

Vienna 1918 – The end of the Habsburg Monarchy. Commemorating the deaths of Otto Wagner, Gustav Klimt, Koloman Moser and Egon Schiele

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Abstract

Within only a few months, four of the main protagonists of Viennese art and culture at the beginning of the 20th century, Otto Wagner, Gustav Klimt, Koloman Moser and Egon Schiele, passed away in 1918. Their sudden deaths also spelled the end of the era of “Vienna 1900”. The artists’ association Secession, founded in 1897, assumed the most innovative role in cultural life in Vienna, and Wagner, Klimt and Moser were all members of this group. They, as well as Schiele, made crucial contributions to early 20th century Modernism. Wagner went beyond the style of Art Nouveau by introducing a new geometrical language and by accentuating functional use in his architectural plans. Klimt developed the formal autonomy of the ornament in his allegorical paintings and portraits. Moser was the chief designer during the first years of the Wiener Werkstätte and realized highly striking and radically purist designs for arts-and-crafts objects. Schiele, meanwhile, tackled existential anxieties and introduced a strong psychological effect into his Expressionist paintings and drawings.

Keywords: Vienna 1900, Early 20th century Modernism, Otto Wagner, Gustav Klimt, Koloman Moser, Egon Schiele, Secession, Wiener Werkstätte, World War I, Dual Monarchy, Austria-Hungary

Introduction

In 1918, four of the main protagonists of Viennese Modernism at the beginning of the 20th century passed away within the space of only a few months. None of their deaths were directly related to the War which would continue to rage in Austria until November 1918. Gustav Klimt died at the age of 56 on 6th February following a stroke he had suffered one month before. Otto Wagner failed to overcome a bacterial inflammation and passed away on 11th April at the age of 77. Koloman Moser fell victim to jaw cancer, which had become noticeable in 1916, and which he succumbed to on 18th October at 50 years of age. Finally, the year 1918 also saw the death of the only 28-year-old Egon Schiele on 31st October, having contracted the so-called “Spanish influenza”, a pandemic raging at the time, only a few days earlier.

Naturally, the unexpected passing of these four protagonists also spelled the end of an entire era, one known today simply as “Vienna 1900”. The following essay recalls the important contributions of each of them to the striking rise of Modernism in Vienna from the turn of the century to World War I. Moreover, this article seeks to shed light on the multiple mutual links and connections between the biographies and works of these four key protagonists of Vienna 1900.

The Dual Habsburg Monarchy Austria and Hungary in 1918

In 1918, Vienna and the Dual Habsburg Monarchy Austria and Hungary had entered the fifth year of a raging conflict, which became known as World War I or, in some participant states, as the “Great War”. The capital was not directly involved in warfare, which was mainly contained to the battlefields on the frontiers of the Monarchy, including the borders with Russia, Romania, Serbia and Italy. After almost five years of War, however, economic goods and materials became scarce in all parts of the Monarchy, and in Vienna, too, the scarcity of food supply was increasingly felt and interfered more and more with everyday life. Moreover, galloping inflation started to undermine the financial system and to reduce faith in money.

Yet, it is surprising how cultural life still went on in a regular, traditional way, almost unchanged to how it had been in prewar years. Art exhibitions were held during the war as

usual and Egon Schiele, for instance, celebrated his greatest success at the 49th exhibition of the Vienna Secession in March 1918. Even abroad, at least in allied or neutral countries, it was still possible to organize exhibitions, though it was impossible to travel to so-called enemy states. In early 1916, for instance, the Berlin Secession invited the Klimt Group to hold a major show there. In the fall of 1917, the ministry of war and the ministry of external relations financed a large exhibition in neutral Stockholm, which was meant to focus on the topic of war but which turned out to be one of the most outstanding and representational art shows on the Austrian avant-garde. The show traveled on a smaller scale also to Amsterdam.¹

The extent to which the War interfered with the artists' and representatives of culture's personal biographies largely depended on their respective ages. Those who were born in the 1860s and before were in their early fifties or older at the outbreak of War in 1914. This applied to many representatives of Art Nouveau, in particular to Klimt and Wagner, who were not affected by the military draft and could continue their work without any obstacles. Those, however, who were born in the 1880s or later, like Egon Schiele, were called up for compulsory military service almost without exception. But it was exactly this generation which represented the new art movements following on from Art Nouveau, in Vienna predominantly Expressionism. For instance, an analysis carried out for an overview exhibition held in 1998 on Expressionist painting and graphic art in Austria between 1905 and 1925 had led to the conclusion that of the 26 artists whose works were chosen for this show only four had not been drafted into the army.²

The Dual Habsburg Monarchy Austria and Hungary was one of the main players in World War I, seeing as it had also been the source of the conflict. When Serbian terrorists killed Franz Ferdinand, the heir to the Austrian throne, and his wife Sophie in July 1914 during a state visit to Bosnia's capital Sarajevo, and when Austria-Hungary declared war against Serbia in August as a result, a fatal system of alliances between several European powers was

¹ Elizabeth CLEGG, "Austrian Art on the Move. The Cultural Politics of International Exhibiting 1900-1918," in: Tobias G. NATTER/Christoph GRUNENBERG (eds.), *Gustav Klimt. Painting, Design and Modern Life* (exhibition catalogue, Tate Liverpool, 2008), Liverpool, Tate Publishing, 2008, pp. 52-62: 55.

² Franz SMOLA, "Austrian Artists during World War I. Introduction on the Theme," in: Peter WEINHÄUPL, Elisabeth LEOPOLD, Ivan RISTIČ, Stefan KUTZENBERGER (eds.), *And Yet There Was Art! Austria 1914-1918* (exhibition catalogue, Leopold Museum, Vienna, 2014), Vienna, Verlag Christian Brandstätter, 2014, pp. 20-26: 24.

put into effect. Serbia competed with the Austrian Monarchy for the hegemony in the Balkans and could rely on her ally Russia. The Austrian Monarchy, in turn, had her strongest ally in the German Reich. In addition, Germany had permanent tensions with France. Therefore, before 1914, a highly fragile balance of powers and a complex allied system characterized European politics, a system that collapsed easily and triggered a series of declarations of war.

More than for any other party involved, the War turned out to be fatal for the Habsburg Monarchy. Losing the War constituted one of the factors responsible for the dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy. On the other hand, the capitulation of Austria-Hungary was not the only reason for the end of the Habsburg Monarchy. Above all, it was the fragility of this state as a whole that occasioned its decline. In 1914, counting more than 50 million inhabitants, Austria-Hungary was Europe's third most-populated state after Russia and the German Empire and with a territory of almost 675,000 square kilometers was the second largest state in Europe after Russia. However, Austria-Hungary was not a nation state like most other European powers, but a multi-ethnic state consisting of more than ten major ethnic groups. These groups spoke very different languages, including German, Hungarian, Czech, Italian, Croatian and Polish.

It was a constant challenge to cope with these cultural and linguistic diversities, and within the parliament in Vienna there were ongoing heavy disputes about the rights of minorities. With Hungary, the state had already found a permanent and stable political solution with the so-called Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867, which had led to the constitution of a Dual Monarchy. The Monarchy had split into an Austrian and a Hungarian half, which had their own governments and tax systems. Only the government of the common ruler, Emperor Francis Joseph, and in addition the external affairs, the military and the financial affairs had to be decided on common grounds. But there were other Crown lands, too, which were eager for more autonomy, such as Bohemia and Moravia. In fact, in 1905 a Compromise was negotiated with Moravia. By 1914, representatives of Bohemia and those of the Italian regions belonged to the thriving opposition forces within the Austrian parliament.

Vienna – political and cultural center of the Habsburg Monarchy

Despite this precarious political situation, the economic growth of the Monarchy in the years around 1900 was quite considerable. Although many of the Crown lands of the Monarchy had a mostly backward rural economy, above all Hungary, Slovakia and Bukovina, there were also highly industrialized regions, such as Bohemia and Lower Silesia. By 1900, the Empire boasted several important political and economic centers, above all Budapest, Prague, Trieste, Cracow, Lviv, Ljubljana and Agram. Besides economic growth, these cities exhibited a vivid cultural life centered mostly on regional interests. One could even speak of various cultural centers within the Monarchy.

Amidst this multitude of diverse ethnic centers, Vienna represented above all the Germanic culture. But beyond that, the city of Vienna as residence of the common ruler Francis Joseph and the seat of administration of joint governmental affairs formed the pivotal focal point of the Empire, which held a huge attraction to all regions of the rest of the Monarchy. There was an enormous migration from the Crown lands from the periphery towards the center that climaxed between 1880 and 1914. In 1910 the city counted more than 2 million inhabitants and was thus among the world's largest metropolises, outdone only by London, New York and Paris and on a par with Chicago and Berlin.

Vienna was not only the political and cultural hub of the Monarchy, it was also an industrial center, and there was both extreme wealth and huge poverty in this city. One has to keep in mind that it was the wealthy few who were responsible for the cultural rise and who stood in stark contrast to the impoverished masses. The artistic movements formed part of this elitist system supported by the leading classes. Most of the new movements within the arts and culture that evolved in Vienna around 1900 were supported by this establishment and were mostly dependent on its financial support. The new artist group of the Secession, for instance, was largely sponsored by the municipality of Vienna, but also by private individuals such as the industrialist Karl Wittgenstein. This means that the “rebellious” group of Secessionists were part of the establishment from the beginning. Highlighting this interconnection is the fact that Emperor Francis Joseph personally attended the opening ceremony of the Secession building in 1898 and thus made it clear that the establishment acknowledged this reformist

group. The design studio of the Wiener Werkstätte, founded by Koloman Moser, Josef Hoffmann and Fritz Waerndorfer in 1903, was largely dependent on clients from the bourgeoisie. Gustav Klimt's numerous commissions for portraits mostly came from members of the upper middle classes, and Klimt's works were eagerly collected above all by rich families like the Wittgensteins, Lederers, Primavesis, Zuckerkandls or Knipses.³

Secession – the onset of Modernism

The artists' association Secession assumed beyond doubt the most innovative role in cultural life in Vienna around 1900. Its name aptly describes how this group came into existence. In the spring of 1897, a group of 23 members of the so-called Künstlerhaus, which was the leading artists' union in Vienna at that time, organized themselves to form a reformatory group within the Künstlerhaus aimed at a renewal of the spirit of art in Vienna and reflecting modern international tendencies. After unsuccessful attempts to establish themselves within the Künstlerhaus, 13 rebellious artists literarily seceded from the union on 24th May 1897 and established their own artists' group, which was to rival their former association. The rebels were clever enough to secure the patronage of the municipality, and on the very day that they declared their secession and exit from the Künstlerhaus, the city government granted permission for the construction of their new exhibition and office building on a prominent site on Vienna's Ringstrasse.

Besides their inclination towards international modern tendencies, the most striking difference between the Secession and the Künstlerhaus was the diversity of its members. The Secession linked representatives of the fine arts, like painters and graphic artists, with architects, designers and even stage designers. To a certain extent, this intermingling of different genres gave rise to a special shared esthetics, which may be termed the Secessionist style. This style adopted features of Art Nouveau, the predominance of stylization of figures and the importance of graphic forms. The most visible manifestation of the Secessionist style can be found in graphic art, as realized for example in the magazine "Ver Sacrum" published by the Secession between 1898 and 1903. All members of the Secession were invited to make

³ Tobias G. NATTER, *Die Welt von Klimt, Schiele und Kokoschka. Sammler und Mäzene*, Cologne, Dumont, 2003, pp. 12-139.

contributions to this magazine, including illustrations and images of their works, and above all were asked to deliver proposals for the magazine's graphic design. In fact, "Ver Sacrum" played a key role in helping to propagate the new Art Nouveau style and in shaping a new taste among Vienna's cultural scene during these years.⁴

Another way of propagating the new Secessionist style was provided by the association's exhibition posters designed by the Secessionists. These posters, created by Moser, Joseph Maria Olbrich, Alfred Roller, Maximilian Kurzweil, Leopold Stolba or Adolf Böhm, became benchmarks of a new style, seeing as they derived decisive influences from Japanese woodcuts and were shaped by a strong geometrical language.

Finally, the Secession set a new milestone in terms of exhibition design. It was mainly during the first few years of the group's activities, between 1898 and 1905, that Joseph Maria Olbrich, the architect of the Secession building, together with Josef Hoffmann and Koloman Moser, shaped a completely new exhibition design. They opted for a modernist setting which provided a lot more space for the artworks than had been accorded them before. Moser and Hoffmann in particular preferred an austere interior with a lot of white empty walls and only scarce geometrical structures.⁵

The very fact that Wagner, Klimt and Moser were members of the Secession proves the Secession's importance. For all of them, the foundation of the Secession had marked a crucial milestone in their personal careers, and they derived strong support from it for their creativity and for shaping their personal style. Klimt and Moser were among the most active founding members of the group. Klimt adopted the role of first president, although he resigned from this position only one year later in order to concentrate more on his commissions. Wagner was to become a member only a few months after the group's foundation. And even Schiele, who was never admitted to this association, was invited in the spring of 1918 to hold a major

⁴ Marian BISANZ-PRAKKE, *Heiliger Frühling. Gustav Klimt und die Anfänge der Wiener Secession 1895-1905*, (exhibition catalogue, Albertina, Vienna, 1998/1999), Vienna-Munich, Verlag Christian Brandstätter, 1999, pp. 109-119.

⁵ Sabine FORSTHUBER, *Moderne Raumkunst. Wiener Ausstellungsbauten von 1898 bis 1914*, Vienna, Picus Verlag, 1991, pp. 91-108.

exhibition in the Secession building, an opportunity which he skillfully turned into his greatest success with the Viennese public.

Otto Wagner – from Art Nouveau to functionalism

With Wagner and Klimt in particular, the date of the Secession's foundation coincided with the adoption of strong elements of Art Nouveau within their work and with the evolution of an independent, personal interpretation of Art Nouveau architecture and painting. In fact, there are some striking parallels in the careers of Wagner and Klimt. Both belonged to the generation of artists and architects whose styles had been informed by the historicist tastes of the time, the most unique and impressive manifestation of which was the construction of the monumental Ringstrasse. Both had honed great skills in the style of historicism and had won early fame. Wagner, in particular, had already received prestigious commissions for apartment buildings along the Ringstrasse and within the noble inner districts in the heart of the city in the 1870s and 1880s. In these works, Wagner largely adhered to a representational historicist, neo-Renaissance style indebted to traditional decor.

Wagner was already in his fifties when he turned from the middle of the 1890s onwards towards the new style of Art Nouveau in his work. Leaving behind the traditional classicist style characterized by tectonic structures of vertical columns, he started to design buildings which highlighted the effect of flat walls and which derived structure mainly from graphical floral decor. The most prominent example for this new way of interpreting architectural elements can be found in the three neighboring apartment houses that Wagner built in 1898 along the Viennese boulevard Wienzeile. The most striking elements are painted tiles, called majolica, which cover the facade of one of the houses, and which had rarely been used before in Viennese architecture.⁶ During those years, Wagner also received the unique commission for planning the new city railway, which constituted a huge and unprecedented enterprise for the metropolis. The project saw three railway lines connecting the suburban areas with the

⁶ Andreas NIERHAUS / Eva-Maria OROSZ (eds.), *Otto Wagner* (exhibition catalogue, Wien Museum, Vienna, 2018), Vienna, Residenz Verlag, 2018, pp. 320-329.

center, and with most of the 36 stations Wagner applied the new architectural language of Art Nouveau, thus creating highly visible landmarks of this new style all over the city.⁷

During the following years, however, Wagner went beyond pure floral Art Nouveau and achieved a new artistic autonomy, which today constitutes his most important contribution to early 20th century Modernism. On the one hand, Wagner developed a particular personal style by introducing a new geometrical language into the designs of his buildings. The most striking expression of this new geometrical Art Nouveau style can be found in Wagner's masterpiece, the church Saint Leopold at Steinhof, erected between 1902 and 1904, which forms part of a large hospital complex on the outskirts of Vienna.⁸ Already the cubic shape of the building indicates a pure geometric outline, and the entire exterior and interior decor reveals a multitude of various geometrical forms. The exterior of the building boasts a solemn chord of gold and white, accentuated by the golden cupola, and the chord is repeated in the interior.

On the other hand, Wagner created his particular personal style by accentuating functionality and usability in his architectural plans. The most prominent example of this functional style is the design for the Austrian Postal Savings Bank in Vienna constructed between 1903 and 1910 (Fig. 1). Situated alongside the prominent Ringstrasse and standing in stark contrast to the neighboring historicist buildings, Wagner stressed the importance of function, for example in showing the aluminum nails that secure the stone tiles to the granite stone facade. Recent research proves the importance of this mechanism, but at the same time exposes an over-emphasis on the visibility of these nails.⁹

⁷ Andreas NIERHAUS / Eva-Maria OROSZ (eds.), *Otto Wagner* (exhibition catalogue, Wien Museum, Vienna, 2018), Vienna, Residenz Verlag, 2018, pp. 292-293.

⁸ Andreas NIERHAUS / Eva-Maria OROSZ (eds.), *Otto Wagner* (exhibition catalogue, Wien Museum, Vienna, 2018), Vienna, Residenz Verlag, 2018, pp. 360-363.

⁹ Michaela TOMASELLI / Thomas HASLER, "Des Nagels Kern und seine Hülle. Über die konstruktive Wahrheit des legendären Scheinnagels," in: Andreas NIERHAUS / Eva-Maria OROSZ (eds.), *Otto Wagner* (exhibition catalogue, Wien Museum, Vienna, 2018), Vienna, Residenz Verlag, 2018, pp. 96-109.

Gustav Klimt – the emancipation of decor

Klimt, like Wagner, started a successful career as master of the historicist style. When he was still a student, he founded the so-called Artist Company together with his brother Ernst and their fellow student Franz Matsch, a workshop specializing in the interior decoration of theater buildings and representational palaces. First, they realized commissions in the provinces, including the theaters in Liberec in Bohemia and in Fiume on the Dalmatian coast, delivering paintings adorning the halls, staircases and stage curtains. Later, they gained notoriety also in the capital of Vienna. Among the most prominent works were paintings in the staircases of the Museum of Fine Arts and that of the Imperial Theater, the Burgtheater. For the brilliant execution of the Burgtheater commission, they even received a medal of honor from Emperor Francis Joseph.

In the late 1890s, Klimt turned towards the new style of Art Nouveau. He was already in his thirties when he left behind the historicist tradition he and his friends had so successfully applied for their representational interior decorations. This shift in style occurred right in the middle of the last commission offered to the company Gustav Klimt and Franz Matsch – brother Ernst had passed away unexpectedly in 1892 – to execute large panels with allegories of the faculties for the ceremonial hall of the new building of Vienna University on the Ringstrasse. Klimt was supposed to depict the faculties “Philosophy”, “Medicine” and “Jurisprudence”, while Matsch was asked to render the faculty “Theology” and execute the large centerpiece of the ceiling showing a general allegory. While Matsch adhered in his paintings to the traditional style of representational allegories, Klimt arrived at a solution that was to be the first masterpiece of Symbolism in Vienna. His new language opposed traditional allegories and presented man in a state of weakness and passiveness. When the paintings were presented for the first time on the occasion of several exhibitions at the Secession between 1900 and 1903, they provoked a public uproar and scandal. The protests of the art critics and academics led to fierce debates about modern art in general and even reached Vienna’s parliament. Following the scandal, the committee in charge decided against displaying the works at the university. Klimt reacted by withdrawing from the commission. He paid back his fee and subsequently sold the paintings to private collectors. Unfortunately,

all three Faculty Paintings were destroyed in the final days of World War II.¹⁰ Aside from these Symbolist works, Klimt also honed a powerful skill in portrait painting during this time and derived considerable influences from international Art Nouveau masters such as the Belgian Fernand Khnopff and the American James McNeill Whistler.

Klimt's outstanding contribution to early 20th century Modernism is the development of the formal autonomy of the ornament. Especially in the works he created during what became known as his "Golden Period" between 1902 and 1909, he liked to combine abstract ornaments of mostly geometrical shapes with perfectly designed figurative parts. As a result, the beholder is confronted with completely different illusionary levels within the same depiction. The most prominent example of this is Klimt's painting "The Kiss" created in 1907/08 (Fig. 2).¹¹ Aside from the symbolic decor of the two protagonists' garments, we can detect a strong tendency towards abstraction in the way he rendered the background. The scattered golden dots, which cover the dark plain surface, evoke a strong spiritual atmosphere within the entire scene. In the portraits, which Klimt executed during the same period, we also observe such an ambiguity of different illusionary levels. In the painting "Portrait of Fritza Riedler" dated 1906, for instance, the figure of the woman, and especially her dress, is executed in a meticulous, almost miniature-like way with a high ambition of imitating reality.¹² The parts of the chair and the background, by contrast, reveal a geometrical structure that cannot even be identified with any precise motif. Thus, decor plays quite an independent role in Klimt's compositions and reaches a striking formal emancipation.

Koloman Moser and the Wiener Werkstätte

While Wagner and Klimt had discovered the style of Art Nouveau in the middle of their careers, Koloman Moser, several years younger, was acquainted with Art Nouveau from his

¹⁰ Franz SMOLA, "Quotes and Images," in: Tobias G. NATTER / Franz SMOLA / Peter WEINHÄUPL (eds.), *Klimt. Up Close and Personal. Paintings – Letters – Insights* (exhibition catalogue, Leopold Museum, Vienna, 2012), Vienna, Christian Brandstätter Verlag, 2012, pp. 176-303: 183-191.

¹¹ Belvedere, Vienna, Inv. 912, in: Tobias G. NATTER (ed.), *Gustav Klimt. Complete Paintings*, Cologne, Taschen, 2012, no. 179.

¹² Belvedere, Vienna, Inv. 3379, in: Tobias G. NATTER (ed.), *Gustav Klimt. Complete Paintings*, Cologne, Taschen, 2012, no. 170.

beginnings. After his studies at the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts, where he was initially trained as a painter, he turned to graphic art and began to specialize in narrative graphic illustrations. In the 1890s he executed numerous illustrations for contemporary novels and revues, for instance for the humoristic journal “Meggendorfers Humoristische Blätter” published in the Bavarian town of Eßlingen. Unsurprisingly, these illustrations reveal a considerable influence of Munich Jugendstil. He contributed various illustrations to the ambitious volume “Allegorien. Neue Folge”, a collection of allegorical graphic works edited by Martin Gerlach in 1895 in Vienna in order to propagate the style of Art Nouveau. Among others, it also included illustrations by Klimt, Carl Otto Czeschka and Bertold Löffler. In 1899, Moser assumed the post of professor at the School of Applied Arts in Vienna. In his position as professor for graphic art, he conveyed the new style of Art Nouveau to a whole generation of students. Moser was also the chief designer for the Secession’s magazine “Ver Sacrum”. During the entire period the journal was published from 1898 to 1903, Moser provided more than 150 illustrations. They allow us to retrace his stylistic development from a curved-linear Art Nouveau style towards a purist orthogonal and geometrical type of Art Nouveau that Moser adhered to from 1901 onwards.¹³

Moser was also responsible for the design of some motifs for the Secession building, which was constructed in 1898 based on plans by Joseph Maria Olbrich. Moser contributed the reliefs of owls on the facade, the frieze of dancers adorning the back of the building, as well as the designs for the large stained-glass window in the entrance hall. The frieze of dancers and the glass window disappeared in later years. Also in 1898, Moser created the design for the golden portrait medallions decorating apartment number 38 on the Wienzeile designed by Otto Wagner. Several years later, in 1905, Moser also furnished the designs for the stained-glass windows of Wagner’s newly erected Church at Steinhof.

Moser was one of the founding members of the famous design studio Wiener Werkstätte, founded in 1903 by the architect Josef Hoffmann, the entrepreneur Fritz Waerndorfer and

¹³ Marian BISANZ-PRAKKEN, “Kolo Moser und der ‘Heilige Frühling’ der Wiener Secession,” in: Rudolf LEOPOLD / Gerd PICHLER (eds.), *Koloman Moser 1868-1918* (exhibition catalogue Leopold Museum, Vienna 2007), Munich-Berlin-London-New York, Prestel, 2007, pp. 68-99.

Moser. Like many other new design studios founded during these years in other European cities, the Wiener Werkstätte also pursued the idea of embellishment of everyday life, of improving the general taste of people, and of enhancing people's wellbeing by surrounding them with objects of modern design. The Wiener Werkstätte manufactured all kinds of interior items, such as furniture, wallpapers, fabrics and rugs, various types of household goods, such as silverware, glassware and ceramics, as well as jewelry and fashion design. The Wiener Werkstätte adhered to the principle of a production process shared by the designing artists and the executing craftsmen, while both left their stamped initials on the objects as permanent signatures.¹⁴ Moser, together with Hoffmann, was the main designer for the Wiener Werkstätte during those initial years. He preferred clear geometrical forms and a very conscious use of materials. Moser executed his most striking and radically purist designs in metal objects, silverware and furniture. Together with Hoffmann, Moser invented the so-called latticed baskets, which are flower baskets and vases in pure geometrical cubic shapes made from latticed metal boards and painted white. Other precious silverware objects embellished with semi-precious stones designed by him often boast an oval, curved design and a striking futuristic appearance (Fig. 3). Moser's highly original ideas constitute a chief contribution to Viennese Modernism at the beginning of the 20th century.

Moser left the Wiener Werkstätte as early as 1907 due to the company's increasing financial problems, though he himself was financially largely independent on account of his 1905 marriage with Ditha Mautner-Markhof, who hailed from a wealthy industrialist family. Owing to this background, Moser was able to acquire two of Klimt's Faculty Paintings, which Klimt had put up for sale after rescinding his contract with Vienna University and the Ministry of Culture. In later years, Moser concentrated mostly on painting, returning to the genre in which he had started his career as a young student. Many of his paintings, in particular his landscapes, are to a certain extent reminiscent of Klimt's late landscapes, especially with regards their penchant for strong colors. Moser became increasingly experimental with colors and developed his own theory of color contrasts. Another source of

¹⁴ Christian WITT-DÖRRING / Janis STAGGS (eds.), *Wiener Werkstätte 1903-1933. The Luxury of Beauty* (exhibition catalogue Neue Galerie New York, New York 2017/2018), Munich-London-New York, Prestel, 2017.

inspiration for Moser's paintings was the work of the Swiss painter Ferdinand Hodler, whom Moser had met several times.

Egon Schiele – the evolution of Expressionism

The Wiener Werkstätte, whose success in early years was closely connected to Moser's contributions, was also a common link between Wagner, Klimt, Moser and Egon Schiele. In 1909, the Wiener Werkstätte commissioned Schiele to create drawings of elegant fashion models for postcards, which the Wiener Werkstätte produced in great number. The model Schiele used for these fashion drawings was Gerti, his own sister, who had worked for some time as a mannequin for the Wiener Werkstätte's fashion department. In 1909, Schiele, who was still studying at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna, was a fervent admirer of Klimt's art. He imitated Klimt's decorative style and even attempted the use of gold and silver in some of his early paintings, for example in the 1909 painting "Stylized Flowers in Front of Decorative Background".¹⁵ Some art critics even dubbed Schiele "Silver Klimt". Klimt recognized the talent of the young student and afforded him his first opportunity to show his works in public. He invited him and many other young artists to participate in the 1909 International Kunstschau, a large collective exhibition organized by Klimt, Hoffmann, Moser and other artists, who at that time formed the so-called Klimt Group.

From 1910 onwards, Schiele developed an outstanding genuine style, which included many Expressionist features but at the same time went far beyond Expressionism. Different from other Expressionist works, such those of the German Expressionists, Schiele concentrated less on the effect of colors but rather on that of linear drawing and of very special, often clearly provocative themes. One of Schiele's pivotal topics was his obsession with the self. In numerous self-portraits, Schiele assumed different roles, showing a variety of gestures and grimaces as if to experiment with the articulation of his own psyche. A prominent example can be found in the drawing "Self-Portrait with Hand to Cheek" of 1910.¹⁶ In the way Schiele tackled existential uneasiness in such works and questioned human integrity, he made a strong

¹⁵ Leopold Museum, Vienna, Inv. 474, in: Tobias G. NATTER, *Egon Schiele. The Complete Paintings. 1909-1918*, Cologne, Taschen, 2017, no. 3.

¹⁶ Albertina, Vienna, Inv. 30.395, in: Jane KALLIR, *Egon Schiele. The Complete Works*, New York, Harry N. Abrams, Inc. Publishers 1998 (Harry N. Abrams, Inc. Publishers 1990), No. D 706.

psychological impact in his oeuvre, doubtlessly providing an important contribution to 20th century Modernism.

Schiele's fascination with the naked human body was regarded by his fellow citizens as pure provocation. In a plethora of drawings, he defined the male and female body as instruments of sexual desire, but beyond that very often also as a means to express mental struggles and tensions or to express the loss of existential security. In many cases, Schiele developed a peculiar spiritual relationship with the models and blurred the borders between academic nudes and portraits. He was a masterly portrait painter, too, and the strong facial features and body language reveals a highly psychological expression of the portrayed, who surprisingly were mostly male. It was Otto Wagner himself who had advised the young painter Schiele in 1910 to create a series of portraits of prominent personalities. Schiele did start to realize a few portraits, among them also one of Wagner, but for some reason Wagner was not satisfied with the result and cut his portraits to pieces.¹⁷

Another particularity of Schiele's work is the development of a kind of symbolistic Expressionism in his oeuvre. He created some large-scale figural compositions which reveal an emotive psychological dimension, and often Schiele blurred the lines between biographical and fictional reality. The painting "Embrace (Lovers II)" of 1917, for example, can be read as a self-portrait of the artist together with his wife Edith, but can also be regarded as a metaphor of a violent embrace between the two sexes (Fig. 4).¹⁸ In many equally mysterious works, the artist presented a visionary account of self-exploration, obscuring the borders between the conscious and unconscious mind. Schiele's landscapes and cityscapes, which constitute a considerable part of his work, also show a strong symbolistic inclination.

1918 – The end of an era

Schiele died only a week before the military capitulation of Austria-Hungary. Several weeks later, the end of World War I was proclaimed. The end of the War also spelled the end of an

¹⁷ Whereabouts unknown, in: Tobias G. NATTER, *Egon Schiele. The Complete Paintings. 1909-1918*, Cologne, Taschen, 2017, no. 44.

¹⁸ Belvedere, Vienna, Inv. 4438, in: Tobias G. NATTER, *Egon Schiele. The Complete Paintings. 1909-1918*, Cologne, Taschen, 2017, no. 197.

era, both in a political and cultural sense. The political landscape could not have changed more dramatically in Central Europe. The Habsburg Monarchy fell apart, and the former Crown lands either gained the independence they had strived for or were usurped by already existing nation states. Vienna became the capital of the newly formed Republic of Austria, which comprised the most coherent German-speaking regions of the former Monarchy. From the start, it was doubtful whether this new state could survive economically and politically, seeing as it faced hyperinflation, an impoverished population and social riots.

However, the year 1918 marked a turning point for Vienna also in a cultural sense. The urban growth of the city so intensively discussed by Wagner came to an abrupt halt. Commissions for palaces for the bourgeoisie were replaced by housing estates financed largely by the City of Vienna. These building programs were beyond doubt to become the most interesting cultural achievements in postwar Vienna. Art Nouveau design had finally been replaced by Expressionist, Cubist and constructivist movements. Even Schiele's peculiar Expressionist style, which featured strong elements of Symbolism, would not find any followers in subsequent years.