

Four-handed vase
(untitled)

Alfred William Finch
1905



Henkelvase, 1905
Entwurf/Ausführung: Alfred William Finch
Material/Technik: Fayence, glasiert
28.5 × 18.7 cm
Eigentum: Museum für Gestaltung Zürich / ZHdK

The massive vase with its four handles initially gives the viewer the impression of a vessel capable of transporting heavy loads. A design invention of the Art Nouveau ceramicist Alfred William Finch (1854–1930), the vase derives its archaic aura from this illusion.

The vessel designed by Alfred William Finch is glazed in a streaky matte brown. Excessive in its form, the ingenious four-handed vase presents the illusion of simple, practical usefulness. The vase can be grasped blindly from all four sides, with its oversize handles that stretch out from the body of the vessel. At the same time, they reinforce the shape of the vase and expand its effective volume by a not inconsiderable air space. The eccentric confluence of the handles at the upper rim of the vase completes this work of artistic faience. With this last gesture, in which the handles are raised into points, Finch approximates the form of a calyx. In 1883, Finch joined the Art Nouveau circle Les Vingt, led by his Belgian countryman Henry van de Velde. Although he joined as a painter, he also shared the latter's interest in the English Arts and Crafts movement. Like van de Velde, Finch gradually moved away from painting to

ceramics, which were in great demand at the time. At the invitation of Louis Sparre, owner of the Finnish company Iris, Finch relocated to Porvoo in 1897 and developed the company's ceramics department. A transition to teaching in 1902 took him to Helsinki's Central School of Applied Arts, where he founded a ceramics class in which a revival of Finnish ceramic arts was set in motion. (Sabine Flaschberger)

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