

(left)  
Madame d' Ora. Herbst  
Emilie Flöge in her shop  
*Schwestern Flöge* 1910

(right)  
Gustav Klimt  
*Emilie Flöge* 1902  
oil on canvas  
178.0 x 80.0 cm  
Wien Museum, Vienna

## Gustav Klimt *Emilie Flöge*, 1902

Gustav Klimt's full-length, elongated portrait of his life-long companion, Emilie Flöge, completed in 1902, was exhibited at the *Klimt Kollektiv* (14 November – 6 January 1903), the Eighteenth Exhibition of the Vienna Secession, where it was listed as *Bildnis einer Dame* (Portrait of a lady).

Painted when Flöge was twenty-eight years old, the work is a compelling portrait of a woman whose confident stance, lovely oval face framed by a mass of dark, untamed curls, and brilliant blue eyes connecting directly with the viewer present an incandescent and mesmerising image. While her slightly parted lips and flushed cheeks and the sensuous outline of her body encased in a tight-fitting sheath suggest passion and emotional connection, this possibility is counterbalanced by the unspecific, minimal environment, the ethereal illusion of the decorative ornamentation of her dress, and the fan-shaped halo that frames her head.

Every aspect of this portrait acclaims the artistic vision of Gustav Klimt and the period. Here is a woman depicted as a *Gesamtkunstwerk* – who encapsulates all aspects of art and design as espoused by the Secessionist artists. Indeed, the avant-garde nature of the painting caused critics to comment on what they saw as the unfinished nature of the portrait and the mosaic-like bejewelled effect of the ornamental patterning. Ludwig Hevesi wrote: 'Another, unfinished portrait has come to us as if from a blue-mottled world of majolica and mosaic,' while Berta Zuckermandl noted: 'Around the head, there is a green-blue wreath of blossoms with all the colour mysticism of Byzantine backgrounds.'<sup>1</sup> Emilie's dress is typical *Reformkleider*, the artistic free-flowing clothing that offered a radical alternative to the strictures and corsets of conventional fashion of the day. The sumptuous fabric covered with ornamental spirals, gold squares and dots is offset by the geometric pattern of the bodice, a motif presaging Wiener

Werkstätte design. This chequered motif, which features in a number of dresses worn by Flöge, identifies her immediately as a person of style and individual expression.<sup>2</sup>

As a businesswoman Flöge was one of Vienna's most successful fashion stylists and designers. In July 1904, together with her sisters Pauline and Helene, she opened the fashion salon *Schwestern Flöge* in Casa Piccola on the Mariahilferstrasse.<sup>3</sup> The salon, with its interiors designed in the Wiener Werkstätte style by Josef Hoffmann and Koloman Moser, quickly became a successful enterprise with wealthy clients who were committed to modernity in all its forms. Many of these women, such as Sonja Knips, Hermine Gallia and Eugenia Primavesi, were also patrons of Klimt.

The relationship between Gustav Klimt and Emilie Flöge lasted for twenty-seven years, until his death in 1918, but its exact nature remains something of a mystery. While it may have begun as infatuation, it matured into a close relationship that was intellectually and emotionally intimate rather than physical. Klimt and his brother Ernst had used the Flöge sisters as models for the Burgtheater murals in 1886 and the latter had married Helene in 1891. Following Ernst's death in 1892, Klimt became guardian of their daughter. He also joined the Flöge family at Lake Attersee in the Salzkammergut for the summer months each year, and the numerous photographs of Klimt and Emilie relaxing there highlight their special connection. After Klimt's death *Schwestern Flöge* continued to operate until 1938, when the salon closed after the Austrian Anschluss to Nazi Germany. Emilie never married, and died in Vienna in 1952.

Frances Lindsay



## Egon Schiele Self-portraits

Egon Schiele's sensational self-portraits explore a new vision of the relation between mind, body and emotion. In attitudes of dance-like eloquence, he mobilises his whole body, expressing sexual vitality, vulnerability, suffering and malaise. While studying at the *Akademie der bildenden Künste* (Academy of Fine Arts) in Vienna in 1907, Schiele met Gustav Klimt, whose emphasis on abstract pictorial design encouraged Schiele's emancipation from strict academic ideals. With a group of fellow students he left the academy and started the *Neukunstgruppe* (New Art Group) in 1909.

Composed with a breathtaking balance of line and space, *Self-portrait with hands on chest*, 1910, testifies to Schiele's incorporation of Klimtian style in its patterns of entwined forms, evident in the hands, which clasp each other and fan out. But his graphic emphasis already betrays a tension that pulls the contour tight like an elastic band. These elements are injected with the theatrical panache that pervades his self-depiction, possibly reflecting the influence of another former academy student, Erwin Osen, known for his outlandish appearance.<sup>1</sup> Schiele has made himself up as if for performance, with white highlights above his eyes, red lips and thick hair spiked and piled up like an exotic headdress.

*Self-portrait with peacock waistcoat, standing*, 1911, is even more theatrical. Schiele sends an electric current through the contours of his earlier drawing style. His hair stands out straight, a precursor of Andy Warhol's 'fright wig', irradiated from behind with a halo of stark white light. His suit, waistcoat and tie are embellished, his pouting lips are cherry-red and his gaze addresses the viewer with supercilious allure.

Schiele's psychological intensity is most apparent in the contorted configuration of his hands, which can be related to contemporary medical attempts to document and interpret

Egon Schiele  
*Self-portrait with hands  
on chest* 1910  
charcoal, watercolour  
and gouache  
44.8 x 31.2 cm  
Kunsthaus Zug  
Stiftung Sammlung Kamm

pathological mental states. From 1879 to 1918, the Paris hospital for diseases of the nervous system, La Salpêtrière, produced photographic journals illustrating hysteria and other neurological diseases that were widely circulated in Vienna.<sup>2</sup> By arrangement with his friend the gynaecologist Dr Erwin von Graff, Schiele was able to pursue his keen interest in medical documentation of the body, producing a series of drawings of pregnant women in 1910.<sup>3</sup> In 1913, Erwin Osen was commissioned to record the appearance of patients with mental illness at Steinhof, the largest psychiatric hospital of its kind in Europe when it opened in 1907.<sup>4</sup> Schiele's frenetic visual imagery can also be related to the popularity of contemporary forms of New Dance and body culture, emphasising nudity, popular music rhythms and release from bourgeois convention.<sup>5</sup>

Schiele's nervous energy was captured in a brilliant series of photographs by Anton Josef Trčka, a painter, poet and photographer born in Vienna of Czech background. Schiele poses for the camera with his characteristic agility, confessional gaze and splayed fingers. Trčka adds his own stylistic framework, compressing his subject into a tableau-like space that barely contains his figure. Through dark-room post-processing and re-touching, he imparts a soft smoky sheen to the artist's features and a glowing background light. In Trčka's interpretation the psychological burden of Schiele's self-presentation is inseparable from the charisma of his seductive personal style.

Vivien Gaston

