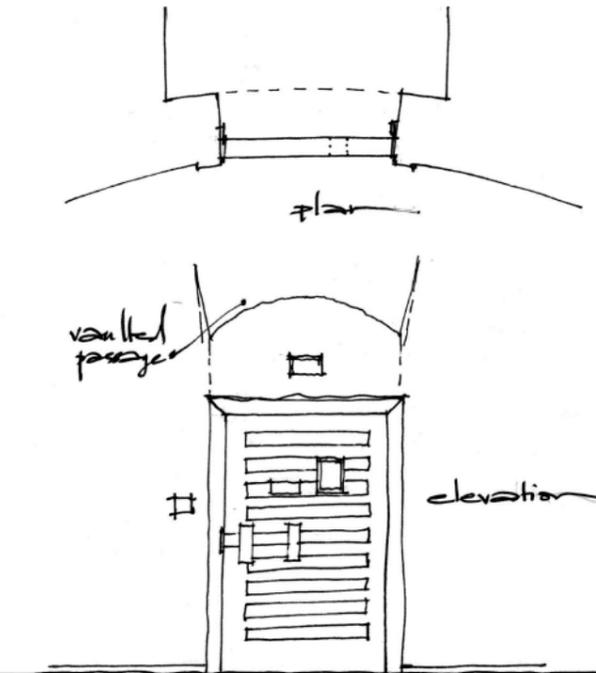


1
The Tower of Fools

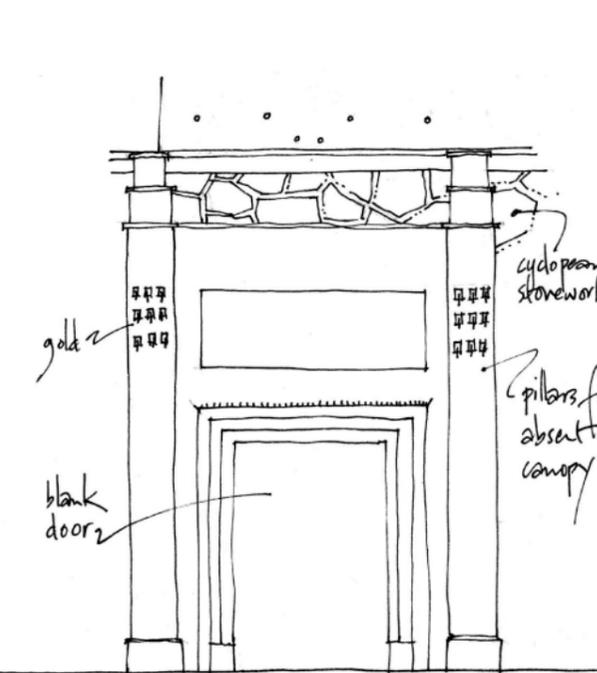


ENTRANCE TO BERGGASSE 19
FREUD'S APARTMENT &
CONSULTING ROOMS



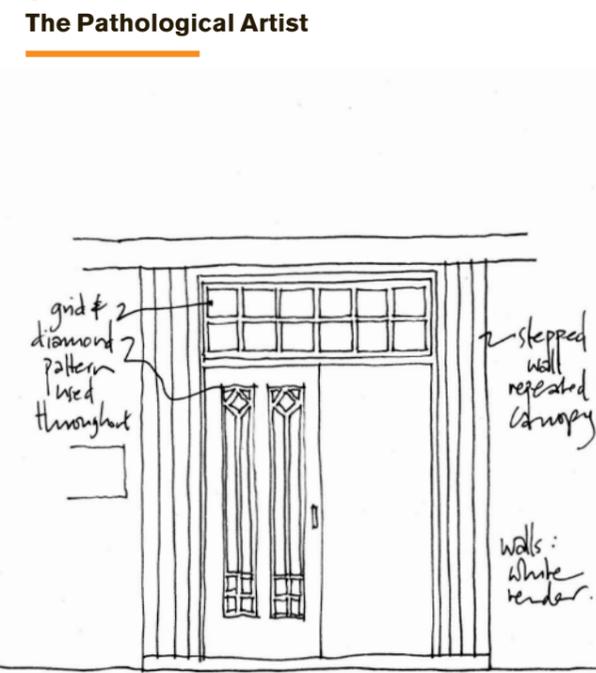
NARRENTURM, CELL DOOR
'THE TOWER OF FOOLS'

2
The Modernist Mental Hospital



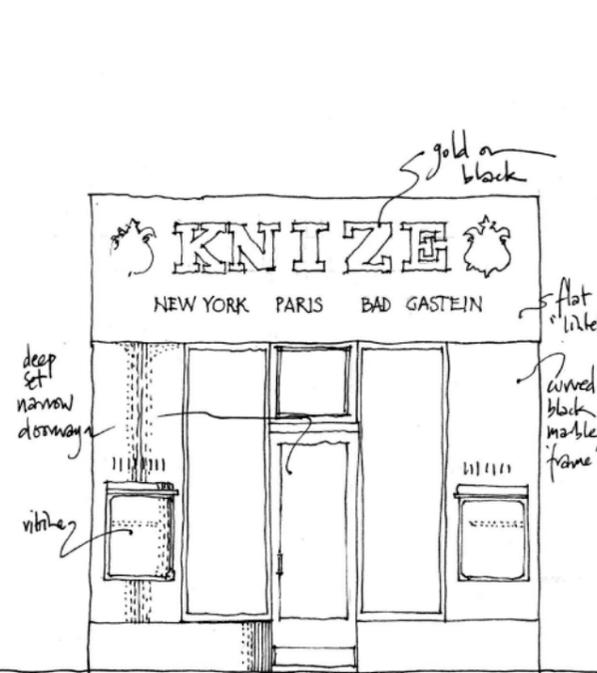
WAGNER — CHURCH AM STEINHOF
1905-7

3
The Therapeutic Spectrum



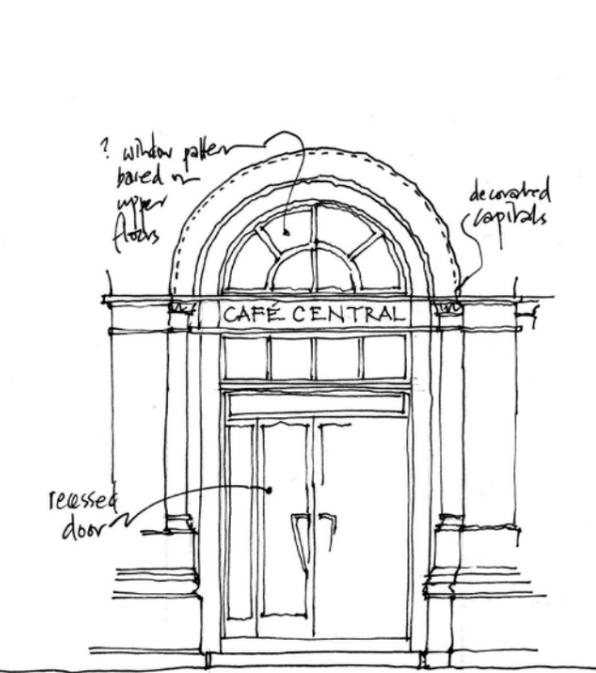
1904 — PURKER SPORF SANATORIUM
ENTRANCE IN EAST FRONT
JOSEF HOFFMANN

5
The Pathological Patron



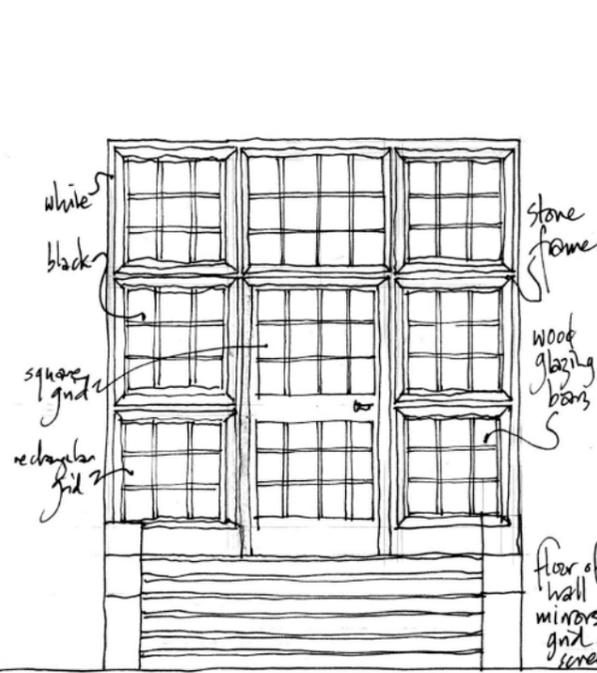
KNIZE SHOPFRONT — GRABEN, VIENNA
1909-13 — ADOLF LOOS

6
The Patient Artist



CAFÉ CENTRAL, VIENNA
FROM AN UNDATED BLACK & WHITE
PHOTOGRAPH.

Madness & Modernity
Mental illness and the visual arts
in Vienna 1900



DUSCHNITZ HOUSE — ADOLF LOOS
1915/16 DOOR TO ENTRANCE HALL

Madness & Modernity
Mental illness and the visual arts
in Vienna 1900

See our website for more, including
image galleries, videos and full information
about related events and tours.

[www.welcomecollection.org/
madnessandmodernity](http://www.welcomecollection.org/madnessandmodernity)

Wellcome Collection
183 Euston Road
London NW1 2BE

opening hours
Tuesday to Sunday 10.00–18.00
Thursdays until 22.00
closed Mondays

Graphic design
Lucienne Roberts +
Exhibition design, gallery guide drawings
Calum Storrie

Madness & Modernity Mental illness and the visual arts in Vienna 1900

When Freud published his first writings on psychoanalysis in Vienna, the visual arts in that city had begun a period of radical change. Vienna's artists and architects were already interested in mental illness and psychiatry. 'Madness' and its cure inspired examples of modern art and design from 'psychological' portraits to the architecture of mental hospitals.

Psychiatric innovation in Vienna 1900 was fostered by an overwhelming sense that the Viennese were living in 'nervous times'. Anxieties about mental health were allied to anxieties about the modern city. The experience of modernity gave a new impetus to the study of madness.

This exhibition presents the range of ways madness and art interacted in Vienna, from designs for utopian psychiatric spaces to the drawings of patients confined in them. It shows how psychiatry influenced early modernism in the visual arts, and how modernism shaped the lives and images of the mentally ill.

1 The Tower of Fools

Eighteenth-century Vienna offered compelling examples of the interaction of art, architecture and madness.

Franz-Xaver Messerschmidt spent the final years of his life in isolation, making a series of grimacing heads. His motives were a mystery, even to his contemporaries, one of whom described him as 'a strange artist and a strange man'. Eight of the heads were rescued from obscurity in 1907 and put on display in Vienna. They were, according to one reviewer, evidence of the 'dreadful lunacy of a realist genius'.

The Tower of Fools (*Narrenturm* in German) was built in 1784 in Vienna under the close supervision of Emperor Joseph II. It was an early example of an institution purpose-built for confining so-called 'dangerous lunatics'. Its design, at once forbidding and geometrically precise, both fascinated and repelled those responsible for designing new psychiatric institutions around 1900.

2 The Modernist Mental Hospital

In 1907 the 'Am Steinhof' psychiatric hospital opened on the edge of Vienna. A publicity campaign emphasised its immense size (60 separate buildings, room for 2,500 patients and 500 staff), state of the art facilities and physical beauty. Otto Wagner, a ground-breaking Viennese architect, designed the urban plan for the complex. He also designed the hospital church, an icon of modern architecture. Wagner helped to transform a mental hospital into what a critic described as 'a white city, shimmering in the bright summer sun'.

Patients were assigned to a pavilion and a daily regime according to gender, the amount of security and supervision they were deemed to need, and ability to pay. Some had the freedom of the grounds, others were confined to cells. Images of patients in this section focus not on their lives but on their physiognomies. They reflect psychiatry's preoccupation with the bodies of the insane.

3 The Therapeutic Spectrum

Around 1900, affluent Viennese saw themselves as living in a 'nervous age'. While mental illness was stigmatised, controllable nervous disorders such as hysteria and neurasthenia were acceptable and in some circles even fashionable.

Mainstream psychiatry focused on the body. Nerve-doctors prescribed recuperative stays in sanatoria outside the city, where a regime of rest and simple diet was supplemented by the latest in technologically-enhanced physical therapies. At the Purkersdorf Sanatorium, outside Vienna, Josef Hoffmann's innovative design provided ordered, hygienic spaces for recovery.

At the same time, Sigmund Freud broke with mainstream psychiatry. For Freud, nervous disorders originated not in the body but in the individual's history and psychology. Rather than retreating to rural clinics, Freud's patients were treated in the consulting room in his urban apartment, amid the clutter of antiques and memorabilia.

4 The Pathological Artist

In 1910 Egon Schiele (1890–1918) embarked on a project of self-portraiture that would preoccupy him throughout his short-lived career. What lay behind this merciless scrutiny of his face and body? Art historians have tended to emphasise Schiele's traumatic early life, when he witnessed the mental decline and death of his father from syphilis. But the late-nineteenth-century obsession with the photograph as a diagnostic tool for the study of mental illness was equally important. The journal produced by the Paris clinic of the neurologist Charcot collated images of the supposed signs of mental illness, from enlarged digits to spinal deformity. It was in circulation in Vienna during this period and was marketed as a source-book for artists searching for new iconographies of the body.

Schiele's celebration of the anarchic potential of his own body flew in the face of mainstream Viennese psychiatry. Grimacing, gesticulating, masturbating and shouting: the pathological artist was born.

5 The Pathological Patron

Portrait-painting was an important business for Vienna's young and ambitious artists. Competition for portrait commissions from the city's high-profile intellectuals was fierce.

Traditionally, portraits were produced to convey messages about the individual. The artists featured here abandoned this notion of singularity by depicting *all* their sitters with withered bodies and twitching faces. Vienna's critics were outraged – these were images of the mentally-ill! Kokoschka came under attack: 'He even divulges the names of those portrayed whose physiognomies leer, gawp and caper out from the sullied canvases with all the signs of quiet or raving madness!'

What was to be gained by representing a group of people as mad? The portraits registered mental illness as a modern condition. They also served to identify an oppositional group of like-minded people around the artist, challenging conservative conventions and mores through their shared pathology.

6 The Patient Artist

Patients in institutions have always made art, but examples from this period survive relatively rarely. Two artists are represented here, the patient known as 'Frau St', confined in a private Viennese asylum, and Josef Karl Rädler, who spent his adult life in two public institutions in and near Vienna.

Frau St assembled carefully-cut strips of newspaper into an irregularly-shaped base for more collage as well as for minute figurative drawings. Rädler used watercolour on paper to create a large series of regularly-shaped works over a period of years. They combined portrait-format depictions of himself and fellow patients as well as scenes of hospital life, with elaborate written inscriptions, front and back.

Other artists in this exhibition, despite their eagerness to present themselves as outsiders, enjoyed a critical and commercial market for their work. These two artists were genuinely isolated within the self-contained world of the institution.

Events programme

Thursday 23 April
19.00–20.30

Bedlam

Find out more about the history of London's famous asylum and how it compares to those featured in the exhibition.

Thursday 7 May
19.00–20.30

Interior Traces

Explore the mind, madness and criminality in a new multi-media performance.

Thursday 14 May
19.00–20.30

The Art and Science of Therapy

Join our guests for a wide ranging discussion of Freud, psychoanalysis, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and more.

Tickets are **free** but must be booked in advance.

For further information visit the Information Point on the Ground Floor or www.wellcomecollection.org/events.