

THE VIENNESE BOHÈME

WORKS FROM THE HAGEN SOCIETY

Exhibition Facts

Duration	25 July – 12 October 2025
Venue	Tietze Galleries The ALBERTINA Museum
Curator	Elisabeth Dutz
Assistant Curator	Laura Luzianovich
Works	137
Catalogue	Available for EUR 26,90 (English & German) onsite at the Museum Shop as well as via https://shop.albertina.at/en/
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Opening Hours	Daily 10 a.m. – 6 p.m. Except Wednesday and Friday 10 a.m. – 9 p.m.
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The Hagengesellschaft: A Forerunner of the Viennese Avant-Garde

The Hagengesellschaft paved the way for Austria's two most important artist associations—the Secession and the Hagenbund—yet today it is known only to a few.

From 1880 onwards, this group met regularly on Gumpendorfer Straße at Café Sperl and the Blaues Freihaus, whose innkeeper, Josef Haagen, gave the Ha(a)ngengesellschaft its name. Its members—including artists, architects, musicians, composers, researchers, journalists, and civil servants—were united by an open-minded attitude toward the spirit of modernity. Although they never formed an official institution, they became trailblazers for Vienna's two key reform movements in the arts: Fourteen members were among the founders of the Wiener Secession in 1897, and many others helped form the Hagenbund in 1900.

In 1905, the Hagengesellschaft donated more than 800 drawings to the Albertina Museum—an act of remarkable artistic self-confidence. This collection is an important historical document of a unique creative network.

Vienna around 1900: A Coffeehouse Culture that Shaped Art History

Viennese coffeehouse culture is usually associated with literature. But in 19th-century Vienna, it also served as a creative hub for artists, actors, and musicians—the Hagengesellschaft found its artistic home in the café. At Café Sperl, their main meeting place, countless drawings were created: spontaneous sketches, portraits, caricatures, humorous images, and grotesque scenes of everyday life. At first, these were drawn directly onto marble tabletops and later wiped away—until 1888, when painter Ernst Stöhr brought along paper so the drawings could be preserved. From then on, they were stored in a portfolio provided by the café owner—most of them eventually made their way into the Albertina Museum.

These drawings are snapshots of the artists' daily lives: the group reading newspapers, engaging in debate, or quietly observing their surroundings. Particularly popular were humorous, motto-based drawing competitions, where sketches were produced in 20 minutes. A jury made up of members themselves chose the winners, who received food and drink as prizes—coffee, croissants, or schnapps. The everyday merged with the artistic—a fine expression of Viennese *Lebenskunst*.

Diversity as Strength: Friendship, Irony, and Self-Staging

The Hagengesellschaft was not a formal association with bylaws—it was a circle of like-minded individuals, held together by friendship, humor, and mutual inspiration. Around fifty members met regularly, with many others joining occasionally. Caricature was a central means of expression: members portrayed one another with affectionate exaggeration—small bodies became rounder, large noses more prominent, character traits more pronounced. Family ties further strengthened the network: Josef Engelhart was Kolo Moser's brother-in-law, Ferdinand Schirnböck was related by marriage to Paul Wittgenstein, and Gustav Frank was a cousin of Gustav Mahler.

Modernist Impulses: From *Ver Sacrum* and the Secession to the Hagenbund

The Hagengesellschaft's influence on Viennese art history was profound. The magazine *Ver Sacrum*, founded in 1898 as the official publication of the Secession, featured numerous drawings from the group's portfolio—over fifty works were published. The visual style they presented—marked by wit, ornament, fantasy, and sharp observation—helped define the look of Viennese *Jugendstil*.

The founding of the Wiener Secession is also hardly imaginable without the Hagengesellschaft. Frustrated by the conservatism of the Künstlerhaus, progressive voices—many of them members of both the Künstlerhaus and the Hagengesellschaft, including Klimt and Moser—began meeting from 1893 onward. Their discussions culminated in the founding of the Secession in 1897 at Hotel Victoria. When some members of the Hagengesellschaft were excluded from this new movement, the Hagenbund was established in 1900, becoming the second major institution of Viennese modernism. Both groups remained closely connected to the Hagengesellschaft's open-minded, humorous spirit—a connection that can still be felt today. The group continued to meet regularly into old age.

ALBERTINA

The exhibition at the Albertina Museum is the first to fully honor the creative and social potential of this remarkable group. It presents the Hagensgesellschaft as a breeding ground for a new kind of artistic practice: playful, interconnected, and avant-garde. The drawings on view offer insights not only into a period of artistic awakening but into a community that deliberately blurred the lines between art, life, and friendship. In a time of social and cultural transformation, the Hagensgesellschaft was a laboratory of modernism—and in many ways, it remains one to this day.

Exhibition texts

Introduction

In 1905, the Hagen Society donated a compilation of more than eight hundred drawings to the Albertina Museum. Although the affiliated artists were convinced of the importance of their association, its role as a vital trailblazer for the Secession often received little recognition later on. In 1897, as many as fourteen members of the Hagen Society had been among the founders of this new, progressive artists' movement. Many of the remaining members joined forces with other artists to form the Hagenbund in 1900. The Hagen Society's members met regularly from 1880, and soon the Blaues Freihaus and the Café Sperl in Gumpendorfer Straße became their regular haunts. The innkeeper of the Blaues Freihaus was Josef Haagen, from whom the Ha(a)gen Society derived its name.

In convivial gatherings, enormously vibrant drawings were created, mostly jotted down on paper quite swiftly, showing the artists at the coffeehouse or as caricatures. A series of drawing competitions documented "club life" in a humorous manner. Humor was omnipresent, for example in the group of the "Color Jokes," which made fun of the new current of Impressionism. However, many of the works also show a clear tendency toward Art Nouveau. Grotesques, scenes featuring everyday occasions and street life, as well as idyllic landscapes were created, and the organ of the Vienna Secession, the magazine *Ver Sacrum*, repeatedly borrowed from the portfolios of the Hagen Society, using individual drawings as illustrations in its issues. The Hagen Society was a complex network of friends and relatives the strength of which lay above all in its heterogeneity. Its members pursued professions as diverse as painter, sculptor, photographer, architect, musician, composer, researcher, bank clerk, fiscal officer, engineer, judge, journalist, or coffeehouse proprietor. Contrary to what has traditionally been handed down, the circle of friends did not break apart with the founding of the artists' associations of the Secession and the Hagenbund, but remained in close contact and exchange over decades, which sheds new light on the networks of artists at the time.

At the Coffeehouse

From the nineteenth century onwards, Viennese coffeehouse culture flourished, and the cafés became a second living room for many artists, writers, and musicians. Beginning in 1880, the Hagen Society met at various cafés and inns, until the Café Sperl in Gumpendorfer Straße became their regular hangout where the friends met almost daily, but at least every Saturday afternoon. There they chatted animatedly, relished a traditional coffee with foamed milk called “Melange” and kipfels, played cards, and, above all, could be seen drawing away eagerly. The proprietor of the Café Sperl initially dedicated a large table with a white marble top to the round of artists, on which they drew with great enthusiasm. In the evening, however, the tables were cleaned, and the drawings were thus wiped away. This went on for several years until the painter Ernst Stöhr realized that the loss of so many original drawings was indeed a great pity. One day he brought paper, paints, and pencils. On November 29, 1888, on the eve of the eight-year anniversary of the founding of the Hagen Society, the first drawing on paper was created. The owner of the Café Sperl provided a portfolio for the drawings, which were collected and stored at the café. In 1905, a large number of these works were donated to the Albertina Museum. Many of them, most of which were created between 1888 and 1898, are snapshots of the group of friends sitting together at the café, conversing, reading the newspaper, or simply sitting there silently, lost in thought.

The Members of the Hagen Society

The Hagen Society was neither an official association, nor did it have registered members or statutes. It was a crowd of unique characters who complemented each other and formed a convivial round table where humor was most essential. More than fifty members met on a regular basis; in addition, there were several hundred guests who only attended once or occasionally at the Blaues Freihaus or the Café Sperl. It was an all-male club made up not only of painters, sculptors, architects, composers, musicians, and photographers, but also of factory owners, bank clerks, researchers, and inventors. The artists made portraits of each other, sometimes lovingly executed, often just quickly jotted down on paper. These were often caricatures, preferably emphasizing physical features and character traits. It was a tight-knit network of friends and relatives: Maximilian Lenz and Moriz Nähr had been close friends since art school. Karl Bauer was related to Ferdinand Schirnböck and Konrad Widter to Josef Engelhart, Hans Tichy to Rudolf Bacher, and Heinrich Tomec to Johann Nepomuk Geller. Ludwig Hevesi and Adolf Boehm were godfathers to Eugen Artin's sons. The connections also went beyond the Hagen Society: Josef Engelhart was Kolo Moser's brother-in-law; Maximilian Lenz had been friends

with Franz Matsch since childhood days; Ferdinand Schirnböck was Paul Wittgenstein's brother-in-law, and Gustav Frank was Gustav Mahler's cousin.

Drawing Competitions

The artists often held little drawing competitions at the Café Sperl, with such variegated themes as “Aussi möchte I” [“I Wanna Break Free”], “Hin is er” [“He's Finished”] or “Höcher geht's nimmer” [“You Can't Get Any Higher”]. Participants often had merely twenty minutes to realize their ideas. A jury was set up, registration lists were kept, the time of submission was recorded, and the winners were registered. Prizes were awarded in kind. For example, the 1st prize was a large coffee, the 2nd prize was a small coffee, the 3rd prize was a schnapps, and the 4th prize was a cigar. Another time, the winner received a coffee and two kipfels, the runner-up a coffee and a piece of bread.

On the theme of “I Wanna Break Free,” a large variety of motifs were depicted, such as a pub brawl, a crowded streetcar, a full railway car, a person behind a locked door, animals in cages, but also an exhibition visitor. For the theme “He's Finished,” a sea monster is shown swimming in the water, a carouser is about to get drunk, a man is thrown out of a pub with his top hat smashed, a dog lies dead on its back, and a chamber pot has been broken.

Drawn Jokes

The most important quality of the Hagen Society was humor. The members frequently caricatured each other and made fun of each other's physical peculiarities and character traits. Adolf Boehm and Maximilian Lenz were usually portrayed as exaggeratedly short and chubby, while Leopold Stolba appeared very tall, with a big nose. Josef Engelhart lent himself to the portrayal of a long, lanky dandy. Theodor Hörmann's typical feature was his raised index finger when lecturing, whereas with Franz Jaschke it was the corns on his feet and with Friedrich König, his bulgy eyes. König was also often portrayed as emperor. A frequent target of ridicule was Anton Nowak because of his good appetite—he was often rendered as a glutton. Even a medal of its own was designed for the Hagen Society, showing Nowak with voluptuous forms on one side and Pippich as “the last of the Pippichoids”—as a Bulgarian dignitary (because he had had to execute several paintings on the battlefield in Bulgaria)—on the other. Julius von Reisinger is typically recognized by his tall, gaunt stature, Methuselah's beard, and protruding ears. In some drawings the artists depicted themselves as a group in various pictorial jokes: as athletes, clergymen, and soldiers, as fauns in painted mosaics, or simply as *Fantasies from the Hagen Society*.

Ver Sacrum

The Association of Austrian Visual Artists, the Vienna Secession, was founded in 1897; its official organ, the magazine *Ver Sacrum* (Latin for “Holy Spring”), followed a year later. *Ver Sacrum* was published on a monthly and subsequently on a semimonthly basis, in altogether six volumes, from 1898 to 1903, and soon established itself as an artistically sophisticated art and literature magazine in striking square format. Today, *Ver Sacrum* is considered the most important Austrian Art Nouveau magazine. Changing teams of artists and authors were responsible for its design. For the purpose of illustration and book decoration, the editorial team made extensive use of the large portfolio of Hagen Society drawings, which was still kept at the Café Sperl at the time. From the first year onward, works the Hagen Society would donate to the Albertina Museum in 1905 appeared in numerous issues. In total, more than fifty drawings were used: meticulously executed and highly imaginative animal creatures and humorous sheets in Hagen Society style by Rudolf Bacher, ornamental designs and landscapes by Adolf Boehm, and various works by Maximilian Lenz and Friedrich König.

Vienna Secession

At the beginning of the 1890s, many members of the Hagen Society also joined the official Society of Austrian Visual Artists at the Künstlerhaus. Things began to fester there as early as 1893. The young generation felt misunderstood and artistically marginalized. Dissatisfaction grew as the young artists became increasingly interested in international art, which was fiercely opposed by the Künstlerhaus. Part of the Hagen Society under Theodor von Hörmann began to meet at the Hotel Victoria at No. 11 Favoritenstraße to discuss possible improvements for the Viennese art scene. This splinter group was joined by other weary members of the Künstlerhaus, including Gustav Klimt and Kolo Moser, as well as members of the Siebener-Club [or “Club of the Seven”], which also had its table of regulars at the Café Sperl. Future founding members of the Secession from the Hagen Society were Rudolf Bacher, Wilhelm Bernatzik, Adolf Boehm, Josef Engelhart, Alois Hänisch, Friedrich König, Johann Victor Krämer, Maximilian Lenz, Karl Müller, Anton Nowak, Alfred Roller, Ludwig Sigmundt, Ernst Stöhr, and Hans Tichy. The Hotel Victoria seamlessly became the venue for the first Secession gatherings in 1897, including the constituent meeting on April 3, 1897.

Hagenbund

Following the Vienna Secession's founding in 1897, it came to a temporary crisis at the Hagen Society, as not all artists who had wished to join the new association were accepted as members. Admission had to be approved unanimously, which was not always the case. This led, at least for the time being, to hurt feelings and the termination of friendships. But the artistic ambition was unbroken, and so a second new artists' association, the Hagenbund, was to be established soon afterwards, in 1900. Almost all members of the Hagen Society who were visual artists were accepted. This was followed by a reconciliation among the friends of the Hagen Society: the old understanding and unconditional friendship of the past prevailed. Founding members of the Hagenbund from the Hagen Society were: Eduard Ameseder, Johann Nepomuk Geller, Raimund Germela, Alexander Demetrius Goltz, Wilhelm Hejda, Eduard Kasparides, Rudolf Konopa, Ernst Payer, Karl Pippich, Josef Straka, Franz Thiele, Heinrich Tomec, and Hans Wilt. Next to the Secession, the Hagenbund was the most important Austrian artists' association open to modern currents in the visual arts.

Press images

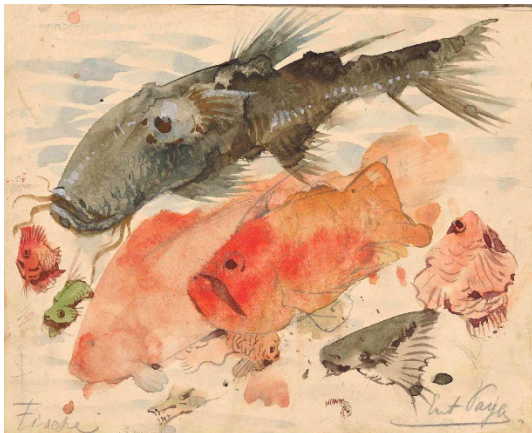
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Adolf Boehm
Storm on the Heath, 1897
Ink, chalk, and opaque white on paper
16,4 × 28,2 cm
The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna
© Photo: The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna



Johann Victor Krämer
Members of the Hagen Society, 1886/1887
Albumin paper
9,9 × 15,4 cm
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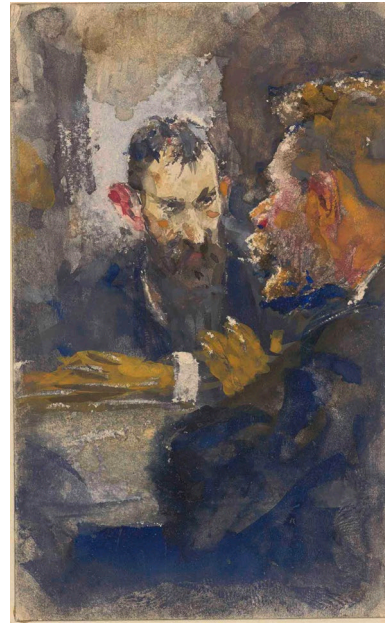
Ernst Payer
Fish, around 1895
Watercolor on paper
13,8 × 17,1 cm
The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna
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Maximilian Lenz
Study trip to Taormina, around 1894
Watercolor, gouache, and ink on paper
30,9 × 22,3 cm
The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna
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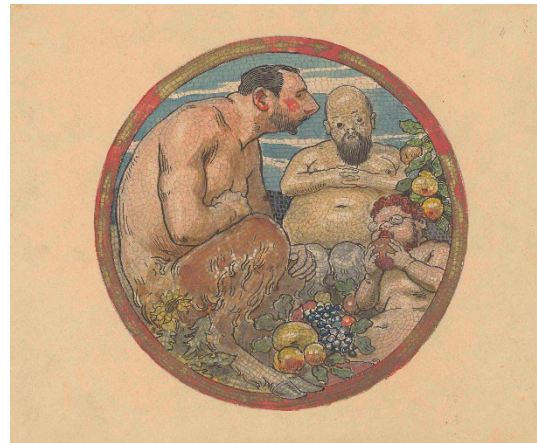
Alfred Roller
Josef Engelhart as a cigarette-smoking dandy, around 1895
Ink on paper
17,3 × 12,7 cm
The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna
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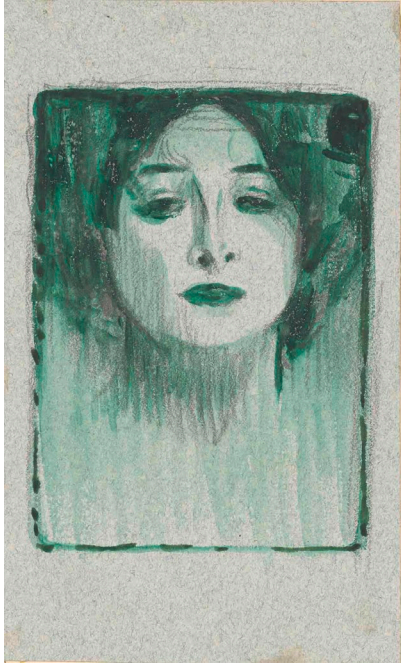
Johann Victor Krämer
Julius Reisinger and Ernst Stöhr talking, around 1893
Watercolor on paper
10,2 × 6,2 cm
The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna
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Rudolf Konopa
The Sacred Art, 1898
Pencil and watercolor on paper
11,5 × 15,8 cm
The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna
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Maximilian Lenz
Stolba, Boehm and Nowak as fauns, around 1895
Ink and watercolor on paper
21,7 × 26 cm
The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna
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Sigmund Walter Hampel
Woman's head, around 1893
Watercolor on paper
15 × 9 cm
The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna
© Photo: The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna



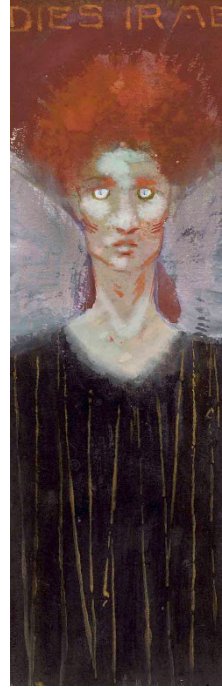
Sigmund Walter Hampel
Two ladies in a coffee house, around 1893
Watercolor on paper
10,1 × 6,2 cm
The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna
© Photo: The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna



Maximilian Lenz
Viennese street scene, around 1897
Watercolor, gouache, and ink on paper
13 × 28,1 cm
The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna
© Photo: The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna



Adolf Boehm
Panneau with flowers, 1897
Ink, watercolor, opaque white, and gold paint on paper
33 × 6,7 cm
The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna
© Photo: The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna



Alfred Roller
Dies irae, around 1895
Opaque colors and gold paint on paper
23,4 × 7,6 cm
The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna
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