

Vienna, May 2014

THE METROPOLIS EXPERIMENT VIENNA AND THE 1873 WORLD EXHIBITION

Press conference: Wednesday, 14 May 2014, 10 a.m.
Opening: Wednesday, 14 May 2014, 6.30 p.m.
Exhibition venue: Wien Museum Karlsplatz, 1040 Vienna
Duration: 15 May to 28 September 2014
Opening hours: Tuesday to Sunday and public holidays, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.
Press photos: www.wienmuseum.at/de/presse

A panoramic view of the era around 1870

After "The struggle for the city", a major exhibition on politics, art and everyday life around 1930, Wien Museum presents another panoramic view of an era. This time, the spotlight is trained on the years around 1870, a crucial transformative phase in Vienna's development towards becoming a major modern metropolis. From 550,000 around 1850, Vienna's population had almost doubled to about one million by the 1870s.

For Vienna, 1873 became the key year of the era. Like the construction of the new *Ringstraße*, the World Exhibition symbolised the city's ambitions of attaining international standing. It was the first event of its kind not to be held in London or Paris, and an ostentatious display of superlatives: an area five times as large as the previous show in Paris, 53,000 exhibitors from 35 nations, 194 extravagantly designed pavilions, and crowning it all the Palace of Industry with its 85-metre-high Rotunda, then the world's largest domed structure and a new Viennese landmark, and the 800-metre-long Engine Hall. The Exhibition attracted more than seven million visitors between 1 May and 2 November, yet its objectives were only partially met. 1873 was also the year of the great stock exchange crash which brought the phase of economic prosperity and optimistic hopes for the future to an abrupt end.

The Wien Museum exhibition tells the story of large-scale building projects and the

movers and shakers of the *Gründerzeit* era, of miserable social conditions, migration and the advent of the mass political parties, of increased mobility thanks to faster transport, of the advances made in medicine and technology and of the fashions of the period, which was a golden age in the decorative arts. Most of the 1000 or so objects on display are from the Wien Museum collections, with the focus on the extensive holdings of over 1600 photos from the Vienna Photographers' Association, many of which feature here. Also on show are a large number of original exhibits from the 1873 World Exhibition. Following "Olden days Vienna. The city that never was" (2004) and "The struggle for the city. Politics, art and everyday life around 1930" (2009), the show is the last major Wien Museum exhibition headed by Wolfgang Kos, whose tenure as Director ends next year.

A "festival of progress": how the World Exhibition came about

1867 marked a turning point. After a number of disastrous years the economy made a sudden recovery. A "miracle harvest" opened up opportunities for export, while the state reform that created the Austro-Hungarian Dual Monarchy (the "Compromise" with Hungary) placed trade, customs and fiscal policy on a new basis. Iron production, mechanical engineering and the construction industry were the drivers behind the upswing. Vienna also established itself as a centre of finance, with countless sometimes dubious joint stock companies springing up in the period before 1873.

These boom years presented industrialists, tradespeople and commercial policy-makers, as well as the proponents of reform in the applied arts, with the opportunity to put into action a plan they had long held dear, namely that of staging a World Exhibition in Vienna. Since the "Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations" held in London in 1851 there had been three further World Exhibitions (1855 and 1867 in Paris, 1862 in London). These "festivals of progress" not only acted as a forum for global exchange of expertise among engineers and manufacturers but also presented bourgeois society and the respective host country with an ideal platform for self-presentation and image boosting. The Vienna of the *Gründerzeit* era was "on the fast track" and intended to present itself to the world as a large modern city on its way to becoming a major metropolis.

It was not until 1870 – barely three years before the opening – that Emperor Franz Joseph enacted a sovereign resolution on the holding of the World Exhibition, in the face of resistance from the City Council, the municipal authorities and Mayor of Vienna Cajetan Felder, who cautioned against excessive costs. The influence of the local politicians was still limited at this point, though their scope for action expanded from the 1860s onwards with the end of the neo-absolutist regime. A prominent symbol of the heightened self-confidence of the civic administration vis-à-vis the imperial house was Vienna's monumental new City Hall, on which work started in 1873.

The city as construction site

The municipal politicians of the liberal age laid the groundwork for a modern technical infrastructure which became a prime driver of the economic boom and radically

transformed the city. One of the key projects was the **regulation of the Danube**, which was undertaken for flood protection purposes as well as with a view to the city's further expansion. The cutting of a new channel to shift the Danube closer to the city was expected to entail advantages in terms of trade, commerce and transport, the aim being to make the Danube into a navigable waterway. The idea of containing the main arm of the river in a uniform, perfectly straight bed was not a new one, but it was not until now, with the aid of modern steam engines, that it became possible to implement the plan within the space of a few years, from 1869 to 1875.

The most costly of the urban infrastructure projects was the construction of Vienna's first **mountain spring water pipeline** (1870-73), which tapped the Alpine springs of the Rax-Schneeberg massif to supply water to the city and its million-plus inhabitants. Repeated water shortages nevertheless ensued as a result of planning errors coupled with escalating water consumption. Besides water supply and sewage disposal the city fathers also tackled another hygienic problem: like the city as a whole, Vienna's "communal" cemeteries were in urgent need of expansion by the middle of the century. In 1863 the City Council introduced a system of central planning, and the new **Central Cemetery** in Simmering was officially opened eleven years later. The "burial question" was fraught with technical, religious and cultural implications that prompted heated debate in Vienna.

Last but not least, Vienna's transport infrastructure also underwent a radical transformation: the years around 1870 saw the construction of four of the city's six major **Gründerzeit railway termini** (*Südbahnhof*, *Nordwestbahnhof*, *Franz-Josefs-Bahnhof* and *Staatsbahnhof* (later *Ostbahnhof*)), and within a period of six years five new **bridges** were built over the newly regulated Danube, among them the *Kaiser-Franz-Josefs-Brücke* (later *Floridsdorfer Brücke*) and the *Kronprinz-Rudolf-Brücke* (which became the *Reichsbrücke*). To coincide with the World Exhibition, the City Council also had several bridges over the Danube Canal and the River Wien renovated or rebuilt. A task not considered to be within the remit of the civic authorities was the expansion of the public transport network, which was left to private investors: by 1873 a basic **tramway** system consisting of the *Ringstraße* lines and some initial links to the suburbs was in place, still operated by horse-drawn trams. The municipal politicians were likewise little concerned with the housing market, with the result that the speculation-driven expansion of new districts on the outskirts was dominated by "American-style" gridiron streets lined with low-standard tenement blocks. Mass immigration of people looking for work and soaring living costs swiftly exacerbated the housing shortage and the squalid living conditions of the urban poor.

Boulevard of grandiose ambitions: the *Ringstraße*

Alongside the World Exhibition itself, the *Ringstraße* is another central theme of the exhibition. The Emperor ordered the demolition of the city walls and fortifications in 1857, and an international urban planning competition held a year later yielded the "master plan" which served as the blueprint for the key public buildings, green spaces, vistas and squares. The construction of the *Ringstraße* was a state-controlled, centrally managed, large-scale project. The overall supervisory role lay with the Ministry of the

Interior, with the City of Vienna reduced to the status of onlooker while still being required to finance the new road and sewer network. The building of "New Vienna" became a bone of contention between the imperial court, government, military administration and civic authorities. Compromise was achieved, *inter alia*, through the assignment of parcels of land free of charge for the laying out of *Stadtpark* and *Rathausplatz*. The proceeds from the sale of building plots to private individuals enabled the state to finance representative public buildings like the State Opera House.

1 May 1865 saw the official opening ceremony for the *Ringstraße* – despite the fact that the major part of the boulevard was not yet built and still at the planning stage. Buildings, most of them inhabited, were already standing on *Opernring*, *Kärntnerring* and *Schubertring*, however, and the economic boom meant that intensive private-sector building activity continued right up until 1873. The clay beneath Vienna was thus transformed into "gold", as illustrated by the meteoric career of brick manufacturer Heinrich Drasche: after founding the "Wienerberger" joint stock company in 1869, he subsequently rose to become the richest man in Vienna, commissioning the building of the "Heinrichhof", a huge new-style luxury apartment building directly opposite the opera house.

By 1873 all the main public buildings were already under construction or discussion, including the new City Hall, the Parliament and the museums. Vienna's leading architects, notably Heinrich Ferstel, Theophil Hansen and Friedrich Schmidt, designed the first major buildings in "Viennese style", an especially opulent variant of the neo-Renaissance style which caused an international furore.

A city within a city: the World Exhibition

Once the Emperor had given his approval for the World Exhibition, a planned city of gigantic proportions sprung up within a very short period of time in Vienna's *Prater* area (the site occupied by today's City Hall had also been discussed as a possible alternative), whose considerable distance from the city centre gave rise to substantial costs. The exhibition grounds not only housed the vast Palace of Industry, Engine Hall and Hall of the Arts and almost 200 national and corporate pavilions, but were also equipped with state-of-the-art infrastructure including a sewer network, rail tracks and their own railway station. At the same time, a side project also saw the long-established *Wurstelprater* remodelled and expanded into the modern *Volksprater* amusement park.

The preparatory phase scheduled for the World Exhibition was incredibly brief. Thanks to the latest developments in transport and communications (telegraphy), however, it proved possible, within a very short space of time, to organise worldwide participation, overcome the logistical problems associated with the transport of vast numbers of exhibits and mobilise huge streams of visitors. World Exhibitions were conceived as popular encyclopaedias of humanity, designed to cover an enormous spectrum of different aspects – industry, technology, science, the arts, culture, and so on. At the Vienna Exhibition, the task of representing the world with attributes such as progress, productivity and speed combined with the emotional experience provided by a huge variety of commodities, luxury and exoticism. The World Exhibition not only served as

an economic stimulus, but also offered the broader public a global showcase of experiences on a whole new scale: Visitors embarked on a "sightseeing tour" of the Industrial Age, gazed in wonder at the clattering steam engines, looms and sewing machines and found out about innovations in the worlds of transport and science. A society fond of consumption revelled in the assembled profusion of craftsman-made objects and devoted itself to the pursuit of "good taste", which from the Austrian point of view primarily meant luxury goods in the internationally acclaimed "Viennese Renaissance" style. Artistic designs by sculptors and architects, executed with precise craftsmanship, were a consequence of the reform of the applied arts - and formed the basis for the latter's success.

But the aim was not only to educate the public: it was also about entertainment and the fascination of faraway places. At the Prater exhibition grounds visitors were able to take an architectural tour of the world; foreigners in exotic costume and authentic dishes from all over the globe became the talk of the town, and cocktails were served in a North American Indian wigwam. The oriental and Asian pavilions exerted the greatest attraction: a defining characteristic of the Vienna World Exhibition, they spawned trends in fashion, lifestyle and the applied arts.

The 1873 World Exhibition is remembered by posterity chiefly for the huge financial deficit it incurred – just 4.2 million gulden in revenues against expenditures of 19 million gulden. In the speculative fever that gripped the age, the hopes of vast attendance figures, not to mention the substantial influx of capital, had led to excessively inflated expectations. Exploding costs, the stock exchange crash and fewer visitors than anticipated – not least due to the cholera epidemic –, resulted in sober disillusionment after the event. Ultimately, the only parties who really profited were individual exhibitors from the successful promotion of trade and industry and visitors from the effective transfer of knowledge. This notwithstanding, the capital of the Austro-Hungarian Empire succeeded in returning itself to centre stage in the eyes of the world for the first time since the Congress of Vienna.

From pneumatic post to the North Pole expedition: other topics covered by the exhibition

Besides the themes outlined above, the Wien Museum exhibition also turns the spotlight on mass entertainments of the *Gründerzeit* period, innovations in home furnishings and engineering, the role played by the illustrated media, inventions such as pneumatic post and, not least, on the great arts debate of the time. As the capital city of music, Vienna around 1870 provided the stage for a musical "clash of the Titans" between the "consummator" of Viennese Classicism, Johannes Brahms, and the New German School represented by Anton Bruckner and Richard Wagner. The early 1870s also saw Austria's first ever environmental campaign, to save the Vienna Woods from logging, as well as the expedition to the North Pole, which returned in 1874 after two years trapped in the ice. Grand hotels like the Metropol and Imperial opened their doors, while Lobmeyr unveiled the first "Arabian-style" range of glassware. The latest fashions were imported from the world's major cities, among them ornate gowns with extravagant bustles.

The curators of the exhibition are Wien Museum Director Wolfgang Kos and art historian Ralph Gleis. Besides putting together the major Makart exhibition at the *Künstlerhaus* (2011), the latter co-curated the exhibitions "*Gründerzeit. 1848-1871. Industry & the fulfilment of dreams between the Age of Metternich and the German Empire*" at the German Historical Museum in Berlin (2008) and "The pictures in our heads: icons of contemporary history" at the *Haus der Geschichte* in Bonn (2009). The exhibition was designed by BWM Architekten with graphics by Perndl+Co and will be accompanied by a 550-page catalogue published by Czernin Verlag.

- Admission:** Adults € 8 / Concessions € 6
(*senior citizens, Vienna Card and Ö1 Club Card holders, disabled persons, students up to 27 years of age, apprentices, conscripts in military/civil social service, groups of ten or more persons*)
Free admission for children and young people under 19 years of age
Free admission for all visitors every first Sunday of the month
- Visitor information:** T +43 1 5058747-85173, service@wienmuseum.at, www.wienmuseum.at
- Guided tours:** Saturdays, 4 p.m.
Sundays and public holidays, 11 a.m. and 4 p.m.
Group bookings: T +43 1 5058747-85180
service@wienmuseum.at
- Curators:** Ralph Gleis, Wolfgang Kos
- Exhibition design:** BWM Architekten
Graphic design: Perndl+Co
- Catalogue:** Experiment Metropole. 1873: Wien und die Weltausstellung, Czernin Verlag, Vienna, 2014, 580 pages, € 39
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Exhibition sponsors: Vienna Economic Chamber
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