



WORKS



The Theatre in Taormina, 1886–1888

Oil on marble plaster

c. 750 × 600 cm

Burgtheater, northern staircase, Vienna

Gustav Klimt, his brother Ernst and their colleague and friend Franz Matsch had achieved their goal. Their artists' association 'Künstler-Compagnie' had received a commission for a project in Vienna which promised great fame: to paint the stairwells of the two grand staircases in the new Burgtheater on Vienna's Ringstrasse. The pictorial programme was to show the development of the theatre from Antiquity to the present day. The artists first transferred their coloured designs in full size onto cardboard using pencil, graphite and charcoal; then they perforated the outlines and traced them onto the ceiling through the holes using graphite dust. Finally, they executed the painting directly onto the plaster.

Gustav Klimt designed one of the two tympanums of the staircases and four of the ten ceiling paintings, including *The Theatre in Taormina*. The theatre in the town in Sicily was built by the Greeks during the third century BC. Later it was extended by the Romans so that they could stage races and gladiatorial fights there. It is famous for the view across the sea and the eastern coast of Sicily with Mount Etna, a panorama which Klimt has depicted here. We cannot see much of the theatre, however; it lies in front of the bay in the background. The scene itself is set in a Roman villa high above the city. The main figure, who attracts all the attention, is a nude dancer. She is moving to the music of a similarly naked woman playing an aulos, and another, dressed in red, who is playing the tambourine. Shades of brown, broken white, gold and a deep, warm red lend the painting an impression of luxury. Klimt may have borrowed ideas for both his figures and the architecture from the scenes from Antiquity by the Victorian painter Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema. The latter was a member of the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna. Another reference was the 'painter prince' Hans Makart, who had been awarded major commissions for the buildings on the Ringstrasse. Painting nude women was certainly permitted in nineteenth-century Vienna if they were shown in an antique context. Nonetheless the scene was criticised as having very little to do with the theatre of Antiquity, and rather focusing on sultry eroticism. At the same time, the powerful colours were admired. All in all, Klimt's works for the two monumental stairwells in the Burgtheater were highly praised. Emperor Franz Joseph I awarded him the Golden Cross of Merit for his achievements.



Josef Lewinsky as Carlos in *Clavigo*, 1895

Oil on canvas

60 × 44 cm

Belvedere, Vienna

Gustav Klimt first gained recognition as an artist with the interior decoration of theatres. In 1888 his gouache in the auditorium of the old Burgtheater caused a sensation. Drama and the theatre are also the subject of this painting, in which he broke away from the Salon painting of the Gründerzeit and progressed to the expressive form of Symbolism.

In 1894 Klimt had been commissioned by the Gesellschaft für vervielfältigende Kunst (Society for the Reproductive Arts) to paint the portrait of an actor of his choice from the Burgtheater. The likeness was to serve as the template for an illustration in the luxury volume *Die Theater Wiens*. Klimt decided on Josef Lewinsky, who had been a life member of the Burgtheater since 1858. He portrays him in one of his star roles as Carlos in Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's tragedy *Clavigo*. Klimt worked for more than a year on the portrait, probably with several model sessions and with the help of photographs. Unlike the Historicist portrait grisailles by his artist colleagues, Klimt's painting for the planned publication is extremely modern. He has divided the format vertically into three sections. Our gaze is directed straight towards Lewinsky's illuminated face, which is worked out in great detail in the main section. The figure in its black costume fades into the background of the darkened stage. The collar, jabot and cuffs are delicately painted and shine out in white; the buttons on the sleeves, the watch chain and the silver shoe buckles gleam in the stage lighting. Two golden bars with the picture title, signature and year of creation, which complete the actual portrait at the top and the bottom, underline the actor's importance. The two other sections of the painting are unusual. To the left, golden ivy – a symbol of immortality – trails downwards against the background, which is executed with casual brushstrokes in shades of grey. At the top of the picture we can discern laurel twigs, which stand for fame and honour, like shadows behind the tendrils. In the right-hand panel there is an ancient tripod with a vessel from which smoke is rising. A young woman is emerging from the smoke, hovering with a theatre mask of an old woman in her hand. Behind her is a man's face mask. With this symbolism Klimt refers back to the origins of European theatre in Greek Antiquity. He positions the achievements of the highly esteemed Burgtheater actor Josef Lewinsky in this millennial tradition and thus intentionally underlines his significance.



Portrait of a Lady with Cape and Hat, 1897/98

Black and red chalk

44.6 × 31.8 cm

Albertina, Vienna

For Klimt, drawing was a daily exercise – indeed, a daily necessity. The sheets were piled up in his studio: sketches, preliminary studies for paintings, and drawings which were created as independent artworks. The human figure formed the main focus of his drawings; few landscapes have survived. Even in his early years, Klimt was an excellent draughtsman. He prepared his Historicist decorative paintings with precise studies and sketches. During the 1890s he turned his attention to Symbolism. He produced anonymous portraits such as this *Portrait of a Lady with Cape and Hat*. The chiaroscuro is created with subtly graded hatching, sometimes across largish areas, recalling the Neo-Impressionist drawings of the French artist Georges Seurat. The young woman's large, dark eyes attract the viewer's gaze but do not respond to it. She is gazing sideways with a blank, slightly sad expression, her head gently inclined. A strip of light behind her hints at a section of window, through which a soft light is falling onto her face, emphasising the bridge of her nose before being reflected in the outer corner of her left eye. In order to achieve this effect, Klimt left the background paper in its original state. The face acquires a sculptural quality through the treatment of the lighting. The economy of the lighting highlights the mysterious mood of the drawing. It is enhanced by the black cape and the feathery stand-up collar, which plays around the lady's cheek. For the cape, Klimt first applied a uniform area of colour, followed by dense black chalk strokes which follow the lines of the garment. He has drawn the decoration on the hat with casual circling lines that contrast with the bright paper ground of the strip of light, and uses red chalk to delicately colour the model's curly hairstyle.

The materials Klimt used in his drawings remained the same over many years.

Initially he worked – as here – on packing paper with black chalk, sometimes adding coloured chalks. From 1903/04 he used lighter, stiffer paper in a larger format that he had sent from Japan, and worked in pencil with the addition of crayons. During his 'Golden Phase' he also added gold and silver paint and watercolours. He rarely used pen and ink. For a long time Gustav Klimt's drawings were more highly appreciated than his paintings.



Portrait of Sonja Knips, 1897/98

Oil on canvas

145 x 146 cm

Belvedere, Vienna

A dream in pink tulle. And a shimmering piece of painting. The young woman was born in 1873 – aristocratic but poor – as Sophie Amalia Maria Baroness Potier des Échelles in Lemberg, present-day Lviv in Ukraine. In 1896 she married one of the richest men in Vienna, Anton Knips, the co-owner of the ironworks C. T. Petzold & Co. He financed his independent-minded wife's passion for Viennese Modernism. At her instigation Josef Hoffmann designed the family's city apartment, as well as a country house in Seeboden by the Millstätter See, a new villa in Döbling and the family tomb. Sonja Knips was a regular customer of the Wiener Werkstätte and the fashion salon of the Flöge sisters. She knew Gustav Klimt before she was married. Did she have a love affair with him? Sonja Knips was at the very least a close friend of the artist, because he gave her one of his sketch books in red leather – like the one she is holding in her hand. She also owned two further paintings by him.

In this commissioned portrait, Klimt adopted a new approach. For the first time he chose a square canvas, a format which he soon came to prefer. The composition is divided diagonally into two halves which are held together by the blossoms at the top edge of the picture. James Abbott McNeill Whistler's portrait of his mother (1871) served as inspiration for the work – it would later appear in many popular films and in 1997 would even play a leading part in a Mr. Bean film. Klimt's portrait lives from its contrasts: light and dark, strong and delicate colours, a casual yet precise painting style. The background remains indeterminate. Is Sonja Knips sitting in the garden or in a house in front of a vast flower arrangement? Here, Klimt refrains from a more precise depiction, in order to show the main subject to best advantage all the more clearly. Even the armchair and Sonja Knips's hands are only hinted at. Her face, on the other hand, is executed in almost photographic detail. We feel as if we could reach out and touch her wavy hair. The contrast lends the composition tension, which Klimt would go on to develop further in later portraits. The blossoms are shown two-dimensionally and do not recede; they hint at the future ornamentation in his paintings.

The sensation in this painting, however, is the dress of superimposed brushstrokes in variations of delicate pink. The fabric almost seems to rustle. At the same time it is painted quite freely. The portrait adorned the dining room of the Villa Knips, which Josef Hoffmann had designed.



Nuda Veritas, 1899

Oil on canvas

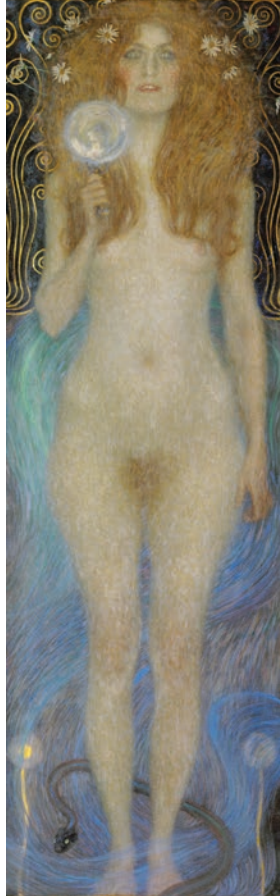
252 × 56.2 cm

Theatermuseum, Vienna

The naked truth – that was the artistic authenticity for which Gustav Klimt stood, together with his fellow artists of the Vienna Secession, which they had founded in 1897. He was the group's first president. The figure of *Nuda Veritas* presented by Klimt is shown facing the front, unclothed and vulnerable. It is an allegory in line with art-historical tradition. In 1494/95 Sandro Botticelli had presented Truth as a beautiful nude woman in his painting *The Calumny of Apelles*; she stands with her head erect and her right hand raised towards heaven. However, she has covered her pubic area with a veil and her left hand. While the figure of the Italian artist is quite clearly not of this world, Klimt presents the 'naked truth' in front view and firmly in the here and now. Admittedly, he provides her with symbolic attributes like the mirror with the light of truth as well as the two stalks of dandelion and the serpent at her feet. Her vulnerability and innocence are emphasised by the delicate blue veil, the dandelion clocks and the daisies in her hair. But at the same time she is an image of new life, not idealised and other-worldly, but utterly present. Klimt's model may have been Maria 'Mizzi' Zimmermann, with whom he had a relationship and who became the mother of his son Gustav in 1899.

'Nuda Veritas' appeared as early as 1898 as a small figure with outstretched arms and as an attribute of Pallas Athene, the patroness of the arts and sciences, whom Klimt depicted programmatically as a modern champion of art representing the claim of the Vienna Secessionists. In the same year he drew a 'Nuda Veritas' using Indian ink to illustrate *Ver Sacrum* (Sacred Spring), the magazine of the Secession. The goddesses of Antiquity in Klimt's Historicist paintings for the new Burgtheater and the Kunsthistorisches Museum on the Ringstrasse became crown witnesses of the new art. Klimt was repeatedly subject to public criticism. *Nuda Veritas* is a reaction to that. The artist answered with a quotation by Friedrich Schiller, with which the latter had countered hostile judgements: 'If you cannot please everyone with your deeds and your art, please a few. To please many is a bad thing.' *Nuda Veritas* was shown at the 4th exhibition of the Vienna Secession and was violently rejected by the public.

KANNST DU
NICHT ALLEN
GEFALLEN DURCH
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MACH ES
WENIGEN RECHT
VIELEN GEFALLEN
IST SCHLIMM. —
SCHILLER



NU DA
VERITAS.

On Lake Attersee, 1900

Oil on canvas

80.2 × 80.2 cm

Leopold Museum, Vienna

A 'frame full of lake water' was the Viennese art critic Ludwig Hevesi's admiring description of this painting when it was displayed in 1901 in the 10th Secession exhibition. During the year in which it was created, Gustav Klimt spent the summer holidays with the Flöge family by the Attersee for the first time; from then on, they were to return there almost every year. Klimt escaped from the heat of summer in the city and sought relaxation and rest in order to work. He loved nature. In the Salzkammergut he could go for walks and undertake long hikes, go rowing and swimming, read, enjoy the company of Emilie Flöge and her family, reflect – and of course paint. For the sojourn of over three weeks, from mid-August to mid-September of 1900, he took six canvases with him, and reported in his holiday correspondence that he was working on five landscapes, including this painting.

Until 1907 the Flöges and Klimt stayed in the Bräuhof in Litzlberg. Looking out from the shore across the lake, one could see a small peninsula on the right with the castle that gave the village its name. Klimt has hinted at it at the top right edge of the picture. Hevesi formulated the basic idea of the composition very accurately with his comment: the surface of the water almost entirely fills the picture format. Towards the top it blurs into mist or fog. Against a greyish-purple background, Klimt reproduces the gentle movement of the little wavelets and their light reflections with countless blue-grey and turquoise-green brushstrokes giving way to white ones on the right-hand edge of the picture. They become smaller and smaller towards the top, until they are replaced by stripes of turquoise and grey-blue-purple which lend depth. We can vaguely make out the line which separates the surface of the water from the mountains behind. The group of trees on the island, with the two clouds above cut off by the edge of the painting, is echoed in the mountain slope on the left, above which another cloud is hovering. Klimt creates an impression of spatiality through the difference in brightness and the use of an aerial perspective which fuses the colour of the landscape elements in the distance with those that are even further away. In his later landscapes he was to depict the sky only rarely: a result of his investigation of the tension relationship between depth and surface, real space and pictorial space. *On Lake Attersee* represents a milestone in the development of Klimt's approach to landscape. The picture expresses his deep understanding of nature and is at the same time an outstanding piece of pure painting.



Judith I, 1901

Oil on canvas

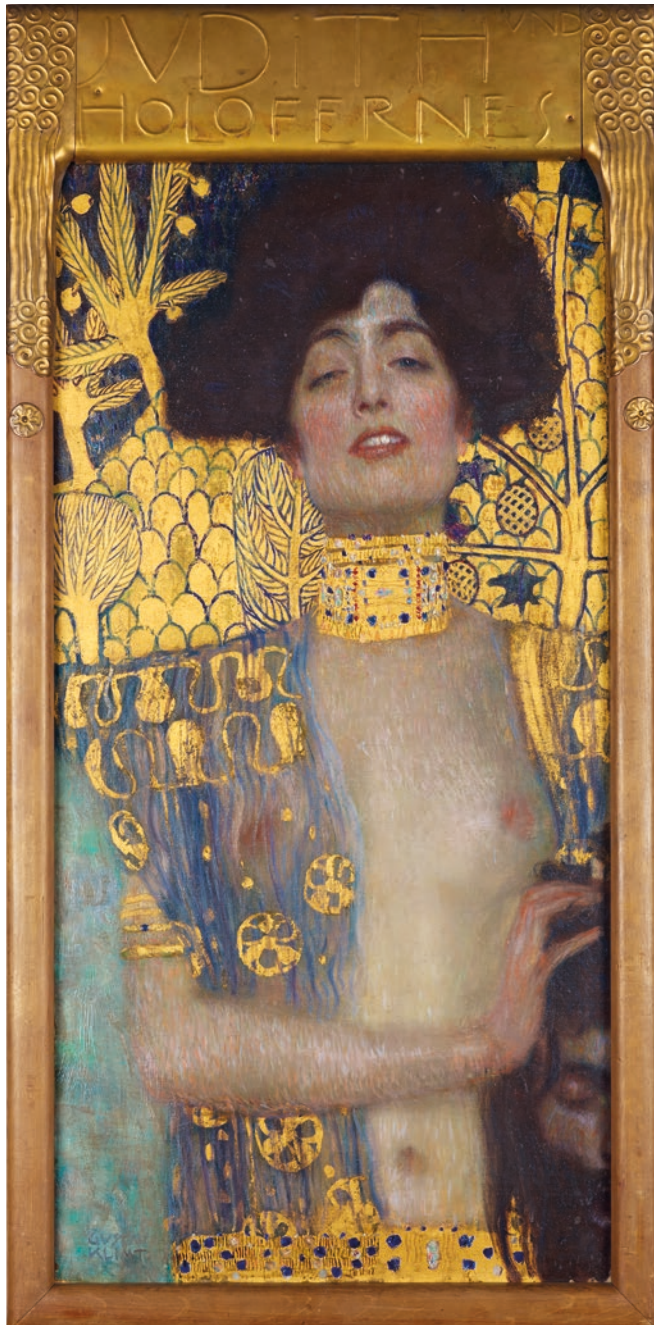
84 × 42 cm

Belvedere, Vienna

Here is a Judith as if out of a fashion magazine. This modern woman has very little to do with the figure from the Old Testament. Slim, with slender limbs, a seductive gaze and a passionate mouth, appearing unconventional and self-assured, she embodies a new type of woman with a devastatingly erotic aura. Klimt breaks with the iconographic tradition of Judith in painting. No sword, no maid, and no basket, in which, according to the Biblical narrative, the head of Holofernes is laid. As the Book of Judith reports, Holofernes, the general of the Assyrian king Nebuchadnezzar, was besieging the town of Bethulia in Judaea. One of the women from the town, the beautiful, intelligent, wealthy widow Judith, accompanied by her maid, succeeded by means of a ruse in gaining entry to the Assyrians' camp. Holofernes invited her into his tent. Judith had brought a basket with powerful wine. When Holofernes was drunk, she and her maid beheaded him, thereby saving the town.

Klimt only shows the head of the dead man at the bottom right edge of the painting, as a hint at the Bible story. Only an expert eye will notice a further clue, however: for the scale ornaments and tree forms in the background, the artist uses as reference an Assyrian alabaster relief from the palace of Sennacherib which had been in the British Museum since the middle of the nineteenth century. The half-figure of Judith almost completely fills the format. She is wearing an elegant transparent wrap with gold ornaments, which only partially covers the upper body and leaves breast and navel exposed. Klimt has painted the skin with Impressionist-like brushstrokes and thus retracts any form of brash physicality. Similarly, he abstracts the precious stones on her neck choker and belt with casually applied dabs of paint applied impasto. Both the accessories look two-dimensional; they scarcely follow the form of the body, and nor do the ornaments on her robe.

Klimt uses the Biblical subject to stage his image of a new type of woman: the elegant femme fatale, as she was to be found among the haute bourgeoisie of Vienna. At the same time he revealed his own idea of modern painting. In the golden age of the Vienna Secession, that included the wooden frame, surmounted by a broad metal band with the inscription 'JUDITH AND HOLOFERNES'. The repoussé work was executed by Klimt's brother Georg; thus fine art and crafts are fused here in a masterly combination.



Goldfish, 1901/02

Oil on canvas

181 × 67 cm

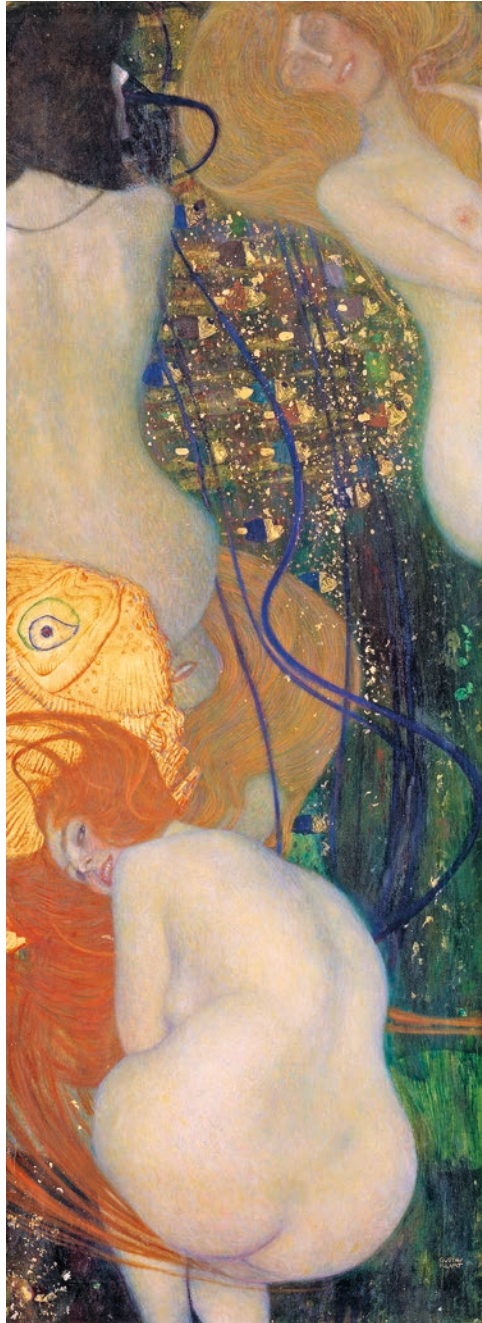
Kunstmuseum Solothurn

Outrageous! Klimt had truly overstepped the mark! Obscene, scandalous! Such was the public opinion when *Goldfish* was exhibited in Vienna for the first time in 1902. Originally Klimt had planned to call the painting *An meine Kritiker* (To My Critics), and it was intended as a riposte to the controversy over the Faculty paintings for the University of Vienna, which Klimt had eventually withdrawn following endless friction and public dispute. Here he is thumbing his nose at those critics. But that is not the only reason that they were up in arms. Some of them considered the curvaceous rear that the saucy red-haired woman is pointing in the viewer's direction to be perverse. And then there was that smile!

Klimt has packaged his rage in a subject which was preoccupying him particularly at that time: the underwater world and beguiling mermaids. Four of these mysterious beings float and hover like waves through their element, cut off by the edges of the picture and incorporated into the overall structure, which appears to take the form of a single large ornament. The shocking bodies gleam like mother-of-pearl, so delicate is the manner in which Klimt has recorded the skin with fine brushstrokes in layers of nuanced blue, turquoise, violet, yellow and white. Only the fourth, hidden mermaid is more restrained in her colour scheme. Her long hair coils like the tendrils of water plants, so that we can imagine how a diver or swimmer would become entangled in it. Vibrant curving blue lines – it is not quite clear whether they are purely ornamental or belong to a plant – emphasise the rounded wave movements that characterise the picture. In the middle of the left-hand group of figures glows an enormous goldfish.

Between the two top mermaids swarms a school of small fish, with golden heads, reddish, blue and purple bodies and huge dark goggle eyes. Klimt has also scattered a shower of golden particles that recall shimmering fish scales across the greenish water.

When the picture was sent to the German National Art Exhibition in Düsseldorf, attempts were made to have it removed before the opening, so as not to offend the German Crown Prince, who was to open the exhibition. But Klimt had a number of knowledgeable and eloquent defenders who appreciated the outstanding painterly quality of this work.



Beethoven Frieze, 1901/02

Casein paints, stucco applications, pencil, various materials (glass, mother of pearl, etc.) and gold applications on plaster over reed matting

215 × 3414 cm, longitudinal wall, each: 215 × 1392 cm, front wall: 215 × 630 cm

Secession, Vienna (on loan from the Belvedere)

At the 14th exhibition of the Vienna Secession in 1902, the Secessionists created a Gesamtkunstwerk. The focal point was the Beethoven sculpture of coloured marble, alabaster, ivory, bronze, amber and gilt by the Leipzig sculptor, painter and graphic artist Max Klinger. The architecture of the exhibition and all the other works on show were chosen to complement the sculpture down to the last detail.

Beethoven was regarded as the epitome of the artist who fought against all adverse circumstances for the salvation of humankind through art. Klimt occupied a prominent position in the exhibition. He arranged the left-hand side room in the exhibition building, with which the tour began after passing through the antechambers. Here visitors were prepared for the Beethoven sculpture, which was already visible through a gap in the wall. Klimt created an allegorical frieze around the top of the walls by analogy with Richard Wagner's description of Beethoven's 9th Symphony. As explained in the catalogue for the exhibition, on the long wall opposite the entrance he painted 'The Yearning for Happiness', 'The Sufferings of Weak Mankind' and the 'Well-Armed Strong One' (the hero, who takes up the fight on behalf of mankind); on the front wall, 'The Hostile Forces'; on the second long wall, 'the assuaging of the longing for happiness' through poetry; and finally, in a kissing scene, salvation. It is based on the lines 'Joy, beautiful spark of Divinity' and 'This kiss to all the world!' from the *Ode to Joy* by Friedrich Schiller, which Beethoven set to music in the final movement of his 9th Symphony for Choir and Orchestra.

Klimt symbolises 'the hostile forces' that obstruct the path of man in his striving for happiness, his fears and cares, through the giant Typhoeus in the form of a huge ape, his daughters, the three Gorgons – to his left – and behind them 'Disease, Madness, Death'. To his right are 'Lust and Unchastity, Immoderation', in the middle in front of the enormous sinuous snake with its scaly ornaments of 'gnawing care' which overwhelms everything. 'Human longings fly away above them': longings that are embodied by the hovering figure which appears at top right.

The representation of the universal struggle of the artist in the service of humankind also had a concrete association for Klimt: the hostility with which he was confronted after the scandal surrounding the Faculty pictures for the University of Vienna.

