







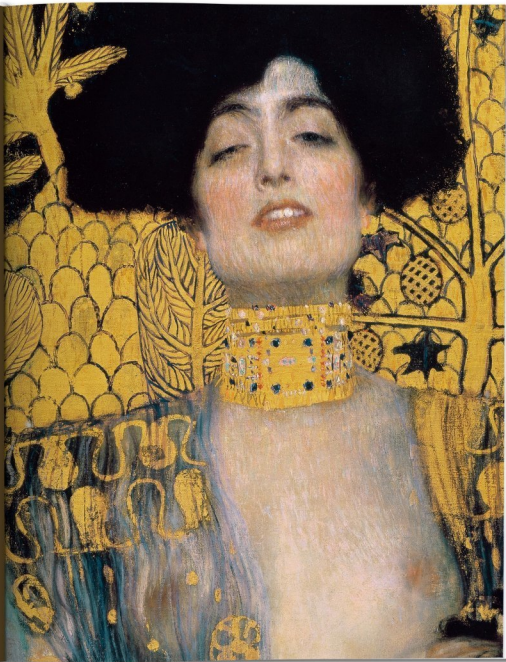
IV.

Paintings of women

Susanna Patsch

"... he let them rigidify to a certain extent and almost turned them into artificial pieces of jewellery, just as if – amongst nothing but jewels – they had been transformed and forged into jewels themselves."

— FRANZ SERVAES, 1911/12





Detail of
Portrait of Milda Prémont, 1913
cat. 2, p. 166

The Prémont siblings, 1920
Paragraph
Private collection

of floral motifs was one that Klimt had already employed in his *Portrait of Santa Feigs*. The same device is reinforced with golden ornaments in *Judith I* and expressed in more geometric terms in the *Portrait of Emilie Fligg*. This tendency continues in the portraits of *Margaret Scarborough-Wirgenstein* (pp. 88, 221; Cat. 18) and *Finist Boudier* (p. 120; Cat. 170) and reaches its high point, of course, in that of *Adèle Bloch-Bauer I* (pp. 222-23; Cat. 174).

Lady in gold

Adèle Bloch-Bauer I is the only portrait by Klimt that can truly be assigned to his 'golden style'. His use of gold in the *Bourgeois Prince* and above all in the *Socialist figure* is found on the same scale in only two other paintings: *The Kiss* and in the *Portrait of Adèle Bloch-Bauer I*. What Klimt had achieved in his other portraits through his choice of colors, he here amplified through the use of gold: the reduction of the female body to ornament.

The square picture portrays Adèle Bloch-Bauer in a gold dress and seated in a gold chair against a gold background and a green plinth base. The individual elements are recognizable solely through the fact that Klimt has painted ornaments in other colors – primarily silver and black, but also yellow, orange, blue, grey and brown – on top of the gold. Thus the arms of the chair are decorated with dove motifs, which appear top left above the sitter's head. This is evidently all we can see of the back of the architrave, which appears to be largely obscured by a form or structure similar to that visible behind the head of Emilie Fligg. It consists of various circular and almond-shaped forms, bounded at the sides by squares, those on the right very much smaller than those on the left. Klimt's preliminary sketches suggest that this form might have been intended as a cushion.

The sitter's head is seen directly in front of it. But if her dark hair, dark eyes and mouth stand out within her face, her complexion hardly distinguishes itself in color from the surrounding gold. This contrast is even weaker in her décolleté and arms, whose yellowish hair approaches that of gold. Adèle Bloch-Bauer is wearing a close-fitting dress that is patterned with eyes inside triangles, which recall both Egyptian hieroglyphs and the Christian eyes of God. These are combined with a host of other smaller triangles, chiefly silver, all pointing towards the left. In Klimt's work, these small triangles embody the male principle, following a contemporary convention established above all by the Austrian philosopher Otto Weininger (1860–1903).

The dress allows us to sense the body beneath it, but also suggests that the figure may be standing. It is bounded in turn by fabric sweeping upwards on either side, in shape that is rigid but which at the same time recalls fields of material through the animated strokes of the brush. The little triangles, this time in gold and pointing upwards, are joined by squares containing Japanese ornaments as found on the dress worn by Emilie Fligg, along with other symbols that call to mind the signs in the Klimt Portfolio issued in translation as from 1908. The letters A and B, in the initial of Adèle Bloch, who did not add her maiden name to her married name until 1907, also make repeated appearances. Klimt's signature and the date 1907 are found in another such square on the right-hand edge of the picture.

Whether the fabric represents a cloak (Nasser-Freud 2000, p. 16; Nasser 2007a, p. 28) or part of the sitter's actual dress (Kopp-Kügler 2006, p. 388) is difficult to

judge, even with the aid of the preparatory drawings. Alisa Szauld lists some one hundred such drawings (Szauld, vol. 1, 1976, nos. 014–016, and vol. 2, 1976, nos. 310–312c). They show that Klimt drew Adèle Bloch-Bauer both seated and standing – as he explored ideas for her portrait from 1903 onwards.

Klimt received the commission just after he had seen the Brazilian monies in women churches in Barcelona. The standing portrait has been rightly associated with these monies. These figures are situated in the celestial sphere, which is left its magnificent expression in gold. The last vestige of perspective, as (left) known from the art of antiquity, were thereby also diminished.

Klimt also renounced the use of perspective, but in the *Portrait of Adèle Bloch-Bauer I* may legitimately be compared with the (seated) portraits in San Vitale in Ravenna, so it should be remembered that in 1907 Pablo Picasso (1881–1973) also abandoned perspective from his picture of *Les Femmes d'Alger* (New York, The Museum of Modern Art, as did Wassily Kandinsky (1866–1944) in his early *Marina Landscape*. Although Klimt, with ornament, took a different path towards abstraction, he was nonetheless in alignment in a certain manner with the spirit of the age.

In *Les Femmes d'Alger* and the *Café* works that he produced shortly afterwards, Picasso renounced not only perspective but also ordinary coloration. Klimt did the same. He furthermore allowed *Santa Feigs*, *General Lovell* and *Margaret Scarborough-Wirgenstein* to 'vanish' into white and Emilie Fligg into blue. In the case of Adèle Bloch-Bauer, he chose the material of gold. Perhaps he was thereby fulfilling a wish expressed by his client. Perhaps he could afford the gold for the portrait only because the sugar manufacture was prepared to pay him such a high fee. The attempt to see echoes of a (past) love affair in Klimt's use of gold seems to me absurd. Whether such a relationship ever existed must remain open.

Anonymous women in hats

Five years later Klimt painted a second portrait of Adèle Bloch-Bauer. The paintings of women that he produced during the intervening period were not conventional portraits but pictures of contemporary female figures. There was, recall to the fact that Klimt's 'golden period' had ended with *The Kiss* and the *Socialist figure*. An example is the *Lady with a Hat and Feather Boa* (p. 126; Cat. 191), executed around 1910, in which Klimt employs an entirely different palette and compositional approach.

The picture, slightly taller than it is wide, employs a dark background, executed in broad brushstrokes that in many places reveal pale strokes reminiscent of points of light. This suggests a metropolitan setting, as does the broad band running horizontally across the centre of the canvas, in which red, green and yellow forms appear to glow like light. To interrupt these as well, there are strong, however, as if random, white, the conservative who opposed the painting, was convincingly able to show, they are in fact rapidly drawn Asian figures on a chest of drawers (Stöber 1993). This can be most easily recognized in the yellow metal sculpture on the left-hand side, which represents a figure reclining on an ottoman. Dimly in front of the colorized horizontal strip is the sitter's head, or rather what can be glimpsed of it, dressed in wide-brimmed hat and a black feather band that conceals the lower part of her face, only her half-lowered eyes are visible beneath this, arching eyebrows, a slender nose and as upper lip-lowered





View of the dining room in the
Villa Kalpa in Vienna, 1915
Photograph
ImaginArt/Artista Architects

Portrait of Sanna Kalpa, 1911
Oil on canvas, 542 x 141 cm /
21 x 57 1/2 in.
Vienna, Schwedler