

Private Museums and Their Legacies

The Case of Ronald S. Lauder and Adele Bloch-Bauer's Neue Galerie

by

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## ABSTRACT

The Neue Galerie in New York City includes some of the most impressive and culturally-specific artwork from Ronald S. Lauder's private art collection. The Neue's permanent exhibitions showcase pieces from the Wiener Sezession (Vienna Secession) and Wiener Werkstätte (Applied Arts of Vienna) in an environment that also employs replicas and period specific motifs to evoke the interiors of the private homes in which affluent fin-de-siècle Viennese art patrons lived, displayed influential modernist work, and held culturally important salons.

Gustav Klimt's celebrated Adele Bloch-Bauer I (1907) is arguably the museum's most prized artwork. It serves as an icon that immortalizes Ronald Lauder as private collector. The figure of Adele Bloch-Bauer has also become an important emblem, whose story epitomizes the complexities of Jewish identity and its influence upon Viennese modern art. This thesis explores how the Neue Galerie's physical layout represents a specific model of modernism. By focusing on the portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer, I urge a rethinking of the museum's relationship to modern art as an interpretation of the past. The themes that surround Adele Bloch-Bauer I have shaped Lauder's agenda as the leading private collector of the art of fin-de-siècle Vienna.

## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my supportive and loving parents, Bruce and Doris Findling, who have pushed me to go after anything and everything. Without those endless spaghetti dinners and their ever-supportive dog sitting, this project would not have been realized. Thank you.

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## INTRODUCTION

In 2001, the Neue Galerie opened on Fifth Avenue in New York City. Dedicated to Austrian and German art from the turn of the twentieth century, the new museum emerged approximately seventy years after the establishment of several other private museums located within walking distance. This new private museum distinguishes itself from the several private collections turned public museums in its vicinity, including the Guggenheim Museum, the Henry Clay Frick Collection, and Whitney Museum of American Art. The objective of the Neue is to “capture the innovative, modern spirit artists discovered and pursued at the turn of the twentieth century.”<sup>1</sup>

This thesis examines the Neue Galerie and its owner Ronald Lauder to understand the relationship of a private owner to his collection. The design of the Neue, a hybrid of private collection and public museum, mimics the atmosphere of many *fin-de-siècle* Viennese homes in which art collectors originally displayed the very artworks Lauder now owns. This analysis of Ronald Lauder and the Neue Galerie aims to explore the various themes that the Neue evokes, not only in the physical display of artworks, but also in its interior design, its location in New York City, and in the relationships between an art collector and their private collection. Numerous exhibition catalogues published by the museum as well as *New York Times* articles have discussed the Neue and its owner, Ronald Lauder. However, I expand upon the existing literature to discuss the Neue Galerie in the context of modernist and museum studies.



Throughout my thesis, I use the term private museum to refer to the Neue Galerie and other museums that are based solely on one owner's (or a single family's) private collection, that are open to the public. I borrow this verbiage from Anne Higonnet's essay "Museum Sight." Higonnet defines the private museum as a space in which collectors demonstrate their impulses to collect and display artworks they personally own.<sup>2</sup> Private museums thus reveal the personalities of their collectors, who inevitably leave traces of themselves throughout their museums, whether through the display of their painted portraits or by exhibiting their most prized collected possessions. Thus, as I suggest, the Neue is categorized into Higonnet's definition as a hybrid of private collection and public museum, or the private museum respectively.

The private museum Lauder created has defined its mission through the display of paintings by leading Viennese artists such as Gustav Klimt, Egon Schiele, and Oskar Kokoschka. These artworks mingle in the museum with decorative and furniture pieces designed by such figures from the Wiener Werkstätte as Josef Hoffmann and Koloman Moser. While the works displayed in the Neue are not consistent in terms of style or media, they share a visual and innovative exploration of *fin-de-siècle* Viennese modernism. The Neue Galerie's interior design is also set apart from other museums situated on the "museum mile;" its meticulously designed and lavishly executed interior reflects the experimental artistic style of turn-of-the-century Vienna. Beginning with the museum's entrance and extending to the museum's shop and café, dramatic *art*

*nouveau* décor immerses the viewer in a *fin-de-siècle* atmosphere that harmoniously compliments the Wiener Secession and Werkstätte artworks that reside permanently on the second floor of the museum. The sensory experience of the museum's interior invites the visitor to experience a physical history of *fin-de-siècle* Vienna from which these artworks emerged.

### **History of the Neue Galerie and Collectors Ronald S. Lauder and Serge Sabarsky**

The original Neue Galerie, opened in Vienna in 1923, was an art museum founded by Otto Kallir. After the Nazis annexed Austria in 1938, Kallir transferred the museum to Paris under the name Galerie St. Etienne. The contemporary Neue Galerie in New York took its name from this Viennese predecessor, but it inhabits a Fifth Avenue mansion with an interesting history all its own. Originally built in 1914 by Carrère and Hastings (the same architects who completed the New York Public Library) and later remodeled by architect Annabella Selldorf, the building served as the private residence of Grace Wilson Vanderbilt (Mrs. Cornelius Vanderbilt III) and later housed the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research. In 1994, Ronald Lauder, a private art collector and heir to the Estée Lauder conglomerate, and Serge Sabarsky, an art dealer and exhibition organizer, purchased the building in order to create the Neue.

Ronald Lauder's affinity to modern art began in his adolescence with his regular visits to New York's Museum of Modern Art. By the age of 32, Lauder became the youngest trustee in the history of the Museum of Modern Art; he has

also held the title of honorary chairman for its board of trustees.<sup>3</sup> Lauder's eventual establishment of the Neue stemmed partly from this lifelong passion for modern art. His specific interest in Viennese culture also sprang from his various political involvements and brief residence in contemporary Vienna. From 1986-1987, Lauder served as US Ambassador to Austria, having been appointed to the post by President Ronald Reagan after serving from 1983 to 1986 as Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for European & NATO Affairs. In addition, Lauder was elected president of the World Jewish Congress in 2007 and president of the World Jewish Restitution Organization in 2008. As I discuss in my thesis, his interests extend to political and religious affairs in Vienna, both historical and contemporary. This further validates Lauder's position not only as a collector interested in the decadent art once produced in Vienna, but also as a significant figure in the political and legal issues now associated with those artworks.

Lauder's long-time friend and one-time co-investor, Serge Sabarsky strongly influenced Lauder's interest in Viennese modern art. An American immigrant from Vienna, Sabarsky was an art dealer and curator from the late 1960s until his death in 1996, at 83 years of age. Sabarsky and Lauder first met in the spring of 1967, when Lauder's brother Leonard (currently chairman emeritus for the Whitney Museum of American Art) wanted to affirm the authenticity of a Schiele watercolor he had recently purchased. Lauder recalls the first conversation between himself and Sabarsky:

Several days later, (after his brother's purchase of the Schiele painting,) I

accompanied my brother to meet Serge. I will never forget entering Serge's apartment just off Riverside Drive that spring afternoon, and seeing in the hallway twelve Schiele drawings and watercolors. It was only after several minutes that I realized Serge was talking to me. "You are reacting the same way I did when I saw my first Schieles," he said. Thus began a friendship that would last almost thirty years.<sup>4</sup>

Not long after this first meeting, Sabarsky opened the Sabarsky Gallery in 1968 on Madison Avenue in New York with "a couple of Schiele drawings, a few Kirchners, a Heckel, a watercolor by Schmitt-Rottluff and works by Pechstein and Nolde."<sup>5</sup> In his autobiography, *Serge Sabarsky: A Full Life*, Sabarsky narrates the story of his life, from his childhood in Vienna to the suspenseful escape from the Gestapo into France and then on to America in 1939. More than half of his story consists of his passionate recollections of life as an art collector and dealer. Sabarsky's journey in the memoir ends with his dream to "set up a special museum for my collection in New York; Austrian modernism ought to have an excellent address in the United States."<sup>6</sup> The private museum he envisioned finally opened five years after Sabarsky's death. Lauder attests that the Neue Galerie stands as a "tribute to Serge's vision and to his love of art. It also represents a lasting emblem of our friendship."<sup>7</sup>

### **Examination of Modernism in the Neue Galerie**

In chapter two, entitled "At the Neue: The Exhibition of a Private Museum," I explore the physical construction of the Neue, how the museum's environment expresses specific models of modernism, and the deep influence of Lauder's interaction with the Museum of Modern Art on the Neue's exhibition methods.

As a private collection, the Neue represents modernism differently than other art museums. While Lauder has made significant choices that differentiate the Neue's expression of modernism from that embodied in New York's Museum of Modern Art, I argue that formalism still takes precedence in the Neue's display methods. Despite the period-specific atmosphere provided by the Neue's lavish *fin-de-siècle* interior, this private museum shares with other modern art museums an overall lack of information within the exhibitions themselves. Exhibition materials in the modern art museum typically include little information about either the cultural and political contexts from which the artworks emerged or the provenance of the works. Within the Neue specifically, very little informative material guides the casual visitor to contextualize even the permanently displayed works among Lauder's rich and culturally complex collection.

In addition to the artworks themselves, the Neue's interior expresses cultural ideas that take form not in text but rather as a performative experience. The unique environment of the Neue Galerie allows visitors to immerse themselves in the aesthetic environment of a unique historical period. The private museum then becomes a stage on which the visitors can use their own memories to create a more complex and meaningful encounter. Among the texts that will aid in this discussion is *National Museums: New Studies from around the World* by Simon Knell, who writes that the museum experience reflects an inevitable split viewpoint: that of the professional who represents history and that of the visitor who projects memory onto the museum environment. I also use Marjorie

Perloff's book *The Viennese Paradox* and Tim Bonyhady's text *Good Living Street: Portrait of a Patron Family, Vienna 1900*, to explore the evocation of memory and other aspects of the visitor experience specific to the Neue Galerie's staging of Austrian modernism. Writing from the viewpoint of a Jewish immigrant from Vienna, Perloff discusses the experience of visiting the Neue within the context of her own past. Bonyhady recollects his family's past, including their art patronage in *fin-de-siècle* Vienna as well as their emigration to Australia after the *Anschluss*.

In addition to encouraging specific personal experiences, the Neue's environment demonstrates the notion of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, an understanding of which is vital to a full appreciation of the museum. Although traditionally this term referred to a culmination of the music, dance, and theatrical compositions of nineteenth-century German composer Richard Wagner, Viennese artists at the turn of the twentieth century integrated this term in their philosophy about the connection between art and interior space, as well as the connection between the interior and its inhabitants. Thus, when discussing the artistic process and products of modernist artists in Vienna, the term *Gesamtkunstwerk* refers to the idea of the entire environment as "a total work of art."<sup>8</sup>

The Neue exemplifies the concept of *Gesamtkunstwerk* in its design and in its blending of Werkstätte furniture with Secession artwork. The ability of the interior to symbolize the individual's psychological reflections was one prominent theme of turn-of-the-century modernism. Modern artists, particularly in Vienna,

further imagined the interior as a place for cultural reform: by patronizing the applied arts in Vienna, art collectors at the time expressed their embrace of modernism and thus supported the development and flourishing of a style now seen as specific to Vienna.

In the groundbreaking book *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna: Art and Politics*, Carl Emil Schorske, a leading scholar on Viennese modernism, accurately summarizes Viennese artists' attempt to shift away from the aesthetic structures of previous generations. Schorske asserts that, in Vienna, modernist culture and aesthetics emerged from the ahistorical attitude adopted by the children of liberalism. Artists during this time defined themselves by turning away from the past and asserting their independence from a history they deemed useless.<sup>9</sup> Modernists, then, saw themselves as engaged in an ahistorical process of self-discovery; not only visual artists but also many other types of Viennese intellectual groups were simultaneously attempting to break away from the bonds of history.

The shared belief that history was meaningless led Viennese writers, musicians, artists, and architects to abandon previous assumptions and ideas. Instead, they declared themselves completely free to recreate Vienna as they saw fit. Their search for a new identification—which Schorske calls a “reshuffling of the self”—forced social groups to replace or revise entire belief systems in order to create history as the present.<sup>10</sup> The result was a revolt by the younger generation against its cultural inheritance. Delving into the political tensions in Vienna, Schorske details the cultural unrest, anti-Semitic tensions, major cultural

and historical personalities, and vibrant artistic innovation of this period. He also discusses the large role anti-Semitism played in turn-of-the-century Vienna, as demonstrated by the political rise of Mayor Karl Leuger and the professional and social alienation of even the most prominent Jewish Viennese figures, including Sigmund Freud.

Though history is Schorske's main theme, he references the visual arts in his fifth chapter, "Gustav Klimt: Painting and the Crisis of the Liberal Ego." In Schorske's account, Klimt leads the Viennese Secession in the quest to express modernism and self through visual form. Schorske takes the reader from Klimt's first famous commission, the Burgtheater, painted in historical realist style, to his rejected University paintings. These controversial paintings also highlight the political turmoil that affected Vienna since the public battle over Klimt's work revealed the depths of national crisis. As Schorske states, during this period, "political issues became cultural and cultural issues became political."<sup>11</sup> The Liberal Philosophical Society, which was comprised primarily of Jewish Viennese, defended Klimt. Both the rising artist and the Jewish community, who patronized the modern arts, became thorough outcasts as the power of Karl Leuger and his right-wing Christian followers grew. However, Schorske does not discuss the profound impact of Jewish art patronage on *fin-de-siècle* Vienna, nor does he discuss Klimt's portraits, whose subjects were primarily liberal, Jewish women who were important patrons of the arts in the city. Numerous works of art once owned by these influential patrons are now on display at the Neue.



Although the exhibition catalogues that accompany each show held at the Neue shed light on the opinion of director Renée Price, associate curator Janis Staggs, and even Ronald Lauder himself, the Neue Galerie has so far received little academic attention. Research and publications that focus on the cultural context of Lauder's collection, *fin-de-siècle* Vienna, are relatively new additions to literature about the historical *avant-garde*. In addition to Schorske's book, Stephen Toulmin and Allan Janik published *Wittgenstein's Vienna*, and William Johnston wrote *The Austrian Mind*. These earlier works also concentrate on the subject of Vienna before World War I, adding to the important political and cultural discourse of *fin-de-siècle* Vienna. Countless articles as well as monumental exhibitions on the subject of Viennese modernism have surfaced in the wake of Schorske's book. Lauder and his staff are no doubt familiar with the discourse of Viennese modernism. The Neue's bookshop offers numerous texts that discuss Viennese modernism; however, the rest of the museum declines to note the arguments of these scholars, leaving the artworks on display with no socio-cultural context or historical information to supplement the viewer's understanding.

Previous exhibitions in New York have focused on Viennese modernism, but these presented themselves very differently from the Neue. For example, in 1986, New York's Museum of Modern Art presented *Vienna 1900: Art, Architecture, and Design*, an exhibition that preceded and influenced the more recent popularization of this subject matter. In this MoMA exhibition, the curator

Kirk Varnedoe examined and defined Austrian modernism as “a fusion of decadence and genius on the one hand and an *avant-garde* steeled to challenge official order and tradition on the other.”<sup>12</sup> In the exhibition catalogue, he asserts that in looking to the margins in the history of the Viennese *avant-garde* (i.e., examining Vienna rather than Paris) we can begin to discover an undervalued tradition. According to Varnedoe, artists and intellectuals working contemporaneously in Vienna did not necessarily express a unified modernist viewpoint or present parallel visions of the city where they lived and worked. Thus, Varnedoe chooses to separate cultural history from visual art, focusing solely on painting, architecture, and design produced in Vienna at the turn of the century. Varnedoe’s emphasis on formalism, therefore, does not allow him to discuss social and political developments like the rise of anti-Semitism in Vienna during the *fin-de-siècle* period. Further, Varnedoe explicitly declines to discuss any possible relationship between Vienna’s culture or politics and its art: “Put simply, Klimt was not Freud, and Schiele was not Schoenberg.”<sup>13</sup> Instead, he focuses strictly on the formal qualities of each artist’s work, carefully avoiding any cultural history that might initiate a discussion of the Jewish culture that prevailed in Vienna at the turn of the twentieth century.

Although the intent and history of the Neue and the MoMA differ, both institutions dedicate themselves to the artwork of modernism. Varnedoe’s analysis of Viennese modernism remains valuable because his MoMA exhibition served as a precedent to the Neue Galerie; in addition, both museums are in the

US, and each has attempted in its own way to display modern Viennese artwork. The exhibition Varnedoe created in 1986 was one of the first American exhibitions to cover the theme of *fin-de-siècle* Viennese modernism. Thus, it set an early standard for the manner in which museums could present Viennese modernism to the American public. The Neue Galerie—founded fifteen years after Varnedoe’s exhibit—chooses to represent Viennese modernism in a distinct way. It is important to be aware of which models of modernism Lauder chooses to present in the Neue. What the museum leaves out because of formalist ideals, however, is also vital in fully understanding the issues that shaped Viennese modernism.

### **Restitution and Provenance at the Neue**

In chapter three of my thesis, entitled “Exhibiting Restitution,” I delve into concerns that are central to any discussion of the Neue Galerie because of its specific collection: provenance and restitution. I question how the exhibition methods used for Lauder’s private collection differ from those utilized in both the Jewish Museum in New York, located steps from the Neue, and the Jewish Museum of the City of Vienna. Lauder is a Jewish art collector, as was Sabarsky, and Lauder’s collection focuses on Vienna, a city whose culture has long included a large and influential Jewish community. This city has also contended throughout the modern era, with issues concerning Semitism and anti-Semitism. Recent scholarship on Viennese society at the turn of the twentieth century deals heavily with the community of Jewish intellectuals who served as art patrons and

that community's significance for Viennese *fin-de-siècle* culture. Steven Beller's book, *Vienna and the Jews, 1867-1938*, discusses "the Jewish question": whether or not there was anything particularly Jewish about the activities or impact of these individuals as art patrons in *fin-de-siècle* Vienna. Although Beller maintains that there were no Jewish modern artists in Vienna, the level of financial sustenance Jewish patrons extended to Viennese artists was astounding; indeed, this financial support may be the main reason modern arts flourished in Vienna.

One particular Jewish art patron, Adele Bloch-Bauer, commissioned a portrait entitled *Adele Bloch-Bauer I* from Klimt in 1907. This portrait is arguably the most famous work of art in Lauder's collection. The complex provenance of this specific painting has prompted further discussion and attention to the restitution of many other artworks, including some for whom the heirs of original owners still await justice. Bloch-Bauer herself serves as an accurate example of Beller's argument about the crucial role of Jewish art patronage in Vienna. In addition, attention to both her personal history and the fortunes of the Bloch-Bauer family since her death can help illuminate the role of the Jewish community in *fin-de-siècle* Vienna and also the role of one contemporary art patron, Ronald Lauder.

By examining the prized portrait of *Adele Bloch-Bauer I*, purchased by Lauder for 135 million dollars in 2006, I explore how and why the image of one affluent Jewish art patron (Adele Bloch-Bauer) has ended up in the possession of

Lauder, a collector who is active in Jewish philanthropic causes. My thorough investigation of the case of the Bloch-Bauer collection also highlights the complex meanings of displaying contested works of art today, at a time when many more artworks stolen from Jewish collectors still await eventual restitution to the heirs of their rightful owners.

Catalogues published by the Neue such as *Gustav Klimt: The Ronald S. Lauder and Serge Sabarsky Collection* and *Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer* foreground and summarize Bloch-Bauer's life as a wife, a passionate modern art collector, and a model for Gustav Klimt—but the discussion ends there. The history of the Jewish Viennese community's persecution during World War II would provide further insight into the struggle that the Bloch-Bauer family endured in order to regain possession of their art collections. The dramatic and very public struggles of Adele Bloch-Bauer's niece, Maria Altmann, to recover possession of her aunt's portrait from Austria led to the direct intervention of Lauder, who was determined to see justice served and the portrait returned to the Bloch-Bauers' heirs, no matter the cost. Although the painting of *Adele Bloch-Bauer I* has a rich history of its own, the Neue's exhibition makes no mention of the artwork's previous owner, nor of how the museum came to acquire the celebrated portrait.

The Neue has not publicly released detailed information about the artwork's provenance or its restitution to the descendants of its original, Viennese Jewish owners. Thus, the way in which the Neue displays the portrait of Adele

Bloch-Bauer emblemizes the challenges many museums in Vienna still face in choosing to exhibit Jewish culture. In order to examine how Viennese cultural museums today are exhibiting Jewish history, and how Jewish intellectuals at the turn of the century in Vienna helped to create pride and identification, I consult Matti Bunzl's discussion of the Jewish Viennese community in *Symptoms of Modernity: Jews and Queers in Late-Twentieth-Century Vienna*. Bunzl argues that Viennese museums today are working through their past by exhibiting objects and images of leading Jewish figures from the *fin de siècle* who are familiar to the public, in order to increase pride in Judaism in present times. According to Bunzl, the museums in Vienna focus on these past intellectuals' professional achievements and religious affiliations, thereby helping to create a bridge of identification between the illustrious, if tragic, past, and Vienna's current Jewish community. By tracing a cultural history back to those Jewish individuals who were prominent in *fin-de-siècle* Vienna, Bunzl describes the Viennese Jewish culture as moving over the course of the twentieth century "from the margins to the center of Austria and its nation."<sup>14</sup> Thus, The portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer serves as an icon on several levels. In addition to serving as an icon for Jewish identity and cultural importance, past and present, she also deserves recognition as an emblem of identification for Lauder, as a prominent private art collector.

### **Ronald Lauder as Private Collector**

In chapter four of my thesis, "Private Art Collections that Precede the Neue: Identification through Artwork," I examine how previous US private

collectors who have installed their collections in private residences influenced Ronald Lauder in his establishment of the Neue Galerie. The exhibitory displays of past private collections turned museums, such as the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum and the Henry Clay Frick Collection, presented the options available to Lauder and his curators when they designed their own private museum. In “Private Museums, Public Leadership: Isabella Stewart Gardner and the Art of Cultural Leadership,” Ann Higonnet explores how the private collector (Isabella Stewart Gardner, in her text) arranges the collection and how the public receives it. She states that the private collector who purchases artworks and displays them in the home intends for visitors to recognize the museum as a memorial to the collector, a kind of personal space in which the collector’s presence lives on through the collected objects. Higonnet’s ideas seem relevant to the Neue since the museum reads like a private residence; its interior mimics a lavish private home similar to the residence-turned-museum homes of previous collectors such as the Gardner and Frick.

Both Gardner and Frick went beyond displaying their collections in private residences to demonstrate their continuing “presence” to visitors. Gardner commissioned ten portraits of herself, all of them on display in the Gardner museum. One of Frick’s portraits is also on display in his former home. Moreover, the presence of both collectors lingers symbolically through the display of the most expensive and striking paintings they purchased. For Gardner, this signature painting was Titian’s *Europa*. Frick’s signature paintings include a

Titian, El Greco, and a Bellini, all of which greet the visitor upon entry. These private collectors chose to be remembered through having their impressive collections, along with their own portraits, displayed prominently in their former homes.

While the Neue's building was never Lauder's home, he also has a close identification with a signature painting. His relationship to *Adele Bloch-Bauer I* extends beyond his involvement in the portrait's restitution to the astonishing 135 million dollar price he eventually paid to add it to his collection. A photograph of Lauder positioned in front of the painting identifies the collector with Viennese modernism, with Klimt, and with Adele Bloch-Bauer herself as a patron of the arts. The use of this photograph as frontispiece in the Neue's catalogues affirms the importance of these associations with the museum's mission and public identity. Although these relations remain unarticulated, the visual depiction of Lauder positioned in front of the Bloch-Bauer painting underscores the importance of his role as collector, and even as a kind of savior of the celebrated portrait, which his patronage has made available to the public in its permanent display at the Neue.

Viennese modernism does not end with the artists and collectors who are included and visually represented in the Neue Galerie. Though the portrait of Bloch-Bauer embodies very specific themes within Viennese modernism, it also points to the major confluence of Jewish identity and modern culture in *fin-de-siècle* Vienna. Therefore, Klimt's painting is more than just a portrait, and Adele



Bloch-Bauer is more than just a model. Within the context of Lauder's private collection and museum, Bloch-Bauer becomes an icon of the repressed and otherwise underrepresented theme of Viennese Jewish identity at the turn of the twentieth century. Adele Bloch-Bauer as a person raises issues of liberalism, bourgeois class structures, patronage, art collecting, and restitution—all issues that remain relevant to the Neue Galerie's collection and Ronald Lauder as a private art collector, as well as to the wider art community.

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<sup>1</sup> Renée Price, *New Worlds: German and Austrian Art 1890-1940* (New York: Neue Galerie, 2001), 9.

<sup>2</sup> Anne Higonnet, "Museum Sight," in *Art and its Politics: Museum Studies at the Millennium*, ed. Andrew McClellan et al. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 134.

<sup>3</sup> Karen Rosenberg, "Breadth of History in One Bite," *The New York Times*, November 3, 2011, C23.

<sup>4</sup> Serge Sabarsky, *Serge Sabarsky: a Full Life*, (New York: Neue Galerie, 2002), 7.

<sup>5</sup> Serge Sabarsky, *A Full Life*, 13.

<sup>6</sup> Serge Sabarsky, *A Full Life*, 94.

<sup>7</sup> Price, *New Worlds*, IV.

<sup>8</sup> Price, *New Worlds*, 9.

<sup>9</sup> Carl Schorske, *Fin-de-Siècle Austria: Politics and Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1981), xxi.

<sup>10</sup> Schorske, *Fin de Siècle Vienna*, xviii.

<sup>11</sup> Schorske, *Fin de Siècle Vienna*, 59.

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<sup>12</sup> Kirk Varnedoe, *Vienna 1900: Art, Architecture and Design* (New York: MOMA, 1986), 21.

<sup>13</sup> Varnedoe, *Vienna 1900*, 33.

<sup>14</sup> Matti Bunzl. *Symptoms of Modernity: Jews and Queers in Late-Nineteenth-Century Vienna* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004), 179.

## Chapter 2

### AT THE NEUE: THE EXHIBITION OF A PRIVATE MUSEUM

Described as “decadent, lavish and a place evoking sensory overload,” the Neue Galerie suggests luxury and wealth from turn-of-the-twentieth-century Vienna not only through its permanent collection of fine and applied arts (created from 1890 to 1914), but also through the design of its refined and impressive space.<sup>1</sup> This chapter will first provide a description of the Neue Galerie’s layout and investigate how the museum represents modernism. It then discusses how the Neue exemplifies specific aspects of Viennese culture such as the notion of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, the city’s coffeehouse phenomenon, and its tradition of modern art patronage including private art collecting. Ronald Lauder’s choice to build and design the Neue Galerie specifically to host Viennese modernist art provides an entirely unique experience for the visitor.

The third section of this chapter discusses two authors who have written their own recollections of *fin-de-siècle* Vienna. The memories of authors Marjorie Perloff and Tim Bonyhady demonstrate how visitors connected to Vienna through family heritage can personally relate to various historical themes that the Neue evokes. The recollections of Perloff and Bonyhady, both of whom write about the setting and artworks in the Neue Galerie, illuminate how the museum represents history and modernism by raising issues of political tension, artistic patronage, and cultural identification. The physical layout of the Neue’s

gallery space echoes the domestic atmosphere of such apartments as Bonyhady's grandparents, Hermine and Moriz Gallia. The Neue's reconstruction of modern Viennese interiors begs further examination of the importance of interior spaces in *fin-de-siècle* European culture. Memory therefore introduces intimacy into the modern art museum setting. This intimacy is the strongest contrast between the Neue's representation of modernism and that suggested by the Museum of Modern Art in New York (MoMA), located across town. The Neue redefines the modern art museum; rather than displaying modernist art in a stark white cube, the Neue surrounds its collection with an intimate atmosphere that encourages personal reminiscence. The fourth section of chapter two examines and compares the impressive modern art collections housed both by the MoMA and the Neue Galerie, particularly in terms of how the museums exhibit their collections. The specific model of modernism suggested by each space in order to clarify the differing representations of cultural and social histories presented within each museum setting will be further examined.

Despite the differences between the two museums, MoMA has strongly influenced the owner of the Neue Galerie, Ronald Lauder, since his early days as an art collector; even today, he remains an active and honorary member on MoMA's board of trustees. The final section of this chapter discusses this influence and concludes that due to their metropolitan locations, both the Neue and MoMA evoke an urban definition of modernism, a notion that became

popular in the late nineteenth century.

Regardless of MoMA's strong influence on Lauder, he chose to build and design a specific museum to house Viennese modernism rather than give MoMA his collection. In the Neue, Lauder assists his curators in developing and displaying the specifically Viennese cultural characteristics that pervade the entire museum environment, thus creating a pertinent addition to the discourse on modern art.

### **A Tour of the Neue Galerie**

Every detail has been taken into consideration at the Neue Galerie. The details transport the visitor through time from the bustling New York streets into the grandeur of *fin-de-siècle* Vienna. Lest it be unapparent at first glance that the former private residence at Fifth Avenue and 86<sup>th</sup> Street is a museum, numerous banners hang along Fifth Avenue advertising the Neue's most recent exhibition. Beginning with its entrance, the Neue includes an accurate replication of *art nouveau* style to create an authentic experience. The wrought iron front door, designed with organic *art nouveau* forms, opens onto an expansive black and white checkered tile of the interior, reminiscent of the work of Josef Hoffmann and Koloman Moser. An authentic Hoffman chandelier gives off a soft, orange glow that illuminates the bookstore located to the left of the front door. In the bookstore, dark mahogany bookcases offer texts that cover an array of theory books and biographies relevant to twentieth-century Germany and Austria.

Directly next to the bookshop, the design store sells pricey replicas of Wiener Werkstätte (Applied Arts of Vienna) items. The rest of the museum's ground floor also echoes the style of the Viennese modern. In the main entrance hall there are reproductions of Werkstätte-style lamps on black-finished Werkstätte-style wood credenzas. A magnificent spiral staircase adorned with black wrought-iron spiral motifs winds upward to welcome the visitor to the permanent exhibitions on the second and third floors.

The second floor houses a permanent exhibition of the Wiener Sezession (Vienna Secession) and Wiener Werkstätte (Applied Arts of Vienna); its physical layout is reminiscent of the historic *Klimt Kollektiv* exhibition presented in Vienna in 1903. In honor of the Neue Galerie's ten-year anniversary in 2011, curators rearranged some of the permanent collection, creating extra space that is now used to celebrate Lauder's collection. This rearrangement mingles the Werkstätte pieces which were originally located in a separate room with Secession paintings. This modification creates a visual association that successfully highlights both groups' use of similar geometric patterning and decorative motifs. An emerald green sofa and three small stools are positioned at the center of the first room. The vibrant green fabric of the sofa instantly connects the viewer's eye to the same shade of green in Lauder's most prized artwork, Gustav Klimt's 1907 portrait, *Adele Bloch-Bauer I*. The famous portrait is set off by a frame created by Josef Hoffmann and is the sole occupant of the

Southeast wall. Two figural sculptures by Georg Minne, entitled *Kneeling Youth*, sit atop pedestals on either side of the painting. The portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer and sculptures by Minne were purchased by the Bloch-Bauers at the turn of the twentieth century. The arrangement of painting and sculpture in the Neue is identical to that designed by Ferdinand Bloch-Bauer in his modern Viennese home. Thus, Lauder has adopted the same layout as the original owner, recreating the intimate domestic context for which such Viennese art was intended.

Positioned in front of both windows in this exhibition space are Werkstätte French walnut cabinets. Crafted by Hoffmann in 1886 for the patron family Hecker, each cabinet includes three glass shelves adorned with various functional Werkstätte silver objects.

Cream-colored canvas shades completely cover each window in the second floor galleries, creating a distinct barrier between the outside and the interior world of the Neue. These subtleties reinforce Lauder's wish to immerse the viewer in the setting of *fin-de-siècle* Vienna. Each painting in this area regardless of artist, Oskar Kokoschka, Egon Schiele, or Gustav Klimt, hangs on its own white wall panel, which is adorned by thin gold beading, a decorative element shared with the *Klimt Kollektiv* exhibition of 1903. Marble baseboards, edging, and molding demarcate each panel from the next. The combination of polished wood floors and gray painted doors mimic the look of a luxurious private living room in which art functions as mere decoration. However intimate the

setting, the single small white art label that hangs beside each work of art returns the viewer to the reality of the museum setting. Each label includes the artist's name, nationality, and date of birth, title of each artwork, its year of production, as well as the medium used.

The room to the right of the portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer is dark and dramatic, portraying twenty-four figural paintings by Egon Schiele that confront the viewer. A crystal chandelier with black ivy leaves designed by Hoffmann serves as the main source of light. Gray upholstered walls with dark green baseboards and the absence of windows create a mysterious atmosphere. The subject matter of the paintings consists mostly of nudes in provocative and emotive expressionistic poses. This room turns away from the opulence and heavy gold décor just outside, communicating an introverted, psychological side of Vienna. Further displays in this room are works by Alfred Kubin, Oskar Kokoschka, and Richard Gerstl, as well as charcoal studies completed by Klimt.

The audio tour that comes with admission presents a special limited time tour with owner Ronald Lauder. The listener engages in a recording personalized by Lauder's voice as he discusses select works in his collection, enthusiastically revealing which artworks he favors. Lauder describes the modern in *fin-de-siècle* Vienna as "special and exciting, as things were changing."<sup>2</sup> Modernism at the turn of the twentieth century created an atmosphere filled with "functionality mixed with luxury."<sup>3</sup> While Lauder cannot verify why Klimt painted such figures



as the woman in *Lady with Black-Feathered Hat*, he nevertheless speculates that “maybe she was Klimt’s lover, since he was famous for his relations with his models.”<sup>4</sup>

Not surprisingly, Lauder says far more about the Neue’s own equivalent of its “Mona Lisa” – *Adele Bloch-Bauer I*.<sup>5</sup> He discusses the story of the painting’s execution and gives a formal analysis of its composition. Bloch-Bauer is “depicted like a queen” and “one cannot tell whether she is sitting or standing.”<sup>6</sup> He directs the viewer’s attention to Bloch-Bauer’s striking diamond choker, designed by Hoffmann, to suggest the close connection the *Werkstätte* and Secession had during this time. Lauder briefly details the terms on which the Neue acquired the painting. Although he does not disclose to the listener his own role in the restitution of *Adele Bloch-Bauer I*, he does mention Maria Altmann, Bloch-Bauer’s niece, who repossessed the artwork along with five other Klimt paintings. According to Lauder, “after the return of the paintings in 2006, the Neue bought the portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer from the heirs and immediately put it on public view.”<sup>7</sup> The painting “encompasses turn-of-the-century Vienna, with all of its power and excitement.”<sup>8</sup>

Lauder, as tour guide, enables the listener to embark on a seemingly private excursion through the museum. Unfortunately, he leaves his tour group with little information about the artwork in the socio-cultural context of *fin-de-siècle* Vienna. In the Neue’s most recent exhibition catalogue, *The Ronald S.*

*Lauder Collection: Selections from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century BC to the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*

*Germany, Austria and France*, Lauder explains his approach to collecting:

It is simply a combination of knowledge and passion. My methods (in collecting the best art) is to buy all the books about an artist that are available, including a catalogue *raisonné*, look at all the pictures, see the works in museums, and research the auction catalogues.<sup>9</sup>

No doubt Lauder is familiar with, and has probably read, many of the texts housed in the Neue's ground-floor bookshop, which discuss early 20<sup>th</sup> century modernism. Yet, Lauder explicitly declines to educate the visitor about Vienna's political, philosophical, and cultural conflicts at the turn of the twentieth century. Instead, the Neue explicates Viennese modernism solely through its atmosphere, which includes the environment that surrounds the paintings. The Neue's café, bookshop, design store, and interior design all provide opportunities for the visitor to imagine the lifestyle of *fin-de-siècle* Vienna. The Neue's unique design also demonstrates that the private collector can construct his own imaginative world, one that includes only superior aspects of *fin-de-siècle* Vienna. Modernism in the Neue does not focus on theoretical content but instead illustrates the popular *fin-de-siècle* Viennese idea of *Gesamtkunstwerk*. The Neue's depiction of turn-of-the-century Vienna empties the era of any dark history, emphasizing instead the best qualities of the period.

### ***Gesamtkunstwerk* in the Neue Galerie**

In an essay entitled "Narrative and Imagination: Remaking National History at the Musée des Monuments François, Paris," Matthias Backstrom

argues that the narrative museum is equivalent to the idea of *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Backstrom defines *Gesamtkunstwerk* as a specific type of collective environment comprised of aesthetic, spatial, temporal and architectural components. Narrative museums, first constructed in late eighteenth-century France, sought to display historical objects chronologically in a sensuous manner rather than a depersonalized and objective one.<sup>10</sup> The Neue Galerie is not concerned with chronological organization since it mixes Expressionist artwork with Secessionist works of art. However, it does an outstanding job in creating a sensory *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Not only did Viennese *fin-de-siècle* artists embrace the notion of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, the Neue Galerie has also revived the concept in order to display modern Viennese artwork.

The Neue's physical rendering of *Gesamtkunstwerk* reflects the philosophical beliefs of artists at the turn of the twentieth century. Instead of explicating those beliefs for the visitor, Lauder shows how through painting, architecture, sculpture, and interior design collectively, Viennese artists created an all-encompassing environment of modernism that emanated from the private home. The Neue also reflects this high quality that Viennese artists strived for in their work. Everything in the museum evokes the luxurious setting in which Secessionist artwork thrived.

The Neue houses many artworks by artists of *fin-de-siècle* Vienna who eventually evolved into prominent citizens of the Habsburg monarchy and

embraced a kind of “material pleasure” through the self-conscious idea of *Gesamtkunstwerk*.<sup>11</sup> This came at a time of industrial expansion, increased financial investments, and burgeoning material fortunes.<sup>12</sup> The tremendous wealth of the aristocracy led to an overflow of mass-produced furniture and artwork that symbolized prosperity and success yet merely imitated aesthetic styles of the past.<sup>13</sup> The generation that included artists from the Secession and Werkstätte grew up in these homes and developed the notion of *Gesamtkunstwerk* to reform what they saw as a mixture of styles that expressed no coherent artistic statement about Vienna.

Through design and more particularly through the handmade, Werkstätte artists were eager to get their artistic innovations out of the studio and into the private home, believing the aesthetics and ethics associated with the minor arts to be agents of reform and signs of social health. Staged as a private residence, the Neue displays the Secession and Werkstätte style that included collaborative design. Lauder exhibits these functional objects alongside paintings and sculptures all accentuated with *art nouveau* decor.

The Neue presents an additional aspect of *Gesamtkunstwerk* by offering food in a café setting. The warm smell of home-cooked Austrian cuisine from Café Sabarsky, the Neue’s prized restaurant, wafts into the rest of the museum. The café serves a variety of Austria’s most decadent and familiar food, that closely mimics the environment in which turn-of-the-century Viennese artists,

philosophers, authors, and musicians gathered to drink coffee and talk about current events. The design of the café space allows visitors to reenact Viennese history and participate in this other Viennese tradition. By providing a physical environment that embraces *fin-de-siècle* café culture, the Neue contains a facsimile of a particular social space in which Viennese modernists collaborated and developed a shared identity.

In Vienna, the coffeehouse flourished as a cultural institution, a kind of public salon where men and women of all classes and races gathered to read, brood, and converse. Café Griensteidl was particularly famous and referred to as the headquarters of *Jung Wien* or “Young Vienna,” a group of *fin-de-siècle* literary intellectuals that revolved around the expressive, psychological, and cultural ideas of their leader, Hermann Bahr. The pleasure in conversation, writing, and creating art in the café allowed coffeehouse patrons to embrace leisure while transforming Viennese aestheticism into a modern mentality.<sup>14</sup> For new and rising artists, to question the preconceived notion of historical “good taste” was to question the very foundation of society.<sup>15</sup> Modernism in Vienna at the turn of the century was therefore conceived by the rejection of historicism, and young Viennese forged their new modernist aesthetic and cultural identity through coffeehouse discussions and collaborations.

The *fin-de-siècle* café supplied daily newspapers and allowed regular patrons to retrieve mail and laundry. Popular recreational activities in cafés

included games of chess and cards. Additionally, the coffeehouse acted as a bridge between classes, allowing advancement and collaboration in thought and discourse. Young intellectuals believed that through dialogue their society and empire could be rebuilt from within.<sup>16</sup> Carl Schorske, author of *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture*, argues, “Traditional Austrian culture was aesthetic. Its greatest achievements were seen in the arts.”<sup>17</sup> The aesthetic principle that Schorske describes was manifested in a variety of fields; however, it grew from relationships developed within café culture, which provided a communal space for discussions of modernism and Viennese style.

Café Sabarsky replicates the physical environment of a *fin-de-siècle* Viennese café, featuring black bentwood chairs, similar to the one designed by Adolf Loos in 1899, positioned around marble tables. Original posters and prints by the Secession fill the walls. The Neue’s recreation of Vienna’s past moves beyond style and furnishings when it allows the visitor to participate in a sweet tradition of coffeehouse indulgence for which Vienna is famous. In a restaurant review, Janet Forman describes the environment and participatory aspect of Café Sabarsky perfectly:

Slide across a banquette covered in extravagant 1912 floral textile overlooking the most fashionable part of Fifth Avenue, place a voluptuous six dollar *Sacher* torte to your lips, and for an hour you can be the vamp Sally Bowles or enigmatic expressionist painter.<sup>18</sup>

For Viennese-born memoirist Marjorie Perloff, visiting Café Sabarsky sparked gustatory nostalgia for the country of her early childhood. Perloff states

that, through sampling Café Sabarsky's authentic *Sacher* torte, she regained a "happiness triggered by a Proustian recollection."<sup>19</sup> It is apparent through Perloff's experience that food is an important aspect of her memory. In the article "Culinary Nostalgia: Authenticity, Nationalism, and Diaspora," author Anita Mannur argues that food serves as an intellectual and emotional anchor that can physically transport one back to childhood. Thus, for Perloff food serves as a connection to Austria, which helped her to maintain a sense of identity after her immigration to America. Mannur also argues that food carries a nostalgic significance only after one migrates to another location and that longing for a homeland specific to one's ethnicity can be identified and expressed through the culinary.<sup>20</sup>

The design choices in the Neue Galerie's exhibition spaces as well as the inclusion of culturally important spaces such as the recreated Viennese café encourage visitors to understand Viennese modernism as a culturally transformative movement that depended on and permeated a variety of environments.

### **Memory, History and the *Fin-de-Siècle* Interior**

The Neue encourages the visitor to travel back in time and thus promotes various forms of culturally specific memories. The historical accuracy of the physical environment mixed with the display of turn-of-the-century Viennese artwork prompts intimate memories of Vienna and provides insight into changing

notions of the interior during the modernist era. In *Body, Place, and Self in Nineteenth-Century Painting*, Susan Sidlauskas claims that in the nineteenth century, the bourgeois class became “addicted to the home.”<sup>21</sup> Interior decoration was becoming popular as a form of self-expression. Numerous paintings by artists such as Eduard Vuillard, Edgar Degas, and Henri Matisse depicted domestic interiors in late nineteenth-century France. Sidlauskas argues that the bourgeois class defined status largely through their “newly conceptualized interior lives,” which they communicated to others through an expressive relation to their interior setting.<sup>22</sup>

The relation of bourgeois individuals to their interior spaces was different in France and Austria although in both cultures people used interior spaces to symbolize their social standing. Many of the manuals on decoration released in *fin-de-siècle* France encouraged readers to “project themselves imaginatively into whatever space was described or represented.”<sup>23</sup> Thus, French individuals experienced the domestic interior as a portal for their most intimate feelings. In 1860, the Parisian architect César Daly defined the house as “the clothing of the family.”<sup>24</sup> He described the interior as a determinant for psychological quality – good or bad. For example, Sidlauskas points out that Vuillard’s signature compact paint strokes link the figures in his work to their backgrounds, forming a continuity between his subjects and their settings. The *art nouveau* style popular at the turn of the century also mirrored the inner tensions of individuals within



society. According to Deborah Silverman in *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France: Politics, Psychology, and Style*, this tension, exteriorized in the forms that shaped the new modern interiors, presented interior spaces that no longer served as refuges but instead as replacements for the external world.<sup>25</sup>

While French *fin-de-siècle* interiors concentrated on personal expression at the expense of harmonious style, Austrian interiors at the turn of the century reflected concern for unified modern expression. In *fin-de-siècle* Vienna, Wiener Werkstätte artists projected their ideas of a strict Viennese style into the private interior. This modernist Viennese style emphasized organization, balance, and unity and expressed itself in clean lines, a limited palette, and repetitive motifs. At the turn of the twentieth century, this new attention to interior spaces gave artists a chance to reform society and its taste in order to define a modernism that was specific to Vienna. For example, in the Gallias' home, which is described in detail by Tim Bonyhady in *Good Living Street: Portrait of a Patron Family, Vienna 1900*, everything from the couches to utensils represented the design and handiwork of Werkstätte artists. The Neue, then, in imitating the simple, precise construction of the Gallias' home, exemplifies the specifically Austrian turn-of-the-century ideal of the interior as expressing a unified vision of Viennese modernism.

The Neue's re-creation of Viennese interiors evokes intimate cultural memories for individuals with personal ties to Vienna. In his book *National*

*Museums: New Studies from around the World*, Simon Knell reflects on the work of Stefan Berger and Chris Lorenz, who claim that memory and history are oppositional because memory perpetuates the present and history represents the past.<sup>26</sup> Memory, then, can create a connection among those groups it binds and thus causes multiple, but individual, responses. In contrast, history belongs to a universal approach that recounts past events. According to Berger and Lorenz, “history is perpetually suspicious of memory, and its true mission is to suppress and destroy it.”<sup>27</sup> Knell asserts that memory is in the hands of individuals while history is in possession of professionals.<sup>28</sup> Within the setting of the Neue, artwork evokes memories and emotions through their relation to the physical construction of the interior. Ronald Lauder, the professional in this example, has constructed the Neue from his private collection, employing his interpretation of history. However, once this interpretation of history is embodied in the museum, the museum environment becomes a stage on which visitors perform the individual and personal work of memory and imagination. History becomes personal heritage.

In this way, authors such as Marjorie Perloff and Tim Bonyhady help to enrich our understanding of the Neue’s construction of history. Memory delivers an authentic understanding of the participants in Vienna’s *fin-de-siècle* aesthetic revolution, illuminating how both they and their city experienced momentous change when modernism gave way to political unrest. The Neue then provides an

opportunity for a much-needed discourse that validates the importance of Viennese modernism in shaping that city and its artists. Bonyhady offers a compelling account of his family's emigration from Austria to Australia during the *Anschluss*. Traced by means of numerous documents, contemporary diaries, and Bonyhady's own recollections, the world of the upper class Gallia family reflects the many facets of Vienna at the turn of the century. Herr Moriz Gallia (Bonyhady's great grandfather) made his fortune as a businessman and as an investor in the Watt Company, which sold gaslights in Vienna. The description of the Gallias' experience exemplifies many commonplaces of aristocratic Jewish life in *fin-de-siècle* Vienna: cultural assimilation and passion for the theatre and art collecting. The author focuses on many of the artworks that his great-grandmother, Hermine Gallia, collected which included an abundance of Wiener Werkstätte pieces by Josef Hoffmann and Koloman Moser, as well as paintings by Secession participants Gustav Klimt and Carl Moll. He writes about one painting in particular, *Portrait of Hermine Gallia*, painted by Gustav Klimt in 1904. This work of art was popular during the exhibition days of the Secession. Klimt borrowed the portrait of Hermine and displayed it in an unfinished state in the 1903 exhibition entitled *Klimt Kollektiv*. Exhibited in the building's sixth room, the painting is surrounded by furniture executed by the Werkstätte. There, as in the present-day Neue, each painting by Klimt hung on its own wall set off by a simple thin piece of gilded beading.<sup>29</sup> The exhibition allowed Hermine a public

means of demonstrating her wealth by showing everyone she could afford to commission a portrait from Klimt.

The milieu of art patronage in turn-of-the-century Vienna rejected everything that reflected historicism, expressing its exclusivity in its expensive taste for the modern. Not only did the Gallias' modern art collection reflect the family's taste and standing, but also they commissioned Josef Hoffmann to design all of the rooms in their Vienna home. By purchasing Werkstätte furniture, the Gallias asserted their individuality as mass-produced furniture made them look common. The Gallias' rooms recalled the rooms in the *Klimt Kollektiv* exhibition that included Hoffman-designed furniture that eloquently accentuated their paintings. Despite the Jewish Gallias' wealth, prominence, and assimilation into Viennese society, persecution from the Nazis during the 1938 *Anschluss* forced them to leave Austria for Australia, where some other Gallia family members had gone. By that time, Gretl and Käthe Gallia, the daughters of Hermine and Moriz, had inherited all of the artwork purchased by the family in recent years. The challenge of moving large pieces such as Klimt's paintings and Hoffmann's furniture was daunting. The furniture went first from its original setting on Wohllebengasse to an apartment in Sydney, Australia, and finally, at the request of Käthe's daughter Anne, to the National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne.

In 1984, the National Gallery of Victoria highlighted the Gallias' collection in *Vienna 1913*, an exhibition that recreated a suite of Hoffmann rooms.

Curator Terry Lane positioned the portrait of Hermine by Klimt at the front of the “apartment” so she could greet museum visitors. Museum staff interviewed a relative who had frequented the Gallias’ home in Vienna and thus experienced the artworks in their original setting. She wrote, “After visiting the exhibition, I relived the first time I came to the Wohllebengasse more than sixty-three years ago.”<sup>30</sup> Having gained possession of an entire private collection, the curators were able to reconstruct the remembered setting. The combination of memory and physical objects wrestles history from the possession of the professionals and presents artifacts from the past in a new manner, one that is intimate, authentic, and personal. The Neue’s physical re-creation of the spaces of historic Secession movement exhibitions and of historic private interiors that displayed personal art collections, supplies a similar bridge of historical accuracy. These spaces also connect Lauder with past art patrons who collected and displayed their work in private residences.

The mimicry of (private) display provokes memory in visitors who are thereby confronted with an immersive historic and cultural setting. Marjorie Perloff’s book, *The Vienna Paradox: A Memoir*, reflects this phenomenon. As assimilated Viennese Jewish citizens, her family remained proud of their affluent cultural heritage even after the *Anschluss* of 1938. Her book focuses not on her emigration but instead on what it meant to be upper class Viennese, a condition that she defines as “more Austrian than Jewish.”<sup>31</sup> Perloff also examines the

context of her heritage and memory in the setting of America, where she emigrated at the age of six. Perloff proposes two successive definitions of Viennese modernism. The first type of modernism refers to the “great imperial city with its opulent, gorgeous, erotic painting and design.”<sup>32</sup> The other consists of “Hitler’s Vienna, whose housing was so substandard that young men arriving to seek their fortune in the capital often ended up, as did Hitler, in bedbug-ridden shelters that were breeding grounds for violence and political upheaval.”<sup>33</sup> The author examines how the second type of modernism emerged from the first, just as the sleek, plain design of such *fin-de-siècle* architects as Adolf Loos emerged from the heavy ornamentation of *art nouveau* style.

Perloff explores these ideas through both the Neue Galerie and the Austrian Cultural Forum located on 52<sup>nd</sup> Street in New York City. For Perloff, the Neue results in “sensory overload.” She attributes this feeling to her parents’ contempt for the art that fills the Neue, art that they considered merely decadent and not yet truly modern. Although the author describes her approval of Café Sabarsky, her ultimate concern is the appropriation of Viennese Jewish property, including the cafés seized by the Nazis, rather than her personal feelings about the Neue as a museum. Perloff argues that her nostalgia results from being exiled from her heritage and past.

Perloff contrasts the Austrian Cultural Forum, which opened April of 2002, to the “classic nostalgic trip” she finds at the Neue Galerie. The Austrian

Cultural Forum presents yet another model of modernism. With its absence of decoration and use of the plain, the Forum's model of modernism represents a successful attempt to evolve from the past. Perloff believes that the Forum exemplifies Austria's goal of moving beyond an early modern model. Although the tall, glass skyscraper that penetrates the sky is reminiscent of many buildings in New York City, this particular structure symbolizes for Perloff a "dream of the new Vienna for a new artist."<sup>34</sup> Events at the Forum include *avant-garde* exhibitions, poetry readings, and concerts, all of which reflect this new conception of the artist. To Perloff, a dark political shadow seems to loom permanently over Austria, no matter the era. Similarly, Raimund Abraham, the native Austrian architect of the Forum, has in the last decade renounced his citizenship due to his own disagreement with the politics of his homeland. Nonetheless, the building's New York location does represent Austria in the American metropolis symbolizing hope for a "new turn."<sup>35</sup> This new turn would separate contemporary Austria from both the decadent *art nouveau* and the Hitler-driven version of the past. Perloff uses the example of the Austrian Cultural Forum to shift into her own later experience of growing up in New York. However, the design and physicality of the Forum's thin, rectilinear glass façade shares many stylistic elements with other modern structures in New York, including the Museum of Modern Art. MoMA expresses the modernist impulse by stripping the museum

environment of all intimate and personal memory. Instead, it displays the art in a formalist context, allowing the work to speak for itself.

### **MoMA's Models of Modernism**

Alfred Barr, the first director at MoMA, explained that the museum's collection was "a torpedo through time, its nose the ever-advancing present, its tail the ever-receding past."<sup>36</sup> Barr's statement exemplifies MoMA's belief that by selling off works more than fifty years old, it would rid itself of "classic art" and successfully continue to focus on the modern as of the moment, or up to date.<sup>37</sup> The institution therefore refused to identify itself with specific artworks, preferring to define itself as new and modern through its most recent acquisitions, not by the work it already held. This institutional impulse to strip away attachments to older modern art continued with the 1998 renovation of MoMA. For the redesign, architect Yoshio Taniguchi, who had never worked outside of his native Japan, chose a "refined, self-effacing brand of Minimalism which rejected modish grandiloquence."<sup>38</sup> His goal was to simply "make the architecture disappear."<sup>39</sup> In an article in the 2005 January edition of *The Burlington Magazine* entitled "A Masterpiece in Manhattan: The Museum of Modern Art, New York," Richard Shone argues that although some of the intimacy of the old rooms in the museum has been sacrificed, each room now organizes itself around an artistic style and movement. The article describes the



physical layout of the museum as “elegant” filled with track lighting, light oak wood floors, and white walls, which are somewhat “harsh.”<sup>40</sup>

Alan Wallach, author of the article “The Museum of Modern Art: The Past’s Future,” argues that MoMA constructs a specific history of modernism by means of its classification and categorization of style and period for each work collected. When MoMA opened its doors in 1929, the contrast between its material and architectural style and that of the surrounding buildings was overpowering. The author argues that this contrast was “crucial in MoMA’s developing aestheticism” as it released itself from outdated historical architecture.<sup>41</sup> MoMA’s new oppositional architecture pointed towards a future of “clarity, rationality, efficiency and functionality.”<sup>42</sup> The façade of the newly designed museum aided in defining its collection. The interior empirically organized its collection in an “antiseptic, laboratory-like space that was enclosed, isolated, and artificially illuminated,” which leaves the viewer to scrutinize the works of art as “secluded specimens.”<sup>43</sup> The environment discourages visitors from participating imaginatively in history, or from accessing any intimate memories; they are merely there to observe, like scientists, the modern display of art history.

Wallach maintains that the present day MoMA is impersonal and fragmented. He states that although MoMA has moved further away from formalism in its evolutionary architectural stages from the thirties to present, the

artwork is still displayed with a stark line dividing it from the viewer. A prime example of this type of display, which contrasts sharply with the Neue's model of exhibition, can be found on MoMA's third floor in the *International New Art: 1890-1914* section, which displays Viennese Secession and Werkstätte artwork. Here the artworks sit neatly categorized and labeled in a manner reminiscent of scientific specimens. As Wallach states, this display method suggests that the art is there purely for observation. The transparent, glass cabinets that house these items allow easy scrutiny of the objects. Along the wall, many large furniture pieces sit carefully arranged on a short, wooden platform. A small white text panel details the artist and date of production for each piece. This method of display lacks the warm staging of the interiors for which artists and craftsmen intended these objects. In contrast to the Neue, the presentation of artworks at MoMA lacks intimacy. There is no sense of time travel experienced. MoMA displays the objects as pieces lifted cleanly from the context of the past to rest eternally in the present. This model of modernism represents the past in a formalist manner only to assert to visitors that they are viewing the art from the unbridgeable distance of the here and now.

Curated exhibitions at the MoMA that focus on Viennese modernism have demonstrated a similarly formalist approach. In 1986, Kirk Varnedoe created a monumental exhibition entitled *Vienna 1900: Art, Architecture, and Design*. Varnedoe examined and defined Austrian modernism as “a fusion of decadence

and genius on the one hand and an *avant-garde* steeled to challenge official order and tradition on the other.”<sup>44</sup> He asserted that in looking to the margins of the modern, (i.e. Vienna) we could begin to discover an undervalued tradition. Varnedoe chose to separate cultural history from visual art, focusing solely on modernist painting, architecture, and design produced in Vienna at the turn of the century. Varnedoe’s emphasis on formalism therefore prevents him from discussing important social and political developments such as the rise of anti-Semitism in Vienna during this same period. Varnedoe does not discuss the intellectual history or the social or political contexts of Vienna within his analysis of Viennese art: “Put simply, Klimt was not Freud, and Schiele was not Schoenberg.”<sup>45</sup> Instead, he strictly focuses on the formal qualities of each artist’s work, carefully avoiding any social, political or intellectual history. Thus, unlike the Neue, the MoMA is not concerned about adapting itself to a particular culture but instead engulfs that culture into its own modern institution.

### **MoMA’s Influence on Lauder**

In the Neue’s first catalogue, Patrick Werkner, author of the essay “Modernism in Vienna,” states that the exhibition *Vienna 1900: Art, Architecture and Design* served as a precedent for the Neue Galerie. He references Varnedoe’s work as a catalyst in the popularization of Viennese art. Lauder, who works closely with the MoMA, was influenced by the museum. He recalls his growing interest in art in relation to the MoMA:

I will admit that, as a teenager, I was out of step with many of my friends. I spent many hours after school learning to recognize great works of art and the prices they were selling for. When everyone else went off to the movies or sports events, I spent most of my time at the Museum of Modern Art. I loved wandering through the galleries, looking at the great works, and trying not to just take it all in but to understand it. I developed my own system of educating myself. I would concentrate on one piece and one piece only during a visit—looking at it from all sides, studying it, and knowing it. Even at that young age, I realized that everything I was viewing in that building was in the *Oh My God* category. I knew the galleries, the hallways, even the stairways at MoMA as well as I knew my own home. I used to imagine what my ideal collection would be and it was the MoMA that set the standard.<sup>46</sup>

However influential the MoMA was to both Lauders' collecting criteria and the popularization of Viennese modernism, the contrasting methods of display of the two museums affect how the visitor receives Viennese modernism. On the one hand, the visitor to MoMA sees intense decorative work festooning the otherwise white walls of the MoMA, expressing with the curator's belief that Viennese modernism needs to be, much like MoMA's permanent art collections, categorized neatly into its different formalist components. On the other hand, the Neue's evocative recreation of *fin-de-siècle* Vienna does not reflect the white cube, yet reinforces the conception of modernism as an accumulation of culture, food, art, and a group of individuals. Each institution represents modern art according to its own model of modernism. This then is reflected in the exhibitions and the curator's mission, and ultimately projected onto the visitors' own experience, and, as discussed above, onto their own memories.

Both museums present equally fascinating, though divergent, expressions of modernism. Both institutions also share a locale, New York City, which embodies the idea of urban modernism. In the essay “Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity,” Griselda Pollock argues that modernism was a product of the nineteenth-century city, based on the “new complexities of a social existence passed amongst strangers.”<sup>47</sup> Modernism became a way of life that embraced fast-paced urban living and focused on consumption. Pollock’s argument resonates with Carl Schorske’s chapter “The Ringstrasse, its Critics, and the Birth of Urban Modernism,” in which he argues that the urban development of Vienna was a symbol for modernism. The city became the canvas where architects, intellectuals, and artists could execute their ideas and form a city that rejected the historicism embraced by their forefathers. It was in the building of the metropolis that Vienna’s younger generation felt it necessary to assert the primacy of the aesthetic.<sup>48</sup> Architect Otto Wagner looked to the “hectic, purposive, capitalistic urbanity he joyfully embraced” to create a modernism in which the Viennese citizen could feel comfortable.<sup>49</sup> His architecture included *art nouveau*, which in turn, can be found throughout the Neue Galerie. Lauder also chose an urban location to display his collection. However, in creating the Neue, he has incorporated both Pollock’s idea of the urban, and the urban Viennese culture and aesthetic, in order to create his own hybrid of urban modernism.

Ronald Lauder's creative mixing of former models of modernism has evolved into a successful replica of a *fin-de-siècle* Viennese interior/ private museum. However, while representing such an exclusive model of modernism and creating a profound sensory experience, Lauder, like the MoMA, declines to acknowledge in his museum many social and political factors that are absolutely crucial to any larger understanding of *fin-de-siècle* Vienna and its art.

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<sup>1</sup> Marjorie Perloff, *The Vienna Paradox: a Memoir* (New York: New Directions Books, 2004), 30.

<sup>2</sup> *The Ronald S. Lauder Collection: Selections from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century BC to 20<sup>th</sup> Century Germany, Austria, France*, exhibition at the Neue Galerie, New York, visited December 17, 2011.

<sup>3</sup> *The Ronald S. Lauder Collection: Selections from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century BC to 20<sup>th</sup> Century Germany, Austria, France*, exhibition at the Neue Galerie, New York, visited December 17, 2011.

<sup>4</sup> *The Ronald S. Lauder Collection: Selections from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century BC to 20<sup>th</sup> Century Germany, Austria, France*, exhibition at the Neue Galerie, New York, visited December 17, 2011.

<sup>5</sup> *The Ronald S. Lauder Collection: Selections from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century BC to 20<sup>th</sup> Century Germany, Austria, France*, exhibition at the Neue Galerie, New York, visited December 17, 2011

<sup>6</sup> *The Ronald S. Lauder Collection: Selections from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century BC to 20<sup>th</sup> Century Germany, Austria, France*, exhibition at the Neue Galerie, New York, visited December 17, 2011

<sup>7</sup> *The Ronald S. Lauder Collection: Selections from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century BC to 20<sup>th</sup> Century Germany, Austria, France*, exhibition at the Neue Galerie, New York, visited December 17, 2011.

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- <sup>8</sup> *The Ronald S. Lauder Collection: Selections from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century BC to 20<sup>th</sup> Century Germany, Austria, France*, exhibition at the Neue Galerie, New York, visited December 17, 2011.
- <sup>9</sup> Ronald S. Lauder, "Preface," in *The Ronald S. Lauder Collection: Selections from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century BC to 20<sup>th</sup> Century Germany, Austria and France*, ed. Janis Staggs et al. (New York: Neue Galerie, 2011), 10.
- <sup>10</sup> Mattias Backstrom, "Narrative and Imagination: Remaking National History at the Musée des Monuments Français, Paris," in *National Museums: Studies from around the World* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 46.
- <sup>11</sup> Kirk Varnedoe, *Vienna 1900: Art, Architecture and Design* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1986), 43.
- <sup>12</sup> Allan Janik, *Wittgenstein's Vienna* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973), 42.
- <sup>13</sup> Janik, *Wittgenstein's Vienna*, 44.
- <sup>14</sup> Janik, *Wittgenstein's Vienna*, 23.
- <sup>15</sup> Allan Janik, "Vienna 1900 Revisited," in *Rethinking Vienna 1900* (New York: Berghan Books, 2001), 9.
- <sup>16</sup> William Johnston, *The Austrian Mind: Intellectual and Social History* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1972), 107.
- <sup>17</sup> Carl Schorske, *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna: Art and Politics* (New York: Vintage Books, 1981), xxv.
- <sup>18</sup> Perloff, *The Vienna Paradox*, 32.
- <sup>19</sup> Perloff, *The Vienna Paradox*, 13.
- <sup>20</sup> Anita Mannur, "Culinary Nostalgia: Authenticity, Nationalism, and Diaspora" *Food in Multi-ethnic Literatures* 32 (2007): 13.
- <sup>21</sup> Susan Sidlauskas, *Body, Place, and Self in Nineteenth-Century Painting* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2000), 31.
- <sup>22</sup> Sidlauskas, *Body, Place, and Self*, pg. 33.

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- <sup>23</sup> Sidlauskas, *Body, Place, and Self*, pg. 22.
- <sup>24</sup> Sidlauskas, *Body, Place, and Self*, pg. 25.
- <sup>25</sup> Deborah Silverman, *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-siècle France: Politics, Psychology and Style* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 77.
- <sup>26</sup> Simon Knell, *National Museums: New Studies from around the World* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 9.
- <sup>27</sup> Knell, *National Museums*, 9.
- <sup>28</sup> Knell, *National Museums*, 10.
- <sup>29</sup> Tim Bonyhady, *Good Living Street: Portrait of a Patron Family, Vienna 1900* (New York: Random House, 2011), 25.
- <sup>30</sup> Bonyhady, *Good Living Street*, 333.
- <sup>31</sup> Perloff, *The Vienna Paradox*, 12.
- <sup>32</sup> Perloff, *The Vienna Paradox*, 12.
- <sup>33</sup> Perloff, *The Vienna Paradox*, 13.
- <sup>34</sup> Perloff, *The Viennese Paradox*, 31.
- <sup>35</sup> Perloff, *The Viennese Paradox*, 32.
- <sup>36</sup> Richard Shone, "A Masterpiece in Manhattan: The Museum of Modern Art," *The Burlington Magazine* 104 (2005): 4.
- <sup>37</sup> Shone, "A Masterpiece in Manhattan," 3.
- <sup>38</sup> Shone, "A Masterpiece in Manhattan," 3.
- <sup>39</sup> Shone, "A Masterpiece in Manhattan," 3.
- <sup>40</sup> Shone, "A Masterpiece in Manhattan," 3.



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<sup>41</sup> Alan Wallach, “The Museum of Modern Art: The Past’s Future,” *Journal of Design History* 5 (1992): 208.

<sup>42</sup> Wallach, “The Past’s Future,” 208.

<sup>43</sup> Wallach, “The Past’s Future,” 209.

<sup>44</sup> Varnedoe, *Vienna 1900*, 33.

<sup>45</sup> Varnedoe, *Vienna 1900*, 21.

<sup>46</sup> Lauder, “Preface,” 11.

<sup>47</sup> Griselda Pollock, “Modernity and the Space of Femininity” in *Vision and Difference: Feminism, Femininity and Histories of Art* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 66.

<sup>48</sup> Schorske, *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna*, 54.

<sup>49</sup> Schorske, *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna*, 56.

## Chapter 3

### EXHIBITING RESTITUTION

This chapter examines the restitution and provenance of the Neue's "Mona Lisa" (Ronald Lauder's words)—*Adele Bloch-Bauer I*. The subject of the famous portrait, Adele Bloch-Bauer, was a prominent Jewish Viennese art patron. It is arguable that the portrait's journey from the Bloch-Bauers' private home, through the upheavals of World War II, and finally to its current place in the Neue, illustrates the frequently underrepresented role of the Jewish community in the cultural life and vitality of Vienna, past and present. I explore how the portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer references Jewish identity and the Jewish community of Vienna. Anne-Marie O'Connor in the book *The Lady in Gold: The Extraordinary Tale of Gustav Klimt's Masterpiece, Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer*, has written extensively on Adele Bloch-Bauer. She concludes that through the saga of the portrait's restitution, Bloch-Bauer has served as a Jewish icon that forces Vienna to reexamine and grapple with its anti-Semitic past. While O'Connor focuses on the restitution of the portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer, I shift the discussion to investigate how contemporary Vienna has revisited and celebrated *fin-de-siècle* Jewish culture, in an attempt to rectify the past exclusion of this community's contributions from the city's official cultural history. This contemporary redefinition of Viennese culture foregrounds the Jewish intellectuals central to *fin-de-siècle* Vienna and acknowledges their professional achievements as well as

their religious affiliations. Specifically, I examine how the Jewish Museum of the City of Vienna, founded after World War II to increase public recognition of Judaism, represents the Jewish contribution to the definition of a contemporary Vienna. By supporting and exhibiting Jewish culture, Vienna works through the dark past of the *Anschluss* of 1938 as well as the Holocaust, and thereby secures a place for the Jewish community in the center instead of at the margins of modern Viennese society.

### **The Provenance and Restitution of *Adele Bloch-Bauer I***

Gustav Klimt painted *Adele Bloch-Bauer I*, also referred to as the “Gold Portrait,” in 1907.<sup>1</sup> The overpowering impression made by the copious use of gold leaf in this painting seems to engulf the twenty-six-year-old Adele. Her sleepy, provocative gaze appears to follow the visitor around the room. Klimt portrays her with porcelain skin, flushed, rosy cheeks, and soft, sensuous pink lips. Her rich brown hair, swept upward and away from her face, forms a dark stylized swirl that contrasts dramatically with the intricate, decorative, and gilded background of the painting. She clasps her right hand anxiously with her left, contorting the right hand in an attempt to hide a disfigured middle finger. The lavish bracelets adorning her left wrist match an equally opulent diamond choker.

The central figure of Adele appears static and trapped, surrounded by abstract shapes that float all around her, forming her dress as well as the background. Klimt’s famous spirals, squares, delicate lines and other geometric

forms contrast with the three-dimensional, realistic figure of Adele and turn the painting into a shimmering decorative fantasy. A few crimson squares to the right of Adele's face, some royal blue rectilinear forms scattered amid the folds of her gown, and multiple Egyptian-style Horus eyes tracing the shape of her slender body within the decorative swirl of her dress, all work to counter the overwhelming gold tones of the painting. To provide a modicum of spatial depth to the composition, Klimt interrupts the speckled gold-leaf background near the base of the portrait with a strip of emerald green outlined by tiny black and white squares. Two large white squares near the painting's top right corner further interrupt the dappled gold background. Peering serenely at the viewer from the midst of this hallucinatory gilded swirl, Adele looks as if she has endless secrets to share. However, the Neue Galerie exhibits her portrait without any accompanying information about her provenance, information that could add a new layer of depth to the multifaceted museum environment.

The history of the Bloch-Bauer family demonstrates how both Jewish art patrons and intellectuals influenced *fin-de-siècle* Viennese culture and how recent events have revived public interest in that community and its influence.

Ferdinand Bloch and Adele Bauer were married in 1899.<sup>2</sup> The previous year, Ferdinand's brother Gustav Bloch married Adele's sister Theresa Bauer; because all five of Adele and Theresa's brothers had died only a few years apart, the couples decided to combine the surnames Bloch and Bauer in order to continue

the Bauer sisters' family lineage.<sup>3</sup> Ferdinand Bloch-Bauer was a successful magnate who had made his wealth in the sugar-beet industry.<sup>4</sup> He became heavily involved in modern art collecting only because of his wife's fervent fascination with the modern art scene in Vienna. Thus, both he and Adele served as important Jewish patrons of *fin-de-siècle* Viennese artists as I discuss further in chapter four. In addition to commissioning two stunning portraits of his wife from Klimt, Ferdinand also bought three of Klimt's landscapes.

Adele Bloch-Bauer died from encephalitis in 1925, at the age of forty-three.<sup>5</sup> Her will requested that upon her husband's death all of the artwork they had commissioned from Klimt be given to the Österreichische Galerie Belvedere in Vienna.<sup>6</sup> However, the *Anschluss* forced Ferdinand Bloch-Bauer to flee Vienna before he could bequeath the paintings to the museum. According to Lynn Nicholas in the 2007 documentary *Rape of Europa*, Jewish art collectors were able to save their own lives by giving the Nazis their artwork.<sup>7</sup> In return, the Nazis granted such citizens an export license to leave Austria. However, on the eve of March 12, 1938, Bloch-Bauer avoided any kind of confrontation with the Nazis and fled, leaving everything he owned behind. The Nazis had charged Ferdinand Bloch-Bauer with evasion of income and corporation taxes for the years 1927 to 1937 and were demanding 260,000 *Reichsmarks* for "damages."<sup>8</sup> Thus, after his departure, Austria's Internal Revenue office impounded Ferdinand's entire property to secure alleged tax debts.<sup>9</sup> On January 28, 1939,

Nazis entered the Bloch-Bauer's home and allowed representatives of the Österreichische Galerie Belvedere to choose the pieces they wanted for their collection.<sup>10</sup> The Nazis sold the rest of the Bloch-Bauers' collection at extremely low prices and inscribed the base of each of the artworks with the words "*Heil Hitler.*"<sup>11</sup>

Following the *Anschluss*, Klimt's illegitimate son Gustav Ucicky took advantage of the Nazi plunder of Jewish-owned art to start his own collection of his father's pieces. In 1941, Ucicky struck a deal with corrupt lawyer Erich Führer and the Galerie Belvedere, trading two Klimt paintings that he had recently acquired, *Adele Bloch-Bauer I* and *Apfelbaum*, for *Schloss Kammer am Attersee III*, which had resided in the Belvedere. Both *Adele Bloch-Bauer I* and *Apfelbaum* were the rightful property of the Bloch-Bauers. Later, in a 1943 retrospective of the artist, the Belvedere displayed all five of the Klimt paintings once owned by the Bloch-Bauers. To eliminate any trace of Jewish affiliation due to the presence of Adele in the commissioned portraits, the Belvedere called her simply the "Lady in Gold."<sup>12</sup>

Towards the end of World War II, in 1945, Ferdinand died in Switzerland.<sup>13</sup> He was eighty-one years old. By then, he had renounced all previous wills and named as his new heirs his brother's children, Robert Bentley, Luise Gutmann, and Maria Altmann. His nephew and nieces inherited only a share of whatever could be repossessed in the future since the Nazis had

liquidated everything that Ferdinand owned. For nearly half a century after Ferdinand's death, the Bloch-Bauers' art collection remained in the possession of the Austrian state, housed at the Galerie Belvedere. In 1965, Walter Frodl, once a curator for Hitler's Museum in Linz, became the president of the Austrian Federal Monument Office. This position made it easier for him to block the return of art he had helped steal during World War II. His son, Gerbert Frodl, was the director of the Belvedere in the 1990s. In a 1995 book written for the Belvedere, the younger Frodl maintained that the museum had actually purchased *Adele Bloch-Bauer I* before the war in 1936.

Soon after Frodl's fraudulent claim, the investigations of wealthy Viennese journalist Hubert Czernin finally inspired Altmann to reclaim what was rightfully hers by investigating the validity of the Belvedere's ownership of the Klimt paintings.<sup>14</sup> For nearly fifty years after Ferdinand Bloch-Bauer's death, Vienna had failed to address the problem of artifacts stolen from Jews during World War II. During the late 1990s, however, Czernin, who wrote for the weekly Viennese *Profil*, popularized the issue of restitution; he published extensively on the refusal of the Galerie Belvedere to return wrongfully obtained artworks to their original owners. Czernin argued that the art was a publically visible symbol of Austria's failure to indemnify its murdered and wronged Jewish citizens.<sup>15</sup> Lost lives could never be recovered, of course—but stolen art could.

Beginning in 2000 the Bloch-Bauer's niece and heir Maria Altmann

sought legal assistance regarding the restitution of her aunt and uncle's artworks from both Los Angeles attorney Randol Schoenberg (grandson of composer Arnold Schoenberg) and private New York art collector Ronald Lauder. Altmann sought to retrieve from the Österreichische Galerie Belvedere in Vienna the five paintings that had once constituted the Bloch-Bauers' Klimt collection. These paintings included *Adele Bloch-Bauer I* (1907), *Adele Bloch-Bauer II* (1912), *Birkenwald* (1903), *Apfelbaum* (1912), and *Hauser in Unterach am Attersee* (1916).

The resulting lawsuit, argued before the US Supreme Court and ultimately decided in Altmann's favor, lasted from 2001 to 2006. It has since served as subject matter for numerous articles as well as documentary *The Rape of Europa*, based on a book by Lynn Nicholas.<sup>16</sup> In the film, Maria Altmann recollects visiting Adele and Ferdinand's home every Sunday for lunch. There Altmann would gaze upon Klimt's portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer, which ever since has "always been in my memory."<sup>17</sup> Altmann had just returned to Vienna from her honeymoon abroad when the *Anschluss* occurred. She recalls that when the Nazis came to her home she was forced to give up her Aunt Adele's choker—the very one that Adele wore in Klimt's famous portrait—in order to escape arrest. After only ten days in their new apartment, Altmann and her new husband fled Vienna, leaving everything behind. According to Altmann, when her aunt drafted her will in 1923, Adele Bloch-Bauer had no intention of moving her paintings to the



Belvedere through the agency of the Nazis. In the film, Altmann states adamantly that Austria refused to admit that the Klimt paintings were not legal national property, and that therefore she did not want them in Austria “under a lie.”<sup>18</sup> As a result, she initially planned for the restituted paintings to end up in an American or Canadian museum.<sup>19</sup>

In 1998, Austria adopted a new bill to govern the restitution of paintings held within its federal collection. Between 1998 and 2006, Austria’s *Restitutionsbeirat* (Advisory Council on Restitution) requested the return of 5,063 artworks to their rightful owners.<sup>20</sup> Five of those works of art were the Klimt paintings once owned by the Bloch-Bauers. Once the law finally acknowledged Altmann as the legal owner of these paintings, she attempted to sell the paintings back to the Österreichische Galerie Belvedere despite her expressed intent to keep them in North America. However, the Viennese museum declined her offer.<sup>21</sup> By 2006, the artworks had attracted such enormous attention that Eli Broad led a bid by donors at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) to purchase all five paintings for 150 million dollars. The hope was that all five of the artworks would remain together in a single collection. However, Lauder received more interest from the heirs because of what he was willing to spend on just one painting.<sup>22</sup>

A less frequently discussed component in the story of the restitution of the Klimt paintings is the important role of Ronald Lauder, a private collector who

showed interest in and ultimately purchased *Adele Bloch-Bauer I*. The Neue Galerie's publications do not mention Lauder's role in the restitution of the Bloch-Bauer-owned artwork. However, O'Connor details Lauder's involvement with restitution issues in Austria. Lauder's short-term role as US Ambassador to Austria in 1986 prompted him to serve as chairperson for the new Commission Act of Art Recovery of the World Jewish Congress. In 2000, Lauder stated to the US House of Representatives that Austria had made little effort to resolve any stolen art claims since a notorious 1999 case in which the Viennese Advisory Council on art restitution demanded that two hundred and forty-one pieces from the Jewish Viennese Rothschild collection be returned.<sup>23</sup> Lauder also stated that the current Austrian cultural minister, Elisabeth Gehrler, had invited Altmann to sue Austria for her family's Klimt paintings, but had made clear that the proceedings would require an investment of half a million Austrian *Schillings* in bonds. Such actions led Altmann to pursue her claim on American soil. In 2000, Altmann's lawyer, Randol Schoenberg, filed suit in US federal court in Los Angeles. Austria asked for the lawsuit to be dismissed; however, Lauder had made such a convincing argument that the Bloch-Bauer restitution case marked the first time in US history that a federal appeals court held a foreign government accountable in an American court. This ruling allowed the case to continue in the US courts. Desperate for a resolution that would return Altmann's paintings, Schoenberg eventually advised his client to accept an Austrian offer to submit the

case to binding arbitration with a panel of Austrian legal experts.<sup>24</sup> In 2005, Schoenberg presented his case before the Austrian Arbitration panel in Vienna. On January 16, 2006, the Viennese arbitrators decided in favor of Altmann.<sup>25</sup> Later in 2006, Lauder expressed his fervent interest in acquiring *Adele Bloch-Bauer I* and paid Altmann's asking price of 135 million dollars.

The other four paintings restituted to Altmann went to auction on November 8, 2006, at Christie's auction house in New York City. Lauder accompanied Altmann to the auction in an attempt to purchase *Adele Bloch-Bauer II*, but he stopped bidding at 70.5 million dollars.<sup>26</sup> Two sculptures by Georg Minne entitled *Kneeling Youth*, which Altmann recalled as having been displayed on either side of *Adele Bloch-Bauer I* in Ferdinand's home, were also among the artworks Austria eventually returned to her. Altmann presented these two figures as a gift to the Neue Galerie, where they now occupy their original positions flanking the painting.

The very public restitution of the Klimt paintings prompted renewed interest in how Jewish individuals influenced *fin-de-siècle* Vienna, a city that was in the midst of changing and defining its own version of modernism. The large amount paid by Lauder for *Adele Bloch-Bauer I* has increased the market value of other Viennese modern artwork. It has also prompted further interest in the history of those Jewish art patrons depicted in Klimt's paintings. The majority of Klimt's sitters were persecuted during World War II because they were Jewish.

Thus, if we are to look at who Adele Bloch-Bauer was, we can understand her current resting place in the Neue and how Klimt's painting emblemizes Austria's attempt to come to terms with an anti-Semitic past.

### **Adele Bloch-Bauer and *Fin-de-Siècle* Viennese Jewish Identity in the Neue Galerie**

According to Lauder in the Neue Galerie's catalogue *Gustav Klimt: The Ronald S. Lauder and Serge Sabarsky Collections*, the Jewishness of Klimt's art patrons is significant because it shaped the fate of their collections following Hitler's annexation of Austria. Of the displaced artworks they did not destroy outright, the Nazis sold many, took others to foreign countries, and hid still more works of art in various locations for later display. The history and eventual resting place of Bloch-Bauer's portrait depend not only on the occurrence of the *Anschluss* but also on the Nazis' interest in Klimt's work. In addition, Lauder has stated that the portrait of Bloch-Bauer "epitomizes turn-of-the-century Vienna: its richness, its sensuality, and its innovation."<sup>27</sup> The restitution of *Adele Bloch-Bauer I*, now considered one of the most important Viennese works of twentieth-century art, has prompted a change in perspective from its viewers. O'Connor notes that during the era of Nazi looting, *Adele Bloch-Bauer I* was already a well-known Austrian icon because Ferdinand had generously loaned the portrait for several exhibitions abroad. Nonetheless, the Belvedere was not exceptionally interested in the portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer at that time. Because Bloch-Bauer had loaned the painting to international exhibitions during the *fin de siècle*,

O'Connor argues that the portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer had become so familiar that it emerged as a symbol for a new Viennese identity.

Once thought of as simply a portrait of a woman, *Adele Bloch-Bauer I* has come to symbolize specific ideas: the importance of Jewish individuals to Viennese cultural reform, to art patronage at the turn of the twentieth century, and to the development of Vienna's own unique artistic style, led by artist Gustav Klimt. Through the very public story of how her portrait ended up at the Neue, Adele Bloch-Bauer herself now has become an important icon whose story epitomizes the complexities of Jewish identity and influence upon the culture to which she belonged. Furthermore, until the publicity surrounding Altmann's case, few knew about the Nazi theft of this painting, among other artworks that belonged to Jewish Viennese patrons, or about the sale of such works to the Österreichische Galerie Belvedere.

As the icon of Adele Bloch-Bauer suggests, Viennese Jews served as a predominant influence in Viennese art collecting at the turn of the century, and these Jewish patrons contributed the financial backing that allowed Viennese modernism to develop and thrive. Gustav Klimt in particular had a significant number of Jewish patrons. Following the controversy of his rejected University of Vienna paintings in 1900-1901, Klimt's artistic alienation led him to rely on income from private patrons. These patrons allowed Klimt to continue his artistic production in an independent manner, usually by executing portraits of various

female sitters.<sup>28</sup> Because most of Klimt's art patrons were Jewish Viennese, *fin-de-siècle* literary figure Karl Krauss dismissed Klimt's work as appealing merely to "Jewish taste."<sup>29</sup> Krauss was famous for his anti-Semitic remarks; in response to seeing the portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer, he remarked, "Whether her name is Hydria, Judith, Madam X or Madam Y, all of his figures have the pallor of the misunderstood woman. They all share the same dark rings under their eyes."<sup>30</sup> The supporters of Klimt's paintings countered Krauss by claiming that the portrait had captured a "Jewish beauty."<sup>31</sup> Other defenders of Klimt's University paintings and portrait commissions included the Liberal Philosophical Society, which was comprised primarily of Jewish members. As the contrast between Klimt's anti-Semitic detractors and his supporters suggests, Klimt and the Jewish community shared the status of outcasts in a political culture. This was a culture dominated by the right-wing Christian followers of the anti-Semitic future Viennese mayor, Karl Leuger, and therefore these outcasts were natural allies.

### **New Scholarship on the Jewish Community in *Fin-de-Siècle* Vienna**

In *Vienna and the Jews: 1867-1948*, Steven Beller argues that the alienation of the bourgeoisie from political discourse caused leading figures in Viennese *fin-de-siècle* culture to retreat into the "aesthetic temple of art."<sup>32</sup> The aesthetic arts then became an important outlet for many Jewish intellectuals, who became leaders in literary, musical, and theatrical Viennese arts. However, this Jewish leadership never extended into the fields of art and architecture.<sup>33</sup> Instead,

Viennese Jewish intellectuals related to the visual arts primarily through patronage. Beller maintains that the flowering of Viennese culture during the turn of the twentieth century was a response of the liberally inclined upper classes rather than a response specific to any religious or ethnic minority. He states that it is impossible to ignore the “Jewish question” of Vienna and its cultural importance.<sup>34</sup>

The Jewish Viennese writer and journalist Hugo Bettauer focused on this “Jewish question” in his 1922 novel *Die Stadt ohne Juden*, which imagined Vienna without its Jewish citizens.<sup>35</sup> According to Bettauer’s novel, everything in Vienna would fall apart without Jews. First, the politicians would have no scapegoats and, in the end, the coffeehouses would be abandoned, there would be no fashion, and artists would go un-patronized.<sup>36</sup> Though the author’s tone is rather light, Bettauer is making a vital point: the novel illustrates that the Jewish citizens of Vienna not only intellectually dominated Viennese culture, but also influenced it through significant financial support. The example of *Die Stadt ohne Juden* supports Beller’s claim that within the work of Jewish Viennese intellectuals, one could see threads of secularized religious tradition, an ideology of emancipation, forms of assimilation, and the existential problems of living in an anti-Semitic environment. These conflicting traditions and discourses helped create a modern and more specific Vienna, one that reflected not just the alienated liberal bourgeoisie, but also now an ahistorical, alienated *Jewish* liberal

bourgeoisie.<sup>37</sup> Jewish citizens therefore kept liberal ideology for their own tradition as a means of escape from rising hostility in the political arena. As liberalism failed, Karl Leuger and anti-Semitism rose; according to Beller, this caused Jews to retreat into the modern through art, writing, the psyche, and Zionism.

The Neue houses art originally purchased by Jewish art patrons (and finally secured by another Jewish patron, Ronald Lauder) and contains Jewish subjects. It is certainly not a history museum; rather, it omits any cultural discussion about the historic Jewish Viennese community from the walls of its galleries. Instead, Lauder employs the MoMA's formalist method of modern art display and thus silences his own participation in Viennese Jewish culture from the exhibition of his art collection.

The Jewish Museum, New York, located only five blocks away from the Neue, contrasts importantly with the Neue in its efforts to fill in the gaps of excluded Jewish history. In contrast to the purely aesthetic approach of the Neue's exhibitions, display materials at the Jewish Museum seek to place artworks within a political and religious context and also to trace how Judaism has managed to thrive around the globe for thousands of years despite adverse circumstances. The permanent section of the museum, entitled *Confronting Modernity*, explores how the encounter with modernism transformed Jewish life.<sup>38</sup> This permanent exhibition reflects Jewish responses to societal changes and



attempts to deal with new forms of persecution. Here, modern paintings executed in the early twentieth century hang next to a video monitor that loops a documentary film about the Holocaust. In the center of the exhibition space, a replication of a café with five tables offers both a resting place and a lesson. Upon sitting down at one of the tables, the visitor finds a world map with red buttons set into select countries. When pressed, each button triggers an audio guide that summarizes the café culture specific to that mapped locale, along with a list of prominent Jewish figures who visited the local cafés and helped to transform the culture of that city. The audio guide for Vienna discusses Theodor Herzl, a Viennese Zionist reactionary who frequented the cafés; it also notes the important cultural role of Jewish Viennese citizens who, because they were particularly interested in defining themselves through the modern, were instrumental in purchasing the city's modern art and books at the turn of the century.<sup>39</sup>

Both the Neue Galerie and the Jewish Museum contain modern artworks. However, the museums' display methods differ dramatically. It is tempting to think that if *Adele Bloch-Bauer I* were displayed at the Jewish Museum, the visitor would understand the painting and its subject quite differently. At the Neue, the specific details of Bloch-Bauer's life, and the significant provenance of her portrait, remain veiled by the constructs of the modern art museum, which prompt the visitor to focus on the painting's formalism. In the Jewish Museum,

the arrangement of the art attempts to reveal the history of Judaism. By contrast, the design and layout of the Neue Galerie reflect Ronald Lauder as art collector, and aim to envelop the viewer, wordlessly, in a reconstructed atmosphere of Viennese modernism.

Although the Neue does not explicitly acknowledge the prominence of Jewish identity in the context of *fin-de-siècle* Vienna, Lauder himself is Jewish and is very active in the Jewish community. In 1990, he founded the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation, which focuses on spreading Judaism to children in Eastern Europe. On the foundation's website, he states that he encountered anti-Semitism in his experience as Austrian Ambassador, an experience that prompted him to explore his Jewish roots.<sup>40</sup> Starting with education for young children, Lauder aims to encourage Jews who live in places with dark histories to embrace their faith. Nonetheless, Lauder does not link his philanthropic actions with the Neue Galerie. Instead, he keeps the Neue's public presentation of modernism distinct and separate from his activist work on Jewish cultural issues. Despite the strong Jewish identity of the museum's founder and principal collector, the Neue displays *Adele Bloch-Bauer I* with little attention to the subject's identity.

In the essay "Exhibiting History or History in a Showcase," Richard Cohen argues that the museum provides a challenging setting in which to raise issues and problems of historical and cultural topics.<sup>41</sup> The museum environment can serve as a setting that allows artistic artifacts to emerge from their individual,

fragmented states and become reabsorbed into their original cultural contexts, thus revealing additional significance. Cohen states that permanent exhibitions of Jewish art have displayed objects mundanely, compartmentalizing them so that viewers have a difficult time relating the artworks to their cultural context, which may or may not include surrounding works of exhibited art. This method of display mimics the exhibition methods of modern art institutions, in which formalism predominates by precluding information vital to a full understanding of the reasons and conditions of the displayed objects' production. Such a display prevents visitors from entering into any dialogue with the themes that emanate from the exhibition and thus mutes any possible response to the original context of the object and the circumstances of its creation.

Therefore, formalism as the exclusive frame or context of a modern art exhibition poses problems for the visitor, though sometimes a larger historical framework is given in the catalogue publication. According to Cohen, the exhibition catalogue has two main goals. One is to describe the exhibited objects as accurately as possible. The second is to elaborate themes relevant to the object by including essays from experts in the field.<sup>42</sup> Exhibition catalogues thus provide important information and are pivotal in helping visitors understand more about the objects on display. However, this is an inconsistent means of disseminating information: if viewers look at artworks in the permanent exhibition and want to know about their provenance, they still need access to the catalogue in order to

obtain that information. In many cases, the catalogues still do not delve into provenance issues fully either, leaving the reader with numerous questions. Such is the case with the Neue Galerie's display of *Adele Bloch-Bauer I*. Visitors simply cannot understand the complex cultural content of artworks such as this portrait without the inclusion of more information in the exhibition space.

Without information posted near the physical installation of *Adele Bloch-Bauer I*, few visitors understand the definitive role that Jewish citizens played in turn-of-the-century Vienna. Thus, the Neue misses a powerful opportunity to embed a wealth of cultural history within its impressive and physically realistic *fin-de-siècle* environment. As Cohen notes, it is ultimately up to the curators (Lauder and Director Renée Price in this case) to relate the past to museum visitors.

The Neue Galerie is in between a private collection and public museum. Lauder's choice of this specific culture and time period raises historical questions that must be addressed if viewers are to understand the unique context from which this art emerged. It is also essential to examine contemporary museums in Vienna to understand how a city that has produced so many leading Jewish intellectuals have attempted to go beyond restitution and work through a persecuted past in museum exhibitions.

### **Contemporary Viennese Museums and Attempts to Come to Terms with the Past**

For the descendants of Jewish art collectors whom the Nazis robbed, forced to flee, deported to concentration camps, or killed, restitution was a

necessary start to the healing process. However, merely returning stolen artworks many decades after their seizure cannot single-handedly repair the problematic relationship between Jewish citizens and Vienna. Addressing this problem more fully will help Viennese society move forward in a correct direction, one that includes the Jewish populace in contemporary life. The current Jewish Museum of the City of Vienna is a significant step in that rightful direction; however, it is not Vienna's first Jewish museum. The first Jewish Museum in Vienna, opened in 1896, displayed thousands of ritual objects in an attempt to increase public recognition of respect for Jewish religion and cultural accomplishment.<sup>43</sup> Obviously, the museum was short lived due to the 1938 *Anschluss*. Following World War II, the Jewish museum in Vienna became a product of the 1990s. During this decade, the Viennese Jewish community underwent a "cultural re-awakening" made possible in part by a new type of rapprochement in the exhibitory display of Jewish identity.<sup>44</sup> The Jewish community entered the public arena in an unprecedented manner, with both media attention and political support reinforcing its significance. Media sources provided an inclusionary discourse promoting Jewish cultural affairs.<sup>45</sup> In 1999, an event held at Vienna's Burgtheater focused on the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the *Israelkultusgemeinde*, Judaism's official organization in Vienna.<sup>46</sup> The event highlighted numerous individuals who influenced society at turn-of-the-twentieth-century Vienna. According to Matti Bunzl in *Symptoms of Modernity: Jews and Queers in Late-*

*Twentieth-Century Vienna*, the history of prominent *fin-de-siècle* Jewish figures has been foundational to the postwar formation of Viennese-Jewish identity. The 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration highlighted figures such as Sigmund Freud, Theodor Herzl, Arthur Schnitzler and Arnold Schoenberg in order to publicize their contributions and thereby encourage Jewish pride. Large photographs of these individuals hung in the main hall where the celebration occurred, reminding visitors of this community's many historic achievements before the tragic effects of World War II. These intellectuals serve as the most popular symbols of the achievements of Viennese Jews, their vital influence on *fin-de-siècle* Vienna, and their crucial contributions to modernism.

The Burgtheater celebration included a wealth of official participants. Vienna's mayor at the time, Michael Haupl, was just one of the many politicians, cultural leaders, and university faculty who received invitations. The guest list alone asserted the importance of and contemporary support for Jewish culture in a Vienna still working to come to terms with its dark past. The Burgtheater event, along with the reinstatement of the Jewish Museum in Vienna, contributed to a public celebration of Jewish "icons of a new body politic."<sup>47</sup> Bunzl argues that from the decades after World War II up until the 1990s, Jewish museums in Vienna had existed in the margins of the public sphere. Unable to confront the reality of the persecutions suffered by Viennese Jews during World War II, the larger Viennese community fell silent until the 1990s. However, as the

Burgtheater event demonstrates, Vienna began not only to celebrate the history and contributions of its Jewish community, but also to shift the awareness of that history from the margins to the center of the public sphere. This reawakened sense of Viennese Jewish history could then assist in the creation of a reimagined Austria, one now successfully working through the repercussions of its difficult history by embracing Jewish citizens, past and present. Beyond cultural events, museums that were recently opened in Vienna are also experimenting with an exhibition method of showing the past but placing focus on present definitions of what it is to be Jewish.

Founded in 1990, the Jewish Museum of the City of Vienna occupies an urban mansion in Vienna's first district.<sup>48</sup> The museum promotes the understanding of Judaism in relation to Viennese history in an effort to restore Viennese Judaism to its proper cultural context. The museum also focuses on figures of the *fin-de-siècle*, suggesting that Austria would not be what it is today without intellectual Jewish figures from its past.<sup>49</sup> In contrast to the Jewish Museum in New York, this institution does not try to give viewers a coherent picture of Jewish history. The Jewish Museum of the City of Vienna does not provide a text panel or video that describes the history of Jewishness in Vienna, nor does it display the art in a conventional method. On the third floor, the museum's permanent exhibition includes twenty-one holograms titled *Jewish Vienna: a Holographic Approach*.<sup>50</sup> The space includes several transparent panes

of glass with holographic projections of historic objects. The museum chose holographic images because it is concerned primarily with memory and the fleeting way in which history is “partial and perspectival, reflecting the interests of those who create it.”<sup>51</sup> The exhibition does not serve to remind visitors what they may have forgotten but to instead create the possibility of a Jewish identity in Vienna’s present. The exhibition also serves as the fleeting way in which material culture does not exist for this specific community that has been destroyed through political and social injustice. The projections of images are not actual objects, and as images, represent what has been lost. It prompts visitors to define themselves in the present, to create a new history, one that is still being identified.

The hologram display includes traces of many detailed reliquaries from prominent Jewish Viennese figures active at the turn of the twentieth century. These include Gustav Mahler’s podium light and Arnold Schoenberg’s playing card case. The curators have publicly denied that this museum should serve as a site of “enlightenment and pedagogy.”<sup>52</sup> Rather, they intended for the history displayed in this museum to inspire an ongoing thinking process; the museum chooses to promote this process by leaving out cultural information connected with the object. Though the curators have dropped hints, the exhibition does not offer an easily digestible explanation of what the viewer sees. The Jewish Museum of the City of Vienna aims to encourage further discourse among present



Viennese Jews, which is important to the redefinition of Vienna, now and in the future.

In connection to the exhibitory display seen at the Jewish museum in Vienna, the portrait of Bloch-Bauer that rests in the Neue serves as a physical icon, a successful type of material culture that shows how provenance can be represented in one object. The painting emblemizes a powerful connection to a past that is thus challenging to exhibit today. In the article “Sacrality and Aura in the Museum: Mute Objects and Articulate Space,” Joan Branham argues that modernism actually desacralizes the objects in museums. The author also introduces the notion of “resonance” in which the art object can reach out beyond its formalist constraints to evoke the complex, dynamic cultural forces from which it has emerged.<sup>53</sup> Branham deems resonance successful when historical and social constructs become present for the viewer. When this happens, resonance succeeds in re-empowering once-silenced objects, which in turn reinforces the object’s original potency.

Despite the complex history of *Adele Bloch-Bauer I*, and the historical and social constructs suggested by the story of its theft, restitution, and provenance, the Neue’s method of display sacrifices resonance for the sake of formalism. Today in Vienna, Jewish and non-Jewish individuals alike are still working through the issues surrounding the historic cultural contributions and horrific historical persecution of the city’s Jewish community. The establishment of the

Jewish Museum of the City of Vienna represents a major step in asserting the importance, and renewed vitality, of Viennese Judaism. However, the contemporary, formalist approach the museum chooses for its displays still makes it challenging for visitors to appreciate the cultural contexts from which the exhibited objects emerged. Adele Bloch-Bauer, forever gazing sleepily out at viewers from the wall of a modern art museum in New York, embodies the fragmented and experimental methods by which both the Neue and the Jewish museum in Vienna display Jewish identity. She also emblemizes the important role that Jewish figures played in the *fin de siècle*, contributing a cultural, artistic, and intellectual vitality that not only recreated the cultural life of the city during their own lifetimes, but that continues to resonate today by influencing the identity and pride of contemporary Viennese Jews.

In contrast to the Jewish Museum of the City of Vienna, *Adele Bloch-Bauer I* inevitably reminds informed visitors of what Vienna had long chosen to forget. Unlike other restituted artworks that take landscapes or still lifes for subject matter, the Neue's "Mona Lisa" depicts an actual, historical Viennese Jewish woman, a culturally influential person whose family was directly affected by Nazi persecution during World War II. Through the restitution of her portrait, Adele Bloch-Bauer promotes, in the present, the rethinking of our relationship to modern art as an interpretation of the past. By considering how the display of *Adele Bloch-Bauer I* fails to discuss Jewish issues, it becomes clear that Vienna's

long process of coming to terms has not yet ended; neither in New York nor in Vienna have curators arrived at a consistently correct way of exhibiting Viennese Jewish culture. Curators want to move away from the victim myth, want to avoid presenting Jews as the ‘Other,’ and want to stress the central importance of the Jewish community to the city of Vienna. The Jewish Museum in Vienna attempts this by fragmenting Jewish history and moving in a direction that is both abstract and non-informative. Perhaps the perpetual silence of Adele Bloch-Bauer’s painted gaze challenges viewers to rethink Jewish identity in terms that are not bound to one time or one place, but as an ever-evolving issue that is always open to fresh interpretations.

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<sup>1</sup> Sophie Lillie and Georg Gaugusch, *Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer* (New York: Neue Galerie, 2009), 9.

<sup>2</sup> Lillie and Gaugusch, *Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer*, 23.

<sup>3</sup> Lillie and Gaugusch, *Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer*, 23.

<sup>4</sup> Lillie and Gaugusch, *Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer*, 31.

<sup>5</sup> Richard Willing, “Family to get back Art Taken in WWII,” *USA Today*, February 20, 2006.

<sup>6</sup> *Rape of Europa*, directed by Richard Berge (2008; Menemsha Films, 2008) DVD.

<sup>7</sup> *Rape of Europa*, directed by Richard Berge (2008; Menemsha Films, 2008) DVD.

<sup>8</sup> Lillie and Gaugusch, *Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer*, 68.

<sup>9</sup> Lillie and Gaugusch, *Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer*, 68.

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<sup>10</sup> Anne-Marie O'Connor, *The Lady in Gold: The Extraordinary Tale of Gustav Klimt's Masterpiece, Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer* (New York: Random House, 2012), 201.

<sup>11</sup> O'Connor, *The Lady in Gold*, 322.

<sup>12</sup> O'Connor, *The Lady in Gold*, 17.

<sup>13</sup> Willing, "Family to get Art Taken in WWII," *USA Today*, February 20, 2006.

<sup>14</sup> Steven Miller, "Her Fight Recovered Paintings Nazi's Stole," *Wall Street Journal*, Feb 9, 2011.

<sup>15</sup> O'Connor, *The Lady in Gold*, 308.

<sup>16</sup> Articles that have discussed Maria Altmann and the restituted Klimt paintings include: Dana Goodyear, "Family portrait," *New Yorker* 80 (2004) 32; Raphael Rubenstein, "Recovered Klimts on View in L.A.," *Art in America*, 94 (2006), 208; Raphael Rubenstein, "Austria to Relinquish Klimt Paintings," *Art in America*, 94 (2006), 33; Linda Greenhouse, "Justices Allow Suit Against Austria to Regain Art," *New York Times*, June 8, 2004; Michael McNay, "Maria Altmann Obituary: She Rested Back from Austria Five Klimt Masterpieces Looted by the Nazis," *The Guardian*, February, 2011; David Usborn, "Klimt Sales take Christies Auction to \$491.4 Million Record," *The Independent*, November 10, 2006; *Rape of Europa*, directed by Richard Berge (2008; Menemsha Films, 2008) DVD.

<sup>17</sup> *Rape of Europa*, directed by Richard Berge (2008; Menemsha Films, 2008) DVD.

<sup>18</sup> *Rape of Europa*, directed by Richard Berge (2008; Menemsha Films, 2008) DVD.

<sup>19</sup> *Rape of Europa*, directed by Richard Berge (2008; Menemsha Films, 2008) DVD.

<sup>20</sup> Andrea Wolfmayr, "Wolfmar: Austrian Restitution Law Exemplary," *Jewish News from Austria*, accessed January 23, 2012, <http://jewishnews.at/jewish-news-from-austria-14/2007/1/4/850283.html>.

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- <sup>21</sup> Sharon Waxman, "A Homecoming, in Los Angeles, for five Klimts Looted by the Nazi's," *New York Times*, April 6, 2006.
- <sup>22</sup> Tyler Green, "This is our Mona Lisa," *Fortune*, September 28, 2006.
- <sup>23</sup> O'Connor, *The Lady in Gold*, 322.
- <sup>24</sup> William Grimes, "Maria Altmann, Pursuer of Family's Stolen Paintings, Dies at 94," *New York Times*, February 9, 2011.
- <sup>25</sup> International Law Group, "Austria to Restore five Klimt Paintings to California Resident," *International Law Update*, February 1, 2006.
- <sup>26</sup> O'Connor, *The Lady in Gold*, 405.
- <sup>27</sup> Ronald S. Lauder, "Discovering Klimt," in *Gustav Klimt: The Ronald S. Lauder and Serge Sabarsky Collection*, ed. Renée Price et al. (New York: Neue Galerie, 2007), 13.
- <sup>28</sup> Lauder, "Discovering Klimt," 56.
- <sup>29</sup> Lauder, "Discovering Klimt," 57.
- <sup>30</sup> O'Connor, *The Lady in Gold*, 96.
- <sup>31</sup> O'Connor, *The Lady in Gold*, 96.
- <sup>32</sup> Steven Beller, *Vienna and the Jews 1867-1938: A Cultural History* (Cambridge: New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 3.
- <sup>33</sup> Beller, *Vienna and the Jews*, 4.
- <sup>34</sup> Beller, *Vienna and the Jews*, 5.
- <sup>35</sup> Hugo Bettauer, *Die Stadt Ohne Jüde: Ein Roman von Übermorgen* (Wien: Glorietty-Verlag, 1922), 52.
- <sup>36</sup> Beller, *Vienna and the Jews*, 6.
- <sup>37</sup> Beller, *Vienna and the Jews*, 8.

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<sup>38</sup> *Confronting Modernity*, exhibition at The Jewish Museum New York, visited December 19, 2011.

<sup>39</sup> *Confronting Modernity*, exhibition at The Jewish Museum New York, visited December 19, 2011.

<sup>40</sup> “Our President,” The Ronald S. Lauder Foundation, accessed January 14, 2012, <http://www.lauderfoundation.com/2010/03/our-work-in-austria.php>.

<sup>41</sup> Richard Cohen, “Exhibiting History or History in a Showcase,” *Jewish History* 12 (1998): 97.

<sup>42</sup> Cohen, “Exhibiting History or History in a Showcase,” 99.

<sup>43</sup> Matti Bunzl, “Of Holograms and Storage Areas: Modernity and Postmodernity at Vienna’s Jewish Museum,” *Cultural Anthropology* 18 (2003): 447.

<sup>44</sup> Abigail Gillman, “Cultural Awakening and Historical Forgetting: The Architecture of Memory in the Jewish Museum of Vienna and in Rachel Whiteread’s Nameless Library,” *New German Critique* 93 (2004): 146.

<sup>45</sup> Matti Bunzl, *Symptoms of Modernity: Jews and Queers in Late-Nineteenth-Century Vienna* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004), 179.

<sup>46</sup> The *Israelkultusgemeinde* (IKG) is Vienna’s official Jewish organization that represents the city’s educational, social and religious issues. Emperor Franz Josef officially first recognized the organization in 1846. For more information, please see the website: <http://www.ikg-wien.at/>.

<sup>47</sup> Bunzl, *Symptoms of Modernity*, 181.

<sup>48</sup> Bunzl, *Symptoms of Modernity*, 192.

<sup>49</sup> Bunzl, “Of Holograms and Storage Areas,” 444.

<sup>50</sup> The exhibition *Jewish Vienna: a Holographic Approach* at the Jewish Museum of the City of Vienna has been removed as of 2011. An article by the Jewish Journal has criticized the method of removal of the panes of glass. For more information, please see: [http://www.jewishjournal.com/arts/article/jewish\\_museum\\_officials\\_decry\\_vienna\\_exhibit\\_destruction\\_20110209/](http://www.jewishjournal.com/arts/article/jewish_museum_officials_decry_vienna_exhibit_destruction_20110209/). Bunzl, “Of Holograms and Storage Areas,” 436.

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<sup>51</sup> Bunzl, “Of Holograms and Storage Areas,” 437.

<sup>53</sup> Joan Branham, “Sacrality and Aura in the Museum: Mute Objects and Articulate Space,” *The Journal of the Walters Art Gallery* 53 (1993): 37.

## Chapter 4

### PRIVATE ART MUSEUMS THAT PRECEDE THE NEUE: IDENTIFICATION THROUGH ART

In *The Ronald S. Lauder Collection: Selections from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century BC to the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Germany, Austria and France*, a catalog that celebrates the tenth anniversary of the Neue Galerie's opening, Ronald Lauder expresses his motivation for collecting art in a single word: "passion."<sup>1</sup> In an essay in this catalogue, "From Wish List to Collection," Elizabeth Kujawski states that long before he became US Ambassador to Austria, Lauder had already assembled an outstanding and diverse collection driven only by his passion for Viennese modernism.<sup>2</sup>

In chapter two, I argued that the Museum of Modern Art in New York influenced Lauder's formalist choices when he finally exhibited his own modern Viennese art collection. In this fourth and final chapter, I explore how Lauder's collecting method relates to those of previous art collectors, specifically Isabella Stewart Gardner and Henry Clay Frick, whose collections also occupy private residences in the US. Lauder stated that he set out to find a museum that would represent both a home and an exhibition so that the visitor would feel like a "guest."<sup>3</sup> He has noted that he emulated the Frick Collection when creating a private museum for his own collection because the Frick's atmosphere was and still is "unique to New York; a place of private ambiance made public in the form of a museum."<sup>4</sup> I have chosen to discuss both the Isabella Stewart Gardner



Museum and the Henry Clay Frick Collection because in each case the collector arranged his or her art acquisitions in a residential setting, using methods that remind the visitor of the owner's presence. Private museums like these set a precedent for the Neue, presaging Lauder's transformation of a once-private residence into a remarkable display of Viennese art.

In the second section of this chapter, I argue that through the portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer, Lauder immortalizes himself as a private collector. The frontispieces of numerous catalogues published by the Neue, as well as many articles published on Lauder, have featured a photo of Lauder in profile, standing before *Adele Bloch-Bauer I*. Through his interest in Viennese modernism, and by visually connecting himself with the persona of Bloch-Bauer, Lauder consciously links himself to the community of Viennese art patrons who originally collected the artworks now displayed inside his private museum, the Neue.

I conclude with an overview of Adele Bloch-Bauer as private collector. As a vital participant in the culture of private art collecting in *fin-de-siècle* Vienna, Adele Bloch-Bauer emblemizes the crucial role of female private art collectors in this period. Not only did these women fund modern artists, but also, by creating numerous salons, they provided the opportunity for collaboration and discourse to take place in a cohesive environment. Decades after the looting of art during World War II, renewed interest in Austria's pre-war art patrons has flourished. The artwork in the Neue Galerie visually presents the tastes,

influences, legacies, and sometimes even the physical likenesses of those patrons—who Lauder connects to himself.

### **Gardner and Frick’s influence on the Neue: Private Collections in the Home**

Both the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum and Henry Clay Frick Collection, two famous private art collections housed in private residencies, serve as a precedent to the Neue. In 1903, the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, housed in a three-story replica of a fifteenth-century Venetian palace in Boston, Massachusetts, opened to display Gardner’s private art collection to the public. As noted by William Henden in *Analyzing an Art Museum*, many early US art museums emerged out of private collections between the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-centuries.<sup>5</sup> By maintaining their collections separately from large public museums, some major art patrons thereby chiseled out memorials for themselves that still exist today.

The Gardner collection encompasses a wealth of paintings, sculptures, furniture, textiles, drawings, silver, ceramics, illuminated manuscripts, rare books, photographs, and letters gathered from diverse locations and time periods, including ancient Rome, Medieval Europe, Renaissance Italy, Asia, the Islamic world, and 19th-century France and America.<sup>6</sup> By using their financial prosperity to collect works of art, Isabella and her husband, Jack (John L.) Gardner III, provided Americans a chance to view art that would otherwise only be accessible to those who traveled outside of the US. The Gardners obtained their fortune

from their families Isabella's father had made his fortune in the Irish linen trade and mining investments and gave the residence that currently serves as the museum to the newlywed Gardners as a wedding present.<sup>7</sup> Jack Gardner was a successful financier in his father's East Indies trading business. After losing their son to pneumonia, the Gardners traveled around the globe expanding their knowledge of art and culture. Their diverse collection, displayed in the private Gardner Museum, demonstrates the new awareness of art and culture that they gained from their extensive world travels.

In the essay "Private Museums, Public Leadership: Isabella Stewart Gardner and the Art of Cultural Authority," Anne Higonnet defines the private art museum as a place that "begins with an art collection which a private founder shapes into the skeleton of an apparently domestic installation intended to become a public museum."<sup>8</sup> Higonnet argues that the role of the American private collector at the turn of the twentieth century was to exert authority by creating a place where culture would affect social and political values. The Gardner Museum in particular reflects the collecting of artworks from various eras and areas, among them, many items that represent a generally European past. The exertion of authority that Higonnet describes, then, allowed Gardner to assert the rising cultural power of the United States. By owning works of art from Europe, which had previously been considered culturally superior, private collectors claimed these works of art as America's own. Gardner thus embraced the

collecting of European art to provide US citizens access to artwork that American collectors now had the economic means to acquire.<sup>9</sup>

In 1935, thirty-two years after the Gardner Museum commenced, the Henry Clay Frick Collection opened to the public. In a Fifth Avenue mansion in New York City, one of three homes that the Frick family occupied, Henry Clay Frick displayed the bulk of his art collection, thus creating an opportunity for visitors to enter a personal domestic space and to observe his personal taste for fine art. Henry Clay Frick started collecting art at a young age, which was unusual since he grew up in an environment neither surrounded by artwork nor studied art history in a scholastic setting.<sup>10</sup> When Frick was twenty-two years old, Pittsburgh bankers T. Mellon and Sons completed a credit check on Frick for a loan and commented, “The borrower may be a little too enthusiastic about pictures, but not enough to hurt.”<sup>11</sup> They dispersed the loan. Once Frick had acquired a large fortune through his investment in the coke industry, he was able to pursue his art collection. Today, the lavish New York residence of the Frick family, much like the Gardner Museum, uses a previously inhabited residential space to pay homage to the art collecting passion of its owner.

The private, residential settings of all three museums—the Gardner Museum, the Frick Collection, and the Neue Galerie—provide intimate looks into these collectors’ passions. The type of personal setting created when private collectors open their own museums allows for their greater creative involvement

than is possible when collectors simply donate their work to the public. Although the Neue was never Lauder's previous home, he nevertheless lives in New York City and remains a prominent figure in New York society and in the city's arts community. These connections explain why he has chosen this specific location for the Neue, amongst the other notable museums and private collections housed nearby.

Those who visit private art collections in residential settings also experience the intimate lifestyles of collectors in a comfortable atmosphere. For example, at the Gardner Museum, which was once Isabella Stewart Gardner's private home, one can "feel at home with history."<sup>12</sup> The inclusion of richly furnished rooms within the private art museum adds to the sense of "living" history versus the "dead" kind that is often represented by national or municipal museums.<sup>13</sup> In the essay "In Quest of a Museal Aura: Turn-of-the-Century Narratives About Museum-Displayed Objects," author Ruth Hoberman argues that objects can symbolize different meanings and values by the way in which they are presented.<sup>14</sup> The object's museal "aura" attempts to promote the location of its original use value in an attempt to counter mass industry and commodification. The author argues that when an object enters the museum institution, it loses its use value and becomes detached, decontextualized and further from its original setting. Vernon Lee further describes the resulting museum as a place of "evil necessities where art is arranged and ticketed and

made dingy and lifeless.”<sup>15</sup> However, the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum encourages a personal connection to the objects that run counter to Lee’s notion about the museum, thus allowing the visitor to view her collection in an environment close to the intention of the collector.

A private museum offers viewers the chance to imagine themselves in the art collector’s role, participating in the fantasy of rearranging and manipulating owned artwork.<sup>16</sup> Every visitor who enters the private collection museum becomes, if just for a moment, “the founder of the museum, the mistress or master of the house.”<sup>17</sup> Experiencing the art in this manner provides insight for the visitor, allowing an imaginative glimpse of what it might be like to be the owner surrounded by such artworks. At the end of the day, when the museum closes and the visitors must leave, they depart with a sense of intimate speculation regarding the private collector’s relationship with the collection.

Higonnet, in “Museum Sight,” argues that there are three levels of private collecting: the psychological, individual and social. She asserts that while the majority of public collections support only one of these three levels, the private museum sustains all three equally. On the psychological level, all private museums, or authored installations, strive to create the perfect vision of its collector. The private collection in the home setting “idealizes the self of the founder and defies death.”<sup>18</sup> The private museum displays personality, reflecting priorities in the ways the collector displays his/her artworks. According to

Higonnet, the private museum also signifies a place that reflects the collector's personality; that is, factors of class, nationality, gender, and race have ultimately governed display choices in the private museum. Further, the art collection that is displayed in an original residential setting where the private collector once enjoyed these works of art—but is now refashioned as a private museum—conveys a more personal setting to engage the artworks.

By displaying a collection in its original setting, the private museum acts as a kind of memorial to its collector, immortalizing the owner and requiring the viewer to experience the collector's presence in addition to the artworks. To emphasize this point, both Gardner and Frick commissioned portraits of themselves, which now hang in their respective museums. Arguably, one of Isabella Gardner's most well known portraits, painted in 1887-1888 by John Singer Sargent, exemplifies how the collector's identity permeates the museum that bears her name. In a specific room dedicated to this portrait's display—the final gallery in the museum—a Sargent painting of Isabella hangs in the corner much like a shrine, surrounded with religious icons; an altar-like table sits in front of the picture.<sup>19</sup> Here, the collector has transformed herself into a work of art that ultimately becomes one with the collection. Long after her death, and through a visual reminder, visitors will know that Isabella Gardner collected all of the artworks on display. She has immortalized herself not only through her art collection, but also through commissioning and displaying this portrait, which

positions her as the “patron saint of the museum.”<sup>20</sup> In fact, the image of Isabella Gardner appears on every floor of the Gardner Museum, as the subject of ten separate portraits. Thus, the collector’s image painted by a famous artist and hanging among works by numerous other famous artists, serves as a constant reminder to the visitor that the master of the collection is immortalized.

Henry Frick does not saturate the Henry Clay Frick Collection with his presence as completely as Gardner does in the Gardner Museum. One painted portrait of him as an elderly man hangs directly off of the main entrance, in the library wing of the museum. While the Frick collection includes four other paintings of either Henry or his wife Adelaide, these are not on public view. When one walks into the Living Hall (or first room) of the Frick Collection, collected paintings from Titian, El Greco, and Bellini—arguably the most valuable art pieces in the Frick Collection—line the walls. Thus, this collector chooses to identify himself less through his own painted image than through a dazzling display of his most prized possessions.

Ronald Lauder employs a similar tactic but he aligns his identity not with an entire entrance hall of paintings but with one specific painting. An online Google search demonstrates the close identification of Lauder, and his private museum, with his most famous possession. When Google-searching “portrait of Ronald Lauder,” one of the first resulting images shows Lauder posing before *Adele Bloch-Bauer I*. By collecting the most famous painted image of Adele



Bloch-Bauer, herself a collector of modern Viennese artwork, Lauder defines his legacy and memorializes his passion for art through an artwork that, now a household name, will remain in the New York museum he founded.

### **Lauder as Private Collector**

So far, academic texts have scarcely examined Ronald Lauder. According to James Stourton, author of *Great Collections of our Time*, it is premature to write about Lauder because he is still alive and developing his methods of collecting.<sup>21</sup> However, as an eager graduate student I am more than happy to write about him based on existing information and his career to date. Lauder's interest in collecting, and his passionate and instinctive appetite for specific areas of art, developed during his teenage years. Lauder did not descend from a family of collectors, but became inspired by art through his studies, his interest in foreign languages and his travel abroad, which included visits to museums and private collections.<sup>22</sup> Early on, he was aware of historic collections as well as the twentieth-century collections of Florence Gould, Germain Seligman, and Nelson Rockefeller.<sup>23</sup>

In the Neue's catalogue essay "The Collector as Connoisseur," Eugene Thaw argues that art collecting is not only an emotional and compulsive activity, but also an intellectual exercise—an ordering of material to create structure. The author praises Lauder's collection, describing it as personal in its interests and enthusiasms, yet so wide-ranging that Lauder belongs among the ranks of the

major American collectors, such as J.P. Morgan, Henry Clay Frick, Duncan Phillips, and Norton Simon.<sup>24</sup> Because Lauder does not collect for profit, Thaw categorizes him as taking an “old-fashioned” approach to art collecting.<sup>25</sup> According to Thaw, this approach has become rare. Today, collectors often have paid advisors; the investor seldom looks at or personally chooses the works of art purchased. As a result, many collections look the same and many acquisitions are available for resale almost immediately, if the price is right. Thaw argues that the Lauder collection is worlds away from a kind of impersonal collection that follows current market trends. The players in these two different modes of art collection seldom ever meet or understand each other.

Christian Witt-Döring, in another catalogue essay “Decorative Arts,” states that the creators of the Neue never intended to display its collections as an encyclopedic presentation of an era; rather, the exhibitions sought primarily to integrate Lauder’s passion for Viennese modern art into his private daily life.<sup>26</sup> Lauder has intentionally constructed his connection to the Jewish community of *fin-de-siècle* Vienna by memorializing and making permanent the modernist moment that this vanished community helped realize. Witt-Döring maintains that Lauder’s private passion for collecting and his philanthropic ambitions come together in the creation of the Neue Galerie. Lauder’s founding of the Neue combined his love for and his identification with a particular cultural aspect of history with his commitment to his native city, New York. Witt-Döring argues

that Lauder's interest in *fin-de-siècle* Vienna extends beyond private motivation and into public responsibility, which will "represent an enduring legacy for future generations."<sup>27</sup>

In addition, Witt-Döring claims that collecting generally offers the opportunity for self-definition, as this can be demonstrated by Lauder's identification with Adele Bloch-Bauer, an individual from a specific historical epoch who shared his appreciation of modern art. Lauder also positions himself as an important collector of Viennese modern artwork through the 135 million dollar price paid for the portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer, an equally historic art collector who lived in *fin-de-siècle* Vienna. Lauder highlights *Adele Bloch-Bauer I* as the focal piece in his collection, and in turn uses the portrait as a backdrop for his own in catalogue photographs. Thus, Lauder asserts that he belongs to the historic community of major American art patrons by placing his own intimate vision of a private museum in New York. Further, he claims membership in the historic community of major patrons of Viennese art by sparing no expense to acquire a masterpiece of the Viennese modern, which brings with it a rich history of its own.

### **Private Art Patronage in *Fin-de-Siècle* Vienna**

The historic art patrons with whom Lauder identifies collected only modern artwork, and the ideas that defined the modern and influenced those works evolved largely in turn-of-the-century salons. During the *fin-de-siècle*, in

an era in which few women received higher education or were permitted to join the workforce, women expressed themselves through the home rather than in the public sphere; one such expression was the creation of *salonnières* (salon). The salon enabled women, including wealthy art patrons, to seek out education, professional identity, and personal empowerment. Although Adele Bloch-Bauer was denied a university education, she pursued a disciplined regime of self-education by holding intimate gatherings in her home that sought out the company of artists and intellectuals.<sup>28</sup> In the essay, “Music, Femininity, and Jewish identity: The Tradition and Legacy of the Salon,” Leon Botstein states that the salon emerged at the end of the eighteenth century when the ideals of Enlightenment universality allowed for salon hostesses to test their freedom as women and as Jews. Salons represented the modern, and this environment brought together various talented individuals such as artists, critics, and exhibition organizers in order to exchange ideas.

Particularly in Vienna, women who were collectors of the modern held popular, intimate gatherings in their homes. One example is Berta Zuckermandl, one of Vienna’s leading journalists and art patrons (her father, Moritz Szeps, was editor of *Neues Wiener Tagblatt*). Berta Zuckermandl’s Vienna home, decorated by Hoffman, served as the gathering space for a salon exhibiting work by Secession artists as well as international artists. For example, Zuckermandl had close contacts in Paris and organized an exhibition of August Rodin’s work in

1902. Zuckerkandl is famous for declaring, “On my divan, Vienna comes alive.”<sup>29</sup> Indeed, critic and salon guest Ludwig Hevesi noted that the idea for the Viennese Secession was first discussed in Zuckerkandl’s living room.<sup>30</sup> Her salon gave emerging artists and intellectuals not only a place to come together, but also gave them access to her financial support, since she purchased numerous modern artworks. Thus, creative pioneers of the modern took aesthetic and financial refuge in the interiors that enabled the domestic setting to be transformed into an aesthetic retreat.

Though Botstein does not discuss her, Adele Bloch-Bauer should occupy the same category as Zuckerkandl. The Bloch-Bauers were famous for holding dinners and parties for the forbearers of the Viennese *fin-de-siècle* modern movement. O’Connor describes Adele’s fervent participation in the parties she hosted:

Adele seemed moody and self-involved. She barely looked up when her sister Theresa’s eight-year old daughter, Maria (Altmann), peered silently through the velvet curtains of Adele’s crowded salon. Maria watched as Adele blossomed in the company of her distinguished, learned friends.<sup>31</sup>

In 1918, Adele Bloch-Bauer led the traditional “Red Saturdays,” in which a group dedicated to reforming Viennese society gathered at her home for a salon. This keen commitment to social and cultural renewal, coupled with enormous financial resources, helped establish Adele and Ferdinand Bloch-Bauer as formidable patrons of the arts. Because Adele died in 1925 at the age of forty-three, she did not personally witness the decline and dissolution of the Jewish

culture in Vienna during World War II. Instead, her portrait reflects her position during a pure moment of the modern, a sort of pre-war time capsule that Lauder guards in the Neue Galerie.

The portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer now rests in a museum that displays the very artworks the Bloch-Bauers and other art collectors from *fin-de-siècle* Vienna owned. In the act of collecting *Adele Bloch-Bauer I*, Lauder has redefined his own image and legacy through the image and legacy of Adele Bloch-Bauer. He has identified with, and modeled himself after, a woman who, like him, collected and raised the profile of Viennese modern art. He has fashioned her as an icon of the modern Viennese culture that emerged from her support. Ultimately, Lauder has memorialized his own identification with Bloch-Bauer by reanimating her spirit in his museum surroundings and by involving himself with the issues that surround both her portrait and her personal history. In turn, Adele Bloch-Bauer's image has come to symbolize Lauder's art collection and the mission of his own private museum, the Neue.

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<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Szancer Kujawski, "From Wish List to Collection," in *The Ronald S. Lauder Collection: Selections from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century BC to 20<sup>th</sup> Century Germany, Austria and France*, ed. Janis Staggs et al. (New York: Neue Galerie, 2011), 26.

<sup>2</sup> Christian Witt-Döring, "Decorative Arts," in *The Ronald S. Lauder Collection: Selections from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century BC to 20<sup>th</sup> Century Germany, Austria and France*, ed. Janis Staggs et al. (New York: Neue Galerie, 2011), 96.

<sup>3</sup> Witt-Döring, "Decorative Arts," 106.

<sup>4</sup> Witt-Döring, "Decorative Arts," 106.

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<sup>5</sup> William Henden, *Analyzing an Art Museum* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1979), 22.

<sup>6</sup> “History,” Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, accessed February 1, 2012, <http://www.gardnermuseum.org/collection>.

<sup>7</sup> “Isabella Stewart Gardner: Biography,” Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, accessed March 12<sup>th</sup>, 2012, [http://www.gardnermuseum.org/about/isabella\\_stewart\\_gardner](http://www.gardnermuseum.org/about/isabella_stewart_gardner).

<sup>8</sup> Anne Higonnet, “Private Museums, Public Leadership: Isabella Stewart Gardner and the Art of Cultural Leadership,” in *Cultural Leadership in America: Art Matronage and Patronage* (Boston: Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, 1997), 80.

<sup>9</sup> Higonnet, “Private Museums, Public Leadership,” 80.

<sup>10</sup> Joanne B. Moore, “The Frick Family: a Portrait,” in *Clayton: the Home of Henry Clay Frick, Art and Furnishings*, edited by Fannia Weingartner et al. (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1998), 24.

<sup>11</sup> Moore, “The Frick Family: a Portrait,” 24.

<sup>12</sup> Higonnet, “Private Museums, Public Leadership,” 80.

<sup>13</sup> Higonnet, “Private Museums, Public Leadership,” 81.

<sup>14</sup> Ruth Hoberman, “In Quest of a Museal Aura: Turn-of-the-Century Narratives About Museum-Displayed Objects,” *Victorian Literature and Culture* 31 (2003): 468.

<sup>15</sup> Hoberman, “In Quest of a Museal Aura,” 467.

<sup>16</sup> Higonnet, “Private Museums, Public Leadership,” 89.

<sup>17</sup> Higonnet, “Private Museums, Public Leadership,” 83.

<sup>18</sup> Anne Higonnet, “Museum Sight,” in *Art and its Publics: Museum Studies at the Millennium*, ed. Andrew McClellan (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 135.

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- <sup>19</sup> Higonnet, “Private Museums, Public Leadership,” 84.
- <sup>20</sup> Higonnet, “Private Museums, Public Leadership,” 85.
- <sup>21</sup> James Stourton, *Great Collectors of our Time: Art Collecting of our Time* (London: Scala Publishers 2007), 13.
- <sup>22</sup> Kujawski, “From Wish List to Collection,” 26.
- <sup>23</sup> Kujawski, “From Wish List to Collection,” 26.
- <sup>24</sup> Eugene Thaw, “The Collector as Connoisseur,” in *The Ronald S. Lauder Collection: Selections from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century BC to 20<sup>th</sup> Century Germany, Austria and France*, ed. Janis Staggs et al. (New York: Neue Galerie, 2011), 92.
- <sup>25</sup> Thaw, “The Collector as Connoisseur,” 92.
- <sup>26</sup> Witt-Dörning, “Decorative Arts,” 96.
- <sup>27</sup> Witt-Dörning, “Decorative Arts,” 97.
- <sup>28</sup> Sophie Lillie and Georg Putsch, *Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer* (New York: Neue Galerie, 2009), 38.
- <sup>29</sup> Emily Bilski and Emily Braun, *Jewish Women and their Salons: The Power of Conversation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 17.
- <sup>30</sup> Bilski and Braun, *Jewish Women*, 84.
- <sup>31</sup> Anne-Marie O’Connor, *The Lady in Gold: The Extraordinary Tale of Gustav Klimt’s Masterpiece, Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer* (New York: Random House, 2012), 107.



## Chapter 5

### CONCLUSION

Academics have not previously examined Ronald Lauder and the Neue Galerie in New York. Most of the media coverage surrounding Ronald Lauder has emphasized his interest in politics. Critics rarely discuss his relationship to his own collection; however, some articles in the *New York Times* have expressed opinions about his collection and his role as private collector. The response of the media to Lauder and his private museum emphasizes the significance of the cultural and historical context I have discussed in this thesis. Those who have criticized Lauder for the lack of provenance in his museum reinforce the importance of displaying cultural information alongside artworks. It is essential to consider and question mainstream media representations of Ronald Lauder and the Neue. Do they critique the absence of sufficient provenance information, or question the ethics of Lauder's collection methods? How does the media cover the Neue Galerie? Which elements of Lauder's project have art reporters focused on, and which have they found problematic?

Despite some criticism of Lauder, most articles about him agree that the captivating portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer is the icon of his private museum. Perhaps the international publicity surrounding the Altmann restitution case among others helps explain the general focus on *Adele Bloch-Bauer I* in the media's coverage of Lauder and the Neue. Writers focus on this painting perhaps

because of its status as one of the masterworks by Gustav Klimt, Vienna's best-known modern artist. The strong physical presence of the portrait within the Neue Galerie, highlighted by the prominent position it holds in the center of Lauder's permanent exhibition gallery, might also explain writers' emphasis on the single artwork in discussions of Lauder and the Neue. In the *New York Times* article "Breadth of History in One Bite," Karen Rosenberg notes that Adele Bloch-Bauer's painted image gazes downward at the museum visitor, evoking a sense that Lauder has built the museum around her portrait.<sup>1</sup> Lauder has deliberately foregrounded this artwork in nearly every Neue exhibition catalogue and even in the pamphlets that advertise the museum. Through his own attention to the painting, this private collector has solidified the importance of *Adele Bloch-Bauer I* both to his collection and as a "poster child" for the Neue Galerie.

In addition to Rosenberg's discussion of the central physical placement of the Neue's "Mona Lisa," *The New York Times* has also published in-depth articles about the provenance questions raised by Lauder and his art collection.<sup>2</sup> In the article "Enigmatic Billionaire is Back in Term Limit Fray," Sam Roberts and Eric Konigsberg concentrate on the controversies associated with Lauder's work regarding the issue of restitution. Roberts and Konigsberg criticize the lack of provenance information at the Neue, pointing out the apparent hypocrisy of a public crusader for restitution who refuses to reveal the provenance of the artworks he himself owns. However, Lauder does not apologize for failing to

document the history of the German and Austrian artwork in his collection. He has responded to this criticism by stating, “It’s my private collection, would it be O.K. for people to see what dresses you have in your closet?”<sup>3</sup> However, the histories and contextual meanings of personal clothing and pre-World-War-II European artwork hardly make a fair comparison. Although Lauder wishes to keep his privately owned items private, he has nonetheless opened a freely available museum with works of art that have had a dramatic life in the public eye; thus, visitors deserve more historical information.

The provenance information shown on the Neue’s website includes the history of the artworks’ previous owners but does not list any acquisition dates. According to Robin Pogrebin in her *New York Times* article “Lauder’s Openness is Sought on Artwork,” if there were any missing dates between acquisitions, Lauder and his collection methods would automatically be in question.<sup>4</sup> Other figures such as Ori Soltes, president of the Holocaust Restitution Project, have echoed this criticism. Soltes states,

I find it strange because of who Lauder is and who he has claimed to be in terms of his concern for those who suffered at the hands of the Nazis. I would think he would bend over backwards to at least be a shining light of provenance propriety.<sup>5</sup>

Perhaps Lauder’s method of displaying modern artwork has excluded an in-depth showcase of provenance because, as I discussed in chapter two, he dutifully based his museum model on the Museum of Modern Art in New York, with which he has long been involved and associated. Regardless of the rich

history of the exhibited artworks, formalism tends to predominate in the display of the artwork presented both at the MoMA and at the Neue. Yet even Randol Schoenberg, the Los Angeles lawyer who assisted Maria Altmann in regaining her family's Klimt paintings, agrees with the *New York Times* writers that the Neue should display further provenance in the museum:

Since he's at the forefront of asking people to return that kind of property, it would make sense for him to do that. It would certainly set a good example if he were to make public his collection.<sup>6</sup>

This statement by Schoenberg clarifies the importance of ownership history not only to the visitor but also to the private collector who in turn represents his collection and his private museum as a cultural and historic experience.

Lauder has a very different view of the choices he made when setting up the Neue. "The museum is transparent," he states. "When you put a piece of work on the wall of a museum and say, 'This is it; it's all there,' I'm as open as I can be."<sup>7</sup> His response to critics like Roberts and Konigsberg, Pogrebin, and Schoenberg seems disingenuous because, as I have attempted to show in this thesis, the context of the artworks in the Neue deserves more attention. In the case of the Neue Galerie, both the history of Viennese modernism and the provenance of the objects displayed are crucial to a full appreciation of the art. Of course, a visitor to the Neue may gaze up at *Adele Bloch-Bauer I* and appreciate it on a simple, visual level. Yet a large connection remains unexplained without an

understanding of the role Jewish modern art patrons and intellectuals played in *fin-de-siècle* Viennese history. There is also a gap in acknowledging the restitution of the portrait of Bloch-Bauer and how Lauder has come to identify himself with this painting. Visitors therefore are unable to experience the full complexity of the rich content and context of this famous painting.

The issue of restitution remains pertinent to artwork that goes up for auction today. Many artworks are still contested: currently, institutions such as Vienna's Leopold Museum continue to be hotbeds of controversy concerning collection ethics and skepticism about the rightful ownership of artworks. In 2009, Lauder himself was among the targets of a restitution case. Like the Bloch-Bauers, famous actor, director, and cabaret artist Fritz Grünbaum, who died in the Dachau concentration camp, had his entire art collection stolen by the Nazis. Grünbaum's lawyer, Ray Dowd, filed a class-action lawsuit in 2009 against the Neue Galerie to claim that Lauder was not the rightful owner of the Egon Schiele drawing, *I Love Antithesis*. Grünbaum did not win, and Lauder stated, "The claim was without merit. There was nothing to it."<sup>8</sup> Regarding his indictment in this restitution case, Lauder said he wished that he had actually owned a stolen artwork in order to demonstrate publically how readily he would give the art back.<sup>9</sup>

Ronald Lauder has become the object of public scrutiny due to his high profile and multi-faceted lifestyle as wealthy heir, politician, Jewish

philanthropist, art collector, and his previous ambassadorship to Austria. In the *New York Times* article, “A Family’s Billions, Artfully Sheltered,” David N. Kocieniewski criticizes Lauder for exploiting tax laws in order to support both the Neue and his own charitable foundation. According to Kocieniewski, Lauder has taken advantage of federal tax deductions worth tens of millions of dollars over the years, and these “savings...help defray the hundreds of millions he has spent creating one of New York City’s cultural gems.”<sup>10</sup> Further, he has used his tax refunds to help finance the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation, which works to improve the lives of Eastern European Jewish citizens through religious education.

However controversial Lauder’s business dealings and collection methods may be, his greatest claim to fame remains the purchase, in the wake of Altmann’s restitution case, of *Adele Bloch-Bauer I* for the extraordinary sum of 135 million dollars. His cherished portrait of Bloch-Bauer, which Lauder allegedly first glimpsed and became enraptured by at the age of fifteen, has helped make the Neue Galerie a destination for tourists and art-lovers from around the world. The figure and persona of Adele Bloch-Bauer functions as a parallel for Lauder’s own persona, due to their mutual and ardent commitment to Viennese art and the wealth that allowed them both to promote their shared passion.

As I have discussed, Lauder and Bloch-Bauer had in common their Jewish religion, a passion for art collecting, and the embrace of *fin-de-siècle* Viennese modernist culture. Further, Lauder has visually identified with and contextually

defined himself through Bloch-Bauer, embracing her image and history as connections to past Jewish patrons of Viennese art.

As a private collector living in New York City, Lauder has also associated himself with preceding collectors who have set up their collections in private residences. Therefore, Lauder moves away from the current trend of donating his collection to a major institution and redefines the philanthropic goal that many art collectors now have in assuring that their collections are available to the public. He goes a step further in creating his own museum from his private collection, a trend that seems to be gaining popularity with other wealthy art patrons, such as Eli Broad and Alice Walton. However, Lauder further differentiates himself from his contemporaries by focusing his museum setting on one specific culture and by looking back to historic private museum models to ensure the success of the Neue.

This study will aid future scholars in examining Lauder and his legacy in particular—and private collectors in general—as more than symbols of wealth who open museums based on artwork that suits their personal tastes. In the case of New York's Neue Galerie, a close examination of Lauder and the artwork he has collected within the context of Viennese history and of Viennese modernism, illuminates how a historically specific collection should better speak to museum visitors in the new millennium.

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<sup>1</sup> Karen Rosenberg, “Breadth of History in One Bite,” *New York Times*, November 4, 2011, C23.

<sup>2</sup> Ronald Lauder, *The Ronald S. Lauder Collection: Selections from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century BC to 20<sup>th</sup> Century Germany, Austria and France*, exhibition at the Neue Galerie, New York, December 17, 2011.

<sup>3</sup> Sam Roberts and Eric Konigsberg, “Enigmatic Billionaire is Back in Term Limit Fray,” *New York Times*, October 9, 2008, A1.

<sup>4</sup> Robin Pogrebin, “Lauder’s Openness is Sought on Artwork,” *New York Times*, October 18, 2007.

<sup>5</sup> Pogrebin, “Lauder’s Openness is Sought on Artwork,” *New York Times*, October 18, 2007.

<sup>6</sup> Pogrebin, “Lauder’s Openness is Sought on Artwork,” *New York Times*, October 18, 2007.

<sup>7</sup> Pogrebin, “Lauder’s Openness is Sought on Artwork,” *New York Times*, October 18, 2007.

<sup>8</sup> Pogrebin, “Lauder’s Openness is Sought on Artwork,” *New York Times*, October 18, 2007.

<sup>9</sup> Pogrebin, “Lauder’s Openness is Sought on Artwork,” *New York Times*, October 18, 2007.

<sup>10</sup> David N. Kocieniewski, “A Family’s Billions, Artfully Sheltered,” *New York Times*, November 26, 2011.



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