



# EGON SCHIELE

## Portraits

Edited by Alessandra Comini

With preface by Ronald S. Lauder, foreword by Renée Price,  
and essays by Christian Bauer, Alessandra Comini, Lori Felton,  
Jane Kallir, Diethard Leopold, and Ernst Ploil

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**NEUE  
GALERIE**  
MUSEUM FOR GERMAN  
AND AUSTRIAN ART  
**NEW YORK**



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Gerti, Melanie, and Egon Schiele, ca. 1895.

Photograph by Josef Müller. Serge Sabarsky Archive



*To the Memory of Schiele's Sisters, Melanie and Gerti*

## PREFACE

When I was thirteen years old, I wandered into the old E. Weyhe bookstore on 63rd and Lexington. I loved that old store and can still remember the very distinct smell of the aging books and wooden shelves. On that particular day, I had just come back from a trip to Europe, where I purchased some posters by Toulouse-Lautrec and I was looking for books about him.

By chance, my eye caught a book by an artist I didn't really know that well. His name was Egon Schiele. Something about the picture on the cover drew me over and I picked it up. When I turned that first page, my view of art and really my entire life was changed forever.

I can still see myself standing there going from painting to painting in absolute awe. What struck me were the amazing portraits, as well as some of the nudes (granted, that would capture the interest of any thirteen year-old boy). They were portraits unlike any that I had ever seen. Since that moment, I have been enthralled by Schiele.

It is the incredible power of Schiele's paintings that first captured my interest in that chance encounter and continues to do the same to this very day. For me, all great art centers on power, and Schiele personifies that—he is powerful and he is tough. And he also offered a direct connection to one of the cities and periods I have always loved, Vienna in the early 20th century.

That is where my fascination with Egon Schiele began, but it hardly ended there. It continued during my earliest days as a collector. As a teenager, when I pored over books on the artist and was drawn into his world, I was determined to collect Schiele's works. I looked for them wherever I could. So it was appropriate that I acquired my first piece in Vienna, the 1909 drawing *Liegendes Mädchen (Die gestreiften Strümpfe) (Reclining Girl [The Striped Stockings])*. This cost me the entire eight hundred dollars I had in my savings, and set me on a lifetime of collecting works by this great artist.

It took me several years to find more Schiele works to acquire. When I was in college, I had managed to purchase two 1910 works on paper: the watercolor *Sitzender Akt mit lila Strümpfen (Seated Nude with Violet Stockings)* and *Frau Dr. Horwitz mit grossem Hut (Frau Dr. Horwitz with Large Hat)*. Now, with three Schiele works, I was really beginning to feel like a serious collector.

Still, I was not able to acquire Schiele paintings for several years after that. Finally, through the legendary Viennese émigré dealer Otto Kallir, I was able to purchase two: the 1913 *Stein an der Donau (Stein on the Danube)*, and the great 1910 portrait of the gynecologist Dr. Erwin von Graff, one of my favorite works. Since then, my interest in the artist has never diminished. I am always learning new things from Schiele's art.

One of the people who taught me the most about Schiele was my longtime friend and Neue Galerie New York co-founder, Serge Sabarsky. He didn't believe in too much interpretation in connection with art; for him, it was all about looking, and learning to see what qualities make



for a great drawing or painting. With Serge, I spent many hours looking at works by Schiele, an experience I will never forget. It was also through Serge that my collection of Schiele works grew considerably.

In organizing an exhibition on Schiele portraits, the Neue Galerie is drawing from the artist's area of greatest strength. Although all of his art is memorable, it is in the area of portraiture that Schiele truly soars. From their stunning psychological depth to their powerful sense of color and composition, Schiele portraits are unquestionably masterworks of twentieth-century art. I am very proud to see them presented in this superb exhibition at the Neue Galerie.

My sincere thanks to our curator, Alessandra Comini, for the excellent job she has done in assembling the exhibition, and in providing the scholarly background that allows us to see and understand this work in greater depth. I also wish to thank Federico de Vera, who has provided an outstanding design that gives us a fresh look at the artist and his subjects. The lenders to the exhibition have generously allowed us to present their work in this exciting context, for which we are most grateful. Finally, my thanks to Renée Price, director, and the entire staff of the Neue Galerie for bringing this show to life.

**RONALD S. LAUDER**

President, Neue Galerie New York



Egon Schiele, *Wally in Red Blouse with Raised Knees*, 1913, watercolor, gouache, and pencil on paper. Private Collection

## FOREWORD

In October 2005, the Neue Galerie New York staged its first Egon Schiele exhibition, which featured works from the collections of our co-founders, Ronald S. Lauder and the late Serge Sabarsky. I was proud and gratified to organize this retrospective and edit the accompanying catalogue, which focused on this extraordinary artist's American reception history.

Almost ten years later, we have returned to Schiele because he is at the core of our permanent museum collection. With this exhibition, we are focusing on the artist's penetrating portraits, which are truly unforgettable. They are all the more remarkable for having been brought to life by Schiele when he was only in his teens and twenties. Born in 1890 into provincial surroundings twenty-five miles outside of Vienna, Schiele entered Vienna's Academy of Fine Art as a wunderkind at the age of sixteen. Portraiture was his key subject throughout his short career—it lasted only ten years—until his tragic death of the Spanish Flu epidemic in 1918. For this exhibition, we are focusing on Schiele portraits through a series of chapters: Family and Academy; Fellow Artists; Sitters and Patrons; Lovers; and Self-Portraits and Allegorical Self-Portraits. In addition, we address Schiele's arrest and brief imprisonment in 1912.

There is no better-suited or more deserving curator for our show than art historian Alessandra Comini. As a young student in 1960s Vienna, Comini discovered Schiele's prison cell in Neulengbach (just outside the city), befriended the artist's sisters, and wrote her doctoral thesis at Columbia University on Schiele's portraits. I am most grateful for the warm friendship and wide-ranging knowledge that Professor Comini has generously shared with me over the years. With this exhibition, we celebrate her lifetime of scholarly achievements.

An exhibition is never possible without those who support it. From the outset, Jane Kallir of the Galerie St. Etienne, author of the Schiele catalogue raisonnée, has given us valuable advice and assisted with securing loans, for which we are most appreciative. We are enormously indebted to Ernst Ploil, our esteemed board member, and to numerous private collectors, for providing crucial loans to this exhibition.

We also wish to thank many institutional lenders and their representatives. In particular, my thanks go to Agnes Husslein-Arco, director of the Belvedere; Benno Tempel, director, and Hans Janssen, curator, of the Gemeentemuseum Den Haag; and Richard Armstrong, director of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum for making rarely lent major works available. I also extend my gratitude to Emily Kass, director of the Ackland Art Museum; Lynn Zelevansky, director of the Carnegie Museum of Art; Maxwell Anderson, director of the Dallas Museum of Art; Thomas Campbell, director, and Sabine Rewald, curator, of the Metropolitan Museum of Art; William M. Griswold, former director of The Morgan Library & Museum; Glenn Lowry, director of The Museum of Modern Art; Anthony Marx, president of the New York Public Library; Michael Lesh

and Ellen Price of Serge Sabarsky, Inc.; and Dr. Wolfgang Kos, director, and Christian Kircher, finance director, of the Wien Museum.

I wish to thank the catalogue authors—Christian Bauer, Alessandra Comini, Lori Felton, Jane Kallir, Diethard Leopold, and Ernst Ploil—for their insightful scholarly contributions. I extend my gratitude to exhibition designer Federico de Vera, who has designed past exhibitions for the Neue Galerie devoted to Alfred Kubin, Otto Dix, and Franz Xaver Messerschmidt. His design for the Egon Schiele show is yet another fine example of his superb creativity and unique vision. Judy Hudson has shown great skill and refinement in designing the exhibition catalogue. Finally, I wish to thank my colleagues at the Neue Galerie, including Scott Gutterman, deputy director; Sefa Saglam, registrar and director of exhibitions; Janis Staggs, associate curator; Liesbet Van Leemput, graphics manager; and Michael Voss, preparator, for their dedicated efforts on behalf of this show.

Our president, Ronald S. Lauder, has enjoyed a lifelong commitment to the art of Egon Schiele. He acquired his first Schiele drawing with his Bar Mitzvah money at age thirteen, and has been under the spell of this artist for almost six decades.

Along with Ronald Lauder, it remains our ambition to share this artist's genius with our audience, in hopes that it may continue to inspire the creative forces of the future.

## **RENÉE PRICE**

Director, Neue Galerie New York



Egon Schiele, *Reclining Woman with Green Stockings*, 1917, gouache and black crayon on paper. Private Collection, Courtesy Galerie St. Etienne, New York



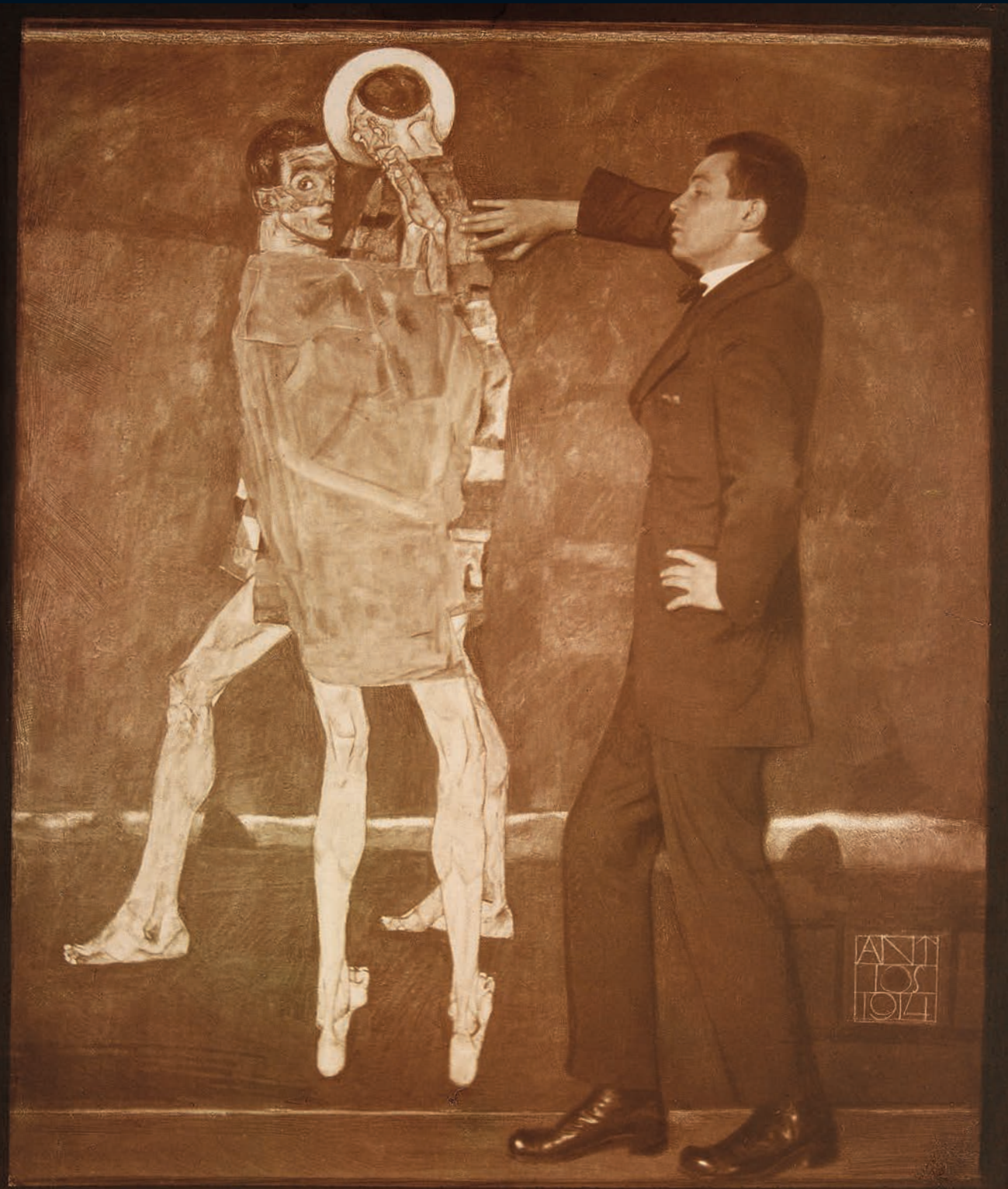
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Portrait of Egon Schiele, 1915, silver bromide  
print. Photograph by Anton Josef Trčka. Neue  
Galerie New York

*We also acknowledge those individuals  
who prefer to remain anonymous.*



ANT  
TOS  
1914

E G O N S C H I E L E

**ALESSANDRA COMINI**

## Egon Schiele: Redefining Portraiture in the Age of Angst

“It is the best conceivable representation of my inner and outer self . . . Thus will I—if at all—be preserved for posterity.” So the Vienna art dealer Paul Wengraf described the portrait study [Fig. 1] made of him in 1917 by the artist Egon Schiele. Wengraf elaborated: “The hands on the forehead lead the viewer to suspect that I was gripping my head in painful embarrassment and did not know how to escape. I peered out into the unknown from behind this embarrassment, which my awkwardness of speech has transformed into my fate.”<sup>1</sup>

One year later, just as World War I was ending, the creator of that riveting portrait was dead, a victim not of war but of the influenza epidemic that spread across Europe. He was only twenty-eight years old.

Half a century had passed when, as a twenty-eight-year-old graduate student from America, I first gazed upon the inner and outer self of Paul Wengraf, as portrayed by Schiele in his trenchant charcoal drawing. I had invaded Vienna in the summer of 1963 with the single purpose of ferreting out all I could possibly learn about the extraordinary, quixotic being who was Egon Schiele. I was fascinated by the artist’s dualism, a constant in both his art and his sense of self. His very nature was driven by opposing drives. As he himself put it, “I am the noblest of the noble, and the humblest of the humble. I am human—I love death and I love life.”<sup>2</sup>

Luck smiled upon me that halcyon summer in Vienna. Both Schiele’s sisters—the serious, older Melanie, 77, and the coquettish, younger Gerti, 69,—and a few of his sitters were still alive. All were helpful and consented to be interviewed multiple times over the years, even responding, finally, to the strangeness of speaking into a Tandberg tape recorder.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, within a month of having arrived in Austria, I had the good fortune, thanks to the artist’s meticulous depiction, to discover, identify, and photograph the forgotten prison cell in the village of Neulengbach outside Vienna where Schiele had been briefly incarcerated in the spring of 1912 on, among other things, charges of public immorality. It was amazing to see that the wooden cell door—the inside of which had been carved with a former prisoner’s initials, “MH”—appeared just as Schiele had meticulously depicted it in his portrayal of the cell interior. The electric call bell on the wall, which he had also drawn, was still in place more than fifty years later. Schiele’s sisters were thrilled to have copies of the Neulengbach prison photographs, and I was able to dedicate my first book to them.<sup>4</sup>



1  
Egon Schiele, *Paul Wengraf, Art Dealer*, 1917, black crayon on paper. Private Collection (Kallir D. 2093)

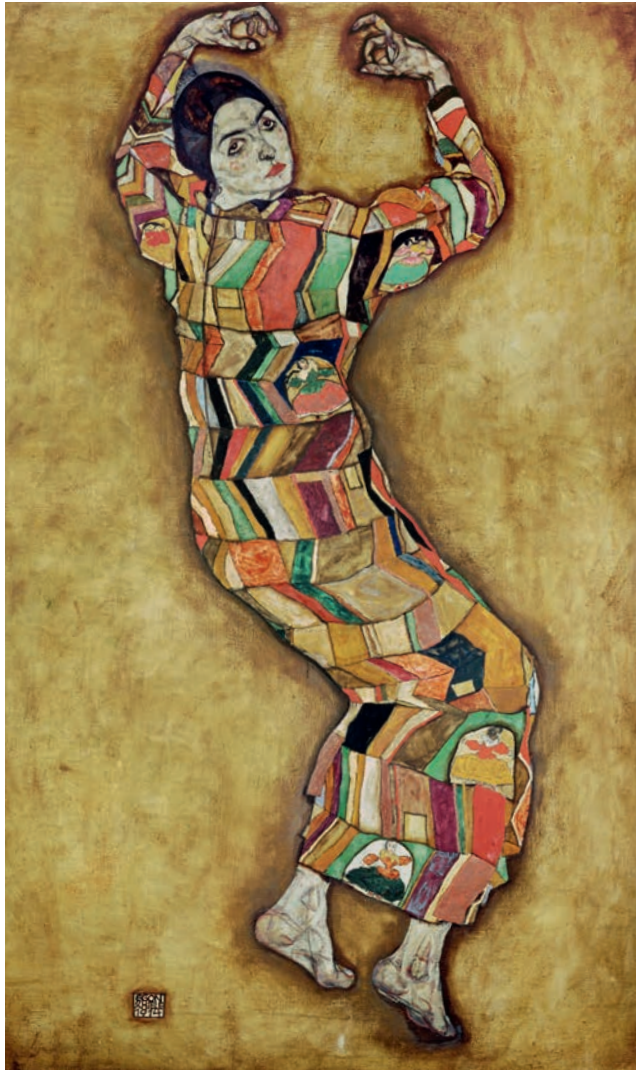
2  
Egon Schiele in front of his unfinished 1913 painting *Encounter (Self-Portrait with Saint)*, 1914 (Kallir P. 259). Photograph by Anton Josef Trčka. Wien Museum, Vienna (facing page)

What did he look like, this *Bürgerschreck* (shocker of the bourgeois) who would have to endure 24 days in prison? One of his sitters from the year 1914, Friederike Beer [Fig. 3], described him for me [Fig. 4]: “He was tall, thin, shy, and quiet. He spoke with the Viennese intonation, but not in heavy dialect. He dressed normally, but even so he stood out in a crowd. One could tell there was something unusual about him. That fantastic head of hair! Those outspread ears! He really appeared rather spectacular.”<sup>5</sup>

In Schiele's portrait of her, Fritzi (as she asked to be called) is shown upright, knees and arms bent, with plunging bare feet, flailing arms, grasping fingers, and oval head turned toward the spectator in a fixed, blank stare. The zigzag body plummets into unarticulated space. Schiele has stripped Fritzi of any explanatory environment—mattress (upon which she was actually lying), pillow (which she had her arms around), or room (the artist's studio)—and instead jettisoned her into an existential, angst-filled void. No one, either in Europe or America, had ever been portrayed quite like this.

3

Egon Schiele, *Portrait of Friederike Maria Beer*, 1914, oil on canvas. Private Collection (Kallir P. 276). Photo credit: Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY







4  
Egon Schiele with art critic and collector Arthur Roessler, 1913. Private Collection

5  
Richard Gerstl, *Self-Portrait Nude*, 1908, oil on canvas. Leopold Museum, Vienna

6  
Max Oppenheimer, *Portrait of Arnold Schönberg*, 1909, oil on canvas. Private Collection, Switzerland. Photo credit: Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY

7  
Oskar Kokoschka, *Portrait of Peter Altenberg*, 1909, oil on canvas. Private Collection

How and why was it that this shy but unusual artist, Egon Schiele, came to help redefine the course of portraiture in Vienna at the beginning of the last century? He was certainly not alone. The magnificent but troubled imperial capital had inspired several other Austrian artists—most importantly, Richard Gerstl [Fig. 5], Max Oppenheimer [“Mopp,” Fig. 6], and Oskar Kokoschka [Fig. 7]—to rebel against the inherited formula of portraiture in which exact likeness of face reigned supreme and painted props signaled the sitter’s social status. The troubled Gerstl, in despair over his short-lived affair with Arnold Schönberg’s wife, committed suicide in 1908 at the age of twenty-five. Oppenheimer, frequently considered a pale echo of Kokoschka, but in fact a master of the psychological portrait in his own right, fled Hitler for America in 1939. Kokoschka, always the survivor and restless wanderer, would continue to produce emotional, painterly displays of suggested verisimilitude and animated surround until his death in Switzerland at ninety-three.



Egon Schiele, *Portrait of Gerti Schiele*, 1909, oil, silver, gold-bronze paint, and pencil on canvas. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Purchase and partial gift of the Lauder family, and private collection. (Kallir P. 155) Digital image © The Museum of Modern Art / Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, NY



Of all these artists, Schiele was the most consistently engaged in overturning conventional portraiture. He veered from a rebellious unmasking of his subjects' ever-changing states of being, to a more empathic later approach that ironically reconciled the possibility of a centered soul with outward stress and vulnerability. Even an early work such as the twisting portrait of his dreaming sister Gerti (1909) [Fig. 8, Plate 13], set with vibrant, edgy contours in empty space, is vastly different from Klimt's mesmerizing 1907 icon of femininity, the golden *Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer I* [Fig. 9]. Adele's mosaic-imbedded, abstracted garb and background almost overwhelm her realistic face and hands. Yet she faces the viewer placidly. Schiele's Gerti—still indebted to Klimt for its decorative fill—turns away from the bolder in a dream state, the one visible eye closed upon an internal, riveting vision.

What compelled the young, upstart artists of Vienna at the beginning of the last century to redefine portraiture, the genre favored by the imperial city's status-hungry nouveau riche? How could the city's most famous and most successful painter, Gustav Klimt, inspire revolt? Why did his own spectacular 1916 image of Friederike Beer [Fig. 10], in all her frozen, decorative glory and animated oriental background, leave the next generation unmoved?

The answer is partly that the younger Expressionist artists, unlike Klimt and his contemporaries, were interested not in the beautiful, distracting façade, but, rather, in the quivering, fluid, intriguing psyche that lay underneath outer appearance. Part of a person's defining essence—her or his identity—could be glimpsed and even pinned down if the artist were a true “seer.” Schiele in fact painted a series of double self-portraits in 1910 and 1911 with the title *Self-Seers*. He expressed his approach thusly: “The painter also can look. To see, however, is something more.”<sup>6</sup>

The act of seeing within, rather than looking at, of penetrating beneath the surface, was of interest not only to Vienna's artistic community. As far back as the mid-1800s, Carl von Rokitansky, a professor at the famed medical school, developed the diagnostic science of *in situ* dissection, supervising some 70,000 autopsies. Paralleling, if not necessarily informing, Schiele's and Kokoschka's dissection of sitters, was Sigmund Freud's exploration of the meaning of dreams and the unconscious, *Die Traumdeutung* (*The Interpretation of Dreams*, published in 1899 but dated 1900 by his savvy publisher). It was a book that few people actually read at the time but about which everyone had a pronounced opinion. The beginning of the new century also saw the publication of *The Analysis of Sensations* (1902) by the physicist Ernst Mach, a hugely popular book that reduced what had hitherto confidently been called reality to an amalgam of transient sensory inputs.

The smothering city of Vienna itself provided another powerful impetus to go beyond the surface of visible reality. The satirist Karl Kraus famously described the rigid atmosphere of imperial Vienna as an isolation cell in which one is allowed to scream. In the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the rational frequently seemed under attack by the irrational. This seething, multi-national empire was headed by the elderly and backward-looking Emperor Franz Joseph I, who had been on the throne since 1848. In the years between 1900 and 1914, when the assassination of the Emperor's heir-apparent triggered World War I, the political fragility of the senescent Hapsburg

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Gustav Klimt, *Adele Bloch-Bauer I*, 1907, oil, silver, and gold on canvas. Neue Galerie New York. This acquisition made available in part through the generosity of the heirs of the Estates of Ferdinand and Adele Bloch-Bauer

10

Gustav Klimt, *Portrait of Friederike Maria Beer*, 1916, oil on canvas. The Mizne-Blumental Collection, Museum of Art, Tel Aviv. Photo credit: Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY



Monarchy was ignored. Signs of impending doom were masked in a frenzied dedication to ritual and spectacle. The changing of the Imperial guard provided a daily pageant and confirmation of the apparent stability of the Court. The great industrialists and wealthy upper class had already created their own symbol of culture, the Ringstrasse, a protective circle of magnificent public buildings and stately homes that effectively blocked off the outlying factories and slums. The great avenue provided an impressive façade, a material representation of Kraus's metaphorical isolation cell.

If the architecture of Vienna projected a euphoric and still-vital identity, the new century's artists, architects, musicians, and dancers all had a different and troubled vision. Essence was to replace ornament. For Schiele the questioning exploration of private identity took priority over public persona, and an unprecedented frankness about sexuality replaced the sensual gaze of Klimt's erotic drawings. Even the signatures of the two artists differ meaningfully: Klimt's flowing "G" and "K" circumscribe a cursive oval with an opening at the top. Schiele's thick, existence-confirming block letters are often boxed in against the void outside.

Schiele's Expressionism was characterized in content by a heightened sense of impending doom, and an acute awareness of the troubled self. In form, his art drew from the great reservoir of European Symbolism. The evocative tableaux of gestural imagery available to Viennese artists included the eurythmic allegories of the revered Swiss artist Ferdinand Hodler, the poignant sculptures of French artist Auguste Rodin, and the elongated figures of Belgian sculptor George Minne. In addition there was the fledgling silent film industry, with its necessarily exaggerated pantomimes of emotion. Another inspiration may have been the "low" popular art forms of such kitsch illustrators as the ubiquitous "Meister Fidus," whose panerotic health-in-nature images appeared from 1895 on in the pages of the popular art magazines, *Pan*, *Jugend*, and *Simplizissimus*.<sup>7</sup>

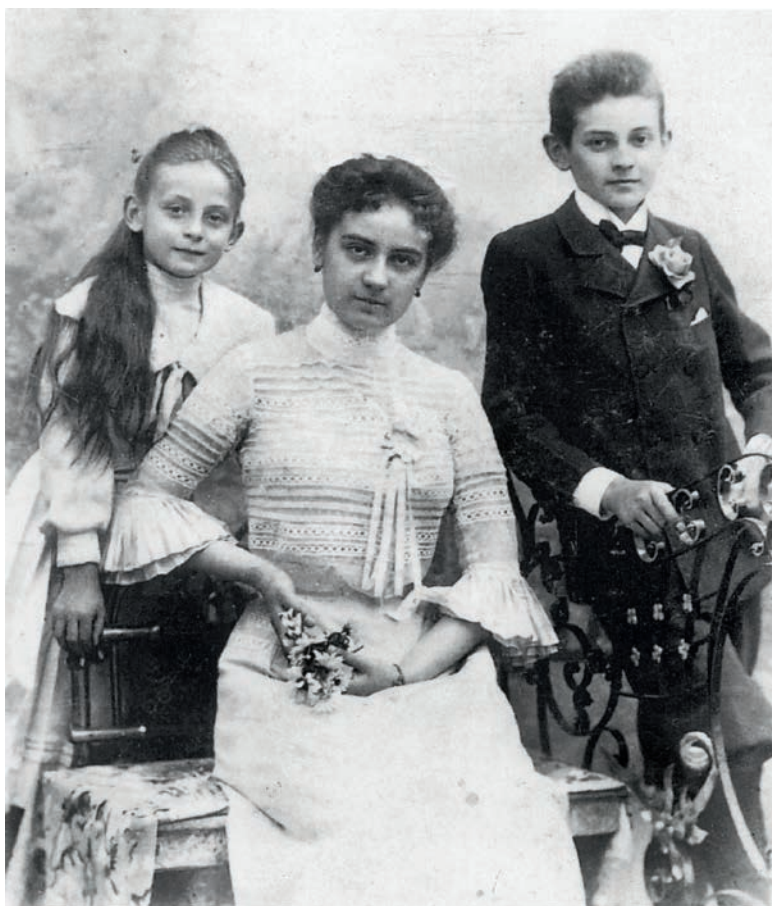
While the cult of Eros and pathos was being addressed quietly by Vienna's uneasy Expressionist painters, the city's writers plumbed their own anxieties in public. Thus an awesome parade of psychologically insightful, sex-obsessed literary works began to emerge. Among the first of these was physician Arthur Schnitzler's 1897 play *Reigen* (*La Ronde*), an ironic examination of ten sexual encounters. Then followed Hugo von Hofmannsthal's blood-lusting play *Electra* (1903), Robert Musil's novel of sadism and adolescent awakening at a military boarding school *Young Törless* (*Die Verwirrungen des Zöglings Törless*, 1906), and Arnold Schönberg's hallucinatory musical monodrama *Expectation* (*Erwartung*, 1909).

Society's rigid and repressive façade was now regarded as a horrendous and hypocritical lie. Truth lay underneath and could be exposed by probing the individual psyche in all its changing states of being. The new aim of art, according to Kraus was not "*was wir bringen*" (what we bring), but "*was wir umbringen*" (what we destroy).<sup>8</sup>

A savage analysis of environment began. Ornament and façade—what Kraus bemoaned in language, Schönberg purged in music, and Adolf Loos criticized in architecture—were attacked by the new delineators of portraiture. The pursuit of essence, the phenomenon of the self with

its varying manifestations—these became the subject matter of painting. A violently subjective view of reality was born, and a new and jarring stylistic vocabulary was fashioned. This entailed not only the passage from the façade to the psyche, but also a transition from the rational to the irrational, from the environmental to the existential, and from *Schein* (appearance) to *Sein* (being). This is what so radically distinguishes Schiele's plummeting portrait of Friederike Beer from that of his mentor, the comparatively old-fashioned, literal Klimt. (The sitter herself preferred Klimt's grounded portrayal to that of Schiele's statement of cascading anxiety.<sup>9</sup>)

In addition to the inescapable cultural malaise of the time, what was there in Schiele's own biographical background that contributed to and shaped such an angst-laden approach? A precocious Mozart of art, Egon Schiele was born in 1890 to a middle-class family in the small town of Tulln, near Vienna (where there is now a museum devoted to his early works). Schiele's parents were both Catholics. His father, Adolf, was the local railroad stationmaster; his mother, Marie, was a Czech from the gothic town of Krumau on the Moldau. (Characterized by its towering castle and winding river, the picturesque town would call forth some of Schiele's most heartfelt and somber paintings.) Two sisters, Melanie, born 1886, and Gertrude (Gerti), born 1894, rounded out the family [Fig. 11].



11

Egon Schiele and his sisters Melanie (center) and Gertrude, 1901. Serge Sabarsky Archive, New York



Alessandra Comini

## **Egon Schiele**

Portraits

Gebundenes Buch, Leinen mit Schutzumschlag, 296 Seiten,

23,5 x 28,5 cm

227 farbige Abbildungen, 72 s/w Abbildungen

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Prestel

Erscheinungstermin: Oktober 2014

### Starke Emotionen und malerische Virtuosität

Dieser aufwendig gestaltete Band versammelt Werke voll starker Emotionen und malerischer Virtuosität und gibt faszinierende Einblicke in das Leben eines begnadeten Künstlers.

Egon Schiele (1890–1918) gehört zu den wichtigsten Künstlern des 20. Jahrhunderts. Als meisterhafter Kolorist und Zeichner schuf er dem Vorbild seines Lehrers Gustav Klimt folgend Bilder von beeindruckender emotionaler Kraft und verstörender Intimität. Durch ihn fand die Kunst seiner Zeit zu einer neuen Offenheit. Sein früher Tod mit erst 28 Jahren trug dazu bei, den österreichischen Künstler zu einem Mythos werden zu lassen.

Im Mittelpunkt von "Egon Schiele: Portraits" stehen insgesamt fünf Werkgruppen mit Bildern von Familienmitgliedern, Akademiekollegen und Künstlerfreunden, Modellen und Mäzenen, Geliebten und allegorischen Figuren. Zusätzlich enthält das Buch ein Kapitel über eine einschneidende Periode in Schieles Leben: seine traumatische Gefängniszeit in den Sommermonaten 1912. Anhand von Arbeiten, die vor bzw. nach der Haftzeit entstanden, wird der Stilwandel in Schieles Werk eindrucksvoll vor Augen geführt. Eigens für die New Yorker Ausstellung sind viele dieser Werke aus amerikanischen und europäischen Museen und Privatsammlungen nun erstmals zusammengeführt worden.