

Gerard Muller

Dutch entrepreneur, glass artist and designer of earthenware dinnerware and utility glass, (1877-1943).

His simple thin blown crystal glass designs without decorations were executed by the Josephinenhütte in the Silesian Schreiberhau and the cut thick-walled glassware was made by the Belgian Val St.Lambert. His designs for pottery dinnerware were executed in Bohemia.

Biography

After being trained at the glass factory of Val St. Lambert in Belgium and in Haida in Bohemia, from 1901 he designs consumer glass himself. Muller designed about 25 sets, countless vases and glasses in his life.

From 1905 until his death he ran the family business Glashuis Muller on the Rokin in Amsterdam, which had been trading Bohemian crystal since the end of the 18th century. Since then, glassware designed by Gerard Muller has been sold here almost exclusively. In the thirties Muller also had earthenware dinnerware made to his own design in celadon and cream-coloured Bohemian porcelain.

Muller also advertised with the telling slogan: "There are no architects or craftsmen associated with our company, all models are manufactured to our own design, based on professional knowledge and years of experience."

FRANK KOOLS August 13, 1994, 00:00

The name Gerard Muller has been forgotten. Anyone who talks about the history of Dutch modern glass does not mention him, but rather the Glasfabriek Leerdam or the Maastricht Crystal Union. The National Glass Museum in Leerdam wants to fill the gap by presenting an overview of his work for the first time.

Glashuis G. & A. Muller on the Rokin in Amsterdam was a household name in pre-war Netherlands. For the wealthy bourgeoisie of Amsterdam, Het Gooi and Aerdenhout, this was the go-to place for dinnerware and vases. The place was tastefully decorated with blue velvet drapes. In the shop window there was always one piece on a marble column.

Gerard Muller received customers in tailcoat. He led them to a seat at one of the two long tables in the center of the place. There they could choose from his own designs, which he had executed in glass works in Bohemia and Belgium. He did not sell glass from other companies. Of course, customers were allowed to try the glassware. There were always decanters of port and sherry on the tables. A statement by Muller, which also forms the title of the exhibition, was: "Usefulness for everything first, then comes the beauty." Muller did not see himself as an 'artist'. It is therefore questionable whether he would have been happy with the museum attention for his 25 sets in total.

But he would certainly have been pleased with the layout of the exhibition. His glasses are on damask cloth in Leerdam, in an arrangement with dinner services from the 1920s and cutlery by goldsmith Jan Eisenloeffel. The whole exudes the atmosphere of Glashuis Muller and its clientele: modern, but not avan-garde. And above all: first name.

The fact that Muller will have his first retrospective exhibition in the museum, which is located in the former residence of director Cochius of Glasfabriek Leerdam, is a strange twist of fate. Because Muller's criticism of glass manufacturers who let 'ignorant' artists make designs was especially true for him. In the 1920s and 1930s, Cochius attracted well-known architects such as De Bazel, Berlage and Lloyd Wright. The idealistic director hoped that they "are the cause of completely new jobs opening up for the company."

Muller had little interest in their work. It was full of "unnecessary curves, twists and narrow necks versus the bulky size of the object." These "jokes" could be tried on any other material, but not on crystal. Didn't the gentlemen realize that you couldn't get a cloth through their ribbed vases yet?

In the Leerdam museum you can see how Muller did like it. His glasses have clean lines and always wide chalices. He sold his best-known Cyrano crockery under the slogan

'Un varen où on peut se tremper le nez' (A glass into which one can stick one's nose).

Muller was very sparing with decorations. The calyxes are always smooth. The feet of the glasses, on the other hand, are often decorated. They are cut square or hexagonal or have a blown ball in them. A number of vases are decorated with applied glass threads. Feeling

Muller's sets do not form a rigid unity, as is the case with Glasfabriek Leerdam, where glasses often have the same height or all have the same height. The different glasses of the Cyrano service differ greatly in height and shape. Gerard Muller was guided purely by his feelings when designing. "Theoretical design leads to disappointment."

A nice curiosity in the exhibition are four glasses from the first service that Muller designed in 1936 for the wedding of Princess Juliana to Prince Bernhard on behalf of the Diplomatic Corps. At the request of the client, he engraved a crown in it. Very against his will and, in his firm conviction, also against the taste of the bride-to-be. He was right. When Juliana and Bernhard came to see their gift, they asked for a smooth version. Muller then kept the first version for his own domestic use. After all, glasses were primarily there to be used, whether they had a crown or not.

The result of Gerard Muller's 'feel' and good taste as seen in Leerdam is simple glassware without many frills, with a

clear line and harmony within the services despite all the differences. It's definitely decent, sometimes a bit too much. So much grandeur looks a bit good.

How much Gerard Muller deserves his own place in modern Dutch glass with his unpretentious designs, however, can clearly be seen in September. Halfway through that month, this exhibition will move to the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. Leerdam then presents an exhibition of Muller's opposite, P.M. cochius.