

GLASS CIRCLE NEWS

Vol. 33 No. 3

ISSN 2942-652

Issue 124 November 2010



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My favourite wineglass

The drinking glasses I cherish are by Lobmeyr, in particular a copy of a fragile white wine glass from the Patrician service [right], designed by Josef Hoffman in 1917 and still produced (with minor alterations) by the Viennese family firm founded in 1823.

This 'muslin glass' is tissue-thin and offers the mouth a whisper of a barrier between the liquid and your lips. It is delicate, but is remarkably resilient thanks to its inner elasticity and formal construction.

I use a variety of Lobmeyr glasses, each of which offers me a different experience. Most I acquired perhaps 8 or 10 years ago from our New York store. But I also have and use a few vintage examples, some of which were gifts to me.

I love Lobmeyr glasses for many reasons, but perhaps mostly because they are not just 'tools', but rather offer opportunities for sensual pleasure: even behaviour modifiers. They have a narrative, a story to tell. And like all extremely beautiful 'functional' objects, they resonate far beyond their functional aspects.

The glass almost deconstructs itself; it is there at the service of the liquid it is meant to contain. The glass is designed with a very subtle 'rim', to allow the liquid to 'pour' into one's mouth. Hence, the object addresses both of its agendas: to 'contain', and then to 'pour' well.

The glass is by definition a sensual, sexual object. We engage intimately with it: we put it to our lips and into our mouths. Hoffmann addresses the issue of the function of transferring the liquid from bowl to mouth: he asks us to 'linger' there a moment, to enjoy that process - to be highly sensitised at that moment. It is almost pagan.

Formalistically, the stem is almost too fragile for the bowl, rendering the liquid it contains a somewhat precarious feeling. The bowl floats. The base is small. All of this requires the 'user' to 'handle with care': to drink with care, with balance in mind - to interact with an extremely fragile object. In other words, it modifies one's behavior: to drink from this glass, one must become extremely graceful, which I believe is the intention of the glass: in rising to the occasion, to the

task, one becomes 'elevated'.

In today's world, to some, this might seem like a 'bad' glass: breakable, not survivable in a dishwasher, not sturdy. It requires delicacy, and hence 'energy' on

by Murray Moss

our part to own it, to use it. If it breaks,

there is a sense of loss as these are costly glasses. They need to be: a Lobmeyr glass passes through at least 24 pairs of hands and four quality controls.

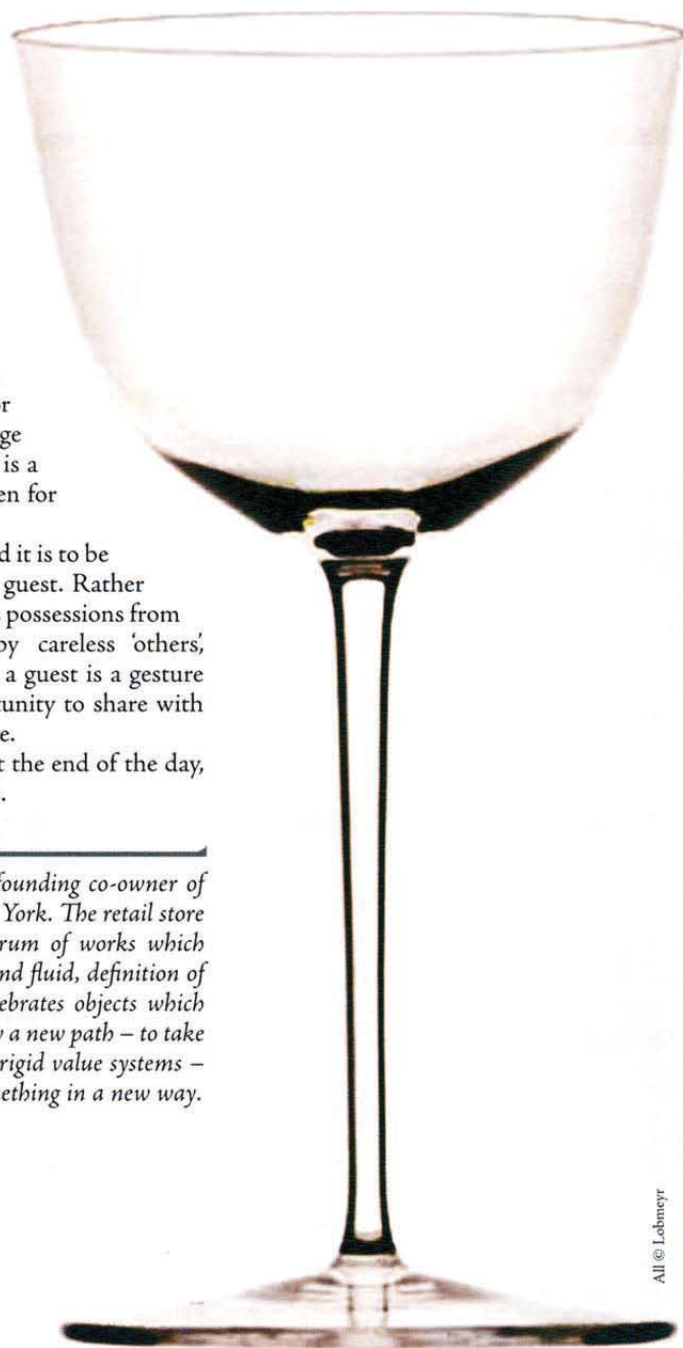
Isn't it wonderful to cherish something, to engage with an object that demand that you be graceful? It's like listening to music: we give ourselves over to something, for a moment. We engage in a ritual. The glass is a key to gentility, if even for a moment.

And how privileged it is to be given this glass as a guest. Rather than 'protecting' one's possessions from potential damage by careless 'others', offering this glass to a guest is a gesture of trust - an opportunity to share with others this experience.

And if it breaks, at the end of the day, it really is just a glass.

Murray Moss is the founding co-owner of Moss Gallery in New York. The retail store exhibits a large spectrum of works which suggest an inclusive, and fluid, definition of art and design. It celebrates objects which require clients to follow a new path - to take a 'holiday' from their rigid value systems - and to experience something in a new way.

Wine glass from drinking set 238 'Patrician', 1917



All © Lobmeyr

The Patrician drinking set

For more than 180 years the name of Lobjmeyr in Vienna has been a synonym for glassware and lighting objects of high artistic and technical quality. Its success lies in the high demands on designers and producers, as well as ongoing development and innovation based on tradition.

In the difficult epoch of the First World War, the J. & L. Lobjmeyr company took a leading role in the reorientation of fine glass and developed alternatives to the traditional thick-walled Bohemian crystal glass.

A decisive element was the reintroduction of 'muslin glass', also named 'straw glass' by Lobjmeyr. The company was already familiar with this extremely thin-walled glass (ca. 0.7 to 1 mm/ 0.03 to 0.04 inches), which was distinguished by specific elasticity, from a drinking set produced as early as 1856 [fig. 1].

The company biographer Robert Schmidt observed in 1925: 'Now it was remembered that form itself may be a complete, self-contained work of art independent of any decorative trim added later. ... The secret of its effect lies in the almost natural outline shape throughout developed from the parison, in the near-incorporeal delicacy of the walls which appear to cozily embrace, rather than enclose, the liquid contents, and in the brilliant, in part softly rounded, in part sharply sparkling reflections which almost alone convey the optical impression of the hollow space.'²

The first muslin glass designs were made in 1916 by Oskar Strnad (1879-1935), architect and professor at the Kunstgewerbeschule, who defined the

outline shapes with utmost artistic sensibility. This was followed by the drinking set no. 238 (fig. 2) by Josef Hoffmann in which he seemed to reduce Strnad's shapes even more. Hoffmann's pupil Oswald Haerdtl (1899-1956)

took the development further in 1924 and fully exhausted the possibilities of the almost incorporeal glass with unusual shapes and long stems while retaining stability and usability [fig. 3]. Together with Strnad they prepared the way for the enormous Parisian 'Exposition des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes' in 1925, resulting in the Art Déco movement. The jury awarded Lobjmeyr the Grand Prix.

Hoffmann (1870-1956) architect and professor of the famous Viennese Kunstgewerbeschule, the state school for arts and crafts, began to supply designs for Lobjmeyr in 1910; a collaboration that lasted until his death.

For drinking set no. 238 the artist chose undecorated thin muslin glass, in which a bell-shaped bowl is supported by a thin thread-like stem. Hoffmann designed a bottle and several glasses for wine, water and beer as well as a fitting finger bowl. The bottle plug was a small drinking cup.

This service, which was also produced in lustrated variants (gold, silver, amethyst), has been in production ever since; being one of its most popular services. It has represented the company at numerous exhibitions. To encourage export, it was also given the high-faluting name 'Patrician'. The glasses of this service were made in several glassworks, mainly in Bohemia. Though the company Lobjmeyr was very strict in always

keeping the same quality, it is possible to see small differences in the different products and one or two sizes were discontinued. Some shapes were added or changed later; recently the designer Sebastian Menschhorn invented a new decoration in copperwheel engraving for the vase.

Though these glasses look very fragile they have an amazing resilience. This is thanks to the inner elasticity of the glass and the logical formal construction. This quality combined with the elegance of the contours make the Patrician one of the most beautiful and timeless table sets.

Footnotes

¹ A time which also saw the death of Ludwig Lobjmeyr (1829-1917), son of the company founder Josef Lobjmeyr (1792-1955) who had opened a 'glassware store' in Vienna in 1823. The nephew of Ludwig Lobjmeyr, Stefan Rath (1897-1916), became the owner in 1917. Today, J. & L. Lobjmeyr is under the management of the same family, now in its sixth generation.

² Schmidt, Robert: *100 Jahre österreichische Glaskunst, Lobjmeyr 1823-1923*, Vienna 1925, pp. 7-8.

Dr Ulrike Scholda is an art historian living in Austria and specialises in applied arts and glass of the 19th and 20th centuries. She has published two books about the collection at the Museum of Applied Arts (MAK), Vienna: J. & L. Lobjmeyr: Between Vision and Reality, Glassware from the MAK Collection 20th/21st century, Vienna 2009 and J. & L. Lobjmeyr: Between Tradition and Innovation. 19th century, Vienna 2006. (German & English)

Lobjmeyr is distributed in the UK by Thomas Goode and Vessel, and by Bergdorf&Goodman, Moss or Neue Gallerie in the US.



FIG. 1: Drinking set 4, designed, 1856



FIG. 2: Drinking set 238 'Patrician', 1917

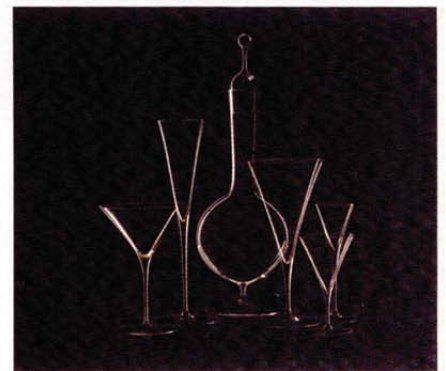


FIG. 4: Drinking set 240 'Ambassador', 1924