

# Attention to the Body in Viennese Kineticism

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## Abstract

Ornament education by Franz Cizek (1865-1946) at the Vienna School of Arts and Crafts culminated around 1920 in 'Viennese Kineticism' (c. 1920-1924). Characteristic of the Viennese kineticists' work is a rhythmic accumulation of impressions of movement, incorporating expressive elements of Expressionism, Cubism and Futurism. Cizek's progressive exercises were ultimately intended to be applied to everyday objects. Expressive art training in the classroom has been noted in previous studies to have similarities with the pedagogical methods of Johannes Itten.

Through analysis of Cizek's manuscripts, students' works and the writings of contemporary critics, this study aims to reveal an aspect of Kineticism's activity as an artistic practice focused on the human body, which is commonly associated with avant-garde performance and modern dance. Particular attention will be paid to Erika Giovanna Klien's (1900-1957) unrealised mechanical stage design, *The Kinetic Marionette Theatre* (1923/26). Here Klien designed a constructivist stage backdrop and the mechanical movement of marionettes representing depersonalised figures and objects.

In conclusion, this study seeks to demonstrate that, from the late 1910s onwards, the themes of machine and body that had been an issue in Futurism, Constructivism and the Bauhaus, permeated the ornamental class of the Vienna School of Arts and Crafts. By focusing on the elements of motion and body in their graphic, plastic and stage design works, the study will shed new light on designers' search for a new relationship between humans and objects, and explore an ideal truth of design in post-World War I Vienna.

**Keywords:** *Vienna Kineticism; Franz Cizek; Erika Giovanna Klien; design in Vienna; interwar period*

## 1. Introduction

In 1918, Gustav Klimt, Egon Schiele, Otto Wagner and other leaders of the Viennese Modernism (Wiener Moderne) died in the Spanish flu epidemic. In the same year, Austria suffered a national crisis comprising of the end of World War I and the dissolution of the Habsburg Empire. This study discusses the further development of the Viennese modern design movement, which ran parallel to Wiener Moderne, in the 1920s.

From the 1910s onwards, avant-garde art such as Futurism, Dada, Russian Constructivism and the Bauhaus emerged in Europe, providing a testing ground for artists who wished to respond to technological progress and accelerated mechanisation. In the context of the avant-garde, it was in the area of art education that notable achievements were made in Vienna around 1920: namely, within the framework of the art education practiced by Johannes Itten (1), who lived in Vienna from 1916 to 1919, and Franz Cizek at the Royal School of Arts and Crafts in Vienna.

In the recent expansion of Bauhaus studies, several researchers have focused on the connections between the Bauhaus and Vienna. In this context, the similarities between Itten's and Cizek's art education, which have long been suggested, are mentioned as follows: although the two

did not know each other personally, their art education methods were similar in encouraging the expression of creativity derived from movement, rhythm and spirituality (2). There are records of Cizek's visits to an Itten exhibition in the premise of the 'Free Movement' [Freie Bewegung] in 1919, and Itten was almost certainly aware of the prominent Viennese pedagogue (3).

Through analysis of Cizek's manuscripts, students' works and the writings of contemporary critics, this study aims to reveal the contemporary elements in Cizek's art education programme after 1918 and the activities of Viennese Kineticism, a development of Cizek's class that has been less studied than Itten. In particular, the study focuses on the de-anthropocentric perspective expressed in the stage designs of Erika Giovanna Klien, a central figure in Kineticism.

## 2. Motion and Rhythm

Viennese Kineticism (hereafter 'Kineticism') was not a consciously organised group, but a trend that emerged in the Ornamental Studies class of the School for Arts and Crafts attached to the Imperial Royal Austrian Museum of Art and Industry in Vienna (Figure 1). The group's mentor was art pedagogue Franz Cizek, and his students in their late teens to around 20 years of age were involved in the execution of the works.



Figure 1: Exhibition in the branch of the School for Arts and Crafts in the Fichtgasse June to September 1924 © Foto: [Wien Museum](#)

The School for Arts and Crafts was renowned for its advanced applied art education provided by professors from the Vienna Secession. Josef Hoffmann and Koloman Moser, founders of the Wiener Werkstätte (1903-1932), were also professors there. Franz Cizek, who had been running a private painting school for children since the 1890s, was hired by the school in 1903 to teach youth art classes for 6-to-14 year-olds and ornamental studies for 17-and-above year-olds, as well as training secondary school drawing teachers (4). Many of the students who attended the Ornamental Studies class until the early years of World War I later joined the Wiener Werkstätte. The airy, child-like innocence of the lineal patterns is a common trait of the Wiener Werkstätte designers who were former students of Cizek (Figure 2).

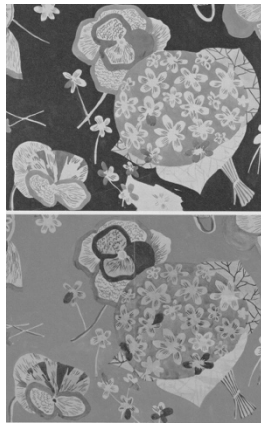


Figure 2: Maria Likarz Strauss, Design for Textile 'Verona', 1924

© Toyota Municipal Museum of Art (Machiko Chiba and Risa Hirota eds., *Kōkan suru Modan: Kinō to Sōshoku no Porifonī* [Modern Synchronized and Stimulated Each Other: The Polyphony of Function and Decoration] (Kyoto: Akaaka Art Publishing), 2022,130.)

Kineticism developed in the Ornamental Studies class, which had been sharpening its progressiveness since the end of World War I. Key members included Erika Giovanna Klien, Marianne (My) Ullmann (1905-1995) and Elisabeth Karlinsky (1904-1994). The predominantly female membership was due to the high number of female students enrolled in the school, as the school had admitted women from its inception, and applied arts was a relatively open field for women. The comparatively free post-war atmosphere probably also stimulated the young women's creativity.

Their formative tendencies were brought to attention in 1920 with the School of Arts and Crafts student exhibition. In his review, the critic Ludwig Steinmetz praised the exhibition of Cizek's students' works on the theme of 'breakthrough in the spiritual foundation of rhythmical form.' This is the earliest dated document to describe the work of Cizek's students using the term 'kinetic,' i.e. dynamic.

One event in particular is recognised for its significance far beyond the borders of our homeland. It is the result of the first year of Professor Franz Cizek's class (...). First, there is the revival of emotion through expressionistic training. Introspection has resulted in transcending the expression of unarticulated feelings, and instead has succeeded in achieving order, coherent emotions and ultimately the expression of perception. Also evident is a revival of thought as a result of Cubist-style training in painting and spatial expression, and finally, a revival of the act of observation through Kinetic training (Futurism). (5)

However, Cizek's Kineticism and the kinetic art of the actual movement differ in concept. Viennese Kineticism only comprised of paintings, three-dimensional graphic and commodity designs, that conveyed the impression of movement. Cizek uses words such as 'movement,' 'rhythm' and 'change' to describe the meaning of Kineticism.

Description of meaning.

Kineticism = the art of breaking up the course of movement into rhythmic elements and using them to construct a painting.

Phase = a shifting figure. Change of state. Phases of variable phenomena. State of motion at a particular point in time.

Panta rei = all things flow (Heraclitus). (6)

Posters from the Ornamental Studies class and Cizek's class notes show that he placed great emphasis on the acquisition of 'rhythm.'

Aim: Rhythm as the basis of art linked to any purpose.

Method: Experience of the rhythmic presence of things through craft. Development of ornamental forms from materials and techniques, always taking into account the purpose to which the art as a whole is subordinated. (7)

Rhythm

- Fixed motor rhythm arising from internal necessity (marching)
- Variable, rhythms left to subjective intention
- Arranged in sequence according to the course of work [?]
- Rhythm of tone as a means of supporting rhythm of movement (8)

To stimulate the body's sense of rhythm, Cizek allowed his students to play instruments and sing songs freely in the classroom (9). In his manuscript 'On Decoration in General' he also stated that decoration was the result of artistic fantasy and creativity (10).

### 3. Student Works: Capturing Motion and Inner Sense

The emphasis on the subjectivity and independence of the pupil goes back to the principles of art education for children, which Cizek had been practising since the end of the 19th century, prior to his ornamental education programme. The idea of respect for children's natural instincts can be traced back to the idea of J. J. Rousseau. However another background to his discovery of the potential of children's expression in free and independent creation was the influence of the Modern art movement, which arose as a reaction against the old academic art (11).

According to Kazuhiro Ishizaki, in his adolescent ornamental education programme Cizek positioned the expressive processes common to children's expression as the basic expression for applied art (12). On this basis, Cizek adopted the expressive methods of modern art from around 1918 onwards.

Most of the Kineticism works and Cizek's teaching materials are currently preserved at the Wien Museum in Vienna. There are 17 files of student studies, including eight Expressionist studies, one Futurist study, seven Cubist studies and one Kinetic study. The files contain rough sketches in charcoal, pastel and watercolour that demonstrate that there was a clear departure from the previous Jugendstil understanding of form and space. In addition to several sketches shown in former publications, the author examined a part of these files at the Wien Museum in March 2023. The following are the contents of two Expressionist study files, one Futurist study file, one Cubist study file and one Kineticist file.

The theme of the Futurist study file was stand-alone and group rhythms. The sketches were monochrome, with, for example, topological depictions of soldiers marching. In the Kineticist file, the assignment was 'moving vehicles' as an expression of Kineticism (Figure 3). The cumulative phase of vigorous movement is very similar to that of Futurist expression. However, Cizek did not explicitly state the influence of Futurism on his own classroom. Cizek appears to have been cautious about being identified with Futurism, which was seen as politicised at the time (13).

In Cizek's Expressionist training, students primarily attempted to visualise emotions and sensations. Sometimes, multiple combinations or opposing relationships of emotions and sensations were depicted on a single sheet. In the Expressionist study file subtitled 'Music,' the image of a piece

of music is sensitively expressed in rapid brushstrokes. Some works have notes indicating that they are symphonies by Mahler or Beethoven.

In the Cubist study file, the subject was village streets and the task was to divide the space by lines and planes. Streets and buildings were drawn as a continuum of short lines and planes, and the volume of the subject was reconstructed in flat space, creating a sense of rhythmic lightness.

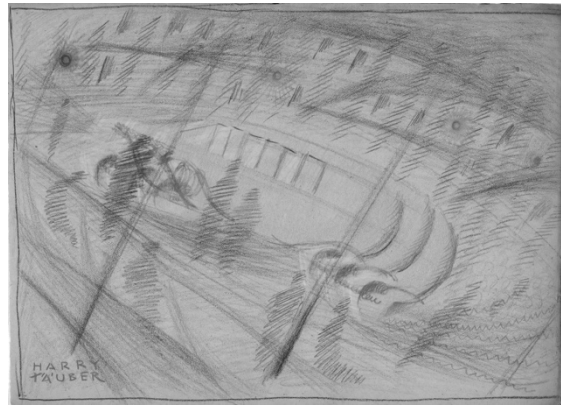


Figure 3: Harry Täuber, Kinetic study: Moving Vehicle, around 1920

© Foto: [Wien Museum](#)

Cizek's files are still being studied, but these training files are consistent with the content of Steinmetz's review mentioned above. In other words, the Expressionist, Cubist and Kinetic (Futurist) trainings were designed to convey emotion, thought and vision respectively. The students' sketches are drawn with vivid vigour, conveying a palpable sense of lively physicality. This expressive process combined with physicality was the basis of Cizek's ornamental lessons and led to the birth of Kineticism in the 1920s.

#### **4. Zeitgeist in E. G. Klien's 'Kinetic Marionette Theatre' (1923-1926)**

Some in Cizek's class worked on stage-related design, such as stage scenery and costumes. Among them was Erika Giovanna Klien, a central figure in Kineticism, who produced highly avant-garde stage concepts (14).

Born in Salzburg in 1900, Klien was one of the few Cizek students who took his ornamental class from 1919 and continued to work as a professional painter after graduating in 1925. She was a lover of the stage, dance, poetry and music, and left a series of paintings featuring dancers. In fact, between 1922 and 1923, she attended a theatre school (school name unknown) alongside the School of Arts and Crafts, and was close to the writer Leopold Rochowansky (1888-1961), whose wife was a dancer and who joined Kineticism himself (15). While benefitting from Cizek's training, Klien had a unique approach to the problems of the avant-garde art of the same period.

The conceptual drawings of the Kinetic Marionette Theatre, made between 1923 and 1926 (approx. 17 cm x 20 cm, 50 cm x 60 cm, etc.), are representatives of work from Klien's early years (16). The sketches depict industrial columns and structures that look like building materials, puppets suspended on strings that look like people or objects, and the overall effect is inorganic, like a constructivist stage.

According to Rochowansky's review of Klien's Marionette Theatre, the backdrop was a roller-driven mechanism.

Her marionette theatre carries all the eternally vibrating, driving, chasing forces within it, can

make them flash by in thousands of whirling, rushing images. The background and two side backdrops run on rollers. These are positioned so that the metre-long backdrop bands can be rotated vertically or horizontally by means of an electric switch. (17)

Also, her marionettes were designed as abstract objects rather than real people, and non-human things were conceived as characters, such as ‘poster-man’ [Plakatmensch], ‘red bridge’ [rote Brücke], ‘church-man’ [Kirchenmensch].

The figures hanging on wires are not people moving their arms, legs and heads. These figures have no naturalism of movement. They are spaces and they place the spaces of their bodies in the space of the stage, they move the spaces of their bodies in the moving space of the stage. They are made of hard cardboard painted in various ways, of coloured wire, of coloured wool, of transparent veil fabric. The chasing background roars through the emptiness of the surfaces. Space within space. Abstract movement. (...) Among the characters we find poster-man, red bridge, the barrel-organ-man, the church-man, the flame of fire, the sprouting, the untouched and yet dissolved in all things and people, the Urding as the cubic existence of all things. (18)

Her marionette design was more of a graphic work than a production sketch. Nevertheless, there were also material instructions, stating that cardboard, wire, cloth, metal and wool are to be used. These materials are consistent with Rochowansky’s text.

A de-anthropocentric perspective is evident in Klien’s imitation of mechanical movement and the use of non-human characters. The concept of puppets with inorganic, mechanical movements also reflects the spirit of the times in relation to machines: much of the theatre of the early 20th century, from Futurism to Russian Constructivism, embraced the theme of ‘machine and body’ to varying degrees (19). In particular, many artists were influenced by Edward Gordon Craig’s (1872-1966) concept of the ‘über-marionette’, which argued that puppets capable of free movement should replace physically and mentally fragile flesh-and-blood actors.

Stylistically, the stage design shows the influence of the Hungarian constructivist Béla Witz (1887-1972), whose exhibition was held in Vienna in 1923. The 1920s was the era of so-called ‘Red Vienna’, when the Austrian Social Democratic Party led the city government, and innovative movements were active in various fields. In the arts, future-oriented artists’ collectives such as the ‘Free Movement’ were formed, while the ‘MA’ constructivists from Hungary fled into exile and temporarily settled in Vienna.

It is also worth noting that at the time of Klien’s stage design, a major international performing arts exhibition was taking place in Vienna. In Europe, the theorisation of the performing arts began in the second half of the 19th century, and in the early 20th century there was a growing momentum to establish performance as an artistic genre and to explore new stage formations. The French Symbolists, led by artists and writers who sought a collaboration between theatre and painting, proposed a new stage of illusion; leading the Ballets Russes, Sergei Diaghilev concretised the concept of ‘total art’ using Stravinsky’s music and Bakst’s set; the Russian Cuvó-Futurist and Constructivist Alexandra Exter (1882-1949) produced sets and costumes incorporating contemporary art. These developments culminated in the Exhibition of New Theatre Technique in Vienna in 1924 (20).

Organised by Frederick (Friedrich) Kiesler (1890-1965) with the aim of developing stage design and furthering social reform, the exhibition attracted many avant-garde artists from Russia, France, Italy and the Netherlands. Participants included Exter, El Lissitzky (1890-1941), Fernand Léger (1881-1955), George Grosz (1893-1959), Kurt Schwitters (1887-1948), Theo van Doesburg (1883-1931) and the Bauhaus artists Laszlo Mohol-Nagy (1895-1946), Joost Schmidt (1893-1948) and Oskar Schlemmer (1888-1943). They saw the stage as more than just a backdrop and embraced

its three-dimensionality, moving away from perspective and conventional painting techniques in search of their own artistic style (21).

In terms of its departure from traditional stage design, the design of the marionette theatre, composed of puppets as lifeless forms and industrial materials, has a common thread with the figurative interests of the artists mentioned above. However, as Cizek refused to exhibit the work of his students (22), Klien's work was not lined up with theirs.

There is no evidence that Klien's Marionette Theatre was ever demonstrated, and the series of preliminary drawings ends in 1926, probably at the conceptual stage. The Kineticism movement also came to an end in the mid-1920s, due to the reorganisation of the school curriculum and the graduation and emigration of key members.

## 5. Conclusions

In conclusion, Cizek, the theoretical leader of Kineticism, saw the essence of Kineticism in movement, rhythm and displacement, and emphasised the mastery of rhythm in his Ornamental Studies. Students' sketches from around 1920 show that his training was based on expressive processes and focused on exercises to awaken the senses in the body and mind. The de-anthropocentric perspective in Klien's conception of a non-living marionette theatre suggests an approximation to the interest in 'other bodies' that emerged at a time when the self-evidence of the free, independent modern body was shaken, and to the problematics of avant-garde art that reassessed the human body from a new angle in relation to the machine.

It is clear from the above that the practice of Kineticism was linked to an interest in the human body, as was the avant-garde trend of the same period. It can be said that the relationship between humans and objects was being questioned anew at the School of Arts and Crafts in the Austrian capital, Vienna, at a time of national upheaval. The author would interpret this as an example of design in search of an ideal truth.

Regarding rhythm and physical expression, this paper was unable to investigate the relationship between modern dance movements of the early 20th century, including expressionist dance, and the new formative tendencies in Vienna. One example is Mary Wigman (1886-1973), who performed in Vienna in the 1920s. The connection between dance and performers of the same period and Kineticism should be a priority for the future research.

## Notes

1. As Christoph Wagner's article shows, his three-year stay in Vienna was a turning point for Itten. Not only did he meet Walter Gropius through Alma Gropius (née Mahler), but his friendships and activities in Vienna also formed the basis of his later preliminary course at the Bauhaus. Christoph Wagner, "Johannes Itten in Wien und die Anfänge der Moderne," in *Bauhaus und Wiener Kreis*, ed. Angelika Schnell and Károly Kókai (Wien: A NoPress Publication, 2022), 50.
2. Kathrina Hövelmann, *Bauhaus in Wien?* (Wien: Böhlau Verlag, 2021), 35. See also: Rainer K. Wick, "Die Wiener Kunstgewerbeschule, Johannes Itten und Franz Cizek," *Wiener Kinetismus. Eine bewegte Moderne*, ed. Gerald Bast, Agnes Husslein-Arco, Harald Krejci and Patrick Werker (Wien: Springer-Verlag, 2010), 12-25.

3. Sabine Plakolm-Forsthuber, "Der Wiener Kinetismus im Kontext," in *Kinetismus: Wien entdeckt die Avantgarde*, ed. Monika Platzer and Ursula Storch (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2006), 101-102.
4. Kazuhiro Ishizaki, *Franz Cizek no Bijutsu Kyōikuron to Sono Hōhō ni kansuru Kenkyū* [Study on the Theory of Art Education and its Method by Franz Cizek] (Tokyo: Kenpakusha, 1992), 123.
5. Ludwig Steinmetz, "Kunstschau 1920," *Kunst und Kunsthandwerk* 23 (1920): 205.
6. Monika Platzer, "Kinetismus = Pädagogik – Weltanschauung – Avantgarde," in *Kinetismus: Wien entdeckt die Avantgarde*, 18.
7. Poster for the Ornamental Studies class, Nachlass Franz Cizek, Wienbibliothek im Rathaus, ZPH 489/1.2.
8. Nachlass Franz Cizek, Wienbibliothek im Rathaus, ZPH 489/1.2.
9. Leopold Rochowansky, *Der Formwille der Zeit in der angewandten Kunst* (Wien: Burgverlag, 1922), 11.
10. Nachlass Franz Cizek, Wienbibliothek im Rathaus, ZPH 489/1.2.
11. Ishizaki, *Franz Cizek no Bijutsu Kyōikuron to Sono Hōhō ni kansuru Kenkyū*, 209.
12. Ishizaki, 289.
13. Marietta Mautner-Markhof, "Franz Cizek to 'Kindai Bijutsu': Wīn Bijutsu Kōgei Gakkō ni okeru Sōshoku Keitai Gaku [Franz Cizek and 'Modern Art': Ornamental Study at the Vienna School of Arts and Crafts]," in *Bijutsu Kyōiku no Paionia: Franz Cizek Ten* [Pioneer of Art Education: Franz Cizek Exhibition], ed. "Franz Cizek Ten" Katarogu Henshū Inkaï [Franz Cizek Exhibition Catalogue Editorial Board] (Tokyo: Musashino Art University, 1990), 164.
14. Barbara Lesák, "Der Wiener Theaterkinetismus," in *Kinetismus: Wien entdeckt die Avantgarde*, 140-143.
15. Marietta Mautner-Markhof, "Wiener Kinetismus E. G. Klien," in *Wiener Kinetismus: E. G. Klien*, ed. Galerie Pabst (München: Galerie Michael Pabst, 1986), no page.
16. See illustrations in: *Kinetismus: Wien entdeckt die Avantgarde*, 147, 149-151.
17. Leopold Rochowanski, "Das kinetische Marionettentheater der Erika Giovanna Klien," in *Wiener Kinetismus: E. G. Klien*, no page.
18. Rochowanski.
19. Chizuko Aoyama, "Dezain to Shintai: Bauhaus ni okeru Mouhitotsu no Suimyaku wo megutte [Design and Body: On Another Path in Bauhaus]," *Bulletin of JSSD* 41, no. 1 (1997): 44.



20. Takako Shibata, *Oskar Schlemmer: Bauhaus no Butai Geijutsu* [Oskar Schlemmer: Performing Art of Bauhaus] (Tokyo: Suisei sha, 2021), 29-33.
21. Shibata, *Oskar Schlemmer*, 33-34.
22. Lasák, “Der Wiener Theaterkinetismus,” 143.

## Author Biography

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Tomoko Kakuyama received Ph.D. from Saitama University, Japan. After teaching at Nanzan University as an Assistant Professor, she became an Associate Professor at Kanagawa University. She specializes in the design history of Central Europe, mainly of Austria in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Her latest publications include *Wīn Kōbō: Teito no Burando Tanjō ni miru Ōsutoria Dezain Undōshi* [Vienna Workshops: The Birth of a Brand and the Beginnings of Modern Design in Austria] (Tokyo: Sairyū sha, 2021). Her recent papers include “Franz Cizek to Wīn Kinetishizumu: Bijutsu Kōgei Gakkō no ‘Zen ei’ [Franz Cizek and Viennese Kineticism: The ‘Avant-garde’ at the School of Arts and Crafts]” in *Modern Synchronized and Stimulated Each Other: The Polyphony of Function and Decoration*, ed. Machiko Chiba and Risa Hirota (Kyoto: Akaaka Art Publishing, 2022), 242-247.