

GOTHIC MODERN

MUNCH, BECKMANN, KOLLWITZ

19 September 2025 – 11 January 2026

In its major autumn exhibition, the ALBERTINA Museum has set out to stage a highly charged encounter between modernism and Gothic art. The spotlight here is on masterpieces ranging from symbolism to expressionism that take inspiration from medieval art's emotional power.

Modernism was, above all, a radical break with the long-dominant academic tradition—and concurrent with this break, many artists turned their gaze to a far earlier era: the Gothic period. In medieval art, they discovered subjects, motifs, and forms of expression that aligned more closely with their own search for truth than did the norms taught at the academies. In Gothic works, they found reflections of much that stirred them most deeply. Themes such as love and sexuality, death and grief, and faith and doubt as well as engagement with social roles and identities had already been present in the Middle Ages and continued to be of central significance in the art of the modern era.

Gothic Modern demonstrates how artists' recourse to art created prior to the rise of the academic tradition enabled them to forge new creative paths. In doing so, major works by modern artists created between 1875 and 1925 will be placed in direct confrontation with iconic paintings, prints, and sculptures by Old Masters. In this extraordinary juxtaposition of artistic eras, *Gothic Modern* reveals how modernism was less a fundamental break with the past than it was a movement in which purposeful engagement with the art of the late Middle Ages played a vital role. Unlike the nostalgic backward gaze of romanticism or the antiquarian reconstructions of historicism, perspectives that were often placed in the service of political or national self-assurance, the focus now lay squarely on art's inherent aesthetic qualities. Modern artists drew inspiration from the expressive visual language of a style that was perceived as raw and unrefined. Increasingly, they sought to visualize inner states and to process existential crises through their work. In predominantly religious imagery, they encountered profoundly human emotions such as love, suffering, and grief rendered in ways that provided starting points for their own artistic explorations. Further points of fascination were traditional artistic techniques such as woodcut and book art as well as stained glass and tapestry-making, which were now rediscovered and integrated into contemporary art production.

It was particularly in German-speaking and Northern European countries that this recentering of the Gothic aesthetic manifested itself as part of the contemporary artistic outlook. Around 1900, Vienna—an important center of modernism—embodied a vibrant melting pot of these innovative artistic currents and a key node of transnational exchange among artists. Figures such as Akseli Gallen-Kallela, Käthe Kollwitz, and Edvard Munch exhibited at the Vienna Secession and engaged in fruitful dialogue with the local art scene, while others like Max Beckmann and Helen Schjerfbeck came to Vienna in search of inspiration.

With its approximately 200 works, this large-scale thematic exhibition sheds light on a phenomenon apparent between 1875 and 1925 in which numerous artists—including Paula Modersohn-Becker, Max Beckmann, Otto Dix, Vincent van Gogh, Gustav Klimt, Käthe Kollwitz, Edvard Munch, Egon Schiele, and Helen Schjerfbeck—deliberately sought inspiration in the expressive power of artistic forebears such as Hans Holbein the Younger, Albrecht Dürer, Lucas Cranach, and Hans Baldung Grien. Encounters with the medieval aesthetic stirred deep emotions and opened up new avenues via which artists could grapple with the fundamental questions of human existence.

Gothic Modern will be on view at the ALBERTINA Museum from 19 September 2025 to 11 January 2026 and will feature numerous international loans alongside works from the museum's own collection.

Curator: Ralph Gleis

Co-Curator: Julia Zaunbauer

Assistant Curators: Lydia Eder, Nina Eisterer

The exhibition has been initiated by the Finnish National Gallery / Ateneum Art Museum, Helsinki and made in collaboration with them and the National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design, Oslo. It stems from an international research project led by Professor Juliet Simpson (Coventry University) as Guest Curator in partnership with the Ateneum Art Museum in 2018.

A comprehensive 292-page catalogue published by Hirmer Verlag to accompany the exhibition will feature numerous illustrations and written contributions by Ralph Gleis, Stephan Kemperdick, Marja Lahelma, Juliet Simpson, Vibeke Waallann Hansen, and Julia Zaunbauer.

Press images

The following images are available free of charge in the Press section of www.albertina.at.
Legal notice: The images may only be used in connection with reporting on the exhibition.



Vincent van Gogh
Skull of a Skeleton with Burning Cigarette, 1886
Oil on canvas
32,3 x 24,8 cm
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (Vincent van Gogh Foundation)



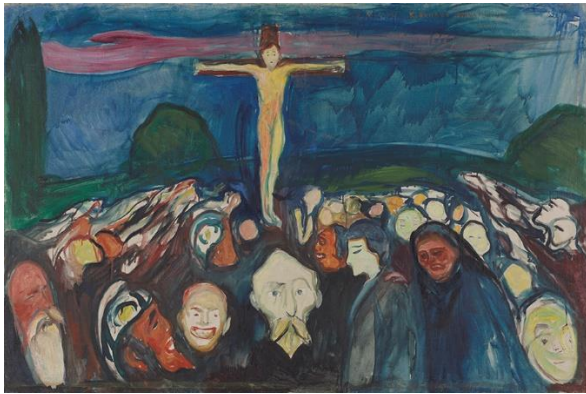
Marianne Stokes
Melisande, c. 1895
Tempera on canvas
87 x 52 cm
Wallraf-Richartz-Museum & Fondation Corboud, Köln



Arnold Böcklin
Self-Portrait with Death Playing the Fiddle, 1872
Oil on canvas
75 x 61 cm
Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Alte Nationalgalerie
© Photo: bpk / Nationalgalerie, SMB / Jörg P. Anders



Max Beckmann
Adam and Eve, 1917
Oil on canvas
79,8 x 56,7 cm
Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Neue Nationalgalerie
© Photo: bpk / Nationalgalerie, SMB / André van Linn



Edvard Munch
Golgotha, 1900
Oil on canvas
80,5 x 120,5 cm
Munchmuseet, Oslo
© Photo: Munchmuseet / Ove Kvavik



Akseli Gallen-Kallela
Ad Astra (2nd version), 1907
Oil on canvas, painted and gilded wooden shrine
Closed: 120 cm H x 117 cm W x 12 cm D
Open: 196 cm W
Weight: 25 kg
Villa Gyllenberg, Stiftung Signe und Ane Gyllenberg,
Helsinki
Villa Gyllenberg, Signe und Ane Gyllenberg
Foundation, Helsinki
© Photo: Matias Uusikylä, Signe and Ane Gyllenberg
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Lucas Cranach d. Ä. (1472 – 1553)
Adam and Eve in Paradise / The Fall of Man, 1533
Oil on beechwood
50,5 x 35,7 cm
Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Gemäldegalerie
© Photo: Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin
/ Antje Voigt; Public Domain Mark 1.0



Hugo Simberg
The Wounded Angel, 1903
Oil on canvas
127 x 154 cm
Ateneum, Finnish National Gallery, Helsinki
© Photo: Finnish National Gallery / Hannu Aaltonen



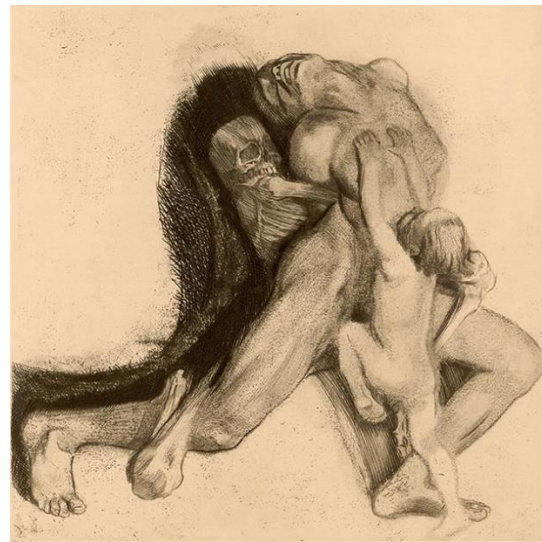
Hans Baldung Grien
The Three Ages of Man and Death, c. 1509/1510
Limewood
Framed dimensions: 61.3 × 46 × 4.5 cm
Panel dimensions: 48.2 × 32.8 × 2.4 cm
Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien, Gemäldegalerie
© Photo: KHM-Museumsverband



Otto Dix
Self-Portrait, 1913
Oil on paper mounted on cardboard
36 × 30 cm
The Ömer Koç Collection
© Bildrecht, Vienna 2025, Photo: Hadiye Cangökçe



Matthias Grünewald
Moses before the Burning Bush, c. 1516
Charcoal, partially smudged in broad areas, fixed,
heightened with white brushwork, on yellow-gray
wash-toned paper
36,2 × 29,2 cm
The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna
© Photo: The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna



Käthe Kollwitz
Death and Woman, 1910
Etching with line etching, drypoint, burnisher, soft
ground with a transfer from grained drawing paper
and Ziegler's transfer paper, with some roulette
45 × 58,2 cm
The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna
© Photo: The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna



Akseli Gallen-Kallela
Lemminkäinen's Mother, 1897
Tempera on canvas
85,5 × 108,5 cm
Finnish National Gallery Collection / Ateneum Art
Museum, Antell collections
© Photo: Finnish National Gallery / Hannu Pakarinen



After Hans Holbein the Younger
The Dead Christ in the Tomb, 17th century
Oil on unprimed fir panel
37,8 × 207,6 cm
Stiftsbibliothek St. Gallen
© Photo: Stiftsbibliothek St. Gallen



Paula Modersohn-Becker
Nursing Mother, 1902
Oil on cardboard
72,2 × 48 cm
Stiftung Museum Kunstpalast
© Photo: ARTOTHEK – LVR-ZMB – Joshua Esters



Hans Baldung Grien
Madonna and Child with Parrots, 1533
Mixed media on limewood
91,5 × 63,3 cm
Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nürnberg
© Photo: Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Photo: Dirk
Meißberger



Egon Schiele
Male Nude, 1912
Pencil and watercolor on paper
48,2 × 31,7 cm
Wien Museum
© Photo: Wien Museum



Martin Schongauer
Saint Sebastian, late 15th century
Engraving
15,6 × 11,1 cm
The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna
© Photo: The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna