

Expressions Gallery

The Modernists

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When Expressions Gallery invited me to participate in this ambitious exhibit, which focuses on work that is strongly influenced or inspired by one of the well known Modernists, I was ambivalent. My first reaction was that while it is not unusual to find the influence of a famous painter on another painter's work, it is much harder to find, or explain, such influence on the work of a photographer. However, I have often heard from viewers that some of my works remind them of paintings by Klimt. This is an extraordinarily flattering comment, especially because Gustav Klimt is one of my favorite Modern artists, whose aesthetics, in turn, synthesized a range of influences including Gothic iconography, Japanese art, Viennese Secession and Art Nouveau – all my favorite art movements. But even though we all know Klimt mostly by his sensual and decorative paintings of *grandes dames* in luxurious gowns covered with gold leaf and intricate patterns, we may forget that he was also a great landscape painter. And it is actually his landscapes that I love most.



If I were a painter, then I, perhaps, would, first, closely study Klimt's technique and style, and then try humbly to imitate them. But what is a photographer to do? She cannot arrange the existing landscape to make it "look like Klimt"! Therefore, when I decided to present two of my landscapes for this exhibit, I actually had to look *back*, do more reading about the artist, and try to find out what exactly in his art must have affected me in the past so much that sometimes, to my own amazement, it somehow shows in my photographs. What I discovered was that, unlike the Impressionists and the Cubists who reacted to the emergence of photography in a way that no photograph (at least at the time) could achieve, with distortions, bold colors and a deeply human content, Klimt's landscapes were not in direct opposition to photography but instead took some of their cues from it. The composition in Klimt's landscapes, for example, shows his interest in retaining some of the informality of a snapshot where the sky, such a traditional aspect of landscape painting, has been deliberately ignored and kept out of the frame, making the painting more "approachable."



Also, while I consciously admired the shimmering, intricately painted foliage that surrounds Klimt's trees, I did not fully realize that he deliberately suppressed the sense of pictorial depth and used textures ("filters"?) to provide an additional layer (!) of information about the *feel* of the portrayed landscape – the effect that I have been trying to achieve in photography! And finally, as a direct result of his interest in flatness and to achieve a suppressed sense of depth, when painting his landscapes, marked by a stylized precision, Klimt actually utilized a *viewfinder* or opera glasses or a small telescope to select "framing" and sometimes was painting at a distance of two miles! Could it, possibly, explain my struggling with the camera to avoid the traditional favorites of modern photography – compositions marked by different focal points, by blurred background and crisp detail in the foreground or vice versa? And could it also explain my love for precision of small details in the background? Risking the accusation of an outrageous lack of humility, I will leave it for you to decide.

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