

<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/jonathanjonesblog/2013/feb/04/syria-klimt-kiss-tammam-azzam>

Tammam Azzam's Kiss: an unromantic commentary on the Syrian conflict

The artist has used Klimt's idealistic vision of love to highlight the pain and suffering in his country



*A kiss for the whole world ... Tammam Azzam's version of the Klimt masterpiece.
Photograph courtesy of the artist and Ayyam Gallery*

Love is the drug for the best and most effective political art. The powerful and hilarious Berlin Wall graffiti picture that showed [a fraternal kiss between Communist leaders Leonid Brezhnev and Erich Honecker](#) became a world-famous work of dissenting art. Banksy emulated its cheek in his mural [Kissing Coppers](#). Now the Syrian artist [Tammam Azzam](#) has enlisted one of the greatest kisses in art to protest against his country's suffering in a war watched passively by the outside world.

Azzam has [Photoshopped Gustav Klimt's painting The Kiss against a war-ravaged \(and ancient-looking\) Syrian building](#). The image has gone viral, being rapidly shared around the world. And no wonder: it is an extremely eloquent picture. Klimt's painting looks like a projection in a pacifist *son et lumiere* – in inventing this apparent piece of public art, Azzam imagines a country where peaceful gatherings are still possible.

The painting whose golden ghost he has made to materialise on a ruinous facade is a passionate plea for universal love.

Klimt's Kiss is the painting that launched a million Athena posters. Many people think of this work, painted in Vienna in 1907-8, as a soppy, romantic image. It is that, but it is profoundly and idealistically so. Klimt visualises an ecstatic union of two people in an image of universal sister- and brotherhood. The Kiss takes its text from a line in the moving choral performance of Schiller's Ode to Joy in Beethoven's Ninth Symphony: ["This kiss is for the whole world!"](#)

In the ethereal white, black and gold Beethoven Frieze that he created for the [Vienna Secession building](#) in 1902, Klimt set out to illustrate the movements, moods and meaning of Beethoven's Ninth. A section of this dreamlike frieze [depicts the "kiss for the whole world"](#). Five years later, when he painted his erotic vision of embracing lovers The Kiss, Klimt gave the same idea of global, unlimited human love a more perfect and gloriously simple image.

Taking that passionate image and putting it on a wall in [Syria](#), Azzam invokes one of the most universal works of art to try and touch international hearts that are OK with ignoring his country's pain. *Diesen Kuss der ganzen Welt*

Banksy, **Kissing Coppers**



Fraternal kiss, a graffiti painting on the Berlin wall by Dmitri Vrubel



