

Example of argumentative essay on gustav klimt and adele bloch bauer i

[Art & Culture](#)



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Gustav Klimt was an important painter in the history of art, and one of the few artists appreciated in their own lifetimes. His portrait of Adele Bach Bauer I in particular illustrates how the flow of his life's work ran through the Victorian Age, into the Edwardian era and influenced the genres that followed. In part, due to the times in which he lived he was exposed to a world in transition. Born on July 14, 1862 in the Austrian-Hungarian city of Baumgarten during the Victorian era he studied at the Vienna School of Arts and Crafts until 1883. He was a founding member and president of the Secessionist movement known as Wiener Sezession. The Viennese government supported the movement and provided land on which they erected an exhibition hall and where they published *Ver Sacrum* or Sacred Spring. The group did not set out to encourage a style; instead, they provided a venue for experiment and unconventional artists. Klimt was certainly that, throughout his life he experimented and combined both two dimensional and illustrative imagery classical Greek references and gold to create a unique style that can be seen in *Adele Bach Bauer I*. This painting incorporates his nineteenth century foundation elements and leads the way for other artists who flowed into the Art Nouveau style at the turn of the century. Because Klimt retained his high level of involvement with this group, his circle of influence extended further beyond his particular genre than most artists have the opportunity to enjoy. The Vienna Secessionists were a strong element in the Art Nouveau movement and Klimt's *Adele Bach Bauer I* an iconic portrait that was influential in leading the way. After leaving the *Ver Sacrum* and breaking with the Secessionist movement Klimt lived his belief that art was something not to be confined to art

academies and designed fashion, jewelry and worked in various other media when he died February 6, 1918 he left several works unfinished.

Hellenism was a pervasive influence in the nineteenth century affecting thought, feeling and art on many different levels. George Steiner wrote that thought and feeling throughout the nineteenth century drew essential force from Hellenism in an analytic and mimetic attempt to grasp the sources of the Attic achievement. . In keeping with the spirit of the time, Gustav Klimt's work includes images and references to ancient Greece as well as from many other civilizations. However, there is a force line running through all his work that shows a greater Hellenistic influence. In Gustav Klimt's work, there is an underlying theme deeper than might be initially discerned by the simple inclusion of the iconic Greek images appearing in his paintings.

Although there was a strong Hellenistic influence throughout the nineteenth century, the early part of that century focused on sculptures based upon Roman copies of the Greek statues. These Hellenistic influenced Roman works unpainted and unadorned and that was the popular image of Grecian work since the Renaissance. The question of using color on classic interpretations of Greek work was under debate, and the Greek War for Independence precluded study at the sites themselves. J. I. Hittorff studied Southern Italian and Sicilian early Doric architecture. Based upon the remaining traces of paint found there he concluded that the Greeks did in fact use color and adornment in their architecture and statuary. This was confirmed in 1885 when excavations found statuary that proved that during the Archaic period the original sculptures were painted. At this time Karl Kundmann read of the enormous quantities of gold Pheidias used in making

his image of Athena and it prompted him to break from tradition and use gold on his statue of Athena for the Athena Fountain in Reichsrat, Vienna. Klimt also chose to ornament his Athena of 1888. Unlike Kundmann however, Klimt's gold dominated one third of his painting that had otherwise a green background with tints of purple and patches of intense red. This use of dominating gold continued as a theme through much of Klimt's work and in particular his portrait of Adele Bach Bauer I. Although gold was the dominant color it was not the dominant symbolic structure in this painting. Klimt incorporated images of Nike, the gorgon and Herakle's struggle with Triton into this painting as well. These images were rendered accurately from Archaic Greek works, but in stark contrast to the notions held by society at the time. Like Nietzsche, Gustav Klimt was able to seize the opportunity offered by the fortuitous archeological finds of that era into supporting icons of their own views of Greek art and society.

Nietzsche's viewpoints and philosophies permeated Viennese culture and society at that time. In particular, the dichotomy between the Apollonian order and restraint and the Dionysian irrational ecstasy that created the basis for the tragic dramas of ancient Greece. These two elements were the central thesis of Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* and are reflected in many of Klimt's works. Klimt used contrasting imagery as an artistic device in his portrayal of Apollo and Dionysus for the Burgtheater ceiling. Apollo appears in the gentler early classical style whereas Dionysus is rendered in an Archaic style that places the two images in sharp contrast.

After the Burgtheater ceiling, his next large project was the Kunshistorische Museum. Two of the paintings Klimt created for this were Athena and The

Girl From Tanagra, both representational of his early Greek style. In many of his works, he uses descriptive detail to animate his representational figures showing them in sharp contrast to the two dimensional back grounds from which they emerge. Frequently, he also incorporates a meander of grapevines as a device repeated in many other of his works. While the predominant figure in The Girl From Tanagra is set out against the backdrop, it is not the two dimensional one he uses in so many of his works, instead he employs a large vase and other background imagery along with a more two dimensional foreground to isolate and bring the central image into focus.

Another commission from the same year as The Girl From Tanagra is his Portrait of Joseph Pembrauer in this Klimt again used elements from Archaic vases, however he selected individual motifs and figures and incorporated them into the portrait's gold frame. Several elements of the iconography are associated with Apollo and serve as a tribute to Joseph Pembauer's musical talents as well as calling to mind the Apollonian Dionysian dualism.

In his 1895 portrait of the actor Josef Lewinsky Klimt uses the same Apollonian and Dionysian duality. Josef Lewinsky is painted in his representational style while the frame in which this image is set contains more flat, symbolic detail, the Apollo's tripod and Dionysus' trailing grape vines appear again, and although it is used more sparingly the gold accents serve to create both a blending effect and to accent the more ancient Greek motifs. As Lewinsky was a tragic actor this portrait further enforces the Apollonian and Dionysian connection.

Klimt incorporated Dionysian themes in his Music I and Music II works painted for Nikolaus Dumba's Music Salon. In these works, a strong

Nietzsche influence can be seen in the grinning satyr mask and the sphinx imagery. Differentiating these works from their predecessors is the way the images are incorporated directly into the paintings rather than being consigned to the frame, although gold is once again used to highlight and set them apart from the other elements. The grapevine again appears in these works, strengthening the Dionysian connection. Although other later works do not have the same strong connection with Nietzsche, Apollo and Dionysus continuing themes are evident. In Danae, painted in the early twentieth century the shower of gold follows the Greek and gold connection balancing Zeus's shower of gold with Mycenaean style gold filigree disks in the lower right corner. Later, works from his gold period contain some more subtle elements that nonetheless still advance these themes. In Waterserpents there are grapevines and the Triton's scaly fish body harkens back to some of his earlier work. Even as subsequent works departed further from his earlier motifs and strong colors replaced the earlier gold the differences are more evident as a series of transitions rather than a clear break with his earlier styles.

"To every age its art. To art its freedom," the English translation of the words above the door that housed the Wiener Sezession. The Viennese secessionist artists had no intention to start a movement; movements are by their nature limiting, the Secessionists existed to explore possibilities. Klimt was a founding member, and served as a catalyst to bring the various artist and genres of the time together in unity. It came naturally, Klimt did this in his own work throughout his career. Starting with the juxtaposition of classic Greek and modern elements, Klimt maintained a dichotomy of

representation and abstraction as separate modalities in his works. That reaches a crescendo in his portrait of Adele Bach Bauer I. In his early work, Klimt began using ornament designs with representational images, usually of Greek origin, particularly vases and in the Archaic style. As his style matured, he developed a combination of representational images set off by two-dimensional designs that reinforced each other by their contrasting interplay. His use of gold served to accentuate this dualistic technique. Illustrative of this the portrait of Adele Bach Bauer I shows that clearly in the way her features are set off by the predominately gold background while the use of gold and silver and the subtle iconography in her costume allows the representational image to blend and merge with the two dimensional background. Painted in an era of transition, this painting reflected and affected the art world of that time. It continues to be a creation of desire to this day. It was the prize in an international lawsuit, the subject of a movie and of recent books. It was commissioned as an act of love by Adele's husband and Klimt's glowing golden vision of her beauty has moved people ever since.

Works Cited

Florman, Lisa. " Gustav Klimt and the Precedent of Ancient Greece." *The Art Bulletin* 72, no. 2 (June 1990).