ART NOUVEAU AND THE VIENNA SECESSION: TO THE TIME ITS ART

Introduction

History being a continuum, it is often difficult to pinpoint beginnings. To be sure, some specific events can be dated with precision: the Sack of Rome in 387 BCE; the signing of the Declaration of Independence on 4 July 1776; Neil Armstrong's first footstep on the Moon at 2:56 GMT on 21 July 1969. But, in a very real sense, these singular events, while marking a beginning for what followed upon them, were also culminations. They marked the end of sequences of events, actions, and reactions—as well as to other attempts to effect change—influenced and motivated by stimuli of a highly eclectic nature. Not only is it practically impossible to identify a *causa causans*, but one may not actually exist. In topology, the answer to the question of the true length of a coastline is, "It depends on how small a ruler you use to measure it." An infinitesimally small measuring unit would yield an infinitely long measurement. In the same way, the causes of a given historical event can become uncountable if the granularity of causes and effects is examined too minutely.

This essay will seek to examine the broad-stroke causes and effects which led up to the formation of the Vienna Secession on 27 March 1897[1]; its place in the wider movement of Art Nouveau; the contributions of some of the Secession's most influential founders and members; and its ultimate legacy to the world of art, craft, and design.

Art Nouveau and the Vienna Secession did not focus on petit genre subjects as had Realism and Impressionism before them. Figures in Art Nouveau works were heavily idealized and romanticized. Also, while Art Nouveau and the Vienna Secession embraced architecture and declared that ". . . the dwellings of ordinary people . . . [were] worthy of an architect's time, and also that a simple object such as a chair or vase . . . may command an artist's attention,"[2] their target audience tended more toward the affluent middle class, rather than the common man. What revolutionary zeal they evinced was directed more at breaking the

monopoly of the existing art establishment (the *Künstlerhaus*) than in unseating the dynastic governments which still held sway in Europe in the early twentieth century. The Secession Style was a fluid and highly decorative art form, and can be more likened to the Rococo of the eighteenth century than to the social-commentary art forms which were its own contemporaries.

Art Nouveau and the Vienna Secession in particular (in which "Art Nouveau reached its most bizarre extremes. . ."[3]) were marked by an internationalist attitude, but were perhaps also a manifestation of a desire to ignore the ominous rumblings which exploded at the declaration of war on Serbia by Austria on 28 July 1914. While a case can be made for an attitude within such styles as Symbolism and Decadence toward a duty of the artist to highlight socio-political dissatisfactions , Art Nouveau was " . . . highly individualistic [and] . . . a vehicle for expression for workers in the field of decorative arts."[4] It was an art which displayed ". . . a highly feminine flavor,"[5] and which depicted figures who were ". . . all seemingly removed from the pressures of everyday life."[6] In short, *Sezessionstil,* like Art Nouveau in general, ". . . may be generally defined as an escapist sort of style."[7]

As Carl Schorske has written, "If the Viennese burghers had begun by supporting the temple of art as a surrogate form of assimilation into the aristocracy, they ended by finding in it an escape, a refuge from the unpleasant world of increasingly threatening political reality."[8] Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Schorske says, ". . . saw the increased devotion to art as related to the anxiety resulting from civic failure. 'We must take leave of the world before it collapses,' [Hofmannsthal] wrote in 1905."[9]

The fin-de-siècle

Socio-Political Upheavals

The Revolutions of 1848 in Europe and some of its colonies had largely been failures, or what gains they had made were quickly reversed. Two notable exceptions were Switzerland, which gained a new constitution and became a federal republic, and France, where Louis-Phillipe was deposed and the Second Republic founded. These two successes—as well as the unification of Italy in 1861 for the first time since the fall of Rome—helped to ensure that the embers of revolution throughout Europe were not extinguished, but continued to smolder.

Prussia defeated Austria in the Austro-Prussian War of 1866, rising in power and importance in Europe. Austria lost territory, as well as all her influence over the member states of the former German Confederation. She would eventually come to rely for military support upon the Triple Alliance with Prussia, which resulted in her ". . . unwillingness to act unilaterally . . ."[10] in 1914 without the express support of Imperial Germany.

In 1867, the Austro-Hungarian Compromise was signed, converting the former Habsburg empire into a dual monarchy in which the Hungarian government in Buda had equal legal status with the Austrian government in Vienna. Although it was an attempt on the part of the Habsburg rulers to weaken nationalism within the empire, it largely had the opposite effect. Separatists in Serbia, especially, would come to play a significant role in the second decade of the approaching twentieth century. "National awareness, which, during the nineteenth century, had been growing among the Monarchy's ethnic groups was now beginning to exacerbate their mutual rivalry."[11]

Austria was not alone. Nationalist ideology persisted in agitating against the long-standing dynasties under which many Europeans were not citizens, but subjects of

monarchs who often held a different religion, spoke a different language, and were removed from those they ruled not only by class and wealth, but geographically, as well. John Keegan has written in *The First World War* that ". . . Europe in 1914 was a continent of naked nationalism . . ."[12] in which "The three great European empires, German, Austrian and Russian, felt threatened by the national dissatisfactions of their minorities, particularly in Austria-Hungary. . . ,"[13] which as ". . . a polity of five major religions and a dozen languages, survived in dread of ethnic subversion."[14] The Imperial government feared that yielding to the nationalist demands of one of its minorities would result in a cascade of such compromises and ". . . that way lay the dissolution of the empire itself."[15]

Carl E. Schorske writes that when the Medieval Ringstrasse (the tract of open land surrounding the city center) was opened for civic development in 1857, the military leadership in Vienna opposed the plan. In the Imperial capital, for them, "The enemy in question was not now a foreign invader, but a revolutionary people,"[16] and that "The imperial court must be secure[d] against possible attacks 'from the proletariat in the suburbs and outlying localities.' "[17] Indeed, Keegan adds, there still existed in Europe ". . . the age-old quest for security in military superiority. . . ,"[18] which led to an ". . . industry of creating soldiers. . . ,"[19] and maintained ". . . within European civil society a second, submerged and normally invisible military society, millions strong. . . ."[20]

These circumstances arose from more than changes in military theorizing. New ways of thinking about the world had appeared in other disciplines, as well. The *Communist Manifesto* had been published in 1848, codifying its anti-capitalist and anti-aristocratic ideology, and espousing a completely egalitarian socio-economic system in which the value of an object was based upon the labor used to produce it, not in any of its inherent attributes. Darwin's *Origin of Species* had appeared in 1859, and was popularly seen as giving scientific respectability to

a number of ideas about race and society which had their origins in the Enlightenment. Advances in the fields of astronomy and physics had begun altering man's understanding of himself in relation to the rest of the universe; telegraphy became commonplace and began to shrink the world by improving long-distance communication. The work of Faraday and Maxwell, and the experiments of Michelson and Morley would be instrumental in Einstein's formulation of Special Relativity in 1905.

Nor can it be overlooked that Vienna in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was the classroom in which a failed artist from rural Austria would begin to develop a political awareness and a social ideology which would devastate Europe in the Second World War. The Vienna Adolf Hitler knew in the 1890s was the Vienna of Georg Schönerer and his Pan-German nationalism, and of the anti-Semitic Christian Socialism of Karl Lueger, who was ratified mayor of Vienna in 1897 by the Emperor ". . . bowing to the electorate's will."[21] Lueger was considered by Hitler to be ". . . the greatest German mayor of all times . . . ."[22] and is considered to have been one of the greatest influences on Hitler's own anti-Semitism. For Hitler and others, Europe's Jews, because "Their civic and economic existence depended not on their participation in a national community . . . but on not acquiring such a status,"[23] were seen as even more dangerous than nationalist agitators like the Serbs or Czechs, because they were eternal outsiders.

Changes in The Arts

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, the Realists and Naturalists sought to depict their subjects on canvas with the same impartiality as that which the camera was perceived to do. They were reacting against the Neoclassical elitism of subject matter (aristocrats, gods and heroes, and biblical figures), as seen in Jacques-Louis David's *Oath of the Horatii* (1784) (Figure 1); and its focus on flawless technique (no visible linework around shapes, smooth

shading, no visible brushstrokes), as in Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres' *Princesse Albert de Broglie* (1853) (Figure 2). Ironically, it was Ingres who was to advise Degas to ". . . draw lines, young man, draw lines."[24]

The Realists/Naturalists were also reacting against Romanticism's focus on intense emotions, such as the despair and outrage engendered by Théodore Géricault's *Raft of the Medusa* (1819) (Figure 3) and its quest for the "sublime" through an emphasis on man's insignificance in comparison to the forces of nature, as in Caspar David Friedrich's *Woman Before a Sunrise* (1818) (Figure 4).

Courbet's *The Stonebreakers* (1848) (Figure 5) was neither about a lofty subject, nor was it executed with consummate technical skill. It lauded the honor of a day's strenuous labor, but highlighted simultaneously the difficult lives of the working classes, as did Millet's *The Angelus* (1857-59) (Figure 6). Artists like Jean-Honoré Daumier interpreted Realism to be as much about depicting the reality of the world of Marx's proletarians. His *The Third Class Carriage* (1863-65) (Figure 7), sought to expand awareness of the disparity between the social and economic classes. Impressionism entered the scene in France in 1863, pioneered by artists like Claude Monet and Auguste Renoir, who had met at the atelier of Marc-Charles-Gabriel Gleyre, whose emphasis on academicism they both chafed against and ultimately rejected. Their works were naturalistic, often produced *en plein air*, and designed to capture the essence of a moment's glance at the scene before them—the artist's impression.

In England at about the same time, the Arts and Crafts Movement was founded by William Morris and others, receiving much support from the Socialist writer and art critic, John Ruskin. Ruskin had long decried the negative aspects of the Industrial Revolution, especially the poor conditions of life and work for the laboring classes. Morris also felt that mass-produced consumer goods were causing a general reduction in the quality of decorative

arts and a consequent decline in respect for the skill and efforts of individual craftsmen. The Arts and Crafts Movement was designed to renew respect for artists and craftsmen by emphasizing the superior quality of hand-made items of craftsmanship and by fostering a closer working relationship between fine artists and fine craftsmen. This philosophy was to have a wide-ranging influence.

Closely associated with the Arts and Crafts movement was the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, founded by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, William Holman Hunt, and John Everett Millais, who believed that ". . . art had taken a wrong turn around the time of Raphael (1483-1520), [having become] frivolous . . . approved imitations of the Greeks, and paintings that would ape Michelangelo and Titian."[25] Art, for them, had become ". . . florid and insincere, lacking in a moral seriousness that was necessary for it to be uplifting."[26]

For the art world in Austria and Vienna, control was largely in the hands of the *Künstlerhaus*, ". . . a society of architects, artists and sculptors founded in 1861. . ."[27] which ". . . stood for opulence and grandeur. . ."[28] and whose artists were ". . . history painters and monumental portrait sculptors."[29] The 1894 *Künstlerhaus* exhibition featured works by the likes of Laurence Alma-Tadema (an Academic Classicist), Josef Israëls (a Realist), Sir Frederick Leighton (an Academic Classicist also associated with the Pre-Raphaelites), and Puvis de Chavannes (a Symbolist).[30] The work of younger artists with fresher ideas was discouraged, or outright ignored.

The break came in 1897, when the dissatisfied artists, led by Klimt, ". . . discontented with the conservatism and lack of imagination in what was being exhibited. . . ,"[31] left the *Künstlerhaus* and founded the Vienna Secession.

Ver Sacrum: To Art Its Freedom

Gustav Klimt

Gustav Klimt has been called "The Leader of the Revolt."[32] He is perhaps the most widely recognized among the Vienna Secessionists, and in the wider realm of Art Nouveau is probably second only to Alphonse Mucha in notoriety. He had ". . . won his spurs in decorating the ceiling [of the Grand Staircase of the Burgtheater in the Ringstrasse] with canvases depicting the history of the theater."[33] In 1890, he was awarded ". . . the *Kaiserpreis* of 400 ducats for his painting of the interior of the Burgtheater, but in 1893, after he had been unanimously proposed for a professorship in history painting at the Academy . . . was turned down . . . due to direct intervention at the highest level, probably that of Archduke Franz Ferdinand."[34] He and several other artists—including Koloman Moser, who would in 1905 become a founding member of the Wiener Werkstätte—broke away from the *Künstlerhaus* to form their own group, officially known as the *Vereinigung bildener Künstler Österreichs*[35] (the Union of Austrian Artists).

The Secession had its first public exhibition in 1898, the year after its founding. The poster for the exhibition (Figure 8) was done by Klimt, and is a prime example of many of the tenets of Art Nouveau works, such as flatness, strong curvilinear lines, use of symbols and symbolism, and text integrated with or accompanying graphical elements.

Across the bottom fifth of the poster is the textual matter, advertizing the exhibition and giving its sponsors (the Union of Austrian Artists), its location, and dates. The font is very curvilinear and not uniform in glyph width, height, or spacing, with marked distinction between vertical and diagonal or curving elements. Only the vine-like braces enclosing the word *Secession* and the heavy wavy line beneath the word *Gesellschaft* in the lower right corner depart from straight text in this part of the poster.

Above the text panel, prominently on the right of the middle section of the poster, the goddess Athena stands in profile, holding a spear and a shield, her *aegis*, and wearing an ornate, decorated helmet. Her skirts, visible from the bottom of the shield to her sandaled feet, are represented by a mass of closely spaced lines progressing from strictly linear in front to strongly curving in back, interspersed with dots. This treatment of her dress presages Klimt's later focus on textile patterning. The *aegis* bears a device of the monstrous face of Medusa, staring wide-eyed and with sharp teeth bared. Her eyebrows, nose, jawline, and chin are formed by a series of loose, sinuous, tangential curves. The serpents of her hair are represented by mirrored rows of tight Archimedean spirals, which curl around to form the foundation of her face, graduating from quite diagonal beneath her ears to fully vertical under the center of her chin. Athena holds in thin and delicately curved fingers a spear, stretching from her feet to above the top of the poster, the point angled slightly away from her and the shaft partially obscured by the disk of the shield. Aside from the phylloid spearhead, the spear is rigidly rectilinear.

Above the shield is Athena's head, her hair flowing in a series of thick, black, wavy lines extending vertically from beneath the helmet to disappear behind the shield. The helmet is decorated with curving lines and more Archimedean spirals, continuing the motif in the shield. Sprouting from the top of the helmet is a plume or mane composed of a large black mass limned by curved lines. Suggestive of a shepherd's crook, this element partially obscurs outline letters spelling out *Ver Sacrum* in the top panel. The plume shape both reflects and contrasts with the spear, not only in the linework used, but also in symbolism. A spear is carried by a warrior, a crook by a shepherd, yet both stand as guardians and protectors of those in their charge. These are attributes of the goddess; they are also symbolic of the mission the Secessionists set themselves.

Across the top of the poster, partially behind Athena as if it were a mural painted on a wall before which she stands, is a scene from the Greek myth of Theseus and the Minotaur.* The Minotaur was the guardian of the Labyrinth of King Minos of Crete, and the offspring of a union between his wife and a white bull. Athens, having lost a war with Crete, was obliged to send as tribute seven youths and seven virgins each year. These were imprisoned in the Labyrinth were imprisoned as prey for the Minotaur.[36]

The symbolism in the choice of this myth for this panel of the poster can hardly be missed. The Secessionists saw themselves as battling the bull-headed, reactionary autocracy of the established art community in Vienna and throughout Austria—the *Künstlerhaus*, itself—here represented by King Minos through the intermediary of the Minotaur. The youths and virgins required by Minos represent *in absentia* the younger artists of the Secession and those whose share their views, sent into the labyrinthine network of the traditional Austrian art world, never to be seen again (except as well-behaved apers of *passé* modes of artistic production and subject matter). Theseus, of course, represents the corporate body of the Secession members. Theseus was a self-recognized hero who took it upon himself to rescue the most recent group of young Athenians sent to Minos and put an end once and for all to the tribute. The Secessionists saw themselves as modern heroes with a valiant mission to rescue the young artists of their time—and ever after—from the fatal intractability of accepted Viennese art.

Graphically, this section of the poster is as typically Art Nouveau as the rest. The figure of Theseus, athletically straining against the Minotaur, his sword poised for the killing thrust, is represented entirely by organic, curvilinear lines of a uniform width and weight, the arrangement of short fragments within the outline of his body suggesting the shapes of his

* The Minotaur is represented in this poster in the common configuration of a bull's head atop a human body, yet, interestingly, Bulfinch states that it was "…a monster with a bull's body and a human head." (see endnote 36 for citation).

musculature, but none of his mass.[†] The Minotaur's body is similarly depicted, with the addition of short strokes of hatching presumably meant to represent a more furry covering, and thus emphasize the difference between the animalistic brute and the civilized man subduing him.[‡] The head of the Minotaur, like the plume of Athena's helm, is a black mass, his face delineated by sinuous and wavy lines, with one crescent shape indicating an eye, wide and staring as those of Medusa on the shield, and another representing a horn. Behind the combatants is a simple landscape of shallow diagonal lines and closed curves representing earth and stones, with a small area representing open sky in the upper right. On the left side, the opening of the Labyrinth appears behind the Minotaur, rough and natural to his left, but geometric and linear to his right. In this panel, filled with vertical wavy lines, appear two sets of outline text; the upper reads *Ver Sacrum*, Latin for "sacred spring[§]," the name of the official publication of the Secession, and the title of the myth, *Theseus und Minotaurus*. This is reflective of the popularity in Art Nouveau to incorporate text among graphics in its fine-art works as well as in its illustrative commercial works and advertisements.

The sectioning of Klimt's poster is typical of the Art Nouveau practice of visually dividing the space of the work into textual areas and graphical areas, yet keeping both delicately balanced and integrated into a cohesive whole. This was accomplished to great effect in a poster by Hungarian artist Arpad Basch (Figure 9) for the Kühnee firm. The space of this work is divided into two main sections, a narrow panel on the left and a wide panel on the right. The left panel is further subdivided into a square graphical panel depicting a line drawing of the Kühnee factory at the top and a rectangular text panel beneath, the background of which

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[†] In the officially sanctioned version of the poster, Theseus' genitals are obscured by one of a series of thin tree trunks depicted as solid black shapes traversing the entire height of the upper panel.

[‡] This also alludes to the South Metope of the Parthenon Frieze, which depicts the animalistic Centaurs being defeated by the civilized Lapiths. Theseus took part in this battle, as well.

[§] "Spring" in this phrase refers to the season, not to a flow of water from out of the ground, though the latter sense of the English translation of the Latin has applicability, as well.

is a repeating pattern of geared wheels. The text in this panel reads: "Kühnee, Hungary's oldest agricultural machine works, the famous Hungarian and Mosonidrill seed drills."[37]

The wide right panel is divided into four smaller panels, the topmost being a window onto the main graphical image, the bulk of which appears in the third panel down. The second is a textual panel containing the name of the company in a typically Art Nouveau font, and the bottom panel is further divided into a number of areas of various sizes, the two largest bearing the word *Moson*, the name of a county in the contemporary Kingdom of Hungary, and the address of Kühnee in Budapest. In the graphical panel(s), the clouds are shown as flat white areas defined by organic lines, but the foreground scene utilizes more traditional chiaroscuro representational techniques.

In 1899, Klimt produced *Nuda Veritas* (Figure 10), an image of a nude woman holding up a mirror to those perusing the painting, and perhaps to the artist himself. In this work, the main panel is divided into three parts. The bottom text panel contains the title of the piece, *Nuda Veritas* (naked truth), and the artist's signature. Passing over this panel, partially obscuring the text, and physically linking it to the graphic panel above, is a serpent in gray-green with a black pit-viper's head in which glow two flat white eyes. The serpent is loosely twined around the lower legs of the painting's main figure, a young red-haired woman holding a mirror in her right hand at the level of her neck and before her right shoulder. Her other hand is at her side, fingers comfortably curled. She is pale, as might be expected of a true redhead, broad of hip, and small of breast. She has a long, straight nose reminiscent of a figure from a Gabriel Rossetti work, lightly rouged lips and cheeks, and light blue or grey eyes, not unlike those of the serpent at her feet. Daisies are interwoven into the flowing, floating mass of her curly red hair (glorious, but not in the sense St. Paul meant[38]). The daisy ". . . represents innocence and is sometimes an attribute of the Virgin. It is an emblem of the

Germanic mother goddess Freya,"[39] is associated with femininity, the planet Venus, the element water, carries the powers of lust and love, and brings love to those who wear it.[40] It was also held to be ". . . excellent good for wounds in the breast . . . a concoction made of them and drank, helpeth to cure the wounds made in the hollows of the breast. . . ."[41] In the top third of this graphic pane, behind the girl's figure, is an indigo field filled with long, sinuous lines like vines, topped with Archimedean spirals. In the lower two-thirds is a swirling field of blues, violets, and cyans, in the bottom corners of which are two circular shapes connected to the horizon line by slightly wavy yellowish lines. The left-hand shape is clearly made of a central yellow circle surrounded by a diffuse, larger circle like the halo seen around a distant light source on a foggy night. The shape on the right has a much less well-defined central yellow circle, and the halo is more obscured by the swirling blue.

The topmost pane is another text pane, bearing a quote from Friedrich Schiller, translated as "You cannot please everyone by your deeds and your art—do it right for the few. To please the crowd is bad."[42] The font is similar to that in the first Secession exhibition poster—the most notable difference being that in this later work, Klimt has drawn his K's in the same manner as that in his signature (Figure 11) and his artist's monogram (Figure 12)[43]. Also similar to the earlier poster, there are a few wavy, horizontal lines in this text pane, but it is otherwise devoid of graphical elements.

Both of these examples by Klimt reveal a commonality between his work and that of the Symbolist artists who were contemporary with Art Nouveau and the Vienna Secession. For the Symbolists, the elements in their work were not meant to be taken at face value; everything in the piece was to stand for something else, some universal quality or truth. In Klimt's exhibition poster, both the figure of Athena and the struggling pair of Theseus and the Minotaur are symbols, a not-so-subtle iconic language sending a message to those with the

will and the knowledge to read it. In *Nuda Veritas*, the combination of the young girl and the serpent readily evoke the Biblical story of Eve's temptation, her fall from grace as a result of her quest for Truth—in this case, the truth of the difference between Good and Evil. Her stance is symbolically ambiguous: she stands straight, looking directly ahead, her head neither tilted back haughtily, nor bowed modestly. Her body is presented boldly, but not provocatively. Her nudity is also nakedness; nudity is innocent and guileless—nakedness is carnal and calculated. One of the naked truths she is demanding that the viewer confront is the duality of his or her reaction to the subject of the painting—and by extension to the visual arts in general. The daisies in her hair, as mentioned above, represent femininity in both its innocence and its maternity, woman both as virgin and as matron. They represent both love and lust, but their essence is also a balm for wounds of the chest, which can mean both physical wounds as well as emotional ones such as rejection and ridicule. Carl E. Schorske has written about this work:

> There soon appeared in the mirror of *Nuda Veritas* an image of modern man not easily harmonized with the beautiful environment to which the Art Nouveau of the period aspired: a man driven by instinct, by Eros and Thanatos (sex and death). The best artists . . . found themselves participating less in the Sacred Spring of communal regeneration than in a somber autumn of personal introspection in a social world running out of orbit and beyond control.[44]

The *Nuda Veritas* is more academic than the exhibition poster, in that the figures in it are rendered more representationally. Klimt used more traditional techniques to give them form and mass, but it has in common with Impressionism the painterly looseness of the brushwork, the soft edges as of an image only glimpsed, barely remembered as from a dream. The space behind the girl's head is clearly Art Nouveau, but the lower background brings to mind the sky of Van Gogh's *Starry Night* (1889) (though whether Klimt had seen the latter at

the time he painted the *Veritas* is unknown). The naturalistic depiction of her face presages the same technique which would be so prevalent in Klimt's later works, such as the 1908 portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer (Figure 13).

In this piece, the subject's face and hands are depicted almost totally classically; but for the paleness of her complexion, they could form the foundation of a proficient but not terribly remarkable portrait. But there any resemblance to a classical work ends, abruptly and glaringly. No other element in this painting is given any hint of three-dimensionality. The shape of the figure's dress is distinguished from her cape or train by a different pattern, oriented along a different axis, and the background of the painting is differentiated from the figure and her accoutrements by the same device. While the flatness, the elongation of Bloch-Bauer's body, and the emphasis on the pattern of her dress may recall Byzantine-era works such as the mosaic of the Empress Theodora in the Church of San Vitale in Ravenna (Figure 14)—which Klimt *had* seen—there are significant differences. The artist of San Vitale attempted to show volume, and to place his figures in a context by including naturalistically presented architectural elements around them. Klimt provides no such contextualization. The San Vitale artist interrupted the pattern of his figures' robes with linework indicating folds, draping, and edges; Klimt avoids overt lines entirely, only implying them in the transition zones between patterns—a characteristic which would reappear in the synthetic cubist works of Picasso, Braque, and Léger (Figure 15).

Still, the portrait of Bloch-Bauer shows much affinity with its Art Nouveau origins. Beyond the elements of the patterns, themselves, there are no straight lines in the work; the edges of the dress and the cap are loose, flowing, wavy. The patterns to the outsides of Bloch-Bauer's elbows (presumably the arms of a chair in which she is seated) are the same Archimedean spirals which have appeared in the other Klimt works examined here. Despite

hints of influences from previous or contemporary art movements, this is clearly a work in which great originality has been exercised within the broadstroke outlines of Art Nouveau ideals.

Koloman Moser

Koloman "Kolo" Moser was dubbed ". . . der Tausendkünstler [the Thousand-Artist]"[45] by Hermann Bahr in 1899, and "The name could not have been more apt. There was virtually no area of applied art that Moser was not interested in and for which he did not develop some new and individual form of expression."[46] While associated with the Secession, Moser designed the main hall of the tenth Secession exhibition in 1901, created book covers, textile and wallpaper designs, designed furniture, jewelry, tableware, glassware, stained glass, and fashions. He was associated with the official organ of the Vienna Secession, *Ver Sacrum*, from its inception in 1898 until its discontinuation in 1904.[47]

In the eleventh issue of the first volume of *Ver Sacrum*, Moser illustrated the poem *Iris* by Arno Holz (Figure 16).[48] Illustration was Moser's favorite field of art,[49] and this piece is an example of his exceptional ability with it. The poem translates as:

> *Seven billion years before my birth, I was an iris.*[**]
> *Under my resplendent roots turned a star.*
> *My giant blue bloom swam on its dark waters.*

Moser's illustration shows the figure of a man lying on the splayed petals of an iris blossom, his arms raised and themselves terminated in the flowing forms of petals. A petal reaches upward between the man's legs, deftly obscuring his genitals, yet also rising proudly in imitation of a male organ in full arousal. The man's legs are fully human at least to mid-calf, at which point they disappear beneath the dark waters of which the poem speaks.

[**] literally, "sword-lily."

Other than the box which houses the text of the poem, there is not a single straight line in this work. The lines breaking the monotony of the black expanse at the top of the frame come closest, but they are subtly wavy. The presentation is representational and naturalistic, notwithstanding the fanciful subject. Varied line widths and weights are used to depict form and mass, as well as to emphasize the flowing, undulating nature of the petals of the iris, which reflect Art Nouveau's ". . . particular fondness for phytomorphic forms . . . based on the life energy of plant forms. Flowers, their stems and leaves, were featured. . . ."[50] The iris, like the daisies discussed earlier, is associated with the feminine gender, the element of water, and the planet Venus. Since Roman times, it has been used to purify places by its very presence, and the three points of its petals represent faith, wisdom, and valor.[51] It is also the flower upon which the *fleur-de-lis* is based, as a result of Louis VII's use of it as his emblem during the Second Crusade.[52] Hence, this work, like those of Klimt discussed earlier, has embedded symbolism, though the source is the text being illustrated, rather than the artist's own purpose.

Moser's illustration work was not reserved for *Ver Sacrum.* A work done for the municipal ball in Vienna in 1897, called *I Was Lured by a Will-o'-the Wisp,* (Figure 17)[53] is another prime example of his command of the tenets of Art Nouveau. There is only the merest hint of form and mass in the figure represented in this work: short lines of hatching at the knuckles of both hands and the wrist of the right hand, and a slight thickening of the lines of the eyelids and lips. Otherwise, the piece is completely flat, depth being shown by the layering of elements and an implication of linear perspective in the smaller scale of the dark masses of the crags or trees in the background. The integrated border of the image is highly linear. Only in the lower half do the shapes curve in hook-like forms which seem too delicate to sustain the weight of the elements attached to them from above. There is fragment of

musical notation in a small pane at the bottom, done in outlines to reflect the Greek fretting style of the linework of the border. The notes are integrated with the lines and bars, and underneath is spelled out the title of the work[††]. The frame of this pane is broken when the lines of the musical notation disintegrate into smoke-like tendrils which float up, at first overlaid on the graphic pane and then integrating into it, and finally disappearing amidst the lines representing high, thin clouds in the sky of the background.

Tightly spaced wavy lines all over the central figure imply the edges of flowing masses of hair, and two flowers at neck and right ear are almost lost, appearing slowly as the eye wanders over the composition gathering more and more detail with each pass. The Will-o'-the-Wisp is represented by a flame-like white shape subtracted out of the dark mass of the background directly over the figure's head.

The figure's face seems almost vacant of thought or emotion, ensorcelled as she is by the enticements of the Wisp, yet the fingers of her left hand are embedded into the masses of her hair over her heart as if in pain. These contradictory representations attest to the struggle to resist the Wisp's enticement even while desiring nothing so much as to submit freely to them and be carried away. Thus, the content of this work is an apt metaphor for the heady, fantastical atmosphere of festive gatherings which are often an almost addictive escape from workaday routine. It is also in keeping with Art Nouveau's emphasis on fantastical situations and circumstances, references from mythology and the occult, intended to distract attention from the harsher elements of everyday existence.

A third Moser illustration further illustrates Secession Style's adoption of Art Nouveau's focus on plant forms. In *Mermaid Lying on the Shore* (Figure 18), the central figure of the piece is noticed secondarily, after the eye has been attracted by the mass of leaf forms in the

[††] a fairly literal translation is "An erring light lured me."

top left of the graphic frame. Only once the eye has been captured by the undulating organic lines and shapes of her tail and followed them down to the bottom of the frame and across does one become aware of a humanoid form in the piece. The large, empty rectangle above her, doubtless intended for text which was never applied, also helps to distract the eye and delay notice of her. Her human torso and face are depicted with a Beardsleyian simplicity of line, her hair represented by a tumbling confusion of wavy lines which somehow manage to appear wet from recent submersion.

The mermaid's attitude is one of bored detachment, ". . . a characteristic feature of the pre-Raphaelite woman [with] a pensive or deliberately inscrutable expression [such that] she often appears to be wrapped in an otherworldly aura, detached from the mundane world."[54] She is both enticing and aloof, inviting and discouraging. She is human enough to be erotically tempting, but non-human enough to assuage the feelings of guilt associated with carnal lust in "civilized" society.

In a markedly different vein, Moser also designed textiles and other types of patterns. Some were in the best tradition of William Morris (Figure 19), highly phytomorphic and organic (Figure 20)[55]. Although designed to be machine producible in infinitely duplicated patterns, they look wild and naturalistic, random rather than repeating. Some were very intricate; others were quite simple yet pleasing in the flow of their lines and shapes (Figure 21)[56]; still others were rigidly geometric, exhibiting a much more utilitarian sense (Figure 22)[57], and utilized in such applications as book covers (Figure 23)[58].

A belt buckle (Figure 24)[59] from 1903 in silver, opal, and ruby displays the curvilinear lines of Art Nouveau expressed in simple and elegant shapes; organic for the bird, geometric for the precious stones and the indentations around the perimeter. The piece is flowing and open, yet the mass of the bird is finely balanced by the combined masses of the stones in the

upper right. A pendant (Figure 25) from 1903 in silver and opal is even more Art Nouveau in its execution. The lizard shape is highly curvilinear and organic, its body hammer-textured in contrast to the finely polished surfaces of the ellipsoid frame and the small squares. Its tail tapers to a thin wire which coils into an Archimedean spiral which reflects and balances the mass of the precious stone around which the lizard coils protectively. The small squares, like abstractions of leaves or water plants, seem to float within the composition due to their arrangement and the minimal solder points between them. They are repeated in the dependent chain at the bottom which itself mirrors and complements the tail of the lizard.

Joseph Maria Olbrich

When the Secessionists split with the *Künstlerhaus*, they needed a place to meet, work, and present exhibitions. The result was J. M. Olbrich's Secession House, completed in 1898 (Figure 26)[60]. This detail of the main entrance (Figure 27),[61] shows the Secession motto: *Der Zeit ihre Kunst. Der Kunst ihre Freiheit*; "To the age its art. To art its freedom." Beneath the three faces over the door, and partially obscured by the serpents which depend from them, are the words *Malerei Architectur Plastik*, "Painting, Architecture, Plastic," the latter a catch-all category including such media as sculpture, metalwork, glass, textiles, etc. This is as much a statement of purpose as the motto: the artists of the Secession were intent on blurring—or erasing—the line between the fine and applied arts, bent on making craft items works of art and emphasizing fine craftsmanship in their artworks. The laurel leaf dome is reflected in the decorative frieze over the door which extends partway onto the façade, and which is connected to the lower section of the wall by low-relief sculptures of tree trunks which are repeated on the side walls, as well. The current edifice is a faithful restoration dating to 1963: "The Vienna Secession [building] was adapted and renovated several times. . . . The entrance hall was already being altered in 1901. In 1908, part of the ornamentation and the

slogan . . . were removed. The building was damaged by bombs during World War II and set on fire by the retreating German army."[62]

Olbrich's Secession building is perhaps the best example of Art Nouveau and Secession style incorporated into architecture. The lines of the overall edifice are simple, clean, and linear, but the laurel leaves, the undulating serpents, the ragged tree trunks, celebrate curvilinear, organic forms and shapes. The façade of the building is divided into sections, just as an Art Nouveau illustration, and text in the characteristic Art Nouveau typeface is incorporated with graphical elements.

The Legacy of The Secession

The Wiener Werkstätte

When a difference of opinion arose in 1905 about the commercial nature of the Secession franchise, Klimt left, along with seventeen other artists, including Koloman Moser and the architect Josef Hoffman.[63] Moser and Hoffman went on to found the Wiener Werkstätte (The Viennese Workshop), which had a different emphasis from that of the Secession:

> From the beginning, the workshops were intended to be a commercial enterprise. By the turn of the century, it was becoming clear that the Viennese reform furniture and objects were not attracting the lower economic classes but, rather, were being purchased by avant-garde intellectuals and members of the upper class. The reformers were forced to adjust their thinking about their products in order to accommodate the actual market—the affluent patrons and clients for whom luxury goods were affordable and desirable.[64]

In this respect, the Wiener Werkstätte was perhaps more aligned with Morris' Arts and Crafts, which was also a commercial enterprise, albeit one with often more of an emphasis on the individual craftsman producing unique items of fine craft. However, a distance had developed,

in practices as well as in time. The Werkstätte combination of ". . . modest materials and straightforward construction with luxurious, costly and obviously hand-wrought decorations"[65] attests to this distancing—as well as a move ". . . away from the early Secessionist concepts of simple, plain, functional objects."[66]

Nevertheless, the representational styles of Art Nouveau passed from the Secession to the Werkstätte. When furnishings and appliances were decorated with figures or vignettes, the techniques of their composition were clearly Art Nouveau. In a silver decorative box (Figure 28) by Koloman Moser from 1906, the floral border motif, the execution of the two figures, and the patterning on the cloths they drape around themselves are clearly Art Nouveau devices. Another silver decorative box, this one by Josef Hoffmann (Figure 29), shows the phytomorphic aspects of Art Nouveau in both the low-relief grape vines, leaves, and bunches on the front, as well as in the elaborate decoration on the top, highly reminiscent of a William Morris wallpaper design. The central figure on the top is, again, clearly rendered in an Art Nouveau manner.

Other Styles and Movements

Maly and Dietfried Gerhardus have written that the ". . . stylistic innovation in both functional and pure art had a highly important part to play in the transformation of man's environment [which] led to a revolution in style [and culminated] in the movements of Expressionism, Futurism, and Cubism. . . ."[67] While these movements may have inherited the philosophy of freedom to explore and experiment in the production of art, resemblances in their works to those of Art Nouveau are incidental, even superficial. This is not intended to be a value judgment about the relative merits or worth of any other stylistic traditions and movements with respect to Art Nouveau. The intent in the following comparisons is simply to establish or refute any direct bequest from it to consequent and subsequent styles.

Expressionism

Edvard Munch is often considered a primary figure in the development of Expressionism[68] (Oskar Kokoschka, a Secession member, also became a prominent Expressionist). In Munch's works such as *The Scream*, from 1893 (Figure 30), there certainly exist undulating, wavy lines and a predominance of organic shapes, as well as little in the way of traditional representational devices for depicting form and mass. But *The Scream* is hardly escapist, idyllic, or idealized. It is tragic, horrific, despairing—a phantasm rather than a fantasy. The face of the screamer does not philosophically challenge as does that of the *Nuda Veritas*, nor does it sensuously entice like that of the *Mermaid.* It viscerally frightens the viewer, fills the observer with a sense of dread, despondency, and defeat.

Not all Expressionist works were so pessimistic. The Expressionist group *Die Brücke* (The Bridge) formed in Dresden in 1905, at about the time that the original incarnation of the Vienna Secession was fragmenting. Another group, *Die Blaue Reiter* (The Blue Rider) followed in Munich in 1911, taking its name from a painting by one of the members, Wassily Kandinsky. The art of these groups was often less overtly emotional than that of Munch, yet they still shared little with Art Nouveau in terms of goals and techniques. In *The Blue Rider* (Figure 31), there is no hint of visible linework, let alone its being a primary feature. It is representational and naturalistic in the sense of making use of perspective and chiaroscuro to depict space, form, and mass, and its brushwork is highly painterly, having more in common with Monet's later canvases than anything produced by Art Nouveau.

Futurism

The Futurist movement developed in Italy in the first decade of the twentieth century, ". . . launched [in 1909] by the poet Marinetti [and joined by] the Italian Cubist Gino

Severini . . . in 1910."[69] While Futurists often emphasized line, eschewed highly naturalist representational devices, and sometimes incorporated text into their pieces, such as *Gun in Action* (Figure 32) by Severini from 1916, there was no direct connection between Art Nouveau in any of its guises and Futurism. Futurism had strong elements of abstraction, as can be seen in *Dynamism of a Soccer Player* (Figure 33) by Umberto Boccioni from 1913, but its object was ". . . the presentation of the speed, furiousness, anger, violence, and mechanistic nature of modern life."[70] Futurism ". . . expressed itself in largely geometrical forms, and some of the painters . . . insisted that the only way to picture reality two-dimensionally was by presenting motion by what they called 'lines of force'. . . ."[71] Even in more sedate works, such as the sculptures *Bird in Space* (Figure 34) by Constantin Brancusi and *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* (Figure 35) by Boccioni, the smoothly undulating lines are not intended to be organic or phytomorphic, but rather mechanical. They capture minute, discrete instances of infinitesimal movement over a period of elapsed time, as opposed to the fluidity, lethargy, and languidness of Art Nouveau compositions.

The very philosophy of Futurism was antithetical to that of Art Nouveau and the Vienna Secession: Futurism was about conflict, combat, conquest, not escapism and flights of fantasy. As Marinetti wrote in *The Futurist Manifesto*:

> We want to sing the love of danger, the habit of energy and rashness. . . . We want to exalt movements of aggression, feverish sleeplessness, the double march, the perilous leap, the slap and the blow with the fist. . . . We declare that the splendor of the world has been enriched by a new beauty: the beauty of speed . . . a roaring motor car which seems to run on machine-gun fire, is more beautiful than the Victory of Samothrace. . . . Beauty exists only in struggle. There is no masterpiece that has not an aggressive character. . . . We want to glorify war—the only cure for the world—militarism, patriotism, the destructive

gesture of the anarchists, the beautiful ideas which kill, and contempt for woman.[72]

Cubism

Cubism shared with Futurism a desire to depict more of the reality of its subject matter than is usually presented on the two-dimensional surface of a painting. However, where Futurism sought to depict multiple *states* of an object in *time*, Cubism sought to depict multiple *appearances* of an object in *space* (with some notable exceptions like Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase* (Figure 36) from 1912). It shared two-dimensionality with Art Nouveau, but utilized it in a much different way. For the Cubist, the two-dimensional canvas was a surface of projection upon which the external appearance of the subject is unfolded, but not in the sense of the orthographic projection of the mechanical drafter. In the latter, different views of an object are depicted as individual drawings, connected to one another in the viewer's mind by the conceptual device of spatial perception. In Cubism, a surface "around the corner" from the viewer can be depicted physically adjacent to a surface to which it is perpendicular in "the real world." Thus, in Pablo Picasso's *Girl Before a Mirror* (Figure 38), the view of the subject's face on the left is shown both in profile and in frontal aspect.

There was much of linearity in Cubism, but it was not the long, continuous, undulating line of Art Nouveau, but rather very orthographic, short, choppy, with some of the frenetic feel of Futurism. Cubism, as well, had a strongly introspective bent which it shared with Expressionism.

Art Deco

If Art Nouveau had any lineal inheritor, it was Art Deco, ". . . a remote descendant of Art Nouveau. . ."[73] which was in part a reaction to the austerity of interbellum Bauhaus design. "[P]opular taste still favored ornamentation . . . [and this] movement in the 1920s and 1930s

sought to upgrade industrial design in competition with 'fine art.' Proponents wanted to work new materials into decorative patterns that could be either machined or handcrafted. . . ."[74] As with Arts and Crafts and Art Nouveau and the Wiener Werkstätte before it, Art Deco, ". . . had universal application—to buildings, interiors, furniture, utensils, jewelry, fashions, illustration, and commercial products of every sort."[75] Its streamlined shapes were derived from nature[76], as were the lines and shapes so prevalent in Art Nouveau.

This poster by John Astin from 1925 (Figure 38), shares a simplicity of organic line, an affinity with patterning, and a preference for flatness with Art Nouveau. But the figure is elongated not unlike those of Amadeo Modigliani (Figure 39), rather than idealized, and the patterning is interrupted by linework depicting folds and edges, as seen in the San Vitale mosaic of the Empress Theodora.

In Art Deco miniature sculptures (Figure 40), and crystal hood ornaments (Figure 41), on the other hand, the exoticized, idealized female of Orientalism and Art Nouveau is alive and well, but Art Deco shares with Futurism an admiration for technology in advertisements for train (Figure 42) and automobile (Figure 43) transportation.

One of the most famous Art Deco buildings is also connected with the auto industry, the Chrysler Building in New York City (Figure 44). A skyscraper unlike any building erected by the architects of Art Nouveau or the Vienna Secession, it stood then and stands now as a monument to modern technology and progress, again more in keeping with Futurism than with Art Nouveau.

Art Nouveau was ended by a worldwide war: while the style of Art Deco continued throughout the period of the Great Depression, albeit for a much-reduced audience, the advent of another worldwide war rang its death knell, as well.

Conclusion

Art Nouveau and the Vienna Secession were neither a passing fad, an aside, nor a failed experiment on the timeline of art history. While they may have been largely decorative and escapist, naïve at best, and self-blind at worst, they were aspects of a movement which grew out of the circumstances of the times and spoke with words of both epitaph and prophecy.

Art Nouveau was feminized, and not always respectfully—the women were ". . . of two distinct types, as a rule, [a] pin-up girl . . . bubbly, carefree, and gay . . . or terribly seductive. . . ,"[77] yet this was hardly new. The seductiveness of Art Nouveau's women, however, usually resulted from the depictions of their modern freedoms and their assaults on traditional limitations to female agency.

Art Nouveau was isolated in some respects from its contemporaries, but this, as well, isn't singular. Romanticism, Academic Classicism, and Orientalism all co-existed with Impressionism in the previous century, each with its devotees and detractors. Time has come to show that all were valid and important landmarks in the history of the visual arts and their association with culture.

In the end, the internationalism of Art Nouveau was either misplaced or too weak to counter the nationalism and greed it attempted to eschew. It was forced to bow to economic "reality" and compromise its egalitarian aims for the decorative arts by learning to cater to the moneyed classes. In this, as well, it was not a trailblazer, but another victim of the Western malady that egalitarianism in the arts is—apparently eternally—countered by inequity in the marketplace, and craft items are either essential tools of the lower classes or the expensive baubles of the upper echelons, but never both at the same time.

Figures

Figure 1. Jacques-Louis David. The Oath of the Horatii. 1784

Figure 2. Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres. *Princesse Albert de Broglie, née Joséphine-Eléonore-Marie-Pauline de Galard de Brassac de Béarn.* 1853

Figure 3. Théodor Géricault. *The Raft of the Medusa.* 1818-19

Figure 4. Caspar David Friedrich. *Woman Before A Sunrise.* 1818

Figure 5. Gustav Courbet. *The Stone Breakers.* 1848

Figure 6. Jean-François Millet. *The Angelus*. 1857-59

Figure 7. Jean-Honoré Daumier. *The Third Class Carriage.* 1863-65

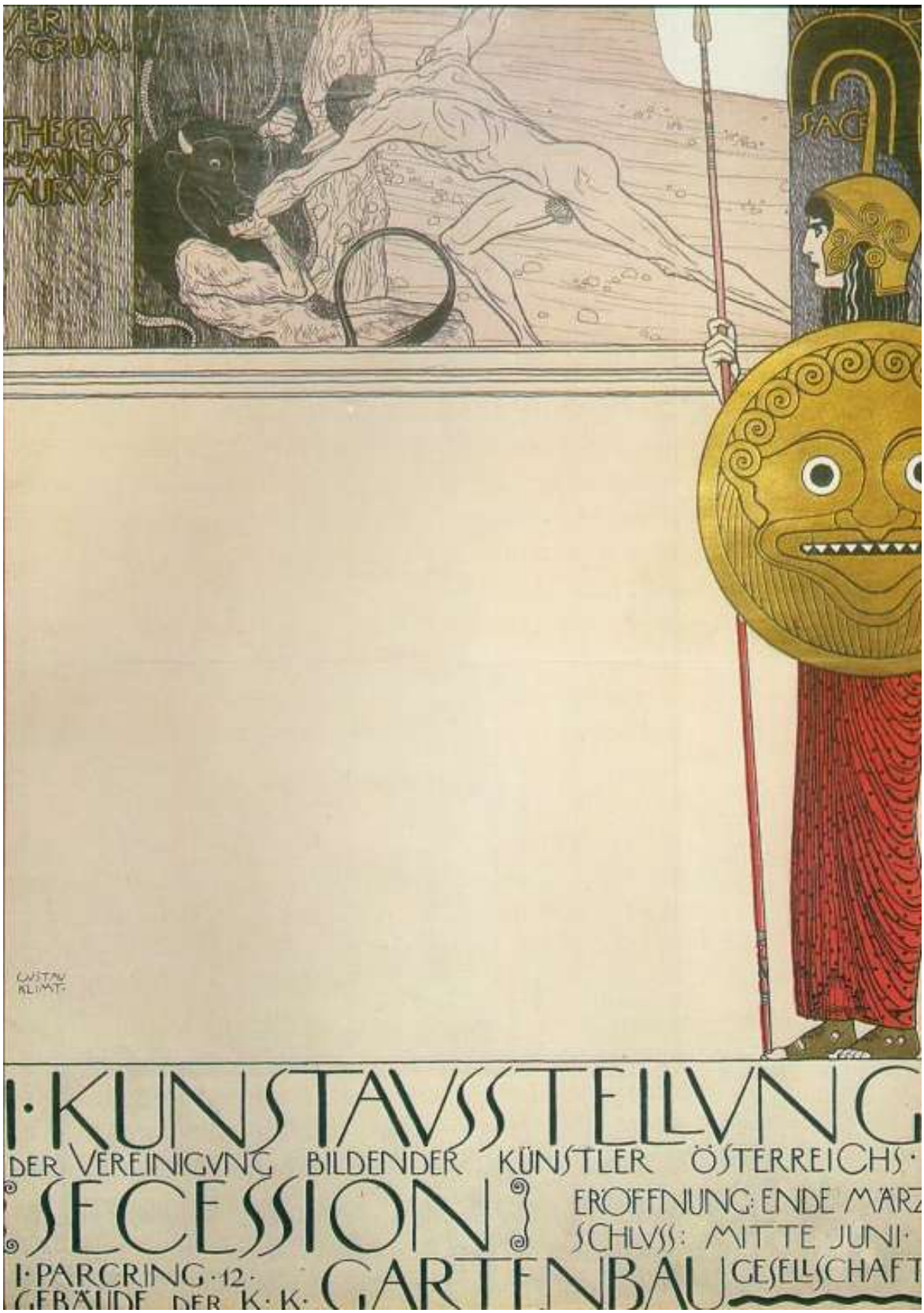

Figure 8. Gustav Klimt. *Poster for the First Secession Exhibition.* 1898

Figure 9. Arpad Basch. Advertisment. undated.

Figure 10. Gustav Klimt. Nuda Veritas. 1899

Figure 11. Klimt's Signature

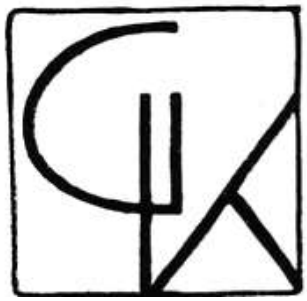

Figure 12. Klimt's Monogram

Figure 9. Gustav Klimt. *Portrait of Adele Block-Bauer I*. 1907

Figure 10. *Empress Theodora and Retainers* (detail). Church of San Vitale, Ravenna Italy. 6th Century CE

Figure 11. Pablo Picasso. *Three Musicians*. 1921

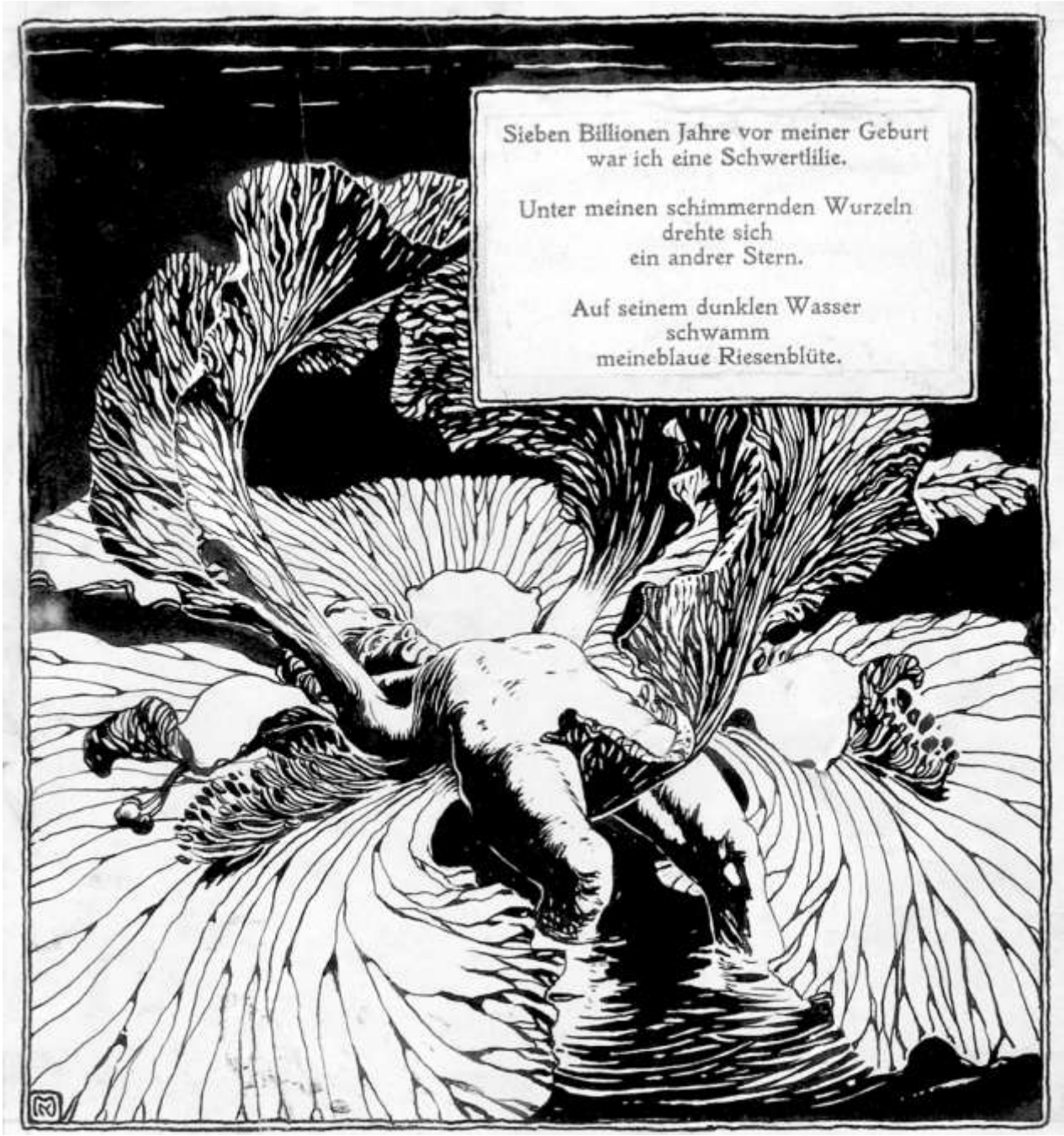

Figure 12. Koloman Moser. *Iris*. 1898

Figure 13. Koloman Moser. *I Was Lured by a Will-o'-the Wisp*. 1897

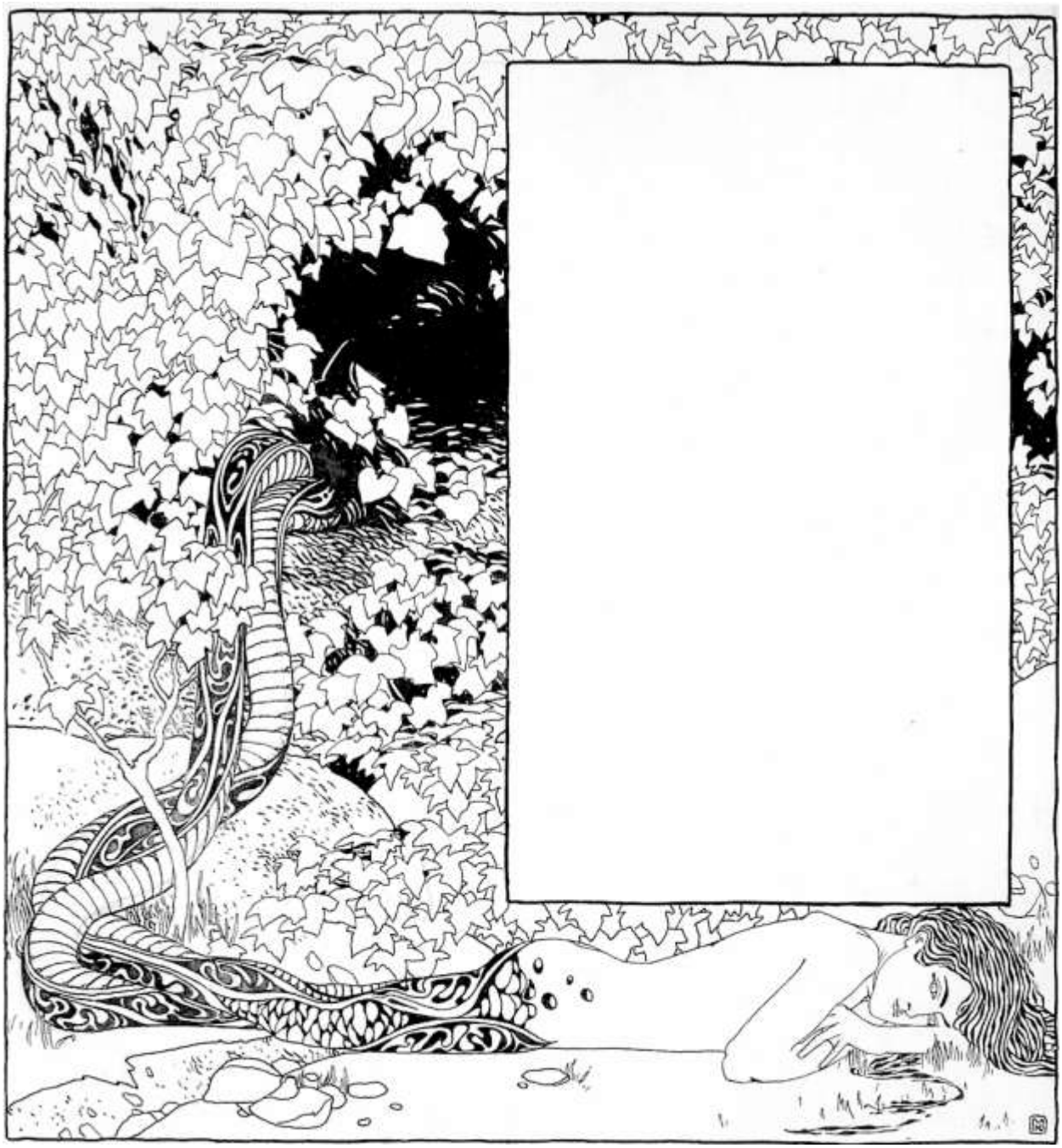

Figure 14. Koloman Moser. *Mermaid Lying On The Shore*. c1896.

Figure 15. William Morris. *Wallpaper Design: Jasmine*.

Figure 20. Koloman Moser. *Four Textile Designs*. c1900

Figure 21. Koloman Moser. *Fabric and Wallpaper Design*. 1901

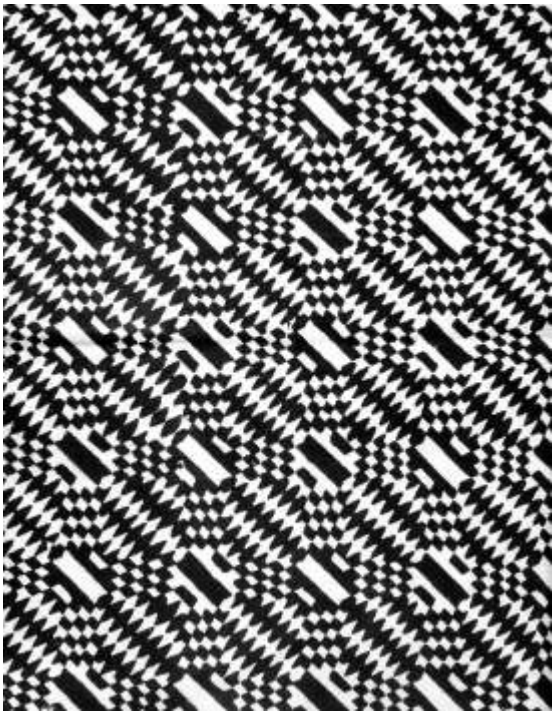

Figure 22. Koloman Moser. *Textile Pattern.* c1910

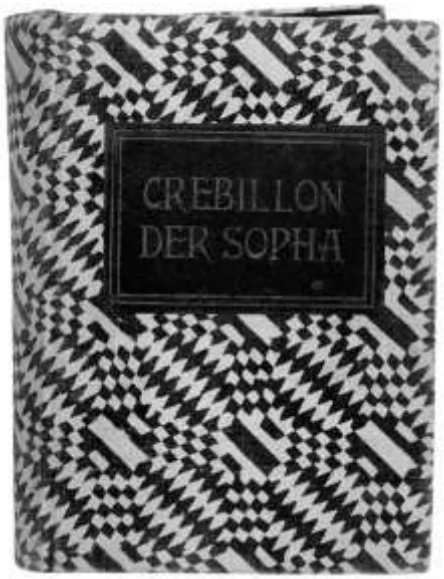

Figure 23. Koloman Moser. Textile Pattern as a Book Cover.

Figure 24. Koloman Moser. Belt Buckle. 1903

Figure 25. Koloman Moser. *Pendant*. 1903

Figure 26. J. M. Olbrich. The Vienna Secession Building. Vienna Austria. 1898

Figure 27. J. M. Olbrich. The Vienna Secession Building. Vienna, Austria. 1898

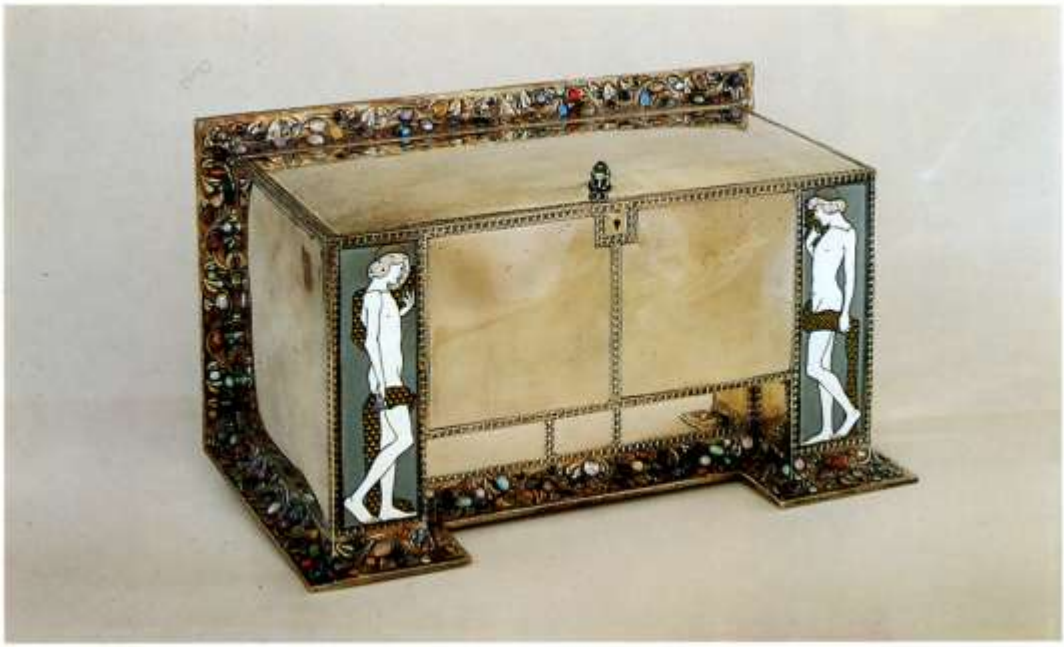

Figure 28. Koloman Moser. *Decorative Silver Box*. 1906

Figure 29. Josef Hoffmann. *Decorative Silver Box*. 1910

Figure 30. Edvard Munch. *The Scream*. 1893

Figure 31. Wassily Kandinsky. *The Blue Rider*. 1903.

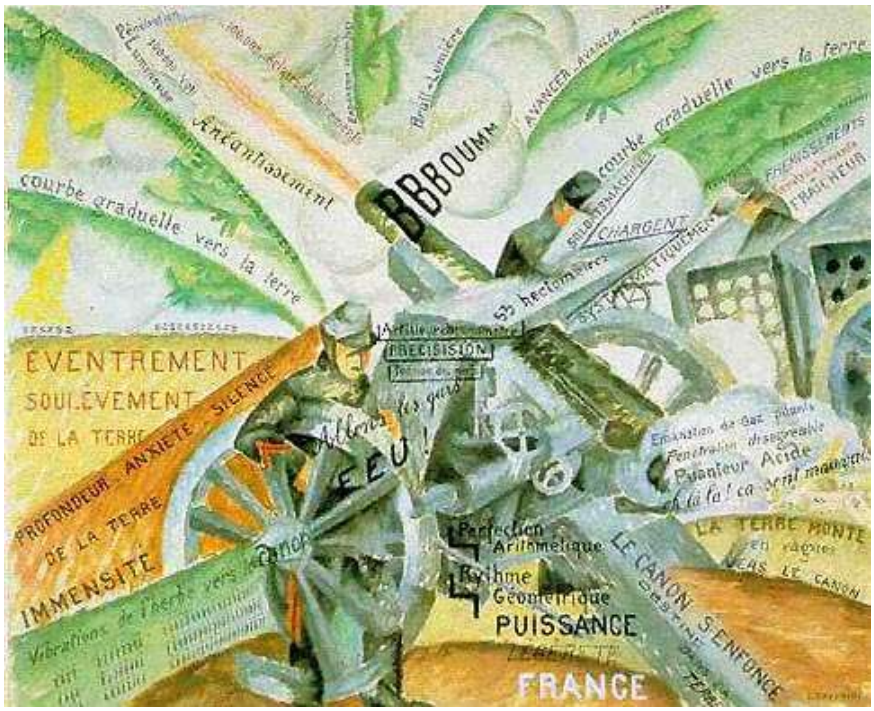

Figure 32. Gino Severini. *Gun in Action*. 1916

Figure 33. Umberto Boccioni. *Dynamism of A Soccer Player.* 1913

Figure 34. Constantin Brancusi. Bird in Space. 1923

Figure 35. Umberto Boccioni. Unique Forms of Continuity in Space. 1913

Figure 36.Marcel Duchamp. *Nude Descending a Staircase.* 1912

Figure 37. Pablo Picasso. *Girl Before a Mirror*. 1932

Figure 38. John Astin. Everyman and Other Plays: Beauty Goeth Fast Away. 1925

Figure 39. Amadeo Modigliani. *Portrait of Jeanne Hébuterne*. 1918

Figure 40. Demetre H.Chiparus. *Syrian Dancer* (detail). date unknown

Figure 41. Émile Gallé. *Crystal Hood Ornament*. date unknown.

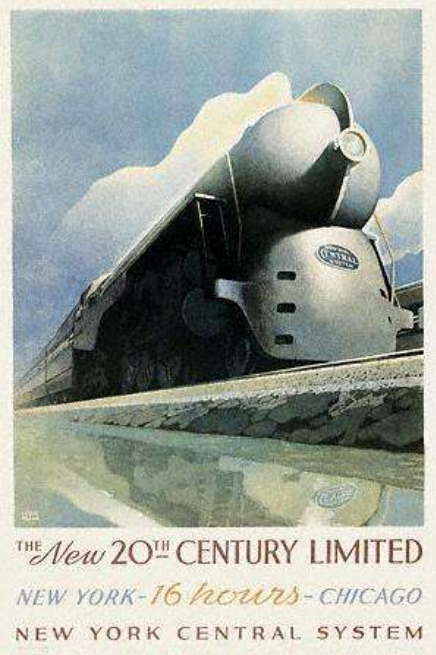

Figure 42. Art Deco Advertisement Illustration. date unknown

Figure 43. Art Deco Automobile Advertisement. 1935

Figure 44. William Van Allen. *The Chrysler Building* (detail). 1929-30

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