

☞ The Naked Truth. Gustav Klimt and his Vienna around 1900

As of July 14, 2022



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About the Exhibition

On the occasion of the 160th anniversary of the birth of Gustav Klimt (1862–1918), the Theatermuseum is showcasing one of this great painter and graphic artist's most important paintings, his *Nuda Veritas* (1899), against the backdrop of radical artistic reform movements in Vienna around 1900.

Vienna around 1900 was shaped by a mood of departure in the artistic, intellectual, and academic fields. The city saw a unique concentration of cultural achievements that formed the ground of the Viennese Modernism. When Gustav Klimt first exhibited his painting *Nuda Veritas* in 1899, he was the first president of the Vienna Secession since its foundation in 1897 and one of the movement's figureheads. The painting was a bid for veracity in art, pleading for uncompromising artistic representation. With this work, Klimt reacted to the lack of understanding he encountered from the public. The proverbial 'naked truth' steps forward as a life-size nude holding up a mirror to her beholders. 'Know thyself', she seems to be demanding, and Klimt crowns her with a quote from Friedrich Schiller:

‘IF YOUR DEEDS AND YOUR ART CANNOT PLEASE EVERYONE = PLEASE A FEW. TO PLEASE MANY IS TERRIBLE.’

A radical message! It says it all – and not everyone reacts with enthusiasm. The new set up of the *Nuda Veritas* room at the Theatermuseum positions important contemporary artists next to this deeply symbolic painting: people who, quite as the work demands, found their affirmation and their guides in their own creations: Hermann Bahr, Anna Bahr-Mildenburg, Joseph Maria Olbrich, Gustav Mahler as well as Alfred and Mileva Roller.

Hermann Bahr (1863–1934), writer and playwright as well as a critic of theatre and the arts, is one of the most important proponents of the Viennese Modernism. He propagates the Secession, which had been founded in 1897, and advises their medium *Ver Sacrum* for which he also acts as board council in the beginning. Bahr also plays an important role in supporting the literary Jung-Wien association. When he first sees Klimt's *Nuda Veritas* during the Secession's fourth exhibition, he is taken by it on the spot. He purchases the painting for the study in his villa in the Viennese suburb of Ober Sankt Veit, which had been designed and fitted out by **Joseph Maria Olbrich** (1897–1908), the architect of the Secession building. He passionately defends the painter in the debates raging around Gustav Klimt's works, especially the scandal triggered by the Faculty Paintings. Together with Koloman Moser, he publishes *Gegen Klimt* in 1902, a collection of vilifications by various journalists. The two editors considered these texts to debunk themselves.

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Until his death, Hermann Bahr turns to the *Nuda Veritas* as a recurrent source of motivation, inspiration, and comfort. He writes: ‚And thus I have lived with it eye to eye for eighteen years, and if I ever tire, I look there and I am able to go on.‘

Anna Bahr-Mildenburg (1872–1947) is one of the stars of the Vienna Court Opera, a celebrated Wagner singer and one of those company members who readily supports the opera reform initiated by the director of the time, Gustav Mahler. In 1904, the singer starts a love affair with Hermann Bahr, and the couple is married after Bahr’s divorce from the actress Rosa Jokl (1871–1940). Anna Bahr-Mildenburg and her husband are passionate collectors. Following her death, the couple’s extensive estate entered the Austrian National Library’s theatre collection, which would go on to become the current Theatermuseum. This is how Gustav Klimt’s *Nuda Veritas*, as well as letters, essays, and countless artist memorabilia, found a new home in Palais Lobkowitz.

An uncompromising artistic veracity as postulated by Gustav Klimt is also a guiding principle for the director of the Vienna Court Opera, **Gustav Mahler** (1860–1911), and his congenial stage designer **Alfred Roller** (1864–1935), one of the co-founders of the Vienna Secession. The composer and conductor Gustav Mahler chooses Richard Wagner’s opera *Lohengrin* for his inaugural performance in 1897. As soon as 1906, he replaces the production with a new one. Deeply dissatisfied with the theatrical realization that had hitherto been commonplace for dramas and operas, he starts to reform this aspect of stage life together with Alfred Roller. In doing so, they let themselves be guided by Richard Wagner’s notion of a Gesamtkunstwerk. The opera reform aims to unleash a storm of great emotion under the aegis of sophisticated direction. Their efforts are met by both exultation and fierce criticism, peppered with antisemitic attacks on Mahler. In 1907, Mahler responds, after great internal conflicts, by resigning from the Vienna Court Opera. On 27 February 1906, Alfred Roller writes to his wife, the painter and illustrator **Mileva Roller** (1886–1949): ‚They are just playing the last scene of the new Lohengrin down below. It went rather well, accompanied by the usual immoderate excitement from all concerned parties. I’m all done for, but that is just today. Had a lot of trouble. The strife among the theatre and newspaper people is spawning new, juicy fruit.‘

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In the exhibition room, the unusual, upright rectangular painting is joined by items of furniture designed by Joseph Maria Olbrich as well as photographs from Hermann Bahr's villa in order to illustrate how the *Nuda Veritas* fitted into Bahr's private everyday life. Further objects selected for the new presentation refer to the seminal *Lohengrin* production from 1906. Anna Bahr-Mildenburg, who liked to show herself as a Jugendstil icon on photographs, was brilliant in the role of the plotting and malicious Ortrud. Her elaborate costume was designed by Alfred Roller. It is positioned, next to a photograph of the singer in her role, on the opposite side of the room in order to serve as antithesis to the 'naked truth'. For the new setting the stage design model from *Lohengrin* was intricately restored by the 'Österreichisches Kostüm- und Dekorationsatelier' following Alfred Roller's designs in order to give visitors an impression of the contemporaneous stage design. The model is flanked by Roller's valuable figurines, which create an atmospheric mood beyond the historical details of the costume, quite as intended by the Secessionist style and by Mileva Roller's drafted bill for the 1908 Vienna Kunstschau exhibition

Marie-Theres Arnbom, director of the Theatermuseum and curator of the newly designed *Nuda Veritas* room: 'Gustav Klimt was at the centre of a radical renewal that manifested itself in many different fields. On the one hand, there was painting with its vehement and emotional discussions surrounding the Secession, and on the other hand, there was the world of opera, where Gustav Mahler unleashed equally emotional conflicts and was furthermore confronted by violent antisemitic attacks. Hermann Bahr and the Jung-Wien movement also set new, radical standards. It was an exciting era of departure that at the same time saw the creation of so much that was new.'

Another person influenced by Gustav Klimt's call was **Richard Teschner** (1879–1948). The painter, illustrator, sculptor, and puppeteer was one of the most important Jugendstil artists. On the occasion of the 1908 Kunstschau featuring his allegorical glass mosaics *Painting* and *Sculpture*, the media dubbed him the 'Prague branch' of the group around Klimt. He was personally acquainted with Klimt from many summer visits to the Paulick family villa on Attersee, being connected to the family by his marriage to Pauline. His estate, which contained prints as well as partly gilded flat glass mosaics, the deeply expressive stick puppets and the 'Figurenspiegel-Bühne' (Magic Mirror) he had conceived, are among the treasures of the Theatermuseum. The public is invited to view this gem right next to the newly arranged *Nuda Veritas* room.

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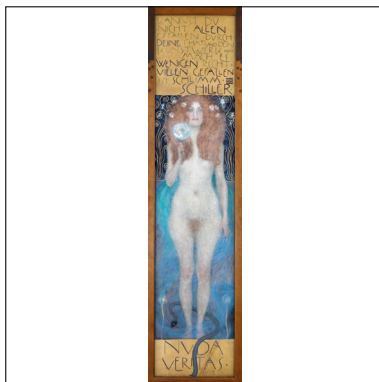
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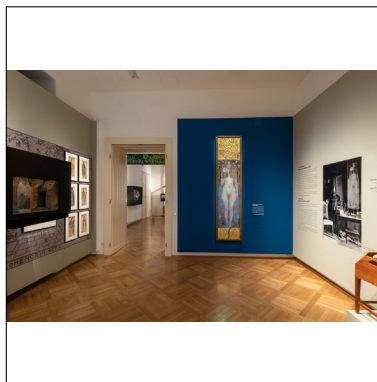
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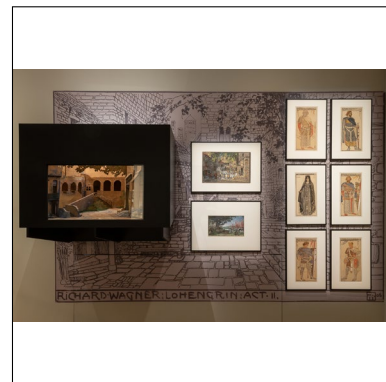
Photos are free of charge in relation to the press coverage of the exhibition.
They are available for download under www.theatermuseum.at/presse/



1_ *Nuda Veritas* (1899)
Gustav Klimt (1862-1918),
Theatermuseum © KHM-Museumsverband



2_ Exhibition view
Theatermuseum © KHM-Museumsverband



3_ Exhibition view
Theatermuseum © KHM-Museumsverband



4_ Exhibition view
Theatermuseum © KHM-Museumsverband



5_ Costume (detail) of Ortrud from
Lohengrin by Richard Wagner.
Design Alfred Roller (1864-1935)
Vienna Court Opera, 1906
Theatermuseum © KHM-Museumsverband



6_ Draft of a bill (not realized) for the
1908 Vienna Kunstschau exhibition
Mileva Roller (1886-1949)
Theatermuseum © KHM-Museumsverband

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Daily except Tue 10 am – 6 pm
Admittance until 30 minutes before closure.

Entrance fees

Annual ticket	€ 49
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Adults	€ 12
with Vienna Card	€ 11
Concessions	€ 9
Children and Youth under 19	free

The Annual Family Ticket € 79*

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More information under: www.khm.at/familie

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