

The Art Nouveau Movement and Its Influence on Modern Culture

Hyewon Cho

Korea International School

Abstract

This research paper discusses the impact of the Art Nouveau movement on the evolution of modern art and its wider impact on the development of culture in general. The historical context behind Art Nouveau is outlined in order to allow the reader to understand the movement's origins. The discussion of the goals and style characteristics of the Art Nouveau movement alongside a review of a few of its major artists gives a visual element of identification and appreciation of the art, architecture and design inspired by and created during the Art Nouveau period. More detailed analyses of the relationship the Glasgow Four Art Nouveau movement in Scotland had with the Viennese Secession, and the return of Art Nouveau-inspired design in the 1960's demonstrate the origins and impact of the movement, respectively. The importance of the Art Nouveau movement is underlined by a concluding look into the major art movements influenced by Art Nouveau.

The Art Nouveau Movement and Its Influence on Modern Culture

During the late 19th century, as Europe and America were entering the modern era, a prominent art movement was also developing: Art Nouveau. Many people fail to notice how much art movements affect the world. This paper brings specific attention to Art Nouveau, as it has significantly influenced some aesthetic and other areas still seen in modern society. The influence of Art Nouveau can be regularly spotted in many urban areas. The movement greatly impacted not only aesthetic and artistic aspects of culture but has also had an effect on many people's daily lives.

In the late 19th century, Europe and America were experiencing dramatic changes, both

regions were experiencing the Second Industrial Revolution, where the economies started to rely more on manufacturing and urbanization than agricultural and handicraft culture. The rapid urbanization of cities, the industrialization of all industries, including agriculture, and the rise of mass production was shifting the world towards the modern era. Factories and mechanization began to conquer the American and European landscapes, affecting the way the world worked and looked.

There were many different responses to these fast changes and one of them was Art Nouveau. Art Nouveau as an art movement occurred during the 19th century, it can be seen as some

artists' reactions to the Industrial Revolution. The term "Art Nouveau" stemmed from an art gallery named L'Art Nouveau in Paris, owned by Siegfried Bing. The gallery consisted of many art works with the similar art style as we now know as Art Nouveau. "L'Art Nouveau" means "The New Art" which effectively describes the characteristics of Art Nouveau style. The style became the first international style, with the fin de siècle trends across Europe aligning with and reflecting and influencing each other for the first time.

One of the main goals of Art Nouveau was to raise value within craftsmanship and applied arts. During the industrial revolution, many items, such as furniture, utensils, and home items, were mass produced, therefore poorly made. The mass-produced items were trying to imitate designs from earlier periods of the 18th century, arguably making it seem unattractive. Nonetheless, many people preferred these mass-produced items because they were affordable. With machines, the items were quickly produced with low maintenance therefore fulfilling the demands of customers. Unlike the majority, Art Nouveau artists rejected these mass-produced items since it demeaned the value of craftsmanship and they were generally visually unappealing. Mass production dismisses the time and craftsmanship an item may need to look appealing. Art Nouveau artists believed that practical things could also be beautiful—they valued the applied arts. To combat the rise of mass production, Art Nouveau was created in the hope of conserving the value of handmade

crafts and rejecting the conservative art styles, see Figures 1, 2 and 3.

Figure 1



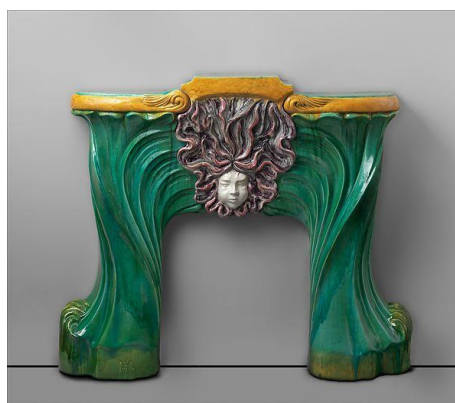
Arm Chair by Henri-Jules-Ferdinand Bellery-Desfontaines (1905)

Figure 2



Coffee pot by Sèvres Manufactory (1900-1904)

Figure 3



Fireplace surround by Jean-Désiré Muller (1900)

The Art Nouveau style is viewed as free and natural as rebelled against the dull and conservative styles created in the past. Many artworks consisted of floral designs as well as women with flowy hair that symbolized nature. The artworks were drawn with organic lines but also incorporated geometric shapes and patterns. They involved bright colors inspired by nature, in contrast to the colorless and strictly formal historical art styles that preceded it.

To an extent, Art Nouveau artists had succeeded in accomplishing their goals as Art Nouveau integrated with people's daily lives during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Practical items such as utensils, furniture and clothing were designed in Art Nouveau styles. The 19th century started to look appealing. Additionally, architectural works were being built in Art Nouveau style, ranging from stairs, columns, and churches.

Many famous sculptures, buildings, and artworks are from the Art Nouveau era. One of the most famous of these is the La Sagrada Familia, a church located in Spain, where Art Nouveau was called Modernisme català "Catalan Modernism." The church's architecture was designed by an Art Nouveau artist, Antoni Gaudí i Cornet, see Figure 4.

Figure 4



La Sagrada Familia by Antonio Gaudí

The church captures both the modern and traditional aspects, including geometric and abstract shapes within the building. The structure takes on a peculiar shape, nothing like any other church's design during the 19th century. This church can be interpreted as one of the most extreme examples of Art Nouveau styles in architecture, as the artist challenged the traditional Romanesque architecture. Romanesque architecture is a traditional style that many 19th century buildings were built to, it can be seen as being based on a rectangular shape with columns.

Antoni Gaudí wanted to challenge the Romanesque architectural style, as he believed it was too conservative therefore, unappealing.

Another example of Art Nouveau styles that were incorporated within architectural works is the entrance to Paris metro stations. The entrances were based a series of threes designs of a green, natural figure, with a natural, flowing and unmistakable typography used for the station names. The 141 stations were designed by architect Hector Guimard. His works could be spotted all around the city of Paris: the metro entrances, the Castel Beranger apartment building, and a number of famous gates, see figure 5.



Abbesses Metro station entrance by Hector Guimard (1899-1905)

However, Art Nouveau was not only seen within architectural works, as there were many Art Nouveau artists working in traditional artistic mediums too. *The Kiss* is a widely known artwork created by Gustav Klimt. Not a lot of people recognize the artwork as an Art Nouveau style. *The Kiss* captures a shimmering and colorful love scene between the two figures. He utilizes many geometric patterns and shapes yet makes the piece seem natural with flowy lines, see Figure 6. This painting is part of his “Golden Phase” in which he created artworks with gold. Gustav Klimt is one of the many artists that helped to shape and define the Art Nouveau movement, and was recognized for this decorative painting that consists of natural lines and expressive human figures.

Art Nouveau as Reaction and Inspiration

The Glasgow Four

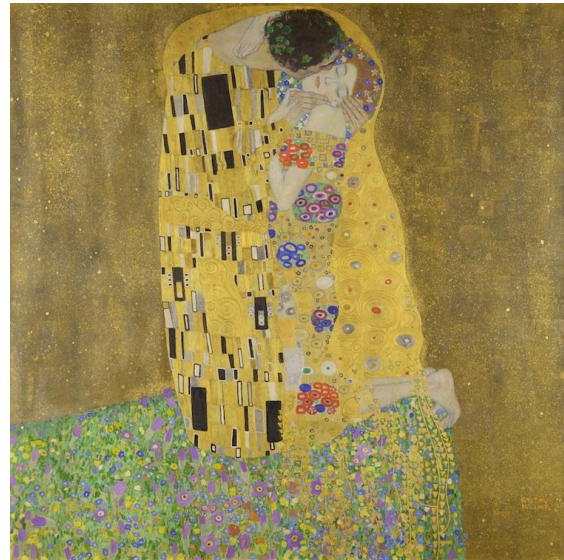
Artists and architects working in the art nouveau style favored the flowing lines inspired by nature and its wild and untethered essence to create a metaphor for the freedom those artists yearned for, and that they believed society should seek, away from the modern mechanization and the traditional expectations of art and aesthetics as well as politics. Sex and sensuality were inherent in the style and symbolized the growing concern over the role of women in society that was still suppressed. Nowhere were these aspects more apparent than in Paris, where the term art nouveau appeared for the first time in the 1880s in the Belgian journal *L'Art Moderne*.

The Bohemian intellectual crowd of the Belle Epoque found its muse in sexually promiscuous actress Sarah Bernhardt, a poster designed by Alphonse Mucha for her play *Gismonda* revolutionized poster and graphic design in 1894 and is seen as a pioneer work of art nouveau. The spectacular style grew to great acclaim around the time of the Exposition Universelle in Paris in 1900, that led to various large-scale building projects and creative endeavors promoting the art nouveau style. Coinciding with the opening of the Paris Metro, the 141 entrances to the underground stations that architect Hector Guimard built on art nouveau principles attracted the Exposition’s visitors’ attention to the city’s brand-new highly advanced public transport system, see Figure 5. In Great Britain, art nouveau was inspired by both the arts and crafts and the aesthetic movements. An advanced state of industrialization had inserted new technology into all areas of everyday life, from agriculture to transport and manufacturing to be later recognized as the Second Industrial Revolution. The international style, or British art nouveau, took direct inspiration from the craftsmanship and knowledge and working of natural materials taught by the arts and crafts designers who had been inspired by William Morris, and also the curvilinear style adopted by the artist Aubrey Beardsley working in aestheticism, himself inspired by Japanese art and design introduced to London by Empirical trade. In Scotland, the architect Charles Rennie Mackintosh and his wife, artist Margaret McDonald teamed up with

her sister Frances and her husband, Herbert McNair, at the Glasgow School of Art. They worked together on posters, metal work and other decorative arts including furniture. They introduced the Glasgow rose into their curvilinear but also long vertical designs with Mackintosh going on to design and build the new Glasgow School of Art from 1896 to 1909. Their work received more recognition on the continent than in Britain, directly influencing Gustav Klimt and the Viennese Secession after being invited to exhibit at the VIII Secession Exhibition in 1900.

In Austria, the vibrant and multi-cultural city of Vienna was growing and evolving as an intellectual and cultural center. The reaction to the speed and impact of the fin de siècle changes there drove artists away from the traditional, conservative styles of art and architecture that they purposefully sought to criticize and reject. Becoming the first time that Austrian art had grown as part of an international style, the art nouveau there was inspired by French, British and Belgian aesthetics and shared many of the founding inspirations including the ideals of the arts and crafts movement and strong notions of social justice. While similarly focusing on materials, craftsmanship and sensuality that included the liberation of women and sex, the Viennese creative minds created the Secession, literally a modernist-thinking group that included the architect Otto Wagner, the painter Gustav Klimt and the designer Josef Hoffman,

see Figure 6.



The Kiss by Gustav Klimt (1907-08)

They called their style Jungdenstil 'Youth Style' and promoted themselves through their own journal, *The Fountain of Youth*, symbolically and practically creating a movement and works that brought in new thinking and new ideas. The Viennese Secession moved away from the curvy art nouveau seen in other locations, to adopt a geometric, grid-like aesthetic that combined the decorative and fine arts.

The Rehabilitated Art Nouveau of the 1960s

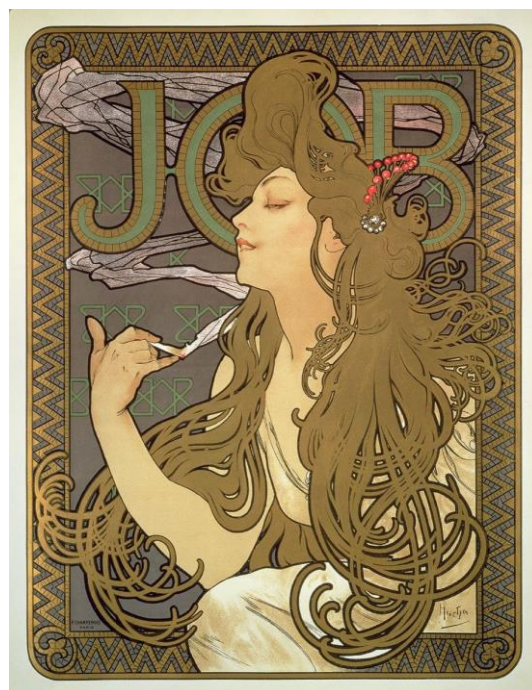
Art Nouveau made a resurgence in the 1960s while America was experiencing great change, similarly to those undergone in the 19th century. The civil rights movement, the Vietnam war, and space race was altering the way American society looked. These changes were not as drastic as those that took place during the industrial revolution and during the reactionary period immediately after that, nonetheless many people in the 60s felt lost. Many people found ways to cope with their confusion through building and

joining communities consisting of people with similar interests. For example, people who like a certain music band or have similar music tastes will get together and essentially form a community. They would do many activities together: visiting concerts, singing music, and collecting band posters. Art Nouveau experiences a resurgence through band posters. Lots of band concerts were held, music ranging from psychedelic, dance, and alternative. Young Americans would join together and attend massive concerts- but concert posters were the only way to attract

audiences therefore, the posters had to be intriguing. No one would attend a concert advertised using a plain grey poster. Poster artists had to be creative and create eye-catching posters. So, the artists would reuse many styles from the past and re-execute it in order to make their posters unique- and Art Nouveau was one of them.

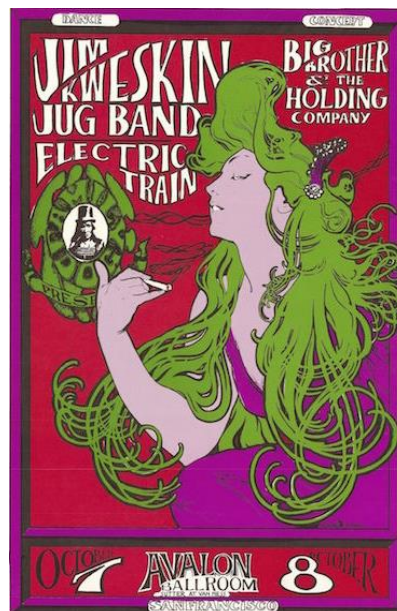
Many 1960s poster artists had easily adapted to the characteristics of Art Nouveau as the posters consisted of flowy patterns, flowers, and feminine symbolism. However, unlike the soft pastel tones the Art Nouveau artworks were composed of, the artist in the 1960s used intense, vibrant colors. The flowy, high-contrast, colored designs became popular in the 1960s and is now known as the psychedelic style. Sometimes artists would directly take Art Nouveau staples but alter the colors. Adding on, the obscure fonts used in the Art Nouveau posters has introduced the art of typography during the 60's, see Figures 7 and 8.

Figure 7



Job cigarette paper advertisement by Alphonse Mucha (1896)

Figure 8



Brother and the Holding Company Poster by Stanley Mouse and Alton Kelley (1966)

The resurgence of Art Nouveau had greatly impacted the 1960's American culture, as Art Nouveau could be found in many items made

during the 1960's such as clothing, furniture, and posters. The Art Nouveau style heavily influenced the hippy aesthetic during the 1960's.

Conclusion

By 1910, art nouveau was already being seen as a decadent and unwanted thing of the past, largely due to the extremely expensive interior and decorative creations that were used to popularize the style. Furniture, glassware and jewelry that could only be reproduced as accessible prices if mass production were used meant going against the practitioners' ideals and principles.

Egon Schiele, a Viennese student of Klimt's, turned toward expressionism. The elaborate decoration and extravagance of the architecture was also soon despised as the ornamentation in general was categorized as symbolizing degenerate thinking or behavior. Adolf Loos took Viennese architecture back to much straighter, more conservative lines, having learned and appreciated a much more practical approach to design in the US.

Despite lasting for a relatively short period of time, Art Nouveau has greatly influenced many other art movements that followed after its vanishment, as the movement created a transitioning bridge between Neoclassicism—arts depicting ancient Greece and Rome—and modernism. The Bauhaus was one of the most heavily influenced art movements, which is one of the iconic movements that defines modernism.

Art Nouveau encouraged applied arts within society as it helped to create practical items with

aesthetically extraordinary design that which also constructed new roles for artists to be able to branch out and become creative designers. Art Nouveau also redefined and gave value to the applied arts. The aesthetic qualities characteristic of art nouveau can be seen in many of today's everyday items, from chairs, doorknobs, jewelry, cups, and graphic design such as book covers and record albums.

Seen at the time as “a new art for a new century” that also meant a new time and a move towards modernity, art nouveau was not that well respected during its time and suffered a fairly severe fate. Currently, indeed since the revival seen in the 1960s, the arts and cultural sectors have paid much more attention to art nouveau and interest in it and its origins and impact continues to grow.

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