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Art Nouveau

Introduction:

An introduction to the art movement and it's artists. I'll be looking at the themes and analysing the artists and challenging their perspectives, like how male artists often have a different perspective on viewing the female form, discussing what inspired them, how different cultures inspired them to create their works and how it relates to my own inspirations in illustration.

"Art Nouveau is an international style in architecture and design that emerged in the 1890s and is characterised by sinuous lines and flowing organic shapes based on plant forms." (Tate)



Medicine (1900-7, by Klimt)

Art Nouveau, ornamental style of art that flourished between about 1890 and 1910 throughout Europe and the United States. Art Nouveau artists were diverse in their choice of media, from many art and design medias, in architecture, interior design, jewellery and glass design, posters,

and illustration. This new style became a part of everyday life and influenced many artists and illustrators today, from architecture in France, swirling plant like gates, with their distinctive lettering, by Hector Guimard. Or the extraordinary poster illustrations by Alphonse Mucha, his illustrations played a big part in the art movement and he was one of many of the leaders of Art Nouveau, others were, Aubrey Beardsley, Gustav Klimt and Henry van de Velde. The distinctive style of Art Nouveau consists of sinuous lines, curvature lines, shapes, or knot like work and natural elements. Colourful and earthly colours were used in a diverse range of media, plants and floral themes added to it's natural and organic like form.

Alphonse Mucha



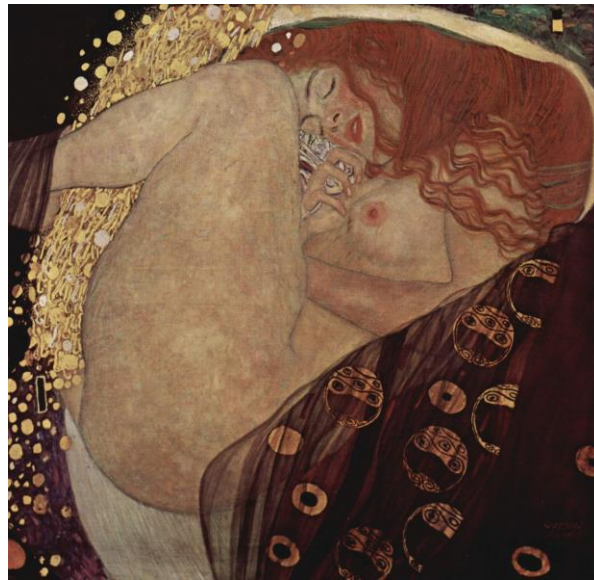
Hamlet (1899 by Mucha)

This French adaptation of Shakespeare's Hamlet was premiered in May 1899, starring Sarah Bernhardt in the title role. Mucha's poster presents the solitary figure of Hamlet against an arched background richly decorated with Celtic motifs. As exemplified in the cartoon, Mucha

prepared many of his designs with well-defined outlines and at a scale of 1:1 in relation to the ultimate sizes of the posters, which enabled the draughtsmen and lithographers to reproduce the designs faithfully during production. (Sato, 2015, p. 30)

Mucha used lithography as the printing technique for his posters, with sketches as a base and paint, ink, pencil, being the main media and many other materials. Mucha's artworks often depicted women in an 'idealistic' manner and his many inspirations were 'Japonisme', or Japanese art and design that influenced many Western European artists. His illustrations also show themes of nature, floral arrangements, Celtic inspired patterns and mythological storytelling, like his 'the Slav Epic' a series of twenty monumental paintings inspired by the Slavic mythology and history. Like many male artists before Mucha's time and after, there continues to be a different perspective on how women are viewed in the artists work, not to say his work isn't any less interesting or problematic to the modern times, but viewing it as a different perspective, as a 'fantasy' of a old folktale about a beautiful maiden or goddess like character, women seem to be the main subject in his work, often depicting illustrations inspired by myths or other storytelling, or even his beautiful illustrations inspired by different seasons, *'The Seasons' (1896 by Mucha)* in colour lithograph, Mucha personified the seasons to look like nymph like women, a series of four panels, innocent Spring, sultry Summer, fruitful Autumn and frosty Winter. With a seasonal background and flowing organic lines, representing a harmonious cycle of nature. Mucha's works have definitely inspired a lot of artists of today and is one of many key portrait illustrators.

Semiotic analysis, Klimt.



Danaë (1907 by Klimt)

This painting by Klimt shows Danae from Greek mythology, her story feels portrayed in this painting. The gold symbolises the formation Zeus takes to impregnate her, thus came their child Perseus was born. There's a flow in the shapes and Danae embracing the love from the gold, how the body of Danae is in formation with the flowing of the shapes harmonises the whole arrangement of the painting. Greek mythology is of many of Klimt's inspirations as it was with Egyptian art.

"After The Kiss Klimt became less willing to conceal: this is the ecstasy of love, at the very moment when the shower of gold pieces mingled with gilded spermatozoa – the form in which Zeus chooses to "visit" the sleeping heroine, symbol of carnal and sensual beauty – pours down between her magnificent thighs." (Néret, 2015, p. 67)

Klimt's artworks were also apart of the Art Nouveau movement, with its distinctive flowing organic shapes and themes that connect to the other Nouveau artists. His works often focuses on the female form, expressing femininity and beauty, there's also elements of love and death. He was largely inspired by Egyptian art, clearly shown in his painting *Tree of Life* (1909 by Klimt) – Egyptian symbolism in shapes also indicate his influence. Klimt's mere obsession with the female form brings back the question of male artists perspective of the female body and how they view it, what inspires the vision to create this 'idealistic' idea and objectivity of the female

form. Nude women were quite a prominent subject in European oil paintings, often romanised and only showing the point of view from a male artists mind.

“Nudes, Berger says, are characterised by the objectification of the female “subject,” who through the assumed gaze of the male viewer is made into an object. Men who were wealthy or powerful enough to buy and commission oil paintings wanted nudes for the same reason they wanted oil paintings of valuable objects: to remind others and themselves that they were rich, powerful, and desirable.” (John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 1972) How art continues to provide visual information is forever important and how it makes us feel in return, questioning the point it is making and how the artist engages in their environment or wider society. Klimt’s artworks I believe were more influenced by the romantic myths of many mythological stories, like the one of Danae from Greek mythology. In this perspective the myths are naturally in a time of indifference of how men and women are treated differently and set to social customs in culture.

Conclusion:

Exploring this art movement has been immensely useful to widening my own knowledge of what creates an art movement and what inspires the artists themselves. Learning the various ways art can be made and observed by its viewers, how the techniques form the art and how cultures inspire artists to create their visions through storytelling of different cultures.

Questioning their motives, or how their artworks affect societies views on different subjects, like how Klimt’s work on ‘the female form’ and many male artists objectification of female nude paintings, might affect societies view on women as a whole. They might have different motives and points they want to present to the viewer, as cultures also have an impact on how we view different subjects in society and their intentions might not always be negative. I think its interesting how female artists view their own body anatomy, compared to that of male artists objectification, female artists are more likely to show the true nature of the female form without worrying about this need for ‘desire’ in nude paintings. That being said, its also important to remember that different people will view these subjects differently and especially

in more modern times, art can be expressed in many ways and expressing their own vision of work is entirely up to their perspectives, as art can be used to provoke new ideas and tell different stories that ain't often heard. I enjoy the mythological themes in both Klimt's work and Mucha's, their storytelling in their work is always inspirational to me and I don't think its always needed to ask a question on the integrity of their work, as I can still admire their artworks and learn from them, but keep in mind how I can provide a different perspective and advocacy for more ideas, in a new climate of need of more minorities to be represented in art. Art Nouveau is many of important art movements that will inspire new artists and of many different kinds of media that has been used throughout the art movement, I also believe their understanding of media and techniques has given me great inspiration as an illustration student, how they use shapes and symbolism in their work and how culture can influence the themes, have inspired me. This movement like many others, has also inspired not only interior design, but also architecture making lots of places around the world. Although I mainly focused on the paintings of Klimt and Mucha's illustrations, there are many artists apart of this movement that inspire me and the style of a lot of illustrators. Theses artists have played a huge role in art itself and the early inspirations of artists that came before them. Mucha's and Klimt's portraits will continue to help me with how I can illustrate my own ideas, as I believe that viewing the 'masters' works of the art world can impact the new generations to create their own visions in the future.

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