

**KLIMT AND THE WOMEN
OF VIENNA'S GOLDEN AGE**



KLIMT AND THE WOMEN OF VIENNA'S GOLDEN AGE

1900–1918

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KLIMT AND THE WOMEN OF VIENNA'S GOLDEN AGE: 1900–1918

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Tobias G. Natter

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in a rowboat in Seewalchen/Attersee, 1909.
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who prefer to remain anonymous.*

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PREFACE

When I was 12 years old, in 1956, I became interested in Art Nouveau. I distinctly remember picking up a book by Maurice Rheims on the subject. As I paged through it, I came to a full stop when I saw the picture of Gustav Klimt's iconic painting *The Kiss*. To this day, I still don't understand why this work was considered part of the Art Nouveau school, but I do know this: I was completely astounded by this painting. It was the first time I had ever seen or even heard of Klimt—remember, I was 12 years old and my guess is that most 12-year-old American boys had not exactly heard of him either.

I can still recall the excitement I felt with the dramatic bend of the head, the multi-colored ground, the colors of the clothing, and perhaps especially, the woman's closed eyes. In my 12-year-old mind, still waiting to experience life, this, I thought, was what a kiss should be—wild, exciting colors, passion, and surrender. Here, in one painting, Klimt was able to capture what Hollywood was constantly trying to find in the magic of a kiss. I instantly became a fan of Klimt.

About a year later, I was in the E. Weyhe Book Store and Gallery on Lexington Avenue when I picked up my first book on Klimt. I couldn't put it down and I felt the same emotions that I had when I first saw *The Kiss*. A year after that, I saw Klimt's paintings for the first time at the Belvedere and other museums in Vienna and, with the help of a friend, I acquired my first Klimt drawing, along with my first Schiele drawing. That Klimt drawing became one of my prized possessions and I have it to this day.

Over the next few years, I made an effort to see more of Klimt's work and I added more drawings to my collection, each one more thrilling than the next. But it wasn't until about seven years later, when I was in my early 20s, that I acquired my first Klimt painting: *The Black Feathered Hat*.

There was no question that, although I loved Klimt's landscapes, his paintings of trees, flowers, and water, it was his interpretation of women that captivated me the most. I often go back to that first painting in the Rheims book and see an unusual understanding of the opposite sex. What came through was the artist's sensuality, his sensitivity, and his breathtaking imagination. Klimt saw women the way few men were able to see them.

I went back to the Belvedere over and over to see his paintings, never even entertaining the thought that his masterwork, the *Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer I*, would someday hang in my museum. For those of you who have seen the film *Woman In Gold* with Dame Helen Mirren, you have some understanding of the tortured history of Klimt's greatest work, the long fight to retrieve it, first from the Nazis and then from the Austrian government. The film shows the world the great efforts that Maria Altmann, the niece of Adele Bloch-Bauer, had to go through to retrieve something that rightfully belonged to her family in the first place.

As is well known, when Mrs. Altmann finally won her case after many, many years of struggle, the painting joined the collection of the Neue Galerie. Although several of Klimt's great paintings still hang at the Belvedere, to me, the portrait of Adele, which we call the *Mona Lisa* of the Neue Galerie, is still his most exciting work of all.



Gustav Klimt, *The Black Feathered Hat*, 1910, oil on canvas. Private Collection

There is no artist that more typifies the golden age of Viennese art than Klimt, and there is no work that captures the beauty of Viennese women better than the *Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer I*.

Seeing so many of Klimt's portraits of women together in this exhibition reminds us of what a great and unique artist he was. You get an unmistakable feeling and understanding for the world of Vienna 1900, as seen through these very beautiful paintings and drawings. This is so important because it is a world that was lost.

Klimt is an artist I will always return to. His impact on me remains just as strong nearly six decades after I first encountered his work. It is a great pleasure and an honor to share Klimt with our visitors through this stunning exhibition.

Ronald S. Lauder
President and Co-Founder, Neue Galerie New York

FOREWORD

Gustav Klimt, whose reputation has reached far beyond his native Europe, is the central artist in the Neue Galerie New York collection. Our museum is privileged to own the largest group of works by Klimt outside of Austria, ranging from major oil paintings to outstanding works on paper, from landscapes to portraits, from documents of his private life to an important body of vintage photographs. The Neue Galerie has often displayed works by Klimt from these rich holdings, most notably in the landmark 2007 exhibition, "Gustav Klimt: The Ronald S. Lauder and Serge Sabarsky Collections." That show was a comprehensive overview that brought together a large number of the artist's major works, and featured a complete reconstruction of the antechamber of his first studio, designed by his friend, the architect Josef Hoffmann.

Although he accepted public commissions early in his career, Klimt gained his greatest acclaim as a portraitist of Vienna's society women. This feat is all the more remarkable because of the artist's own humble beginnings. With the founding of the Vienna Secession—Klimt served as its first president—he began to work in a style that imbued his heavily decorated surfaces with a ravishing sensuality. Inspired by the Byzantine mosaics he saw in Ravenna, amongst many other sources, Klimt created his highly regarded "golden style" paintings, most notably *Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer I* (1907), the centerpiece of the Neue Galerie collection.

Klimt's portraits of women are important for a number of reasons. On an aesthetic level, they represent some of the artist's most accomplished and extraordinary paintings, which he elaborated with dozens of preparatory drawings; in the case of the *Adele Bloch-Bauer I* portrait, these numbered more than one hundred. Klimt integrated diverse influences to yield a style that is singular to Vienna 1900. Considered from a social point of view, they create a group portrait of some of the most culturally significant figures of the day, including Adele Bloch-Bauer, Emilie Flöge, Hermine Gallia, Sonja Knips, Szerena Pulitzer Lederer, her daughter Elisabeth Lederer, Gertha Loew, Fritza Riedler, and Margaret Stonborough-Wittgenstein. These invariably fashionable women were formidable characters and role models for the emerging archetype of the New Woman.

The influence of these women, as well as Klimt's portrayals of them, has continued into the present day. Scores of artists and designers cite Klimt's portraits of women as having shaped their own creative output. These include the artist Inge Prader, the filmmaker Wes Anderson, and the designers Anna Sui, Dolce & Gabbana, L'Wren Scott, Oscar de la Renta, Rick Owens, Tory Burch, and Valentino. The present catalogue includes a special section detailing the close relationship between Klimt and the world of contemporary fashion.

In planning this major exhibition, we have joined forces with the premier authority on the subject, curator Tobias G. Natter. We had the privilege of working with Dr. Natter on our first loan exhibition at the Neue Galerie, in 2002, "Oskar Kokoschka: Early Portraits from Vienna and Berlin, 1909-1914." The study of Gustav Klimt is a particular interest of his, as manifested in his very successful exhibition "Klimt und die Frauen" (Klimt's Women) at the Österreichische Galerie Belvedere in 2000 and his authoritative Klimt catalogue raisonné of 2012. Dr. Natter has brought his scholarly acumen and commitment to original research to this project, and we offer him our most sincere thanks.



Gustav Klimt, *Two Girls with Oleander*, ca. 1890-92, oil on canvas. Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, CT. The Douglas Tracy Smith and Dorothy Potter Smith Fund and The Ella Gallup Sumner and Mary Catlin Sumner Collection Fund

The designers for this catalogue are Richard Pandiscio and Bill Loccisano of Pandiscio Co. We have worked often with Richard and Bill, and they always show extraordinary creativity in finding exciting ways to present the work at hand. Designer Han Feng created exquisite models clothed in her interpretation of Vienna 1900 fashion. She brings a keen eye and tremendous *joie de vivre* to all her projects, and it has been a delight to collaborate with her on this very special project. She worked closely with paper artist Brett McCormack on the dazzling installation.

Tremendous thanks go to all the lenders to this exhibition, including Leonard A. Lauder; Thomas Campbell of The Metropolitan Museum of Art; Glenn Lowry of The Museum of Modern Art; Joseph Lewis and the Lewis family of the Lewis Collection; Michael Lesh of the Serge Sabarsky Collection; Elizabeth Szancer of the Ronald S. Lauder Collection; Maria Grazia Marini of the Comune di Ravenna; and those private lenders who wish to remain anonymous.

The Neue Galerie staff deserves credit for the planning and execution of this beautiful show, including Scott Gutterman, Deputy Director and Chief Operating Officer; Janis Staggs, Director of Curatorial and Manager of Publications; Allison Needle, Chief Registrar and Director of Exhibitions; and Michael Voss, Head Preparator.

Finally, our greatest thanks, as always, go to our President and Co-founder, Ronald S. Lauder. His commitment both to the art of Gustav Klimt and to the mission of the Neue Galerie is unparalleled, and his steadfast support makes all these endeavors possible.

Renée Price
Director, Neue Galerie New York



Interior view of the Wiener Frauenclub (Vienna Women's Club), designed by Adolf Loos, 1900. Photograph printed in the journal *Das Interessante Blatt*, Volume 22, November 1900. Austrian National Library, Vienna

THE WOMEN

- THE VIENNESE WOMAN: A COMMUNITY OF STRENGTH
- KLIMT AND SZERENA LEDERER: IDENTITY AND CONTRADICTIONARY REALITIES OF GREAT ART
- EMPIRE OF ORNAMENT: KLIMT'S PORTRAIT OF ELISABETH LEDERER
- KLIMT'S STUDIES FOR *PORTRAIT OF ADELE BLOCH-BAUER I*
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THE VIENNESE WOMAN

A COMMUNITY OF STRENGTH¹

Jill Lloyd



Gustav Klimt's brilliant artistic career coincided with a period of profound cultural, social and political ferment that witnessed fundamental changes in the position women occupied in society. While women in Austria fought for new social freedoms, the right to education, and political recognition, they became for many artists and writers of the period a symbol for the conflicts and transformations that were underway as the old world gave way to the new. In Klimt's lifetime, women came to be seen not only as a "Störfaktor der Gesellschaft"² (disruptive factor in the social order) but also as "a sign whose meanings implicated much of modernity itself, that sweeping process of change which was hard to define but harder to remain neutral toward."³

The processes of modernization and women's emancipation stretched, of course, far beyond the boundaries of the Habsburg Empire. The reason these issues came to the fore with such intensity in Vienna surely relates to the clashing social and ethnic factors that turned the city into a virtual tinderbox threatening at any minute to ignite. At every turn modernization came up against the "bastion of archaism"⁴ represented by the Hapsburg monarchy, with its entrenched hierarchies and traditions. Simultaneously, the huge population boom

in Vienna between 1870 and 1910, which involved arrivals from every corner of the Empire seeking work and lodgings, resulted in a highly polarized urban situation, where rents in the crowded slums on the outskirts of the city could exceed those demanded on the fashionable Ringstrasse.⁵ The extreme contrast between the prosperity of the educated bourgeoisie and the impoverished, illiterate proletariat, together with the heterogeneity of this ethnically mixed population, gave rise less to a melting pot than a “battlefield of national chauvinisms, of ethnic and social opposites, and ultimately, of all kinds of racisms and of anti-Semitism,” according to Jacques Le Rider.⁶ These acute social disparities are clearly evident in the position of women, reflected, for example, in the statistics regarding women’s employment in the 1890s. An unusually high percentage of women in Vienna, some 55 percent, were active in various kinds of proletarian work (including factory workers, seamstresses and domestic laborers), as opposed to 25 percent in the United States and 37 percent in England and Wales. In contrast, the figures for bourgeois professions (primarily teaching and a very small number of public sector jobs, mainly in the postal service) show that only 12 percent of middle-class women were employed, in comparison to 19 percent in the United States and 25 percent in England and Wales.⁷ This throws light on the precariously polarized and imbalanced social realities of Vienna; it also evokes the influence of autocratic Catholic traditions under the Hapsburg monarchy, which imposed social expectations of marriage as the be-all and end-all of a middle-class woman’s existence, despite the fact that the erosion of the traditional family in the second half of the nineteenth-century left many seeking employment outside the home.

The first stirrings of opposition can be found, not in any mass movement (this was to come

later), but rather in the activities of a very small number of upper class, mainly Jewish women, who challenged conventional expectations of domesticity through their role as *salonnières*. The Viennese women’s salon, which had a longer lifespan than in any other European city, has its roots in the eighteenth century, when Fanny von Arnstein [Fig. 1] brought the liberal enlightenment tradition of Berlin salon culture to Vienna, where she arrived in 1776 as the bride of Nathan Adam von Arnstein, a prominent Viennese wholesaler and banker. Fanny von Arnstein created her salon because of her desire to play an active role in the social and cultural life of her adopted city. Although her primary passion was for music, she also engaged with the political issues of her day, using her access to Emperor Joseph II to advocate for the Jews before the Edict of Tolerance in 1782. Her salon reached its height during the Congress of Vienna in 1814–15, when it was frequented by international statesmen including the Duke of Wellington and Charles-Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord, as well as the Romantic poets and philosophers Karl Wilhelm and August Wilhelm Schlegel. According to secret service reports, Fanny von Arnstein openly voiced her anti-French sentiments and opposition to Napoleon,⁸ although typically for politically engaged women, she was criticized, specifically for her support of Prussia, which was thought to throw doubt on her Austrian patriotism.

Although Fanny von Arnstein’s overtly political stance was exceptional, the continuation of the salon tradition in Vienna by her daughter, Henriette Pereira, and in the mid-nineteenth century by Josephine von Wertheimstein [Fig. 2] and her sister, Sophie Todesco, subverted the bourgeois expectations and restrictions imposed on women. By cultivating support of the arts, giving voice to their own artistic talents, and bringing together a wide variety

1. Vincenz Georg Kininger, Portrait of Fanny von Arnstein, 1804, mezzotint engraving, based upon a painting by Christophe Guérin. © Imagno/Getty Images, Hulton Archive



2. Josephine von Wertheimstein. Jewish Museum Vienna, inv. no. 13369



3. Karoline von Perin-Gradenstein, before 1888. Photographer: Josef B. Fechner. Austrian National Library, Vienna, Pf85 95B1

of influential figures, these women created sheltered, alternative arenas “where interactions that were otherwise unacceptable could safely occur, while they also pushed the limits of acceptable roles for women and Jews.”⁹ The Wertheimstein salon in Döbling, and Sophie Todesco’s salon in the newly built Todesco Palace on the Kärtnerring, attracted distinguished men from the world of politics and commerce, as well as scientists, artists and musicians. While Josephine was praised for her brilliance as well as her beauty, her daughter Franzl was known as a talented artist. Alongside literary figures such as Ferdinand von Saar and Hugo von Hofmannsthal, and musicians including Johannes Brahms, Franz Liszt, and Johann Strauss, the women cultivated the leading artists of their day, including Hans Makart, Moritz von Schwind, and Franz von Lenbach. However, as we shall see, it took the next generation of *salonnières* to open their doors to progressive Secessionist artists like Gustav Klimt.

Jürgen Habermas contends that European salons—as theaters of conversation and exchange—played an important role in the emergence of what he terms the “public sphere.” Other historians have argued that these salons were never part of an oppositional public sphere, and that the polite and agreeable role played by their female hostesses re-inscribed gender norms linked with patriarchy.¹⁰ The women described above necessarily worked within the framework of their age, but it would be entirely wrong to think that they were merely promoting or representing their husbands’ wealth and position. On the contrary, their salons gave them the opportunity to play a prominent and influential role that was denied to them in the “outside” world of the professions. Directly or indirectly, women used their salons to exert influence on artistic and political affairs when doing so by other means

was very difficult. Indeed, their salons challenged the very boundaries between public and private spheres, providing a space of interaction for social groups who were excluded from more public arenas and a testing ground for new ideas. The convergence of these various factors, in Alison Rose’s view, made for “a unique challenge to the status quo.”¹¹

While women in the upper echelons of Viennese society fought a battle from within, the events of the 1848 revolution gave rise to the first public battles for women’s rights. The Democratic Women’s Union, which was founded in August 1848 by Baroness Karoline von Perin [Fig. 3], was the first association to protest against lower wages for women. Its activities were cut short when a demonstration organized by the Union in front of the Viennese parliament led to a brutal press attack on its founder, who was defamed as a “dirty Amazon” and “a political fishwife.”¹² In the wake of these events the Union was dissolved and Von Perin arrested, declared insane, and deprived of the right to care for her children. Her husband was shot for his revolutionary activities and Von Perin forced into exile. In 1867 these sorry events were followed by a ban on women forming political associations. From this point on the fight for women’s rights developed in two directions: on the one hand the bourgeois feminists avoided direct confrontation with the authorities by devoting themselves to charitable and educational concerns, taking an essentially conciliatory approach to achieving their aims and concentrating on issues like the reform movement in women’s fashion, petitions to parliament, and organizing women’s clubs with cultural aims. The working class women’s groups, on the contrary, led by Adelheid Popp [Fig. 4], were agitational and combative, organizing protests, demonstrations, and strikes, and closely aligning themselves with the rise of the Social Democratic Party [Fig. 5]. Reflecting

the hierarchical social divisions of Vienna more generally, the women's movement nevertheless opened lines of communication between different social spheres through the drive for girl's education and the common causes they held dear. Needless to say, it remained far easier to slip downwards in society than to rise. In his fascinating analysis of social mobility, Peter Gay demonstrates how easy it was, particularly at the lower end of the social scale, to slide from one level to another, and how these slippages in social status helped trigger a more general crisis of identity.¹³ If a girl lost her position as a maid, for example, she could easily be sucked into the vast underclass of prostitutes that was officially tolerated in Vienna. Another option, which was considered scarcely more respectable at the time, lay in becoming an artist's model.

Prostitution was one of the main targets for reform by feminist groups stemming from liberal bourgeois backgrounds. The misery and poverty of the women engaged in the sex trade and the double standards prostitution symbolized in an age when men fully expected their brides to be virgins, provoked a women's protest in 1893 that was sparked by the intention of the local government in Vienna to endorse licensed brothels. This was one step in the increasing radicalization of the Austrian feminist movement in the 1890s. Events followed quickly during these years, when women not only fought for and finally achieved the right to grammar school and higher education (entering the Philosophical Faculty at the University of Vienna for the first time in 1897 and the Medical Faculty in 1900), but also took up the banner for women's suffrage. In 1890 the first protest for women's suffrage since 1848 took place when the schoolteacher Auguste Fickert organized a demonstration to preserve the limited rights of propertied women to vote in Vienna. Then in 1893 Fickert founded



the General Austrian Women's Association (Allgemeiner Österreichischer Frauenverein) to pursue women's rights in various fields. From this point on Rosa Mayreder became Fickert's right-hand woman; despite the new politicization of the women's movement, both of these leaders continued to emphasize the moral and cultural development of the individual rather than women's collective political goals. Both Fickert and Mayreder avoided a head-on confrontation with men, partly because they needed them to support their cause. Moreover, in Mayreder's case, her ideal vision of society involved surpassing the differences between the sexes in order to achieve a higher level of personal, individual culture.¹⁴ Nevertheless, when the granting of universal male suffrage in 1906–07 removed the last significant municipal voting rights for women, feminists finally petitioned for the repeal of the 1867 law banning them from forming political associations and launched their campaign for universal suffrage, which was eventually granted in 1918—the year of Gustav Klimt's death.

ANTI-FEMINISTS

During the early years of protest, the women's movement in Austria was beset by opponents

4. Social democratic women: from left, Therese Schlesinger (standing), Adelheid Popp, Anna Posch, Amalie Seidl, Lotto Glas-Phohl, ca. 1905. Imagno/Austrian Archives



5. Meeting of the constituting National Assembly in Parliament. Sector with women members of the Social Democratic Party from front left: Adelheid Popp, Therese Schlesinger, Anna Boschek, Emmy Freundlich, Maria Tusch, and Amalie Seidel, 1919. Austrian National Library, Vienna 118.074C

on every side. As Harriet Anderson writes in her history of Austrian feminism: “Although anti-feminism was by no means a new phenomenon in Austria, it was given an obvious focus in the last decade of the nineteenth century by the rise of an organized political feminist movement.”¹⁵ It seems that anti-feminism infiltrated every branch of politics and culture, including philosophy, philology, art, literature and medicine—indeed a poisonous mix of all these disciplines characterized anti-feminist harangues. Science was dragged into the fray to give dubious corroboration to slanderous attacks on women; the idea that women were inferior beings, for example, was often justified by a brand of social Darwinism that set out to prove how women, children, and non-Aryan races necessarily occupied a lower rung on the evolutionary ladder.¹⁶ This forged a crucial and highly characteristic link between anti-feminism and anti-Semitism in turn-of-the-century Vienna. Just as anti-Semitic rhetoric frequently associated Jews with the rise of capitalism and the breakdown of traditional social structures, so too women were viewed as the cause—or at best accomplices—in the collapse of the existing order.¹⁷ Indeed ideas about the “Judaization” and “feminization” of Viennese culture were frequently linked. When the dominant culture portrayed Jews as “feminine, materialistic and sexually deviant or aggressive,” it used stereotypes that in many aspects mirrored fin-de-siècle images of women, “which juxtaposed the ideal of the virtuous mother with the dangerous, seductive prostitute.”¹⁸

Significantly, it was not only the conservative forces in Viennese society who raised their voices against the feminists. Representatives of what Allan Janik terms “critical modernism,”¹⁹ spearheaded by Karl Kraus’s attacks on hypocrisy in Viennese society, also associated the advances of the women’s movement

with cultural decline. Kraus fulminated against Vienna’s “vaginal society” and accused the women who gathered to protest against the state’s toleration of brothels of vicarious sexual titillation²⁰ (although he also condemned the co-existence of coyly worded advertisements for prostitution in the city’s leading newspapers alongside editorials with a high moral tone).²¹ While Sigmund Freud acknowledged that nervousness in women was associated with excessive sexual repression among the Victorian middle classes, he also believed that the psychosexual development of feminists was arrested, suspecting them of bitter jealousy of men and a failure to overcome penis envy.²² As Harriet Anderson points out, “all of these commentators see the feminist movement in terms of a female sexuality which has in some way transgressed the bounds set by nature and which is invading the masculine domain of the intellect.”²³

Anti-feminist rhetoric thus thinly masked masculine anxiety about the shifting, porous boundaries of identity between the sexes. In the workplace men felt threatened by the influx of women, just as at home they felt their patriarchal authority challenged.²⁴ Fears that the female sex had transgressed the boundaries of its gender and imperiled male identity reached a climax in Otto Weininger’s notorious *Sex and Character* (*Geschlecht und Charakter*) published in 1903 [Fig. 6] and admired by a broad spectrum of Viennese artists and intellectuals. Weininger lamented the effeminacy of his times but also condemned feminist activism, bemoaning the existence of “virilized women” and the “monstrous increase of fops and homosexuals.”²⁵ He advocated differentiation between the sexes, whereby “true femininity” would be antithetical to emancipation and women would assume their “proper” servile place. In Weininger’s worldview, women are mothers or prostitutes, a category that includes any woman

who enjoys sex for its own sake. Contrastingly, Aryan men possess an autonomous moral self, characterized by intrinsic genius.

This is not the place to go into detail about the peculiar twists and turns of Weininger's reasoning, which pushes many of the themes in contemporary cultural discourse to absurd extremes; his popularity nevertheless underlines the extent to which he touched a nerve in the psyche of his times. In his penetrating analysis of Weininger's book, the medical historian Chandak Sengoopta acknowledges, "much of the interest in woman's nature, including a lot in Otto Weininger's *Geschlecht und Charakter*, was a direct response to feminist demands for equality and emancipation."²⁶ Sengoopta perceptively sums up cultural discourse about women in turn-of-the-century Vienna in the following terms: "Turn-of-the-century intellectual responses to modernity were ambivalent at best and hysterical at worst, but the nature and meanings of femininity (and indeed of gender itself) were at the very heart of debates about the nature and future of civilization."²⁷

FEMINISTS AND MODERNISTS

Caught in the crossfire of so much anti-feminist propaganda, feminists in turn-of-the-century Vienna naturally looked for allies, mostly among the educated intelligentsia, both male and female, who joined their associations, supported them with donations, and offered lecture courses or premises in which they could hold their meetings. This was precisely the sociological group that was also prepared to embrace the innovations of Secessionist art, spearheaded by Gustav Klimt. Indeed, the feminists and Secessionists shared not only supporters but also detractors, Adolf Loos viewed the ornamental style represented by Klimt and Josef Hoffmann as a "feminization" of modern culture that required urgent reform, while Kraus launched virulent attacks on both

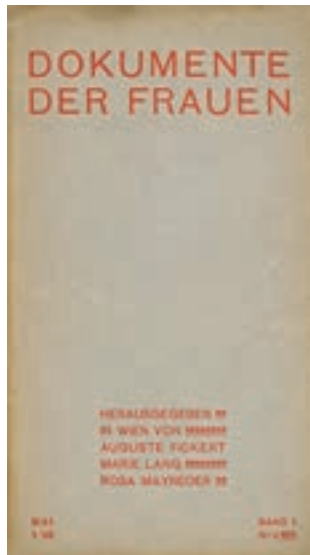
the Secession and its liberal patrons and clientele, many of whom were of Jewish descent. Despite these perceived affinities—perhaps partly because of them—the Vienna Secession remained closed to women members; women occasionally exhibited as guests, but the most significant move they made in the direction of women artists was their exhibition of "The Art of Women" ("Die Kunst der Frau"), which was organized by the Austrian Association of Women Artists in 1911. Although many women decorators were members of the Wiener Werkstätte—a sphere that was more easily reconciled with their traditional skills and roles—few women established themselves as high-profile painters or sculptors. Those who did, such as Tina Blau and Elena Luksch-Makowsky, have largely been omitted from standard art histories of the period.²⁸

Nevertheless, from the bourgeois feminists' point of view the Secession was perceived as launching a parallel assault on patriarchal society and its outmoded values. As we have seen, the emphasis of the bourgeois women's associations until after the turn of the century was on cultural rather than political emancipation, and in this sense the link with the artistic Secession was self-evident. Auguste Fickert went so far as to describe the women's movement itself as a "secession," elaborating her ideals in an extended architectural metaphor that obviously references modernist principles of design: "The women's secession is not directed against man, it does not want to rebuild the old edifice which has become too cramped; it wants to erect a new building—roomy, high, spacious, light, for joint work between men and women, with rooms commanding an extensive view, with cozy, peaceful alcoves for shared happiness."²⁹

Fickert's colleague, Marie Lang, was a passionate admirer of the Secession and main-



6. Cover of the first edition of Otto Weininger's *Geschlecht und Charakter* (Sex and Character), 1903 (Vienna/Leipzig: Wilhelm Braumüller, 1903). Image from Wikipedia



7. Cover of *Dokumente der Frauen*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (May 1899). Edited in Vienna by Auguste Fickert, Marie Lang, and Rosa Mayreder. Collection of Christian Witt-Döring, Vienna

tained contact with many important figures on the cultural scene, including Klimt, Loos, Mahler and the theater designer Alfred Roller, as well as with the influential Hofmannsthal and Wittgenstein families. Lang regarded Joseph Olbrich's Secession building, completed in 1897, as a temple, "in its basic traits earnest, strict, bare and burdensome like the tasks we have to cope with." Indeed she regarded the Secession movement as a striving for freedom on the part of modern man, who, like the feminists, "can no longer tolerate farces and old masquerades."³⁰ Marie Lang became a founding editor of *Dokumente der Frauen*, a journal that was launched in 1899 as the mouthpiece of the General Austrian Women's Association [Fig. 7]. Aimed at middle-class women, it was not a woman's journal in the traditional sense but rather a cultural and political forum with a revolutionary, visionary message that echoed the aspirations of the Secession. Its first editorial spoke of "a great movement... sweeping through the countries of Western civilization. New forces are emerging from the earth, life is seeking to take on a new form, and a promising stirring of minds heralds the coming century."³¹

When Marie Lang founded the Viennese Settlement in 1901 to provide childcare for working mothers, she commissioned the Secessionist designers Josef Hoffmann, Koloman Moser and Alfred Roller to fit out an old brewery building in the working class district of the Ottakring to house its activities. Self-help, harmony, and promotion of the individual's own strengths and talents, regardless of class, religion, or nationality, were at the heart of the Settlement's philosophy. Typically, its aim was to "raise" working-class women to embrace bourgeois values without any real regard for the economic gulf that separated them, although the childcare facilities it offered were indeed revolutionary at the time.

Another project that was a showcase for modernist design was the Vienna Women's Club, opened in 1900 as a social and cultural meeting place for women [Fig. 8]. Loos (who originally worked in the architectural practice of Rosa Mayreder's husband, Karl) designed the interior, and its style was described as combining "functionality and honesty in materials with colorfulness."³² A problem was nevertheless posed by the deep, elegant English gentlemen's club chairs, which Loos had installed without considering how genteel women were supposed to perch on the edge of their seats—in this case they were more likely to sink into their "apple purée" depths.³³ Although the club was once again intended to appeal to all "ladies" (that is, women with an unspoiled reputation and perfect social manners), regardless of their class or background, it not surprisingly attracted mostly prosperous women from the upper-middle classes.

One prominent member of the Women's Club was the journalist Berta Zuckerkandl, who was also a passionate advocate of Klimt and the Secession [Fig. 8]. Writing for the *Wiener Allgemeine Zeitung* as well as the Secessionist journal *Ver Sacrum* and *Dokumente der Frauen*, Zuckerkandl played a key role in the cultural politics of her age. She was sarcastically dubbed by Kraus as "the puppeteer of the Viennese cultural scene"; indeed, her network of influence extended to Paris, where her sister was married to Paul Clemenceau.³⁴ Zuckerkandl fostered the international relations of the Secession, introducing, for example, Auguste Rodin to Klimt.³⁵ The very concept for the Secession is thought to have taken shape in her apartment, which was designed by Hoffmann and Dagobert Peche and was home to an influential salon that continued and renewed the nineteenth-century tradition of *salonnières*. Zuckerkandl likewise brought together leading figures from the worlds of



8. Interior view of the Wiener Frauenclub (Vienna Women's Club), designed by Adolf Loos, 1900. Photograph printed in the journal *Das Interessante Blatt*, Volume 22, November 1900. Austrian National Library, Vienna

science, politics, and the arts: Peter Altenberg, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Hoffmann, Klimt, Mahler, Otto Wagner and Stefan Zweig were all habitués, alongside medical scientists like the psychiatrists Richard Krafft-Ebing and Julius Wagner von Jauregg, and the surgeon Theodor Billroth. Contact with the world of science and medicine was forged by Berta's husband Emil Zuckerkandl, a renowned professor of anatomy at the University of Vienna, and her brother-in-law Victor Zuckerkandl, owner of the Purkersdorf Sanatorium, which was designed on Berta's recommendation by Hoffmann and decorated by the Wiener Werkstätte. Berta and Emil Zuckerkandl merit special attention because they are a prime example of a male/female alliance that lent its support both to the women's movement and the Secession, using public forums to express their progressive views. Emil Zuckerkandl led the opposition within the University of Vienna when Klimt was accused of obscene depictions of female nudity in his Faculty Paintings, while Berta defended the artist no less vociferously in her

newspaper column. Both of the Zuckerkandls also supported women's right to higher education.³⁶ Berta believed that only an improvement in women's education would encourage them to take an interest in public affairs, and in her memoirs she proudly recalled her husband's support for women's entry to the medical school, claiming he was the first to choose women medical assistants once they were finally admitted to the university in 1900.³⁷

Progressive artists and designers took part, alongside the Zuckerkandls, in various pedagogical projects initiated by the women's movement. In the same year as the Secession opened its doors to the public, the Art School Association for Women and Girls (Verein Kunstschule für Frauen und Mädchen) was co-founded by Rosa Mayreder, who was not only a talented author but also the first woman member of the Vienna Club of Watercolor Artists. This school offered the first opportunity in Vienna for women to be trained as professional artists and commercial designers.³⁸



9. Berta Zuckerkandl, 1908. Photograph by Atelier d'Ora (Dora Kallmus, Arthur Benda). Austrian National Library, Vienna

The school shared the Secession's aim to break down the boundaries between the fine and decorative arts, and to this end it established courses in applied arts and engraving. Some of its pupils went on to design for the Wiener Werkstätte, while others were among Koloman Moser's most successful students at the Viennese School of Applied Arts. Alongside traditional skills like embroidery, a chiseling course was taught by Georg Klimt (Gustav's brother); woodcutting and calligraphy were also on offer. Although once again this initiative appealed mainly to women from the educated middle classes, it was subsidized by the Ministry of Education after 1908, which made it possible for the school to offer free and supported places. Indeed, the school continued to thrive even after 1920 when Vienna's Academy of Fine Art at last opened its doors to a limited number of women.³⁹

One of the most ambitious and high-profile educational projects for women was launched in 1901 by Eugenie Schwarzwald, a Jewish intellectual and visionary educator who had graduated from Zurich University with a doctorate in German literature [Fig. 10]. Like Berta Zuckerkandl, Schwarzwald counted among her friends leading figures of Austrian art, literature, and music, including Elias Canetti, Robert Musil, Rainer Maria Rilke, Adolf Loos, Oskar Kokoschka, and Arnold Schoenberg—all of whom either taught for her school or attended her famous "outsider's salon," which she ran after 1909 as an open house in the apartment Loos had designed for her. The Schwarzwald'sche School, mainly attended by girls from rich assimilated Jewish families, began as a lycée for girls and was extended in 1902 so that her pupils could sit for the Matura examination and enter university. The following year she added the first co-educational junior school to exist in Vienna. An equal weight was given to science and modern and

classical languages and, in her own words, Schwarzwald's aim was to provide a "creative education,"⁴⁰ liberating the artist she believed resided in every child and activating its powers of thinking and feeling. Influenced by the writings of Rosa Mayreder and Marie Lang, Schwarzwald placed a great emphasis on the "naturalness" of the girls' education, emphasizing the dangers of city life for body and soul and eventually planning a new countryside school in Semmering that was to be designed by Loos. The idea was to offer a curriculum including physical exercise and observation of nature in order to achieve "the harmonious development of all talents and strengths."⁴¹ Significantly, many leading feminists placed a special emphasis on women's "natural" role as mothers. Marianne Hainisch, a leading figure in the League of Austrian Women's Associations (Bund Österreichischer Frauenvereine), strongly encouraged women to preserve the qualities of "devotion, self-sacrifice and humility" which she associated with "the eternal feminine," and which marked out women, in her opinion, as morally superior creatures. Inspired by Hainisch's visionary feminism, Schwarzwald believed that "it would be the highest task of culture to reunite humanity and nature, to find the way back to the primal mother."⁴²

One of the most remarkable aspects of Schwarzwald's school was the number of progressive artists she attracted to her teaching staff. Arnold Schoenberg taught free seminars in the afternoons on harmony and counterpoint, and other musicians she involved included Alexander Zemlinsky, Elsa Bienenfeld, and Egon Wellesz. Kokoschka took part as an art teacher until he was forced to give up his post in 1913 because of a lack of suitability to teaching. Loos also played an important role, holding private architecture classes in the premises of the school from 1912–13 and teaching art history as one of the fur-

ther education classes the establishment also offered. Loos became an important ideological influence on the Semmering project, as he encouraged Schwarzwald in her fight against unnaturalness, hypocrisy, excess, and lack of authenticity. In line with Loos' attack on ornamentation in his polemical essay, "Ornament and Crime" ("Ornament und Verbrechen," 1908), Schwarzwald encouraged her girls to wear simple, practical clothing, to abandon jewelry and corsets, and to develop their personalities through "health, uprightness, and strength of character."⁴³ In the school's annual report for 1913, Loos published an essay relating to his work at Semmering (which was eventually curtailed by the outbreak of World War I), entitled "Rules for Building in the Mountains." Here he passionately enjoined architecture to truth, emphasizing the need for honesty and simplicity. Although Loos is often associated with the virulently anti-feminist writings of Otto Weininger, and known for his attacks on what he termed "feminine" ornamentation, he nevertheless sympathized with the feminists' demands for a return to natural principles.

The women's movement straddled what we would now think of as two generations of Viennese modernism, beginning with the ornamental Secession and continuing with the fundamentalist approach of Loos, Kokoschka, and Schiele, all of whom aspired to strip away outward appearances in order to reveal underlying truths. What makes the situation complicated, looking back from the perspective of today, is that feminists, modernists of both generations, and anti-feminists alike all perceived the need for a moral reform of society. True enough, their means to this end differed, but there are areas where aspects of their ideas overlap, for example in the association of women with motherhood and nature, and their attacks on the failings of modern civilization. But while Weininger associated women with cultural decline and

feared the invasion of the masculine principle by feminine sexuality, Rosa Mayreder and Marianne Hainisch believed that the male temper of the times, with its emphasis on intellect and egoism, should be counterbalanced by the cultivation of feminine qualities and virtues. Like many feminists of the period, they associated women with nature, a life force they often linked with motherhood, that was capable not only of regenerating a tired and decadent civilization but also of cutting through the double standards and "wretched hypocrisy" of modern society—a society that maintained one set of rules for men and another for women. This reforming spirit struck a chord with the modernists, and Hermann Bahr (editor of *Ver Sacrum* and spokesman for the early ideals of the Secession) consequently affirmed that men's support for women's suffrage was motivated "not so much out of liking for women... but for the sake of politics...because they hope that with women a new moral element will force its way into politics, an element which it needs in order to be up to the great tasks of the times."⁴⁴ The feminists' attacks on social hypocrisy also forged a link with Janik's critical modernists; it was the basis of their common ground with reformers like Kraus and Loos—even though these men expressed on occasion hostile anti-feminist views.

KLIMT'S WOMEN

Klimt's exclusive preoccupation with the subject of women after 1900, and his contact with a wide spectrum of Viennese women, ranging from the upper-class women he portrayed to the working-class models for his nude drawings, all link him inextricably with the *Frauenfrage* that preoccupied his age. Significantly, Klimt's most important and enduring relationship was with Emilie Flöge, a talented dress designer and successful businesswoman who was the artist's lifetime companion and confidante. Together with her two sisters, Emilie Flöge



10. Eugenie Schwarzwald, 1924–25. Photograph by Trude Fleischmann. © Imagno/Getty Images, Hulton Archive

opened an exclusive couture house in 1904, Schwestern Flöge, with interior designs by Hoffmann and Moser, which was located in the heart of Vienna's fashion district, on the first floor of the Casa Piccola in Mariahilferstrasse. As Janis Staggs points out, this was "a unique enterprise for the period, offering the latest French and English fashions as well as *Reformkleider* and their own designs... because of their close ties with Klimt, they had a potential client list before they opened their doors."⁴⁵ Emilie Flöge visited London and Paris each year to research the latest fashion trends and maintained her own impressive household. She also enjoyed a longstanding relationship with Klimt outside the conventional bonds of marriage, which many feminists of the period would have considered an ideal arrangement—almost all of them condemned marriage as a hypocritical social restraint that gave the man unjust rights over his spouse and prohibited a free and equal exchange of affection. Although Emilie is often presented as a victim of Klimt's serial philandering with his studio models and others, she would have been well aware that marriage would have compromised her profession; indeed most married women were forced to renounce their working lives outside the home. Surviving photographs of Emilie Flöge show her as a tall, proud, and beautiful woman, often modeling her own fashion designs. She appears in a similar light in Klimt's 1902–03 portrait, wearing a dress with a high bodice that falls loosely at the waist, with sleeves billowing at the elbows, both features of reform fashion that allowed women a new freedom of movement [Fig. 11].

Klimt and Emilie Flöge shared a passion for textiles, fashion, and jewelry. They both assembled collections of European and Oriental embroidered textiles, and their mutual interest in Far Eastern art and design exerted an influence on both Flöge's dress designs and

Klimt's paintings. In an early color photograph taken in the summer of 1910 on one of their summer trips to Attersee, Flöge appears in a sumptuous Chinese robe that was probably from Klimt's collection [See page 285]. Another photograph [Fig. 12] pictures Klimt and Flöge together in the garden of the Villa Oleander wearing loose-fitting caftans—with Flöge noticeably towering over Klimt. Caftans were an element of men's fashion reform and were not altogether unknown in progressive artistic circles: Klimt, Hermann Bahr and the sculptor Anton Hanak were all known to favor this comfortable garb. However, given the current discussion about the "feminization" of Viennese culture among the anti-feminists and the attempts by the feminists themselves to promote the "natural" feminine principle as a means of reforming civilization, this photograph is particularly interesting for its lack of sexual differentiation. True enough, Flöge's caftan is flowered and Klimt's plain, and he sports his customary beard, but there is nevertheless a sexual equality or ambivalence in their casual dress that relates to the shifting boundaries of identity between the male and female sexes.

How, we might ask, if at all, did Klimt's relationship with this strong, independent woman impact more generally on his representations of the female sex? In terms of the feminist versus antifeminist debates, it has often been pointed out that if Klimt had his "Midi" (his affectionate nickname for Emilie), he also had his "Mizzi"—the artist's model Maria Zimmerman, who mothered two of the artist's illegitimate sons and was just one of his many conquests. There is evidence that Klimt had an alternative set of rules for this second liaison: Maria received short shrift when she disturbed a summer sojourn with Flöge on the Attersee, and Klimt brushed aside her artistic ambitions.⁴⁶ In his life Klimt clearly divided women into those he respected, even exalted, and those he slept with—although the



11. Gustav Klimt, *Portrait of Emilie Flöge*, 1902–03 (with later reworkings), oil on canvas. Wien Museum, Vienna

boundary between the two was not absolutely fixed—in a manner highly characteristic of the double moral standards of his age.⁴⁷

However, it is not necessarily correct to assume that double standards in Klimt's life were directly and unproblematically reflected in his art. Alongside his remarkable female portraits, women also became the focus of his



12. Emilie Flöge and Gustav Klimt in the garden of the Villa Oleander in Kammerl/Attersee, 1910. Private Collection

allegorical paintings, not to mention the numerous erotic drawings that flowed from his pen. While this may well relate to a personal obsession, it also seems likely that Klimt viewed the subject of women as a key to the modernity of his art. Chandak Sengoopta's observation that women in turn-of-the-century Vienna served "not merely as an uncomplicated symbols of femininity but as a sign whose meanings implicated much of modernity itself" is highly relevant to Klimt, who only began to concentrate exclusively on female subjects after he was appointed first president of the Vienna Secession in 1897. Indeed, Berta Zuckermandl, in her enthusiastic reviews of Klimt's work, often praised his ability "to paint the woman of his time."⁴⁸ More generally Klimt's images of women are acknowledged as complex representations with a symbolic force; as such they embody allusions to the "women question" that are far from straightforward to read.

After the scandal provoked by the University Faculty Paintings that resonated from 1900 to 1905, Klimt made the decision to assert his independence from state patronage, breaking with the patriarchal forces that had directed his

early career, just as he broke, in the paintings themselves, with a stable, hierarchical worldview. From this time onwards Klimt was reliant for his continuing success on private portrait commissions of wealthy, cultivated women, most of whom were Jewish by descent. It was usually their husbands or fathers (including some of the wealthiest and most powerful businessmen and industrialists in the Hapsburg Empire) who commissioned the portraits, but it was the women who cultivated the relationship with Klimt; some of whom, like Szerena Lederer and Eugenia Primavesi, assembled extensive collections of his work. As Tobias G. Natter points out, “that Klimt’s women could have their portraits painted by one of the most expensive painters in Europe but were not allowed to vote is all too often overlooked today.”⁴⁹

Nevertheless, in the established Viennese tradition of the salon hostess, these women wielded considerable power in the social sphere. Not only the wealthy heiresses like Adele Bloch-Bauer—who were entitled to own the contents of their residences while their husbands owned the structures—but also less socially elevated women in Klimt’s circle, like Berta Zuckerkandl, played an influential role through their salons. When we delve a little deeper into the lives of “Klimt’s women,” we find that a striking number of them achieved remarkable professional success given the limited opportunities available to them at the time. Emilie Flöge and Berta Zuckerkandl (whom he never portrayed) are outstanding examples, but there are others: Rose von Rosthorn-Friedmann (whom Alma Mahler claims had an affair with Klimt⁵⁰) was a renowned woman mountaineer; Gertha Loew became the principal shareholder and chairwoman of her father’s sanatorium, where Klimt was taken after his fatal stroke in 1918; Marie Henneberg was a teacher before her marriage, and Hermine Gallia became a partner in the

Wiener Werkstätte when it was restructured in 1914, and a founder of the Austrian Werkbund. Adele Bloch-Bauer, meanwhile, supported various organizations advocating social reform and women’s suffrage.⁵¹ Several women who were portrayed by Klimt had ambitions as artists, which he apparently encouraged. Klimt gave Szerena Lederer drawing instruction for many years and actively encouraged her daughter Elisabeth Lederer to train as a sculptress at the School of Arts and Crafts, which led to a public career in the 1930s. Eugenia Primavesi had to give up her career as an actress when she married her banker husband, but she retained her stage name “Mäda” and her love of the theater. After 1914, when the Primavesi family took over the financing of the Wiener Werkstätte, Eugenia was a member of the supervisory board and sole owner after 1925, before both the Primavesi fortune and the Wiener Werkstätte crashed at the end of the decade.⁵²

The lives of these women, even briefly surveyed, give a fascinating insight into changing gender roles in the upper reaches of Viennese society. But how, if at all, is this reflected in Klimt’s portraits? In the “Kunstschau” exhibition of 1908 Klimt made something of a programmatic statement about his female portraits by presenting a core group—*Adele Bloch-Bauer, Fritza Riedler* and *Margaret Stonborough-Wittgenstein* [See page 188]—in a room that summarized his achievement to date. In these three portraits Klimt used ornamental decoration that he partly derived from royal portraiture—the stylized hairstyle of the Infanta portrayed by Velázquez is often cited as a source for the geometrical shapes behind Fritza Riedler’s and Margaret Stonborough-Wittgenstein’s heads,⁵³ while the shimmering gold leaf patterning in *Adele Bloch-Bauer I* [See page 129] was inspired by the Byzantine mosaic of Empress Theodora in Ravenna’s San

Vitale [Fig. 13].⁵⁴ By painting women from the haute bourgeoisie in a royal style, Klimt subtly flattered their social aspirations—and those of their husbands and fathers—literally ennobling them and, as the contemporary critic Josef Anton Lux notes, fulfilling their “great longing to rise above the ordinary, everyday world, like princesses and Madonnas, in a beauty that can never be ravaged and devastated by the clutching hands of life.”⁵⁵

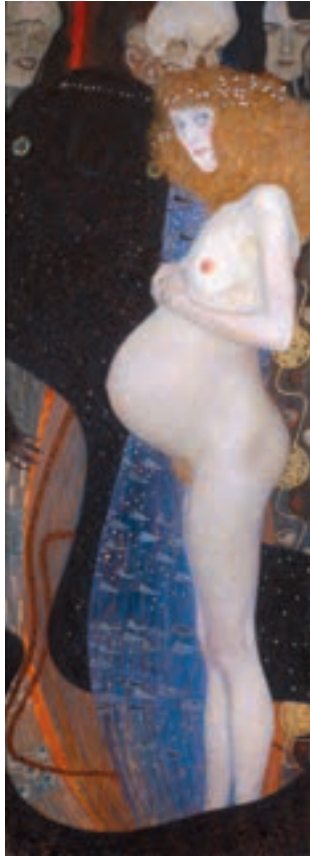
The geometric ornamentation that encases these women and reaches a climax in Adele Bloch-Bauer’s iridescent body armor can be interpreted as a restriction the artist imposes on his models, which directly contradicts the emancipatory ideals of fashion reform.⁵⁶ However, it may well be that the layers of reality and illusion in these examples of Klimt’s finest female portraits refer in a more general way to current discussions about the multiple layers of female identity and social ambition. In a way Klimt’s portraits acknowledge that the social expectations and conventions “encasing” women were at odds with their desire to break the mold and assert their individual identity. The coexistence of Klimt’s formal, hierarchical style for the clothes and surroundings with his highly naturalistic treatment of the faces and hands involves above all a play between surface and structure, between artifice and nature—categories that frequently recur in discussions about women’s role in the changing kaleidoscope of modern life. In her fascinating essay concerning the sources of Klimt’s decorative imagery in evolutionary biology, Emily Braun points out that there is a noticeable progression in Klimt’s depictions of women, from their association with the biological impulses of nature (for example, in his water nymph paintings) to an association with decorative symbols drawn from early cultures like Mesopotamia, Egypt, pre-classical Greece, and Byzantium—including the Egyptian “all-seeing eye” in Adele

Bloch-Bauer’s gown. “The ornamental accompaniment of the portraits,” Braun writes, “does more than adorn these women; it represents a larger history of ideas concerning the genealogy of decorative and symbolic form.”⁵⁷ Braun connects this development to Klimt’s fascination with theories of evolution, which he drew not from the social Darwinism that featured in contemporary anti-feminist literature, but rather from the enlightened discourse in Berta Zuckerkandl’s socially progressive salon, where he came across the leading medical minds of his day.⁵⁸ These references in Klimt’s symbolic ornamentation may also relate to feminist ideas about reforming modern civilization. As we have seen, Rosa Mayreder and others believed that women’s deep connection with nature provided a vital force capable of cultural regeneration. It is surely not by chance that Klimt associates symbols from the early cultures he most admired with the educated, progressive women he portrayed, thus acknowledging their vital role in regenerating the culture of their times—not least as supporters and defenders of his art.

The theme of biological and cultural regeneration runs through many of Klimt’s allegorical paintings of women, often set in opposition to the contrary forces of darkness and death. In *Hope I* [Fig.14] and *Hope II*, for example, Klimt breaks the taboo of depicting pregnant nudes, who are nevertheless haunted by spectral skulls that lurk in the surrounding space. Although Klimt is not typically presented as an artist interested in the social issues of his day, mother and child mortality ran high in turn-of-the-century Vienna, particularly among the disadvantaged lower classes (although class was not the only determining factor; Adele Bloch-Bauer, for example, lost two babies before 1905, and shortly before painting *Hope I* Klimt witnessed the death of his own son, Maria Zimmerman’s baby, Otto). Although Klimt’s allegorical style transposes



13. Copy of the mosaic of the Empress Theodora from the Basilica of San Vitale, Ravenna, mid-6th century. Execution: Gruppo Mosaicisti dell'Accademia di Belle Arti di Ravenna, 1951, glass, enamel, wood, metal. Ufficio Turismo e Attività Culturali. Comune di Ravenna



14. Gustav Klimt, *Hope I*, 1903–04, oil on canvas. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa

current social issues into a philosophical realm that symbolizes the universal cycle of life and death, there is nevertheless a play between contemporary and universal allusions that is a potent aspect of Klimt's modernity. Klimt's allegorical women, moreover, are frequently seductive; even a young woman in the full bloom of pregnancy like *Hope I* has a seductive allure. Whereas the anti-feminists associated women with traditional, saintly ideas of motherhood that were radically opposed to the threatening sexuality of the prostitute or femme fatale, Klimt combines elements of both stereotypes to achieve more complex, ambivalent representations. Even when he comes close to more typical fin-de-siècle images of the femme fatale, for example in his Judith paintings, Klimt significantly chooses a story associated with a biblical heroine who murders Holofernes to save her people from the Assyrians, rather than the misogynist story of Salome, who dances so seductively in front of her stepfather that he presents her with John the Baptist's head on a plate.⁵⁹

In two of Klimt's late allegorical paintings, *The Virgin* (1913) and *The Bride* (1917–18) [Fig. 15], the artist raised issues that were of central importance to the "women question." The double morality that required women to remain chaste while young men were encouraged to pursue amorous adventures indeed provoked passionate protest among the feminists. Anti-feminists, meanwhile, perceived women's sexuality as a threatening force; Weininger, we recall, condemned all women who enjoyed sex as prostitutes. Klimt was certainly under no obligation to take sides in this heated debate, but his treatment of the subject is nevertheless far removed from Weininger's invective. *The Virgin* in Klimt's painting is an innocent, dreaming girl surrounded by sensuous nudes who appear to embody her fantasies, thus acknowledging a fracture between women's

socially acceptable roles and her inner drives. In *The Bride*, Klimt introduces a male protagonist caught in a web of encircling nudes, while the innocent bride rests her head trustingly on his shoulder. On the right side of the painting, which remained unfinished at the time of Klimt's death, the bride is transformed into a sensual nude, spreading her legs so that her sex is half-visible through a decorative veil. Locating a hidden skull in this side of the painting, Marian Bisanz-Prakken interprets this composition as a meditation on the deadly consequences of venereal disease: the first sexual act "brings with it the risk of infection... to which the man has been exposed through his previously unbridled sexual life."⁶⁰ Be this as it may, Klimt once again comments on the multiple identities of women and the difference between social expectations and sexual drives. By so doing, he formulates an allegory that is wholly pertinent to his times and raises unresolved issues about the sexual predicament of both men and women.

Klimt is frequently accused of visualizing women merely as objects of male desire, particularly in the numerous erotic drawings of his studio models, who are shown dreamily pleasuring themselves, apparently unaware of the male artist observing them yet unconsciously playing out his fantasies before our eyes. These drawings of "autonomous" sexuality, which so ambivalently draw together the threads of male and female desire, provoked charges of obscenity when they were first exhibited in Vienna—not surprisingly in an age when female sexuality was perceived as a threat, masturbation was treated as an illness, and clitoridectomy was not unknown.⁶¹ Klimt did not endorse Rosa Mayreder's aspiration that women should "perceive and experience the self as an active, self-determining subject, not solely as the passive object of male desire."⁶² Nor was he a "feminist" in the sense

that he neither illustrated feminist books nor openly supported women's political emancipation. However, the fact that feminist sympathizers and progressive thinkers like Berta Zuckerkandl and Marie Lang so wholeheartedly approved of Klimt's art may well relate to his ability to visualize some of the dilemmas that beset women in the modern age. Moreover, his allegories embody a belief in the regenerative force of the female sex—an idea that was current in the feminist sphere, and quite foreign to anti-feminists like Weininger, who associated women with cultural degeneration and decline. Klimt brought his controversial representations of female sexuality into the public domain, and in his layered portraits of women he not only ennobled the female sex but also acknowledged a fracture between social expectations and individual identity—a fracture that would eventually widen into a chasm separating women in the nineteenth century from their twentieth-century heirs.



15. Gustav Klimt, *The Bride*, 1917–18 (unfinished), oil on canvas. Private Collection, on loan to the Belvedere, Vienna

¹ This essay is a revised version of "Feminists and Femme Fatales: Representing Women in Turn-of-the-Century Vienna," originally published in *Vienna 1900, Style and Identity* (Munich: Prestel Verlag in association with Neue Galerie New York, 2011), 121 ff.

² Alfred Weidinger, "Gustav Klimt—Machismo and Nervous Heroines: Thoughts on the Image of Women," edited by Agnes Husslein-Arco, Jane Kallir and Alfred Weidinger, *The Women of Klimt, Schiele, and Kokoschka* (Vienna: Belvedere, 2015), 213.

³ Chandak Sengoopta, *Otto Weininger, Sex, Science and Self in Imperial Vienna* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 5.

⁴ Luisa Viaja, "On the Women's Question in Vienna around 1900: Gender Asymmetries, Emancipation Efforts, and Uprisings," in *The Women of Klimt, Schiele and Kokoschka*, op. cit., footnote 2, 10.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁷ Lily Braun, *Die Frauenfrage: ihre geschichtliche Entwicklung und wirtschaftliche Seite* (Leipzig, 1901), 220, 153. Quoted in Ziaja, op. cit., footnote 4, 9.

⁸ Alison Rose, "The Jewish Salons of Vienna," in *Gender and Modernity in Central Europe: The Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and its Legacy*, edited by Agatha Schwartz (University of Ottawa Press, 2010), 123.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 121.

¹⁰ See Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT, 1991), and Daniel Harkett's review of *The Power of Conversation: Jewish Women and Their Salons*, The Jewish Museum New York, and the accompanying catalogue edited by Emily D. Bilski and Emily Braun (Yale University Press: New Haven, 2005), in *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide: A Journal of Nineteenth-Century Visual Culture*, e-journal published by AHNCA, vol. 4, issue 3, Autumn 2005.

¹¹ Rose, op. cit., footnote 8, 120.

¹² "schmutzige Amazone" and "politische Marktschreierin." See entry on Karoline von Perin