Vienna 1900 : Vienna 1900, art, architecture & design : the Museum of Modern Art, New York, July 3-October 21, 1986 : [brochure
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At the End of an Ancient Monarchy, Birth of a New Culture

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, looking toward the Orient. At these walls the Turkish invasion finally founndered 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 (1764-90), 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 bourgeois piety 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 problematic collaboration and contention: first, an aggressive new middle class, emboldened by the profits of industrialization and impatient with the power held by the church and the throne; and second, a new emperor, the young Franz Joseph I. Only eighteen when he took the throne, he was to rule the empire for nearly seven decades, presiding over a period of immense conflict and sweeping change—the Ringstrasse era, by the late 1800s its high-water mark of an era of boom and bust, of aggressive, often risky expansion (as signaled by the stock-market crash of 1873), and of a certain liberal dream of secular, “progressive” consensus.

Discontents
Whatever the achievements of the Ringstrasse era, by the late 1800s its failures and hypocrisies were becoming more widely criticized. Its “costume” style of facades was increasingly seen as symptomatic of an untenable compromise between a more thoroughgoing commitment to the modern on the one hand, and a more traditional respect for tradition on the other. Leaders such as Victor Adler and Karl Lueger, and their new political parties (the new-left Social Democrats and the new-right Christian Socialists), fashioned around 1890 what the historian Carl Schorske has called “politics in a new key”—a more shrill, confrontational, and demagogic style of appeal to the masses. The new politics brought to the forefront a panoply of problems. The diverse nationalities and language groups in Austria-Hungary were buffeted by opposing urges—some seeking local self-determination (especially in the Slovak lands) and others (especially among the Viennese educated elite) dreaming of cultural, if not political, fusion with the German Empire. Racial and ethnic tensions, as well as distaste for new cosmopolitan values and doubts about new business structures, found disturbing voice in the explicit anti-Semitism of Lueger and others. Especially among workers, artisans, and small-business owners threatened by economic change, this “new key” drew a powerful response.

The continuity of the Hapsburg dynasty, and the viability of the constitutional monarchy, were meanwhile both brought into doubt. Franz Joseph’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 pursued 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—co-bro of the air of erotic refinement and muscular sexuality we find in some Secessionist art—stemmed more from the world of Bal- 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 Griensteidl, the nickname "Cafe Melancholia." When the place was torn down in the urban recon- structions of the later 1890s, the critic Karl Kraus wrote: "The place was the true heart of 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 base of modern writing, a product of indulgent subjectivity and imprecise language all too sympatico.

Arthur Schnitzler's plays and novels were the psychological make-up of turn-of-the-century Viennese bourgeois society. Freund, who used Schnitzler's brilliantly characterized protagonists as examples of types of psychological behavior, told him: "You know through intuition—or 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 Leutnant Grete (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 German 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 society at large. Schnitzler shared Freud's fascination with the power of instinctual drives. In his plays he treated erotic encounters as archetypes of human relations, convinced that sexual love alone was strong enough to break down social hierarchies. His most famous play, Reigen (Merry-Go-Round), written 1897, privately published 1900, is built on ten dialogues between lovers of unequal social origin. Schnitzler was an innovator in dramatic form, building his plays from kaleidoscopic sequences of images. And in his novella Leutnant Grete (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 German language.

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The Secession

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 bi-monthly until 1903. On its lavishly illustrated pages there were discussions of art, samples of music, and literary contributions by Rilke, Hofmannsthal, 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 tastes 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 1903, 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 1945 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 instinctual, and most especially erotic, forces—as Hugo von Hofmannsthal also did in *Elektra* (1900). The virgin goddess Athena, protector of the people (and
Vienna’s Critical Intelects

Throughout Europe in the later nineteenth century, there was a widespread reassessment against the limitations of a worldview based on materialism and positivist values—a worldview that seemed associated not only with the success of a certain kind of inductive method, 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 soliarity of the material world was a treacherous illusion. Diverse and contradictory thinkers seemed to offer a similar lesson: Ernst Mach, who held epiphenomenal sensibility as the only reality, Arthur Schopenhauer, whose early-nineteenth-century espousal of a world-denying fatalism found a newly ephemeral sensation as the only reälity itself seemed to raise the challenge. On the identification of X ray, in 1895, for example, suggested that faith in the soliarity of the material world was a treacherous illusion. Diverse and contradictory thinkers seemed to offer a similar lesson: Ernst Mach, who held epiphenomenal sensibility as the only reality, Arthur Schopenhauer, whose early-nineteenth-century espousal of a world-denying fatalism found a newly ephemeral sensation as the only reality itself seemed to raise the challenge.

Here the Enlightenment tradition seems to meet an almost Oriental will to refine and transcend the mundane. 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 young Ludwig Wittgenstein, who had already 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—is its ethical value—cannot be articulated through language. This dichotomy between fact and inner value parallels the critical tradition in Vienna, thinkers such as Alois Riegl—who rejected the imitation of nature as a criterion for ranking art, that called for art, too, to abandon prosaic naturalism.

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FRITZ MAUTHNER
1849–1923

Around the turn of the century, a dissolution 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 “silence of language.” A parallel may be seen in Hugo von Hofmannsthal, whose similar disregard 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 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 “Voil— and to denounce the danger of such vague, yet potent ideas as vehicles for dogmatism and intolerance.

Aloys 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 (1893) 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 considered to be only incomplete or decadent versions of nebler forms of classicism. 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 prominence 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 opposed the earlier German theoretician and architect Gottfried Semper’s influential premise that the form of a work of art is determined by the traditions of its material, and refuted the notion that the imitation of nature was the motivating force behind the creative process. Riegl argued instead that developments of style grow out of an inherent energy within the forms themselves, evoked by what he identified as Kuntswollen—the German term for Kuntswollen—literally, “a will to art” —which he saw as the product of powerful, if often not 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 Athena, 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 works assertively 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 — looks 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 Viennese 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 prismatic language for basic principles of constructive reason and biological fertility, suspended within the overall patterned energies. A sweetened, oniric intensity that might be called psychedelic permeates this lyrical vision, in which elements of high naturalism and abstract ornament, seething coiled energy and floating weightlessness, come together to suggest the transports of love as fusion and dissolution.
Especially in the early years of the Secession, the forces of innovation in Viennese art found remarkably little resistance. The prime land accorded the rebel group for its building, and the appointments of major Secession figures to teaching positions in state schools, are only the most evident instances of encouragement from high places. Moreover, the antagonism we associate with the eruption of modernism elsewhere in Europe—an antagonism between the avant-garde and an established bourgeois—was at first largely absent in Vienna. The Austrian capital has 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 bourgeoisie and industrialists of the Ringstrasse era. Their inherited money was used to furnish the lair of historic Viennese art, which 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 very different ambitions 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, one of the most virulent attacks on the press, in particular the feuilletons. In 1894, he fought for a strict separation between imaginative prose and factual reporting. Kraus strongly believed in the correspondence between language and ethical thought. He saw in the abuse of language a clear indication of personal 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 1919-21, his epic, collage-form satire on World War I, in which he indicted the moral and physical annihilation 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 unresolved opposition to the so-called geht Zeit 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 Walpurginacht (The Third Walpurgis Night), published after his death in 1936, which he indicted the moral corruption that had united Klimt and his colleagues to commit Hòa vào nghệ thuật. His journal Die Fackel (The Torch), which he founded in 1898, 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.

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 his contemporary culture. As an early champion of the Secession, he was an important mediator between the artists and their patrons, and between the Viennese and the international art scene. Bahr 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 Unehmern." ("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 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 very different ambitions 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 variety of social backgrounds among the supporters of Viennese art is suggested by the contrast between the cool elegance of Margaret Stonborough-Wittgenstein in the portrayal of the industrialists of the Ringstrasse era. Thus Schiele was introduced to Ferdinand Hodler's work at the house of his patron, Carl Reinhardt. While Oskar Reidel gave Schiele and Kokoschka the opportunity to study works by Manet, Gauguin, van Gogh, Toulouse-Lautrec, and Munch.

Of all the arts, architecture is by its very nature the most dependent on patronage. Joseph Maria Olbrich’s Secession building was largely the result of the financial assistance of Karl Wittgenstein, father of the philosopher and founder of a steel combine—and one of the earliest and most persistent sponsors of the new art movement. In 1923 Victor Zuckerkandl, brother-in-law of the influential art critic Berta Zuckerkandl, fulfilled Josef Hoffmann’s dream of being able to create the Gesamtkunstwerk with the commission for the Perkursendorf Sanatorium. Two years later, the Belgian financier Adolphe Stoclet entrusted Hoffmann with the design and building of his mansion in Brussels. The Wiener Werkstätte virtually owns the entire Werkstatte, which is itself backed by the double support of Fritz Waerndorfer, heir to one of the largest textile concerns of the empire. His generous financial support offset the effects of the Werkstatte’s chronic mismanagement, until he was driven into bankruptcy. After that, the major clients of the Werkstätte joined as shareholders in the concern, thus keeping it afloat by their double support until 1932.
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 Ruskin 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 and hammered-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

Zionism aspire to create a publicly guaranteed homeland for the Jewish people in the land of Israel; thus read the program for the first Zionist congress, in Basel in 1897. Twenty years later (on May 14, 1918), the State of Israel was proclaimed. Behind the idea, and instrumental in building the movement that achieved it, was the utopian dreamer and man of action Theodor Herzl, the founder of political Zionism.

Born in Budapest, Herzl was stressed the state as an organic collective, determined by local bonds of blood and tradition — more deep-seated massete to Catholicism, 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 edness 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-assured 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) attached itself to the broader wave of militant nationalism that swept Northern Europe beginning in the late nineteenth century. This movement looked to the sagas and traditions of the North as sources of a rude vigor, impervious to what was seen as the corrupt and effete decadence of modern times. The eclectic historicism that marked the Ringstrasse era, and the multifaceted Anglonmania that was apparent in the avant-garde art of 1910, thus gave way to a more assertive Pan-Germanism a sentiment that reached its height in the years of Conservatism stressed the state as an organic collective, determined by bonds of blood and tradition.

Theodor HERZL
1860-1904

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 of German folk art, changed to the "effeminate" influences of 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 Provinzkunst was rigorously anti-urban and anti-modern. Hermann Bahr, the champion of Jung-Wien who in the eighties and nineties suffered his first major anti-Semitic approach of aestheticism (see p. 6), became — with his 1899 essay "Die Entdeckung der Provinz" ("The Discovery of the Provinces") — one of the propagators of Provinzkunst. In literature, theater, and art, this new outlook on a rural ideal stock instead of sensitive urbanities. True defenders of the native culture of the fatherland, ready to fight and die for Blut und Boden ("blood and soil"), these heroic peasants became the new ideal; and the Provinz-Künstler ("artist of the provinces") — inspired by the ethnological lessons of fairy tales and Northern legends and sagas — was seen as the sole interpreter of the folk soul. For the lower middle-class, uncomfortable in the new urban culture, such veneration of rural life and a "purer" past provided an escape into the utopia of an idealized, pre-industrial society.

The land he envisioned was to be built under the telling titles of Heimat (Homeland), Das Land, Heimatschutz (Protection of the Homeland), Der Grad (The Grad), and Neue Bahnen (New Paths), their constant objective seemed to have been to assail the city as an avaricious whore. The periodical Der Kyrlthausen (the name of a mountain in the nationalistic myth of Barossa) was founded with the specific aim of advancing the extreme right-wing politician Georg von Schonerer's German nationalist movement. On the cover of its first issue, in 1892, this magazine called itself the "battlefield for German politics, culture and art."

In literature and poetry the same battles were waged. Whether in the German Julius Langbehn's widely influential anti-modern tract Rembrandt's Educator (1890) or in the architectural articles of Alfred Lichtwark, the message was the same: only a return to the spirit of peasant art could provide the vital energy necessary for the revival of a healthy national art. Lichtwark's praise for the nobly unfinished forms of the houses made by fishermen and farmers 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 monumenality, while others saw in Lichtwark's writing the license for a profusion of picturesque detail. But the mannered artificiality of Provinzkunst was its least noxious aspect; its more consequential impact lay in the virulent attacks on the intellec
tual, cultural, and ethical foundations of liberalism — forebodings of a darker future.
Kunstschau and the Kabarett Fledermaus

In 1905 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 1908 (Vienna Art Show 1908) marked the most complete expression of the desire to extend art into every realm of life. The Wiener Werkstaette and the Kunstgewerbeschule participated along with the Klimt Group. Besides the rooms devoted to painting and design, there was also an outdoor theater, and even a complete house prototype by Josef Hoffmann, ready to sell.

The displays at the Kunstschau announced dramatic shifts in Viennese aesthetics. Instead of the severe, impersonal geometry that had dominated the first years of Wiener Werkstaette design (see p. 7), a more eclectic, often Romantic sensibility now dominated, in the form of elaborate, brightly colored designs that looked to folk art and children's art for their inspiration. Styles that were held to be specifically characteristic of Northern lands (as opposed to the classical heritage of the Mediterranean), or particular to Austria, were taken as models from the past. Thus such disparate modes as a flowery neo-Baroque and a self-conscious archaism could appear side by side, united in their rejection of any "rational," reductive plainness. Where architecture had seemed to dominate design from around 1902 to 1905, a more fanciful emphasis on complex surface pattern now emerged, drawing on spirals and filligree patterns found more often in embroidery and metalwork. On the one hand this suggests trivialization, pandering to a taste for the merely cute and picturesque; on the other hand, these designs also often contained the marks of a new energy that would give rise to expressionism.

In Carl Otto Czeschka's illustrations for Die Nibelungen, several of the new directions in Viennese art were implicit. The attention lavished on this book, which was part of an ambitious series of illustrated tales for young readers, typifies the new interest not only in Northern legends and sagas but also in art by or for children. Drawing on the patterns of peasant embroidery and on a style of medieval manuscript illumination, Czeschka stressed a "barbaric" congestion of patterns, and sought nobility in a certain wilful stiffness of line and pose.

Kabarett Fledermaus

In 1907, the Wiener Werkstaette built for itself a theater/restaurant, the Kabarett Fledermaus. Inspired by the artists' cabarets in Paris, the Fledermaus was intended to extend the Viennese avant-garde. The cabaret featured a mixed program of experimental dance, theater, and poetry readings as well as more popular entertainments. During the second week of performances, the twenty-one-year-old Oscar 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 delicate feel of the Palais Stoclet interior (see p. 15). But covering the bar-room wall were 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 Loefler 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 figural 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 as unhealthy and constricting deformation of the body. Whalebone and laces were to fall away from the body to allow for free movement. This new Rational dress of Floege and Gustav Klimt's work, visited Vienna in 1912, and purchased quantities of fabric from the Werkstaette.

The fabric workshops, and eventually the special Werkstaette stores dedicated to fashion, were among the most prominent and profitable aspects of the enterprise. The success of Wiener-Wagnerin's and the Werkstaette 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. When the war came, the Werkstaette was expected to take the lead in redifining a properly Germanic mode, in the folio of approved designs for 1914-15, the slim elegance of the previous years switches to a suitably studly 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 Werkstaette was that good craftsmanship and design were more important, and ultimately more valuable, than expensive materials. Thus the Werkstaette strove to work 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 made 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.

The Reform dress were redefined 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 Werkstaette.

The major talent shaping Werkstaette fashion was Eduard Josef Wiener-Wagnerin, Vienna's answer to the star of Paris couture, Paul Poiret. Wiener-Wagnerin's designs and those of his Werkstaette 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 Werkstaette.

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Dreams and Sexuality

Dreamy eroticism seems in one respects the key to the fluid lightness of much of Viennese art, fantasy blurring the line between the desired and the actual. But eros and the unconscious were equally near the heart of the most disturbing and disturbing innovations of early modern Viennese culture. The realm of the dream, evoked by Gustav Klimt in the fluid lines of plain language, took on an unsettling concreteness in the more grotesque visions of Alfred Kubin; and the melding of narcism with sensuality, the savor of sensuality, the mingling of dream and eros, but the specificity mixture within this imagery—of desire and danger, glamor and unease, the chic and the shocking—seems attuned to the Viennese temper.

Freud's approach relied on several new techniques which together constituted the essence of the psychoanalytical process: the interpretation of the "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 about unawakened 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 re-experiencing 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.

Freud 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 1880-1881, he studied in Paris, where he met 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 in Hysteria (1895). Five years after The Interpretation of Dreams Freud published his most explosive ideas in Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality (1895), further developing his insights into the sexuality of children, and their obsession with their parents in what he called the Oedipus complex.

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 shared with the painter Gustav Klimt an interest, parallel to Freud's, in intertwined obsessions with death and sex.

Notwithstanding those currents of interest, only three hundred and fifty copies of The Interpretation of Dreams had been sold two years after it was published. Freud found refuge from disappointment in his fascination with archaeology (which attracted him because of its obvious parallels with the process of psychoanalysis). More important, in order to escape the death of his famous falsetto in the allure of erotic attraction, the peripatetic 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 with 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 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 and Kranz's defense and interpretation in Die Fackel helped Weininger's ideas gain special currency among Viennese intellectuals and artists. The philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, the composer Arnold Schoenberg, and even Freud himself acknowledged the austere rigor of Weininger's argument. Later, his ideas fell on more dangerous ground, as they were adapted to serve Nazi racial ideology.
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 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 Klimt and others in the early twentieth century. Czeschka's love for elaborate arabesque comes through, however, in the complexly 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 turned them out in quantity. Yet, far from being "potboilers," these drawings are consistently inventive, and marked by a special energy that is in some ways fresher and more authoritative than that of his more ambitious paintings.

Egon Schiele was an extraordinary draftsman. His numerous erotic drawings sold quickly, and he grappled, dissatisfied human gesture is set against the hollow unresponsiveness of the puppet—a sign perhaps that Schiele, inheritor of the full-bodied sensual emphasis 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...
Ideals of Unity: Music and the Visual Arts

Vienna'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. 6).

The creative forces in music were nonetheless often closely intertwined with those in painting and architecture, at the turn of the century. Virtually every Vienna 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 from the different arts. Thus, Mahler, with his Wunderhorn, painted by Peter Altenberg and postcards by Peter Altenberg that included Mahler's compositions, showed the close relationship between music and painting.

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 Kalisht, 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 the most dissonant elements of popular song into symphonies (such as the French song "Frère Jacques" in his Symphony No. 1 of 1883), Mahler wanted his music to capture the mundane experiences of life as well as its metaphysical aspects. A client of Freud and devotee of Schönbrunn 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 world-wide 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" that composer Mahler believed he had forestalled 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.

ANTON VON WEBERN
1883-1945

In his departure from the tonal system, Anton von Webern was the most radical of Schönberg's students. His innovative years had been colored by the Romanticism of Richard Wagner, but his contact with Schönberg 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 shortest 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 Schönberg'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, passionate feeling for nature.

Webern's composition 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, Schönberg found, in the twelve-tone system, the kind of control he had sought for his atonal compositions. Although he did not invent the system, Schönberg brought it to prominence, using it first in Five Pieces for Piano, Op. 33 (1923) and working with it in most of his subsequent compositions.

The rise of Nazism revived Schönberg's allegiance to his Jewish background; he chose an Old Testament subject for his twelve-tone opera Moses and Aaron (1930). In the early 1930s he 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 1907.

ALBAN BERG
1885-1935

Alban Berg is best known for his two operas: Wozzeck, the first full-length atonal opera (1917-22, after Georg Büchner's play Woyzeck) and Lulu (1929-35, after two plays by Frank Wedekind). He was 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 ample sketches and notes.) Both are powerful psychological dramas for which Berg himself prepared the libretto.

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Later Painting

With the performance at Moerder Hoffnung der Frauen (Murderer, Hope of Women; see p. 13), it was clear that a new kind of art was on the rise in Vienna. Kokoschka had worked for the Wiener Werkstätte, and his first illustrated book was dedicated to Klimt; but he soon quit the Werkstätte, 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. The wealthy elite of Vienna clung to the sense of elegance and good taste that had been implicit in the Secession and the Werkstätte, and self-consciously stressed by many of the Kunsthistoriker artists.

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 decorateness 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 hunched posture 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 whitened vacuum. In early portraits like that of Dr. Erwin von Graff, the constructed 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). 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 concern 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 Joseph 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 concern with economic and governmental with private finance. But where Haussmann's boulevards were notable for their homogeneity, the Ringstrasse's hallmark was the eclecticism 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 flattered 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 initiated 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 sanitation, 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 philistine hypocrisy, which sought to disseminate 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.

Otto 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 theatrical, 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 1900, might be said to haunt the Viennese search for a modern architecture.

Gustav Klimt, Hoffmann, and the other original members of the Secession dreamed of finding support for larger-scale public projects in which, as in medieval cathedrals, architecture would draw back under its aegis all the arts of painting, sculpture, and so on—arts that had been relegated by the modern market to small-scale private expression. This was a dream that (with the exception perhaps of Wagner's Steinhaus Church) went unrealized; only the collaborative Secession exhibitions or exceptional private commissions like the Palais Stoclet suggested what these artists envisioned on a larger scale.

Modern Viennese architecture set out to reconcile several conflicting needs and desires. The simplicity of anonymous rustic styles was to be brought into harmony with the authority of high traditions, and a spare demilavugal of vulgarity was to be balanced against the demands for luxury of an elite clientele. The issues raised in these attempts, of the tensions between country and city values, or between social consciousness and interior life, are perhaps even more revealing than the less ambiguous and more confidant rhetoric of the would-be modern reformers. And the disjunctions and disparities—notably in the self-conscious separation between facade and interior—are perhaps the most fascinating aspects of Vienna's role in an emerging modern architectural movement.

CAMILLO SITTE
1843—1903

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 rebuffed 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—elicited only anxiety (specifically Plattenstädte, or agoraphobia, the fear of open spaces).

Nostalgic for what he felt was the surging 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 commentator-critic of the Ring differed sharply from the objections of more self-conscious 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.
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 Werkstaette 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 Postal Savings Bank (built in 1904-06 and 1910-13) combined the nobility of traditional materials with details that suggest the energies of modern industry. Wagner made a point of declaring the artifice of the stone facade on this vast masonry structure. Emphasizing 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 Hinterbrühl, 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 1905-04. Upon his father’s death, Stoclet was forced to return 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 Werkstaette 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 Werkstaette. The dining room features a three-part monastic frieze by Gustav Klimt (executed by Leopold Forster) 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 bareness 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 venerable, if not prestigious, styles of Viennese architecture. “I kept the plaster surfaces as simple as possible because the burghers of Vienna also disapproved of decoration that was vulgar. The guilds of burghers have always been against all ornament. Like Wagner 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.

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.


Adolf Loos. Haus am Michaelerplatz (Goldman & Salatsch Building). 1908-11

Otto Wagner. Warm-Air Blower from Main Hall, Postal Savings Bank, c. 1906. Aluminum, 83% (25cm) high. Oesterreichische Postsparkasse, Vienna

Josef Hoffmann. Palais Stoclet, Brussels. Music room. 1905-11

IN THE EXHIBITION

15
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 Emperor Elisabeth, always a troubled and distant consort, was assassinated by an anarchist in 1918. 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.

Fiinal 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 shift divided the symbolic theater of the emperor's venerable, paternal authority from the volatile realities of a rapidly changing Vienna. Austria's fractions internal disunion 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 innovations of Sigmund Freud, Gustav Mahler, Alois Riegl, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and the other thinkers and artists cited in this publication — seem in retrospect to have been set within a larger tableau of impending doom. Intimations of decadence and despair are not hard to find interwoven with the golden fabric of Vienna's brilliance, not least in the suicides that recurrently punctuate the chronicle of its notables. Indeed, one of the dialogues apparent within all the Viennese arts of the period is that between the elaboration of seductive superficial ornament and the probing of darker, more ambiguous and alienating inadequacies of modern life. These poles, of eros and neurosis, of the indulgent and the insatiable, became the hallmark — opposed yet entwined — of the intransigent, became the hallmark of the legacy that survived the eventual destruction of Vienna's "golden age."

When Franz Joseph's nephew and heir, the Archduke Franz Ferdinand, was assassinated at Sarajevo in 1914 by a young Serbian nationalist, Austria's inscrutable position drew along with its ally Germany, and eventually unleashed the great war which many (with eagerness as well as foreboding) had long anticipated. Franz Joseph died in the depths of the war, in 1916, and the empire itself was dissolved in the defeats of 1918. That year had a terrifying finality in the arts as well, as the architect Otto Wagner, the designer Koloman Moser, and the painters Gustav Klimt and Egon Schiele all died before the new Austrian republic had established itself. A great epoch had ended, and the "modern genius" of Vienna's modern genius had begun — only to be finalized by the wave of emigration with fascism's rise in the 1930s.

Retrospect

Only since the 1960s has the convergence of studies on the great Viennese figures — Theodor Herzl, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and others, as well as artists such as Klimt and Schiele — pieced back together the scattered elements, to bring to full public awareness the rich heritage bequeathed by turn-of-the-century Vienna. The diverse and often contradictory implications of this legacy risk being overwhelmed, however, by the very power of our new fascination with this special time and place. Our retrospective sense of the combined glimmer and doom of the last years of Hapsburg rule can create a romantic aura, a seamless "spirit of the time," and find the marks of fate in every aspect — leading to the myth of a society so fraught with the ambivalent energies of modernity that it virtually required an apocalyptic end as its only appropriate consummation.

The works of the Viennese creators, in their complexity and specificity, resist such simplifications. No all-embracing romance of the lost empire, nor any simple label such as "the cradle of modernity," is adequate to the challenging variety of experiences provided by these works of art. Similarly, the brief background provided here is not intended to "explain" Vienna, or to level achievements in very different fields to a vague common denominator, but only to point to the stunning, often paradoxical constellation of achievements that transformed Vienna's place in the Western imagination — from a capital of waltz-like Old World charm to a key site of origin for the culture of our times. n

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To the Republic of Austria (Dr. Hein Fischer, Bundesminister fuer Wissenschaft und Forschung) for their generous help with this project, which had its origins in the exhibition Trum und Wirklichkeit. Wien 1870-1919, organized by Hofrat Dr. Robert Waisenberger and Prof. Hans Hollein and presented in Vienna in 1985. We thank, as well John Salier, who has served as Austria's Commissioner for the exhibition at The Museum of Modern Art. A great debt of gratitude is owed to the lenders to the exhibition, whose participation was essential; their names are listed, and the invaluable participation of many other friends acknowledged, in the book published to accompany the exhibition.

LECTURES

These lectures are made possible through the generosity of the Austrian Institute, New York. Related lectures, films, concerts, and exhibitions are being offered by the Austrian Institute, 11 East 52 Street. For further information, call (212) 759-5145.

PUBLICATIONS


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LECTURES

The Museum and the 92nd Street Y will collaborate in presenting a festival of concerts in September and October in the Museum. Distinguished musicians will participate in this series devoted to turn-of-the-century Viennese music, generously underwritten by Mr. and Mrs. Milton Petrie. For further information, inquire at the Lobby Desk.

FILMS

For information on film programs in the Museum related to the exhibition, inquire at the Lobby Desk.

CAFE

A Vienna 1900 Cafe, sponsored by the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, is open in The Ably Aldrich Rockefeller Sculpture Garden.

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