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| Secessionist Movement |
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| The Secessionist Movement is the name applied to a range of artistic splinter groups that began to emerge in the 1890s. Objecting to what they saw as the inherent conservatism of established academies, these groups ‘seceded’ or broke away from their parent institutions and launched their own, avant-garde approach. The first Secessionist group appeared in Munich in 1892 under the leadership of Franz von Stuck and Wilhelm Trübner.  Among the most influential Secessionist groups was that founded in Vienna by a coalition of artists, architects and designers who resigned from the Association of Austrian Artists in 1897. United by the urge to elevate the applied arts to the status of fine art, members of the Vienna Secession produced exquisite work across a spectrum of creative disciplines. The aesthetic initially resembled the curvilinear ART NOUVEAU style, but it increasingly moved towards abstraction and geometric simplicity. The founding of the Vienna Secession thus marked the beginning of a new artistic era in Austria and heralded the birth of the Modern Movement. |
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The founding of the Vienna Secession thus marked the beginning of a new artistic era in Austria and heralded the birth of the Modern Movement.  File: OlbrichSecessionHall.jpg  Figure Joseph Maria Olbrich, Secession Hall, 1898.  Source: http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/2/25/Secession\_Vienna\_June\_2006\_007.jpg  The first president of the Vienna Secession was the artist GUSTAV KLIMT, who designed an exhibition poster depicting the helmeted head of Athene; this image was soon adopted as the symbol of the group. Klimt’s paintings explored the mysteries of femininity and were embellished with sequins and beads, producing a highly decorative effect that echoed Secessionist achievements in interior design. Other participants included the architects Josef Hoffmann and Joseph Maria Olbrich and the designer Koloman Moser, who described the group as ‘a youthful Club of Seven.’ The architect OTTO WAGNER is widely recognised as a member of the Secession, but he was not a founding member. The languid, intoxicating style was propounded in the group’s journal, *Ver Sacrum* (Sacred Spring), which was published from 1898 to 1903.  The Vienna Secession was acclaimed for its pioneering exhibitions, which were held in a purpose-built pavilion designed by Olbrich (1897). This took the form of a pristine white temple crowned with a cupola of golden leaves. Moser contributed a lavish decorative scheme including sinister Gorgons with writhing snakes. Above the entrance was carved the motto, ‘To every age its art and to art its freedom.’ The pavilion exhibited works by many of the most progressive artists in Europe. In particular, the Vienna Secession championed the Scottish architect and designer CHARLES RENNIE MACKINTOSH and his fellow members of the Glasgow Four, who were largely unappreciated in Britain. The ethereal spaces they created for the Eighth Secession exhibition in 1900, based on calm geometric lines and intense passages of abstract decoration, had a profound influence in Europe. Hoffmann was enraptured by Mackintosh’s designs and his subsequent work embraced a rigid geometry of straight lines and squares, so much so that it earned him the epithet Quadratl Hoffmann (Square Hoffmann). A prime example is the Kubus Armchair (1910), which multiplies the form of a basic cube to create a powerful geometric design and an early exemplar of Modernism.  Much of the early Secessionist work has the lyrical beauty of Art Nouveau, but some exponents embraced the new spirit of modernity and developed a more functionalist approach. The architect ADOLF LOOS advocated a stripped-down, rational style appropriate for the modern age. His design and writings rehearsed many of the founding principles of Modernism. For example, his provocatively-titled essay ‘Ornament and Crime’ (1908) states: ‘The evolution of culture marches with the elimination of ornament from useful objects.’ Such statements anticipated the emergence of the austere, minimalist aesthetic of Modernism.  File: OlbrichErnstLudwigHaus.jpg  Figure Joseph Olbrich, Ernst Ludwig Haus, Fertiggestellt, 1901.  Source: http://www.iticse2011.tu-darmstadt.de/sites/default/files/ernstLudwigHaus.jpg  The work of Otto Wagner illuminates this transition. His Majolika Haus in Vienna (1898) has a rectilinear façade embellished with sinuous lines of glazed ceramic tile. A shift towards functionalism is apparent in his Karlsplats Station in Vienna (1900), which consists of marble slabs mounted onto a steel framework. Similarly, his Post Office Savings Bank (1904-6) is composed of marble slabs fixed with aluminium bolts onto a brick structure.  In an early demonstration of the Modernist principal of structural honesty, the bolt heads were left visible to reveal how the building was constructed.  Similar tensions between artistic elaboration and formal clarity are apparent into the work of Wagner’s former assistant, Joseph Maria Olbrich. In 1901 Olbrich designed the Ernst Ludwig Haus, which formed part of an artists’ colony founded in Darmstadt by Ernest Ludwig, Grand Duke of Hesse. The white expanse of the façade anticipates the austerity of the Modern Movement, but the entrance is a gilded shrine to the applied arts: heroic figures of Strength and Beauty flank a sweeping archway adorned with golden flowers and gleaming majolica tiles.  Some artists left the Vienna Secession due to internal disagreements. In 1903 Hoffmann and Moser founded the Wiener Werkstätte (Vienna Workshop). This group was inspired by Charles Ashbee’s Guild of Handicraft, but embraced the possibilities offered by mass production. The pinnacle of Hoffmann’s achievement as an architect is the Palais [Stoclet](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stoclet_Palace) in [Brussels](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brussels) (1905-11). With its ascending configuration of angular planes and use of lustrous materials, the building pre-empts the ART DECO style by at least a decade.  A later Secessionist group emerged in Berlin in 1899, with Max Lieberman as its first president. This was triggered by the Great International Art Exhibition held in Berlin in 1892, which displayed Norwegian artists including EDVARD MUNCH. Members of the conservative Verein Berliner Künstler (Association of Berlin Artists) protested against the exhibition because they found Munch's paintings offensive. Repudiating this view, dissident artists including Watler Leistikow and Franz Skarbina seceded from the Association of Berlin Artists in 1899 to found the Berlin Secession. In turn, several artists left the Berlin Secession to found the Freie Secession (Free Secession), which lasted from 1914 to 1924. Again, Max Liebermann was president, while Max Beckmann and Ernest Barlach were principal exponents. |
| Further reading:  (Borsi and Golodi)  (Bubnová)  (Loos)  (Powell)  (Topp)  (Varnedoe)  (Vergo)  (Waissenberger) |