

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

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"EGON SCHIELE" PREMIERES AT THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

FEBRUARY 6 THROUGH MAY 8, 1994

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- The National Gallery of Art will be the opening venue for Egon Schiele, a retrospective exhibition of more than seventy paintings, watercolors, and drawings by the leading figure of Austrian expressionism and one of the foremost draftsmen of all time. The exhibition, which encompasses works from every period and subject of the artist's career, will be on view in the Gallery's West Building central galleries, February 6 through May 8, 1994.

This is the first major Schiele exhibition to be seen in the United States since 1965 and the first comprehensive showing to travel here since 1960. Important works from public and private collections worldwide are being loaned to the exhibition, including many from Schiele's native Austria that have never been seen previously in this country.

The exhibition has received support from a public and private consortium, including Goldman Sachs; Bank Austria;

-more-

schiele . . . page 2

Creditanstalt; Austrian Federal Ministry for Foreign Affairs; Austrian Cultural Institute of New York; The City of Vienna; the International Corporate Circle of the National Gallery of Art; Joan and David Maxwell; and His Excellency, Helmut Tuerk, Ambassador of Austria.

"We are very grateful to the sponsors for enabling us to present this exhibition, as it will reveal a balanced and comprehensive view of Egon Schiele's artistic achievements, which often have been overshadowed by the more dramatic and tragic aspects of his life," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art.

The exhibition is organized and circulated by Art Services International, Alexandria, Virginia. Additional assistance was provided by the Austrian National Bank and Austrian Airlines. An indemnity for this exhibition was granted by the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities. It will travel to the Indianapolis Museum of Art, June 11 - August 7, 1994, and the San Diego Museum of Art, August 27 - October 30, 1994.

The selection of works has been made by Jane Kallir, author of the first comprehensive catalogue raisonné of the artist's work, and co-director of Galerie St. Etienne, New York. Andrew Robison, Andrew W. Mellon Senior Curator, National Gallery of Art, advised on the selection of the works and is coordinating the exhibition at its National Gallery venue.

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schiele . . . page 3

Egon Schiele (1890-1918) lived a brief and turbulent, but extremely productive life before his death at age 28 from influenza. At 16, he was admitted to the prestigious Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna, the youngest of its students. Frustrated with its tradition-bound instruction, Schiele left the Academy after two years. Initially, Schiele followed the variant of art nouveau developed by Gustav Klimt in tandem with the Vienna Secession and the Wiener Werkstätte (Vienna Workshop). He was heavily influenced by Klimt, who personified his ideal of the artistic life. However, his personal search for meaning took him in a new direction toward his own unique brand of expressionism.

Schiele emphasized expression over decoration, heightening the emotive power of line with a feverish tension. He concentrated from the beginning on the human figure, and his candid, agitated treatment of erotic themes defied the sexual mores of victorian Austria. His landscapes exhibited the same febrile quality of color and line. In 1909 he helped found the Neukunstgruppe (New Art Group) in Vienna. Following the death of Klimt and shortly before his own death, Schiele was kept busy organizing exhibitions at home and abroad and was recognized as Austria's leading artist.

The exhibition is organized chronologically and thematically, inviting comparison between Schiele's handling of similar subjects over the course of his career: Schiele and his Models, 1909-1911; Portraits, 1909-1914; Landscapes and Still

schiele . . . page 4

Life, 1909-1918; Self and the Search for Meaning, 1911-1915; Relationships with Women, 1910-1918; and Portraits, 1915-1918.

Paintings punctuate the exhibition at key points, but its primary substance--like that of Schiele's oeuvre--consists of works on paper. His reputation rests today primarily on his watercolors and drawings, partly because of the primacy of line, but also because many of his crucial works in oil have been lost or destroyed, or, in some cases, completed by another hand.

The paintings and works on paper alike explore the artist's struggle with the duality of life and death, fear and passion. The drawings of female models, such as Moa (1911), depict quirky, elusive creatures who seem to inhabit a mysterious and inaccessible sexual realm all their own. Ambivalence and ambiguity haunt his famous self-portraits, many of which are in the exhibition. It is significant that Schiele's only major sculpture, Self-Portrait (c. 1917, cast c. 1925-1928), is included here. (This bronze sculpture was given to the Gallery by Mr. and Mrs. Leonard Lauder in Honor of the 50th Anniversary of the National Gallery of Art in 1991.)

While portraits, such as the painting Portrait of Dr. Hugo Koller (1918), were the most lucrative component of his output, Schiele considered allegory to be of supreme importance and this attitude extended to every branch of his production. Even his landscapes were, on the whole, an outgrowth of the allegories: his so-called Dead Cities paintings are emblematic of

schiele . . . page 5

the emptiness and moral bankruptcy of human civilization, and his frail, anthropomorphic trees are stand-ins for man's existential isolation, as in Little Tree (Chestnut Tree at Lake Constance) (1912).

A major scholarly catalogue will accompany the exhibition. It is written by Jane Kallir with an essay by Alessandra Comini, professor of art history at Southern Methodist University. Detailed commentaries by Kallir augment the 101 color plates and 83 comparative illustrations, and she has also provided an incisive introduction and an illustrated chronology. Comini's essay, "In Search of Schiele," recounts her experiences interviewing Schiele's family, friends, and major sitters, bringing a very personal angle to the life and art of Egon Schiele. The catalogue is co-published by Art Services International and Harry N. Abrams, Inc.

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