

An imaginary letter from Gustav Klimt to Charles Rennie Mackintosh.

Dear Charles:

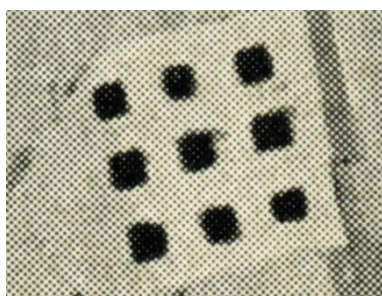
I have fond memories of your great exhibition in Vienna in 1900. Kolo is enthusiastic about the "magic" chair he acquired at the Exhibition with Margaret's poetic panel and now he has it at home. Occasionally he sits there and thinks about the delicate lines of Glasgow Art that have influenced him so much.

Fritz, who translated this letter to English, is eager to receive Margaret's frieze, based on *The Seven Princesses* of Maeterlinck, for her music room. What a great work of art! You cannot imagine the admiration that already arouses among the Viennese and foreign attendees. With the frieze the living room will become complete and will be a total work of art. Here we call it "Gesamkunstwerk".

I have to make a confession: I am determined to make for you and Margaret a portrait, as a tribute. It is not usual for me to portray couples. My pictures are almost always single women, but you are so in love! To get inspired I have thought a lot about the story of Apollo and Daphne. I have been looking at the Bernini sculpture with care, especially how the toes of Daphne lengthen to form roots, but I have again read the phrase of Ovid that says, when Apollo sees Daphne becoming Laurel: "Apollo loves this one too and with a right hand placed on the trunk feels that her heart still trembles under the new bark, and having embraced the branches as limbs with his own arms, he gives the wood kisses, and the wood shrinks from the kisses".

Apollo's kiss to Daphne, the "kiss of the wood", has never been represented in art history. We have to break this taboo. And for that purpose, we have to take into account the turn that Petrarch gives to the history, becoming Apollo himself and transforming himself into a laurel to be with his beloved, the laurel alter ego, Laura. It is a beautiful story of Petrarch whom, as you will remember, I painted together with Laura in the "Italian Renaissance" section on the staircase of the Vienna Museum of Art History. I also like to recite Petrarch from time to time. You know the history of the *Canzoniere* of Petrarch because you drew it in the congratulations of the new year that you sent us and that we had the pleasure of publishing in our magazine *Ver Sacrum* in 1901. That is why I think you will like the idea. I also remember an illustration signed by you (although the style is more the one of Margaret if you allow me to tell you). The illustration is headed by the last words that Apollo says to Daphne in Ovid's metamorphosis and in it there is also a passionate kiss (I annex in a separate sheet a copy of the illustrations in case you do not remember them).

So, if you accept that, I will portray you with a kiss to Margaret and I will title the painting "the lovers" (Liebespaar) (now I remember that your admirer Muthesius called you and Margaret "Künstlerpaar"). It will be a very special and very symbolic painting since the crown of Apollo will be almost imperceptible and the laurel branches of Daphne will grow downwards, instead of upwards. It will be difficult to guess the meaning, except for yourselves. Daphne -Margaret- will retain its beauty as Ovid writes, her legs and feet will become roots and the laurel flowers will be seen on her head, turned into the top of a tree! As a symbol of yours I will draw your heart with black and white squares that are so familiar to you. It will be a clear sign of identity because, as you know, thanks to the influence of my dear Emilie, my dresses convey meanings. I am sending you a drawing of your heart in the future painting. What do you think?



Our new group of artists (already out of the Secession) is planning to do an Austrian Art Exhibition in Vienna in 1908, and I will present your painting next to the one which Adele Bloch-Bauer asked me to do, because I think they will be, at least, at the same level as works of art. Kolo will decorate the room.

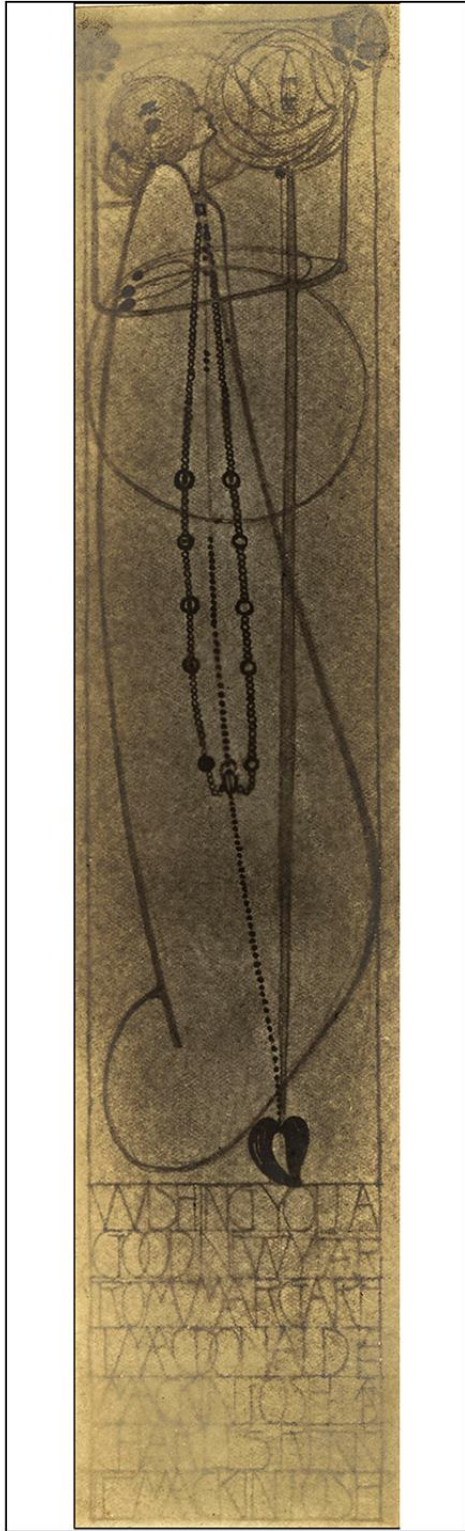
I hope we will meet at the Imperial-Royal Austro-Hungarian Exhibition in London next year.

I'm also thinking about how to make the frieze for the dining room at the Stoclet Palace in Brussels, work commissioned to Joseph (he is very happy). I can't help but remember the "life of the rose" panels that Margaret designed for the dining room of the art lover's house project. Perhaps I will make the frieze depicting the fulfillment (Die Erfüllung) of your metamorphosis!

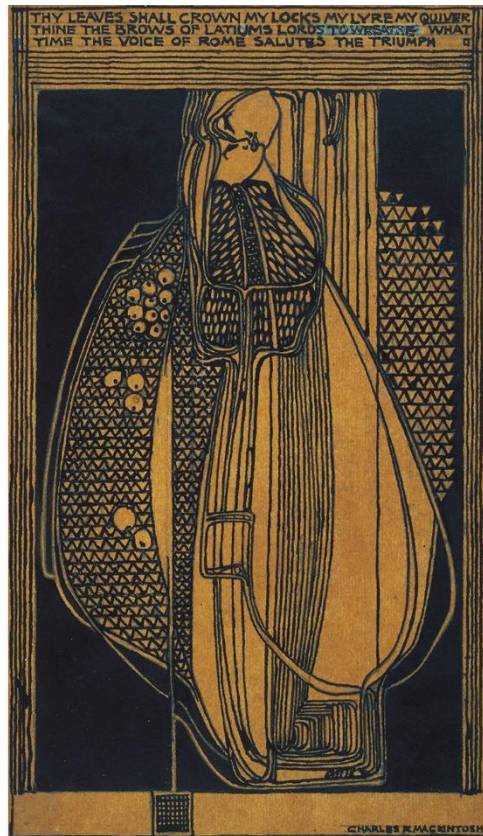
Kind regards from Vienna.

December 16th, 1905.

Signed: Gustav Klimt.



Ver Sacrum, 1901, Heft 23.



Hunterian Museum and Art Gallery.