

Gustav Klimt and Emilie Flöge: Artist & Muse Mementoes evocative of an era to be sold at Sotheby's in London

TOUCHING mementoes that hint at the mysterious romance between the artist Gustav Klimt and the woman who remained with him throughout his life and whose portrait is one of the icons of the era, are to be sold at Sotheby's in London on Wednesday, October 6, 1999. The sale starts at 11.00 am.

Beautiful jewellery, delicate textiles, photographs and correspondence exchanged by Klimt and his muse, the fashion designer Emilie Flöge, provide a fascinating insight into the avant-garde fashion of early 20th century Vienna, and reflect the spirit of the new modern movement of which Klimt and Emilie were main protagonists.

The collection is being sold by Dr. Wolfgang Fischer, one of the world's main dealers in major German and Austrian Expressionist and Modern art. He acquired it from the Flöge estate, where it had remained since the death of Emilie in 1952, and further researched and documented it in a book which he published in 1987.

The collection will be offered in a dedicated catalogue as part of Sotheby's sale of German and Austrian Art which immediately follows at 2.00pm. The nature of Klimt's relationship with Emilie will always remain a mystery. He lived with his mother all his life and was unwilling or unable to make Emilie his wife or his acknowledged mistress. There is no doubt, however, that Emilie had a profound influence on Klimt and his work, inspiring great works such as the renowned 1902 portrait of Emilie now in the Historische Museum in Vienna.

The families of each were close. Klimt's brother Ernst was married to Emilie's sister Helene, and Klimt was a regular visitor to the Flöge family house on the Attersee, a tranquil lakeside resort near Salzburg, where he painted some of his most important landscapes. A spectacular and intensely evocative landscape painting from 1900 which Klimt painted while staying at Lake Attersee will be offered in the sale of German and Austrian Art (see separate release).

Philippe Garner, Senior Director of Sotheby's Applied Arts department in London, said: "This collection epitomises not only the strength of the regard held by the artist for his muse, but also a fascinating moment in the history of Western art and culture. It is sure to appeal to international collectors drawn by the romance of their relationship as well as the beauty and workmanship of the objects."

Among the wonderful examples of Wiener Werkstätte jewellery is a beautiful heart-shaped pendant which Klimt commissioned from Josef Hoffmann in 1905 for Emilie. Inset with mirrored glass and applied with four vertical stems, of which two terminate in teardrop opals, the pendant is estimated at £45,000-55,000. It is being offered with its original chain, also decorated with opals (lot 28). Designed by Koloman Moser is an impressive silver necklace given by Klimt to Emilie, probably as a Christmas present in 1903. Of unusual design and applied with star-shaped motifs, the pendant is daringly decorated with contrasting white chalcedony and carnelian red beads. It is estimated at £45,000-55,000 (lot 18).

Also included are various Wiener Werkstätte objects from Emilie's personal collection. Among these are a beautiful belt buckle and sash attributed to Koloman Moser, circa 1910 (estimate £3,000-4,000, lot 19); a stunning hand mirror attributed to Josef Hoffmann, circa 1905 (estimate £10,000-15,000, lot 1); two hair combs also designed by Hoffmann (estimate £300-500 each, lots 13 & 14); a perfume bottle, circa 1900 (estimate £180-220, lot 22) and other items such as boxes, card holders, purses, a three-part folding mirror and a pill box. Emilie founded the fashion house Schwestern Flöge in 1904 with her two sisters and the salon was entirely fitted by the Wiener Werkstätte, with paintings by Koloman Moser, glass display cases with highly coloured folk embroideries and a Jugendstil mosaic. A large establishment with up to 80 employees, the Salon Flöge attracted a wealthy clientele looking for arty and exclusive clothes in the Reform style. The fashion house closed in 1938 with the onset of the Second World War and Hitler's occupation of Austria.

The Reform Dress movement was a reaction against the restrictive and impractical gowns worn in the previous decades and promoted the idea of unrestrained freedom of movement and some degree of comfort. Both Emilie and Klimt were protagonists of this new avant-garde movement, and illustrating this is a rare album comprising 20 photographs by Klimt of Emilie modelling her own dresses in the garden of the Flöge family house at Lake Attersee. It was probably Klimt's idea to have the dresses modelled in the open air, a highly unusual and original concept for the period. The album is estimated at £30,000-50,000 (lot 11).

Further textiles in the collection include the celebrated purple and gold Syrian cloak worn by Klimt when spending his summers with Emilie at the Lake Attersee (estimate £5,000-8,000, lot 27); stunning chiffon stoles with prices ranging from as little as £300 to £1,500 as well as beautiful evening handbags with estimates in the region of £400.

One of the most striking features of the collection is an extraordinary group of approximately 300 Wiener Werkstätte postcards and letters dating from 1897 to 1913, including 24 rare illustrated postcards by artists such as Oskar Kokoschka, which Klimt wrote to Emilie from his travels in Europe and also from Vienna, sometimes extending to eight cards on the same day. The correspondence dates from the very beginning of their friendship and spans a period of nearly 16 years. It covers a wide range of subjects, from his own painting, to the work of other European painters, aspects of contemporary theatre and music, the weather and his state of health (estimate £35,000-45,000, lot 66).

PHOTOGRAPHS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST:

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