

<http://www.klimt.com/en/gallery/women.html>

Der Kuss 1908

The Kiss

Measures: 180 x 180 cm

Technique: Oil on canvas

Depository: Österreichische Galerie Belvedere, Vienna



The Kiss (In German: *Der Kuss*) was painted by the Austrian Symbolist painter Gustav Klimt between 1907-08, the highpoint of his 'Golden Period', when he painted a number of works in a similar gilded style. A perfect square, the canvas depicts a couple embracing, their bodies entwined in elaborate robes decorated in a style influenced by both linear constructs of the contemporary Art Nouveau style

and the organic forms of the earlier Arts and Crafts movement. The work is composed of conventional oil paint with applied layers of gold leaf, an aspect that gives it its strikingly modern, yet evocative appearance. The painting is now in the Österreichische Galerie Belvedere museum in the Belvedere (palace)|Belvedere palace, Vienna, and is widely considered a masterpiece of the early modern period. It is a symbol of Vienna Jugendstil--Viennese Art Nouveau--and is considered Klimt's most popular work. Klimt was 45 when he painted *The Kiss*, still living with his mother and two unmarried sisters. Behind the respectable facade he was a man with a ferocious sexual appetite; he fathered at least three known illegitimate children. *The Kiss* reflects his fascination with eroticism, and while its overall architecture is obviously phallic, it is renowned because of its tender representation of the female model who is tightly embraced within the overall geometry of the picture and whose body is formed from the most detailed, colourful and best expressed abstract passages of Klimt's career. In its tenderness, the painting deviates from his typical portrayal of woman as distant femme fatales; here the female is the protagonist, rather than merely the object of desire.

Background

Although the painting is today one of the most popular and recognisable works of art, it was painted soon after his three part *Klimt University of Vienna Ceiling Paintings*|*Vienna Ceiling series* which created a scandal and were criticized as both 'pornography' and evidence of 'perverted excess'. The works had recast the artist as an *enfant terrible* for his anti-authoritarian and anti-popularist views on art. He wrote, "If you can not please everyone with your deeds and your art, please a few". Inscribed on the reverse of the 1899 *Nuda Veritas*. By contrast, *The Kiss* was enthusiastically received, and immediately found a buyer.

Description

Klimt depicts the couple locked in intimacy, while the rest of the painting dissolves into shimmering, extravagant flat patterning. The patterning has clear ties to Art Nouveau and the organic forms of the Arts and Crafts movement. At the same time the background evokes the conflict between two- and three-dimensionality intrinsic to the work of Degas and other modernists. Paintings such as *The Kiss* were visual manifestations of fin-de-siecle spirit because they capture a decadence conveyed by opulent and sensuous images. The use of gold leaf recalls medieval "gold-ground" paintings and illuminated manuscripts, and earlier mosaics, and the spiral patterns

in the clothes recall Bronze Age art, and the decorative tendrils seen in Western art since before classical times. The man's head ends very close to the top of the canvas, a departure from traditional Western canons that reflects the Japonisme|influence of Japanese prints, as does the very simplified composition. The two figures are situated at the edge of a patch of flowery meadow. The man wears a robe with black and white rectangles irregularly placed on gold leaf decorated with spirals. He wears a crown of vines while the woman is shown in a tight-fitting dress with flower-like round or oval motifs on a background of parallel wavy lines. Her hair is sprinkled with flowers and is worn in a fashionable upsweep; it forms a halo-like circle that highlights her face, and is continued under her chin by what seems to be a necklace of flowers. Similarly juxtaposed couples appear in both Klimt's *Beethoven Frieze* and *Stoclet Frieze*. It is thought that Klimt and his companion Emilie Louise Flöge|Emilie Flöge modeled for the work, but there is no evidence or record to prove this. Others suggest the female was the model known as 'Red Hilda'; she bears strong resemblance to the model in his *Woman with feather boa*, *Goldfish* and *Danaë (Klimt painting)*|*Danaë*. Klimt's use of gold was inspired by a trip he had made to Italy in 1903. When he visited Ravenna he saw the Byzantine mosaics in the Basilica of San Vitale|Church of San Vitale. For Klimt the flatness of the mosaics and their lack of perspective and depth only enhanced their golden brilliance, and he started to make unprecedented use of gold and silver leaf in his own work.

Private Life of a Masterpiece, BBC TV

Analysis of masterpiece

Artist:
Title:
Medium:
Year:
Size:
Museum:
City:

Examine the work and his creator:

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