

Alphonse Mucha (1860-1939)

Sarah Bernhardt

Czech painter Alphonse Mucha leapt to fame in Paris in 1895 with his poster 'Gismonda' (1894) for the superstar Sarah Bernhardt. It was an overnight sensation and announced the new artistic style and its creator to the citizens of Paris. Bernhardt was so satisfied with the success of that first poster that she entered into a 6 years contract with Mucha.

The Parisian actress Sarah Bernhardt was the single most influential figure in Mucha's life as an artist, he grew both as a man and an artist through his professional collaboration and friendship with the greatest stage personality of the era. Her love of his work combined by her status shot Mucha to fame.

Mucha was influenced by **Symbolism** and by the social aspects of William Morris' **Arts and Crafts Movement** in England. He attempted to give access to the beauty of art to every social class and to elevate the decorative elements to the status of works of art.



Art Nouveau (1890-1910)

In an age when the industrial revolution was making mass-produced goods available, it also seemed to be diminishing the role of the artist/craftsman in society. Art Nouveau was a revolt against this – the overall philosophy of the style was to bring the beauty of art to everyday objects.

The Art Nouveau artists shared the belief that all arts should work in harmony in order to create a “total work of art”: buildings, textiles, furniture, jewellery, clothes all conformed to the principles of Art Nouveau.



Inspired by the decorative style of Art Nouveau (**inspired by natural forms and structures**)

Flowing/swirling/rhythmic lines are visibly apparent within Mucha's work -

Mucha macaroni hair is the name given to Mucha woman with her **swirls of abundant hair**.

Portraits of lean, languid, glamorous women represented the peak of Art Nouveau graphic style. Women's bodies were transformed from stark, Victorian mistresses to **elongated, sensually curved forms**.

Whiplash – celtic design.

With the Industrial Revolution underway, printing techniques became more sophisticated. By the early 19th century, the streets of Paris were dotted with posters. **The medium gained popularity.**

Artists and Designers

Mucha was excited by light and colour and was inspired the work of **Hans Makart**. **'The five senses'** – Makart depicted beautiful women in his works and Mucha was influenced by the **sensuality in many of Makart's paintings**.

Mucha shared a studio with **Paul Gauguin**. Their studio had a playful and free-spirited mood and it was here that Mucha first explored his interest in the occult with August Strindberg, and engaged in hypnotic and psychic experiments with Albert de Rochas and the astronomer Camille Flammarion.

Charles Rennie Mackintosh also designed 'long' posters (unusual for that time).



Japonism

Inspired by **Japanese art work**, especially woodblock prints, on French artists in the second half of the nineteenth century. Many Japanese artists drew inspiration from beautiful women.

Celebration of line seen in Japanese woodblock prints is apparent throughout Mucha's work. **Dark outline commonly found around everything.**

Mucha's posters reflect a rich texture of modern life in 'fin-de-siecle' (turn of the 19th century) Paris.

Nationality and Religion

A single figure or the head of a seductive woman, against a **halo like disk**. The halo disk seen in most of Mucha's work is **representative of the halos from religious icons** Mucha saw throughout his childhood.

Elements seen in Mucha's posters reflect his **pride in his nationality**. Evoking memories of his native land – **Woman often depicted in Slovak dress and crowns** traditionally worn by Slovak women.

The goddess Slavia was a recurring icon both in Mucha's commercial and fine art work, and on posters and logos for the Slavia Bank.



Byzantine surface decoration - Mucha introduced the border decoration **inspired by Byzantine mosaic work** which adds an air of dignity to a commercial poster.