



Fig. 1: Museum benefactress Heidi Horten (seated) with founding director Agnes Husslein-Arco

FOREWORD

Agnes Husslein-Arco

The collection is the heart and soul of a museum, shaping its character and giving it an identity and standing in a national and international context. But a collection should never stagnate; it must remain dynamic and engaging, which is what museums achieve through their changing exhibitions. Collecting and showcasing go hand in hand, driven by motivations and interests as diverse as the collectors themselves. The Heidi Horten Collection is the result of one woman's passion, steered by personal taste, to build an internationally recognized art collection. Heidi Horten's path to creating her collection was unique. In her childhood, art played an important role for her parents—especially her father, who worked as an engraver—which instilled in her a lifelong belief that art is an essential part of life. However, it was not until the 1990s that she began to collect with a purpose, which introduced new and exciting goals into her life as an art buyer. At that time, as a specialist in modern and contemporary art at Sotheby's, I had the privilege of advising and assisting her in building her collection from the ground up.

HISTORY OF THE COLLECTION—THE BEGINNINGS

In the early 1990s, Heidi Horten was focused on broadening the range of works by artists already in her core holdings, and thus acquired additional pieces by Marc Chagall, Emil Nolde, Raoul, Jean Dufy, and Moïse Kisling. Initially, there was no clear plan or strategy behind the acquisitions. The goal was to furnish newly designed living spaces, so personal taste and the collector's penchants were paramount in selecting works. At first, she focused on established artists, but as time went on, her approach changed and became more daring. At a London auction in 1996, some thirty modern and contemporary art masterpieces were purchased—anonymously—in one fell swoop, instantly elevating the character of the collection. This coup caused a sensation in the art world and generated widespread media attention. On June 30, 1996, in their summary of the London auction, the *New York Times* speculated that the "mystery buyer" would eventually open a museum or set up a foundation for art. That decision would come more than two decades later. As a result of the

FRIEDRICH VON AMERLING

1803 Vienna (AT) – 1887 Vienna (AT)

Der Brief

The Letter

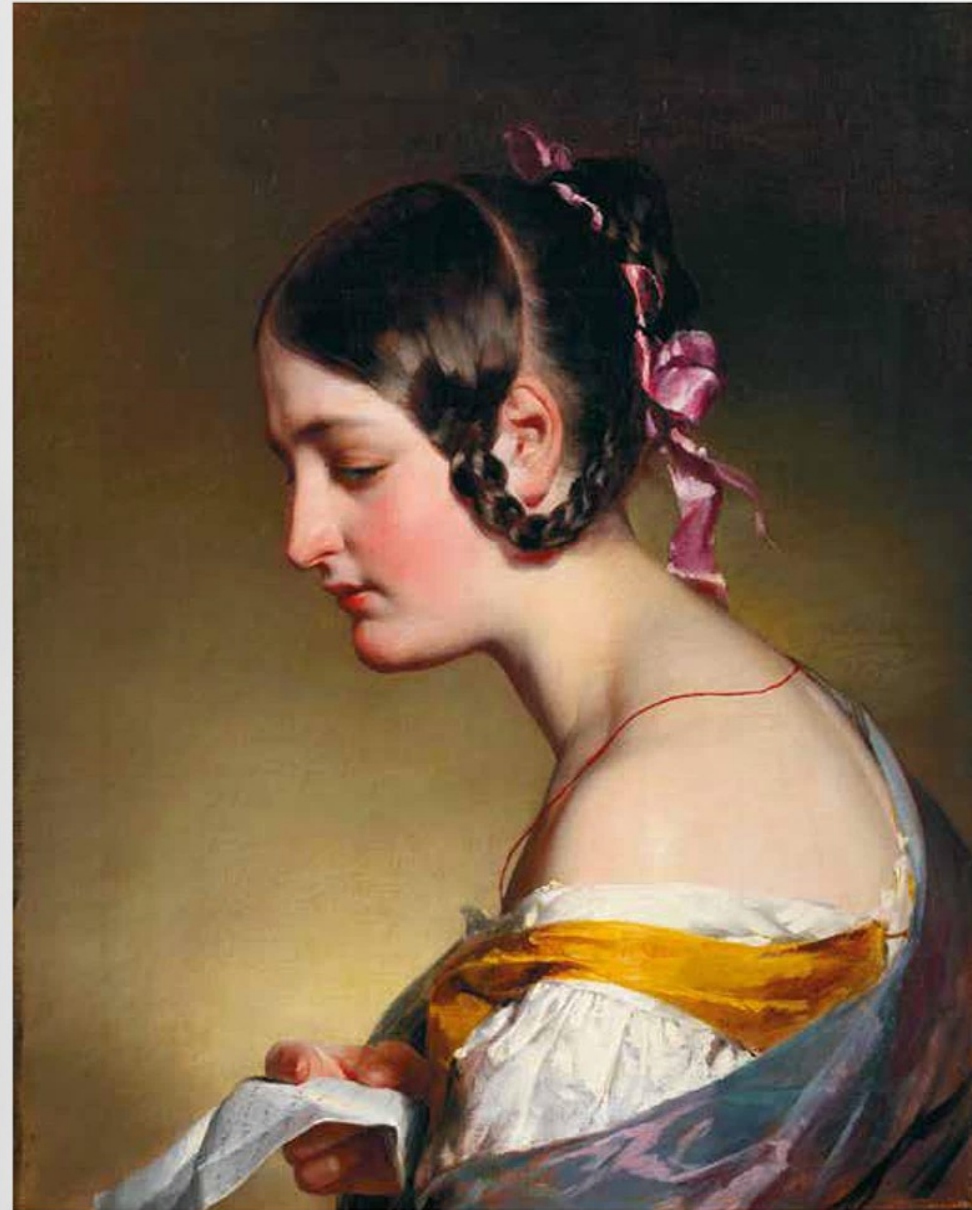
1837

Oil on canvas, 58 × 47 cm

Acquired 2021

A woman is seated, seemingly unaware of her surroundings. Her head is slightly tilted, and her eyes are cast downward. She holds a letter she must have just finished reading in her right hand. Her hair is parted in the middle and then parted again from one ear to the other, a style typical of the Biedermeier era. A braided pigtail runs from her temple to the back of her head, where it disappears into a chignon held in place by a silk ribbon tied into a bow. At first glance, her clothing seems a bit careless when compared to her hairstyle. The woman's blouse and dress are open at the back. Both garments have slipped off her shoulders, giving the picture an undeniably erotic component, subtly emphasized by the silk ribbon that lightly touches the woman's neck and a draped red cord drawing the eye to her décolleté: despite the innocuous appearance of the picture, Friedrich von Amerling left nothing to chance.

After studying at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna, Amerling spent some years in Prague before moving to London and Paris from 1827 to 1828, where he was greatly influenced artistically. During his stay in these cities, he had the opportunity to observe the works of Thomas Lawrence, a renowned portrait painter of his era. While in Paris Amerling also contacted Horace Vernet, a prominent history painter, who advised him to copy the old masters in the Louvre (an essential part of an artist's training at the time). Upon his return to Vienna, Amerling was commissioned to paint a larger-than-life portrait of Emperor Franz I in 1832. This portrait marked a turning point in Amerling's career and propelled him to the forefront of Vienna's portraitists. With the decline of Biedermeier modesty, the nobility and bourgeoisie, including pioneers of the Industrial Revolution, demanded portraits that accentuated their social standing, mirroring Lawrence's iconic portraits. However, it is unlikely that any woman of high social standing such as a noblewoman or a banker's wife would have consented to be depicted in the same manner as the girl holding the letter. The picture is not a portrait in the classical sense but rather an idealized image based on an anonymous young woman who posed for the painting. Here, Amerling is more interested in the woman's reaction to the letter's content. She seems lost in thought, perhaps thinking about her lover. RJ



MAURICE DENIS

1870 Granville (FR) – 1943 Paris (FR)

Saint-Sacrement à l'autel bleu

The Holy Sacrament at the Blue Altar

c. 1898/99

Oil on canvas, 37.5 × 31 cm

Acquired 1996

From an early age, Maurice Denis—devout Catholic, multitalented artist, theorist, and critic—had a strong desire to create religious paintings. Over the years, this calling became increasingly important to him, leading him to establish Ateliers d'art sacré in 1919. The renowned Parisian art dealer Ambroise Vollard acquired *Saint-Sacrement à l'autel bleu* shortly after its completion. In his inventory of receipts, Vollard listed it as “Communi-antes” (Communion girls). This additional title, combined with the spring-like setting surrounding the altar, strongly suggests that the painting depicts the Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament on Corpus Christi Day, the solemn conclusion of the Communion season. The altar boys can be seen on the bottom left, kneeling on the steps leading up to the altar and waving incense to draw the eye upward in a diagonally ascending line toward the priest. Dressed in a golden choir robe with a white humeral veil, the priest approaches the altar with a raised monstrance in his hand to place it there. The protagonist's size and central position dominate the composition, which is further amplified by the skillful use of line and the smooth transition from dark to light areas. A soaring effect is created that lends additional grandeur to the mystical act. The somewhat naive and indistinct rendering of the few figures—even the participating nuns and girls at the bottom of the picture are reduced to their veiled heads—is indebted still to the aesthetics of the Nabi period. The Nabis (a Hebrew term for “prophets”) were a group of artists that had existed since 1888/89, of which Denis was one of the founders. The surrounding vegetation in the painting, however, with its flowering shrubs, is painted in a Neo-Impressionist technique. The predominant colors—gold for the divine and heavenly and blue for contemplation, devotion, and the earthly connection with the supernatural—have a high symbolic value. This small devotional painting of a personal nature demonstrates Maurice Denis's love of church festivities, which he had noted at the age of fifteen. It expresses his deep religiosity, a driving force behind his art. AN



1 See Maurice Denis, *Journal. I: 1884–1904* (Paris, 1957), p. 35.

EDVARD MUNCH

1863 Løten/Innlandet (NO) – 1944 Ekely/Oslo (NO)

Self-Portrait

1904

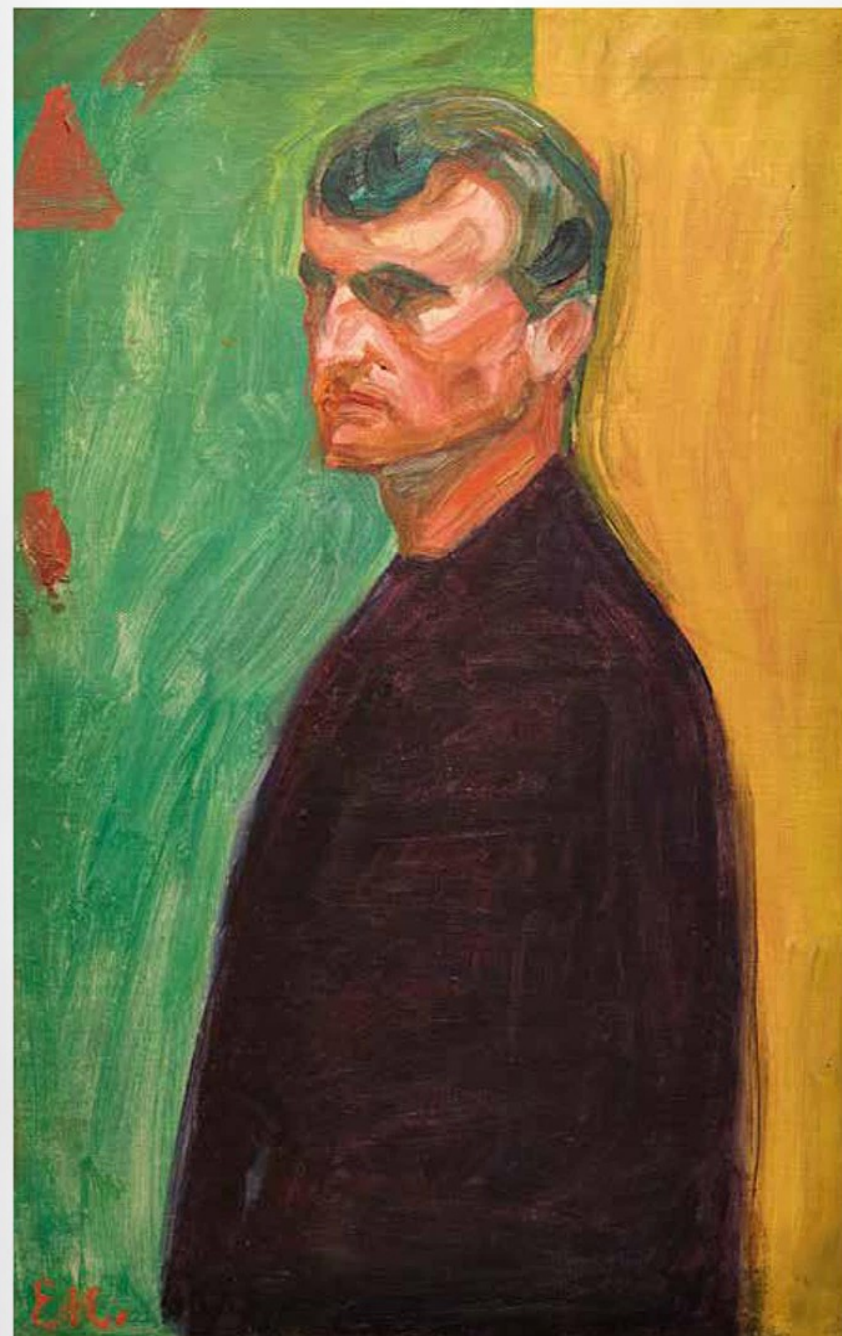
Oil on canvas, 69.7 × 44 cm

Acquired 2006

Edvard Munch painted this self-portrait against a two-color background in 1904. Two years earlier, he had celebrated his breakthrough as an artist in Berlin. German art dealers and collectors such as the ophthalmologist Max Linde from Lübeck showed interest in his work. At that point, he had also experienced a dramatic break-up with Mathilde Larsen, otherwise known as Tulla, the daughter of the largest wine merchant in Kristiania (today Oslo).

In his many self-portraits, Munch relentlessly documented his physical and psychological states. Using dynamic brushstrokes, he painted himself in dark clothing, turned to the left, monumental and solitary against an abstract background consisting of two blocks of color. Munch also uses a two-color background in other portraits of Tulla and himself. While his face is rendered with strong colors, his eyes are obfuscated by darkness. Eye contact with the sitter is denied to the viewer; it is time for introspection.

Munch was a master of depicting things in such a way that nothing is what it seems. At forty years old, he was full of drive and energy, yet the background, divided into two halves of different colors, suggests an inner conflict. Throughout his life the sensitive artist was vexed by conflicting forces, which he attributed to his ancestral heritage. On his mother's side, his ancestors were farmers, sailors, and timber merchants, and plagued by tuberculosis. His paternal line consisted of civil servants, priests, scientists, and artists. When Munch's parents met, his father, Christian Munch, was forty-four years old and a naval surgeon. His mother, Laura Cathrine, née Bjølstad, was more than twenty years younger than Christian and worked as a housemaid for a fellow doctor. In their short married life together, she gave birth to five children. Munch was only five years old when his mother, suffering from tuberculosis, died of exhaustion in 1868. When he was fourteen years old, his sister Johanne Sophie also died of tuberculosis. Munch was a sickly child for whom the bed became a place of torment. His life was haunted by gloomy childhood memories and his own wounded soul, which proved an inexhaustible source for his visionary painting. VT



GUSTAV KLIMT

1862 Baumgarten, near Vienna (AT) – 1918 Vienna (AT)

Kirche in Unterach am Attersee

Church in Unterach on the Attersee

1915/16

Oil on canvas, 110 × 110 cm

Acquired 2011

“It is dreadful, just awful here in Vienna, everything is withered, hot, horrid, and on top of that, so much work, the ‘hustle and bustle’—I long to get away like never before,” wrote Gustav Klimt to his confidant and life partner, Emilie Flöge, on August 1, 1901. Klimt could hardly wait to go on his summer holiday to the Attersee, where, until 1906, he usually spent several weeks a year with Emilie Flöge. He always took his painting materials with him, along with a telescope and, from 1903, a “seeker,” a simple piece of cardboard with a square hole cut in it. Klimt used the telescope to search for motifs and his homemade “seeker” to determine the composition he wanted to capture in the painting.

Klimt painted more than two dozen landscapes during these summer holidays, completing a significant portion of them in his studio in Vienna. In the early years, he created them in quick succession. In letters to his lover Marie Zimmermann, he mentions six paintings that he completed in 1900 and six or seven the following year, which he hoped to bring back to Vienna. By 1915/16, he was producing only half as many paintings each year, including *Kirche in Unterach am Attersee*. Unterach is located opposite Weißenbach, where Klimt and Emilie Flöge spent their summer vacations from 1914 to 1916. Klimt depicted the town from the lakeside. The towering church, trees, a multistory building by the shore, and a boathouse are reflected in the water, with a grassy slope rising in the background.

For *Kirche in Unterach am Attersee*, Klimt employed the *alla prima* technique, which means he painted without underdrawing and without subsequent corrections. Each brushstroke remains visible, creating the effect of everything shimmering as if in bright sunlight. He also abandoned the “correct” perspective of individual elements in the painting. As a result, the image appears strangely “flat,” lacking in depth. In both his landscapes from the Attersee and his numerous portraits of women, Klimt pursued stylization: moving away from the landscape or person as perceived by the eye toward an aestheticized, ornamentalized depiction. RJ



GERHARD RICHTER

1932 Dresden (DE)

Schneelandschaft

Snow Landscape

1966

Oil on canvas, 50 × 40.2 cm

Acquired 1996

A vast, snow-covered plain and, as if blurred and barely perceptible in the background, buildings on the horizon, with a sky above them that ranges from light gray to nearly black—it is not easy to put Gerhard Richter's *Schneelandschaft* into words. It was painted in 1966, a time when representational painting was deemed outdated, and artistic engagement with landscapes was viewed as reactionary. Landscape painting's last heyday had been in the nineteenth century—during the Romantic era—and had no place in contemporary art.

Born in Saxony, Richter studied at the Dresden Academy of Fine Arts, where he received a classical academic education. His final-year project in 1956 consisted of a wall mural of over sixty square meters at the German Hygiene Museum in Dresden. Art, according to Socialist Realism, was to serve the young German Democratic Republic and celebrate the success of building a new socialist state. Abstraction was condemned as Western decadence, yet Richter still experimented in this style. In 1959, he visited documenta II in Kassel and was greatly impressed by the works of Lucio Fontana (p. 106, 108) and the Abstract Expressionist Jackson Pollock. Two years later, Richter enrolled at the Düsseldorf Academy, where Sigmar Polke (p. 114) was studying at the same time.

Richter saw himself as "heir to a vast, great, rich culture of painting, of art in general, which we have lost, but to which we are obligated."¹ Richter's dedication to German Romanticism, and particularly to Caspar David Friedrich, is present in all of his landscapes, not just in *Schneelandschaft*. While Friedrich used drawings as the basis for his landscapes, Richter used photographs, which he projected onto the canvas in order to paint. In the process, he "blurred" everything. He noted in 1964/65 that he did this "to make everything the same, equally important and unimportant. I don't blur to make it look artistic and craftsmanlike but technical, smooth, and perfect. I blur to bring all parts closer together. It's possible that I may also be wiping away the excess of unimportant information."² RJ



1 Hans-Ulrich Obrist, ed., *Gerhard Richter: Text. Schriften und Interviews* (Frankfurt am Main/Leipzig, 1993), p. 137.

2 Obrist 1993 (see note 1), p. 31.