

H E N R Y M O R R I S O N

FLAGLER MUSEUM

— PALM BEACH, FLORIDA —

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Flagler Museum Exhibition Showcases Work of Joseph Urban Rare Objects Chronicle Life of Extraordinary Architect, Illustrator and Designer.

(Palm Beach, FL) – The Flagler Museum presents “The Extraordinary Joseph Urban” from February 1 through April 17, 2011. The exhibition explores the life and work of Joseph Urban (1872-1933), a prolific and innovative Gilded Age artist of whom the *New York Herald-Tribune* observed, “did more than any other man to revolutionize the American sense of design ... He had a feeling for color and material so original that they did much to remake the American stage, revitalize American architecture and contribute a new impetus to American industrial design.” The exhibition is included with Museum admission.

The exhibition will feature over 100 objects from Joseph Urban's extraordinary body of work, including his projects in Palm Beach. The exhibit includes rarely seen objects that have been archived for over 90 years, including the only surviving copies of Urban's elevations of the Mar-a-Lago estate, and the only surviving rendering of the demolished Oasis Club.

Joseph Urban received his first architectural commission at 19 when he was selected by the future khedive of Egypt to design a new section of the Abdin Palace in Cairo. Among other things, the experience informed Urban's sense of color, particularly his lifelong love of blue, which he used throughout his long career. Urban went on to work for the architect to the Emperor Franz Joseph II, and was only 23 when he was commissioned to design a bridge over the Neva River in St. Petersburg, Russia. Other projects quickly followed: the Kaiser Bridge in Vienna (1898), and the Esterházy Villa in Hungary

(1899). Concurrently, Urban worked with his brother-in-law, Heinrich Lefler to illustrate books based on Grimm's Fairy Tales, Edgar Allen Poe's *The Masque of the Red Death*, and Hans Christian Anderson's Fairly Tales. Urban was also given the prestigious appointment of the Architect Delegate to the Artists' Union of the 1900 Exposition Universelle in Paris.

Following the Exposition Universelle, Urban and a group of artists formed the Hagenbund, often mounting exhibitions showcasing the group's departure from the traditional artistic styles. The Hagenbund exhibited at the Louisiana Purchase International Exposition in 1904, and Urban was awarded a gold medal for his thoroughly modern exhibit design. The next year Urban began to design theater sets in Vienna. By 1911, he and Lefler were commissioned by the Boston Opera to work on three stage productions. Shortly after, the Boston Opera offered Urban a position as the artistic director with a five-year contract. America would forever benefit from Urban's dramatic transformation of stage design and artistic direction.

The Boston Opera closed after three years due to War War I and Urban moved to New York, where he immediately began working as a set designer. His first set design in New York attracted the attention of the legendary Flo Ziegfeld who offered Urban a position as head designer for *Ziegfeld's Follies*. Urban designed the Follies from 1915 until 1932.

By 1917 Urban was appointed chief designer for the Metropolitan Opera, designing 55 productions before his death in 1933. In 1920, William Randolph Hearst hired Urban to be a set designer for Hearst's Cosmopolitan Pictures. Urban served as artistic director, set designer, and/or set decorator on 40 films produced or released through Cosmopolitan Pictures, Fox Studios, Paramount Studios, and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.

Elite social circles also brought Urban to Palm Beach in the 20s, and he designed a number of prominent buildings including the iconic Bath & Tennis Club, Mar-a-Lago, and the Paramount Theatre. By 1927 he completed Hearst's International Magazine Building and the Ziegfeld Theatre in New York. He also designed a new Metropolitan

Opera House, but the building was never erected. Disagreements over the location dragged on until the Great Depression finally killed the project all together.

Never one to forget his homeland, Urban opened the Wiener Werkstätte Showroom in New York, featuring work by artists who were struggling to survive in postwar Vienna. In 1930 Urban won a commission over Frank Lloyd Wright to design the New School for Social Research, which stands today as a masterpiece of Modernist design. In 1932, Urban was appointed as the color advisor for the Chicago World's Fair. However, he never saw those designs implemented. He died of cancer in July of 1933 at the age of 61. The dynamic range of his talent spanning many media and architectural styles made Joseph Urban one of the most prolific and revered artists of the 20th century. Columbia University professor Arnold Aronson wrote, his legacy "exists wherever bold colors and undulating lines create a world of wonder and fantasy."

The primary lender to the exhibition will be the Butler Library of Columbia University, supported by a variety of important objects loaned by: the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Detroit Institute of Arts, Alan Moss (New York), Donald Trump, bel etage - Vienna, Hillwood Museum & Gardens, Galerie St. Etienne (New York), and a number of private collectors. The exhibition is sponsored by Northern Trust, Sir Thomas R. Moore and the Laurence Levine Charitable Fund, and *The Palm Beach Post*.

In conjunction with the exhibition the Flagler Museum will host a Children's Exhibit Activity on February 5, 2011 from 10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. The Museum invites 4th - 8th graders to a special tour of the exhibition with the Education Director followed by a hands-on learning activity. The event is free with Museum admission.

The Museum will also host a Gallery Talk on February 22, 2011 beginning 12:15 p.m. Visitors may tour the exhibition with Urban biographer John Loring and learn more about the life and legacy of the renown architect. Loring is a former New York bureau chief of *Architectural Digest* and design director of Tiffany & Co. since 1979. He graduated from Yale University, has an honorary Doctor of Fine Arts degree from Pratt Institute, and

studied at the École des Beaux-Arts. Loring will also sign copies of his latest book on Joseph Urban. The Gallery Talk is free with Museum admission, but space is limited. Please call the Museum at (561) 655-2833 for reservations.

The Flagler Museum will present a Movie In The Grand Ballroom on March 3, 2011 beginning at 7:00 p.m. Joseph Urban's spectacular set design can be seen during a special screening of "Little Old New York" starring Marion Davies. The 1923 classic was the highest grossing film at the time. Davies plays a charming Irish girl who poses as her dead brother to inherit a fortune in 18th Century New York. The film's historical setting features Gilded Age figures like Cornelius Vanderbilt, Washington Irving, and John Jacob Astor. Tickets for non-members are \$10.

When it was completed in 1902, Whitehall, Henry Flagler's Gilded Age estate in Palm Beach, was hailed by the *New York Herald* as "more wonderful than any palace in Europe, grander and more magnificent than any other private dwelling in the world." Today, Whitehall is a National Historic Landmark and is open to the public as the Flagler Museum, featuring guided tours, changing exhibits, and special programs. The Museum is located at Cocoanut Row and Whitehall Way, Palm Beach. The Museum is open from 10:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m., Tuesday through Saturday, and noon until 5:00 p.m., Sunday. Admission is \$18 for adults, \$10 for youth ages 13-18, \$3 for children ages 6-12, and children under six are free.

For more information, please call the Flagler Museum at 561-655-2833 or visit www.flaglERMuseum.us.

High resolution images are available upon request.

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