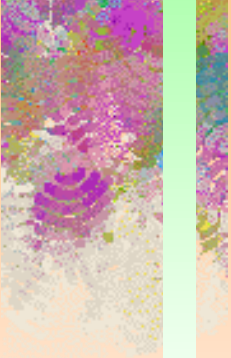




“What Love Tells Me”

Art and Eros in Mahler’s World



Mahler Centenary Conference
University of Surrey
9 July 2011

Morten Solvik

Egon Schiele, male nudes



Gustav Klimt, female nudes





Gustav Mahler, writing to Anna von Mildenburg (Summer 1895)

You want to know “What Love Tells Me”? Dearest Annerl, love tells me many very beautiful things! And when it speaks to me now, it always tells me only of you! But in the symphony, my dearest Anni, it is a different kind of love than what you are assuming. [...] It is an attempt to show the summit, the highest level from which the world can be surveyed. I could equally well call the movement something like: “What God tells me!” And this in the sense that God can, after, all, only be comprehended as “love.”



Arthur Schopenhauer

Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung

Indeed, it may be said that man is concrete sexual impulse, for his origin is an act of copulation, and the desire of his desires is an act of copulation, and this impulse alone perpetuates and holds together the whole of his phenomenal appearance. [...] The sexual impulse is therefore the most complete manifestation of the will-to-live [...]. [Chpt. 42]

All true and pure love [...] results from seeing through the *principium individuationis*; when this penetration occurs in all its force, it produces perfect sanctification and salvation [...]. [I§68]



Gustav Mahler describing the finale of the Third Symphony (August 1895)

VI. Was mir die Liebe erzählt
(nicht die *irdische*, sondern die *ewige*)

[VI. What love tells me
(not the *earthly*, rather the *eternal*)]



Arthur Schopenhauer

Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung

The great Goethe has given us a distinct and visible description of this denial of the Will, brought about by great misfortune and by the despair of all deliverance, in his immortal masterpiece *Faust*, in the story of the sufferings of Gretchen. [...] no description known to me brings to us the essential point of that conversion so distinctly and so free from everything extraneous as the one mentioned in *Faust*. [I§68]



Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

Faust //(closing lines)

Alles Vergängliche
Ist nur ein Gleichnis;
Das Unzulängliche,
Hier wird's Ereignis;
Das Unbeschreibliche,
Hier ist's getan;
Das Ewig-Weibliche
Zieht uns hinan.

[What is destructible
Is but a parable;
What fails ineluctably,
The undeclarable,
Here it was seen,
Here it was action;
The Eternal Feminine
Lures to perfection.]



Gustav Mahler on Goethe and productivity

Letters to Alma (1909 and 1910)

That which draws us by its mystic force, what every created thing, perhaps even the stones, feels with absolute certainty as the centre of its being, what Goethe here – *again employing a metaphor* – calls the *eternal feminine* – that is to say, the *resting-place*, the *goal*, in opposition to the striving and struggling towards the goal (the eternal masculine) – you are quite right in calling [it] the force of love.

The essence of it is really Goethe's idea that all love is generative, creative, and that there is a physical and spiritual generation, which is the emanation of this “Eros.” You have it in the last scene of *Faust*, presented symbolically.

Man – and probably all forms of life – are unceasingly productive. This occurs inevitably at all stages as a consequence of life itself. When the energy of production fails, then the “entelechy” dies; that is, it must acquire a new body. At the stage where men of a higher development are found, production (which is natural to the majority in the form of reproduction) is accompanied by an act of self-realization [the work of art]; and hence its creativeness is heightened on the one hand, and on the other is manifested as a *challenge* to the moral being.

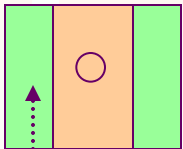
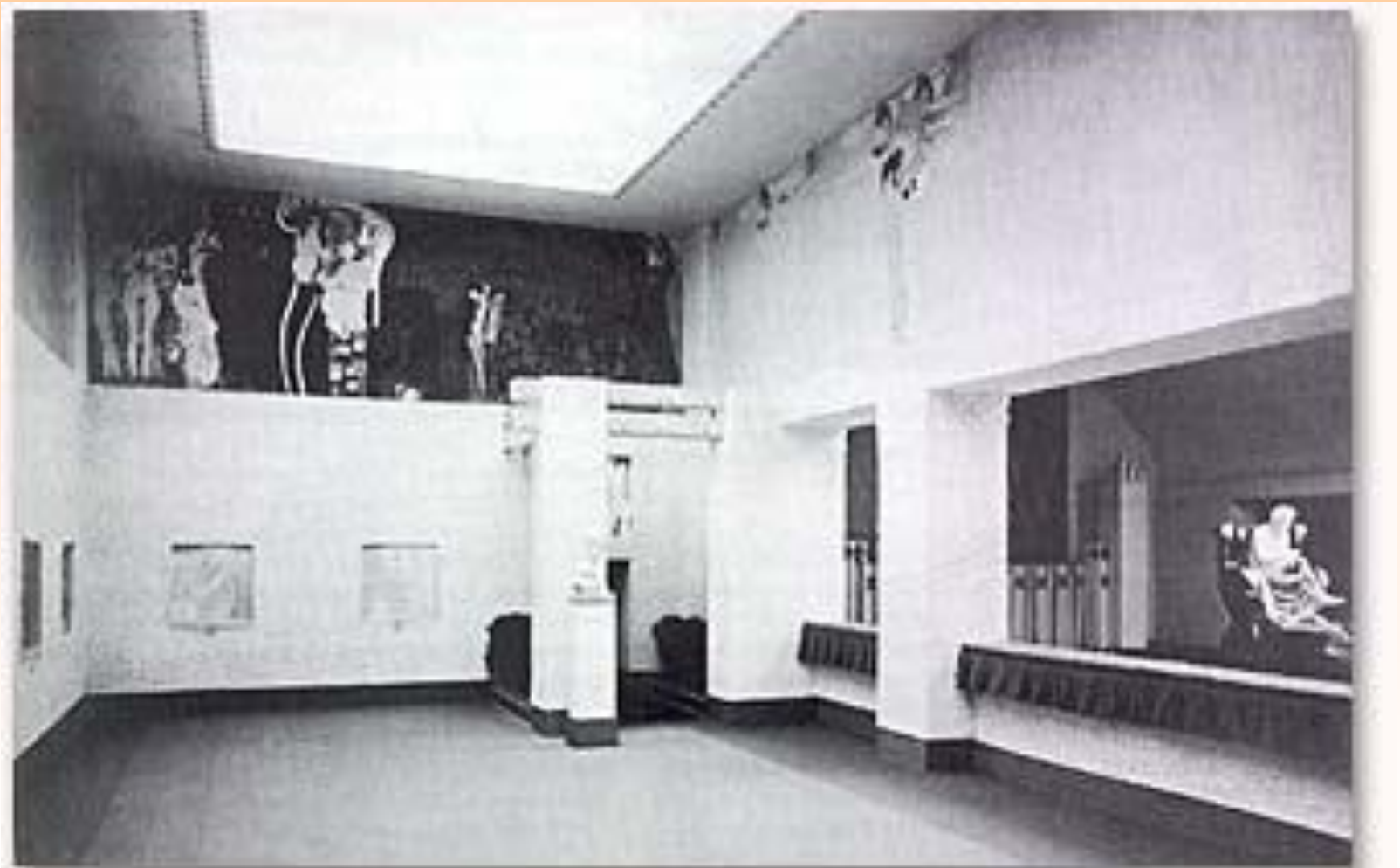
Secession Exhibit, 1902

Max Klinger, "Beethoven"



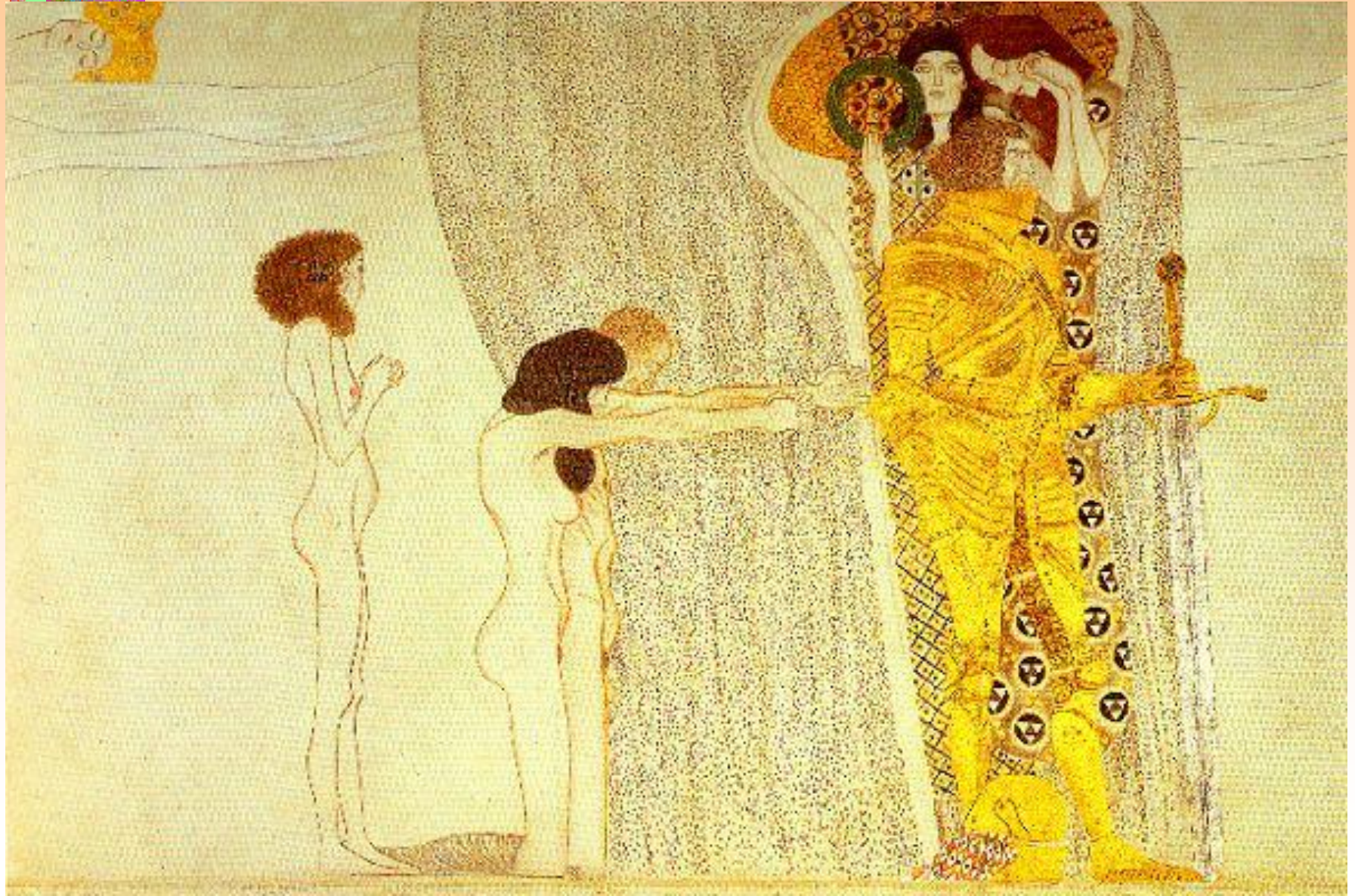
Secession Exhibit, 1902

Klimt's *Beethoven Frieze* in left vestibule
with view to Klinger's "Beethoven"



Klimt, *Beethoven Frieze*

First Panel: “The Yearning for Happiness”



Klimt, *Beethoven Frieze*

Second Panel: "The Hostile Forces"



Klimt, *Beethoven Frieze*

Third Panel:

“Yearning Finds Fulfillment in Poetry,”

First Section: “Poetry”



Klimt, *Beethoven Frieze*

Third Panel:

“Yearning Finds Fulfillment in Poetry,”

Second Section:

“This Kiss of the Whole World”

(“Diesen Kuss der ganzen Welt”)



Gustav Klimt, *Beethoven Frieze* (1902)

Second Panel: "The Hostile Forces"



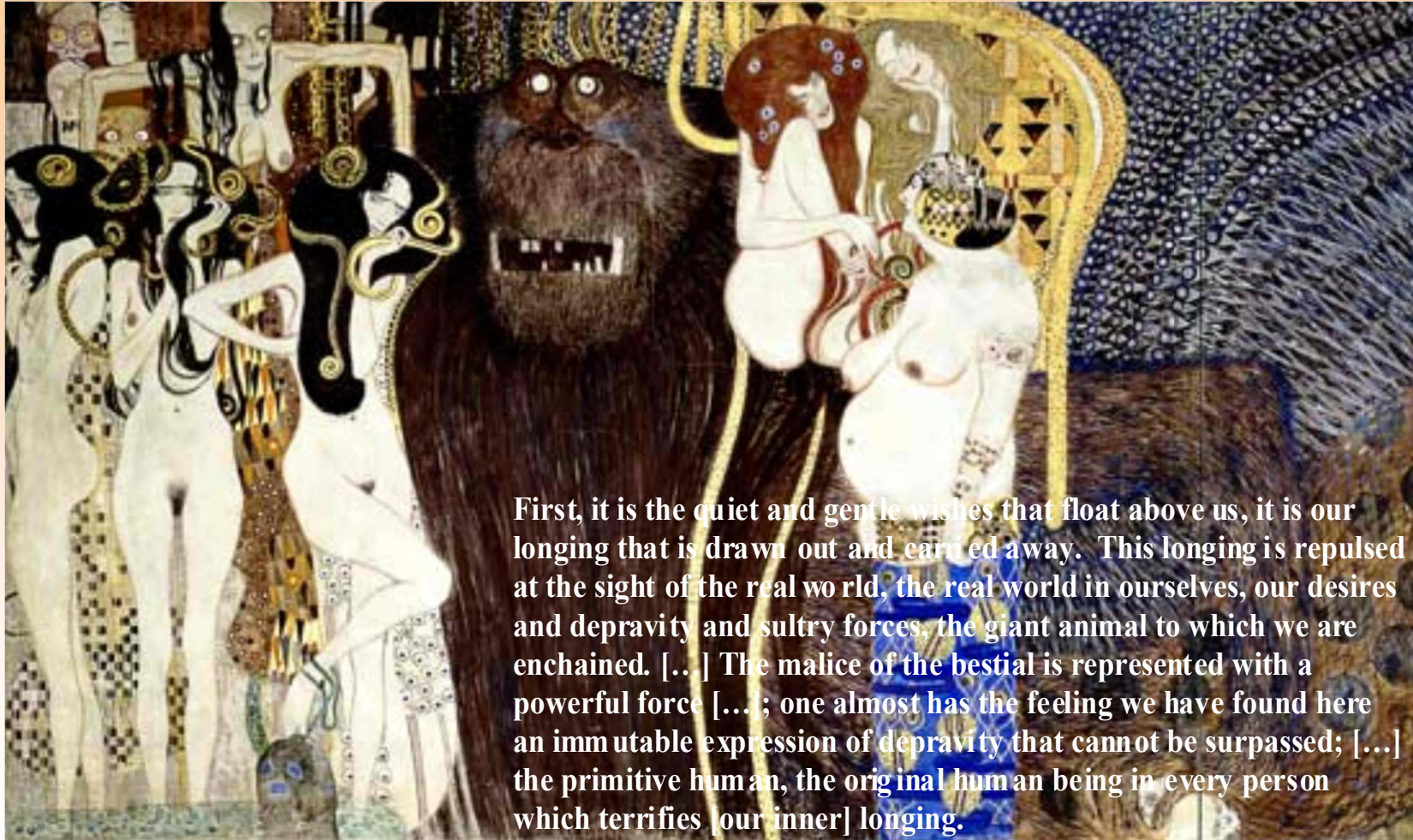
Klimt, *Beethoven Frieze*

Second Panel: "The Hostile Forces" (detail)



Klimt, *Beethoven Frieze*

Second Panel: "The Hostile Forces" (detail)



First, it is the quiet and gentle wishes that float above us, it is our longing that is drawn out and carried away. This longing is repulsed at the sight of the real world, the real world in ourselves, our desires and depravity and sultry forces, the giant animal to which we are enchained. [...] The malice of the bestial is represented with a powerful force [...]; one almost has the feeling we have found here an immutable expression of depravity that cannot be surpassed; [...] the primitive human, the original human being in every person which terrifies [our inner] longing.

Klimt, *Beethoven Frieze*

Third Panel:

“Yearning Finds Fulfillment in Poetry,”

Second Section:

“This Kiss of the Whole World”

(“Diesen Kuss der ganzen Welt”)



Klimt, *Beethoven Frieze*

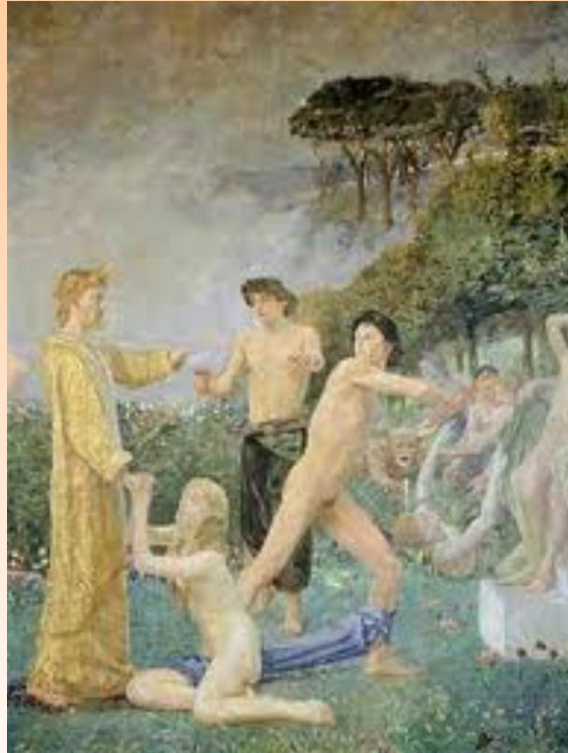
“Diesen Kuss der ganzen Welt” (detail)



Max Klinger, *Christus im Olymp* (1897)



Max Klinger, *Christus im Olymp* (detail)





Description of Klinger's *Christus im Olymp* Secession program (1899)

Into the brightly coloured, cheerful world of the senses inhabited by the Olympians, there has suddenly irrupted a strange, stern apparition. With measured tread, dressed in a bright yellow robe, the founder of Christianity approaches Zeus, father of the gods, who is seated on a marble throne. Faced with this apparition, the hilarity of the gods is silenced as if by magic. In a flash, the realization has come upon Zeus that his dominion is at an end. Recoiled in stiff horror, he looks upon Christ, while Ganymede clings to him in fright. Eros turns with a gesture of distaste away from the earnest stranger, while Psyche sinks to her knees at the feet of Christ, with a gesture of humility laying her hands in his. Dionysus offers him a cup of nectar, which he solemnly rejects. Hera, Athene and Aphrodite, their divine dignity wounded, observe with an expression of the profoundest scorn the four female figures, clad in flowing garments, who bear the Cross, symbol of the Christian faith, behind its founder. Next to Zeus, with his back to the spectator, stands Hermes, and next to him Apollo, bearing his sister Artemis in his arms.

