

## EXHIBITION REVIEW:

### ***Gustav Klimt: The Immersive Show.* Aural Eye Studio, Music Producer Alexei Țurcan, Museum of Immersive New Art, 25.08.2023–31.01.2024**



The Exhibition *Gustav Klimt. The Immersive Show* is part of the permanent exhibition *Immersive Space – Gustave Klimt – Underwater World – Inner Constellations – Santa Claus* of the Museum of Immersive New Art, which opened its doors on 25th August 2023. The exhibition was presented as a multimedia production, it included over 60 of the most renowned works of the celebrated artist from various periods of his career. Each projection of Gustav Klimt lasted around 15 minutes, and it repeated itself every hour of the museum's daily program.

Among these, notable pieces included *The Kiss*, recognized as the artist's most iconic work and considered a national treasure in Austria, and *Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer*, known as *The Woman in Gold*, representing the pinnacle of Gustav Klimt's golden period. The venue impressed with its towering seven-meter height and generous space. Inside, strategically placed mirrored columns conveyed the illusion of a larger space. For the comfort of attendees, the room was equipped with soft cushions, contributing to a relaxing atmosphere. The experience was facilitated by high-performance 360-degree video projectors by Epson. The duration of the projection extended over a period of 60 minutes, thus providing a comprehensive journey through various artistic realities such as the ones mentioned: Underwater World, Inner Constellations, and Santa Claus which was a special projection for the month of December. During the projection of Klimt's artworks I observed, in addition to the well-known



paintings mentioned, others such as *Judith and the Head of Holofernes*; *Goldfish*; *Hygieia* from the ceiling of the University of Vienna, *Portrait of Fritza Riedler*, *Water Serpents II*, *Portrait of Emilie Flöge*, *Lady with a Fan*, *Hope I*, *Hope II Danae*, *Lady with Hat and Feather Boa*, *Portrait of Margaret Stonborough-Wittgenstein*, but also very early works of Klimt like *Idylle*. The technique employed in crafting the projection is video mapping, defined by the creation of the video through the successive layering of images. The exhibited projection at MINA constitutes a 2D video mapping project executed by Aural Eye Studio in collaboration with music producer Alexei Turcan.

The projections started with a message to the public: “Please maintain silence throughout the immersive show. If accompanied by children, for their safety and the immersive experience of all visitors, kindly keep them close.” The restrictions on movement within the immersive show were, in my opinion, quite inconvenient for the overall immersive experience. The essence of participating in an immersive exhibition is to freely experience being a part of the artwork, to feel engrossed within the painting.

The selection of artworks comprises a wide variety of well-known paintings. The approach taken by the art studio involves creating a collage featuring distinct cutouts of characters from the paintings mentioned. The backgrounds used to fill the cutouts of characters consisted of various symbols from Klimt’s artworks. The focal point of the projection lies in the expansion of the dress depicted in the *Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer I*. Additionally, the noteworthy augmentation of the background, replete with substantial details from *The Kiss* painting, enhances the overall impact of the presentation.

Immersive exhibitions typically involve curators who collaborate closely with show designers and artists. However, in the case of MINA, no individual was appointed to fulfil this role; the creators did not assign someone for the position. I believe a curator was necessary in this context because the one-hour projection that people paid for included three additional projections that lacked artistic value or relevance to artistic subjects. These additional projections were solely for the entertainment of children. The projections titled *Underwater World*, *Inner Constellations*, and *Santa Claus* exhibited explicit titles indicative of their content. While MINA has appropriately categorized the projections of Gustav Klimt and those designed for children into distinct classifications on their social media platforms and website, this distinction was not maintained within the consolidated one-hour projection experience.

Immersive experiences with video mapping in black box setups have become popular over time as a fascinating blend of art and tech. This type of exhibition, whether technology-infused or not, has existed for some time. Yayoi Kusama’s *Infinity Mirror Rooms* from the 1960s stand out as an early and well-known example of immersive art. However, over the past three years, particularly in

the aftermath of the pandemic, this type of exhibitions has witnessed a notable rise in popularity. This resurgence is evidenced by the renewed interest in Yayoi Kusama's works, such as *My Heart Is Dancing into the Universe* in 2018 and the widely discussed *One with Eternity: Yayoi Kusama in the Hirshhorn Collection* from 2022.<sup>1</sup>

Taking a critical perspective, drawing from my experiences at various immersive exhibitions in Central Europe, including venues like the Gallery *Dark Matter* in Berlin that includes some of the most fascinating experiences I have seen titled *Grid* and *Liquid Sky*,<sup>2</sup> Immersive Space *The Lighthouse of Art* in Berlin that includes an infinite room and the show *Particle Poetry*,<sup>3</sup> Immersive Space *Khroma*,<sup>4</sup> Immersive International Exhibition *Klimt Kiss: Spiel mit dem Feuer*,<sup>5</sup> and other immersive exhibitions from the same studio, like *Monet*<sup>6</sup> and *Van Gogh, The Immersive Experience*,<sup>7</sup> there are significant distinctions between MINA and these widely recognized international exhibitions.

One of them pertains to the architecture of the space: the columns made of mirrors mentioned earlier disrupt the immersive experience, making visitors aware of their surroundings and themselves. This addition is quite contradictory in the overall experience. In the exhibitions above-mentioned, I have only encountered spaces where the ceiling is incorporated into the projections, fully immersing the entire space in the artistry of the artists. Another shortcoming is the absence of projections on the ceiling. Unfortunately, the open ceiling space exposes all the technical cables, which, once again, disrupts the overall immersive experience for each individual. The spectators' experience is abruptly interrupted by the cables and metal supports of the projectors, which is, ironically, contrary to the museum's intended message.

---

<sup>1</sup> Elliot C. Williams, "Yayoi Kusama's Long-Anticipated 'one with Eternity' Hirshhorn Exhibit Opens in April," NPR, March 7, 2022, accessed January 13, 2024, <https://www.npr.org/local/305/2022/03/07/1084485025/yayoi-kusama-s-long-anticipated-one-with-eternity-hirshhorn-exhibit-opens-in-april>.

<sup>2</sup> "Über," Dark Matter, accessed December 30, 2023, <https://rb.gy/oj5x3e>.

<sup>3</sup> "Exhibition," The Lighthouse of Digital Art, November 20, 2023, accessed December 30, 2023, <https://lighthouse.berlin/en/exhibition/>.

<sup>4</sup> "Khroma - New Media Art Center: Revaler Str. 99-Book Tickets," Berlin.de, accessed December 30, 2023, <https://rb.gy/d34k0m>.

<sup>5</sup> "Klimts Kiss - An Immersive Story: Ticket," visitBerlin.de, accessed December 30, 2023, <https://www.visitberlin.de/en/klimts-kiss-an-immersive-exhibition-berlin-ticket>.

<sup>6</sup> "Monet Exhibition: The Immersive Experience," Monet Exhibition: The Immersive Experience, accessed December 30, 2023, <https://monetexpo.com/>.

<sup>7</sup> "Van Gogh Exhibition: The Immersive Experience," Van Gogh Exhibition: The Immersive Experience, accessed December 30, 2023, <https://vangoghexpo.com/>.

The outcomes of my inquiry revealed a spectrum of responses among participants. A minority of adults exhibited notable engagement, while the remainder showed little to no interest, resorting to checking emails during the projection. Conversely, adolescents emerged as the cohort investing time to attentively observe and engage with the projection, demonstrating authentic interest in the immersive encounter. Conversely, children displayed behaviors indicative of distraction, such as sleeping, reading, or employing headphones during the unfolding of the projection. Despite an initial enthusiasm among parents, evidenced by their active capture of moments through photography, a gradual waning of interest transpired, serving as an indicator that the pledged immersive experience did not resonate as anticipated.

In the previous exhibitions I visited across Central Europe, the audience was captivated. I believe this was partly due to the fact that the participants were able to move around freely, following the projections throughout the 360-degree space. Having the freedom to move and synchronize my movements with the projections significantly enhanced my experience. It made me feel as if I were immersed in the universe of Klimt, Van Gogh, or Monet. Being able to touch the walls, feel the beauty of Van Gogh's sunflowers, and engage myself in the same universe depicted in Klimt's *The Kiss* painting heightened the connection with the artists' mastery.

In conclusion, the presentation of *Gustav Klimt: The Immersive Show* at the Museum of Immersive New Art constitutes an insightful exploration into the iconic works of the esteemed Viennese artist, showcasing a selection of his beloved artworks. While the exhibition successfully captures the essence of Klimt's artistry, certain aspects warrant critique. The imposed restrictions on movement and the absence of ceiling projections detract from the immersive experience. Furthermore, the inclusion of entertainment-focused projections within the one-hour session, without a curator's guidance, creates a dissonance in thematic cohesion.

Drawing comparisons with other international exhibitions reveals distinctions, particularly in the architectural approach. The incorporation of mirrored columns and the absence of ceiling projections in MINA diverge from established immersive exhibition practices. These elements disrupt the immersive experience and introduce a level of self-awareness that is ironic in the context of the intended artistic immersion.

Despite these shortcomings, the exhibition succeeds in engaging certain demographics, with teenagers notably demonstrating genuine interest. The audience's varied responses, from notable engagement to disinterest, indicate a mixed reception, suggesting a need for further refinement in the curation and execution of immersive experiences. In my opinion, the success of immersive

## EXHIBITION REVIEW

exhibitions lies in the freedom of movement, allowing participants to feel fully absorbed in the artwork. The lack of it in MINA's presentation hinders the audience's connection with the art.

Ultimately, the Museum of Immersive New Art's exhibition has its merits but falls short of providing a consistently immersive experience. While it successfully showcases Klimt's masterpieces, addressing the identified shortcomings, such as architectural disruptions and thematic cohesion, could enhance its overall impact and resonate more effectively with diverse audiences.

**Gabriela Iulia MOLDOVAN**

*University of Art and Design, Cluj-Napoca, Romania*

*Email: moldovangabrielaiulia@gmail.com*