

Gustave Klimt

“Truth is like fire; to tell the truth means to glow and burn.”



Gustav Klimt (1862–1918) was an Austrian symbolist painter and one of the most prominent members of the Vienna Secession movement.

He was the second of seven children. His mother, Anna Klimt (*née* Finster), had an unrealized ambition to be a musical performer. His father, Ernst Klimt was a gold engraver. All three of their sons Gustave, and his two younger brothers, Ernst and Georg, displayed artistic talent early on.

They were very poor and Klimt lived in poverty while studying at the University of Applied Arts, Vienna, where he studied architectural painting. He revered Vienna's foremost history painter of the time, Hans Makart, and readily accepted the principles of a conservative training; his early work may be classified as academic.

In 1877 his brother, Ernst, who, like his father, would become an engraver, also enrolled in the school. The two brothers and their friend, Franz Matsch, began working together and by 1880 they had received numerous commissions as a team that they called the "Company of Artists". They also helped their teacher in painting murals in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna. Klimt began his professional career painting interior murals and ceilings in large public buildings on the Ringstraße, including a successful series of "Allegories and Emblems".

Klimt's primary subject was the female body, and his works are marked by a frank eroticism. He painted figurative works with an allegorical or symbolic theme, portraits, and landscapes. Among the artists of the Vienna Secession, Klimt was the most influenced by the art of Japan.

As he worked and relaxed in his home, Klimt normally wore sandals and a long robe with no undergarments. His simple life was somewhat cloistered, devoted to his art, family, and little else except the Secessionist Movement from which he and many colleagues eventually resigned. He avoided café society and seldom socialized with other artists. Although he was known to have a number of mistresses, and fathered more than fourteen children, he sought publicity only for his art, and kept his private life largely out of the public eye.

Early in his artistic career, he was a successful painter of architectural decorations in a conventional manner. The *Idylle* (1884) is oil on canvas, commissioned by the publisher Martin Gerlach as part of a set of *Allegories and Emblems* to illustrate various abstract conceptions. It is painted as if it were a piece of wall decoration, in the conventional manner of history painting. A piece of *trompe l'oeil* flight of fancy, representing painted sculptures, it owes a lot to Michelangelo's *Ignudi*, supporting a roundel with a mythological scene.



In 1883 the 'Company of Artists' received a commission from King Carol I of Romania to decorate his newly built summer residence near Sinaia, Peleş Castle (now the National Peleş Museum). They represent the ancestors of the King lining the

staircase and include decorations in the theatre.

Taken together, Gustav Klimt's portraits of the King's ancestors (Eitel Friedrich VII, Johann Georg, Philipp, Friedrich Christoph) and his copy in the academic manner after Titian (Isabella d'Este) are impressive for their compositional skill, their learned handling of lighting, their chromatic exquisiteness, and, in particular, their ability to suggest the materiality of items of armour and courtly costume.

Although painted sixteen years before the turn of the century, the Muses, Masks, Allegories and Emblems series as a whole looks forward to the Secession movement in a number of its stylistic features: the decorative background elements (floral motifs and ornamental wands framing the compositions) and details of costume. It might be said that these works, form the earliest, still academic stage of Gustav Klimt's career, but already



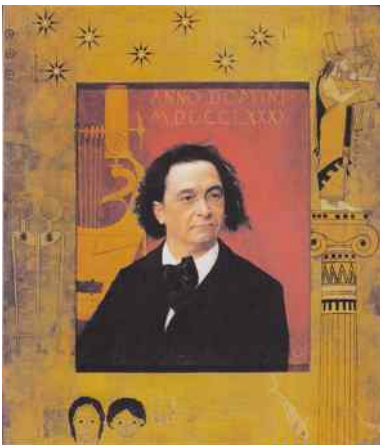
marked by a modern sensibility, are interesting to analyse given the distance that separates them from his more mature works.



When the old theatre in Vienna was due for demolition. Klimt and others were commissioned to paint various aspects recording the life of the theatre. The painting, **Old Burgtheater in Vienna** (1888), at only 82 x 93 centimetres, is a remarkable documentary work in that it shows the faces of many recognisable personalities, making the work a collective portrait of Viennese society.

The cycle of ten murals painted for the ceiling of the grand staircases of the new Burgtheater were commissioned by Emperor Franz Josef I. As a meeting place for the upper reaches of society they made the reputations of the young Klimt brothers and Franz Matsch. They depict in symbolic form the history of theatre.

The Theatre in Taormina is one of four by the hand of Gustave the others being *The Cart of Thespis*, *The Altar of Dionysus* and *Shakespeare's Globe Theatre*, which features the artist's only known self-portrait. In 1888 Klimt received the Golden Order of Merit from the Emperor for his contribution to the murals.



As a student he had earned money by painting portraits from photographs, a more demanding skill when conveying character than working from life, and his ability to capture a likeness with 'photographic' accuracy stood him in good stead when painting commissioned portraits of the elite of Viennese society.

The **Portrait of Joseph Pembauer** (1890) is a realistic portrait of the pianist and piano teacher. The addition of the decorative frame imparts a symbolic element which relates the abstraction of music to the realism of the portrait. This combination of naturalistic portraiture and stylised decoration was new to European art. The 'abstraction' of the red background, the lyre (representing the sitter's profession), the decorative golden frame with classical motifs and hieroglyphic symbols, and the inclusion of the date in formalised Roman lettering, marks a departure in Klimt's oeuvre and a foretaste of the style that was to revolutionise his later work.

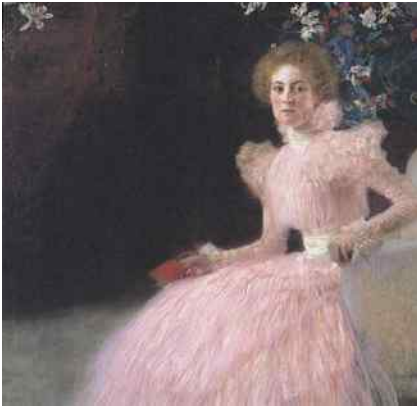
The Blind Man (1896) is a realistic portrait showing the character of the sitter; a characteristic which is not common in Klimt's later portraits, where he uses the figure to create a decorative scheme at the expense of realism and psychological insight. Note, however the backlighting which emphasises the spreading shape of the hair; a feature which in later subjects he uses for decorative and compositional effect.

In the early 1890s Klimt met Austrian fashion designer (1874-1952) Emilie Louise Flöge (a sibling of his sister-in-law) who was to be his companion until the end of his life. He was close to the Flöge family and usually joined them on their summer holidays at Lake Attersee. Emily's elder sister Helene married Ernst Klimt. When he died in 1892 she joined Gustave's household and he became Guardian to their daughter Helene.

In 1892 Klimt's father also died, and he had to assume financial responsibility for his father's and brother's families. The tragedies also affected his artistic vision and soon he would move towards a new personal style.



Klimt is known to have had a number of mistresses, throughout his life, and fathered at least fourteen children, four of whom he acknowledged. His lifetime companion, Emilie Flöge, was probably not one of his mistresses.



The subject of **Portrait of Sonja Knips** (1898) is a lady from the Viennese élite, who was active with her husband in the circle of the Wiener Werkstätte. The face contrasts with the soft fluffy dress. In this diagonal composition, the chair, forming an abstract shape barely in the picture, and the book's red blur, the head surrounded by flowers, all anticipate the portraits of the golden period.

Klimt is unique in that his art is omnipresent yet his personal life is nearly invisible. Much discussion around his life is speculative and drawn from his art and from rumour. What we do know is that he loved women. The artist once said, "I am less interested in myself as a subject for painting than I am in other people, above all women." And with the exception of his early work, Klimt painted portraits only of women.

Music 1 (1895) is an allegoric representation of Music, a subject which Klimt painted several times in various renderings. Besides the lyre, symbol of music, this particular canvas emphasises the sphinx (alluding to artistic freedom), the Silenus mask on the extreme left, the lion's teeth at the centre (a metaphor of the spread of new ideas) and finally the woman's meditative face.



Pallas Athena, the Greek goddess of just causes, wisdom, and the arts, was adopted as the symbol of the Vienna Secession.

The representation of **Pallas Athene** (1898) is enhanced by the golden frame created by Klimt's brother, Georg. The goddess Athena is portrayed in front of a frieze borrowed from a black-figure Attic vase of the 6th century BC. The red hair issues from the helmet emphasising the goddess' femininity, notwithstanding her armour.

In her hand stands the figure of *Nuda Veritas* (naked truth) as a symbolic figure of the veracity of art in the face of the hypocrisy of society, and the dissembling of the political class.

"Whoever wants to know something about me as an artist, which alone is Significant, they should look attentively at my pictures and there seek to recognize what I am and what I want."

"Art is art and life is life" wrote Peter Altenberg (1859–1919, Viennese poet and key writer on the genesis of Modernism in the city) "but to live life artistically that is the art of life." In his address to the public on the opening of the Kunstschau exhibition of 1908 Klimt declared that the objective was to form a link between the artist and the public, and furthering William Morris's idea that "even the smallest object, properly crafted, tends to increase beauty on earth, and that....the progress of culture is based on the penetration of all life with artistic intentions."

Garden with Chickens in St Agatha or After the Rain (1899) was painted at Saint Agatha in Upper Austria, where he first went on holiday with the Flöge family. It represents an exception in Klimt's gallery, for the animals it depicts, and for the depiction of actual weather conditions. Klimt's art was aimed at timelessness, averse to the anecdotal or transient. The oblong format and the particular decorative, linear style affirm their Japanese derivation. The rainy mist enveloping the whole, as well as the ornamental interpretation of every element, recall Whistler's evanescent landscapes.

Klimt captures not only features of the locality but also the typical weather, notorious for its drizzle and mountains covered in cloud.

Klimt wrote little about his vision or his methods. He wrote mostly postcards to Flöge and kept no diary. In a rare writing called "Commentary on a non-existent self-portrait", he states "I have never painted a self-portrait. I am less interested in myself as a subject for a painting than I am in other people, above all women... There is nothing special about me. I am a painter who paints day after day from morning to night...."





Schubert was reported to be Klimt's favourite composer. **Schubert at the Piano** (1899, destroyed 1945) was painted as part of a commission to decorate a house. He sets the composer in an imaginary scene in contemporary dress as if playing to Marie Zimmermann, one of his mistresses. With two young women singing at a Schubertiade.

The space is indeterminate. Marie appears to be standing in front of an open window; while the light comes from the candlesticks on the corners of the piano, and from another source off to the left of the picture.

Historians believe that Klimt, with the **Nuda Veritas** (1899), denounced both the policy of the Habsburgs and Austrian society, which ignored all political and social problems of that time, and defined his bid to further "shake up" the establishment. It reprises the tiny figure of 'naked truth' in the hand of Pallas Athene of the previous year.

The starkly naked red-headed woman holds the mirror of truth, while above her is a quotation by Friedrich Schiller in stylized lettering: "If you cannot please everyone with your deeds and your art, please only a few. To please many is bad." The aim of this quote is to incite the Vienna Secession to action. The mirror held by Veritas is a modern invitation to "Know yourself", and the flowers are symbols of regeneration.



Between the years of 1900–1907 Klimt worked on a commission for the ceiling of the Great Hall of the University of Vienna. Upon presenting his paintings on the themes of *Philosophy*, *Medicine* and *Jurisprudence*, he came under attack for depicting pornography and 'perverted excess'.

In his paintings for the University Klimt transformed traditional allegory and symbolism into a new language that was more overtly sexual and hence more disturbing to some. The public outcry came from all quarters—political, aesthetic and religious.



Jurisprudence is laden with anxiety: a condemned man is depicted surrounded by three female furies and a sea monster, while in the background, the three goddesses of Truth, Justice, and Law look on. They are shown as the Eumenides, punishing the condemned man with an octopus's deadly embrace.



Medicine was presented in March 1901 at the tenth Secession Exhibition. It featured a column of semi-nude figures on the right hand side of the painting, representing the river of life. Beside it was a young nude female who floated in space, with a newborn infant at her feet, representing life. A skeleton represented death in the river of life. The only link between the floating woman and the river of bodies is two arms, the woman's and a man's as seen from behind. At the bottom of the painting Hygenia stood with the Aesculapian snake around her arm and the cup of Lethe in her hand, turning her

back to mankind. Klimt conveyed an ambiguous unity of life and death, with nothing to celebrate the role of medicine or the science of healing. Upon display of the painting in 1901, he was attacked by critics.



None of the paintings went on display in the university. This would be the last time Klimt would accept commissions from the state, remarking: "I've had enough of censorship... I reject all state support, I don't want any of it."

Eighty-seven faculty members protested against the murals, and in 1901 a public prosecutor was called in and the issue was discussed in parliament, the first time that a cultural debate had ever been raised there, but in the end no action was taken. Only the education minister defended Klimt.

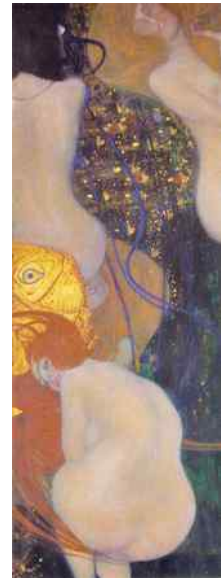
He subsequently accepted no more public commissions, but achieved a new success with the paintings of his "golden phase", many of which include gold leaf.

Klimt became one of the founding members and president of the *Wiener Sezession* (Vienna Secession) in 1897 and of the group's periodical, *Ver Sacrum* ("Sacred Spring"). He remained with the Secession until 1908. The goals of the group were to provide exhibitions for unconventional young artists, to bring the works of the best foreign artists to Vienna, and to publish its own magazine to showcase the work of members. The group declared no manifest and did not set out to encourage any particular style—Naturalists, Realists and Symbolists coexisted. (See article: The Vienna Secession)

The theme of the fourteenth Secession exhibition was devoted to *Ludwig van Beethoven* for which Klimt painted his *Beethoven Frieze*. (See article: The Beethoven Frieze.)



When **Goldfish** (1901-02) was presented at the XIII **Secession** Exhibition it created such a controversy (undoubtedly because of the pose of the main figure exposing here rear and turning to the viewer with a cheeky smile) that Klimt renamed it *To my critics*, as a gesture to what he thought of them following the attacks on his ceiling paintings for the university.



The unusual subject of **Hope** (1903) and its formal rendition created critical perplexity, so much so that, in order for Klimt to exhibit this work, he had to give it a religious interpretation.

In the years before this painting was made, it was uncommon to show pregnancy in Western art. Klimt was one of the first artists who blatantly portrayed a nude pregnant female in a powerful manner; it was shown in a public exhibition until 1909. The themes present in this painting are contradictory: the subject of an attractive pregnant young woman is life enhancing, but there are dark figures, a skull and several images of death, in the background. They swirl around the nude female seeming to blend the idea of life, death, and rebirth.

The model for this painting was Herma, whom he described as "having a backside more beautiful and more intelligent than the faces of many other models." However, it is suggested that the painting refers to the death in infancy a year earlier of his son, Otto Zimmermann, by his favourite mistress, Marie, hence the inclusion of the skull.



"All art is erotic."



Judith and the Head of Holofernes (1901) depicts the biblical character of Judith holding the severed head of Holofernes. It tells of a Jewish widow, Judith, who uses her beauty and charm to cut off the head of an Assyrian general and save Israel from oppression. A subject painted by many Renaissance artists, most notably by Artemisia Gentileschi. It is suggested that Klimt possibly used as a model his friend and maybe lover Adele Bloch-Bauer. Judith's face exudes a mixed charge of voluptuousness and perversion.

Klimt deliberately ignores any narrative reference and concentrates his pictorial rendering solely on to Judith, so much so that he cuts off Holofernes' head at the right margin. And there is no trace of a bloodied sword as if the heroine would have used a different weapon. Hence, it was interpreted as Salome, rather than Judith. To stress and re-emphasize that the woman was actually Judith and not Salome he had his brother, Georg, make the metal frame for him with "Judith and Holofernes" engraved on it.

Austrian historian Franz A. J. Szabo describes it best as a "[symbol of] triumph of the erotic feminine principle over the aggressive masculine one". Her half-closed gaze, with its expression of pleasure, directly confronts the viewer. In 1903, author and critic Felix Salten described Judith's expression as one "with a sultry fire in her dark glances, cruelty in the lines of her mouth, and nostrils trembling with passion. Mysterious forces seem to be slumbering within this enticing female."

Having given up his government commissions Klimt was dependent on private patronage from the Viennese upper middle classes. They were remarkably sympathetic to his experiments, and he was in demand so that he could afford to be highly selective. His painting method was very deliberate and painstaking at times and he required lengthy sittings by his subjects. Although very active sexually, he kept his affairs discreet and he avoided personal scandal.

Portrait of Hermine Gallia (1904, National Gallery, London) is the only painting by Klimt in a British public collection, and it's a fine example of the portraits of society women that he painted in the early years of the twentieth century. Wearing a shimmering dress made of translucent white chiffon, Hermine Gallia appears almost to float before us. The sinuous lines of her dress recall Art Nouveau and Japanese prints, in a style that suggests it might be from the salon run by Emilie Flöge and her sister. The geometrical pattern of its lower half, and the mosaic-like design of the carpet, hint at the 'Byzantine' style Klimt was to adopt a few years later.



The Three Ages of Woman (1905) features three women in varying stages of age, symbolizing the cycle of life. The two younger women are in a blue aura that has a fluid pattern of cool colours. The old woman is in an aura by herself, and it is filled with a less fluid pattern with more distinct separations in the design. The colours of this aura are warm, earthy tones that contrast with the cool colours of the other aura. The woman and the auras overlap slightly. The leg of the young woman goes behind the left aura and the old woman's head comes in front of the right aura.



The youngest figure, a child, is connected to the young woman who is her mother. The young woman has flowers around her head representing spring. Her hair is bright and voluminous, contrasting with that of the old woman. Her head is turned away and facing down. The effects of old age are obvious



through her sagging skin, bloated belly, and prominent veins. She is also unlike the other two in the fact that both of her feet are shown, revealing her age in its entirety.

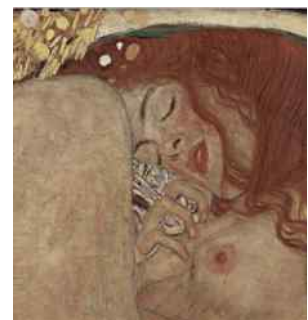
Portrait of Fritza Riedler (1906) combines the naturalistic portrayal of the face and dress with the abstract, geometrical shapes of the setting. A novel and revolutionary manner of treating a subject.

Fritza Riedler was the wife of the Austrian mechanical engineer Alois Riedler. She embodies the wealth and status of a growing Viennese middle class, in a pale eau de Nil dress and backed by a 'secular halo' of stained glass. The shape is possibly derived from Velasquez's portrait of the infanta, or from Egyptian hair styles. While the delicate folds of her dress are painted realistically, the chair which encloses her is treated as a flat, formless shape, decorated with silver and olive green eye shapes, suggestive of a peacock's tail. The colours of the 'eyes' are repeated in the tiny squares in the background. The rich red colour of the background, studded with silvery squares, imparts a jewel-like quality to the setting; which, however, is composed of flat rectangles, with little reference to a real luxurious Viennese sitting room.



Danaë was a popular subject for many artists, from the Renaissance to the present day, as the quintessential symbol of divine love, and transcendence.

Danaë was imprisoned by her father Acrisius, King of Argos, in a tower of bronze, in order to prevent the fulfilment of the prophesy of the Oracle at Delphi, that he would be murdered by his son. While there she was visited by Zeus in the form of a shower of golden rain.



In Klimt's **Danaë** (1907) she is shown curled in a royal purple veil which refers to her imperial lineage. Sometime after her celestial visitation she gave birth to a son, Perseus, who is cited later in Greek mythology for slaying the Gorgon Medusa and rescuing Andromeda. Klimt shows the golden coins as a shower flowing between her legs, leaving little to the imagination as to its destination. It is apparent from the subject's face that she is aroused by the golden stream.



Water Snakes (1904-07) is painted by using various techniques, from watercolour to tempera and gold leaf on parchment. The composition portrays long slender typical of the Jugendstil, but its central motif is the glitzy decoration of the *golden period*, played in the abstract yet allusive illustration of the embrace and the mosaic of open almonds.

It was started at about the same time as he finished his portrait of Hermine Gallia, and shows that he switched easily between styles. In Freudian terms the notional setting of snakes in a watery medium is a regression to the primal realm, and the dangerous forces of the Id, identified with the unconscious. A small, slightly comical whale, intrudes in the corner, perhaps signifying a male voyeur, introduces a characteristically light note. There are two female figures, embracing, which suggests that it is a depiction of lesbian love. The foremost figure is turned so that only her hair, and no part of her face, is revealed to the viewer. The forms are so blended together that it is not immediately obvious that there are two figures. The decorative swirling patterns of lines and dots that engulf the

figures are suggestive of water plants and currents.

The painting was bought by Margaret, daughter of the industrialist Karl Wittgenstein and sister of the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein.

“Art is a line around your thoughts.”



In **Judith II** (1909), Klimt's second version of Judith, she is depicted side view and lunging forward aggressively. As in the first painting, the head of Holofernes, which she clutches with hooked fingers by the hair, is dramatically amputated, not only at the neck but also across his face, so that it is partly obscured as it disappears into the folds of her dress.



Klimt has shown his model with fine, material bindings round her neck, seemingly separating her head from her body. Her torso is partly exposed by her dress, which seems to fall off her shoulders, and her body is cropped by the edge of the picture. The juxtaposition of titillating nudity and violence is shocking and the detail of the jewellery, hair ornaments and decorated background add to the uneasy contrast. The woman represented here is more aggressive, harmful and daring. Whereas *Judith I* still seems to caress Holofernes's head, *Judith II* leaves it dangling from her hands, clenched like claws adorned with bracelets.



The picture is framed on either side by gilded bands, as if enclosing her in a halo which creates a narrow doorway, and the effect of glimpsing the gruesome scene, as if in another room. The hot, sensuous red background of this enclosed space, along with the swirling white bands contribute to the sense of an otherworldly space. The narrow format once again emphasizes the dramatic tension of the composition, creating an atmosphere of oppressive.



The abstract patterning on the dress merges with the stylised background. This aggressive man-destroying femme fatale, with her head thrust forward and exposed breasts, and with eyes narrowed, appears almost to be in a trance, as if she is still reliving, almost sensually, her victory over the man

The details show a figure from the Stoclet frieze, with the coiled loops of the *“Tree of Life”*, picked up again in the *Judith II*; and a Japanese print of a woman with a fancy coiffure, and depicted in the line-ere, flat style which influenced artists of the turn of the century.

Klimt traveled little, but trips to Venice and Ravenna, both famous for their beautiful mosaics, most likely inspired his gold technique and his Byzantine imagery: the sixth century **Mosaics of Justinian I and Theodora** in the Basilica San Vitale, Ravenna, with the gold back-grounds and jewelled and stylised costumes are a clear influence on his 'Golden Phase', which was marked by positive critical reaction and financial success. Many of his paintings from this period included gold leaf. He had previously used gold in his *Pallas Athene* (1898) and *Judith I* (1901), although the works most popularly associated with this period are the *Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer* (1907) and *the Kiss* (1907–08).



In 1904, he collaborated with other artists on the lavish Palais Stoclet. Klimt's contributions to the dining room, including both *Fulfillment* and *Expectation*, were some of his finest decorative works, and as he publicly stated, "probably the ultimate stage of my development of ornament." (see article: The Vienna Secession.)



The Kiss (1907–08) is Klimt's most popular painting. There have been many interpretations of its meaning or symbolism, from Apollo and Daphne to Orpheus and Eurydice. The face of the woman resembles 'Red Hilda' the model for *Goldfish* and *Danaë*. It has also been suggested that it represents Klimt and his lifetime companion, Emilie Flöge, but there is no documentary evidence to support this supposition; as there is no evidence that they were lovers.

The Kiss is a visual manifestation of the *fin-de-siecle*, capturing the decadence and spirit of the age, conveyed by opulent and sensuous images.

The use of gold leaf recalls medieval paintings with gold grounds, illuminated manuscripts, and pre-Renaissance mosaics. The spiral patterns in the clothes recall Bronze Age art and the decorative tendrils seen in Western art since before classical times. The man's head, with his face turned away from the viewer, is close to the top of the canvas, a departure from traditional Western canons that reflects the influence of Japanese Prints, as does the painting's simplified composition.

The two figures, locked in an intimate embrace against a gold, flat background, are situated at the edge of a patch of flowery meadow that ends under the woman's exposed feet, perhaps a river bank. The man wears a robe printed with geometric patterns and subtle swirls. He wears a crown of vines while the woman wears a crown of flowers. She is shown in a flowing dress with floral patterns.

Although having a reputation as an *enfant terrible* for his anti-authoritarian and anti-populist views on art, following the scandal over his University Faculty paintings, *The Kiss*, however, was enthusiastically received, and was purchased, still unfinished, by the Austrian government when it was put on public exhibition.

Hope II (1907–08) was the second of Klimt's works to focus on a **pregnant woman**, both depicting Herma, one of his favourite models. It was entitled *Vision* by Klimt, but has become known as *Hope II* after the earlier work *Hope I*.

She has long brown hair and closed eyes, bowing her head towards her bare breasts and burgeoning abdomen. An incongruous human skull appears attached to the front of her clothing – perhaps a sign of the dangers of labour, or possibly a *memento mori*. Swathed in colourful robes, decorated with gold leaf like a Byzantine artwork, she forms a single, tapering column-like form against a dark gold-speckled brown background.



The flesh, painted with small Impressionistic dabs of paint and modulations of tone and colour, contrasts with the flat, decorative treatment of the clothing, without any indication of natural folds.

At the foot of the painting, three women also bow their heads, as if praying or perhaps in mourning.

Beginning in the late 1890s Klimt took annual summer holidays with the Flöge family on the shores of Attersee and painted many of his landscapes there. These landscapes constitute the only genre aside from **figure painting** that seriously interested Klimt. In recognition of his intensity, the locals called him Waldschrat ("forest demon").

This photograph from 1909 shows Klimt in his 'monk's habit' style robe, which he wore almost permanently, whether painting or at leisure. Emile is wearing one of her dresses which she designed in collaboration with Klimt, along with her sister for their fashion house.



For his mature landscapes he exclusively used a square format. This imposes a static, balanced form within which he is enabled to create a harmonic, 'artistic entirety': that is, one colour relates to another, one line to another and the colours to the lines, all "in a fixed relationship to each other that it is impossible to imagine the painting without any single element without destroying it." (Hermann Bahr). Like a perfectly composed poem, which would fall apart if one single word were lost or displaced, every mark has its place in the organised whole.



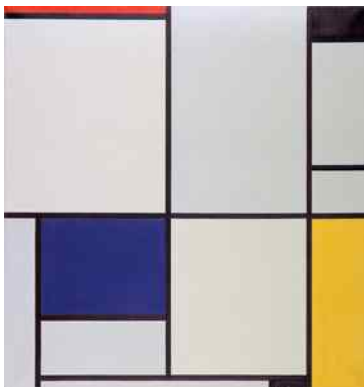
In his search for suitable motifs, Gustav Klimt repeatedly used a self-made square cardboard frame which helped him find the best possible detail from the landscapes around the Attersee. In **Island in the Attersee** (1902) the line of the far shore at the very top limits the eye's journey across an abstract pattern of scattered brush marks, and sets it as a fragment of a real view. The cropped, dark rectangular form of the island holds the 'floating balance' to the water's surface. The reflected shadow of the island and the varied reflections of light as they move across the water signifies the sky, the clouds and the sunlight lying outside of the picture.

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"On my journey here to Bavaria, I have seen so many meadow flowers which gave me such a wonderful feeling."

"On the way through my garden the breath of spring—birdsong—the buds are opening—one day can make a difference!"

Klimt translates spatial depth onto a two-dimensional picture surface, causing the motifs appear as carefully elaborated flat patterns. German painter Max Liebermann stated that Viennese painting was not about paintings, but painted carpets. The tree foliage in **Rosebushes under the Trees** (c.1905) fills most of the picture, with just a hint of the sky in the top corners to indicate the curving height of the trees, which are dotted with bright yellow marks suggestive of fruit, possibly apples. The rosebushes rise in front like anthropomorphic forms.



The balance and harmony which Klimt sought in his landscapes has parallels in the abstract paintings of **Piet Mondrian** (1872-1944), as in **Tableau I** of 1921. Mondrian's austere, pure abstract, or none figurative works developed directly out of his early landscape paintings. Likewise, Klimt's landscapes are organised around an underlying frame-work, or grid, and a balance of overlapping forms in an overall, flattening of the surface which compresses depth into a suggestion of shallow space. His colouration was influenced by the scientific theories of Chevreul and Goethe's colour circle, as were those of the Impressionists, and the following generations of artists. Colour harmonies are sought to achieve visual melodiousness and a sense of immersion in the visual field by the onlooker.

Klimt was fond of flowers: the garden in front of his studio was a riot of varied flowers and shrubs, which had the look of a wild jungle. The flowers in **Farm Garden with Sunflowers** (1907) grew in front of the inn at Litzberg where he regularly spent the summer.



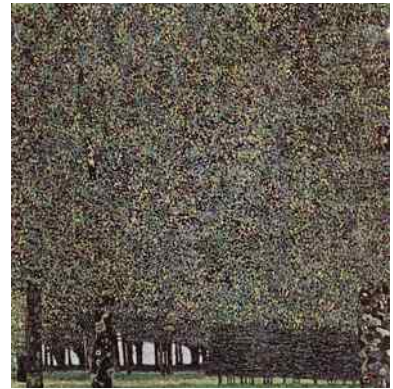


With a total absence of sky or horizon the landscape loses any sense of depth. We are confronted by a rich mosaic-like pattern of realistically painted flowers, bursting with colour, arranged in four vertical bands or zones.

In contrast to his usual mature practice of abstract mark making it is painted with great realism: the flowers, leaves and twigs of undergrowth can be clearly identified.

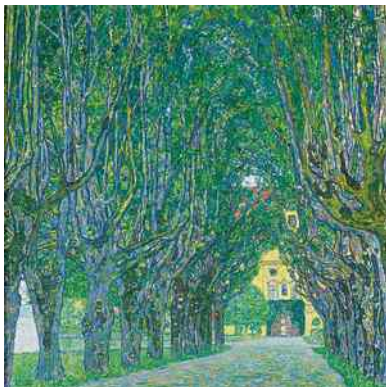
The Park (1909-10) is painted on a system of orthography (right-angles), constructed from rectangles of varying colour and density, amplified by short, regular brushstrokes, creating an 'all-over' effect of interacting green, yellow,

blue and violet tones. On the left a slender, slightly curving tree trunk penetrates the thick crown of foliage, echoed by a rectangular section of trunk in the bottom right corner. A darker wedge of foliage alongside indicates a tight clump of bushes in front of the main line of trees, which fill most of the picture space, with only a glimmer of light penetrating the dense stand of trees. A long streak of yellow sunlight at the very bottom, although difficult to position in relation to the foliage above, provides both a supporting base and an indication of depth across the forest floor.



In order to preserve their colouring, in conformity with French practice at the time, Klimt varnished none of his paintings. However, some of them, such as *The Park*, have been subsequently varnished, so losing some of their vibrancy and harmony.

“If the weather is good I go into the nearby wood - there I am painting a small beech forest (in the sun) with a few conifers mixed in. This takes until 8 'o clock [am.]”



“Painting appears most picturesque, most artistic if we keep it free of all historical aspects, aspects which are otherwise important.” (Franz Wickhoff, Austrian art historian.) Klimt's motifs were usually mundane and the pictorial construction clear and simple, with a concept of frontality and parallelism, and of positive and negative forms, complimented by the texture of the paint marks.

Klimt made multiple paintings of the charming Schloss Kammer, which stands on a peninsula at the north end of the Attersee Lake. Many of them are of views from across the lake. In **Avenue in Schloss Kammer Park** (1912) he depicts it from the land and is unusual in depicting a path leading into the picture with a view of the long avenue of trees leading to the castle entrance. The lake intrudes below the trees on the left. Through foreshortening, the rows of trees on either side draw the viewer in and imply depth to the picture, which, however, is then negated by the flat wall

of the building at the end, which lies in a horizontal band with the lake, and the red roof and a white building behind and above, and the densely composed, flatly pictorialised framework of trees, painted in a net-like structure with no spatial differentiation. The bold dots of colour and the decorative treatment of the trunks and branches with their contorted, outlined contours, reflect the influence of van Gogh on Klimt's landscapes.

The exquisite colour palette used for the treetops depicts the shadowed areas largely in a subdued blue, while sunlit areas shine in a subdued yellowish-green. Klimt evidently adopted this striking combination of blue, yellow, and green—which was rarely used in Vienna at the time—from the French Impressionists and their predecessors.

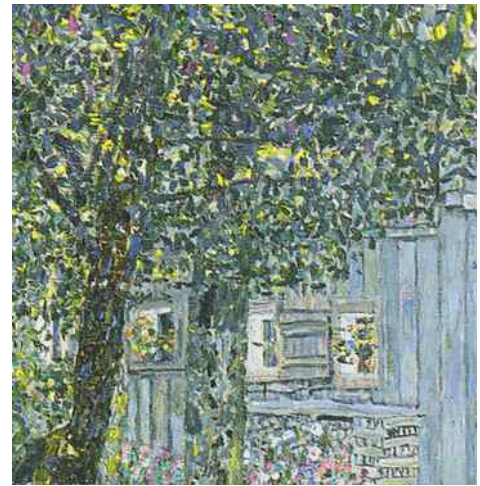


Klimt was known to use a telescope or binoculars to paint distant views. This has the effect of condensing the space between foreground and background and equalising the relationships of size between objects, as we see in **Farmhouse in Upper Austria** (1911).

Two trees frame the scene, focusing on the main motif. There is no indication of sky and no sense of depth or shading is imparted to the side wall of the building, which recedes into the picture space. The overall impression is of various layers stacked behind each other.



Klimt continued to use a pointillist painting technique, especially for his landscape paintings for some time. However, he freely varied this technique, as this picture also shows. The grey-blue planking of the farmhouse is painted in long, slick strokes, in contrast to the small dabs used to construct the leafage. Using this method, the flower meadow in the foreground has an almost ornamental stylization. Combined with a particular focus on greens, yellows, and blues which merge together without shadows, the forester's lodge in its idyllic surroundings has the effect of a magnificent colour mosaic separated from reality. Lightly or unpainted areas within the foliage indicate that the work is 'incomplete.' Klimt, like Cézanne, always regarded his paintings as work in progress.



Painted c.1912 **Apple Tree I** radiates a sense of monumentality. A

single tree “appears almost personified in its dignity and magnificence, with its dazzling fruit. On account of its architectural stringency this painting makes clear just how great a role the architecture of the painted space made for Klimt.... Apple Tree I reveals a change in Klimt's work: it is more graphically constructed. The trunk and angled branches are presented in all their power and self assurance. The dazzlingly red apples seem to be independently elaborated, while the brushstrokes of the foliage of the tree appear particularly energetic.

The contour of the tree's crown is composed of zones executed in small brushstrokes with a darker colouration on on both sides. Particular attention was paid to the flowers in the foreground. As so often in Klimt's work, they form a pedestal, and at the same

time a drama of chromatic orchestration.” (Stefan Kojca: in *Gustave Klimt, Landscapes.*)

In 1913 Klimt and the Flöge family broke with their usual custom of visiting the Attersee and went to Lake Garda in Italy instead.

In 1909 Klimt visited Paris, along with his younger friend, Egon Scheile. There they became acquainted with the work of Cézanne and the early cubist paintings of Picasso and Braque, as well as the Fauve group. **Malcesine on Lake Garda** (1913) betrays an influence of these encounters.

It used to be thought that Klimt painted his views across water from a boat. While it is known that he enjoyed boating with his friends, recent research indicates that such views were painted from the opposite shore, with the aid of binoculars or a telescope. Photographs show him carrying these implements. A photograph of the town from a high viewpoint from across the lake shows the sloping hillside rising up behind the castle, and the buildings between the castle and those on the foreshore, which would be obscured by a lower and nearer viewing position on the lake.



From 1914 to 1916, Klimt and the Flöge family returned to the Attersee, but to Weissenbach on the south shore, their former lodging no longer being available. The sisters Emilie and Helene, their mother, Barbara and Klimt's niece, the young Helene found accommodation (next door to a relative) on the shore of the lake, while Gustave found lodging in a forester's house, somewhat secluded at the edge of town, and at the foot of the Weissenbach Valley.

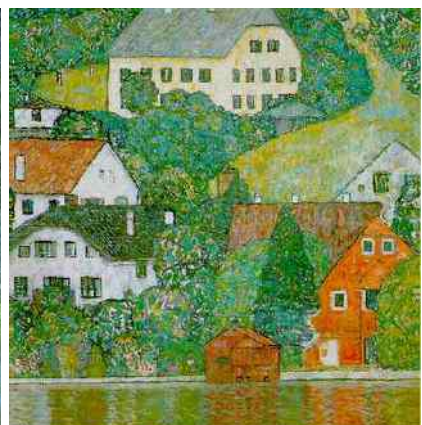
Villa on the Attersee (1914) depicts the lodge from the large meadow stretching out in front. The walls of the house are largely covered in plants, partly obscuring the windows.

He began by outlining the details in black, such as the shingles on the roof, and the flowers on the shrubs; then painting in a rich

mosaic of speckled colours, which fill the entire painting, giving it the look of a tapestry, or carpet, and making the objects seem insubstantial. Two dark bushes stand at the edges of the picture, support the composition and introducing a sense of distance in an otherwise flattened view. The painting is zoned into horizontal bands, in which the various parts fit or overlap, The shrubs which appear dotted about at random are in fact carefully arranged, and are curved at the tops in an echo of the roofline and other aspects of the house.

The former owner of one of the villas said that he was often to be seen in his “caftan-like cloak, wandering around with his easel, and laden down with painting utensils. He was fairly cantankerous, if not unfriendly, and hardly had contact with the local inhabitants.”

The features and structural methods described can be found on many of his Attersee paintings, such as *Unterach on the Attersee* (1914), *The Litzbergkeller on the Attersee* (1915) and *Houses at Unterach on the Attersee* (c.1916), where the the sense of flatness and condensed space, on the one hand brings the scene close to the viewer, yet simultaneously retains a sense of remoteness. This is a result of painting the scenes from a distance of several kilometres with the aid of a telescope mounted on a tripod.



The Virgin (1913), also called *The Maiden*, occupies a special place in Klimt’s oeuvre. It has a key Secession theme as its motif – the relationship between beauty and ephemerality, youth and mortality, the celebration of young life and the phenomenon of a woman’s existence. Klimt painted it in his later creative period, when the theme of the “femme fatale” gave way to the dream-like sensuality of a young girl. His virtuoso drawing was combined with stylized abbreviation and rapidly applied intense colours. *The Virgin* is imbued with one of the finest expressions of Klimt’s eroticism. The girl sleeps peacefully under a blanket ornamented with flowers and spirals, symbolising fertility.

The title, and meaning, is ambiguous, some people suggest that it is an erotic dream of a young woman, others that the other figures represent different stages of her sexual awareness.



Death and Life, the last of Klimt’s great allegories, in the sense of a having a subject title with a clear indication of an inner meaning, was begun in 1908. It was first exhibited in 1911 and received first prize in the world exhibition in Rome. In 1915 Anna, his mother, died. After being exhibited a further five times he repainted parts of it, changing the gold background to a dark greenish grey, and adding some mosaics.

The main panel shows humanity, male and female, at different stages of their lives, huddled together, bestowing love and mutual comfort. On the left the tall figure of death, clothed in a robe covered in crosses and other symbols, and with a grinning skull for a head and skeletal hands, clutches a red implement, possibly a weapon or mace, with a distinct phallic appearance.

Death, and the temporality of life, is one of Klimt's central themes, central also to his time and to his contemporaries, among them Edvard Munch and Egon Schiele. Klimt makes of it a modern dance of death, but unlike Schiele, he introduces a note of hope and reconciliation: instead of feeling threatened by the figure of death, his human beings seem to disregard it.

The marked rupture cutting this composition in two parts represents several symbolic motifs: the disquieting and dark image of Death looms over the entangled group of the human bodies, where colour retrieves its decorative vividness. The ascending structure narrates life's salient motifs: from friendship to love, to maternity.

The **Portrait of Friederike Maria Beer** (1916) is one of the masterpieces of Gustav Klimt's later years. It represents a unique synthesis between two approaches: ornamentation and realism.

Friederike reported: "Klimt made me try on Chinese and Japanese robes of which he had a large collection. When I told him that I had a dress made out of hand-blocked Wiener Werkstätte silk that I called my 'Klimt dress,' he asked me to bring it and was enthusiastic and decided to paint me in it....I also asked permission [from Klimt] to put my coat on as I would like to wear it in public, if had I more courage . . . with its beautiful Wiener Werkstätte lining [on the outside] and the fur inside."

In order to maintain a tonal unity and soften the colour contrasts, Klimt painted the fur a bluish-grey colour, rather than its original white.

He sets her against an imaginary background which replicates the oriental elements taken from a Korean vase which she owned. Amongst the figures which can be identified are Chinese fighters, horses, a bearded man with the painted face of a Chinese opera actor, masks, and decorative, abstract elements.



The background makes a clear reference to the outbreak of the First World War. The three colours at top right – red, white, and black – allude to the Austrian flag. These and additional components all blend into a single flat unit, an overall pattern in which only Beer's voluminous face stands out, which is typical for Klimt.



The warm colours, soft fabrics, fantastic creatures and exotic flowers of **Girlfriends** or **Two Women Friends** (1916–17) contributes to the sense of being present in a gentle intimate scene. This painting differs from Klimt's usual representation of the nude, where the figure is essentially an anonymous vehicle for erotic feelings, a metaphor of a general condition, such as youth or old age, or a symbol of an abstract concept, such as 'truth.' Here, by contrast, we are confronted by a representation, maybe even a portrait, of two women whom we can imagine having homes and friendships. Is this an intimate moment between lovers; or just two women friends trying on clothes? Either way as they turn to look at us we are complicit in the scene, not as voyeurs but as participants. Maybe the viewer is in the role of another close friend engaged in trying on clothes.

Like a number of Klimt's late paintings **The Dancer** (c.1916-18) has a bright, softer quality than his earlier representations of women. The decoration, based on flowers and other natural forms has almost entirely superseded the golden geometric ornamentation of his earlier years. The dancer holds a bouquet, which merges with the mass of blossoms in the wall hangings, on the table and in the stylised flowers on her wrap. It becomes a floral celebration from which the delicate form of the model emerges. She is named the dancer, and a hint of restrained movement in the twist of her body as she glances coyly over her right shoulder, perhaps to some unseen admirer outside of the picture.

Her lace trimmed black pantaloons are just visible below her wrap and on her feet she wears highly detailed shoes with the fashionable Louis heels of the time, decorated with bows.

It is believed that this work began as a posthumous portrait of Ria Munk, who had committed suicide over a failed love affair. Klimt subsequently reworked the image of the face. The painting remained unfinished in the artists studio at the time of this death.





Adam and Eve, Fall of Man (1917-18) was among the many paintings left incomplete at Klimt's death, as is evident in the sketchy, unfinished hands.

Adam, depicted in darker colours (a convention that Klimt took from Greek vase painting), is about to enfold Eve in his arms in a position not unlike that of a ballet dancer. In contrast to Eve, his expression is one of suffering and exhaustion. Posing serenely against a leopardskin, her feet buried in a carpet of anemones, this serene portrayal of a fair-skinned beauty is one of his least troubling and most charming nudes.

The Bride (1917-18) is another unfinished painting. The right half is dominated by a semi-naked female figure. On the left a tower of intertwined female figures, their eyes closed in soporific sleep, with faces red-cheeked suggesting sexual arousal, one looking out at the viewer with parted lips and smiling eyes. A single male head, tops the assemblage. The meaning of this evocative work is difficult to define. A female figure occupying the centre, and modestly robed in a dark costume, smiles, eyes closed, leans her head onto the shoulder of the male figure. Perhaps she is the Bride of the title, in transition between her virginal state on the right and her erotic fantasy of the fulfilment of the marital state on the left, linking the two sides of her life together.



The male figure is perhaps intended as the husband. It is difficult to make out the outline of his figure, but perhaps his red costume is intended to enclose the dreaming, soporific women.

These unfinished canvases are extraordinarily revealing of his working methods. We see that unlike the Old Masters, he worked directly on a bare canvas without the benefit of underpainting. We can also see that he worked section by section, beginning with the faces, that are sometimes completed before surrounding sections are even begun. *Bride* reveals a secret that can also be divided from some of Klimt's preparatory drawings – that beneath their gorgeous clothing, Klimt envisaged his female figures nude and in full anatomical detail, including pubic hair. Perhaps in reaction to the horrors of the war or perhaps just reflecting his own changing attitudes, *Bride* like other late paintings depicts sex in purely celebratory terms and without the dark and menacing qualities of much of his earlier work.

As the art historian Alessandra Comini described it: "The knees were bent and the legs splayed out to expose a carefully detailed pubic area on which the artist had leisurely begun to paint an overlay 'dress' of suggestive and symbolic ornamental shapes." Thus Klimt's own death revealed the sexual obsession that lay beneath his shimmering surfaces.

Although he was a delightful painter of landscapes, women were Klimt's theme above all others. Richard Muter, in a newspaper review of 1909, claimed that "the new Viennese woman, a specific sort of new Viennese woman - their grandmothers were Judith and Salome - has been invented or discovered by Klimt. She is delightfully vicious, charmingly sinful, fascinatingly perverse." Klimt was certainly able, like certain couturiers and fashion photographers, to make his sitters and models look extraordinarily glamorous. In his later portraits, the work for which above all he is famous, his strategy was to retain the academic realism of his earlier work for the face and figure of the subject. But he dissolved the rest of the image in luxuriant decoration, derived from Byzantine mosaics, Celtic design, and the Oriental textiles and ceramics that filled his studio. The effect is sumptuous, sensual, near-abstract but not too dauntingly avant-garde. That ornament, however, tended to be filled with meaning.

In January 1918 as the First World War was entering its final bitter year, the 55-year-old Klimt suffered a stroke. A few weeks later he died in hospital of pneumonia.

From 1942 rooms were rented in the Schloss Immendorf to store works from the confiscated Lederer Klimt collection for safeguarding, along with other works and furniture. On the last day of the war the castle caught fire, presumably set by the retreating German army, destroying the contents. Klimt's work included his ceiling paintings for the University, *Schubert at the Piano*, *Malcesine on Lake Garda* and *Two Women Friends*.

External links: The Burgtheater Cycle and Peles Museum, Romania

https://artsandculture.google.com/story/the-burgtheater-cycle-of-paintings-burgtheater/UwWBIFk_Ivy0Kw?hl=en

<https://artsandculture.google.com/story/gustav-klimt-in-the-national-peles-museum/NgLYal--2hu0IA>