



Urban Folly II : Emilie Louise Flöge, by Stephan Goldrajch

This work, conceived in 2023 by the artist Stephan Goldrajch as part of the *2023 Brussels Art Nouveau Year*, curated by Paul Dujardin, is a tribute to the Viennese fashion designer and businesswoman Emilie Louise Flöge (1874-1952). It is a monumental sculpture, around 3,50 m high, made of mesh on a metal structure, inspired by Emilie Flöge's textile creations. It is located on the Avenue de Tervueren in Woluwe-Saint-Pierre, close to the Stoclet Palace, and will be inaugurated on 19 April 2024.

Emilie Louise Flöge

The Flöge family belonged to the inner circle of the painter Gustav Klimt (1862-1918), who painted several portraits of its members. In 1891, Klimt's brother Ernst (1864-1892) married Hélène Flöge (1871-1936), and they had a daughter together, also named Hélène. Following the early death of his brother, Gustav Klimt became his very young niece's official guardian, strengthening his ties with the Flöges and contributing to the development of a special and unique relationship with Emilie, the family's fourth child. Whether it was romantic or platonic, this strong and trusting relationship would last until the painter died in 1918 and left Emilie part of his estate.

While Klimt's art and fame still endure, Emilie Flöge's name has been somewhat forgotten, known only to Klimt enthusiasts as his model, close confidante and companion (certain experts believe that the couple in the *Kiss* painting represent Gustav Klimt and Emilie Flöge).

Nonetheless, Emilie Flöge left her mark on Viennese society at the beginning of the 20th century as a fashion designer and as an independent and successful businesswoman. From 1904 onwards and for more than three decades, she and her sisters Hélène and Pauline, and then her niece Hélène, ran the fashion boutique *Schwestern Flöge* (the Flöge sisters), which established itself as an influential fashion centre in the Austrian capital, employing nearly 80 dressmakers at its peak. The sisters entrusted the interior decoration of the boutique to Josef Hoffmann and Koloman Moser, who applied to it the total artwork vision (*Gesamtkunstwerk*) of the *Wiener Werkstätte* (WW) and its taste for simple, geometric forms (which can also be found in the interior decoration of the Stoclet Palace, also by Hoffmann's hand).

The Flöge sisters' clientele belonged to the Viennese upper classes. To satisfy their expectations, Emilie Flöge travelled to London and Paris every year to keep up with the latest trends. Nevertheless, she produced her own designs, which were revolutionary for the time, to say the least: her wide dresses made of geometrically patterned fabrics inspired by the WW aimed to free the female body from constricting corsets, contributing to a form of liberation of the feminine silhouette. Several Klimt portraits show beautiful Viennese women wearing Flöge creations. Moreover, photographs from that period - some taken by Klimt, notably for the magazine *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration* - show that Emilie Flöge was the best representative of the *Schwestern Flöge* company; both in private and on official occasions, she wore her own creations, adorned with jewellery produced by the *Wiener Werkstätte*.

Pauline died in 1917, Hélène in 1936, leaving only Emilie and her niece Hélène to keep the Flöge sisters' boutique going. The Anschluss in 1938 forced them to close for good. Bit by bit, Emilie Flöge, model and companion of Gustav Klimt, close friend of Josef Hoffmann and the artists of the *Wiener Werkstätte*, joined the ranks of talented and spirited women history has made invisible.

The artist

Stephan Goldrajch is a contemporary artist who lives and works in Brussels. Inspired by ancestral traditions, rites and techniques used by craftsmen, he is fascinated by human and social interactions. Stephan's artistic approach uses various techniques (crocheting, weaving, embroidery, sewing, etc.). It is also based on the need to create links and generate relationships. He loves working with the uninitiated, with those who do not play the art game



and who let themselves be swept away by a mysterious experience. An experience that overturns roles and conventions. In most cases, he starts from gaps and deficiencies to rewrite and reshape a story and to create an elsewhere.

More on Emilie Flöge & Gustav Klimt

TRETTER, S., WEINHÄUPL P., *Gustav Klimt. Emilie Flöge. Reforming Fashion.*

Inspiring Art 1874-1952, Vienna, 2016.

Familie und Umfeld » Gustav Klimt-Datenbank (klimt-database.com)

Orte » Gustav Klimt-Datenbank (klimt-database.com)

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