

Gustav Klimt and The Vienna Secessionists

The formation of The Vienna Secessionists in 1897 marked quite accurately, the formal beginning of the Modern Art in Austria.

The Secession was in large part responsible for the meteoric rise to international fame of several of its members, including Gustav Klimt, Joseph Olbrich, Koloman Moser and Joseph Hoffman who helped to a large extent put Austrian Art back on the map during the 1st 2 decades of the 20th Century and beyond.

The Secession grew out of dissatisfaction of a group of artists with the system of expositions of contemporary art in the city during the 1890's. These shows were controlled by the Assoc. of Austrian Artists, which ran the Artist House (Kunstlerhaue) and favored the conservative artists. They made up a majority of its members, and generally discouraged its members efforts in the decorative and applied arts., which at the time were gaining ground in prestige relative to the traditional fine arts of painting and sculpture. Such issues were among those discussed by smaller groups of the young progressive artists within the Assoc. Feeling that their voices of progressivism would never be heard otherwise, on April 3, 1897, these younger artists announced their intention to form a new organization specifically for the purpose of creating a venue for their work, especially the decorative arts. They sought approval from the Assoc. but were turned down and so formally resigned from it, thus creating a new organization, The Vienna Secession.

SOME GOALS AND PRINCIPLES

Renew the applied and decorative arts

Create a total art-committed to the idea of complete artistically designed environment

Create a new artistic expression that was specifically opposed to the inferior art of the official Vienna Salons

The objectives were self-consciously forward-looking attempted to break with the past and national traditions and clearly hoped to inject some new, outside thinking into a system that for them had become old and stale.

At the time the rise of Art Nouveau was happening from the 1880's until the 1st World War . Western Europe and US witnessed the development of Art Nouveau (New Art). Taking inspiration from the unruly aspects of the natural world, organic lines, intricate patterns, diverse use of materials, and earthy colors. It influenced art and architecture especially in the applied arts, graphic work and illustration.

Like Art Nouveau, The Secessionists was greatly influenced by Japanese art and design which had first been introduced to Vienna in 1873. Kim and other painters favored the exaggerated vertical forms for figures in their paintings. The flattening forms of figures, and spacial depth mimic those of Japanese designers.

Secessionist artists saw many parallels between their art and that of Japan, the complete designed environment, the sense of abstraction and the balance between positive and negative space and emphasis on handcraft as opposed to the machine-made mechanical reproduction.

The vast majority of the Secessionists were themselves painters, print makers or graphic artists. They were fortunate to be working during essentially the golden age of poster development when color photography had not yet been invented, but the perfection of technology for high-volume color lithography had been achieved. Thus the large scale designs for the Secessionists graphic work constituted the most prominent and widely disseminated examples of their art.

Klimt's exotic sirens may be unmistakably sexual in their allure but they're also achingly dreamy, soft-focus figures of wistful yearning and desire.

The purity of the classical arts and architecture had always been held up as their justification, but what did they offer an age which sensed that the excitements of art, as of life, were likely to be impure ? Even when it was ostensibly erotic, classical art was not completely convincing

anymore. The classical female nude, beautiful as she may be, is austere even in her nakedness. She certainly seemed straight laced beside the surging sexual allure of the women Klimt was painting, studies in eroticism in their sinuous postures, their spangled forms and their gaudy gowns. For better or for worse, Klimt women are seldom subjects in their own right. What we see is inseparable from the way we see it. The backgrounds in these pictures don't know their place; instead they bundle up their subjects in a wider more extravagant vision so that they seem to evoke the imagery of a dream. Or of course, a nightmare. The more sensually Klimt represented the women in his paintings the more we feel we're gazing into sexuality's deep dark heart. Freud had yet to formulate his famous association between desire and death wish, but Klimt was clearly on to it already.

Koloman Moser was an Austrian artist who exerted considerable influence on 20th century graphic art. He was one of the foremost artists of the Vienna Secession movement. Moser's designs in architecture, furniture, jewelry, graphics, and tapestries helped characterize the work of this era. He drew upon the clean lines and repetitive motifs of classical Greek and Roman art.

Moser was one of the designers for Austria's leading journal, *Ver Sacrum*. This art journal paid great attention to design and was designed mainly by Moser, Gustav Klimt and Josef Hoffmann.