

Art around 1900 in Central Europe

#4

Realism, impressionism and symbolism

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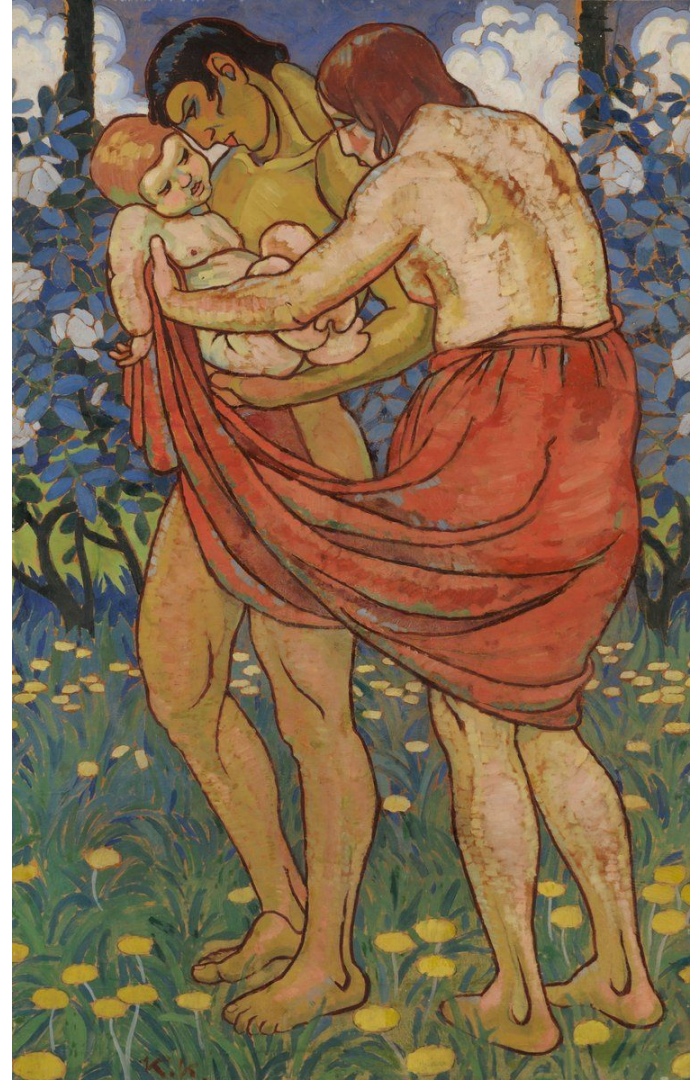
Art around 1900 in Central Europe

In this popular culture series we will examine one of the most inspiring moments in the history of European culture.

The turn of the 19th and 20th century was a **special period for the art of Central Europe**, with various artistic trends occurring in a short time and an intensified cultural exchange between countries politically connected with the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

We will deal with paintings, architecture and sculpture, but also other important cultural phenomena, such as international exhibitions and art collections. We present a panorama of **the Belle Époque** by comparing artists from Central European countries.

Károly Kotász (HU), *Model*, circa 1919,
Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest



New styles

Around 1870, **new styles** began to appear in European painting – realism, impressionism and symbolism.

The novelty was not so much in the actual style, but rather the approach to painting taken by the artist.

It is therefore worth noting that there were **no rapid changes** in the artistic education system or the art market per se. Simply put, the new styles appeared next to the old genres and tendencies, and with time (around 1900) became the most important styles of European art.

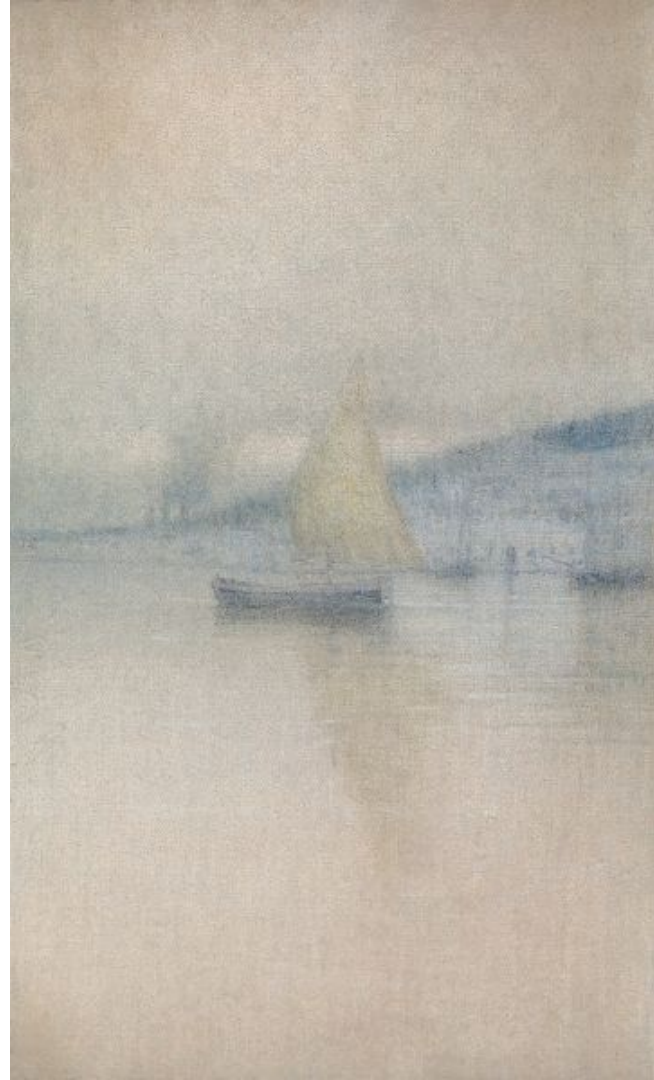


Władysław Ślewiński (PL), *Woman combing her hair*, 1897, National Museum in Cracow

Critique of impressionism

The new artistic trends were not immediately accepted. Impressionism and realism raised the most **doubts**.

Impressionism was believed at first to be **simply sketches**, or badly (that is – not in accordance with today's accepted academic principles) painted.

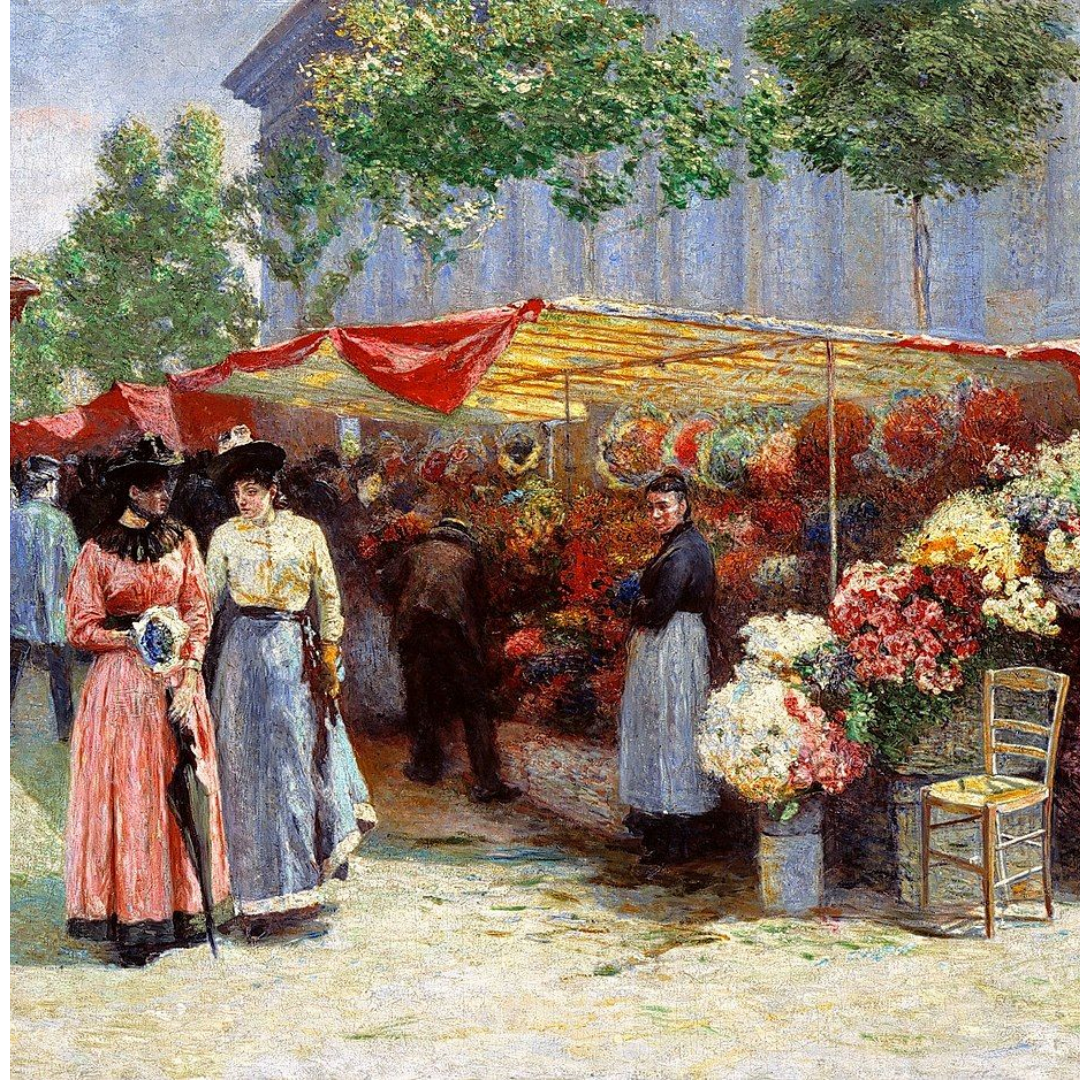


Emanuel Vidović (HR), *Vision of Split I*,
1901–1905, Gallery of Fine Arts, Split

This is well illustrated by the story of Józef Pankiewicz, who, after his stay in Paris, showed paintings from the impressionist influence in Warsaw.

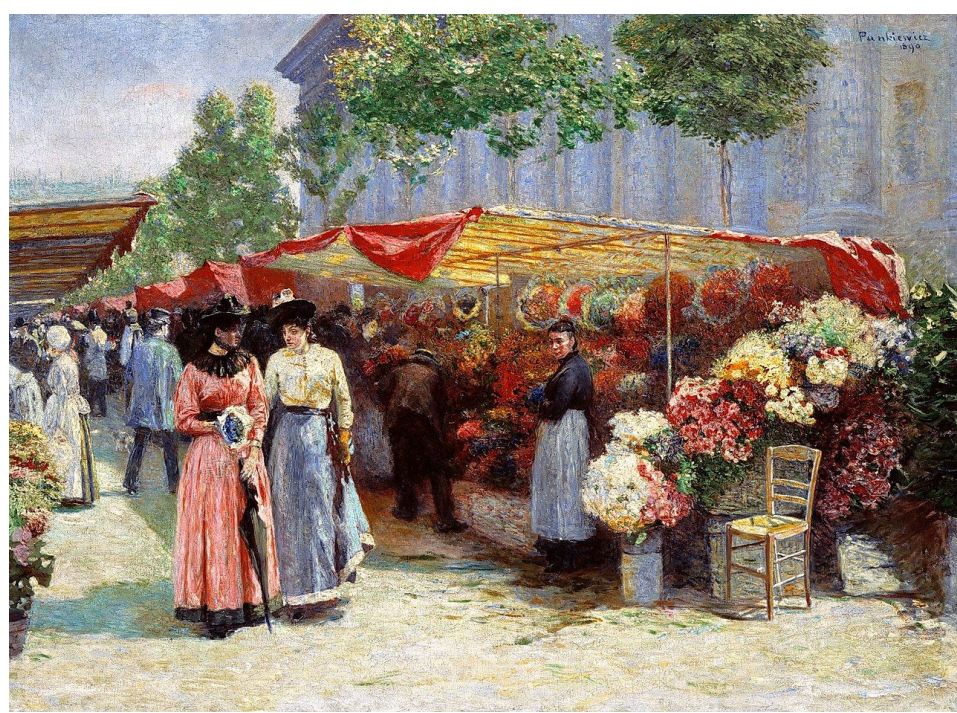
Malicious critics asked in the reviews if the artist had problems with his eyesight. His earlier, more realistic compositions were much more appreciated.

Józef Pankiewicz (PL), *Flower market in front of the Madeleine Church in Paris* (detail), 1890, National Museum in Poznań





Józef Pankiewicz (PL), *Vegetable market in the Iron-Gate Square in Warsaw*, 1888, National Museum in Poznań



Józef Pankiewicz (PL), *Flower market in front of the Madeleine Church in Paris*, 1890, National Museum in Poznań

Critique of realism

Realism, however, raised other kinds of doubts. At the time, it was believed that painting should elevate – the whole concept of art was based on the assumption that it was something higher, nobler, and therefore should not deal with **“low” topics**.



Oszkár Glatz (HU), *Wrestling boys*, 1901,
Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest

The tradition of genre painting has always existed, and “**noble**” elements were expected to be found in it – i.e. a symbolic message in still life. In other words, while realistic elements were noticed and appreciated, it was believed they should not become a leading trend.

Meanwhile, realist painters wanted to paint the world as they saw it and found no reason for any additional content to be hidden in their paintings.



Lajos Deák Ébner (HU), *Barge haulers*, 1880s,
Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest

Contractual division

It is worth emphasizing that although today we distinguish these styles and set precise boundaries between them, at the time they **coexisted** and **permeated** one another.

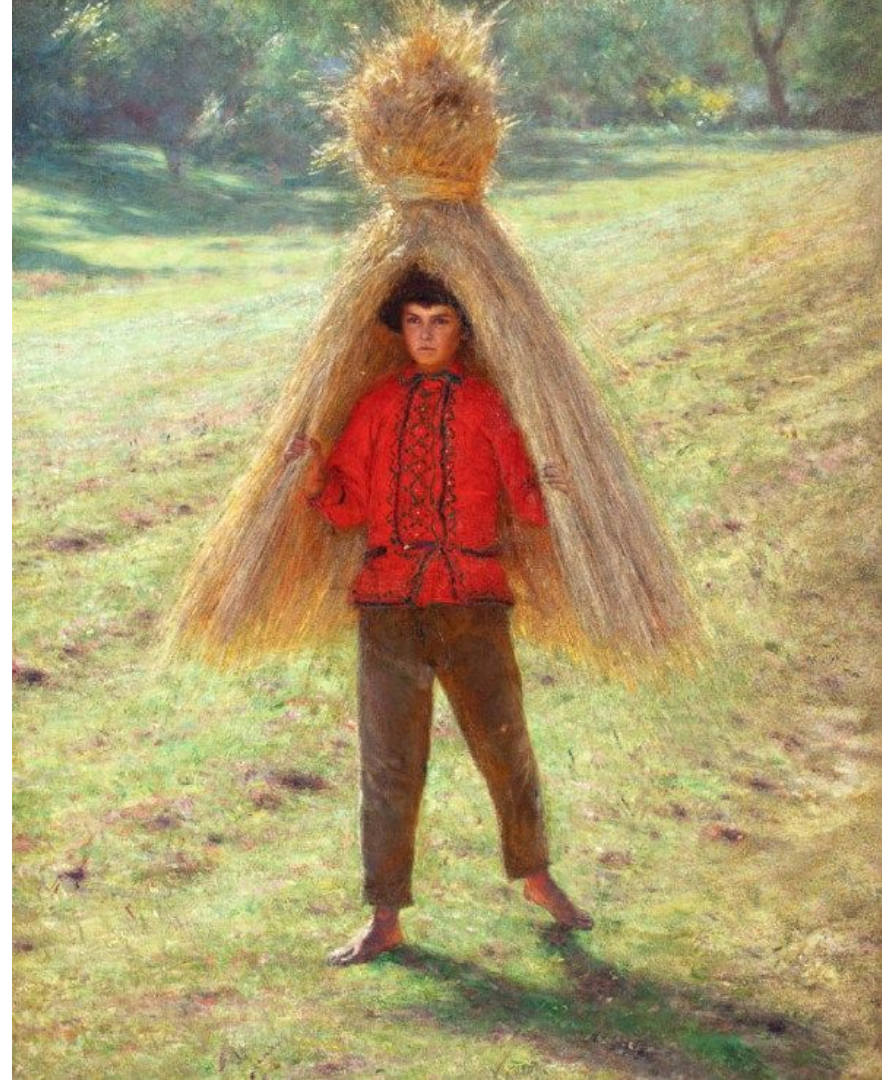
The resulting effects could have been two. Let's take a closer look at this phenomenon through the example of Aleksander Gierymski's painting.

Aleksander Gierymski (PL), *In the bower*,
1882, National Museum in Warsaw



First, the painter could successively refer to various styles in his work. Gierymski reached for, among others, realistic (*Sandblasters*), pre-impressionist (*In the bower*) or post-impressionist (*Evening on the Seine*) aesthetics.

Second, the artist sometimes drew on several trends within one painting. In the composition *Boy in the sun*, we see elements that are realist (the boy's face) and elements painted under impressionist influence (the landscape).



Aleksander Gierymski (PL), *Boy in the sun*,
1893–1894, National Museum in Wrocław



Aleksander Gierymski (PL),
Sandblasters, 1887,
National Museum in Warsaw



Aleksander Gierymski (PL),
Evening on the Seine, 1893,
National Museum in Cracow

Realism

The principles of realism can be discussed with the example of the painting *The last day of a condemned man* by Mihály Munkácsy. As the title suggests, we see a man, surrounded by family and guards, who will soon be subject to the death penalty.

Here we see the main tenet of realism – **life as it really is**. There is nothing astonishing about the convict – we do not know whether he is, for example, an unjustly convicted hero or an ordinary criminal. The painting shows the realities of this type of event – the prison is dark and gloomy, while the physiognomy of the other characters is average.

Mihály Munkácsy (HU), *The condemned cell I* (detail), 1870, Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest



Mihály Munkácsy
(HU), *The condemned
cell I*, 1870, Hungarian
National Gallery,
Budapest



Mihály Munkácsy (HU), *The convict (The condemned cell)*,
1869–1872, Hungarian
National Gallery, Budapest



The painting was hugely successful at an exhibition in Paris in 1870 and was awarded a gold medal. What was especially liked was that the work was – at the time – about the **present day**, and **not distant historical events**.

Interestingly, the same exhibition displayed Jan Matejko's *Union of Lublin*. This work was met with mixed emotions by critics – many of them, especially the younger ones, considered historical painting obsolete.



Jan Matejko (PL), *Union of Lublin*, 1869, National Museum in Warsaw

The city

The second half of the 19th century was also marked by the **Industrial Revolution** and the extremely dynamic **development of cities**, which were then becoming modern metropolises.

This was reflected in realist painting. The artists closely watched the everyday life in the city, noting all social standings: from workers, through Jewish vendors, to elegant pedestrians.



Károly Ferenczy (HU), *In front of the posters*, 1891, Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest



Johann Nepomuk Geller (AT), *On the meadow*, 1901, Österreichische Galerie Belvedere, Vienna



Jindřich Tomec (AT/CZ), *Building of Postal Savings Bank in Vienna*, circa 1900, Österreichische Galerie Belvedere, Vienna



Johann Nepomuk Geller (AT), *Croatian market on the Haide in Vienna*, before 1898, Österreichische Galerie Belvedere, Vienna



Vojtěch Bartoněk (CZ), *Conscripts*, 1888, National Gallery Prague

Jakub Schikaneder
(CZ), *Murder in the
house*, 1890, National
Gallery Prague





Antonín Chittussi (CZ), *Paris seen from Montmartre*, 1887, National Gallery Prague



Anna Bilińska (PL), *Unter den Linden street in Berlin*, 1890, National Museum in Warsaw

In turn, a pretext for “**painting the lights**” were scenes showing the city at night – streets and buildings lit with gas lanterns, the latest technical achievement.

Painters were inspired not only by large and stunning metropolises such as Paris, but also by local centres: Warsaw, Prague and Budapest.

Ludwik de Laveaux (PL), *Place de l'Opéra in Paris*, circa 1893,
National Museum in Warsaw



Mihály Munkácsy
(HU), *Park Monceau
at night*, 1895,
Hungarian National
Gallery, Budapest



The people

Another subject that gained importance in realist painting was the countryside: the **everyday life of peasants**, folk games, and religious customs.

The so-called “characters”, single figures in characteristic and picturesque **folk costumes**, represented a given ethnic group from a specific region. For example, in Hungarian painting, the inhabitants of the Pannonian Steppe were very meaningful.



Teodor Axentowicz (PL), *Kolomyjka dance*, 1895,
National Museum in Warsaw



Vojtěch Bartoněk (CZ), *Grazing (Rural Idyll)* – final work and study, 1890,
National Gallery Prague





Johann Nepomuk Geller (AT), *Kalwarya (bei Krakau)*, before 1908, Österreichische Galerie Belvedere, Vienna



Józef Chełmoński (PL), *White storks*, 1900, National Museum in Warsaw

Ferdo Vesel (SI), *Two friends*, circa 1889, National Gallery of Slovenia, Ljubljana

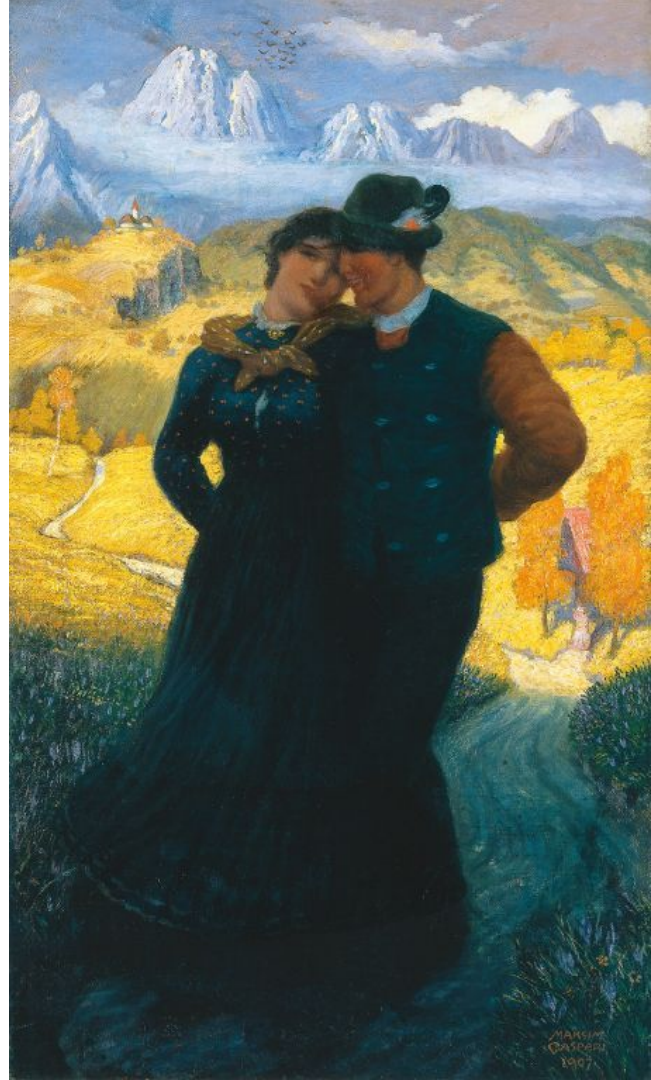


Lajos Deák Ébner (HU), *Poultry Market*, 1885, Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest





Włodzimierz Tetmajer (PL), *Święcone [the blessing of the Easter baskets]*, 1897, National Museum in Cracow



Maksim Gaspari (SI), *The Slovenian couple*, 1907, National Gallery of Slovenia, Ljubljana

This trend is related to an interest in **traditional folklore**. In Cracow, it even led to the so-called “**peasant-mania**”, or fascination of artists and writers with the Polish countryside.

Some of them, such as Włodzimierz Tetmajer or Stanisław Wyspiański, despite their noble and urban origin, went as far as to marry peasants.



Stanisław Wyspiański (PL), *Self-portrait with wife*, 1904,
National Museum in Cracow

Artist Włodzimierz Tetmajer
with his family in Bronowice
near Cracow, circa 1915,
National Library in Warsaw





Włodzimierz Tetmajer (PL), *Artist's family*, 1905,
National Museum in Cracow

Realist paintings, drawing on the rural theme, were not limited to joyful or everyday scenes. An important part of showing the poverty of peasants were **scenes of death** in the countryside.

Aleksander Gierymski (PL), *Peasant coffin*, 1894, National Museum in Warsaw





Sándor Bihari (HU), *Walachian Funeral*,
1885, Hungarian National Gallery,
Budapest



Jakub Schikaneder (CZ), *Gloomy journey*
(*Mournful return*), 1886,
National Gallery Prague

Impressionism

Impressionist painting brought about a change to the painting technique itself. The emphasis was on bright, unbroken colours, as well as contrasts and bold light and shade effects. One impressionistic trick was to include a **vivid red element** in the composition.

It was also observed that a painting is primarily a **combination of patches of colour** on the canvas, arranged in specific forms. The subject matter is only a pretext for the **actual painting technique**.



László Mednyánszky (HU), *Cottages on Gellérthegy*,
between 1890 and 1895, Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest

Józef Mehoffer (PL), *Red umbrella*, 1917, National Museum in Cracow



Antonín Slavíček (CZ), *In Veltrusy's park*, 1896, National Gallery Prague

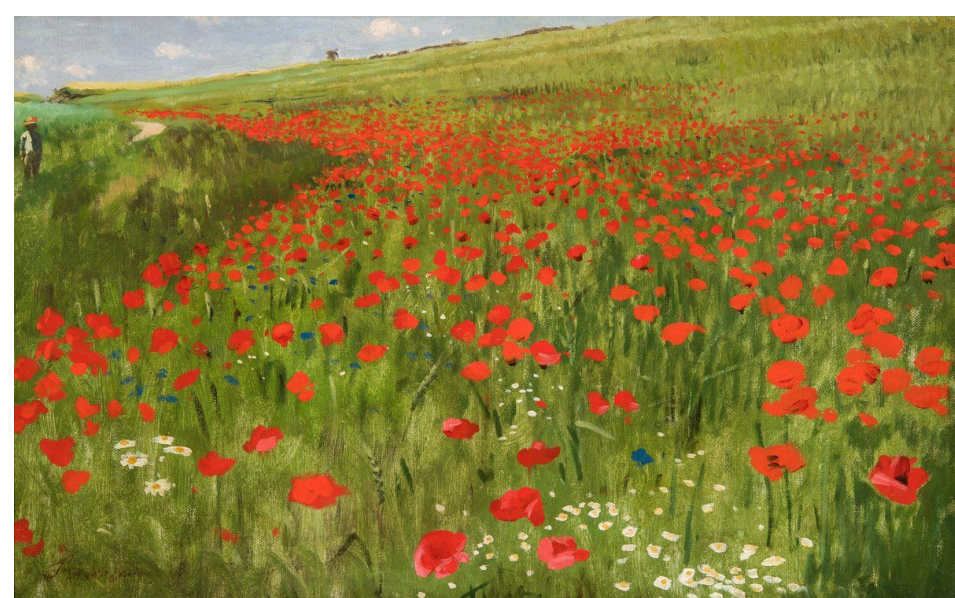


Matej Sternen (SI), *The red parasol*, 1904, National Gallery of Slovenia, Ljubljana



Károly Ferenczy (HU), *Birdsong*, 1893, Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest





Pál Szinyei Merse (HU), *Poppy field*, 1896,
Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest



Gustav Klimt (AT), *Poppy field*, 1907,
Österreichische Galerie Belvedere, Vienna

This can be seen in the sketch and finished painting of Hungarian painter Pál Szinyei Merse. His first sketch shows the distribution of colours, **painting masses**, which only take specific shapes in the final painting.

The very technique of applying the paint: quick brush strokes, more freedom in painting, and **“not hiding”** the fact that there are **colour spots on the canvas**, were also elements of change introduced by impressionism. As mentioned in previous presentation, the perfect and extremely smooth finish of the canvas was one of the main tasks of an academic painter.



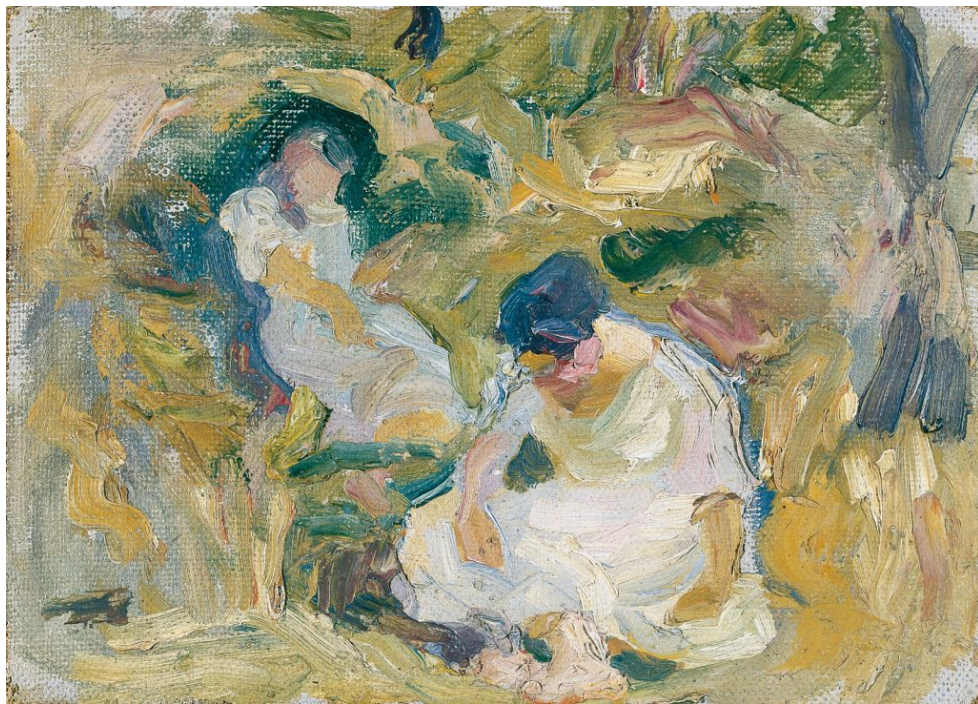
Pál Szinyei Merse (HU), *Picnic in May I. – Sketch*, 1872, Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest

Pál Szinyei Merse (HU), *Picnic in May*, 1873, Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest



Władysław Podkowiński
(PL), *In the garden*, circa
1892, Silesian Museum
in Katowice

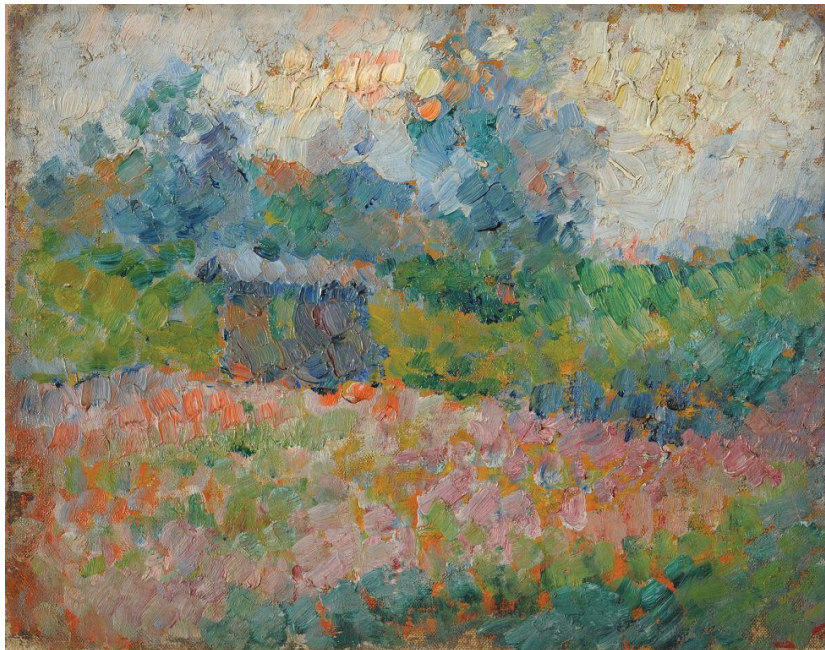




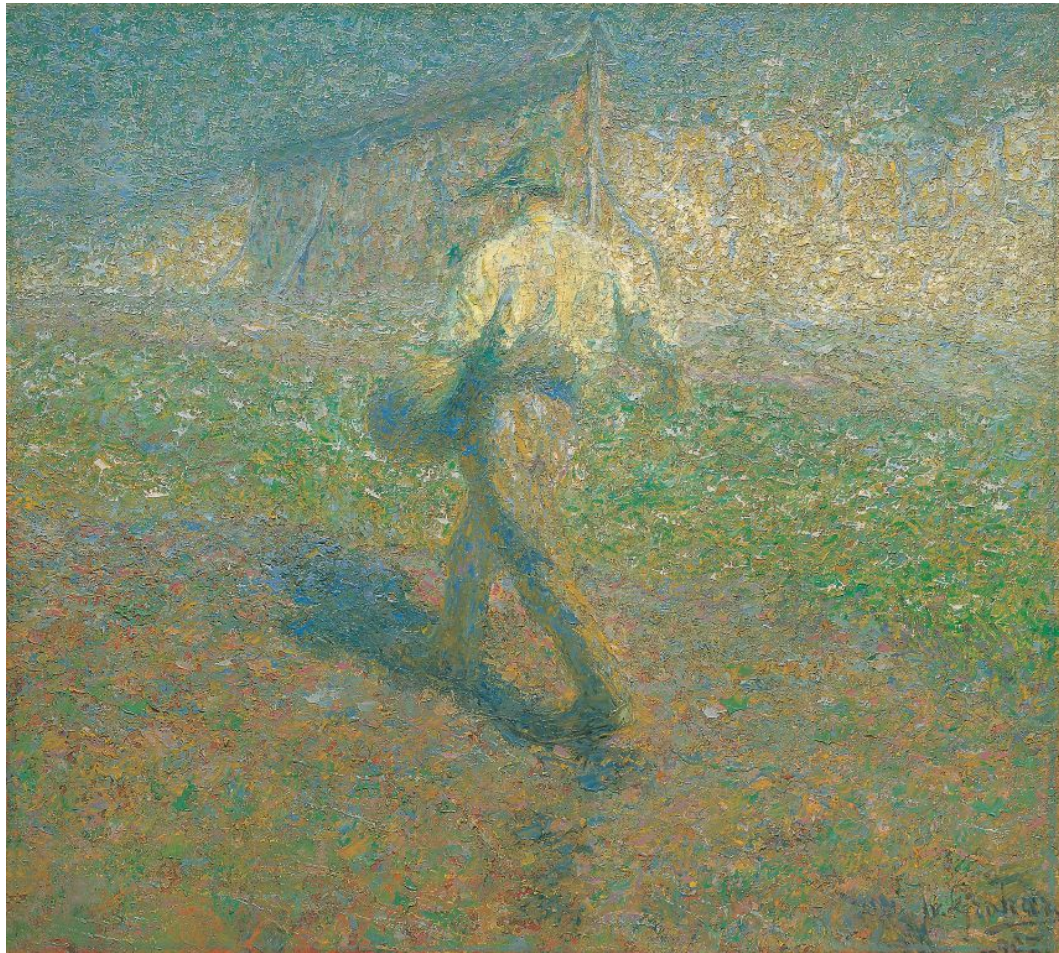
Rihard Jakopič (SI), *A break*, circa 1905,
National Gallery of Slovenia, Ljubljana



Leon Wyczółkowski (PL), *A game of croquet*,
1895, National Museum in Cracow



Rihard Jakopič (SI), *Autumn*, 1912,
National Gallery of Slovenia, Ljubljana



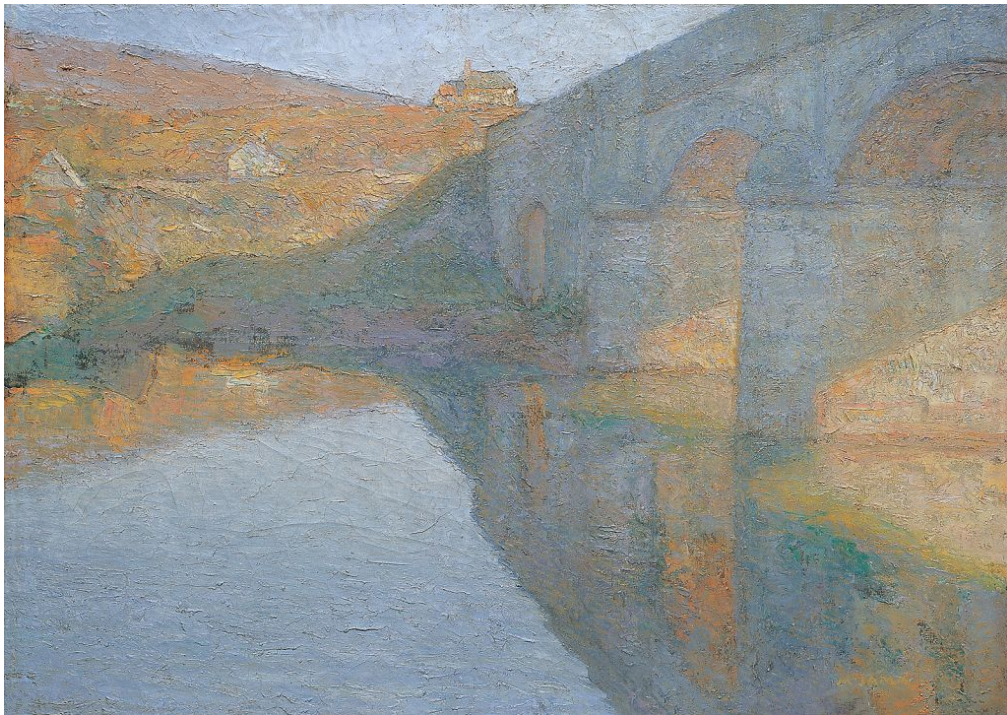
Ivan Grohar (SI), *The sower*, 1907,
National Gallery of Slovenia, Ljubljana



Emanuel Vidović (HR), *Lagoon*, 1907–1911,
Modern Gallery, Zagreb



Slava Raškaj (HR), *Water lilies I*, 1899,
Modern Gallery, Zagreb



Matija Jama (SI), *Bridge on the Dobra*, 1907,
National Gallery of Slovenia, Ljubljana



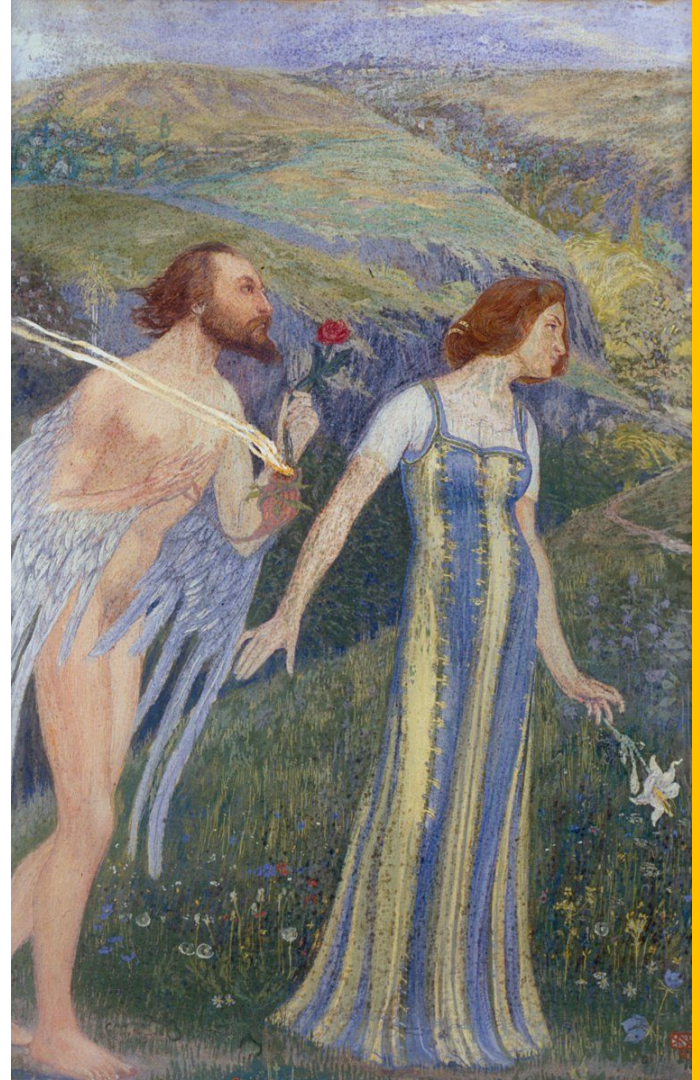
Matija Jama (SI), *Dürnstein I*, 1911,
National Gallery of Slovenia, Ljubljana

Symbolism

Although the placement of symbols, i.e. elements that were to replace the entire system of ambiguous content, has almost always existed in European painting, it was only symbolism that made so much use of the opportunities associated with it.

Symbolists assumed that reality is in fact incomprehensible, however symbols can open the viewer to their own interpretation. In this way, painting was to be a bridge between what is real and what is **hidden behind the reality**.

Sándor Nagy (HU), *Ave Myriam*, 1904,
Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest



Jan Preisler (CZ), *Black
Lake*, 1904, National
Gallery Prague



It was then combined with a fascination with the **human subconscious** and **Sigmund Freud's research** on this subject. It was believed that hidden in it were the **real desires** and reasons behind human actions that were not necessarily comprehensible.

Interestingly, although symbolist painting of Central Europe touched upon a universal subject, in Poland the works of some artists were still interpreted and created with regards to patriotism. In many works by Jacek Malczewski, we can decipher encrypted national threads.

Jacek Malczewski (PL), *Adoration of the Madonna*, 1910, National Museum in Warsaw

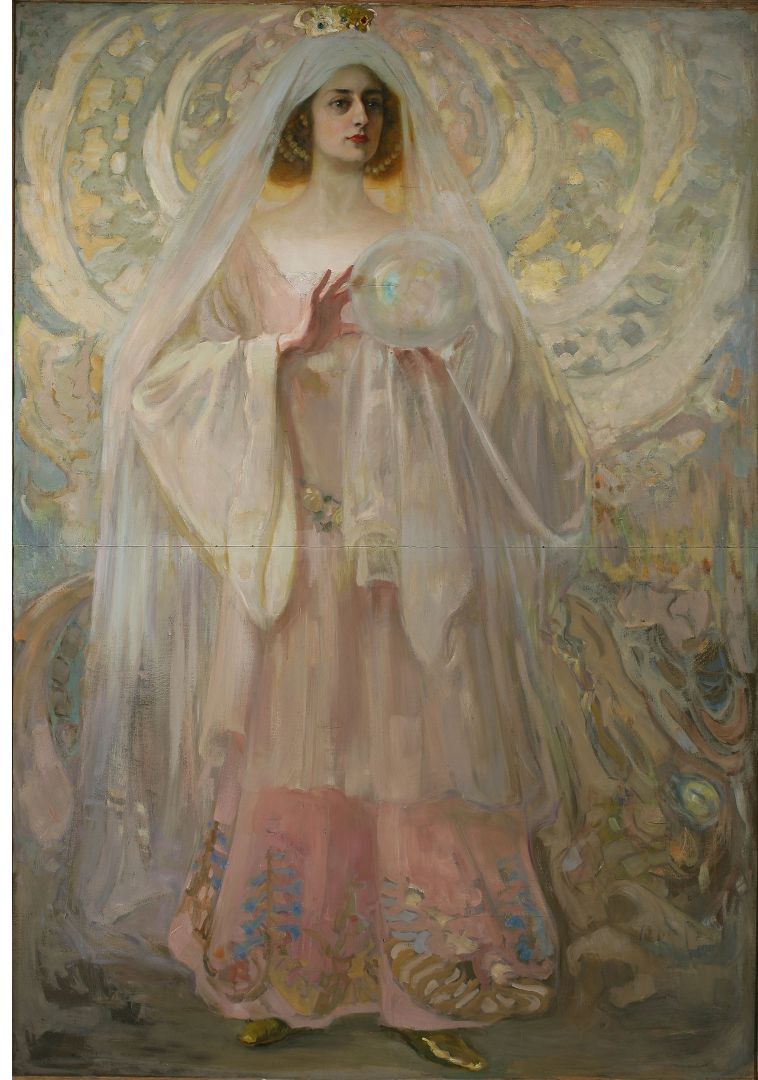


Fantasy

As we remember, historical painting sought to make the final product as true to reality as possible. For this reason, apart from religious painting, supernatural figures appeared extremely rarely.

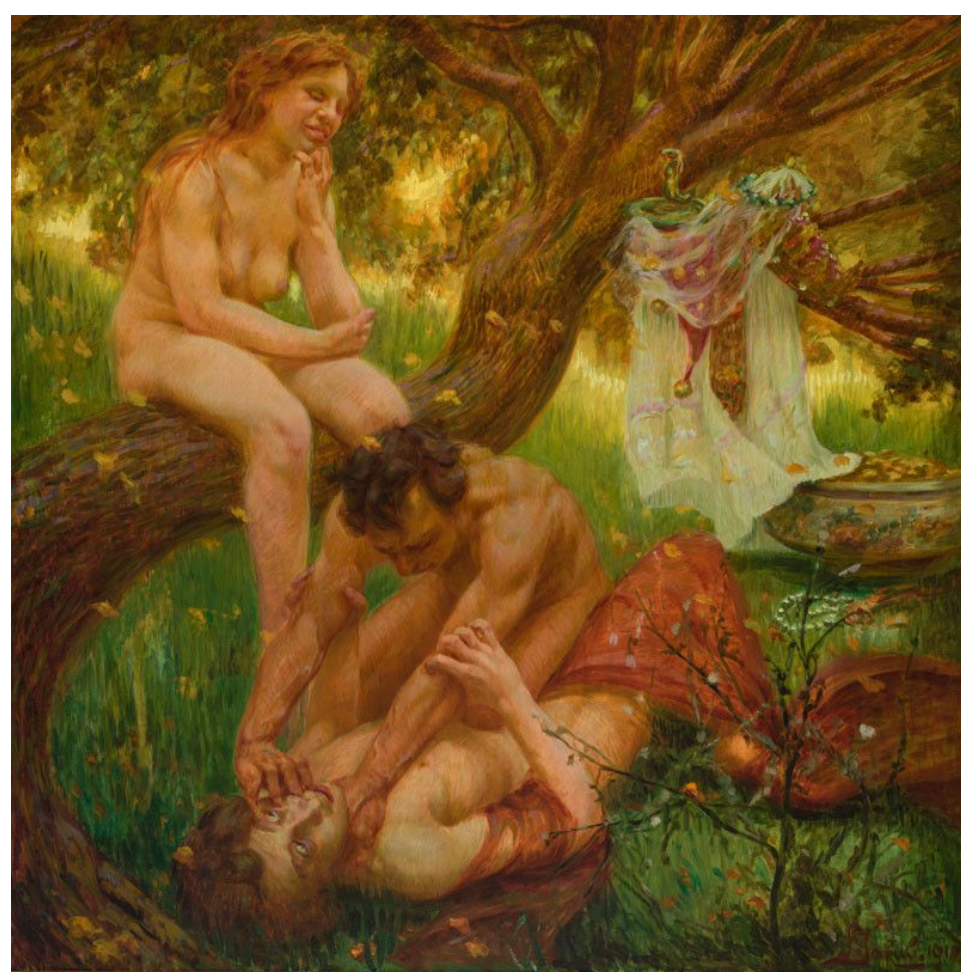
This changed in symbolist painting, which with great pleasure juxtaposes real and **supernatural figures** – phantoms, angels, heroes of **folk tales, mythology** (not only Greek, but also Celtic or Slavic), sometimes combining human and animal bodies.

Kazimierz Stabrowski (PL), *Princess of the magic crystal*, before 1910,
National Museum in Warsaw





Jacek Malczewski (PL), *Fairy tales (I)*,
1902, National Museum in Poznań



František Jakub (CZ), *Mythological scene*, 1910,
National Gallery Prague

Beneš Knüpfer (CZ), *Fauns
fleeing before an automobile,*
1905, National Gallery Prague



František Kupka (CZ),
Ballad (Joys of Life), 1901,
National Gallery Prague





Rudolf Jettmar (AT), *Fighting with a monster*, 1903, National Gallery Prague



Józef Mehoffer (PL), *The Muse*, circa 1897, National Museum in Warsaw



František Kupka (CZ), *Blue and red Prometheus*, 1909–1910, National Gallery Prague

János Vaszary (HU),
Golden Age, 1898,
Hungarian National
Gallery, Budapest





Alexander Rothaug (AT), *Cassandra*, 1911,
Österreichische Galerie Belvedere, Vienna

Very often, the main key to understanding such a work was **onirism**, i.e. the **aesthetics of dreams**, which justified blurring the boundaries between reality and fabrication.

Józef Mehoffer (PL), *The strange garden*, 1903, National Museum in Warsaw



Maximilian Lenz
(AT), *A world*, 1899,
Hungarian National
Gallery, Budapest





Adolf Hirémy-Hirschl (HU), *The Souls of Acheron*, 1898,
Österreichische Galerie Belvedere, Vienna

Religion & literature

Biblical characters became not only the historic heroes of salvation, but **universal figure-symbols** somehow detached from the religious context (more or less fighting with their own demons).

This interest in literature continued, and symbolist painters each had their own preferences. One of the most popular texts was Dante's *Divine Comedy*.

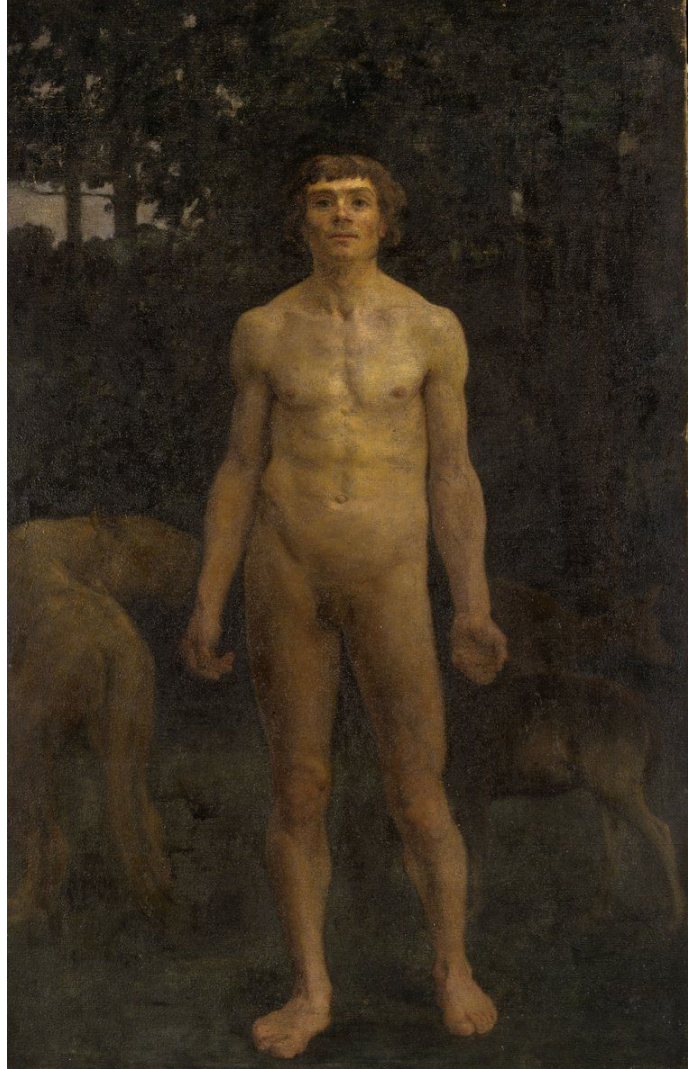
Jacek Malczewski (PL), *Tobias with an angel*, 1924, National Museum in Warsaw



László Hegedűs (HU),
Cain and Abel, 1899,
Hungarian National
Gallery, Budapest



Károly Ferenczy (HU), *Adam*, 1894–1895,
Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest



Károly Ferenczy (HU), *The sacrifice of Abraham*, 1901, Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest



Lajos Gulácsy (HU), *Paolo and Francesca*, 1903, Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest



Ernst Klimt (AT), *Francesca da Rimini and Paolo*, circa 1890, Österreichische Galerie Belvedere, Vienna



Femme fatale

Symbolist painting also introduced a different perception of the woman. It was then, under the influence of French literature, that the idea of a *femme fatale* – a **temptress bringing distress** to those around her – appeared. This is how the story of the biblical Eve began to be perceived.



Sándor Nagy (HU), *Longing*, circa 1910,
Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest

Károly Ferenczy (HU),
*Painter and Model
(in the Atelier)*, 1904,
Hungarian National
Gallery, Budapest



Gustav Klimt (AT), *Judith I*, 1901,
Österreichische Galerie Belvedere, Vienna





Władysław Podkowiński (PL), *Ecstasy (Ecstasy of imagination)*, 1894, National Museum in Cracow



Edward Okuń (PL), *Self-portrait with Sicilian woman (Pomegranates)*, 1913, National Museum in Warsaw

Illustration

Symbolist painters willingly made illustrations for magazines and books. It was not only a collaboration involving sending one's own art, but also a desire to **create comprehensive works**, where graphics and literature were to suffuse.



Alfred Roller

Alfred Roller (AT), detail from artistic magazine "Ver Sacrum", 1898, Heidelberg University Library



LYSISTRATÈ

LYSISTRATÈ.

A si que dans le temple de Bakkhos on les eût
conviciés, ou dans celui de Pan, de Kôlios ou de
Génétyllis, et l'on ne pourrait passer dans la cohue des
tambourins! Mais aujourd'hui, pas une femme ici n'est



MAGYARÁZÓ · TANULMÁNY
AZ · EMBER · TRAGÉDIÁJÁHOZ

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MORVAY GYÖZÖ

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OKVŃ. 1903.

František Kupka (CZ), *Lysistrata*,
head of chapter I, 1909–1911,
National Gallery Prague

Károly Ferenczy (HU), cover of Győző
Morvay's book, 1897, Hungarian
National Gallery, Budapest

Edward Okuń (PL), cover of artistic magazine
"Chimera", 1905, National Museum in Cracow

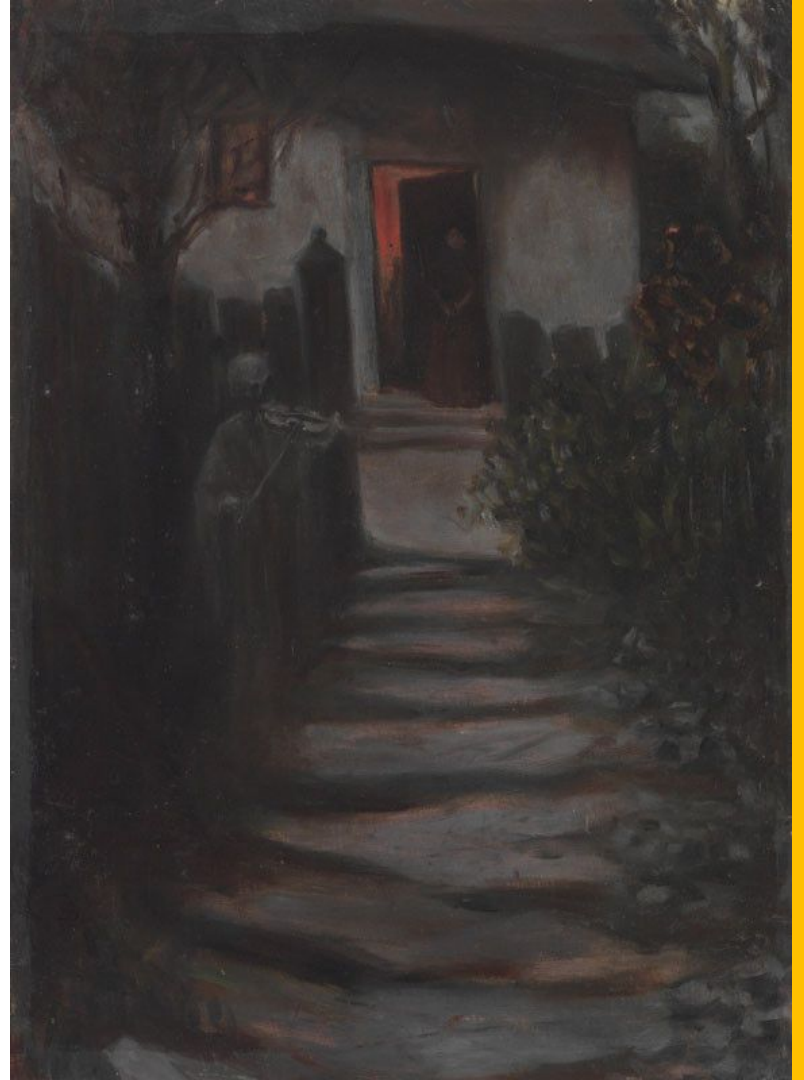
CHIMERA—TOM IX—ZESZ. 27.
REDAKCYA—WARSZAWA, NOWY ŚWIAT, 22.

Death

Although the theme of death appeared early on in European culture, in symbolism it became the main subject.

It appeared in various forms and allusions – as a *memento mori*, as the final end of man, as an announcement of life in some other form.

Jakub Schikaneder (CZ), *Symbolic scene*, first half of the 1890s,
National Gallery Prague



Emil Jakob Schindler (AT), *Pax*
(*Gravosa cemetery near Ragusa*),
1891, Österreichische Galerie
Belvedere, Vienna





It also corresponded with the phenomenon of *fin de siècle* (“the end of the century”) or **decadence** (the feeling of decline). At the time, it was believed that the present world would end with the end of the century, and people agonized what would happen next.

In its own way, this bodement proved true a few years later – World War I turned out to be the end of the 19th-century European world.



Wojciech Weiss (PL), *A melancholic person*
(*Totenmesse*), 1904, National Museum in Cracow

Wojciech Weiss (PL),
The Demon (In the café),
1904, National Museum
in Cracow



The canon of modern art

Over time, realism, impressionism and symbolism became the canons of modern art – the works inspired by them are widely recognized and are considered a synonym of the **ideal painting**.

Moreover, all modern thought about painting is organized around these three styles. They also formed the basis of development of other styles like post-impressionism and hyperrealism.

Károly Ferenczy (HU), *Sunny morning*, 1905, Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest



It is evident that each of these styles had a **different interpretation of specific art genres.**

For the Impressionists, landscape was primarily a collection of coloured elements that could be depicted on the canvas; while for symbolists it was a metaphorical depiction of the state of the human spirit.

Likewise, portraiture could be viewed either as an accurate representation of a person's appearance or as a psychological analysis of their personality.

Ivan Grohar (SI), *Spring*, 1903, National Gallery of Slovenia, Ljubljana





MALI SVIET.

Emanuel Vidović (HR), *Small world*, 1904,
Museum of Arts and Crafts, Zagreb



Alina Bondy-Glass (PL), *Self-portrait*, circa 1890-1900, National Museum in Warsaw



Konrad Krzyżanowski (PL), *Portrait of Alina Bondy-Glass*, circa 1903, National Museum in Warsaw



Jan Rembowski (PL), *Portrait of Alina Bondy-Glass*, early 20th century, National Museum in Warsaw

Anna Bilińska (PL),
Lady with binoculars,
1884, National
Museum in Warsaw



Jurij Šubic (SI), *Dr Ivan Tavčar*, circa 1885,
National Gallery of Slovenia, Ljubljana



Józef Pankiewicz (PL),
*Portrait of a girl in a red
dress*, 1897, National
Museum in Kielce



Olga Boznańska (PL), *Portrait of Paul Nauen*,
1893, National Museum in Cracow





Aladár Körösfői-Kriesch (HU),
Portrait of Lenke Boér, 1905,
Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest



Károly Ferenczy (HU), *Double Portrait (Noémi and Béni)*, 1908, Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest



István Zádor (HU), *My wife*, 1910,
Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest



Gustav Klimt (AT), *Portrait of Fritza Riedler*,
1906, Österreichische Galerie Belvedere, Vienna

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