

Gustav Klimt in the Arts and Crafts Era

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History, Art and Architecture from the 1880s - 1930s

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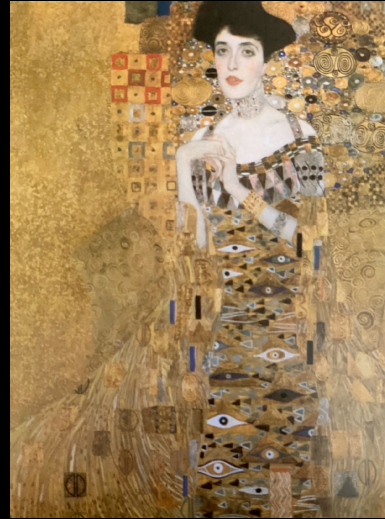


Klimt 1914

By Karen Tripson with clarification edits for oral presentation purposes by Pat Nugent

Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer

1907
Neue Gallery, NY



Unlike many artists who struggle anonymously and never sell much until they die, Gustav Klimt was highly regarded all his life by colleagues and patrons and was a winner of prizes from international art groups. He commanded big prices and after death he set more records for sales, such as \$135 million for the Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer in 2006, famously renamed by the Nazis, The Woman in Gold. The fame and fortune didn't mean he didn't experience difficult times. His success in life was as extraordinary as it was after death.

Born to a poor goldsmith in 1862 he showed artistic talent early. His brother, Ernst, and he received seven years of classical training at the Vienna School of Arts and Crafts where he learned techniques for drawing, painting, portraiture and mosaic. While a teenager and student he received his first commission for a public building: the ceiling of the staircases of the new Burgtheater. It certainly was lucky for Klimt to be trained and ready to work in the era of the Emperor's plan for magnificent new buildings on the new "ring road" in Vienna.

Klimt, his brother Ernst and another student formed a company to create public art in the favored style and ride the building boom. They were busy for years doing biblical and mythological murals. This work showed no individuality for Klimt. The three partners were interchangeable on any project. Gustav began to weary of the limitations of this type of commission and the complaints or requests to make changes to paintings. Sadly his father and brother died about the same time which left Klimt the only money maker for his family (his mother and his two sisters) plus his brother's widow and her sisters (the Flöge family).

Portrait of Sonja Knips

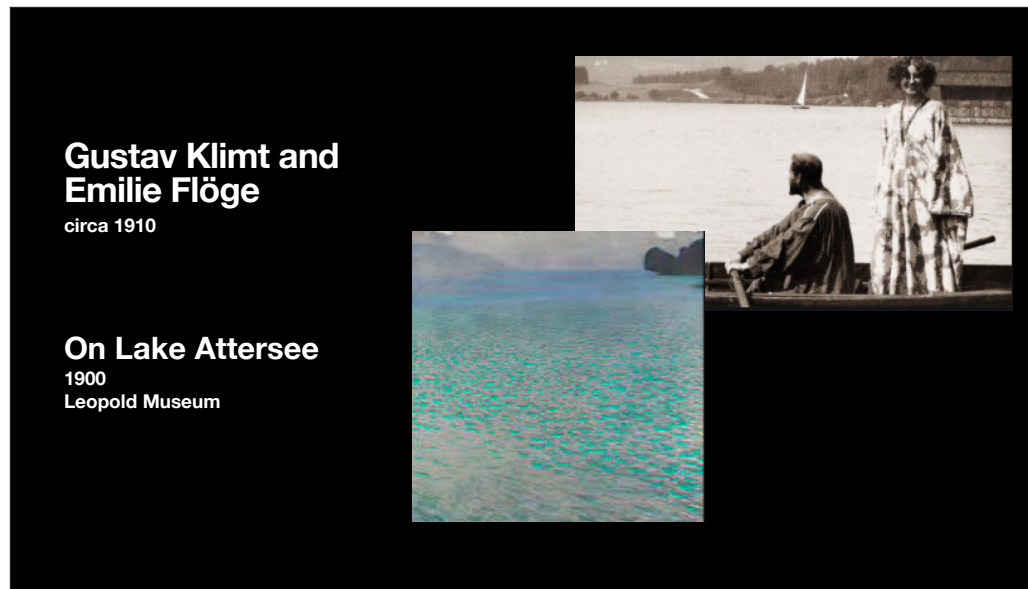
1897
Österreichische Galerie Belvedere,
Vienna



Klimt was happy to give up painting for public buildings. Portraits for wealthy clients became his focus, such as this portrait of Sonja Knips from 1898 in the style of the Early Impressionists. The portraits were always flattering with opulent dresses. He loved women, and was interested in nothing else as a subject for art. This was a lucrative line of business for him. Vienna had wealthy industrialists and aristocracy who wanted portraits. His last big public project for the University dragged on for years, became a scandal and was finally cancelled by him. He returned the down payment and sold the paintings to other patrons. One of the rejected paintings that had received scathing criticism from the conservative Viennese press was submitted to an exhibition in Paris where it won first prize.

Uncle Gustav was well known to the Flöge family even before his brother married into the family. The three Flöge sisters had modeled for crowd scenes with Klimt's sisters when there wasn't enough money to pay for professionals. When the youngest sister Emilie was 18 years old in 1892, she received her first starring role in Klimt's art in the painting titled, "Harlequin at the Fair in Rothenburg ob der Tauber." Originally sketched into the background crowd, Gustav brought her front and center revealing her red hair and beauty.

They began taking French lessons together once a week from a private teacher. Her lower middle-class parents felt no chaperone was necessary with Uncle Gustav. This was the beginning of a lifelong relationship between Emilie and Gustav. Whether it was a platonic relationship is still debated but as one scholar of their correspondence says, "...no matter, she was the wife for twenty years." He wrote postcards to her almost daily, frequently several times a day, with complaints about his patrons, his paintings, his health, the weather and don't forget the opera glasses. He lived at home with his mother and sisters. He went to bed after dinner exhausted and got up early to paint all day again in his suburban studio. Klimt never married but fathered 12 or more children. He left his estate to Emilie and his sisters.



When it was unbearably hot in Vienna in the summer months, as is the case most summers, the Flöge family vacationed at Lake Attersee. Klimt would join them for as long as he could, usually August. He painted the alpine forest and lake many times. He loved to swim and row. He bought a motor boat and became an enthusiast. Emilie and Gustav wore unisex costumes of their own making, kaftans, kimonos and smocks.

(Note the seascape painting of the Attersee in this photo montage. Klimt's sea and landscape paintings deserve a presentation all their own.)

Emilie's father was also a craftsman/tradesman who never made much money but Emilie showed her inherited talent and ambition to be a modern woman by becoming a successful fashion designer and entrepreneur. Positioned in between couture and department stores she ran an enterprise, Salon Schwestern Flöge (Salon of the Flöge Sisters) creating ball gowns, suits, blouses, handkerchiefs, scarfs and coats for her wealthy clients. Her atelier employed both her sisters and at one time 80 people in the work room. Emilie made two trips each year to Paris to buy fabric, belts and buttons. She viewed the latest fashions at Worth, Violet, Chanel, and Schiaparelli. The Salon closed in 1938 when there were no more wealthy clients due to the rise of the Third Reich in Austria



**Necklaces and Hand Mirror
designed by Klimt
From the WW Studio**

Emilie and Gustav were devoted to each other. They attended cultural events together, the opera, theatre, music. They collaborated on many projects. He designed dresses for her which she had made in her workroom and she modeled for Klimt as the photographer. They designed fabric together. He designed jewelry for her, as seen here. He bought her lovely gifts from his friends design studio, WW.

Tree of Life

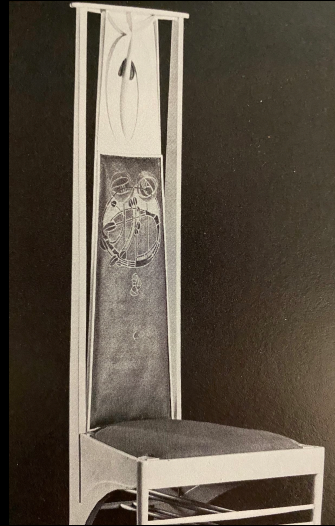
**1905-1909
Palais Stoclet,
Brussels**



One summer the Tree of Life painting for a mosaic for the Stockton's house in Brussels was rolled up and traveled to Lake Attersee, hung on a wall and they painted together every morning to finish it.

Arts and Crafts Movement

Charles Rennie MacKintosh Chair 1902



The Vienna Secession and the Arts and Crafts Movement

The Arts and Crafts movement as labeled by the British was inspired by shoddy, inhumane industrial manufacturing. Handmade quality the artist could be proud of was the goal of the movement and featured a new emphasis on nature and rejecting the stilted ornate aesthetics of the past. It embraced the ‘total’ concept of the elements integrated together. The architecture of the of the building was to be in relationship to the land and aesthetic living. The interiors reflected the aesthetics of the exterior. William Morris designs were the most well-known influences in Europe and America and were admired by the Viennese.

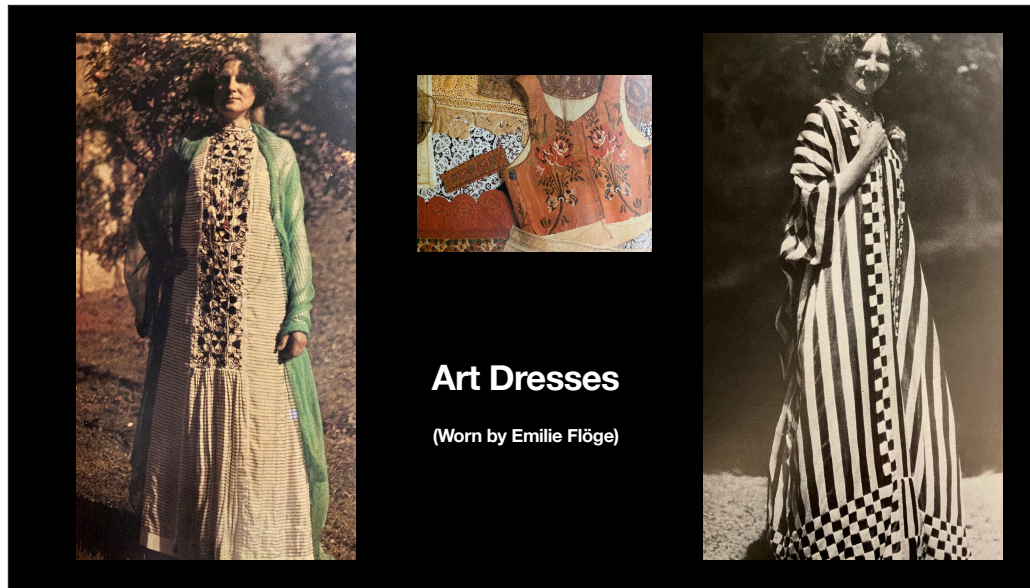
The Vienna Secession grew out of frustrated young artists who couldn’t get exhibitions or recognition from the two stodgy Viennese art institutions. The artists were roughly divided into two groups that took their name from the cafes (the Hagenbund and the Siebener) they frequented to discuss the importance of new painting styles and giving more attention to architecture and interior design.

Although Klimt had made his early reputation painting on the Ringstrasse (the Ring Road) in Vienna, he began to visit the Siebener Café when he had time. He was never an everyday café goer except for his breakfast. He was too busy making money for the families. Ultimately the artists agreed to resign from the two existing art organizations and create a new organization that would promote new styles and ideas, host exhibitions of their work and attract artists from outside of Vienna. Klimt was president in 1897. They called themselves the Vienna Secession after the Berlin and Munich Secession. But they were not necessarily embracing the German Jugendstil movement of art nouveau. They leaned more toward the British Arts and Crafts artists like William Morris, William Asbhee and Charles Rennie Mackintosh. Klimt’s group built their own building which still stands today with its motto “To every generation its art, to every art its freedom.”



The Vienna Secession hosted several exhibitions every year. All but two exhibitions had a designer who set the theme and commissioned work. A poster was created by one of the members. Klimt made the first one. The building featured flexible walls. They published a magazine, *Ver Sacrum* (Sacred Spring) with dazzling interior design, scholarly articles and photos of art from the exhibitions. They all considered the activities of the group as an example of the Secession's goal to make a total work of art. It was an exciting time for artists in Vienna and outside. They succeeded in attracting international artists and attendance. Klimt exhibited often and had his own one man show. His close friends were the architects Josef Hoffmann and Otto Wagner and artists Koloman Moser, Adolf Loos, and Joseph Maria Olbrich. A leading design firm called the Vienna Workshop (WW) founded by Hoffman and Moser created furniture, fabrics, jewelry and more. The WW also published a magazine.

Gustav and Emilie both had Hoffman and the WW design their studios. The outdoor signage for the Salon Flöge was a blue and green mosaic on a black background. These two places of business displayed the Secession style in every element of color, furniture, repeated squares and rectangles. Gustav displayed his collection of primitive sculptures from the Congo, a suit of Samurai armor, Chinese pictures and Japanese woodcuts. Emilie's reception area featured two Mackintosh chairs and was Secession fashion forward with white lacquered walls and black trim and a grey felt wall to wall floor covering instead of the typical parquet floor. Pictures by Koloman Moser hung on the walls. Emilie collected folk art, fabric, costumes and needle work. She changed her displays frequently and used these design elements in the clothing she created. Gustav's painting smock often had embroidery on the shoulders.



The Art dress, as seen here, celebrated freedom from corsets and other restrictive under garments. A woman could move freely for the first time and not have trouble breathing. Gustav designed a series of 20 dresses for day or evening for Emilie that were never intended for production. They just loved the process of creating. The fabrics could be sumptuous silks for evening wear or cottons and Austrian linens for day wear. Intricate inlays of repeating symbols and other embellishments were unique to each dress. These dresses were freeing, similar to Flapper Dresses but were worn ankle length or longer showing the influence of Eastern European Fashion.

It all seemed to be working well until it didn't. In simple terms the easel painters felt the non-easel painters (architects and craftsmen) were getting too much emphasis and they wanted a gallery to sell their work. After only eight years Klimt, his architects and designers resigned again and left the Secession building to the easel contingency who never did anything truly outstanding afterward. The building today is a popular museum.

The Stoclet Palais in Brussels was the swansong for the Vienna Secessionists. It was an amazing, once in a lifetime commission that took several years, where money was no object and the artists could do whatever they wanted. Everyone in the Klimt circle had a hand in it. Hoffman designed the building. Klimt was responsible for the dining room with two mosaics that were twenty feet long that included semi-precious stones. One of these was titled Fulfillment/Embrace which was an early version of The Kiss. When Klimt toured the project after completion in 1911, he was overwhelmed with how beautiful it was. It truly was the total work of art the Secessionists aspired to. It exists today as it was, protected by conservationists and UNESCO and is still a private family residence that is NOT open to the public.

Judith and Holofernes

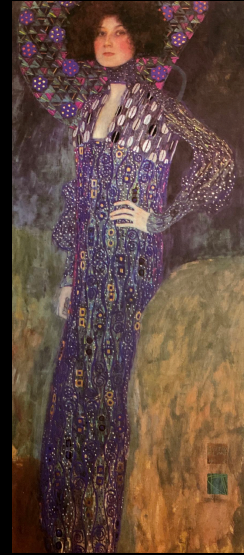
1901
Österreichische Galerie Belvedere,
Vienna



If you could only choose a few of Klimt's paintings that demonstrate the Secessionist spirit, my personal choices would be Judith and Holofernes, the Portrait of Emilie Flöge and the Kiss. They all shimmer in colors, show extensive use of symbols and plant life that speak to Klimt's obsession with evolution and fertility and they show the beautiful women of Vienna to make his points about women and life. Judith shows a woman who clearly enjoys everything about this experience with seduction and murder. To the good people of Vienna who might be shocked at that much sexual confidence and pleasure radiating from a painting of the cheating wife of a titan of industry, Adele Bloch-Bauer, Klimt said, is an allegory. That's Judith the Jewish heroine who saved many lives in her village by enticing the Assyrian, General Holofernes, and after sex cuts off his head. The world needs confident women like Judith. Sometimes the right person for the job is a woman not a man.

Portrait of Emilie Flöge

1902
Wien Museum,
Vienna



Klimt is firmly out of Impressionism and into Symbolism with this portrait of Emilie as the beloved woman who is smart and chaste. She wears a modern flowing dress that shows her shape with the blue colors that reference her eyes. The sparkling symbols in the dress tell the story of life and death and mirror the modern complexity of her mind. She is the competent new woman of the era. Klimt clearly loves her dearly and reveres her.

The Kiss

1907
Österreichische Galerie Belvedere,
Vienna



This painting is Klimt describing the universal law of love and one of his most famous images. This is man and woman happily bound to each other forever with Emilie as the model of womanhood. The garments display all the symbols of love and life.

After Klimt died at age 56 in 1918, Emilie maintained a locked room in her home above the salon with all the Klimt possessions she had. She kept all his letters and postcards carefully tied in ribbons. She tried unsuccessfully to preserve his last studio as a museum. Emilie dies on 1952 at the age of 78.

In one of Klimt's obituaries, Hand Tietzen wrote in 1919, "He jealously guarded his intimacy and took his deepest secret with him the grave."

Klimt's enduring popularity helps keep the values of the Arts and Crafts movement dynamic. Any well-made item brings pride to the creator and the owner.



Tranquil Pond
1899
Leopold Museum



Cottage Garden
1905



Avenue on
Schloss Kammer Park
1912
Österreichische Galerie
Belvedere

(Added landscape images for comparison.)

