

Professor and Curator Collaborate on Exhibition Highlighting Literature and Art in Turn-of-the-Century Vienna

***“As though my body were naught but ciphers”*: Crises of Representation in Fin-de-Siècle Vienna can be seen February 12 – June 12, 2005 at Harvard’s Busch-Reisinger Museum**



Josef Hoffmann, *“Lynx,”* Wiener Werkstätte fabric sample, 1910-12. Ink on silk, 14.4 x 10.2 cm. Busch-Reisinger Museum, HUAM, Gift of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, BR55.48. Photo: Allan Macintyre, HUAM. © President and Fellows of Harvard College.

CAMBRIDGE, MA (February 4, 2005) – A Harvard professor of Germanic Languages and Literatures has collaborated with the Busch-Reisinger Museum on an exhibition of art and literature from turn-of-the-century Vienna that can be seen through June 12, 2005.

This teaching exhibition, which complements the University’s Core-Curriculum course “Repression and Expression: Literature and Art in Fin-de-Siècle Germany and Austria,” focuses on the dramatic breakdown and transformation of art and literature around 1900, when the Hapsburg empire was fading and artists and writers alike were rebelling against traditional forms of expression.

Many young artists of the time were challenging the art establishment’s emphasis on naturalism and realism, which they found tradition-bound and inadequate. At the same time, writers felt that the literary realism of the 19th century was no longer an appropriate mode of representing the world as they experienced it. Some artists and writers came close to questioning whether language and art could accurately render experience at all.

On view are 42 objects, most from the collections of the Busch-Reisinger Museum, the Fogg Art Museum, and Harvard’s Fine Arts Library and Houghton Library, that illustrate the crises in art and literature that occurred in turn-of-the-century Vienna. Drawings, prints, illustrated

books, and textile samples from artists Gustav Klimt, Egon Schiele, Oskar Kokoschka, and Josef Hoffman will be on display adjacent to early edition books by Friedrich Nietzsche, Sigmund Freud, playwright Arthur Schnitzler, and poet and playwright Hugo von Hofmannsthal. In addition, the curators are providing an exhibition reader for the gallery that will include excerpts from most of the literary works on display, along with the syllabus for the class. The quotation in the exhibition's title is taken from Hofmannsthal.

“This exhibition is an impressive example of how our collections can be creatively integrated with Harvard's academic program,” said Thomas W. Lentz, Elizabeth and John Moors Cabot Director of the Harvard University Art Museums. “We have always organized teaching exhibitions for art history students, but this partnership with a professor of Germanic languages and literatures has produced a fascinating and unexpected look at the common threads in art and literature at that time.”

The exhibition was co-organized by Laura Muir, Charles C. Cunningham, Sr., Assistant Curator of the Busch-Reisinger Museum, and Professor Peter J. Burgard, of the Department of Germanic Languages and Literature, with the assistance of head teaching fellow Doris McGonagill. It was made possible by the Museum's Ernst A. Teves Fund.

Burgard considers the exhibition a vital part of his course “Repression and Expression.” “The exhibition allows the students to experience the intersection of the literature and art of this time and place with an immediacy that lectures can't offer,” he said. “We will hold section meetings in the gallery, and the students will visit the exhibition frequently enough to become well acquainted with it and to be tested on it.”

Works on Display

One of the key objects in the exhibition is a large black-and-white photographic reproduction of Klimt's mural *Jurisprudence* (1903–07, destroyed 1945), one of three paintings commissioned by the University of Vienna for the ceiling of its Great Hall. “*Jurisprudence* is a powerful and unsettling image that provoked a great deal of controversy and debate and is emblematic of the crisis and themes this exhibition explores,” said Muir. Although the university's faculty angrily

rejected the murals, all three were shown in exhibitions mounted by the Vienna Secession – a group of artists who broke away from the conservative Viennese art establishment in 1897. Klimt was the Secession’s first president. Klimt’s 1903 painting *Pear Tree*—the Busch-Reisinger’s one great painting from this period—will also be on display. Using quasi-pointillist brush strokes, he transformed a grove of fruit trees. “The painting is meant to represent a pear tree, but in fact it comes very close to being a complete abstraction,” Muir noted.

Visitors will be able to view 12 fabric samples created by Josef Hoffmann and Koloman Moser for the Wiener Werkstätte (Vienna Workshops), a design collaborative inspired by the English Arts and Crafts movement that created ceramics, fabrics, furniture, and other decorative art objects from the time of the group’s founding in 1903.

Five works by Egon Schiele will be on display, including the Busch-Reisinger’s *Sleeping Figure with Blanket*, a 1910 watercolor and charcoal on paper in which Schiele uses a tartan blanket’s bold geometric pattern to begin to abstract the female form beneath it. In another 1910 work by Schiele, *Kneeling Girl, Disrobing*, one can see how—unlike Klimt, who used mosaic-like decorative elements associated with the feminine as his primary means of abstraction—Schiele made the female figure itself the vehicle of abstraction.

Houghton Library has lent ten rare literary works to the exhibition, including the first edition of Sigmund Freud’s *Drei Abhandlungen zur Sexualtheorie* (Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality), published in 1905; poet Hugo von Hofmannsthal’s “Letter of Lord Chandos,” published in the newspaper *Der Tag* on Oct. 18 and 19, 1902; and Oskar Kokoschka’s illustrated book *The Dreaming Boys*, published by the Wiener Werkstätte in 1908.

Additional loans to the exhibition include two works on paper and an illustrated book from the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, a major gouache by Schiele from the New York collector Lowell M. Schulman, a drawing from the Boston collector Tom Rassieur, and an important poster from the distinguished graphic design collection of Merrill C. Berman (Harvard A.B. ’60).

About the curators

Peter J. Burgard is a professor of German and a faculty associate of the Minda de Gunzburg Center for European Studies at Harvard. He teaches courses on Goethe, Baroque literature and art, Nietzsche, and Freud. In the University's Core Curriculum, he teaches a Foreign Cultures course on early modern German culture and its reception in the 20th century, as well as Literature and Arts C-65, "Repression and Expression," upon which the current exhibition is based.

"Repression and Expression" examines German and Austrian literature and art between 1880 and 1920. Students trace the Nietzschean critique of language and the Freudian revolution in thought on human sexuality in order to explore the ways in which the literature and art of the period reflect one another in their treatment of these central themes and in their innovative modes of representation.

Burgard's research interests include German Baroque literature and European Baroque art, the Age of Goethe, Turn-of-the-Century literature and art, and 20th-century European drama. Burgard is the author of numerous essays and "Idioms of Uncertainty: Goethe and the Essay," and is editor of *Nietzsche and the Feminine* and *Barock: Neue Sichtweisen einer Epoche*.

Laura Muir has been the Charles C. Cunningham, Sr., Assistant Curator of the Busch-Reisinger Museum since 2001. She organized the exhibition *Surface Tension: Works by Anselm Kiefer from the Broad Collections and the Harvard University Art Museums* in 2002 and the ongoing installation *Basic Research: A Selection of Postwar German Paintings and Sculpture*. She has also worked as a research associate in the Department of Photographs at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, where she organized the exhibitions *Dancing on the Roof: Photography and the Bauhaus (1923-29)* and *Pictorialism in New York: 1900-1913*.

Other teaching exhibitions at the Busch-Reisinger

The Busch-Reisinger Museum has organized several teaching exhibitions for large-enrollment undergraduate classes in various departments of Harvard's Faculty of Arts and Sciences. They include: *Russian Modernism* in 1992, for Professor John Malmstad, Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures; *The Body Politic: Surrealism on Both Sides of the Atlantic 1924-1947* in 1995, for Professor Susan Suleiman, Department of Comparative Literature; and *A Laboratory of Modernity: Image and Society in the Weimar Republic* in 1998–99, for Professor Eric Rentschler, Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures.

The Harvard University Art Museums

The Harvard University Art Museums are one of the world's leading arts institutions, with the Arthur M. Sackler, Busch-Reisinger, and Fogg art museums, the Straus Center for Conservation, and the U.S. headquarters for the Archaeological Exploration of Sardis, an excavation project in western Turkey.

The Harvard University Art Museums are distinguished by the range and depth of their collections, their groundbreaking exhibitions, and the original research of their staff. As an integral part of the Harvard community, the three art museums serve as resources for all students, adding a special dimension to their areas of study. The public is welcome to experience the collections and exhibitions as well as to enjoy lectures, symposia, and other programs.

For more than a century, the Harvard University Art Museums have been the nation's premier training ground for museum professionals and scholars and are renowned for their role in the development of the discipline of art history in this country.

Location and Hours

The Fogg Art Museum and the Busch-Reisinger Museums are located at 32 Quincy Street, Cambridge. The Arthur M. Sackler Museum is located next door at 485 Broadway. Each Museum is a short walk from the Harvard Square MBTA station.

Hours are Monday through Saturday, 10 a.m. – 5 p.m., Sunday 1 – 5 p.m.; the Museums are closed on national holidays. Admission is \$6.50; \$5 for seniors; \$5 for students; and free for those under 18 years of age. The Museums are free to everyone on Saturday mornings, 10 a.m. – noon. The Harvard University Art Museums receive support from the Massachusetts Cultural Council. More detailed information is available at 617-495-9400 or on the Internet at www.artmuseums.harvard.edu.

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