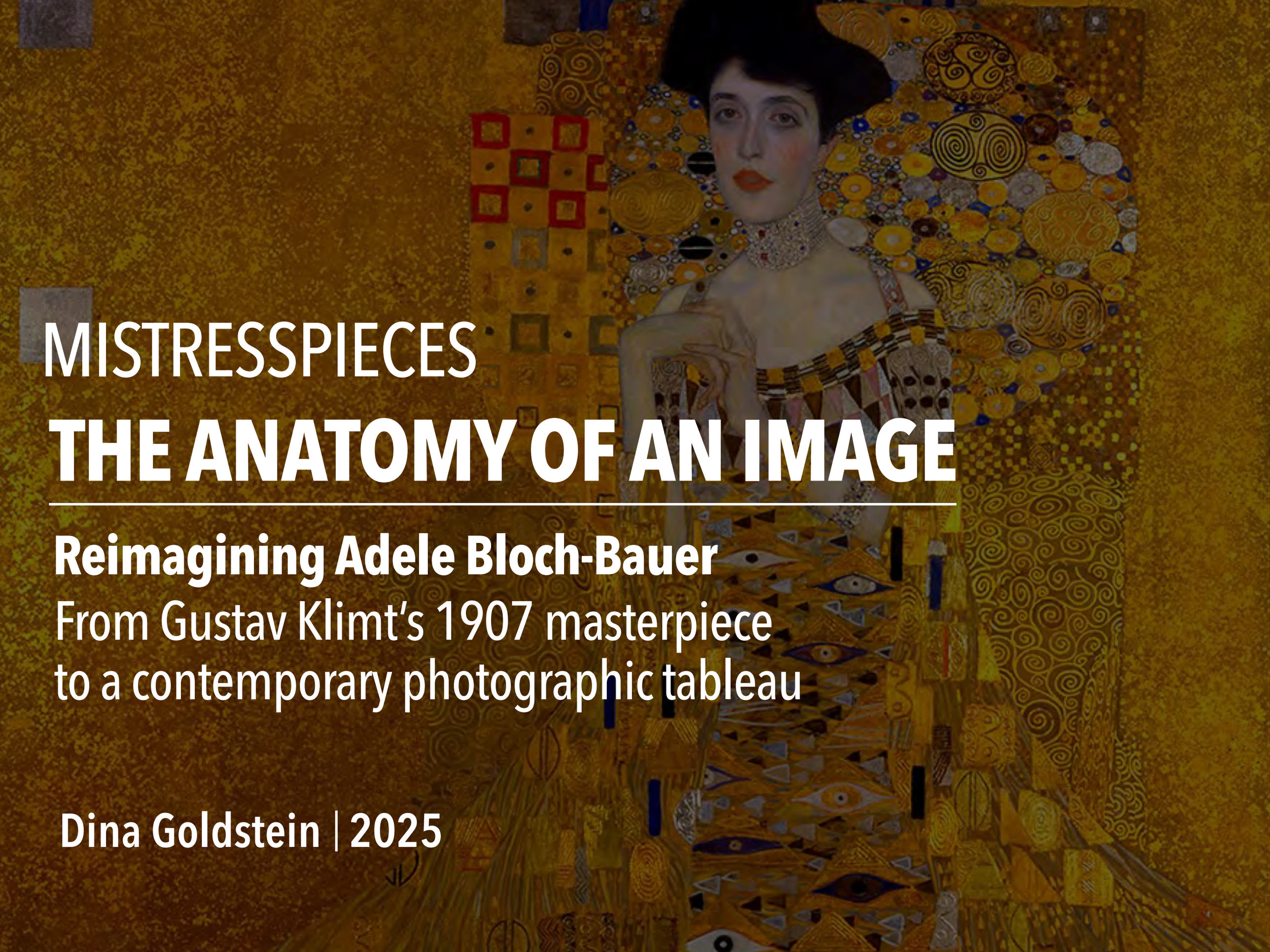


MISTRESSPIECES

THE ANATOMY OF AN IMAGE

Reimagining Adele Bloch-Bauer

From Gustav Klimt's 1907 masterpiece
to a contemporary photographic tableau

Dina Goldstein | 2025

THE HISTORY

Gustav Klimt's *Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer I* (1907), also known as *The Woman in Gold*, is one of the most celebrated paintings of his Golden Period. Commissioned by Ferdinand Bloch-Bauer, a wealthy Jewish industrialist, the portrait depicts his wife Adele, a prominent figure in Vienna's intellectual and cultural circles. Adorned with gold leaf, intricate geometric patterns and Byzantine-inspired ornamentation, the painting captures both the elegance of Viennese high society and the artistic innovation of the early twentieth century.

Yet its history is as compelling as its artistic significance. In 1938, following the Nazi annexation of Austria, the painting was seized from the Bloch-Bauer family and subsequently renamed *The Woman in Gold* to obscure Adele's Jewish identity. Decades later, her niece, Maria Altmann, embarked on a lengthy legal battle against the Austrian government to reclaim her family's stolen artworks.

In 2006, the painting was finally returned to the Bloch-Bauer family's heirs and later acquired by Ronald Lauder for a reported $135 million. Now housed at the Neue Galerie in New York, the portrait stands not only as a masterpiece of modern art but also as a powerful symbol of Jewish cultural heritage, historical injustice, resilience and restitution.

THE PAINTER

By the early 1900s, *Gustav Klimt* was a sought-after portraitist among Vienna's wealthy industrial families. Ferdinand Bloch-Bauer, a prominent art collector, commissioned him in mid-1903 to paint Adele.

Klimt began working on *Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer I* during his Golden Period. Inspired by the Byzantine gold mosaics he encountered in Ravenna in late 1903, he incorporated gold and silver leaf alongside elaborate ornamental patterns.

After more than a hundred preparatory drawings and several years of meticulous work, Klimt completed the portrait in 1907.

THE PHOTOGRAPHER

Dina Goldstein began her career over 30 years ago as a photojournalist, evolving from a documentary, editorial and portrait photographer into an independent artist specializing in large-scale narrative photographic tableaux.

Her highly conceptual work offers complex social commentary, incorporating cultural archetypes and iconography from the collective imagination with narratives inspired by the human condition. Drawing on the visual language of pop surrealism, she stages compositions that expose the underbelly of modern life, challenging cultural conventions and established belief systems.

Her vivid and provocative imagery emerges through a cinematic approach, guided by a meticulous creative process spanning pre-production to post-production.

THE SERIES

For centuries, the representation of women in Western art has been shaped predominantly by the male gaze. From the idealized figures of the Renaissance to the commodified imagery of Pop Art, women have been portrayed through the prevailing cultural and social attitudes of their time, raising enduring questions about identity, agency, power and objectification.



by Dina Goldstein







In MISTRESSPIECES, Israeli-Canadian visual artist Dina Goldstein reimagines ten iconic female subjects from art history through elaborately staged photographic tableaux. Revisiting these celebrated works from a contemporary female perspective, she transforms their original narratives to reflect the social and cultural complexities of our time.

The series draws inspiration from Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*, Johannes Vermeer's *Girl with a Pearl Earring*, Sandro Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus*, Jean Fouquet's *Virgin and Child Surrounded by Angels*, John Singer Sargent's *Madame X*, Pablo Picasso's *Dora Maar*, Henri Rousseau's *The Dream*, Salvador Dalí's *Galatea*, Andy Warhol's *Marilyn* and Gustav Klimt's *Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer I*.

While some male artists celebrated the female form with reverence or empathy, others objectified or fetishized it, contributing to ongoing debates about gender, power dynamics and the portrayal of women in art. Many of these female subjects have since achieved iconic status, their likenesses becoming as recognizable as the artists who immortalized them.













THE MODEL

Casting is one of the most critical elements of my photographic process. Beyond physical resemblance, I look for someone who can embody the psychological and emotional essence of the character.

When I first saw María performing in a play, I immediately knew she was the right person to portray Adele Bloch-Bauer. A model and actress from Mexico, María was eager to take on the role. There was something deeply captivating about her eyes that drew me in — a quiet intensity, a sense of mystery and an unspoken vulnerability that echoed the gaze of Adele in Klimt’s portrait.



THE COSTUME

After carefully studying Klimt’s portrait, I realized that Adele’s elaborate garment was composed of a dress and a cape.
We carefully considered both the construction and the intricate surface design to emulate Klimt’s original painting.

Local designers Ben Reitmeier and Rachele Amara took María’s measurements and transformed an old piece of canvas from my studio into a wearable work of art. Ben constructed the dress and cape, Rachele hand-painted the dress, and Iara Barylko painted the cape, recreating Klimt’s elaborate patterns and ornamental details.

The final embellishments were completed in the studio, bringing the garment to life while remaining true to the spirit of the original masterpiece.



THE JEWELLERY

Jewellery plays an integral role in Klimt's portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer, complementing the intricate patterns and opulence of her elaborate garment. Particular attention was given to her distinctive choker and bracelets, which reinforce the visual language of wealth and luxury.

With a limited crew and an elaborate necklace still to be made, I took on the task of recreating Adele's elegant diamond choker myself. Using rolls of decorative crystals and an assortment of jewels, I carefully assembled the piece to emulate the intricate design of the original.

I also handcrafted several silver bracelets and sourced the gold bangles from a local shop specializing in Indian jewellery. Some of the remaining bangles came from my studio collection, left over from the production of *Lakshmi* for my *Gods of Suburbia* series.

HAIR AND MAKEUP

Hair and makeup artist Mrinali Prashar joined the production to recreate Adele Bloch-Bauer's distinctive appearance. Hair extensions were incorporated to achieve the dramatic volume and sculptural silhouette of Adele's elaborate hairstyle.

The makeup closely mirrored the original artwork, paying particular attention to Klimt's use of colour. Despite the predominantly warm, golden palette of the painting, Adele's complexion is rendered in noticeably cooler tones, accentuated by pronounced blush, precisely defined eyebrows and coral lips.

Recreating this subtle contrast was essential to capturing the painterly quality of Klimt's portrait.





THE CONCEPT

Choosing a copper mine as the setting for Adele Bloch-Bauer was both a conceptual and an aesthetic decision.

By relocating Adele from Klimt's opulent golden environment to the interior of a copper mine, I wanted to juxtapose the visual language of wealth and luxury with the environmental consequences of extracting natural resources from the Earth.

Aesthetically, I envisioned a background that would echo the richness of Klimt's original painting through intricate textures, organic patterns and layers of golden and copper tones.

THE LOCATION

The historic Britannia Mine, once a major copper producer and now a museum, offered the ideal setting for this narrative. Given the logistical complexities of staging an elaborate photographic production within an active museum, securing permission was far from certain. I was delighted when the management embraced my concept and granted my crew and me access to the mine.

THE CREW

PHOTOGRAPHY & CREATIVE DIRECTION
Dina Goldstein

MODEL
Maria Paula Martinez Gil
Samaniego

HAIR & MAKEUP
Mrinali Prashar

COSTUME
Ben Reitmeier
Rachele Amara
Iara Barylko

PRODUCTION CREW
Varshil Tushar
Iara Barylko
Jaideep Singh Mann
Tyquira Dixon
Guntas Ksran
Jeo Kim

DIGITAL IMAGING
Tina Chin

SPECIAL THANKS
Britannia Mine Museum









THE CHALLENGES

Throughout my three decades as a photographer, I have worked in many demanding locations, but Britannia Mine stands out as one of the most challenging.

Navigating the uneven, muddy terrain while copper-rich water continuously dripped around us made protecting our equipment particularly difficult.

The mud was inescapable, finding its way into virtually everything. Long after we had emerged from the mine, we spent days meticulously cleaning our equipment.

Ironically, the very conditions that made the location so challenging were also what made it so visually compelling.

THE LIGHTING

Anticipating the challenges of photographing inside the mine, I photographed María in my studio beforehand, devising a lighting plan that could be replicated in both environments. I used a large softbox to a create soft, even frontal illumination, emulating the painterly quality of Klimt's portrait. The addition of a blue gel accentuated the cooler tones of María's complexion, creating a deliberate contrast with the warm golden hues of her costume and surroundings.

Working under controlled studio conditions allowed me to refine every detail, from the styling of her hair to the precise positioning of her hands.

The dress was also photographed separately, providing additional plates from which individual patterns, textures and ornamental details could be reconstructed in post-production.



LIGHTING THE MINE

The next challenge was lighting the interior of the mine itself. I wanted to reveal its extraordinary depth, illuminating successive layers of texture, mineral deposits and natural colour.

Of particular interest were the vibrant green copper deposits interwoven with the golden tones of the rock, creating an organic tapestry reminiscent of Klimt’s intricate ornamentation.

The natural formations within the mine became a geological counterpart to the elaborate patterns and gilded surfaces of Klimt’s painting.

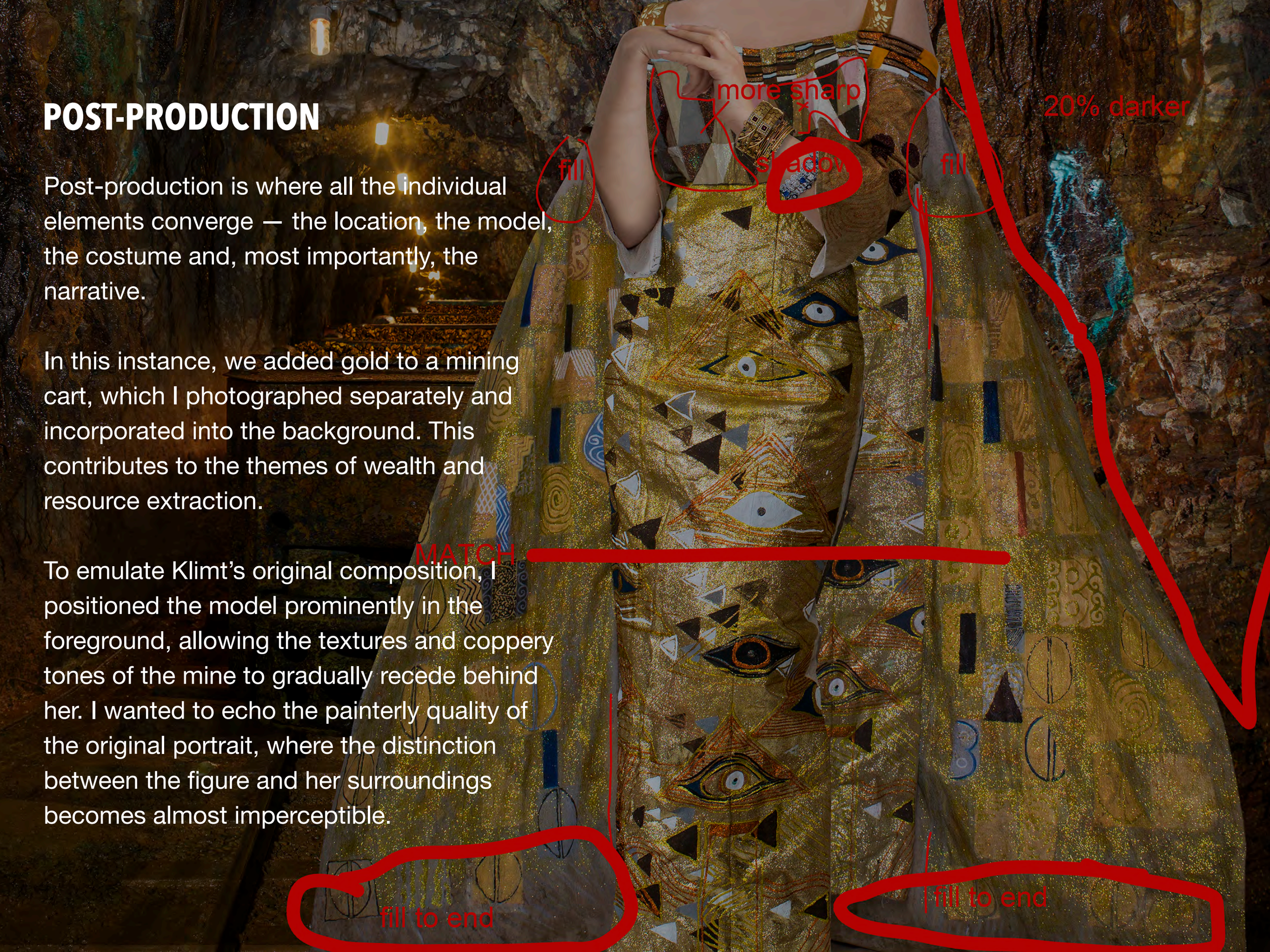


POST-PRODUCTION

Post-production is where all the individual elements converge — the location, the model, the costume and, most importantly, the narrative.

In this instance, we added gold to a mining cart, which I photographed separately and incorporated into the background. This contributes to the themes of wealth and resource extraction.

To emulate Klimt's original composition, I positioned the model prominently in the foreground, allowing the textures and coppery tones of the mine to gradually recede behind her. I wanted to echo the painterly quality of the original portrait, where the distinction between the figure and her surroundings becomes almost imperceptible.



THE PHOTOGRAPHIC PLATES

Photographing additional plates proved invaluable, as some of the more delicate elements, particularly the necklace and elaborate hairstyle, began to deteriorate during the location shoot.

Capturing these essential details under controlled studio conditions allowed me to preserve the integrity of my original vision.

DIGITAL IMAGING

Each photographic plate becomes an individual component of the final composition, enabling me to refine the image without compromising its photographic integrity.

Working with digital imaging technician Tina Chin, my collaborator of over twenty years, I selectively integrate details from multiple photographs into a single composition.

In this particular image, the eyes were especially important. We spent considerable time refining María’s gaze, carefully studying the subtle expression, intensity and emotional quality of Adele’s eyes in Klimt’s original portrait.

THE RESULT



Dina Goldstein, Adele Bloch-Bauer
MISTRESSPIECES, 2025

THE PRINTING

I print all of the photographic works in the MISTRESSPIECES series in-house, maintaining complete artistic control over colour, tonal range, detail and the quality of each finished print.

Using a 44-inch Epson large-format printer and archival Epson lustre fine art paper, I am able to achieve exceptional colour fidelity, rich tonal depth and precise rendering of intricate details. The subtle sheen of the lustre surface enhances the luminosity of the golden hues while preserving the delicate textures and nuances within the composition.

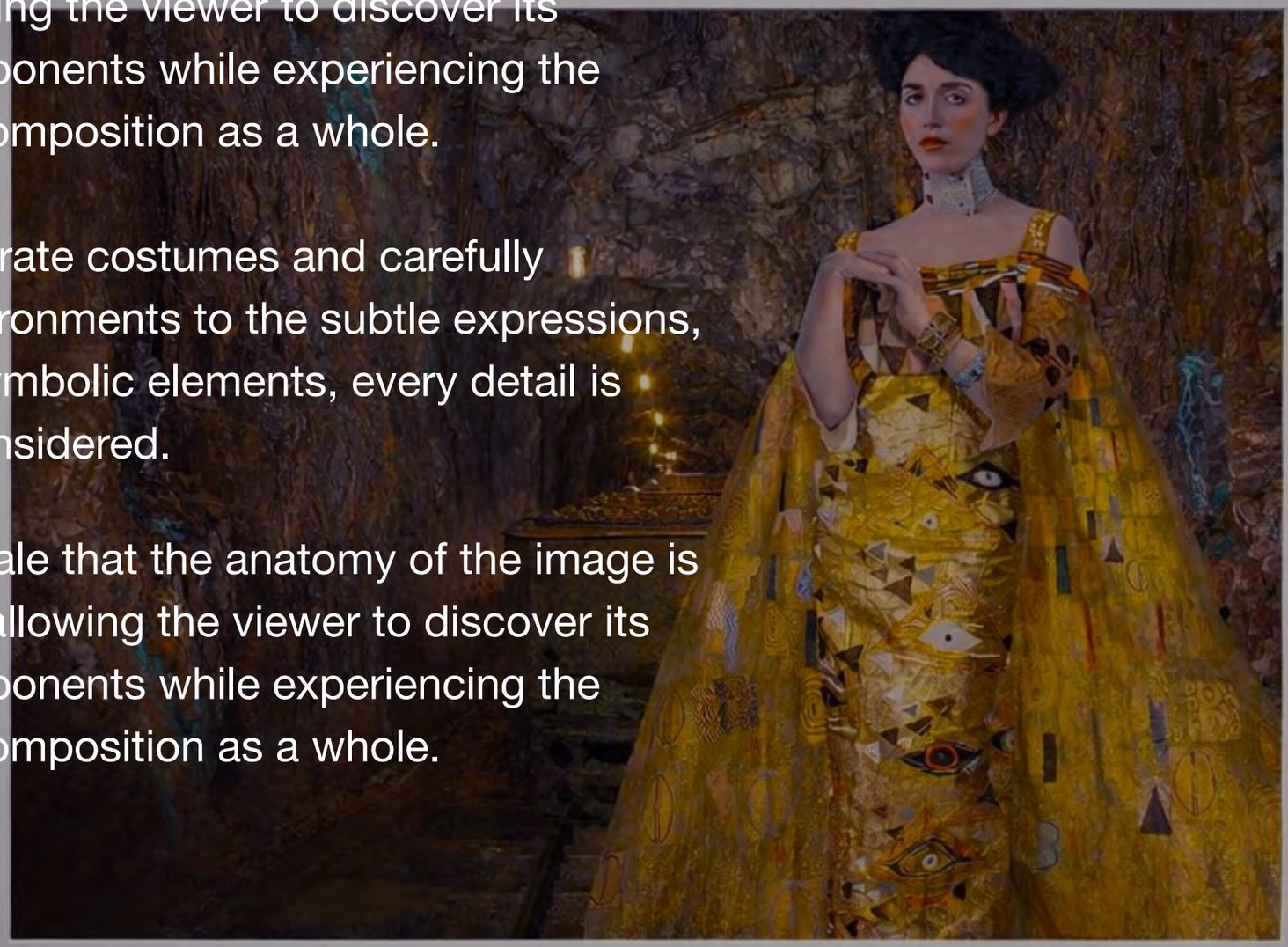
Printing is the final stage of my creative process, requiring the same meticulous attention to detail as every preceding stage of production. It is here that the digital image is transformed into a tangible, large-scale work of art, intended to be experienced in its full visual complexity.



THE FINAL ARTWORK

Through scale, the anatomy of the image is fully revealed, allowing the viewer to discover its individual components while experiencing the power of the composition as a whole.

From the elaborate costumes and carefully conceived environments to the subtle expressions, textures and symbolic elements, every detail is deliberately considered.



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