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At the End of an Ancient Monarchy, Birth of a New Culture

Koloman Moser. Commemorative Postage Stamp for Emperor Franz Josef’s Jubilee. 1908. Österreichisches Museum für angewandte Kunst, Vienna

Rising from a flood plain near the river Danube, the walls of the city of Vienna long stood as the last remnants of Western Europe, facing east toward the Orient. At these walls the Turkish invasion finally foun-dered in 1683—a victory that established the ruling Hapsburg monarchy as the defender of Christianity, and initiated a grand epoch of Catholic Baroque culture in Central Europe. Under Maria Theresa (ruled 1740-80) and her son Joseph II (1761-90), the governmental structure of the Austrian empire was established: a strong Catholic monarchy joined to an all-pervasive and efficient administrative bureaucracy. But already, in the resistance of Hungarians and Slovaks to Joseph’s efforts to impose German as the language of the empire, the intractable problems of this vast, complex realm were evident. First the victories of Napoleon, then the combination of the power of Prince Metternich and the weakness of the Hapsburg heirs, shaped Austrian life in the first half of the nineteenth century—a period of neoclassical style and utopian ideals known as the “Biedermeier” epoch, which would later be seen as a privileged moment of pre-industrial calm. That era closed with the revolutions of 1848, which wound up ushering onto the stage two new forces, in problem-Art and imperial tradition and those of change, as Vienna’s critical intellects

Cultural Background

- ‘Young Vienna’ and Modern Literature
- Vienna’s Critical Intelects
- Supporters and Opponents of the New Art
- The Aesthetics of Nationalism
- Dreams and Sexuality
- Music and the Visual Arts
- The Ringstrasse

In the Exhibition

- The Secession
- Klimt’s ‘Golden’ Style
- The Wiener Werkstaette and Geometric Style
- Kunstschau and the Kabarett Fledermaus
- Drawing
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The Ringstrasse Era

In 1860, the principle of a constitutional monarchy was established, allowing representative government and the newly prosperous middle classes—a share of power. The emperor’s authority was further compro-mised following Austria’s defeat by Prussia at Königgrätz in 1866. A dual Austro-Hungarian empire was established, with semi-independent legislatures at Vienna and Budapest overseeing the eleven national groups of the realm, scattered among the many territories that stretched from the Veneto to Russia. Over the follow-ing decades the prerogatives of the Austrian throne would be circum-scribed on the west by Bismarck’s new German Empire, on the east by Bud-pest’s desires for autonomous rule over its minority lands, and from within by the energetic rise of a new liberal politics.

Nowhere was the new secular, bur-glar ascendency more evident than in the capital, Vienna, which began to expand dramatically with the increasing influx of immigrants from the provinces; and nothing so clearly sym-bolizes the shifting interplay in the new Austria, between the forces of tradition and those of change, as Vienn-a’s major boulevard, the Ringstrasse. The architecture of this broad new thoroughfare, girding the metrop-olous along the site of the old city walls, yoked a pragmatic and even ruthless drive for modernization to the affectations of imitative historical style. (For more on the Ringstrasse, see p. 14.)

The new-money spirit of the Ring, progressive and expansive but also often apparently crass and uncrea-tive, seemed the essence of the epoch—a period dominated by forces of liberal politics that began to lose their clout only in the 1880s.

The dominant artist of the epoch—a “prince” of taste who even gov-erned ladies’ fashion—was Hans Makart, a painter of flashy allegories and Rubensian historical tableaux. Makart’s grandest moment, and a supreme instance of life as theater in Vienna, came in his scenic choreo-graphy of the vast, costumed parades honoring the twenty-fifth an-niversary of Franz Josef’s marriage to the Empress Elisabeth, in 1879. The continuity of the Hapsburg dynasty, and the viability of the constitutional monarchy, were meanwhile both brought into doubt. Franz Josef’s
In the 1890s, as the arts of Vienna embraced the German version of Art Nouveau known as Jugendstil ("youth-style"), after the Munich magazine Jugend, its writers were equally concerned to find the voice of youth. The leading Viennese poets and writers of the new movement were, like the painter Gustav Klimt, men in their thirties, with the exception of the precocious adolescent Hugo von Hofmannsthal. The group was known collectively as Jung Wien (Young Vienna).

These writers were fond of using an "impressionism" that had little to do with the naturalist visions of sunlit landscapes we might associate with this term. Their "impressionism" entailed a devotion to the ephemeral feelings of the moment, a reaction against naturalism in favor of a self-consciously "decadent," inward-turning cultivation of neurotastic sensibility. Their inspirations — consonant with the air of exotic refinement and musky sensuality we find in some Secessionist art — stemmed more from the world of Bazil delaire than from that of Monet.

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Like the artists' clubs that were the breeding ground of the Secession's revolt, the writers' group found its home in the Viennese cafes. Their heated debates gave to their favorite spot, the Cafe Grienzteidl, the nickname "Cafe Megalomania." When the place was torn down in the urban revolu- tions of the later 1890s, the critic Karl Kraus wrote a whole movement, in his essay "The Demolished Literature." Favorite cafe reading was the feuilleton, a brief essay of impressions and opinion, frequently by one of the city's leading writers, that was an essential part of the daily newspaper. It was this kind of light essay that Kraus railed against as the bane of modern writing, a product of indulgent subjectivity and imprecise language all too symp- pathetic.

Arthur Schnitzler's plays and novels were the psychological makeovers of turn-of-the-century Viennese bourgeois society. Freud, who used Schnitzler's brilliantly characterized protagonists as examples of types of psychological behavior, told him: "You know through intuition — rather through detailed self-observation — everything that I have discovered by laborious work on other people." Such insight was, however, not pure intuition, since Schnitzler had himself studied medicine and had shown particular interest in psychology. As a playwright Schnitzler was an innovator in dramatic form, building his plays from kaleidoscopic sequences of images. And in his novella Leuanten Gert (1901), known in English as None But the Brave), Schnitzler experimented with the literary form known as the interior monologue — the first to do so in the Ger- man language.

Schnitzler was a master at revealing the Viennese proclivity for social role-playing and for self-deception. He saw in them the roots of the failure of human communication, a failure as disastrous for the individual as for so- ciety at large. Schnitzler shared Freud's fascination with the power of instinc- tual drives. In his plays he treated erotic encounters as archetypal experiences, convinced that sexual love alone was strong enough to break down social hierar- chies. His most famous play, Reigen (Merry-Go-Round), written 1897, pri- vately published 1900, is built on ten dialogues between lovers of unequal status whose chain of affairs involves many levels of society. In his later life and work he would return to the more traditional morality of his up- bringings.

Unlike many other Jews of the Viennese intelligensia, Schnitzler never abandoned his Jewish faith. In his highly autobiographical novel Der Weg im Prie (The Road to the Open) and in the play Professor Bern- hardt (1912), he dealt with the dilem- mas of being Jewish in contemporary Austria.
The Secession

At the end of the nineteenth century, art exhibitions in Vienna were controlled by the Kuenstlerhaus, a private, conservative exhibiting society that exercised considerable influence on public taste and government policy. In May 1897, a group of nineteen artists, who had previously been trying to work for change from within, broke away from the Kuenstlerhaus and formed a new organization, called the Secession, with Gustav Klimt as president (and the aged watercolorist Rudolf von Alt as honorary president). Among the other young defectors were the architects Josef Hoffmann and Joseph Maria Olbrich, the designer Koloman Moser. The Secessionists’ goals were twofold: to show the most advanced work of Austrian and foreign artists in regular exhibitions; and to achieve unity among the arts, to realize the ideal of the Gesamtkunstwerk, or total work of art, through collaborative efforts.

Emblazoned on the facade of the Secession’s new exhibition hall, designed by Olbrich, were the words “Der Zeit ihre Kunst, der Kunst ihre Freiheit” (“To the Age, Its Art, to Art, Its Freedom”). The open interior space with movable partitions was an important innovation of Olbrich’s plan. The windowless solemnity of the facade, however, evoked, as he intended, a “temple of art.”

Ver Sacrum

The regenerative purpose of the Secession was expressed in the title of its official publication, Ver Sacrum (“Sacred Spring”). The name refers to a Roman ritual of consecration, in which the elders, in times of national danger, pledged their children to the divine mission of saving society. In Vienna, it was the young generation themselves who pledged to save culture from what they saw as the philistinism of their elders. Ver Sacrum appeared once a month from 1898 to 1900 and thereafter bimonthly until 1903. On its lavishly illustrated pages there were discussions of art, samples of music, and literary contributions by Rilke, Hoffmannsthal, and Maeterlinck; emphasis was placed on the harmonious integration of picture and text. Gustav Klimt, Josef Hoffmann, Joseph Maria Olbrich, Koloman Moser, the designer Alfred Roller—all collaborated to embellish the magazine. The vignettes and page decorations drew on stylized neo-Greek motifs, on Jugendstil, with its emphasis on curvilinear natural forms, and on the abstract rhythms of Japanese design. Ver Sacrum exemplifies the high importance the Viennese avant-garde placed upon decorative design—not only in posters and books, but in all the applied arts.

Koloman Moser

At first an illustrator and later a painter, Koloman Moser was perhaps the most original graphic designer of the Vienna Secession. Besides his extensive work for Ver Sacrum, he also created around 1900 an extraordinary series of fabric and wallpaper designs, in which the repetitive patterns announce a newly rigid ordering of the viscous curvilinearity of Jugendstil. The effects of figure-ground reversal in these patterns anticipate by decades the popularization of similar perceptual conundrums by M.C. Escher.

Klimt’s Allegorical Paintings

The ideal of the Gesamtkunstwerk was realized on the grandest scale at the fourteenth Secession exhibition, in 1902, organized around the monumental statue of Beethoven by the German sculptor Max Klinger. Josef Hoffmann transformed the exhibition space into a temple-like setting, and Klimt painted a great allegorical frieze, inspired by Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony, on the upper walls. Preparatory drawings for the mural are on view in this exhibition.

Klimt’s greatest challenge as a painter of large-scale allegorical subjects was his commission for three works for the ceiling of the Great Hall of the University of Vienna: Philosophy, Medicine, and Jurisprudence. Klimt was well qualified for the task; earlier, as an architectural decorator, he had painted the ceilings of Ringstrasse buildings in a conservative style that satisfied the taste of his institutional clients. By the time he undertook the university paintings, Klimt was no longer the dutiful decorator but a progressive artist commenting darkly on the human condition. The complicated canvases for the ceiling, exhibited one by one at Secession shows from 1900 to 1905, aroused violent controversy, more a measure of Vienna’s artistic conservatism than of Klimt’s daring. His vision of untempered nudity and psychic anxiety, mingling morbidity with eroticism, touched a raw nerve.

Klimt abandoned his fight to have the panels accepted, and in 1905 bought back the commission. These events marked a split between the Viennese avant-garde and official patronage, and a defeat for the young generation’s ideals of a grand new public art.

The three huge paintings were destroyed in a fire at the close of World War II. Preparatory studies for two of them are included in the exhibition.

Pallas Athene

It was in the smaller paintings of the late 1890s that Klimt began to develop his rich ornamental style and combine images from many different sources. In Pallas Athene (1898) Klimt drew upon ancient, exotic, and sacred material to find a new means for expressing the uncertainties and anxieties inherent in modern life. Like Freud, whose discoveries were linked to a passion for archaic culture and archaeological excavation, Klimt employed symbols from antiquity to reveal instincual, and most especially erotic, forces—as Hugo von Hofmannsthal also did in Elektra (1900). The virgin goddess Athene, protector of the people (and
Throughout Europe in the later nineteenth century, there was a widespread revaluation against the limitations of a worldview based on materialist and positivist values—a worldview that seemed associated not only with the success of a certain kind of industrial machinery, but also with the domination of industrial capitalism. In several key instances, science itself seemed to raise the challenge. Discoveries such as Roentgen’s identification of X-ray in 1895, for example, suggested that faith in the solidity of the material world was a treacherous illusion. Diverse and contradictory thinkers seemed to offer a challenge. Discoveries such as Roentgen’s based on materialist, positivist values encouraged his own approach to philosophy, which he called a “rational” confidence, sought to construct more rigorous systems of differentiation between fact and illusion, and to draw more stringent limits for dependable structures of meaning—sometimes to the point of declaring abstinence from speech superior to a corrupt and fallible communication. In this school of thought, as in so much of Viennese art, we are reminded of Vienna’s special place on the frontier between West and East. Here the Enlightenment traditions of systematic critique and logical analysis seem to meet an almost Oriental will to transcend the mundane. An urge to asceticism was the other, complementary side of the mental reality of a society—the front that could be engaged by Western philosophers. The system of values that called for art, too, to abandon prosaic naturalism. In Vienna, thinkers such as Alois Riegl—who rejected the imitation of nature as a criterion for ranking art, and valued minor ornament as highly as grand representations in estimating the mentality of a society—were at the forefront of this change in values. The particular Viennese contribution was a sharp skepticism about the truths transmitted by language. The most powerful Viennese thinkers, rather than retreat into hermetic or poetic language, sought to draw a line between rational and personal values, concepts such as truth and knowledge were subjective and could have no validity as absolutes.

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Vienna’s Critical Intelects

LUDWIG WITTGENSTEIN
1889–1951

Wittgenstein, widely regarded as one of the foremost philosophers of his time, also excelled in the fields of music, architecture, and engineering. Educated by private tutors, he grew up in the refined climate of Vienna’s cultural elite. His father, Karl Wittgenstein, was one of the wealthiest industrialists of the empire and one of the earliest and most faithful patrons of the Secession. His sister, Margarete, married the young Ludwig to the works of the philosophers that most influenced his intellectual development: Schopenhauer, Kant, and Kierkegaard. Wittgenstein then studied at Cambridge under Gottlob Frege and Bertrand Russell, whose investigations into the mathematical basis of logic encouraged his own approach to philosophical problems through the logical analysis of language.

Wittgenstein’s first book, Tractatus logico-philosophicus, was written during World War I (in which Wittgenstein served as a volunteer) and published in 1921. The treatise deals with the nature and limits of language as it relates to reality. With his so-called “picture theory,” Wittgenstein argued that, while facts can indeed be communicated by “deliberately constructed verbal representations,” the most crucial meaning of the world—its ethical value—cannot be articulated through language. This dichotomy between content and form has paralleled the critical distinction between the factual and poetic uses of language, p. 4. Karl Kraus’s journal Die Fackel and liked to write in Krausian aphorisms. The Tractatus concludes: “Hereof one cannot speak thereof one must be silent.”

FRITZ MAUTHNER
1894–1929

Around the turn of the century, a disillusionment with language and its expressive limits affected a broad range of Viennese writers, including Robert Musil, Arthur Schnitzler, and Hugo von Hofmannsthal. Fritz Mauthner, however, was the first to shape the systematic investigation of language into a philosophy. Influenced, like Ernst Mach, by the empiricism of the British skeptics Francis Bacon and David Hume, Mauthner shared Mach’s aversion to metaphysical beliefs. He felt that, in a world of changing values, concepts such as truth and knowledge were subjective and could have no validity as absolutes. Mauthner recognized that language, based on cultural conventions, was an adequate tool for day-to-day communication, and as such indispensable for survival. But he found it unsuited to the definition of either thought or sensory impressions in all their authenticity. In his Contributions to a Critique of Language (1901–03), Mauthner concluded that silence was the only solution; he termed this the “sacred language.” (A parallel may be seen in Hugo von Hofmannsthal’s, whose similar despair over language culminated in an artistic crisis, which led to his renunciation of the lyrical forms; see p. 2.) As a novelist, satirist, and as the art critic for the Berliner Tageblatt, Mauthner’s weapons were irony and satire, in his mind the most effective tools of language. He employed them to debunk what he called “word superstition”—the use of preconceived metaphysical concepts, such as “race” and “Völkisch” and to denounce the danger of such vague, yet potent ideas as vehicles for dogmatism and intolerance.

ERNST MACH
1838–1916

Mach was a doctor of mathematics, Mach taught widely in the sciences (first in Graz, then Prague, and finally Vienna), and his approach to philosophy was above all that of a physicist. Influenced by the philosophy of science of his time, Mach mistrusted hypothetical and rigorously opposed metaphysics. He believed that knowledge came from contact with the objective world. This led him to the conclusion that the world was not made up of irreducible elements, but of forces special to each age.

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ALOIS RIEGL
1858–1905

Alois Riegl and his contemporary Franz Wickhoff are considered the founders of the Vienna School of art history. Through his writings, and in particular his books Problems of Style (1895) and Late Roman Art Manufacture, based on Finds in Austria-Hungary (1901), Riegl opened up the field of art history to new areas of investigation and to a new interdisciplinary approach. At a time when scholarship in art was based almost exclusively on considerations of style, and when the classical was the only accepted canon of beauty, Riegl did away with the supremacy of Greco-Roman art. For Riegl each manifestation of art was to be judged, not according to some canon of perfection, but on its own merits and in the context of “the leading intellectual tendencies of its time.” He revived interest in hitherto neglected areas of artistic creativity, such as the pre-classical art of Greece, late Roman painting, Baroque art, and early nineteenth-century Biedermeier design— all of which had previously been confined to theRole of Decoration and the Commonplace in Decorative Art

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Together with the artists of the Secession, Riegl was instrumental in breaking down the distinctions between “high” and “low” art. His pioneering work in the history of ornament was consonant with the promotion of ornamentation in Jugendstil design and architecture—and with the abstract patterns of ornament in some of Klimt’s paintings, which virtually took over the visual field, and help break down naturalism. For Riegl the need for decoration was “one of the most elementary needs of man.” He proposed the earlier German theoretician and architect Gottfried Semper’s influential premise that the form of a work of art is determined by the demands of its material, and refrained the notion that the imitation of nature was the motivating force behind the creative process. Riegl argued instead that developments of style grew out of an inherent energy within the forms themselves, evoked by what he identiﬁed as the “fact that form is a means of expression” or, literally, “a will to art” —which he saw as the product of power, if not often wholly conscious, cultural forces special to each age.
Klimt’s ‘Golden’ Style

Gustav Klimt’s father was a goldsmith, and the tradition of artisanship in precious metals remained strong in his family. Some of his early works (such as Pallas Athene; see p. 3) featured not only golden elements in the images, but also prominent hammered-metal frames. But it was apparently only after his experience of the sixth-century Byzantine mosaics in Ravenna, on trips in 1903 and 1904, that Klimt began to see the grander expressive possibilities he explored in his “golden” works of about 1907-10.

The hard, glittering surface of these worksassertively rejects the atmospheric ambiguities of fin-de-siècle Symbolist art. But the rich patterning creates new kinds of confusion for the eye, and the mood of the “golden” pictures involves a complex alchemy. Drawing on a tradition that included everything from Mycenaean metalwork to Renaissance altarpieces and Japanese screen paintings, Klimt evoked a particularly worldly kind of otherworldliness, an alloy of barbarism and decadence in which lust for materials, high spiritualism, and chic elegance were all commingled.

In Salome (Judith II) of 1909, Klimt used metallic accents to give concrete immediacy to legendary exoticism — complementing the seductively exposed flesh of the fatal woman, and lending a perverse glamour to the gory motif, with its severed head at lower right. (Judith, like Salome, is the protagonist in a biblical story of decapitation; she beheaded the Babylonian general Holofernes, while Salome requested from Herod the head of John the Baptist.)

However hard-edged, this bejeweled style was attached to the feminine spirit in Klimt’s work, and some of its most stunning manifestations lie not in the domain of fantasy, but in the exceptional portraits he made of elegant Viennese ladies. The supreme example is his portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer of 1907. Here Klimt combines a subtle psychological characterization, in the oddly ill-at-ease twining of the hands and the specifically unglamorous slackness of the physiognomy, with a bristling opulence. Never was more brilliant form given to the Viennese dream of an Eastern splendor that surpassed the rational. In the shadowless golden light that emanates from the picture, the floating variety of forms — checks, spirals, eye-forms, chevrons, meanders, and lozenges — look backward to the primal authority of prehistoric glyphs and forward to the delicate fantasy world of Paul Klee.

Klimt’s interest in Eastern art, his attempt to meld artisanal decoration with high art, and his desire to find a modern style that fused sensual and spiritual appeals, all suggest parallels with other artists, such as Matisse, in the same period. But Klimt’s special feel for eye-befuddling brilliance and patterned complexity rejected the search for synthetic simplicity found elsewhere in early modern art; and his acute sense of sophisticated sexual energies, both languorous and tautly strong, could not be satisfied by the earthier physical affirmations of vi
talist thought, so influential in his day. The world of dream, and of ambiguity, was his preferred domain, even — or especially — in the gleaming surfaces of these elaborately materialist works.

Thus in the most celebrated of all Klimt’s works, The Kiss of 1907-08, the lovers float above the world in an enclosing nimbus of light, and the melding of opposites is conjured in the coming together of the darker rectangles of the man’s robe with the clustered ovals of the woman’s—a primordial language for basic principles of constructive reason and biological fertility, suspended within the overall patterned energies. A sweetened, on
eiric intensity that might be called psychedelic permeates this lyrical vision, in which elements of high naturalism and abstract ornament, flowing softness and metallic gleam, seeking coiled energy and floating weightlessness, come together to sug
gest the transports of love as fusion and dissolution.

Gustav Klimt. Adele Bloch-Bauer I. 1907. Oil and gold on canvas, 54¼ x 54¼” (135 x 135 cm). Osterreichische Galerie, Vienna

Gustav Klimt. The Kiss. 1907-08. Oil and gold on canvas, 70½ x 70½” (180 x 180 cm). Oesterreichische Galerie, Vienna

Gustav Klimt. Salome (Judith II). 1909. Oil on canvas, 69¾ x 17¾” (175.9 x 45.5 cm). Galleria d’Arte Moderna Ca’ Pesaro, Venice

Gustav Klimt. Adele Bloch-Bauer I. 1907. Oil and gold on canvas, 54¼ x 54¼” (135 x 135 cm). Osterreichische Galerie, Vienna
E specially in the early years of the Secession, the forces of innovation in Viennese culture found remarkably little resistance. The prime land accorded the rebel group, not been traditionally known as an easy environment for genius, as the sufferings of musicians from Beethoven to Mahler attest. Yet only with a conservative turn in governmental policy, after about 1903, did a sense of exclusion or truncated opportunity begin to mark the outlook of the major Viennese artists.

The new art of the turn of the century seems to have found its most crucial support among the sons and daughters of the businessmen and industrialists of the Ringstrasse era. Their inherited money was used to buy the latest art that marked the first decades of industrial wealth. Many of these new fortunes belonged to Jewish families, who found in patronage of the visual arts an avenue of assimilation into a Viennese culture traditionally closed to them on other fronts. The young rich redirected their energies from the public sphere to the cultivation of private sensibility. This shift is perhaps best seen in the patronage of the architects Otto Wagner — who most frequently found commissions in public-works projects and built primarily in the city — and Josef Hoffmann, who worked exclusively on private commissions, often for grand villas outside the urban center.

The Austrian capital has not been known as an easy environment for genius, banishing the taste of historicist vulgarity that marked the first decades of industrial wealth. Many of these new fortunes belonged to Jewish families, who found in patronage of the visual arts an avenue of assimilation into a Viennese culture traditionally closed to them on other fronts. The young rich redirected their energies from the public sphere to the cultivation of private sensibility. This shift is perhaps best seen in the patronage of the architects Otto Wagner — who most frequently found commissions in public-works projects and built primarily in the city — and Josef Hoffmann, who worked exclusively on private commissions, often for grand villas outside the urban center. The young rich redirected their energies from the public sphere to the cultivation of private sensibility. This shift is perhaps best seen in the patronage of the architects Otto Wagner — who most frequently found commissions in public-works projects and built primarily in the city — and Josef Hoffmann, who worked exclusively on private commissions, often for grand villas outside the urban center.

Karl Kraus
1874–1936

Writer, poet, journalist, would-be actor, and polemicist, Karl Kraus was a mordant adversary of Gustav Klimt and the Secession, the artists of the Wiener Werkstaette, and the writer of Jung-Wien. His 1896 polemical essay "Die Demolierte Literatur" ("The Demolished Literature") denounced as Kaffeehaus-Dekadenz Modernism their tendency to disguise reality behind the aestheticizing screen of art. That made him an ally of the architect Adolf Loos, who — a staunch moralist like Kraus — had rejected the false historical styles of the Ringstrasse. Both ridiculed what they saw as the tyranny of taste. Although Kraus was at odds with many of the first generation of the early-20th-century Viennese artists, he maintained a strong following among such younger artists as Oskar Kokoschka and Arnold Schoenberg. His journal Die Fackel (The Torch), which he founded in 1899, and wrote single-handedly from 1911 until his death in 1936, became Kraus's pulpit from which he relentlessly denounced the hypocrisy of Viennese society. Police and military corruption, the superficiality of the operettas of Franz Lehár, Herzl's Zionism, Freud's psychoanalysis, and the polite aestheticism of Hugo von Hofmannsthal, as well as just about everything by and about Hermann Bahr, were the repeated targets of Kraus's scathing wit. He brought the same passion to his defense of the underdogs of society as to the praise of the neglected works of his favorite authors, standing up as strongly for prostitutes and homosexuals as for Offenbach's operettas, the writing of the earlier Austrian satirist Johann Nestroy, and the late works of Goethe.

Kraus's most virulent attacks were aimed at the press, in particular the Moderne, the modern movement of opinion, see p. 2). He argued that their dishonest and narcisistic mulling of fact and personal opinion would lead inexorably to the distortion of truth and unification of creative fantasy. Kraus saw himself as the defender of integrity. In his name he fought for a strict separation between imaginative prose and factual reporting.

Kraus did not share his generation's skepticism concerning the power of words to convey personal meaning. On 10 July 1888 in Vienna, Kraus strongly believed that the correspondence between language and ethical thought. He saw in the abuse of language a clear indication of person ality, as well as societal depravity — a moral sickness which he thought had led to the disasters of World War I. This at least was the basic thrust of Die letzten Tage der Menschheit (The Last Days of Mankind) of 1919–25, his epic, collage-form satire on World War I, in which he indicted the enormous alliance of ink, death, and technology ("Tinte, Tod, und Technik"). Although Jewish by birth, Kraus, like Otto Weininger, whom he admired, converted to Christianity and adopted a sharply critical attitude toward everything Jewish. Some saw therein the reason for his unrelenting opposition to the so-called "Jew of the Secession and its patrons and supporters."

Kraus remained publicly silent about Hitler's rise to power. However, in his final work, Die dritte Walpurgnacht (The Third Walpurgnight), completed before his death in 1936 but not published until 1952, he saw the "new generation of the 1930's," which he treated elliptically — by reference to Goethe's Faust, and through an analysis of language and speech in political propaganda.

Hermann Bahr
1863–1934

Hermann Bahr, the apostle of the modern movement in Vienna, was the author of forty plays, ten novels, and several dozen volumes of prose, and the most knowledgeable Goethe commentator of his time. Yet Bahr is mainly remembered today as a critic of the contemporary culture of Austria, an early champion of the Secession, the forces of innovation in Vienna. Bahr was an important mediator between the artists and their publics, and between the Viennese and the international art scene. He was enthusiastic for everything new. For the modern movement he meant being two steps ahead of his time and being "at every time a revolutionary" — an ambition that won him the nickname "der Mann von morgen" ("the Man from the Day After Tomorrow"). However, his constant changes of allegiance led also to the criticism that he lacked character. As a young student in Vienna, Bahr rebelled against the liberal beliefs of his family by his Pan-Germanic, anti-Semitic, and pro-Bolshevik in the July Movement of 1896. While studying economics in Berlin, he turned to socialism, in which he came to be an important mediator between the artists and their publics, and between the Viennese and the international art scene. He was enthusiastic for everything new. For the modern movement he meant being two steps ahead of his time and being "at every time a revolutionary."
The Wiener Werkstaette and Geometric Style

In 1903, Josef Hoffmann and Koloman Moser founded the collaborative design enterprise the Wiener Werkstaette (Viennese Workshop). Uniting the best craftsmen under optimum working conditions, the aims of the Werkstaette were clearly expressed by Hoffmann in an article written in 1904: "We want to establish an intimate connection between public, designer and craftsman, to create good simple articles of household use. Our point of departure is purpose, utility is our prime consideration, our strength must lie in good proportions and use of materials . . . . The work of craftsmen must be measured by the same standards that of the painter and the sculptor . . . ."

The Werkstaette program clearly reflected the Secession's intent to strive for unity in the arts. But even more essential to the workshop idea was the English Arts and Crafts movement that had developed in the mid-nineteenth century. The writings of the Englishmen John Raskin and William Morris had stressed the social responsibility of art and the moral nature of handicrafts. Their ideas had been amplified around 1900 by Charles Robert Ashbee, who established the Guild of Handicrafts in London, and Charles Rennie Mackintosh, working in Glasgow. Both designers had participated in the eighth Secession exhibition, in 1900, where their furniture and interior designs deeply impressed the Viennese public, and Hoffmann continued to correspond with Mackintosh. The link between the British and Austrian design movements was further reinforced by the Anglophile tastes of the Werkstaette's patron, Fritz Waerndorfer. It was Waerndorfer who underwrote the initial expenses for establishing the Werkstaette, enabling Hoffmann and Moser to include bookbinding, work in gold and silver, and leather, as well as furniture.

Most frequently, Wiener Werkstaette furniture is noted for its severe rectilinearity and elegant detail. Designs often featured decorative inlay, which accentuated the lines of the piece without disrupting its contours. The inlaid desk by Koloman Moser when closed forms a solid rectangular block; it opens to provide drawers, compartments, and writing space. A dazzling all-over geometric pattern enlivens the flat surface planes and camouflages the points where the hinged pieces fit together. On the front, Moser inset ebony, mother-of-pearl, ivory, and gold leaf to compose an "antique"-inspired tableau of two figures and dolphins.

The Werkstaette furniture designs coincided with a new appreciation in Vienna for the simplicity of Biedermeier—the neoclassical style of Austrian furniture and architecture of about 1810-45. Respect for the plainness of Biedermeier may be sensed in the bentwood furniture made by the firm of Thonet Brothers in Vienna. Wagner, Moser, and Loos all admired the simple clarity of the unpretentious mass-produced work of Thonet. In turn, they designed furniture very much in this spirit for specific clients and also for general production by Thonet and the rival bentwood manufacturer J. & J. Kohn.

The characteristic products of the first few years of Wiener Werkstaette design were punched-metal andhammered-metal objects. The challenge for the designers was to elicit richness from reduction. Koloman Moser's elegant cruets and stand (1904) exemplify such an ideal. The silver stand is punched into a crisp design of squares, precisely measured so that each opening is twice the width of the supporting strip. A double "ribbon" of squares acts as the handle for the low rectangular base. Set against the burnished silver are the two cruets—smooth, conical sweeps of glass with spherical tops and right-angled handles. Typical of many Werkstaette pieces, the spare geometry of this design is enriched by the fine materials crafted scrupulously by hand.

In principle, the rigorous parity of design is appropriate for useful objects which would be distributed to a broad public. In practice, however, their lavish materials and costly handwork make them available only to an elite. As the Werkstaette grew and expanded, it became an international purveyor of fine silks, fashions, and decorative ceramics and silver, often highly ornate. Its promise of reforming life for the common man through better design was never fulfilled. But in the best productions of the Wiener Werkstaette's early years, simplicity and luxury become complementary principles that define a modern sense of material pleasure.
The Aesthetics of Nationalism

The inflections of "folk-style" apparent in Viennese art and design around 1900 signaled a complex pattern of reactions against the metropolis and its values. On one level, these stylizations spoke with a strongly conservative voice — expressing a veneration for the greater continuity and solidity of rural life as a reaction against the rapid ascendency of urban, secular, industrial society. As such, they were part of a quasi-official style, reflected most obviously in the picturesque peasant brigades in the parades for the emperor's jubilee in 1908. This conservatism stressed the state as an organic collective, determined by local bonds of blood and tradition — more deep-seated than the "universal" legal and rational values previously touted by liberal politics. (Ironically, it was just such particularism, on the part of the empire's self-assertive ethnic minorities, that threatened Austria-Hungary's stability.)

Stress on ethnic costume and rustic decorative style in Austria (a force that revived popular forms of the country's Baroque age as well) attatched itself to the broader wave of militant nationalism that swept Northern Europe beginning in the late nineteenth century. This movement looked to the sages and traditions of the North as sources of a rude vigor, impervious to what was seen as the corrupt and effeminate decadence of modern times. The eclectic historicism that marked the Ringstrasse era, and the multifaceted Anglonmania that was apparent in the avant-garde after 1900, thus gave way to a more assertive Pan-Germanism — a sentiment that reached its height in the years of World War I. A strong streak of anti-Semitism (based in part on the stereotyped image of the Jew as exemplar of modernity — vices of indulgence and engagement with capitalist finances) was among the most sinister aspects of this new, anti-socialist, anti-nationalist Zeitgeist (literally, "homeland-art," known as Provinz Kunst in Austria), with its veneration for Germanic home and hearth.

In the Secession two tendencies were evident from the very beginning: the "stylists" around the central figure of Gustav Klimt, and the "naturalists" in the painting of Josef Engelhard. After the departure of Klimt and the other "stylists" in 1905, the "naturalists" increasingly exalted the simple forms. German nationalist magazines called to the "effeminate" influences from abroad, be they Impressionism or Symbolism. In stark contrast to the cosmopolitan aesthetic culture of the artists associated with Klimt or the writers of Jung Wien, such Provinz Kunst was rigorously anti-national and anti-modern. Hermann Bahr, the champion of Jung Wien who in the eighties and nineties gave rise to two very different interpretations. A modernist such as Josef Hoffmann (who had provided the architectural renderings for an article by Lichtwark) could draw on the spirit of simplicity for a purified monumentality, while others saw in Lichtwark's writing the license for a profusion of picturesque detail. But the maimed artificiality of Provinz Kunst was its least noticeable aspect; its more consequential impact lay in the virulent attacks on the intellecual, cultural, and ethical foundations of liberalism — forebodings of a darker future.

Conservatism stressed the state as an organic collective, determined by bonds of blood and tradition.

The World War I. A strong streak of anti-Semitism, in exchange for a Papal pledge of protection. Gradually, however, Herzl recognized that assimilation could not be the solution for an increasingly race-related anti-Semitism. (Ironically, the idea for a Jewish state came to him during a performance of Wagner's Tannhäuser.) In his book The Jewish State (1896), Herzl wrote that the Jewish problem was political — and not, as generally believed, religious or economic — and that the solution could only be found on the level of international politics. His idea of a return to a Jewish homeland rekindled a long-standing hope of Orthodox Jews and brought back to life an idea, considered even by Napoleon as early as 1789, of a Jewish state in Palestine. Herzl brought to these dreams a new systematic approach and an irresistible personal drive. Living a double life — as the feuilleton editor for the Neue Freie Presse (delighting Viennese society with the wit and intelligence of the young Judenrat); as the cosmopolitan ambassador of Zionism — Herzl relentlessly pursued his dream. He organized the World Congress of Zionists, founded a Zionist periodical, and traveled extensively to gain support for his idea (visiting, among others, Emperor Wilhelm II, Sultan Abdul Hamid II, and Pope Pius X). Convinced that the "promised land and a "pure" past provided an escape into the utopia of an idealized, pre-industrial society.

Polonaises between the country and the cities were virulent in innumerable periodicals of the time. Published however, have quite different implications. Gustav Klimt's interest in "barbaric" ornament, Emilie Flöge's attraction to peasant lacework of the Slovak provinces, the high estimation of children's art by the young Oskar Kokoschka and others in his circle — all these were signs of a radical revulsion of unadorned art as the direct expression of primal imagination. These tendencies connected to the broader climate of interest in "primitive" style that had been announced by Paul Gauguin in France, and that was particularly evident in expressionist circles in Munich. Such attention to the "low" styles of popular prints and rural devotional imagery was the opposite of conservative local chauvinism, as it disrupted hierarchies and cultural boundaries — melding East and West, old and new, in an effort to find unconventional signs of the basic energies of creativity.
Kunstschau and the Kabarett Fledermaus

In 1908 Gustav Klimt led a group of artists in defecting from the Secession, further fragmenting Viennese artistic life. The “Klimt Group” decided to hold an independent exhibition in 1908, to coincide with the celebration of the sixty-year anniversary of Emperor Franz Joseph's reign. Staged on rented land in temporary pavilions designed by Josef Hoffmann, Kunstschau Wien of life. The Wiener Werkstaette and Josef Hoffmann, Kunstschau Wien temporary pavilions designed by referred to folk art and children's art now dominated, in the form of elaborative plainness. Where architecture had seemed to dominate design projections of patterns, and sought nobility in a certain willed stiffness of line and pose.

Josef Hoffmann. Brooch. 1908. Silver, partially gilded, with lapis lazuli, coral, opal, almandine, turquoise, chrysoprase, agate, moonstone, and kameol, 2 1/2” x 2 1/2” (5.5 x 5.5 cm). Private collection.

Josef Hoffmann. Brooch, 1908. Silver, partially gilded, with lapis lazuli, coral, opal, almandine, turquoise, chrysoprase, agate, moonstone, and kameol, 2 1/2” x 2 1/2” (5.5 x 5.5 cm). Private collection.

The cabaret featured a mixed program of experimental dance, theater, and poetry readings as well as more popular entertainments. During two weeks of performances, the twenty-one-year-old Oskar Kokoschka attempted to project a sequence of images in a shadow drama entitled The Speckled Egg (a kind of cinematic allegory).

Josef Hoffmann designed the interior of the Fledermaus as well as its furniture and silver. In the theater room, he used gray and white marble, prefiguring the deluxe feel of the Palais Stoclet interior (see p. 15). But covering the bar-room wall were over seven thousand randomly sized tiles of every color, arranged like a large mosaic in a crazy-quilt design. The tiles of riotous color and comic content were made by Bertold Löffler and Michael Powolny of the Wiener Keramik.

The rambunctious humor of the bar's decor is due in part to the Fledermaus club spirit. But it reflects, too, the wider turning away from classicizing dignity toward styles more picturesque and varied, from the earlier Secessionist clarity toward a new emphasis on figurative fantasy.

Fashion

The subject of women’s clothing involves the larger issues of feminism and ultimately even nationalism. The fashionable silhouette of the tightly corseted ladies of the 1880s was regarded in progressive circles as an unhealthy and constricting deformation of the body. Whalebone and laces such clothes could be made more appealing if the plain, straight lines of the Reform dress were redefine by the style of the Napoleonic empire or the more “antique” look. The resulting Rational dress of Floege and Gustav Klimt was promoted by the fashion department of the Wiener Werkstätte.

The major talent shaping Werkstätte fashion was Eduard Josef Wimmer-Wiggrill. Vienna's answer to the star of Paris couture, Paul Poiret. Wimmer-Wiggrill's designs and those of his Werkstätte colleagues show a constant dialogue with French fashion. Poiret in turn admired Hoffmann's work, visited Vienna in 1912, and purchased quantities of fabric from the Werkstätte.

The fabric workshops, and eventually the special Werkstätte stores dedicated to fashion, were among the most prominent and profitable aspects of the enterprise. The success of Wimmer-Wiggrill and the Werkstätte fashions among German and Austrian patrons was due not only to the quality of design but also to the social need to beat Paris at its own game. And when the war came, the Werkstätte was expected to take the lead in redefining a properly Germanic mode, in the foil of approved designs for 1914/15, the slim elegance of the previous years switches to a suitably sturdy look.

Jewelry

Josef Hoffmann, Koloman Moser, and other Viennese artists applied to brooches and bracelets the same principles that governed their larger projects. One of the key principles of the Wiener Werkstätte was that good craftsmanship and design were more important, and ultimately more valuable, than expensive materials. Thus the Werkstätte stressed well-worked jewelry of original design, fashioned from silver more often than gold and using beautiful semi-precious stones rather than valuable gems. Intricate structures and a special attention to the colored patterning of variegated stones make Hoffmann's brooches distinctly Viennese in their appeal, and remind us that — as in the case of fashion — elegant glamour was central to the aesthetic aims of much of the early modern art in Vienna.
Dreams and Sexualities

Dreamy eroticism seems in some respects the key to the fluid lightness of much Viennese art, fantasy blurring the line between the desired and the actual. But eros and the unconscious were evenly near the heart of the most disrupting and disturbing innovations of early modern Viennese culture. The realm of the dream, evoked by Gustav Klimt in the fluid lines of plaint language, took on an unsettling concreteness in the more grotesque visions of Alfred Kubin; and the melding of narcissism with sensuality that gave fin-de-siecle art its allure was transformed by Egon Schiele into a more extreme form of corporeal self-obsession. In all these cases, the taste for fantasy commingled with nightmarish apprehension, the savor of sensuality was never far removed from the threat of pain, and the role of art was seen in terms of both confrontation and consolation. Such art has often been held to show that Vienna was the appropriate, if not the necessary, setting for Sigmund Freud’s ideas regarding the ambivalent power of unconscious sexuality in human affairs.

Freud’s studies of cases of hysteria led him to the specific recognition of the repressed sexuality of women of the Viennese upper and middle classes. The disparity between the social facade and inner trauma of these women in turn pointed to the painfully evident hypocrisies to which sexuality gave rise in the culture of the day. Celebrated in verse and image, the erotic was given little if any expression in “proper” Viennese society. Young men exploited the lower-class working women known generically as ”sasone Modell” (“sweet young things”) in a form of casual prostitution, while some middle-class women were expected to remain innocent until marriage. The interest in adolescent girls that we find in such Viennese figures as Alfred Loos, Peter Altenberg, and Egon Schiele thus suggests not only the new awareness of the onset of sexuality, but also an ongoing fascination with the stimulations of innocence and with unequal relationships outside social convention.

Klimt’s portraits (see p. 5) record one aspect of this world, its elite of financially and intellectually privileged women. Schiele’s drawings display another side, the available, raw-boned models from the fringes of society; and Kokoschka’s cruel fantasies of primal male/female confrontation filled vent to the darker energies Freud found. It is not only the general mingling of dream and eros, but the specific mixture within this imagery—of desire and danger, glamour and unease, the chic and the shocking— that seems attuned to the Viennese temper.

Although Freud’s theories were sharply criticized, his fascination with the life of the psyche was shared by a generation of thinkers. This growing sensitivity to psychological states was, according to Carl Schorske, a central aspect of the late nineteenth-century reaction against the rationalist beliefs of Austrian liberal culture. The writers Robert Musil and Arthur Schnitzler, to name just two figures, expressed in such paintings by Gustav Klimt as Judith I and Salome (see p. 5) the danger of his famous Fatale in the allure of erotic attraction, the pituitary Weininger only sees doom for a society in the fatal grip of destructive feminine values.

In one chapter of Sex and Character, Weininger—a born Jew who had converted to Protestantism—developed a bitterly anti-Semitic thesis. He identified “the Aryan race” with the masculine principle and “the Jewish race” with culture and the despised feminine principle. Weininger used Freud’s concept of the castration complex as the basis for his contention that Jews, like women, lack ego and thus are self-esteem.

Weininger committed suicide at the age of twenty-four. More the Romantic “decadent” than he wanted to admit, he chose for his final act the house where Beethoven had died. A scathing controversy arose over the virulent anti-feminist and anti-Semitic ideas in Sex and Character (and over questions of authorship and plagiarism). Far more widely circulated than Freud’s books, Weininger’s led to misconceptions about psychoanalysis in general as well as a restatement of Freud’s conceptions of sexuality from Plato, Aristotle, and Schopenhauer—as well as a restatement of Freud’s conceptions of sexuality from Plato, Aristotle, and Schopenhauer—as well as a restatement of Freud’s conceptions of sexuality from Plato, Aristotle, and Schopenhauer. The philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, the composer Arnold Schoenberg, and even Freud himself acknowledged the influence of Weininger’s argument. Later, his ideas fell on more dangerous ground, as they were adapted to serve Nazi racial ideology.

SIGMUND FREUD
1856–1939

Freud’s approach relied on several new techniques which together constituted the essence of the psychoanalytical process. The interpretation of free association, the elucidation of the hidden content of dream imagery (which he saw as fulfilling, in disguised form, the desires of waking life), and the investigation of early childhood memories. In particular Freud revealed that the many cases of hysteria among women of the Viennese upper bourgeoisie were rooted in frustration over unavowed sexual desire. Freud was convinced that a neurosis would be healed once its deeper reasons were understood, and that a trauma could be mastered by reexperiencing its cause—through the psychoanalytical process of ‘transfer’, in which the patient shifts the focus of the original emotion onto the representative figure of the therapist.

Fried came to psychoanalysis relatively late in life. Under the spell of Darwinian evolutionary theory and Goethe’s nature philosophy he chose science over law and began medical studies in Vienna at age seventeen. He preferred research, but took up medical practice because of financial need. In 1885, in Paris, Freud witnessed Jean-Martin Charcot’s treatment of hysteria through hypnosis. Back in Vienna he and Joseph Breuer developed their own treatments, which they published in Studies on Hysteria (1895). Five years after The Interpretation of Dreams Freud published his most explosive ideas in Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality (1905), further developing his insights into the sexuality of children, and their obsession with their parents in what he called the Oedipus complex.

At twenty-four, Otto Weininger was convinced that he had identified the key to human nature. He argued the point in his contentious first book, Sex and Character (1903), an expanded version of Eros and Psyche, his 1902 dissertation in philosophy and psychology for the University of Vienna. The book included a highly controversial compendium of philosophical and para-scientific ideas from Plato, Aristotle, Kant, and Schopenhauer—as well as a restatement of Freud’s conceptions of sexuality from Plato, Aristotle, and Schopenhauer. The latter was beset from the beginning by a clash of different conceptual traditions.

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Drawing

Line played a dominant role in the development of early modern art in Vienna, from the sinuous tendrils of Gustav Klimt’s organicism to the more tortured contours of Egon Schiele’s and Oskar Kokoschka’s figures. Draftsmanship was thus a key talent for the Viennese artists. It often served as a major, independent form of expression, and it yielded some of the most arresting work of the period. As a private and intimate mode, it was also a primary vehicle for the realization of the Viennese concerns with the worlds of eros and of the dream.

Carl Otto Czeschka’s Nude with Drapery (1909) shows a version of the spare, shadowless linear style that dominated the figure drawings of Klimt and others in the early twentieth century. Czeschka’s love for elaborate arabesque comes through, however, in the complexity patterned fabric, and gives the drawing a decorative energy quite different from that found in the soft, interwoven outlines of Klimt’s insistently erotic nude studies.

Oskar Kokoschka’s ink drawings for his play Moerder Hoffnung der Frauen (Murderer, Hope of Women) are among the most extraordinary images of early modern Vienna. The savagery of their near-abstract vocabulary of spiked, scar-like lines looks years ahead, anticipating in surprising ways Picasso’s drawings connected with his Guernica (1937). The play in question was performed at the second Kunstschau exhibition, in 1909. Its ritualized drama of desire and blood lust served notice that the sensuality of Klimt, was also attuned to modern metaphors of the depersonalized and vacant spirit.

Alfred Kubin’s extraordinary fantasy drawings, first appearing around 1900, when he was still a teenager, directly reflect the fascination with dreams and the unconscious that marked Central European thought in the late nineteenth century. Though they contain echoes of other graphic artists from Hieronymus Bosch to Odilon Redon, Kubin’s early works have a unique, hallucinatory strangeness, much admired by the German Expressionist painters in Kandinsky’s circle and premonitory of aspects of Surrealism.

In Kubin’s twilight world, the mood of reverie is often jolted by cruel or violent notes. An eerie light, as in Self-Consideration (1902), may also lend a calm, lyric glow to images built from impossible incongruities. The huge head on the horizon at the left surface, yields an image that is powerful not only in sculptural terms but as a colorful, rhythmically decorative design. His line is, moreover, specific in its attention to the particularities of tousled hair, crumpled petticoats, and bony anatomy, yet rich in its abstract qualities, and virtually unparalleled in its combination of swift spontaneity and decisive economy of means.

Not only in the exacerbated intensity of Schiele’s numerous drawings of himself, but in all his renderings of the nude, a distinctive sensibility emerges, mingling a raw, often painful erotic energy with a special sense of hard-edged glamour. Often, as in the drawing at hand, live figures seem paired with doll-like dummies, and the staring back at a perfectly attentive, headless, body—its own? The sense of a psyche divided against itself, and of disproportion between mind and body in self-confrontation, is brought home with disturbing immediacy in the smooth chiaroscuro handing of the ink washes, lending to this impossible vision the implacable, seamless quality of a photograph.

Like the younger draftsman Klens Brosch, Kubin subscribed to the idea advanced by the German sculptor Max Klinger in an essay of 1893: that the graphic mediums in black and white offered the best way to communicate a fantasy vision of another world, or a deeply subjective and critical view of our own.
Ideals of Unity: Music and the Visual Arts

Vienne's venerable status as the cultural hub of Central Europe depended far more on its contributions to music and the visual arts than on the history of its visual arts. The liveliness in the visual arts announced by the formation of the Secession reflected in part the self-assertion of a new class of supporters of culture, excluded from the more established and limited world of musical and theatrical patronage (see p. 4).

The creative forces in music were nonetheless often closely intertwined with those in painting and architecture, at the turn of the century. Virtually every Viennese creator of the time was affected by the music and writings of the composer Richard Wagner, and one of Wagner's central tenets was that modern art should call on creative talents in all the arts. The musician, painter, designer, and so on—to collaborate in works that would enthral the total sensory response of the viewer. This was the ideal of the Gesamtkunstwerk, the total work of art, that so captured artists' imaginations. In one of the most ambitious attempts by Viennese artists to realize this ideal—the 1905 Secession exhibition built around Max Klinger's sculpture of Beethoven (see p. 2)—Gustav Mahler participated by creating an arrangement of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony for wind instruments and by conducting its performance in the exhibition hall. Writers such as Carl Schorske have moreover shown how the imagery of Mahler's work, and his reception by a hostile Viennese establishment, have parallels in the paintings of Gustav Klimt and in the scandals that they provoked.

Suggestive parallels continue when we compare the shift in Viennese musical generations, from Mahler to Arnold Schoenberg, with the shift in painting, from Klimt to the younger Egon Schiele and Oskar Kokoschka. In both domains a search for grand harmonies gave way to a more dissonant art.

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GUSTAV MAHLER
1860-1911

The musical achievement of Gustav Mahler has to be assessed under the aspect of his two careers: the one creative, as composer; the other, interpretative, as one of the leading conductors of his time.

His compositions combined the formal flowering of German musical Romanticism with premonitions of later twentieth-century developments, foreshadowing such major innovations as the dissolution of tonality. Idolized by the young musicians of the Schoenberg school for his emphasis on spontaneous creativity, Mahler, in turn, was one of their strongest supporters.

Mahler's entire musical oeuvre is couched essentially in the symphonic form. This is true even of his songs and song cycles. Intensely rhetorical and autobiographical, his work resonates with recollections of the children's songs, folk music, military marches, and sounds of nature of his early youth in the small bohemian village of Kaštel, halfway between Vienna and Prague. Those influences were to affect his compositions as strongly as the musical legacy of Richard Wagner. Among the first to incorporate undisguised elements of popular songs into symphonies (such as the French song "Frere Jacques") in his Symphony No. 1 of 1888), Mahler wanted his music to capture the mundane experiences of life as well as its metaphysical aspects. A client of Freud and devotee of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, Mahler was intensely preoccupied with philosophical, even mystical notions and with questions of life and death. As early as his Symphony No. 2 (1894) he devoted a major work to the theme of resurrection, while his Symphony No. 8 (1907) expresses his belief in the redemptive power of love.

Among his contemporaries Mahler found little understanding for his compositions. It was in his capacity as conductor, and in particular as artistic director of the Vienna Court Opera (1897-1907), that he achieved worldwide recognition. He made the Court Opera the premier opera house in the world through its complete overhaul: reshaping the repertoire, redefining the staging of opera productions, and hiring and firing singers to establish a distinguished ensemble.

1907 was the year of "the three blows of fate" that had befallen Mahler before he had foretold in his Symphony No. 6 in 1905: the death of his child, his forced resignation from the opera, and the first signs of the heart disease that was to kill him four years later. Although Mahler spent the last years of his life in New York, conducting the New York Philharmonic Orchestra and performances at the Metropolitan Opera, he never cut his ties to Vienna. He returned there fatally ill, and died on May 18, 1911.

ALFRED ROLLER
1864-1935

The designer Alfred Roller was one of the founding members of the Vienna Secession. He was editor of their journal Ver Sacrum and taught at the Kunstgewerbeschule. In collaboration with Mahler, during four extremely fruitful years at the Court Opera (1890-97), Roller revolutionized opera productions. By clearing the stage of the clutter of naturalist and historical detail that crowded earlier nineteenth-century productions, Roller wanted to lead the public's attention back to the essence of the play. Roller's guiding principle was that "each play carries within it self the laws of its production." Operating through suggestion rather than illusion, he intended his stage sets not to create a reality of their own, but to serve the poetry and music of the work. Roller's simplified decors and use of permanent elements in his stage sets, such as the famous Roller towers (framing the stage on either side and easily adaptable to production requirement), allowed faster scene changes to preserve the dramatic flow of action and music. The major element in his creations was the sensa tion of space itself, manipulated through his pioneering use of stage lighting and color.

When Mahler left the opera in 1907, Roller departed too. He enjoyed a world-wide reputation working at the Metropolitan Opera in New York, and with Max Reinhardt in Berlin, as well as in productions of the operas of Richard Strauss in Dresden and Vienna. Together with Reinhardt and Hugo von Hofmannsthal, at the end of World War I Roller helped establish the annual Salzburg Festival.

ARNOLD SCHONEBERG
1874-1951

Arnold Schoenberg twice opened up new possibilities for composition: first by breaking away from conventional forms and harmony—a step he called "the emancipation of dissonance"—and then by developing the twelve-tone system.

His first compositions showed the largely self-taught Schoenberg still under the spell of Richard Wagner. After a period in Berlin, during which he worked on the tone poem Pelléas et Melisande while supporting himself by conducting a cabaret orchestra, Schoenberg returned to Vienna in 1903. There he taught composition to students such as Anton von Webern and Alban Berg. Reaching against his Romantic beginnings, Schoenberg then aimed at greater simplicity and economy, and increasingly purged his music of subjectivity and self-expression. In 1908, in the final movement of his String Quartet No. 2, Schoenberg ventured for the first time into the sphere of atonality—a technique of musical composition that does away with traditional harmony. He introduced the twelve-tone system, a type of vocal utterance midway between speech and song, with instrumental accompaniment, in his song cycle Pierrot Lunaire (1912, premiered that same year in Berlin), and it became yet another trademark of the Schoenberg school.

Performances of Schoenberg's music provoked such scandals that the composer was prompted to found, in 1918, the Society for Private Musical Performances; applause was forbidden, and only sympathetic critics were admitted. Under its auspices, over one hundred fifty new works by contemporary composers were presented during the following three years.

After World War I, Schoenberg found, in the twelve-tone system, the key to a kind of music he had sought for his atonal compositions. Although he did not invent the system, Schoenberg brought it to prominence, using it first in Five Pieces for Piano, Op. 23 (1923) and working with it in most of his subsequent compositions.

In 1931, his music provoked such a scandal in Paris that a judge had to mute the orchestra during the performance in the exhibition hall. Writ large on the poster was the word "Schoenberg." In 1933, Schoenberg emigrated to the United States, teaching at the University of Southern California and UCLA. There his music gradually became less hermetic and more emotional, admitting again the feelings he had banished from his compositions since about 1917.

ANTON VON WEBERN
1883-1945

In his departure from the tonal system, Anton von Webern was the most radical of Arnold Schoenberg's students. His formative years had been colored by the Romanticism of Richard Wagner, but his contact with Schoenberg made him explore the new possibilities which atonality offered. Deeply committed to the pursuit of new forms of musical expression, Webern aimed at the highest density of expression in the simplest possible form. His Five Pieces for Orchestra, Op. 10 (1913) are most characteristic of what he called his "aphoristic" style: the pieces range in length from about fourteen seconds to a little less than two minutes.

In 1924 Webern was quick to follow Schoenberg's lead into the twelve-tone system, applying it for the first time in his Kinderstueck for piano solo. His subsequent compositions were entirely set within his own modified version of the twelve-tone (or "serial") system. Yet within that formal rigor Webern's music always remained extremely sensitive, reflecting personal experience and his deep, pensive feeling for nature.

Webern's heartfelt pursuit of the serial system made him a hero to a later avant-garde, an inspiration to composers such as Pierre Boulez and Karlheinz Stockhausen.

ALBAN BERG
1885-1935

Alban Berg is often called the "Romanticist" of the Schoenberg school. Even after he joined this group in 1904, Berg was more hesitant than Anton von Webern in renouncing the traditional tonal system. His compositions during those years still owe much to Wagner and Mahler. By 1912, however, in Five Orchestral Songs, Op. 4, Berg had taken the step into atonality. Short and concise like the postcards by Peter Altenberg that inspired them (see p. 2), the works astounded through their exceptionally complex orchestration.

Berg is best known for his two operas: Wozzeck, the first full-length atonal opera (1917-22), after Georg Buechner's play Woyzeck) and Lulu (1929-35, after two plays by Frank Wedekind)—both written entirely in the twelve-tone system. (Unfinished at Berg's death, the last act of Lulu has been, since 1979, performed on the basis of his fragmentary sketches and notes.) Both are powerful psychological dramas for which Berg himself prepared the libretto.
Later Painting

With the performance at the 1909 Kunstschau exhibition of Oskar Kokoschka's cruelly violent drama "Moroder Hoffnung der Frauen" (Murderer, Hope of Women; see p. 1), it was clear that a new kind of art was on the rise in Vienna. Kokoschka had worked for the Wiener Werkstatte, and his first illustrated book was dedicated to Klimt; but he soon quit the Werkstatte, and was brought into the circle of its opponents, including the architect Adolf Loos (see p. 15) and the critic Karl Kraus (see p. 6). Eventually he went on to Berlin, in a move that was symptomatic not only of the livelier art market then expanding in Germany, but also of the greater receptivity of the German cities to the harsh new energies of expressionism.

Expressionism first appeared in Vienna in the brief career of Richard Gerstl, a young painter strongly affected by local exhibitions of the work of Vincent van Gogh and Edvard Munch. Gerstl was an intimate of the composer Arnold Schoenberg and his family (a failed affair with Schoenberg's wife precipitated Gerstl's suicide in 1908), and he inspired Schoenberg himself to draw and paint. Schoenberg had no formal training in art, but his self-portraits, caricatural fantasies, and visionary "gazes" (abstracted faces) were treasured by artists such as Wassily Kandinsky as art born from necessity rather than tutored ability.

Among the earliest and greatest works of expressionism in Vienna are the portraits done by Kokoschka and Schiele in the years 1909-11. Strongly different in conception, the works of the two emerging artists were equally radical in their renunciation of decorated elegance for a more strident and psychically charged approach to their sitters.

Kokoschka's portrait of Peter Altenberg of 1909 is by legend the record of this bohemian writer and poet (see p. 2) responding to a provocation that had disturbed him at a cafe. The figure emerges dramatically from a void defined only by the slashing, scratching life of Kokoschka's brush, and his venous flesh seems shaken to near dissolution by a quivering internal energy. The lunging gesture and bulging eyes are conjured with a disregard for either flattery or decorative finish that is characteristic of all the early Kokoschka portraits—a series that projects the disturbed psychic energies of an extraordinary world of scholars, creators, and dissipated aristocrats.

While Kokoschka divorced these sitters from their mundane surroundings by setting them in a turbulent atmosphere that seemed to bristle with ambient energy, Schiele's concentration on character and psychology took the form of a radical emptying out of the pictorial space that left his subjects alone in a whited vacuum. In early portraits like that of Dr. Erwin von Graff, the contracted gestures of bony anatomy and outsized hands communicate a semaphoric message of cramped alienation from within a denuded environment, the aesthetic and psychological antithesis of the luxuriantly full spaces of Klimt (see p. 6). Klimt continued to paint lovely society portraits, but the special intensity of the "golden" works was not maintained, and his most personal works of the period after about 1910 are the imagined scenes he painted, such as The Maiden of 1912-13. Here the soft fullness of an all-consuming dream state is conjured in loose, floating forms of luscious color—a fantasy free of the morbidity and sexual tensions seen in his earlier allegories, yet full of an indulged eroticism so vividly sweet as to be disquieting in a different way.

Schiele and Kokoschka were deeply concerned, as Klimt never was, with self-portraiture. Schiele's numerous self-portraits, both in drawings and in paintings, point up the particular sense of the theatrical associated with expressionism in Vienna—the artist's assuming of allegorical guises, and the projection of himself as actor in violent dramas of frustrated communication. In the broadly miming, gestural language of the portraits, as in this sense of self, Kokoschka and Schiele make evident a Viennese self-consciousness about communication and inner truth (see p. 4), they transform into something modern and problematic the notions of the costume and of the facade that had formerly seemed only the outmoded concerns of the Ringstrasse generation (see p. 14).
The Ringstrasse, Problematic Symbol of an Age

Old Vienna was a tightly packed network of small streets bound in by encircling military fortifications. When the young Emperor Franz Josef came to the throne after the revolutionary tumult of 1848, he became persuaded that these walls were anachronistic and that the time had come to modernize Vienna. In 1857 he ordered the old walls torn down. On the open military glacis they had overlooked, a huge new boulevard, the Ringstrasse, was laid out around the city’s edge.

The boulevard project was doubtless influenced by the similar work then being done in Paris by Napoleon III and his architect Baron Haussmann, and it involved a similar commingling of strategic with economic concerns, and governmental with private finance. But whereas Haussmann’s boulevards were notable for their homogeneity, the Ringstrasse’s hallmark was the eclectic diversity of its architecture. Each of the major institutional structures along the street was built in a mode thought appropriate: the Parliament in a Greek style to recall Athenian democracy, the Rathaus (City Hall) in Gothic guise to suggest the medieval epoch of burgher civic rule, the University of Vienna buildings in the Renaissance mold to honor the humanist pursuit of knowledge, and so on. Rich residential districts were also developed, where apartment houses in imitation Renaissance and Baroque palazzo styles flattened the self-image of those with new industrial wealth.

Though the major part of the Ring was built in the 1860s and 1870s, additions continued piecemeal into the 1890s and even beyond. By then, however, the political forces that had shaped the project — a loose and often contentious combination of imperial and liberal bourgeois interests — had been supplanted. The major urban reforms of the nineties and the first years of the new century were instigated by a new populist politics, less focused on the inner-city, well-to-do world defined by the Ring and more concerned with the vast working suburbs then being assimilated into municipal government.

For all the improvements it had brought, including better water services and circulation, the urbanism of the liberal era was criticized by the new politicians as the self-serving and short-sighted scheme of a parvenu class. For those in the arts, too, the imposing edifices came to be regarded as monuments to phallistic hypocrisy, which sought to dissemble modernity in the false “costume” facades of noble historical styles. One of the most trenchant attacks came in Adolf Loos’s article “Die Potemkinsche Stadt” (“Potemkin’s City,” published in the July 1898 issue of the Secession journal Ver Sacrum). Loos compared the decorated facades of the Ring buildings to the fake building fronts that a Russian minister, Potemkin, had once ordered erected along the travel route of Catherine the Great, to convey the illusion of prosperous provincial villages.

No other art form seemed so immediately linked to Viennese creational dreams of modern reform as architecture. Otto Wagner’s writings, which espoused a new “honesty” in building, based on rational principles of functional efficiency, were key texts in the imagination of a generation that looked to art as the agent of an all-embracing transformation of life. The more direct relationship of exterior to interior, the abolition of imitative craft, and the purging of historicism set the stage for a more complex manner of quoting and subsuming historical references. The decorative, eclectic ways of the Ringstrasse, loudly deplored around 1890, might be said to haunt the Viennese search for a modern architecture.

Wagner and his younger admirers Josef Hoffmann and Adolf Loos shaped their work in ways that simultaneously interpreted the classical tradition and found new forms — expressive and even theoretical, rather than straightforwardly “honest” — for modernity. In Vienna, the reductive elimination of ornament was often only a prelude to the invention of new ornamental motifs, and the purging of historicism set the stage for a more complex manner of quoting and subsuming historical references. The decorative, eclectic ways of the Ringstrasse, loudly deplored around 1890, might be said to haunt the Viennese search for a modern architecture.

The major artery of circulation in the inner-city, and as the site of such institutions as the great Art and Natural History Museums, the State Opera and the City Theater (not to mention the ubiquitous cafes), the Ringstrasse remains today Vienna’s most distinctive public space.

CAMILLO SITTE

Before the criticisms of the Ringstrasse at the turn of the century, Camillo Sitte, a professor at Vienna’s Kunstgewerbeschule (School of Applied Arts), had rebuked the failings of this effort at modernization, in his book City Planning According to Artistic Principles of 1889. Sitte’s ideal urban forms were the protectively enclosing spaces of older towns. He felt that the wide, long-view vectors of Haussmann-style boulevards — like the Ringstrasse — elected only anxiety (specifically Plaztangst, or agoraphobia, the fear of open spaces).

Nostalgic for what he felt was the nurturing collective solidarity of traditional small-town society, Sitte felt that avenues like the Ring would intensify the sense of alienation and fragmentation that modern life entailed. As the historian Carl Schorske has shown, Sitte’s communitarian critique of the Ring differed sharply from the objections of more self-consciously modern architects such as Otto Wagner and Adolf Loos, who found the street and its buildings too indebted to — rather than too removed from — tradition. These opposed critiques were moreover symptomatic of the broader turn-of-the-century rejection of the liberal era the Ring represented, a rejection that came from conservatives and progressives, the political right and left simultaneously.
Architecture

The four major architects working in Vienna around 1900 were Otto Wagner, Joseph Maria Olbrich, Josef Hoffmann, and Adolf Loos. Wagner, the oldest, is considered the “father” of modern Viennese architecture. His buildings were the first outstanding examples of the modern style in Vienna and earned him an international reputation. Olbrich, the designer of the Secession’s exhibition hall (see p. 3), was Wagner’s young protégé, with whom he collaborated on urbanization projects in the 1890s.

Another prize pupil of Wagner’s was Josef Hoffmann, who became a professor at the Kunstgewerbeschule in 1899 and a favorite of Secession supporters. Hoffmann enjoyed a steady flow of commissions from wealthy clients; under his leadership, the Wiener Werkstätte determined what was tasteful for Viennese society (see p. 7). Adolf Loos, an exact contemporary of Hoffmann’s, was an architect whose early reputation rested mostly on his biting cultural criticism. A dedicated enemy of the Secession’s aestheticism, Loos later championed the more raw and aggressive work of the painter Oskar Kokoschka (see p. 15).

Otto Wagner

Wagner influenced an entire generation through his teaching and writings. In his 1895 book Modern Architecture he insisted that the primary focus of the architect should be on satisfying the practical functions of a building, that choice of materials should be determined by their cost and ease of maintenance, and that structure should be simple and economical. His competition design for the array of metal bolt heads that held the stone cladding panels, he made from basic technology a new kind of decorative element. For the glass-roofed main hall, he adapted the look of the great train stations. Among the most striking features of this room are the aluminum hot-air blowers whose unconventional appearance and audacious exposure seem a premonition of the “high-tech” future.

Joseph Maria Olbrich

Although Olbrich worked closely with Wagner, the younger man’s taste leaned to the dreamier decoration of Jugendstil, evident in the illustrations he contributed to the Secession publication Ver Sacrum. He also designed the Secession building, with its temple-like facade and movable interior walls, and while it was under construction in 1898 became involved with domestic architectural projects.

For the Villa Friedmann at Hinterbruehl, near Vienna, Olbrich was brought in to replace the original architect. (The owner wanted to have his home completed in “Secession-style.”) Olbrich simplified the structure and carefully tended to details of decor. In the children’s room, for example, Olbrich called for furniture, woodwork, wall paintings, and windows to blend together in cozy harmony; an earnest message on the landscape-like walls exhorted the young to be loyal, honest, and industrious.

Olbrich had been planning a series of villas to be built in the fashionable wooded area above Vienna called the Hohe Warte. However, when the Grand Duke of Hesse invited him to help create an artists’ colony at Darmstadt, he left Vienna in 1899 and relinquished to Hoffmann the projects on the Hohe Warte.

Josef Hoffmann

One of the villas that Hoffmann completed on the Hohe Warte attracted the attention of Adolphe Stoclet, a wealthy Belgian who was living in Vienna during 1903-04. Upon his father’s death, Stoclet was forced to re-turn to Brussels, and he commissioned Hoffmann to build a house for him there. The Palais Stoclet (1905-11) is the most stunning realization of the Viennese ideal of Gesamtkunstwerk, the total work of art. Stoclet imposed no budgetary restrictions so that Hoffmann and his Wiener Werkstätte colleagues were free to indulge their imaginations and talents on a lavish scale.

The Stoclet exterior is composed of sweeping flat planes of marble, crisply bound by gilded moldings. For the splendid interior, different marbles and marquetry woodwork were coordinated with special textiles, wallpapers, and furnishings by the Werkstätte. The dining room features a three-part mosaic frieze by Gustav Klimt (executed by Leopold Forstner) in marble, semi-precious stones, and colored glass. Hoffmann planned all the furniture and silver and designed the garden as well — its terraces and pergolas, summerhouse, tennis courts, garden chairs, and tables.

Every aspect of the Palais Stoclet was intended to harmonize with the architectural concept. To test the effect, each entire room was assembled first in Vienna before any pieces were shipped to Brussels. As one commentator observed in 1909, “This is the new Viennese art — an art which exports whole houses.”

Adolf Loos

Opposed to Hoffmann’s opulent orchestration, Adolf Loos argued against the tyranny of the total-design architect and the imposition of “style.” “We already possess the style of our time,” he wrote; “It may be found wherever the artist hasn’t yet stock his nose in.” Best known for his scathing criticism of the use of ornament (especially his essay “Ornament and Crime” of 1908), Loos was in fact not against all ornament. Like Wagner (and Louis Sullivan in America), he disapproved of decoration that was meaningless or unnecessary or which confused our understanding of a building’s function.

Loos had designed several interiors around 1900 and received his first commission for a complete building in 1908 from the English-style tailoring firm he himself favored, Goldman & Salatsch. The building he devised looks directly across the Michaelerplatz toward the Hofburg, the Imperial Palace. Many critics at the time considered the radical barenness of Loos’s upper stories an insult to the traditions of historic Vienna, as represented by the ornate Baroque style of the Hofburg. Loos defended his plain walls and windows as being true to the venerable, if not prestigious, styles of Viennese architecture. “I kept the plaster surfaces as simple as possible because the burghers of Vienna also built in a simple style.” Characteristic of Loos is his combination of this burgher strictness with the classicizing arcade and lavishly veined stone of the lower stories. Like Hoffmann and others of this generation, Loos sought not just simplicity, but also a new sense of purified elegance, free from what he saw as the vulgarity of bourgeois historicism.
Ancient Monarchy, New Culture

Continued from front page

only son, Crown Prince Rudolf, committed suicide with his lover, a young society lady, in a royal hunting lodge at Mayerling in 1889. The Empress Elisabeth, always a troubled and distant consort, was assassinated by an anarchist in 1898. The aging emperor, ever more psychologically isolated, found it difficult either to resist the pressure for greater democracy universal suffrage was finally granted in 1907 or to contend with a faction-torn parliament. These internal tensions were only magnified by the ever more bellicose international climate of the early twentieth century, as Austria-Hungary's unique geographical position opening onto the Orient, the Russian Empire, and Western Europe as well made it a key, if no longer militarily dominant, player on the European stage.

Final Glitter, Final Darkness

Three times in the 1890s the demagogic Christian Socialist Karl Lueger (known as "Handsome Karl") received the votes sufficient to make him mayor of Vienna; three times Franz Joseph refused to approve the appointment, in significant part because of Lueger's outspoken anti-Semitism. In 1897 the emperor finally ceded, and a new era of populist politics came to the enlarged municipality of Vienna. In the same year a parliamentary crisis over the long-standing problem of the German language's dominance as the official and legal tongue, caused the emperor to dissolve the legislature and rule by decree. From this point on, an even more marked split divided the symbolic theater of the emperor's venerable, paternal authority from the volatile realities of a rapidly changing Vienna, Austria's fractions internal dismemberment and its entanglement in European politics.

Yet it was in the same year, 1897, that the formation of the Vienna Secession announced a period of unparalleled creativity in Viennese cultural and intellectual life. All of the brilliant achievements wrought within the next twenty years by Vienna's cosmopolitan citizenry - the innova-

Karl Lueger (1844-1910)

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POSTERS

Gustav Klimt

Otto Wagner

FARM GARDEN WITH SUNFLOWERS (THE SUNFLOWERS), c. 1905-06

HOPE II, 1907-08

Salome (Judith II), 1909

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