VIENNA 1900
OPENING MARCH 16TH
BIRTH OF MODERNISM
PRESS RELEASE
The exhibition Vienna 1900. Birth of Modernism has been conceived as the Leopold Museum’s new permanent presentation. It affords insights into the enormous wealth and diversity of this era’s artistic and intellectual achievements with all their cultural, social, political and scientific implications. Based on the collection of the Leopold Museum compiled by Rudolf Leopold and complemented by select loans from more than 50 private and institutional collections, the exhibition conveys the atmosphere of the former metropolis Vienna in a unique manner and highlights the sense of departure characterized by contrasts prevalent at the turn of the century. The presentation spans three floors and features some 1,300 exhibits over more than 3,000 m² of exhibition space, presenting a singular variety of media ranging from painting, graphic art, sculpture and photography, via glass, ceramics, metals, textiles, leather and jewelry, all the way to items of furniture and entire furnishings of apartments. The exhibition, whose thematic emphases are complemented by a great number of archival materials, spans the period of around 1870 to 1930.

UPHEAVAL AND DEPARTURE IN VIBRANT FIN-DE-SIÈCLE VIENNA
At the turn of the century, Vienna was the breeding ground for an unprecedentedly fruitful intellectual life in the areas of arts and sciences. Paradoxically, this unparalleled golden age coincided with increasing political and social power struggles and conflicts of interest between the various nationalities of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. What made this phenomenon so especially unique is that it not only extended to specific areas but that it occurred in the most diverse disciplines, from painting and literature, via music, theater, dance and architecture, all the way to medicine, psychology, philosophy, jurisprudence and economy.

“The newly conceived permanent presentation aspires to showcase the phenomenon of Vienna 1900 in all its creativity and contradictory complexity. Around 1900 the vibrant Danube metropolis was shaped by contrasts: it was the capital of both the high nobility and of liberal intellectuals, of the splendid Ringstrasse and endless slum areas, of anti-Semitism and Zionism, of a rigid conservatism and emerging Modernism. Splendor and squalor, dream and reality, Symbolism and self-questioning characterized the existing pluralism of this time, marking Vienna as a laboratory of ideas, and thus as a motor to a turbulent movement of renewal. This heterogeneous atmosphere provided the setting for the unique consolidation of cultural efforts that today makes us look upon the period of Vienna around 1900 as a source of Modernism.”
Hans-Peter Wipplinger

HEYDAY OF HISTORICISM AND ATMOSPHERIC LANDSCAPE PAINTING
The exhibition starts on the fourth floor of the Leopold Museum with an overture dedicated to the heyday of Viennese Historicism around 1870, featuring works by Hans Makart, Hans Canon and the artists’ association Künstler-Compagnie. The “Makart parade” staged in 1879 to celebrate the 25th wedding anniversary of Emperor Franz Joseph I and his wife Elisabeth would mark one of the last displays of Imperial representation.

While this spectacular staging conveyed a sense of the idyllic world of the Ringstrasse era through paintings and photographs, it was miles apart from the rarely documented everyday lives of the proletariat.
Gustav Klimt’s artistic development from an exponent of the art of Historicism to a founding member of the Secession can be impressively retraced in the presentation. Aged only 14, he was admitted to the present-day University of Applied Arts in 1876. In 1883 he joined forces with his brother Ernst Klimt and Franz Matsch to found the studio collective *Künstler-Compagnie*, which soon benefitted with numerous commissions from the busy construction activities in Vienna at the time. The naturalistic paintings from Klimt’s early oeuvre are juxtaposed with sculptures by Auguste Rodin and Medardo Rosso as well as portraits by Anton Romako and Franz von Lenbach.

Along with mythological and allegorical works of Historicism, the exhibition also shines the spotlight on reticent, atmospheric landscape renderings and genre depictions by Emil Jakob Schindler, his friend and rival Tina Blau, Olga Wisinger-Florian and Theodor von Hörmann. Known as “Atmospheric Impressionism”, this new form of landscape painting paid homage to untouched nature during the era of industrialization and provided an antithesis to history painting.

**FOUNDING OF THE VIENNA SECESSION**

“The founding of the Vienna Secession in 1897 must be seen against the background of Viennese Historicism and Atmospheric Impressionism. A veritable act of liberation, it stirred up the art scene and is considered the hour of birth of Austrian Modernism in the visual arts. In keeping with the idea of the Gesamtkunstwerk, or universal work of art, the Viennese modernists wanted to permeate all areas of life with art; the applied arts being placed on a par with the fine arts. This gave rise to the concept of the Wiener Werkstätte founded in 1903 by Josef Hoffmann, Koloman Moser and Fritz Waerndorfer.”

Hans-Peter Wipplinger

In revolt against the conservative Künstlerhaus, progressive artists including Gustav Klimt, Koloman Moser, Alfred Roller, Carl Moll and Josef Hoffmann united to create a platform for contemporary and international art. Immediately after the founding of the Union of Austrian Artists – Secession in 1897, an exhibition building designed by the architect Joseph Maria Olbrich and financed with the support of benefactors such as the industrialist Karl Wittgenstein was built and opened in 1898.

In the presentation, paintings by Giovanni Segantini and Ferdinand Hodler, as well as sculptures by Max Klinger and Franz von Stuck, illustrate the animated exchange of the Viennese avant-gardists with international artists whose works were presented in the Secession exhibitions. Works by Emil Orlik, Carl Moll, Broncia Koller-Pinell, Wilhelm List, Josef Maria Auchentaller, Erich Mallina and Alexander Rothaug highlight the stylistic diversity at the Vienna Secession, with tendencies ranging from post-Impressionism via Symbolism to Japonism.

The Secessionist’s mouthpiece was the magazine *Ver Sacrum* established in 1898. The regular publication of this magazine, whose title translates as “Holy Spring”, was to close the gap in art publications in Vienna at the time and to propagate the ideas of the Secession. The magazine published original graphic works by Secession members, as well as motifs created especially for the medium of books, such as vignettes, initials and edge decorations. The visual culture was further revolutionized by ground-breaking poster designs which turned the streets of Vienna into “the poor man’s picture gallery”.
DANCE, PSYCHOLOGY, FASHION, PHOTOGRAPHY
Along with innovations in the visual arts, the exhibition also highlights revolutionary aspects from other artistic and cultural fields, among them the liberation of dance from the tradition of the classical ballet to become an autonomous art form owing to the activities of artists like the Wiesenthal sisters, Gertrud Bodenwieser and Rosalia Chladek. Sigmund Freud’s trailblazing works, especially his 1899 publication *The Interpretation of Dreams*, are also addressed on account of their far-reaching consequences. Viennese fashion, which overcame the restraints imposed by the corset with the reform dress, features with creations by the fashion pioneer Emilie Flöge, while the at the time still relatively young medium of photography is represented with works by Dora Kallmus, Moriz Nähr and Heinrich Kühn.

GUSTAV KLIMT
Gustav Klimt features in the exhibition with chief works from the Leopold Museum and with eminent permanent loans from private collections. His landscapes are testament to his interest in symbolic expression and in questions of transience. These interests are also at the center of the singular allegory depicting the cycle of life *Death and Life*. Klimt’s refuge and preferred destination for recreation, the Attersee, is addressed in the exhibition through works and archival documents, as is the scandal surrounding his faculty paintings: following years of scathing criticism of the three monumental commissions for the ceiling of the auditorium of Vienna University, Klimt withdrew from the commission in 1905 and returned his fee to the state. The presentation further features a reconstruction of Klimt’s studio on Josefstädter Straße and touches upon his close friendship with Emilie Flöge, who shaped fashion as a designer and operator of the salon Schwestern Flöge on Mariahilfer Straße and was an important figure among the era’s creative set.

KOLOMAN MOSER
A separate room is dedicated to the innovative designer of exhibitions and co-founder and influential protagonist of the Secession and the Wiener Werkstätte Koloman Moser. Moser designed more than half of the exhibitions organized by the Secession until 1905 and made vast numbers of contributions to the association’s magazine Ver Sacrum as a graphic artist and illustrator. In 1899 Moser was appointed professor at the present-day University of Applied Arts. Together with Josef Hoffmann and the industrialist Fritz Waerndorfer he founded the Wiener Werkstätte in 1903. He designed items of furniture, textiles, fashion, wallpapers, glasses, ceramics, metal works and jewelry. Aside from his work as a designer, Moser was also active as a stage designer and not least as a painter. He received important impetus for his painting from Ferdinand Hodler whose 1904 exhibition at the Secession he curated.

ARTS AND CRAFTS SCHOOL AND WIENER WERKSTÄTTE
The priority of the Wiener Werkstätte, which followed the example of the British Arts and Crafts movement and was devoted to a renewal of artisan craftwork, was the promotion of a new lifestyle permeated by art. The most eminent examples of the Gesamtkunstwerk on account of their complex designs are Josef Hoffmann’s Sanatorium Westend in Purkersdorf (1904–1905), the Palais Stoclet in Brussels (1905–1911) as well as the Cabaret Fledermaus in Vienna (1907) also designed by Josef Hoffmann and furnished by the Wiener Werkstätte. All three ground-breaking buildings feature in the exhibition with architectural models complemented by original furnishings from the Cabaret Fledermaus and Purkersdorf Sanatorium.
An entire exhibition room is dedicated to artisan craftwork in order to highlight the central role played by the Arts and Crafts School, the present-day University of Applied Arts, and the Wiener Werkstätte. Josef Hoffmann and Koloman Moser both taught at the Arts and Crafts School – which, as opposed to the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts, admitted women from its inception – and in 1903 founded the Wiener Werkstätte together with the industrialist Fritz Waerndorfer. The workshop enjoyed international success and had outlets in Vienna, Karlsbad, Zurich, Berlin and New York. Numerous exceptional creations by artists from the Arts and Crafts School and the Wiener Werkstätte – including items of jewelry, glasses, ceramics, tableware, textiles, book and poster designs, examples of paper marbling, playing cards, leather products, etc. – impressively illustrate how design and crafts were merged to an incredibly high standard.

**VIENNA AS A METROPOLIS OF ARCHITECTURE**

**OTTO WAGNER, JOSEF HOFFMANN, ADOLF LOOS**

On the third floor of the Leopold Museum, Vienna is presented as a metropolis of architecture: the architect, theoretician and town planner Otto Wagner decisively shaped the face of Vienna through projects including the planning of the city railway and the regulation of the Danube canal. Treated with reverence and hostility in equal measure, he created some of the icons of Viennese Modernism, including numerous apartment buildings as well as some projects financed by the public sector, among them the church St. Leopold am Steinhof (1904) and the official building of the Austrian Postal Savings Bank (1910).

The architect and essayist Adolf Loos, meanwhile, criticized his colleagues Koloman Moser and Josef Hoffmann in his fight against Viennese Jugendstil. Among his eminent projects are the interior decoration of Café Museum (1899) and the “house without eyebrows” on Michaelerplatz created in 1911. Koloman Moser features in the exhibition with individual furniture ensembles from the apartment of the family of industrialists Eisler von Terramare. Finally on display is one of the most eminent museum acquisitions of recent years: the room designed by the architect and designer Josef Hoffmann in keeping with the idea of the Gesamtkunstwerk for the daughter of the industrialist Max Biach from 1902.

**AUSTRIAN EXPRESSIONISM**

**RICHARD GERSTL, EGN SCHIELE, OSKAR KOKOSCHKA**

The adjacent exhibition rooms are devoted to the variants of a specifically Austrian Expressionism, whose main exponents include Richard Gerstl, Oskar Kokoschka, Egon Schiele, Anton Faistauer, Max Oppenheimer, Anton Kolig, Albin Egger-Lienz, Albert París Gütersloh and Herbert Boeckl. They were all searching for new forms of expression in painting, focused on man and his vulnerability, and each arrived at their own expressive pictorial language characterized by a formal tendency towards ecstasies and distortion.

“Exploring existence, Richard Gerstl, Oskar Kokoschka and especially Egon Schiele embarked on new paths of investigating artistic identities and thus founded the Austrian variant of Expressionism shaped by a simmering Symbolism and the questioning of the individual. The works by these Expressionists are among the most preeminent achievements of 20th century Austrian art history, which was subject to abrupt changes owing to the outbreak and course of World War I.”

Hans-Peter Wipplinger
The two rooms to be dedicated to Oskar Kokoschka won't be furnished until after the large-scale retrospective shown at the Leopold Museum from 6th April to 8th July 2019. In the meantime, they house a presentation devoted to Arnold Schönberg curated by Therese Muxeneder of the Arnold Schönberg Center in Vienna. It illustrates the composer's impressive visual oeuvre which comprises self-portraits, portraits, works dubbed “impressions and imaginations” and “studies and figurines”, as well as stage works and nature depictions. Numerous compositions by Schönberg can be listened to at the exhibition’s audio stations. Richard Gerstl’s expressive, gestural painting, which in some of his works led to a dissolution of forms, makes him the first exponent of Austrian Expressionism. Owing to his withdrawn lifestyle and his refusal to participate in exhibitions, his works were never publicly shown during his lifetime. The Leopold Museum is home to the world’s largest collection of works by the artist and presents self-portraits, portraits and landscapes by Gerstl. Aside from painting, the artist took a keen interest in philosophy, literature and music. Very important in this context was his close connection to the circle surrounding Arnold Schönberg whom he introduced to painting. The bond between the two artists was broken by Gerstl’s affair with the composer’s wife Mathilde Schönberg, resulting in the social isolation of Gerstl and his suicide aged 25.

In the exhibition, the oeuvre of Egon Schiele is embedded into the context of Austrian Expressionism. Comprising 42 paintings and more than 180 works on paper, as well as autographs, poems and photographs, the Leopold Museum houses the most eminent and extensive compilation of works by this artist. From 1910, Schiele broke away from Secessionist Jugendstil with his radically expressive art and created works unparalleled in their intensity and mysteriousness. In his oeuvre, he focused on questions concerning identity and the individual, sexuality, spirituality and death – themes that Schiele kept revisiting during his short life. A large part of his works is dedicated to depictions of women, ranging from incarnations of motherhood to erotic nudes. Works including Small Tree in Late Autumn and Setting Sun, meanwhile, illustrate how Schiele rendered emotional states by means of nature depictions, while his painting Cardinal and Nun (“Caress”), which caused a scandal at the time, is a testament to how he radically broke with traditions on all levels. In his ensouled cityscapes, created predominantly in his mother’s hometown of Krumau, Schiele was more concerned with conveying emotions than with achieving topographically precise views. The exhibition further illustrates how the artist addressed the topic of mother and child, as well as the mystery of death, for instance in the painting Levitation. Also on display are the works Self-Portrait with Chinese Lantern Plant, along with its counterpart Portrait of Wally Neuzil showing his long-standing muse and partner, as well as the spectacular rendering The Hermits.

ART AND WAR

The permanent presentation continues on the ground floor of the Leopold Museum. The generation of artists surrounding Egon Schiele experienced the Great War on the battlefields. Many of them had been caught up in the general enthusiasm for the War, but their euphoria soon gave way to disillusionment or even bitter opposition to war. This is illustrated in the exhibition with numerous works by artists including Anton Hanak, Albin Egger-Lienz and Anton Kolig. The two latter artists received professorships in Weimar and Stuttgart before and after World War I and were thus in contact with representatives of German Expressionism. In the exhibition, a few select sculptures by Ernst Barlach and Käthe Kollwitz from Rudolf Leopold’s collection of Expressionist works are placed into a dialogue with works by Austrian exponents of this movement.
PLURALISM OF STYLES

Marking the end of World War I and the collapse of the Habsburg Monarchy and proclamation of the Republic associated with it, the year 1918 represented a caesura not only on a political level. With the deaths of the figure heads Gustav Klimt, Egon Schiele, Koloman Moser and Otto Wagner, Vienna also lost its status as an art metropolis. While the often precarious economic situation and the political upheaval of the interwar period was reflected here and there in the artistic output of the time, counterdrafts to a committed art were provided by escapist positions. Priority was given to questions of style, and artists did not deviate from a mimetic, representational art.

The hallmark of this time is the pluralism of styles, made up of elements from Expressionism, naturalism, New Objectivity, Cubo-Futurism and Constructivism. The diversity of art from this time is vividly illustrated by the works of Max Oppenheimer, who combined aspects of New Objectivity with Cubism and thus captured the zeitgeist of the 1920s, as well as of Albert Paris Gütersloh, Marie-Louise von Motesiczky, Jean Egger, Herbert Boeckl, Dagobert Peche and Erika Giovanna Klien. Within this milieu, artisan craftwork proved to be an avant-gardist field for experimentation: this is illustrated especially by the expressive ceramic works by Vally Wieselthier, Gudrun Baudisch and Kitty Rix who transformed everyday ceramics into autonomous sculptures.

NEW OBJECTIVITY AND MAGIC REALISM

“The exhibition affords comprehensive insights into the first decade of the young Austrian Republic with its moderate tendencies towards Expressionism and New Objectivity. In the 1920s, emerging innovative developments in art and science were increasingly prevented by economic instability, which promoted the establishment of authoritarian and fascist ideas.”

Hans-Peter Wipplinger

The generation of artists born around the turn of the century worked through their trauma of war with experimental practices, but their yearning for structure, clarity and order was evident. Formally, the works of New Objectivity — a term first used in 1925 as a title for an exhibition in Mannheim — are characterized by a linear style of sharp edges and a deliberately sober, purist and reserved manner of depiction. Calmness, rigidity and motionlessness were coupled with reticent colors and a solidification of forms. While there appear some more or less encrypted socio-critical allusions to hardships and social injustice, many exponents of New Objectivity tended towards idealized motifs. Along with works by the main representatives of New Objectivity in Austria, among them Carry Hauser, Otto Rudolf Schatz, Josef Dobrowsky, Albert Birkle, Alfred Wickenburg, Josef Gassler, Viktor Planckh and Sergius Pauser, the exhibition also features the work La Femme aux Roses by Greta Freist, who had repeatedly exhibited her works in the exhibitions of the Hagenbund. Despite the economic tensions of the 1920s and owing to its creative exhibition and marketing politics and animated exchange with other groups, this artists’ association founded in 1900 managed to spread its progressive idea of a cosmopolitan and multicultural Modernity and to position itself as one of the leading Viennese art collectives.
From the beginning of the 1920s, a new form of realism started to emerge in various European countries – that of Magic Realism. Interpreted as a variant of New Objectivity, the movement is characterized by a fantastical-surreal undertone, with the depicted scenes often appearing melancholy and menacing. In his paintings, Rudolf Wacker strove towards a synthesis of rational reality and a world shaped by secrets, dreams and hallucinations. Some works seem to anticipate the evils of the ensuing years.

“The fragile democracy was headed for ruin. The deposition of parliament and the appointment of an authoritarian government, the ban of the social democratic party and the establishment of an Austrofascist corporate state provided an ideal breeding ground for National Socialism. Some visual artists identified this danger early on. Others aided the propaganda and would later become convinced members of the NSDAP. Eventually, a large number of those leading figures from art, music, literature and science who had played a substantial part in the golden age of Viennese Modernism were either forced into emigration or murdered.”

Hans-Peter Wipplinger

Select works from the field of memorial art highlight these fatal developments and represent the ominous and visionary end to the exhibition: Peter Weibel’s installation The Expulsion of Reason addresses the cultural exodus and the systematic extermination of the Jewish population, while two works by Heimrad Bäcker refer to the totality of the National Socialist’s killing machine.

The museum’s Director Hans-Peter Wipplinger invited a panel of experts to support this exhibition project through various symposia held in 2018 at the Leopold Museum. This body of experts includes Andrea Amort (dance), Bazon Brock (esthetics), Monika Faber (photography), Allan Janik (philosophy and economics), Stefan Kutzenberger (literature), Diethard Leopold (genesis of the collection), Monika Meister (theater), Therese Muxeneder (music), Ernst Ploil (applied arts), Ivan Ristić (architecture), August Ruhs (psychology), Burghart Schmidt (philosophy) and Thomas Zaunschirm (art history).
AUSSTELLUNGSDATEN | EXHIBITION FACTS

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Kurator | Curator Hans-Peter Wipplinger

EXPO NATE | EXHIBITS rund | ca.: 410 Kunstgewerbe | arts-and-crafts objects
1.300 gesamt | in total 90 Möbel | items of furniture
280 Gemälde | paintings 50 Fotografien | photographs
120 Arbeiten auf Papier | works on paper 15 Film-, Audiobeiträge | video, audio features
80 Skulpturen | sculptures 260 Archivalia | archival documents

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