At the End of an Ancient Monarchy,
Birth of a New Culture

Rising from a flood plain near the river Danube, the walls of the city of Vienna long stood as the last remnants of Western Europe, looking toward the Orient. At these walls the Turkish invasion finally faltered in 1683—a victory that established the ruling Hapsburg monarchy as the defender of Christianity, and initiated a grand epoch of Catholic Baroque culture in Central Europe. Under Maria Theresia (ruled 1740-80) and her son Joseph II (1780-90), the governmental structure of the Austrian empire was established: a strong Catholic monarchy joined to an all-pervasive and efficient administrative bureaucracy. But already, in the resistance of Hungarians and Slovaks to Joseph's efforts to impose German as the language of the empire, the intractable problems of this vast, complex realm were evident.

First the victories of Napoleon, then the combination of the power of Prince Metternich and the weakness of the Hapsburg heirs, shaped Austrian life in the first half of the nineteenth century—a period of neoclassical style and bourgeois piety known as the "Biedermeier" epoch, which would later be seen as a privileged moment of pre-industrial calm. That era closed with the revolutions of 1848, which wound up ushering onto the stage two new forces, in problematic collaboration and contention: first, an aggressive new middle class, emboldened by the profits of industrialization and impatient with the power held by the church and the throne; and second, a new emperor, the young Franz Josef I. Only eighteen when he took the throne, he was to rule the empire for nearly seven decades, when he took the throne, he was to rule.

In 1860, the principle of a constitutional monarchy, were meanwhile a strong Catholic monarchy, was established, allowing representative government—albeit only in the minority lands, and from within by the energetic rise of a new liberal politics.

Nowhere was the new secular, bourgeois ascendancy more evident than in the capital, Vienna, which began to expand dramatically with the increasing influx of immigrants from the provinces; and nothing so clearly symbolizes the shifting interplay in the new Austria, between the forces of tradition and those of change, as Vienna's major boulevard, the Ringstrasse. The architecture of this broad new thoroughfare, giving the metrop-
In the 1890s, as the arts of Vienna embraced the Germanic version of Art Nouveau known as Jugendstil ("youth-style"), after the Munich magazine Jugend, its writers were equally concerned to find the voice of youth. The leading Viennese poets and writers of this new movement were, like the painter Gustav Klimt, men in their thirties, with the exception of the precocious adolescent Hugo von Hofmannsthal. The group was known collectively as Jung-Wien (Young Vienna).

These were years marked by an "impressionism" that had little to do with the naturalist visions of sunlit landscapes we might associate with this term. Their "impressionism" entailed a devoction to the ephemeral feelings of the moment, a reaction against naturalism in favor of a self-consciously "decadent," inward-turning cultivation of neurotic sensibility. Their inspirations—consonant with the air of exotic refinement and muskiness we find in some Secessionist art—stemmed more from the world of Baudelaire than from that of Monet.

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Like the artists' clubs that were the breeding ground of the Secession's revolt, the writers' group found its home in the Viennese cafes. Their heated debates gave to their favorite spot, the Cafe Griensteidl, the nickname "Cafe Megalomania." When the place was torn down in the urban renovation of the later 1890s, the critic Karl Kraus wrote a touching eulogy at Altenberg's death. This was the last word on the cafe before it was demolished in a whole movement, in his essay "The Demolished Literature." Favorite cafe reading was the feuilleton, a brief essay of impressions and opinion, frequently by one of the city's leading writers, that was an essential part of the daily newspaper. It was this kind of light essay that Kraus railed against as the bane of modern writing, "an appeal."

Peter Altenberg's work as poet, essayist, and critic appeared in some fifty periodicals throughout the German-speaking world. His sketches were presented at the Kabarett Fledermaus (see p. 9), and the texts he wrote for his postcards inspired songs by the composer Alban Berg. Peter jester, part philosopher, Altenberg was a true bohemian who lived in a tiny, memorabilia-filled room in the Grabenhotel, and spent most of his daily life in coffeehouses, bars, and cabarets, where he gathered material for his vignettes of Viennese life. Life and work were inextricably linked for Altenberg. Although associated with the literary circle Jung-Wien, Altenberg did not share their aestheticizing, "decadent" tendencies. Fascinated by the pace and transitoriness of urban life and death, he felt the moral slackness of the day. Kraus's position is telling, for he was no friend of the Secession, while the Secession found many of its early defenders in the aesthetic orbit of Jung-Wien.

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The Secession

Alfred Roller. Poster for Secession XVI, 1903. Lithograph, 6 5/8 x 25" (168.9 x 63.5 cm). Private collection, courtesy Serge Savitzky Gallery, New York

At the end of the nineteenth century, art exhibitions in Vienna were controlled by the Kuenstlerhaus, a private, conservative exhibiting society that exerted considerable influence on public taste and government policy. In May 1897, a group of nineteen artists, who had previously been trying to work for change from within, broke away from the Kuenstlerhaus and formed a new organization, called the Secession, with Gustav Klimt as president (and the aged watercolorist Rudolf von Alt as honorary president). Among the other young defectors were the architects Josef Hoffmann and Joseph Maria Olbrich and the graphic artist and designer Koloman Moser. The Secessionists’ goals were twofold: to show the most advanced work of Austrian and foreign artists in regular exhibitions; and to achieve unity among the arts, to realize the ideal of the Gesamtkunstwerk, or total work of art, through collaborative efforts.

Emblazoned on the facade of the Secession’s new exhibition hall, designed by Olbrich, were the words “Der Zeit ihre Kunst, der Kunst ihre Freiheit” (“To the Age, Its Art, to Art, Its Freedom”). The open interior space with movable partitions was an important innovation of Olbrich’s plan. The windowless solemnity of the facade, however, evoked, as he intended, a “temple of art.”

Ver Sacrum

The regenerative purpose of the Secession was expressed in the title of its official publication, Ver Sacrum (Sacred Spring). The name refers to a Roman ritual of consecration, in which the elders, in times of national danger, pledged their children to the divine mission of saving society. In Vienna, it was the young generation themselves who pledged to save culture from what they saw as the philistinism of their elders.

Ver Sacrum appeared once a month from 1898 to 1900 and thereafter bimonthly until 1903. Its lavishly illustrated pages there were discussions of art, samples of music, and literary contributions by Rilke, Hofmannsthal, and Maeterlinck; emphasis was placed on the harmonious integration of picture and text. Gustav Klimt, Josef Hoffmann, Joseph Maria Olbrich, Koloman Moser, the designer Alfred Roller—all collaborated to embellish the magazine. The vignettes and page decorations drew on stylized neo-Greek motifs, on Jugendstil, with its emphasis on curvilinear natural forms, and on the abstract rhythms of Japanese design. Ver Sacrum exemplifies the high importance the Viennese avant-garde placed upon decorative design—not only in posters and books, but in all the applied arts.

Koloman Moser

At first an illustrator and later a painter, Koloman Moser was perhaps the most original graphic designer of the Vienna Secession. Besides his extensive work for Ver Sacrum, he also created around 1900 an extraordinary series of fabric and wallpaper designs, in which the repetitive patterns announce a newly rigid ordering of the viscous curvilinearity of Jugendstil. The effects of figure-ground reversal in these patterns anticipate by decades the popularization of similar perceptual conundrums by M.C. Escher.

Klimt’s Allegorical Paintings

The ideal of the Gesamtkunstwerk was realized on the grandest scale at the Klimt’s Allegorical Paintings were on view in this exhibition. In 1902, organized around the monumental statue of Beethoven by the German sculptor Max Klinger. Josef Hoffmann transformed the exhibition space into a temple-like setting, and Klimt painted a great allegorical frieze, inspired by Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony, on the upper walls. Preparatory drawings for the mural are on view in the exhibition.

Klimt’s greatest challenge as a painter of large-scale allegorical subjects was his commission for three works for the ceiling of the Great Hall of the University of Vienna: Philosophy, Medicine, and Jurisprudence. Klimt was well qualified for the task; earlier, as an architectural decorator, he had painted the ceilings of Ringstrasse buildings in a conservative style that satisfied the tastes of his institutional clients. By the time he undertook the university paintings, Klimt was no longer the dutiful decorator but a progressive artist commenting darkly on the human condition. The complicated canvases for the ceiling, exhibited one by one at Secession shows from 1900 to 1905, aroused violent controversy, more a measure of Vienna’s artistic conservatism than of Klimt’s daring. His vision of untempered nudity and psychic anxiety, mingling morbidity with eroticism, touched a raw nerve.

Klimt abandoned his fight to have the panels accepted, and in 1905 bought back the commission. These events marked a split between the Viennese avant-garde and official patronage, and a defeat for the young generation’s ideals of a grand new public art.

The three huge paintings were destroyed in a fire at the close of World War II. Preparatory studies for two of them are included in the exhibition.

Pallas Athene

It was in the smaller paintings of the late 1890s that Klimt began to develop his rich ornamental style and combine images from many different sources. In Pallas Athene (1898) Klimt drew upon ancient, exotic, and sacred material to find a new means for expressing the uncertainties and anxieties inherent in modern life. Like Freud, whose discoveries were linked to a passion for archaic culture and archaeological excavation, Klimt employed symbols from antiquity to reveal instinctual, and most especially erotic, forces— as Hugo von Hofmannsthal also did in Elektra (1900). The virgin goddess Athen, protector of the people (and
Vienna’s Critical Intelects

Throughout Europe in the later nineteenth century, there was a widespread revulsion against the limitations of a worldview based on materialistic and positivist values—a worldview that was associated not only with the success of a certain kind of industrialist mentality, but also with the domination of industrial capitalism. In several key instances, science itself seemed to raise the challenge. Discoveries such as Roentgen’s identification of X-ray, in 1895, for example, suggested that faith in the solidity of the material world was a tenuous illusion. Diverse and contradictory thinkers seemed to offer a similar lesson: Ernst Mach, who held epistemological fears as the only reality, Arthur Schopenhauer, whose early nineteenth-century espousal of a world-denying fatalism found a newly receptive audience; and the occultists, who suggested grand spiritual truths beyond appearances. All these notions conflated to support the new rebellion that called for art, too, to abandon prosaic naturalism.

In Vienna, thinkers such as Alois Riegl—who rejected the imitation of nature as a criterion for ranking art, and valued minor ornament as highly as grand representations in estimating the mentality of a society—were at the forefront of this change in values. The particular Viennese contribution was a sharp skepticism about the truths transmitted by language. The most powerful Viennese thinkers, rather than retreat into hermetic channels of thought, expressed their newly rationalized “rational” confidence, sought to construct more rigorous systems of discrimination between fact and illusion, and to draw more stringent limits for dependable structures of meaning—sometimes to the point of declaring abstinence from speech superior to a corrupt and fallible communication.

In this school of thought, as so much of Viennese art, we are reminded of Vienna’s special place on the frontier between West and East. Here the Enlightenment traditions of systematic critique and logical analysis seem to meet an almost Oriental will to ascend beyond the mundane. An urge to asceticism was the other, complementary side of the more familiar coin of Vienna’s love of semi-Byzantine splendor.

LUDWIG WITTGENSTEIN 1889–1951

Ludwig Wittgenstein, widely regarded as one of the foremost philosophers of his time, also excelled in the fields of music, architecture, and engineering. Educated by private tutors, he grew up in the refined climate of Vienna’s cultural elite. His father, Karl Wittgenstein, was one of the wealthiest industrialists of the empire and one of the earliest and most faithful patrons of the Secession. His sister, Margaret, encouraged the young Ludwig to the works of the philosophers that most influenced his intellectual development. Schopenhauer, Kant, and Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein then studied at Cambridge under Gottlob Frege and Bertrand Russell, whose investigations into the mathematical basis of logic encouraged his own approach to philosophical problems through the logical analysis of language.

Wittgenstein’s first book, Tractatus logico-philosophicus, was written during World War I (in which Wittgenstein served as a volunteer) and published in 1921. The treatise deals with the nature and limits of language as it relates to reality. With his so-called “picture theory” Wittgenstein argued that, while facts can indeed be communicated by “demonstratively constructed verbal representations,” the most crucial meaning of the world—is its ethical value—cannot be articulated through language. This dichotomy between content and inner value parallels the critical Ethics, in brief, could not be expressed in words but only through deeds and thought, with this conclusion, and with his understanding of Tolstoy’s moral repugnance against individualism, Wittgenstein had founded a new field—his, inaptly named, abandoned philosophy, and committed himself to “humanly useful” activities. For ten years following the war he worked as a schoolteacher in provincial villages, as a gardener, and as architect for the Vienna residence of his sister Margaret (built 1926–28).

By the time of his return to Cambridge in 1929, Wittgenstein’s philosophical beliefs had fundamentally changed. Turning from a logical investigation of language and reality, he concentrated instead on the actual practice of language and its relevance in the human context. He became professor of philosophy at Cambridge in 1939.

The logical rigor of the Tractatus had great impact on the philosophers of the Vienna Circle before World War II, and Wittgenstein’s later work has been—through his students at Cambridge and the posthumous publication of his second book, Philosophical Investigations (1953)—extremely influential in the second half of the twentieth century.

FRITZ MAUTHNER 1894–1923

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ERNST MACH 1838–1916

Ernst Mach is most widely known today as the man who founded the logical-empiricist philosophical movement. Mach mistrusted hypothetic theory and rigorously opposed metaphysics. He believed that knowledge consists of continuous data, and not of preconceived speculative energy within the forms themselves, evoked by what he identified as “the pre-conceptual natural forces”—literally, a “will to art”—which he saw as the product of powerful, if not wholly conscious, cultural forces special to each age.

A doctor of mathematics, Mach taught widely in the sciences (first in Graz, then Prag, and finally Vienna), and his approach to philosophy was above all of that of a physicist. In founding the Vienna Circle, one of the major philosophical movements of the last fifty years, Mach’s rejection of the concept of the absolute in time and space affected the modern study of aeronautics and influenced Albert Einstein in his speculations on relativity. It was, however, among the philosophers of the Ernst Mach Society that his theories had their strongest impact, culminating in the 1920s in the philosophy of logical positivism upheld by the Vienna Circle of science-oriented thinkers.

Alois Riegl and his contemporary Franz Wickhoff are considered the founders of the Vienna School of art history. Through his writings, and in particular his books Problems of Style (1893) and Late Roman Art Manufacture, Based on Finds in Austria-Hungary (1901), Riegl opened up the field of art history to new areas of investigation and to a new interdisciplinary approach.

At a time when scholarship in art was based almost exclusively on considerations of style, and when the classical was the only accepted canon of beauty, Riegl did away with the supremacy of Greco-Roman art. For Riegl each manifestation of art was to be judged, not according to some canon of perfection, but on its own merits and in the context of “the leading intellectual tendencies of its time.” He revived interest in hitherto neglected areas of artistic creativity, such as the pre-classical art of Greece, late Roman painting, Baroque art, and early nineteenth-century Biedermeier design—all of which had previously been considered to be only inadequate or decadent versions of nebler forms of classicism.

Together with the artists of the Secession, Riegl was instrumental in breaking down the distinctions between “high” and “low” art. His pioneering work in the history of ornament was consonant with the prominence of ornamentation in Jugendstil design and architecture—and with the abstract patterns of ornament in some of Klimt’s paintings, which virtually took over the visual field, and helped break down naturalism. For Riegl the need for decoration was “one of the most elementary needs of man.” He opposed the earlier German theoretician and architect Gottfried Semper’s influential premise that the form of a work of art is determined by the demands of its material, and refuted the notion that the imitation of nature was the motivating force behind the creative process. Riegl argued instead that developments of style grow out of an inherent energy within the forms themselves, evoked by what he identified as “the pre-conceptual natural forces”—literally, a “will to art”—which he saw as the product of powerful, if not wholly conscious, cultural forces special to each age.
Klimt's 'Golden' Style

Gustav Klimt's father was a goldsmith, and the tradition of artisanship in precious metals remained strong in his family. Some of his early works (such as Pallas Athene; see p. 3) featured not only golden elements in the images, but also prominent hammered-metal frames. But it was apparently only after his experience of the sixth-century Byzantine mosaics in Ravenna, on trips in 1903 and 1904, that Klimt began to see the grander expressive possibilities he explored in his "golden" works of about 1907-10.

The hard, glittering surface of these works assertively rejects the atmospheric ambiguities of fin-de-siècle Symbolist art. But the rich patterning creates new kinds of confusion for the eye, and the mood of the "golden" pictures involves a complex alchemy. Drawing on a tradition that included everything from Mycenaean metalwork to Renaissance altarpieces and Japanese screen paintings, Klimt evoked a particularly worldly kind of otherworldliness, an alloy of barbarism and decadence in which lust for materials, high spirituality, and chic elegance were all commingled.

In Salome (Judith II) of 1909, Klimt used metallic accents to give concrete immediacy to legendary exoticism — complementing the seductively exposed flesh of the fatal woman, and lending a perverse glamour to the gory motif, with its severed head at lower right. (Judith, like Salome, is the protagonist in a biblical story of decapitation; she beheaded the Babylonian general Holofernes, while Salome requested from Herod the head of John the Baptist.) However hard-edged, this bejeweled style was attached to the feminine spirit in Klimt's work, and some of its most stunning manifestations lie not in the domain of fantasy, but in the exceptional portraits he made of elegant Viennese ladies. The supreme example is his portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer of 1907. Here Klimt combines a subtle psychological characterization, in the oddly ill-at-ease twining of the hands and the specifically unglamorous slackness of the physiognomy, with a bristling opulence. Never was more brilliant form given to the Viennese dream of an Eastern splendor that surpassed the rational. In the shadowless golden light that emanates from the picture, the floating variety of forms — checks, spirals, eye-forms, chevrons, meanders, and lozenges — look backward to the primal authority of prehistoric glyphs and forward to the delicate fantasy world of Paul Klee.

Klimt's interest in Eastern art, his attempt to meld artisanal decoration with high art, and his desire to find a modern style that fused sensual and spiritual appeals, all suggest parallels with other artists, such as Matisse, in the same period. But Klimt's special feel for eye-befuddling brilliance and patterned complexity rejected the search for synthetic simplicity found elsewhere in early modern art, and his acute sense of sophisticated sexual energies, both languorous and tautly strong, could not be satisfied by the earthier physical affirmations of vitalist thought, so influential in his day. The world of dream, and of ambiguity, was his preferred domain, even — or especially — in the gleaming surfaces of these elaborately materialist works.

Thus in the most celebrated of all Klimt's works, The Kiss of 1907-08, the lovers float above the world in an enclosing nimbus of light, and the melding of opposites is conjured in the coming together of the darker rectangles of the man's robe with the clustered ovals of the woman's — a primordial language for basic principles of constructive reason and biological fertility, suspended within the overall patterned energies. A sweetened, ecstatic intensity that might be called psychedelic permeates this lyrical vision, in which elements of high naturalism and abstract ornament, seething coiled energy and floating weightlessness, come together to suggest the transports of love as fusion and dissolution.
Especially in the early years of the Secession, the forces of innovation in Vienna found remarkably little resistance. The prime land accorded the rebel group for its building, and the appointments of major Secession figures to teaching positions in state schools, are only the most evident instances of encouragement from high places. Moreover, the antagonism we associate with the eruption of modernism elsewhere in Europe — an antagonism between the avant-garde and an established bourgeois — was at first largely absent in Vienna. The Austrian capital has not been traditionally known as an environment propitious to modern art. For the Secession, after which he continued to work exclusively on private commissions, often for grand villas outside the urban center.

Thanks to the patronage of the magistrates of Vienna, artists were targets of critical abuse — especially in the case of the Volksgarten — was at first largely absent in Vienna. The Austrian capital has not been traditionally known as an easy environment for genius, as the sufferings of musicians from Beethoven to Mahler attest. Yet only with a conservative turn in governmental policy, after about 1903, did a sense of exclusion or truncated opportunity begin to mark the outlook of the major Viennese artists.

The new art of the turn of the century seems to have found its most crucial support among the sons and daughters of the businessmen and industrialists of the Ringstrasse era. Their inherited money was used to

Also as well as societal depravity — a moral sickness which he thought had led to the disasters of World War I. This at least was the basic thrust of Die letzten Tage der Menschheit (The Last Days of Mankind) of 1919-23, an epic, collage-form satire on World War I, in which he indicted the enormous alliance of ink, death, and technology ("Tinte, Tod, und Technik"). Although Jewish by birth, Kraus, like the opera singer Otto Weingartner, whom he idolized, converted to Christianity and joined a congregation of the neglected works of his favorite authors, standing up as strongly for prostitutes and homosexuals as for Offenbach's operettas, the writing of the earlier Austrian satirist Johann Nestroy, and the late works of Goethe.

Kraus's most virulent attacks were aimed at the press, in particular the serialized, serialized feuilletons (brief essays, novels) — see p. 2). He argued that their dishonest and narcisistic mingling of fact and personal opinion would lead inexorably to the distortion of truth and discussion of creative fantasy. Kraus saw himself as the defender of integrity. In its name he fought for a strict separation between imaginative prose and factual reporting.

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The Wiener Werkstaette and Geometric Style

In 1903, Josef Hoffmann and Koloman Moser founded the collaborative design enterprise the Wiener Werkstaette (Viennese Workshop). Unitting the best craftsmen under optimum working conditions, the aims of the Werkstaette were clearly expressed by Hoffmann in an article written in 1904: "We want to establish an intimate connection between public, designer, and craftsman, to create good simple articles of household use. Our point of departure is purpose, utility is our prime consideration, our strength must lie in good proportions and use of materials.... The work of craftsmen must be measured by the same standards as that of the painter and the sculptor.... The Werkstaette program clearly reflected the Secession's intent to strive for unity in the arts. But even more essential to the workshop idea was the English Arts and Crafts movement that had developed in the mid-nineteenth century. The writings of the Englishmen John Raskin and William Morris had stressed the social responsibility of art and the moral nature of handicrafts. Their ideas had been amplified around 1900 by Charles Robert Ashbee, who established the Guild of Handicrafts in London, and Charles Rennie Mackintosh, working in Glasgow. Both designers had participated in the eighth Secession exhibition, in 1900, where their furniture and interior designs deeply impressed the Viennese public, and Hoffmann continued to correspond with Mackintosh. The link between the British and Austrian design movements was further reinforced by the Anglophile tastes of the Werkstaette's patron, Fritz Waerndorfer. It was Waerndorfer who underwrote the initial expenses for establishing the Werkstaette, enabling Hoffmann and Moser to include bookbinding, work in gold and silver, and leather, as well as furniture.

Most frequently, Wiener Werkstaette furniture is noted for its severe rectilinearity and elegant detail. Designs often featured decorative inlay, which accentuated the lines of the piece without disrupting its contours. The inlaid desk by Koloman Moser when closed forms a solid rectangular block; it opens to provide drawers, compartments, and writing space. A dazzling all-over geometric pattern enlivens the flat surface planes and camouflages the points where the hinged pieces fit together. On the front, Moser inset ebony, mother-of-pearl, ivory, and gold leaf to compose an "antique"-inspired tableau of two figures and dolphins.

The Werkstaette furniture designs coincided with a new appreciation in Vienna for the simplicity of Biedermeier—the neoclassical style of Austrian furniture and architecture of about 1810-45. Respect for the plainness of Biedermeier may have been sensed in the bentwood furniture made by the firm of Thonet Brothers in Vienna. Wagner, Moser, and Loos all admired the simple clarity of the unpretentious mass-produced work of Thonet. In turn, they designed furniture very much in this spirit for specific clients and also for general production by Thonet and the rival bentwood manufacturer J. & J. Kohn.

The characteristic products of the first few years of Wiener Werkstaette design were punched-metal and hammer-metal objects. The challenge for the designers was to elicit richness from reduction. Koloman Moser's elegant cruets and stand (1904) exemplify such an ideal. The silver stand is punched into a crisp design of squares, precisely measured so that each opening is twice the width of the supporting strip. A double "ribbon" of squares acts as the handle for the low rectangular base. Set against the burnished silver are the two cruets—smooth, conical sweeps of glass with spherical tops and right-angled handles. Typical of many Werkstaette pieces, the spare geometry of this design is enriched by the fine materials crafted scrupulously by hand.

In principle, the rigorous parity of design is appropriate for useful objects which would be distributed to a broad public. In practice, however, their lavish materials and costly handwork make them available only to an elite. As the Werkstaette grew and expanded, it became an international purveyor of fine silks, fashions, and decorative ceramics and silver, often highly ornate. Its promise of reforming life for the common man through better design was never fulfilled. But in the best productions of the Wiener Werkstaette's early years, simplicity and luxury become complementary principles that define a modern sense of material pleasure.
The Aesthetics of Nationalism

The inflections of "folk-style" apparent in Viennese art and design around 1908 signaled a complex pattern of reactions against the metropolis and its values. On one level, these stylizations spoke with a strongly conservative voice — excusing a veneration of the greater continuity and solidity of rural life as a reaction against the rapid ascendancy of urban, secular, industrial society. As such, they were part of a quasi-official style, reflected most obviously in the picturesque peasant brigades in the parades for the emperor's jubilee in 1908. This conservatism stressed the state as an organic collective, determined by local bonds of blood and tradition — more deep-seat ed than the "universal" legal and rational values previously touted by liberal politics. (Ironically, it was just such particularism, on the part of the empire's self-assured ethnic minorities, that threatened Austria-Hungary's stability.) Stress on ethnic costume and rustic decorative style in Austria (a force that revived popular forms of the country's Baroque age as well) attached itself to the broader wave of militant nationalism that swept Northern Europe beginning in the late nineteenth century. This movement looked to the sagas and traditions of the North as sources of a rude vigor, impervious to what was seen as the corrupt and effete decadence of modern times. The eclectic historicism that marked the Ringstrasse era, and the multifaceted Anglonization that was apparent in the avant-garde around 1900, thus gave way to a more assertive Pan-Germanism a sentiment that reached its height in the years of World War I. A strong streak of anti-Semitism (based in part on the stereotyped image of the Jew as exemplar of modernity by virtue of his stubbornness and engagement with capitalist fi nance) was among the most sinister aspects of this new, anti-socialist, anti-universalist Heimatkunst (literally, "homeland-art," known as Provinzkunst in Austria), with its veneration for Germanic home and heart.

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In literature and poetry the same battles were waged. Whether in the German Julius Langbein's widely influential anti-socialist tract Rembrandt as Educator (1898) or in the architectural articles of Alfred Lichtwark, the message was the same: only a return to the spirit of peasant art could provide the vital energy necessary for the revival of a healthy national art. Lichtwark's praise for the nobly unpublished forms of the houses made by fishermen and farmers gave rise to two very different interpretations. A modernist such as Josef Hoffmann (who had produced the architectural renderings for an article by Lichtwark) could draw on the spirit of simplicity for a purified monumentality, while others saw in Lichtwark's writing the license for a profusion of picturesque detail. But the mazurian artificiality of Provinzkunst was the least nosacious aspect; its more consequential impact lay in the virulent attacks on the intellectual, cultural, and ethical foundations of liberalism — forebodings of a darker future.

The idea for a Jewish state came to him during a performance of Wagner's Tannhäuser. In his book The Jewish State (1896), Herzl wrote that the Jewish problem was political and not, as generally believed, religious or economic — and that the solution could only be found on the level of international politics. His idea of a return to a Jewish homeland rekindled a long-standing hope of Orthodox Jews and brought back to life an idea, considered even by Napoleon as early as 1789, of a Jewish state in Palestine.

Herzl brought to these dreams a new systematic approach and an irresistible personal drive. Living a double life — as the feuilleton editor for the Neue Freie Presse (delighting Viennese society with the wit and intelligence of the leading "high society" columnist) and the influential anti-modern tract Rembrandt as Educator (1898) or in the architectural articles of Alfred Lichtwark, the message was the same: only a return to the spirit of peasant art could provide the vital energy necessary for the revival of a healthy national art. Lichtwark's praise for the nobly unpublished forms of the houses made by fishermen and farmers gave rise to two very different interpretations. A modernist such as Josef Hoffmann (who had provided the architectural renderings for an article by Lichtwark) could draw on the spirit of simplicity for a purified monumentality, while others saw in Lichtwark's writing the license for a profusion of picturesque detail. But the mazurian artificiality of Provinzkunst was the least nosacious aspect; its more consequential impact lay in the virulent attacks on the intellectual, cultural, and ethical foundations of liberalism — forebodings of a darker future.

Under the telling titles of Heimat (Homeland), Das Land, Heimatschutz (Protection of the Homeland), Der Graf (The Graf), and Neue Bahnen (New Paths), their constant objective seemed to have been to assault the city of East ern Europe. It was not until his funeral, when thousands of Jews came from all over Europe to mourn their leader, that many of Herzl's contemporaries fully understood how powerful the aim of advancing the causes he became in only eight years. And some may have realized, with Stefan Zweig, "how much passion and hope this lone and lonesome man had borne into the world through the power of a single thought."
Kunstschau and the Kabarett Fledermaus

In 1905 Gustav Klimt led a group of artists in defecting from the Secession, further fragmenting Viennese artistic life. The "Klimt Group" decided to hold an independent exhibition in 1908, to coincide with the celebration of the sixty-year anniversary of Emperor Franz Josef's reign. Staged on rented land in temporary pavilions designed by Josef Hoffmann, Kunstschau Wien 1908 (Vienna Art Show 1908) marked the most complete expression of the desire to extend art into every realm of life. The Wiener Werkstaette and the Kunsthistorisches Museum participated along with the Klimt Group. Besides the rooms devoted to painting and design, there was also an outdoor theater, and even a complete house prototype by Josef Hoffmann, ready to sell.

The displays at the Kunstschau announced dramatic shifts in Viennese aesthetics. Instead of the serene, impersonal geometry that had dominated the first years of Wiener Werkstaette design (see p. 7), a more eclectic, often Romantic sensibility now dominated, in the form of elaborations for Die Nibelungen, several of which are implicit. The attention lavished on spirals and filigree patterns found in medieval manuscript illumination, and the fanciful emphasis on complex surface patterns once again came to the fore. Drawing on the patterns of peasant embroidery and on a style of medieval manuscript illumination, Czeschka stressed a "barbaric" conception of patterns, and sought nobility in a certain wilful stiffness of line and pose.

The cabaret featured a mixed program of experimental dance, theater, and poetry readings as well as more popular entertainments. During the second week of performances, the twenty-one-year-old Oskar Kokoschka attempted to project a sequence of images in a shadow drama entitled The Speckled Egg (a kind of cinematographic allegory).

Josef Hoffmann designed the interior of the Fledermaus as well as its furniture and silver. In the theater room, he used gray and white marble, prefiguring the delicate feel of the Palais Stoclet interior (see p. 15). But covering the bar-room wall were over seven thousand randomly sized tiles of every color, arranged like a large mosaic in a crazy-quilt design. The tiles of riotous color and comic content were made by Bertold Loefler and Michael Powolny of the Wiener Keramik. The rambunctious humor of the bar’s decor is due in part to the Fledermaus club spirit. But it reflects, too, the wider turning away from classical and more "antique" look. The resulting dignity toward styles more picturesque and varied, from the earlier Secessionist clarity toward a new emphasis on figural fantasy.

Fashions for the merely cute and picturesque; for their inspiration.

The subject of women’s clothing involves the larger issues of feminism and ultimately even nationalism. The fashionable silhouette of the tightly corseted ladies of the 1880s was regarded in progressive circles as an anachronism and ultimately even nationalism. The fashionable silhouette of the tightly corseted ladies of the 1880s was regarded in progressive circles as an anachronism, while the more "antique" look. The resulting dignity toward styles more picturesque and varied, from the earlier Secessionist clarity toward a new emphasis on figural fantasy.

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In 1907, the Wiener Werkstaette built for itself a theater/restaurant, the Kabarett Fledermaus. Inspired by the artists’ cabarets in Paris, the Fledermaus was intended to extend the group’s cultural mission into the performing arts. In its two active seasons, the Fledermaus became the haunt of the Viennese avant-garde. Discarding the cultish solemnity of the Ver Sacrum years, the cabaret set a more playful tone.

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Dreams and Sexuality

Dreamy eroticism seems in some respects the key to the fluid lightness of much Viennese art, fantasy blurring the line between the desired and the actual. But eros and the unconscious were equally near the heart of the most disrupting and disturbing innovations of early modern Viennese culture. The realm of the dream, evoked by Gustav Klimt in the fluid lines ofpliant languor, took on an unsettling concreteness in the more grotesque visions of Alfred Kubin; and the melding of narcism with sensuality that gave fin-de-siecle art its allure was transformed by Egon Schiele into a more extreme form of corporeal self-abasement. In all these cases, the taste for fantasy commingling with nightmarish apprehension, the savagery of sensuality was never far removed from the threat of pain, and the role of art was seen in terms of both confrontation and consolation. Such art has often been held to show that Vienna was the appropriate, if not the necessary, setting for Sigmund Freud’s ideas regarding the ambigious power of unconscious sexuality in human affairs.

Freud’s studies of cases of hysteria led him to the specific recognition of the repressed sexuality of women of the Viennese upper and middle classes. The disparity between the social façade and inner trauma of these women in turn pointed to the painfully in a form of casual prostitution, while some middle-class women were expected to remain virgins until marriage. The interest in adolescent girls that we find in such Viennese figures as Wilde, Bloch, Peter Altenberg, and Egon Schiele thus suggests not only the new awareness of the onset of sexuality, but also an ongoing fascination with the stimulations of innocence and with unequal relationships outside social convention.

Klimt’s portraits (see p. 5) record one aspect of this world, its elite of financially and intellectually privileged women. Schiele’s drawings display another side, the available, rawboned models from the fringes of society; and Kokoschka’s cruel fantasies of primal male/female confrontation give full vent to the darker energies Freud found. It is not only the general mingling of dream and eros, but the specific mixture within this imagery—of desire and danger, glamour and unease, the chic and the shocking—that seems attuned to the Viennese temper.

Almost a century has passed since Sigmund Freud opened his private medical practice. Living and working at Berggasse 19 in Vienna, he developed the techniques in the treatment of neuroses which he was to call psychoanalysis. By his own admission psychoanalysis did not “drop from the skies ready made”, psychology and psychiatry lay their roots in the shoemaker’s dawn of time, and the concept of the subconscious had come down in philosophy from Plato, via Leibniz and Schopenhauer. Freud contributed a systematic approach to the understanding of subconscious motivation.

He recognized that some physical disorders were of psychic origin, and were due to a process of resistance and repression in the subconscious strata of the mind. The birth of psychoanalysis occurred, according to Freud, in the years 1895-1900, when he wrote what he considered his major work, The Interpretation of Dreams (published 1900). He was convinced that the investigation of dreams had opened up the “royal road to a knowledge of the unconscious activities of the mind.”

Freud’s approach relied on several new techniques which together constituted the essence of the psychoanalytical process: the interpretation of “free association,” the elucidation of the hidden content of dream imagery (which he saw as fulfilling, in disguised form, the desire of waking life), and the investigation of early childhood memories. In particular Freud revealed that the many cases of hysteria among women of the Viennese upper bourgeoisie were rooted in frustration over unavowed sexual desire. Freud was convinced that a neurosis would be healed once its deeper reasons were understood, and that a trauma could be mastered by reexperiencing its cause—through the psychoanalytical process of “transference,” in which the patient shifts the focus of the original emotion onto the representative figure of the therapist.

Freed came to psychoanalysis relatively late in life. Under the spell of Darwinian evolutionary theory and Goethe’s nature philosophy he chose science over law and began medical studies in Vienna at age seventeen. He preferred research, but took up medical practice over law and began medical studies in Vienna at age seventeen. He preferred research, but took up medical practice. In 1885, in Paris, Freud witnessed Jean-Martin Charcot’s treatment of hysteria through hypnosis. Back in Vienna he and Joseph Breuer developed their own treatments, which they published in Studies on Hysteria (1895). Five years after The Interpretation of Dreams Freud published his most explosive ideas in Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality (1896), further developing his insights into the sexuality of children, and their obsession with their parents in what he called the Oedipus complex.

Although Freud’s theories were sharply criticized, his fascination with the life of the psyche was shared by a generation of thinkers. This growing sensitivity to psychological states was, according to Carl Schorske, a central aspect of the late nineteenth-century reaction against the rationalist beliefs of Austrian liberal culture. The writers Robert Musil and Arthur Schnitzler, to name just two figures among many in the arts, were clearly involved in uncovering the deeper layers of human consciousness; and they shared with the painter Gustav Klimt an interest, parallel to Freud’s, in intertwined obsessions with death and sex.

Notwithstanding these currents of interest, only three hundred and fifty copies of The Interpretation of Dreams had been sold two years after it was published. Freud found refuge from disappointment in his fascination with archaeology (which attracted him because of its obvious parallels with the process of psychoanalysis). More important, in order to escape what he felt to be intellectual isolation, Freud started in 1902 a series of informal gatherings with like-minded psychologists: the Psychological Wednesday Society, which grew in 1908 into the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society and then in 1910 into the International Psychoanalytic Association. The latter was beset from the beginning by dissent and defection.

Despite his lifelong love-hate relationship with Viennese society, Freud left the city only unwillingly; after the Nazis took over Austria in 1938. He died one year later, in England, of the cancer that had plagued him for the last sixteen years of his life.
Drawing

In the exhibition, line played a dominant role in the development of early modern art in Vienna, from the sinuous tendrils of Gustav Klimt’s organicism to the more tortured contours of Egon Schiele’s and Oskar Kokoschka’s figures. Draftsmanship was thus a key talent for the Viennese artists. It often served as a major, independent form of expression, and it yielded some of the most arresting work of the period.

As a private and intimate mode, it was also a primary vehicle for the realization of the Viennese concerns with the worlds of eros and of the dream.

Carl Otto Czeschka’s Nude with Drapery (1909) shows a version of the spare, shadowless linear style that dominated the figure drawings of Klimt and others in the early twentieth century. Czeschka’s love for elaborate arabesque comes through, however, in the complexly patterned fabric, and gives the drawing a decorative energy quite different from that found in the soft, interwoven outlines of Klimt’s insistently erotic nude studies.

Oskar Kokoschka’s ink drawings for his play Moerder Hoffnung der Frauen (Murderer, Hope of Women) are among the most extraordinary images of early modern Vienna. The savagery of their near-abstract vocabulary of spiked, scar-like lines looks years ahead, anticipating in surprising ways Picasso’s drawings connected with his Guernica (1937). The turned them out in quantity. Yet, far from being “potboilers,” these drawings are consistently inventive, and marked by a special energy that is in some ways fresher and more authoritative than that of his more ambitious paintings.

Egon Schiele’s Two Girls Lying Entwined (Two Models) typifies Schiele’s exceptional ability to command arrangements of bodies in the most complex, interlocked, and foreshortened poses. His sense of the paper shape, as both compressing volume of space and graphic surface, yields an image that is powerful not only in sculptural terms but as a colorful, rhythmically decorative design. His line is, moreover, specific in its attention to the particularities of tousted hair, crumpled petticoats, and bony anatomy, yet rich in its abstract qualities, and virtually unparalleled in its combination of swift spontaneity and decisive economy of means.

Not only in the exacerbated intensity of Schiele’s numerous drawings of himself, but in all his renderings of the nude, a distinctive sensibility emerges, mingling a raw, often painful erotic energy with a special sense of hard-edged glamour. Often, as in the drawing at hand, live figures seem paired with doll-like dummies, and the gift of the viewer’s attention differentiates an image where the image is set against the hollow unresponsive blankness of the puppet—albeit perhaps that Schiele, inheritor of the full-bodied sensual emphasis of Klimt, was also attuned to modern metaphors of the depersonalized and vacant spirit.

Alfred Kubin’s extraordinary fantasy drawings, first appearing around 1900, when he was still a teenager, directly reflect the fascination with dreams and the unconscious that marked Central European thought in the late nineteenth century. Though they contain echoes of other graphic artists from Hieronymus Bosch to Odilon Redon, Kubin’s early works have a unique, hallucinatory strangeness, much admired by the German Expressionist painters in Kandinsky’s circle and premonitory of aspects of Surrealism.

In Kubin’s twilight world, the mood of reverie is often jolted by cruel or violent notes. An eerie light, as in Self-Consideration (1902), may also lend a calm, lyric glow to images built from impossible incongruities. The huge head on the horizon at the left
Ideals of Unity: Music and the Visual Arts

Vienna's venerable status as the cultural hub of Central Europe depended far more on its contributions to music and theater than on the history of its visual arts. The liveliness in the visual arts announced by the formation of the Secession reflected in part the self-assertion of a new class of supporters of culture, excluded from the more established and limited world of musical and theatrical patronage (see p. 6).

The creative forces in music were nonetheless often closely intertwined with those in painting and architecture, at the turn of the century. Virtually every Vienna creator of the time was affected by the music and writings of the composer Richard Wagner, and one of Wagner's central tenets was that modern art should call on creative talents of an entirely new kind. His disciple and successor, Gustav Mahler, was also a pioneer in the fields of theater and opera. In both domains artists to realize this ideal — the 1902 Secession exhibition built around Max Klinger's sculpture of Beethoven (see p. 2) — Gustav Mahler participated in creating an arrangement of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony for wind instruments and by conducting its performance in the exhibition hall. Writers such as Carl Schorske have moreover shown how the imagery of Mahler's work, and his reception by a hostile Viennese establishment, have parallels in the paintings of Gustav Klimt, such as in the scandals that they provoked.

Suggestive parallels continue when we compare the shift in Viennese musical generations, from Mahler to Arnold Schoenberg, with the shift in painting, from Klimt to the younger Egon Schiele and Oskar Kokoschka. In both domains a search for grand harmonies gave way to a more dissonant art. In both domains a search for grand harmonies gave way to a more dissonant art.

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ARNOld Schoenberg 1874-1951

Arnold Schoenberg twice opened up new possibilities for composition: first by breaking away from conventional harmony — a step he called "the emancipation of dissonance" — and then by developing the twelve-tone system.

His first compositions show the largely self-taught Schoenberg still under the spell of Richard Wagner. After a period in Berlin, during which he worked on the tone poem Péladan and Melancholia while supporting himself by conducting a cabinet orchestra, Schoenberg returned to Vienna in 1903. There he taught composition to students such as Anton von Webern and Alban Berg. Resisting against his Romantic beginnings, Schoenberg soon aimed at greater simplicity and economy, and increasingly purged his music of subjectivity and self-expression. In 1908, in the final movement of his String Quartet No. 2, Schoenberg ventured for the first time into the sphere of atonality — a technique of musical composition that does away with traditional harmonies. He introduced Sprechstimme, a type of vocal utterance midway between speech and song, with instrumental accompaniment, in his song cycle Pierrot Lunaire (1912, premiered that same year in Berlin), and it became yet another trademark of the Schoenberg school.

Performances of Schoenberg's music provoked such scandals that the composer was prompted to found, in 1918, the Society for Private Musical Performances; applause was forbidden. The only sympathetic critics were admitted. Under its auspices, over one hundred fifty new works by contemporary composers were presented during the following three years.

After World War I, Schoenberg, in the twelve-tone system, found the freedom of style and musical language that he had sought for his atonal compositions. Although he did not invent the system, Schoenberg brought it to prominence, using it first in Five Pieces for Piano, Op. 23 (1923) and working with it in most of his subsequent compositions.

In his first composition for the serial system, written in 1921, Anton von Webern was the most radical of Arnold Schoenberg's students. His five works were composed under Schoenberg's lead into the twelve-tone system, applying it for the first time in his Kinderstück for piano solo. His subsequent compositions were entirely within his own modified version of the twelve-tone (or "serial") system. Yet within that formal rigor Webern's music always remained extremely sensitive, reflecting personal experience and his deep, pantheistic feeling for nature.

Webern's work was a heartfelt pursuit of the serial system made him a hero to a later avant-garde, an inspiration to composers such as Pierre Boulez and Karlheinz Stockhausen.

ALBAN BERG 1885-1935

Alban Berg is best known for his two operas: Wozzeck, the first full-length atonal opera (1917-22, after Georg Buchner's play Woyzeck) and Lulu (1929-35, after two plays by Frank Wedekind) — written entirely in the twelve-tone system. (Unfinished at Berg's death, the last act of Lulu has been, since 1979, performed on the basis of his ample sketches and notes.)

Both are powerful psychological dramas for which Berg himself prepared the libretto.
With the performance at the 1909 Kunstschau exhibition of Oskar Kokoschka’s cruelly violent drama Moeder Hoffnung der Frauen (Murder, Hope of Women; see p. 11), it was clear that a new kind of art was on the rise in Vienna. Kokoschka had worked for the Wiener Werkstaette, and his first illustrated book was dedicated to Klimt; but he soon quit the Werkstaette, and was brought into the circle of its opponents, including the architect Adolf Loos (see p. 15) and the critic Karl Kraus (see p. 6). Eventually he went on to Berlin, in a move that was symptomatic not only of the livelier art market then expanding in Germany, but also of the greater receptivity of the German cities to the harsh new energies of expressionism. The wealthy elite of Vienna clung to Klimt and the Werkstaette, and self-consciously stressed by many of the Kunstschau artists.

Expressionism first appeared in Vienna in the brief career of Richard Gerstl, a young painter strongly affected by local exhibitions of the work of Vincent van Gogh and Edvard Munch. Gerstl was an intimate of the composer Arnold Schoenberg and his family (a failed affair with Schoenberg’s wife precipitated Gerstl’s suicide in 1908), and he inspired Schoenberg himself to draw and paint. Schoenberg had no formal training in art, but his self-portraits, caricatural fantasies, and visionary “gazes” (abstracted faces) were treasured by artists such as Wassily Kandinsky as art born from necessity rather than tutored ability.

Among the earliest and greatest works of expressionism in Vienna are the portraits done by Kokoschka and Schiele in the years 1909-11. Strongly different in conception, the works of the two emerging artists were equally radical in their renunciation of decor and psychically charged approach to their sitters.

Kokoschka’s portrait of Peter Altenberg of 1909 is by legend the record of this bohemian writer and poet (see p. 2) responding to a provocation that had disturbed him at a cafe. The figure emerges dramatically from a void defined only by the slashing, scratching life of Kokoschka’s brush, and his ve neous flesh seems shaken to near dissolution by a queering internal energy. The lunging gesture and bulging eyes are conjured with a disregard for either flattery or decorative finish that is characteristic of all the early Kokoschka portraits—a series that projects the disturbed psychic energies of an extraordinary world of scholars, creators, and dissipated aristocrats.

While Kokoschka divorced these sitters from their mundane surroundings by setting them in a turbulent atmosphere that seemed to bristle with ambient energy, Schiele’s concentration on character and psychology took the form of a radical emptying out of the pictorial space that left his subjects alone in a whitened vacuum. In early portraits like that of Dr. Erwin von Graff, the constructed gestures of bony anatomy and outsized hands communicate a semaphoric message of cramped alienation from within a denuded environment, the aesthetic and psychological antithesis of the luxuriantly full spaces of Klimt (see p. 5). Klimt continued to paint lovely society portraits, but the special intensity of the “golden” works was not maintained, and his most personal works of the period after about 1910 are the imagined scenes he painted, such as The Maiden of 1912-13. Here the soft fullness of an all-consuming dream state is conjured in loose, floating forms of luscious color—a fantasy free of the morbidity and sexual tensions seen in his earlier allegories, yet full of an indulged eroticism so vividly sweet as to be disquieting in a different way.

Schiele and Kokoschka were deeply concerned, as Klimt never was, with self-portraiture. Schiele’s numerous self-portraits, both in drawings and in paintings, point up the particular sense of the theatrical associated with expressionism in Vienna—the artist’s assuming of allegorical guises, and the projection of himself as actor in violent dramas of frustrated communication. In the broadly miming gestural language of the portraits, as in this sense of self, Kokoschka and Schiele make evident a Viennese self-consciousness about communication and inner truth (see p. 4), they transform into something modern and problematic the notions of the costume and of the facade that had formerly seemed only the outdated concerns of the Ringstrasse generation (see p. 14).
The Ringstrasse, Problematic Symbol of an Age

Old Vienna was a tightly packed network of small streets, bound in by encircling military fortifications. When the young Emperor Franz Josef came to the throne after the revolution in 1848, he became persuaded that these walls were anachronistic and that the time had come to modernize Vienna. In 1857 he ordered the old walls torn down. On the open military glacis they had overlooked, a huge new boulevard, the Ringstrasse, was laid out around the city’s edge.

The boulevard project was doubtless influenced by the similar work then being done in Paris by Napoleon III and his architect Baron Haussmann, and it involved a similar combining of strategic with economic concerns, and governmental with private finance. But where Haussmann’s boulevards were notable for their homogeneity, the Ringstrasse’s hallmark was the eclectic diversity of its architecture. Each of the major institutional structures along the street was built in a mode thought appropriate: the Parliament in a Greek style to recall Athenian democracy, the Rathaus (City Hall) in Gothic guise to suggest the medieval epoch of burgher civic rule, the University of Vienna buildings in the Renaissance mold to honor the humanist pursuit of knowledge, and so on. Rich residential districts were also developed, where apartment houses in imitation Renaissance and Baroque palazzo styles flattened the self-image of those with new industrial wealth.

Though the major part of the Ring was built in the 1860s and 1870s, additions continued piecemeal into the 1890s and even beyond. By then, however, the political forces that had shaped the project—a loose and often contentious combination of imperial and liberal bourgeois interests—had been supplanted. The major urban reforms of the nineties and the first years of the new century were instigated by a new populist politics, less focused on the inner-city, well-to-do world defined by the Ring and more concerned with the vast working suburbs then being assimilated into municipal government.

For all the improvements it had brought, including better water services and drainage, the urbanism of the liberal era was criticized by the new politicians as the self-serving and short-sighted scheme of a parvenu class. For those in the arts, too, the imposing edifices came to be regarded as monuments to philistine hypocrisy, which sought to disseminate modernity in the false “costume” facades of noble historical styles. One of the most trenchant attacks came in Adolf Loos’s article “Die Potemkinsche Stadt” (“Potemkin’s City,” published in the July 1898 issue of the Secession journal Ver Sacrum). Loos compared the decorated facades of the Ring buildings to the fake building fronts that a Russian minister, Potemkin, had once ordered erected along the travel route of Catherine the Great, to convey the illusion of prosperous provincial villages.

View of the Ringstrasse, left to right: Parliament, Rathaus (City Hall), University of Vienna, and Burgtheater, c. 1888

An oppressive inheritance for Loos’s generation of young modernists, the Ringstrasse ensemble has nonetheless survived, and prospered. Like Haussmann’s boulevards, this broad, tree-lined avenue seemed almost predestined for the demands of the age of the automobile. As the major artery of circulation in the inner city, and as the site of such institutions as the great Art and Natural History Museums, the State Opera and the City Theater (not to mention the ubiquitous칼리모시, the Ringstrasse remains today Vienna’s most distinctive public space.

CAMILLO SITTE
1843–1903

Before the criticisms of the Ringstrasse at the turn of the century, Camillo Sitte, a professor at Vienna’s Kunstgewerbeschule (School of Applied Arts), had rebuked the failings of this effort at modernization, in his book City Planning According to Artistic Principles of 1889. Sitte’s ideal urban forms were the protectively enclosing spaces of older towns. He felt that the wide, long-view vectors of Haussmann-style boulevards—like the Ringstrasse—elected only anxiety (specifically Platanzaf, or agoraphobia, the fear of open spaces).

Nostalgic for what he felt was the nurturing collective solidarity of traditional small-town society, Sitte felt that avenues like the Ring would intensify the sense of alienation and fragmentation that modern life entailed. As the historian Carl Schorske has shown, Sitte’s communitarian critique of the Ring differed sharply from the objections of more self-consciously modern architects such as Otto Wagner and Adolf Loos, who found the street and its buildings too indebted to—rather than too removed from—tradition. These opposed critiques were moreover symptomatic of the broader turn-of-the-century rejection of the liberal era the Ring represented, a rejection that came from conservatives and progressives, the political right and left simultaneously.

ARCHITECTURE AND REFORM

No other art form seemed so immediately linked to Viennese crepuscular dreams of modern reform as architecture. Otto Wagner’s writings, which espoused a new “honesty” in building, based on rational principles of functional efficiency, were key texts in the imagination of a generation that looked to art as the agent of an all-embracing transformation of life. The more direct relationship of exterior to interior, the abolition of imitative styles and superfluous ornament—these were principles of the new architecture as well as metaphors for a new attitude toward man and society.

The texts of Viennese architecture are not, however, always in line with the buildings. Architects such as Wagner and his younger admirers Josef Hoffmann and Adolf Loos shaped their work in ways that simultaneously reinterpreted the classical tradition and found new forms—expressive and even theatrical, rather than straightforwardly “honest”—for modernity. In Vienna, the reductive elimination of ornament was often only a prelude to the invention of new ornamental motifs, and the purging of historicism set the stage for a more complex manner of quoting and subsuming historical references. The decorative, eclectic ways of the Ringstrasse, loudly deplored around 1900, might be said to haunt the Viennese search for a modern architecture.

Gustav Klimt, Hoffmann, and the other original members of the Secession dreamed of finding support for large-scale public projects in which, as in medieval cathedrals, architecture would draw back under its aegis all the arts of painting, sculpture, and so on—arts that had been relegated by the modern market to small-scale private expression. This was a dream that (with the exception perhaps of Wagner’s Steinhof Church) went unrealized; only the collaborative Secession exhibitions or exceptional private commissions like the Palais Stoclet suggested what these artists envisioned on a larger scale.

Modern Viennese architecture set out to reconcile several conflicting needs and desires. The simplicity of anonymous rustic styles was to be brought into harmony with the authority of high traditions, and a spare denial of vulgarity was to be balanced against the demands for luxury of an elite clientele. The issues raised in these attempts, of the tensions between country and city values, or between social consciousness and interior life, are perhaps even more revealing than the less ambiguous and more confidant rhetoric of the would-be modern reformers. And the disparities and disparities—notably in the self-conscious separation between facade and interior—are perhaps the most fascinating aspects of Vienna’s role in an emerging modern architectural movement.
The four major architects working in Vienna around 1900 were Otto Wagner, Joseph Maria Olbrich, Josef Hoffmann, and Adolf Loos. Wagner, the eldest, is considered the "father" of modern Viennese architecture. His buildings were the first outstanding examples of the modern style in Vienna and earned him an international reputation. Olbrich, the designer of the Secession’s exhibition hall (see p. 3), was Wagner’s young protégé, with whom he collaborated on urbanization projects in the 1890s.

Another prize pupil of Wagner’s was Josef Hoffmann, who became a professor at the Kunstgewerbeschule in 1899 and a favorite of Secession supporters. Hoffmann enjoyed a steady flow of commissions from wealthy clients; under his leadership, the Wiener Werkstätte determined what was tasteful for Viennese society (see p. 7). Adolf Loos, an exact contemporary of Hoffmann’s, was an architect whose early reputation rested mostly on his biting cultural criticism. A dedicated enemy of the Secession’s aestheticism, Loos later championed the more raw and aggressive work of the painter Oskar Kokoschka (see p. 15).

Otto Wagner

Wagner influenced an entire generation through his teaching and writings. In his 1895 book Modern Architecture he insisted that the primary focus of the architect should be on satisfying the practical functions of a building, that choice of materials should be determined by their cost and ease of maintenance, and that structure should be simple and economical.

His competition design for the Postal Savings Bank (built in 1904-06 and 1910-12) combined the nobility of traditional materials with details that suggested the energies of modern industry. Wagner made a point of declaring the artifice of the stone facade on this vast masonry structure. Emphasizing the array of metal bolt heads that held the stone cladding panels, he made from basic technology a new kind of decorative element. For the glass-roofed main hall, he adapted the look of the great train stations. Among the most striking features of this room are the aluminum hot-air blowers whose unconventional appearance and audacious exposure seem a premonition of the “high-tech” future.

Joseph Maria Olbrich

Although Olbrich worked closely with Wagner, the younger man’s taste leaned to the dreamier decoration of Jugendstil, evident in the illustrations he contributed to the Secession publication Ver Sacrum. He also designed the Secession building, with its temple-like facade and movable interior walls, and while it was under construction in 1898 became involved with domestic architectural projects. For the Villa Friedmann at Hinterbrühl, near Vienna, Olbrich was brought in to replace the original architect. (The owner wanted to have his home completed in “Secession-style.”) Olbrich simplified the structure and carefully tended to details of decor. In the children’s room, for example, Olbrich called for furniture, woodwork, wall paintings, and windows to blend together in cozy harmony; an earnest message on the landscape-like walls exhorted the young to be loyal, honest, and industrious.

Olbrich had been planning a series of villas to be built in the fashionable wooded area above Vienna called the Hohe Warte. However, when the Grand Duke of Hesse invited him to help create an artists’ colony at Darmstadt, he left Vienna in 1899 and relinquished to Hoffmann the projects on the Hohe Warte.

Josef Hoffmann

One of the villas that Hoffmann completed on the Hohe Warte attracted the attention of Adolphe Stoclet, a wealthy Belgian who was living in Vienna during 1905-11. Upon his father’s death, Stoclet was forced to re-coordinate with special textiles, wallpapers, and furnishings by the Werkstätte. The dining room features a three-part monastic frieze by Gustav Klimt (executed by Leopold Forster) in marble, semi-precious stones, and colored glass. Hoffmann planned all the furniture and silver and designed the garden as well - its terraces and pergolas, summerhouse, tennis courts, garden chairs, and tables.

Every aspect of the Palais Stoclet was intended to harmonize with the architectural concept. To test the effect, each entire room was assembled first in Vienna before any pieces were shipped to Brussels. As one commentator observed in 1909, “This is the new Viennese art - an art which exports whole houses.”

Adolf Loos

Opposed to Hoffmann’s opulent orchestration, Adolf Loos argued against the tyranny of the total-design architect and the imposition of “style.” “We already possess the style of our time,” he wrote, “It may be found wherever the artist hasn’t yet stock his nose in.” Best known for his scathing criticism of the use of ornament (especially his essay “Ornament and Crime” of 1908), Loos was in fact not against all ornament. Like Wagner (and Louis Sullivan in America), he disapproved of decoration that was meaningless or unnecessary or which confused our understanding of a building’s function.

Loos had designed several interiors around 1900 and received his first commission for a complete building in 1908 from the English-style tailoring firm he himself favored, Goldman & Salatsch. The building he devised looks directly across the Michaelerplatz toward the Hofburg, the Imperial Palace. Many critics at the time considered the radical bareness of Loos’s upper stories an insult to the traditions of historic Vienna, as represented by the ornate Baroque style of the Hofburg. Loos defended his plain walls and windows as being true to venerable, if not prestigious, styles of Viennese architecture. “I kept the plaster surfaces as simple as possible because the burgheers of Vienna also built in a simple style.” Characteristic of Loos is his combination of this burgher strictness with the classicizing arcade and lavishly veined stone of the lower stories. Like Hoffmann and others of this generation, Loos sought not just simplicity, but also a new sense of purified elegance, free from what he saw as the vulgarity of bourgeois historicism.
only son, Crown Prince Rudolf, committed suicide with his lover, a young society lady from a royal hunting lodge at Mayerling in 1889. The Empress Elisabeth, always a troubled and distant consort, was assassinated by an anarchist in 1898. The aging emperor, ever more psychologically isolated, found it difficult either to resist the pressure for greater democracy (universal suffrage was finally granted in 1907) or to contend with a faction-torn parliament. These internal tensions were only magnified by the ever more bellicose international climate of the early twentieth century. As Austria-Hungary’s unique geographical position — opening onto the Orient, the Russian Empire, and Western Europe as well — made it a key if no longer militarily dominant, player on the European stage.

Fiala, Glitter, Final Darkness

Three times in the 1890s the demagogic Christian Socialist Karl Lueger (known as “Handsome Karl”) received the votes sufficient to make him mayor of Vienna; three times Franz Joseph refused to approve the appointment, in significant part because of Lueger’s outspoken anti-Semitism. In 1897 the emperor finally ceded, and a greater democracy (universal suffrage was finally granted in 1907) opened up the possibility of greater democracy. In 1897 the emperor finally ceded, and a great wave of emigration set in. The aging emperor, ever more psychologically isolated, found it difficult either to resist the pressure for greater democracy (universal suffrage was finally granted in 1907) or to contend with a faction-torn parliament. These internal tensions were only magnified by the ever more bellicose international climate of the early twentieth century. As Austria-Hungary’s unique geographical position — opening onto the Orient, the Russian Empire, and Western Europe as well — made it a key if no longer militarily dominant, player on the European stage.

Karl Lueger (1844-1910)

When Franz Joseph’s nephew and heir, the Archduke Franz Ferdinand, was assassinated at Sarajevo in 1914 by a young Serbian nationalist, Austria’s fractions internal dissension and its entanglement in European politics died. Yet it was in the same year, 1897, that the formation of the Vienna Secession announced a period of unparalleled creativity in Viennese cultural and intellectual life. One of the brilliant achievements wrought within the next twenty years by Vienna’s cosmopolitan citizenry — the innova-