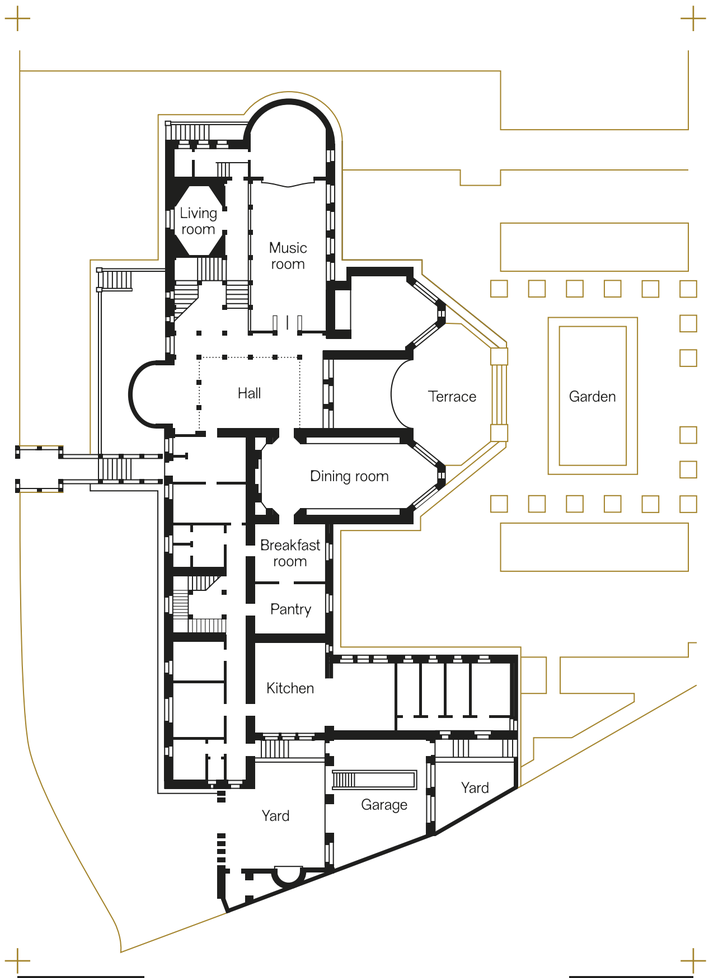
STOCLET HOUSE 1911 / 1932 VILLA CAVROIS

INFLUENCES

EN



Stoclet House

Brussels, 1911

A journey through time: the 1911 Stoclet House brought to life through its digital twin.

This exhibition and the digital reproduction presented in the form of a film is designed to allow visitors to explore the interiors of Stoclet House. This building has been inscribed on UNESCO's select list of Brussels World Heritage sites since 2009, but is still relatively unknown to the general public.

The virtual reproduction of this house, based on specific archival sources and a detailed architectural analysis of its spaces, has taken a team of experts* almost two years to complete. Its realism strengthens the impression that visitors are immersed in the building as it was between 1911 and 1918. Visitors discover the house exactly as the couple Suzanne Stevens and Adolphe Stoclet dreamed it would be.

Today, for the duration of this exhibition, we are all their guests.

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*This scientific study of Stoclet House was a partnership between experts from the Brussels Capital Region (urban.brussels) and the ULB (AllCe Laboratory).

Why Stoclet House inspires such fascination

Stoclet House is perhaps the ultimate masterpiece by Josef Hoffmann, an architect who had a profound influence on European architecture. In the late 19th century, designers, architects and artists gradually became autonomous, seeking to distinguish themselves from the artistic trends that had preceded them. This marked the beginning of a frantic succession of artistic movements, in ever-shorter cycles. This dynamic, driven by the quest for 'modernity' and 'progress', marked much of the 19th century and all of the 20th century. For each of these artistic movements, society designated a few individuals, typically men, who were hailed as mentors, including Victor Horta, Frank Lloyd Wright, Henry Van de Velde, Le Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe, Rem Koolhaas, Frank Gehry and others. Throughout this narrative, they became the ultimate points of reference, placed at the pinnacle of this hierarchical pyramid. They were awarded the status of 'geniuses', overshadowing those who sometimes developed less radical but nonetheless interesting careers.

Hoffmann was one such 'genius' who both fascinated and fuelled this myth. Through his teaching, his presence at numerous international exhibitions and his longevity, he influenced several generations. But above all, it is his quest for modernity, spiritual elevation through beauty, and purity of form that inspires dozens of architects and designers in Western culture, including Robert Mallet-Stevens, architect of the Villa Cavrois.

Stoclet House, a foundational inspiration for the Villa Cavrois

Stoclet House played a pivotal role in the training of Robert Mallet-Stevens, who, as a relative of the Stoclet family, closely followed its construction. There, he discovered the architecture of Josef Hoffmann and the Viennese concept of the 'total work of art', combining architecture, furniture, decor and gardens.

Guy Conde-Reis – Curator

1 Driven by an exceptional woman: Suzanne Stevens-Stoclet

In recent years, a critical reappraisal of our society has led to the re-emergence of women who were for too long invisible in the field of art history. Alongside women artists, who are now being rightfully acknowledged and featured in museum collections and exhibitions, it is equally important to recognise those women who, although they may have remained somewhat in the shadows of their husbands socially, actively played a role in fostering artistic commissions.

In this context, Suzanne Stevens-Stoclet's role must be reevaluated and appreciated for its true significance. Coming from a family in which art played a central role, it is inconceivable that her keen eye did not exert a significant influence on the aesthetic choices made at Stoclet House. It is likely that she was closely involved in the construction of the house and, most certainly, invited artists to collaborate on it. She was also involved in selecting the artworks from all over the world that made up the couple's collection.

SUZANNE STEVENS CAME FROM A BACKGROUND WHERE SHE WAS SURROUNDED BY ART

Suzanne Stevens (1874–1949) was the niece of the famous painter Alfred Stevens and, more significantly, the daughter of the art critic and dealer Arthur Stevens. Arthur Stevens served as art collector to the Russian Prince Alexander Gorchakov, many of whose paintings were confiscated from the prince's son after the October Revolution of 1917 and are now housed in the Hermitage Museum. The Stevens family moved in influential circles in Paris, with the Goncourt brothers, at the Bing art and furniture gallery, and within the diplomatic community.

A COLLECTOR FOR A FATHER

Arthur Stevens, Suzanne's father, was both an unconventional figure (divorced, close to Victor Hugo and Charles Baudelaire) and firmly entrenched within the dominant elite.

Appointed curator of the Painting Gallery of H.M. the King of the Belgians, he is known to have played a secret diplomatic role in Leopold II's African venture. Between 1882 and 1884, on the King's orders, he shuttled between the Quai d'Orsay and the Palace of Laeken to negotiate with France for the acquisition of the Kouilou-Niari valley and its river in what is now the Republic of Congo.

A DISAPPROVED MARRIAGE

Victor Stoclet's son, Adolphe (1871–1949) commissioned Stoclet House. After mediocre and unfinished studies at the Ecole Polytechnique, afflicted by poor health but blessed with an artistic nature (enjoying drawing and reading, a young collector of Japanese prints and deeply passionate about Italy, where he spent extended periods), he struggled to fit in with his own family, who were Catholic and overly focused on social climbing and wealth accumulation. He became a freethinker and fell madly in love with Suzanne Stevens.

Adolphe's parents immediately disapproved of this relationship and they legally opposed any matrimonial union. Based on a ruling by the Court of First Instance, the marriage was nevertheless authorised and took place in 1896, much to the despair of Adolphe's parents.

The couple had three children, Raymonde and René, both born in Milan in 1897 and 1902 respectively, followed by Jacques, born in Vienna in 1903.

Adolphe Stoclet died at home on 3 November 1949. In accordance with his wishes, his body was placed in the music room of Stoclet House, in front of a sculpture of the Buddha. His wife died a few days later on 16 November. They lie together in the family vault at Watermael-Boitsfort cemetery.

VIENNA'S ARTISTIC INFLUENCE

In time, family relations were restored and, in 1903, Adolphe was sent to Vienna to work for the Vienna-Aspang and Wiener-Lombard railway companies, of which his father was chairman and director respectively. A new life therefore began for the couple, who immersed themselves in the city's cultural scene, captivated by the Vienna Secession and the workshops of the Wiener Werkstätte (established the year they arrived).

The discovery of the artists' colony on the Hohe Warte hill, founded in 1901 by Josef Hoffmann, left a deep impression on them. They soon expressed their desire to have Hoffmann build them a villa there. Initial contacts were established and a plot of land was selected.

A DESTINY

The death of Adolphe's elder brother in 1903, followed a few months later by that of his father in Vienna, precipitated his return to Brussels, but also made him the family's principal heir. The titles and properties he inherited constituted a colossal fortune whose value is still impossible to estimate today. In addition, Adolphe succeeded his father as director of seven companies operating in Belgium, France, Italy and Austria.

Now, with their minds filled with the splendours of Vienna, their hands free and their pockets full, Adolphe and Suzanne could embark on the fabulous project that would become one of the architectural masterpieces of the 20th century.

2 Suzanne's nephew: Robert Mallet-Stevens

Through his mother, Suzanne's half-sister, Robert Mallet-Stevens was Suzanne Stevens-Stoclet's nephew by marriage. He later made his own mark, continuing the legacy of this family of art collectors and creators with his brilliant career. Mallet-Stevens travelled to Brussels several times to visit his aunt, which gave him the opportunity to follow the design process and construction of Stoclet House. The scale and perfection of this building exerted a strong influence on his subsequent aesthetic choices, to the point where his early architectural drawings are completely in the Hoffmann vein.

3 A radical work

Hoffmann enjoyed a long career and his work is impossible to summarise without oversimplification. While his early creations were more aligned with the French-inspired Art Nouveau movement or followed in the footsteps of Otto Wagner, shortly after 1900 there was a turning point in his research and his creations took a significant step towards abstraction. It is hard to envision the impact of a building as minimalist as the Purkersdorf Sanatorium (1906) without considering the context of the time.

Alongside Adolf Loos, a Viennese born in the same year as him, Hoffmann became one of the pioneering advocates of complete simplicity in modern architecture. Their influence permeates the entire history of architecture, notably with the Bauhaus in Weimar and Dessau and, closer to home, at La Cambre School in Brussels, founded by Henry Van de Velde. Their radical approach certainly heralded the avant-garde and modernism movements. In Brussels, only Dr Van Neck's clinic (1910) designed by Antoine Pompe, exhibits an equally early and equivalent modernity.

At the time, Hoffmann was obsessed with pure geometric shapes, especially the square. Recent ULB research has highlighted the modularity in the Stoclet House's composition, both in its ground plan and elevation, including the garden layout.

VILLA CAVROIS (1929–1932)

Paul Cavrois, a powerful textile industrialist, decided to build a villa to house his family of seven children. In 1929, he assigned the project to Mallet-Stevens. Unlike the Stevens-Stoclet couple, there was nothing to suggest that Paul Cavrois and his wife Lucie would commission such a villa: the couple were neither collectors nor connected to avant-garde circles. However, they gave Mallet-Stevens a great deal of freedom and he designed a truly modern château with impressive dimensions (60 m long). The villa is reminiscent of Stoclet House with its austere volumes, lack of ornamentation, the concept of total art and the geometric dominance of the tower.

THE VILLA NOAILLES (1923–1933) IN HYÈRES

Robert Mallet-Stevens would later have the opportunity to design a villa of a similar size but in an even more modern style. During the Roaring Twenties, Viscount Charles de Noailles and his wife Marie-Laure, inspired by the Stevens-Stoclet couple, visited Stoclet House and commissioned Mallet-Stevens to design a villa in the south of France. This was to become one of the first French buildings in the modern style. The furniture, often made of metal, and the decoration of the rooms were created by the leading designers of the time: Pierre Chareau, Francis Jourdain, Eileen Gray, Pierre Legrain, Djo-Bourgeois and Charlotte Perriand.

While it may not resemble Stoclet House aesthetically, the two buildings share many similarities: a lifestyle concept in which art, in this case avant-garde art, occupies a central place in a 'cubist palace' bathed in light and adorned with minimalist decor.

4 Stoclet House construction and costs

Hoffmann was commissioned to design a 'house' on a 68-are property for the Stoclet couple and their three children. It was also intended to serve as a showcase for their extensive collection of art from all over the world, satisfy their passion for music and host distinguished guests in prestigious surroundings.

The planning application was submitted in April 1906 and the permit issued in July. Although Hoffmann designed the project and most of the furniture, his team was responsible for overseeing the finances and the construction site. The general contracting company, François & Fils, which carried out the construction, was renowned in particular for its work on Victor Horta's Hôtel Solvay and the A l'Innovation department stores. The famous painter-decorator Adolphe Crespin was also commissioned to decorate some of the ceilings and apply the intricate gilding on the facades. The level of sophistication of these finishing touches was the main reason for the delays in the construction project. Construction was not completed until late 1911, after Klimt's frieze had been installed.

The overall cost of the construction, finishes and furnishings is impossible to determine. However, the total amount of work and commissions was staggering. For example, the orders placed with the Wiener Werkstätte workshops (furnishings and decorations) alone amounted to 600,000 Austro-Hungarian crowns at the time, or approximately 3.45 million euros in today's money. The Klimt frieze cost almost 100,000 crowns. The total cost is estimated to have exceeded 1.2 million crowns, equivalent to roughly 7 million euros today.

Image captions

Gustav Klimt & Emilie Flöge, 1909
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Facade – Palais Stoclet
© Fondation Civa stichting

Railway Matadi - Stanley Pool (Congo), ca 1907
© Conde-Reis

Palais Stoclet, ca 1911

Music Room, Palais Stoclet, ca 1920
in The Studio

Design by Gustav Klimt, 1905
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Palais Stoclet, ca 1909
in Pioniere der Moderne



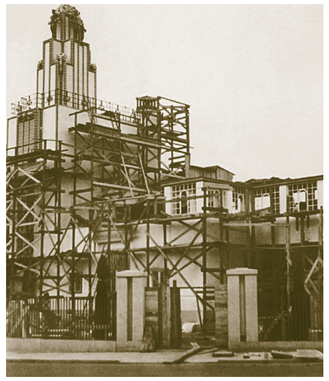












5 Avenue de Tervuren in 1911

It's no coincidence that Stoclet House is located on the Avenue de Tervuren. The avenue was laid out for the 1897 Universal Exhibition, at the request of King Leopold II. Its purpose was to provide a 10 km long connection to the Palace of Tervuren, where the colonial exhibition was held. Beyond the Parc du Cinquantenaire, in the middle of which stand the famous arcades that some consider to be the embodiment of Leopold II, this avenue continues along Rue de la Loi to the Royal Palace. This can therefore be described as power-driven urban planning.

This upscale avenue, lined with chestnut trees and designed by the renowned landscape architect Victor Besme, widens to 90 m in places, creating pastoral spaces intended for walking, horse riding and electric trams.

6 Josef Hoffmann, the Secession and the Wiener Werkstätte

Josef Hoffmann was born in 1870 into a middle-class family in Brtnice (where his father was mayor), now in the Czech Republic but then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Originally destined to become a lawyer in accordance with his father's wishes, Hoffmann showed a talent for technical subjects and was therefore sent to the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna. Here, he studied under Karl Freiherr von Hasenauer, a key figure in the development of Vienna's Ringstrasse, and later under Otto Wagner. At the end of his studies, he won the Prix de Rome, which enabled him to spend a year studying in the city. Upon returning to Vienna, he entered Otto Wagner's studio, but soon joined forces with a group of avant-garde artists (Gustav Klimt, Koloman Moser, Joseph Maria Olbrich, Carl Moll, etc.) to establish the Vienna Secession, as a reaction to official academicism.

Influenced by the English Arts & Crafts movement, he too was convinced that art could 'heal' the human soul through beauty.

In 1903, together with his friend Koloman Moser, he took this vision a step further by founding the Wiener Werkstätte ('Vienna Workshops'), which produced furniture and domestic objects of great quality and understated elegance, intended to enrich and beautify everyday life for as many people as possible.

THE BIRTH OF A FORM OF MODERNITY IN ARCHITECTURE

J. Hoffmann's style is hard to classify: it is still considered Art Nouveau by some and modernist by others. His geometric and functional yet always refined forms would go on to influence several generations of architects.

Throughout his career, he would build exhibition pavilions that enabled him to reach an international audience, as well as villas, apartment buildings and factories, combining modernity and classicism in a language that was uniquely his own.

Hoffmann died in 1956, after a long career.

7 Was Joseph Hoffmann a Nazi sympathiser?

Following Hitler's rise to power in Germany in 1933 and Austria in 1938, artists, architects and scientists who were persecuted as Jews fled to Great Britain and the United States. Others left because they were either associated with so-called 'degenerate' art and seen as too close to a 'Judeo-Bolshevik' milieu, or simply because they were marginalised and could no longer make a living through their profession. The hesitations of these individuals at the outset of Hitler's rise to power are well documented. For example, Walter Gropius (1883–1969) unsuccessfully proposed a project for a House of Work in Berlin and was involved in the German Pavilion at the Milan Triennale. He later emigrated to the United States in 1937. Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (1886–1969), who had Communist students expelled from the Bauhaus school by the police, proposed an unsuccessful modernist project for the Reichsbank and joined the Reich Chamber of Culture.

He emigrated to the United States in 1938.

In contrast, Josef Hoffmann, who was 68 years old at the time Austria was annexed by Nazi Germany in 1938, remained in the country and even accepted several official public commissions.

CAN ART AND BEAUTY BE CONSIDERED TO TRANSCEND POLITICAL CONTINGENCIES?

Hoffmann designed the staging for the 1939 Vienna Opera Ball, a grand annual ball held at the Vienna Opera, this time strewn with swastikas. He drew up the plans for the new German embassy in Vienna, which became the Haus der Wehrmacht (officers' quarters). He was also commissioned to design several officers' clubs for the Waffen-SS, and was appointed artistic director of the Vienna Arts and Crafts Association by the Reich Chamber of Fine Arts.

In the aftermath of the war, his reputation shielded him completely from any judgement. In 1950, he even received the 'Großer Österreichischer Staatspreis für Architektur', the Grand Austrian State Prize for Architecture from the Austrian government.

Certainly, Hoffmann fully integrated into a society whose political and social elite welcomed the Nazi regime.

More generally throughout history, beauty has sometimes been the object of such a cult that it can imbue those who possess its codes with a sense of superiority over other social classes or cultures. In Vienna, Hoffmann helped define the contours of what was then considered the quintessence of beauty and refinement by a dominant social class.

In Brussels, Stoclet House enjoyed artistic protection during the war, granted by Otto Kümmel and placed under the direction of Professor Heinz Rudolf Rosemann, with whom Adolphe maintained cordial relations. This protection allowed the house to escape requisition and destruction.

8 The omnipresence of music

The music room is set at the heart of the house and became a focal point for avant-garde music and jazz (performed by the family's sons in the 'Doctors Mysterious Six' band), as well as for modern and Oriental dance, such as in the Javanese style. The family itself was devoted to music, as evidenced by the room upstairs designed for learning and rehearsing. The music room features a double-keyboard organ and a Macassar ebony Steinway piano that Hoffmann designed specifically for this room.

9 Sculpture by Frantz Metzner and Emilie Schleiss-Simandl, the only woman involved in the project

The focal point of the street façade, the tower houses a glass-enclosed staircase that spans its entire height. At its base, above a bay window, is a relief attributed to the young German artist Emilie Schleiss-Simandl (1880–1962), renowned for her ceramics. It depicts two stylised women with bent backs carrying sprays of flowers, possibly alluding to the female condition. Emilie Schleiss-Simandl also created two bronze sculptures to adorn the couple's bed.

10 Universalism: a panorama of art from around the world

The term 'universalist' was used regularly between 1870 and 1914 to refer to the political will to unify peoples and create favourable conditions for lasting peace. The Stoclet couple's art collection places a special emphasis on Japanese prints and Italian primitives. However, beyond this focus, it features works from all continents and all the 'great' civilisations, including works from Cambodian, Indian, Egyptian, African, Chinese civilisations among others. Spiritually and philosophically, Stoclet House emerges as an idealised place, embodying the vision of a better, more peaceful world.

11 Associated Belgian artists

Viennese artists were not the only ones to be included in Stoclet House.

GEORGES MINNE

The son of an architect, Georges Minne (1866–1941), a sculptor and draughtsman, joined the symbolist movement at an early age, alongside Maurice Maeterlinck and Émile Verhaeren. As early as 1896, he created his first Agenouillé or kneeling youth, a naked adolescent, head bowed, fragile and isolated from the world, a motif he would revisit many times in his work. In 1898, he created the Fontaine des Agenouillés or the Fountain of Kneeling Youths, an undeniable masterpiece of symbolist sculpture. For it he conceived five figures around a pool: here, Minne's introverted art reaches a peak of formal simplicity.

FERNAND KHNOPFF

Fernand Khnopff (1858–1921), a symbolist painter, draughtsman, photographer and engraver, was a founding member of the Brussels avant-garde group Les XX. A solitary dandy, he frequently used his sister Marguerite as a model for his enigmatic female figures (part-sphinx, siren or angel) with a blank stare. His work gained international recognition, notably in Vienna, where he was one of the guests of honour at the first Vienna Secession. Gustav Klimt regarded him as a major influence. Stoclet House incorporates several of his works into its architecture, including pastels and a marble bust of a young woman ('Futur'), that was exhibited at the Vienna Secession in 1898 (currently on display at the Musée d'Orsay).

12 The collector Adolphe Stoclet and the origins of a family fortune

The Stoclet family's fortune can largely be traced to the lawyer and businessman Adolphe Stoclet (1814–1892). Through his 'good marriage' to the young widow and heiress Pauline De Munck, herself the daughter of a Brussels alderman who was the director of several companies, Adolphe I entered the thriving world of Belgian industry. His business rapidly expanded into the railway and banking sectors, often in conjunction with Société Générale de Belgique. His son Victor (1843–1904), an engineer, took over the family business and developed it beyond Belgium's borders into Persia and China, significantly increasing the family's wealth. He even became a Director of Société Générale in 1882.

WHAT CONNECTIONS TO THE BELGIAN CONGO?

It's hard not to draw links between the Stoclet fortune and the Belgian Congo because the entire Belgian economy of the time was based on a capitalist principle of expansion. Through the multitude of companies associated with these three generations of Stoclets, direct and indirect connections can be established with the colonisation of the Belgian Congo.

On his father's death, Adolphe became a director of Société Générale, one of Belgium's largest holding companies, which owned some forty different businesses. These included banks, arms factories, mines in Katanga (copper, tin, cobalt, radium, etc.) and the Congo forestry and mining company, the Société Internationale Forestière et Minière du Congo (diamonds, gold, silver, cotton, palm, cocoa, rubber and exotic woods).

In 1906, Adolphe joined the Board of Directors of Banque d'Outremer, a subsidiary of Société Générale de Belgique. Founded in 1899, this investment company had already invested in Canada, China, the Dutch East Indies and Russia, but primarily in the Congo. The stone façade of its headquarters on Rue Brederode still bears the inscription 'Banque Congo Belge'. The proximity of this headquarters to the 'Norwegian Chalet', itself in the vicinity of the Royal Palace, where Congolese affairs were managed, is not insignificant. At the request of Leopold II, who was one of the main shareholders, the economic exploitation of the Congo intensified in 1906. In 1910, Adolphe joined the Board of Directors of Compagnie du Congo pour le Commerce et l'Industrie, itself a subsidiary of Banque d'Outremer. Adolphe Stoclet's position at Banque d'Outremer was so firmly established that, in 1910, he did not hesitate to ask Hoffmann to design the entire interior decoration and furniture for his personal office on the executive floor. Adolphe Stoclet's name is inscribed on the pedestal of the equestrian sculpture of Leopold II, which can be seen in the atrium of the Royal Museums of Art and History, identifying him as one of its patrons. This is evidence that he was officially part of the Belgian social and economic elite. He cannot in any way be reduced to the stereotypical image of a gentle dreamer and art enthusiast, extravagant and disconnected from financial realities.

The Compagnie des Chemins de fer du Congo (CFC) was set up at the end of the 19th century to build the Matadi-Léopoldville railroad (completed in 1898). Through a series of interconnections, the CFC was affiliated to the Compagnie du Congo pour le Commerce et l'Industrie (CCCI), itself incorporated into the Banque d'Outremer, created in 1899, whose main shareholder was Société Générale.

Living conditions during the construction of this railway were appalling. The construction of the line between Matadi and Stanley Pool cost the lives of 1,932 people (1,800 black people and 132 white people according to an inscription still visible at Kinshasa's central railway station).

13 Portrait of Kongo Chief of Nemlao, circa 1890

The ivory pommel of the sceptre belonging to the Kongo Chief of Nemlao (in what is now the Democratic Republic of the Congo) was part of Adolphe Stoclet's collection. The statuette depicts a woman kneeling in a respectful pose, bearing geometric scarifications. Dating back to as early as the 18th century, this prestigious object was used by chiefs and other dignitaries during public appearances, ceremonies or ritual acts. This piece was sold through Christie's in 2018 as part of the significant collection of African art that belonged to A. Stoclet. The circumstances in which objects of this type were originally acquired are often poorly documented; they raise the sensitive issue of the conditions under which many works of African art left Africa at that time and entered European collections — both private and public — during the colonial period, in a situation characterised by a very significant power imbalance. Two other similar specimens are held at the AfricaMuseum, which, for several years now, has been carrying out meticulous research, in collaboration with African researchers, into the circumstances under which its own collections were acquired.

14 Klimt's most famous work of art in Brussels

GUSTAV KLIMT'S FRESCO AND ITS SYMBOLISM

A masterpiece by Gustav Klimt and Leopold Forstner, the dining room frieze is an ode to love and the cycles of life and light. Made of semi-precious stones, gilded tesserae and set enamels, the optical perception of these friezes varies depending on the natural light or artificial illumination provided by the wall lights and lamps featuring curtains of glass beads.

THE DANCER

The dancer, connected by the branches of the tree of life, a central element repeated on each panel, is clad in a flowing chasuble with triangular motifs and illuminated by the first rays of the sun. It is a feast for the senses. It was graphically inspired by the work of fashion designer and businesswoman Emilie Flöge (1874–1952), with whom Gustav Klimt had a passionate affair.

THE KNIGHT

Facing the garden, behind the prominent seat reserved for the master of the house, stands the abstract figure of the knight. His cape combines geometric and floral motifs, reflecting the blend of femininity and masculinity.

THE KISS

On the next wall, the cycle of life continues, propelled by the tree's repeating spirals. Horus keeps watch while butterflies flutter from flower to flower in this precious garden. Facing the dancer, the embracing couple represents the fulfilment of desire. In addition to the allegorical dimension, it is possible that Gustav Klimt depicted himself and Emilie Flöge as lovers here.

The vocabulary used by Klimt still leaves some unsolved mysteries; despite the reference to ancient Egypt, the precise meaning of several motifs remains open to interpretation.

15 One of the most fascinating couples of the 20th century

A FEMALE ARTIST WORTHY OF GREATER FAME: EMILIE FLÖGE

Emilie Louise Flöge (1874–1952) was the most important woman in Gustav Klimt's life. Their free, non-marital relationship lasted several years and then developed into a deep and lasting friendship. She became Klimt's heir following his death.

Long reduced to the role of Klimt's muse, she is now recognised for her many talents. In 1892, she was an entrepreneur, running her own fashion and dressmaking salon that employed over 80 seamstresses; the interior was designed by Josef Hoffmann and Koloman Moser. Above all, she was an influential fashion designer in her own right, sometimes compared to Coco Chanel (1883–1971). Her Reformist-style dresses were loose-fitting so that women could move freely and avoid compressing their organs with excessively tight corsets, which were still considered compulsory at the time. Her garments featured geometrically patterned prints that were far ahead of their time. It was these garments that Klimt incorporated into his compositions. There is also no doubt that he portrayed himself and Flöge as a couple in several of his works, including those at Stoclet House.

16 The concept of Total Art (Gesamtkunstwerk)

The concept of Gesamtkunstwerk (total work of art) characterises the Viennese Secession's quest for harmony on every level. Born in the wake of the Romantic movement, the term was coined by the German philosopher and theologian Karl Trahndorff. Everything, from clothing to furniture, must be in perfect harmony and contribute to a unified vision of lifestyle.

Stoclet House is a surviving example of this principle. The interaction between architecture, various artistic expressions and furniture is ubiquitous, both inside and in the garden. The shape of the furniture elements, the dominant colours (black, white, gold, yellow, red, green and brown) and the recurring motifs (squares, diamonds, ovals, etc.) all contribute to the harmony of the space.

As a centre of cultural and social activities, the Gesamtkunstwerk character of the music room is particularly pronounced. It contains representations of or allusions to all the arts: architecture, furnishings, paintings by Fernand Khnopff, sculpture, stained glass, mosaics, lyric art, music and poetry.

17 The Stoclets' table is renowned!

Any adjectives used to describe the grand dining room seem inadequate. Despite the varied treatment of surfaces, there is an overwhelming sense of spatial, chromatic, and visual unity. The walls, adorned with Italian Paonazzo marble, mosaics, glassware and semi-precious stones by Gustav Klimt, command admiration for both their beauty and the excellence of their craftsmanship.

Naturally, the furniture is exceptional: an Indonesian macassar ebony ensemble comprising two large sideboards and two built-in display cabinets, as well as an 11 metre table with 24 matching chairs. The table's veneered top is inlaid with chequered patterns and equipped with power sockets. The table service includes cutlery sets, plate warmers, electrified centrepieces and tea and coffee sets, all designed by goldsmiths Alfred Mayer, Johann Fessner and Adolf Erbrich.

As evening falls, the room is bathed in the soft glow from five oval ceiling lights, each with a gilded brass frame draped with three beaded curtains.

The house attracted many celebrities, including Karl Ernst Osthaus, Henri Leboeuf, Jean Cocteau, Blaise Cendrars, Aldous Huxley, Ernest Hemingway, Sacha Guitry, Paul Morand, Queen Elisabeth and King Albert…

18 World Heritage listing (UNESCO)

Thanks to the descendants of the Stevens-Stoclet couple, Stoclet House has been preserved and maintained in a state of authenticity, while many of Hoffmann's other creations have been altered or even disfigured. At the suggestion of the Brussels Capital Region, Stoclet House was added to the UNESCO World Heritage List in June 2009, during the Committee's 33rd session in Seville. This affirmed its significant place in the history of art to the international community, 'as a crucial architectural milestone foreshadowing modern architecture, and as a masterpiece of creativity'. While this decision was well received in the scientific community, it also deepened the general public's lack of understanding, as they were denied both physical and virtual access to this building, the architectural and aesthetic value of which is nevertheless recognised worldwide.

19 The garden as an initiatory walk

The concept of total art extends beyond the walls of the residence to include the rear garden, covering an area of over 50 ares.

The geometric and streamlined composition of this architectural garden extends the axes of the house and is arranged in a series of spatial sequences, some paved, others more verdant: pathways, green spaces, arbours, topiary, ponds, pavilions and sculptures. Continuing the artistic journey of the interiors, these ancient, predominantly Oriental, and more modern artworks become part of the garden's scenography: a figure of Ganesha, an obelisk or two R. Luksch sculptures in yellow glazed ceramic (currently stored in the living room).

At the back, there was a playground and a tennis court, as tennis was one of the few sports open to women at the Olympic Games as early as 1900 and was played by Suzanne and her friends.