

Egon Schiele : [brochure] the Leopold collection, Vienna : October 12, 1997- January 4, 1998, the Museum of Modern Art, New York

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Author

Schiele, Egon, 1890-1918

Date

1997

Publisher

The Museum of Modern Art

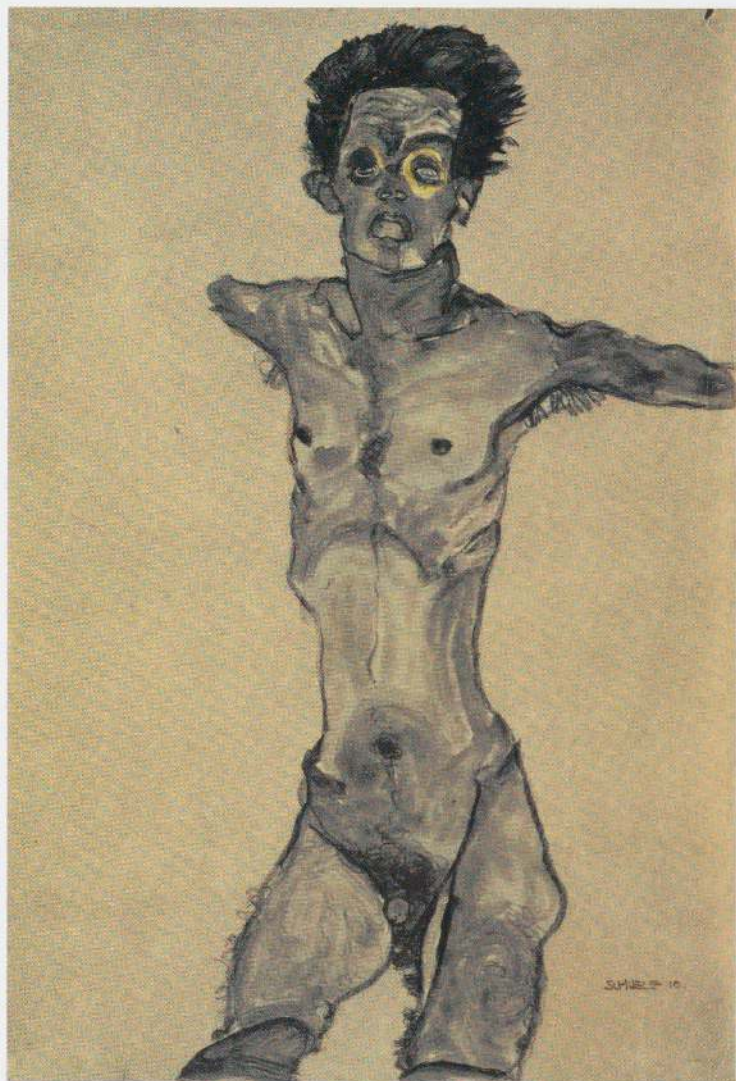
Exhibition URL

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EGON SCHIELE

THE LEOPOLD COLLECTION, VIENNA



OCTOBER 12, 1997 – JANUARY 4, 1998

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, NEW YORK

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"So I bring forth out of myself always more, always something further, an endlessly brighter shining, as far as love, which is everything, enriches me in this way and leads me to that which I am instinctively drawn, that I want to tear apart inside me, so that I may create a new thing from this state of newness which, in spite of myself, I have perceived."

EGON SCHIELE, 1911

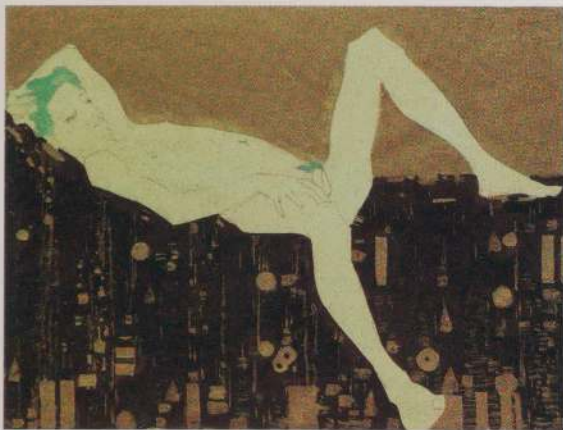
EGON SCHIELE (1890–1918) INVESTED HIS ART WITH AN EMOTIONAL INTENSITY THAT, coupled with his radical formal innovations, characterized the Austrian contribution to Expressionism. During his short but highly prolific career which ended with his premature death, Schiele created over three thousand works on paper and approximately three hundred paintings. Contemporary accounts of his personality, as well as his own letters, reveal a young man driven by an egotistical faith in the immortality of his talent who nevertheless lamented his struggle for public recognition and the attendant financial rewards. Numerous self-portraits portray an uninhibited exhibitionist, but in reality Schiele was said to be shy and sensitive. His preoccupation with sexuality and existential explorations of the human condition resulted both from his having achieved aesthetic maturation when he was barely beyond adolescence, and from the climate of his time. The period of Viennese history during which Schiele worked was one of great cultural and intellectual activity in the visual and applied arts, architecture, music, literature, philosophy, and psychoanalytic thought. Fashionable Viennese society hypocritically embraced prudish conventional mores while reveling in the material splendor and sensuality of the Austro-Hungarian empire in the golden years before its dissolution after World War I. The very aspects of Schiele's art that precluded its popularity during much of his lifetime—unveiled eroticism, personal angst, and ugly distortion in place of accepted notions of beauty—are those for which it is considered most compelling today.

Because the majority of his oeuvre remains in Austrian collections, this exhibition of over 150 oil paintings, gouaches, watercolors, and drawings in ink, crayon, and pencil on paper, amassed by Dr. Rudolf Leopold in Vienna, presents an unsurpassed opportunity for an American audience to contemplate the rich scope of Schiele's production. Marking the first time that these works will be

shown together in the United States, it traces the extraordinarily inventive, stylistically idiosyncratic, and profoundly human nature of Schiele's art.

Born in the town of Tulln, outside Vienna, Schiele was raised among a bourgeois family that included two generations of railway

Nude Boy Lying on a Patterned Coverlet. (Nackter Knabe, auf gemusterter Decke liegend). 1908. Gold metallic paint, gouache, pencil, and ink on paper, 9 $\frac{1}{2}$ × 12 $\frac{3}{8}$ " (23.8 × 31.5 cm)



Schiele, whose own father had died when Schiele was fourteen. The two artists met in 1907, and thereafter the older, successful Klimt introduced Schiele to his own models and patrons, found him work with the seminal design collaborative the Wiener Werkstätte (for which Schiele designed postcards and men's fashions), and included him in the 1909 *Internationale Kunstschau*, an important exhibition of foreign and Austrian artists.

Toward the end of 1909, Schiele became disillusioned with academic traditionalism and, with fellow dropouts from the Academy, formed the Neukünstler (New Artists) Group. The following year, financially cut off by his family and plagued by feelings of alienation and a certain degree of narcissistic self-pity, Schiele embarked on a series of self-portraits using a new, expressionist vocabulary of exaggerated gestures, startling color combinations, and jagged contour lines. The Leopold Collection contains eight self-portraits of 1910—seven

ABOVE: *Dead Mother I*. ("Tote Mutter" I). 1910. Oil and pencil on wood, 12 $\frac{3}{8}$ × 10 $\frac{3}{8}$ " (32 × 25.7 cm)

RIGHT: *Black-Haired Girl with Raised Skirt.* (Schwarzhaariges Mädchen mit hochgeschlagenem Rock). 1911. Gouache, watercolor, and pencil on paper, 22 × 14 $\frac{1}{2}$ " (55.9 × 37.8 cm)

officials. He began drawing as a child and in 1906, at the age of sixteen, enrolled at the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts. Among his earliest works are portraits reflecting an already exceptional skill as a draftsman and heavily impastoed landscape paintings of Klosterneuburg, the town to which his family had moved.

Through 1909, Schiele was strongly influenced by Gustav Klimt and the reigning Secessionist style, with its emphasis on flowing line and ornamentation, as seen in the gold background and decorative motif of *Nude Boy Lying on a Patterned Coverlet* and the sinuous outline in the crayon drawing *Nude Boy Bending Forward, Seen from the Back* (both 1908). Klimt became a kind of father figure for





Cardinal and Nun (Embrace). (Kardinal und Nonne ["Liebkosung"]). 1912. Oil on canvas, 27½ × 31¾" (70 × 80.5 cm)

and hair that appears to stand on end impart a desolation made more haunting by the modulation of gray brushstrokes punctuated only by bright orange circles around the eyes. This somber tonality effectively contrasts with the blank expanses of paper seen through the transparent wash and functioning as background void. Always executed before a mirror, the self-portraits of this period reflect Schiele's observation of the poses of the mime Erwin van Osen, with whom he briefly shared a studio. The self-conscious posturing in *Osen with Crossed Arms* and *Osen with Fingertips Touching* (both 1910) manifest a theatricality heightened by the elongated limbs and oversized hands rendered in quickly drawn, distinct black outlines. Jarring juxtapositions of thinly applied yellow, orange, pink, lavender, and green watercolor act to supplement the basic linear structure of the composition. In this respect, Schiele's drawing technique has been compared to that of Auguste Rodin, who drew the human form without looking away from the model, resulting in an energized line. Schiele's revelations of the psyche of the sitter (whether himself or another) parallel the scrutiny of the inner self then prevalent in Viennese circles, particularly in the psychoanalytic theories of Sigmund Freud.

Through 1913, Schiele explored his highly individualistic idiom in a multitude of drawings of female models, either nude or semi-nude, which endure as his best-known pictures. As in *Black-Haired Girl with Raised Skirt* (1911), Schiele constructed oddly foreshortened poses by positioning himself above or below his subjects, and by eliminating their limbs to reinforce a sense of disconcertion. The women are confrontational in their sexuality, openly exposing themselves beneath raised skirts; sometimes Schiele surrounded them with a white gouache halo, setting off their nakedness. Drawings made at the gynecological clinic of a doctor acquaintance are especially disturbing for their eerie use of red or yellow to delineate a pregnant woman's body or sick girl's face and for the placement of the figures against neutral space.

drawings and one painting. These edgy, provocative works utilize facial expression and sometimes strangely contorted body positions to communicate a range of psychological and emotional states, from despair to glowering hostility to boyish, quiet intensity.

Nude Self-Portrait in Gray with Open Mouth (1910; cover) demonstrates the extremes to which Schiele subjected his own naked image. Its truncated, outspread arms, gaunt torso, stunned expression,

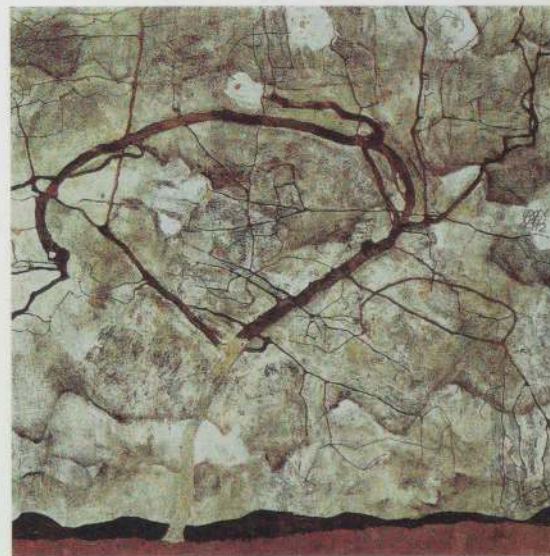
Adolescent girls also frequently served as models, exhibiting a combination of youthful innocence and brash display that still carries the ability to shock. While indicative of a popular turn-of-the-century male fetishistic obsession with the child-woman, complete with rolled-down stockings and ruffled undergarments, such sexually explicit works may also reflect Schiele's grappling with his own sexual identity, as he was only in his early twenties.

Schiele's canvases, less well known than his erotic drawings, were often imbued with private symbolism. In the Leopold Collection, the theme of mother and child recurs in several paintings of vibrantly living children clutched by dead or impassive mothers: *Dead Mother I* (1910), *Mother and Child* (1912), *Blind Mother* (1914), and *Mother with Two Children II* (1915). It is conjectured that these images stem from the artist's difficult relationship with his own unsupportive mother, and from his association of the act of birth with death (three of his siblings died before he was born) and with the creation of art. Even his landscapes, many of them depictions of his mother's hometown of Krumau and rendered in dark, murky tones, connote death or loneliness. The bare trees against stark, silvery brown backgrounds in both *Small Tree in Late Autumn* (1911) and *Autumn Tree in a Gust of Wind* (1912) seem to project human aspects in keeping with the artist's statement: "One experiences an autumnal tree in summer most profoundly, with one's entire heart and soul. This melancholy I want to paint."

Other pivotal allegorical canvases include two double portraits, *Hermits* and *Cardinal and Nun (Embrace)* (both 1912). The former is commonly thought to symbolize Schiele's break from Klimt. Both artists are shown wearing long black caftans (indicative of Klimt's real habit of dress, also appropriated by Schiele), with the older man blinded and leaning against and partially concealed behind the younger. In keeping with other self-images as a martyr, Schiele imagines himself and his mentor as existing on the fringes of society, only now he has become the dominant successor, gazing boldly outward. *Cardinal and Nun (Embrace)* parodies Klimt's famous painting *The Kiss* (1907–08), showing two lovers locked in an embrace. Here Schiele

inserts himself and his lover, Valerie (Wally) Neuzil, dressed in red and black ecclesiastical garb, against a black background. Wally stares out at the viewer, as if caught. This scandalous subject has been interpreted as Schiele's defiance of the small-minded community in which he was imprisoned earlier that year on charges of kidnapping and corrupting a minor.

Wally appears in various other guises in several images of



Autumn Tree in a Gust of Wind. (Herbstbaum in bewegter Luft). 1912. Oil on canvas, 31½ × 31¾" (80 × 80.5 cm)

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1912 from the Leopold Collection: as the melancholy subject of *Mourning Woman*; as the playfully erotic *Wally Kneeling in a Gray Dress*; and as a demure companion in the tender *Portrait of Wally*, a pendant to the *Self-Portrait with Chinese Lanterns*.

From late 1913 to 1915, Schiele continued the subjects of portraiture (including many self-portraits), landscape, allegory, and nudes. While his erotically charged treatment of the last remained unchanged, a formal shift occurred in his drawings of the body. He began to favor adult women as models because their fuller proportions allowed for a greater examination of three-dimensional plasticity. Volumetric contours of muscle and bone are suggested by cross-hatchings of color, as in *Seated Nude with Red Garter, Seen from the Back* (1914), or by thinner outlines and accents of color highlighting blank areas of paper, as in *Standing Nude Girl with Stockings* (1914). A new kind of unshaded line appears, overlaid with an animating spiral. *Kneeling Woman with Head Bent Forward* (1915) exemplifies many of the figures' awkward poses, in which their clothing is hitched above their waists or they are partially draped with brightly colored fabric, their faces hidden from view or simply cut off by the paper's edge.

Two important events occurred in 1915: Schiele married Edith Harms, a young woman from a bourgeois family, and he was drafted into the military and assigned to various posts outside Vienna. The Harms family lived across the street from Schiele's studio, and to court Edith and her sister, Adele, he would hold up drawings of himself at the window, such as the comical *Self-Portrait with Striped Armlets* (1915). Sensitive portraits of his new wife show Schiele adapting a more naturalistic pictorial language which was also employed in the growing number of portrait commissions he received in the following years. The Leopold Collection contains several pictures from his military service, including drawings of fellow officers and Russian prisoners-of-war as well as quickly sketched interior scenes and streetscapes notable for their realistic detail.

In 1917, Schiele was reassigned to Vienna, which allowed him greater time to focus on his art and once again work on large paintings. Whereas the emphasis on contour line to suggest volume stays essentially the same in his works on paper, Schiele's canvases become far more painterly. The loose, open brushstrokes in *Two Crouching Women* (1918), for example, create

an abstract design of thick, bright dabs of color in the background. This



ABOVE RIGHT: *Two Crouching Women*. (Hockendes Frauenpaar). 1918. Oil on canvas, 43 $\frac{1}{2}$ × 55 $\frac{1}{2}$ " (110 × 140.5 cm)

LEFT: *Kneeling Woman with Head Bent Forward*. (Kniende mit hinuntergebeugtem Kopf). 1915. Gouache, watercolor, and pencil on paper, 11 $\frac{3}{4}$ × 18 $\frac{1}{2}$ " (28.6 × 46 cm)



exuberant color marks a great change in the palette of Schiele's paintings, and it nearly overwhelms the figures. Their passive expressions and poses are themselves anomalies among Schiele's usual assertively erotic female nudes, which may be explained by the supposition that the painting was meant to form part of an allegorical cycle of works in a mausoleum. However,

since many of the paintings from 1918 are unfinished, the evolution of Schiele's style is left open to question.

Just as he had begun to achieve a previously elusive commercial success—most importantly in a large exhibition of his work at the 1918 Viennese Secession—Schiele contracted the Spanish flu. His last work is a moving portrait drawing of his wife, who died in the same epidemic the day after the drawing was made; she was six months pregnant. Schiele died three days later at the age of twenty-eight.

A complete portrait of Schiele's work is revealed in this exhibition, testifying to Dr. Leopold's remarkable dedication to the artist over a period of nearly five decades. Indeed, the exhibition represents only a selection of works by Schiele in the collection, which also contains major holdings of other Austrian artists from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries. Now owned by the Austrian government, the entire Leopold Collection will soon be housed in a new museum in Vienna, not far from the Graphische Sammlung Albertina, the greatest repository of Schiele's works on paper, and the Österreichische Galerie and Historisches Museum der Stadt Wien, which together own many of Schiele's oils.

This presentation of works from every facet of Schiele's creative development fosters a fuller understanding of the singularity of the artist's achievement. His tortured aesthetic is so aligned with his investigations into the malaise of human existence in modern times that his art maintains a timeless relevance for contemporary artists and viewers alike.

Mary Chan
Curatorial Assistant
Department of Drawings

COVER: *Nude Self-Portrait in Gray with Open Mouth*. (Selbstakt in Grau mit offenem Mund). 1910. Gouache and black crayon on paper, 17 $\frac{1}{2}$ × 12 $\frac{3}{8}$ " (44.8 × 31.5 cm)

**The following public programs will be held in conjunction with the exhibition
*Egon Schiele: The Leopold Collection, Vienna***

Panel Discussion

Tuesday, November 4, 1997, 7:00 p.m.

The Roy and Niuta Titus Theater 2

Tickets: \$8.00; members \$7.00; students and seniors \$5.00

Available at the Lobby Information Desk

Moderated by Magdalena Dabrowski, Senior Curator, Department of Drawings, The Museum of Modern Art, this panel discussion will include artists Eric Fischl and Nan Goldin; Jane Kallir, author of *Egon Schiele: The Complete Works* (H. N. Abrams, 1990) and Co-Director of Galerie St. Etienne, New York; Patrick Werkner, Schiele scholar and Professor at the Hochschule für Angewandte Kunst, Vienna; and others

Brown Bag Lunch Lectures

Tuesday and Thursday, November 11 and 13, 1997, 12:30 to 1:15 p.m.

The Edward John Noble Education Center

(enter the Museum at 18 West 54 Street)

Admission: \$5 at the door

An informal lunch lecture on "The Self-Portraits of Egon Schiele," presented by Mary Chan, Curatorial Assistant, Department of Drawings, The Museum of Modern Art. You are welcome to bring your lunch.

For more information about public programs, please call the Department of Education at 212-708-9781.

Publication

Egon Schiele: The Leopold Collection, Vienna, by Magdalena Dabrowski and Rudolf Leopold, 364 pp., 201 ills., 156 in color. Clothbound \$60, paper \$32.50. Available at The MoMA Book Store.

All works reproduced are owned by the Leopold Collection, Vienna.

This exhibition is sponsored by ROBERT LEHMAN FOUNDATION, INC.

Additional generous support is provided by Jo Carole and Ronald S. Lauder.

The Museum gratefully acknowledges the assistance of the Oesterreichische Nationalbank (Central Bank of Austria), the Austrian Mint, and the Austrian Cultural Institute, New York.

An indemnity for the exhibition has been granted by the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities.