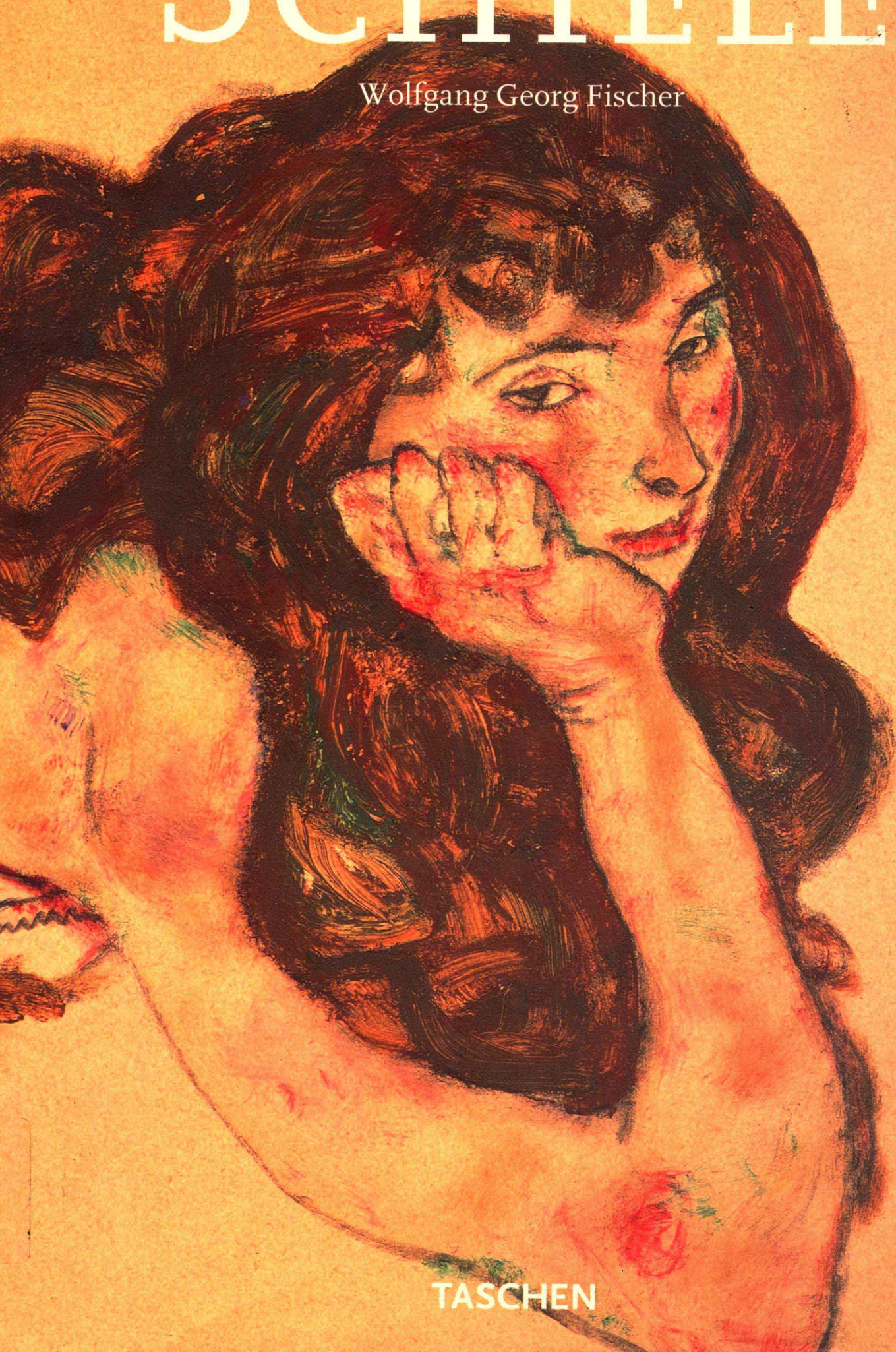


SCHIELE

Wolfgang Georg Fischer



TASCHEN

Wolfgang Georg Fischer

EGON SCHIELE

1890 – 1918

Desire and Decay

TASCHEN

KÖLN LISBOA LONDON NEW YORK PARIS TOKYO

ILLUSTRATION PAGE 2:

Anton Josef Trčka

Egon Schiele (with hands entwined), 1914

Photograph

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Edited by Simone Philippi, Cologne

English translation: Michael Hulse, Cologne

Cover design: Angelika Taschen, Cologne

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Contents

| | |
|-----|--|
| 6 | Fighting Teachers and Society: A Brief Life |
| 46 | A Bird's-Eye View of the World |
| 68 | From Girl Child to <i>Grande Dame</i> |
| 120 | The Image of Humanity: Allegory and Unmasking |
| 146 | The Theatre of the Self |
| 170 | Withered Flowers and Dead Cities: Autumn Landscapes of the Soul |
| 190 | Egon Schiele – A Chronology |
| 196 | The Major Exhibitions |
| 198 | Bibliography |
| 200 | Notes |

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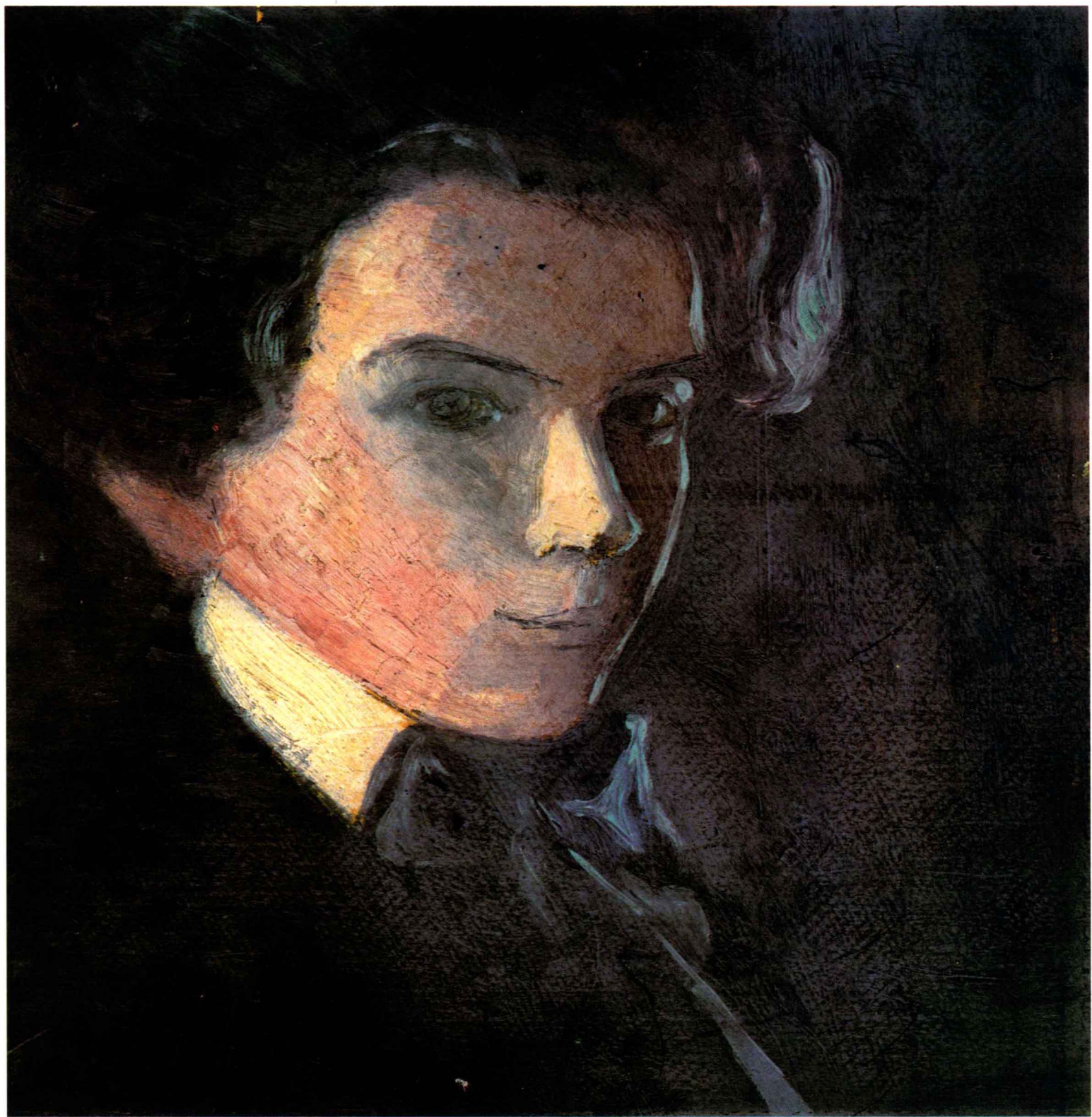
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| 200 | Notes |



Fighting Teachers and Society: A Brief Life

“I love antitheses”, wrote Egon Schiele on 24 April 1912, on one of the drawings he had done in his prison cell. On another, on 23 April, he noted emphatically: “Hindering the artist is a crime, it is murdering life in the bud!” Deeply hurt and humiliated by the charges brought against him, the artist was sounding the note that we hear throughout his early work, a note of defiance, rebellion and provocation. Much of this stance can be understood if we consider the experience that life had by then brought Schiele – at the age of twenty-two.

Time and time again in his letters, Schiele bemoaned the incomprehension of the world about him. “My uncultivated teachers were always my worst enemies”¹, he once wrote. Yet it would be mistaken to see Schiele – as has often been the case – as a misunderstood and embittered artist. He was in fact of a passionate nature, and no defeatist.

Moreover, from the outset he had both friends and patrons who, each in his own way, took his part. Schiele’s greatest distress was caused by the rejection of those who were closest to him – his mother, with her eternal reproaches; his uncle and guardian, irreconcilably disposed; and the teachers who spurned his work. Against all of them, however, Schiele stood his ground.

Schiele, born on 12 June 1890, was of a middle-class background. He was the third child of Adolf Eugen Schiele and his wife Marie (née Soukoup). Adolf Schiele was then stationmaster at Tulln, a small town on the Danube some 30 kilometres upriver from Vienna, in a fertile if scenically unprepossessing part of the country. More interesting, however, were the neighbouring towns with Gothic churches and fortifications, set amidst vineyards sloping down to the Danube, which provided the backdrop to Schiele’s youth: Krems, where he went to first year of grammar school; Klosterneuburg, where he continued his schooling; and Stein, renderings of which appear in his later work.

The Schiele family, which had produced generations of ministers, civil servants, officers and doctors, originally came from northern Germany. On the maternal side, the Soukups came from Krumau in southern Bohemia, where they moved in agricultural and provincial circles. The Schieles had made their move south when Egon’s grandfather, Ludwig Schiele (1817–1862), an architect and railway engineer, builder and first inspector general of the Austrian Imperial Privileged Bohemian Western Railway, settled in Prague. It was probably from this grandfather that the artist inherited his gift for drawing. With a railway father and grandfather,

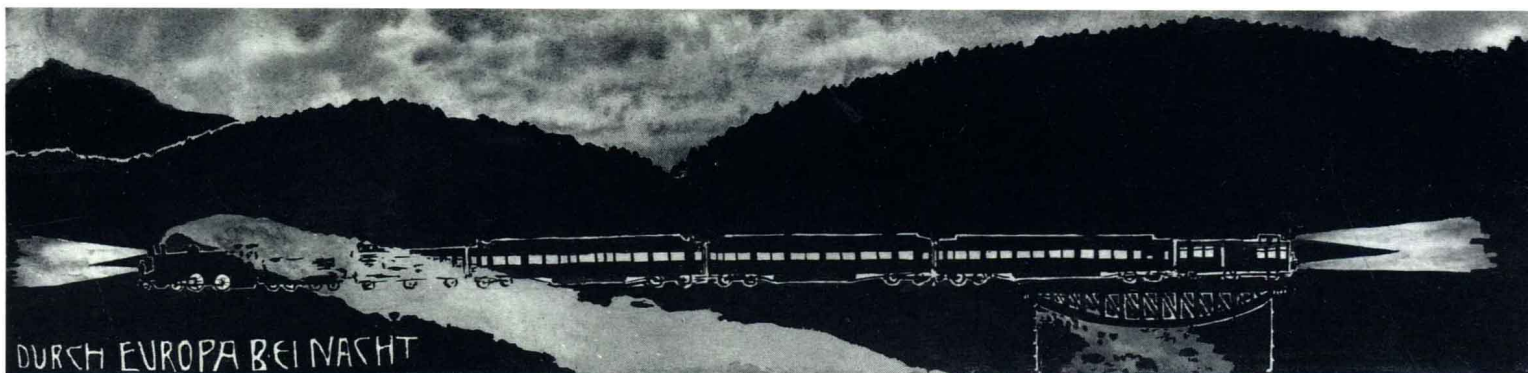


Egon Schiele with palette, 1906
Photograph
Vienna, Graphische Sammlung Albertina

Photographer Adolf Bernhard took this portrait shot of the Klosterneuburg schoolboy with the tools of his hoped-for trade. The young Schiele’s teachers had been quick to recognise his gifts and had advised him to study art.

PAGE 6:
Self-Portrait, Facing Right, 1907
Selbstbildnis nach rechts
Oil on card, 32.4 x 31.2cm
Kallir P 26; private collection, courtesy Galerie St. Etienne, New York

Egon Schiele began his visual soliloquy of self-portraiture early in life. This self-assured picture shows him at seventeen, dressed for the role of the artist, a year after passing the Vienna Academy entrance exam.



Through Europe by Night, 1906

Durch Europa bei Nacht

Watercolour and Indian ink, 9.4 x 39.2cm

Kallir D 76; Vienna, Niederösterreichisches Landesmuseum

The world of railways was in Schiele's blood, so to speak, and he never lost his enthusiasm for trains. He did this almost Expressionist drawing of a brightly-lit train speeding through the night when he was sixteen.

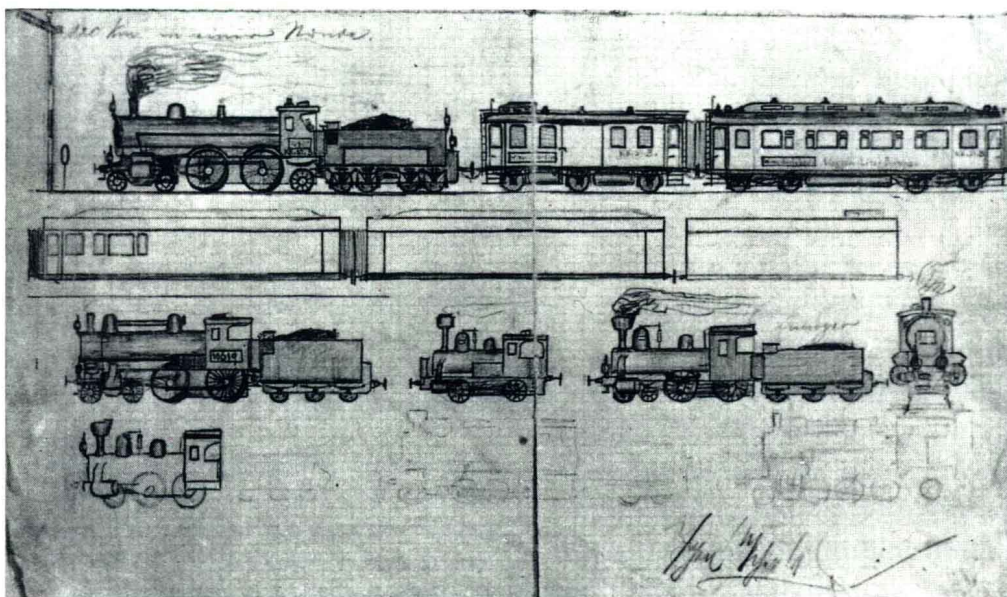
The station at Tulln, Schiele's birthplace, about 1900

Photograph

Vienna, Graphische Sammlung Albertina



Egon's father, Adolf Eugen Schiele, was the stationmaster in Tulln, and the boy grew up with trains on his doorstep. His grandfather Ludwig Schiele had been a railway engineer and an inspector on the Bohemian railways.



Trains, c. 1900

Züge

Pencil on paper

Kallir D 73; private collection, courtesy

Galerie St. Etienne, New York

Inspired by his father's example, Schiele became amazingly skilful at drawing locomotives and rolling stock in his boyhood. His father wanted him to become an engineer and to work on the railways too. At the turn of the century, the railways were at their peak, and stood for the allure of faraway places.

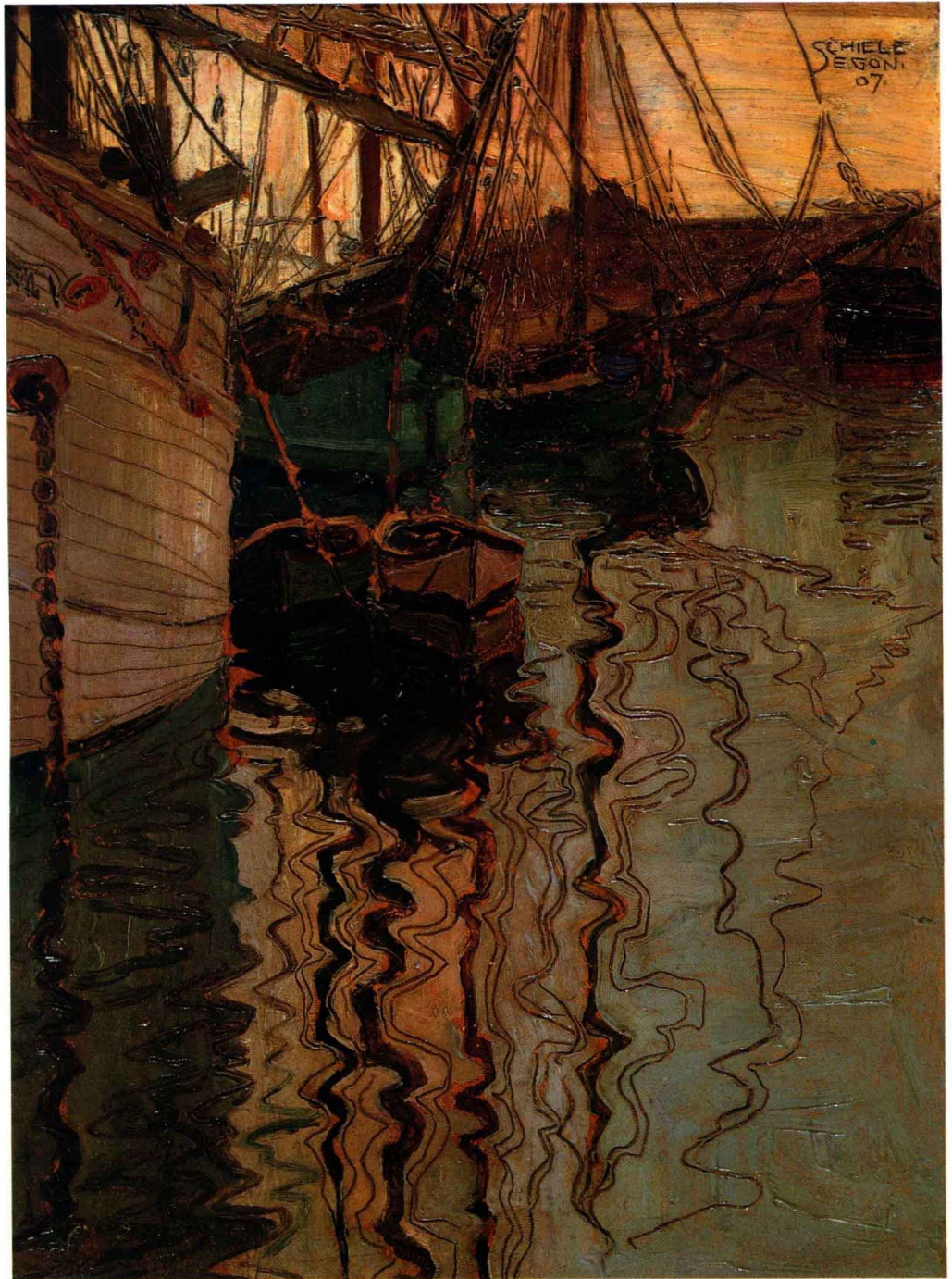
Harbour of Trieste, 1907

Hafen von Triest

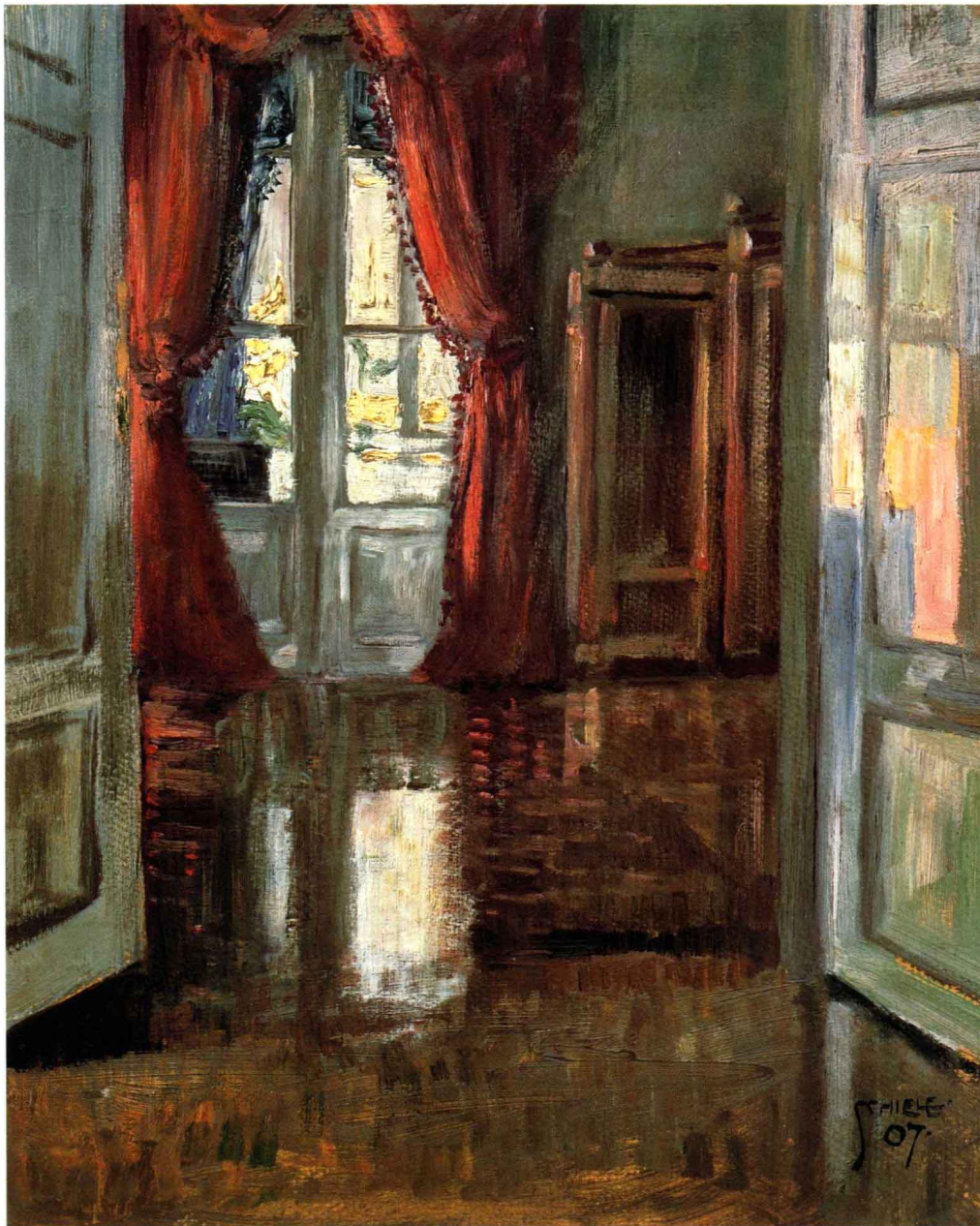
Oil and pencil on card, 25 x 18 cm

Kallir P 84; Graz, Neue Galerie am Landes-
museum Joanneum

Egon Schiele was not slow to take advantage of the free rail travel he enjoyed as a railwayman's son. When he was seventeen, he and his sister Gerti, four years his junior, went to Trieste, then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. His oil sketch of the harbour features the arabesque decorativeness characteristic of Art Nouveau.



and free rail tickets as a child, Schiele developed a taste for travel. Growing up in rooms provided by the company in the station building at Tulln, with good views of the trains that came and departed, he had railways in his blood, as it were; and at sixteen he was already drawing trains in a manner that married technical precision and a visionary longing for far-away places. In the drawing *Through Europe by Night* (1906, p. 8) a train is roaring across a bridge at night, the very image of steam and speed and light against a landscape backdrop of darkly silhouetted hills. The fascination with foreign parts took Schiele on many a rail journey: at seventeen he was already travelling to Trieste with his sister Gerti (Gertrude), four years his junior. In 1913 he made a number of trips, to the Wachau region near Krems, to Krumau and Munich, to Villach, Tarvis and Altmünster; all of these were recorded in his work. In this travel fever there was of course an element of escape from the parental home. Adolf Eugen



View into the Apartment of Leopold and Marie Czihaczek, 1907
Blick in die Wohnung von Leopold und Marie Czihaczek
 Oil on card, 39.1 x 31.2 cm
 Kallir P 35; Vienna, Österreichische Galerie. Belvedere

The middle-class interior of the Czihaczek home, elegant and airy, its parquet floor shining. Egon Schiele lived there with his guardian and aunt when he first arrived in Vienna.

The salon of Leopold (at the piano) und Marie Czihaczek, née Schiele
 Photograph
 Vienna, Graphische Sammlung Albertina

Leopold Czihaczek, seen here in his salon with his wife Marie, a sister of Egon Schiele's father, was a chief inspector on the Emperor Ferdinand Northern Railways. Himself a music lover, he was nonetheless baffled by the rebellious temperament of his artistic nephew.



Schiele (1850–1905) did not have a happy life; the inspector general's son failed to rise higher than stationmaster at Tulln, and at fifty-two, seriously ill (possibly the result of syphilis), took early retirement, only to become the evil spirit of the family in the last three years of his life. His mind became unsettled; he burnt the family's stocks and bonds in a fit of insanity; he had visions of invisible visitors for whom a place must be laid at the table. When he died, Egon was fifteen.

Schiele's uncle Leopold Czihaczek (1842–1929; cf. p. 11), chief inspector of the Emperor Ferdinand Northern Railways and married to Adolf Eugen's sister, became the youngster's guardian. Solemn in appearance and demeanour, Leopold was the prosperous middle class personified: an affluent property owner, a man both pedantic and musical, with a season ticket for the undisputed capital of Viennese theatre, the Burgtheater. A photograph (p. 10) shows him white-haired and with a neatly trimmed goatee beard, seated at the grand piano, with his admiring wife at his side. Their salon is furnished with all the typical turn-of-the-century props: potted palms, white figurines, a decorative lidded vase positioned in front of an enormous fan, and heavy curtains gathered up. The irruption of Leopold's unshaven nephew into this stately realm, in his artist's cravat, poverty-stricken yet laying claims to genius, must have been deeply unsettling. Yet Schiele's much-maligned uncle must surely have had his good sides. When the lad had passed his Academy entrance exam, Leopold sent a telegram to Schiele's mother: "Egon passed with flying colours."

This was in 1906. Egon had had the recommendation of three Klosterneuburg supporters who were convinced that he had the talent needed for the Vienna Academy: Dr. Wolfgang Pauker (p. 18), art historian, choir-master with the Augustinians; Karl Strauch, art teacher at the grammar school; and the painter Max Kahrer. In 1911, however, Leopold Czihaczek relinquished his guardianship, and from that time on remained obdurately deaf to the attempts of well-meaning outsiders (such as Heinrich Benesch, an early collector of Schiele) to pour oil on the troubled waters.

Acceptance into the Vienna Academy marked the end of Schiele's life in a small country town. The change to city life cannot have been easy for him, not least since his means were distinctly modest. In 1910, feeling he had to get out of the city, he wrote to fellow artist Anton Peschka, later his brother-in-law: "Vienna is a city of shadows. It is black..."²

When Schiele arrived in its great metropolis, the Austro-Hungarian Empire was in a state of transition. In the latter half of the 19th century, the emergent middle class had taken its place alongside the aristocracy and church as a force in imperial society. Vienna's Ringstrasse, with its neo-Gothic town hall, its neo-Renaissance opera house and Burgtheater, and its Moorish-inspired stock exchange, was a majestic statement of 19th-century confidence; and yet, even so, the first cracks were fissuring the Habsburg world. Rapid industrialization was attracting immigrants, workers who lived in pitiful conditions in outlying suburban districts that subsequently became part of the city. The population of the capital rose from 801,176 in 1890 to over 1,300,000 at the turn of the century. The days of Hans Makart (1848–1884), that prince among artists who had given the affluent middle classes the bombastic art they wanted, were over.

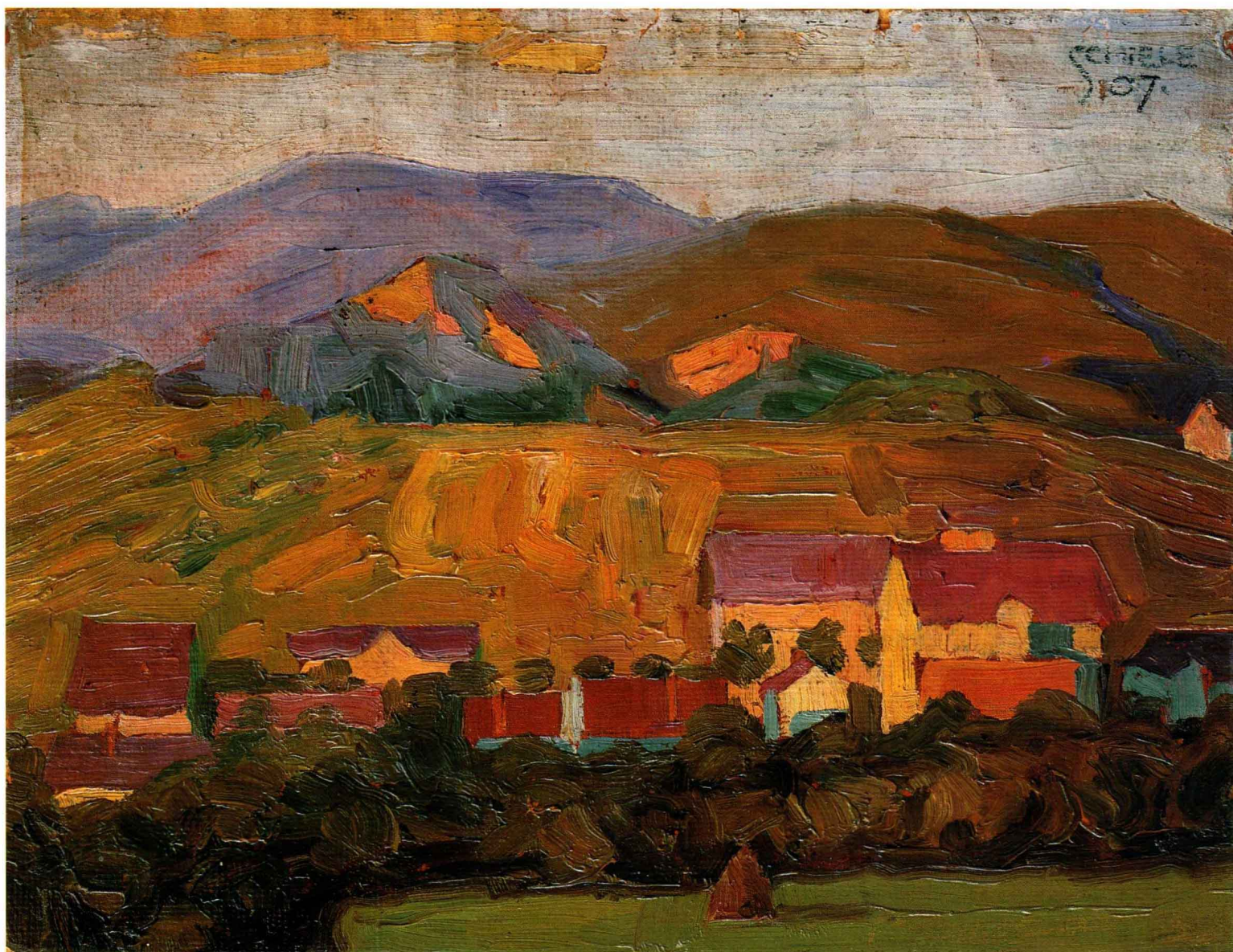


Portrait of Leopold Czihaczek, Standing,
1907

Bildnis Leopold Czihaczek, stehend

Oil on canvas, 149.8 x 49.7 cm

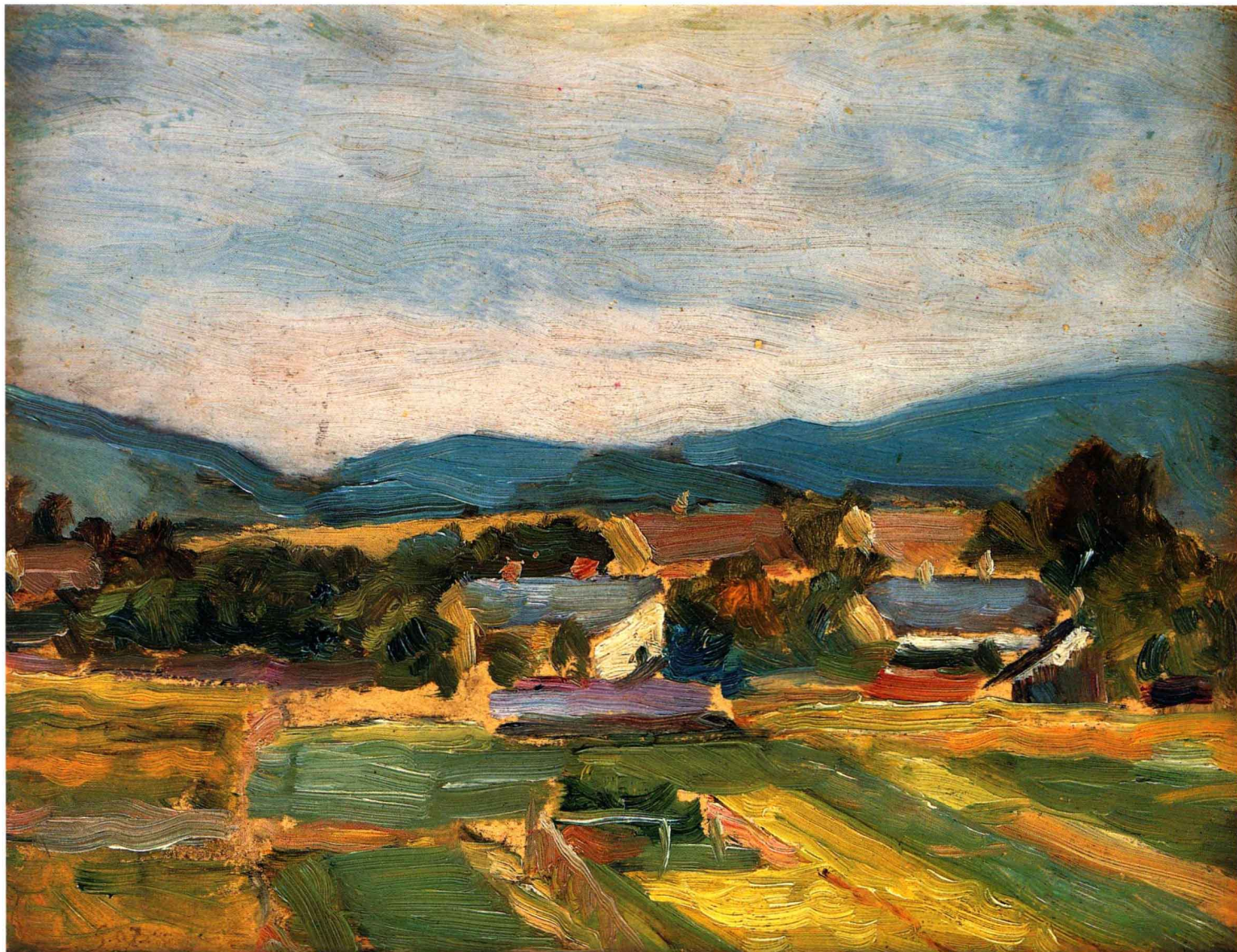
Kallir P 20; private collection



***Village with Mountains*, 1907**
Dorf mit Bergen
 Oil on paper, 21.7 x 28 cm
 Kallir P 64; private collection



***Meadow with Village in Background II*, 1907**
Wiese mit Dorf im Hintergrund II
 Oil on card, 19.8 x 34.4 cm
 Kallir P 66; Vienna, Österreichische Galerie.
 Belvedere



Landscape in Lower Austria, 1907
Landschaft in Niederösterreich
 Oil on card, 17.5 x 22.5 cm
 Kallir P 67; private collection

The young Schiele's first landscapes were in an academic post-Romantic vein. Clearly the work of a gifted youngster with a grasp of his craft, they nonetheless give no indication of the expressive power he was later to develop.



Houses on the Town Square in Klosterneuburg, 1908
Häuser am Rathaus in Klosterneuburg
 Oil on card, 19.4 x 21.9 cm
 Kallir P 127; private collection