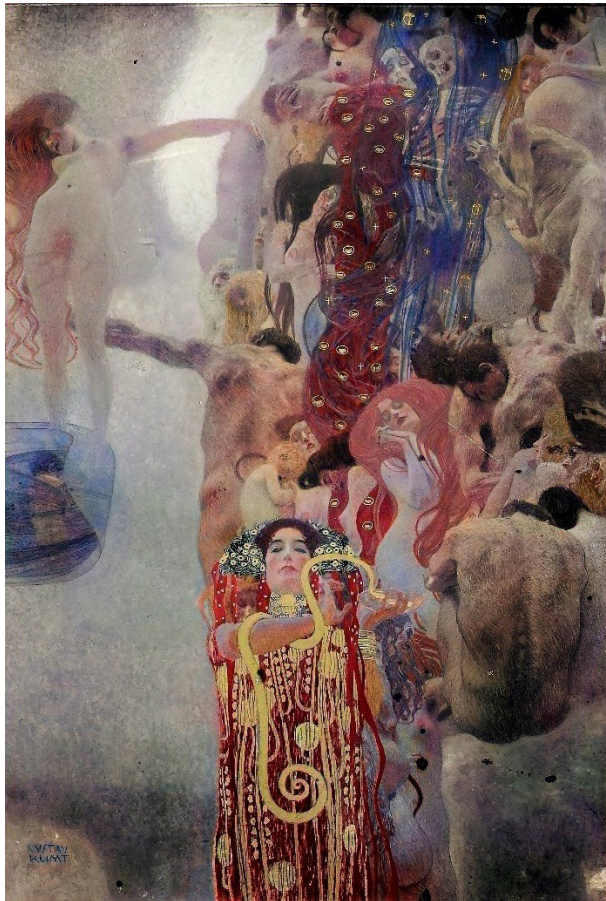


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GUSTAV KLIMT – PIGMENT & PIXEL Rediscovering Art Through Technology

Lower Belvedere

20 February to 7 September 2025



Gustav Klimt, Faculty painting *Medicine*, 1900-1907, recolorization from historical photograph.
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What secrets are hiding beneath the surface of Gustav Klimt's famous works? How did the artist apply gold and other precious metals to the canvas? Today's technologies offer unprecedented opportunities to ascertain Klimt's methods and reconstruct the process by which his works were created. This exhibition in the Orangerie of the Lower Belvedere uses eight paintings from the collection to present the results of radiological investigations and studies of material technology performed on Klimt's works in recent years.

According to General Director Stella Rollig, One of the Belvedere's most important tasks is to expand knowledge about our magnificent collection. Scientific and technological methods are employed to learn more about the materials and methods used to create the works. In recent years, all of Gustav Klimt's paintings have been thoroughly examined, which yields valuable new information about their conservation status and insights into Klimt's painting technique and his concept of the works.

There has also been intensive research into Klimt's University of Vienna ceiling paintings, known as the Faculty Paintings. Originally created for the ceiling of the Great Hall of the University of Vienna, the paintings were destroyed by a fire in 1945. All that remains of the works are black and white photographs. As part of the digital platform "Klimt versus Klimt," developed by Google Arts & Culture in cooperation with the Belvedere, an attempt was made to reconstruct the original colors of the paintings. Artificial intelligence played an essential role in the project. Now for the first time, the Faculty Paintings can be viewed in color in their original size and arrangement on the ceiling.

The project of colorizing Klimt's Faculty Paintings has restored the striking, vibrant appearance the works once had. It represents a significant contribution to scientific

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research and draws attention to these paintings for the first time in many years. At the same time, it also helps to explain the scandal that the works caused with their unusual and provocative use of color, says Curator Franz Smola.

From mid-May, in cooperation with Österreichische Bundesgärten, there will be a display on the theme of "Klimt's Garden" in the Orangerie and the so-called Privy Garden of Prince Eugene. Visitors can learn about Klimt's famous paintings of flowers and gardens, see the flower varieties painted by Klimt, and discover interesting botanical details about them.

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EXHIBITION TEXTS

What secrets are hiding under the surface of Gustav Klimt's famous works? Did the artist paint in a way that was quick and spontaneous? Or was he a precise planner, mulling over the minutiae of each brushstroke? Did he stick to his first drafts, or did he change them as his work progressed? And how did Klimt get gold and other precious metals onto the canvas? Curators and restorers at the Belvedere have been considering these questions for a long time. Advances in art technology allow us to look below the painted surface, revealing how the artist worked and structured his paintings. This exhibition presents the results of recent investigations into works by Klimt that are part of the Belvedere's collection.

Research has also been done on Klimt's *Faculty Paintings* in cooperation with Google Arts & Culture. Originally created for the ceiling of the Great Hall of the University of Vienna, the paintings were destroyed in a fire in 1945. Only black-and-white photographs of the paintings remain. Using artificial intelligence, an attempt was made to determine the colors of the works and reconstruct their original appearance. Not only can the *Faculty Paintings* now be seen in color, but for the first time in their original size and positioning on the ceiling, giving viewers a sense of the overall impression intended by the artist.

Understanding Klimt: Insights from Technical Photographs

Advanced imaging methods have revealed preparatory sketches in pencil or chalk under the oil paint in Gustav Klimt's paintings. The artist prepared the subjects of his oil paintings in numerous sketches and studies before putting them down on

canvas. Infrared reflectography reveals the preparatory drawings and show how Klimt originally planned the composition. In some of the artist's works in the Belvedere's collection, it is evident that he departed from his plans, refining the composition of his paintings over time before they were finished.

Gilded Klimt: The Latest Insights About His Working Methods and Materials

The years between 1901 and 1909, when Gustav Klimt created the works for which he is probably best known today, are known as his "Golden Period." It may be a surprise to learn that all the shimmering gold sections of the artist's works are made of real precious metals—even the thin, delicate lines and ornamental shapes. Recent studies allow us to reconstruct the process Klimt used to apply gold leaf to the canvas. He often departed from widespread gilding practices in order to achieve special effects. Klimt used the finest brushes, sprinkled gold dust, and sometimes painted over already gilded areas, only to cover them in gold again later. Nevertheless, he worked with such technical skill that the paintings still have a stable surface from a restoration point of view. Another insight is that in some paintings he used not only gold and silver but also platinum, a costly and particularly durable metal that was very unusual at the time.

Reconstructing Klimt: The Project of Recolorizing the Faculty Paintings

Gustav Klimt's *Faculty Paintings* have presented a puzzle for more than eighty years: What did the paintings actually look like? What colors did Klimt use? What can we find out about their overall effect?

The artist painted these monumental oil paintings for the ceiling of the Great Hall of the University of Vienna between 1898 and 1907. *Medicine*, *Philosophy*, and *Jurisprudence* were created to represent three of the four academic faculties. However, the pictures never made it to their intended location. Klimt's provocative interpretation of the academic disciplines, which eschewed idealization, met with rejection. Too garish, too erotic, and unworthy of scholarship—these were the criticisms that came from the university and the public. Klimt ultimately backed out of the commission, and the pictures found their way into private ownership. Tragically, they were destroyed at the end of World War II in a fire started by German troops withdrawing from Schloss Immendorf in Lower Austria. Only black-and-white photographs have been preserved. The only known color detail is from *Medicine*.

Klimt's *Faculty Paintings* have been reconstructed in their original colors as part of a joint project by Google Arts & Culture and the Belvedere. Historical descriptions of the paintings served as a basis for the project, as did other works produced by Klimt at the same time. The colorization of the black-and-white photographs relied on an algorithm developed for this project by Emil Wallner, an expert in machine learning. Art-historical research and artificial intelligence combined to produce the results we see here. This project makes no claim to be an authentic reconstruction; it is an approximation of the original color. Here, for the first time, the recolorized *Faculty Paintings* can be experienced in their original size. They are also arranged on the ceiling in accordance with the artist's original plans, giving us a sense of the effect they would have had in the Great Hall of the University.

Klimt's Garden

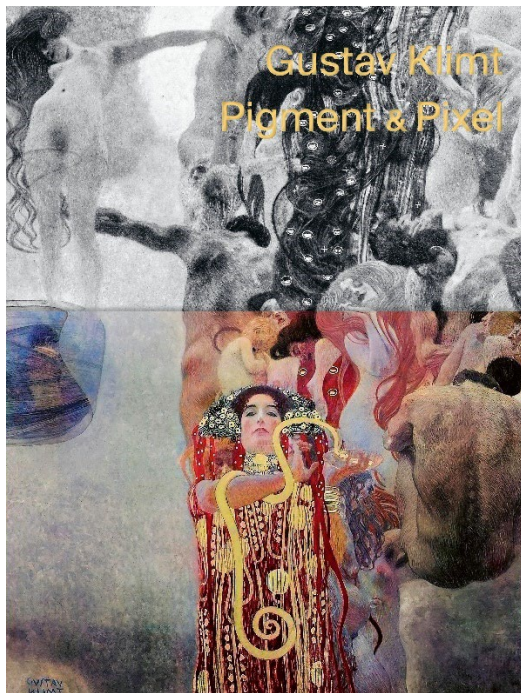
In cooperation with the Austrian Federal Gardens

Paintings of Flowers and Gardens by Gustav Klimt

Almost every summer, Klimt left the city to spend a few weeks in nature. His preferred summer retreat was the region around the Attersee in Upper Austria. Here he found time to unwind, as well as rich sources of inspiration. He often worked on several landscape paintings at a time, which he began in the open air and sometimes finished only later in his studio in Vienna. This is how Klimt's paintings of orchards and flowery meadows came about. Although the works are reminiscent of small-scale mosaics or woven carpets in their decorative, two-dimensional design, the artist adhered to his real-life natural models in the details. Klimt painted dahlias, daisies, sunflowers, and white and pink phlox with a precision that makes them easy to identify.

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EXHIBITION CATALOGUE



Gustav Klimt – Pigment & Pixel

Rediscovering Art Through Technology

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For more information on the exhibition and high-resolution press photos please visit www.belvedere.at/en/press