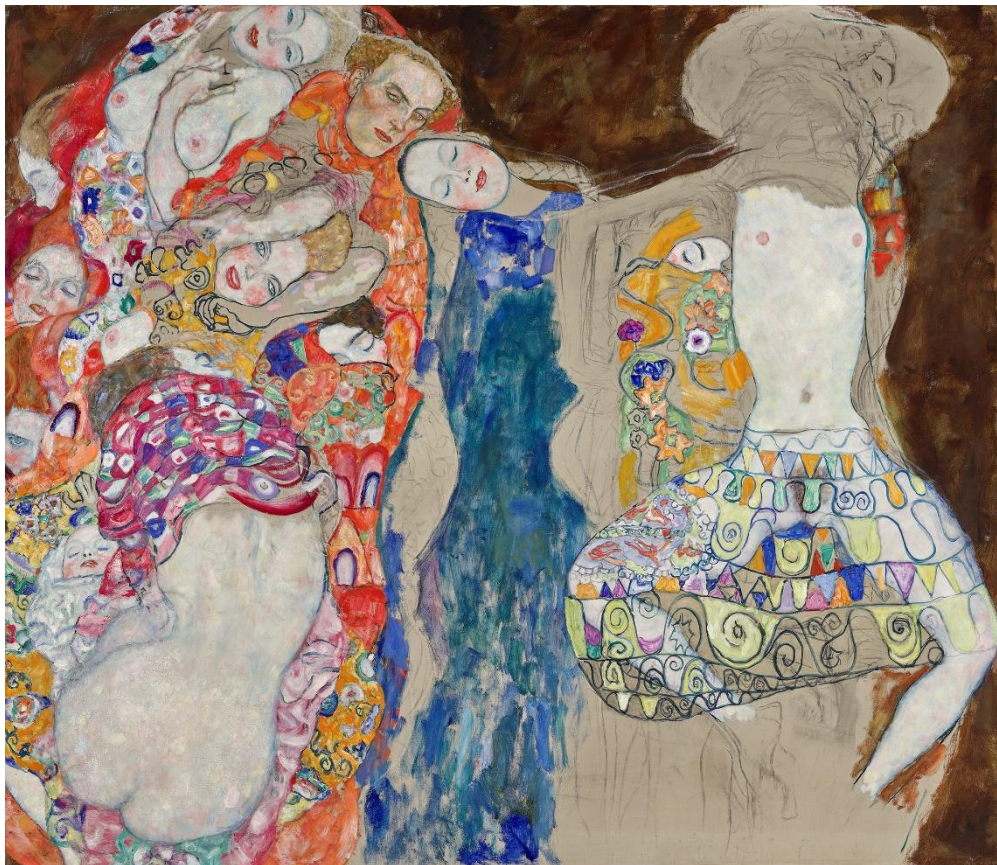


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IN-SIGHT GUSTAV KLIMT. THE BRIDE

Upper Belvedere
15 May to 5 October 2025



Gustav Klimt, *The Bride*, 1917/18 (unfinished)
Klimt Foundation, Vienna, on loan in the Belvedere, Vienna
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Gustav Klimt's *The Bride* is one of the most fascinating and enigmatic paintings by the Viennese artist. This exhibition, a joint project with the nonprofit Klimt Foundation, is not only dedicated to the artwork itself but also examines the context in which it was created. It spotlights Klimt's legendary studio on Feldmühlgasse in Vienna's Hietzing district and presents numerous drawings and sketches related to the work, in addition to the latest technical analysis of the painting.

General Director Stella Rollig: The series IN-SIGHT usually shows works from the Belvedere's collection. However, this exhibition about Klimt's The Bride focuses on a painting that does not belong to the museum but has enriched it for years—on loan from a private collection since 1963 and from the Klimt Foundation since 2013. The Belvedere is fortunate to be able to include this work in its displays as it fits perfectly with the rest of the museum's Klimt collection. Indeed, as a large-scale allegorical depiction, similarities can be drawn between The Bride and Klimt's iconic work The Kiss (Lovers), which is also conceived as an allegory.

Klimt had started work on this large-scale painting by 1917 at the latest. After his sudden death in February 1918, the painting remained unfinished in his studio on Feldmühlgasse in the Hietzing district of Vienna. A place of inspiration and retreat, this studio played a pivotal role in Klimt's final years. Contemporary voices convey personal impressions of his workplace and of Klimt as a person and artist. These include accounts by his fellow painters Egon Schiele and Felix Albrecht Harta, writings of author Arthur Schnitzler and Japanese artist Kijiro Ota, in addition to reminiscences by Friederike Maria Beer, who was portrayed by Klimt, and his patron Eugenia Primavesi.

The Bride is one of the rare compositions with allegorical content in Gustav Klimt's oeuvre. It strikingly illustrates Klimt's artistic development within the space of a few

years—both in his visual language and in his symbolism, said Franz Smola, curator at the Belvedere.

A sequence of pencil drawings demonstrates Klimt's meticulous preparation of the figures in *The Bride*. Studies for the painting can also be found in the artist's last sketchbook, comprehensively presented to the public for the first time in the show. Furthermore, visitors will see *Adam and Eve*, another important late work by Klimt from the Belvedere's collection.

Sandra Tretter, curator at the Klimt Foundation, Vienna: This exhibition offers the rare opportunity to experience the creation of one of Gustav Klimt's most enigmatic works in all its complexity. By bringing together drawings, sketches, photographs, and eyewitness accounts, we gain a unique insight into Klimt's creative process. In particular, Klimt's last sketchbook before his death—one of the few surviving sketchbooks by the artist—allows us to trace the painter's artistic ideas and visions during the second half of 1917.

Finally, the show sheds light on the later history of *The Bride*. Who were the owners? When and where was the work exhibited? At the same time, the exhibition presents the results of recent technical examinations conducted on the painting.

EXHIBITION TEXTS

When Gustav Klimt died unexpectedly in February 1918 at the age of just fifty-five, there were unfinished paintings in his studio. Among them was the work known today as *The Bride*, which depicts a young woman surrounded by sensuously intertwined and sometimes naked bodies. The title first appeared in an art magazine a year after the artist's death. But what do we know about the origins of this painting? How did Klimt go about painting it, and what happened to it after he died? The exhibition investigates these questions from different perspectives. Accounts by contemporaries offer a vivid impression of Klimt's last studio on Feldmühlgasse in Vienna-Hietzing. Pencil drawings and Klimt's sketchbook, which he kept from June 1917 to January 1918, show how the artist carefully studied the individual figures in this composition. Technical analyses and findings discovered during the painting's restoration offer deeper structural insights. *The Bride* has been on loan to the Belvedere from a private collection since 1963. Since 2013, it has been part of the Klimt Foundation collection. In this exhibition cooperation with the nonprofit foundation, the Belvedere turns the spotlight on one of Klimt's most enigmatic paintings.

Gustav Klimt's Last Allegory

Gustav Klimt had not yet given a title to the unfinished work on his easel. But what was he working on? What was he depicting? In the center of the painting is a young woman clad entirely in blue, her head dreamily inclined toward the man on the left of the picture. He is surrounded by sensuously intertwined bodies. A sleeping baby can also be seen among the colorful fabrics. But the man's gaze is focused solely on the woman at his side. The female nude on the right of the picture is unfinished. A number of preliminary sketches show that the artist was searching for the ideal position of the head. We can only speculate how Klimt intended the picture to turn out. The painting and the many figures in it remain an enigma. Is Klimt's subject (unrequited) male desire? Or is it a metaphor for the transition of a woman from childhood to adulthood and motherhood? For the last time in this large allegorical work, Klimt presents the relationship between man and woman.

Searching for the Perfect Pose

Gustav Klimt made drawings not only in preparation for his paintings but also often as independent works. Over five thousand of them have survived today. Female nudes were among Klimt's most frequent motifs. The artist worked with live models and often had them pose reclining in his studio. He completed around 120 pencil drawings in preparation for *The Bride*, in which he studied the positions of the figures in minute detail

Sketchbook

Gustav Klimt is thought to have filled more than fifty sketchbooks during his lifetime with spontaneous "idea sketches." Almost all of them were destroyed in a fire in 1945. His last sketchbook has survived and is dated by him as covering the period from June 22, 1917, to January 2, 1918. Apart from works that have been destroyed or are no longer traceable today, it also contains previously unexplored aspects of the artist's work, including religious themes. There are also many sketches for the oil painting *The Bride*, mainly studies for the unfinished female nude on the right of the picture, with designs for the ornamentation of the dress and thoughts about the direction of her gaze. The distinctive tilt of the center figure's head can be seen in the sketchbook as well. The regular oval shape of the face recalls Japanese Nō theater masks. The composition of the intertwined figures on the left of the painting was also already worked out in the sketchbook.

Gustav Klimt, *Adam and Eve*

Eve is in the foreground with her gaze directed at the viewer. Adam is nestling tenderly against her with his eyes closed. The unfinished work is usually thought to have been painted in 1917, the last year in which Klimt worked. But according to a diary entry by fellow artist Felix Albrecht Harta, the painting probably already existed in its present form in June 1916. A year later, Gustav Klimt started work on *The Bride*, which shares formal similarities with *Adam and Eve*. The central figure in *The Bride* has a comparable tilt of the head and shape of the face as Eve. The facial features of the two male figures also show parallels, as a study of Adam by Klimt demonstrates.

Looking Under the Surface

The unfinished state of Gustav Klimt's *The Bride* enables viewers to understand more about the way the artist worked. Technical examinations also give a more detailed view under the surface of the painting, allowing us to reconstruct the painter's creative process step by step. Klimt first primed the canvas with light-colored paint and drew on it his initial concept in charcoal, which he protected from smudging with a thin layer of resin. Then he applied the oil paint. White lines on this layer of paint indicate that Klimt constantly considered making corrections. He also changed the position of the canvas on the stretcher frame and moved it a few centimeters to the right, as can be seen by the left-hand fold-over edge and the visible tack holes. During the restoration it was possible to reconstruct the space between the central figure and the intertwined group of figures. Historical photos show traces of ornamentation that are thought to have disappeared in the early 1930s.

On the History of the Painting

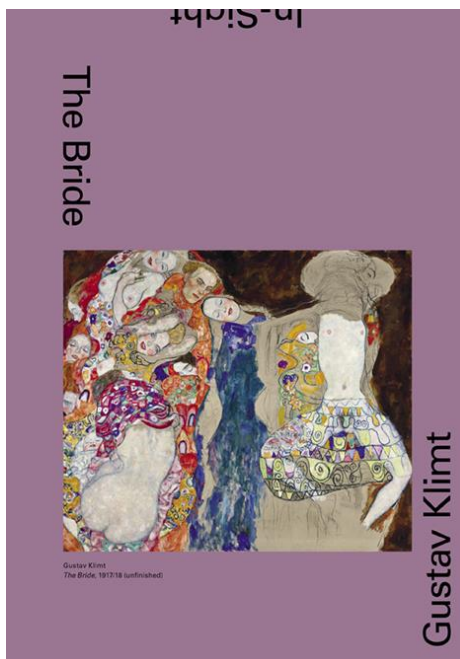
Emilie Flöge (1874–1952), Klimt's lifelong confidante, inherited *The Bride* in 1918 from the artist's estate. Flöge retained the title to the painting from 1918 until at least February 1948. From 1925 onward, she lent *The Bride* to various exhibitions, including the commemorative exhibition marking the tenth anniversary of Klimt's death in 1928 at the Vienna Secession and presentations of Austrian art in Paris and Bern in 1937. From 1929 to 1933, *The Bride* was on display at the Modern Gallery in the Orangery of the Lower Belvedere. In 1943 the painting was shown in the Klimt retrospective at the Secession building in Vienna. By 1952 at the latest, Gustav Ucicky (1899–1961) had acquired *The Bride* from Emilie Flöge. In the 1920s, Klimt's illegitimate son had already started a collection of his father's works, which included paintings expropriated from their Jewish owners. From his youth, Ucicky worked as a cameraman and later as a film director. With propaganda films such as *Heimkehr* (Homecoming, 1941), he became one of the leading film directors of the Nazi era. In 1957 he gave *The Bride* to his third wife, Ursula Lena Ucicky, née Kohn, as a wedding present. She in turn lent the painting to the Austrian Gallery in 1963. From 1981 *The Bride* was on display at the reorganized Gallery of the

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Twentieth Century in the Upper Belvedere. In 2013 Ursula Lena Ucicky included it in the nonprofit Klimt Foundation cofounded by her.

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EXHIBITION CATALOGUE



IN-SIGHT: Gustav Klimt. The Bride

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GUSTAV KLIMT BIOGRAPHY

1862–75

Born on July 14, 1862 in Baumgarten near Vienna; several moves during his early years within the present-day Vienna districts of Josefstadt, Neubau, Mariahilf, and Rudolfsheim-Fünfhaus.

1876–78/79

Entrance examination for the Imperial Royal School of Applied Arts (now University of Applied Arts Vienna); preparatory classes with brother Ernst and Franz Matsch; joint use of a studio in the school; establishment of the Künstler-Compagnie (Artists' Company); admission following preparatory years to Ferdinand Laufberger's class, later taken over by Julius Victor Berger.

1880–85

First notable commissions for Viennese residences and theater decorations in Bohemia, including the first major commission for Reichenberg Municipal Theater (1882/83, now Divadlo F. X. Šaldy, Liberec, Czech Republic); from 1883 new joint studio at Sandwirtgasse 8 in Vienna; further commissions for Peleş Castle, Romania (1883), and the municipal theaters of Fiume/Rijeka (1884) and Karlsbad/Karlovy Vary (1884);

participation in the decoration of the Hermesvilla in Lainz near Vienna (1885).

1886/87

Decoration of the staircases of the Imperial Royal Court Theater (now Burgtheater).

1888/89

Golden Cross of Merit; first meeting with August and Serena Lederer, who were to become his most important patrons; visits to Kraków, Trieste, Munich, Gmunden, and elsewhere.

1890

Emperor's Prize for the auditorium of the Old Burgtheater (1888/89); Künstler-Compagnie art collective is commissioned to decorate the staircase of the Imperial Royal Museum of Art History (now Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna); new studio for the Künstler-Compagnie at Josefstädter Strasse 21.

1891

Marriage of Ernst Klimt and Helene Flöge; frequent contact with Helene's sister, fashion designer Emilie Flöge, Klimt's future life companion, who took custody of *The Bride* after Klimt's death.

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1892

Death of father and brother Ernst.

1893

Silver State Medal for the theater auditorium at Esterházy Palace in Totis/Tata, Hungary; design of the overdoors *Music* (1897/98) and *Schubert at the Piano* (1899) in Palais Dumba (paintings destroyed in the fire at Schloss Immendorf in May 1945).

1894

Klimt and Matsch are commissioned to design the ceiling paintings in the Great Hall (formerly aula) of the University of Vienna; several designs for and completion of the scandal-ridden allegories *Philosophy* (1898–1900), *Medicine* (1898–1901), and *Jurisprudence* (1898–1903) with minor alterations until 1907, Klimt's last public commission; these three large-format paintings and other works by Klimt were destroyed in the fire at Schloss Immendorf in Lower Austria in May 1945.

1897

Founding of the Vereinigung bildender Künstler Österreichs Secession (Association of Austrian Artists—Secession) with Klimt as its first president; resignation from the Künstlerhaus.

1898

Opening of the first exhibition by the new association with poster and catalog cover by Klimt; Sonja Knips sits as model for the first square-format portrait.

1899

First square-format landscape paintings; birth of Klimt's first illegitimate son, Gustav Ucicky, later owner of *The Bride*.

1900

First summer vacation in Litzlberg on the Attersee; participation in the World's Fair in Paris (prize).

1901/02

Work in the summer on sketches for the *Beethoven Frieze*; presentation of the frieze the following year at the Vienna Secession.

1903/04

Commission by Ferdinand Bloch-Bauer for the first portrait of his wife, Adele; design of the Stoclet Frieze the following year.

1905

Withdrawal from Faculty Painting project; resignation from the Vienna Secession.

1906

Frequent travel; honorary member of the Royal Academy of Fine Arts Munich.

1907

First meeting (probably) with Egon Schiele; completion of *Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer I*.

1908

Kunstschau Wien art exhibition in Vienna; purchase of *The Kiss (Lovers)* for the Modern Gallery; publication of the first consignment of the portfolio *The Work of Gustav Klimt* by Galerie Miethke; summer vacations for the next few years in Kammerl, now part of present-day Kammer-Schörfling on the Attersee.

1909/10

Internationale Kunstschau exhibition in Vienna; participation the following year in several exhibitions; start of work on the painting *Death and Life (Death and Love)*.

1911

Completion of drawings for the *Stoclet Frieze* in Brussels; participation in the International Art Exhibition in Rome; move from the studio in Josefstadt owing to demolition work after it had been photographed by Moriz Nähr, including the iconic photo of Klimt with a cat; move to last studio at Feldmühlgasse 11; photographs of Klimt outdoors taken by Pauline Hamilton.

1912

Klimt becomes president of the Bund österreichischer Künstler (Union of Austrian Artists).

1913

Frequent participation in exhibitions; stay on Lake Garda with completion of three paintings there; increased contact with Primavesi family and first portrait commission; visit to Klimt's studio by Japanese painter Kijiro Ota.

1914

Purchase of *The Virgin* (1913) by the National Gallery in Prague; visit to Palais Stoclet; stay in Bad Gastein; summer vacations from now on in Weissenbach on the Attersee; photographs of Klimt and Schiele taken by Anton Josef "Antios" Trčka; visit to Klimt's studio by Eugenia Primavesi.

1915

Death of Klimt's mother; first visit to the Primavesi family's country house in Winkelsdorf/Kouty nad Desnou; visit to Klimt's studio by Arthur Schnitzler and his wife, and Friederike Maria Beer.

1916

Wiener Kunstschau exhibition in Berlin with participation of Klimt, Egon Schiele, and Oskar Kokoschka; last stay on the south bank of the Attersee; visit to Klimt

at Feldmühlgasse in Vienna by Felix Albrecht Harta and others.

1917

Exhibitions in Stockholm and Copenhagen; at the latest this year start on the painting *The Bride*; studies in Klimt's last sketchbook from June 1917 to January 1918 indicate intensive work on this last allegory; photographic documentation of the studio and garden by Moriz Nähr, with famous picture of *The Bride* and *Lady with Fan* on easels in the studio; portrait sittings by Johanna Staude; purchase by Hugo Heller of the remainder of the Miethke portfolio and visit to Klimt in his studio. Walter Gropius probably also came to visit.

1918

Klimt suffers a stroke on January 11 and dies on February 6; apart from the above-mentioned paintings, *Adam and Eve* (1916–18), *Woman in White* (1917/18), *Johanna Staude* (1917/18), *Amalie Zuckerkandl* (1917/18), and *Portrait of Fräulein Lieser* (1917) remain at Feldmühlgasse; unsuccessful efforts by Schiele to take over Klimt's studio; death of Schiele, Kolo Moser, and Otto Wagner; Carl Moll and Gustav Nebehay maintain memory of Klimt through presentation of his paintings in exhibitions in Zurich and Vienna.

DIGITAL OFFERS

Gustav Klimt – The Biography

Link: <https://gkdb.link/5657-3356>



Audio extracts from Arthur Schnitzler's novella *The Bride* (around 1893)

Link: <https://gkdb.link/8980-8933>



GENERAL INFORMATION

Exhibition	IN-SIGHT: Gustav Klimt. The Bride
Curator	Franz Smola (Belvedere) and Sandra Tretter (Klimt Foundation, Vienna)
Duration	15 May to 5 October 2025
Location	Upper Belvedere, Prinz-Eugen-Straße 27, 1030 Vienna
Opening Hours	Monday to Sunday, 9 am to 6 pm
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For more information on the exhibition and high-resolution press photos please visit www.belvedere.at/en/press