

## RICHARD JARAY AND HIS FURNITURE DESIGNS

In 1941, Richard Jaray, born in Vienna in 1902, was deported to the Łódź ghetto together with his mother Emma: coming from a Jewish family, they were both murdered in the Holocaust. Among the few remaining traces of Richard's life are some personal documents and a bundle of drawings that have subsisted in the possession of his niece Tess Jaray. Tess was lucky enough to leave Vienna together with her parents shortly after her birth in 1937 and emigrate to England where she lives today as a renowned artist.

Richard Jaray came from a well-established furniture dynasty: His grandfather Sigmund Jaray had founded a company for upholstery furniture and interior decoration in Vienna in the early 1870's that was awarded the title of a k. u. k. Hoflieferant (purveyor to the court) already in 1891. In 1895, Sigmund's eldest son Max joined the firm that he took over after his father's death in 1908. Concurrently, Sigmund's second son Karl – Richard's father – became a partner of the company that had its headquarters at Prinz-Eugenstrasse 70. After Max and Karl had both died unexpectedly in 1920, the Jaray family enterprise was led by their cousin Felix until its liquidation in 1933.

As the surviving documents attest, Richard Jaray began his higher education with an apprenticeship in the family business in 1920 around the time of his father's death. After his training as a cabinetmaker, he studied architecture at the Kunstgewerbeschule (School of Arts and Crafts) with Oscar Strnad in the mid 1920's and was – at the same time, it seems – working part-time for Josef Frank and his company Haus & Garten. At the end of the 1920's, Richard Jaray stayed in Berlin for some time where he had brief engagements with different architectural firms.

For the 1930's, we have no official records that indicate how Richard Jaray continued with his career. Among the surviving documents is, however, a substantial part of Richard Jaray's artistic legacy: The bundle of drawings – of which only a small selection could be chosen for this presentation – consists of ca. fifty neatly colored drawings of interiors and furnishing as well as ca. thirty penciled furniture drawings on tracing paper. None of these drawings is dated or signed but all of them bear the same stamp of the "Architekt Richard Jaray" with the established company address at Prinz-Eugenstrasse 70.

Stylistically, most of the drawings point to the mid 1930's. The furniture designs are exquisite, indicating sophisticated constructions with delicate surfaces or rich upholstery. Many of the designs suggest the use of polished macassar

wood, sometimes combined with glass or chromed steel tube. Predominantly, the individual pieces of furniture as well as the interiors advocate the lavish life-style of the Viennese bourgeois. Especially the living rooms seem to promote the comfortable tradition of hand-crafted, high-quality furniture beyond the formalist concepts and stylistic dogmas of the time. Most likely, however, these drawings were intended as a portfolio and do not outline actual assignments or commissions. Nevertheless, some of the individual pieces of furniture represented in the interior depictions are drawn again on single sheets in more detail and with technical annotations.

Ultimately, it should be noted that many of the drawings are inscribed in English: we can assume that Richard Jaray had thus prepared his illustrations as a portfolio when his brother Franz and his family emigrated to England. Unfortunately, the approval of the authorities did not arrive in time to allow Richard and his mother to get into safety in England, as well. In this way, the drawings are not only important contributions to the Viennese tradition of furniture and interior design, but also touching testimonials of a singular fate and a lost world.

Sebastian Hackenschmidt, curator for furniture and wood work, Museum of Applied Art, Vienna, April 2021