

TEACHING

# ART NOUVEAU

1890-1914

National Gallery of Art  
Washington





TEACHING

ART NOUVEAU

1890–1914



National Gallery of Art  
Washington

This teaching program was developed in connection with the exhibition *Art Nouveau, 1890–1914*, and was made possible by The Terra Foundation for the Arts.

*Art Nouveau, 1890–1914*, was organized by the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, in association with the National Gallery of Art, Washington.

**The exhibition was made possible by DaimlerChrysler Corporation Fund.**

Additional support was provided by The Terra Foundation for the Arts, Robert P. and Arlene R. Kogod, Eleanor and Donald Taffner, The Fund for the International Exchange of Art.

The exhibition was supported by an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities.

This text is based in large measure on the exhibition catalogue and information supplied by the exhibition curator, Paul Greenhalgh. Sincere thanks go to him and to the education staff of the Victoria and Albert Museum for giving so generously of their time and ideas. Images and photographic permissions were handled by Leo Kasun at the National Gallery of Art. Teaching activities were suggested by members of the National Gallery of Art education division. The booklet was written by Carla McKinney Brenner, edited by Tam Curry Bryfogle, designed by Wendy Schleicher Smith, and produced by the editors office of the National Gallery of Art.

© 2000 Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art, Washington

[www.nga.gov](http://www.nga.gov)

Note: Dimensions are given height before width in centimeters (with inches in parentheses).

cover Victor Horta, *Interior of the Tassel House*, 1893, © 2000, Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/SOFAM, Brussels (slide 11)

page 1 Henry van de Velde, *Candelabrum*, 1898–1899, Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, Brussels (slide 13)

# Contents

	<b>Art Nouveau</b>				
5	A Short History	20	Slide 9 Otto Eckmann and Scherrebek Weaving School, <i>Five Swans</i>	32	<b>Glossary</b>
6	Sources and Inspirations	21	Slide 10 Fernand Khnopff, <i>Des Caresses</i>	34	<b>Resources</b>
9	Modernity and Modern Life	22	Slide 11 Victor Horta, <i>Interior of the Tassel House</i>	35	<b>Timeline 1853–1914</b>
	<b>Slides</b>	23	Slide 12 Henry van de Velde, <i>Tropon: L'Aliment le plus concentré</i>	36	<b>Slide List</b>
11	Discussion Ideas	24	Slide 13 Henry van de Velde, <i>Candelabrum,</i> and Josef Hoffmann, <i>Fruit basket</i>		
12	Slide 1 Arthur Heygate Mackmurdo, <i>Chair</i>	25	Slide 14 Charles Rennie Mackintosh and Margaret MacDonald, <i>Ladies' Luncheon Room</i>		
13	Slide 2 Paul Gauguin, <i>Self-Portrait</i>	26	Slide 15 Joseph Maria Olbrich, <i>Vienna Secession Building</i>		
14	Slide 3 Pierre Bonnard, <i>Poster for "La Revue blanche"</i>	27	Slide 16 Gustav Klimt, <i>Pallas Athene</i>		
15	Slide 4 René Lalique, <i>Dragonfly woman corsage ornament</i>	28	Slide 17 Vilmos Zsolnay, <i>Vase</i>		
16	Slide 5 Alphonse Marie Mucha, <i>Nature</i>	29	Slide 18 William H. Bradley, <i>Thanksgiving No. from "The Chap-Book"</i>		
17	Slide 6 Hector Guimard, <i>Entrance to the Métropolitain</i>	30	Slide 19 Persian, <i>Glass flasks,</i> and Louis Comfort Tiffany, <i>Glass flask</i>		
18	Slide 7 Louis Majorelle and Daum Frères, <i>Orchidée desk</i>	31	Slide 20 Louis Sullivan and George Grant Elmslie, <i>Elevator Medallion</i>		
19	Slide 8 Émile Gallé, <i>Bat vase</i>				



# Art Nouveau

Art nouveau was a style of international scope and eclectic vitality that resulted from attempts to find an art appropriate for the modern world. Its earliest works appeared in the 1890s. Art nouveau triumphed at the 1900 Paris World's Fair, becoming the style of the age.



1 Aubrey Beardsley, British, 1872–1898, *J'ai baisé ta bouche Jokanaan*, illustration for Oscar Wilde's *Salomé*, 1893, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.



2 Aubrey Beardsley, Poster for "The Studio," 1894, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

A critic at the beginning of the nineteenth century complained about the term *art nouveau*, pointing out that every style was "nouveau" (new) in the beginning. But in fact it was art nouveau's newness — or more exactly its modernity — that defined it. This surprises us today. We associate art nouveau most immediately with the whiplash curve and fin-de-siècle decadence. We associate it with the decorative, and the **decorative arts**, and these are not what come to mind when we hear the word "modernity." We think instead of the spare lines and functional rationality of the **Bauhaus** — of form following function, of buildings without ornament. But for designers and those who bought their products, art nouveau meant "modern."

Although we usually call the style "art nouveau" in English, it has a wealth of other names: in Germany it was *Jugendstil*, in Austria *Sezessionstil*, in Catalonia the *Modernista movement*, and in Italy *stile Liberty* (after the London retailer). Even this incomplete list suggests two things: international scope and great variety. It should be said at the outset that art nouveau is not defined simply by the way it looks. It embraced both sweeping organic forms and controlled geometric ones, and although it was largely driven by the decorative arts, its impact was felt in painting and architecture as well.

## A SHORT HISTORY

Defining the moment when art nouveau came into existence is difficult. Many point to the 1895 opening in Paris of Siegfried Bing's commercial gallery, L'Art Nouveau. Bing was an important supporter of the new style, and his shop was a meeting place for artists and devotees. But the first art nouveau works certainly appeared earlier.

In 1893 the inaugural issue of *The Studio*, "an illustrated magazine of the fine and applied art," reproduced a startling new work by the young English artist Aubrey Beardsley, an illustration for Oscar Wilde's play *Salomé* (fig. 1). Its bold sinuous line, so clear in black and white — and its fascination with the femme fatale — would be of great influence on art nouveau design. Some regard this print as the first work of art nouveau.

Journals like *The Studio* were one of the primary forums in which the new style gained exposure (fig. 2). Also important were the exhibitions organized by avant-garde groups in various cities, which afforded artists a look at new work being done in other regions. One of the most active of these groups was Les XX in Brussels. Brussels was well situated to be at the vanguard of art nouveau, located literally between the English **arts and crafts movement** and French **symbolism** (which were also important forces in the emergence of art nouveau; see below). The same year Beardsley's print appeared, Victor Horta built a radically new townhouse in Brussels for his friend Émile Tassel. Although Horta probably had not seen Beardsley's work, the profuse — and unified — decoration of curving tendril-like lines throughout the house conveyed much the same spirit.

By 1895, when Bing's store opened, art nouveau was beginning to flourish in cities all over Europe and North America: Chicago, New York, Glasgow, Brussels, Vienna, Munich, Barcelona, Helsinki, Prague, Paris. In each city, it developed a unique character. In Belgium, France, and Germany, as in the United States, art nouveau design was curvilinear and based on natural forms (fig. 3), and it

Marginal notes refer to slide discussions.

Beardsley's influence: slide 18

journals: slides 3, 18

Les XX: slides 10, 12

Tassel House: slide 11

Belgium: slides 10–13

France: slides 2–8

Germany: slide 9

United States: slides 18–20



3 Tiffany Studios, American, firm active 1902–1932, *Wisteria table lamp*, c. 1902, Lillian Nassau Ltd., New York. The American master of glass, Louis Comfort Tiffany, based many of his designs on nature.

4 Josef Hoffmann, Austrian, 1870–1956, *Adjustable armchair*, c. 1908, Victoria and Albert Museum, London. The geometric shapes of Hoffmann's *Sitzmaschine* exemplify art nouveau design in Scotland and Austria.



often adopted a mystical or **pantheistic** approach to nature. In Scotland and Austria, by contrast, much art nouveau design was geometric (fig. 4).

It was at the Paris World's Fair in 1900 that art nouveau reached a wider public. Although art nouveau objects by no means dominated in their numbers, they were the works visitors perceived as representing the future of design. Art nouveau became the style of the age, no longer avant-garde but omnipresent, found in public places and in homes, on posters and products of all kinds.

Already by the end of the decade, art nouveau's ubiquity had cheapened it. As it was applied to shoddy mass-produced goods, art nouveau began to seem debased in the eyes of some of the best artists and designers, even those who had pioneered it. Moreover, art nouveau's eclectic nature made momentum difficult to sustain. Even before the start of World War I in 1914, art nouveau was no longer in the forefront of design, no longer modern. It was not until the 1960s that it again received serious attention, and only now are its contributions to the future of design in the twentieth century being understood.

#### SOURCES AND INSPIRATIONS

Art nouveau designers were consciously trying to break free from past convention. In place of the historical revival styles — neobaroque, neoclassical, Gothic revival — that had dominated for a half century or more, they wanted, at the end of the nineteenth century, to find an art appropriate to modern life. This idea was expressed in a motto over the door of the Secession Building in Vienna: "Der Zeit Ihre Kunst. Der Kunst Ihre Freiheit" (To the age its art. To the art its freedom). This did not mean, however, that art nouveau was without sources and inspirations. The most important are discussed below.

pantheism: slides 8, 9  
Scotland: slide 14  
Austria: slides 13, 15, 16  
Paris World's Fair: slides 4, 6

posters and products:  
slides 3, 12, 18

Vienna Secession:  
slides 13, 15, 16

**The English Arts and Crafts and Aesthetic Movements** — England did not embrace art nouveau. Works in this style by English artists were most often sold abroad. But many of the design strategies — and ideas — that shaped art nouveau arose in England. It was there, which had industrialized faster than other nations, that dissatisfactions with “progress” first surfaced, prompting men like **John Ruskin** and **William Morris** to call for restoration of the standards of craftsmanship practiced in past eras. Ruskin believed objects could be both useful and beautiful and that their decoration should derive from nature. Morris, designer and committed socialist, became the defining figure of the arts and crafts movement. Stylized arts and crafts patterns offered art nouveau designers an approach to natural forms that was conventionalized by repetition and abstraction (fig. 5).

Art nouveau also inherited the arts and crafts belief in the unity of all the arts and, with that, a rejection of any distinction between fine and applied art. Many art nouveau designers were influenced by the arts and crafts approach to materials, handwork, and an insistence on honesty in construction. And the movement’s strong ethical base and egalitarian ideals were congenial to the many art nouveau practitioners with socialist or anarchist political associations.

While arts and crafts promoted an ideal of “art for all,” it was the notion of “art for art’s sake” that fired the **aesthetic movement**. Its quest for the pure aesthetic experience verged on hedonism and decadence, and the sort of scandalous lifestyles exemplified by Oscar Wilde. The aesthetic movement contributed to art nouveau a romantic individualism and a taste for eroticism. It also offered examples of cultivated refinement and elegant simplicity, particularly in the work of American artist James McNeill Whistler.

**Arts of Japan and Islam** — As one critic around 1900 put it, Japanese art “set us free and made us bold.” Japanese woodblock prints enjoyed a huge vogue, especially in Paris, at the end of the nineteenth century. Their flat planes, strong colors, abruptly cut-off scenes, and looming perspectives had been a powerful influence on impressionist and postimpressionist artists, and the same qualities attracted art nouveau designers as well.

Also important for art nouveau were decorative objects from Japan: ceramics, textiles, and lacquerware. Their elegant designs based on plants and insects would reappear on many types of art nouveau objects, including glass, jewelry, metalware, textiles, ceramics, and furniture.

The art of the Islamic world had been influential in Europe for many hundreds of years, but art nouveau was particularly receptive to its sinuous curves and arabesques. The Near East also supplied art nouveau with an exotic setting for sensual luxury and the erotic. Most of art nouveau’s *femmes fatales* were associated with the Orient: **Salome**, the Carthaginian princess **Salambo**, the **sphinx**. At a time when the position of women in society was changing, these females — exotic, dangerous, and sexual — could only exist in some “otherly” place.

**Historical Styles** — In seeking an art appropriate to its own time, art nouveau did not reject historical styles, but it did look on them with new eyes. In France art nouveau designers fashioned a modern look based on eighteenth-

arts and crafts: slide 1

materials/construction: slides 6, 11, 13, 20

ethical/ social ideals: slides 12, 13

ego and individualism: slides 2, 10  
the erotic: slides 4, 5, 10

Japanese prints: slides 3, 9

Japanese motifs: slides 4, 8

Islamic art: slide 19

femme fatale: slides 3 – 5, 10



5 Eugène Gaillard, French, 1862–1933, printed cotton velveteen, c. 1900, Musée de la Mode et du Textile, Paris. Photograph by Laurent Sully-Jaulmes. The conventionalized and repeated floral pattern of this French art nouveau textile, which was shown at the 1900 Paris World’s Fair, was inspired by arts and crafts design.



century rococo. The style of Louis XV — asymmetrical, with curving lines and motifs derived from plants and shells — had assumed something of the character of a national style by the end of the nineteenth century and was promoted by the state. Considered frivolous and decadent after the revolution, rococo had been rehabilitated largely through the efforts of brothers Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, who, as writers, publishers, and aesthetes, championed artists like François Boucher (fig. 6). In the nineteenth century's romanticized view, rococo offered refinement, even languor, and its "feminine" lines held a distinctly sensual appeal: "Visions of the eighteenth century haunted him . . . Boucher Venuses, all flesh and no bone, stuffed with pink cottonwool, looked down on him from every wall . . . It is the only age that has known how to envelop a woman . . . shaping the furniture on the model of her charms." (Joris Huysmans, *A Rebours [Against the Grain]*, 1884)

rococo influence: slides 7, 11

Elsewhere — in Germany and Austria, for example — artists turned to the art of the ancient world. They gave the architectural forms and mythological subjects of ancient Greece or Rome a new resonance, one that emphasized dark Dionysian forces over rationality and proportion.

classical influence: slides 15, 16

**Symbolism** — Those living at the end of the nineteenth century experienced a rapidly changing world. Unprecedented advances in almost every sphere of activity were met by an equally pervasive sense of impending chaos and degeneration. It was a time of both technology and spirituality, of "machines and ghosts."

Symbolism was one manifestation of their malaise. It has been called the final gasp of nineteenth-century romanticism: not a style but what **Charles Baudelaire** called a "mode of feeling." Symbolism informed the works of poets (including Baudelaire, **Stéphane Mallarmé**, and Paul Verlaine), musicians (**Claude Debussy** most famously), and artists of very different stripes. What was important, as Jean Moréas wrote in the Symbolist Manifesto, was to "clothe the idea in sensitive form."

compare two symbolist paintings: slides 2, 10

Symbolism gave art nouveau a metaphysical approach to the visual world. Art revealed what could not be seen; it could provide access to what industrial life had left behind.

**Folk and National Styles** — Following the model of Paul Gauguin, who went to Brittany and then to the South Seas hoping to tap the power of an unspoiled "primitive" culture, symbolists often made use of ancient and mystical folk traditions. These traditions can be seen in art nouveau works from many regions, especially in northern and eastern Europe. In some places the use of folk traditions had a specifically nationalistic character. (The same could be said of art nouveau's use of rococo in France.)

folk traditions: slides 14, 17

national style: slides 7, 17

**Nature** — By far the most important source of inspiration for art nouveau was nature, and in surprisingly complex ways. To a person living at the end of the nineteenth century, nature was not neutral, the way we might consider plant or animal motifs to be today. More than simply suggesting shapes and patterns for artists to copy, nature was a model for transformation and metamorphosis. Its changeable states could also mirror psychological realities.

nature: slides 4–9

transformation: slides 4, 5, 8



6 François Boucher, French, 1703–1770, *The Love Letter*, 1750, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Timken Collection.





7 Ernst Heinrich Philipp August Haeckel, German, 1834–1919, *Actiniae (Anemones)* from *Kunstformen der Natur (Art Forms in Nature)*, Leipzig and Vienna, 1898, Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Although a zoologist, Haeckel had a view of nature that was heavily laced with mysticism.

The sixth edition of Charles Darwin's *Origin of the Species* was published in 1871. Cheaper than previous editions and illustrated for the first time, it gained a much wider audience and attracted the attention of more artists. The concept of evolution was expanded to engage social progress as well as progress in the arts. Artists were interested in the look and the dynamics of nature. Meanwhile, improved microscopy and undersea exploration yielded new species that were recorded in illustrated scientific manuals (fig. 7). Art nouveau designers mined these sources for new creatures on which to base more exotic organic forms. Several art nouveau designers were in fact trained as botanists and produced botanical illustrations.

training in botany: slide 8

#### MODERNITY AND MODERN LIFE

Art nouveau was self-consciously modern, the first international attempt to “show man his modern face,” and its modernity was expressed in many ways. As we have seen, a devotion to nature and the use of natural forms was not exclusively an artistic choice. Nature also entailed ideas of social progress and devolution. It could stand for innocence or voluptuousness, or it could represent national aims. Because it yielded to both science and mysticism, the use of nature as a basis for decorative schemes was distinctly modern.

Nature was often the vehicle (although not the only one) for uniting the arts in a total visual environment. *Gesamtkunstwerk*, as this was called (German for “total work of art”), surrounded modern man in an appropriate setting: coordinated architecture, painted decorations, wallpaper, furniture, lighting, and so on. *Gesamtkunstwerk* was an art nouveau ideal and related to the notion that all the arts were unified. The word was originally used for the synthesis achieved in the musical theater of Richard Wagner. An environment that was integrated in this way offered respite from the anxieties of the industrial age. And it underscored the equally modern notion of equality of applied and fine arts.

unity of arts: slides 11, 14

Modernity was also signaled in a new approach to materials — especially iron and glass — which was appropriate to and communicative of their functions. Modernity embraced industrial techniques or practices, but, paradoxically perhaps, it could also be expressed in a return to old handcraft and guild traditions.

iron and glass: slides 6, 11, 20

guild traditions: slides 1, 13

At the root of many art nouveau preoccupations is what has been called a “sensitivity to the psyche.” Fantasy, dream worlds, the esoteric and occult, the sexual — which can seem to us superstitious, irrational, and even anti-modern — were regarded quite differently by men and women at the turn of the twentieth century.

psyche: slides 2, 4, 8, 10, 16

Perhaps these claims on modernity seem misplaced in a style that was most completely expressed in the decorative arts, but this is largely a function of our own bias. In fact the decorative arts were — and are — well placed to be in the forefront of modern life. At the end of the nineteenth century, the questions were: What do we do with technology? How do we accommodate mass markets, new ways of selling, a huge new pool of middle-class consumers, new industrial techniques — in sum, the modernization of culture? These changes had a direct impact in the public arena of the decorative arts before they were felt in painting or sculpture. The decorative arts were forced to respond to change first. They made art nouveau new.





# Slides

## Discussion Ideas

*This section presents twenty works of art that are representative of the art nouveau style, with learning activities suggested for each one. In addition, the general questions below can provide a framework for analysis and understanding.*

- What comparisons can be drawn between the end of the nineteenth and the end of the twentieth century? In the response to technology? In anxieties over changing social roles for women (or other groups)?
- What are the relationships of art and decoration? Are these different today than they were at the beginning of the twentieth century?
- How do we perceive something as "modern"? Which art nouveau objects in this packet look modern today? Which do not? How could people living around the turn of the century have associated such disparate forms with modernity?
- How have these artists shown the irrational, the subconscious, the dream state?
- How are forms abstracted? Consider the roles of simplification and repetition in the design of different objects. Which objects are most naturalistic? Which are most abstract?
- How do different objects in this teaching program relate to industrial production? Which are highly individual and which geared for mass consumption?
- What is the symbolism of women in these objects? How does it relate to nineteenth-century views on the nature of women?
- How do these objects reflect changes in the conception of public or private space?
- To what extent can art be seen as embodying the "spirit" of its age? To what extent does it record and to what extent does it shape that spirit?
- What is the effect of material on form? On function?
- Can we identify something as being representative of a national style? Do these objects offer any examples? Does such a style exist today in the United States?
- What is the evidence for new technologies in these objects?

**Arthur Heygate Mackmurdo**

British, 1851 – 1942

**Chair, 1882**

mahogany and leather, 97.1 x 49.5 x 47.5

(38 1/4 x 19 1/2 x 18 3/4)

Victoria and Albert Museum, London



In 1882 Arthur Heygate Mackmurdo, who had traveled in Italy with John Ruskin and worked with William Morris, formed the Century Guild. Bringing together craftsmen in different media, the guild hoped, it said, to “restore building, decoration, glass-painting, pottery, wood-carving and metal to their rightful places beside painting and sculpture.”

This chair is one Mackmurdo designed for the guild’s dining hall. The back splat translates into three dimensions the kind of asymmetrical linear pattern Mackmurdo used on the title page illustration for *Wren’s City Churches*, published in 1893 (figure).

The rhythm and movement of the plant tendrils — they have been compared to seaweed tossed by opposing currents — is one of the earliest expressions of what would become the essentials of art nouveau design. They were quite different from anything being produced elsewhere at that time. Mackmurdo’s works, shown in exhibitions in several European cities, were one of the major conduits by which **arts and crafts** style made its way to the continent.



Arthur Heygate Mackmurdo, title page design for *Wren’s City Churches*, 1883, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

**LEARNING ACTIVITIES****art**

- Discuss symmetrical versus asymmetrical design.
- Discuss the role of arts and crafts in evolution of art nouveau.
- Research Morris and Co. and find more examples of arts and crafts designs for wallpaper or fabric.

**social science**

- Discuss different effects of industrialization.
- Research Ruskin and Morris to learn more about the aims of art reformers in nineteenth-century England.
- Compare the renewal of interest in handicraft at the end of the twentieth century.

**DESIGN REFORM**

Mackmurdo’s chair back and woodcut follow, consciously or not, design rules outlined in Owen Jones’ *Grammar of Ornament*, first published in 1856. An influence on the arts and crafts movement, Jones was an early advo-

cate of design reform, hoping to offer a way out of reliance on historical styles by discovering universal principles of design.

His Proposition XI, “a law derived from the study of the Orient,”

instructed: “In surface decoration all line should flow out of a parent stem. Every ornament, however distant, should be traced to its branch root.”

Proposition XIII: “Flowers or other natural objects should not be

used as ornaments, but conventional representations founded upon them sufficiently suggestive to convey the intended image to the mind, without destroying the unity of the object they are employed to decorate.”



## SLIDE 2

### Paul Gauguin

French, 1848–1903

#### Self-Portrait, 1889

oil on wood, 79.2 x 51.3

(31 1/4 x 20 1/4)

National Gallery of Art,  
Washington, Chester Dale Collection

Gauguin sought to portray what could not be seen, to express interior states rather than surface appearances. He was at the center of a group of avant-garde artists who dedicated themselves to what they called *synthétisme*, ordering and simplifying sensory data to its fundamentals. Color, especially, was used for its inherent emotive qualities to communicate intangibles. Gauguin struggled with ways to express the questions of life and death, knowledge and evil, that preoccupied him.

He was the most influential and powerful artist associated with symbolism, but unlike many other symbolist artists, including Fernand Khnopff (see slide 10), for example, Gauguin avoided literary or narrative content. He “synthesized” his



subject — his idea — with color and form, uniting them in an alchemical way. “Don’t copy nature too literally,” Gauguin advised, “Art is abstraction; draw art as you dream in nature’s presence, and think more about the act of creation than about the final result.”

This enigmatic self-portrait was painted in Brittany, to which Gauguin had retreated before he went to the South Seas, hoping to tap the expressive potential of its rural, fervently religious, and even “primitive” culture. In the six weeks after their arrival in late 1889, Gauguin and his colleague Meyer de Haan had made dozens of ceramic works, woodcarvings, and sculpture. They covered the walls of the inn where they were staying with paintings. This work may have decorated cupboard doors in the dining room.

Gauguin’s likeness was described by friends at the time as an “unkind character sketch,” but today it provokes a range of interpretations. Some see the artist casting himself in the role of Satan, others as Christ. What are we to make of the conflicting imagery — the apples that prompted man’s expulsion from Eden; the halo over Gauguin’s disembodied head; the snake that is both tempter of Eve and the embodiment of knowledge; the bold division into vivid yellow and red, the latter a color evocative of both of hellfire and the heat of creation? All of these must have been in Gauguin’s mind, and in his intention.

Perhaps it is most likely that Gauguin is revealing his conception of the artist as hero, and — almost to challenge his colleagues — of himself particularly as a kind of magician, a master who knows that he possesses the power of magic by virtue of talent and genius.

### LEARNING ACTIVITIES

#### art

- Discuss the relationships of different colors with emotion.
- Compare Gauguin’s painting with another symbolist canvas by Khnopff (slide 10).

#### social science

- History tends to focus on urban life. Research the life of people in rural areas like Brittany in the late nineteenth century. What about that lifestyle would have attracted Gauguin?

### SYMBOLISM

Symbolists regarded a work of art as a product of the emotions, growing from the inner spirit of the artist. They were preoccupied with mysticism, dream states, and the erotic,

all of which helped release creative potential of both artist and the receiving audience. It was a reaction to and a rejection of the materialism in modern culture.

## SLIDE 3

### Pierre Bonnard

French, 1867–1947

#### Poster for “La Revue blanche,” 1894

color lithograph, sheet: 58.7 x 78.2

(23 1/8 x 30 3/4)

National Gallery of Art, Washington,  
Rosenwald Collection

This poster advertises *La Revue blanche*, an important forum for symbolist artists and writers. The title refers to white light, which is composed of all the colors of the spectrum. In a similar way, the review wanted to bring together the entire scope of artistic and literary endeavor. Its pages were “open to all ideas, all schools.” It published literary contributions by Marcel Proust, André Gide, and Henrik Ibsen, and illustrations by Edouard Vuillard, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, and Gauguin (see slide 2). The flamboyant wife of one of the brothers who edited the review (friends of Bonnard’s) was, in all probability, the model for the vamp who looks out from this poster.

Her face half hidden in the voluminous ruffles of a cape, she beckons viewers with her eyes. Behind her, a man — just readable — pauses before a wall plastered with placards. His top hat, split by a highlight, looks at first like the ears of a bat. It has been suggested that these dark forms, almost without interior definition, were influenced by shadow plays Bonnard saw performed at a cabaret. Their contrast to the chattering repetition of the background tends to flatten space in the manner of Japanese prints. Bonnard, once described as “très japonard,” was particularly influenced by the flat planes, asymmetrical compositions, and decorative patterns of Japanese prints.

On the poster’s right, a rude newsboy hooks his thumb toward the lettering. His expression and Bonnard’s playful treatment of the title give the poster a touch of humor. Notice how the letters are integrated in the scene: an ‘l’ seems to hang like a parasol from the woman’s arm, while the ‘a’ wraps around her leg.



Although a poster for champagne was Bonnard’s first real success — and persuaded his family that he could abandon law in favor of a career as an artist — he made relatively few posters. His lithographs, however, were influential for other artists, particularly Toulouse-Lautrec.

#### LEARNING ACTIVITIES

##### art

- Discuss what factors influence our perception of space in a flat print or painting. What types of shapes, pattern, or colors tend to flatten space?
- Research the influence of Japanese prints on impressionism.

##### humanities

- Read and discuss selections by authors published in *La Revue blanche*.
- Create your own literary magazine.

#### THE NABIS

Bonnard was a member of the **Nabis**, a group of artists that included Vuillard, Maurice Denis, and others. Formed at the end of 1888 as a kind of spiritual brotherhood, the Nabis

took the name from the Hebrew word for “prophet.” Sometimes they donned robes, and their meetings veered toward mysticism and ritual. Like Gauguin, who was their greatest

inspiration, the Nabis were not interested in appearance but in emotion and power lurking below the surface of things. They made no distinction between painting and other forms of

expression, always striving to capture, as Stéphane Mallarmé said of poetry, “not the object, but the effect it produces.”



**René Lalique**

French, 1860–1945

**Dragonfly woman corsage ornament, 1897–1898**gold, enamel, chrysoprase, moonstones, and diamonds, 23 x 26.5 (9 x 10<sup>3</sup>/<sub>16</sub>)

Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, Lisbon

© 2000 Artists Rights Society (ARS),

New York/ADAGP, Paris

Lalique reinvented jewelry. A contemporary asked, “Prior to René Lalique, what was jewelry? . . . The old jewel was based upon the idea of wealth; the new is built upon an artistic idea.” Jewelry had relied on gems, particularly diamonds, and on precious metals. But between about 1892 and 1897 Lalique developed an approach that emphasized artistry over intrinsic value. He introduced horn and other new materials and made extensive use of glass, enamel, ivory, and semiprecious stones. Lalique especially loved the ever-changing iridescence of opals. It has been said that where the old jewelry sparkled, Lalique’s glowed.

It triumphed at the Paris World’s Fair of 1900. Photographs show crowds pressed against the glass of Lalique’s window displays. One of the pieces he showed was this remarkable corsage ornament, considered by many to be his masterwork. It was purchased by the wealthy collector Calouste Gulbenkian; his wife was the only person ever to have worn it. It would have moved with her — the long spine is articulated

and the wings hinged to flutter. In that sense, and in its finely observed detail, Lalique’s piece has a remarkable degree of naturalism. He was interested in the specific not the generic, in individuals not species. This corsage ornament is exact — and imaginary.

Emerging from the jaws of a chimera (part serpent, part lion) is a woman/dragonfly. The dragonfly was an especially popular art nouveau motif, a favorite of Lalique, Louis Comfort Tiffany (see slide 19), and Émile Gallé (see slide 8), all of whom would have seen examples in Japanese art. Probably its popularity in France grew after translation of a series of Japanese poems (Judith Gautier, *Poèmes de la libellule* [*Poems of the Dragonfly*], 1885).

But why this conflation of dragonfly and woman? On one level, the two are connected through language: the small iridescent blue and bronze dragonflies, called “damselies” in English, are *demoiselles* (young ladies) in French. But probably of greater significance is the idea of metamorphosis. Interest in biological transformations had been spurred by Darwin’s theories of evolution. Yet even this fails to offer satisfactory explanation. Here is a very different sort of metamorphosis, more psychic than physical. It reveals something of fin-de-siècle views on the nature of women — of women as an embodiment of nature, instinctual and seductive.

**LEARNING ACTIVITIES****art**

- Research *plique à jour* and other enamel techniques.
- Use sculpting clay to create jewelry based on an imaginary animal.

**social science**

- Discuss the size and type of jewelry worn in relation to changing fashion.

**humanities**

- Read and discuss myths of metamorphosis.
- Research the nineteenth-century reception of Darwin’s *Origin of the Species* and its influences in various spheres, including art.

**ENAMEL**

For jewelers an insect’s diaphanous wings were a perfect use for *plique à jour* enamel. This transparent enamel was suspended without backing in a metal frame — much like stained

glass. The difficult technique, described by Renaissance goldsmith Benvenuto Cellini, had been lost until its rediscovery by French enamellers in the mid-nineteenth century.

## Alphonse Marie Mucha

Czech, 1860–1939

### Nature, c. 1900

gilt bronze, silver, marble,

69.2 x 27.9 x 30.5 (27 1/4 x 11 x 12)

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond,

The Sydney and Frances Lewis Art

Nouveau Fund

Mucha rose above the ranks of anonymous illustrators with a series of posters he designed in Paris for the celebrated actress **Sarah Bernhardt**. It has been suggested that this silver bust is also based on a portrait of the “Divine Sarah” (as Oscar Wilde first called the actress), but no direct evidence supports this. Several similar busts are known today. One, surrounded by flowers, was a centerpiece of the display of the French perfume company Houbigant at the Paris 1900 World’s Fair. Another may have been intended for the jewelry store of Georges Fouquet. Mucha designed the jeweler’s richly appointed shop and collaborated with Fouquet on jewelry designs, some worn by Bernhardt on stage.



A third bust appears in a photograph taken at the fair, where it is labeled *La Nature*, which suggests that the figure might have been intended as an allegorical representation of nature. Mucha was strongly influenced by symbolism and the occult. Perhaps the marble egg crowning her headdress refers to regeneration and continuity. A similar headdress appears on a woman surrounded by astrological signs that Mucha used for a calendar poster.

Like time and nature, this silver figure is constantly changing, responding to minute differences in light. Even the hair seems in motion. Swirling tresses wrap like tendrils around her neck and shoulders, actually becoming the base of the bust. Nature is eternal, but eternally in a state of transformation.

No one made this point more concretely than the innovative dancer Loïe Fuller (figure), an American performing in Paris. Accompanied by the music of Chopin, Schubert, and Debussy, Fuller appeared on a stage lit from below and behind wearing a costume of diaphanous fabric attached to short wands. As she manipulated the fabric it took on the appearance of birds or flowers. **Isadora Duncan**, who was a protégé of Fuller, wrote about her performance: “Before our very eyes she turned to many-colored shining orchids, to a wavering sea-flower and at length to a spiral-like lily, all magic of Merlin, the sorcery of light, color, flowing form. What an extraordinary genius.” The symbolist poet Georges Rodenbach called Fuller’s dance a “miracle of endless metamorphoses.” His description continued, “Woman, when she wants, becomes the universe; she [Fuller] was a flower, a tree in the wind, a changing cloud, a giant butterfly, a garden with paths of pleated fabric.”



Portrait of Loïe Fuller, 1901. Photograph by Falk, New York © CORBIS.

## LEARNING ACTIVITIES

### art

- Consider the effect of reflective and nonreflective materials in sculpture.

### social science

- Research the position of women in the late nineteenth century and the history of women’s suffrage in the United States and other countries.
- Learn more about the Paris 1900 World’s Fair and compare its impact with more recent fairs.

### movement

- Improvise a dance like Loïe Fuller’s to show a metamorphosis between a plant and an animal.

## LES FEMMES FLEURS (WOMEN FLOWERS)

The publisher of the Bernhardt posters quickly realized the popularity of Mucha’s designs and put him under contract, producing the graphic work for which the artist is best known.

Mucha’s images of *femmes fleurs*—women with abundant flowing tresses—were reproduced as calendars, postcards, posters, and the more expensive *panneaux décoratifs* (deco-

orative panels), which were printed without type on fabric or a better grade of paper.



## SLIDE 6

### Hector Guimard

French, 1867 - 1942

**An Entrance to the Paris Métropolitain, conceived 1902, fabricated 1902/1913 painted cast iron and bronze, height 421 (165)**

National Gallery of Art, Washington, Gift of Robert P. and Arlene R. Kogod

Guimard, who styled himself the *architect d'art*, did not exhibit at the Paris 1900 World's Fair, but his work was highly visible nonetheless. He had won the competition to design entrances for the city's new subway system, the Métropolitain. With the large number of visitors expected to attend the fair, city planners realized that transportation would have to be improved, and permission was given for six underground lines. (London's Underground, the oldest subway system, went into service in 1863.)

The influential president of the society of architects was Charles Garnier, who had designed Paris' ornate baroque-style Opéra. He felt the new subway entrances should have the same grandeur — expensive materials and a design that disguised the structures' true function. At least in part, the grand designs he preferred failed because many Parisian streets were simply too narrow to accommodate them.



Instead, the city built Guimard's light and graceful structures. They became so closely identified with the subway that in France art nouveau was sometimes called *le style métro*. (Guimard, who was not shy about self-promotion, did not wince when it was also called *le style Guimard*.) The entrances were made of modern materials — iron and glass — whose functions were obvious. The design was modular; five types of station could be constructed using the same components. They ranged from simple open stairways illuminated by electric lights, like the one in the slide (at the Château d'Eau station), to complete pavilion enclosures or covered stairs whose glass canopies were likened to dragonfly wings.

Parisians and foreign visitors to the exposition were struck by the stations' modernity. Clearly the iron and glass and engineering were modern. So, too, was Guimard's decision to use natural forms as a basis for decoration rather than the repertory of **baroque** and **classical** architectural motifs that had usually been applied to public architecture. Tall iron stalks arched over the stairs and supported bulbous lights shaped like flower heads.

## LEARNING ACTIVITIES

### art

- Create a design proposal for a subway, bus stop, or rail station in your town.
- Compare the design of various new airport terminals. How do their designs reflect a twentieth-century modernity?

### social science

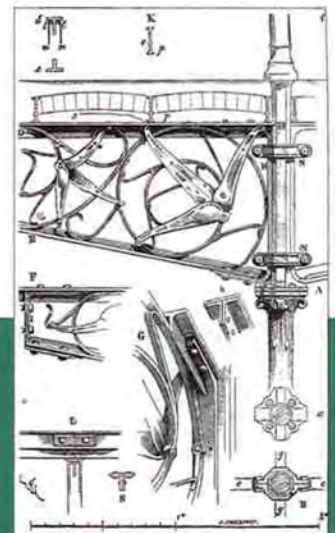
- Discuss the criteria used to decide a design competition for a major twentieth-century monument or a public works project in your town.

## VIOLLET-LE-DUC AND MODERN IRON

Guimard, like Victor Horta (see slide 11) and Louis Sullivan (see slide 20), cited the theories and designs of French architect Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc (1814 – 1879) (figure) as an important influence. Viollet-le-Duc, who restored Paris' Notre Dame

Cathedral, was a proponent of the Gothic revival style, yet he decried what he called the "grotesque medley" of eclectic historicism. He felt a style appropriate to the nineteenth century could be found with modern iron and glass, used in honest con-

structions that did not try to disguise the materials' or the buildings' functions. The Paris métro provided a clear answer to Viollet-le-Duc's question, "Is the nineteenth century destined to close without possessing an architecture of its own?"



Proposal for a wrought-iron bracket published by Viollet-le-Duc in 1872, from *Viollet-le-Duc, Entretiens sur l'architecture* vol. 2 (Farnborough, reprint 1965), 126.



## SLIDE 7

### Louis Majorelle

French, 1859–1926

and **Daum Frères**

French, firm active 1878–present

### Orchidée desk, c. 1903

carved and inlaid mahogany, gilt bronze, and glass, 92.7 x 175.3 x 90.2

(36 1/2 x 69 x 35 1/2)

Anonymous

Louis Majorelle was the undisputed leader among French art nouveau furniture designers. This desk epitomizes his use—and transformation—of rococo style. Like Émile Gallé (see slide 8), Majorelle was from Nancy, a city in eastern France noted for the rococo elegance of its fine central square, La Place Stanislas, and for a tradition of luxury crafts. When he first took over the family business in 1879, Majorelle designed furniture that was close to his eighteenth-century models. But he began, partly under the influence of Gallé, to abstract and exaggerate forms, and by the mid-1890s he was creating furniture in a fully art nouveau style.

Compare Majorelle's *Orchidée desk* with a chest made by an eighteenth-century cabinetmaker (figure). Both rely on graceful oval shapes, use gilded mounts, and are inlaid with marquetry, yet no one would mistake one for the other. Majorelle has elongated the ovals. The electric lamps—the glass was supplied by the Nancy firm of Daum Frères—are conceived as plant forms. Twining stems bow in support of these heavy flower



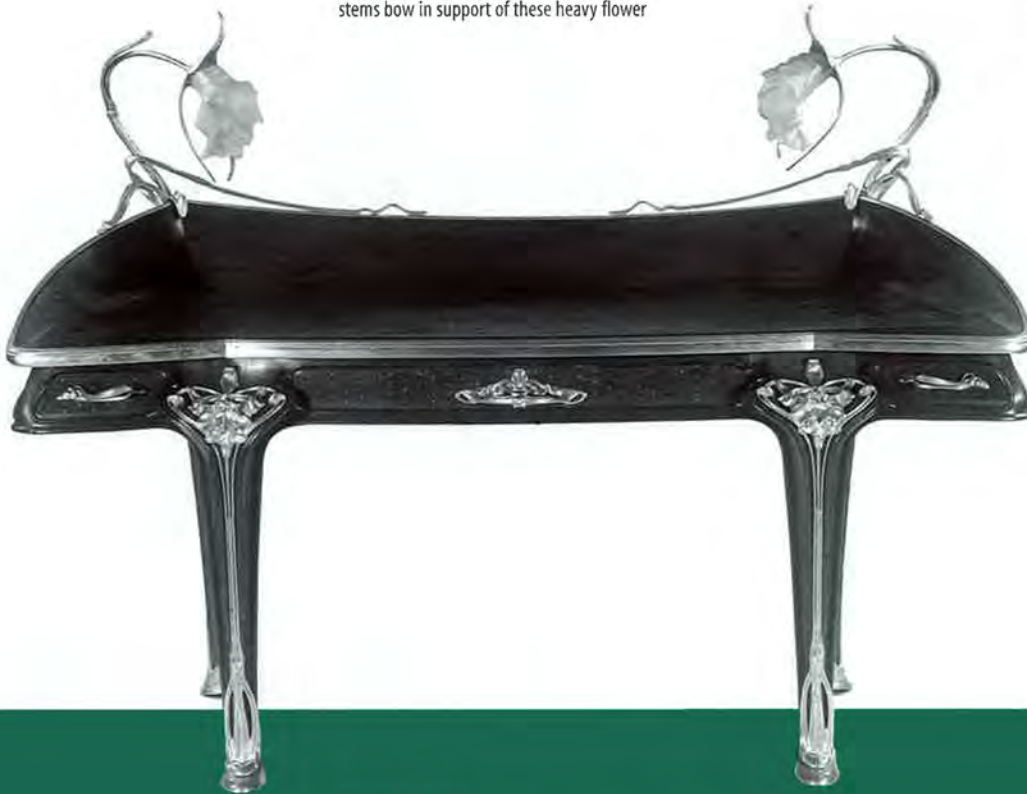
Jean-Mathieu Chevallier, French, 1696–1768, *Commode with Chinese motifs*, c. 1745, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Widener Collection.

heads. Here, organic forms are not mere decoration in the way floral motifs were applied to the earlier chest. Majorelle has made the orchid, exotic and voluptuous, an organizing principle. Such use of nature was as modern as the desk's electric lights.

### LEARNING ACTIVITIES

#### art

- Describe how natural organic forms are used as a basis for the design of Majorelle's desk.
- Design a desk using a building as basis for design.
- Compare art nouveau furniture made by the Vienna Secession (see essay fig. 4).



### ROCOCO STYLE

Art nouveau and rococo shared many of the same fascinations: fantasy, nature, and the exotic. Rococo appeared in France after the long reign of Louis XIV. If the baroque style of Louis XIV's Versailles had been

impressive, rococo was meant to please. It delighted in mythological love stories, lyrical gardens, and in playful chinoiserie motifs inspired by porcelains imported from the East.

**Émile Gallé**

French, 1846–1904

**Bat vase, c. 1903–1904**

wheel-cut and acid-etched glass  
with applied cabochons over silver foil,  
37.5 (14<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>)

Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Glass seems particularly well matched to the aesthetics and aspirations of art nouveau. It lends itself naturally to sinuous, linear designs. Moreover, glass has an almost alchemical attraction that was especially appealing to symbolists. Base materials—sand and chemicals—are transformed by fire and air, by breath itself, into something shimmering and fragile. A contemporary called Émile Gallé a “fire magician.” Mottled, translucent colors seem always on the verge of change. Like nature, glass appears to be in a constant state of becoming.

Over the gates of his factory Gallé inscribed the motto: “Our roots are in the depths of the forest. / Among the mosses, amidst the water.” He had studied botany and mineralogy as a young man, and his designs are quite faithful to nature. We see the delicate bones of this bat and sense how the skin is stretched taut. Yet Gallé’s work is never merely scientific. For him the forms of nature were also deeply mysterious, powerful, resonant. In the late 1880s he increasingly sought to evoke, as he said, “the latent spirit beneath phenomena,” something alive below the surface. Natural forms could express physical force, as the trees on this vase seem to bend before an unseen breeze. He described the pine tree as a “metaphor of energy in repose.”

By plumbing the mysterious forces in nature, Gallé also examined imagination as an interior force—psychic as well as physical—to be tapped and communi-

cated. He wrote to the jury of the 1889 Paris World’s Fair that his work consisted “above all in the execution of personal dreams.” Perhaps the bat on this vase is a reference to dreams. The nighttime creatures appear often in his work, and he inscribed another vase with a bat motif: “La silence des nuits pense l’âme blessée. La bonté de la nuit caresse l’âme sombre” (The silence of night tends the wounded soul. The kindness of night caresses the melancholy soul).

Symbolism and science coincided at the end of the nineteenth century in the new study of the unconscious. Gallé and several other art nouveau artists had strong links with two pioneering French neurologists, Jean Martin Charcot and Hippolyte Bernheim. Charcot (whose investigations contributed to the early ideas of his pupil Sigmund Freud) wrote often about the need for art to provide a soothing respite from modern life. Of even greater significance for Gallé was the hypnotist Bernheim’s study of suggestion and the “transformation of ideas into images.” Like dreams, inspiration sprang from Gallé’s unconscious, triggered by a stream of visual suggestion. The art that emerged was itself capable of inducing a dream state in viewers and releasing their imaginations in turn.

**LEARNING ACTIVITIES****art**

- Discuss ways in which artists show movement.
- Design a vase or other object using a bat form.

**social science**

- Learn more about how Gallé or Tiffany (slide 19) ran their factories, and investigate the impact of new time and motion studies in various fields, such as automobile manufacture.

**art / science**

- Consider how the theory of evolution was an influence on art nouveau. Are artists today similarly influenced by chaos theory or fractals?

**AN INDUSTRIAL ENTERPRISE**

Despite Gallé’s preoccupation with the dream world, he ran his factory in a down-to-earth fashion. Glass production, unlike ceramics and many other art nouveau media, relied on skilled artisans to accomplish an

artist’s designs. It takes years to master the techniques of glassmaking, and it is hot, dangerous work. Even Gallé, who trained and apprenticed as a glassmaker—his father founded the company—did not make his own

glass and only rarely decorated it after he became owner of the glassworks. He managed the glassworks as an industrial rather than purely artistic endeavor, organizing the work by a strict division of labor and using

the profits from lower-cost wares, produced in large numbers, to finance unique pieces like this one.



## SLIDE 9

### Otto Eckmann

German, 1868–1902

with the **Scherrebek Weaving School**  
(founded 1896)

### Five Swans, 1897

woven wool, 26.4 x 76 (9<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 29<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub>)

Danish Museum of Decorative Art,  
Copenhagen



In November 1894 Otto Eckmann, who had enjoyed success with his symbolist canvases, auctioned off all of his paintings. He bid them, as he wrote to the auctioneer, a “cordial farewell” but hoped, “May we never meet again.” He had determined to devote his energies exclusively to the **applied arts**, and this he did, designing for metalwork, stained glass, silver, and tapestries.

This wall hanging, woven at the Kunstwebschule (art weaving school) at Scherrebek (now in Denmark), is probably his best-known design. Within a short time it had been reproduced in many of the modern art journals (see essay fig. 2) and was hailed as the “freshest product of the new movement.” It was also a great success for Scherrebek, which produced some one hundred copies of it.

After Eckmann abandoned painting, some of his first works were woodcuts that he produced using traditional Japanese techniques. His study of Japanese prints is also reflected in his designs. In *Five Swans* we find all the major characteristics of his work: strong contrasts of color, sinuous line, motifs from nature, and tension between the surface as illusion or representation and the surface as sheer decorative pattern. A critic in 1902 pointed to this tapestry as “a good example of how a pupil of Japanese art can transpose natural motifs into a delightful play of colored surfaces and lines by suppressing the material process and concentrating entirely on the decorative.”

Swans, though, appear in many of Eckmann’s works and must have had some symbolic meaning for him. German art nouveau tended generally to have a strongly pantheistic approach to nature, seeing the creator and creation as the same thing.

## LEARNING ACTIVITIES

### art

- Describe the sense of space conveyed in this tapestry. Is there depth? How is it achieved? Compare the sense of space in a medieval work like one of the well-known *Unicorn Tapestries* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York).

### humanities

- Research pantheism in American literature from the nineteenth century.

**Fernand Khnopff**

Belgian, 1858–1921

**Des Caresses, 1896**

oil on canvas, 50.5 x 151 (19 7/8 x 59 1/2)

Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts  
de Belgique, Brussels

On one level, it seems likely that this painting was inspired by Honoré de Balzac's story "A Passion in the Desert." It recounted the strange love that developed between a soldier of Napoleon's army, lost in the Egyptian wastes, and a female panther. Balzac described the animal's sinuous body and movements, her spots and ringed tail, and the soldier's caresses.

But of course this is not a panther, not even a cheetah, though Khnopff painted a cheetah's body. This is a sphinx. Enigmatic and dangerous, it was one of the common guises for a fin-de-siècle femme fatale. Through mythology or the mysterious Orient, women could be presented as exotic and voluptuous — that is, in ways that were subject to deeply felt anxieties but whose representation lay outside the boundaries of convention.

In the popular imagination, even in the scientific literature, women were not regarded as fully rational beings, and their impulses, unchecked, posed a threat. Consider art nouveau's other femmes fatales: Medusa, the snake-haired Gorgon, whose look turned men to stone, and Salome, whose dance was rewarded with the head of John the Baptist.

The sphinx devoured all who failed to answer her riddle: "What walks on four legs, two legs, and three legs?" So it is natural to see Khnopff's youth as Oedipus, who answered her: "Man, crawling as a baby, walking an adult, and using a cane when old." Already in ancient times, the sphinx had come to represent knowledge, of good and evil, life and death. In William Butler Yeats' poem, "The Double Vision of Michael Robartes," she "lashed her tail; her eyes lit by the / moon / gazed upon all things known, all things / unknown, / In triumph of intellect / With motionless head erect."

In another way, the youth can be seen as a symbolic portrait of the artist, and the painting as alluding to art itself. At times it has been called *L'Art*. The pansy above the youth's ear (in French *pensée* means both "pansy" and "thought") was an emblem Khnopff sometimes used as his signature. The sphinx (like almost all of Khnopff's females) resembles the

artist's sister Margueritte. For that matter, the youth resembles her as well, and this androgyny accounts for much of the painting's unsettling effect. Androgyny was central to the notion of art espoused by Khnopff's friend Joséphin Péladan, a novelist, spiritualist, and descendant, he claimed, of the Magi. In art alone could the union of male and female — creation — be complete. Khnopff has been called a "painter of the invisible," his images merely physical expressions of an idea.

## LEARNING ACTIVITIES

## art

- Discuss the impact of this painting's exaggerated horizontal format.
- Draw a picture inspired by Debussy's *L'Après-midi d'un faune*.
- Invent and draw a hybrid creature, part animal, part human.

## humanities

- Read the Balzac short story or view the film "Passion in the Desert." Discuss their relation to Khnopff's painting.



## LES XX

Knopff was a founding member in Brussels of Les XX (The Twenty), who called themselves in 1884 "votaries of art nouveau" — apparently the first appearance of the

term. The group was strongly influenced by symbolism and socialist politics, philosophies that involved them with both interior and public life. They sought to reform society and

the arts, the latter by integrating and establishing relationships between them. Along with paintings by Georges Seurat, they exhibited ceramics by Paul Gauguin (figure with

slide 17) and book illustrations by Aubrey Beardsley (see essay fig. 1) and William Morris. Claude Debussy performed at the first opening.



# SLIDE 11

## Victor Horta

Belgian, 1861–1947

### Interior of the Tassel House, 1893

© 2000, Artists Rights Society (ARS),  
New York/SOFAM, Brussels  
Photograph by C. H. Bastin and J. Evrard,  
Brussels

The Brussels townhouse that Victor Horta built for Émile Tassel is often called the first full expression of art nouveau. It was completed in 1893.

Tassel was a professor of geometry and a friend of the architect. A collector of Japanese prints and a music enthusiast, he entertained often. Like most of Horta's clients in the 1890s, he was also a member of a young, politically progressive middle class eager to demonstrate its modernity.

Tassel's house illustrates many of the elements that went into making art nouveau: an alternate "take" on historical styles, an arts and crafts sensibility, and the modern materials of iron and glass. Horta himself did not see the building as a total break with the past. The stone exterior includes the consoles, moldings, and columns of classical architecture. But the columns are iron, not stone. The building had a smooth, fluid façade unlike the carefully articulated planes of true classical buildings.

Walking inside, a visitor would sense a different mood: the delicacy and curving "femininity" of a rococo drawing room. Yet it was alloyed by modernity in the choice of materials and their interpretation as plant forms. From a calyxlike capital, the iron columns sprout slender iron strips to support the floor above. No attempt is made to disguise this material—the rivets are clearly visible, decorative in their own right. They emphasize rather than conceal the structure. Yet Horta turned to wrought-iron craftsmen to fashion the industrially laminated material.

Horta's organization of interior space was innovative—the slide shows the first-floor stair landing. Rooms were filled with natural light (from two light wells), and the floor plan had a fluid,



asymmetrical flow. To achieve an integrated whole, Horta also insisted on designing all elements of the interior decoration: the stair rail and painted wall decoration, the mosaic flooring, electric light fixtures, even the door handle are elements of a total design. Such a complete visual environment, or *Gesamtkunstwerk*, was thoroughly modern in its desire to place modern man in a fully modern setting.

#### LEARNING ACTIVITIES

##### art

- Discuss materials an architect would choose today to express his or her modernness. Collect images and research the materials of the new Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain.
- Compare the decoration in your own house. Does it have a similar *Gesamtkunstwerk*?

##### humanities

- The Tassel House is now an embassy, and Horta's own residence is a museum. Discuss the appropriate use (public or private) of such historic structures.
- Discuss which contemporary structures in your town will likely merit historic preservation in the future.

## SLIDE 12

### Henry van de Velde

Belgian, 1863–1957

#### Tropon: L'Aliment le plus concentré, 1898

color lithograph, 111.8 x 77.1 (44 x 30 3/8)

Museum of Modern Art, New York,  
Arthur Drexler Fund

This is the only poster ever produced by Van de Velde, one of art nouveau's most acclaimed designers. It was created for the Tropon food company as part of a comprehensive design program, the first of its kind for a commercial enterprise. The rhythmic lines — purely graphic — appeared on everything from packages of powdered egg white to advertisements and the company's stationery.

Van de Velde avoided the more sensual qualities of French art nouveau. These springing curves, energetic rather than languorous, are more abstract and less dependent on plant forms than those of Hector Guimard (see slide 6), for example. His logolike treatment of the firm's name makes it an active element in the design. Framed by a repetition of angular rules, it has looked to some like a preview of the twentieth century's machine aesthetic. In fact, Van de Velde moved to Germany and in 1907 helped found the Deutsche Werkbund, often regarded as a forerunner of the Bauhaus.

Van de Velde had first achieved success as a painter, mostly with symbolist-tinged works in the **neo-impressionist** style of Seurat. But at the final exhibition of Les XX (see slide 10) in 1893, he showed a large wall hanging, embroidered and appliquéed with the assistance of his aunt. It marked a turning point for his career. He went on to design a house for his family

— though he had no formal training as an architect — as well as all its furnishings: wallpaper, silverware, porcelain. With his wife, he also designed women's clothes that were less confining than the corseted norm. Van de Velde's shift in focus was strongly influenced by the social doctrines of the arts and crafts movement and his own commitment to a more egalitarian future: "the hope of a happy and egalitarian future lies behind these new decorative works," he wrote in 1894 in *La Société Nouvelle*. The applied arts, he felt, could join individual and the community.

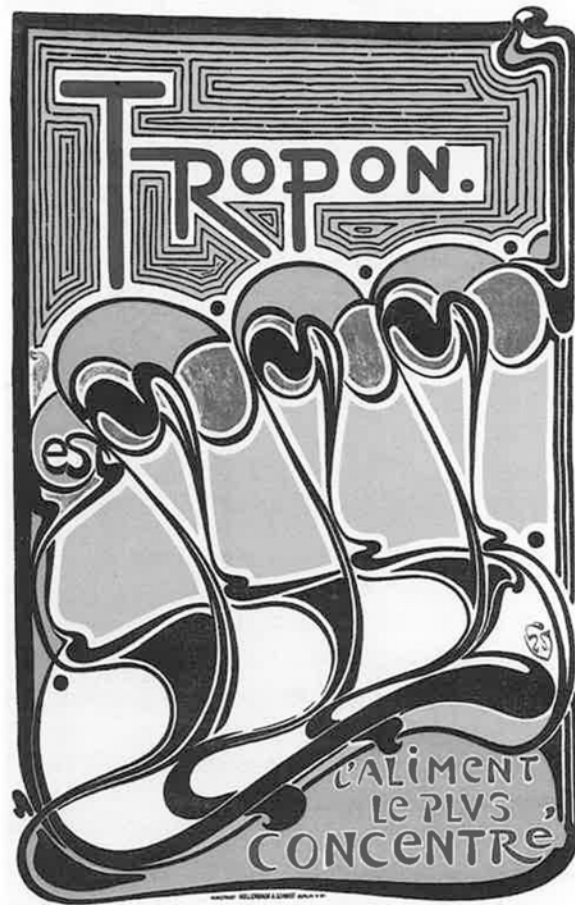
#### LEARNING ACTIVITIES

##### art

- Design a poster for a food using a purely abstract design and incorporating type.
- Design a typeface that reflects current industrial design.

##### social science

- Investigate the history of advertising. Consider how the Internet has changed or will change advertising techniques.



*"Catalogues, posters, advertisements  
of all sorts. Believe me, they  
contain the poetry of our age."*

Guillaume Apollinaire, 1912



**Henry van de Velde**

Belgian, 1863–1957

**Candelabrum, 1898–1899**

electroplated bronze, 58.5 x 50.8 (23 x 20)

Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, Brussels

**Josef Hoffmann**

Austrian, 1870–1956

**Fruit basket, 1904**

silver, 27 x 23 x 23

(10<sup>7</sup>/<sub>16</sub> x 9<sup>1</sup>/<sub>16</sub> x 9<sup>1</sup>/<sub>16</sub>)

Victoria and Albert Museum, London

According to English arts and crafts artist Walter Crane, "Line is all important. Let the designer, therefore . . . lean upon the staff of line — line determinative, line emphatic, line delicate, line expressive, line controlling and uniting." Art nouveau is an overwhelmingly linear style, but its line is surprisingly varied. In some places, Glasgow and Vienna, for example, it manifested itself in a rectilinear, geometric manner. Elsewhere, in France and Belgium particularly, it was flamboyantly curved. But it was always decorative in intent. Compare the type of line in these two metal works, a candle stand by Van de Velde and a silver fruit basket designed by Hoffmann for the Wiener Werkstätte.

The tensed energy of a whiplash — the sinuous line curving back on itself — is often the first image that our minds conjure up on hearing the words "art nouveau." This is the line that animates the

candelabrum. "Line," Van de Velde said, "is a force." He believed it carried in it the energy that had created it. A line derived ultimately from nature is here abstracted into a controlled and decorative pattern.

At first Hoffmann's fruit basket appears altogether different. His constant use of squares and cubes earned him the nickname "Quadrat-Hoffmann" (little square Hoffmann). We might be tempted by the angles and neat lines to see this basket as a forerunner of the spare functional style that would predominate in the twentieth century. But rectilinear design is not an index of Bauhaus **modernism**, which demanded that "form follow function." Geometric simplicity was a decorative choice here, no different at its core than the more complex sinuous line of Van de Velde's candle stand. In fact Hoffmann's *quadratstil* — square style — works against the functionality of the basket. It is far from practical for the soft round forms of fruit. Despite this, Hoffmann clearly did have an interest in function, which he once called "our first requirement." The back of his armchair (see essay fig. 4), for example, adjusts.

Hoffmann's fruit basket is very much a handmade — and so expensive — piece. The hammered surface of the bowl even emphasizes the craftsman's presence and physical processes. Van de Velde's candlestick, on the other hand, is electroplated, a technology that allowed for industrial production and mass marketing to a wide — and ever expanding — buying public.

**LEARNING ACTIVITIES****art**

- Design a curvilinear fruit basket and a geometric candlestick.
- Research Van de Velde's role in the Deutsche Werkbund and relation to the Bauhaus.

**social sciences**

- Research current prices for fine handcrafts.
- Discuss what, if anything, separates craft from art. Research how prominent contemporary artisans have viewed this question.

**WIENER WERKSTÄTTE (VIENNA WORKSHOP)**

With the financial backing of a wealthy businessman, Hoffmann set up the Wiener Werkstätte in 1902. It was one of many similar organizations established in various countries on the model of earlier arts and crafts guilds in England (see slide 1). Like

its predecessors, the Werkstätte brought together artists and craftspeople working in different media. It likewise sought the elevation of craft, honesty in construction, and the use of materials appropriate to their function. The Viennese group

differed from its English models, however, in its open production of luxury goods for a progressive — and rich — clientele, while the ideal of the English guilds was to bring good design to working people. The arts and crafts movement had sought to

produce "art for all" and believed with reforming zeal in the ability of the arts to uplift the common man. Yet their products were rarely affordable by many because of the artists' insistence on hand production.



## SLIDE 14

**Charles Rennie Mackintosh**

Scottish, 1868–1928

and **Margaret MacDonald**

Scottish, 1865–1933

**Ladies' Luncheon Room from  
Miss Cranston's Ingram Street  
Tearooms, c. 1900, reconstructed  
1992–1995**

Glasgow Museums, Art Gallery  
and Museum, Kelvingrove



The Glasgow tearooms designed, entirely or in part, by Charles Rennie Mackintosh rank among the most innovative spaces produced during the art nouveau years. The projects benefited from a client who sought out originality. Although Catherine Cranston herself continued to wear nineteenth-century-style dress until she died in 1934, she wanted her tearooms to have the look of modernity, something that may surprise today, when the very word “tearoom” suggests a certain fustiness. But in Glasgow around 1900, tearooms were still relatively new, and they represented a modern alternative to male- and alcohol-dominated pubs and clubs. Tearooms were part of an expanding public space available to women at the end of the nineteenth century. For Kate Cranston, also a temperance supporter, the art nouveau style of her tearooms was an expression of innovation and a part of social change.

Miss Cranston was Mackintosh's most important patron, and over the course of several years he and his wife, Margaret MacDonald, produced designs for four of her establishments as well as for her home. In them they tried to achieve a total environment, specifying lighting, furniture, decorations, table settings, menu cards, even the waitresses' uniforms.

The slide illustrates the reconstruction of the Ladies' Luncheon Room in Miss Cranston's Ingram Street tearoom. The spare light walls (dark colors were generally held to be more “masculine”) are punctuated by a regular series of square panels echoing small cutouts in the chairs. As described by English architect Edwin Luytens, it is “all very elaborately simple.” Tall chair backs afforded some privacy in the open room. The design supports a sense of both public and domestic space. It combined the niceties of home with the excitement of being out in the world.

The unusual verticality of the chairs also draws attention to the decoration high on the wall. The metal relief, *The Dew*, is by MacDonald, and the larger gesso mural, *The Wassail*, by Mackintosh. The latter shows three pairs of young women with long podlike bodies, floating as if in amber, frozen in some ancient and mysterious procession. A romantic thrall with Scotland's misty past coincided with the aims of symbolism, and the works of Glasgow artists had strong symbolist underpinnings.

As Mackintosh's friend and collaborator Herbert MacNair noted, “not a line was drawn without purpose, and rarely was a single motif employed that had not some allegorical meaning.” The flowers, blood-red forms allied to those of the women's bodies, probably suggest themes of creation and regeneration. These “ghoul-like designs” were not universally admired, however, and earned Glasgow artists the nickname the “Spook School.” It is not entirely clear what patrons of the tearoom might have thought of these decorations. But even if the visitors did not actually decipher their multilayered symbolism, the works would have helped underscore the modernity of the design and the new kind of space they decorated.

### LEARNING ACTIVITIES

#### art

- Identify a coffee house in your town that you feel projects a “modern” feel. How is it accomplished?
- Research directions of influence among Glasgow, Vienna, and Frank Lloyd Wright.
- Design a chair to provide privacy in a public waiting room.

### GLASGOW AND VIENNA

Opinion differs about whether the rectilinear style that evolved in Vienna (see slide 15 and essay fig. 4) was inspired by the work of Mackintosh, or whether the reverse was true. Mackintosh and MacDonald

were invited to show at the eighth Secession exhibition, and their “Scottish Room” was highly praised. Yet squares had already figured prominently in Secession interiors designed by Josef Hoffmann.



# SLIDE 15

## Joseph Maria Olbrich

Austrian, 1867–1908

### Vienna Secession Building, 1897–1898

photograph by C.H. Bastin and  
J. Evrard, Brussels

In 1897 a group of mostly young artists in Vienna split from the dominant artists' organization, which controlled the city's only public exhibition space. Led by painter Gustav Klimt (see slide 16), the breakaway artists wanted to see not only more of their own work shown but also that of the avant-garde from elsewhere in Europe. This is the building erected to house their exhibitions. It opened in 1898. Emblazoned on the building is their motto: "Der Zeit ihre Kunst. Der Kunst ihre Freiheit" (To the age its art. To the art its freedom).

The group called itself the Vienna Secession, a name that echoed the *secessio plebis*, when the plebs of ancient Rome literally "withdrew" to the Aventine hill outside the authority of ruling patricians.

It signaled a desire to break with the fathers, to leave behind traditional conventions and make an art appropriate for the modern world. In the anxious climate of impending chaos that marked the *fin de siècle*, "appropriate" art was one that could both express the psyche and save it.

Olbrich, architect of the Secession Building, said he wanted "to erect a temple of art, which would offer the art lover a quiet, elegant place of refuge." He saw that "there would have to be walls white and gleaming, holy and chaste... [expressing] pure dignity." The building's spare design shares the geometrical proportion and axial focus of ancient temples. This parallel was unusual in a day when museums and exhibition spaces were more often conceived as great palaces of art. Here the references are not baroque but classical—seen in the clarity of the façade's organization, the decoration of laurel, the furies who guard the doorway, and the dome.

The building's forms are simple and confident, yet they were perceived by contemporaries as exotic. During construction the building became the object of intense scrutiny: "If these days you pass by the River Wien in the early morning... you can see behind the Academy a crowd of people standing around a new building. They are office people... who should be on their way to work, but instead stop in amazement unable to tear themselves away. They stare, they interrogate each other, they discuss this 'thing.' They think it strange, they have never seen anything of the kind. They don't like it." Several disparaging nicknames were coined, and the cupola was punningly called the "gilded cabbage." Secession style art, however, gained an appreciative audience among wealthier Viennese and even won official support. Austrian currency and stamps were re-designed in the art nouveau style.

The interior space of the Secession Building was entirely open; it pioneered the use of moveable partitions. Space was mutable and momentary just like modern life. The decoration inside was understated and geometric, and the widely spaced hanging of paintings on a single level was innovative at a time when Salon hangings stacked works to the ceiling.

## LEARNING ACTIVITIES

### art

- Compare the Secession Building with the Pantheon and with an art museum in your town.
- Discuss the way art is displayed in a museum in your town. Or compare two installations, if possible. What effect do things like the wall color, lighting, and spacing have on the art displayed?

### humanities

- Learn what the Latin slogan *Ver Sacrum* on this building means. Discuss why it might appear there.
- Devise a motto for the art of today.
- Collect examples of mottoes on buildings in your town. How were they chosen? How do they relate to the functions of the buildings on which they appear?



## SLIDE 16

### Gustav Klimt

Austrian, 1862–1918

#### Pallas Athene, 1898

oil on canvas, 75 x 75 (29½ x 29½)

Museen der Stadt Wien

The first Secession exhibition was held in rented space, but the second took place in Olbrich's new building (see slide 15), and this painting was one of the works shown there.

Pallas Athene was a familiar figure in Vienna, officially adopted as a symbol by the parliament. This, however, is not the coolly detached goddess of classical art, embodying an ideal of harmony and balance. Instead, Klimt's Athene, flashing-eyed as Homer described her, seems to come from an older stratum, to have a deeper and more mysterious, even unsettling, power. The familiar face of the goddess has been transformed, as one contemporary critic said, into a "demon of the Secession."

This Athene draws on an alternative, even subversive, view of ancient art. Art nouveau artists were inspired by the art and history of the past, but they took it with a new set of expectations. The old view of ancient Greek culture—entailing rationality, clarity, moderation, and order—was under revision. A new picture was emerging that had been recently expressed by **Friedrich Nietzsche** in the *Birth of Tragedy* (1871). Nietzsche drew attention to two contrasting aspects of Greek culture, which he termed the Apollonian and the Dionysian. Coexisting with the calm rationality and moderation of Apollo, god of light, was the irrational nature of the wine god Dionysus and his followers. In their drunken revelries were expressed darker psychic forces: eros, violence, and madness. And these anxieties had currency for the modern world.



Athene had appeared on the Secession's first poster, also designed by Klimt. She alluded to the group's heroic struggles to promote a new artistic originality and quality. Athene usually holds a small Nike, or figure of Victory. But Klimt instead has her support a waiflike young woman holding a mirror in which modern man will see his own reflection.

The painting's frame was designed by Klimt and made his brother.

#### LEARNING ACTIVITIES

##### art

- Research Byzantine mosaics from Ravenna and consider their decorative influence on Klimt.

##### humanities

- Compose a dramatic monologue in which Klimt's Athene speaks to the artist.

##### social science

- Identify subversive use of traditional symbols in modern culture—by artists, musicians, protest groups, etc.



**Vilmos Zsolnay**

Hungarian, 1828–1900

**Vase, 1899**

earthenware with iridescent metallic luster glaze, 39.4 x 27.9 (15½ x 11)  
 Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Gift of the Norwest Corporation

Until the later part of the nineteenth century, the focus of pottery decoration had been on narrative scenes painted on the vase, less on the shape of the pot or its glaze. But art nouveau ceramics shifted the emphasis: some studio potters carved or sculpted the clay of their vases, others relied on the decorative effect of the glaze alone. The Zsolnay factory at Pecs, in southern Hungary, became well known for its brightly colored lusterware glazes, including the Eosin glaze on this vase.

Luster glazes had first been perfected by Islamic potters during the ninth century. Their metallic sheen, and the legendary difficulty in achieving it, exercised great

mystique. Although they had been reproduced in Renaissance Italy and Moorish Spain, as late as 1892 an English ceramist could still recall the glazes “as a sort of potters’ philosopher’s stone.” Their mysterious and mutable effects appealed to art nouveau tastes.

For Vilmos Zsolnay, who had studied Islamic art and ceramics in London at the South Kensington Museum (later the Victoria and Albert), adoption of luster glazes entailed a degree of nationalism as well. In the nineteenth century it was still widely believed that the Magyars of Hungary shared a common origin with the Turks and nomadic peoples of the Asian steppes.

On this vase, the glaze’s flowing and changeable colors are well matched to its fluid form. The sinuous shapes of the tulips are also in keeping with native Hungarian tastes. Plants and bees, and especially tulips, were common in Hungarian folk decoration. Indeed, a group promoting rural industries was named “Tulipán,” and Hungarians wore red cloth tulips to protest economic rule from Vienna.

**LEARNING ACTIVITIES****art**

- Make a portfolio of lusterware ceramics.
- Make a pot that incorporates a national symbol of your country.

**humanities**

- Learn more about the Magyars of Hungary.

**A NEW CERAMIC ART**

When Paul Gauguin started making pottery (figure) in 1886, no one had ever made pots like his before. Gauguin took over production of the entire piece, using “intelligent hands

which powerfully communicate to the vase the life of a figure.” Magical effects came from the fire of the kiln. The colors that emerged from a single *grand feu* firing had, he believed,

a natural harmony. Accidental effects produced in the firing process itself — mottled color, blistered surface, splotches and nuances — lent complexity and individuality.



Paul Gauguin, *Vase decorated with Breton scenes*, 1886–1887, *Musées Royaux d’Art et d’Histoire*, Brussels.

## SLIDE 18

### William H. Bradley

American, 1868–1962

#### Thanksgiving No. from

#### “The Chap-Book”, 1895

color lithograph, 50.8 x 33.7 (20 x 13 ¼)

Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.,  
Prints and Photographs Division

The *Saturday Evening Post* called Will Bradley the “dean of American design,” and his life and career were closely linked with American publishing. Son of a cartoonist, his first job, at age eleven, was as a printer’s devil (apprentice). Between 1896 and 1898 he published his own magazine, *Bradley: His Book*, devoted to “Art, Literature, and Printing.” Although Bradley’s illustrations and typography appeared in several well-known magazines, his reputation grew because of the bold posters, like this one, that he designed for the *Chap-Book*, a literary journal based in Chicago.

These posters were among the first examples of the art nouveau style in the United States, and they were instrumental in popularizing it. Bradley was influenced by Beardsley’s sinuous lines and broad areas of contrast (see essay fig. 1). Here the swirling folds of the women’s voluminous dresses echo the type above and recall the fluted round shapes of Thanksgiving pumpkins. The strong contrast of orangish red and blue emphasizes the movement of the skirts’ curving folds. Tiny feet peek out as small triangles and make the women seem almost airborne.

Eye-catching posters like this were meant to boost newsstand sales of magazines. Magazines were no longer sold primarily through subscriptions, and there was great competition for readers. Spurred by the lure of profitable national advertising, some 7,500 periodicals were estab-



lished in the United States between 1885 and 1905. Most were short lived, but collecting newsstand posters became something of a popular craze in the 1890s.

The *Chap-Book* was published between 1894 and 1898. It was planned primarily as a way to promote a small publishing house, but its crisp modern design and lively writing won it a sophisticated audience. The first issue included a self-portrait by Beardsley. Over its run the *Chap-Book* published fiction, poetry, and criticism by Stephen Crane, Paul Lawrence Dunbar, Thomas Hardy, Stéphane Mallarmé, Paul Verlaine, Henry James, and William Butler Yeats. Max Beerbohm contributed a regular caricature.

#### LEARNING ACTIVITIES

##### art

- Research the technique of color lithography.
- Design a poster for a contemporary magazine.

##### humanities

- Consider the impact of magazines today on popular culture. Do they perform the same role now? If not what does?
- Read selections by authors published in the *Chap-Book*.
- Create a chapbook.

#### CHAPBOOKS

The name “Chap-Book” came from the earliest days of printing. In the sixteenth century chapbooks — or “cheap” books — were short pam-

phlets, often illustrated, that contained folk stories, remedies, and other popular literature. They played an important role in expanding literacy.



## SLIDE 19

(left and right)

### Persian

#### Glass flasks, c. 1885

35.6 (14)

Victoria and Albert Museum, London

(center)

### Louis Comfort Tiffany

American, 1848–1933

#### Glass flask, 1896

40.6 (16)

Victoria and Albert Museum, London

While at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, Tiffany saw two Persian rose-water sprinklers of blue glass. Fine ridges, some colored, spiraled up and around the graceful swan-neck shapes, revealing the movement of the molten material as the vases were formed at the end of a glassblower's pipe. They inspired the American artist to create his own version, seen in the center of this slide, flanked by his two models.

These pieces demonstrate in a direct way how the arts of Islam influenced art nouveau. Islamic glass, textiles, woodcarvings, and inlaid metalware provided a rich vocabulary of arabesques and sinuous form. The designs were organic, drawing on nature, but simplified into linear pattern. For Tiffany, who had traveled in North Africa as a young man, Islamic designs would become a major source of inspiration. His swan-necked sprinkler is not a slavish imitation, however. Notice in particular how its decoration differs from the Persian pieces. In a technique Tiffany used often, the natural swelling of the vase literally

inflates the pattern of lines, making the shape and its decoration an organic whole.

Tiffany is an acknowledged master of glass and looked to many different glass traditions for inspiration. In addition to Islamic shapes, he also adapted the hobs of Renaissance drinking cups and the iridescence of glass buried for centuries. (Archaeological glass acquires a metallic sheen from minerals in the soils around it.) Tiffany's most important source of inspiration, however, was nature—perhaps most famously for what we today call “Tiffany lamps” (see essay fig. 3). He treated nature in a more straightforwardly naturalistic way than most of his European counterparts, neither abstracting it as strongly as Van de Velde (see slide 13), for example, nor swathing it with the poetics of Gallé (see slide 8).

Tiffany said his search for a new type of glass occupied him for thirty years. He patented the result, which let him produce shimmery, kaleidoscopic patterns without resorting to, as he said, “paints, etching, or burning, or otherwise treating the surface.” Material and decoration were one. Tiffany originally called his glass *Favrile*—from a root meaning to make—but soon changed it to the more elegant sounding *Favrile*.

## LEARNING ACTIVITIES

### art

- Learn more about Islamic art.
- Visit a glassblower.
- Assemble a portfolio of contemporary glass artists.

### humanities

- Research the origin and development of the modern art museum.
- Consider the role of museums for art students today.



**Louis Sullivan**

American, 1856–1924

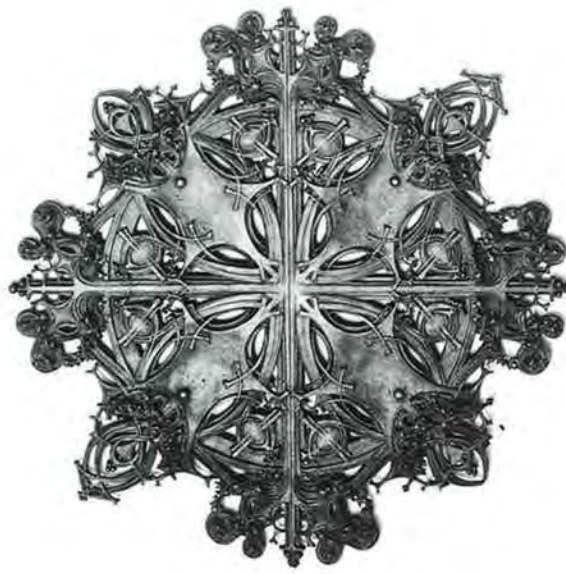
and **George Grant Elmslie**

American, 1871–1952

**Elevator medallion from the Schlesinger and Mayer Store, Chicago, 1898–1899**

copper-plated cast iron

Seymour H. Persky



The Schlesinger and Mayer department store (today called Carson, Pirie, Scott & Co.; see figure) was the last of nine Chicago skyscrapers Sullivan built with his partner, the engineer Dankmar Adler. A wave of building followed in the decades after the great Chicago fire of 1871, and many of the new structures were skyscrapers, in their engineering if not in their height. Most were ten to fifteen stories. The innovation of an internal steel structure supporting the exterior shell is what made skyscrapers possible; the invention of the elevator made them feasible.

In 1904 a reviewer for the *Architectural Record* wrote about Sullivan's design for the Schlesinger and Mayer store: "Here is L'Art Nouveau indigenous to the United States, nurtured upon American problems." The exterior is divided into two distinct levels. The upper floors are tiled and relatively plain. Below, a two-story jewel box of ornamental metal, similar to the intricate interlace seen in the slide, frames the entrances and display windows. While the upper levels were utilitarian spaces, the lower level was meant to entice shoppers.

Sullivan's attention to differing functions (and some remarks about ornamentation taken out of context) are sometimes—and mistakenly—used to paint the architect as protomodernist. But his quest was not to eliminate ornament. Rather he sought to find ornamentation suitable for a modern world and for this new type of building. In step with other art nouveau designers, he turned to nature and science with a tinge of mysticism. Like Viollet-le-Duc (see figure with slide 6), Sullivan believed that each natural function expresses its necessary form and that these should be visible. Decoration should not mask but amplify. In an essay entitled "The Tall Office Building Artistically Considered," Sullivan wrote, "It is the pervading law of all things organic and inorganic, of all things physical and metaphysical, of all things human and all things superhuman, of all true manifestations of the head, of the heart, of the soul, that the life is recognizable in its expression, that form ever follows function. This is the law."

## LEARNING ACTIVITIES

## art

- Look at the ornament of skyscrapers in your town. Are the interior and exterior related? What are some of the sources of the ornamentation?
- Identify structures in your town whose functions are clear from the way they look. And some whose functions are not obvious.
- Read and discuss essays written by Sullivan,

## science/art

- Research the materials used in skyscrapers today.
- Compare the materials used in the construction of two recent buildings of different style. Did the materials used affect the overall appearance? If so, how?

## social science

- Research the impact of various inventions (e.g., elevator, car, airplane) on architecture and/or urban planning.



Louis Sullivan, *Carson, Pirie, Scott & Co.*, Chicago, built 1899–1904; image supplied by Archivision.com

## THE DEPARTMENT STORE

Le Bon Marché, which opened in Paris in 1869, is usually cited as the first department store. The importance of these new institutions should not be overlooked. For one thing, they offered women a new public space. They employed lower-class women in

respectable work and gave middle-class women a socially acceptable destination outside the home.

They also presented the perfect venue for modern design, created to sell modern products to modern consumers. Moreover, modern materials

like metal and glass lent themselves perfectly to their large, bright displays. Several art nouveau artists designed department store buildings or interiors: Louis Majorelle (see slide 7) was commissioned by the Galleries Lafayette in Paris to design

its grand center stair; in Brussels Victor Horta (see slide 11) built one of the city's largest stores, appropriately named "Innovation."



# Glossary

## aesthetic movement

Predominantly English movement that stressed “art for art’s sake.” Major figures included **Oscar Wilde** and **James McNeill Whistler**.

## applied arts

Traditionally, art made for a practical purpose (e.g., weaving, metalwork, ceramics, woodworking, graphic design, etc.). Art nouveau rejected the distinction between applied and **fine art**.

## arts and crafts movement

Movement that originated in England around the middle of the nineteenth century and whose influence spread to Europe and the United States. Its major inspirations were **John Ruskin** and **William Morris**. Anti-industrial in outlook, it promoted an image of the artist-craftsman, insisted on the equality of **fine** and **applied art**, and was committed to honest use of materials. Though medieval art influenced many arts and crafts designers, the movement rejected **historicism**.

## baroque

A style in art and architecture that flourished about 1600–1750. It was characterized by bold and dynamic forms, a strong sense of drama, and monumentality.

## Charles Baudelaire

French symbolist poet, 1821–1867. One of the originators of **symbolism**, he sought correspondences among different sensory inputs (sound, color, etc.).

## Bauhaus

School in Weimar, Germany, founded in 1919 by Walter Gropius (1883–1969). The Bauhaus aesthetic, which encompassed architecture and the **applied arts**, was committed to an art allied with technology. Its emphasis on industrial techniques and appropriate, economical use of industrial materials lay the cornerstone for the spare geometry of much twentieth-century architecture.

## Aubrey Beardsley

English artist, 1872–1898. The sinuous linear style of Beardsley’s book illustrations was an important influence on art nouveau.

## Sarah Bernhardt

French actress, 1844–1923. Posters of her plays made by Alphonse Mucha are some of the best known works of art nouveau.

## chinoiserie

Chinese motifs and subjects, used especially in European **rococo** design.

## classical

Variably defined; generally of or pertaining to the art or culture of ancient Greece and Rome. In architecture it suggests clear lines and harmonious proportions.

## Claude Debussy

French composer, 1862–1919. His composition *L’Après-midi d’un faune* was based on a poem by **Stéphane Mallarmé**; such unity among all the arts was an art nouveau ideal.

## decorative arts

See applied arts.

## Isadora Duncan

American dancer, 1878–1927. She was a pioneer of expressive movement in the Western dance tradition.

## fine arts

Traditionally, art made for beauty (e.g., painting, sculpture) rather than practical use. Distinctions between fine and **applied** or **decorative arts** were rejected by art nouveau.

## historicism

Use of styles, ornamentation, and motifs from the past (e.g., **rococo**, **baroque**, **classical**), often in eclectic combination, especially in architecture.

## Stéphane Mallarmé

French symbolist poet, 1842–1898. His verse sought to evoke thoughts through suggestion rather than description, the “music” of his words holding equal place with their meaning.

## modernism

An imprecise term variously used. Generally it describes a succession of avant-garde styles that dominated art and architecture in the twentieth century. In architecture, what is usually called “International modernism” stressed rationality (functionality) and clarity of design. Clean-lined, mostly cubic international style buildings avoid all reference to historical precedents.

## William Morris

English writer, artist, and political activist, 1834–1896. Morris was an important theorist and practitioner in the **arts and crafts movement**.

## Nabis

A group of artists influenced by **symbolism**, who stressed the equality of **fine** and **applied arts** and sought to convey ideas or emotions rather than the external appearance of the natural world.

## neo-impressionist style

A **postimpressionist** style also called pointillism. Developed by Georges Seurat, it was characterized by discrete touches of color. While it relied on scientific theory of perception, it also had a more mystical approach to harmonies of color and line.

## Friedrich Nietzsche

German philologist and philosopher, 1844–1900. His investigation into the irrational aspects of ancient Greek culture gave art nouveau, especially in Germany and Austria, an alternative approach to **classical** traditions.

## pantheism

A belief that nontheistic divinity completely pervades all of nature, making the creator and the created one.

**postimpressionism**

A loose designation for work by artists like Gauguin, Van Gogh, and Seurat, all of whom sought to move beyond impressionism's transcription of visual phenomena in order to express interior thought or emotion.

**John Ruskin**

English critic, 1819–1900. Ruskin's opinions were enormously influential. His writings that decried the ugliness of modern industrial society were a major influence on the **arts and crafts movement**.

**Salambo**

Fictional Carthaginian princess, heroine of a novel by Gustave Flaubert.

**Salome**

In the New Testament, Salome's dance before King Herod is rewarded with the beheading of John the Baptist.

**sphinx**

In Egyptian and Greek mythology, a hybrid creature, part lion and part woman, which often symbolized knowledge.

**symbolism**

A movement in literature and the visual arts that was occupied with a symbolic or spiritual world beyond appearances. It emphasized interior states, fantasy, dreams, the erotic, the exotic, and the occult.

**James McNeill Whistler**

American artist, 1834–1903, associated with the **aesthetic movement** in England. Whistler's use of elegant and simple Japanese design and his concern for creating whole aesthetic interiors were important influences on art nouveau.

**Oscar Wilde**

Irish poet, playwright, and wit, 1854–1900. Wilde was allied with the **aesthetic movement**. Public outrage over the trials arising from Wilde's homosexuality fueled English distrust of art nouveau as decadent and effeminate—and is one reason the style did not succeed in England as it did elsewhere.



# Resources

**Arwas, Victor.** *Glass: Art Nouveau to Art Deco.* London, 1977.

**Becker, Vivienne.** *Art Nouveau Jewelry.* London, 1998.

**Brett, David.** *C. R. Mackintosh: The Poetics of Workmanship.* London and Cambridge, Mass., 1992.

**Duncan, Alastair.** *Art Nouveau.* London, 1994.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Art Nouveau Furniture.* London and New York, 1982.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Art Nouveau Sculpture.* London, 1978.

**Escritt, Stephen.** *Art Nouveau.* London, 2000.

**Greenhalgh, Paul.** *Essential Art Nouveau.* London, 2000.

\_\_\_\_\_, ed. *Art Nouveau, 1890–1914.* Exh. cat., Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 2000.

**Johnson, Diane Chalmers.** *American Art Nouveau.* New York, 1986.

**Rennert, Jack.** *Posters of the Belle Epoque.* New York, 1990.

**Schorske, Carl.** *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture.* New York, 1980.

**Silverman, Debora L.** *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France.* Berkeley, 1989.

**Weisberg, Gabriel P., and Elizabeth Menon.** *Art Nouveau: A Research Guide for Design Reform in France, Belgium, England, and the United States.* New York and London, 1986.

Numerous Web sites provide images and information on art nouveau objects and architecture. Among the best for architecture is:  
[www.greatbuildings.com](http://www.greatbuildings.com)

Good sources of images and reliable information are Web sites maintained by the institutions who lent to this exhibition. Try especially:  
[www.nga.gov](http://www.nga.gov)  
[www.vam.ac.uk](http://www.vam.ac.uk)

# Timeline

## 1853–1914

- 1853**  
Commodore Perry sails into Tokyo Bay, opening Japan to the West.
- 1859**  
Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species* is published.
- 1871**  
France is defeated in the Franco-Prussian War; Germany is unified.
- 1875**  
William Morris reorganizes his firm, renaming it Morris & Co.
- 1873**  
Walter Pater's *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* is published.
- 1874**  
First impressionist exhibition is held in Paris.
- 1878**  
First Congrès International du Droit des Femmes is held in Paris.
- 1879**  
Thomas Edison demonstrates the electric light.
- 1883**  
Construction begins on William Jenney's ten-story Home Insurance Building in Chicago, the first to use skyscraper engineering.
- 1884**  
Term "art nouveau" appears in print for the first time, describing the Belgian artists' group Les XX.
- 1885**  
Gottlieb Daimler and Karl Benz invent the first automobile run by the internal combustion engine.
- 1886**  
The Symbolist Manifesto, by Jean Moréas, appears.
- 1889**  
The Eiffel Tower is built for the Paris World's Fair.
- 1891**  
First exhibition by the Nabis is held in Paris.  
Henrik Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* premieres in London.
- 1892**  
Tiffany Glass and Decorating Company is established in New York.
- 1893**  
Women win the right to vote in New Zealand, the first country to embrace female suffrage. In Belgium universal male suffrage is adopted.
- 1894**  
Claude Debussy completes *L'Après-midi d'un faune*.
- 1895**  
The Lumière brothers screen the first moving picture—of workers leaving a factory.
- 1898**  
European and American troops are sent to quell the Boxer Rebellion in China.
- 1899**  
Thorstein Veblen's *The Theory of the Leisure Class* is published.
- 1900**  
Sigmund Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* is published.  
Art nouveau design triumphs at the Paris World's Fair.
- 1901**  
Queen Victoria dies after sixty-three-year reign.
- 1902**  
Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Hound of the Baskervilles* is published.
- 1903**  
Americans Wilbur and Orville Wright make the first manned flight at Kitty Hawk.  
Pierre and Marie Curie share the Nobel Prize for discovery of radium.
- 1904**  
Gustav Mahler's *Symphony No. 5* premieres.
- 1905**  
Albert Einstein presents the special theory of relativity.  
Exhibition at Salon d'automne includes the artists dubbed "les fauves."
- 1907**  
Pablo Picasso finishes cubist painting *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. Version O)*.
- 1913**  
Igor Stravinsky's *Le Sacre du printemps* provokes public outrage.
- 1914**  
Assassination of Archduke Ferdinand triggers World War I.



# Slide List

## Slide 1

Arthur Heygate Mackmurdo  
British, 1851–1942  
*Chair*, 1882  
mahogany and leather, 97.1 x 49.5 x 47.5  
(38<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 19<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> x 18<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>)  
Victoria and Albert Museum, London

## Slide 2

Paul Gauguin  
French, 1848–1903  
*Self-Portrait*, 1889  
oil on wood, 79.2 x 51.3 (31<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 20<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>)  
National Gallery of Art, Washington,  
Chester Dale Collection

## Slide 3

Pierre Bonnard  
French, 1867–1947  
*Poster for "La Revue blanche,"* 1894  
color lithograph,  
sheet: 58.7 x 78.2 (23<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 30<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>)  
National Gallery of Art, Washington,  
Rosenwald Collection

## Slide 4

René Lalique  
French, 1860–1945  
*Dragonfly woman corsage ornament*, 1897–1898  
gold, enamel, chrysoptase, moonstones,  
and diamonds, 23 x 26.5 (9 x 10<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub>)  
Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, Lisbon  
© 2000 Artists Rights Society (ARS),  
New York/ADAGP, Paris

## Slide 5

Alphonse Marie Mucha  
Czech, 1860–1939  
*Nature*, c. 1900  
gilt bronze, silver, marble,  
69.2 x 27.9 x 30.5 (27<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 11 x 12)  
Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, The  
Sydney and Frances Lewis Art Nouveau Fund

## Slide 6

Hector Guimard  
French, 1867–1942  
*Entrance to the Château d'Eau Station  
of the Métropolitain*, c. 1898  
cast iron and bronze, height c. 400 (156)  
Photograph © Art-on File, Inc.

## Slide 7

Louis Majorelle  
French, 1859–1926  
and Daum Frères  
French, firm active 1878–present  
*Orchidée desk*, c. 1903  
carved and inlaid mahogany, gilt bronze, and  
glass, 92.7 x 175.3 x 90.2 (36<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> x 69 x 35<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>)  
Anonymous

## Slide 8

Émile Gallé  
French, 1846–1904  
*Bat vase*, c. 1903–1904  
wheel-cut and acid-etched glass with  
applied cabochons over silver foil, 37.5 (14<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>)  
Victoria and Albert Museum, London

## Slide 9

Otto Eckmann  
German, 1868–1902  
with the Scherrebek Weaving School  
(founded 1896)  
*Five Swans*, 1897  
woven wool, 26.4 x 76 (9<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 29<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub>)  
Danish Museum of Decorative Art,  
Copenhagen

## Slide 10

Fernand Khnopff  
Belgian, 1858–1921  
*Des Caresses*, 1896  
oil on canvas, 50.5 x 151 (19<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 59<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>)  
Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique,  
Brussels

## Slide 11

Victor Horta  
Belgian, 1861–1947  
*Interior of the Tassel House*, 1893  
© 2000, Artists Rights Society (ARS),  
New York/SOFAM, Brussels  
photograph by C. H. Bastin and J. Evrard, Brussels

## Slide 12

Henry van de Velde  
Belgian, 1863–1957  
*Trojan: L'Aliment le plus concentré*, 1898  
color lithograph, 111.8 x 77.1 (44 x 30<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub>)  
Museum of Modern Art, New York,  
Arthur Drexler Fund

## Slide 13

Henry van de Velde  
Belgian, 1863–1957  
*Candelabrum*, 1898–1899  
electroplated bronze, 58.5 x 50.8 (23 x 20)  
Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, Brussels

## Josef Hoffmann

Austrian, 1870–1956  
*Fruit basket*, 1904  
silver, 27 x 23 x 23 (10<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 9<sup>1</sup>/<sub>16</sub> x 9<sup>1</sup>/<sub>16</sub>)  
Victoria and Albert Museum, London

## Slide 14

Charles Rennie Mackintosh  
Scottish, 1868–1928  
and Margaret MacDonald  
Scottish, 1865–1933  
*Ladies' Luncheon Room from Miss Cranston's  
Ingram Street Tearooms*, c. 1900,  
reconstructed 1992–1995  
Glasgow Museums, Art Gallery  
and Museum, Kelvingrove

## Slide 15

Joseph Maria Olbrich  
Austrian, 1867–1908  
*Vienna Secession Building*, 1897–1898  
photograph by C. H. Bastin and J. Evrard, Brussels

## Slide 16

Gustav Klimt  
Austrian, 1862–1918  
*Pallas Athene*, 1898  
oil on canvas, 75 x 75 (29<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> x 29<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>)  
Museum der Stadt Wien

## Slide 17

Vilmos Zsolnay  
Hungarian, 1828–1900  
*Vase*, 1899  
earthenware with iridescent metallic  
luster glaze, 39.4 x 27.9 (15<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> x 11)  
Minneapolis Institute of Arts,  
Gift of the Norwest Corporation

## Slide 18

William H. Bradley  
American, 1868–1962  
*Thanksgiving No. from "The Chap-Book"*, 1895  
color lithograph, 50.8 x 33.7 (20 x 13<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>)  
Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.,  
Prints and Photographs Division

## Slide 19

(left and right)  
Persian  
*Glass flasks*, c. 1885  
35.6 (14)  
Victoria and Albert Museum, London

## (center)

Louis Comfort Tiffany  
American, 1848–1933  
*Glass flask*, 1896  
40.6 (16)  
Victoria and Albert Museum, London

## Slide 20

Louis Sullivan  
American, 1856–1924  
and George Grant Elmslie  
American, 1871–1952  
*Elevator medallion from the Schlesinger  
and Mayer Store, Chicago*, 1898–1899  
copper-plated cast iron  
Seymour H. Persky