

PICTURE THIS!

The Belvedere Collection from Cranach to Lassnig

Upper Belvedere



Franz Xaver Messerschmidt, *The Simpleton* („Character Head" Np. 17), 1777/83, Belvedere/Vienna

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The focus of the presentation of the collection is the relationship of artists with the social, political, and cultural conditions of their time: How does an era shape its art? How do artists respond to upheavals and crises while themselves being part of social developments? A chronological tour guides visitors through eight hundred years of artistic production—spanning from the Romanesque period to the 1970s.

General Director Stella Rollig: How can an art-historical narrative be made current? The guiding idea behind the presentation of the collection is to tell the story of art from the perspective of artists, who were always also contemporaries of their time. It sheds light on the cultural, social, and individual conditions in which the works were created. The life experiences and future concepts of past generations will be vividly conveyed to visitors.

Art through the Eyes of Artists

The presentation of the collection at the Upper Belvedere looks at art in the context of the period in which it was made, enabling a deeper understanding of the works. *Picture This!* goes beyond a purely stylistic history of art to focus on the interactions between art and society. Influenced by the political and social environment, migration, economic conditions, as well as aspects like international networks, artistic production always reflects the complexity of its time.

Chief Curator Luisa Ziaja: Each section of the display highlights selected self-portraits. They act as a leitmotif, offering an insight into the changing image and self-conception of artists through the centuries, ranging from anonymity and dependence to autonomy. This spans from the mostly nameless work in a medieval workshop to the self-confident production in the service of the court and church, and finally to the emancipated authorship as we know it today.

From Romanesque Art to the Avant-Gardes of the 1970s

The presentation offers visitors a comprehensive insight into the Belvedere's collection from its earliest works dating from the late twelfth century to the Feminist Avant-Garde of the 1970s. Iconic artworks such as Messerschmidt's "Character Heads" and the world-famous "Vienna 1900" collection are showcased alongside focal points, including Central European Modernism and the transnational networks of the early twentieth century. The permanent exhibition features around four hundred exhibits—paintings, works on paper, photographs, sculptures—as well as contextualizing material presented at media stations and additional information in the form of graphics, maps, and documentary photographs. The displays include important new acquisitions, such as Giuseppe Tominz's painting *The Freight Forwarder Paolo Preinitsch*, as well as highlighting key permanent loans of the Czech and Hungarian avant-garde from the collections of Ivo Rotter and Carlo Laszlo. The chronological tour with a textual accompaniment explores eight hundred years of artistic production in the context of its time.

Visitors' Lounge

A furnished lounge at the Upper Belvedere provides visitors with a space where they can pause for a while in a tranquil, relaxed atmosphere. The design created specifically for this lounge by Sascha Reichstein is based on a modular system called *Variants* devised by the artist in 2019. It uses the atmospheric, tactile, and noise-reducing properties of textiles to create a more harmonious and appealing space. Reichstein's color scheme for the seating and wall elements was inspired by a work from the collection: Gustav Klimt's portrait of *Johanna Staude* (1917/18).

CHRONOLOGICAL TOUR

Middle Ages – Renaissance 1200 – 1600

The earliest works in the Belvedere's collection are paintings and sculptures dating from the late 12th century up to around 1600. These displays chart the transition from Romanesque to Gothic art and finally to the emerging Renaissance. A key development was the shift from anonymous art in the service of religion to self-confidently signed works that gave a new visibility to artists.

Baroque 1600 – 1800

Pomp and drama characterize Baroque art, yet in this period we also encounter realistic depictions of landscapes and everyday objects. Important works commissioned by the aristocracy and the Church paint a diverse picture of the time. Entirely unique are Franz Xaver Messerschmidt's "Character Heads," a mysterious series that has inspired multiple interpretations and continues to fascinate viewers to this day.

Neoclassicism – Biedermeier 1800 – 1865

In the late 18th century, society and conceptions of art started to change. Artists began looking less to the events of the past for their subject matter and turned their attention to the here and now, with all its social contrasts in town and country. At the same time, the depiction of nature gained in importance with the mountains of the Salzkammergut and the Berchtesgadener Land as particularly popular motifs.

Vienna 1900

Toward the end of the 19th century, Vienna was growing into a metropolis. Numerous artists were engaged in creating decorative schemes for the grand buildings of the Ringstrasse. This flourishing of the arts paved the way to the foundation of the Vienna Secession. Gustav Klimt was already Vienna's most acclaimed painter; the Belvedere acquired *The Kiss* during the artist's lifetime. This period also saw growing recognition and renown for women artists.

Emerging Modernism 1900– 1920

Industrialization fundamentally altered society. Higher educational standards were needed and the state professionalized schools and vocational training, drawing tuition included. This had a profound impact on artistic creativity. At the same time, new technology simplified and accelerated communication and

exchange, as demonstrated by artistic networks and their magazines such as *Der Sturm* and *Die Aktion*.

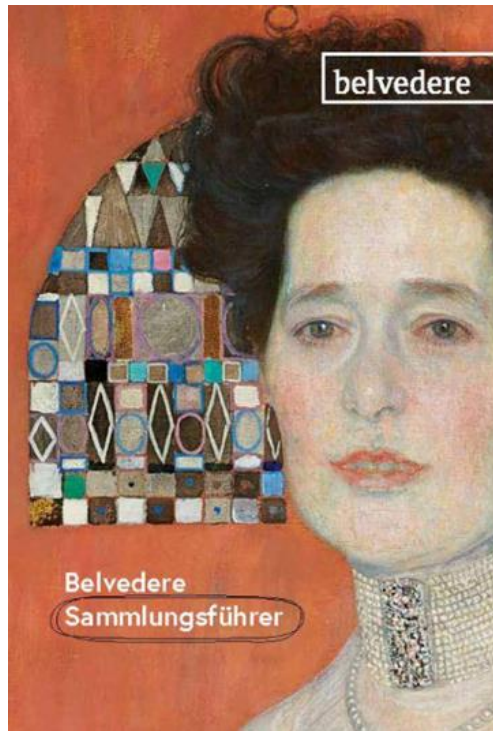
Avant-Gardes 1920s – 1950s

For many artists, the end of World War I restored opportunities to discuss concepts and utopias in an international exchange of ideas. The rise of nationalism, totalitarian dictatorships, and finally World War II isolated artists and destroyed livelihoods. It was only after 1945 that combined efforts gradually reunited artists and international commonalities fostered an openness to new approaches in art.

Avant-Gardes 1960s & 1970s

In the 1960s, the relationship between art and society became highly dynamic. Viennese Actionism reacted to the repressive religious and post-Nazi atmosphere by provocatively introducing the human body as a material of art. At the same time, a generation of feminist artists emerged who dismantled patriarchal structures and gender roles. Increasingly the audience becomes an active, integral part of the artwork.

PUBLICATION



"The Belvedere Companion Guide" offers a comprehensive overview of eight centuries of Austrian art. More than one hundred works of the permanent collection - from the Middle Ages to the twentieth century - are vividly described and illustrated in this book.

Introductions to each period of art provide in-depth information and are complemented by elaborated biographies of the collection's most famous protagonists of each era. From Biedermeier represented by the illustrious Ferdinand Georg Waldmüller, over Franz Xaver Messerschmidt, the Baroque sculptor of the "Character Heads", to Egon Schiele, whose portraits have lost none of their original intensity.

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GENERAL INFORMATION

Exhibition	Picture this! The Belvedere Collection from Cranach to Lassnig
Curators	Björn Blauensteiner, Verena Gamper, Sabine Grabner, Arnika Groenewald-Schmidt, Maike Hohn, Alexander Klee, Harald Krejci, Georg Lechner, Katharina Lovecky, Franz Smola, Luisa Ziaja
Art Education	Michaela Höß, Kerstin Krenn, Katalin Vardaj, Philipp Reichel-Neuwirth, Julia Haimburger
Exhibition management	Stephan Pumberger, Monica Strinu
Collection management	Werner Sommer
Exhibition architecture	Gerhard Veigel
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Further information and images for download are available here:
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