

Modernity and Opulence: Women of the Wiener Werkstätte

The Jewish Museum

Audio Description Guide

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800. Koloman Moser, "Sacred Spring" ("Ver Sacrum") poster for the Thirteenth Secession Exhibition, 1902

NARRATOR: This poster is titled "Sacred Spring" ("Ver Sacrum") poster for the Thirteenth Secession Exhibition. It is by the artist Koloman Moser, and is a lithograph made in 1902. It is 73 3/16 inches high and 25 3/16 inches wide. In centimeters that is 185.9 high and 64 wide. The length of the design required the artist to connect two pieces of paper vertically. It is displayed in a thin black frame.

This elongated poster is principally made of five different colors, a brownish brick-red, deep navy blue, medium-dark ocean blue, a warm grey, and the white of the paper.

Here is curator Kristina Parsons.

KRISTINA PARSONS: There's three figures at the top half of the poster. And they're arranged in a triangular or pyramidal form with one central figure tallest and two flanking that figure a little bit lower. All three figures are more or less identical.

NARRATOR: Each figure has a white face with a pointed chin. A wide dark blue semi-circle, with the flat side on top, covers the faces from the middle up. The middle of the rounded side is broken into jagged pieces over where the eyes would be, giving the sense of thick fringed bangs. There is a thin line that bisects this half-circle into two shapes. A long red inverted triangle at the very bottom of the face with a smaller one on top denote lips and the base of a nose. These simple shapes give the impression of the figures looking downwards. Blue circles emerge from the base of their necks to form a large halo-like shape around each face. The inner third of these circles on the lower two figures become speckled and translucent where they intersect with the body of the third higher figure. A thin white circle is laid on top, above all of the faces, connecting them even further.

Each figure has slightly curved shoulders that lead to a tube-like body outlined in black. On the left and right side are thin white stripes, each equal to half the size of the body, with a thicker speckled tan vertical stripe in the middle. The side stripes form arms tucked in at their sides. The only decoration is an upside-down teardrop filled with a pattern of small outlined red triangles, and two horizontal blue stripes on the one in the middle.

KRISTINA PARSONS: The text on the lower half of the poster is arranged in several rows and each of those rows are framed in a very structured grid. The text fits inside blocks and on either end of these rows are a checkered pattern that creates a decorative ornament.

NARRATOR: The text is stylized, with letters that are tall, angular, and curved, giving the impression of something architectural. E's and A's are tilted strongly to the left with their respective middle lines thrusting upwards. M's have two straight sides with a gently shallow curve in between them, and J's curve juts out and up. The letters are pressed together side-to-side and vertically, forming busy blocks of text.

The top four rows are written in blue, and read Ver Sacrum, V. Jahr.

KRISTINA PARSONS: Ver Sacrum is Latin for "Sacred Spring," seen as this time for artistic renewal and reform. The Secession was a revolt against the more

conservative art of the period, and “Sacred Spring” really resonated as a call for the birth of new artistic practices.

NARRATOR: Below is text in red over seven lines. It translates to “13th exhibition of the Association of Austrian Artists, Secession. Open from 9-7. Admission 1 krone.” The background of the poster is a solid brick red with curved corners, mimicking the shapes of the letters and the figures’ shoulders.

KRISTINA PARSONS: The story of the Wiener Werkstätte begins even before it was officially founded in 1903. To understand the Wiener Werkstätte, we have to look back a few years earlier at the Vienna Secession. This poster announces the 13th exhibition organized by the Secessionists, a group of young progressive artists led by Gustav Klimt. Amongst the Secessionists were two others who would co-found the Wiener Werkstätte the following year: architect Josef Hoffmann, and painter Koloman Moser, who also designed this poster.

801. Felice Rix, Dressing gown in "Thunderstorm" ("Donnerwetter") fabric, Fabric designed 1919; garment made c. 1920

NARRATOR: This garment is a Dressing gown. The fabric was designed by Felice Rix in 1919 and was made around 1920 from printed plain-weave silk. This long robe-like garment measures 52 inches long and 21 inches wide. In centimeters, that is 132 high and 55 wide. The piece is displayed on a mannequin inside a plexiglass case on an emerald green platform.

Here is curator Kristina Parsons.

KRISTINA PARSONS: This garment, designed by Felice Rix-Ueno, who went by Lizzi, is in the form of a very elegant dressing gown. It's made out of silk, it's got a pattern, and it's got a lovely tie around the neck. The garment wraps around the body. Each of the sleeves are a bright blue color, which is accented in the sash that could be tied around the neck or around the waist. And the body of the gown is quite straight. It's almost tube-like. But on the form of the body of this gown is a striped pattern with alternating stripes of yellow, white, and light blue with black.

NARRATOR: The repeated pattern consists of ten horizontal stripes starting at the bottom with a thin white line. Above it another thin white line that juts upward right before the garment's midline, and a golden yellow one of the same width. Above, an even thinner pale-blue line followed immediately by the thickest stripe of stacked pink, blue, and yellow, and one more yellow line above. Between each of these stripes is a varied band of black, from $\frac{1}{4}$ of an inch to 4 inches in width. The fabric runs lengthwise down the body, so the repeated pattern is visible three times. This pattern's name translates from German as "thunderstorm" and was available in multiple color combinations, like all of the Wiener Werkstätte's fabrics.

KRISTINA PARSONS: Many of their fabrics were sold as bolts of cloth that clients could purchase and have made up in a design of their own, in everything from apparel, like this dressing gown, to lampshades, curtains, and even upholstery.

In this period, there was an increasingly popular trend towards making and wearing garments with a looser silhouette that gave the wearer greater freedom to move. Women were rejecting garments that were tightly corseted or rigidly structured. These modern ideas paralleled women's movements which advocated for voting rights, and Viennese women actually won the right to vote finally in 1918.

802. Gustav Klimt, *Study for Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer I*, 1903

NARRATOR: This drawing is the *Study for Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer I*, by Gustav Klimt. It is charcoal on paper and was made in 1903. The piece is 17 15/16 inches high and 12 3/8 inches wide. In centimeters, that is 45.6 high by 31.4 wide. It is displayed in a thin black frame with an off-white mat.

Klimt made this study using delicate, sometimes wispy lines to outline the figure on medium-tan paper. Adele Bloch-Bauer is positioned, standing, just left-of-center. She vertically fills the page; the paper cuts off just above her nose and below her floor length dress, so the top of her head and her feet are not shown. Here is culture and design historian, Elana Shapira.

ELANA SHAPIRA: Adele stands facing the viewer. She carries herself as if she were a woman of high social status. Her left-hand rests on the back of an unfinished armchair drawing. So, the armchair is not completed, it's just the outline of the armchair.

NARRATOR: Her dress has a low square neckline. It follows the form of her body, with a defined waistline, while remaining loose and airy. Klimt's delicate wavy lines suggest that the garment is made of lightweight fabric; at the bottom of the column-like skirt the lines lie and move to the left, perhaps capturing wind or a change in her pose.

ELANA SHAPIRA: The dress accentuates her slender figure, and it has loose wavy sleeves. A small circular pattern is randomly distributed across the front of the dress. Klimt did not paint her eyes, and her lips are slightly parted. It seems as if she is tilting her head to the left in reaction to his presence.

In the summer of 1903, Ferdinand Bloch-Bauer asked Klimt to paint his wife's portrait, Adele Bloch-Bauer. She was a salon hostess who fashioned herself as a kind of a modern woman. Salon woman is not just a woman who brings in sandwiches at the five o'clock. They were also maneuvering diplomatically between the people that were invited and made sure that if they had something on their agenda, they will push it forward. Adele Bloch-Bauer believed in the power of art and literature. And therefore, her relationship with the artists she supported were very important.

803. Wilhelm List, *Young Woman in Undergarments*, c. 1910–11

NARRATOR: This painting is *Young Woman in Undergarments* by William List. He painted it between 1910 and 1911, and the materials are oil on canvas. This thin, vertical painting is 49 $\frac{5}{8}$ inches high and 22 $\frac{5}{8}$ inches wide. In centimeters that is 126.05 high and 57.47 wide. It has a black frame with brass detailing on the inside.

Here is curator Kristina Parsons.

KRISTINA PARSONS: This painting features a woman sitting on the end of a settee or a couch and the framing of this image is quite closely cropped, so you can only see about half of the piece of furniture that she's sitting in and while her body fills the entire frame it is a bit cramped in how her body extends almost to the edges of the canvas in every direction.

NARRATOR: This young, realistically painted woman has pale skin, and a delicately angular face. She has dark brown hair piled on top of her head, some tendrils framing her temples. It's held atop by a dark green head covering with a black band. Her expression is neutral, neither smiling nor frowning. She sits leaning slightly towards the right side of the canvas, her body resting against the arm of the settee. Her body faces the viewer, with just her shoulders turned slightly into the lean. Her right knee is pulled up towards her chest, and her left leg hangs off the couch, toes pointing towards the bottom-right of the canvas. Her left elbow rests on the side of the couch, and her arm crosses her chest, hand on the right knee. Her right arm rests at her side.

KRISTINA PARSONS: Her head is turned to one side with her nose and mouth kind of tucked towards her shoulder, looking off to the left. She's dressed in what appear to be undergarments. There's some lace detailing around the bodice and the straps.

NARRATOR: These garments are made of a white square neck top, and long shorts with loose legs and ruffles at the end. They crinkle and pool as she lifts her leg.

KRISTINA PARSONS: It looks like she's wearing a necklace or two as well and has long black stockings on.

NARRATOR: The paint is applied thickly, with visible lustrous brushstrokes. List also plays with color here; her pale skin has strokes of soft yellow and green, while her white clothing was painted with interspersed blues and purples.

KRISTINA PARSONS: In addition to these undergarments, she is sat on top of a green piece of billowing fabric that's scrunched up under her body. And both the white of her undergarments and the green of this cloth that she's sitting on is set in contrast to the very bright patterned textile that is featured on the upholstery of the settee.

NARRATOR: The patterned fabric is the Blätter textile designed by Martha Alber. It has blue stylized leaves travelling vertically up the fabric, like vines with foliage alternating direction from right to left. The rounded leaves are a light grey-blue, with edges and a middle defined by dotted black lines. Behind them, loops of medium blue, purple, tan and black form a darkened background. In a case nearby is a New Years greeting card featuring the same printed pattern.

This card gives you a sense of the broad dissemination of these designs. Likely the Wiener Werkstätte licensed, or perhaps even donated, the use of this pattern, which allowed individuals and organizations to personalize them.

804. Felice Rix (textile designer), Blouse, c. 1918, in "Summer Butterflies" ("Sommerfalter") fabric, before 1925

NARRATOR: This garment is a Blouse by the designer Felice Rix with the fabric called the Summer Butterflies. It was designed around 1925 and made after 1925. It is made of plain-weave silk, a slightly transparent fabric with a light ethereal quality and shine. It is displayed on a mannequin in a plexiglass case with a light purple base.

This colorful shirt has short sleeves and is buttoned up the front. It has a collarless crewneck with a small tie in a bow at the front. While the title implies that the pattern is butterflies, they are abstracted to look like a cacophony of flowers or a whimsical wearable garden. This title was most likely meant to emphasize the visual ambiguity between the forms of butterflies and flowers.

Each of the cartoonish flowers or insects, as the title suggests, is made of four teardrop-shaped petals or wings, joined at the center by a circle. While they have the same form, they differ in size, coloring, and pattern. The largest one has light orange petals with three or four large orange dots in each. It is outlined in a thin black line. Another large motif has four light red petals with brick red swirls emerging from the center, and no outline. Other flowers or butterflies include white with orange polka dots, yellow with golden stripes, white with green lines, blue with dark blue lines, and white with golden lines.

Interspersed among the riotous overlapping flowers are green stems with thin upward-pointing leaves and sticks with two rows of four light green circles hanging off. This pattern is not arranged in a discernable order, but each flower appears multiple times on the front and back of the shirt.

The owner of this blouse, Friederike Maria Beer, was a prominent Jewish socialite, arts patron, and gallerist. She lived in an apartment designed and furnished by the Wiener Werkstätte and owned many of the collective's modern fashions. She styled herself as a "walking billboard" and model modern woman.

805. Susi Singer, *Figure with Jug*, 1921–22

NARRATOR: This sculpture by the artist Susi Singer is titled *Figure with jug*. It was made between 1921 and 1922. It is 67 ¼ inches high, 20 inches wide, and 13 inches deep, making the figure roughly life size. In centimeters, that is 170.8 high, 50.8 wide, and 33 deep.

Here is art historian Megan Brandow-Faller.

MEGAN BRANDOW-FALLER: So, this work is made from red earthenware pottery and polychrome glaze. And it depicts a female figure draped in vaguely classical clothing, carrying a jug on her head. Her skin is painted pale white, and she has dark hair and painted red lips. There are green vines entwining one of her legs, and she's depicted in a slight contrapposto position.

NARRATOR: This figure stands on a round black base like a column. Her right knee is bent, and her left foot steps back slightly, her weight in her left hip. Her torso is straight, and her arms are raised to support a white rounded jug. There is a handle at the top of the jug held in her left hand. Her black hair sweeps across her forehead in soft curly waves and rests just past her shoulders. Thin black arches define her eyebrows and eyelashes, and her eyes are cast downwards. A rosy pink on her cheeks gives her a youthful glow.

The garment depicted on her drapes over her left breast and leaves the right-side exposed. It gathers at her waist to form a short skirt. The ripples and folds of the fabric are reinforced by brushstrokes in blues and light pinks.

MEGAN BRANDOW-FALLER: The clothing is vaguely inspired by the clothing of ancient Greece.

NARRATOR: There is a horizontal line that divides this piece into two across the woman's hips, showing that the sculpture was made in two pieces due to the size of the kiln.

MEGAN BRANDOW-FALLER: It is very deliberate that Wieselthier and her colleagues choose earthenware, as the material and they are making a very deliberate statement. Earthenware was a medium with connotations to domesticity, to femininity and women's roles in the domestic sphere. But yet they are creating works which are not domestic and not functional, and not useful in this quote-unquote crude material and medium.