The Features Of Art Nouveau In Gustave Klimt's The Kiss

Art Nouveau means the new art and this movement took place in countries all over the world. The movement began in 1861 when the Arts and Crafts movement wanted there to be a closer relationship between decorative arts and fine arts. They also wanted to make sure they showed more function and nature in their work rather than be a part of the old styles.

The piece I will discuss in this essay is The Kiss, an oil-on-canvas painting by Gustave Klimt. The reason why Gustav Klimt was such an extravagant figure in the Art Nouveau movement is because he was known for being a symbolist. What made this so special was the use of silver, platinum and gold leaf. The painting took one year to complete from 1907 to 1908 and was created during the height of Klimt's Golden Period. During the time when the piece was displayed in Osterreiche Galerie Belvedere in Vienna, Austria, it was also named 'Liesbesparr' or 'The lovers'. The piece showed a couple in a warm embrace both dressed in robes. In 1903, Klimt got inspired by the Byzantine mosaics that he saw in the Church of San Vitale. These mosaics had also used the gold leaves that were so famously used in Klimt's painting of The Kiss.

The piece was displayed on a gold background that was flat, lacking perspective and depth, another aspect of the mosaics that Klimt enjoyed. He felt that this made the gold in the painting more enhanced. The couple in the painting were shown in a warm embrace, both placed on a flowery patch. Klimt used symbolism in what he portrayed both characters wearing. The man, dressed in a robe that consisted of black geometric forms, portrayed the appearance that he was a manly being. His head appeared to be nearing towards the top of the painting , thought to be indicating the departing from the traditional western canons. The women appeared to be dressed in many swirls, twirls and tendrils, proposing a very elegant and gentle approach. The patterns included in the piece reflect the style from the Art Nouveau movement and the different forms of organic patterns reflect the style from the arts and crafts movement.

Klimt used the recurring motifs of intimacy, love and sexuality throughout most of his work. All three are evident in his Stoclet Frieze and his Beethoven Frieze, both Romantic Series. Klimt used the way the man looks intently at the woman, as if she is about to kiss her cheek, as a symbol for romance and intimacy. The woman's eyes are shut, which also symbolizes the tranquility of the piece. This intimacy that was portrayed so greatly in the painting was not received well by many critics who found the piece to be 'pornographic' and 'perverted'.

Even though the piece wasn't completely critiqued how Klimt would have liked, it was still bought before it was even finished showing how much it must have been liked at the time and still to this day. Klimt wrote 'If you cannot please everyone with your deeds and your art, please a few. To please many is bad'. He states that he doesn't care much of the opinion of the critics and in fact, his painting Goldfish, a painting of a naked woman directing her backside to the viewer was intended to be called 'to my critics'.