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Literature Review



Reinventing Women: Gustav Klimt's Explores for Female Emotion and Expression

Mu He 📭, Mandana Barkeshli 📭²*, Reza Moayer Toroghi 📭³

- ¹ PhD Candidate, De Institute of Creative Arts and Design, UCSI University, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2 Professor, Dr., De Institute of Creative Arts and Design, UCSI University, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- ³ Assistant Professor, Dr., De Institute of Creative Arts and Design, UCSI University, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- * Corresponding Author: mandana@ucsiuniversity.edu.my

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ABSTRACT

Received: 05 Feb 2024 Accepted: 28 May2023 This study examines the depiction of women in Gustav Klimt's artwork and its links to the feminist movement of the early twentieth century. Klimt, a key figure in the Viennese Secession, challenged traditional constraints and championed personal expression and artistic innovation. His art broke new aesthetic ground and engaged in the era's critical debates on gender and power by reimagining women's portrayal. Furthermore, European society's social and cultural dynamics at the start of the 20th century, especially the rise of the feminist movement, provided a fertile backdrop and creative catalyst for Klimt's work. While Klimt's contributions are widely recognized, more specific analyses of how his art reflected and influenced the transformation in women's status still need to be more specific. This study details the evolution of female representations in Klimt's works through a literature review methodology, exploring how his art shaped and mirrored contemporary perceptions of women, thereby deepening the understanding of the interplay between art, societal norms, and cultural evolution.

Keywords: Gustav Klimt; Feminism; Systematic Literature Review; History; Cultural Heritage.

INTRODUCTION

At the intersection of art and feminism, scholarship has increasingly focused on exploration, discussion, and reinterpretation (Sherman, 2023). During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Europe experienced significant changes in women's roles, aligning with the rise of feminism as a force for societal transformation (Skov & Nadal, 2020). Women began challenging traditional norms, striving for educational and economic independence and new forms of self-expression in art and literature (Maloni, 2009; Baker, 2017). These movements resonated with the artistic innovations of the Viennese Secession, which advocated for individual freedom and critiqued oppressive traditions, thereby shaping new identities for women within the socio-political context of the era (Ganser, 2009).

Gustav Klimt, a symbolist painter from Austria, emerged as a prominent figure of the Vienna Secession (Gürbüz, 2008; Husslein-Arco et al., 2015). His art, known for its decorative style, drew from the artistic traditions of the 17th and 18th centuries (Skov & Nadal, 2020). Decorativeness in art, defined by the arrangement and treatment of elements like composition, form, color, and materials, evokes emotions and creates aesthetic appeal (Gharezeddin & Sedon, 2023; López Pérez, 2023). In modern contexts, this style is viewed as a transformation of natural images and a medium for emotional expression (Liu, 2013).

Klimt's works blend Eastern and Western artistic traditions and techniques, creating a distinctive style of decorative symbolism (The Getty Center, 2012; Karaahmetoğlu, 2014). His frequent use of gold leaf and intricate patterns highlights this decorative approach (Gürbüz, 2008; Liu, 2013).

The gender and psychological themes in Klimt's art, especially his portrayal of women, challenge traditional female roles and echo the rise of feminist ideologies (Qiu, 2022). While Klimt's artistic portrayal of women is

celebrated for its aesthetic value (Alseaidy, 2021; Qiu, 2022; Devens Ortlieb, 2023), further research is needed to fully understand how his depictions reflect and influence changes in women's social positions. Klimt's paintings often depict women as strong and autonomous, challenging conventional authority and gender roles, thus portraying them in more complex and diverse societal roles (Graham, 1993; Sármány-Parsons, 2012; Lampl, 2018).

Klimt's bold depiction of female identity and sexuality marks a departure from traditional representations of women as passive aesthetic objects (Stricker, 2000; Lampl, 2018). His work presents women as self-aware and erotic subjects, contrasting sharply with the prevailing norms of female chastity and purity (Mox, 2015; Woock & Arbeit, 2020). This artistic approach mirrors women's evolving status and anticipates broader social changes toward gender equality and emancipation (Stricker, 2000; Woock & Arbeit, 2020).

Moreover, Klimt's art reflects profound socio-cultural shifts. The Industrial Revolution's impact on social structures and individual lives allowed women to challenge traditional gender roles and family structures (Hunyady & Sauvayre, 2014). Previous studies often overlook how Klimt's artwork critiques these societal expectations (Quell, 2010), a gap this study aims to address by providing a more comprehensive understanding of Klimt's engagement with his times.

This paper uses a systematic literature review to investigate Klimt's unique representation of women. The research aims to understand how Klimt's art challenges and redefines traditional female roles. It also explores the connection between Klimt's decorative style and modern feminism, mainly focusing on themes of women's power, desire, and social positioning. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of the interplay between Klimt's artwork and the broader feminist discourse.

This systematic literature review investigates the expression of feminist perspectives in the decorative arts of Gustav Klimt's paintings. By analyzing the female figures in Klimt's works, the study delves into his art's cultural connotations and symbolism. Additionally, it explores the impact of Klimt's paintings on contemporary feminism, women's understanding of gender, and their status in society. Through a comprehensive examination of related literature, the study reveals the artistic characteristics and feminist connotations embedded in Klimt's decorative arts, highlighting how his work reflects and influences feminist discourse and perceptions of gender roles within the broader cultural and social context.

METHODOLOGY

This systematic literature review is designed to investigate Gustav Klimt's decorative art and its feminist interpretations by identifying pertinent scholarly sources. Due to the specialized nature of research on Gustav Klimt's art and its intersection with feminist themes, Google Scholar and Scopus were selected as the primary databases for literature screening in Table 1. These platforms provide extensive access to authoritative publications across the social sciences, making them ideal for this study's needs.

The choice of studies from 2010 to 2023 reflects the aim to capture contemporary discussions on feminism that the rapid evolution of social media and digital communication technologies has influenced. These developments have transformed the reach and impact of social movements, notably feminism, facilitating a global conversation that transcends cultural and geographical boundaries (Schuster, 2013; Boizot, 2019). The last decade, marked by significant movements such as #MeToo, has seen a renewed focus on gender issues and women's rights, making it a pertinent period for analysis (Boizot, 2019).

The search strategy encompassed a broad understanding of "Feminism", incorporating related terms such as "woman", "pregnant women", "motherhood", and other descriptors pertinent to women's roles. This approach ensured a comprehensive inclusion of relevant studies. Specific search strings incorporating the keywords "Gustav Klimt" and "Women" were employed following the PRISMA 2020 guidelines to facilitate an accurate and targeted literature search over the past thirteen years.

This meticulous approach to sourcing and screening literature aims to construct a nuanced understanding of how Klimt's artwork engages with and reflects feminist ideologies and societal changes concerning gender during a transformative era in global communications and social advocacy.

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Database	Search string
Scopus	(TITLE-ABS-KEY (Gustav Klimt)) AND (Woman) OR (Female) OR (Mother) OR (Feminism) OR OR (Pregnant Woman) (LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2023) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2022) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2021) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2020) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2019) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2018) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2017) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2016) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2015) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2014) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2014) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2013) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2012) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2012) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2011) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2010)) AND (LIMIT-TO (PUBSTAGE, "final")) AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE, "ar")) AND (LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA, "SOCI"))
Google Scholar	Results for ((TS= (Gustav Klimt)) AND TS= (Woman) OR TS=(Female) OR TS=(Mother) OR TS=(Feminism) OR TS=(Pregnant Woman) AND Article or Review Article (Document Types) AND LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2023-2010)

The databases used for the literature search were Scopus and Google Scholar, and the indexing terms were set to "Gustav Klimt" and "women." The indexing period was limited to the last thirteen years and was prepared with the PRISMA 2020 statement. The search is based on the following principles.

According to Figure 1, PRISMA Search is the first step, articles must be original and contain the most original data. In addition, the articles must be peer reviewed. This ensures that the articles contain valuable information for our research and maintains the quality of the articles.

Second, the topics of these articles must include Gustav Klimt and keywords that are female and related to women. If the articles did not include these two topics, they were excluded to ensure that the screened literature fit the topic of this paper.

Finally, articles were screened multiple times. In the search strategy, the keywords of the articles were retrieved first. Due to time and date constraints, additional screening was performed on "original peer-reviewed articles" and "Gustav Klimt-related articles".

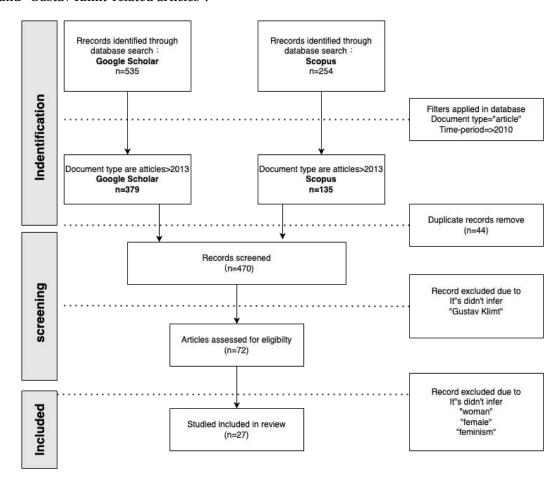


Figure 1. PRISMA Search

RESULTS

The Description of the Woman in the Graphic Decoration of the Art

In Gustav Klimt's later paintings, he frequently uses geometric patterns like squares, triangles, and circles. These shapes are either layered over each other, arranged in a repeating and orderly fashion, or combined in slightly altered forms. This method of using shapes helps to convey the core message of his artwork.

Single Line Graphic Decoration

Separatist artists, including Gustav Klimt, often incorporated elements from nature such as butterflies, flowers, and flying insects, into their designs, blending these with geometric motifs to create a unique style (Gürbüz, 2008; El Saadoon & Hadi, 2018). Klimt is known for using simple lines to exaggerate subjects in his paintings. One of his notable works, "Der Kuss" (The Kiss) (Figure 2), illustrates his early style (The Getty Center, 2012). In this painting, a man and woman are depicted in a tight embrace that resembles male genitalia, symbolizing the union of genders (Liu, 2013; Yener, 2017; Erkan, 2017). This pose represents lust, which in Western mythology is often associated with fertility and the perpetuity of love (Gürbüz, 2008; Husslein-Arco et al., 2015). The painting's use of oval and wavy lines suggests the softness and vulnerability traditionally attributed to femininity (Liu, 2013), while the depiction of the man's strong back suggests strength. Klimt suggests that women can express their power through their association with male strength (Ai, 2012; Galowitsch, 2017).

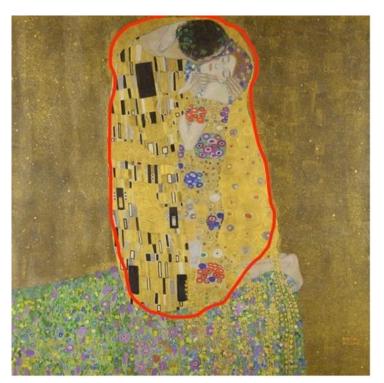


Figure 2. "Der Kuss" (Source: Rye Art)

In Gustav Klimt's painting "Danae" (Figure 3), the artist notably exaggerates the female thighs to emphasize sensuality (Gilbert & Brauckmann, 2011; Ai, 2012; Urdea, 2015). Similarly, in "Goldfish" and "Wasserschlangen" (Water Serpents) (Figure 3), Klimt enhances the female buttocks and elongates the body of a young girl with smooth lines, further accentuating female forms to convey themes of sensuality and seduction (Moratón, 2015; Yener, 2017; Cobbs, 2018). Klimt's female figures are often depicted as long and slender, with waists that twist serpentinely, evoking elegance, mystery, and allure (Uz, 2012; The Getty Center, 2012; Liu, 2013). He believed that the intrinsic charm of women was powerful enough to captivate men (Uz, 2012; Moratón, 2015; Cobbs, 2018; Lin, 2022; Göğebakan & Turan, 2022).

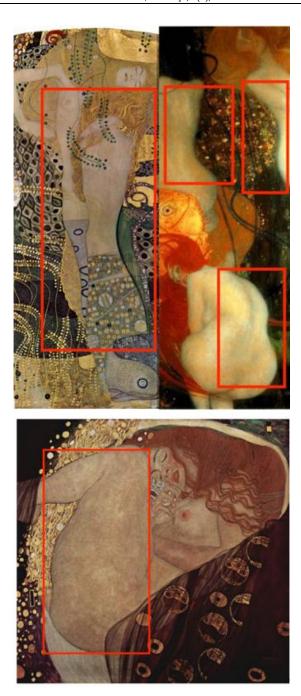


Figure 3. "Danae" on the Top Left, "Goldfish" on the Right, and "Wasserschlangen" on the Bottom (Source: Rye Art)

Repeated Symbol Decoration

Gustav Klimt specializes in using repetitive rosettes, a decorative technique frequently applied to the backgrounds of portraits or clothing to enhance his images' visual appeal (Ai, 2012). These patterns add beauty and reflect Klimt's appreciation and portrayal of female characters in his works (Cheng, 2018). For instance, in "Beethoven's Frieze Detail II" (Figure 4), the depiction of young girls in the background is highly uniform and orderly, reminiscent of the frescoes in Egyptian tombs, conveying a sense of harmonious beauty (Yener, 2017). In "Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer I," the background and attire are adorned with various geometric patterns, including circles and triangles. These elements serve decorative purposes and symbolize the intertwining of life and death, as well as the contrast between rigidity and softness (Liu, 2013; Cheng, 2018).



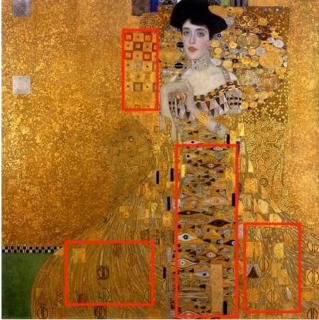


Figure 4. Above is "Beethoven Frieze Detail II" and below is "Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer I" (Source: Rye Art)

Complex Geometric Decorations

In Gustav Klimt's artwork, decorative symbols play a crucial role, with each symbol being universal and highly versatile. The spiral pattern stands out due to its historical significance as one of humanity's oldest motifs, traditionally linked to the moon, the cycle of life and death, and other natural and life concepts (Henao, 2020). This pattern is prevalent in Klimt's work, particularly in the clothing of female portraits. It can be seen in the background of the "Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer I" and the tulle ribbons of "Judith II" (Figure 6) (Hammer-Tugendhat & Zanchi, 2012; Liu, 2013; Urdea, 2015). Additionally, the motif appears in "Der Kuss," "Hope II," and "Emilie Flöge" (Uz, 2012; Liu, 2013; Galowitsch, 2017) (Figure 5).

These symbols align with the Symbolists' notion of "serpentine beauty," reflecting an appreciation for the mystical and the occult (Uz, 2012; Hammer-Tugendhat & Zanchi, 2012; Smits, 2020) (Figure 5). With the rise of women's consciousness, depictions of serpentine beauty became more prevalent in art, representing men's mixed feelings of fear and fascination with the emerging feminist movements (Gilbert & Brauckmann, 2011; Uz, 2012; Hammer-Tugendhat & Zanchi, 2012; Moratón, 2015). This trend underscores how the zeitgeist of the time influenced Klimt's artistic expression, mirroring broader societal shifts.

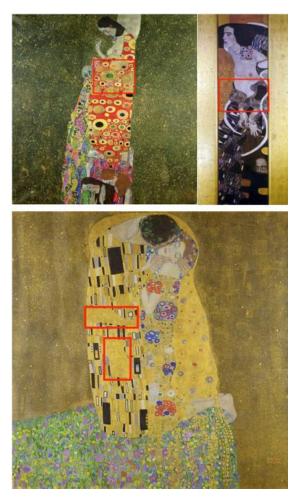


Figure 5. "Hope II" at the Top Left, "Der Kuss" at the Bottom Left, and "Judith II" at the Right (Source: Rye Art)



Figure 6. "Emilie Flöge" on the Left, "Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer I" on the Right (Source: Rye Art)

In many cultures, the spiral is recognized as a symbol of conception and life. In Gustav Klimt's painting "The Three Ages of Woman" (Figure 7), the spiral is subtly incorporated into the lower right corner of the image, hidden within the twisted blue silk. This placement, along with the depiction of a mother cradling her child, uses the symbol to convey themes of fertility and reproduction (Gilbert & Brauckmann, 2011; Karaahmetoğlu, 2014; Lin, 2022). Additionally, spiral motifs have historical significance in ancient European contexts; they were often painted at the entrances of megalithic tombs. These tombs are believed to be pathways guiding souls back to the grave, and they symbolize the womb of the 'mother goddess,' reinforcing the motif's association with fertility (Liu, 2013). In Western religious traditions, the spiral is imbued with special symbolic meanings related to reproduction and fertility, widely recognized as a sign of life and recurrence (Briggs, 2002).



Figure 7. "The Three Ages of Women" (Source: Rye Art)

Seaweed motifs are pivotal decorative elements in Gustav Klimt's paintings, exemplified by the golden seaweed motif in "Der Kuss" (Figure 8). This motif offers an abstract, dynamic representation of seaweed, vividly imitating and exaggerating plant forms. These decorative elements contribute a soft, rhythmic quality and intricate features to the artwork's female portraits, enhancing the images' overall beauty and embedding them with symbolic meanings through semiotics.

In Western culture, water is frequently associated with feminism, often resonating with idealized notions of femininity (Husslein-Arco et al., 2015; Petrovič, 2016; Smits, 2020). Around 1900, cultural representations linked women with sea creatures and water, embodying submissiveness, flexibility, inclusiveness, and permeability (Uz, 2012; Smits, 2020). These associations are reflected in Klimt's use of seaweed motifs, which not only decorate but also deeply signify the thematic underpinnings of his work, connecting the natural element to broader cultural and symbolic interpretations of femininity.



Figure 8. "Der Kuss" (Source: Rye Art)

As seen in Gustav Klimt's works, the seaweed motif is frequently used in art to represent sickness and weakness. In "Water Serpents II" (Figure 10), the female figure is depicted with a combination of purity and beauty, yet she also embodies a fragile and morbid quality, highlighted by the surrounding seaweed patterns (Uz, 2012; Karaahmetoğlu, 2014; Smits, 2020). Similarly, in "Water Serpents I" (Figure 9), the portrayal of a young girl wandering in the sea amidst seaweed motifs conveys a sense of powerlessness and vulnerability. This representation of morbid femininity was a prevalent aesthetic trend in Austrian society during that era, reflecting women's societal expectations and perceptions at the time (Uz, 2012; Smits, 2020).

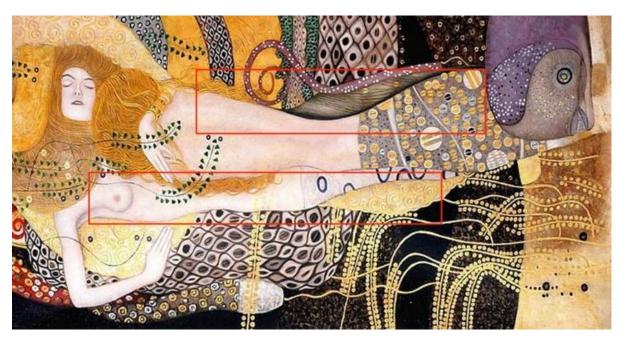


Figure 9. "Water Serpents I" (Source: Rye Art)

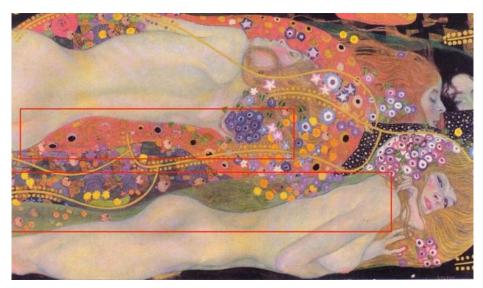


Figure 10. "Water Serpents II" (Source: Rye Art)

Gustav Klimt is renowned for his distinctive use of original graphic symbols, which are visually striking and decorative. Using various colors and techniques, he skillfully incorporated these symbols into his artwork (Liu, 2013). While some interpretations of these symbols have labeled them as sexual and Klimt himself as a "pornographic painter" (Gürbüz, 2008), a deeper examination of the historical and sociocultural context in Austria at the time reveals a different perspective. Klimt transformed these primitive symbols into decorative elements that align with his intrinsic artistic style, employing them extensively across his works.

These decorative symbols in Klimt's art are not merely representations of sexuality. Instead, they express beauty and delve into broader concepts such as life, death, and reincarnation. By transcending simple erotic imagery, Klimt's use of these symbols contributes to a richer understanding of his artistic vision and the thematic depth of his work, reflecting his ability to reinterpret traditional symbols within the context of contemporary themes and societal reflections.

Facial Expression Modification of Women in the Art

The concept of 'serpentine beauty,' emblematic of powerful and enigmatic femininity, is a central motif in Gustav Klimt's paintings. This theme, prevalent in late 19th-century art, arose as female consciousness grew, leading to depictions of women as 'snake charmers'—figures representing power, danger, and glamour. These images were often seen as a male response to the anxieties brought about by emerging feminism (Moratón, 2015; Cobbs, 2018).

Klimt's "Judith II" serves as a prime example of this motif (Gürbüz, 2008; Karaahmetoğlu, 2014; Husslein-Arco et al., 2015; Cheng, 2018; Cobbs, 2018). In this painting, Judith is depicted as both sensual and formidable. Her slightly narrowed eyes and languid expression, enhanced by her thick black hair adorned with golden ornaments, not only heighten her sensuality but also align with the biblical story of Judith beheading Holofernes, underscoring themes of danger, power, and independence (Gürbüz, 2008; Kelley, 2012; Giepert, 2016).

Additionally, the painting subtly suggests decapitation with Judith's head appearing almost separate from her body, emphasized by a gold necklace against a golden background. This artistic choice reinforces the motif of danger associated with the female figure and highlights their transformative and potentially threatening power (Gürbüz, 2008; The Getty Center, 2012; Smits, 2020).

Furthermore, Gürbüz (2008) notes that Klimt's use of nudity was intended to celebrate natural beauty and convey a sense of pure pleasure, not to evoke lust. This approach challenged the conventional perspectives of the time and provided significant artistic support for feminist ideas, emphasizing the role of art in reflecting and influencing societal changes regarding gender perceptions.



Figure 11. "Judith II" on the Left, "Water Serpents II" on the Right (Source: Rye Art)

In "Water Serpents II" (Figure 11), the image of serpentine beauty is brought to life. Through their expressions and movements, the women in this work display extraordinary beauty and diversity (Uz, 2012; Yener, 2017). They can be either cold and mysterious or gentle and sweet, but in any case, they exude an irresistible charm (; Carmona Escalera, 2012; Giepert, 2016; Erkan, 2017). The stature of these women, the luster of their skin, and their features combined with their red manes give them a sense of mystery and sinfulness (Gürbüz, 2008). This image is precisely what feminists have tried to portray for modern women in a patriarchal society—mysterious, glamorous, dangerous, and arrogant (Hammer-Tugendhat & Zanchi, 2012; Moratón, 2015; Yener, 2017; Cobbs, 2018).

In addition, Feminists of the time emphasised women's innate maternal qualities (Ross, 1995; Allen, 2005; Lewis, 2012), and the images of pregnant women in Klimt's "Hope I" (Figure 12) and "Hope II" (Figure 12) are artistic representations of this view. It is suggested that the pictures of pregnant women in these two works may have been inspired by Klimt's lover, Mitzi—Zimmermann's two pregnancies (Ai, 2012). In Hope I, the pregnant woman's eyes show indifference and sadness (Uz, 2012; Giepert, 2016; Yener, 2017), while "Hope II" shows the pregnant woman in a prayerful gesture, embodying maternal devotion and compassion for life (Ai, 2012; Yener, 2017). Both works celebrate motherhood and reveal in depth the emotions inherent in female heroism (Cobbs, 2018).



Figure 12. Pictured on the left is "Hope I", on the right is "Hope II" (Source: Rye Art)

Secondly, pregnant women in "Hope I" and "Hope II" are nude (Figure 12), expressing erotic implications (The Getty Center, 2012; Moratón, 2015; Qiu, 2022). In mythology, lust appears as a natural power in the most ancient narratives, ensuring the unity and reproduction of the universe (Gürbüz, 2008; Karaahmetoğlu, 2014).

Modification of Colours in the Artwork

Klimt specialises in using yellow-grey tones to depict women, creating a sharp visual contrast effect through the complementary colours in the background (Shang, 2022). In "The Three Ages of Woman" (Figure 13), he contrasts orange-red and blue-violet to emphasise the clash of warm and cold in life. The dark background highlights the fear of ageing and death, while the bright blue and white tones show the vitality and hope of a young mother and child. The contrast of these colours enhances the visual impact and reveals the two sides of life: life and death, hope and despair (Gürbüz, 2008; Ai, 2012; Shang, 2022).



Figure 13. "The Three Ages of Woman" (Source: Rye Art)

In "Hope II" (Figure 14), Klimt's use of bright red, green, and gold creates a strong visual impact. The green colour, which often represents new life and fertility, has gold flecks that further enhance the symbolism of "hope"

and divinity. The lady's robe is adorned with gold, adding to its vibrancy. The bright red colour draws the viewer's eye, representing solid emotions such as passion, love, seduction, and even anger and danger (Hammer-Tugendhat & Zanchi, 2012; Moratón, 2015; Galowitsch, 2017; El Saadoon & Hadi, 2018). motherhood is not only his attachment to good feelings but also reflects his deep affection for kinship, especially the impact of his close relationship with his mother and sisters (Ai, 2012).



Figure 14. "Hope II" (Source: Rye Art)

Personal Experience after Klimt's Work: "Oedipus" Oedipus Complex

Klimt had a particular affinity for his mother, having remained unmarried all his life and living with her and his two unmarried sisters. His work often emphasises the maternal body as both the origin of life and the end of death. Particularly in his Mother and Child series, the figure of the pregnant woman shows motherly love and the coexistence of life and death (Ai, 2012; Uz, 2012; Karaahmetoğlu, 2014; El Saadoon & Hadi, 2018).

In "Hope I" and "Hope II", the image of a pregnant woman is closely linked to the symbol of death (Gilbert & Brauckmann, 2011; Galowitsch, 2017) (Figure 14). Although "Hope I" is titled "Hope," the skull in the background suggests that life is intertwined with death and disease. This reflection may stem from Klimt's son's untimely death, which caused him to reflect deeply on life and death. In "Hope II" (Figure 14), on the other hand, maternal warmth is more evident as the other women pay homage to the mother at the center, demonstrating respect for her (Gilbert & Brauckmann, 2011; Giepert, 2016; Miller, 2017;).

In "Hope I", Klimt depicts a pregnant woman, with the entire image cantered on her. In "Hope II" (Figure 15), however, the maternal warmth is more evident. The three women bow their heads as if to pay homage to the mother at the center, demonstrating Klimt's deep respect for the mother figure (Gilbert & Brauckmann, 2011; Giepert, 2016: Miller, 2017). Behind the mother in the painting is a mass of flesh-coloured shapes whose colour and form resemble angel wings, endowing her with symbols of divinity (Miller, 2017). Klimt portrays the mother in Hope II as a divine bridge between heaven and earth, life and death.

In addition, the vermillion dress in the painting is mirrored with irregular ovals, the graphic language Klimt uses to symbolize femininity, further emphasizing the vitality of the pregnant woman (Miller, 2017). On the other hand, the small triangles in the painting play a balancing role, making the whole picture more harmonious and fuller of warmth (Yener, 2017;Shang, 2022;).

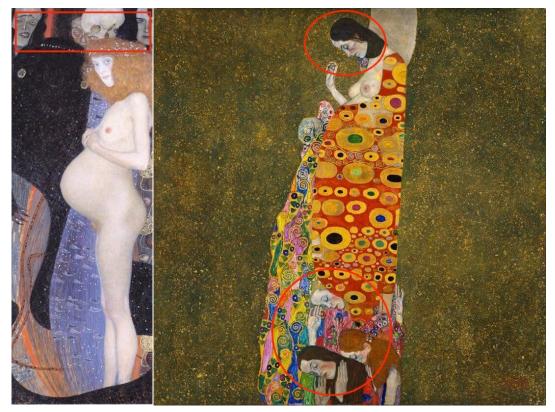


Figure 15. "Hope I" on the left, "Hope II" on the right (Source: Rye Art)

The Social Context behind Klimt's Artwork

From the 16th century to World War I, the Austrian Habsburg Empire retained its pre-modern structure, characterized by a long-standing feudal system and absolute rule (Hess, 1973; Feldbacher, 2020; Horvath & Horvath, 2020; Evans, 2020; Grinin, 2022). By the mid-19th century, Austria was undergoing a liberal revolution, spurred by increased immigration from other regions and rising nationalism (Offen, 1984; Judson, 1996). This era saw significant shifts in religious, moral, and philosophical views (Deak, 2015), and the tension between the bourgeoisie and the feudal ruling class was exacerbated by industrialization and urbanization. During this period, marginalized groups, including women, began to initiate liberation movements (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2018).

Around 1880, improvements in Europe's transportation and communications infrastructure enabled greater mobility (Lagendijk, 2022; Campisi et al., 2022; Kousoulis, 2023). Between 1890 and 1910, the urban population of Vienna swelled by over 60%, highlighting the growing tension between the feudal system and modern societal forces (Antoniazza et al.,2023; Steidl, 2023). Art became a medium to address these social contradictions (Liu, 2013; Shang, 2022; Lin, 2022).

In 1897, Gustav Klimt, Josef Hoffmann, and other avant-garde artists founded the Viennese Secession, aiming to revolutionize the art world by breaking away from traditional historical art and advocating for modernization and liberalization (K. A. Smith, 2003; Kelley, 2012). This movement garnered support from many Jewish and bourgeois patrons who financed and championed modern art.

Klimt, often referred to as a "painter of beautiful women" (Hammer-Tugendhat & Zanchi, 2012), portrayed women as pivotal elements in modern art (Uz, 2012). His paintings reflect the active involvement of women in Viennese avant-garde culture and society, placing them in roles traditionally held by men and boldly portraying their emotions, desires, and bodies (Giepert, 2016). This approach not only affirmed women's identities but also elevated their status in society. The women depicted in Klimt's works are dynamic and expressive, a departure from traditional passive portrayals (Kelley, 2012). Many women sought out Klimt for their portraits, believing he could capture their modern and feminist attributes authentically and accurately (Hammer-Tugendhat & Zanchi, 2012; Cobbs, 2018).

Klimt's Portrayal of Women Relate to the Social and Cultural Context of the Time?

The Morbid Aesthetics of Nineteenth-century Women

In late 19th-century Europe, political unrest and social uncertainty engendered a pervasive sense of fear and fatalism, giving rise to a decadent culture known as "Fin de siècle" (Ledger, 1997; Stevens, 2019; Sánchez León,

2020; Minowa, Maclaran, & Balfour, 2020). This era was characterized not just by the time period but also by a cultural atmosphere focused on themes such as the subconscious, sexuality, power, and perversion (Alder, 2020; K. M. Smith, 2020). Art movements like decadentism, aestheticism, and symbolism flourished, reflecting these themes (Longworth, 2019; Fonio, 2019; Stone, 2019; Armstrong, 2020; Wicky, 2023).

In this context, Viennese artists like Gustav Klimt sought new ways to represent and explore the lives of marginalized groups, including non-white women (Brandow-Faller & Morowitz, 2022). During this period, women were often depicted as inherently frail, epitomized by the notion of being "born sick" (Offen, 1984;Fowler, 2022;). This portrayal intersected with the concept of combining "beauty and death." For instance, in "Water Snake II," the depiction of women blends their beauty with notions of sickness and weakness, reinforcing the male-dominated idea that women's beauty is transient (Kelley, 2012;Smits, 2020). Driven by these societal ideals, many women even resorted to voluntarily starving themselves to achieve the 'tubercular look,' which was then celebrated as the epitome of 'true femininity' (Gürbüz, 2008; Kelley, 2012; Giepert, 2016; Smits, 2020).

The Awakening of Women's Power in the Mid-20th Century

Entering the 20th century, the Industrial Revolution and evolving societal norms significantly bolstered the feminist movement (Travis, 2008;Jia, 2021). In 1893, the establishment of the Austrian Women's General Association (GAWA) marked a pivotal moment in the resurgence of this movement, led by influential feminists such as Rosa Mayreder, Irma Troll-Borostyáni, and Grete Meisel-Hess (Sármány-Parsons, 2012). These feminists were dedicated to advocating for broader societal changes and believed it was their duty to save Vienna (Petrovič, 2016). GAWA pushed for freedoms in marriage, the abolition of prostitution, and equal educational opportunities for women, emphasizing the importance of women 's representation in the public sphere and autonomy over their sexual orientation (Petrovič, 2016).

Simultaneously, Gustav Klimt, known for his challenges to tradition and authority, resonated with these revolutionary feminist ideas, which deepened his interest in progressive views on feminism (Sármány-Parsons, 2012). Feminists of the time introduced the "femme fatale" concept, viewing it as a symbol of female power and rejecting marriage as the sole path for women (Gürbüz, 2008).

Influenced by these ideas, Klimt produced a series of artworks, including the seductively powerful "Judith II," the female-empowering "Pallas Athena", and "Der Kuss," which explores the dynamics of power between men and women (Gürbüz, 2008;Uz, 2012; Kelley, 2012; Karaahmetoğlu, 2014; Giepert, 2016). These pieces not only demonstrate Klimt's challenge to traditional norms but also reflect his profound understanding and support of feminist ideals (Gilbert & Brauckmann, 2011;Uz, 2012;Moratón, 2015; Giepert, 2016).

How Has Klimt's Portrayal of Women Affected the Female Population?

With the rise of feminism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, women began to seek greater political and economic freedom and moved away from restrictive clothing like corsets, opting instead for more comfortable attire suitable for work outside the home (Kessler-Harris, 2003; Giepert, 2016).

Viennese women were internationally recognized for their unique taste and elegance (Wagener, 1989). Artist Gustav Klimt's influence extended beyond the art world into fashion, inspiring demand for ornate gold jewelry and loose-fitting tunics (Urdea, 2015).

Klimt's "Judith II" illustrates the nobility and power of women, with its gold frocks and gold-leaf backdrops symbolizing female status (Carmona Escalera, 2012; Karaahmetoğlu, 2014). While these garments were not everyday wear, they reflected the fashion trends associated with women's emancipation. This portrayal stands in contrast to the traditional biblical image of Judith (Smits, 2020).

Klimt also showed a keen interest in the reform of women's fashion. He, along with other artists of the Vienna Secession, began to design looser and more flowing garments for women, emphasizing comfort and freedom (Urdea, 2015;Smits, 2020). This shift in design philosophy mirrored the broader feminist movements of the time, advocating for both aesthetic appeal and practicality in women's clothing.

DISCUSSION

This investigation critically examines Gustav Klimt's artistic contributions, particularly his portrayal of women, which has significantly influenced the evolution of feminist ideologies. Klimt's artwork stands out for infusing his female subjects with confidence and multifaceted personalities, challenging the prevalent maledominated art narrative of the late 19th century (Lampl, 2018). His portrayal provided alternative avenues for female self-identification, reshaping traditional societal and familial roles. Through a comparative analysis of various paintings across different periods, it becomes evident that Klimt was pivotal in the shift from depicting

women as passive entities to showcasing them as active and influential societal figures.

This study analysis, supported by Stricker (2000), illustrates the complexity in Klimt's portrayal of women—ranging from the 'serpentine' to the 'morbidly gentle.' This duality in representation goes beyond the meek and passive archetypes, creating well-rounded, multidimensional female characters. In the context of the era's rigid social norms concerning gender roles, Klimt's work affirms female agency and an implicit endorsement of burgeoning feminist sentiments that advocated for recognizing women as whole and independent individuals.

Furthermore, Klimt's portrayal of female nudes transcended existing gender norms, equalizing the depiction of both men and women as art subjects and, consequently, advancing the feminist discourse on the autonomy of female consciousness and the appreciation of femininity. Thus, his work contributed aesthetically to the art world and catalysed societal revaluation of womanhood, supporting their emancipation and foreshadowing their indispensable role in imminent social transformations.

The findings suggest that Klimt's work was critical in redefining women's identities and anticipated vital aspects of feminist thought that would gain prominence. This study confirms the hypothesis that Klimt's unique depiction of women significantly justified the transformations seen in the subsequent feminist movement, as reflected in his deviation from traditional gender depictions. Further interdisciplinary studies could deepen the understanding of the interplay between Klimt's work and the feminist movement, as recent shifts in women's rights and the reemergence of the feminist movement attest to the ongoing relevance of his work (Baker, 2017).

CONCLUSION

Gustav Klimt's work stands as a testament to the transformative power of art in societal perception, particularly in the context of feminism. This study has highlighted Klimt's pioneering role in depicting women with autonomy and complexity, countering the passive norms of his time. His nuanced portrayals have provided a visual advocacy for women's agency that resonates with contemporary feminist dialogues.

In essence, Klimt's legacy is not merely in his contribution to art history but also in his inadvertent championing of women's empowerment. His depictions encourage a reassessment of female identity that remains relevant, underscoring the importance of historical art in current discussions on gender equality. As such, Klimt's influence extends beyond his era, continuing to inspire and provoke thought on the representation and rights of women. Through this lens, Klimt is reaffirmed as an artist ahead of his time, whose work still echoes in pursuing gender equity today.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study employs a literature review methodology, meaning the analysis is primarily based on existing scholarly literature and critical articles. While this approach helps to construct a theoretical framework and provide a known scholarly discussion, it may have limited the exploration of primary materials, such as access to Klimt's personal archives, letters, or unpublished interviews. As a result, interpretations of Klimt's thoughts and motivations may be more in-depth and complete than they could be.

In addition, this study needs to use multidisciplinary approaches to analyze Klimt's works extensively. For example, an approach that combines art historical research with psychology, sociology, and even gender studies might have more fully revealed the social and psychological motivations behind the works and how they affected audiences then and today.

To overcome these limitations and deepen the understanding of Klimt's works and their socio-cultural significance, future research should consider a more diverse range of approaches, including interdisciplinary research methods and new data sources. They are also expanding the geographical and cultural perspectives of the study, as well as directly analyzing the artwork.

Additionally, although we discussed how Klimt expresses feminism in her art, we did not delve into how viewers receive and interpret her works and how these works shape society's view of women. Future research could further explore the impact of Klimt's art on society from the perspectives of audience response, art criticism, and social influence.

In conclusion, this study provides new research directions for future research. The interdisciplinary approach will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of Klimt's art and its contribution to feminism, providing a more diverse perspective on art and feminist studies.

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