

ALFONS MUCHA

Art Nouveau stamp designer extraordinaire

Art Nouveau

Literally « new art » is an international style of art often inspired by curves such as the sinuous forms of plants and flowers.

It was popular between 1890 and 1910, during the Belle Epoque period.

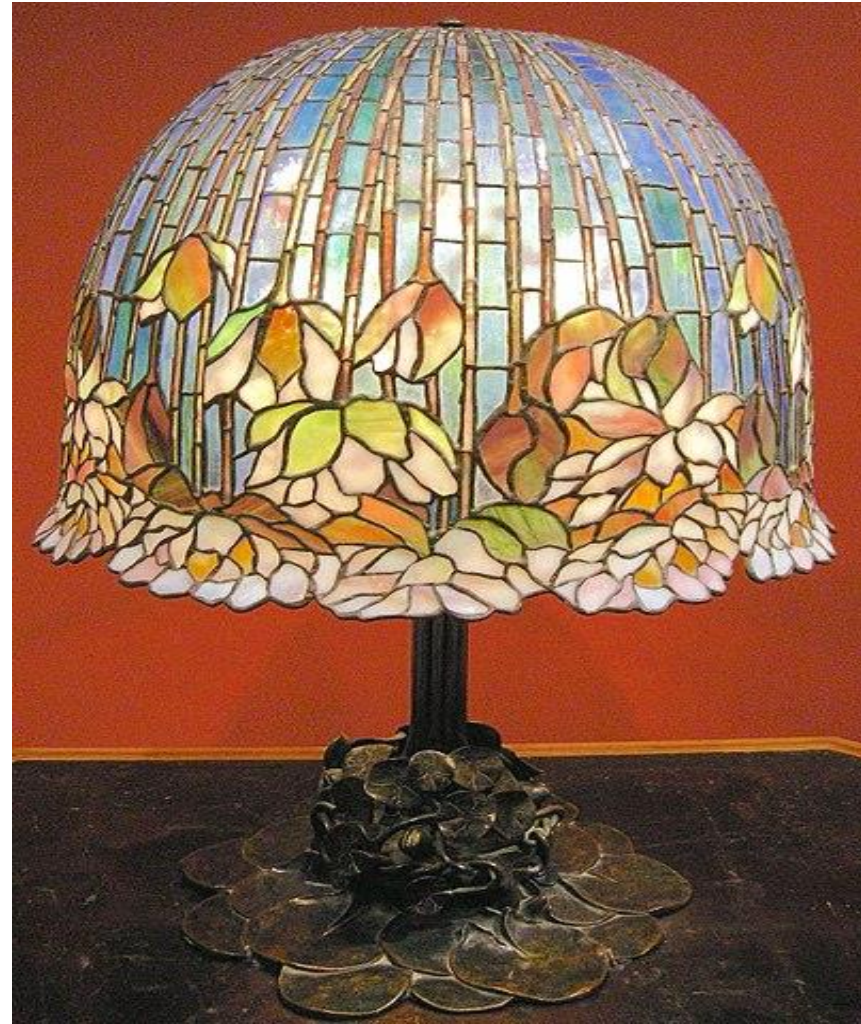


Art Nouveau broke down the traditional distinction between fine arts (e.g. painting and sculpture) and applied arts. It was most widely used in interior design, graphic arts, furniture, glass art, jewellery, metal work and of course, stamps!



It reached its peak at the 1900 Paris international Exposition, which introduced the Art Nouveau work of artists such as Louis Tiffany.

It also appeared in graphic arts in the posters of Alphonse Mucha.



By 1914, with the beginning of the WWI, Art Nouveau was largely exhausted.

It was replaced by Art Deco and then Modernism.



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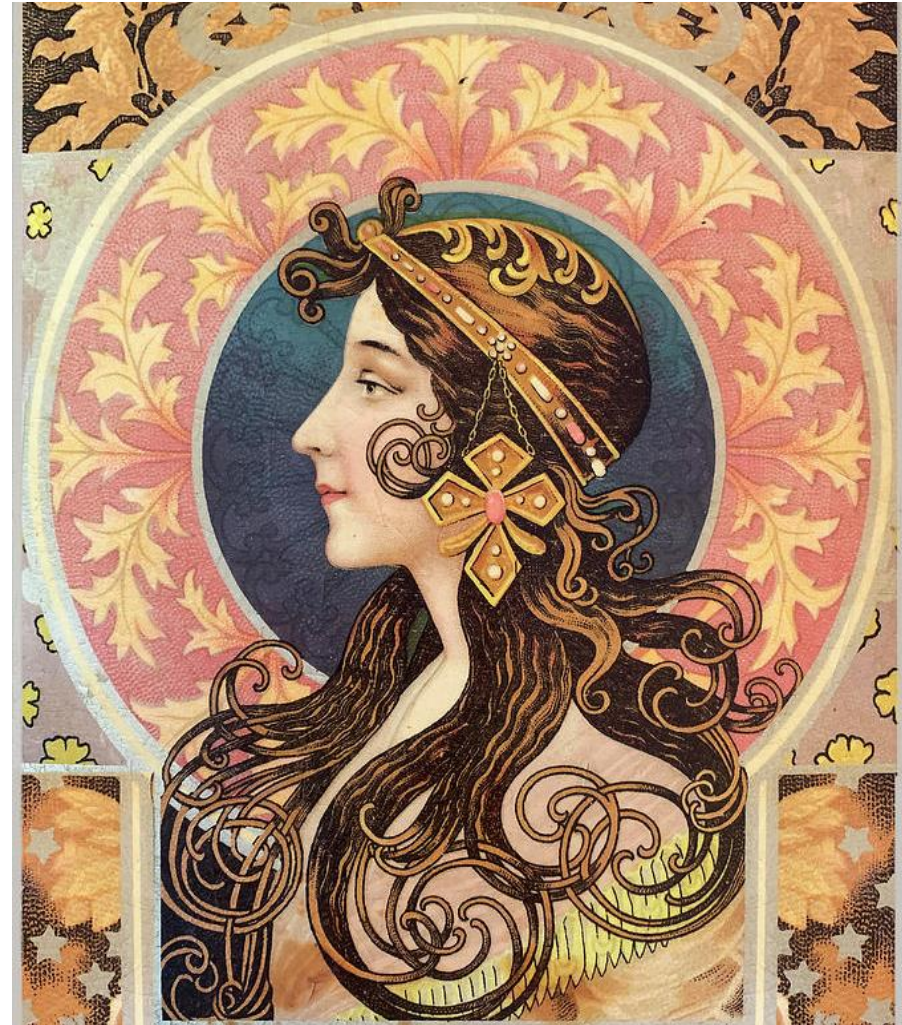
The Czech artist Alphonse Mucha (1860–1939) arrived in Paris in 1888. In 1895, he made a poster for the actress Sarah Bernhardt.

The success of this poster led to a contract to produce posters for six more plays by Bernhardt.



Based on the success of his theater posters, Mucha made posters for a variety of products, ranging from cigarettes and soap to beer biscuits, all featuring an idealized female with an hourglass figure.

Less well known is Alphonse Mucha's work as a stamp designer.



Stamps

October 1918: creation of the Republic of Czechoslovakia. Its government chose Alphonse Mucha to design the first stamps of the new republic.

October 1918 : 10 imperforate stamps (Scott 1-10) depicting Hradcany Castle in Prague. Perforated versions issued later (Scott 13-16, 20).



1919: similar design but with reconfiguration of the inscription “*Posta Cesko-Slovenska*” (Scott 23, 25, 27, 29, 30-34, 36, 38-40).

These stamps were imperforate but perforated versions (41-47, 50, 53) issued later.



1920: Mucha's Hradcany stamps overprinted "SO/1920" for use in Eastern (Cieszyn) Silesia, a disputed area between Czechoslovakia and Poland.

20 imperforate (Eastern Silesia Scott 1-18) and nine perforated stamps (20-30).



1920: First airmail stamps. Hradcany Castle stamps surcharged and overprinted with a monoplane in red, blue or green.

Three issues imperforate (Scott C1-C3); three perforated (C4-C6).



1918: imperforated newspaper stamps portraying a “windhover”.

This design is more in the Mucha style than were the Hradcany Castle stamp designs.



Imperforate special
delivery stamps:
depict two doves in
the elaborate art
nouveau style.

1919: 2h and 5h
(Scott E1-E2)

1920: 10h (Scott E3)



1920: perforated stamps, 80h and 90h (Scott 74-75), depict a Hussite priest holding a chalice.

Stamp design opposed by Czech Catholics: the stamp is supplied to few post offices and is valid for postal use for only 10 months.



CONCLUSION

Six different stamp designs: three display the strong influence of the art nouveau style. Three are based on the history and culture of the Czech people, and less influenced by the art nouveau style.

Died in Prague in 1939.

