

Tate Liverpool Educators' Pack

Gustav Klimt:

Painting, Design and Modern Life in Vienna 1900



Gustav Klimt

Fir Forest I 1901

courtesy Kunsthhaus Zug, Stiftung Sammlung Kamm

The Exhibition at Tate Liverpool

As the first comprehensive survey of the work of this artist in the UK, this exhibition at Tate Liverpool focuses on the life and art of Gustav Klimt.

The exhibition examines Klimt's role as founder and leader of the Vienna Secession, a progressive group of artists whose work and philosophy embraced all aspects of arts and craft. It features key works from all stages of the artist's career alongside fellow Secessionist artists such as Josef Hoffman, Carl Moll, Bruno Reiffenstein, and Koloman Moser.

This pack will help educators focus on specific areas of this large-scale exhibition with suggested activities and points for discussion that can be used in the classroom and in the gallery.

The Vienna Secession (1897-1939)

At the turn of the Twentieth Century, the city of Vienna was one of Europe's leading centres of culture. The rising middle classes sought to free themselves from the past and explore new forms of expression in art, architecture, literature and music.

The Vienna Secession was founded in 1897 by a group who had resigned from the Association of Austrian Artists, as a protest against the prevailing conservatism of the traditional *Künstlerhaus*. The movement represented a separation from the art of the past and the establishment of modernism in Austria. The younger generation sought to bring about a renaissance of arts and crafts, uniting architects, designers, Symbolists, Naturalists and craftsmen, from metalworkers to engravers. The first chairperson of the Vienna Secession was Gustav Klimt.



Gustav Klimt
Poster for the First Secession Exhibition – Censored Version, 1898
© Wien Museum

Joseph Maria Olbrich designed the iconic building that became known as “the Secession” and would house their exhibitions. It was built near Vienna’s *Ringstrasse* and carved above its entrance were the words “to every age its art and to art its freedom”.

The first exhibition in November 1898, introduced some of the most important European artists of the time to the Viennese public - such as Auguste Rodin, Edvard Munch, Vincent van Gogh, Edgar Degas, Paul Gauguin and Charles Rennie Mackintosh. The group also promoted its values through elaborate posters and its own cutting-edge journal, *Ver Sacrum* (Sacred Spring).

The 14th Secession Exhibition was dedicated to the musician Ludwig Van Beethoven. It was designed by Josef Hoffmann and featured Max Klinger’s sculpture of Beethoven, surrounded on three walls by Klimt’s Beethoven Frieze.

As part of the Klimt exhibition, Tate Liverpool is presenting a full-scale reconstruction of this frieze which was created using the same techniques as the original.

Work in Focus:

Gustav Klimt, The Beethoven Frieze



Gustav Klimt
The Beethoven Frieze (detail), 1901-2 (copy 1984)
Belvedere, Vienna

Gustav Klimt's frieze is based on Richard Wagner's interpretation of Ludwig van Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. A series of panels form a narrative that can be read from left to right across three walls. The groups of figures comprising each panel are as follows:-

Floating Genii

Floating female figures symbolise the yearning for happiness

Suffering Humanity, Knight in Shining Armour

suffering humanity, represented by a kneeling couple and girl standing behind them, offer their pleas to a knight in golden armour. He stands for the external driving forces of compassion and ambition, whilst the female figures behind him represent internal motivation inspiring him to take up the fight for happiness.

The Hostile Forces

The giant *Typhoeus*, against whom even the gods battle in vain, extends across the central wall. His daughters, the three gorgons, are to his left and above them are figures representing *Sickness*, *Madness* and *Death*. To his right are *Lasciviousness*, *Wantonness* and *Intemperance* with the cowering *Gnawing grief* and the yearnings and desires of humankind fly past them.

Poetry, the Arts and Choir of Angels

The yearning for happiness and pure joy is fulfilled by the Arts. Poetry is represented by a female figure playing a lyre.

Five women symbolise The Arts and lead us into this ideal state. The upper three figures point to the last scene illustrating Schiller's *Ode to Joy*. Here a choir of angels in paradise sing

"Joy, thou gleaming spark divine. This kiss to the whole world!" The frieze concludes with the powerful image of an embracing couple.

Materials

Klimt used a wide range of paints, coloured chalks and graphite. The rich textures of the frieze also consist of various appliqué materials (e.g. mirror, gem stones, gold foil, mother-of-pearl, curtain rings, etc.)

History of the Frieze

- As part of a temporary exhibition, *The Beethoven Frieze* was originally intended to be removed and destroyed after its closure. Fortunately, as the Secession planned to stage a major Klimt retrospective during the following year, it was decided to leave the frieze in place.
- In 1903 the frieze was purchased by arts patron and Carl Reinighaus. In order to remove it from the Secession walls, it was cut into seven pieces and placed in storage for twelve years before being sold to the industrialist and one of Klimt's most important patrons, August Lederer.
- During the Second World War the Lederer family, due to its Jewish origins, was dispossessed. *The Beethoven Frieze* was entered "state custody". Following the war, the frieze was officially returned to the ownership of the family who had meanwhile settled in Switzerland. The Lederers decided that, rather than export the fragile artwork, they would sell it to the Republic of Austria.
- From 1973 -1983, Manfred Koller from the Federal Office of Monuments Vienna. Supervised the restoration of the frieze.
- A room was created for the frieze in the basement of the newly renovated Secession, with controlled conditions for conservation purposes. Since 1986 the *Beethoven Frieze* has been permanently on view at the Secession as a loan from the Österreichische Galerie Belvedere.

Activities

Art and Music

- Using a glossary of musical terms, discuss whether there could be visual equivalent for terms such as *forte*, *andante*, *chords*, *notes*, *refrain* etc.
- Find possible equivalents in Klimt's work (for example, the heads of the figures could be read as "notes", separate scenes as "verses", colour as "tone")

Make a Frieze

As a group, make a frieze based on the work of another composer or contemporary musician

- Listen to the music
- Find out about the stories behind the composition
- Use your imagination to create images that illustrate or symbolise passages, verses, lines etc from the piece of music
- Compile your resulting works to create a continuous narrative or equivalent of the music you have chosen

Note: You do not have to choose a classical piece of music. You could take an album such as the Beatles' *Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* or a contemporary piece of music, and represent each track in order to form a continuous narrative.

Design an album, CD cover, or poster

In the style of Klimt, design a cover or poster for your favourite piece of music

- Try to capture the sound, tone and mood of your chosen composition in visual terms – line, colour, texture etc
- Use a wide range of materials (e.g. gel-pens, glitter, coloured foil, fabrics etc) in order to make your work decorative

GOLD!

- List your associations with the word gold (either as a material or a colour).
- List the reasons why your class thinks gold is such an attractive material/colour.
- Can you think of any other artists who have used gold?
(artists who made Illuminated manuscripts, painters of mediaeval art, religious panels, artists from non-Western traditions)
- How did they use gold?
- Why did they choose gold rather than any other colour?
- Discuss Klimt's use of gold – how and where in his works did he employ this colour?
- Why do you think Klimt used gold?
- What is the effect of gold in his work?

Wiener Werkstätte

The *Wiener Werkstätte* or Viennese Workshops was founded by Josef Hoffmann and Koloman Moser in 1903 with the aim of providing an outlet for young artists from the Kunstgewerbeschule (the college of arts and crafts). The *Werkstätte* created highly distinctive works of craftsmanship – jewellery, ceramics, fabrics and furniture - all characterised by simple shapes, functional form, minimal decoration and strong, linear patterns. Important members included Klimt, Schiele, Kokoschka, Czeschka, Moll and Emilie Flöge.

The *Wiener Werkstätte* believed that schools should incorporate practical instruction on craftsmanship besides design and that decorative and fine art should be given the same status. In contrast to the English Arts and Crafts movement which was interested in integrating traditional crafts with mass-production techniques for a larger market, the *Wiener Werkstätte* was more elitist in its aims. It believed that artists should concentrate on producing highly crafted works for a more select group of people. Hoffmann said, "*Since it is not possible to work for a whole market, we will concentrate on those who can afford it*".

The *Wiener Werkstätte* closed in 1932 due to lack of finances.

Activities

Design your own room

- Following the principles of the Wiener Werkstätte, create a room where all of the furniture, fabrics, objects and architecture conform to an overall design.
- Compile your drawings and sketches in a folder or book
- Choose works of art for this room – or create your own
- Make a 3-D model of your room

Research Charles Rennie Mackintosh

- Do you recognise his style? You may have seen his work before.
- Find examples of his designs and list the different forms that his art took
- How do his ideas compare with those of the Wiener Werkstätte?

Research Art Nouveau

- Do you recognise this style? Have seen this form of art before? Why do you think this style developed at the turn of the twentieth century?
- Compare this style of art with that of the Wiener Werkstätte and Mackintosh. Are there any similarities? What are the differences?
- Design your own Art Nouveau poster based on the style of Alphonse Mucha.

Portraits

Klimt painted portraits throughout his career. Even his early works displayed a contrast between naturalistic representation of his subject and the flat, two-dimensional background against which the sitter is set. His portrait of Joseph Pembauer, for example, places a realistic likeness of the pianist in front of a flat backdrop decorated with a lyre, symbolizing music. The golden frame, characteristic of the artist, was made specifically for this work and is also decorated with emblems relating to the arts.

In later portraits, this tension between realism and flat ornamental areas became even more pronounced. The parts of the subject that reveal character and individuality, such as face and hands, were painted naturalistically and almost set like jewels against the rest of the body which was treated as a flat, elaborately patterned surface.

This style was highly appropriate for his portraits of Viennese society ladies. The rich, luxurious treatment of their gowns and accessories gave them an aura of wealth, distancing them from everyday life. He further enhanced this feeling of superiority by lengthening their bodies and viewing the subject from below.

Klimt has often been criticized for capturing the feeling of the age rather than the character of his sitter.

Work in Focus:

Gustav Klimt, Portrait of Eugenia Primavesi, 1913-14



Gustav Klimt
Portrait of Eugenia Primavesi, 1913-14
Credit: Toyota Municipal Museum of Art

The Primavesis were keen patrons of Austrian art. They had shares in the *Weiner Werkstatte*, commissioned Hoffmann to build their country house, *Palais Stoclet* in Brussels and they owned a number of Klimt's paintings. In February 1912, Eugenia Primavesi visited the artist's studio to commission a portrait of her daughter, Mada. A year later, Klimt was invited by Otto Primavesi to paint his wife. She is wearing a bright kimono that was fashionable in Vienna at the time. Its busy design is almost integrated into the floral background, painted in bright yellow. An area of green behind the sitter is suggestive of an outdoor or garden setting and in the top right-hand corner is an oriental bird motif.

Eugenia was an actress before marrying the banker and glass manufacturer Otto Primavesi. She was well known in the fashion world of Vienna and deeply involved with the *Weiner Werkstatte*. She financed many of their projects and threw lavish parties for the artists and their circle.

Klimt knew his sitter well, which is perhaps why this is one of his most naturalistic portraits, despite his typical stylized treatment of her body. He also did numerous sketches in preparation for this painting. Mada Primavesi later recalled her visits with her mother to the artist's studio:

"We went every few months to Vienna and stayed about ten days...

He made about two hundred sketches."

The portrait of her mother remained a prized family possession. It was hung above Otto's desk in his study until his death. Mada then displayed the painting on the walls of her home even after she moved to Canada in 1949. It was shipped in its original frame, made from hammered silver probably by the artist's brother, Georg.

Activities

Paint...

A portrait – of a friend, one of your family...or yourself

- Copy Klimt's style and paint the face and hands in a realistic manner (you could use a photograph for these areas) against a flat, decorative body and background
- Use collage for the body – collect different materials such as sweet wrappers, fabrics, coloured paper etc
- Make an elaborate frame, decorated with symbols suggested by your subject

Look...

At other artists' portraits – eg Holbein, Rembrandt, Cezanne, Picasso, Hockney, Freud etc

- How are they painted – describe the brushstrokes, colours, textures, background, etc
- What does the artist tell you about the sitter?
- What mood is evoked by the painting?
- How are they different from Klimt's portraits?

Landscapes

Klimt's allegorical works contain virtually no landscapes. Conversely, his landscapes are free from narrative elements and feature few people. Often painted outdoors and finished in his studio, these paintings are usually square. The scenes are tranquil, motionless and undisturbed by any form of activity.

In a work such as *The Park, 1910*, almost every inch of the canvas surface is covered with a dense layer of leaves, executed in impressionistic strokes that emphasise the picture plane. Similarly, in *Apple Tree 1, c1912*, spatial zones are merged into a floral curtain. A mere suggestion of branches helps the viewer to separate the blossoms on the tree from the flowers in the foreground and intermediate grassy meadow. Even where perspective is suggested, any sense of recession is counteracted by vast webs of brushstrokes that bring the eye immediately back to the painting's flat, decorative surface.

Klimt used a square template to help him locate suitable subjects for his landscapes. This often resulted in fragmented views and unusual compositions. He also used optical devices such as binoculars which helps to explain the "close perspective" of these works where everything appears to be brought forward into the same plane as the viewer.

Another effect of the surface density of these paintings combined with high (or no) horizons is that the viewer can, as when contemplating nature, become "lost" in them.

Activities

Paint...

..a view from a window

- Make a cardboard "viewfinder" to focus on a specific point
- Use binoculars to "flatten" the view and bring it up close
- Choose a dense area of grass, branches, brickwork, sky etc to focus on
- Paint your view as two-dimensionally as possible – make shapes flat and eliminate perspective

Look...

...at other artists' landscapes – eg Constable, Turner, Monet, Cézanne, Braque, Nash, Hockney, Doig etc

- How are they painted – describe the brushstrokes, colours, textures, viewpoints, perspective etc
- Are there any people or buildings in the landscape?
- What feelings are evoked by these landscapes?
- How are they different from Klimt's paintings?

Discuss...

...moods suggested by Klimt's landscapes

- Write a list of colours used in one painting
- Write down words and feelings suggested by the painting
- Use these words to create a poem about the painting

Write...

...a story that takes place in one of Klimt's landscapes

- Imagine you are inside the frame
- Describe everything around you – including the parts outside the painting that you will have to imagine
- Invent other characters to enter the scene
- Now make up your story...

Further Reading:

Fliedl, Gottfried, *Klimt*, Tashen, 1998

Varnedoe, Kirk, *Vienna 1900: Art Architecture and Design*, New York City, Museum of Modern Art, 1986

Boubnova, Laroslava et al (eds), *Vienna Secession: 1898-1998*, Prestel, 1998

Vergo, Peter, *Art in Vienna, 1898-1918, Klimt, Kokoschka, Schiele and Their Contemporaries*, Phaidon, 1994

Other resources

<http://www.tate.org.uk/liverpool/exhibitions/gustav Klimt>