

Readers Guide

1. The Viennese artist Egon Schiele (1890-1918) is considered Austria's greatest exponent of Expressionist art, despite his tragically brief life. In addition to poignant land-and-townscapes, his psychological portraits redefined portraiture at the beginning of the twentieth century. Those who sat for him were represented as gesticulating vessels of angst set in existential voids, rather than within a defining environment. But Schiele turned his most penetrating gaze upon himself. In a 1910 series of life-size naked self-portraits showing himself in the throes of sexual arousal, he went further than had any other artist in history. What did the compositional amputation of his hands signify?

2. The opening paragraphs of *The Schiele Slaughters* find a night watchman's naked body propped up under Schiele's famous *Self-Portrait Nude Sitting* in Vienna's Leopold Museum. The slaughtered guard's hands and feet are missing. A black metal rose, tipped in silver, is on the floor next to Schiele's painting which has been "censored" with black duct tape affixed to its genitals. Are the Jewish restitution

demonstrators of the IKG responsible? What does the black rose signify?

3. We meet the book's primary protagonist, Megan Crespi, still agile and engaged at seventy-seven. She is a professor of art history *emerita* and a world expert on Viennese art and music, especially Egon Schiele, about whom she has published several books. Megan is in London on a lecture tour when she receives a call from the Leopold Museum's director, Johannes Ohm, who begs her to come to Vienna to help shed light on the crime. She agrees to fly over the next morning. In the meantime she visits friends at Sotheby's Auction House where a previously "lost" Schiele *Self-Portrait Nude Standing* is undergoing restoration. Who is the anonymous owner of the provocative portrait? And who bid on the Schiele *Krumau Townscape* that Sotheby's recently sold? Was it one of the two billionaire Russian dealers: Boris Ussachevsky of St. Petersburg or Alexandra Azarova of Moscow?

4, An Inner Circle meeting of the Doppel-O, a secret cult devoted to "obliterating obscenity," is taking place at a castle, Schloss Gemmingen-Eggaberg in Gmunden. The Grand Master Kurt Wagner is initiating a new member, Wolf Schnitt, whose proof

of compliance is in a black box. What does opening the box reveal?

5, Megan is in Vienna conferring with her friend "Hannes" Ohm in the Leopold Museum's restoration room where the Schiele canvas is being restored. Suddenly a call comes in: Schiele's gravestone has been desecrated! Who could have done this? The IKG or perhaps the Doppel-O sect?

6. We meet Doppel-O member Lorenzo Ladro who has successfully stolen from Sotheby's the Schiele *Self-Portrait Nude Standing*. He delivers it to the Grand Master who informs the baron of the Schloss Gemmingen-Eggaberg, that in exchange for six acres of the castle's adjoining forest land, he will pay him half of whatever he gains from the sale of the offensive artwork in Russia. We learn that the family owns an Albrecht Dürer 1500 *Self-Portrait as Christ*. Is this portentous? Does Lorenzo Ladro's surname indicate anything about him? Will the Doppel-O's Grand Master be able to pay the baron of the castle the sum needed to purchase the six acres he desires for his clan's meeting house? To whom will he try to sell the stolen Schiele?

7. We meet the pushy Éva Vidovszky, owner of a slightly shady Antiquariat in Vienna. Short and slight of build, she could pass as Megan's double. Will this play any role in the future? How soon and under what circumstances do we learn of Vidovszky's irritating nature?

8. Tall, slim, with dark spikes of hair similar to Schiele's, Boris Ussachevsky sits in his St. Petersburg gallery office contemplating the unsigned Schiele *Krumau Townscape* for which he outbid his Moscow rival, Alexandra Azarova. He has just been offered a colossal Schiele "find" by Kurt Wagner under the pseudonym of Max Valentin. Boris contemplates the similarities between his looks and life with Schiele. What are they?. Reveling in how well he knows Schiele the man, Boris inscribes the artist's signature and date on the Krumau landscape. Was he right to do this, or is it a criminal act? Is this a common practice in the art world?

9. Talking to Arnold Moll on the phone from Moscow, Kurt Wagner is unpleasantly surprised to learn Megan Crespi is in Vienna. He decides this champion of pornography must be eradicated and orders his second in command, Arnold Moll, to instruct the new initiate Wolf Schnitt to do away with

her. Moll is mortified that it was not he who was assigned the task. Will Moll's jealousy play a further role?

10. Megan visits the new Schiele Museum at the Wattmannngasse. Shortly after she arrives someone spray paints the enlarged photographs of Schiele on exhibition in the front room. The museum's founder, Felicitas Geduld, reminds Megan that this could be the work, not of the IKG, but possibly the Doppel-O. She tells Megan that the sect leader, Kurt Wagner, with his shoulder-length red hair, looks exactly like the Dürer 1500 *Self-Portrait as Christ* in the Munich Museum. Will the Dürer play a role in unfolding events? What does Felicitas's surname mean in English?

11. After breakfast in her Römischer Kaiser hotel, Megan visits the Wien Museum. She finds and borrows the key that is hidden in the little wooden horse in Schiele's black cabinet's hidden drawer, about which only she knows. She goes out to Schiele's former Hietzinger Hauptstrasse studio and discovers that the key opens a trap door in the building's basement. Inside the sunken chamber she discovers a number of five-by-five narrow wooden planks standing on end in groups of four. She realizes

that these boards, all painted black, could be frames. But frames for what? Was Schiele planning a series of allegories like those of Gustav Klimt?

12. Kurt Wagner, alias Max Valentin, visits Alexandra Azarova at her Moscow gallery and shows her the stolen Schiele *Self-Portrait Nude Standing*. She refuses to buy it because he can not provide a provenance for the work. Wagner flies to St. Petersburg and barter with Boris Ussachevsky, who does not care about provenance. After much give and take, Boris wins and pays 100 million dollars for the work. Why does Boris want this particular Schiele? What is a provenance? Why is it so important when selling a work of art?

13. Sonja Oppenheimer of Königsberg in Russia, contacts Megan Crespi. She is disturbed that the Schiele self-portrait she had entrusted via an intermediary, Éva Vidovszky, to Sotheby's has been stolen. Would Megan please come to Königsberg? Whose home town is this Russian city and what is its new Russian name?

14. Dressed in her warm red parka, Megan returns to the Wien Museum to replace the Hietzinger

Hauptstrasse key in its secret hiding place. While she is doing this, a tall man with white hair and trim beard loops a trip wire across the top of the museum stairway at foot level. He is Wolf Schnitt, newest initiate of the Doppel-O sect. What happens next? Will Megan survive?

15. Kurt Wagner pays Fritz von Gemmingen-Eggaburg his half of the one hundred million dollar sale of the stolen Schiele and buys the six coveted forest acres from him. Fritz shows Kurt his Dürer self-portrait; Kurt believes his resemblance to it ordains him, as the modern-day Christ, to carry on his work to bring purity to an impure world. What is Kurt, the Grand Master, planning to do with this acreage? Does Fritz have any idea as to the drastic ends the Doppel-O sect will go?

16. A dazed Megan, saved from any broken bones by her padded red parka, regains consciousness. She suffers swollen wrists and elbows however. In another 48 hours she is so much better that she agrees to fly to Königsberg to see Sonja Oppenheimer's Schiele. From Sonja she learns of the existence of Schiele's great grand nephew Adolf Peschka-Schiele, who pursues all Schiele works with doubtful

provenances. Are there restitution lawsuits in the offing? What sort of man is Peschka-Schiele?

17. Megan unwittingly foils Wolf Schnitt's second attempt on her life by suddenly taking a streetcar out to the Upper Belvedere Museum to see a special exhibition. But Schnitt has another chance to kill her when, during a sudden hail storm, he spots her returning to her hotel. What happens next? Who has been slaughtered?

18. Megan, Alexandra Azarova, the Moscow gallery owner, and art restorer Igor Borodin all meet in Königsberg to see Sonja Oppenheimer's remaining Schiele. Why is it such a surprise? Arnold Moll also visits the elderly woman and with what result? What role does a black metal rose play?

19. What is the subject matter of the unusual Schiele drawing Peschka-Schiele finds. Why does it send him to the town of Krumau? Why does Boris Ussachevsky agree to meet him there?

20. What is Wolf Schnitt doing in Dallas? Is his mission successful?

21. The Grand Master has built a special feature into the new meeting hall near the Schloss. What is this feature and why must it remain secret?

22. Back at her friend Antal Maack's Vienna flat Megan receives a call from Milan. She and Anton fly there immediately. What will they find there at the Galleria La Scala? Does it impact Megan's search to find what Schiele's seven images were that would, in his words, "benefit all of Vienna"?

23. Adolf Peschka-Schiele supervises the workmen excavating the blocked up cellar arches in the octagonal building in Krumau Boris Ussachevsky has bought. Why is it important that the building is octagon in shape? What are the two startling discoveries that send Peschka-Schiele berserk?

24. The Grand Master dyes his red hair a dark brown prior to the convening of the entire Doppel-O membership. Why is this? What does he take from the Schloss for the meeting? And what sinister act does his subordinate Arnold Moll perform? How does this impact the Doppel-O?

25. Megan, Dietrich Mann, and Johannes Ohm arrive at the Army Museum to meet with the uncooperative director Franz Forelle and go down to the cellar, used now only for storage of paintings not on display upstairs. What connects the Army Museum with Schiele? And what stunning, undreamt-of find does Megan discover in this, the denouement of the book?