



Alphonse Mucha

DESIGNER'S FULL NAME: Alphonse Maria Mucha

DESIGNER'S PSEUDONYM/NICKNAME: Alfrons Mucha

GENDER: Male

YEAR BORN: 1860

COUNTRY IN WHICH DESIGNER BORN: Moravia (province of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, now Czech Republic)

YEAR DIED: 1939

COUNTRY IN WHICH DESIGNER DIED: Czechoslovakia (now Prague, Czech Republic)

RACE | ETHNICITY | RELIGION | POLITICAL ALIGNMENT

Czechoslovak / Catholic Upbringing

IF ANY OF THE ABOVE AFFECTED EITHER THE ARTIST'S LIFE EXPERIENCE OR WORK BECAUSE IT/THEY PROVIDED A CHALLENGE AT THE TIME, PLEASE EXPLAIN.

Mucha was an advocate for Czech Independence and Slavic culture. Most of his later years were spent creating large works of those themes in Prague. In, 1918 when Czechoslovakia gained independence, Mucha designed the country's postage stamps and bank notes. He worked a lot in gold and silver, adorning his works with the natural themes and organic styles of his native land for his main inspiration. His final work, which he worked on from 1910 to 1928, was the Slav Epic that was 20 monumental paintings that told the story and mythologies of the Slavic and Czech people.

DID THIS DESIGNER DO NOTABLE WORK IN FIELDS OTHER THAN WHAT WOULD BE CONSIDERED GRAPHIC DESIGN TODAY? EXPLAIN.

In addition to graphics, Mucha produced work in fields such as furniture, carpentry, staining glass windows, and manufacturing objects. Aside from graphic design, he is most well known for his paintings inside churches and his twenty large murals called the Slav Epic.

FOR WHAT IS THIS DESIGNER MOST NOTED? EXPLAIN.

Mucha is most noted for depiction of women. They project an archetypal sense of unreality. The women were exotic and sexualized but retain an essence of innocence. They have no age, nationality, or historical period. The "noodles and spaghetti" style hair patterns became a hallmark for art nouveau.

IS THERE ANYTHING CONTROVERSIAL ABOUT THIS DESIGNER? EXPLAIN.

Mucha was one of the first individuals to be interrogated by Hitler due to him creating the country's currency. The Czechoslovakia currency featured an Aryan man and the hammer and the sickle symbols of Bolshevik learnings. Mucha died of pneumonia before making it to prison.

EXPLAIN THIS DESIGNER'S EDUCATION/TRAINING, INCLUDING ACADEMIC, APPRENTICESHIPS, AND /OR MENTORSHIPS.

Mucha received a scholarship for his singing at the age of twelve and attended high school in Brno. He had to leave school due to poor academic grades and never graduated from high school. After painting a mural for Count Karl Khuen, Khuen funded his education at the Munich Academy of Fine Arts. Kheun continued to fund Mucha's education in the mid-1880's when he attended Académie Julian and a year later Académie Colarossi in Paris.

DID THIS DESIGNER PROMOTE A SPECIFIC IDEOLOGY IN HIS/HER WORK? EXPLAIN.

Alphonse Mucha helped push the emergence of the "New Woman" during the beginning of Modern art. During this time women were fighting for suffrage and had been labeled as wives and home keepers. Mucha's depiction of women was far more progressive. He used symbolism, archetypes, and thematic ideas to show women as socially entitled, sexual, and socially threatening. This helped the feminist movement by making women more present in the public sphere.

WHY IS THIS DESIGNER VIEWED AS ICONIC IN THE HISTORY OF GRAPHIC DESIGN?

He is viewed as iconic in the history of graphic design for his Gismonda Poster. It started on Christmas Eve 1894, when actress Sarah Bernhardt demands a new poster for her play Gismonda by New Year's Day. Mucha was the only artist available and received the commission. He used the basic pose from Grasset's Joan of Arc and sketches Bernhardt made at the theatre, and elongated Grasset's format, used Byzantine inspired mosaics as background motifs, and created a unique piece. The bottom portion of the design is unfinished due to only having a week to work on the project. Due to its complexity and muted colors, Parisians were astounded. Sarah Bernhardt thought he captured her so well that she contracted him for six years.

IS THERE ANY OTHER IMPORTANT INFORMATION TO KNOW ABOUT THIS DESIGNER?

His work was so pervasive with his central female figure and organic stylized forms that by 1900, le style Mucha was interchangeable with l'art nouveau. Not only did he create graphics but also furniture, carpets, stained glass windows, and manufactured objects.

YOUR NAME: Alivia Rouse

GIVE YOUR EDUCATED OPINION OF THIS PERSON AND THE QUALITY/IMPORTANCE OF HIS/HER WORK. EXPLAIN WHAT INFLUENCE - OR LACK OF INFLUENCE - THIS WORK HAS HAD ON YOUR OWN.

During our study of graphic design history this semester and out of the hundreds of designers we have examined, Mucha has been my favorite one we have studied. I call his time in Paris the fairytale story that every designer has longed for. Christmas Eve 1894, while correcting proofs at the Lemecriers' printing company, the world-renowned actress Sarah Bernhardt contacted Mucha's boss demanding a redesign of Eugene Grasset's poster for the play Gismonda by New Year's Day. Mucha, being the only designer available, was given the project and used Grasset's format but elongating it and using Byzantine-inspired mosaics as background motifs. After the release of the poster on New Year's Day, his career began its rise and gained a six-year contract with Bernhardt for capturing her likeness as Joan of Arc.

From this point forward, Alphonse Mucha shaped the style of Art Nouveau and revolutionized the art of the poster. From 1895-1900, his posters dominated Art Nouveau to the point that it became interchangeable with “Le Style Mucha.” I agree with this idealization of his work defining the two-decade long movement. He helped paved the way to Modernism by inventing lines and forms rather than copying them from nature. Just like other art nouveau artists, his designs used basic forms and shapes that were formed by and evolved with the use of ornament.

He became the trailblazer he is known as today due to his designs of women. Women have been focal points in the art world since its creation, but had yet to be seen the way Mucha presents them. He took Victorian Era (which was coming to an end) style women and completely changed it in concept and execution. He no longer looked to realism and presented women as sensuous abstracted creatures of no age, nationality, or historical period.

This is how, in my opinion, that Mucha revolutionized the poster and advertisement. He is the first artist I have found that used sexually appealing women to sell a product. Posters like Jobs presented these women with their heads tilted back sensuously with whiplash curved hair that would draw in any person into the advertisement. I normally would have issues with the sexualization of women for commercial benefit, but these illustrations are beautiful and still maintain an aura of innocence. I also agree that he helped push the idea of the “New Woman” as being entitled, sexual, and socially threatening, deteriorating the old concept of house wives and home keepers. This helped the feminist movement reach new heights and made women more present in the public sphere.

My favorite thing about Mucha that has influenced me greatly this semester is that he believed art was eternal and could never be new. Since reading this, I have taken a step back and studied the styles of art nouveau and modernism. I just created my best piece of client work by stepping away from post-modernism and using the horizontal grid of modernism and flat silhouettes of Japonisme.

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