

Kissenbezug, um 1895
Entwurf: Hermann Obrist
Ausführung: Berta Ruchet
Material/Technik: Wollgewebe, bestickt, Applikationen
73 x 46.5 cm
Eigentum: Museum für Gestaltung Zürich / ZHdK



The versatile Art Nouveau artist Hermann Obrist (1862–1927) approached the design of textile surfaces according to artistic and aesthetic criteria. The cushion cover is a prime example of how his decoration was based not merely on observing the growth of plants but rather taking their typical characteristics to develop his own system.

Textiles gave Hermann Obrist a way to lend form to his “musical rhythmic fantasies.” He set up an art embroidery studio in Florence in 1892 with Bertha Ruchet, his mother’s former companion. Ruchet instructed the studio’s Italian embroiderers who had previously embroidered church vestments. The studio complete with staff relocated to Munich in 1894, where Obrist’s embroideries met with an extremely positive response at their first presentation in 1896, selling well. For this cushion cover, Obrist started with a wool fabric woven in two colors onto which reed canary grass leaves made of plain fabric were applied, always slightly varying in form. Finally, Ruchet as embroiderer added to the curved lanceolate leaves flowers in different stages of growth, lending the overall image a cinematographic component. With outlines in yellow yarn, she combined the

disparate elements into a pleasing whole. The initial impression of a repeating pattern is thus deceptive. Every single episode is different. Obrist described using plants on textiles as a tool for illustrating his method to the observer, which involved translating the ubiquitous oscillations and vibrations of nature into coherent forms. This turn to line as a creative device heralded the biomorphic sculptural work Obrist would devote himself to exclusively after 1900. At that point his collaboration with Ruchet came to an end. (Sabine Flaschberger)

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