Egon Schiele was born on 12 June 1890 in Tulln, a small town not far from Vienna. He was the third child of Marie and Adolf Schiele and grew up with his three sisters: Elvira and Melanie, who were both older, and Gerti, who was born in 1894. The Schiele family lived in the apartment at the railway station in Tulln to which Adolf Schiele, as the stationmaster and railway official in charge, was entitled.

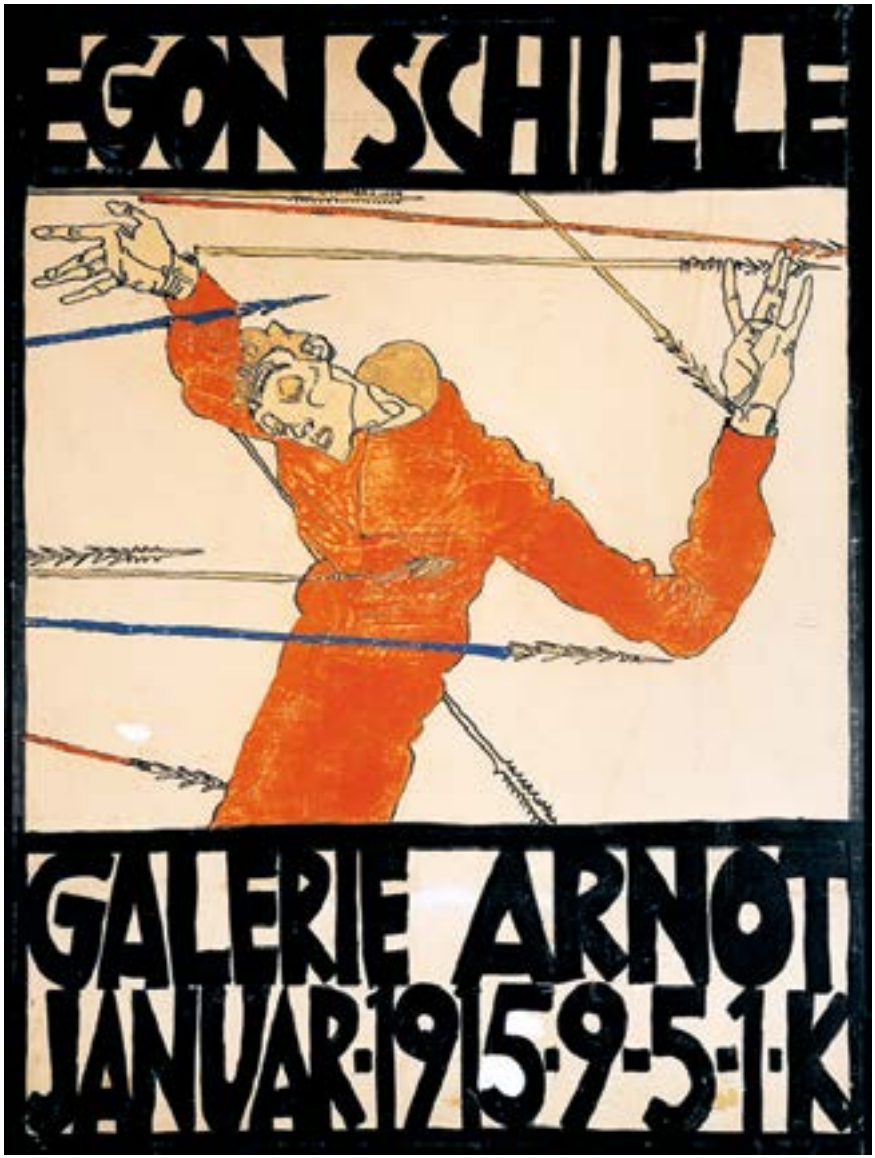
Egon was fascinated by the railways. His sister Gerti recalled that her brother was able to imitate perfectly the noises the trains made because he spent a large part of the day "in front of the station building, shuffling, hissing, huffing and whistling". He also took up the subject in his drawings: even as a child he sketched everything around him, mostly in pencil. During the early years that included above all trains and rails, crossing barriers and the station building.

Egon loved drawing from the very start, but he found learning at school very difficult. During his first two school years, he was taught by a private tutor, after which he attended primary school, where his marks were at best mediocre. But his parents had very definite ideas: they wanted their son to study for a technical profession. There was no secondary school in Tulln, so when Egon was ten years old they sent him in the first instance to Krems. Egon attended grammar school in the town on the Danube, some forty kilometres from home—but with little success. He even had to repeat a year. In 1902 he transferred to Klosterneuburg, which was nearer to Tulln and where a grammar school had just been opened.

Adolf and Marie Schiele together with the children Egon, Melanie and Elvira, c.1892

Initially he lived in Klosterneuburg at the home of his former tutor; in 1904 the rest of the family joined him in the town.

Portrait of Marie Schiele with fur collar, 1907



Poster design featuring Saint Sebastian (self-portrait), 1914

Egon Schiele, posing, 1914

have left my precarious existence behind me." His poems were also published for the first time in 1914. Arthur Roessler sent them to the Berlin magazine *Die Aktion*, an important publication for Expressionist poetry and graphics. Schiele repeatedly submitted further works, drawings, woodcuts and poems. In 1916 an entire issue was dedicated to him in the form of a special edition.

In the meantime, the First World War had broken out: on 4 August 1914, Austria-Hungary declared war on the neighbouring country of Serbia. Schiele, who was small of stature and had suffered from a congenital heart condition since birth, was assessed as unfit for military service. But even away from the front, suffering and death were omnipresent, with the newspapers disseminating gruesome pictures of the war. Schiele wrote to his mother that he was so repulsed by the military uniforms that he could not even leave the house. And in any case he was not a patriot; he did not care in which nation he lived. In November that year, Schiele described to his sister Gerti how incisive even the first months of the war had been for him: "We live in the most violent time the world has ever seen.—We have become accustomed to all privations—hundreds of thousands of people are perishing pitifully—and each one must endure his fate alive or dead—we have become hard and fearless.—What happened before 1914 belongs in another world."

Nevertheless, Schiele continued to exhibit his works as energetically as before; even during the war years he showed and sold his works in Vienna, Berlin, Munich and Dresden, and also in Brussels and Rome. Schiele had his first solo exhibition at the age of twenty-four, at the end of 1914 and beginning of 1915. He also designed the exhibition poster for the show in the Galerie Arnot in Vienna. On it he showed himself pierced by arrows. It was a representation that referred back to a popular motif, the martyrdom of the Roman soldier Saint Sebastian. Schiele, however, was not alluding to a religious context, but rather to the sentence he had received in Neulengbach. After his spell in prison, he portrayed himself several times in similar martyr-like roles, as a hermit, a monk and a preacher (pages 64/65).

Schiele also took up another form of self-portrait in 1914. He made the acquaintance of the

WORKS

Portrait of Arthur Roessler, 1910

Oil on canvas
100 × 100 cm
Wien Museum, Vienna

The art critic Arthur Roessler discovered Schiele at the exhibition of the New Art Group in 1909. He wrote a detailed review of the show in the newspaper *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, for which he worked as a critic: "Some of them will fall by the wayside, but I consider some of them to be mentally and physically strong enough to 'survive'. Among these I count the extraordinarily talented Egon Schiele, Toni Faistauer, Franz Wiegele, Hans Ehrlich, [...] all those I have named have an astonishingly pronounced feeling for style."
From then onward Roessler accompanied Schiele's career enthusiastically and promoted him wherever he could: either with positive reviews, advice in business matters, or by establishing contacts with collectors. Schiele and Roessler became friends; the critic also purchased a number of drawings by the young artist, and commissioned Schiele to paint this portrait.
The square canvas shows Roessler in a dark suit sitting against a bright, empty background. He is lost in his own thoughts, his eyes closed. He has turned his head noticeably towards his left side, while his body is turned in the other direction. This creates a tension in the figure which is emphasised by the bent arms and outstretched hands.
This was to become Schiele's style. He portrays the body in fragmentary fashion. Here he cuts off Roessler's legs abruptly at the bottom edge of the picture. Before long he would dispense entirely with the design of the background. Here, too, he provides no points of reference; he does not even record the chair on which Roessler is sitting. His sole concern is the inner life of the sitter. Schiele's portraits of 1910 thus mark a turning point in his creative work as he moved on from *Jugendstil* (Art Nouveau) to Expressionism.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Girl in Ochre-Coloured Dress, 1911

Pencil, black chalk on Japan paper
48.2 × 32 cm
Albertina, Vienna

As later recalled by his painter friend Paris von Gütersloh, in Schiele's studio there were always "two or three small or larger girls from the neighbourhood, from the street, whom he had spoken to in nearby Schönbrunn Park, ugly and pretty ones, clean ones and others who were unwashed, and [who] sat around in his studio doing nothing [...] They slept, recovered from beatings by their parents, lolled around lazily, which they were not allowed to do at home, combed their hair quickly or somewhat longer, depending on whether it was short or tangled, pulled their skirts up or down, tied or untied their bootlaces."
Children wandered in and out of Schiele's studio in Vienna: during his sojourns in the country in Krumau and later in Neulengbach, he drew children from the neighbourhood on countless occasions. Sometimes his preferred technique was to use watercolours. In 1911, for example, he mostly worked with water-soluble paints which flow over the paper and do not cover it very densely. As a result, the paper on which Schiele was drawing continued to shine through. Mostly he simply placed the children, like his figures in general, on an empty sheet of paper. He provided no details about the space around them. This is also true of the girl in the yellow-ochre dress gazing at us earnestly with her big, dark eyes and her hands folded. The child is probably sitting, but Schiele does not even tell us that much. He concentrates entirely on the people he is portraying. And as in his portraits of adults, Schiele does not prettify the children's likenesses in any way. The girls and boys he draws have dirty hands or marks on their faces; they are quite often shown wearing torn clothing. Only a few of them look happy or playful.
Schiele's contemporaries were suspicious of the fact that he drew children in the first place, all the more so because he sometimes showed them half-naked. Even in Vienna he created a scandal which his artist colleagues warned him about. It would not be long before their concerns were confirmed.

Woman in Black Stockings (Wally Neuzil), 1913

Gouache, watercolour and pencil on paper
32.2 × 48 cm
Private collection

Schiele's drawings, mostly executed with pencil and chalk, are not necessarily preliminary studies for pictures. On the contrary: most sheets are independent artworks. Accordingly, Schiele also signed his drawings exactly like his paintings. Schiele's collectors appreciated his drawings from the start. And the drawings, in turn, proved a valuable source of income for the artist. Some of them were published as reproductions in separate portfolios which were sold to collectors.
Schiele's erotic sketches were also desirable collector's objects even during his lifetime, and at times it was these that enabled him to keep his head above water financially. His model for many of these works, including the *Woman in Black Stockings*, was his partner Wally Neuzil. Here Schiele shows her from a low angle; she is leaning back with one leg crossed over the other. Her light petticoat has slid upwards across her thigh and the jagged hem has fallen to one side, so that the black stockings emphasise the naked flesh in between. Schiele displays as much as he conceals: the model has turned her head towards her raised shoulder and she has covered her upper body with her arm, whilst the splayed legs reveal her genitals.
The undisguised sexuality which characterised Schiele's nude drawings was as radical as it was new. Nudity had been displayed in nude pictures for centuries, but it had remained primarily the preserve of goddesses or other allegorical persons. Schiele's nudes, by contrast, are daring; he shows real women, explicitly and in an unprettified manner, and without offering a narrative context. He thus put to the test the rigid sexual morality of his time. And he dared even more than that: his nude models do not gaze dreamily into the distance or even have their eyes closed. But they involve the viewer by gazing directly at him.

Four Trees, 1917

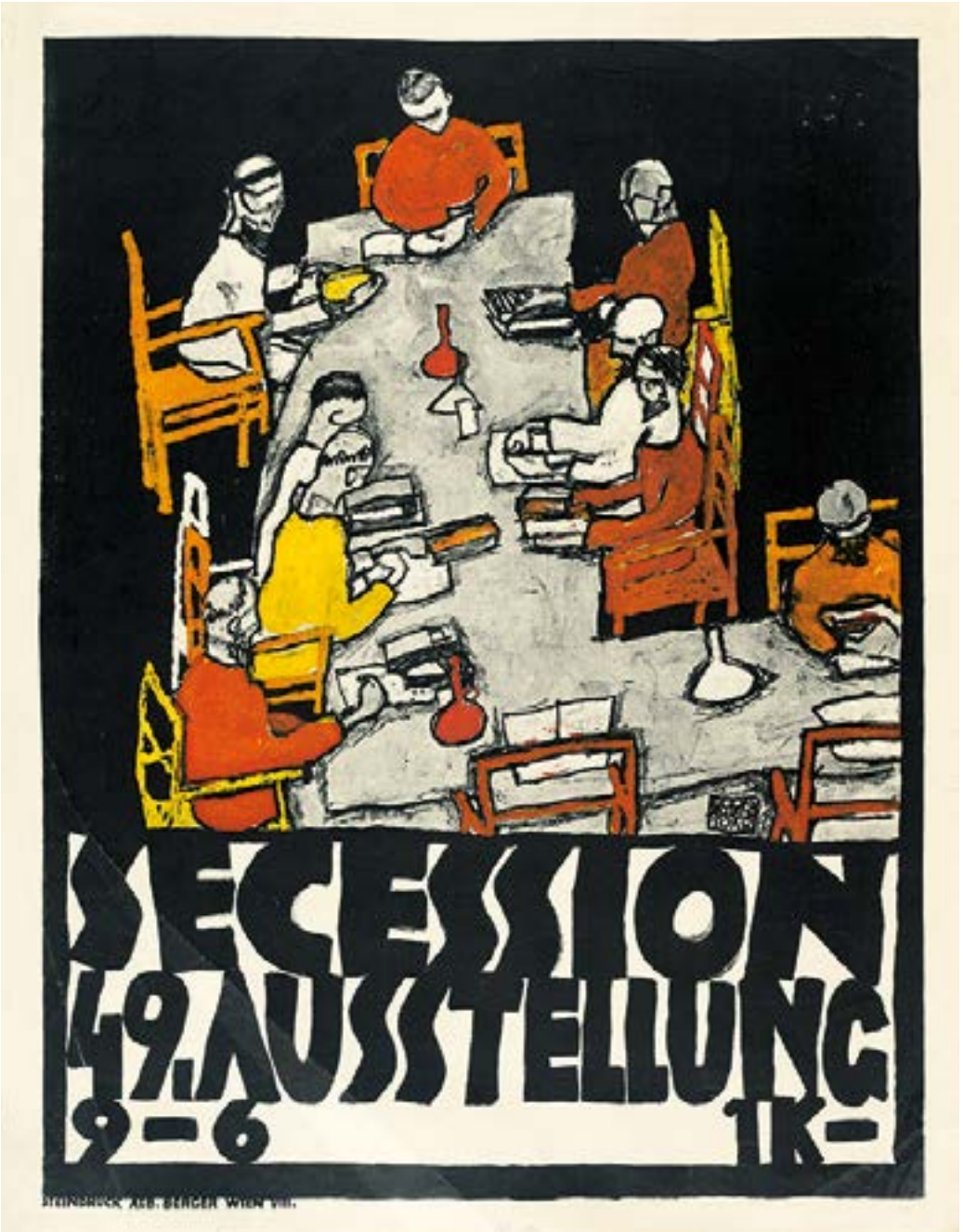
Oil on canvas
110.5 × 141 cm
Belvedere, Vienna

Schieles's representations of figures are so famous that we sometimes almost forget how many landscape pictures he also painted. He often recorded streets and houses in the little town of Krumau, but in many of his landscapes the protagonists are large sunflowers and wind-blown trees. In this large-format oil painting, which hangs in the Belvedere in Vienna, trees are also the central motif, but the mood has changed. Here there is no trace of the solitary, bare trees of winter which he painted during his early years (pages 76/77).
Instead, Schiele shows here an evening landscape in autumn in warm colours. The horizontal lines of the sky form a contrast with the four chestnut trees which rise vertically skywards. Standing in a row in front of gently rolling hills, they still have brownish-red foliage; one of the trees has already lost most of its leaves. In the distance, almost exactly in the middle of the picture, the sun is setting as a red ball of fire. The sky around it is bathed in the reddish stripes of the evening light, while further up Schiele has added darker shades of grey and blue. In some places we can clearly recognise the brushstrokes and splashes of colour on the canvas.
Schiele discovered this preference for symmetrical lines and patterns from another artist: Ferdinand Hodler. The Swiss painter became famous in Vienna following the exhibitions in the Secession. The young Egon Schiele must also have discovered him there and learned to appreciate his art. Characteristic of Hodler's style is this parallelism: a symmetrical picture structure, and the emphasis of horizontal lines and stripes of colour. Hodler recognised these patterns in nature and copied them in his pictures. The artists of Viennese Modernism were strongly influenced by his works—not only Schiele: Gustav Klimt was also impressed by Hodler's pictures. It was he who invited the Swiss artist to the Secession exhibition in 1904, thereby contributing in no small measure to Hodler's fame.

Exhibition Poster for the 49th Vienna Secession, 1918

Colour lithograph on paper
68.5 × 53 cm
Vienna

The 49th Exhibition of the Vienna Secession focused above all on Egon Schiele: the prominent centre room in the building was reserved for him, and he showed almost fifty of his works there—oil paintings, watercolours and drawings. The exhibition was a great success, both artistically and financially. Schiele sold five of his paintings and several drawings while the exhibition was still in progress. He was delighted at the large number of people interested in his work: "I think people are incredibly interested in my new art. [...] On the opening day you really couldn't move at noon,—so many visitors."
Schiele was not only the principal artist in the exhibition; he had also been in charge of the organisation of the show during the previous months. He had even designed the exhibition poster on the basis of his painting *The Round Table*. In the poster he harked back in a highly symbolic way to depictions of the Last Supper. He shows a group of artists, immersed in books and sitting at a large, rectangular table.
We cannot easily recognise the people he has portrayed, but it was intended to represent Schiele's artist colleagues who supported the modern approach to art, including Paris von Gütersloh, Anton Faistauer and Otto Wagner. Schiele himself is sitting at the top end of the table; the empty chair at this end of the table, on the other hand, recalls Gustav Klimt, who had died a short while previously.
The exhibition poster was produced using the technique of lithography. Here the subject is drawn onto lithographic stones, and these are then used to print the image on paper, each stone printing a different colour. Usually about 300 to 400 prints of lithographs like this were made, but during this final year of the war it may have been fewer. The yellowish paper is thin—after all, the posters were intended for advertising purposes and were not supposed to be preserved indefinitely.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