most notorious and most expensive contemporary artist. Klimt’s fee for a life-size portrait was 10,000 crowns or about A\$100,000 in today’s money. He also demanded substantial advances but was often slow to complete his commissions. While Andri completed his family portraits in 1901, it was not until 1903 that Klimt exhibited his portrait of Hermine at the Secession, and even then it remained a work in progress.

The Gallias’ collection grew particularly fast that year. One of their acquisitions was a Klimt landscape from his series of forest interiors that showed beech, birch and pine trees up so close that their trunks typically extended beyond the top of the picture frame. Another acquisition was an even bigger landscape by Ferdinand Andri. A third was a small oil by Carl Moll of the house where Beethoven lived in the outer Viennese

suburb of Heiligenstadt⁵ – one of the many manifestations of Vienna’s Beethoven cult at the turn of the century. A fourth was a sparkling moonlit scene by Ernst Stöhr, among the first of Austria’s Neo-impressionist works. When Klimt finally completed Hermine’s portrait, the family boasted one of the great early collections of Secessionist pictures.

Hermine also acquired her first piece of Wiener Werkstätte in 1903 – just six months after its foundation by the architects Josef Hoffmann and Koloman Moser and the businessman Fritz Wärndorfer. This silver sweet bowl (p. 31) was a gift from Theobald Pollak, a senior official in the Imperial Department of Railways who was very close to Gustav Mahler, Carl Moll and the Gallias. Much of the Wiener Werkstätte’s early work combined silver with semi-precious stones. The bowl commissioned by Pollak conformed to this style as Moser not only set Hermine’s monogram in a square of pearl shell on the bowl’s handle but also placed beads of lapis lazuli around its rim.⁶ Because Pollak was among the many assimilated Viennese Jews who celebrated Christmas with gift-giving, he may have given the Moser bowl to Hermine then, though he may have waited until New Year’s Eve, which he also marked with gifts.⁷

By 1903 another family member – Melanie Gallia, the eldest child of Moriz’s brother Wilhelm – had become a patron of the modern. The catalyst was Melanie’s marriage in 1902 to the financier Jakob Langer, who operated a chain of currency exchanges with his brother Leopold. Many wealthy Viennese couples began married life in apartments with architect-designed rooms usually paid for by the bride’s parents as part of her dowry. The Langer family’s architect was Adolf Loos – the most controversial architect in fin-de-siècle Vienna, as notorious for his polemical essays as his interiors and buildings – whose work combined two radically different aesthetics. Most of Loos’s furniture was severe, using simple, geometric patterns, but he also copied the elaborate rococo chairs of the eighteenth-century English cabinetmaker Thomas Chippendale, which Loos regarded as the most comfortable chairs ever made: impossible to better, ideal for the present and hence ‘modern’. In 1901, he designed the interiors of the

Ferdinand Andri
The Gallia children 1901
oil on canvas
100.4 x 130.8 cm
National Gallery of Victoria,
Melbourne



Langer brothers’ currency exchanges. In 1902, he fitted out two rooms in the apartment of Jakob and Melanie with his typical combination of simple, severe furniture and reproduction Chippendale chairs. In 1903, he designed a room in Leopold’s apartment and another in his country house. By then, the Langers were among Loos’s most important early patrons.

Hermine’s preferred designer was Josef Hoffmann, who had much in common with Loos. Both were born in Moravia in 1870 and attended the same high school and technical college. They each looked to England for inspiration, employed the finest craftsmen, selected the most expensive timbers and used simple forms at the start of the century before gradually becoming more decorative. But while Hoffmann embraced the idea of a *Gesamtkunstwerk* (total work of art) as applied to interior design, Loos abhorred it, arguing that the rich should not try to express their individuality by commissioning architects to design objects for daily use but should instead buy the work of skilled craftsmen. Hoffmann’s objects also failed Loos’s test of utility. Even though he acknowledged in 1898 that Hoffmann was ‘an artist with an exuberant imagination’ who could ‘successfully attack the old traditions’, he still declared himself ‘totally opposed’ to Hoffmann’s direction. A decade later Loos dismissed Hoffmann’s work – and, implicitly, that of the Wiener Werkstätte – as a ‘mistake’.⁸

When he first delivered his polemic ‘Ornament and Crime’ as a lecture in 1910, Loos went further. As he decried decoration as retrograde and degenerate, a waste of labour, materials and money, he branded Hoffmann’s work ‘intolerable’.⁹

The gulf between Loos and Hoffmann was so great that families who commissioned apartments from Loos generally did not give commissions to Hoffmann. The extended Gallia family did not fit this pattern. Although Moriz and Hermine were close to the Langers, Hermine’s commitment to the Secession meant she would not have considered employing Loos even if he had designed the kind of silverware that she began collecting. Instead, like most of Klimt’s patrons, she went to Hoffmann, who enjoyed much greater contemporary success than Loos, becoming a professor at Vienna’s *Kunstgewerbeschule* (School of Arts and Crafts) and obtaining a string of commissions from wealthy supporters of the Secession.

Hermine’s first recorded purchase of Hoffmann’s work was from the Wiener Werkstätte in 1906.¹⁰ It was five ‘flower baskets’ or vases featuring the simple geometric grids made of either silver or plated silver known as *Gitterwerk*, which put Hoffmann at the forefront of modern design. Before long Hermine was acquiring only Hoffmann’s silver – fitting out her dining room with an array of his boxes, bottle tops, serviette rings and coasters, together with a basket for fresh fruit and a table centrepiece for preserved fruit. While some of her purchases were part of large editions, a cigarette box inscribed with her initials from about 1910 was commissioned and two ribbed vases on bell-shaped feet designed by Hoffmann in 1911 were all the Wiener Werkstätte made in this form.¹¹ An inkstand for Moriz (p. 31), probably dating from 1909, was most spectacular.¹² Like many of Hoffmann’s best pieces of tableware, it looked more like a model of a fantastical building than a functional object.¹³

Moriz and Hermine, who were uncle and niece as well as husband and wife, acquired the wealth to build this collection partly through her father, Nathan. One of the first Jews to settle in the small Silesian town of Freudenthal in the

Gustav Klimt
Portrait of Hermine Gallia 1904
 oil on canvas
 170.5 x 96.5 cm
 The National Gallery, London



northern reaches of the Habsburg Empire, Nathan initially rented one of Freudenthal's two breweries. In 1870, the year Hermine was born, Nathan bought this brewery and rapidly transformed it into one of the most modern in Silesia. Soon he was also producing malt for export and had acquired two inns, a restaurant, a hall, a business selling farming equipment and a butter factory. In 1893, when the twenty-two-year-old

Hermine married the thirty-four-year-old Moriz – a typical age difference for men and women of their class – she came with a substantial dowry.

Most of the family's money was made by Moriz, who came from the even smaller Moravian town of Bisenz, where his father was a successful produce merchant, innkeeper and landowner. Moriz's brother Adolf – the first Gallia to go to university, as well as the first to move to Vienna – was the key to Moriz's rise to riches. A leading patent lawyer, Adolf not only advised the Austrian scientist Auer von Welsbach but also was one of his closest associates. While Austria's contribution to global culture in the fin-de-siècle period is typically conceived in terms of art, music, literature, architecture, design and ideas, Auer put it at the forefront of basic science when he discovered and isolated two of the rare earths which form the bottom section of the periodic table. Auer also placed Austria at the forefront of innovative technology by inventing the gas mantle and metal filament light bulb, thereby transforming lighting around the world. Through Adolf, Moriz became the director of commercial operations of Auer's Austrian lighting company in 1892.

The benefits for Moriz were immense, as Auer's company initially reaped spectacular profits and was highly successful for almost twenty years. Moriz's salary in 1900 was between 35,000 and 40,000 crowns, the equivalent of about A\$400,000 today. He also acquired shares in Auer's company that returned big dividends. His position entitled him to a substantial apartment in the Fourth District above the company's gas mantle showroom in the Schleifmühlgasse, which probably came rent-free because Auer owned the building. Moriz also became a significant industrialist in his own right by investing in several other companies while still working for Auer. He was part of Vienna's 'second society', the city's economic and bureaucratic elite that was eclipsed only by its 'first society' of old aristocratic families with entrée at the imperial court.

Moriz and Hermine maintained their families' religion in Vienna through the 1890s. Their wedding in 1893 was in the Stadttempel, Vienna's main synagogue in the First District.

Koloman Moser (designer)
 Josef Holi (silversmith)
 Wiener Werkstätte, Vienna
 (retailer)
 Sweet basket 1903
 silver, shell, lapis lazuli
 14.8 x 19.4 x 8.6 cm
 National Gallery of Victoria,
 Melbourne



Their four children – Erni, born 1895; Gretl, born 1896; and the twins Käthe and Lene, born 1899 – all became members of the *Israelitische Kultusgemeinde*, Vienna's Jewish community.¹⁴ Yet within a few years the Gallias began to convert to Catholicism not only because Hermine had a strong attachment to the Catholic Church arising from her education as a girl by nuns in Freudenthal, but also because Viennese Jews were increasingly looking to conversion in the hope of escaping anti-Semitism and improving their social and economic prospects. While the annual number of conversions remained less than half a per cent of Vienna's Jewish population, this still made Vienna the city where Jews were abandoning their religion faster than anywhere else in the world.

Moriz and Hermine would have known many converts, as a disproportionate number were wealthy. In 1902, one commentator observed that once Viennese Jews had accumulated their first 100,000 crowns, they almost always had their children converted, even if they did not do so themselves.¹⁵ Moriz and Hermine exemplified this practice by having six-year-old Erni baptised in 1902, followed by six-year-old Gretl and four-year-old Käthe and Lene in 1903, so that Christianity would always be part of the children's identities. For the next seven years Moriz and Hermine were responsible, despite their Judaism, for their children's

Josef Hoffmann (designer)
 Wiener Werkstätte, Vienna
 (manufacturer)
 Inkstand c.1908
 silver, glass
 (a-b) 12.4 x 29.3 x 21.0 cm
 (overall)
 Private collection, Melbourne



Christian education. But in 1910, forty-year-old Hermine and fifty-two-year-old Moriz were baptised together, and so the Gallias again became a family of one religion.

Philanthropy changed the Gallias' identity in a different way. One of the Secession's goals was to transform the permanent display of contemporary art in Vienna by persuading the imperial government to establish a *Moderne Galerie*. In order to do so, the Secession acquired works from its own exhibitions, which it donated to the government so the new gallery would have more to show. The Secession also tried to persuade some of its wealthiest supporters to buy major oil paintings for the gallery. Moriz was the first to respond after Austria laid claim to Giovanni Segantini, one of the great Symbolist painters who was also at the forefront of Neo-impressionism. To make good its claim to Segantini, who was born in Austria in 1858, spent most of his life in Italy and died in Switzerland in 1899, Austria needed to acquire one of his major works. When the Secession staged a Segantini retrospective in 1901, Moriz provided the money to buy his masterpiece *The evil mothers*, 1894 (p. 32), which probably cost over 100,000 crowns, more than ten times the price of Klimt's portrait of Hermine. Moriz's reward was a title that conferred great prestige in a society preoccupied with modes of address: the government immediately made him a

Giovanni Segantini
The evil mothers (Die bösen Mütter) 1894
 oil on canvas
 105.0 x 200.0 cm
 Österreichische Galerie
 Belvedere, Vienna



Regierungsrat (imperial councillor), a position involving no formal powers or responsibilities but significant cachet. Just as Moriz became Regierungsrat Gallia, so Hermine became Frau Regierungsrat Gallia.

Moriz's brother Adolf used some of his wealth to shape the culture in a very different way. His goals were political. While Carl E. Schorske has suggested that, with the triumph of the Christian Social Party in the 1890s, Vienna's liberal bourgeoisie abandoned political engagement,¹⁵ Adolf was an exception. In 1902, he invested in *Die Zeit*, which, from its striking new office on the Kärntnerstrasse designed by Otto Wagner, went from being a weekly magazine to a daily newspaper with the aim of providing independent, radical commentary on social and political issues.

The politics of Moriz and Hermine are less clear, but their closest friends included the industrialist Maximilian Luzzatto

and his wife, Elisabeth, one of Vienna's most prominent feminists and socialists at the turn of the century. Elisabeth was a leading member of the *Frauenstimmrecht* (women's suffrage movement), who chaired meetings devoted to free education, the secret ballot and female hygiene, delivered lectures on 'Marriage' and 'Value and capital', and wrote a 444-page history of socialism ranging from ancient Greece and Rome to the European revolutions of 1848. Just as Moriz and Maximilian probably did business together, Hermine probably shared some of Elisabeth's political views.

If so, this viewpoint was no barrier to the Gallias' opulent lifestyle. The building that Moriz and Hermine erected in the Wohllebengasse in 1913 (p. 28) was the most significant manifestation of their wealth, a mark of how rich they had grown in their twenty years together in the Austrian capital. The building was also the sharpest expression of their social aspirations, the realisation of their ambition to live in one of

Carl Witzmann (designer)
 Austria 1863–1952
Vase c.1910
 glass
 16.7 x 23.7 cm diameter
 Private collection



the most exclusive parts of Vienna and entertain in the most lavish, luxurious style. It became a vast source of income vital to their finances as they rented out the front of the ground floor as offices and the top three floors as apartments (while still retaining one-and-a-half floors or 700 square metres for themselves). It was also the greatest demonstration of their taste for modern design. Although they commissioned it from Franz von Krauss, they had Hoffmann design five of the six front rooms in their apartment – a salon for formal entertaining, a smoking room for Moriz, a boudoir for Hermine, a dining room for formal meals and a hall for less formal gatherings.

Hoffmann typically designed almost everything in these rooms as part of creating a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, but despite their common elements each room had its own distinctive style. The hall was hung with floral fabric and contained ebonised furniture with red morocco upholstery. The salon was painted yellow, with fruitwood furniture covered in black-and-white upholstery. The boudoir was hung with blue silk embellished with red-and-green rose sprays, and its white-and-gold furniture was also upholstered in red. The dining room combined white walls with a black marble wall fountain and buffet, black marble dados and architraves, and walnut furniture. The smoking room was hung with floral fabric, topped by a thick wooden frieze and painted white walls, and contained ebonised furniture upholstered with green wool. Each room had a different carpet, which was placed on parquet flooring in the hall, salon and dining room but lay wall-to-wall in the boudoir and smoking room.¹⁷

These rooms placed Moriz and Hermine where they wanted to be – at the forefront of fashion. As was the case with Hoffmann's other big commissions during this period, the Gallia apartment excited immediate interest in fashionable design circles in Austria and Germany. Austria's leading interior design magazine, *Das Interieur*, published six of Hoffmann's drawings of the rooms as the furniture was being built. When the rooms were completed, the German magazines *Innen-Dekoration* and *Deutsche Kunst und*

Dekoration published photographs of them, as well as of a new silver jardinière designed by Hoffmann for the family's dining room. The most important contemporary book about Viennese design, Max Eisler's *Österreichische Werkkultur*, included photographs of two of the interiors as well as images of the jardinière, the white-and-gold bureau from Hermine's boudoir and the family's most spectacular piece of glass, a red-and-white bowl by Carl Witzmann, who was one of Hoffmann's students.

Had construction gone to schedule, the apartment would have been ready in September 1913, so the family could have occupied it when they returned from their annual summer holiday at their villa in Alt Aussee in Austria's Salzkammergut. Because wet weather slowed progress, the family moved into the apartment at the end of the year, and even then work continued; the Wiener Werkstätte did not finish the last of the Hoffmann light fittings until March 1914.¹⁸ But Moriz and Hermine were not willing to wait that long before entertaining. They started in December 1913 on St Stephan's Day, when a pianist called Blum provided the music for a

Fig. 8
Bruno Reiffenstein
The salon of the Gallia apartment
c.1913
gelatin silver photograph
Private collection



soirée for thirty-eight people. In mid January the Gallias held another soirée. A week later they held their ball for the season, which was attended by seventy-one guests including one baroness, eight 'vons', one professor and one doctor.

The start of the First World War put an end to such entertaining. Although the Gallias had no reason to suspect it at the time, the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in June 1914 put an end to their heyday in the Hoffmann apartment. However, the family's collection of Wiener Werkstätte continued to grow – not just because of their enduring attachment to its work but because Moriz became a shareholder of the Werkstätte in 1914 and chairman of its board in 1915. When Moriz and Hermine celebrated their silver wedding anniversary in May 1918, their most spectacular present was a Hoffmann silver mocca service, given to them by Hermine's three brothers.

Fig. 9
Design for a salon for government approval 1913
Page 37 in *Das Interieur (The Interior)* volume 14, published by Anton Schroll & Co., Vienna 1913
lithograph
31.0 x 40.6 cm (Page)
Private collection



The death of Moriz that August made 1918 a 'year of disaster' for the family, as Gretl described it in her diary.¹⁹ The death of Hermine's father, Nathan, just nine days after Moriz, made the year even more calamitous, as did Austria-Hungary's defeat in the war, which saw the family lose about an eighth of its fortune when war bonds became valueless. While the Gallias withstood the hyperinflation that occurred after the war and then the Great Depression that followed far better than many other families, they stopped being major patrons of art and design. When Hermine died after a short illness in 1936, her three surviving children – Erni, Käthe and Gretl – decided to retain the family building in the Wohlebengasse. After largely emptying the family home (leaving only the Hoffmann dining room substantially intact), they found tenants for the apartment and divided most of their parents' collection between them.

Austria's annexation by Nazi Germany in March 1938 changed the family's lot yet again; despite their conversions, the Nazis regarded the Gallias as Jews. Their peril was underlined when the Nazis immediately stripped Käthe of her job, and arrested and imprisoned her in a police jail in Vienna's Ninth District. When the Nazis released her after seven weeks, she

and Gretl set about trying to escape with Gretl's daughter Annelore. To do so, they had to not only secure visas from another country prepared to take them but also pay the Nazis' *Reichsfluchtsteuer* – a departure tax set at a quarter of each refugee's total assets – and obtain a bewildering array of Nazi permits and approvals. By November 1938, Gretl, Käthe and Annelore had all the necessary papers. On 12 November, two days after *Kristallnacht*, Gretl and Annelore took the overnight train from Vienna to Switzerland, followed three days later by Käthe.

To take their collection out of the country, Gretl and Käthe needed the approval of Austria's *Zentralstelle für Denkmalschutz*, its Central Office for Monuments Protection, created following the First World War to control the export of objects of cultural significance to Austria. Because the legislation governing this office stipulated that only the work of artists who had been dead for at least twenty years fell within its purview, it ignored the family's Hoffmann and Wiener Werkstätte collection and most of their modern paintings. Klimt's works were within the office's jurisdiction because he had died in February 1918, but the office displayed no interest in his work in 1938 – perhaps still conceiving of him as a modern artist, whose works were of no heritage significance – and, in any event, portraits of Jews (as the Nazis deemed Hermine) enjoyed a special exemption, allowing refugees to take them. When Käthe applied to take the portrait, its export was as simple as that of the family's doormats and garbage bins, which the sisters took too, as part of leaving with almost all their household possessions.²⁰

Gretl and Käthe could have gone to the United States but opted for Australia because other members of the family had decided to settle there. Although Hoffmann's interiors could never be completely transplanted from one building, let alone one hemisphere to another, Gretl and Käthe (as Käthe became in Australia) came remarkably close by deciding to live together after landing in Sydney in 1939, thus reuniting much of the Hoffmann material that each had inherited from Moriz and Hermine. For more than thirty years, while the

sisters lived in a small flat in the Sydney suburb of Cremorne, there was no comparable apartment in New York, Zurich, London, Budapest or Prague. Nor, for that matter, was there one in Vienna itself, since most Hoffmann interiors had been destroyed or dispersed.

The collection remained largely intact until 1971, when Gretl had a stroke and Käthe's health also deteriorated sharply. Together with Anne (as Annelore called herself in Australia), the two sisters decided to sell the portrait of Hermine. At the time, international interest in Klimt was rising sharply – manifested, above all, in the *Vienna Secession* exhibition staged by the Royal Academy, London, at the start of 1971. That November Christies' auctioned the portrait in London, where it was bought by the dealers Harry and Wolfgang Fisher for 20,000 guineas, then a world record for a Klimt. When the National Gallery in London acquired the portrait five years later, it became the first (and still the only) painting by Klimt to be held in an English museum.

The death of Gretl late in 1975 and that of Käthe early in 1976 prompted Anne to sell the Hoffmann collection. While an array of international dealers and institutions showed interest – and some encouraged her to break up the collection – Anne wanted it all to stay in Australia because it had given refuge to Gretl, Käthe and herself. In June 1976, she wrote: 'So far I have not sold anything as I am trying to keep the collection together for the National Gallery of Victoria.'²¹ In his acquisitions proposal, the Gallery's curator of decorative arts Terry Lane argued that the Gallery needed the collection both because of its international importance as part of the 'modern movement' and 'as a memorial to the contribution of European migrants to the culture of this country'.²² Thirty-five years later no other museum has secured a Hoffmann commission of this size largely intact.