



ITINERARIO LIBERTY



Germany

In Germany, while in the rest of Europe a real artistic revolution was in action, the dictates of the neo-rococo style was still followed. Only after 1895, following the suggestions of the international exhibitions and the founding of two important magazines, the attention of the artists was focalized on Art Nouveau. The first magazine, "Jugend", is the one which gave its name to the German movement. Although it did not specifically deal with applied art, "Jugend" was important for the publication of the works of the major illustrators of the period. The second magazine, "Pan", founded by Julius Meier-Graefe in 1896, collected all the international and national debates on decorative art.

The Jugendstil was not a homogeneous phenomenon and two successive phases are clearly distinguished. The first, floral, was related, in the years before 1900, to the English and Belgian influence. It was characterized by naturalistic and figurative forms and by a fresh atmosphere with references to fairy tales and phantasmagoria. The second phase, abstract, was characterized by the influence of Henry van de Velde, the Belgian artist who lived in Germany for a long time, and by the Austrian influence. In this phase, forms less and less figurative and decoration based almost uniquely on the linear module were privileged.

The most important centre of the floral phase was Munich. As regards the decorative arts, the best results were reached in the furnishing field and in the manufacture of furniture, the characteristics of which were the importance given to the constructive elements, the connections and the joints and the slight curve of the base and the top of the structure. Among the most important exponents we would mention Hermann Obrist (1863-1927) who designed, besides furniture on floral style, precious embroidery, too. He founded his workshop in Florence and transferred it to Munich in 1894. In his embroidery in a refined style, in which the influence of Japanese art is evident, the vegetable motifs form stars, circles and other designs. The Japanese influence also characterizes the furniture, the lamps and other objects of everyday use designed by Otto Eckmann (1865-1902), who also worked as an illustrator. The most important work of August Endell (1871-1925) was the reconstruction of the photographic studio "Atelier Elvira". The decoration of the façade, applied to the flat surface, is of natural inspiration, but not realistic. The forms, which recall organic elements, compose a fantastic totality. On the inside, the lamps and balustrades are coordinated with the external decoration.

With Richard Riemerschmid (1868-1957) the passage to the second phase of the Jugendstil comes to an end. His pieces of furniture no longer have ornaments, the lines on the basis of which he models wood are still an expression of organic life and dynamism, but without figurative references any more. Peter Behrens (1868-1940) also designed furniture and carpets in abstract forms, before reaching modern architecture. In ceramics Max Laeuger (1864-1952) and Julius Scharvogel (1854-1938), whose vases have a plastic form and an unrefined character, given by the dappled paint which trickles downwards, distinguished themselves. The only glass artist who had international resonance was Karl Koepping (1848-1914), who produced delicate goblets in the form of flowers with very extended stems.