# Letter opener
## (untitled)

Henry van de Velde
ca. 1905

Faithful to Henry van de Velde's (1863–1957) motto "Beauty is a weapon," the simple letter opener in carved ivory captivates through the ornamental power of the line, the luxury of the materials, and its unpretentious yet noble appearance. The small object thus succinctly embodies van de Velde's overall creative vision.

Three letter openers from the estate of the great Art Nouveau artist, architect, and designer Henry van de Velde joined the collection of the Museum für Gestaltung Zürich in 1905. We don't know for sure for whom the artist originally designed them, but he presumably used them himself in his final years, which he spent in Switzerland. The letter opener is a simple everyday object, made here from an exquisite animal material that at the time was not yet ethically reprehensible. On the contrary, van de Velde even used it at the explicit behest of King Leopold II of Belgium, who administered the Belgian Congo as his private property and had a commercial interest in promoting luxury items made of ivory. Originally a fine artist, from 1895 van de Velde devoted himself programmatically and emphatically to the design of all manner of utilitarian objects.

He regarded the items that accompany us each day as art in the highest sense, viewing them as a mirror of reality and a tool with which to influence it: "Art is changing its shape because society is changing its shape." We can thus read into the small object of the letter opener the vision of a new way of life. For van de Velde, this new way of life would have to leave room for the revival of the applied arts. (Franziska Müller-Reissmann)

https://www.eguide.ch/en/objekt/ohne-titel-15/

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