

**mahJ**

musée d'art  
et d'histoire  
du Judaïsme

**Arnold  
Schönberg.  
Peindre  
l'âme**

**28 September 2016  
— 29 January 2017**



“I have never seen faces, only gazes, because I look people in the eyes. This is why I can recreate a man’s gaze. A painter captures the entire human being with a glance, but I only his soul.” (A. Schoenberg, 11 February 1938)

The inventor of new ways of composing and teaching music and the creator of dodecaphony, Arnold Schoenberg (1874-1951) was one of the greatest and most innovative composers of the 20th century. Although *Verklärte Nacht* [*Transfigured Night*], *Pierrot Lunaire* and *Moses und Aron* [*Moses and Aaron*] caused scandals and were widely criticised, they inspired many modernist artists, notably his pupils at the Second School of Vienna and the painter Wassily Kandinsky.

Schoenberg’s creativity extended beyond music, encompassing also literature and particularly painting, which he practiced as an “amateur” from 1906 to 1944.

This exceptional body of work ranges from the quasi-hallucinatory visions he called “gazes,” to portraits of his entourage and his many self-portraits.

They show an artist seeking the truest expression of himself, a quest also reflecting his questioning of his Jewish identity. Born into a Jewish family in Vienna in 1874, he converted to Protestantism at the age of twenty-four, but returned to Judaism in Paris in 1933 before emigrating to the United States.

## The artistic revival in Vienna

Arnold Schoenberg participated fully in the artistic and intellectual life of the Austrian capital at the turn of the 20th century. Self-taught, he was introduced into these circles by his mentor and future brother-in-law, the composer and conductor Alexander Zemlinsky. Rejected due to the radicalism of the compositions that would lead him to atonal music, Schoenberg drew closer

to avant-garde artists and met Oskar Kokoschka, Max Oppenheimer and Egon Schiele. The portraits and self-portraits in this section of the exhibition show a world examining its attitude to modernity. Schoenberg’s relationship with the artist Richard Gerstl, who initiated him to painting, drew him towards new forms of expression.

## Schoenberg and Kandinsky: artistic convergences

Following a concert in Munich on 2 January 1911, Wassily Kandinsky wrote to Schoenberg to tell him how much his music reflected his own “aspirations” in painting. This letter marked the beginning of the sustained correspondence and life-long friendship between these two great creators, and

led to Schoenberg’s participation in the first exhibition of the Blaue Reiter group in Munich in the winter of 1911–1912. In 1912 Kandinsky published an article on Schoenberg’s pictures, dividing them into two genres: figures and landscapes painted directly from nature, and “visions.”

# The quest for the total work of art

Both Kandinsky and Schoenberg were haunted by the notion of the *Gesamkunstwerk*, an all-embracing synthesis of the arts or “total work of art.” Although both were experimenting with equivalencies between sounds and colours, their respective approaches to stage design and direction resulted in very different works. Schoenberg’s “drama with music”

*Die glückliche Hand* [*The Lucky Hand*], composed between 1909 and 1913, recounts the emotions of an artist incapable of creating whose wife leaves him for another man. The monumental and burlesque *Violet* [*Violet*], Kandinsky’s last stage project in 1914, is composed of crowd movements in a Russian folk décor, interspersed with dramatic or absurd cameos.

## The daily life of a composer

Paris played a key role in Schoenberg’s career, successfully staging performance of works such as *Pierrot lunaire* (1912), conducted by Darius Milhaud, in 1924. In 1927, the Société musicale indépendante organised a festival in his honour, with Schoenberg conducting

his latest works based on the twelve-tone composition technique (dodecaphony). But games also played an important role in his private life, as shown by the card games and chessboard for four players he invented and the stories he imagined for his children.

## Judaism, identity and politics

Schoenberg was born into a Jewish family but converted to Protestantism in 1898. However, after the First World War, some of his works deal with biblical themes and the destiny of the Jews. The unfinished opera *Moses und Aron* [*Moses and Aaron*, 1928-1931] is probably the most emblematic of Schoenberg’s reflections on his relationship to Judaism. Dismissed from his teaching post at the Academy of Arts in Berlin in 1933,

he reconverted to Judaism at the synagogue in rue Copernic in Paris before leaving for the United States. In May 1938 he was one of the targets of the *Entartete Musik* [Degenerate Music] exhibition organised by the Nazi regime in Düsseldorf. *A Survivor from Warsaw*, composed in 1947, is one of the first musical works to pay tribute to the victims of the Shoah.

## Self-portraits and visions

Schoenberg produced most of these works between 1906 and 1911, the pivotal years in the development of his musical composition, during which he produced the remarkable *Impressions and Fantasies* and *Self-Portraits* series, which Kandinsky described as “visions.” Schoenberg himself preferred the term “gazes” evoking the subconscious. With his marriage in crisis, due to his wife’s affair with the painter Richard Gerstl, Schoenberg

examined his threatened identity by painting himself, yet without directly “depicting” himself. These works were acclaimed in artistic circles and shown in three exhibitions in Vienna, Munich and Budapest from 1910 to 1912. Schoenberg subsequently turned down exhibition offers and distanced himself from this activity, which he said he practiced only as an amateur.

## Lectures and panel discussions

Wednesday 28 September 2016, 19:30

### Schönberg, à la croisée des chemins artistiques

Discussion between **Alain Poirier**, musicologist, and **Jean-Louis Andral**, curator of the exhibition, moderated by **François-Xavier Szymczak**, musicologist, producer at France Musique

Monday 14 November 2016, 19:30

### Schönberg-Kandinsky, correspondances

Lecture by **Marcella Lista**, art historian, with readings by **Laurent Natrella**, actor (Comédie-Française)

Wednesday 7 December 2016, 19:30

### Judaïsme, identité et politique chez Schönberg

Panel discussion between **Esteban Buch**, specialist in the relationships between music and politics in the 20th century, and **Danielle Cohen-Levinas**, philosopher and musicologist, moderated by **Karin Le Bail**, historian, producer at France Musique

## Colloquium

Friday 7 October 2016

### Trajectoires, expressions et jeux de l'exil artistique

Organised by Parsons Paris, The New School for Social Research and the EHESS

This exhibition was organised with the exceptional participation of the Arnold Schönberg Center in Vienna.



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## Concerts

Sunday 9 October 2016, 17:00

### Schoenberg, Webern, Beethoven

Florent Boffard, piano

Wednesday 30 November 2016, 20:00

### Arnold Schoenberg, Night Transfigured

**Johannes Brahms String Sextet No.2**  
Musicians from the Orchestre de Paris

Sunday 15 January 2017, 17:30

### Arnold Schoenberg, Pierrot lunaire

**Alexander Zemlinsky, Trio for Piano, Clarinet and Cello, Opus 3**  
Soloists from L'Ensemble Intercontemporain

## Films

Sunday 22 January 2017

### Straub and Huillet

Cycle presented by **Cyril Neyrat**, writer on cinema and art

15:00  
**Introduction to Accompaniment to a Cinematographic Scene**  
by Arnold Schoenberg

followed by  
*Du jour au lendemain*

17:00  
*Moïse et Aaron*

## For families

Sunday 11 December 2016, 11:00

*La Princesse*, a tale for children  
by **Arnold Schoenberg**  
Told by **Agnès Delachair**

## Guided tours of the exhibition combined with thematic tours of the Centre Pompidou

## Booklet-game

Qui suis-je ?  
**Arnold Schönberg**, musicien touche-à-tout  
For 7-12 year-olds

## Catalogue

### Arnold Schönberg Peindre l'âme

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