



MASTERS OF ART

SCHIELE

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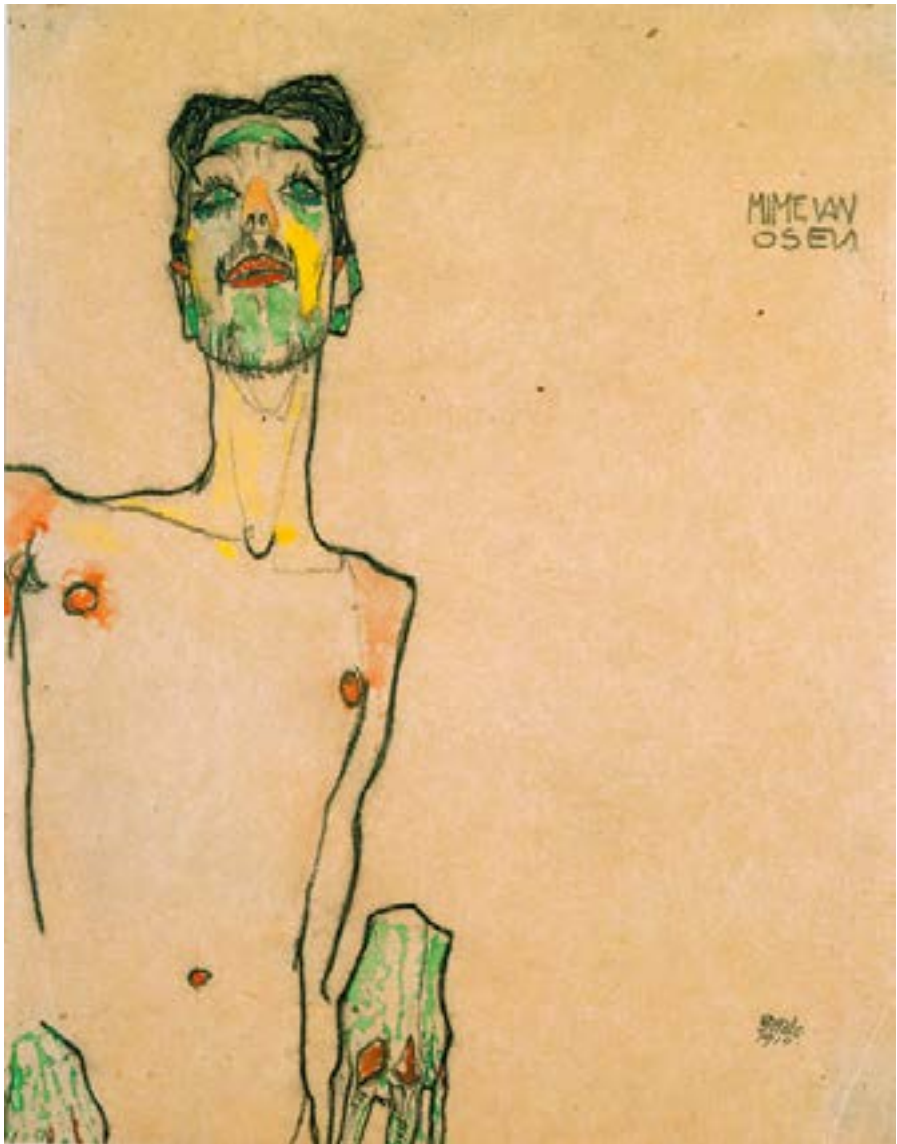
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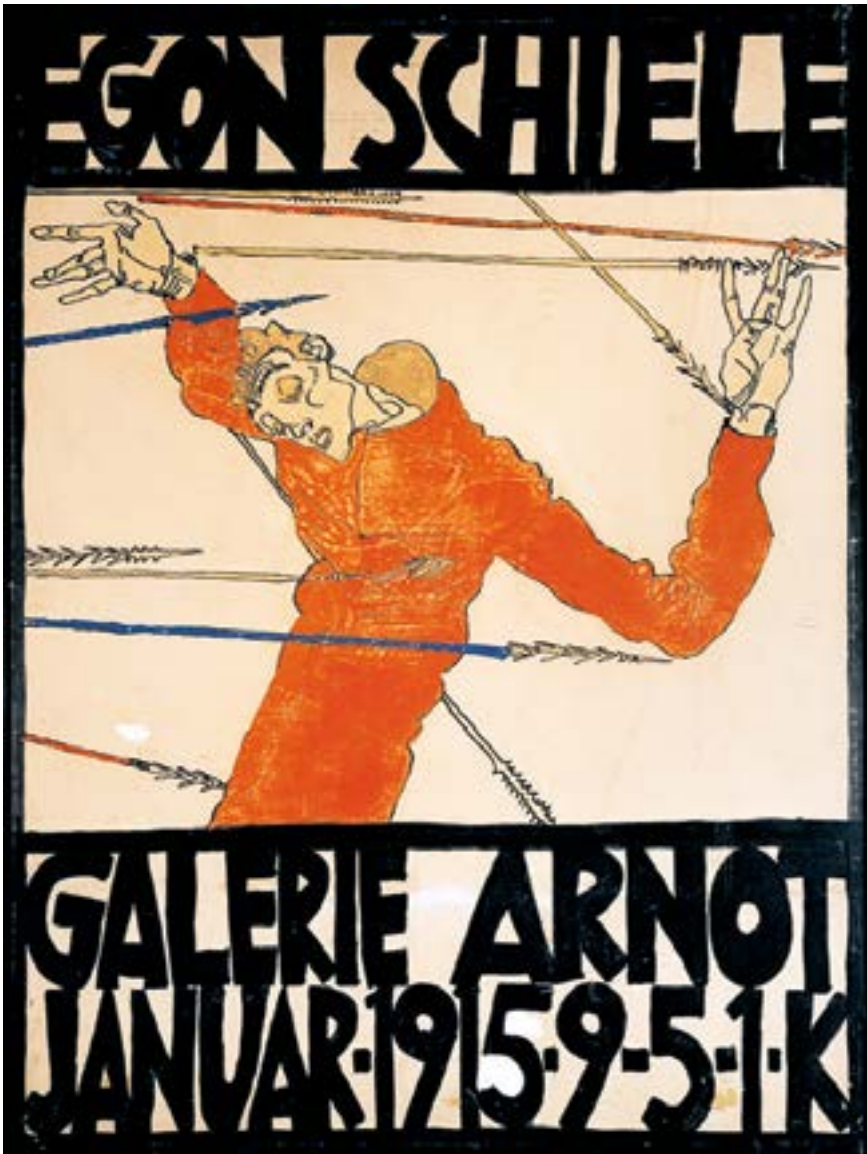




Mime van Osen, 1910



Nude Self-Portrait, Grimacing, 1910



Poster design featuring Saint Sebastian (self-portrait), 1914

have left my precarious existence behind me." His poems were also published for the first time in 1914. Arthur Roessler sent them to the Berlin magazine *Die Aktion*, an important publication for Expressionist poetry and graphics. Schiele repeatedly submitted further works, drawings, woodcuts and poems. In 1916 an entire issue was dedicated to him in the form of a special edition.

In the meantime, the First World War had broken out: on 4 August 1914, Austria-Hungary declared war on the neighbouring country of Serbia. Schiele, who was small of stature and had suffered from a congenital heart condition since birth, was assessed as unfit for military service. But even away from the front, suffering and death were omnipresent, with the newspapers disseminating gruesome pictures of the war. Schiele wrote to his mother that he was so repulsed by the military uniforms that he could not even leave the house. And in any case he was not a patriot; he did not care in which nation he lived. In November that year, Schiele described to his sister Gerti how incisive even the first months of the war had been for him: "We live in the most violent time the world has ever seen.—We have become accustomed to all privations—hundreds of thousands of people are perishing pitifully—and each one must endure his fate alive or dead—we have become hard and fearless.—What happened before 1914 belongs in another world."

Nevertheless, Schiele continued to exhibit his works as energetically as before; even during the war years he showed and sold his works in Vienna, Berlin, Munich and Dresden, and also in Brussels



and Rome. Schiele had his first solo exhibition at the age of twenty-four, at the end of 1914 and beginning of 1915. He also designed the exhibition poster for the show in the Galerie Arnot in Vienna. On it he showed himself pierced by arrows. It was a representation that referred back to a popular motif, the martyrdom of the Roman soldier Saint Sebastian. Schiele, however, was not alluding to a religious context, but rather to the sentence he had received in Neulengbach. After his spell in prison, he portrayed himself several times in similar martyr-like roles, as a hermit, a monk and a preacher (pages 64/65).

Schiele also took up another form of self-portrait in 1914. He made the acquaintance of the

Portrait of Arthur Roessler, 1910

Oil on canvas

100 × 100 cm

Wien Museum, Vienna

The art critic Arthur Roessler discovered Schiele at the exhibition of the New Art Group in 1909. He wrote a detailed review of the show in the newspaper *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, for which he worked as a critic: "Some of them will fall by the wayside, but I consider some of them to be mentally and physically strong enough to 'survive'. Among these I count the extraordinarily talented Egon Schiele, Toni Faistauer, Franz Wiegeler, Hans Ehrlich, [...] all those I have named have an astonishingly pronounced feeling for style."

From then onward Roessler accompanied Schiele's career enthusiastically and promoted him wherever he could: either with positive reviews, advice in business matters, or by establishing contacts with collectors. Schiele and Roessler became friends; the critic also purchased a number of drawings by the young artist, and commissioned Schiele to paint this portrait.

The square canvas shows Roessler in a dark suit sitting against a bright, empty background. He is lost in his own thoughts, his eyes closed. He has turned his head noticeably towards his left side, while his body is turned in the other direction. This creates a tension in the figure which is emphasised by the bent arms and outstretched hands.

This was to become Schiele's style. He portrays the body in fragmentary fashion. Here he cuts off Roessler's legs abruptly at the bottom edge of the picture. Before long he would dispense entirely with the design of the background. Here, too, he provides no points of reference; he does not even record the chair on which Roessler is sitting. His sole concern is the inner life of the sitter. Schiele's portraits of 1910 thus mark a turning point in his creative work as he moved on from *Jugendstil* (Art Nouveau) to Expressionism.



Female Nude, 1910

Pencil, black chalk, brush, watercolour, body colour
and opaque white on packing paper

44 × 30.5 cm

Albertina, Vienna

Schiele was twenty years old when he discovered the nude as a new subject for his pictures. Apart from self-portraits in which he depicted himself in the nude, from 1910 drawings of the nude became a main focus of his work. Hundreds of sheets show how he repeatedly investigated the human body. As Schiele explained to his student Silvia Koller: "The figure—the human body—is the most important thing and is what satisfies me the most."

The nude has been a subject in art for centuries. However, artists have generally portrayed the female or male body as flawless and in an idealised manner, and the pubic area is usually elegantly covered. Schiele's nudes are far removed from this traditional concept. And at the same time they also go beyond realistic representation.

Schiele shows naked bodies in yellow, green or red. And they are fragmented: for example, the legs of this female nude with a shock of red hair have been cut off, together with her right arm. Along with the reddish colours and the austere contours, the artist also uses opaque white to add emphasis to the contours – Schiele's nude has very little to do with romanticised beauty. He is interested less in the tender eroticism or seduction with which his contemporary viewers were familiar from nude representations, but rather in a very open sexual presence. His subjects not infrequently even gaze directly at the visitor.

So that he could draw them, Schiele's models posed for him standing, sitting lying. He frequently sketched his sister Gerti, but professional models and girls from the street posed for the daring erotic nudes. Schiele also found another source of subjects in 1910: he made the acquaintance of a gynaecologist from the University hospital in Vienna who introduced him to some of his patients. Many of the women whom the artist portrayed were pregnant.

Schiele's drawings shocked his contemporaries. He had now totally abandoned the elegance and beauty of the *Jugendstil* (Art Nouveau) which characterised his earlier works.



Girl in Ochre-Coloured Dress, 1911

Pencil, black chalk on Japan paper

48.2 × 32 cm

Albertina, Vienna

As later recalled by his painter friend Paris von Gütersloh, in Schiele's studio there were always "two or three small or larger girls from the neighbourhood, from the street, whom he had spoken to in nearby Schönbrunn Park, ugly and pretty ones, clean ones and others who were unwashed, and [who] sat around in his studio doing nothing [...] They slept, recovered from beatings by their parents, lolled around lazily, which they were not allowed to do at home, combed their hair quickly or somewhat longer, depending on whether it was short or tangled, pulled their skirts up or down, tied or untied their bootlaces."

Children wandered in and out of Schiele's studio in Vienna: during his sojourns in the country in Krumau and later in Neulengbach, he drew children from the neighbourhood on countless occasions. Sometimes his preferred technique was to use watercolours. In 1911, for example, he mostly worked with water-soluble paints which flow over the paper and do not cover it very densely. As a result, the paper on which Schiele was drawing continued to shine through. Mostly he simply placed the children, like his figures in general, on an empty sheet of paper. He provided no details about the space around them. This is also true of the girl in the yellow-ochre dress gazing at us earnestly with her big, dark eyes and her hands folded. The child is probably sitting, but Schiele does not even tell us that much. He concentrates entirely on the people he is portraying. And as in his portraits of adults, Schiele does not prettify the children's likenesses in any way. The girls and boys he draws have dirty hands or marks on their faces; they are quite often shown wearing torn clothing. Only a few of them look happy or playful.

Schiele's contemporaries were suspicious of the fact that he drew children in the first place, all the more so because he sometimes showed them half-naked. Even in Vienna he created a scandal which his artist colleagues warned him about. It would not be long before their concerns were confirmed.



Hermits, 1912

Oil on canvas

181 × 181 cm

Leopold Museum, Vienna

In 1912 Schiele turned his attention to a new subject: he developed an allegorical level in his pictures—and frequently in very large formats. In *Hermits*, for example, two men in long dark habits clinging to each other in a barren, bleak landscape. The two figures are so closely intertwined that they seem to have become fused together. We viewers look slightly upwards towards them, which heightens the block-like impression still further. The younger of the two men has his eyes open, while the older man at his side seems to be dreaming with his eyes closed. Schiele has portrayed himself in the figure on the left, while many researchers see the man on the right as his mentor Gustav Klimt. Schiele himself, however, made no comment about this when he described the picture to the collector Carl Reininghaus. His interest did not lie in a realistic representation: "It is not a grey sky, but a grieving world in which the two bodies are moving; they have grown up in it alone, emerging organically from the ground; this entire world together with the figures aims to portray the 'frailty' of all beings [!]."

It was not only the melancholy, unwieldy subjects which impeded the sale of such works at the time; so, too, did their monumental size: the *Hermits*, for example, measures 180 by 180 centimetres. Schiele did not dispute the fact that such pictures were virtually unsalable; at the same time, they were also both time-consuming and hard work, and expensive with regard to the materials required. He told people that the allegories were of value to him alone. He saw himself as a prophet who had been called upon to paint—and who was also misunderstood by society. With this comment, the artist was reacting to the sentence he received in April 1912, after he had had to spend three days in prison because of drawings the authorities considered indecent. After his time in prison, he presented himself on a number of occasions as a hermit, a monk or a preacher. He initially remained faithful to these weighty themes.



Portrait of Wally Neuzil, 1912

Oil on panel

32.7 × 39.8 cm

Leopold Museum, Vienna

The portrait of Wally Neuzil is regarded as the counterpart of Schiele's *Self-Portrait with Lampion Fruits*, which was produced at more or less the same time (pages 70/71). Wally's portrait has had a turbulent history, which was only reviewed in its entirety a few years ago. It shows how important it is to research the provenance of pictures in order to rectify possible injustice.

The little oil picture originally belonged to the Jewish art dealer Lea Bondi Jaray, who had to flee from Vienna in 1939 and whose property was expropriated by the National Socialists. After the war the portrait was erroneously returned not to her but to another collector. He in turn sold the picture to the Belvedere. The collector Rudolf Leopold acquired it from the latter.

It was only in 1997 that things started to happen. This was the year in which the New York Museum of Modern Art showed a major exhibition with works from the Leopold Collection, including the portrait of Wally Neuzil. At the end of the exhibition, it was confiscated by the United States authorities as stolen property, because the heirs of Lea Bondi Jaray in New York laid claim to the picture. This was the beginning of a legal battle which lasted for over ten years. It was unclear whether Leopold would be compelled to return the painting to its original owner. In the meantime, the case has been resolved and Wally's portrait has returned to Vienna to the Museum Leopold: in 2010 Rudolf Leopold's heirs purchased it from the heirs of the original owner for almost € 10 million. In this context, it was not only the history of Wally's portrait that was being reviewed: in 1998 Austria passed a law regarding the restitution of artworks, thereby enabling the return of confiscated art.



Female Lovers, 1915

Pencil and gouache

32.8 × 49.7 cm

Albertina, Vienna

Throughout his life Schiele drew naked or semi-naked female figures. Sometimes he showed them as couples, but mostly he drew them alone. His method of representation changed over time: in his early works Schiele often portrays a direct sexuality, women who gaze at the viewer and thus draw him or her into the picture. This changed after his traumatic experience in Neulengbach, where one of his drawings was burned in public. In the works that were created after this event, Schiele's eroticism is more concealed. He plays with forms and colours, tests poses in which the figures look still and contorted. Many of the female figures he drew in 1915 look almost doll-like.

With her button-like eyes the right-hand figure in the drawing from the Albertina in particular looks more like a jointed doll than a human being. The colours, too, seem far removed from nature as a slightly greenish tone has spread across the body. Here, once again, Schiele is breaking with taboos: in works like the *Female Lovers* he focuses on something which society of the time would have preferred to remain hidden.

Female nudes account for a large part of Schiele's oeuvre, but he also turned his attention to a wide range of other pictorial topics: he created portraits of fellow-artists and of his family, and he sketched landscapes, flowers and house façades. The speed with which Schiele drew repeatedly provoked comments. In this respect, the art critic Arthur Roessler's memories of his friend are important. He observed that Schiele had drawn unceasingly: "An untiring worker; as a draughtsman he became independent with remarkable speed; he was almost a virtuoso. His accurate pencil strokes flowed from his wrist. [...] He ignored no opportunity [for drawing]; and so we can understand that he always had a pencil in his hand, not only in his studio, but also in the open air, on the train, during journeys and in company during a conversation."

