



## CONTENTS

ENCOUNTERS WITH EGON SCHIELE . . . . .	5
THE NEW ARTIST . . . . .	10
SELF-PORTRAITS . . . . .	22
FAMILY, FRIENDS, CLIENTS . . . . .	35
HAPPINESS AND MISERY IN THE COUNTRY . . . . .	44
IN THE VIENNA STUDIO . . . . .	63
WOMEN . . . . .	72
MILITARY SERVICE. . . . .	84
FAME . . . . .	97

© Vitalis, 2018 • Translated from the German by Rachel Ward • Produced in the European Union • All rights reserved  
ISBN 978-3-89919-554-5 • www.vitalis-verlag.com

Front cover: *Self-Portrait in Striped Shirt*, 1910.  
Back cover: *Egon Schiele in his Studio*, circa 1914.

Fig. 1 (title page): *Self-Portrait with Checkered Shirt*, 1917. The portrait was sold at auction in 2007, fetching over ten million dollars.

Fig. 2: *Self-Portrait with Eyelid Pulled Down*, 1910.





## ENCOUNTERS WITH EGON SCHIELE

Late April 1909 saw the grand opening of the Internationale Kunstschau in Vienna. It was the art event of the year. Despite the cold, damp weather – snow and hail were reported in the south and east of the empire – the public flocked to the exhibition. Fifty-four wooden pavilions, gleaming with white plaster and featuring courtyards, terraces and gardens, had been set up to form a modern, airy collection of galleries. The site had also played host to an exhibition the year before. 176 artists had shown over a thousand works in a patriotic ‘revue of the strengths of Austrian artistic endeavour’. Now the monarchy’s artists were measuring themselves against the stars of international Modernism. Works by Paul Gauguin (1848–1903), Vincent van Gogh (1853–1890), Henri Matisse (1869–1954) and Edvard Munch (1863–1944) adorned the bright walls.

The people of Vienna came to experience something spectacular, and they were not disappointed. The *Wiener Abendpost* promised its readers a good deal of ‘sad and ridiculous brazen impertinence, screeching inkblots in the latest Parisian fashion, incompetence that takes itself for genius – but also much genuine, serious new art.’ The main attraction was Gustav Klimt (1862–1918). In pavilion 22, the grand master of the Viennese Jugendstil was showing his paintings which included *Hope II* (1907/08) and *Judith II* (1909). The public passed by, amazed at the beauty and sneering at the stridency on display. They shrugged off much that was shallow and strained to sniff out any hint of scandal.

A young student of the Vienna Academy made his debut on the big stage in pavilion 19. The nineteen-year-old was showing four paintings, rather unfortunately hung beside etchings and woodcuts by other artists. Three of his pictures were portraits, the most striking of them being *Young Girl* (1909, cf. fig. 7).

The likeness of an elegant lady in a hat stands out strongly against the beige background. Her beautiful,

Fig. 3: Egon Schiele in his studio, 1914. The wooden horse also appears in both a painting (fig. 108) and a draft poster.





Fig. 50: The 'perpetual child' – *Self-Portrait in Striped Shirt*, 1910.

Fig. 51: *Railway Train*, pre-1906.

Fig. 52: The Schiele family, circa 1893.

Fig. 53: Tulln station, circa 1900. Schiele was born on the first floor in 1890.

Fig. 54: Egon Schiele, circa 1895.

The Schieles were railwaymen. Egon's paternal grandfather was the chief engineer for the Böhmi-sche Westbahn railway company, for which his maternal grand-father did construction work; his uncle on his father's side was a re-tired head inspector on the Kaiser-Ferdinands-Nordbahn. As a se-nior official of the Imperial and Royal State Railway, his father pre-sided over Tulln an der Donau sta-tion, about thirty kilometres west of Vienna. It was here that Egon Schiele grew up in good middle-class surroundings in an official residence on the first floor of the station building. Trains were the subject of the gangling lad's first scribblings. Already tall enough to climb onto the windowsill, much to his parents' horror, he scrambled out on to the precipitous sta-tion canopy to get a better view of the hissing engines. Trains re-mained his passion even into adult-

hood. A friend observed the twenty-three-year-old 'perpetual child' playing with a toy train, 'carrying out all the daily tasks of a "real", running railway, while imitating their sounds.' Schiele would go on to marry the daughter of a railway locksmith, while his sister Melanie would work at Vienna's Westbahnhof.

At the age of eleven, Egon left the shelter of Tulln station to attend the grammar school in Krems an der Donau. The following year he transferred to Klosterneuburg, home to some of his family. He did not feel at ease in either place. It was at this time that his father's mental decline, a late consequence of the syphilis, became apparent. As Egon only saw him when he was home for visits and was thus unable to grow



accustomed to his illness from day to day, the advancing madness must have been especially shocking for him. In 1904, Adolf Schiele was pensioned off. The family moved to Klosterneuburg but living with his father was hard to bear. He was depressed, played cards against invisible opponents and received imaginary guests in uniform at a table laid for a feast; in the course of one attack, he burnt all their shareholdings in the stove, thus robbing the family of its financial reserves. This was particularly painful because Adolf's premature incapacity to work meant that he was not receiving a full pension. Perhaps it was due to lack of funds that he was not admitted into the large mental asylum in Klosterneuburg. On a summer holiday in Krummau [Český Krumlov] in southern Bohemia, Schiele's mother's home town, his father tried, unsuccessfully, to kill himself the very day of their arrival. He died, probably of the effects of his paralysis, on New Year's Eve 1904/05 in Klosterneuburg.

His father's suffering and death were momentous events in Egon Schiele's life. He frequently travelled to





Fig. 152: Probably shows Schiele's sister-in-law, Adele Harms – *Seated Woman with Bent Knee*, 1917.

husband, but also her own sister Adele. One of Schiele's best-known gouaches, *Seated Woman with Bent Knee* (1917, fig. 152) is probably of her. The picture *Seated Couple* (1915, fig. 151) which depicts Edith and Schiele together is also confusing: while she is embracing him from behind, the artist lies absently in her arms, as listless and lifeless as a mechanical doll, his gaze vacant, his arm on his member.

All the same, the Schieles' family life seems to have run harmoniously. Edith's letters to Egon speak of love, admiration and her hopes for a happy future. When she died on 28 October 1918, she was six months pregnant.

#### MILITARY SERVICE

In June 1914, Egon Schiele was sitting over the printing plates recently lodged in his studio.

He no longer had any difficulties with the initially unfamiliar material and he was now incising the images of *Squatting Woman*, *Sorrow* and *Arthur Roessler*. Several gratifying letters lay on the table: one from the publisher Franz Pfemfert in Berlin, who had recently published Schiele's *Neukunst* manifesto in his Expressionist journal *Die Aktion* and who now wanted to print some of his drawings; one from Munich, where the painting *Blind Mother* (1914) was currently on display at the Secession – the gallery owner Hans Golz had written to ask for pictures for a larger exhibition

there; a postcard sent by Arthur Roessler from Brussels, where the Salon Triennal was showing four of Schiele's drawings and three paintings. One of them, *Sunflowers* (1914), was bought by a collector for a cool three thousand francs. The summer of 1914 was looking promising for Egon Schiele.

The money from Brussels would never reach Schiele, however; he would not see *Sunflowers* again until 1917, when it returned to Vienna by a circuitous route. The reason for this was two shots fired in Sarajevo on 28 June, which set the world in uproar. The nineteen-year-old Bosnian Serb nationalist Gavrilo Princip fired on the heir to the Austrian throne, Franz Ferdinand von Este, and his wife, Countess Chotek, at point-blank range. The couple had only recently survived an attempted bombing but Princip's bullets proved fatal. The murder unleashed a diplomatic crisis between Austria-Hungary and Serbia. By the end of July this had resulted in war in the Balkans; by the beginning of August, it had escalated into the First World War.

The war formed the backdrop to the last years of Egon Schiele's life. He was conscripted in June 1915 and remained a soldier until 1918. He did not live to see the armistice signed. All the same, the armed forces and the war are almost invisible in his work. There is a series of portraits of Russian prisoners of war, a few likenesses of comrades, occasional drawings of military offices and that is all. Nothing either patriotic or critical. A picture by Schiele with the sensational title *Heroes' Graves-Resurrection* (1917) to be found in one catalogue turned out to be the 1913 work *Resurrection*. He had renamed it for the war exhibition at the Prater amusement park in Vienna because the pictures to be shown there all had to 'have some kind of connection with the war, however remote'. His pictures had none. Before 1914, his portraits reflected nervous, dark moods; now they became somewhat muted, less effusive. We can only speculate as to whether or not the war contributed to this change in style. As a subject, it

Fig. 153: *The Artist's Sister-In-Law in a Striped Dress, Seated*, 1917.

Fig. 154: *Putto* (Anton Peschka jr.), 1915 – the image is of Gertrude and Anton Peschka's son.







Fig. 163: *Portrait of the Artist's Wife, Standing (Edith Schiele in a Striped Dress)*, 1915.

Fig. 164: Edith and Egon Schiele with Edith's nephew, Paul Erdmann, circa 1915.

Fig. 165 (right page): *Portrait of Edith Schiele*, 1918.

time with her, playing cards and billiards in the officers' casino or outside shooting at skittles as if it were peacetime – or working in the little studio his superiors set up for him in the camp. On 1 June, Schiele began one of his most beautiful landscapes, *Tumble-Down Mill* (1916, fig. 162). He had discovered its picturesque subject on an excursion with comrades shortly after his arrival, 'with all the coloured white stones lit up by the strong sunlight.' From August on-

wards, he continued his series of portraits of Russian prisoners of war. We know nothing about the circumstances in which these impressive images were created – whether Schiele drew the sitters in his studio or in their barracks, for example, or whether or not they volunteered to model for him.

Schiele had struck lucky in Mühling, yet after a short time he was drawn away from the safe siding onto which he'd run. Vienna was calling him back. There, he was sure, his artistic career must now pick up speed, and he negotiated a major exhibition for November with the gallery owner Guido Arnot. The



italis

