

Vienna, May 2012

Wien Museum Karlsplatz, Karlsplatz, 1040 Vienna

KLIMT
THE WIEN MUSEUM COLLECTION

Press conference: Tuesday, May 15, 2012, 10 a.m.
Opening: Tuesday, May 15, 2012, 6.30 p.m.
Exhibition venue: Wien Museum Karlsplatz, 1040 Vienna
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Press photos: www.wienmuseum.at/de/presse

The Klimt Collection of the Wien Museum impresses not only by its size, but its variety. It encompasses all his creative periods from his student days, his first major commissions in the 1880s right through to the year before his death in 1918. There are two absolute masterpieces amongst the paintings, 'Pallas Athene' and the portrait of Emilie Flöge, as well as a fascinating watercolour 'Interior view of the old Imperial and Royal Burgtheater', a commission from 1887/88 that brought the young aspiring painter public recognition. Most of all the collection comprises around 400 drawings, as well as rarities such as the scandalous poster, uncensored, of the first exhibition of the Secession, Klimt's cloak that he wore when painting, precious prints, vintage prints of portrait photographs, the painter's death mask as well as Egon Schiele's drawing of Klimt on his death bed.

Klimt's 150th anniversary offers an opportunity to see the City of Vienna's collection in its entirety for the first time, helping us to appreciate the sheer diversity of an artist at the threshold of the 19th to the 20th century. Especially the drawings – sketches for his major works as well as independent erotic sheets – allow a fascinating view from within of Klimt's development and working methods: a close-up of an artist.

The exhibition concept is radical considering the masses of material available: it is deliberately *not* a typical presentation of chosen masterpieces, but rather 'Klimt in his entirety' as owned by the Wien Museum. The design of the exhibition by BWM Architects successfully transforms the rigorous approach of the curators into an impressive overall picture, by the way pictures are hung in several rows. At the same time a subtle accentuation on key works creates a guiding thread for the visitor through Klimt's work.

By means of video interviews the exhibition raises provocative questions concerning today's approach to Klimt, be it uncritical worship or unrestrained selling-off or sentimentalising. How much 'Klimtisation' (Ludwig Hevesi) can Vienna bear in the long run? Where is the dividing line between the successful city branding 'Vienna around 1900' and a complete overdose of Klimt? Is every little pencil drawing a masterpiece? Also on view are merchandising products connected with Klimt acquired for the

collection in years gone by or posted by users from all over the world as part of the much noticed Facebook campaign 'Worst of Klimt'. In the Atrium of the Wien Museum the exhibition is extended by a show of posters from the Wienbibliothek of Klimt exhibitions in the 20th century, and Klimt imitations in advertising graphics in the 1970s and 80s. A collection catalogue is published by Hatje Cantz Verlag in German and English.

The history of the collection

The Klimt Collection of the Wien Museum developed from various acquisitions and donations from the past 120 years. As early as 1893 an original drawing was donated to the City Museum which was won as the lady's prize at a ball of the City of Vienna. The first important drawings 'Junius', 'Sculpture' and 'Tragedy (created for the model of 'Allegories. New Series 1895-1900') were bought in 1901. In 1907 the watercolour 'Auditorium in the old Burgtheater' followed.

In 1921 when Vienna became an independent state of Austria, the City Collections were given the portrait of Emlie Flöge from the collections of the Lower Austria State Museum. In 1928 the posters for the Secession exhibitions were acquired followed by further drawings. Franziska Klimt, widow of Gustav's brother Georg donated a total of 273 drawings to the Museum in 1944, turning the collection with one fell swoop into the biggest in the world.

Under the directorship of Franz Glück further works were acquired in the 1950s and 60s, for example 33 drawings from a private collection in 1951. The famous painting 'Pallas Athene' was bought from an art dealer in 1954. In 1965 the portrait of Marie Moll, a signed chalk drawing, was acquired from a private Canadian owner – the last new Klimt acquisition for a long time. Only in the 1980s did two further sheets – work studies for the university faculty paintings 'Jurisprudence' and 'Medicine' – become part of the Wien Museum Collection. The three paintings 'Portrait of Emilie Flöge', 'Pallas Athene', and 'Love' can be seen all year round in the permanent collection. The paper works cannot be exhibited all the time for reasons of conservation. The last Klimt exhibition took place in 1984 and since the 1980s many Klimt objects from the Wien Museum could be seen in various exhibitions all over the world as part of 'Vienna around 1900'.

Tour through the exhibition

The exhibition starts with **nude drawings and studies of children**, created by Gustav Klimt during his time at the Wiener **Kunstgewerbeschule** (1876 – 1881) where he studied to become an arts teacher. During this time he was also commissioned to paint portraits from photographs, by means of which the young artist contributed to the family income. The first larger group of objects was acquired by the Wien Museum in 1901 from publishers Gerlach & Schenk. This publishing house had brought out a model collection for late-historicist arts and crafts, illustration and advertising in which well known artists presented their idea of modern allegories, including Klimt. From 1895 to 1900 followed 'Allegories. New Series' which comprise some of Klimt's most famous drawings, 'Junius', 'Sculpture', and 'Tragedy'.

Section 3 collects works from 1883-1898, when Klimt was able to execute some lucrative commissions with his brother Ernst and fellow-student Franz Matsch under the name of '**Künstler-Compagnie**', like for example the painting of the staircase in the Kunsthistorisches Museum and in

the Burgtheater – a number of study sheets of this are contained in the Wien Museum Collection. The section gathers the works around the large-format watercolour '**Interior view of the old Imperial and Royal Burgtheater**'. In 1887 Klimt and Franz Matsch were commissioned by the City of Vienna to capture the auditorium of the old Court Burgtheater on Michaelerplatz before its demolition. Klimt's work shows the view of the auditorium from the stage, with over 100 celebrities from art, politics and science, as well as the nobility and bourgeoisie. Along with the official 'picture puzzle' of Viennese society, the Wien Museum Collection contains 25 drawings as well as a sketch book.

Chapter 5 is devoted to Klimt's Works for the Secession, whether designs for the Secession building, the scandalous poster for the first exhibition, the oil painting 'Pallas Athene' (*the programmatic image of the Secession par excellence*) as well as sketches for the Beethoven Frieze. A central role in Klimt's career is occupied by his **allegorical depictions of the faculties** of Philosophy, Medicine and Jurisprudence, which he completed from 1894/95 to 1903 as commissioned works for the Ceremonial Hall of the new University, and which was ultimately turned down by this institution. Klimt's interpretation caused a storm of controversy: the heavily symbolist picture for *Philosophy* gathers a stream of humans hovering in space, a sphinx and a woman's head. *Medicine* showed not only the goddess of health, Hygeia, but also naked women, men, children and old people as a personification of pain, death and transience. The central motif of Jurisprudence was an old man in the clutches of a polyp-like monster. The Wien Museum owns 57 studies of these uncompromising pictures.

Chapter 7 brings together **figure studies**, which reflect Klimt's steady search for the perfect form, but also his continuous treatment of certain sets of themes. Section 8 concentrates on **portraits**. Klimt's early work is epitomised, for example, by the naturalistic 'Portrait of an Unknown Lady'; in the groundbreaking portrait of Emilie Flöge (1902), Gustav Klimt wraps a woman's body in an ornamental surface for the first time, rather than in a real item of clothing. Furthermore, diverse sketches for other famous portraits of women are on display (Sonja Knips, Paula and Amalie Zuckerkandl, Adele Bloch-Bauer, Mäda and Eugenia Primavesi among others), as well as serial sketches for anonymous portraits which can be categorised as finger exercises or snapshots.

Around a quarter of Gustav Klimt's drawings from the Museum Collection are nude studies or erotic depictions from all periods of creation, which are largely identifiable as studies for the well-known paintings (Death and Life, Water Snakes I & II, Leda etc.). Themes here include growth and decay, as well as same-sex love between women. **Bodies embracing**, and **lovers** are motifs which Gustav Klimt varied in his painting over many years. The most well-known interpretation is depicted by his most famous painting *The Kiss* (1907/08), for which design sketches are to be found in the Wien Museum Collection, as for the Stoclet Frieze, which varied the theme.

For the Wien Museum, it is not only Klimt's importance for art history that matters, also his significance for the city's cultural history: as a central figure of 'Vienna around 1900', he has long since mutated into a 'city saint'. To document this aspect, Klimt memorabilia and souvenirs have been acquired for the Museum Collection, which are shown in a separate small area. Moreover, screens show over 100 suggestions for the 'Worst of Klimt' examples that have been tracked down by Facebook users since February 2012. A Wien Museum jury has selected a 'Worst of the Worst': a decorative egg with 'Kiss' figures, which rotate to the melody of 'Can't Help Falling in Love' – purchased in a shop on Kärntnerstraße.

The **catalogue to the exhibition**, edited by curator Ursula Storch, gathers contributions from Marian Bisanz-Prakken, Brigitte Borchhardt-Birbaumer, Georg Gaugusch, William M. Johnston, Sophie Lillie, Ursula Storch and Kerstin Krenn. The accompanying programme offers, among other things, two controversial Klimt topics (Klimt overkill and Klimt's image of women), talks, and a city tour in the footsteps of the artist.

Exhibition sponsors

Sponsors of the exhibition 'Klimt. The Wien Museum Collection' are Wiener Städtische Versicherung AG Vienna Insurance Group as well as Münze Österreich, which has issued a special coin series to mark the 150th birthday of Gustav Klimt, available in the Wien Museum Shop.

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- Admission:** Adults: 8 €. Reduced Rates 6 € (pensioners, Wien-Card holders, Ö1-Club members, the disabled, students up to 27, apprentices, military and civilian service conscripts, groups of more than 10 people) School children and young adults under 19 - admission free! Every first Sunday of the month - admission free!
- General guided tours:** Sundays and public holidays, 11 a.m. and 4 p.m.
Prior booking for groups: Tel.: (+43 1) 505 87 47- 85180;
Email: service@wienmuseum.at
- Visitor information:** Tel (+43 1) 505 87 47-0, www.wienmuseum.at;
e-mail: service@wienmuseum.at
- Curatorial team:** Ursula Storch with Kerstin Krenn
- Exhibition production:** Isabelle Exinger
- Exhibition architecture:** BWM Architekten
- Graphics:** Perndl+Co
- Catalogue:** Klimt. Die Sammlung des Wien Museums. Verlag Hatje Cantz, 2012; c. 300 pages.
- Main sponsor Wien Museum:** Wiener Stadtwerke
- Exhibition sponsors:** Wiener Städtische Versicherung AG Vienna Insurance Group; Münze Österreich
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