

Biography

Gustav Klimt was born in 1862 near Vienna, Austria-Hungary. He lived in poverty as he attended Kunstgewerbeschule school of arts in Vienna. He was successful early in his career by essentially “reworking” other artists’ work, which led to a commission from the Austrian government (Vergo). He was hired in 1894 with Franz von Matsch, another painter, to paint a ceiling at Vienna University. As Klimt gained exposure to a variety of European influences, he began to paint with “a blend of late Symbolism and Art Nouveau,” (Vergo). As Klimt became more active in the group of artists known as the Vienna Secession, his art became more radical and taboo for the time. “Accusations of pornography were made against Klimt from the earliest days of the Secession,” and followed his art, often including some nudity, throughout his life (Vergo). Much of his work remained erotic. He left the Secession in 1905, isolating himself from a large portion of the Austrian art scene. He died in 1918.

Critical Reception

Early in his career, the reception of Klimt’s work was primarily positive, as it was based on prior works. He received great criticism for his ceiling paintings at the University of Vienna, *Philosophy, Medicine, and Jurisprudence*. The paintings “unleashed a storm of public protest” as they were “a radical change towards [an]... ‘indistinct’ manner of painting,” (Vergo). His paintings were often accused of being pornographic, creating strong negative criticism against his work. Nowadays, many critics praise him for his sexual subject matter, as it created innovative pieces.

Why is *The Embrace* an abstraction?

Abstract art “generally does not rely on an external framework of knowledge... [and] is highly ambiguous,” meaning that it departs from a strictly realistic form for a non-clear representational form of art (Kandel). Although Kandel retains the shape of a woman and (presumably) a man in *The Embrace* and *The Kiss*, the patterns on their clothing depart from reality. Kandel also mentions that abstract works can be cluttered, which is present in Klimt’s pieces. He contrasts reality (the body) with cluttered patterns to create a semi-abstraction.

Paintings



Citations

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