

COLNAGHI



JOSEF HOFFMANN
(Pirnitz 1870 - 1956 Vienna)

DESIGN FOR AN AMPHORA

Pencil and indian ink on paper mounted on cardboard.

23,3 x 14,7 cm; 9 3/16 x 5 3/4 in.

Monogrammed "JH", studio stamp of Josef Hoffmann on the verso and inscribed "N. 59".

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Prominent architect and designer, pivotal to Viennese Modernism, Josef Hoffmann (1870–1956) trained under the tutelage of Otto Wagner and became the co-founder of the *Wiener Werkstätte* (WW) in 1903. Together with painter Koloman Moser and industrial magnate Fritz Waerndorfer, Hoffmann conceived WW in the image of the British Arts and Crafts Movement, stylistically shaped by the Viennese Secessionist aesthetics. Aiming at creating the so-called *Gesamtkunstwerk*, the "total work of art", the WW pursued artistic integrity and rigorous craftsmanship, through a holistic artistic language. The influence of contemporaries, such as Gustav Klimt and female artisans Vally Wieselthier and Gudrun Baudisch, among others, enriched the collective's progressive trajectory, allowing it to evolve beyond its early influences.

The present work, *Design for an Amphora*, consists in a pencil and Indian ink study on paper, mounted on cardboard. It bears Hoffmann's distinctive monogram, "JH", on the *recto*, and the *verso* carries his studio stamp, inscribed "N. 59", indicating its provenance and position within the body of his design oeuvre. The design reflects Hoffmann's dialogue with classical antiquity, reimagined through a modernist lens. The amphora's elongated silhouette is marked at the rim by a vine motif executed with a delicate elegance that complements rather than disrupts the overall linearity. In accordance with WW's harmonisation of nature with modern design, this motif showcases Hoffmann's attitude towards evoking nature in an abstracted, stylised manner. The handles, executed with fluid, spiral curves, offer a counterpoint to the linear rigidity of the overall structure. Such elements reflect *Wiener Werkstätte*'s broader principles, where purist function and poetic ornamentation coalesce seamlessly. This synthesis is emblematic of the gradual stylistic transition from the ornate intricacies of Art Nouveau to the geometric clarity that presaged Art Deco. It also expressed the contemporary necessity to move away from industrial mass production: "Better to work ten days on one product than to produce ten products in one day," as Hoffmann famously declared.

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During the German occupation of Austria, Josef Hoffmann was commissioned to oversee the development of the Vienna Arts and Crafts Association as its artistic director. This role included the establishment of an "artistic experimental institute" in 1941, where young artisans received advanced training under Hoffmann's mentorship. Following the war, in 1948, Hoffmann founded the *Österreichische Werkstätten*, conceived as a successor to the *Wiener Werkstätte* and the *Werkbund* (ÖWB), with which he had been affiliated until 1920. He was then elected President of the *Secession* from 1948 to 1950.

Today, the archives of the *Wiener Werkstätte* are preserved at the MAK – Museum of Applied Arts in Vienna, encompassing an extensive array of materials, from sketches and textile samples to posters and photo albums. Additionally, the museum houses a comprehensive collection of objects representing all creative phases of the movement, featuring the world's largest assemblage of furniture, artefacts, and designs by Josef Hoffmann.