

# A New Year—An Old Hope

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This splendid painting of a nude, near-term pregnant woman was painted by the Viennese Secessionist, Gustav Klimt (1862 to 1918), in 1903. Klimt created works rich in sexual symbolism, of the life, death, and hope around him. This work in oil on canvas measures a larger-than-life 189.2 cm × 67 cm. It depicts the serenity of a mother-to-be bringing the promise of new life into the world surrounded by images of disease and death. There are many tensions in the piece juxtaposing life and death; purity and darkness; and past, present, and future ages: all are reflected in the woman's eyes.

Klimt is known to have fathered at least 14 children within a series of relationships, and this painting is inspired by the pregnancy of one of his models. Interviewed in 1903, Klimt said “Everything is ugly: she is, and what she sees is—only within her is there beauty growing, hope. And her eyes say that.”<sup>1</sup> The painting was so controversial that it had to be withdrawn from Klimt's first Secessionist retrospective. Although obstetrical practice today is far more refined than it was around the turn of the last century, the image remains a classic juxtaposition of the forces with which obstetricians still deal with daily.

The painting is one of the most important pieces in the National Art Gallery of Canada. Perhaps when next in Ottawa, all of us should make a trip to the gallery to reaffirm our own Hope.

Image from the collection of the National Gallery of Canada.

## REFERENCE

1. Gustav Klimt. Hope 1. In: Franklin D, ed. Treasures of the National Art Gallery of Canada. New Haven (CT): Yale University Press; 2003:288.

