

## ***PORTRAIT OF ADELE BLOCH-BAUER I***

Gustav Klimt's first portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer had initially been intended as a wedding anniversary present for her parents. But Klimt was notoriously slow in completing his portraits and it became clear that the intended gift would not be completed in time. He began work on the painting in 1903. In December of that year, Klimt visited the Church of San Vitale in Ravenna, Italy, where he greatly admired the sixth-century Byzantine mosaics. This portrait, completed in 1907, is his masterwork in that style.

Klimt presents Adele in an ambiguous position—it is unclear if she is standing or is seated in an armchair that is covered in sinuous spirals. A golden and highly ornamented halo surrounds her face. Her flushed cheeks and vivid red lips convey the sensuality of the woman behind the portrait. Adele's hands are clasped together in an unusual fashion to mask a disfigured finger about which she was extremely self-conscious.

Adele Bloch-Bauer is bedecked in precious jewelry, including a diamond choker, which had been a wedding present from her husband Ferdinand. (When the Nazis seized the Bloch-Bauer collection, this stunning necklace ended up in the possession of notorious Nazi leader Hermann Göring.) The form-fitting sheath she wears is adorned with all-seeing eye motifs set within golden triangles. The diaphanous cloak that surrounds her is studded with her initials "AB," raised in low relief. The black and white trim at the lower left edge recalls decorative elements on pieces of furniture from Klimt's studio that were fabricated by the Wiener Werkstätte. The portrait has been called the greatest in the artist's "golden style."