

Schiele

DELPHI  CLASSICS

Masters of Art

Egon Schiele

(1890-1918)



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The Delphi Classics Catalogue



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Masters of Art Series

Egon Schiele



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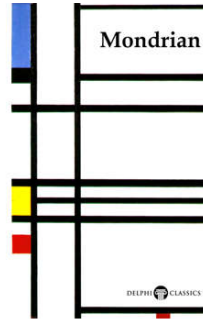
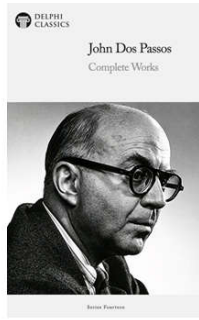
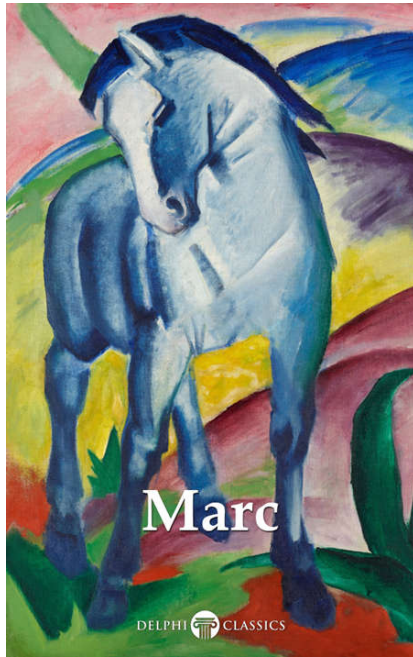
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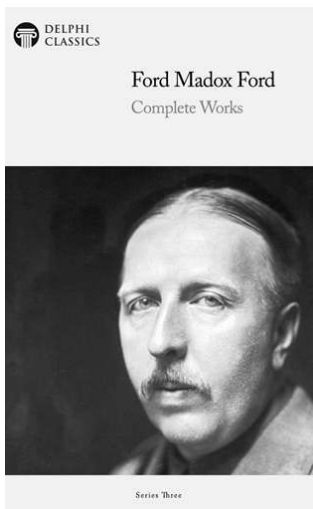
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The Highlights



Tulln an der Donau, a historic town in the Austrian state of Lower Austria — Egon Schiele's birthplace



Cabinet photo, the family of Egon Schiele, 1893. Adolf and Marie Schiele with their children Egon, Melanie and Elvira.



Schiele, c. 1914

The Highlights



In this section, a sample of Schiele's most celebrated works is provided, with concise introductions, special 'detail' reproductions and additional biographical images.

Self Portrait (1906)

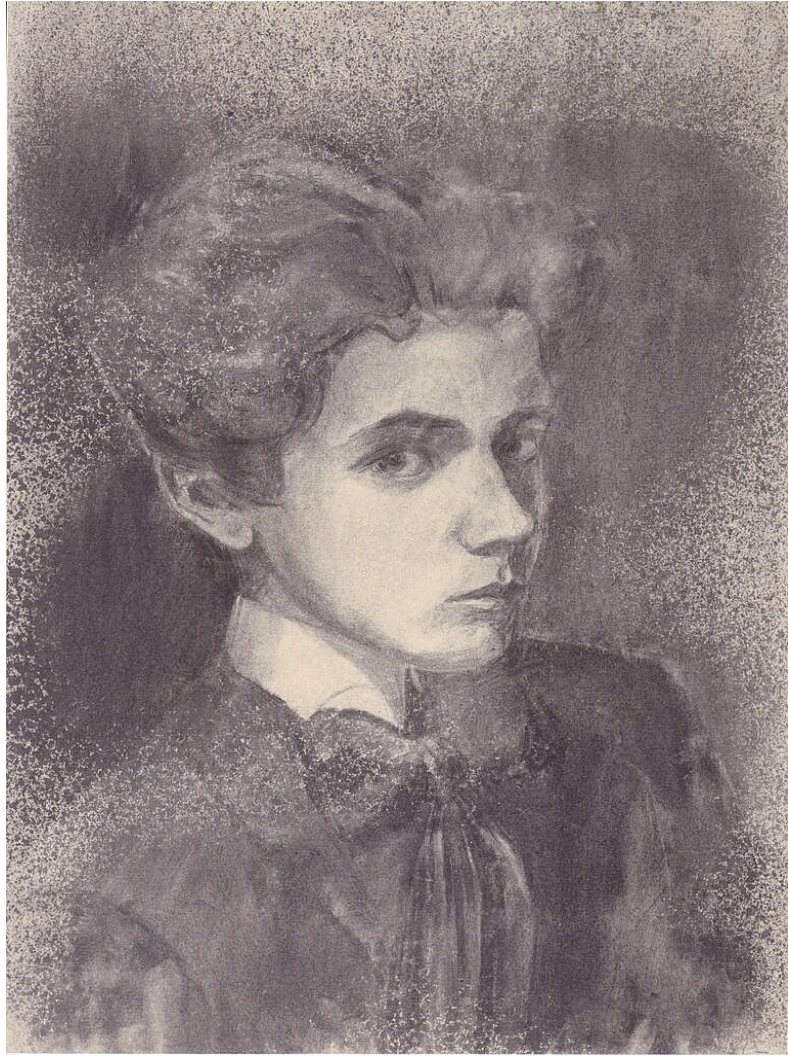


The Austrian Expressionist painter Egon Schiele was born on 12 June 1890 at Tulin in Lower Austria. His mother, Marie (née Soukup), came from Krumau in Bohemia and his father Adolf Eugen Schiele came from northern Germany and served as stationmaster at Tulin. Young Egon was especially close to his father, from whom he inherited a lifelong penchant for railways. His first childhood sketches were of trains and many of his landscapes and townscapes, featuring uninterrupted series of linked visual units, often give the impression as though they were being watched from a train window.

He had been born a weak and silent child, who did not fare particularly well at his grammar schools in Krems and Klostemeuburg. In fact, he had to repeat one year due to poor grades. To those around him, Schiele was regarded as a strange child. Shy and reserved, he displayed incestuous tendencies towards his younger sister Gertrude (known as Gerti). When he was sixteen he took the twelve-year-old Gerti by train to Trieste without permission and spent a night in a hotel room with her.

The only subjects he appeared to enjoy were athletics and drawing. He was initially taught art by his Klosterneuburg teacher, Ludwig Karl Strauch, followed by the painter Max Kahrer, and Wolfgang Pauker, who was the master of the Augustinian choir. All three approved his application to study art at the Academy in 1906. However, the year before his formal studies commenced, Schiele suffered great personal hardships. On New Year's Day 1905 his father died of an advancing paralysis, caused by syphilis. As well as the crippling financial difficulties that he now faced, the aspiring artist was without the person he had become closest to in his life. He had never been close to his mother, who in surviving letters often criticises him for being reckless in his spending. The loss of his father would have a lasting impression on the youth, who in later years confessed that he still “spoke to his father” in his dreams. Many art historians believe this death shaped Schiele as the artist he would become, while providing one of the recurring themes of his oeuvre.

Following this loss, the medium of self portraiture — wherein maker and sitter become one — was a great source of consolation for the young artist, enabling him to express his grief personally, without the scrutiny of a witness. Some critics have argued that by drawing or painting himself, Schiele was able to replace the lost and idealised parent. One of the earliest self portraits offers a charcoal half-length representation of Schiele in profile, wearing a suit and wing collar, indicating a claim to adulthood. The early self portraits reveal an enduring interest in representing the artist as a self-confident youngster, not afraid to pose with the tokens of his chosen trade. His alert and secure, perhaps even stern, gaze in the following self portrait, blended with the dandyish quality of his dress — from an early age Schiele had a taste for fashionable clothes — stress how important it was for the grieving son to appear no longer as a child, but as an artist in his own right. After all, he now regarded himself as the head of the Schiele family.





Detail



Detail



Detail



Detail



Detail



Schiele's portrait of his early teacher Max Kahrer (1878-1937)

Trieste Harbour (1907)



After his father's death, Schiele became a ward of his maternal uncle, Leopold Czihaczek, who was also a railway official. Although he wished for his nephew to follow in his footsteps, Czihaczek was distressed at his lack of interest in academia. Still, he recognised Schiele's talent for drawing and half-heartedly allowed him a tutor, the artist Ludwig Karl Strauch. In 1906 Schiele applied at the School of Arts and Crafts in Vienna, where the celebrated Austrian symbolist painter Gustav Klimt (1862-1918) had formerly studied. Schiele was sent, at the insistence of several faculty members, to the more traditional Akademie der Bildenden Künste in Vienna. His main teacher was Christian Griepenkerl (1839-1916), a painter whose strict doctrine and ultra-conservative style frustrated Schiele and his fellow students. The Academy demanded a firm discipline of its students, favouring the study of ancient statuary, the living model and drapes. Schiele exhibited a dislike for these academic exercises, though they helped him perfect his gift for draughtsmanship. Still, the style of his teachers had no influence on the development of his style. Rather than being inspired by Griepenkerl's traditional classes, he was much more impressed by the flat-dimensioned linear style of Klimt and the Secession artists, as their influence became noticeable in his work.

In 1907 Schiele directly sought out Klimt, who kindly offered his time to mentor younger artists. On a subsequent visit to Klimt's studio, where he showed the elder artist his work and asked the great man if he saw any talent, Schiele received the now famous reply, "Talent? Yes, too much talent." From then on Klimt took a special interest in Schiele, purchasing some of his drawings, offering to exchange them for some of his own, finding models for him and introducing him to possible patrons. Klimt also introduced Schiele to the Wiener Werkstätte, an arts and crafts workshop connected with the Secession. Schiele's works between 1907 and 1909 reveal striking similarities with Klimt's paintings, with a strong preference for the Art Nouveau style.

In time, Schiele declared his affinity to the more radical and experimental art of the Viennese Secession movement. The artist group had been constituted in 1897 to assail the rigid academic conventions of historicism. These Secessionist artists upheld that art and life must be harmonised. At that time crafts were undergoing a revival, seeking to transform the human environment into a realm of beauty. Klimt was ultimately regarded as the new movement's leader, whose art could "heal the ills of mankind" with a decorative veil drawn over hard reality, leading to redemption. During his time at the Academy, Klimt's decorative and sublime art became Schiele's guiding influence, which he would revere till his untimely death in 1918 — the same year that Klimt also died. Instead of the naturalistic and perspective drawings required by Griepenkerl, Schiele opted for Klimt's teachings, placing an emphasis on the painted surface, aided by fine draughtsmanship and the prevalence of decorative forms in place of spatial values.

Trieste Harbour (1907) is one of Schiele's finest oil paintings from this formative period of his career; it is also the first to indicate the future direction that his work would take. The image depicts several boats resting in Trieste's harbour and was likely painted on one of the artist's many sojourns to the Adriatic port that year. Usually accompanied by Gerti, his beloved sister, Schiele likely chose Trieste as it

had been the location of his parent's honeymoon. The bustling port offered a welcome diversion away from the restrictions he felt both at home and at the Academy. Schiele often recalled these early visits to Trieste as being among the happiest times of his life. There, he could be free to pursue his own artistic vision independently.

At the Academy Schiele was not permitted to paint in oils and his teachers would have regarded with horror the style of this radical painting, with its flamboyant emphasis on abstract pattern lines replicating the water's surface, imitating the Jugendstil of the Secession. Griepenkerl had been especially strident in his opposition to Secessionist art and had tried to forbid his students from visiting the exhibitions. Distrusting any originality or off-beat talent in his students, Griepenkerl found Schiele to be a challenging presence in his classroom. Reputedly, on one occasion the professor scolded Schiele with the words: "the devil has shat you into my class... For God's sake don't tell anyone that I was your teacher!" For such an austere and traditional master as Griepenkerl, *Trieste Harbour* would have appeared an illicit work of art; for his rebellious student, it represented an escape from the strictures of Academy training, announcing a clear defiance of all that his 'master' had taught him.

Nonetheless, the painting reveals the student's mastery of formal technique, while exploring the possibilities of Expressionistic styling of lines reflected in the water. He fashions these through the experimental technique of scoring wet paint with a pencil or the wrong end of the brush. Schiele's precocious talent as a draughtsman is shown in the assured ease with which these distinct and fluid angular lines describe the watery reflection of the masts and rigging. This drawing technique would become a hallmark of his pioneering Expressionist style.

The oil and pencil on cardboard artwork was originally part of the collection of Dr. Heinrich Rieger, a discerning collector and personal friend of Schiele. Little is known about Rieger, except that he held a dental practice at 124 Mariahilferstrasse, where both Schiele and his wife were patients and that he was in the habit of accepting works of art in exchange for treatment. Through his practice and by spending all of his available income on the work of young Viennese artists, Rieger assembled one of the finest collections of avant-garde Austrian art. Nevertheless, his fate, like so many of the Austrian collectors of the time, was to be tragic. His collection was confiscated by the Nazis in 1938 and he died in Theresienstadt concentration camp in 1942.

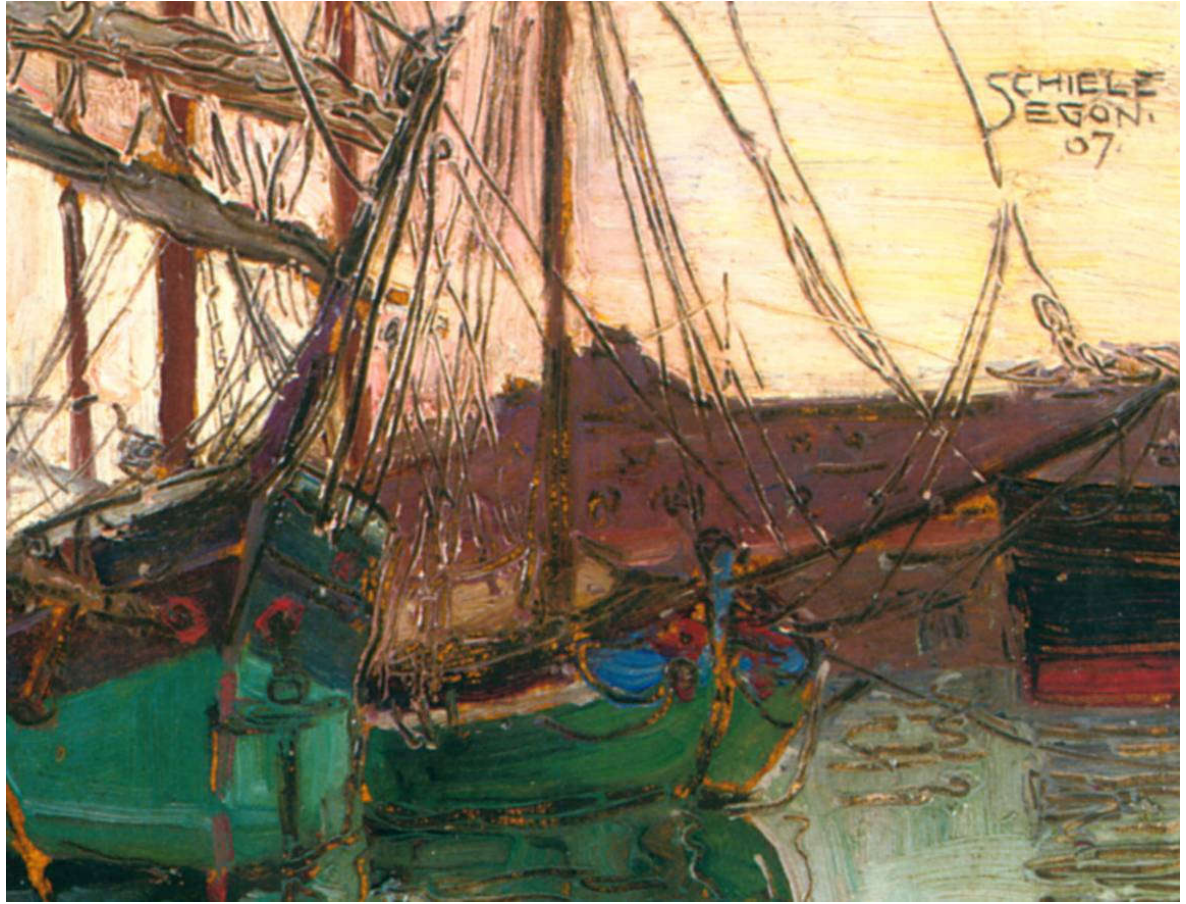




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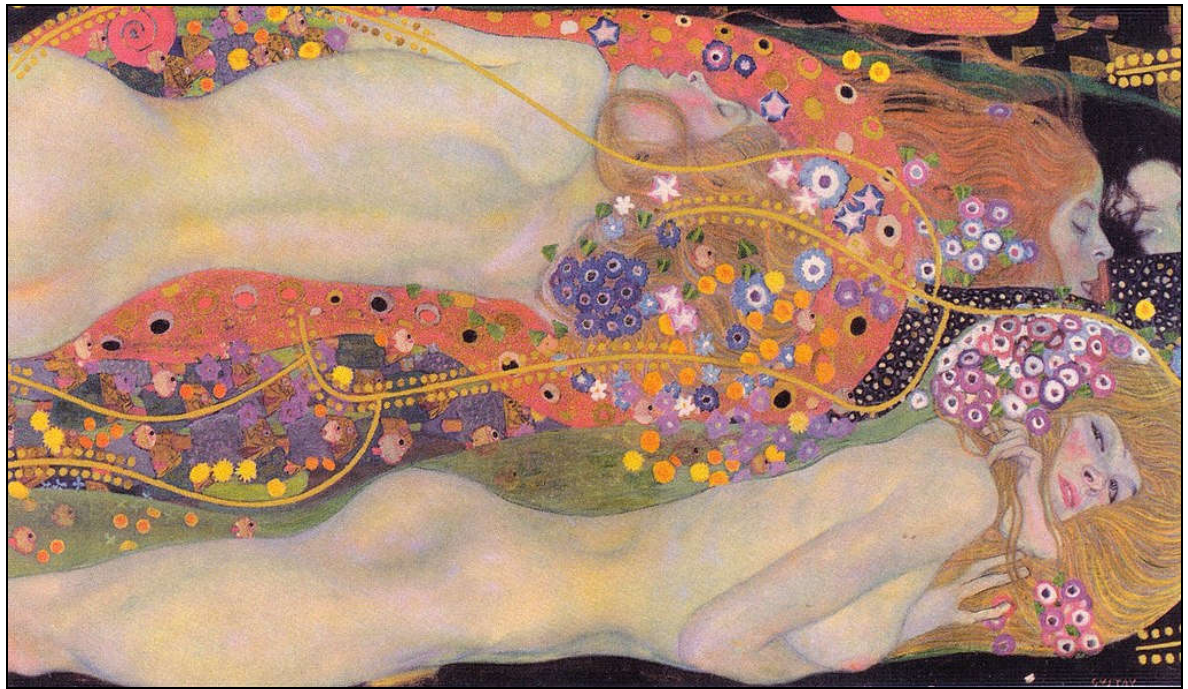
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Gustav Klimt, 1887



'Water Serpents II' by Gustav Klimt, private collection, 1904-1907



Trieste Harbour, 1893

Gerti Schiele (1909)



One fundamental difference between Klimt's representations and Schiele's is how the elder artist demarcates sensuous lines of figures in a perfectly naturalistic manner, while covered in abstract decorative shapes and colours. Yet, Schiele's figures actually become part of the ornamental abstraction of the compositional structure. He likes to present angular bodies, lacking the rounded plasticity of Klimt's figures, appearing as though they have been cut out of metal. Schiele's female figures also lack the erotic charge of his mentor's, while his male profiles are often presented in a dark palette, implying a spiritual sense. For Klimt, the line was important for defining a subject, though the figures are aesthetically stylised into melodic forms. For Schiele, the line functions independently as an instrument of interpretation. Therefore, it is non-physical, with the dominant sense of angularity conveying a strikingly expressive approach. These angular lines — for which Schiele would become so famous — were not used to conceal, but to exhibit a subject in an emphatic manner. It is not merely a stylised ornament, but embraces the possibilities of expressive exaggeration. This technique would inform his work for the rest of his short life.

It was not long until Schiele started to view himself as a kind of “priest of art” — more of a visionary pioneer, than an academician. He felt that it was his responsibility to reveal ideas that were hidden from others. In 1909 he took the decisive step of leaving the Academy, where he had not fared well, to found the short-lived New Art Group with several friends and fellow students. In an original manifesto Schiele defined the artist as one with a vocation:

“The new artist is and must at all costs be himself; he must be a creator; he must build the foundation himself without reference to the past to tradition. Then he is a new artist.”

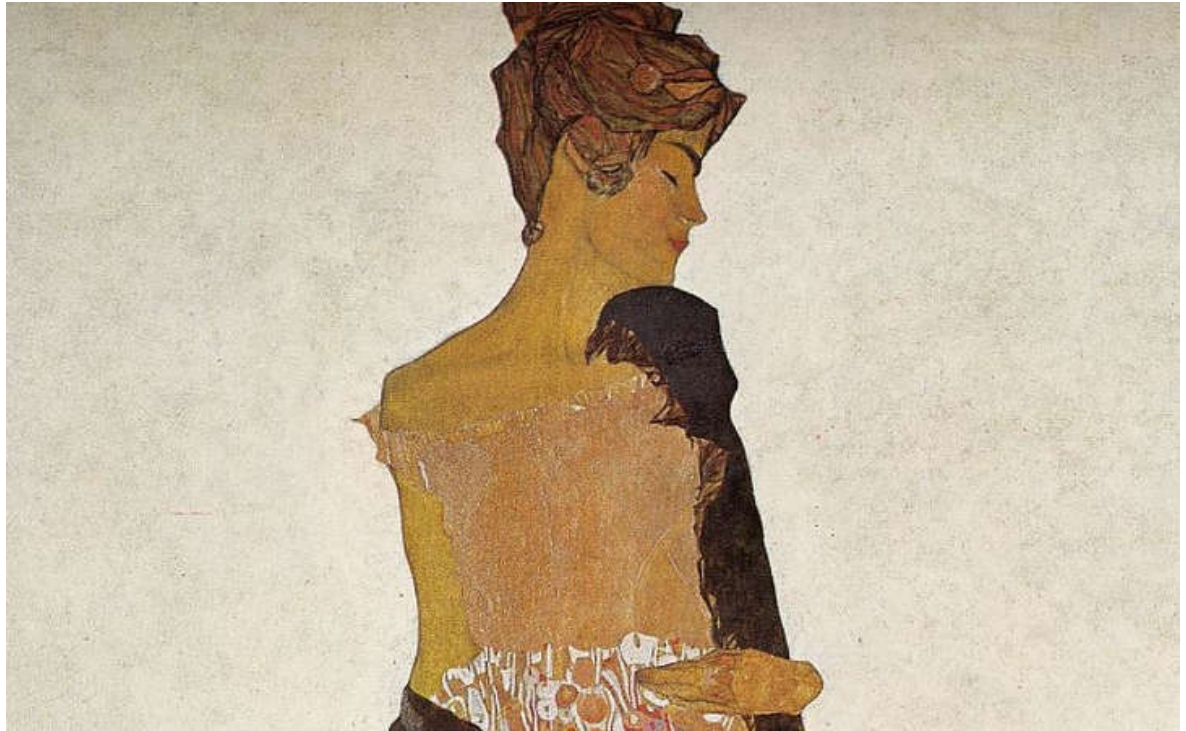
Focusing upon the importance of being oneself and creating from within oneself and for oneself, the radical student had developed the major concept that would form the mainstay of his work. And he was still only nineteen years old!

The Second International Art Show of 1909 featured numerous avant-garde artists, including Pierre Bonnard, Paul Gauguin, Henri Matisse, Félix Vallotton, Vincent van Gogh and Eduard Munch. It also gave Schiele his first opportunity to participate in a noteworthy exhibition. He contributed four portraits, exhibited in a room alongside drawings by Oskar Kokoschka, who had already caused something of a sensation at the First International Art Show of 1908. This time around it would be Schiele causing a stir with the exhibition visitors...

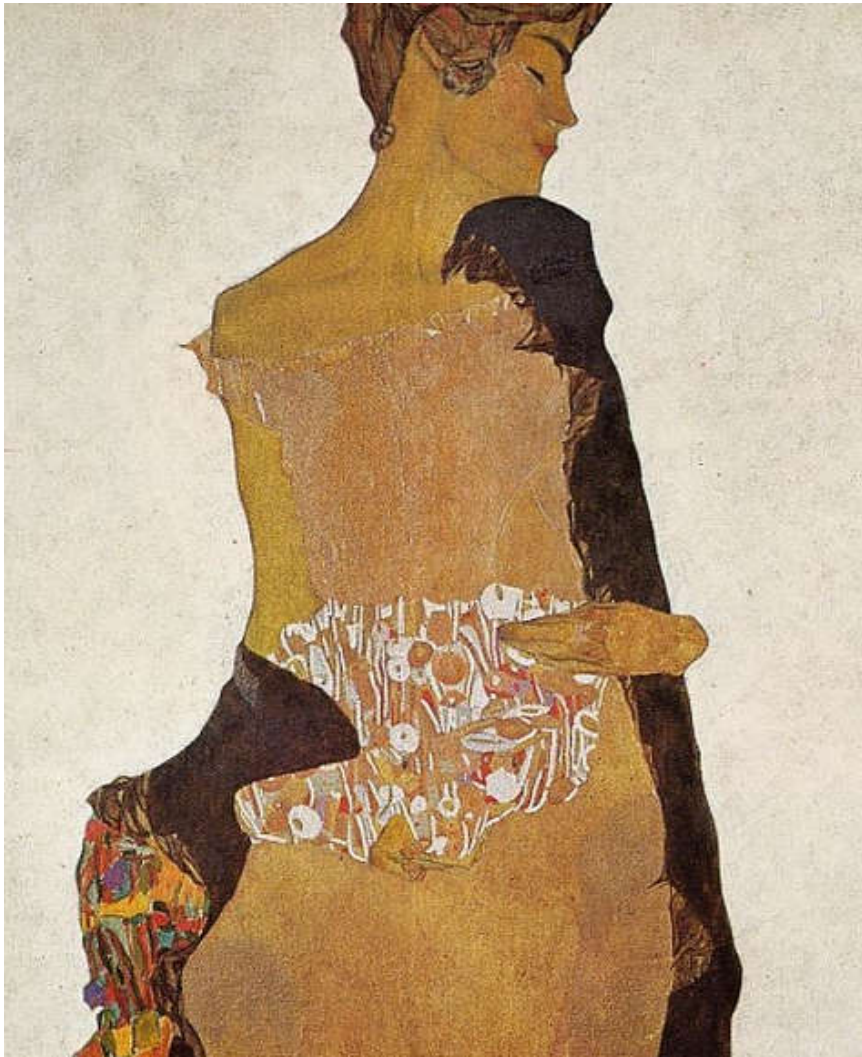
One of the submitted portraits was that of Schiele's sister Gerti, held today in the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. It shows the customary decorative style favoured by Klimt, employed by Schiele through the use of an angular, awkward line. Gerti's facial expression forms the principal focus of the artwork. Her meek gaze unfolds from a bold shock of sparsely-brushed golden locks, accentuating her delicate features, while her cheeks appear to blush under red blotches of paint. The image's soft edges and the bland background give the portrait a dream-like and unreal quality, connecting with the theme of Gerti's youthfulness and innocence. The composition reveals a softer and gentler approach than many of his later paintings of young women.

This softness of style underlines Schiele's move away from simple emulation of Klimt, as seen in the large areas of flat colour accented in silver. Schiele was starting to prefer the use of a more restrained and less elaborate technique than that usually adopted by his mentor. The Gerti portrait gives the impression of a two-dimensional representation of a clay or plaster sculpture, with a reserved and dry palette.

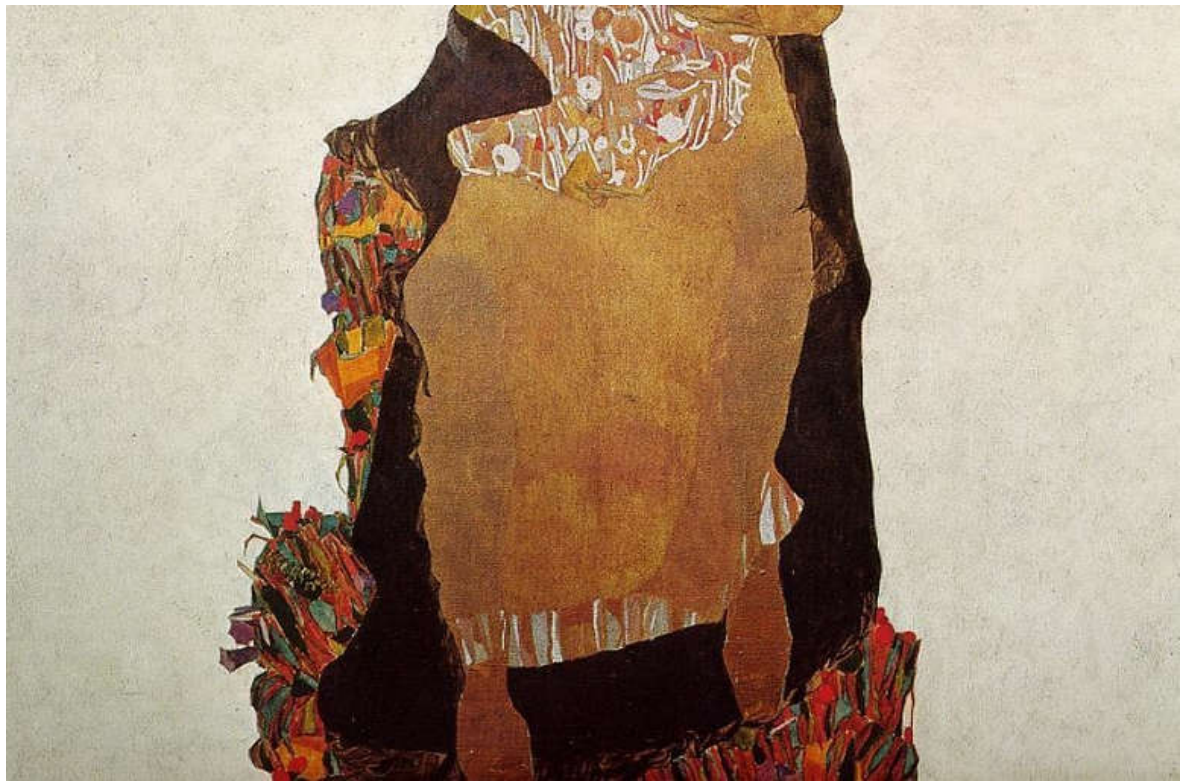




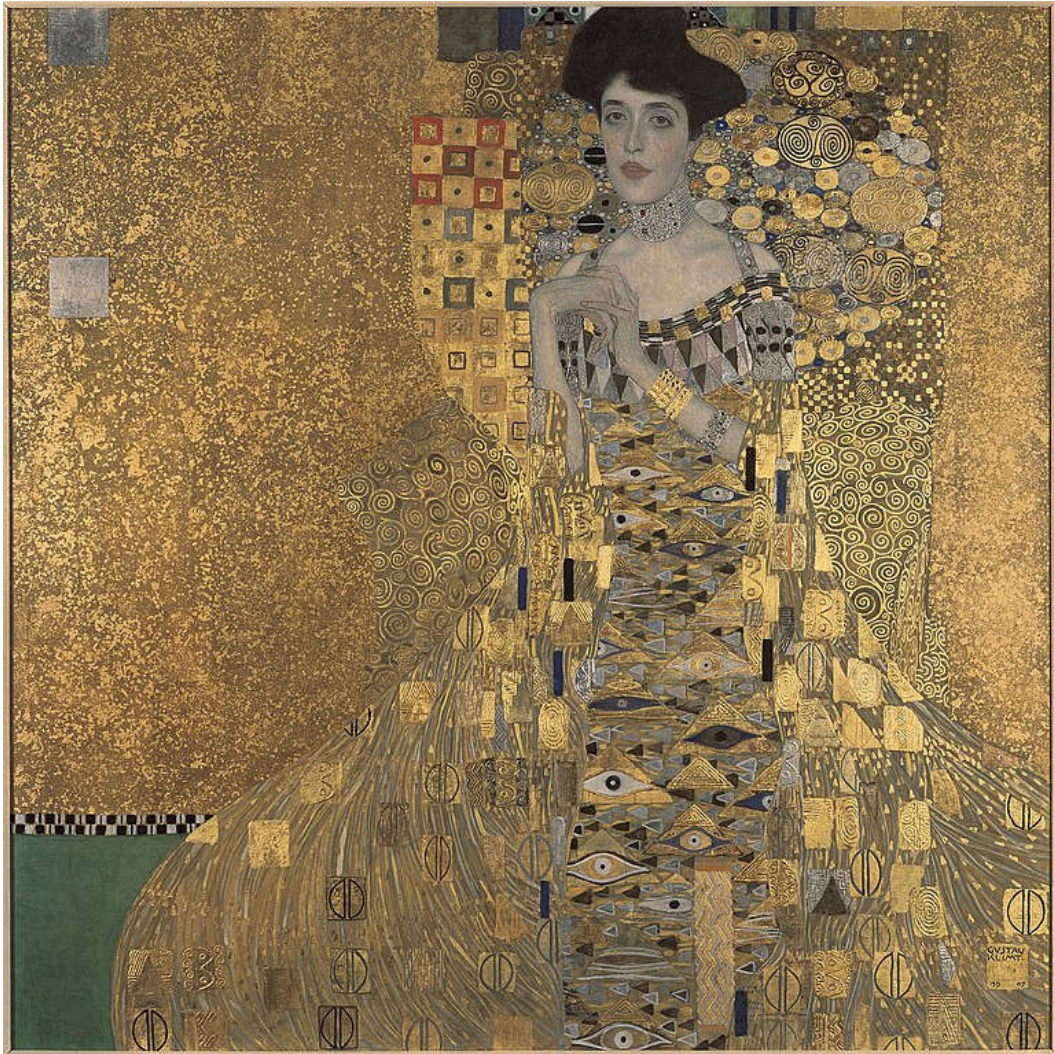
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A likely source of inspiration: Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer I, Neue Galerie New York, 1907



Schiele and his sisters Gerti and Melanie, Tulln, c. 1902

Standing Nude Girl (1910)



In the 1910's Schiele turned away from Klimt's elegant linear clarity, as he evolved his own drawing style, which even his mentor readily acknowledged to be "the style of a master". Whereas Klimt's drawings demonstrate a more self-contained quality, with a soft outline defining a figure as an entity, in contrast Schiele's use of line appears weak and tensed, with a fragmentary quality and it is seldom straight. However, Schiele always ensures that the line is controlled and never wasted, confirming his reputation as a gifted draughtsman. The Austrian art historian Heinrich Benesch (1862-1947) personally witnessed Schiele's work:

"... his artistry as draughtsman was phenomenal. His hand's assurance was almost infallible. When he drew, he usually sat on a low stool, the drawing-board and sheet on his knees, his right hand resting on the board... Then he rested the board on his right knee and held it at the top with his left hand, and, his drawing hand unsupported, placed his pencil on the sheet and drew his lines from the shoulder... If he happened to get something wrong, which was rare, he threw the sheet away; he never used an eraser. He only drew from nature. Most of his drawings were completed in outline and only became more three-dimensional when they were coloured. The colouring was always done without the model, from memory."

During this period Schiele became known for his ill-judged use of young models, posing nude and in controversial positions. This disregard for the youth of his sitters would land the painter in serious trouble in 1912 during the infamous Neulengbach affair, resulting in a brief spell behind bars. Schiele and his friend Erwin Osen had rented a studio at Krumau in southern Bohemia. He had first focused on nude studies of himself and Osen. The following year he returned to Krumau, this time with his partner Walburga ('Wally') Neuzil, who had previously modelled for Klimt and with whom Schiele was to be always seen with for the next few years.

It was not long before Schiele was driven out of Krumau, due to his free lifestyle and reckless display of drawings of young girls. He then moved that to a reasonably-priced house in the country at Neulengbach, west of Vienna. Again, the same antics landed him in trouble with the locals. On 13 April 1912 he was arrested for "seducing" and "violating" an under-age girl at Neulengbach and his drawings were confiscated. Eventually, the charges were dropped at the trial, though the artist was still given a three day spell behind bars for displaying immoral drawings that were visible to children. This sentence had taken into account that Schiele had already spent three weeks in custody before the trial. Benesch later explained what led to the artist being charged:

"Goodly-natured as he was, when Schiele had finished drawing child models, he would often let whole hordes of boys and girls, the models' schoolfellows, come into the room and romp about. Schiele had pinned up on the wall only one single wonderful sheet in colour, of a very young girl clothed only from the waist up. Children that were no longer wholly innocent would whisper about it, and talked, and so the charges came about. The beautiful drawing was consequently destroyed by order of the court."

Schiele's nudes have often been criticised as grotesque and corpse-like figures, with his preference for a sickly colour palette and harsh rendering of human flesh. As his female sitters were repeatedly positioned in explicit and revealing poses, their

anatomy became the inevitable focus of the works. This tangled merging of the grotesque and erotic is as intriguing and perhaps unsettling today as it was to the viewers of early twentieth century. Are Schiele's portrayals of the female form radical, allowing women to reclaim their bodies and embrace their sexuality in a time of strict female oppression? Or, are they the subject of the artist's own misogynistic and illicit desires?

Frustrated by the repression of the Academy, while the rest of society was progressing, Schiele wished to challenge the tradition of art. His nude drawings, like the following plate *Nude Girl Standing* (1910), are not solely intended as mere studies. They are infused with a desire and sexuality that is difficult to ignore. In many cases, Schiele's female nudes are depicted with spread legs and unapologetic attention to their anatomy. At times he portrays them in acts of sex and masturbation. Yet for Schiele, the female subject is not a passive muse, as her gaze confrontationally meets that of the viewer. In *Nude Girl Standing*, the young girl, whose facial features seem too young for her body, looks seductively back at the viewer, while caressing her face with her hand. Many of the artist's female figures are presented as unabashed, contrasting strongly with the academic nude of the goddess Venus. Schiele's nudes often appear in unarticulated spaces, their bodies placed on a blank canvas with no scenic context, emphasising the full-frontal nudity of the young sitters. There is no veil of a mythological setting to suggest we are viewing a goddess, but an unflinching depiction of raw emotion and sexual desire.

In some respects Schiele's female figures are given power, as they confront the viewer directly and are never apologetic or demur. The forms are not idealised for the male gaze, which is extraordinarily empowering for works of the early twentieth century. However, a fundamental issue of these paintings, particularly with viewers today, is what was Schiele's precise relationship with these young sitters? The answer to this question will likely never be known.





Detail



Detail



Detail



Detail



Walburga Neuzil, 1915

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