



# M223 Dining room for the A. S. Ball exhibition of modern furniture, Berlin

## Introduction

Mackintosh designed a dining room to be displayed at an exhibition organised by Alfred Grenander, the Swedish-born professor of architecture at the Museum of Applied Arts, Berlin. The exhibition was held in the premises of furniture-maker and retailer Arthur S. Ball in Potsdamerstrasse in central Berlin.

**Authorship:** Photographs of the exhibited dining room were published in contemporary German journals under Mackintosh's name.

**Status:** Temporary

## Chronology

### 1903

18 March: Alfred Grenander writes to Hermann Muthesius about the possible participation of Mackintosh in an exhibition he is organising in Berlin. <sup>1</sup>

12 May: Mackintosh writes to Muthesius enclosing a letter from Grenander. Mackintosh has replied to Grenander confirming that he will proceed with drawings for a room for the exhibition. <sup>2</sup>

### 1905

February – March: Exhibition open. <sup>3</sup>

## Description

### Background

In early 1905 a dining room designed by Mackintosh featured in an exhibition of modern furniture curated by Berlin-based Swedish architect and designer Alfred Grenander. It was held in the premises of A. S. Ball, a furniture-making company in Potsdamerstrasse, Berlin. The exhibition followed international success for Grenander at the 1904 World Exhibition in St Louis where his furniture, made by Ball, shared an award for best technical execution. <sup>1</sup>

Mackintosh's involvement in the Berlin exhibition came about through Hermann Muthesius, with whom Grenander was acquainted. <sup>2</sup> Exhibition preparations were already under way two years earlier. On 18 March 1903, Grenander wrote to Muthesius to enquire about Mackintosh, evidently familiar with the reputation of his work. 'Don't you think that Mackintosh would be interesting for us? In my opinion [he would be] an attraction for the exhibition. Ball ... would buy a room directly from Mr Mackintosh .... I don't think we will be able to execute his work here, [but] would like to hear your opinion on the matter.' <sup>3</sup>

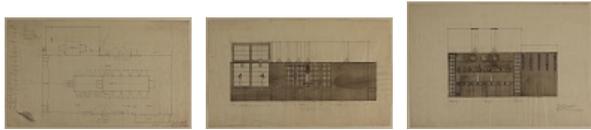
Two months later Mackintosh confirmed to Muthesius that he would contribute to Grenander's exhibition: 'I enclose a letter which I received from your friend Professor Grenander. It seems very satisfactory and I have written to say that I will proceed with the drawings as soon as I get the exact measurements. I see that he gets rooms from Moser, Hoffmann, Billing, George Walton etc.' <sup>4</sup> At the exhibition Mackintosh was joined by non-Germans George Walton, Viennese architect Leopold Bauer and Swede Carl Westmann; Joseph Maria Olbrich based in Darmstadt; and designers from Munich, Dresden, Karlsruhe and Berlin itself, including a group of Grenander's pupils. <sup>5</sup>



### Design

The exhibition was arranged over two floors. An entrance hall designed by Grenander on the ground floor led up one storey to a hall which in turn led to all other rooms. <sup>6</sup> Mackintosh's comment to Muthesius in May 1903 suggests that each designer was given a designated space within which to design a room. A surviving plan and four published photographs show that Mackintosh's room was L-shaped and complete with walls and ceiling. The short arm of the 'L', a shallow alcove, had a barrel-vaulted ceiling. <sup>7</sup>

Five drawings for interior elevations and furniture show dark coloured walls with fitted furniture including a dresser, tall narrow cupboards and a table under the leaded-glass window as well as two sets of double doors on opposite walls. Movable furniture included a long table with eight chairs in the centre of the room and a smaller square one with two chairs in the alcove, a sideboard and a tall clock. The photographs show changes from the drawings: the proportions of the fitted cupboards were amended and the double doors replaced with curtains. <sup>8</sup>



This was Mackintosh's first dining room on a domestic scale since the 1901 House for an Art Lover and the fitted furniture is similar to that of the earlier design. Other items recall projects of the intervening years: tables, chairs and clock are related to those in the Salon de Luxe and Front Saloon at the Willow Tea Rooms, and the window table is similar to a piece at The Hill House. <sup>9</sup> The sombre grey-green stained oak was relieved by the only decorative motif in the scheme, the square, in lattice work and inlaid purple tile details. <sup>10</sup>

It is not clear if Mackintosh's furniture was made in Glasgow and sent to Berlin – he did not travel to Berlin himself – or if, as the newspaper advertisement stated, all exhibited furniture was made by A. S. Ball. Grenander's letter of 18 March 1903 casts doubt on whether the Berlin company would be able to make Mackintosh's furniture, while one of the elevation drawings, now untraced, was owned in the 1950s by Herbert Smith, son of Glasgow craftsman Francis Smith, whose company regularly made furniture to Mackintosh's designs, and who may have done so for the Berlin exhibition. <sup>11</sup>

It is not known what became of Mackintosh's furniture following the exhibition. Items designed by Grenander's pupil Marie Philipp for the school room have appeared at auction. <sup>12</sup>



## Reception

The exhibition was picked up by the German art press, probably due to Grenander's reputation as a World Exhibition prize winner. *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration*, *Berliner Architekturwelt* and the *Kunstgewerbeblatt* (published in Leipzig) carried extensive and richly illustrated reviews commending the simple design and colour of Mackintosh's dining room, while some critics drew attention to the influence of Mackintosh and Viennese design on other or the exhibits.

M. Rapsilber writing in *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration* described the exhibition as a 'sensation' and an 'evident success'. He considered the dining room as the 'most delightful' in the exhibition, 'simply distinguished and at the same time even rhythmic ... As so often is the case with Mackintosh's interiors, the balance of the ambience between cool assertiveness and clear comfort has been duly drawn out.' Two views of Mackintosh's room were among the photographs accompanying the review. <sup>13</sup>

Max Creutz, in *Berliner Architekturwelt*, drew attention to the use of inexpensive materials, such as Mackintosh's grey packing paper wall covering, and commented that 'in this respect we have much to learn from England [sic]'. Mackintosh's palette was thought 'simple but dignified' and the distribution of furniture simple and quiet so as not to crowd the room. The favoured square pattern in purple enlivened the cupboard doors. 'Everything bears an almost rough, peasant character; only the few colours are of the highest refinement ... In these few colours in the predominantly dark grey room ... lie the secret of its effectiveness.' <sup>14</sup>

Georg Swarzenski in the *Kunstgewerbeblatt* considered Mackintosh's and Walton's rooms, along with Grenander's, the 'high points of the exhibition': 'They belong definitively to the best work these artists have ever created and any commentary is superfluous.' He did however briefly describe Mackintosh's room, highlighting the 'perfect chromatic harmonisation of the whole'. <sup>15</sup>

Viennese journal *Kunst und Kunsthandwerk* called attention to the influence of its own artists and of the Scottish school on the work shown, in particular on Grenander's white-painted first-floor hall with battens around doors, and windows painted and pierced with squares. Mackintosh's dining room was described as 'very simple, structural, without any mysterious connotations in the ornament'. He 'appears to see his fulfilment in a well-balanced chromatic mood with the most unadorned materials.' <sup>16</sup>

Felix Poppenberg, in *Kunst und Künstler*, published by gallery owner and Berlin Secession member Bruno Cassirer, also noted the undoubted debt in the forms and composition of Grenander's hall to Mackintosh. 'It is the familiar, very inspiring note of Scottish interior design. ... That there are also other means in reserve is demonstrated by the genuine Mackintosh room. It is a dining room of extraordinary simplicity.' <sup>17</sup>

A photograph showing the dining room window, which does not seem to have been published elsewhere, was included in *Ausgeführte Möbel und Zimmereinrichtungen der Gegenwart*. <sup>18</sup>



## People

### Other:

- Alfred Grenander
- Hermann Muthesius

## Documents

## Images



## Bibliography

### Published

- Roger Billcliffe, *Charles Rennie Mackintosh: The Complete Furniture, Furniture Drawings and Interior Designs*, Moffat, Dumfriesshire: Cameron & Hollis, 4th edn, 2009, pp. 219–22
- Christoph Brachmann and Thomas Steigenberger, *Ein Schwede in Berlin: Der Architekt und Designer Alfred Grenander und die Berliner Architektur 1890–1914*, Korb, Germany: Didymos-Verlag, 2010, pp. 89–93
- Alan Crawford, *Charles Rennie Mackintosh*, London: Thames & Hudson, 1995, p. 140
- Max Creutz, 'Die Ausstellung von moderner Zimmereinrichtungen von der Firma A. S. Ball', *Berliner Architekturwelt*, 1, 1906, p. 25–35
- Felix Poppenberg, 'Möbelausstellung', *Kunst und Künstler*, 1905, p. 306
- M. Rapsilber, 'A. S. Ball – Berlin Ausstellung moderner Zimmereinrichtungen', *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration*, 16, 1905, pp. 395–430
- Georg Swarzenski, 'Die Ausstellung künstlerischer Innenräume der Firma A. S. Ball in Berlin', *Kunstgewerbeblatt*, 16, 1905, pp. 201–15
- 'Kleine Nachrichten: Berliner Dekorative Chronik', *Kunst und Kunsthandwerk*, 8, 1905, pp. 197–8

### Unpublished

- Hiroaki Kimura, 'Charles Rennie Mackintosh: Architectural Drawings Catalogue and Design Analytical Catalogue', University of Glasgow: unpublished PhD thesis, 1982, pp. 50–1, 205–7

### Notes:

- 1: Berlin, Werkbundarchiv, Museum der Dinge: Hermann Muthesius Estate, letter from Alfred Grenander to Hermann Muthesius, 18 March 1903.
- 2: Berlin, Werkbundarchiv, Museum der Dinge: Hermann Muthesius Estate, letter from Mackintosh to Muthesius, 12 May 1903.
- 3: The *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration* critic wrote that the exhibition had taken place during the carnival month. M Rapsilber, 'A. S. Ball – Berlin Ausstellung moderner Zimmereinrichtungen', *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration*, 16, 1905, p. 395. In 1905 carnival ended on 7 March. An advertisement for the exhibition appeared in local newspapers between 26 January, *Berliner Morgenpost*, p. 22, and 1 March, *Vossische Zeitung*, p. 17. The same advertisement also appeared in the *Berliner Lokal Anzeiger* and the *Berliner Tageblatt* during February 1905.
- 4: M Rapsilber, 'A. S. Ball – Berlin Ausstellung moderner Zimmereinrichtungen', *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration*, 16, 1905, p. 395; Christoph Brachmann and Thomas Steigenberger, *Ein Schwede in Berlin: Der Architekt und Designer Alfred Grenander und die Berliner Architektur 1890–*

1914, Korb, Germany: Didymos-Verlag, 2010, pp. 88–9.

5: Christoph Brachmann and Thomas Steigenberger, *Ein Schwede in Berlin: Der Architekt und Designer Alfred Grenander und die Berliner Architektur 1890–1914*, Korb, Germany: Didymos-Verlag, 2010, p. 321–2.

6: Berlin, Werkbundarchiv, Museum der Dinge: Hermann Muthesius Estate, letter from Alfred Grenander to Hermann Muthesius, 18 March 1903.

7: Berlin, Werkbundarchiv, Museum der Dinge: Hermann Muthesius Estate, letter from Mackintosh to Hermann Muthesius, 12 May 1903.

8: Christoph Brachmann and Thomas Steigenberger, *Ein Schwede in Berlin: Der Architekt und Designer Alfred Grenander und die Berliner Architektur 1890–1914*, Korb, Germany: Didymos-Verlag, 2010, p. 89; M. Rapsilber, 'A. S. Ball – Berlin Ausstellung moderner Zimmereinrichtungen', *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration*, 16, 1905, pp. 396–400.

9: M. Rapsilber, 'A. S. Ball – Berlin Ausstellung moderner Zimmereinrichtungen', *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration*, 16, 1905, pp. 395–6.

10: For the plan of the room, see The Hunterian, University of Glasgow: GLAHA 41795 (M223-001).

11: Three of these drawings are in the The Hunterian, University of Glasgow: GLAHA 41795 (M223-001); 41796 (M223-003); 41798 (M223-004). Annotations written on the plan by an unknown third party state in German 'Opening only. No doors'.

12: For analysis of the furniture and discussion of the drawings, see Roger Billcliffe, *Charles Rennie Mackintosh: The Complete Furniture, Furniture Drawings and Interior Designs*, Moffat, Dumfriesshire: Cameron & Hollis, 4th edn, 2009, pp. 219–22.

13: M. Rapsilber, 'A. S. Ball – Berlin Ausstellung moderner Zimmereinrichtungen', *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration*, 16, 1905, p. 402.

14: Billcliffe labels this drawing D1905.15A. Roger Billcliffe, *Charles Rennie Mackintosh: The Complete Furniture, Furniture Drawings and Interior Designs*, Moffat, Dumfriesshire: Cameron & Hollis, 4th edn, 2009, p. 222.

15: See for example, Von Zezschwitz, Munich, sale 69, 20 October 2001, lot 621.

16: M. Rapsilber, 'A. S. Ball – Berlin Ausstellung moderner Zimmereinrichtungen', *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration*, 16, 1905, p. 402; pp. 416–17.

17: Max Creutz, 'Die Ausstellung von moderner Zimmereinrichtungen von der Firma A. S. Ball', *Berliner Architekturwelt*, 1, 1906, p. 27; p. 34.

18: Georg Swarzenski, 'Die Ausstellung künstlerischer Innenräume der Firma A. S. Ball in Berlin', *Kunstgewerbeblatt*, 16, 1905, p. 213.

19: 'Kleine Nachrichten: Berliner Dekorative Chronik', *Kunst und Kunsthandwerk*, 8, 1905, pp. 197–8.

20: Felix Poppenberg, 'Möbelausstellung', *Kunst und Künstler*, 1905, p. 306.

21: Roger Billcliffe, *Charles Rennie Mackintosh: The Complete Furniture, Furniture Drawings and Interior Designs*, Moffat, Dumfriesshire: Cameron & Hollis, 4th edn, 2009, p. 219. Originally published in *Ausgeführte Möbel und Zimmereinrichtungen der Gegenwart*, 1, Berlin: Ernst Wasmuth Verlag, no date, pl. 56.

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