

# One Kiss May Lead to Another

From Gustav Klimt and Auguste Rodin to Diebenkorn, Mapplethorpe, and Thiebaud, S.F.'s museums and galleries have chosen to display a huge number of the greats.

By Jonathan Curriel

Gustav Klimt's two most famous works, *The Kiss* and *Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer I*, feature people bathed in sheaths of gold leaf and brilliant color patterns. Made in the early 1900s during Klimt's "Golden Phase," the two canvasses are explosions of paint that submerge the figures into gold-tinged swirls, squares, and contours. The art-goers crowding into the Legion of Honor for "KLIMT & RODIN: An Artistic Encounter" — the first exhibit in California to survey Klimt's work — badly want to see *The Kiss* and *Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer I*, which is why the Legion of Honor's stores feature all manner of items with *The Kiss* and *Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer I*. Postcards, journals, pins, puzzles, posters: They're all there in stacks and shelves.

What's not at the museum are Klimt's two original paintings. *Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer I* (also known as *The Woman in Gold*) is at the Neue Galerie in New York, where it has occupied a prominent spot since 2006, when the heir to the Estée Lauder Companies bought the work for a then-record \$135 million. And *The Kiss* is ensconced at the Österreichische Galerie Belvedere — one of the most ornate museums in Klimt's native Austria. What is at the Legion of Honor, though, pinpoints Klimt's other Golden Phase works. You'll find his erotic drawings and paintings of women, along with his traditional later portraits — much less ornate than *Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer I* but still entirely colorful. In short, the exhibit connects the artistic dots between Klimt and French sculptor Auguste Rodin, whom Klimt met in Vienna.

Klimt and Rodin used nudity and realism to break from artistic tradition — but Klimt faced an especially strong backlash because of the conservatism that held sway in Austrian society. Where other Austrian painters like Hans Makart used historic scenes or exotic countries to portray the female form, Klimt painted women like the redhead in *Nuda Veritas*, whose nudity includes her red, natural-looking pubic hair.



Gustav Klimt, *The Virgin*, 1913.

That caused an outcry in 1899. That she's holding a mirror and looking directly at the art-goer — and that *Nuda Veritas* features a rebellious quote from a German poet ("If you can't please everyone with your actions and your art, please only a few. It's bad to please many") — also stirred controversy at the time.

"It's about nakedness [being] the truth," Tobias G. Natter, the former curator in chief of the Österreichische Galerie Belvedere, who curated the Legion of Honor's exhibit, told arts journalists at a preview of "KLIMT &

RODIN." The redhead is a "modern" woman who represented the "here and now," not a place of distant time or geography. That was threatening to Viennese society, Nagger said.

Klimt also caused controversy with his early-1900s commissions from the University of Vienna, which wanted allegorical representations of Philosophy, Medicine, and Jurisprudence. What Klimt delivered — and what can be seen at the Legion in reproduction, since fire destroyed the works — were hellish, complicated visions of female nakedness, mythological figures, people

near death, and cloud-like vapors that gave the scenes the feeling of a séance. *Jurisprudence* featured patterns that Klimt would emphasize so beautifully in *Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer I*, and *Philosophy* won the Grand Prix at the 1900 Paris World's Fair, but the outcry in Austria forced Klimt to cancel the commission and return his advance. Like Rodin, though, Klimt became a sought-after artist — and like Rodin, Klimt made thousands of drawings that revealed his artistic direction and his personal likes. "KLIMT & RODIN" highlights a handful of these drawings.

"Rodin said, 'If you want to understand what I do, look at my drawings,'" Nagger says. "This is even more true for Gustav Klimt. Rodin did about 10,000 drawings, and Klimt close to 5,000. He was constantly working on drawings. He had all these new women in his studio. It was to practice. He was a great drawer. The drawings are considered to be the most silent medium, but on the other hand, they are the most explicit medium. It's about eroticism. And it's very similar for Rodin."

Klimt's drawings, which are even more explicit than *Nuda Veritas*, complement the exhibit's large oil paintings, which include *The Virgin*, a 1913 work that shows a sleeping woman surrounded by a sea of other women. The National Gallery in Prague loaned the work for the Legion's exhibit.

"For the first time since 1996, it is traveling," Nagger said of *The Virgin*. Lots of other galleries and museums contributed works to the exhibit — which prompted Nagger to exclaim in his own scholarly way, "It will take another 100 years to see an exhibition like this again."

Klimt is the real draw in "KLIMT & RODIN." San Francisco art-goers have seen Rodin's work for years, including a large version of *The Thinker* that is situated in the Legion's entrance. The new exhibit asks art-goers to see Klimt beyond his best-known canvases, and among the surprises are Klimt's landscape works that border on abstraction. What's clear, though, is that Klimt gravitated toward figuration, and — unlike Rodin — toward one gender. And that's what art-goers expect to see.

"Klimt did no portrait of a man after 1900," Nagger said. "He was simply not interested. What interested him was beauty. And women."

**Hackett Mill and the McEvoy** Foundation for the Arts opened their doors last week in San Francisco, and their emergence — or re-emergence, in the case of Hackett Mill — is a gift to those who want to engage with inspiring art in inspired settings, and do it for free.

For years, Hackett Mill had its gallery on an upper floor of 201 Post St. (at Grant), but when its lease was up, owners Francis Mill and Michael Hackett decided to move to the fourth

floor at 145 Natoma (at Second Street). The new location is a 30-second walk to SFMOMA, but the more notable development is the way Mill and Hackett designed the space. The gallery's office area and the gallery area have melded together into a kind of "atelier" that, in Mills' words, is more inviting.

"Why follow the convention?" Mills told *SF Weekly* on opening night. "Why design it to be a traditional gallery space? It parallels abstract expressionism, because it's a redefinition of the picture plane, which we teach our clients. There are no longer sky-ground relationships or foreground and background. It's all the plane that exists in the physical space that you're in. In a traditional gallery you have hierarchy — with front room and back room, public space and private space. I have the most lively conversations with my clients in offices, and you step outside into the exhibition space, and the volume of your voice hushes. Why do that? With limited space, why not just walk into our offices, so there's no hierarchy. We can stand in the back and chat, or stand in front. And there's art everywhere."

The new location's debut exhibit, "Decades in the Making," features notable works from David Park, Manuel Neri, Richard Diebenkorn, Elmer Bis-

choff, Lee Krasner, and others. Hackett Mill will rotate other works into the exhibit, which runs until March. The space is tight, but with its movable dividing walls that create little corridors, each work has enough room to breathe.

By contrast, the McEvoy Foundation for the Arts opened in a warehouse-like building that's part of the Minnesota Street Project, and its exhibition area is enormous — like the airy exhibit space that comprises the Minnesota Street Project's gallery building, one block away.

The foundation's opening exhibit, "la mère la mer" (in English: "the mother the sea"), pays homage to Chronicle Books publisher Nion McEvoy's mother Nan, a philanthropist who ran the *San Francisco Chronicle* and died in 2015. With work from the collections of both mother and son, it delves into the subject of the ocean and its literal and metaphoric place in people's lives. Juxtapositions are everywhere, as in the wall that has a still from Man Ray's 1928 film *L'Etoile de mer*. It shows a bare leg on a book, adjoining a 1975 Joan Brown enamel work, *The Weight Room at the Dolphin Club*, which depicts a bare leg on a floor of tiles. Many of the art works had been in storage — which meant

that pieces by the likes of Diebenkorn, Wayne Thiebaud, Dora Maar, Roy Mapplethorpe, Nan Goldin, Ray Kjartansson, and David Hockney stashed away. No longer.

"It's still a revelation to see these works all together like this on a wall and to see them resonating with another — so it's new to me in that sense, and exciting," Nion McEvoy told *SF Weekly* on the exhibit's opening day. "Ninety-five percent of this work was in storage, and that seemed so wasteful. I felt other people should enjoy this work, and should have access to it."

**"KLIMT & RODIN: An Artistic Encounter"**  
Through Jan. 28 at the Legion of Honor, 100 34th Ave., \$15-\$30. 750-3600 or legionofhonor.org

**"Decades in the Making"**  
Through March 29, 2017, Hackett Mill, 145 Natoma St. hackettmill.com

**"la mère la mer"**  
Through Jan. 13, 2017, McEvoy Foundation for the Arts, 1150 25th St. Free; mcevoyarts.org

## Untitled

1 Montgomery St. (by Market Street)

On a recent Wednesday, as the sky was turning to dusk and people were rushing along Market Street to get home, Jonathan Knowell and his friend Jaz painted a canvas they'd placed on an overhang of BART's Montgomery Street station. Knowell and Jaz were using the kind of paint brushes and paints that every good artist uses, but their canvas was entirely different: They'd made it from the sides of cardboard boxes, which they'd stitched together with tape. Knowell and Jaz have used similar boxes to sleep in. Both men have suffered through bouts of homelessness. Both men are artists.

The painting they were finishing that Wednesday evening was pretty damn good — a combination of graffiti-influenced calligraphic lettering, waves of undulating horizontal columns, and colorful circles and swirls. The impromptu painting — both abstract and figurative — was street art at its best. Passersby would ask Knowell and Jaz about their approach, and both men gladly interrupted their work to gab.

"People inspire me, especially down here, because I live here," Knowell told *SF Weekly* as he took a break from painting with Jaz.

Knowell said he and Jaz were fortunate to make art in the open. They are also fortunate to be alive. Jaz, who was a shoe-shine worker at the corner of Market and Sutter streets, was seriously injured a year ago when a cab plowed into his shoeshine stand and crashed into him and the stand's co-owner, Saleem Bey. Jaz is still recovering, and art is one of his outlets. Ditto for Knowell, who says he's 52 and sleeps in Downtown San Francisco doorways most nights. He's had a rough life, and has tried to commit suicide three times, he says. Each day can be a struggle, but on that Wednesday evening, he was excited about the painting, and excited to converse with strangers who were interested in their art. They posed for photos.

"For Jaz, it's a form of therapy," Knowell said. "And for me, too. Him after the car accident. And me after I tried to kill myself."

"I live in a doorway," Knowell said, adding that Jaz has found housing. "The whole Earth is my turf. We met after his accident. I started doing shoe-shines next. We've known each other about a year."

For 10 minutes, Knowell spoke to *SF Weekly*, and then he went back to the BART entrance to do his collaborative art piece. Knowell and Jaz's paint tubes and canisters lined the top of the BART overhang. They knelt on the street as they painted their cardboard piece.



They also stood at times. In traditional art terms, Knowell and Jaz were "plein air" painting, just like Moris Renoir and scores of other artists. Their works are now in venerable museums. But these other artists' works are permanent collections. At some point last night, Knowell and Jaz took down their cardboard painting. Or maybe BART officials asked them to remove it. Never the reason, their canvas was gone by the next morning, and it has