

## Document Citation

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(AUSTRIA-GERMANY-U.K.-FRANCE)

An EPO Film (Austria)/Film-Line (Germany)/Lunar Films (U.K.)/Gemini Films (France) production, in association with Andreas Schmid. (International sales: Independent Film Sales, London.) Produced by Dieter Pochlatko, Arno Ortmaier, Matthew Justice, Andreas Schmid. Co-producers, Ira Zloczower, Paolo Branco.

Directed, written by Raul Ruiz. English screenplay adaptation, Gilbert Adair. Camera (color), Ricardo Aronovich; editor, Valeria Sarmiento; music, Jorge Arriagada; production designers, Rudi Czettel, Katharina Woeppermann; costume designer, Birgit Hutter; sound (Dolby Stereo), Michael Spencer; line producer, Dieter Limbek; assistant director, Marijan Vajda; casting, Fleischhacker/Englander (Austria), Baumueller/Schottldreier (Germany), Sue Jones (U.K.). **Reviewed at Rotterdam Film Festival (Vita Brevis), Jan. 27 (producer's cut), Jan. 28 (director's cut), 2006. (Also in Berlin Film Festival.)** Running time: producer's cut, **96 MIN.**; director's cut, **130 MIN.**

Klimt ..... John Malkovich  
Midi ..... Veronica Ferres  
Lea de Castro ..... Saffron Burrows  
Lea de Castro double ..... Georgia Reeve  
Secretary ..... Stephen Dillane  
Duke Octave ..... Paul Hilton  
Serena Lederer ..... Sandra Ceccarelli

With: Karl Fischer, Irina Wanka, Antje Charlotte Sieglin, Nikolai Kinski, Joachim Bissmeier, Ariella Hirschfeld, Verena Mundhenke, Peter Appiano, Aglaia Szyszkowitz, Mark Zak, Alexander Strobele, Dennis Petkovic, Annemarie Dueringer, Marion Mitterhammer, Gunther Gillian.

(English, German dialogue)

## By JAY WEISSBERG

**T**he hothouse world of Vienna circa 1900, and especially the febrile beauty of Gustav Klimt's art, are unsurprising subjects for Raul Ruiz's fertile imagination. Transferring that fascination to the screen, however, proves an unwieldy task, and neither the producer's version nor the longer director's cut manages to make sense of the material gathered, alternately ponderous and evanescent. Billed as a phantasmagoria rather than a biopic, "Klimt" falls into the philosophical conundrum it attempts to resurrect — whether portrait and allegory can coexist. Notwith-

**In efforts to capture the essence of Klimt's art, a magical moment comes when gold leaf flutters down from the ceiling, paying homage to his ravishing use of gilding.**

**standing moments of great beauty, in this case the answer is clearly "no."**

Still smarting from the wholesale butchery of "Time Regained" in some regions, Ruiz agreed with the producers to release a shorter, 96-minute version of his latest picture, which may stay the independent editor's hand. It's an odd compromise, since 130 minutes isn't an unusual time for an art-house film, surely its target audience. Word is both versions will play at Berlin, but release prints are being negotiated.

Pic's convoluted genesis is one of the key sticking points. Written by Ruiz in French, the script was



**Saffron Burrows and John Malkovich star in writer-director Raul Ruiz's "Klimt," a biopic about the fin de secle Vienna artist.**

translated into German (the original language of choice), then translated into English, which was then given to novelist Gilbert Adair for tweaking and period flavor. The result is a Tower of Babel: No one in the international cast appears to be speaking real words, just reciting lines in a vacuum.

Since the stated aim is an impressionistic rendering of the atmosphere of the era as seen through Klimt's rebellious nature, any description of narrative is a frustrating task.

Pic opens with the artist (John Malkovich) on his deathbed, his mind and body wasting away from the effects of syphilis. His sole visitor is fellow artist Egon Schiele (Nikolai Kinski), popping in and out of the story like Renfield to Malkovich's Dracula.

Two-way mirrors provide the device necessary to jump back in time to Klimt's healthier days, when his evolving style was scandalizing Vienna. The Paris 1900 Expo gives him the official recognition he both spurns and craves, and there he meets his muse, Lea de Castro (Saffron Burrows), a sex-driven vixen.

Of all his many mistresses, Klimt's focus of desire remains Lea, and the more liberating atmosphere of Paris. But Vienna is where he works, and where the Secretary (Stephen Dillane) dogs his movements. Introduced as a minor consular official, the Secretary is a figment of Klimt's fevered brain, and acts as a sparring partner for the artist's thoughts on the function of art and the artist in society.

Attempting to capture the aesthetic debates raging at the fin-de-siecle, side characters chatter on about form vs. function, and the legitimacy of ornamentation, but the lines sound stilted and unnatural.

Slightly more successful, but only sketchily used, are Ruiz's attempts to capture the essence of Klimt's art. A broken mirror, its pieces reflecting mosaic-like fragmentations, has nice parallels to the painter's late backgrounds, while a magical moment when gold leaf flutters down from the ceiling pays homage to Klimt's ravishing use of gilding.

The director's cut is undoubtedly the richer version, making clearer the repeated motifs — Ruiz claims Schnitzler as an inspiration. A bizarre gilded cage sequence in a brothel feels even more peculiar without the earlier parallel sequence, just as anachronistic Chinese kids have no point in the 96-

minute prints without the fuller context of the artist's introduction to Chinese painting in the longer version.

Due in part to the over-arch dialogue ("Kisses anywhere other than the lips is like smoking without inhaling"), performances are mannered and unnatural. Only Dillane delivers his lines as if they're real sentences; Burrows is weak, and Malkovich's etiolated figure and deadening delivery remain a mystery.

Generally superb art direction (aside from the painting reproductions and their modern frames) is beautifully captured by d.p. Ricardo Aronovich's rich, fluid lensing, and lighting is especially magical in several snow sequences. Birgit Hutter's costumes would have made Cecil Beaton smile.

Sound quality is a major problem in the producer's cut, which muffles actors already having difficulty finding the rhythm of the English. The director's cut is clearer, although the few lines in German, subtitled in the shorter version, are left untranslated in the longer print.