

Katie Pech

Sculpture 1

11.1.4

Gustav Klimt

As a Sculptor of the Female Form

As a modernist painter, Gustav Klimt may well have enjoyed more broad and lasting popularity than any other artist of his time. His works have been reproduced time and time again in nations around the world. They have been shown so frequently that, though his name may not be as well-known, even Salvador Dali, Pablo Picasso and Andy Warhol cannot compete. Klimt's work can easily be taken home in the form of postcards or posters. In fact, you can even adorn your bathroom with Klimt tiles or decorate your living room with handmade Klimt embroidered pillows. For the nationally televised Vienna Philharmonic New Year's concert, Klimt's most famous piece, *The Kiss*, was re-enacted as a live painting.

But all of this seems to contradict two points that I would like to bring up in this paper. My main point is that Klimt was a *sculptor* of pleasingly decorative, yet timeless art and second is that his decadent work holds more value than just decoration; it displays social, political and artistic rebellion.

Klimt's Life

Klimt was born on the fourteenth of July, 1862 at Baumgarden, near Vienna, the second of seven children. His mother was also from Vienna. His father was an engraver from Bohemia.

At age fourteen Klimt joined the School of Applied Art of the Royal and Imperial Austrian Museum for Art and Industry, Vienna, where he was taught painting by Professor Julius Viktor Berger.

Three years later, in 1879 he began working with his brother Ernst and their fellow classmate Franz Matsch. They took on many decoration jobs for the city of Vienna, including the Museum of Art History, the Imperial silver wedding building, and the Burgtheater.

Klimt was awarded the Golden Cross of Merit in 1888 for his completion of the latter. The following year he began work on the spandrels and intercolumniation of the staircase in the Museum of Art History in Vienna.

He was the original recipient of the Imperial Award for his painting *Auditorium at the Old Burgtheater*. These awards marked the beginning of a lifetime full of recognized career achievements.

On the eleventh of January, 1918 Klimt suffered a stroke in his flat in Vienna. He died February sixth, leaving behind numerous unfinished paintings.

The Allegory Sculpture

Possibly the most stunning sculpture Klimt created in his lifetime is the Allegory Sculpture. The life-sized piece was chiseled out of marble in a Hellenistic Greek fashion. The focal point is an idealized form of the biblical Eve, standing nude, contrapposto and with the fruit from the tree of wisdom in her left

hand. Below, behind, and above her are other carved depictions, mostly varying human busts, created with eye-popping realism. Each of these busts is a representation of a different time and culture in the civilizations which came into existence as a result of Eve's choice in the moment depicted here. The faces seem to hover over her, as she pauses to consider. Although each bust varies somewhat in size, value and style, there is one which stands out nearly as much as Eve. It is a woman who appears to be from modern times, though she wears ancient Roman-style leaves in her hair. This woman, who is actually modeled after Klimt's lifetime partner, Emilee Floge, is not behind or above the figure of Eve; rather she is in the foreground at Eve's feet. She and Eve are the only two who hold eye contact with the viewer. Her head is actually of larger proportion than Eve's.

Though Klimt's style is evident to the trained eye in this piece, I think that most anyone can spot the influence of the ancient Classical and Hellenistic Greeks in this sculpture, which was made for the Historical Museum in Vienna.

In flipping through one of Klimt's books, a glance at this piece stopped me in my tracks. Its texture is silken and smooth. The "T" shape of this 14' tall sculpture drew my eye in from the top, down the figure of Eve, and rested on the confident expression of the "modern" woman.

The amazing artistry in this piece is captivating to say the least. It is inspiring to me and I would be thrilled to bring even the smallest aspect of its natural expression into my own future work.

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