ADELE BLOCH-BAUER I. 1907

Oil, silvering and gilding on canvas, 140 x 140 cm
Signed and dated bottom right: GUSTAV KLIMT 1907
Inventory Nr. 3830
Acquired through a bequest (1936) of the Bloch-Bauer family, Vienna

Novotny/Dobai, Nr. 150
Cf. Strobl I, Nrs. 1054–1151 and IV, Nrs. 3526–3526 p, 3527–3536
First exhibition: unofficially in the Wiener Werkstätte, 1907, and subsequently in the same year at the
International Art Exhibition, Mannheim, Nr. 497 a

This portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer (1881–1925), the wife of the Viennese industrialist Ferdinand Bloch, is the most important work of the so-called "golden style" apart from *"The Kiss"*; indeed it is often somewhat misleadingly taken as quintessentially Klimtian and as the expression of the Viennese Secession style *par excellence*. Ludwig Hevesi, friend and promoter of the Secession, called the picture an "idol in a golden reliquary holder", correctly drawing attention to its affinity with the Byzantine mosaics in Ravenna, and in particular the 6th century figure of the Empress Theodora in San Vitale. This representative portrait evidently held a special significance for Klimt himself, since he did more than 100 preparatory studies for it over a period of several years. He would seem to have conceived it as a universally valid celebration of a beautiful woman, and thus of the female sex in general, which was to be depicted with all the sumptuousness befitting an empress. Form and content, almost to the exclusion of colour, and notwithstanding the inclusion of historical discourse, are here perfectly harmonised in a way that distinguishes Viennese Jugendstil from the related art and decorative fashions of other European cities. Of course there is a danger that the preponderance of multifarious and enormously refined ornamentation may overwhelm the subject matter: however a glance at the exquisite features of the woman, powerfully contrasted with the gold surroundings, immediately renders this danger insignificant.

Adele Bloch-Bauer in her drawing-room.