

Art Nouveau Visual Art

by Sophia



WHAT'S COVERED

This tutorial covers Art Nouveau visual art. By the end of this lesson, you'll be able to identify and define today's key terms, describe the motivation behind the Art Nouveau movement, and identify examples of Art Nouveau artwork. This will be accomplished through the exploration of:

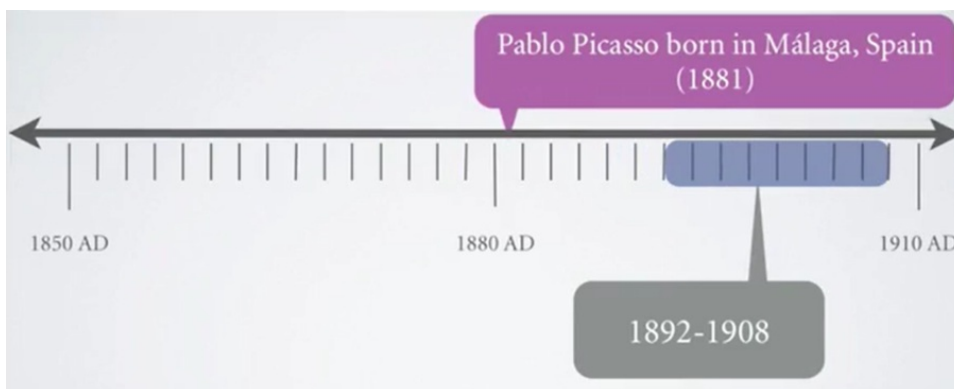


BIG IDEA

The Art Nouveau aesthetic was in many ways a “return to nature.” The traits of Art Nouveau were responses against the Industrial Revolution.

1. Period and Location: Art Nouveau

The artwork you will be looking at today dates from between 1892 and 1908. These pieces focus geographically on four locations: Menton, France, where Aubrey Beardsley died in 1898; Vienna, Austria, where Gustav Klimt was educated and worked; Prague in the Czech Republic (at the time part of Czechoslovakia), where Alphonse Mucha died in 1939; and Paris, France, where Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec worked.



2. Art Nouveau: Historical Context, Philosophy, and Aesthetic

Art Nouveau, or literally “new art,” is the French name for an international art style that saw its greatest popularity during the 1890s and very early 1900s. It was known by other names in other parts of the world: as “the Jugendstil” in Germany; as “the Secession” in Vienna (or the Vienna Secession); and “Modernismo” in

Spain.

Regardless of the name, the aesthetics of Art Nouveau were relatively consistent throughout Europe and included:

- An emphasis on organic, curving lines and shapes
- Themes of flowers, leaves, grass, and insects
- Women with long, flowing hair

Art Nouveau shared many of the same philosophical beliefs as the Arts and Crafts movement of the same time period. In fact, Art Nouveau could be considered a derivative form of the Arts and Crafts philosophy, in so much as the stylistic aspects were very similar.

Art Nouveau also had a similar emphasis on functional objects, high-quality artisanship, and the decorative arts. Like the style of the Arts and Crafts movement, these are traits that were responses to the Industrial Revolution, and as such, were difficult to mass-produce.



THINK ABOUT IT

Why do you think this negative response to mass-produced items was important? Well, mass-produced items were considered ugly and of poor quality. However, it's important to note that, although related, the two movements were *not* the same thing. Art Nouveau penetrated all areas of art, not just architecture and design. It took on newer forms of artistic expression, clean commercial art, and graphic art.



TERM TO KNOW

Art Nouveau

Or Jugendstil, Vienna Secession, Modernismo; an international style of decorative art and architecture popular in the late 1800s and early 1900s, characterized by themes of plants and flowers and curving lines.

3. Gustav Klimt

As previously mentioned, Art Nouveau was an international movement known as the Secession in Vienna, Austria. The artist Gustav Klimt is perhaps the most important artist to emerge from this region during this time. He's one of the founding artists of the Vienna Secession, as it was known, which was established to explore outside the boundaries of traditional academic art. Klimt's painting below, "The Kiss," is an example of how artists such as Klimt were pushing new boundaries.



The Kiss by Gustav Klimt

1907-1908

Oil on canvas

This painting is part of Klimt's golden period, or golden phase, as it was sometimes called, due to his inclusion of gold leaf. It's an interesting depiction of an intimate moment between two lovers, albeit in a rather uncomfortable-looking posture. Klimt only exposes the heads, arms, hands, and lower legs of the woman. Notice how everything else melds together in an exquisite blend of gold and pattern. His style is truly unique, but the design aesthetic of Art Nouveau is evident in the inclusion of flowers and elements of nature.



DID YOU KNOW

"The Kiss" is thought to be inspired by the Byzantine mosaics of the Shenzhen and Ravenna in Italy.

4. Commercial and Graphic Art

As mentioned above, Art Nouveau penetrated all areas of art, taking on newer forms of artistic expression, clean **commercial art**, and **graphic art**. Alphonse Mucha (pronounced "moo-kha," with "kh" sound coming from the back of your throat) was at the forefront of this new direction in artistic expression, and he produced numerous poster prints that were used in advertisements. Many of these prints serve as some of the best examples of the Art Nouveau design aesthetic.

The print below is from an advertisement for *Gismonda*, a Greek melodramatic play, and is one of the first examples of this new form of artistic advertisement. The long, flowing hair and organic motifs are classic examples of Art Nouveau design. In fact, it was Mucha's particular style, seen in the emphasis on curvilinear organic lines and stylized woman's hair in tendrils, that came to define much of the aesthetic of Art Nouveau.

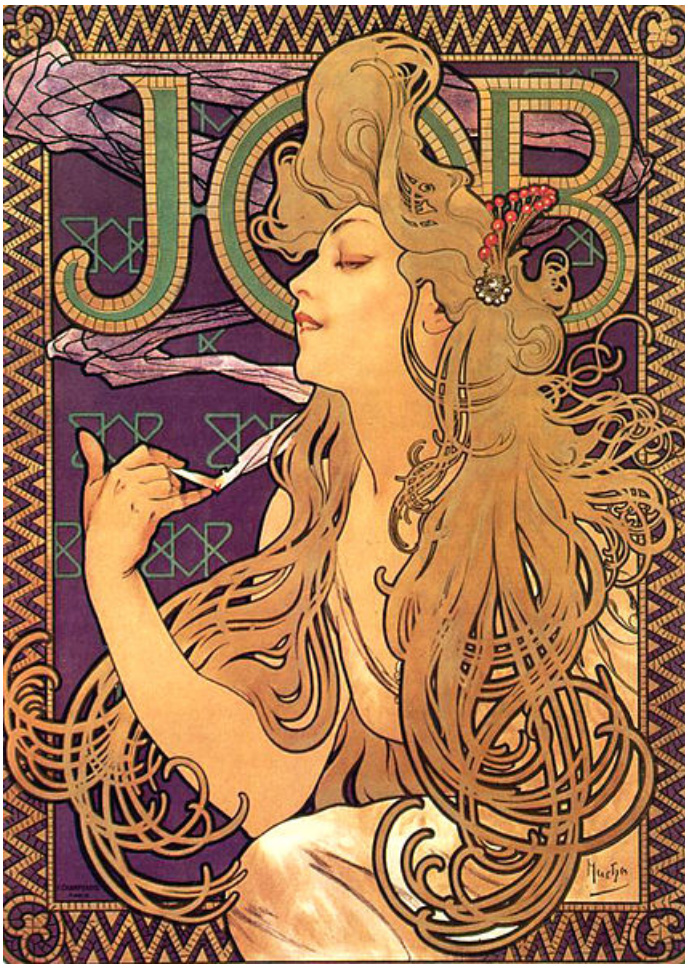


Advertisement for *Gismonda* by Alphonse Mucha

1894

Lithograph (print)

The example above essentially launched Mucha's career. He was commissioned to produce numerous advertisements, such as this next example for Job Cigarettes. The company's name almost seems like an afterthought, partially hidden behind the figure of a beautiful woman whose hair essentially takes on a life of its own, defying gravity and cascading around her in mounds of curly, vegetative-looking tendrils. Mucha brilliantly avoids reducing his art form to a common advertisement. Quite the contrary, he raises the advertisement to the realm of high art.



Advertisement for Job Cigarettes by Alphonse Mucha

1897

Lithograph (print)

This next example, Aubrey Beardsley's "The Peacock Skirt," was an illustration for a work of literature by Oscar Wilde, the famous Irish author. This piece departs from the Post-Impressionist and Impressionist emphasis on color, reducing the image to black and white, and using organic patterning and curvilinear lines rather than color to define the image. It's an important example of how Japanese illustrations were influencing the creation of new forms of artwork during this time period.



The Peacock Skirt by Aubrey Beardsley

1892

Graphite & ink illustration

The influence of Japanese artwork can also be seen in the art of Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec. Does the example below look familiar? You may notice that this image has come up before because it serves as an example of the influence of Japanese artwork on Post-Impressionism as well as Art Nouveau and how the line is often blurred between the two, depending on the particular aspects of the works of art being emphasized.



In terms of Post-Impressionism, this print is an example of color exploration. On the other hand, it definitely retains the illustrative line that exists in artwork classified as Art Nouveau and also serves as yet another example of how commercial art—such as that of Alphonse Mucha—had become an entirely new form of artistic expression.



La Reine de Joie by Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec

1892

Chromolithograph (print)

Notice how the characters are reduced to simplified caricatures amidst a further simplification in the overall complete reduction of background and ancillary elements to color and line in order to emphasize the important moment from the book being depicted.



DID YOU KNOW

This print in English is called the “Queen of Joy,” and it’s actually an advertisement from a book of the same name. It depicts a scene from the book in which a Jewish banker is flirting with a well-known Parisian courtesan. Like Mucha, Toulouse-Lautrec succeeded in elevating the advertisement to high art, yet he maintained the functional aspect of the artwork, which was to sell books. Clearly articulated in a large font, the title and author are identified.



TERMS TO KNOW

Commercial Art

Art produced for the purpose of advertising a product.

Graphic Art

Art made on a two-dimensional or flat surface.



SUMMARY

Today you learned about **Art Nouveau** visual art. You learned how to identify and define today's key terms. You also learned how to describe the motivation behind the Art Nouveau movement, exploring the **historical context and philosophy behind the movement**. You also learned about the **aesthetic common to Art Nouveau artwork**, so that you're able to identify **examples of Art Nouveau artwork**.

Source: This work is adapted from Sophia author Ian McConnell.



TERMS TO KNOW

Art Nouveau

Or Jugendstil, an international style of decorative art and architecture popular in the late 1800's and early 1900's characterized by themes of plants and flowers and curving lines.

Commercial Art

Art produced for the purpose of advertising a product.

Graphic Art

Art made on a two-dimensional or flat surface.