

FASCINATION JAPAN: MONET. VAN GOGH. KLIMT.

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The autumn exhibition of the Bank Austria Kunstforum Wien 2018 is devoted to “Japomanie” – the passion of the West for the aesthetics and world of images of the Far East. It traces how the fascination for the exotic and the new developed, from its beginnings in the 1860s until long after the turn of the century, and includes both its amalgamation into the vocabulary of forms of Western painting as well as the influence of its aesthetics on the development of Modernism around 1900.

As early as the 1860s the elegant and exotic aesthetics of everyday objects, the exquisite textiles and most of all the vividly imaginative and impassioned narrative qualities of the ukiyo-e – the refulgent, colourful woodcuts – conquered the European market and fulfilled the public’s yearnings for an unknown culture and a new kind of aesthetic.

Artists were at the forefront in collecting and integrating the strange vocabulary of forms, the astounding themes and motifs into their idiom. Monet, Manet, Van Gogh and Degas were the first, followed by the younger guard – Toulouse-Lautrec, Bonnard, Vuillard and Vallotton, Franz Marc and Wassily Kandinsky, to name only the most illustrious.

Starting out from Paris, Japomanie conquered the whole of Europe – in Austria, too, the Vienna World Exhibition in 1873 triggered a regular hype around the aesthetics of the Far East, also inspiring Gustav Klimt and Egon Schiele.

Subsequently the ideas from the Far East generated an autonomous interpretation and transposition into a new language of forms, paving the way towards the upcoming Modernism of the twentieth century – an idiom in which the trends towards abstraction and emancipation from the conventional picture space developed further as autonomous movements.

The exhibition is showing paintings and printed graphics, also objects and furniture. European works influenced by the aesthetics of the Far East by Claude Monet, Edgar Degas, Gustav Klimt and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, the Nabis and the Blaue Reiter (The Blue Rider) will be juxtaposed to Japanese woodcuts, screens and objects. Around a hundred exhibits from international public and private collections present a wide-ranging overview of the phenomenon of “Japonisme”, which spread throughout Europe from the late nineteenth century to the dawn of the avant-garde.

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