



Gustav Klimt and Otto Wagner,

Two Representatives of the Art Nouveau Style that Define the Vienna Cultural Heritage

Christian
Schuhböck
Austria

*Allegorie
der Skulptur*
Gustav Klimt
1889
© Archiv
Alliance
For Nature



Shameless and tasteless are these paintings of Mr Klimt. *Immoral, outrageous* - this is the common opinion of his works at the time of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in the streets, side streets and backstreets of Vienna as well as at the court itself. Disgrace and shame happened to the master of Art Nouveau at the peak of his artistic career. But in 2012, the 150th anniversary of his birth, he is a hero of the nation and the whole nation turns to him. The Belvedere itself (the building under UNESCO protection, in which the State Treaty was signed and Austria was re-established as a sovereign state after WWII) devoted a separate exhibition to this great Austrian painter.

The second representative of Art Nouveau, Otto Wagner, was in conflict with the authorities very often too, but today his works also part of the cultural heritage of Vienna. Never-

theless, even now there continues to be a bitter argument and struggle for the preservation of one of his major works, the Otto Wagner Hospital *Am Steinhof*.

Gustav Klimt is one of the most famous representatives of the Vienna Secession. It had taken the public years, even decades, to finally acknowledge his talent in the 1960s. Only then did the prices for his works soar and his portraits of women become popular all over the world. Klimt was a lover of women and nature. This also can be seen in his works.

Gustav Klimt was born on 14 July 1862 in Baumgarten, which then was a suburb of Vienna. His father was a gold engraver. His mother was a typical suburbanite of a cheerful disposition. Klimt had many siblings, two brothers and four sisters, who posed for him in the early years of his work. Together with his brother Ernst, he studied in Vienna in the newly founded School of Arts and Crafts. There, they were taught the basics of handicraft, starting from imitating historical styles and copying figures. This is reflected in his early works, e.g. in *Love* (where *The Kiss* is already emerging) and in *Idylle* from 1884.

In their free time, the two students did portraits from photographs, copied sketches for the paintings, accepted commissions for decorating new buildings along Ringstraße, and worked for the publisher of *Allegories and Emblems*, the great book of patterns, for which in 1889 Klimt prepared, *inter alia*, *Allegory of Sculpture*.

In 1883, together with Franz Matsch, the Klimt brothers founded a studio they called the *Company of Artists* (Künstler-Compagnie). Among much else, they painted ceilings and curtains in the theatres in Reichenberg, Karls-



Otto Wagner died on 11 April 1918, only a few weeks after Gustav Klimt. They both left magnificent works that today, nearly a century after their passing away, have finally been given the appreciation they deserve.



Altar des Dionysos
Gustav Klimt 1886-1888
© Archiv
Alliance For Nature

bad and Fiume. In the old building of the Burgtheater, which was demolished in 1888, the artists painted pictures. Where are they now? They are in the picture Auditorium in the *Old Burgtheater, Vienna* by Klimt, where he also immortalized many Viennese personages, as well as his sisters and girlfriends that posed for him. The legend has it that many representatives of the Viennese high society urged Klimt to include them in the honourable circle of theatregoers portrayed in the given painting. For this work in 1890, Klimt received the Emperor's Prize.

In the new Burgtheater, Klimt and the Künstler-Compagnie made the décor inside both staircases, comprising paintings that still today are very highly regarded, such as *Thespis' Wagon*, *Theater in Taormina*, and *Altar of Dionysus*. Work on the commission lasted till 1888, but once completed, it met with lively

appreciation and the Künstler-Compagnie deservedly received the Golden Order of Merit from Emperor Franz Josef I of Austria. The three young men forming the *Company of Artists*, Franz Matsch, Ernst and Gustav Klimt, knew a lot about their craft. They also managed to make their artistic styles sufficiently similar that they could work in three over one piece with the effect as if it had been made with one hand. All three felt connected with Hans Makart (1840-1884), a nonpareil master of the Austrian Neo-Renaissance. They received a commission for work in the respectable Kunsthistorisches Museum, where they were to paint the pendentives. On the occasion of *Gustav Klimt Year 2012*, the Kunsthistorisches Museum enabled visitors to view pictures on pendentives close-up, thanks to the platform built temporarily for the purpose. Klimt is the author of the oil painting on stucco titled *Egyptian Art*, for which he



Italienische Kunst
Gustav Klimt
Kunsthistorisches Museum
Wien
© Christian Schuhböck,
Alliance For Nature

drew a few sketches. The pendentives by Gustav Klimt refer to Greek antiquity. However, in his version, it is depicted in a quite modern manner.

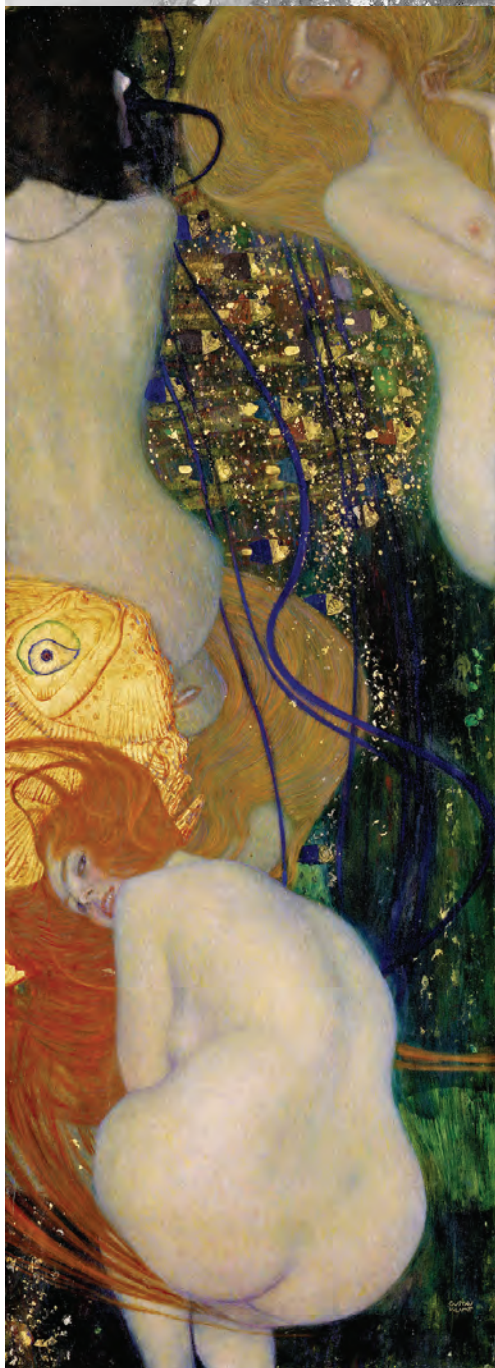
Klimt's style gradually changed and had less and less in common with the academic history painting. In 1892 - 1894, the Ministry of Education commissioned the Künstler-Compagnie to provide sketches for the décor in the Great Hall of the University of Vienna in Ringstraße. Unfortunately, Ernst Klimt died in the same year and the *Company of Artists* disbanded. There was a difference of opinion between Franz Matsch and Gustav Klimt, yet they completed sketches for the faculty pictures. The faculty pictures were to present allegorically the four classical faculties of the European university. Klimt was to create *Medicine*, *Philosophy* and *Jurisprudence*, while Matsch was to produce *Theology*. Already at the

first public presentation of the painting *Philosophy*, at the art exhibition of the Vienna Secession in 1900, the work of art met with harsh criticism, especially from the professors of the University of Vienna. They argued that Klimt's representation of *Philosophy* did not correspond to the guidelines for the project given by the employers. Instead, it showed deeply pessimistic and critical prospects for science. *Medicine* caused a similar scandal. The nude pregnant women right next to *Death*, a symbol of transience - this was in contradiction with the fact that the picture was supposed to be a paean to the triumph of science and medicine. It is believed that when a fierce public controversy raged over the two paintings, Klimt decided to compose *Jurisprudence* even more daringly. In this picture Klimt presented not the desired triumph of law but a state of hostility and uncertainty. *Jurisprudence* as an octopus swallowing every-





Goldfische (draft)
Gustav Klimt
© Archiv Alliance For Nature



Goldfische
Gustav Klimt
© Archiv
Alliance For Nature



thing up was strongly objected to by professors, but also by Members of Parliament.

In contrast, these works were appreciated abroad. At the Paris World Exhibition in 1900, the French awarded the medal of honour to Klimt for painting *Philosophy*. In Austria, however, the protest was so strong that there was no room any longer for agreement. To avoid further dispute, in 1905 Klimt decided to buy the three controversial pictures with the help of some private patrons. In this way, they became private property. Unfortunately, they burnt in 1945, so today in the Great Hall of the University of Vienna on the ceiling one can see only the copies instead of the originals. At present, the Wien Museum possesses the largest collection of sketches by Gustav Klimt. They were presented to the public on the occasion of Klimt's 150th birth anniversary in a separate exhibition, attracting large crowds.

Gustav Klimt was also censored on the occasion of his 1898 Art Nouveau poster for the First Vienna Secession exhibition, entitled *Theseus and the Minotaur*. The censors made the artist correct the indecent poster and cover the male genitals of naked Theseus with tree trunks. Politics dictated to the arts what could and could not be presented.

Danae
Gustav Klimt
1907



In protest against the interference of bureaucracy and politics in the arts, the Art Nouveau artists decided to display their creed above the main entrance to the Secession Building. It went, *To every age its art. To art its freedom. (Der Zeit ihre Kunst. Der Kunst ihre Freiheit)*. Gustav Klimt expressed his protest in a sophisticated way - with the painting entitled *Gold Fish*, which could be seen at the Thirteenth Secession exhibition in 1902. Originally, Klimt wanted to entitle this oil painting *To my critics*, but his friends advised him against such a provocation. Even as it finally was, the opponents understood immediately that the naked beauty in the picture was frivolously sticking out her impressive bottom in their direction.

Due to deepening differences between conservatives and liberals that was polarizing Vienna public opinion and antagonized the community of the city, in 1897 a number of modern artists seceded from the regarded Künstlerhausgesellschaft (the Austrian Artists' Society) and founded the Vienna Secession. The narrow circle of *secessionists* gathered around Gustav Klimt, Koloman Moser, and Carl Moll. Later some architects, e.g. Otto

Emilie Flöge and Gustav Klimt



Wagner, joined the group. Gustav Klimt was the first president of the Secession, while Rudolf von Alt became the honorary president of the Viennese painters. The latter, a doyen of Viennese painters, welcomed Emperor Franz Joseph I at the opening ceremony of the First Secession exhibition. Thanks to this masterful move, the rebellious movement of secessionists obtained official recognition.

In the Secession Building, erected in the years 1897-1898 by architect and co-founder Joseph Maria Olbrich, 22 exhibitions were held from 1897 to 1905, displaying works by such prominent artists as Auguste Rodin. At that time, the city of Vienna was an artistic capital of Europe. In 1902, Klimt created the Beethoven Frieze on the underground floor of the Secession Building. This long series of pictures, measuring 34 by 2 metres and dedicated to the composer Ludwig van Beethoven, represents allegorically the human states of nostalgia, passion, happiness and fear. The floating female figures symbolize yearning for happiness and love. The standing girl and the kneeling couple with hands outstretched in supplication represent suffering humanity. They ask the Golden Knight to take up the struggle for



Gustav Klimt with his cat
1911



happiness on their behalf. The Knight is assisted by two female characters, the symbols of ambition and sympathy, acting as stimuli of action.

On the central wall of the frieze, there is the undefeated giant Typhoeus with his Gorgon daughters. Next to him on the left, there are the goddesses of fate, symbolizing the hostile forces. Next to the Gorgons, there are - lurking in the background, dark and similar to masks - heads representing sickness, madness, and

Klimt's Family Home
Wien-Baumgarten
© Archiv Alliance For Nature



death. On their right side, there are three female figures denoting lust, wantonness, and gluttony. The right side of the mural presents the arts, the choir of angels and the embracing and kissing couple. The female characters represent the fine arts, while the angels sing Schiller's *Ode to Joy, Joy, thou gleaming spark divine. This kiss to the whole world!*

Again this time Klimt was fiercely criticized in public. Only thanks to Egon Schiele and some private patrons could the Beethoven Frieze be preserved. No sooner than in 1973 the Republic of Austria decided to restore its badly damaged fragments and put it on permanent display in the Vienna Secession Building. In 2004, Austria issued a 100 Euro gold coin, whose reverse side features a small portion of the frieze.

Gustav Klimt was very bitter about the criticism he again faced. In an interview by the art critic Bertha Zuckermandl, whose apartment was frequented by the artistic and scientific elite of the monarchy, he described his painful experience with the state policy in the field of art. He said, *I also do not intend to cooperate, and certainly not with this minister, on any*

Märchen

Gustav Klimt

1884

© Archiv Alliance For Nature



state-organized exhibition, unless my friends make me do so. I've had enough of censorship. [...] I reject any state sponsorship; I give up everything. [...] I want to make a common front against the way in which the Austrian state and the Ministry of Education treat the subjects of art. On every occasion they object to true art and true artists. [...] A state should not try to be a patron of the arts if it gives it nothing but alms. The interview was well-publicized and the ministry retaliated. When Gustav Klimt was nominated as a professor on the initiative of the Academy of Fine Arts, the ministry opposed it and eventually he was rejected.

Often attacked by authorities, Gustav Klimt was highly regarded by private collectors.

Many Viennese aristocrats, especially rich ladies, posed for him, even in the nude. Thus, Adele Bloch-Bauer, the wife of Ferdinand Bloch, a wealthy industrialist who had made his fortune in the sugar industry, was one of the models of Gustav Klimt. In 1901 Klimt created the oil painting *Judith and the Head of Holofernes* (also known as *Judith I*), and in 1909 he painted *Salome (Judith II)*. There began Klimt's *Golden Period*.

Much more famous, and much more valuable, is the *Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer I* (1907), also called *The Lady in Gold*. It is rated among the most important works of Klimt, and of the Austrian Secession in general. During the media discussion on the restitution of the picture by the Republic of Austria to the inheritors of the property, it was sometimes referred to as the *icon* of Austrian cultural identity. According to an unauthorized disclosure in the *New York Times*, the painting was purchased in 2006, after a prior legal tussle, for the record price of \$135 million by an American entrepreneur, Ronald Lauder. To date it is the highest price ever paid for a painting. Just before the transaction, the Republic of Austria waived its pre-emptive right. Since then, *The Lady in Gold* has been the centrepiece of the Neue Galerie in the heart of Manhattan, New York City.

The Republic of Austria also waived its pre-emptive right in the case of the painting *Adele Bloch-Bauer II*, and the work was auctioned off as well in 2006. An anonymous bidder purchased it by telephone at one of the largest Christie's auctions in New York for nearly \$88 million.

The Kiss (1907-1908), probably the most famous painting by Klimt, is still owned by the Republic of Austria. The square oil painting on





Medizin
Gustav Klimt
1901-1907

© Archiv
Alliance For Nature

canvas is of largish dimensions of 180 by 180 cm. Initially, it was entitled *Lovers*, and was acquired by the Austro-Hungarian Ministry of Culture for the sum of 25,000 crowns. Today, the painting is in the Belvedere palace, where the Austrian State Treaty was signed in 1955.

Death and Life, worked on in 1908-1911, is also still in Austria - although in the private collection of the Leopold Museum. It constitutes one of the finest works of this private collection assembled by the art collector Rudolf Leopold, an ophthalmologist born in Vienna. In 1911, the painting received first prize at the International Exhibition of Art in Rome, where all paintings by Klimt filled the visitors with admiration. Some are of the opinion that the mother painted in the picture is Emilie Flöge, the life companion of Klimt.

Emilie Flöge, born in Vienna, was a daughter of a wealthy manufacturer of pipes. Her sister Helene was the widow of Gustav Klimt's brother, Ernst. Emilie was a designer, fashion designer, and, with her sisters, owned a *haute couture* fashion salon. In this salon, designed in the Jugendstil, the Flöge sisters presented the Viennese female customers of refinement with the latest fashion trends from Paris and London. Social contacts of Emilie gave Klimt access to the Vienna bourgeoisie. She was a life companion of Gustav but remained, like him, unmarried. It was with Emilie that he spent his leisure time. In summer, they usually went to Lake Attersee, where he would take long walks and have a swim from time to time to keep himself in form. Gustav Klimt was a lover of nature. He loved overgrown gardens, such as in the 8th district of Vienna in Josefstädterstraße, where he had his studio, but also lakes and forests. However, most particularly he was fascinated by the water. Therefore, he made many paintings of Lake Attersee. He liked a combination of water and women. *My main work is on a woman*, he is believed to have said once.

The above resulted in numerous sketches and pictures depicting female nudes, such as *Water Serpents I and II*, created in the years 1904-1907 and today on display in the Belvedere palace, which houses the world's largest collection of paintings by Gustav Klimt.

The largest collection of nudes drawn by Klimt belongs to the Wien Museum. For the first time they were shown in grand style in 2012. The success of the exhibition made the director of the museum extend the exhibition by a few weeks.

The oil painting from 1907 titled *Danaë*, though it presents a woman with a stream of golden sequins flowing between her thighs,

heralds Klimt's departure from pure ornament and the end of his *Golden Period*. The picture, today in the Leopold Museum, shows *Danae*, a daughter of the King of Argos, imprisoned by her father so that no man had access to her. However, Zeus metamorphosed into a golden shower and aroused her. The subject's face and the portrayal of her body convey in a very special way the fulfilment in divine love.

In the picture *The Bride*, one can notice Klimt's passion for drawing first a completely nude woman, down to the last detail, and then covering her with some elements of clothing. In this way he could, under the guise of what was morally permissible, paint what he was almost exclusively interested in - women in stunning erotic scenes. The picture is unfinished because the author, a lover of women and nature, died on 6 February 1918.

On January 11, 1918, Gustav Klimt suffered a stroke in his apartment in Westbahnstraße in Vienna. Partially paralyzed, he lay for weeks in a sanatorium, with Emilie Flöge at his side. He could confide in her his distress and despair until February 6, 1918, the day he died of pneumonia. His descendants had nothing to inherit, since Klimt, a ladies' man through and through, did not leave them a penny. He used to throw his money around, especially on his models, whom he paid handsomely. Only his

works were distributed among his heirs and today they are extremely high-priced.

Otto Wagner was born on July 13, 1841 in Vienna. He was the most prominent Austrian architect and urban planner of the city of Vienna in the Belle Epoque. His buildings in the Art Nouveau style as well as his academic works within the field of urban studies gained international recognition in the 1890s.

In the years 1860-1861, Wagner studied at the Bauakademie (Building Academy) in Berlin, and in the years 1861-1862 at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna. The beginning of his career as an architect coincided with the peak of development of Viennese architecture. In 1858, there began a demolition of the city walls around the Old Town of Vienna. In 1865, Ringstrasse was opened, along which over the



Otto-Wagner-Spital Kirche 'Hl. Leopold'
Wien

© Christian Schuhböck, Alliance For Nature



Otto-Wagner-Spital Kirche
'Hl. Leopold' Kanzel Altar
Wien
© Christian Schuhböck,
Alliance For Nature





next 20 years many fine public buildings and stately homes of the capital city of Austria-Hungary were constructed.

Wagner ran a large architectural atelier, where he employed dozens of architects. In 1890 he drew up a study of the Berlin Cathedral, for which he had already entered the architectural competition in 1867. In 1893, he won first prize in the competition for the general plan for Vienna. In the 1890s, the construction of the Vienna Metropolitan Railway (the Wiener Stadtbahn) became important. The Minister for Trade at the time, Ladislaus von Wurmbrand-Gundacker Stuppach, who was responsible for railways as well, nominated Professor Otto Wagner in 1894 for a position of artistic advisor, who was to prepare stylistically consistent designs for buildings, platforms,

and bridges along the urban rail network of Vienna. The Stadtbahn stations by Otto Wagner are a prime example of the Vienna Secession. Metal and wood elements were painted apple-green, the distinctive colour of the Wiener Stadtbahn. The exterior was complemented with gold and white marble. Today, these historic buildings are protected.

In the years 1898-1899, in the Linke Wienzeile 38-40 (a street in Vienna), in the immediate vicinity of the Naschmarkt, in the 6th district of Vienna, Wagner built three residential and office buildings that still today are very often photographed. At the same time, i.e. during the construction of the Vienna urban rail network, Wagner took up work on the architectural plan for Nussdorf weir, eventually erected in 1894-1898 on the Donaukanal (the Danube Canal) in Vienna in order to protect the Danube Canal against flooding and icing over.

In the years 1903-1906 and 1910-1912, Wagner designed and built the Austrian Postal Savings Bank building in the centre of Vienna. It is one of his major works. The building, which today is owned by BAWAG P.S.K. (Bank für Arbeit und Wirtschaft und Österreichische Postsparkasse Aktiengesellschaft), includes also a museum dedicated to Otto Wagner.

Not all designs by Otto Wagner have been realized, including his favourite one on the transformation of Wienzeile street, which leads from the city centre towards Schönbrunn Palace, into a lovely avenue. In this case, he succeeded only partially, as only a few impressive tenement houses in the Naschmarkt recall his idea. His project on the reconstruction of the Vienna Karlsplatz together with the construction of the Museum of Emperor Franz Joseph has never been realized either, and the discussion about the appea-



Linke Wienzeile Ecke
Köstlergasse
Jugendstilhaus
Wien

© Christian Schuhböck,
Alliance For Nature

rance of this city square continues. If Wagner's project had not been rejected in the past, this district of Vienna would have been spared many blots on the landscape in the following years. Finally, the design for a new building of the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts (1898), once again, has never been executed.

In 1905, Otto Wagner won fourth prize in the competition for the architectural plan of the Hague Peace Palace (Vredespaleis), in the Netherlands, for the use of the Permanent Court of Arbitration with a library.

In the years 1902-1907, Wagner worked on the plan of the Steinhof Psychiatric Hospital (previous official title was the Lower Austrian State Healing and Care Institution for the Neurologically and Mentally Sick *Am Steinhof*), and in the years 1904-1907 he was especially preoccupied with the construction of the church dedicated to Saint Leopold. Among several alternative designs, which were published and promoted in separate publications, one riveted attention of the public opinion but MPs from the Lower Austria State Parliament were strongly opposed to it. Unfavourable comments appeared like, *This building looks great indeed, but at the same time it makes an impression as if it were a tomb of an Indian maharaja*, or *In the psychiatric hospitals there are people who are afflicted by personal tragedies and diseases and want to have some peace, while such a church*

only bothers the one who looks at it. Eventually, the hospital, named after its architect the Otto Wagner Hospital *Steinhof*, was built and today is a landmark of the city of Vienna, standing in the west, recognizable from afar by its gilded dome. The Church of St. Leopold is one of the most important Art Nouveau churches in the world. Expert opinion has confirmed that this splendid church, together with the Otto Wagner Hospital *Steinhof*, meet the requirements of the relevant UNESCO convention and could be on the World Heritage List. Unfortunately, some policy-makers of the city of Vienna want to develop the building plot under the hospital. A group of citizens is trying to save this Art Nouveau masterpiece of architecture (created also by Koloman Moser).

Otto Wagner died on 11 April 1918, only a few weeks after Gustav Klimt. They both left magnificent works that today, nearly a century after their passing away, have finally been given the appreciation they deserve.

Acknowledgement

Translated into English from the presentation "Gustav Klimt and Otto Wagner - two Secessionists and their impact on the world cultural heritage of Vienna" on the occasion of "Austria Days in Torun, 2012" and also presented at the European Evening on April 4, 2013.

Bibliography:

Kränsel Nina (2011), *Gustav Klimt*. München London New York: Prestel Verlag 3. Edition

Leopold Diethard, Weinhäupl Peter (2009), *Wien 1900 Sammlung Leopold*, Wien. Wien München: Christian Brandstätter Verlag

Schuhböck Christian (2013), *Otto-Wagner-Spital "Am Steinhof"*. Berndorf: Kral Verlag.





Wien Secession
© Christian Schuhböck,
Alliance For Nature