

# 5

## Art Nouveau and the Beginnings of Expressionism

As seen in chapters 3 and 4, the *fin de siècle* was a period of synthesis in the arts, a time when artists sought new directions that in themselves constituted a reaction against the tide of “progress” represented by industrialization. At the same time, the architects discussed in the previous chapter recognized that new patterns of life in the industrial age called for new types of buildings—bridges, railroad stations, and skyscrapers. The great innovators, such as Richardson, Sullivan, or Mackintosh, were able to draw selectively upon older styles without resorting to academic pastiche, and to create from the past something new and authentic for the present. While these architects did not abandon tradition, their work constituted a powerful countercurrent to Beaux-Arts historicism. At the same time, the search of the Symbolist poets, painters, and musicians for spiritual values was part of this reaction. Gauguin used the term “synthetism” to characterize the liberating color and linear explorations that he pursued and transmitted to disciples. The phenomenal thing about this synthesizing spirit is that, in the last decades of the nineteenth century and the first of the twentieth, it became a great popular movement that affected the taste of every part of the population in both Europe and the United States. This was the movement called Art Nouveau, a French term meaning simply “new art.” Art Nouveau was a definable style that emerged from the experiments of painters, architects, craftspeople, and designers and for a decade permeated not only painting, sculpture, and architecture, but also graphic design, magazine and book illustration, furniture, textiles, glass and ceramic wares, jewelry, and even clothing. As the name implies, Art Nouveau represented a rejection of historical revivalism and academic classicism and reflected a conscious search for new and genuine forms that were capable of expressing the modern age. Its emphasis on elaborate and intricate decorative motifs, however, meant that it was rapidly superseded in the first decade of the twentieth century by more radical forms of modern, machine-age art and architecture.

### Natural Forms for the Machine Age: The Art Nouveau Aesthetic

Art Nouveau grew out of the English Arts and Crafts movement, whose chief exponent and propagandist was the artist and poet William Morris (1834–96) (see chapter 4). The Arts and Crafts movement evolved as a revolt against the new age of mechanization, a Romantic effort on the part of Morris and others to implement the philosophy of the influential critic John Ruskin, who stated that true art should be both beautiful and useful and should base its forms on those found in nature (fig. 5.1). They saw the world of the artist-craftsperson in the process of destruction by mass production, and they fought for a return to some of the standards of simplicity, beauty, and craftsmanship that they associated with earlier centuries, notably the Middle Ages. Ironically for these social reformers, it was only the wealthy, in the end, who could afford their handcrafted goods. The ideas of the Arts and Crafts movement spread rapidly throughout Europe and found support in the comparable theories of French, German, Belgian, and Austrian artists and writers. A key characteristic of the movement was the concept of a synthesis of the arts based on an aesthetic of dynamic linear movement. Many names were given to this phenomenon in its various manifestations, but ultimately Art Nouveau became the most generally accepted, probably through its use by the Parisian shop and gallery called the *Maison de l'Art Nouveau*, which, with its exhibitions and extensive commissions to artists and artisans, was influential in propagating the style. In Germany the term “Jugendstil,” or “youth style,” after the periodical *Jugend*, became the name.

In 1890, it must be remembered, large quantities of mainstream painting, sculpture, and architecture were still being produced in accepted academic styles using traditional methods. In contrast to the Arts and Crafts movement, Art Nouveau made use of new materials and machine technologies both in buildings and in decoration. Moreover, although Art Nouveau artists could not avoid



5.1 William Morris, Detail of *Pimpernel* wallpaper, 1876. Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

the influence of past styles, they explored those that were less well known and out of fashion with the current academicians. They looked to medieval or Asian art forms or devices that were congenial to their search for an abstraction based on linear rhythms. Thus the linear qualities and decorative synthesis of eighteenth-century rococo; the wonderful linear interlace of Celtic and Saxon illumination and jewelry; the bold, flat patterns of Japanese paintings and prints (see fig. 2.22); the ornate motifs of Chinese and Japanese ceramics and jades were all used as sources for ideas. The Art Nouveau artists, while seeking a kind of abstraction, discovered most of the sources for their decoration in nature, especially in plant forms, often given a symbolic or sensuous overtone. They also drew on scientific discoveries, such as the forms of microorganisms that new explorations in botany and zoology were making familiar.

### Painting and Graphic Art

In the later works of Seurat and his followers (see chapter 3), line took on an abstract, expressive function. The formal innovations of Gauguin and of the Nabis were rooted in linear as well as color pattern. Toulouse-Lautrec reflected (and influenced) the Art Nouveau spirit in his paintings and prints, particularly in his subtle use of descriptive, expressive line. Through his highly popular posters (see fig. 3.29), aspects of Art Nouveau graphic design were spread throughout the Western world. While

Art Nouveau in architecture was largely a phenomenon of continental Europe, there were many precursors of the movement in England, particularly in painting. The mystical visions of William Blake (1757–1827; fig. 5.2), expressed in fantastic rhythms of line and color, were an obvious ancestor, as were the late, highly decorative paintings of the Pre-Raphaelite artist Dante Gabriel Rossetti.

The drawings of the young English artist Aubrey Beardsley (1872–98) were immensely elaborate in their black-and-white stylization and decorative richness (fig. 5.3). Associated with the so-termed “aesthetic” or “decadent” literature of Oscar Wilde and other *fin-de-siècle* writers, they were admired for their beauty and condemned for their sexual content. They probably constitute the most significant contribution of the English to Art Nouveau graphic art. Beardsley, like Edgar Allan Poe and certain of the French Symbolists, was haunted by Romantic visions of evil, of the erotic, and the decadent. In watered-down imitations, his style in drawing appeared all over Europe and America in popularizations of Art Nouveau book illustrations and posters. Beardsley based one of his illustrations for Wilde’s 1894 poem *Salome* on this drawing, in which the stepdaughter of Herod holds up the severed head of Saint John the Baptist in a gesture of grotesque eroticism.

One of the most influential figures in all the phases of Art Nouveau was the Belgian Henry van de Velde (1863–1957). Trained as a painter, he eventually produced abstract compositions in typical Art Nouveau formulas of color patterns and sinuous lines (fig. 5.4). For a time he



5.2 William Blake, *The Great Red Dragon and the Woman Clothed with the Sun*, 1805–10. Watercolor, 16½ × 13¼" (41 × 33.5 cm). National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

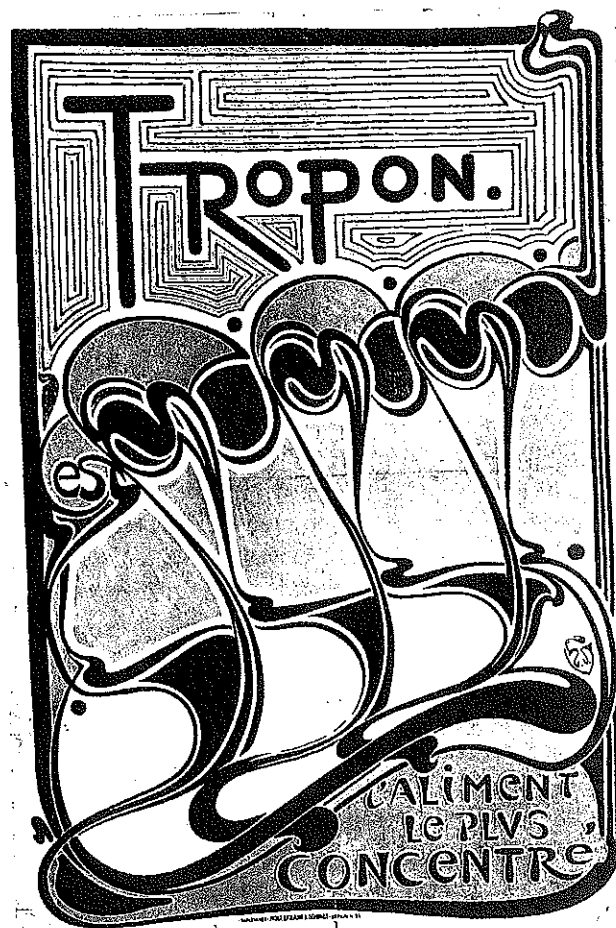


5.3 Aubrey Beardsley, *Salome with the Head of John the Baptist*, 1893. India ink and watercolor, 10 $\frac{3}{4}$  × 5 $\frac{3}{4}$ " (27.6 × 14.6 cm). Aubrey Beardsley Collection, Manuscripts Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University library, New Jersey.

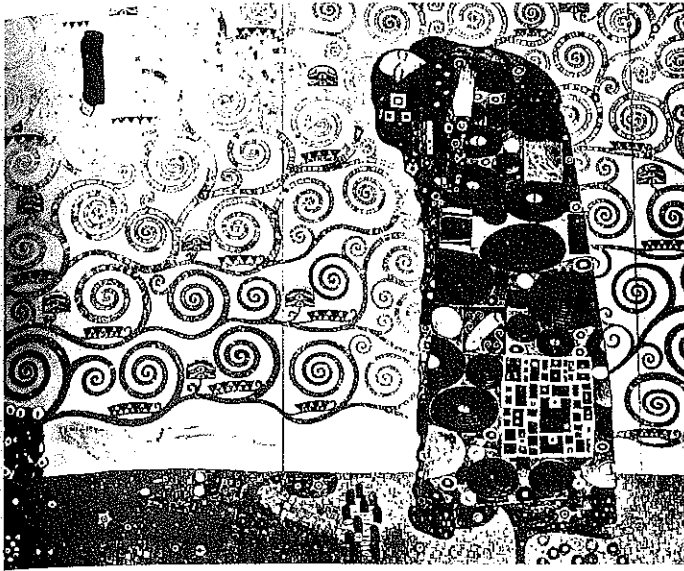
was interested in Impressionism and read widely in the scientific theory of color and perception. He soon abandoned this direction in favor of the Symbolism of Gauguin and his school and attempted to push his experiments in symbolic statement through abstract color expression further than had any of his contemporaries. Ultimately, Van de Velde came to believe that easel painting was a dead end and that the solution for contemporary society was to be found in the industrial arts. Though significantly influenced by Morris's theories, unlike the Englishman he regarded the machine as a potentially positive agent that could "one day bring forth beautiful products." It was finally as an archi-

tect and designer that he made his major contributions to Art Nouveau and the origins of twentieth-century art.

In Austria, the new ideas of Art Nouveau were given expression in the founding in 1897 of the Vienna Secession and, shortly thereafter, in its publication, *Ver Sacrum* ("Sacred Spring"). This diverse group was so named because it seceded from Vienna's conservative exhibiting society, the Künstlerhaus, and opposed the intolerance for new, antinaturalist styles at the Academy of Fine Arts. The major figure of the Secession was Gustav Klimt (1862–1918), in many ways the most talented exponent of pure Art Nouveau style in painting. Klimt was well established as a successful decorative painter and fashionable portraitist, noted for the brilliance of his draftsmanship, when he began in the 1890s to be drawn into the stream of new European experiments. He became conscious of Dutch Symbolists such as Jan Toorop, of the Swiss Symbolist Ferdinand Hodler, of the English Pre-Raphaelites and of Aubrey Beardsley (see fig. 2.8; see figs. 2.18, 5.3). His style was also formed on a study of Byzantine mosaics. A passion for erotic themes led him not only to the creation of innumerable drawings, sensitive and explicit, but also to the development of a painting style that integrated sensuous nude figures with brilliantly colored



5.4 Henry van de Velde, *Tropone*, c. 1899. Advertising poster, 47 $\frac{1}{2}$  × 29 $\frac{1}{2}$ " (121 × 74 cm). Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe, Hamburg.



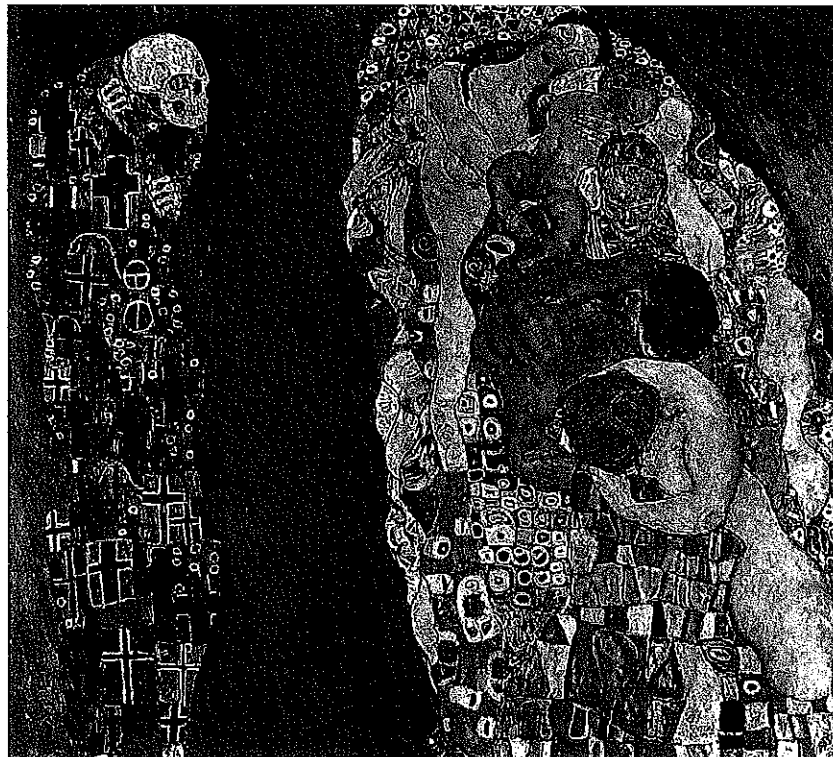
5.5 Gustav Klimt, Detail of dining-room mural, Palais Stoclet, Brussels. c. 1905–8. Mosaic and enamel on marble.

decorative patterns of a richness rarely equaled in the history of modern art. He was increasingly drawn to mural painting; his murals for the University of Vienna involved elaborate and complicated symbolic statements composed of voluptuous figures floating through an amorphous, atmospheric limbo. Those he created for the Palais Stoclet, designed by Josef Hoffmann, in Brussels between 1905 and 1910 (fig. 5.5, see also fig. 5.15) are executed in glass, enamel, metal, and semiprecious stones. They combined figures conceived as flat patterns (except for modeled heads

and hands) with an overall pattern of abstract spirals—a glittering complex of volumetric forms embedded in a mosaic of jeweled and gilded pattern. Although essentially decorative in their total effect, the Stoclet murals mark the moment when modern painting was on the very edge of nonrepresentation. Through his relationship with the younger Austrian artist Egon Schiele, as well as through his own obsessive, somewhat morbid and febrile eroticism (fig. 5.6), Klimt also occupies a central place in the story of Austrian Expressionism.

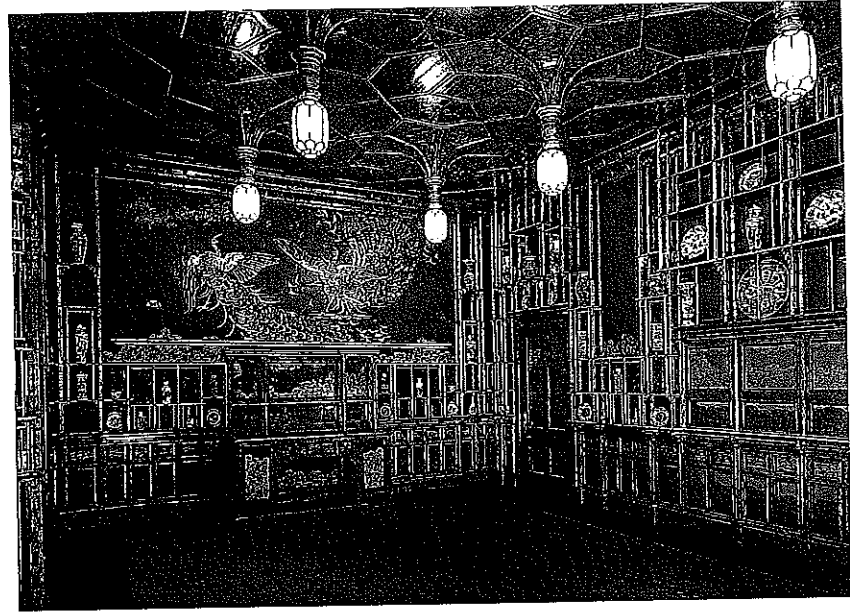
### Architecture and Design

The Aesthetic Movement of the 1870s and 1880s, with its emphasis on beautiful but useful objects and a decorative style largely shaped by the reigning craze for *japonisme*, was an important forerunner of Art Nouveau. A masterpiece of the period is James Abbott McNeill Whistler's famous Peacock Room from 1876–77 (fig. 5.7), made in collaboration with the architect Thomas Jeckyll (1827–81) for the London house of the shipping magnate Frederick Richards Leyland. Designed to showcase Leyland's Chinese porcelain collection, the Peacock Room was eclectic in style, as was typical of the Aesthetic Movement, but it is generally suffused with an exotic, Oriental flavor. Like his exact contemporary William Morris (and perhaps in response to him), Whistler, known for his paintings and prints (see figs. 2.23, 2.24), wished to prove his strength as a designer of an integrated decorative environment. The result is a shimmering interior of dark greenish-blue walls embellished with circular abstract patterns and golden peacock motifs,



5.6 Gustav Klimt, *Death and Life*, 1908–11. Oil on canvas, 70 $\frac{1}{8}$ " × 6'6" (178.1 cm × 2 m). Private collection.

**5.7** James Abbott McNeill Whistler, *The Peacock Room*, 1876–77. Panels: oil color and gold on tooled leather and wood. Installed in the Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.



which Whistler called *Harmony in Blue and Gold*. On the south wall of the room he depicted two fighting peacocks, one rich and one poor, which slyly alluded to a protracted quarrel between the artist and his patron. Leyland, who refused to pay Whistler for a great deal of work on the room that he had never commissioned, finally banned the irascible artist from the house after he invited the public and press to view his creation without Leyland's permission. The room was later acquired intact by an American collector and is now housed in the Freer Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C.

It is difficult to speak of a single, unified Art Nouveau style in architecture except in the realms of surface ornament and interior decoration. Despite this fact, certain aspects of architecture derive from Art Nouveau graphic art and decorative or applied arts, notably the use of the whiplash line in ornament and a generally curvilinear emphasis in decorative and even structural elements. The Art Nouveau spirit of imaginative invention, linear and spatial flow, and nontraditionalism fed the inspiration of a number of architects in continental Europe and the United States and enabled them to experiment more freely with ideas opened up to them by the use of metal, glass, and reinforced-concrete construction. Since the concept of Art Nouveau involved a high degree of specialized design and craftsmanship, it did not lend itself to the developing field of large-scale mass construction. However, it did contribute substantially to the outlook that was to lead to the rise of a new and experimental architecture in the early twentieth century.

The architectural ornament of Louis Sullivan in the Guaranty Trust Building (see fig. 4.12) or the Carson Pirie Scott store in Chicago was the principal American manifestation of the Art Nouveau spirit in architecture, and a comparable spirit permeated the early work of Sullivan's great disciple, Frank Lloyd Wright (see fig. 12.1). The



**5.8** Louis Comfort Tiffany, Table Lamp, c. 1900. Bronze and Favrite glass, height 27" (68.6 cm), shade diameter 18" (45.7 cm). Lilian Nassau Ltd., New York.

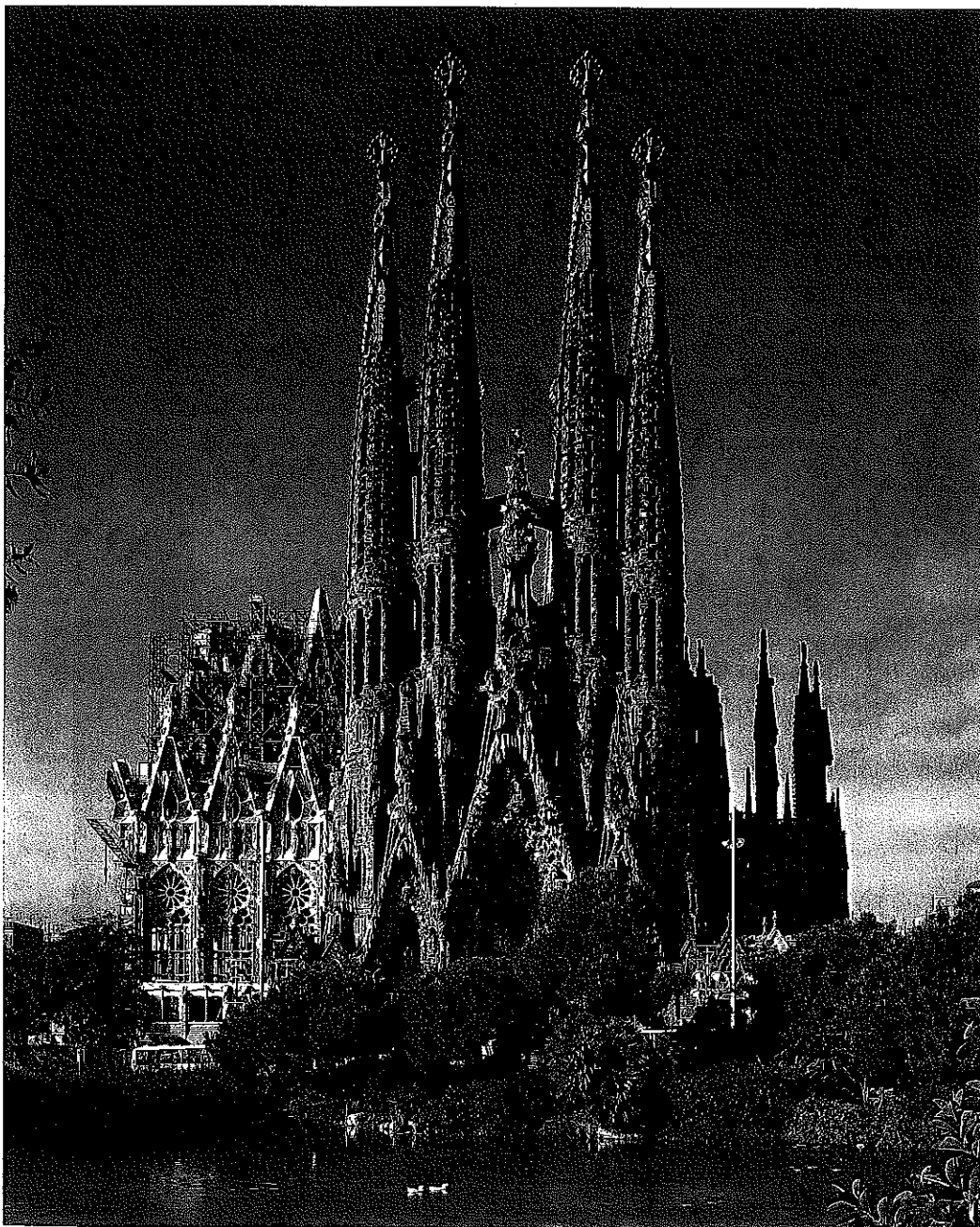
outstanding American name in Art Nouveau was that of **Louis Comfort Tiffany** (1848–1933), but his expression lay in the fields of interior design and decorative arts, notably his table lamps, which combined the stylized natural forms so typical of Art Nouveau with his patented Favrile glass, which appeared handmade although it was industrially manufactured (fig. 5.8). Tiffany was not only in close touch with the European movements but himself exercised a considerable influence on them.

In Spain, **Antoni Gaudí** (1852–1926) was influenced as a student by a Romantic and Symbolist concept of the Middle Ages as a Golden Age, which for him and other Spanish artists became a symbol for the rising nationalism of Catalonia. Also implicit in Gaudí's architecture was his early study of natural forms as a spiritual basis for architecture. He was drawn to the work of the influential French

architect and theorist Eugène Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc. The latter was a leading proponent of the Gothic Revival and a passionate restorer of medieval buildings who analyzed Gothic architectural structure in the light of modern technical advances. His writings on architecture, notably his *Entretiens* ("Discussions"), which appeared in French, English, and American editions in the 1860s and 1870s, were widely read by architects. His bold recommendations on the use of direct metal construction influenced not only Gaudí, but a host of other experimental architects at the end of the nineteenth century. While Gaudí's early architecture belonged in part to the main current of Gothic Revival, it involved a highly idiosyncratic use of materials, particularly in textural and coloristic

arrangement, and an even more imaginative personal style in ornamental ironwork. His wrought-iron designs were arrived at independently and frequently in advance of the comparable experiments of mainstream Art Nouveau. Throughout his later career, from the late 1880s until his death in 1926, Gaudí followed his own direction, which at first was parallel to Art Nouveau and later was independent of anything that was being done in the world or would be done until the middle of the twentieth century, when his work was reassessed.

Gaudí's first major commission was to complete the Church of the Sagrada Família in Barcelona (fig. 5.9), already begun as a Gothic Revival structure by the architect Francisco de Villar. Gaudí worked intermittently on this



5.9 Antoni Gaudí, Church of the Sagrada Família, Barcelona. 1883–1926.

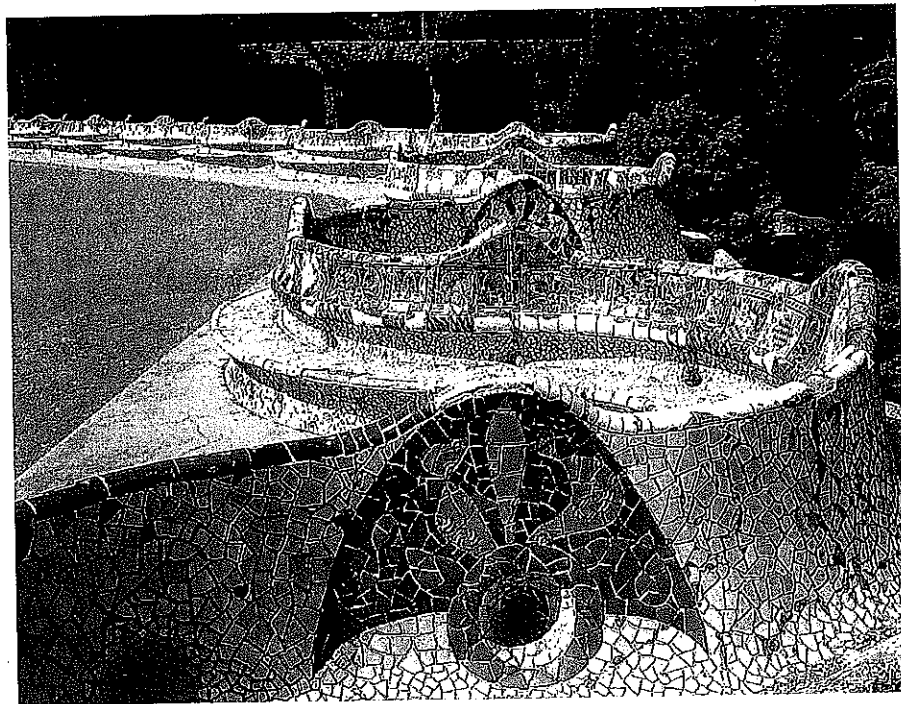
church from 1883 until his death, leaving it far from complete even then. The main parts of the completed church, particularly the four great spires of one transept, are only remotely Gothic. Although influences of Moorish and other architectural styles may be traced, the principal effect is of a building without historic style—or rather one that expresses the imagination of the architect in the most personal and powerful sense. The decoration of the church contains a profusion of fantasy in biological ornament flowing into naturalistic figuration and abstract decoration. Brightly colored mosaic embellishes the finials of the spires. These forms were not arbitrary; they were tied to Gaudí's structural principles and his often hermetic language of symbolic form, informed by his spiritual beliefs. To complete the church according to the architect's plans, an enormous amount of construction has been undertaken since his death and continues today.

At the Güell Park in Barcelona (also unfinished), Gaudí produced a demonstration of sheer fantasy and engineering ingenuity, a Surrealist combination of landscaping and urban planning. This gigantic descendant of the Romantic, Gothic-style English gardens of the eighteenth century is a mélange of sinuously curving walls and benches, grottos, porticos, and arcades, all covered with brilliant mosaics of broken pottery and glass (fig. 5.10). It exemplifies the strongly sculptural quality of Gaudí's architecture, a quality that differentiates it from most aspects of Art Nouveau. He composed in terms not of lines but of twisted masses of sculpturally conceived masonry. Even his ironwork has a sculptural heaviness that transcends the usually attenuated elegance of Art Nouveau line.

Gaudí designed the Casa Milá apartment house, a large structure around open courts, as a whole continuous movement of sculptural volumes. The façade, flowing around the two main elevations, is an alternation of void and sculptural mass. The undulating roof lines and the elaborately twisted chimney pots carry through the unified sculptural theme. Ironwork grows over the balconies like luscious exotic vegetation. The sense of organic growth continues in the floor plan, where one room or corridor flows without interruption into another. Walls are curved or angled throughout, to create a feeling of everlasting change, of space without end. In his concept of architecture as dynamic space joining the interior and external worlds and as living organism growing in a natural environment, in his daring engineering experiments, in his imaginative use of materials—from stone that looks like a natural rock formation to the most wildly abstract color organizations of ceramic mosaic—Gaudí was a visionary and a great pioneer.

If any architect might claim to be the founder of Art Nouveau architecture, however, it is the Belgian **Victor Horta** (1861–1947). Trained as an academician, he was inspired by Baroque and rococo concepts of linear movement in space, by his study of plant growth and of Viollet-le-Duc's structural theories, and by the engineer Gustave Eiffel (see fig. 4.2).

The first important commission carried out by Horta was the house of a Professor Tassel in Brussels, where he substantially advanced Viollet-le-Duc's structural theories. The stair hall (fig. 5.11) is an integrated harmony of linear rhythms, established in the balustrades of ornamental iron, the whiplash curves atop the capitals, the arabesque designs



5.10 Antoni Gaudí, Detail of surrounding wall, Güell Park, Barcelona, 1900–14.



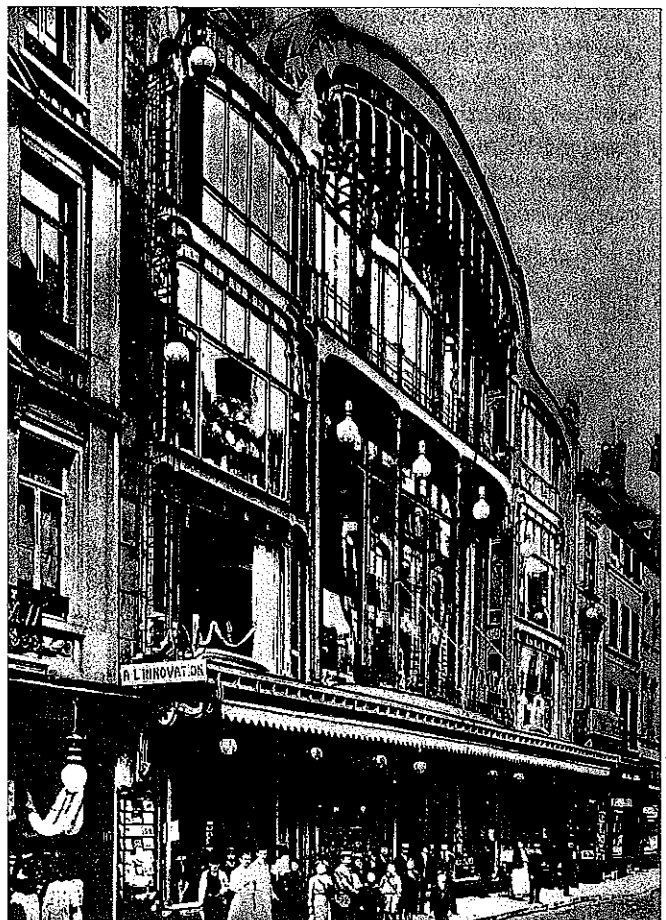
5.11 Victor Horta, Stairwell of interior, Tassel House, Brussels. 1892–93.

on the walls and floor, and the winding steps. Line triumphs over sculptured mass as a multitude of fanciful, tendrillike elements blend into an organic whole that boldly exposes the supporting metal structure. In Horta's *Maison du Peuple*, built in 1897–99 as the headquarters of the Belgian Socialist Party, and now destroyed, the architect worked for a clientele that departed from the usual upper-middle-class patrons of his houses. The façade was a curtain wall of glass supported on a minimum of metal structural frames and wrapped around the irregularly curving edge of an open plaza. The auditorium interior effectively became a glass enclosure in which the angled, exposed frame girders formed articulated supports for the double curve of the ceiling. The interior was given variety and interest by the combination of vertical glass walls, angled metal struts, and an open, curving ceiling, and in general achieved a harmonious unity between ornament and articulated structure.

Many of the chief examples of Art Nouveau architecture are to be found in the designs of department stores and similar commercial buildings. The large-scale department store was a characteristic development of the later nineteenth century, superseding the older type of small shop and enclosing the still older form of the bazaar. Thus it was

a form of building without traditions, and its functions lent themselves to an architecture that emphasized openness and spatial flow as well as ornate decorative backgrounds. The façade of Horta's department store in Brussels, *À l'Innovation* (fig. 5.12), is a display piece of glass and curvilinear metal supports. Such department stores, like Sullivan's Carson Pirie Scott store (1899–1904), sprang up all over Europe and America at the beginning of the twentieth century. Their utilitarian purpose made them appropriate embodiments of the new discoveries in mass construction: exposed-metal and glass structure and decorative tracery. Horta's design was notable for its expression of the interior on the glass skin of the exterior, so that the three floors, with a tall central "nave" and flanking, four-story side aisles, are articulated in the façade.

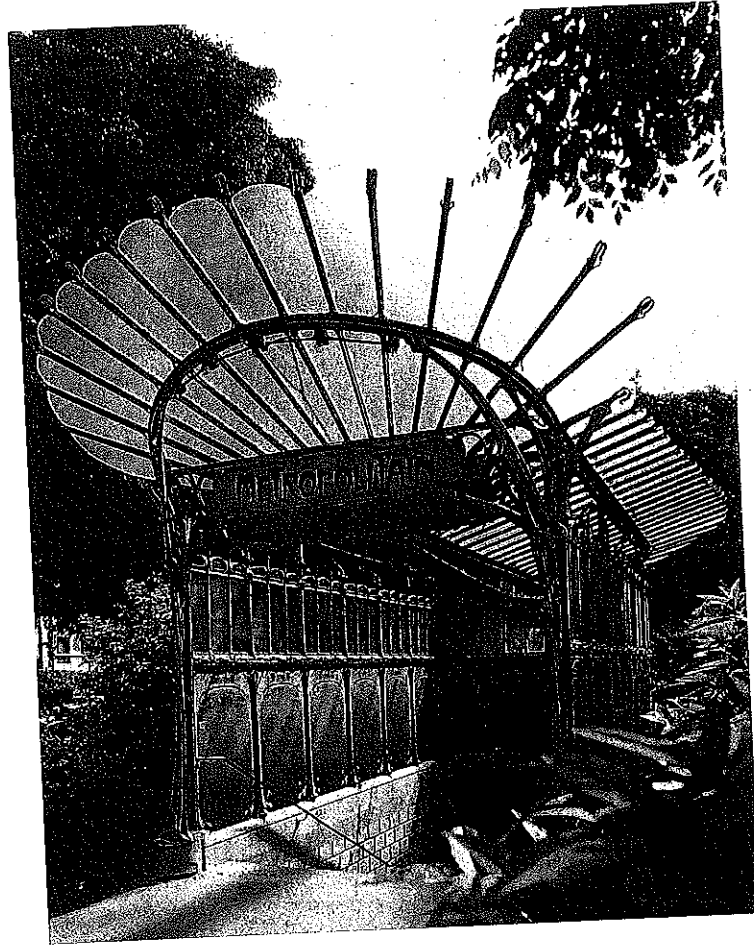
Many distinguished architects were associated with Art Nouveau in one context or another, but few of their works can be identified with the style to the same degree as Horta's. The stations designed by Hector Guimard (1867–1925) for the Paris Métropolitain (subway) can be considered pure Art Nouveau, perhaps because they were less architectural structures than decorative signs or symbols. Guimard's Métro stations were constructed for the enormous Exposition Universelle in 1900 out of prefabricated parts of cast iron and glass. At odds with the prevailing



5.12 Victor Horta, *À l'Innovation* department store, Brussels. 1901. Destroyed by fire 1967.

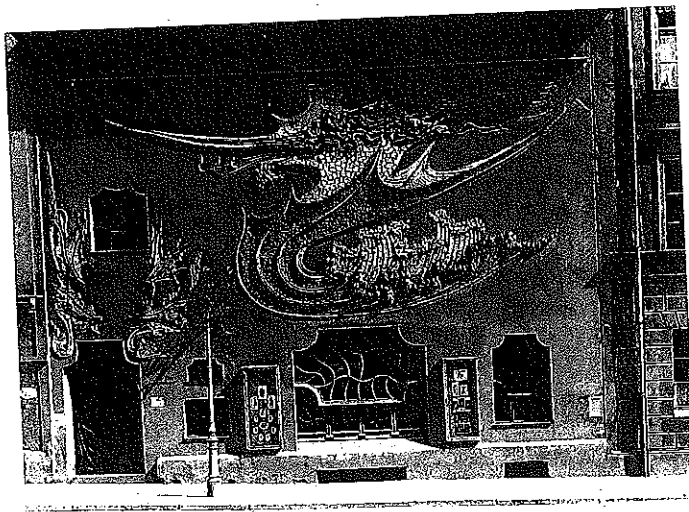


**5.13** Hector Guimard, Entrance to the Porte Dauphine Métropolitain station, Paris. 1901.



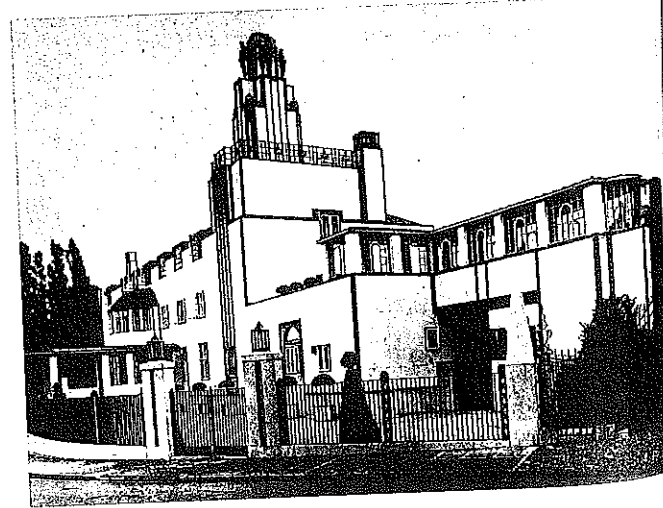
taste for classicism, they created a sensation in Paris, causing one critic to compare them to a dragonfly's wings. His entrance for the Porte Dauphine station (fig. 5.13) is a rare example of an original Guimard canopy still intact.

Aside from the elaborate "sea horse" ornament on its façade, the Atelier Elvira by August Endell (1871–1925) in Munich (fig. 5.14) is a relatively simple and austere structure. However, details of the interior, notably the stair hall, did continue the delicate undulations of Art Nouveau.



**5.14** August Endell, Atelier Elvira, Munich. 1897.

The Palais Stoclet in Brussels (fig. 5.15) by the Austrian architect Josef Hoffmann (1870–1955), is a flat-walled, rectangular structure, although the dining-room murals by Klimt (see fig. 5.5) and the interior furnishings and decorations represent a typical Art Nouveau synthesis of decorative accessories. Hoffmann's starkly abstract language is closer to the elegant geometry of the Viennese Jugendstil school than the flourishes of the Belgian Art Nouveau, and really belongs in the context of works such as Otto



**5.15** Josef Hoffmann, Palais Stoclet, Brussels. 1905–11.

Wagner's Postal Savings Bank in Vienna and the architecture of Peter Behrens, Adolf Loos, Joseph Maria Olbrich, and van de Velde, all discussed in chapter 12 (see figs. 12.9, 12.10, 12.11, 12.12, 12.13).

## Toward Expressionism: Late Nineteenth-Century Painting beyond France

In retrospect it is apparent that Jugendstil was as important for the new ideas it evoked in painters of the era as for the immediate impetus given architects and designers working directly in an Art Nouveau style. The Norwegian Edvard Munch, who had a sizable impact on German Expressionism; the Swiss Ferdinand Hodler; the Belgian James Ensor, a progenitor of Surrealism; and the Russian Vasily Kandinsky, one of the first abstract artists, all grew up in the environment of Jugendstil or Art Nouveau. Although some of the artists in this section formed their highly individual styles in response to advanced French art, they also drew extensively from their own local artistic traditions.

### Scandinavia

By 1880, at the time Edvard Munch (1863–1944) began to study painting seriously, Oslo (then Kristiania), Norway, had a number of accomplished painters and a degree of patronage for their works. But the tradition was largely academic, rooted in the French Romantic Realism of the Barbizon School and in German lyrical naturalism, in part because Norwegian painters usually trained in Germany. In Kristiania, Munch was part of a radical group of bohemian writers and painters who worked in a naturalist mode.

Thanks to scholarships granted by the Norwegian government, Munch lived intermittently in Paris between 1889 and 1892, and he had already spent three weeks in the French capital in 1885. Though it is not clear what art he saw while in France, the Post-Impressionist works he must have encountered surely struck a sympathetic chord with his incipient Symbolist tendencies. In 1892 his reputation had grown to the point where he was invited to exhibit at the Verein Berliner Künstler (Society of Berlin Artists). His retrospective drew such a storm of criticism that the members of the Society voted to close it after less than a week. Sympathetic artists, led by Max Liebermann, left the Society and formed the Berlin Secession. This recognition—and controversy—encouraged Munch to settle in Germany, where he spent most of his time until 1908.

In evaluating Munch's place in European painting it could be argued that he was formed not so much by his Norwegian origins as by his exposure first to Paris during one of the most exciting periods in the history of French painting, and then to Germany at the moment when a new and dynamic art was emerging. The singular personal quality of his paintings and prints, however, is unquestionably a result of an intensely literary and even mystical approach that was peculiarly Scandinavian, intensified by his own

tortured psyche. The painter moved in literary circles in Norway as well as in Paris and Berlin, was a friend of noted writers, among them the playwright August Strindberg, and in 1906 made stage designs for Ibsen's plays *Ghosts* and *Hedda Gabler*.

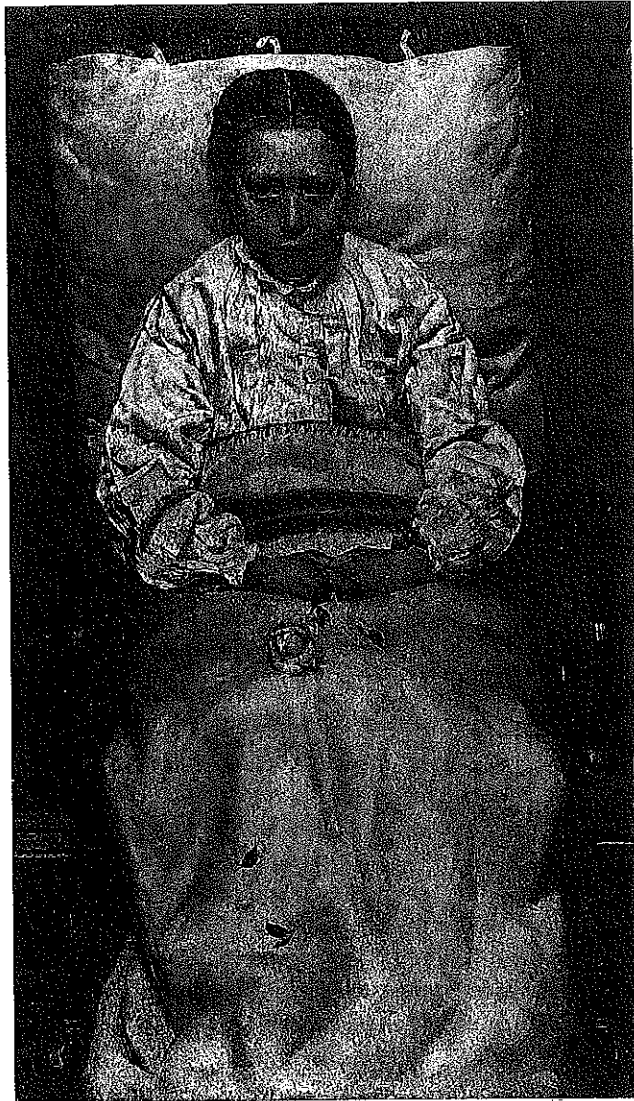
Although he lived to be eighty years old, the specters of sickness and death hovered over Munch through much of his life. His mother and sister died of tuberculosis while he was still young. His younger brother succumbed in 1895, five years after the death of their father, and Munch himself suffered from serious illnesses. Sickness and death began to appear early in his painting and recurred continually. The subject of *The Sick Child*, related to the illness and death of his sister (fig. 5.16), haunted him for years. He reworked the painting over and over, and made prints of the subject as well as two later versions of the painting.

Munch's mentor, the leading Norwegian naturalist painter Christian Krohg (1852–1925), had earlier explored a similar theme, common in the art and literature of the period, but he did so with an astonishingly direct and exacting style (fig. 5.17). This sitter confronts the viewer head-on, her pale skin and white gown stark against the white pillow. Krohg, who had also watched his sister die of tuberculosis, avoided the usual sentimentality or latent eroticism that normally pervaded contemporary treatments of such subjects. While his version could not have predicted the melodrama or painterly handling of Munch's painting, the connection between the two canvases is obvious, though Munch, typically, denied the possibility of influence.

Munch was enormously prolific, and throughout his life experimented with many different themes, palettes, and styles of drawing. The works of the turn of the century, in



5.16 Edvard Munch, *The Sick Child*, 1885–86. Oil on canvas, 47 × 46½" (119.4 × 118.4 cm). Nasjonalgalleriet, Oslo.



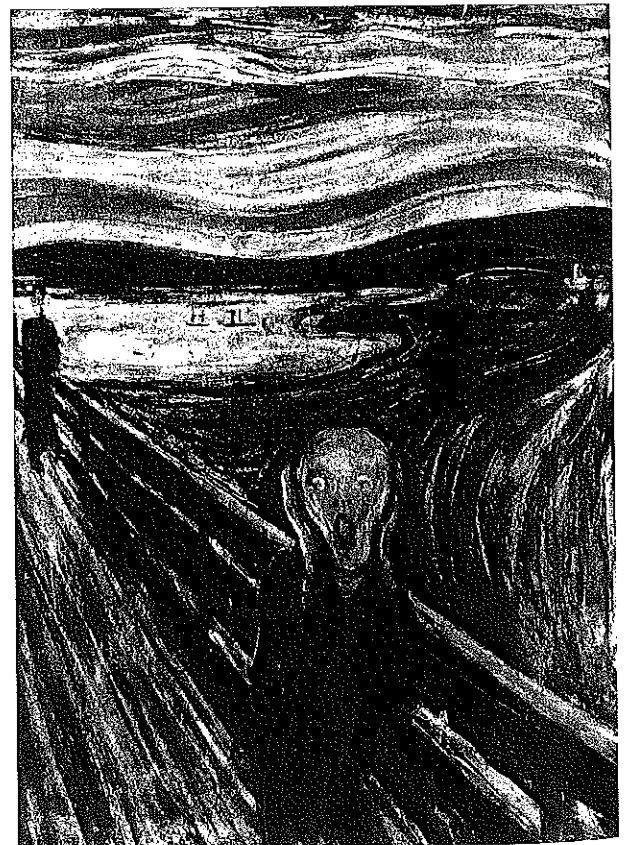
**5.17** Christian Krohg, *The Sick Girl*, 1880–81. Oil on wood, 40% × 22% (101.9 × 58.1 cm). Nasjonalgalleriet, Oslo.

which the symbolic content is most explicit, are characterized by the sinuous, constantly moving, curving line of Art Nouveau, combined with color dark in hue but brilliant in intensity. Influences from Gauguin and the Nabis are present in his work of this period. The anxieties that plagued Munch were frequently given a more general and ambiguous, though no less frightening, expression. *The Scream* (fig. 5.18) is an agonized shriek translated into bands of color that echo like sound waves across the landscape and through the blood-red sky. The image has its source in Munch's experience. As he walked across a bridge with friends at sunset, he was seized with despair and "felt a great, infinite scream pass through nature." *The Scream*, the artist's best-known and most widely reproduced image, has become a familiar symbol of modern anxiety and alienation.

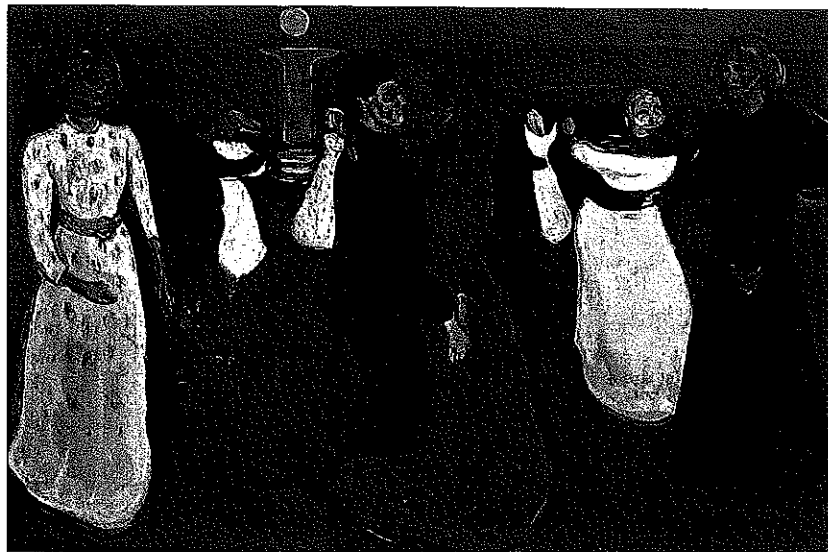
Munch was emerging as a painter at the moment when Sigmund Freud was developing his theories of psychoanalysis. His obsessions with sex, death, and woman as a

destructive force seem at times to provide classic examples of the problems Freud was exploring. In many works, *The Dance of Life* among them (fig. 5.19), Munch transformed the moon and its long reflection on the water into a phallic symbol. *The Dance of Life* belongs to a large series Munch called The Frieze of Life, which contained most of his major paintings (including *The Scream*), addressing the central themes of love, sexual anxiety, and death. The subject of this painting, based on Munch's troubled personal history of love and rejection, was in step with international trends in Symbolist art.

Munch was one of the major graphic artists of the twentieth century, and like Gauguin, he took a very experimental approach to printmaking and contributed to a revival of the woodcut medium. He began making etchings and lithographs in 1894 and for a time was principally interested in using the media to restudy subjects he had painted earlier. The prints, however, were never merely reproductions of the paintings. In each case he reworked the theme in terms of the new medium, sometimes executing the same subject in drypoint, woodcut, and lithography, and varying each of these as each was modified from the painting. For *Vampire* (fig. 5.20), Munch used an ingenious method he had invented for bypassing the tedious printmaking process of color registration, which involves inking separate areas of the woodblock for each color and painstakingly aligning the sheet for every pass



**5.18** Edvard Munch, *The Scream*, 1893. Oil and tempera on board, 35% × 29% (90.8 × 73.7 cm). Nasjonalgalleriet, Oslo.



5.19 Edvard Munch, *The Dance of Life*, 1900. Oil on canvas, 4'1½" × 6'3½" (1.26 × 1.9 m). Nasjonalgalleriet, Oslo.

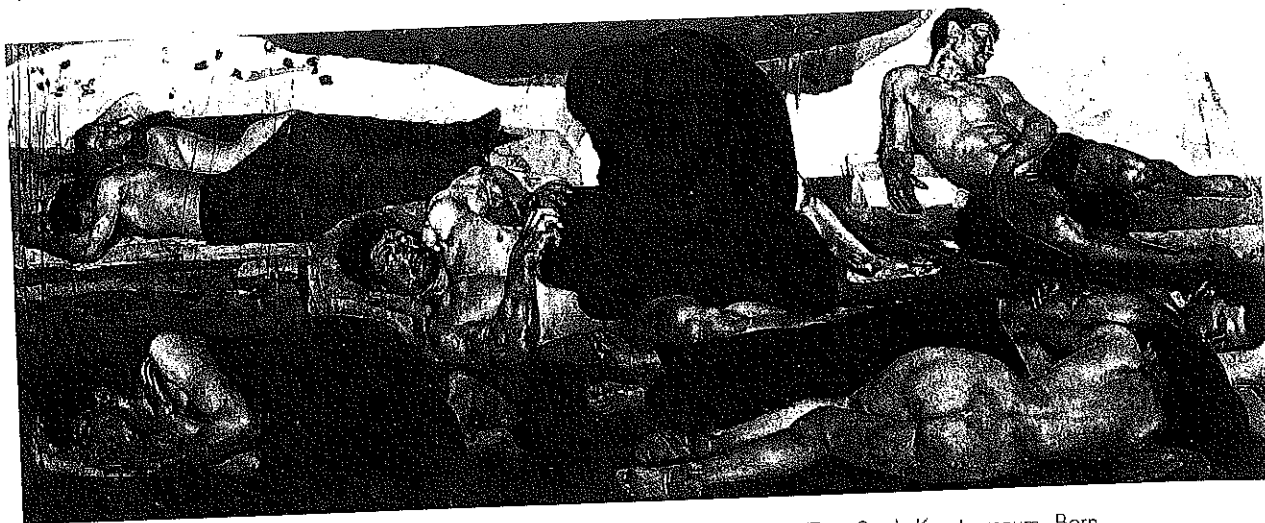
(one for each color) through the press. Munch simply sawed his block into sections, inked each section separately, and assembled them like a puzzle for a single printing. In *Vampire*, he actually combined this technique with lithography to make a "combination print." Through these innovative techniques, Munch gained rich graphic effects, such as subtly textured patterns (by exploiting the rough grain of the woodblock), and translucent passages of color. His imagery, already explored in several drawings and paintings made in Berlin, is typically ambiguous. While the redheaded woman could be embracing her lover, the ominous shadow that looms above them and the title of the work imply something far more sinister.

### Northern and Central Europe

The Swiss artist **Ferdinand Hodler** (1853–1918) also knew the ravages of sickness and death, and, like Van Gogh, had undergone a moral crisis in the wake of deep religious commitment. In his paintings, he avoided the turbulent drama of earlier Romantic expressions and sought instead frozen stillness, sparseness, and purity, the better to evoke some sense of the unity within the apparent confusion and complexity of the world of experience. This can be discerned in the famous *Night* (fig. 5.21), where the surfaces and volumes of nature have been described in exacting detail, controlled by an equally intense concern for abstract pattern, a kind of rigorously balanced, friezelike



5.20 Edvard Munch, *Vampire*, 1902. Woodcut and lithograph, from an 1895 woodcut, 14¾ × 21½" (38 × 54.6 cm). Munch-Museet, Oslo.



5.21 Ferdinand Hodler, *Night*, 1889–90. Oil on canvas, 3'9¼" × 9'9¼" (1.17 × 3 m). Kunstmuseum, Bern.

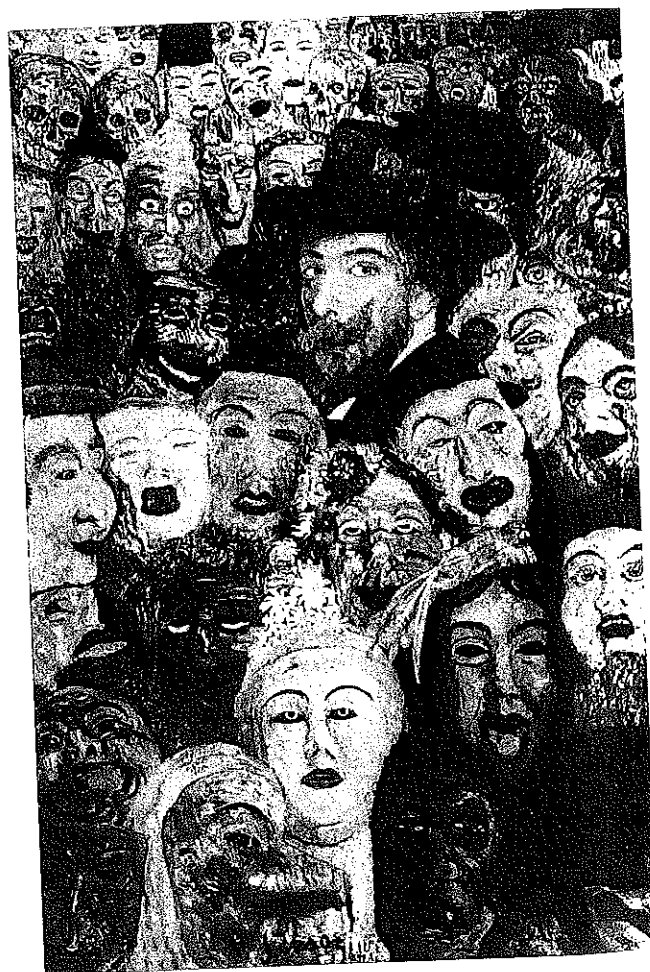
organization the artist called "parallelism." As in Munch's *The Scream*, the imagery in *Night* was an expression of Hodler's own obsessive fears. The central figure, who awakens to find a shrouded phantom crouched above him, is a self-portrait, as is the man at the upper right, while the women in the foreground are depictions of his mistress and ex-wife. The painting was banned from an exhibition in Geneva in 1891 as indecent, but encountered a better reception when it was later shown in Paris.

James Ensor (1860–1949), whose long life was almost exactly contemporary with Munch's, differed from the Norwegian in being the inheritor of one of the great traditions in European art—that of Flemish and Dutch painting. The consciousness of this heritage even compelled him to assume from time to time, though half satirically, the appearance of Rubens (fig. 5.22), and it is difficult to believe that he could have conceived his pictorial fantasies without knowledge of the late-medieval works of Hieronymus Bosch (despite his denials) and Pieter Brueghel the Elder. Outside of a three-year period of study at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Brussels, Ensor spent his entire life in his native Ostend, on the coast of Belgium, where his Flemish mother and her relatives kept a souvenir shop filled with toys, seashells, model ships in bottles, crockery, and, above all, the grotesque masks popular at Flemish carnivals.

By 1881, Ensor could produce such accomplished traditional Realist–Romantic paintings that he was accepted in the Brussels Salon and by 1882 in the Paris Salon. His approach was already changing, however, with the introduction of brutal or mocking subject matter, harshly authentic pictures of miserable, drunken tramps and inexplicable meetings of masked figures. *Scandalized Masks*, for instance, shows a familiar setting, the corner of a room, with a masked figure sitting at a table. Another masked figure enters through the open door. The masked figures obviously derive from the Flemish carnivals of popular tradition, but here, isolated in their grim surroundings, they cease to be merely masked mummers. The mask becomes the reality, and we feel involved in some communion of monsters.

This troubling and fantastic picture reveals intensification of the artist's inner mood of disturbance. In any event, the new works did not please the judges of the Brussels Salon, and in 1884 all Ensor's entries were rejected.

Ensor's mature paintings still have the capacity to shock. He was something of an eccentric and much affected by



5.22 James Ensor, *Portrait of the Artist Surrounded by Masks*, 1899. Oil on canvas, 47 × 31½" (119.4 × 80 cm). Menard Art Museum, Aichi, Japan.

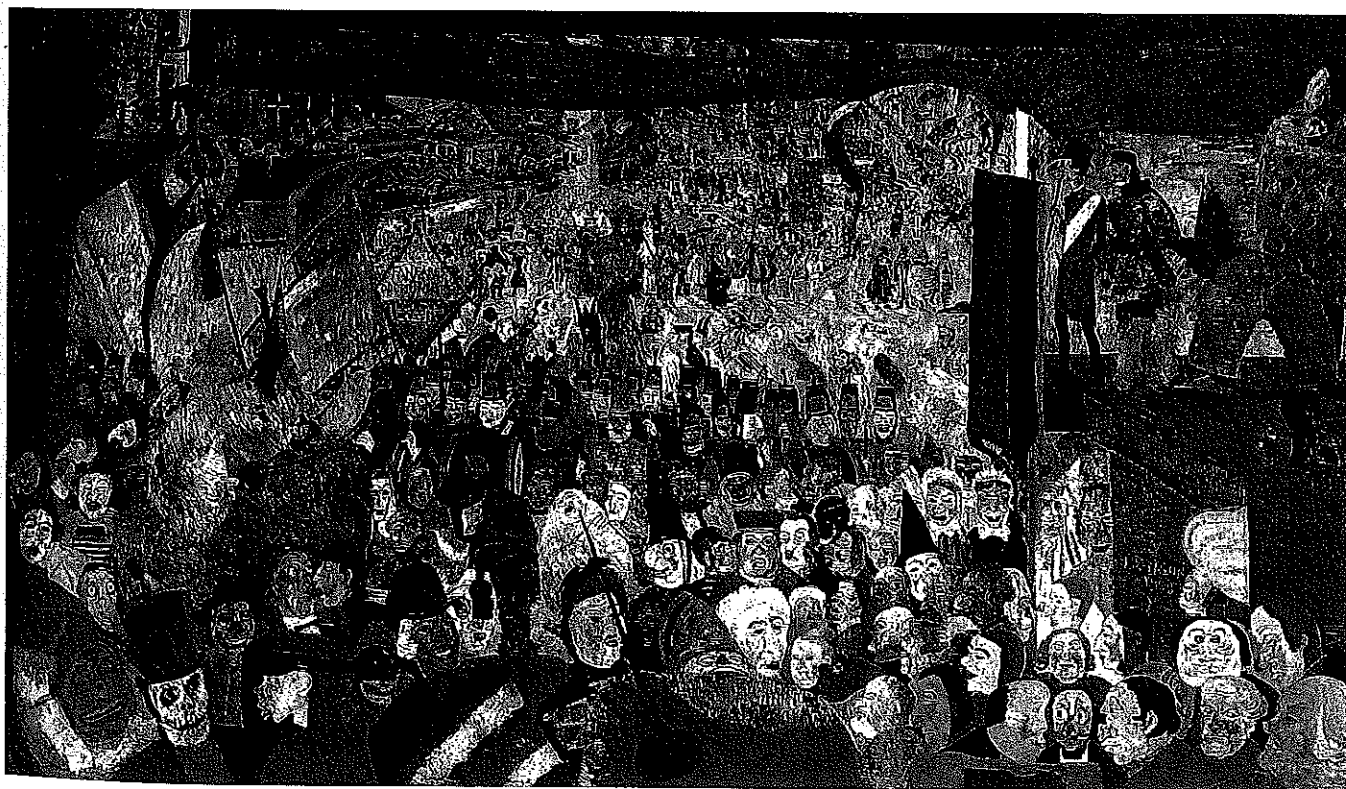
nineteenth-century Romanticism and Symbolism, evident in his passionate devotion to the tales of Poe and Balzac, the poems of Baudelaire, and the work of several contemporary Belgian writers. He searched the tradition of fantastic painting and graphic art for inspiration—from the tormented visions of Matthias Grünewald and Bosch to Goya. Ensor was further affected by Daumier and his social commentaries (see figs. 2.14, 2.15), the book illustrator Gustave Doré, Redon, and the decadent-erotic imagery of the Belgian artist Félicien Rops.

During the late 1880s Ensor turned to religious subjects, frequently the torments of Christ. They are not interpreted in a narrowly religious sense, but are rather a personal revulsion for a world of inhumanity that nauseated him. This feeling was given its fullest expression in the most important painting of his career, *The Entry of Christ into Brussels in 1889* (fig. 5.23), a work from 1888–89 that depicts the Passion of Christ as the center of a contemporary Flemish kermis, or carnival, symptomatic of the indifference, stupidity, and venality of the modern world. Ensor describes this grotesque tumult of humanity with dissonant color, compressing the crowd into a vast yet claustrophobic space. Given the enormous size of *The Entry of Christ* (it is over twelve feet, or 3.5 m, wide), it has been suggested that Ensor painted it in response to Seurat's *La Grande Jatte* (see fig. 3.1), which had been much heralded at an exhibition in Brussels in 1887. While the French painting was a modern celebration of middle-class life, Ensor's was an indictment of it. The figure of

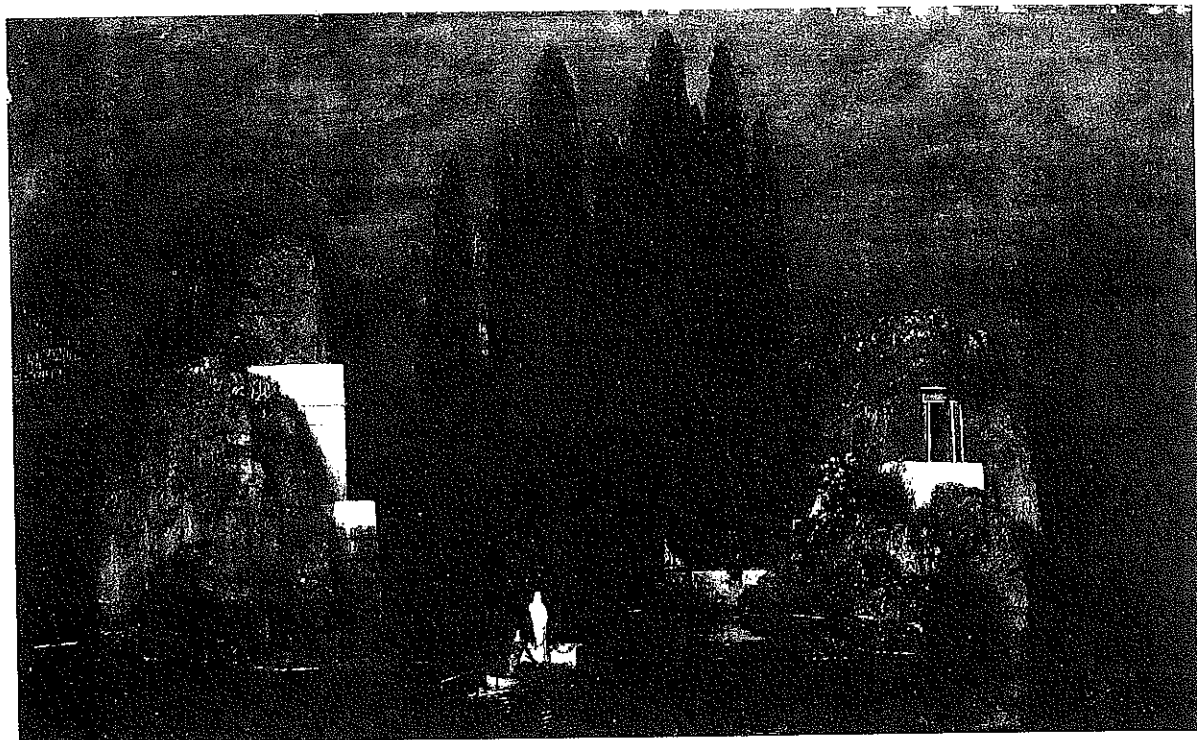
Christ, barely visible in the back of the crowd, was probably based on the artist's own likeness. This conceit—the artist as persecuted martyr—was being exploited by Gauguin in Brittany at virtually the same time. By extension, Ensor's hideous crowd refers to the ignorant citizens of Ostend, who greeted his work with incomprehension.

Even members of a more liberal exhibiting group of Brussels, called L'Essor, were somewhat uneasy about Ensor's new paintings. This led in 1884 to a withdrawal of some members, including Ensor, to form the progressive society Les XX (The Twenty). For many years the society was to support aspects of the new art in Brussels. Although it exhibited Manet, Seurat, Van Gogh, Gauguin, and Toulouse-Lautrec, and exerted an influence in the spread of Neo-Impressionism and Art Nouveau, hostility to Ensor's increasingly fantastic paintings grew even there. *The Entry of Christ* was refused admission and was never publicly exhibited before 1929. The artist himself was saved from expulsion from the group only by his own vote.

During the 1890s Ensor focused much of his talent for invective on the antagonists of his paintings, frequently with devastating results. Some of his most brilliant and harrowing works were produced at this time. The masks reappeared at regular intervals, occasionally becoming particularly personal, as in *Portrait of the Artist Surrounded by Masks* (see fig. 5.22), a painting in which he portrayed himself in the manner of Rubens's self-portraits—with debonair mustache and beard, plumed hat, and piercing glance directed at the spectator. The work is reminiscent of



**5.23** James Ensor, *The Entry of Christ into Brussels in 1889*, 1888–89. Oil on canvas, 8'5" × 12'5" (2.6 × 3.8 m). J. Paul Getty Museum, Malibu.



**5.24** Arnold Böcklin, *Island of the Dead*, 1880. Oil on wood, 29 × 48" (73.7 × 122 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

an earlier 1883 self-portrait by Ensor and, in a curious way, of a painting by Hieronymus Bosch of Christ surrounded by his tormentors (here, Ensor's critics): the personification of Good, isolated by Evil but never overwhelmed.

The ancestors of twentieth-century Surrealism can also be found in a trio of artists who emerged in German-speaking Europe during the Symbolist era: Böcklin, Klinger, and Kubin. The eldest of these was **Arnold Böcklin** (1827–1901), born in Basel, educated in Düsseldorf and Geneva, and then resident in Italy until the end of his life. Like so many others within contemporary German culture, Böcklin fell prey to the classical dream, which prompted him to paint, with brutal, almost grotesque academic Realism, such mythical beings as centaurs and mermaids writhing in battle, or in some sexual contest between a hapless, depleted male and an exultant *femme fatale*. One of his most haunting images, especially for later painters like Giorgio de Chirico and the Surrealists, came to be called *Island of the Dead* (fig. 5.24), a scene depicting no known reality but universally appealing to the late Romantic and Symbolist imagination. With its uncanny stillness, its ghostly white-cowled figure, and its

eerie moonlight illuminating rocks and the entrances to tombs against the deep, mysteriously resonant blues and greens of sky, water, and tall, melancholy cypresses, the picture provided inspiration not only for subsequent painters but also for numerous poets and composers.

The German artist Max Klinger (1857–1920) paid homage to Böcklin by making prints after several of his paintings, including *Island of the Dead*. Klinger is best known for a ten-part cycle of prints, entitled *A Glove*, whose sense of fantasy may owe something to the dark, sinister imaginings of Goya. The Czech artist and illustrator Alfred Kubin (1877–1959) proved capable of phantasms well in excess of those found in the art of either Böcklin or Klinger. Indeed, he may be compared with Redon, though his obsession with woman-as-destroyer themes places him alongside *fin-de-siècle* artists like Rops as well as anticipating the Freudian world of Surrealism. Kubin was to become a member of Kandinsky's Munich circle, and in 1911 he joined a set of brilliant and experimental artists in Germany called *Der Blaue Reiter* (the Blue Rider). Meanwhile, in 1909, he published his illustrated novel entitled *The Other Side*, often regarded as a progenitor of the hallucinatory fictions of Franz Kafka.

