

# Art Nouveau: A New Style for a New Culture

In the latter part of the nineteenth century, an entire generation of designers in Europe believed that the urban world fostered by the Industrial Revolution lacked beauty. These artists shared William Morris's stated desire to make the mundane everyday world a place of aesthetic accomplishment and to unify the different design arts, including graphic design, using a set of basic stylistic principles. However, while Morris had looked to the past in his embrace of historicist styles, it was the consensus of other artists that they could, and should, create new styles for the industrial world in which they lived. Hence, Art Nouveau, or "New Art," became an umbrella term to designate the various design movements of the late nineteenth century in Europe and the United States. Curiously, the French Art Nouveau, which came into general use in the 1890s, was most popular with English speakers, while the French often tended toward the exotic-sounding English translation New Art.

Art Nouveau designers sought to devise a range of styles that were not directly based on historical revivals, but rather created a fresh visual vocabulary that celebrated the vibrant pulse of urban life. As we will see, Art Nouveau is used to refer broadly to a number of disparate design movements from this era, as well as in a more narrow sense to delineate a specific set of stylistic criteria—meaning that not all Art Nouveau design, in a chronological sense, features an Art Nouveau style.

## FRENCH ART NOUVEAU

### Jules Chéret

The most influential poster designer of the later nineteenth century was Jules Chéret (1836–1932). A French artist, the son of

a typesetter, Chéret worked in London as a young man, eventually settling in Paris in the 1860s. Technically innovative as well as artistically gifted, he is credited with dramatically enhancing the recognition of chromolithography, which had an uncertain reputation at the time (see Chapter 1). After establishing a firm in 1866 through which to pursue lithographic printing (he was convinced that color lithography would soon replace letterpress printing), Chéret worked out a process that allowed him to create brightly colorful posters with a wide range of hue, value, and intensity.

There are two major stylistic streams in the poster art of Chéret; one is the influence of Japanese art, while the other is the French eighteenth-century style called Rococo. Chéret's use of the Rococo style is quite specific to the condition of French society in the 1870s. Having suffered a stinging defeat in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–1871, followed by a precipitous decline in industrial production relative to other European powers, the French people felt strongly that their traditional leadership in the design arts had to be maintained. Chéret accordingly invoked a style that was uniquely French, and celebrated the national achievements of a society that was experiencing a wave of self-doubt and introspection. The Rococo style was famous as the first modern design movement that had unified all of the decorative as well as the fine arts in dynamic compositions that featured brilliant colorist atmospheres. For example, the painting *The Rising of the Sun* (1753; see fig. 2.2, page 56), by François Boucher (1703–1770), shows the French king Louis XV and his mistress, Madame de Pompadour, amid a swirling atmosphere of color and light. In addition, Rococo subject matter relied on the same sort of playful sensuality that was a popular part of the new

opposite: 2.2 François Boucher,  
*The Rising of the Sun*, 1753.  
Oil on canvas, relined,  
10 ft 4 in × 8 ft 6 in (3.1 × 2.6 m).  
The Wallace Collection, London.

2.3 Jules Chéret,  
*La Loïe Fuller*, 1893. Poster.  
Color lithograph, 47 × 32½ in  
(119.3 × 83.2 cm).



cabaret culture in Paris. Just as Boucher's picture had shocked many people in 1753 with its nudity, so the frank sexuality of many Art Nouveau posters scandalized the modern Parisian public. Chéret's poster *Folies Bergère—Fleur de Lotus* (1893; fig. 2.1, see page 54) perfectly captures, while updating, the sexual energy of Rococo art. This poster advertised a ballet and pantomime—popular entertainment at the Folies Bergère, Paris's most famous cabaret, which had been founded in 1869. Chéret's use of the Rococo is not historicist in the manner of William Morris; rather, he has reengineered the style by combining it with his own innovations.

In addition, Chéret employed an ephemeral, industrial medium, the mass-produced chromolithograph, which is a far cry from Morris's handcrafted use of age-old materials.

Chéret's poster art rose in prominence at the same time as the popular theater, which was a source of many designers' commissions. Many of his most famous images feature star performers from the world of dance, music, and theatrical productions. In a poster that displays Chéret's dramatic Rococo style, the popular American dancer Loïe Fuller (1862–1928) spins on the stage as her silk garments shimmer in a rainbow of color (1893; fig. 2.3). Born near



2.4 Jules Chéret, *Les Girard*, 1879. Poster. Color lithograph, 22½ × 17 in (57.6 × 43.1 cm). Acquired by Exchange. 122.1968. Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York.

Chicago, Fuller became a dance sensation in Paris in the 1890s through a combination of innovative techniques, such as the integration of natural movements and improvisation with more formal dance, as well as her startling use of colorful stage lighting. Here, Chéret has found the performer whose aesthetic perfectly matches his own dynamic compositions and profuse colorism. It is easy to see how the colorful, kinetic style of Chéret's Rococo posters, such as *La Loïe Fuller*, may have also been inspired by the American circus posters he had seen while living in England. The difference, of course, lies in the skill with which Chéret created his composition, as American circus posters appear dazzling yet artistically undernourished.

Chéret's *Les Girard* (1879; fig. 2.4), a poster advertising yet another dance performance at the Folies Bergère, is an excellent example of his embrace of the Japanese style that was sweeping through France. The planes of even color, set apart by crisp contour lines, as well as the two-dimensional character of the overall work, are all elements derived from the style of *Ukiyo-e* woodblock prints. In addition to the Japanese influence, *Les Girard* also demonstrates other stylistic attributes of the new art of graphic design. Chéret has expertly intertwined the legs of the dancers with the lettering on the poster. Not only are the text and image integrated in this spatial sense, but because there is no need to use predesigned type in a chromolithograph, Chéret was free to devise his own lettering by hand. Therefore, the exuberant forms of the letters mimic the frenetic movement of the dancing figures. The integration of text and image produces a key contrast with Victorian posters, as in the Astley's Circus poster (see fig. 1.1; Chapter 1, page 28), where the lettering and the picture of the horse occupy different zones and share little in the way of shape or structure. It is also significant that Chéret minimized the amount of text in his posters, creating in its place an overall feeling of *jouissance*, or joyfulness, which captures the excitement of a live performance.

The high-profile success of Chéret, a designer who created over 1,000 original compositions during his career, accounting for literally millions of mass-produced posters, helped to elevate the status of the poster designer during the last two decades of the century. In 1890, he was granted two tributes: first, a solo exhibition of his posters was arranged in Paris; second, he was accorded one of the highest awards of the French state, becoming a chevalier of the Legion of Honor (his rank later increased to that of grand officer). Coming on the heels of the first group exhibition of modern posters (in 1884), and the first French book on poster art (in 1886), Chéret's recognition announced to Europe that the art of the poster had arrived.

Chéret's entrepreneurial skills were almost as important as his artistic ones in igniting and fueling the public's appetite for posters. One of his most significant projects in terms of popularizing the art of the poster was the series of lithographs called *Les Maîtres de l'Affiche* ("Masters of the Poster"), which was published in Paris between 1896 and 1900. *Les Maîtres de l'Affiche* featured some new work but was focused mainly on small-format reprints of notable posters, reaching a total of 256 plates. The plates were published by the printing house Imprimerie Chaix, which had been allied with Chéret's workshop since 1881. Each bore a special seal based on a design by Chéret, indicating his central role in the series.

Each month for the five years that *Les Maîtres de l'Affiche* was in production, subscribers received a set of 4 reprints, plus

an additional 16 special plates made up of brand-new images. Chéret, as director of the project, featured his own work 67 times in the series, including 7 of the 16 new commissions. Other artists in the series included Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, Alphonse Mucha, Théophile Steinlen, the Beggarstoffs, and Eugène Grasset—a veritable pantheon of top poster designers. *Les Maîtres de l'Affiche* had definite advantages for collectors at the height of the "poster craze" of the 1890s because they measured 11½ × 15¾ inches (29 × 40 cm), a format that was much more easily displayed in a home than the massive posters used on outdoor hoardings. The series also made use of high-quality inks and papers, in contrast to the cheap newsprint and inferior inks used for the ephemeral products posted out on the street. It should be noted that a number of the reproductions of posters in this chapter are not of the originals, but are from *Les Maîtres de l'Affiche*.

Imprimerie Chaix also published a two-volume set of 84 lithographic reprints in a slightly smaller format entitled *Les Affiches Illustrées* ("Illustrated Posters"), featuring many of the same posters as the larger series. Aimed at poster collectors, *Les Affiches Illustrées* and *Les Maîtres de l'Affiche* also played important roles in spreading the Art Nouveau style among artists in that these easily portable plates made their way across Europe and to the United States. Still, some collectors sought out the large-scale originals, and for that market dealers such as Edmond Sagot would produce overruns by popular artists such as Toulouse-Lautrec so that they could sell them direct to the collecting public.

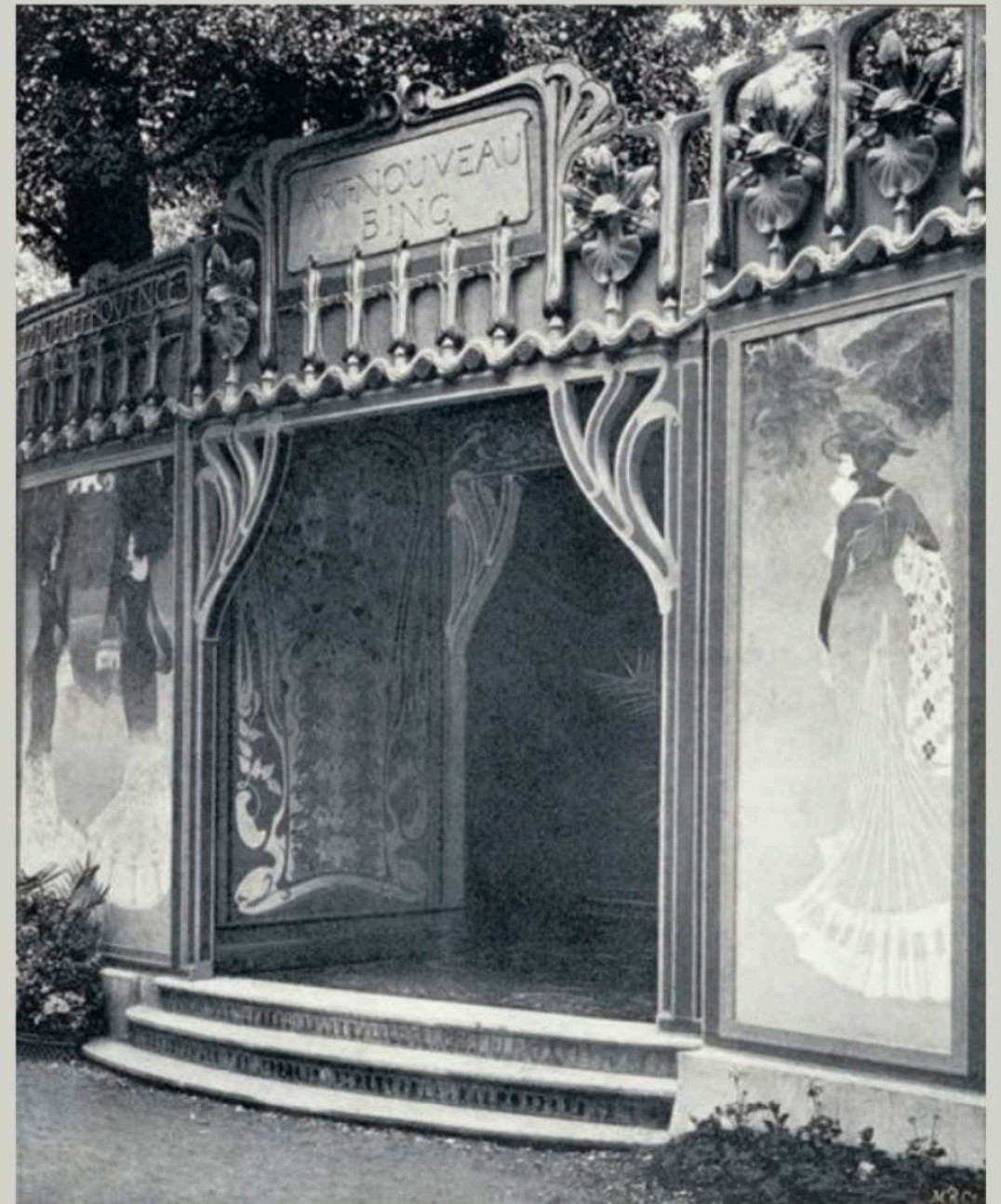
### Leonetto Cappiello

Popular magazines also served a significant role in bringing new graphic art to the attention of the public. One of the most famous, *Le Rire*, was a satirical journal with strong political views, established by Félix Juven in 1894. It also featured thousands of works by key poster designers. The front and back covers as well as an occasional centerpiece, which were printed in color, became important sites for progressive designers to display their work. In its early years, prominent artists including Toulouse-Lautrec contributed several lithographs to the publication. *Le Rire* was also responsible for igniting the careers of young artists, as was the case with the Italian caricaturist Leonetto Cappiello (1875–1942), who moved to Paris from Italy in 1898. Noticing the steady demand for caricatures of famous people at *Le Rire*, Cappiello appealed to a fellow Italian, the celebrity composer Giacomo Puccini (1858–1924), to model for him. The drawing was a success and Cappiello soon found steady work with a variety of publications. He later made some of his most popular caricatures for Alexandre Natanson, publisher of the edgy literary journal *La Revue Blanche*, who commissioned Cappiello to draw a series of images of actresses, including the most famous actress in Europe, Sarah Bernhardt (1844–1923). Called *Nos Actrices* ("Our Actresses"), this enterprising series added to the artist's own fame. Cappiello's work as a caricaturist incidentally led to a request for an advertisement, whereupon he embarked on a new and extremely lucrative career as a designer of commercial posters.

Over four decades, Cappiello produced over 1,000 individual designs, rivaling even Chéret in his combination of commercial savvy and memorable aesthetic invention. Cappiello's mature style mixed his own gift for caricature, the influence of Toulouse-Lautrec's love of the bizarre, **Japonisme**, and



2.5 Kitagawa Utamaro, *Young Woman with Black Teeth Examining her Features in a Mirror*, from the series *Ten Facial Types of Women*, c. 1792–93. Woodblock print, 14 $\frac{5}{8}$  × 9 $\frac{5}{8}$  in (36.5 × 24.6 cm). The British Museum, London.



2.6 Siegfried Bing, *L'Art Nouveau Bing*, Exposition Universelle, Paris, 1900. Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

## JAPANESE PRINTS

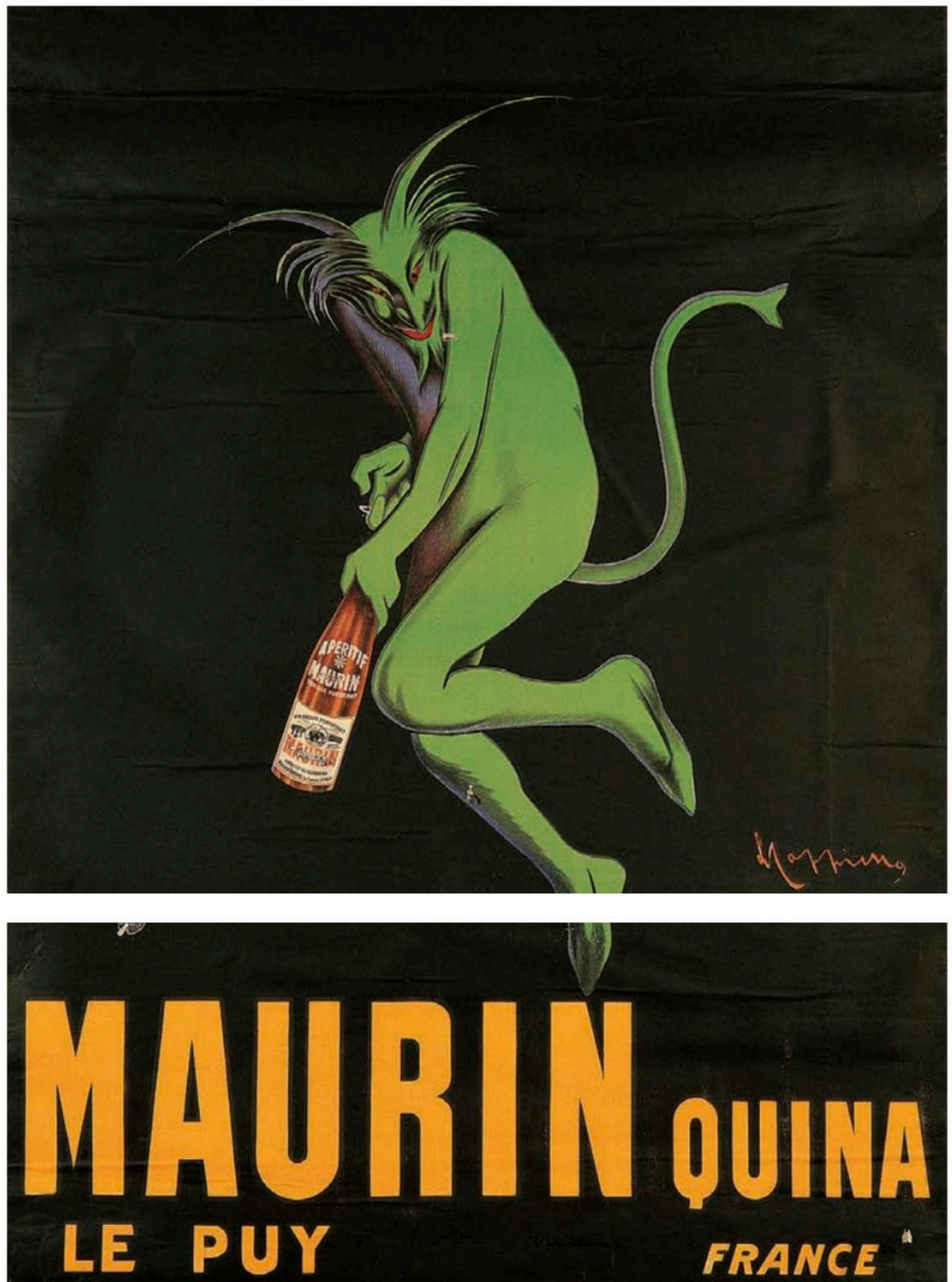
During the late nineteenth century, the art of Japanese woodblock prints had an enormous impact on European artists, including graphic designers. After Japanese trade with the West increased in the 1850s because of American military threats, an influx of Japanese art, especially a type of mass-produced commercial woodblock print called *Ukiyo-e*, or “floating world,” caught the attention of the French art world. The name “floating world” was a euphemism for scenes set in the Yoshiwara district of Tokyo, where many commercial entertainments, including popular theater and dance, as well as prostitution, were allowed by the authorities to flourish.

Stylistically speaking, the bold passages of flat color arranged in asymmetrical compositions, which lack any three-dimensional perspective spaces, combined with fresh, crisp linear elements, were all adopted by European graphic designers. The manner in which Japanese artists rendered the figure—relying on black contour lines, which they combined with short, fluid strokes to produce details in the face—was also widely copied in France. This Asian influence led many European artists to reject the three-dimensional shading with light and dark, called modeling, which had been a fundamental part of European draftsmanship since the Renaissance.

The print illustrated here of a woman (*fig. 2.5*) displays many of the attributes of Japanese style, creating an overall sense of flat, decorative beauty. It is important to recognize Japanese influences not just in the style but also in the subject matter of Art Nouveau graphic design. Many *Ukiyo-e* prints highlighted

the intoxicating atmosphere of Tokyo’s Yoshiwara district and the glamorous women who worked there. The print shown here is an example of *Bijin-ga*, a specialty of Utamaro (1753–1806) that featured idealized pictures of beautiful women. The young beauty here (from the series *Ten Facial Types of Women*) is admiring her dyed black teeth; this was a Japanese fashion that had its roots in aristocratic culture and had become popular among the general population. Posters such as *Fleur de Lotus* and *Loïe Fuller* (see *figs. 2.2, 2.3*; pages 56–57), which advertise the events held in the pleasure-seeking quarters of Paris, often attempt to emulate the sensual tone of *Bijin-ga* prints.

Japanese art was widely recognized in France because of its prominent place at three Paris world’s fairs—in 1867, 1878, and 1900—and through the efforts of private art dealers such as Siegfried Bing (1838–1905). While Bing showcased his collection of Japanese art at the 1900 Exposition Universelle (*fig. 2.6*), as early as 1875 he had opened the first of a succession of decorative arts galleries that became an intrinsic part of the frenzied collection of Japanese art, a phenomenon called Japonisme, as well as the Art Nouveau design movement that arose under its influence. In 1895, Bing named his new Parisian gallery the Maison de l’Art Nouveau, creating a showplace where his name became synonymous with the term “Art Nouveau.” Bing held a number of exhibitions of Japanese prints during this period, the most notable in 1889 and 1893. As the name of Bing’s gallery makes clear, the Japanese influence was one of the fundamental stylistic elements of the Art Nouveau movement.



2.7 Leonetto Cappiello, *Maurin Quina*, 1906. Poster. Color lithograph. Museum für Gestaltung, Zurich.

a dash of Chéret’s kinetic colorism into a striking new synthesis. For example, Cappiello’s 1906 lithograph for Maurin Quina features a dynamically moving green devil (fig. 2.7), which serves as a complement to, or even sardonic commentary on, the ubiquitous, luscious young women posing as allegorical fairies that dominated the market for aperitif posters. *Maurin Quina* also displays Cappiello’s ahead-of-its-time technique of simplifying the commercial message to its essentials—a single, irresistible image matched only with the name of the product.

### Alphonse Mucha

Alphonse Mucha (1860–1939), another expatriate, moved to Paris from Czechoslovakia in 1887, and built his career in posters

because of a bit of luck that tied him to the actress Sarah Bernhardt. “The Divine Sarah,” as she was called, was renowned for her “golden bell” of a voice, as well as her charisma and patriotism. By 1880, she had developed an unparalleled international reputation, and she eventually toured the world as a theatrical superstar. On Christmas Eve 1894, Mucha found himself alone as the junior employee of a French print shop when Bernhardt submitted a rush order for a new poster of herself in the guise of Gismonda, a title role written for her by the dramatist Victorien Sardou (1831–1908). With this first acclaimed poster (see fig. 2.8; page 62), Mucha developed his signature style that featured an elongated figure amid a mesmerizing field of decorative flat patterns. With more muted color than Chéret, Mucha concentrated on



2.8 Alphonse Mucha, *Gismonda* (Sarah Bernhardt), 1894. Portfolio reproduction from *Les Maîtres de l’Affiche*, 18 $\frac{1}{8}$  × 13 $\frac{3}{8}$  in (48 × 34 cm).



2.9 Alphonse Mucha, *Bières de la Meuse*, 1897. Portfolio reproduction from *Les Maîtres de l’Affiche*, 18 $\frac{1}{8}$  × 13 $\frac{3}{8}$  in (48 × 34 cm).

the curvilinear rhythm of contour lines, particularly where they appear in the figure’s hair and in the rich floral decoration that fills in Bernhardt’s opulent costume as well as any empty space in the composition. The often geometric, repetitive patterns used in posters during the Art Nouveau movement are known as *arabesques*, although these patterns usually have at best only a distant relationship to the artworks of the Arab culture that inspired the term. Bernhardt admired this first poster, and, always aware of the importance of self-promotion, recognized that Mucha’s grasp of Art Nouveau decorative glamour, as well as his ability to draw attention to her luxuriant reddish hair, was a perfect vehicle for her public image. After several more successful posters, in 1895 she hired Mucha to design not only more posters but also sets, costumes, and jewelry for her shows.

Mucha’s advertisement for *Bières de la Meuse* (1897; fig. 2.9) shows a young woman displaying the idealized beauty and open sexuality that became the artist’s trademark. An icon of *jouissance*,

her image is one of the earliest examples of a favorite theme of advertising: the implicit promise of sexual availability that will be awarded to the male purchaser of a product. As she grasps a frothy glass of beer, the dense floral elements around her are made up of barley and hops. Here Mucha has designed hand-drawn letters whose curving rhythm matches the lines of the figure as well as the overall composition. The young woman’s hair depicted in the lower right quadrant has the undulating form that became known as a basic building block of *le style Mucha*, a synonym for Art Nouveau.

An essential principle of the Art Nouveau movement was the belief that the New Art must consist of a style that could be applied in all situations, and would not be unique to any one type of design. It was hoped that this type of unifying stylistic coherence would serve to tie together visually an otherwise chaotic urban environment. For this reason, it is important to recognize the ties between Art Nouveau graphics and other art

## ABSINTHE, THE GREEN FAIRY

*The poison that spills from your eyes*

*Your green eyes*

*Lakes where my soul trembles*

*And is turned upside down.*



2.10 Henri Privat-Livemont, *Absinthe Robette*, 1896. Portfolio reproduction from *Les Maîtres de l’Affiche*, 18 $\frac{3}{8}$  x 13 $\frac{3}{8}$  in (48 x 34 cm).

These words by the French poet Charles Baudelaire (1821–1867) celebrate absinthe, the alcoholic drink of choice for many denizens of Paris’s café culture. First marketed commercially in 1797 by Henry-Louis Pernod, absinthe combined a high concentration of alcohol with extract of wormwood as well as a variety of other, often aromatic, ingredients. Drinking absinthe was an art in itself, as water was strained into the drink through a sugarcube supported by a spoon. Because of the large, competitive market for serving alcoholic drinks, at a time when there were over 27,000 cafés in Paris alone, many posters of this period served to advertise the liquor, and it was an important element of the glamorous, decadent culture of the Belle Époque. By the late nineteenth century, it was apparent that the wormwood in absinthe had a narcotic effect that was highly addictive, and could also lead to seizures, hallucinations, and psychotic episodes. For this reason, absinthe played a role in both the ecstatic highs and the dreary low moments of many people’s lives. Artists including Henri de

Toulouse-Lautrec and Vincent van Gogh both became absinthe addicts. Traditional absinthe was banned in most European countries by 1920.

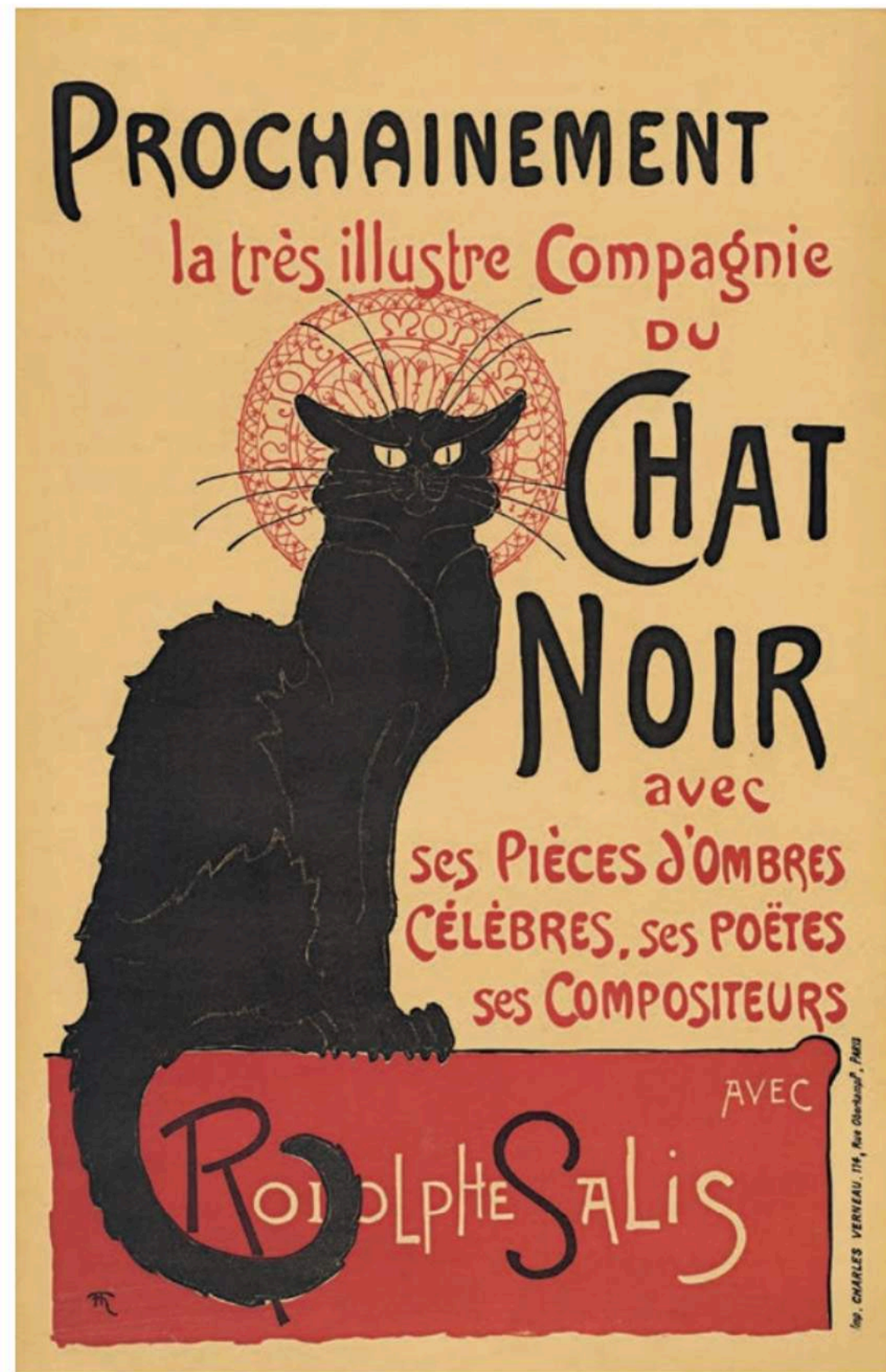
An advertisement for the drink, the poster *Absinthe Robette* (1896; *fig. 2.10*), by the Belgian artist Henri Privat-Livemont (1861–1936), displays the expressive **organic form**, curvilinear rhythm, and sensual atmosphere that are synonymous with Art Nouveau. Note that Privat-Livemont’s use of what is essentially an allegorical figure is quite traditional, tying the art of commercial graphic design to the rarefied world of the fine arts while at the same time proffering a powerful sexual fantasy. The color in the poster, a subtle element with slight gradations for which Privat-Livemont became justly famous, is derived from the color of the absinthe that it serves to ennoble.

The evocative sensuality and ethereal atmosphere that pervade *Absinthe Robette* also show the influence of the French Symbolist movement (see page 64).





2.11 Hector Guimard, Métro Entrance, 1899.



2.12 Théophile Steinlen, *Cabaret du Chat Noir*, 1896. Poster. Purchased for the Virginia and Ira Jackson Collection, 2014.100.1. National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.

forms, for it is only in this broader context that the aims of the artists involved can be made manifest. Outside the graphic design field, the work of architects provides some of the finest examples of the Art Nouveau movement. Analogous to the lithographic poster in that they were designed as part of a mass-produced series of works that beautified the streets of Paris, the Métro stations created around 1899 by Hector Guimard (1867–1942) provide an outstanding example of how the stylistic principles of Art Nouveau could thrive in different media (fig. 2.11). The undulating forms, **whiplash curves**, and exuberant floral motifs of Guimard's station entrances exude the same sort of sensuous elegance that Mucha had captured in the medium of the poster. The tendrils of the plants seem to have a life of their own as they wrap themselves round the iron framework, enveloping it in a dense web of abstract design.

### Sensuality and Symbolism

Centered on a group of poets that included Stéphane Mallarmé (1842–1898), the Symbolists advocated art forms that tantalized the mind and tempted the senses. One of Mallarmé's most famous

experimental works, "L'Après-midi d'un Faun," is loosely based on the amorous adventures of the Greek god Pan. Mallarmé produced a dreamlike work in which it is never quite clear whether events that take place are real or imagined. At one point the lustful god questions, "Was it a dream I loved?" Pan's pursuit of desirable nymphs, minor forest deities, serves as an ambiguous framework for the poem. The many young beauties that appear in contemporary posters wearing revealing, diaphanous drapery are suggestive of the Symbolists' influence on visual culture. These poets theorized an "art for art's sake," in which the aesthetic pleasure of the work is an end in itself, irrespective of any moral lesson or uplifting message. Symbolists also sought inspiration in a veritable smorgasbord of esoteric religious thought, including Theosophy, Rosicrucianism, and other nascent mystical beliefs. In contrast to many artists and designers who found much to celebrate in the new urban spaces of Europe, the Symbolists are an example of a flight from modern life, an escape into a dreamy world of visionary nuances that was in many ways prefigured by Victorian Romanticism.

The Symbolists decried the use of literal description in poetry and, by extension, all of the arts. Mallarmé famously



2.13 Théophile Steinlen, *La Rue: Affiches Charles Verneau*, 1896. Poster for the printer Charles Verneau, 93 $\frac{1}{8}$  x 118 $\frac{1}{8}$  in (236.5 x 300 cm).

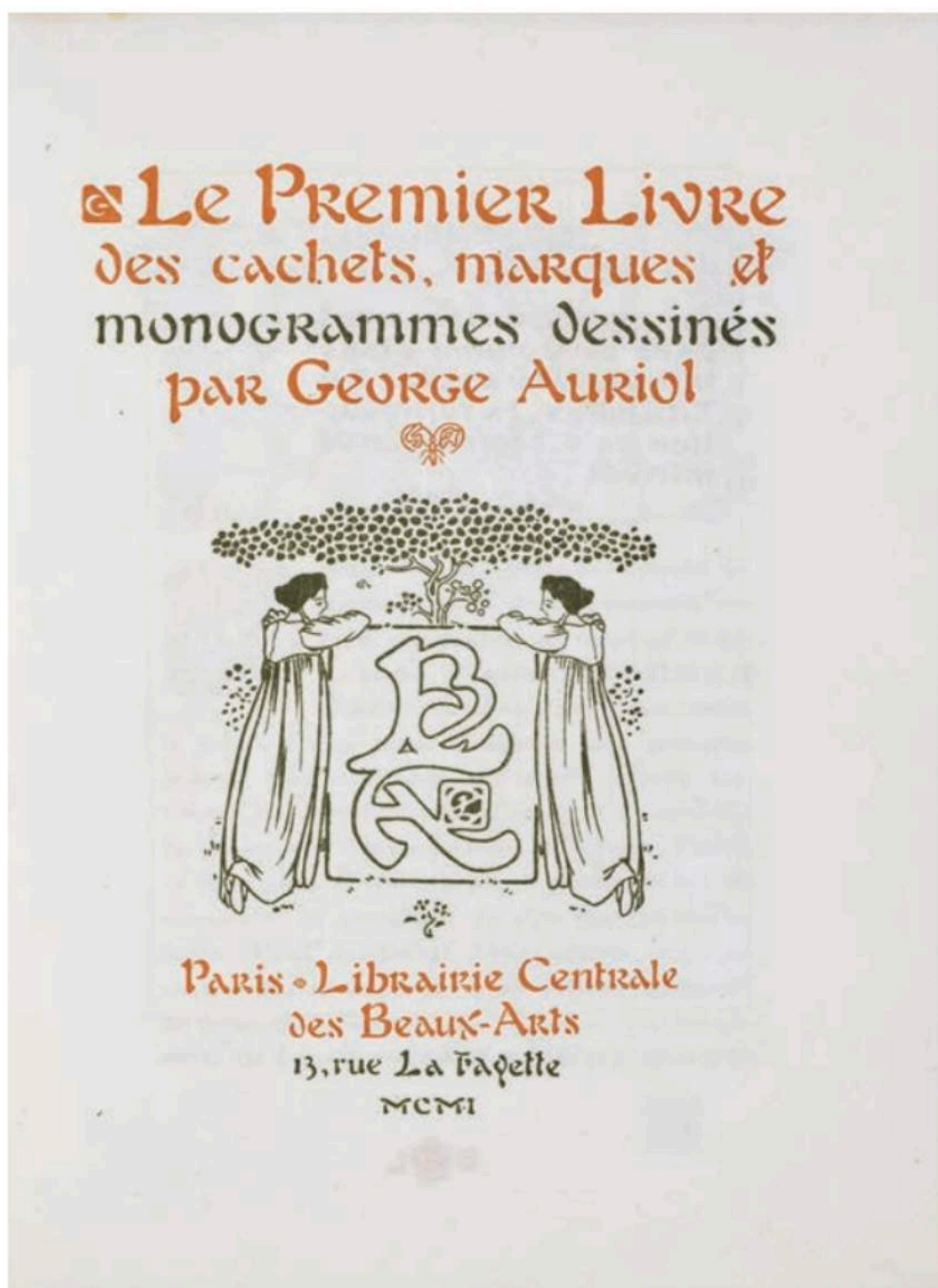
wrote, “To name an object, that is to suppress three-quarters of the enjoyment of the poem ... to suggest it, that is the dream.” In place of exposition, the Symbolists advocated artworks that evoked without describing, replacing clear narrative with subjective feeling and imaginative flights of fancy. It is clear that the unfocused, atmospheric imagery typical of Symbolist poetry influenced Privat-Livemont’s poster, in which a fantasy beauty inhabits an undefined space.

Despite the strong currents of nationalism that racked Europe during the Belle Époque, one of the French Symbolists’ great heroes was the German composer Richard Wagner (1813–1883), and in 1885 the Symbolists inaugurated a journal in Paris devoted to his work, called the *Revue Wagnérienne*. The Symbolists admired Wagner’s musical dramatizations of past worlds, full of mythic heroes who confront the mysteries of existence. They also sought to explore Wagner’s commitment to a synthesis of the arts, whereby a common aesthetic feeling would unite disparate media. The sinuous designs that pervade Art Nouveau works across many media are indicative of this concern with creating a holistic style for all of the arts.

### Théophile Steinlen

The posters of Théophile Steinlen (1859–1923) contrast sharply with the dense, decorative elegance of Privat-Livemont or Mucha. Instead, Steinlen’s posters, such as *Cabaret du Chat Noir* (1896; fig. 2.12), feature the bold simplicity of the Japanese print. Le Chat Noir was one of the first cabarets in Montmartre, the burgeoning entertainment district on the northern outskirts of Paris that became the center of modern social life in the city. Established in 1881, Le Chat Noir was also the first establishment to provide its customers with musical entertainment, something that would become a staple of Parisian nightlife of the 1890s. The rise of popular entertainment of this sort, often with sexual overtones as well as a great deal of actual prostitution, ties the culture of the city to the one depicted in Japanese prints.

Steinlen’s advertisement for the printer Charles Verneau, *La Rue* (1896; fig. 2.13), provides an excellent example of how some artists and critics hoped that the art of the poster would enliven the often grim streets of urban Paris. This movement, called *art à la rue* (“art on the streets”), took up the cause of everyday working people espoused by William Morris, and, like Morris, Steinlen



2.14 George Auriol, Auriol typeface, from *Le premier livre des cachets, marques et monogrammes*, 1901. The British Library, London.



2.15 Moulin Rouge, c. 1900. Photograph.

opposite: 2.16 Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, *La Goulue*, 1891. Lithograph in black, yellow, red, and blue on three sheets of tan woven paper, image  $74\frac{3}{8} \times 45\frac{1}{2}$  in (189 × 115.7 cm); sheet  $74\frac{3}{4} \times 45\frac{7}{8}$  in (191 × 117 cm). Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

believed that the design arts could have more of an impact on society than simple beautification. The architect Frantz Jourdain (1847–1935), who wrote frequently on the subject, asserted that accessible artworks on the street, especially posters, could bring art to ordinary people and uplift their aesthetic, as well as moral, taste. Like many thinkers of this era, Jourdain believed that a rise in aesthetic knowledge would naturally lead to more important changes in society, which would bring about a better life for working people. *La Rue* shows a busy crowd streaming by a wall of colorful posters, exemplifying the hope that the urban environment could be shaped so as to make it more livable for the common people. It is apparent that the theory behind *art à la rue* is well intentioned, although it is also somewhat unrealistic in its faith that the design arts can spur dramatic social changes, as well as rather patronizing in its attitude toward working people. However, in later chapters we will see a continuation of this belief in the design arts' ability to act as a catalyst for social change.

The Art Nouveau movement engendered some stylish new type designs. The typeface called Auriol was created in 1901 by George Auriol (pseudonym of Jean-Georges Huyot, 1863–1938) and released by the G. Peignot & Sons foundry (fig. 2.14). This type combines elements derived from Asian calligraphic scripts, such as the gestural flourishes and the variable thickness of each line, with the languid elegance of the Art Nouveau.

### Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec

The center of Paris's decadent nightlife in the 1890s was the previously rural district of Montmartre. Free of city taxes as well as of the watchful eyes of the authorities, Montmartre became known for its more than 100 "café concerts," venues combining nightclub, theater, dancehall, and bar, some of the most famous of which were located in former farm buildings. Two of the most notable clubs, the Moulin Rouge (opened 1889) and the Moulin de la Galette (opened 1874) were distinguished by the renovated windmills that were their most recognizable feature (fig. 2.15). At the Moulin Rouge, the artist and designer Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec (1864–1901) became something of a fixture, spending countless evenings drinking absinthe, sketching, and socializing with the rest of the clientele. Toulouse-Lautrec had an unusual background for an artist as he was a member of the French aristocracy, although he had been excluded from upper-class society because of stunted legs, the result of a series of accidents he had suffered as a child. He found comfort in the more marginal social whirl of Montmartre, where bourgeois men consorted with their mistresses and prostitutes.

Each night at the Moulin Rouge, a frisson of sexual excitement was provided by the entertaining spectacles as well as the members of the demimonde, young women who supported themselves by becoming the lovers of wealthy men. Toulouse-Lautrec captured this atmosphere in posters such as *La Goulue* (1891; fig. 2.16), which shows the dancer and performer Louise Weber (1866–1929), who called herself La Goulue ("the Glutton") because of her enormous alcohol intake. Weber was one of the performers who made the cancan, a dance during which high-kicking women exposed their undergarments (or even more) to the spectators, an enduring motif of Parisian nightlife. In the poster, Weber is dancing with her partner Jacques Renaudin (1843–1907), whose rubbery joints had earned him the nickname "Valentin the Boneless."

**M** **MOULIN ROUGE** **CONCERT**  
**MOULIN ROUGE** **BAL**  
**MOULIN ROUGE** **TOUS LES SOIRS**  
**LA GOULUE**



TOUS LES SOIRS

**MOULIN ROUGE**

les **Mercredis** et **Samedis**

**BAL MASQUÉ**

*H. Aubrac*

CH LEVY 10 Rue Martel P.



2.17 Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, *Divan Japonais*, 1892. Poster. Color lithograph, 31¾ x 24 in (80.8 x 60.8 cm). Bequest of Clifford A. Furst, 58.621.17. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Toulouse-Lautrec reveled in the odd spectacle of this unmatched pair, which parallels the artist's own life; he was often accompanied by his unusually tall and gangly friend Gabriel Tapie de Celeyrán, who towered above him. Stylistically, this poster shows the artist's expressive style, which is governed by free-flowing line and a striking sense of color.

Toulouse-Lautrec's poster for the Montmartre café concert called the *Divan Japonais* (fig. 2.17) that opened in 1883 shows the artist working under the influence of the Japanese print aesthetic. The flattened areas of even color, prominent curvilinear black contour lines, and overall simplification are all elements that show a Japanese influence. Here, Toulouse-Lautrec's style matched the interior design of the club, which featured an assemblage of Asian motifs. In this poster, he represents two of his friends watching a performance by the singer Yvette Guilbert (1867–1944). Guilbert was an important part of the popular music scene, through which thousands of new songs were introduced in Paris each year. The center of the poster shows the cancan dancer Jane Avril (1868–1943) seated next to the art critic Édouard Dujardin (1861–1949), who had written persuasively on the aesthetic sophistication of Japanese art. The three figures are not interacting; many of Toulouse-Lautrec's posters suggest just such a sense of ironic detachment, as the artist distanced himself from the spectacles that were an important part of his daily experience.

A singer who delighted in his rough, outlaw reputation, Aristide Bruant (1851–1925) used his own club, Le Mirliton,



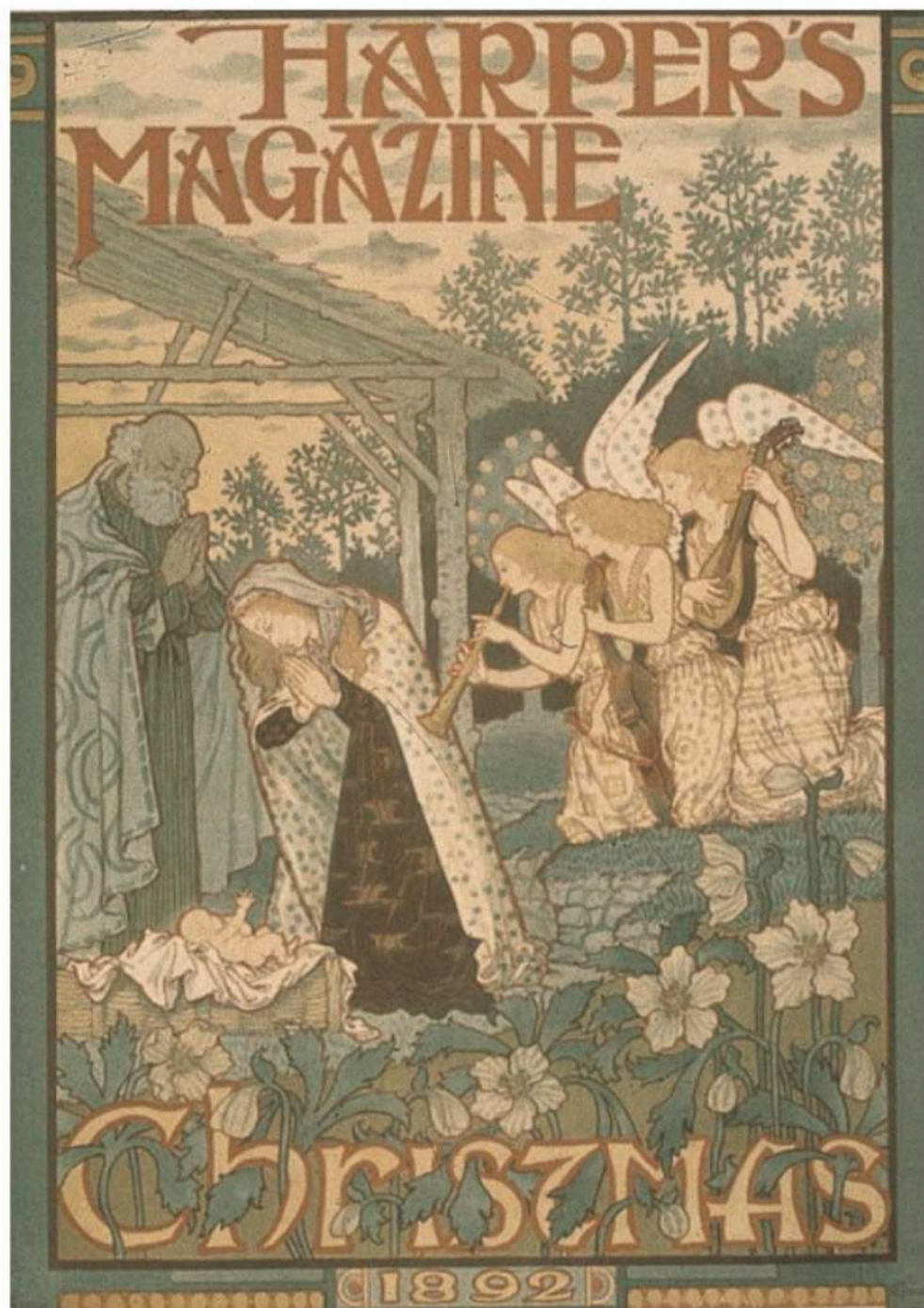
2.18 Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, *Ambassadeurs: Aristide Bruant dans son Cabaret*, 1892. Poster. Color lithograph. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Billy Wilder, 59.80.14. Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA).

as one of several venues where he showed off his rather brutish, satirical lyrics. Famous for verbally abusing his patrons, especially those who were members of the bourgeoisie, Bruant befriended Toulouse-Lautrec in 1885. Toulouse-Lautrec's posters for the singer (1892; fig. 2.18) portray Bruant's aggressive personality and stage-dominating charisma. Creating a complex flat pattern of planes that recede or push forward through color, Toulouse-Lautrec again demonstrates his mastery of Japanese style.

The participation of artists such as Toulouse-Lautrec in the design of posters had a hugely beneficial effect on the status of graphic design, in that it helped to create the impression that the making of posters was artistically valid and strongly related to the fine arts, not simply a commercial activity. It is also possible to date the end of the first great period of French poster design in terms of Toulouse-Lautrec's own life and career. In 1899, the artist began to decline from the effects of alcohol (particularly absinthe) addiction, as well as syphilis. Committed to an asylum, he died in 1901.

## THE UNITED STATES

During the nineteenth century, it was often the strategy of artists in the United States to look to Europe, especially France and Britain, for inspiration. American artists did not generally feel confident enough in their own skills to initiate new styles,

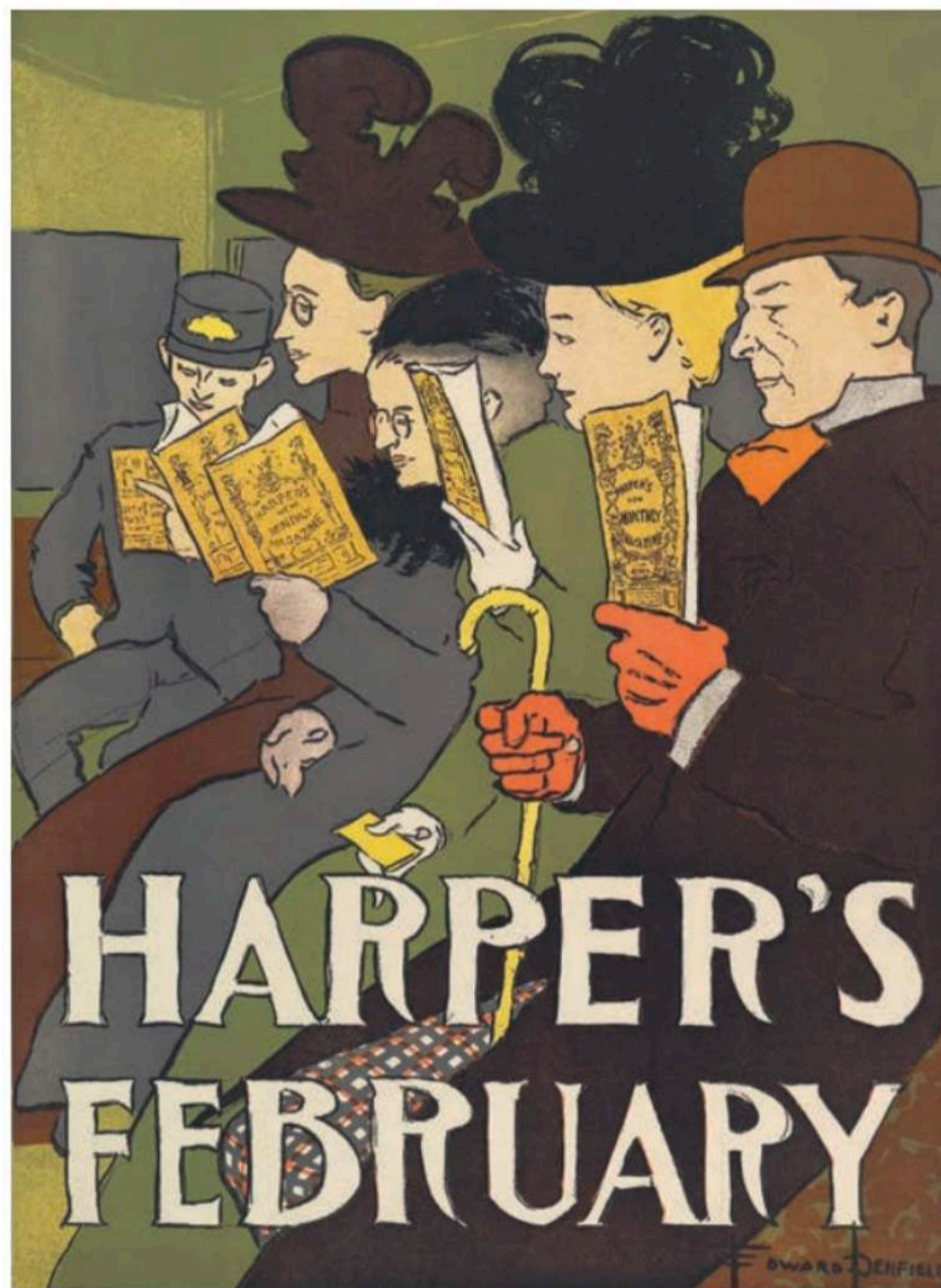


2.19 Eugène Grasset, *Harper's Magazine*, 1892. Color lithograph, 17 $\frac{1}{8}$  × 14 in (45.5 × 35.5 cm). Les Arts Décoratifs, Musée de la Publicité, Paris.

and instead sought to reinvent European styles with American subject matter. British magazines such as *The Studio* and *The Yellow Book*, as well as French poster compilations such as *Les Maîtres de l’Affiche*, proved to be significant sources for an aspiring generation of American designers and illustrators.

### Harper's and Japanese Prints

A key moment in the history of American graphic design came in 1889, when the widely read periodical *Harper's Magazine* first published a poster for its holiday issue designed by the Swiss-born French artist Eugène Grasset (1841–1917). Grasset, a major inspiration for Alphonse Mucha, created works that used the dense ornament emblematic of the Art Nouveau style, as seen in this example for *Harper's* from 1892 (fig. 2.19). The success of this publicity campaign led, during the 1890s, to fierce competition between established magazines, including *Harper's*, *Century*, and *Lippincott's*. In fact, there was continuing expansion in the magazine industry at this time, as over 7,000 new periodicals were published in the United States between 1885 and 1905. As competition increased and the marketing of magazines became more important, publishers sought to advertise their holiday issues with posters. Publishers of a progressive bent initially relied on European designers such as Grasset when they wanted the most striking, up-to-date styles, as there were few Americans able to serve their needs. Furthermore, hiring an expensive European designer had a “snob appeal” that lent a certain cachet to the

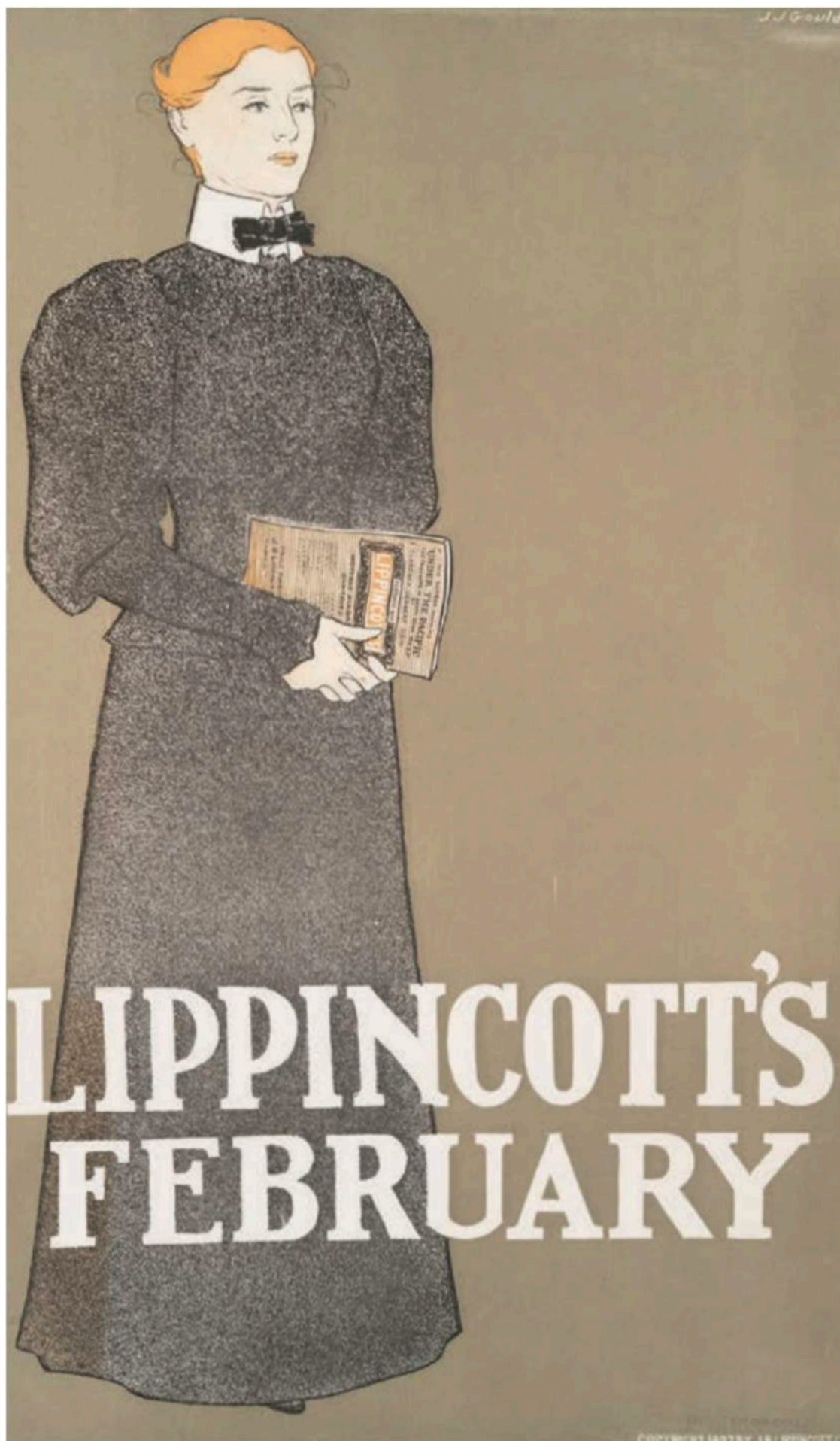


2.20 Edward Penfield, *Harper's Magazine*, February, 1897. Poster. Museum accession, 1957, 57.627.924. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

publisher. However, a clamor quickly arose among American illustrators who were aware of the exciting new French styles, and capable of producing posters of the highest quality. In a parallel to the European poster craze of the 1890s, American collectors also sought out the finest examples of this new art form, and posters by famous designers often disappeared off the streets immediately after they had been displayed.

Edward Penfield (1866–1925), a young American artist who made the expected pilgrimage to Paris in order to study art between 1890 and 1892, was appointed art editor at Harper & Brothers in 1891. In 1893, he became the overall art director at the company, after which he personally designed monthly promotional posters for *Harper's* various magazines until 1899. Penfield's 1897 poster for the February issue of *Harper's* shows how far American design had come in embracing the most fashionable European trends (fig. 2.20). Penfield depicts a group of well-dressed Americans on an intercity bus, each and every one of them engrossed in a copy of the new *Harper's* edition. Even the conductor in the background is ignoring his duties because the magazine has proved such a compelling source of entertainment. The style combines the asymmetrical composition, heavy black contour lines, and flat, unmodeled planes of even color characteristic of the Japanese impulse in Art Nouveau. In 1896, a well-publicized exhibition titled “Japanese Color Prints” had been held in New York City.

The pull of Japanese aesthetics for American artists in the late 1890s is also evident in a poster of a competing artist for



2.21 J.J. Gould, *Lippincott's*, February, 1897. Poster. Art & Architecture Collection, Miriam & Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints, & Photographs. The New York Public Library. Astor, Lenox & Tilden Foundations.

a competing magazine: this one by J.J. Gould (1880–1935) for *Lippincott's* from February 1897 (fig. 2.21). Gould's work shows a single figure of a conservatively dressed young woman with a serious mien, holding a copy of what must be a serious, significant journal—*Lippincott's*, of course. It is important to recognize that the Japanese style was widely embraced by artists such as Penfield and Gould because it fitted neatly into a long-standing tradition in American art: a commitment to realism. Many Americans prided themselves on being simple and plain spoken when compared to Europeans—less likely, or so they would have argued, to indulge in artifice or pretension. This cultural value had always informed American art, which favored the simple naturalism of clearly rendered figures. The American version of Japanese Art Nouveau, predictably, emphasizes the clean lines and realistic details of the style, and eschews the more decorative effects—such as the dense, flat patterns of color that often appear in French works.

## The Portrayal of Young Women

Another predictable element of both American and European posters of the late nineteenth century is their tendency to focus on the lives and leisure time of young women. For example, Penfield's poster for Stearns bicycles (1896; fig. 2.22) shows an elegant young woman who, to paraphrase the copy writer, is cycling contentedly. This poster's subject matter is related to a broad trend in both European and American society at the time: the gradual emergence of women into more fulfilling lives that allowed them to play larger roles in society. The so-called "safety bicycle" shown in the poster had been invented in 1890, and took its name from the fact that it was much easier to ride and offered less risk than the previous high-wheeled models, which had perched the cyclist far above the ground. With the advent of the pneumatic tire, invented in 1892, bicycling became accessible to more people, but especially to women, who could ride a safety bicycle while maintaining the proper decorum expected on public roadways. In fact, the modern bicycle became emblematic of women's newfound freedom and ability to assert themselves as active members of American society. Indeed in 1896, Susan B. Anthony (1820–1906), one of the leaders of the nascent women's movement, declared, "The bicycle has done more for the emancipation of women than anything else in the world."

The poster for Waverley Cycles (fig. 2.23), a British company that hired the Paris-based Art Nouveau designer Alphonse Mucha to make this advertisement, provides a fascinating comparison with Penfield's Stearns poster. The Mucha poster displays all of the decorative energy typical of Art Nouveau posters in Europe, showing a style from which less daring American companies kept their distance. The model's hair is formed into the intertwining tendrils that are a hallmark of *le style Mucha*, the curvilinear lines of which are repeated in the straps of her gown. She seems lost in a dreamy reverie. The American poster, in contrast, features the straightforward realistic style, without the elegant, "artificial" details such as the hair, and combines it with a mundane moment drawn from everyday life. However, the greatest contrast between American and European posters of young women is in their displays of sexuality. The young woman riding the Stearns is modestly dressed, her collar tightly around her neck, and her clothes shielding her body, other than a length of her lower leg. In contrast, Mucha's young "spokesmodel" is almost completely falling out of her clothes, providing a provocative view of her breasts. Part of the distinction is that Mucha's young woman is arguably an allegory, which in French tradition would allow the artist more leeway to show idealized nudity—along the lines of the goddess Venus—while Penfield's woman is intended to represent a customer of the bicycle company. Here, in terms of subject matter, the American penchant for realism, the prosaic moments of everyday life, versus the French love of the dreamlike and the ideal, is made manifest. At the same time, the fact remains that American companies and their customers were simply more prudish than their European counterparts, as well as less adventurous in accepting new stylistic trends.

## Will H. Bradley

Will H. Bradley (1868–1962), the most prominent American graphic designer of the 1890s, was largely self-taught and generated works in a variety of Art Nouveau styles derived from European

right: 2.22 Edward Penfield, *Ride a Stearns and be content*, 1896. Color lithograph, 53 $\frac{3}{8}$  x 40 $\frac{1}{4}$  in (136.9 x 102.3 cm). Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

below: 2.23 Alphonse Mucha, *Waverley Cycles*, 1898. Poster. Color lithograph. The Mucha Trust.







2.24 Will H. Bradley, *The Chap Book*, 1895. Poster. Color lithograph. Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

works. His Thanksgiving poster advertising a literary magazine called *The Chap Book* (1895; fig. 2.24) displays flat planes of color and the repetition of curvilinear form that integrates Japanese style with the expressive line of Art Nouveau. Note the way in which the “OO”s of the title intertwine, as well as the manner in which the curves of the letters are echoed by the curves in the contours of the figure. Bradley also uses the color red to harmonize the text and image, especially in the way that the red “The” of the title is nestled into the large black “C,” just as red and black are balanced in the image of the woman itself. At this point in the history of the poster, there was a widely recognized distinction between the thousands of inexpertly designed chromolithographs published each year and the so-called “art posters,” such as the ones Bradley produced. Art posters, with their vaunted artistic pedigrees, initially were used only to publicize *avant-garde* literary journals, theatrical performances, and the like. Only through a gradual process that lasted well into the twentieth century did such graphic designs become the norm, rather than the exception, in the world of advertising.

Bradley also decried the overall low quality of American type design and typography. He soon became a consultant to the American Type Founders association, which was dedicated to raising the level of typography in American design. The American Type Founders had first noticed Bradley’s work in 1894, when they licensed a blackletter typeface which they called Bradley. The typeface was based on a hand-lettered design by the artist for the cover of the Chicago-based journal *The Inland Printer*. Trade publications such as this, despite their narrow, specialized audience, served as important conduits for the publicizing of aesthetic innovations in the nascent design community. Bradley is essentially a historicist style type along the lines favored by Morris, with a clear reference to medieval European styles. In this manner, Will Bradley’s career proved quite eclectic as he embraced the aims and styles of both Arts and Crafts and Art Nouveau, even though the two were often seen as incompatible.

## ENGLAND

In England, companies had long displayed the same conservative taste for representational advertisements as their American counterparts. Nevertheless, growing competition for consumer goods created a need for images that stood out on a crowded hoarding. That was the motivation behind the industrialist

Thomas Barratt’s purchase of an oil painting by the artist Sir John Everett Millais (1829–1896). In the 1880s, Millais was perhaps England’s most popular and successful artist. His painting *A Child’s World*—a sentimental genre scene of a young boy playing—was typical of the artist’s late work in both its conventional style and its mawkish subject matter. In 1886, Barratt paid £2,200 for the painting, which had already become well known because it had been reproduced in the *Illustrated London News*. In order to advertise Pears’ Transparent Soap, Barratt secured the artist’s permission to add the product name plus a bar of soap to the painting’s reproduction. The resulting lithograph, called *Bubbles*, was printed more than a million times, making it one of the most ubiquitous advertisements of the nineteenth century (fig. 2.25). One key to this strategy was the fluid relationship that existed between commercial illustration and academic painting during the Victorian age, when both types of art featured naturalistic styles with a high degree of polish. Also, associating Pears’ soap with fine art was somewhat akin to hiring an artist such as



2.25 Sir John Everett Millais, *Bubbles*, 1886. Pears’ soap advertisement. Color lithograph.

Toulouse-Lautrec to design an advertising poster, in that it added cachet to an inexpensive mass-marketed product.

### English Art Nouveau

In England, just as in other European countries, the public's fascination with Art Nouveau posters peaked in the 1890s. In October 1894, a show with the lengthy title "The First International Artistic Periodical Poster Exhibition" opened at the Westminster Aquarium in London. The collector Edward Bella had organized the show—which was dominated by French posters, in accord with his own taste. Bella had appointed Toulouse-Lautrec to head the French section, which featured 19 works by Chéret, 21 by Steinlen, and 20 by Toulouse-Lautrec himself. While the exhibition was a success in terms of attendance, the venue was not exactly the most reputable as the Aquarium was known mainly for lowbrow entertainment and seedy spectacles. It is possible that many of the visitors were less interested in the posters than in the various sideshows, which included singing donkeys, a boxing kangaroo, and "Zulima the Female Samson." Several critics cited the dour mood and lack of sophisticated colorism in the English posters, which by all reports paled in comparison with the French works. Nonetheless, this exhibition inaugurated a series of similar shows in England devoted to the art of the poster. Then, in 1898, a new journal called *The Poster* was established in London in order to promote the medium as a new art form.

### Arthur Liberty and Liberty's

English designers had access to Japanese artworks through the endeavors of Arthur Liberty, whose shop on Regent Street in London served from 1875 as a major conduit for Japanese art. Like Siegfried Bing's shop in Paris, Liberty's exhibitions brought advanced Asian aesthetics to a generation of British artists. The shop sold original Japanese silks, embroideries, furniture, carpets, and ceramics, and soon added a line of British-made goods in a variety of Asian styles. The Japanese kimono shown here was imported for the shop in the early 1890s, and was later acquired by the Victoria and Albert Museum (*fig. 2.26*). It features a stylized abstraction of moving water, complemented by bamboo and small birds, all floating unattached to the flat ground plane. The rich interplay of embroidered textures contrasts with the smooth sheen of silk.

Liberty's shop became a major competitor to William Morris's various Arts and Crafts businesses by offering an alternative to the sometimes stodgy styling favored by Morris. The shop's promotion of Asian decorative art established it as the foremost purveyor of Art Nouveau in England. Eventually, Liberty expanded his business, opening stores in Birmingham and then Paris; his Japanese-inspired products would become so successful in Europe that Italians came to call the Art Nouveau style *Stile Liberty*.

### Aubrey Beardsley

The career of one of the most influential English designers, Aubrey Beardsley (1872–1898), was ignited in 1893 with the publication of a new art journal called *The Studio*. This innovative periodical, described as "an illustrated magazine of fine and applied art," was the fruit of collaboration between an established editor, Lewis Hind (1862–1927), and the publisher Charles Holme (1848–1923). Hind sought to find young artists with fresh styles that the



2.26 Anonymous, Kimono, 19th century. Silk damask, dyed glue, green, and purple, gold thread. Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

2.27 Aubrey Beardsley, design for the first issue of *The Studio: An Illustrated Magazine of Fine and Applied Art*, September, 1895. Letterpress on paper. London, 1893. Victoria and Albert Museum, London.



journal could champion, thereby helping *The Studio* make a splash in a crowded market. This strategy worked well because Hind was fortunate enough to make the acquaintance of Beardsley, then a 23-year-old unknown. The first issue of *The Studio* featured a cover by the young artist (fig. 2.27), as well as a number of other illustrations that supplemented an article on “A New Illustrator: Aubrey Beardsley” by the American printmaker Joseph Pennell (1857–1926). Beardsley’s cover for the first issue displays how

much he had been influenced by the styles of Japanese prints. The scene of a forest is essentially two-dimensional, a series of overlapping flat forms set apart by different types of cross-hatched strokes of the pen. He succeeded in synthesizing an individual style that fused Japanese aesthetics with a graceful curving line as its foremost element. The subject of the cover illustration, a mysterious forest, resonates with the French Symbolists’ exaltation of the natural world as an inspiring source of creativity.

2.28 Aubrey Beardsley, *J'ai baisé ta bouche, Iokanaan* ("I Kissed Your Mouth, Iokanaan"), from *The Studio*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1893. Illustration to Oscar Wilde's *Salome*. Line block print.



In fact, Beardsley's original design had included the figure of the Symbolists' favorite sexual persona, the Greek god Pan, but Hind and Holme considered the reference to be too lascivious for the cover.

Beardsley's embrace of French Symbolist principles marks him as part of a parallel movement in England in the later nineteenth century called the **Aesthetic movement**. Centered on the life and work of the playwright Oscar Wilde (1854–1900), this loosely defined group of authors, artists, and critics rejected the sermonizing morality of Victorian culture. The members of the Aesthetic movement focused on the idea of enjoying the pleasure of art for its own sake, as opposed to seeking out a historical lesson from art's subject matter. Followers of the movement shared the fascination with provocative images of sexuality, subjective emotional responses, and supernatural mysteries that characterized the Symbolist poets in France. Stylistically, the Aesthetic movement was first inspired by the display of Japanese decorative arts at London's 1862 International Exhibition. In the 1890s, hostile critics labeled the work of the Aesthetic and Symbolist movements "decadent," because it rejected traditional Classical styles, and because its creators embraced overtly sexual themes in their writings and artworks. While the term "decadent" was intended as a rebuke, suggestive of the moral weakness of the Aesthetic movement, it was in turn adopted by authors such as Wilde as a declaration of their modern taste.

Beardsley's strangely erotic drawing *I Kissed Your Mouth, Iokanaan* (fig. 2.28) was undoubtedly the most striking image included in the first issue of *The Studio*. The imagery is drawn from the play *Salome*, by Wilde, first published in French in 1893. In the play, Wilde had reinvented the biblical narrative of John the Baptist's execution into a story that highlights a phantasmagoria of sexuality and macabre fantasies. This drawing illustrates Beardsley's "hairline" style, as well as his penchant for elongated figures in a vertical format. An alternative version of this drawing, minus the text and some of the linear elements in the background, was published in book form to illustrate the 1894 English translation of *Salome*. Reportedly, Wilde was pleased with the work, although he criticized the license with which Beardsley had chosen to compose his images, many of which did not bear a strong relationship to Wilde's text. In many English people's minds, the Art Nouveau style was inherently decadent, although that connection was rarely as manifest as it was in the composite vision of Wilde's and Beardsley's erotic imaginations.

In direct contradiction to the expensive handmade production techniques used at Morris's Kelmscott Press, Beardsley's drawings for *The Studio* were created in order to be mass reproduced by the photomechanical line block process. Because Beardsley worked mainly in black and white, his drawings could be reproduced without losing their visual impact. Inexpensive industrial techniques enabled his designs to be among the most widely circulated of this era, making him perhaps the most influential draftsman associated with the whole of the Art Nouveau period. Beardsley's influence on advertising imagery was mainly indirect, although he did complete a handful of posters for ostensibly commercial purposes. In his *Avenue Theatre* poster (1894; fig. 2.29), the geometric pattern and attenuated figures characteristic of his work are evident. In one of his few forays into the world of color



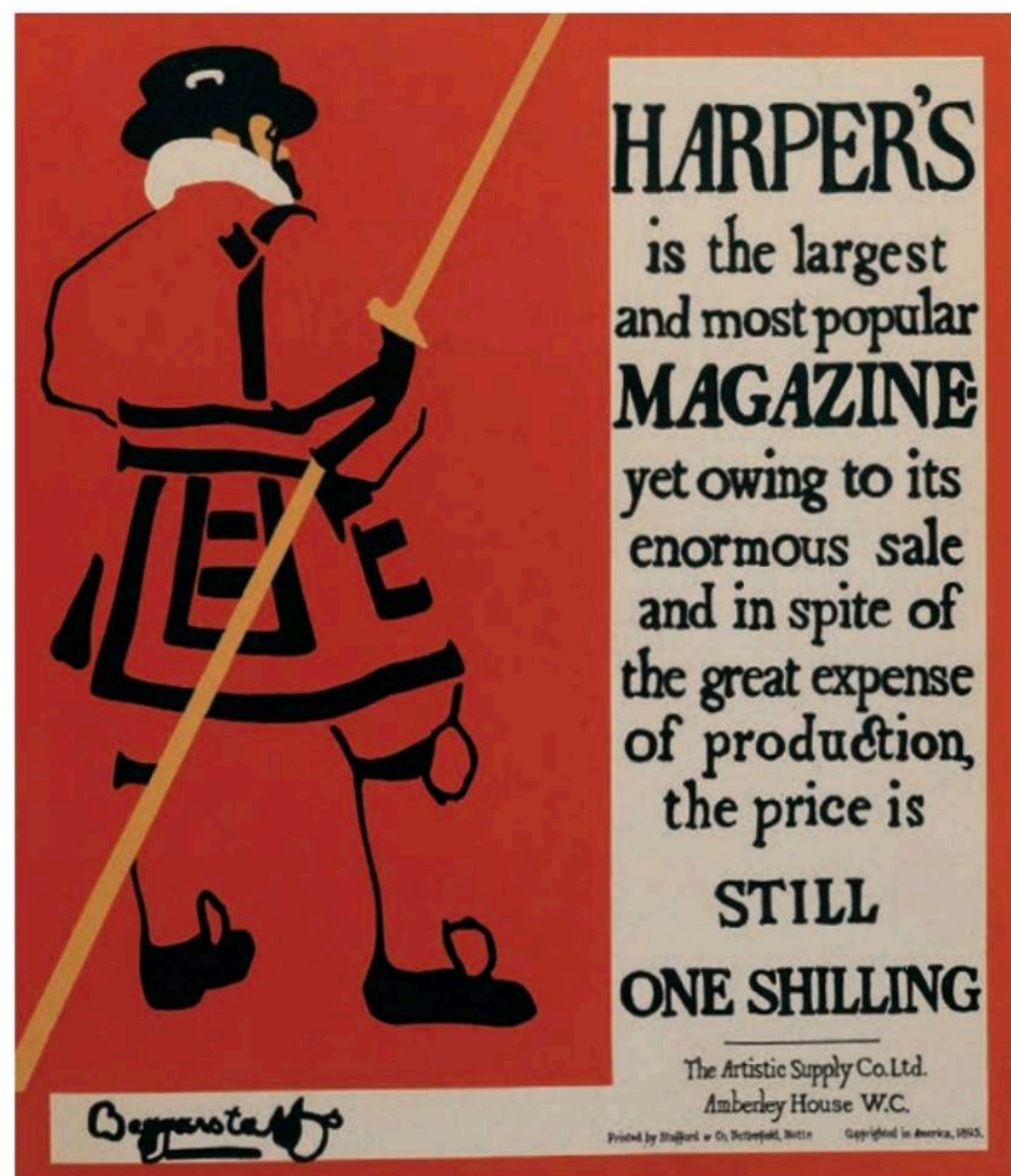
2.29 Aubrey Beardsley, *Avenue Theatre*, 1894. Poster. Color lithograph.

lithography, Beardsley made this poster to advertise a pair of plays. Note how the words “Avenue Theatre” have been written in an approximation of Asian calligraphic script. This poster, along with the Aesthetic movement in general, was relentlessly mocked by the satirical magazine *Punch*, which referred to it with the invitation “Ave a new poster.”

While 1894 found Beardsley at the pinnacle of his celebrity as an artist, the next year would witness a meteoric fall from grace. In 1895, Oscar Wilde pursued a libel suit that ended badly; he was publicly excoriated and eventually imprisoned for violating laws against homosexuality. Because Beardsley was closely associated with the playwright, his own career rapidly deteriorated in the face of renewed public criticism of his “decadent” drawings. Beardsley went into self-imposed exile in France, and in 1898 at the age of 25 he succumbed to tuberculosis.

### The Beggarstaff Brothers

The foremost English designers in the Japanese mode were the Beggarstaff Brothers, a name used for the collaborative works made by the artists William Nicholson (1872–1949) and James Pryde (1866–1941). The Beggarstaffs adopted their pseudonym because they did not want their reputations in the fine art world sullied by any association with advertising. The use of pseudonyms was not uncommon when painters took up commercial graphics—publishers are said to have preferred this arrangement as well, because they could reduce the fee paid to the artist while still receiving a top-quality product. The Beggarstaffs’ 1895 poster for *Harper’s* (fig. 2.30) displays some of the most aggressive simplification of any work produced in this area. Clearly indebted to Japanese prints, as well as to Toulouse-Lautrec, the silhouetted figure in this poster is more



radically abstract than comparable images of the time; its contour line disappears in several places so that the figure blends into the background. The flat tones, in stark contrast to contemporary French posters, make the image appear almost completely two-dimensional. Note also how effectively the image is related to the text. Three parts of the figure—its head, waist, and feet—are set off by heavy swaths of black ink. These three highlights are then matched by parallel parts of the text design, as the corresponding words, “Harper’s,” “Magazine,” and “Still One Shilling,” are all lettered in boldface black. Curiously, the striking image of a Beefeater, a ceremonial royal bodyguard, had been designed for a poster that advertised beef extract, but it was turned down by the original client. Eventually, it was bought by the American company in order to advertise the European edition of its magazine.

Another Beggarstaff design, offered for a performance of *Don Quixote* at the Lyceum Theatre (1895; fig. 2.31), shows the unusual cropping—note the horse’s missing hoofs and the partial view of a windmill—typical of the Japanese style. While the most obvious precedent for the Beggarstaffs’ reductive abstraction is Japanese art, it is also apparent that they were making a virtue out of necessity in terms of cost. The simple black and brown scheme was much less expensive to print than, for example, the polychromed posters of Jules Chéret. Partly because of the challenging nature of their images, the Beggarstaffs did not build the same type of successful practice as other noted designers. In fact, the *Don Quixote* is perhaps the most famous poster never printed; it rose to fame years later because of the admiration of artists who saw it reproduced in *Les Maîtres de l’Affiche*. It is important to realize that our contemporary view of the Art Nouveau is in some ways a fantasy history, as today’s iconic works were often virtually unknown and unappreciated except by a tiny few connoisseurs at the time of their first printing. The Beggarstaff collaboration had been one of opportunity, and when the poster craze began to subside around 1900, Nicholson and Pryde, forced to confront the fact that they had not really made much of an income as designers, dissolved their partnership.

### ART NOUVEAU IN SCOTLAND, AUSTRIA, AND GERMANY

As interest in new styles spread across Europe, Art Nouveau designers in Scotland, Austria, and Germany developed a visual language that was overall more symmetrical, **rectilinear**, and abstract than that of their French and English contemporaries. Broadly speaking, this trend deemphasized the evocative potential of line, form, and color in pursuit of simplicity and clarity. In addition to tracking this stylistic thread, the next section explores three recurring themes. First is the continuing attempts by artists to collapse the hierarchical relationship between the “fine arts” of painting, sculpture, and architecture on one hand, and the less esteemed “crafts”—a category that included graphic design—on the other. Second is the belief in the feasibility of artist-led utopias, or perfect worlds, which served as an escapist alternative to the alienating spaces of the industrial age. Third is the use of design styles as a marker of national or regional identity, which celebrated the accomplishments of society under the leadership of bourgeois industrialists.



opposite: 2.30 The Beggarstaff Brothers (William Nicholson and James Pryde), *Harper's*, 1895. Portfolio reproduction from *Les Maîtres de l’Affiche*, 18 $\frac{1}{8}$  x 13 $\frac{3}{8}$  in (48 x 34 cm).

above: 2.31 The Beggarstaff Brothers (William Nicholson and James Pryde), *Lyceum Don Quixote*, 1895. Black and brown paper pasted on white. Portfolio reproduction from *Les Maîtres de l’Affiche* 18 $\frac{1}{8}$  x 13 $\frac{3}{8}$  in (48 x 34 cm).



## GLASGOW: THE FOUR

Four artists—Margaret Macdonald (1864–1933), Frances Macdonald (1873–1921), Herbert MacNair (1868–1955), and Charles Rennie Mackintosh (1868–1928)—together formed the larger part of the Art Nouveau movement in Scotland. None of these artists worked professionally as a graphic designer; however, the limited works that they produced were to prove influential, and secured for Scotland a stable niche in the history of the Art Nouveau movement. When formed, this partnership, called The Four, consisted of two sisters and their respective husbands-to-be: Frances Macdonald and MacNair married in 1899, while Margaret Macdonald and Mackintosh followed suit a year later.

### The Glasgow School of Art, Celtic Revival

The city of Glasgow itself is important to an understanding of the Art Nouveau movement centered there. A nineteenth-century boom town, Glasgow had undergone startling urban growth during the Industrial Revolution. The rapid changes in its economy had created a vast economic chasm between the nascent bourgeoisie with their fortunes and the workers who toiled in the factories. In fact, the city became rather notorious as a vulgar, blighted industrial zone, a reputation that most probably partly reflected English chauvinism. The decorative elegance of Scottish Art Nouveau produced at the Glasgow School of Art (GSA) should be understood in this context, in which art served to provide an alternative world from which the difficulties of the industrial age could be conveniently banished. At the same time, the art produced at the school also served to reject this caricature of the city and rejoice in the affluence of the Glasgow bourgeoisie, a social class that included the Macdonald sisters. In fact, the sisters' education in the visual arts represented a typical step for young women from

more progressive, affluent families. Finally, the spirit of the Arts and Crafts movement, in which the fine arts and applied arts were equally valued, was intended to act as a democratizing force, one that could in some small way combat the general perception of urban life as rife with social and economic injustices.

The collaboration began when the Macdonald sisters enrolled at the GSA in 1893. Once there, they found a supportive group of fellow students determined to engage with the newest artistic trends. “The Immortals,” as these young women called themselves, were excited by Japonisme as well as by the “decadent” artists gathered around Aubrey Beardsley and Oscar Wilde in England. However, the students at the GSA sought to carve out a unique, and specifically Celtic-inspired, visual style and subject matter. In a parallel to French designers' embrace of the Rococo, Scottish artists wanted to establish their art as part of a national tradition. The Four were influenced by the Celtic revival of this era, as evidenced by the continuing fascination with the works of Ossian, an epic poet whose writings were filled with Celtic symbolism as well as supernatural adventure. (“Ossian” was in fact an invention perpetrated by the author James Macpherson (1736–1796) in 1761—Macpherson is credited with sparking the search for a historically distinct Celtic identity.) The Four were also aware of more recent scholarship, such as *Architecture, Mysticism, and Myth* (1891), a book by W.R. Lethaby (1857–1931) that argued in favor of the prominence of magic, supernatural strivings, and subjective responses in architectural theory. A favorite of the Arts and Crafts Society in London, Lethaby advocated the relationship between architecture and design crafts.

For artists desiring to showcase new work, the importance of publications and willing patrons cannot be overestimated. At the GSA, a group of progressive students organized themselves around a journal they called *The Magazine* (published 1893–1896);

## CELTIC MANUSCRIPTS AND THE FOUR

The art of The Four was strongly influenced by Celtic art, especially by its celebrated illuminated manuscripts. While Celtic art may be found across much of Europe and even farther afield, its artistic centers were in the British Isles—in Ireland, Scotland, and Northumbria in England. Although the term Celtic art may refer as far back as to the ancient works of the La Tène culture (450 BCE to 50 BCE), it is also used broadly to refer to the medieval art produced in this region between 500 and 1000 CE.

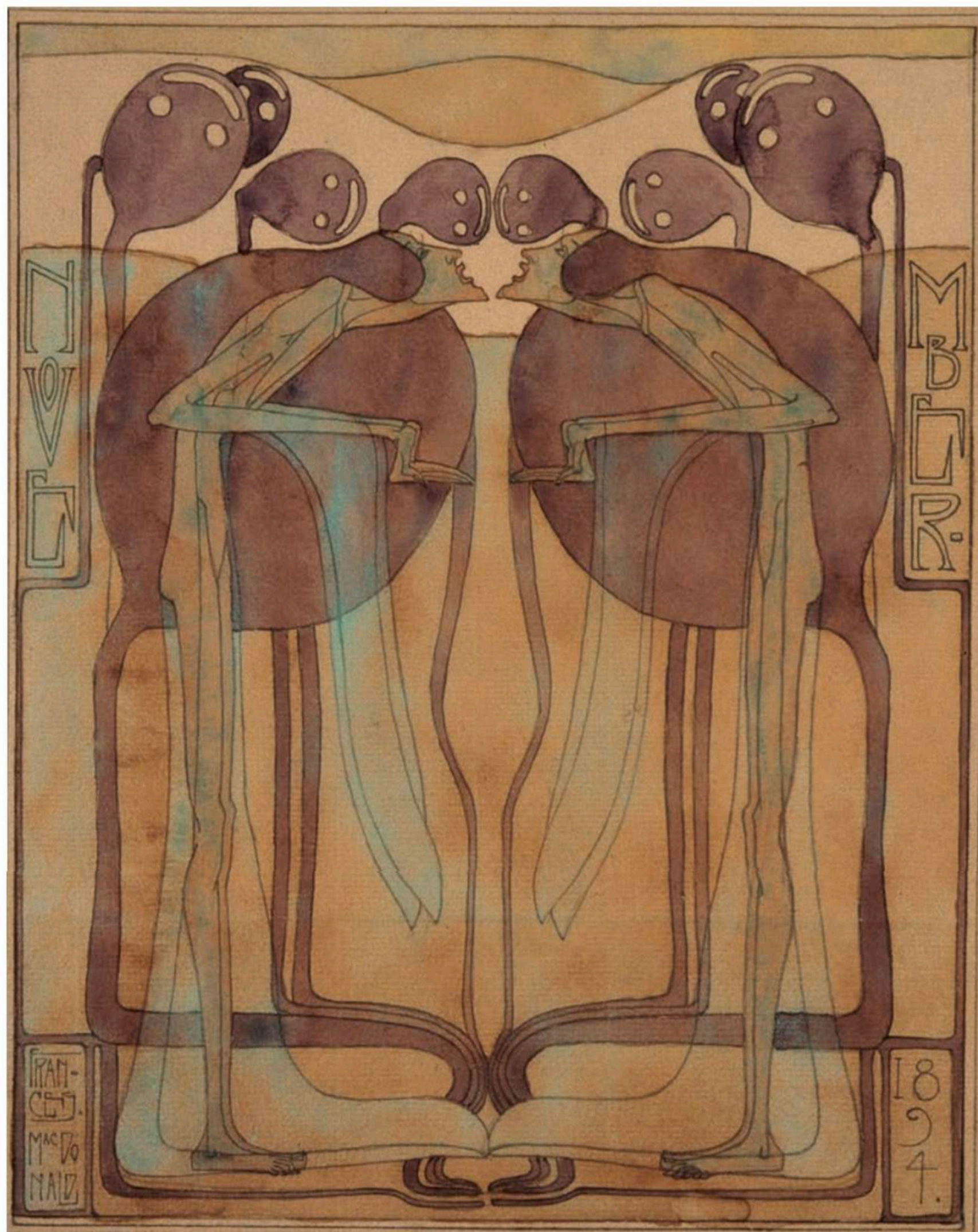
A mix of pagan and Christian styles and subject matter, Celtic art represents one of the great examples of cross-cultural ferment that characterized the Middle Ages. Later, in Ireland as well as in Scottish cities such as Glasgow during the mid-nineteenth century, there was a resurgence of interest in Celtic art for nationalistic reasons, and also because of the broader celebration of medieval culture that lay at the heart of the Arts and Crafts movement.

Characteristics of Celtic art include dense interlaced patterns, curvilinear elements, and zoomorphic forms. Although many of the abstract elements were invented by metalworkers working

in three dimensions with raised linear elements, a sophisticated knowledge of color allowed artists working in two dimensions to replicate the spirals and flowing, knotted forms. Typically, manuscript illuminators displayed great skill in devising elaborate initial capitals, with letters that transformed themselves into beasts or abstract shapes while maintaining a recognizable typography. These flourishes served as a model for The Four.

A major center of medieval Celtic manuscript production was in a monastery on the island of Iona, off the western coast of Scotland. When the monks of Iona fled from marauding Vikings around 800, they settled in Kells on the Irish coast. The resulting Book of Kells from the early ninth century represents the ultimate achievement of the manuscript tradition. It was published in a facsimile edition in 1892, fueling a burst of creativity during the later stages of the Celtic revival. In the 1890s, the tendency of The Four to mix curvilinear elements with strong geometric structures would have derived from their knowledge of the Celtic manuscript tradition (see Lindisfarne Gospels, Introduction).

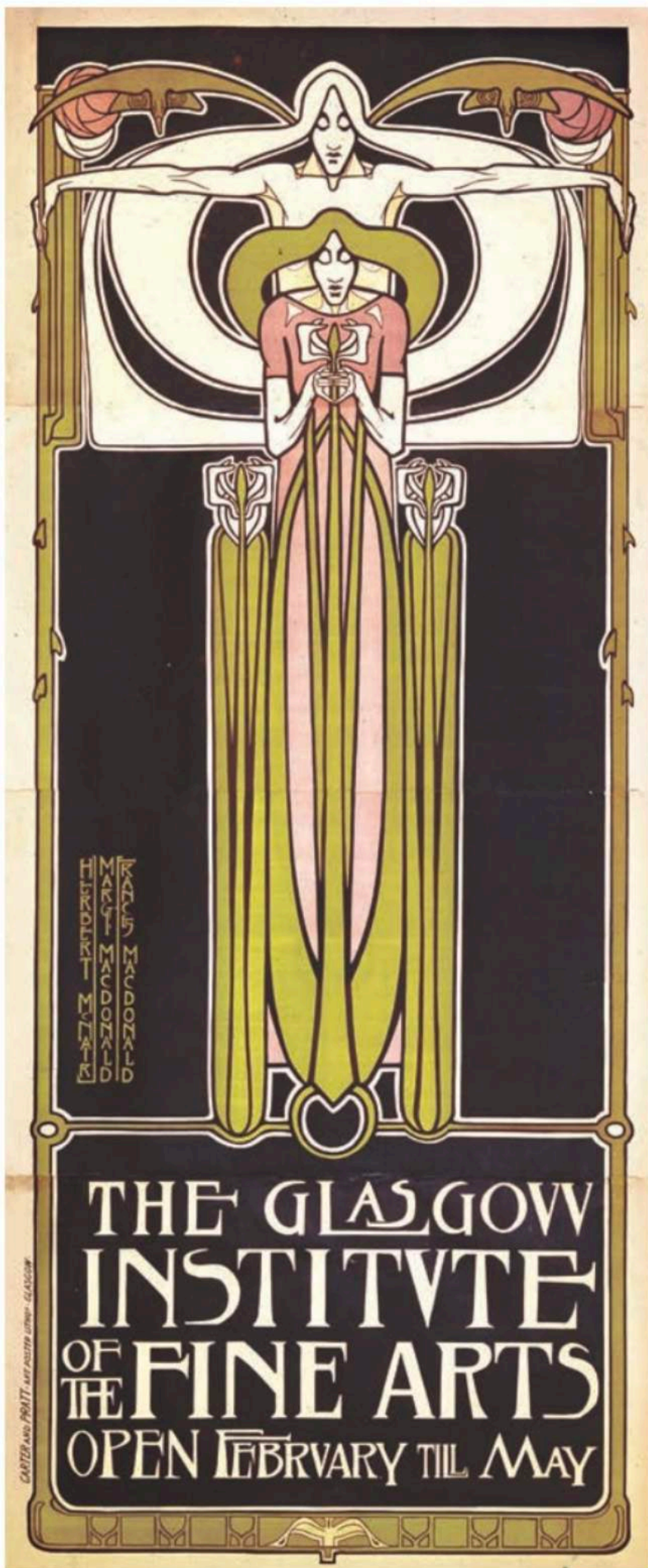
2.32 Frances Macdonald, *A Pond*, 1894. Watercolor. Glasgow School of Art Collection.



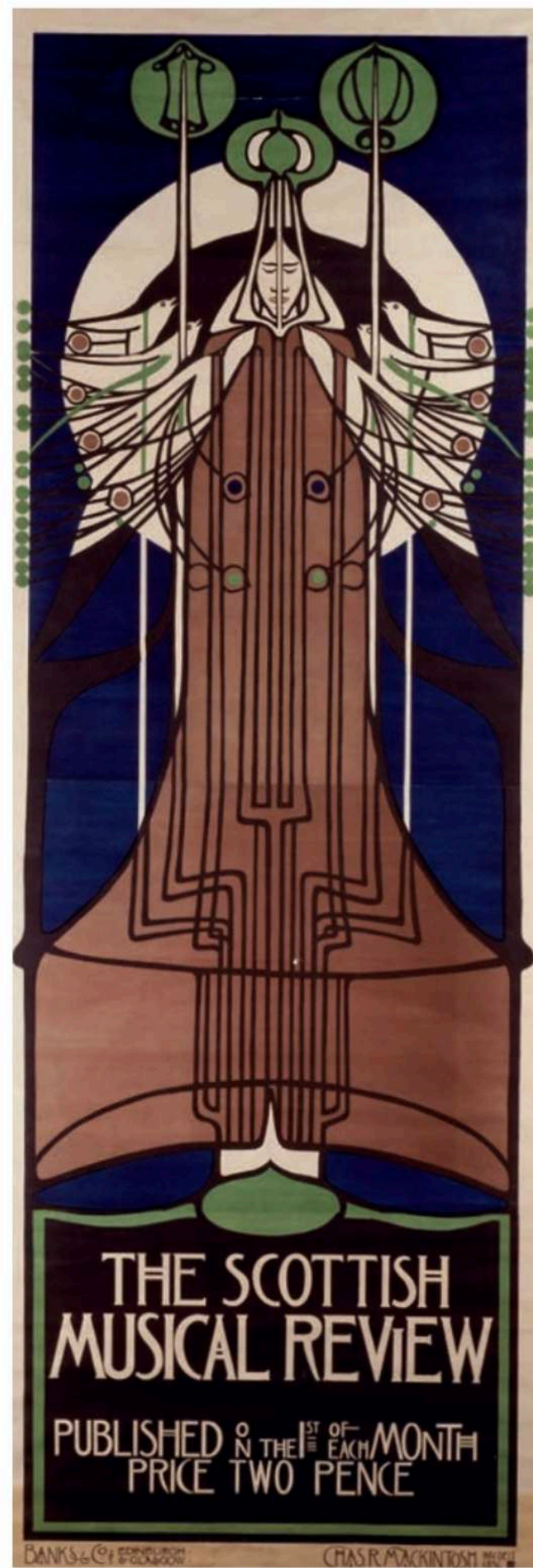
it was on the November 1894 cover of that periodical that Frances Macdonald published one of the first works, a watercolor, that displays the seeds of her mature style. Called *A Pond*, the image combines sinuous, organically shaped figures and water plants with a symmetrical organization (fig. 2.32). The attenuated grace of the figures is derivative of a number of other Art Nouveau designs; however, its combination of orthogonal structure and fluid, curvilinear forms—especially at the bottom of the image—as well as its nearly perfect symmetry (the left and right are mirror images, apart from the textual elements), suggests the beginnings of a bold new graphic style. The decorative type of the word “November” reverses these two elements, as it combines rectilinear letterforms with strong asymmetrical elements. As is the case with many Scottish posters from this era, the palette, a mix of green

and purple, clearly invokes a set of colors with strong associations to the Scottish identity movement. The subject is evocative and ambiguous, suggestive of mystical creatures that embody the spirit of this watery environment. The female forms decisively reject the prevailing “decadent” images of women as seductive temptresses, as Macdonald’s figures exude mystery and ambiguity without defining that mystery in sexual terms.

The first poster by the Macdonald sisters in collaboration with Herbert MacNair displays many of the stylistic devices seen in *A Pond*, albeit in a more staunchly vertical format (see fig. 2.33; page 82). Advertising the GSA’s 1895 student show, the poster’s attenuated plant forms are superimposed on similarly long, sinewy figures. The most striking element of the symmetrical design is the way the female figure’s hair and the male figure’s hooded cloak



far left: 2.33 Frances Macdonald, Margaret Macdonald, and Herbert MacNair, *The Glasgow Institute of Fine Arts*, 1895. Poster. Library of Congress, Washington, DC.



left: 2.34 Charles Rennie Mackintosh, *The Scottish Musical Review*, 1896. Lithograph, 97 × 39 in (246.3 × 99 cm). Art Gallery and Museum, Kelvingrove, Glasgow, Scotland.

both sweep round behind them and form part of the surrounding abstraction. The hand-drawn lettering of this lithograph has a number of dramatic flairs, despite its overall blocky proportions. For example, the arms of the “F” and “E” both extend out of the implied frame in a dramatic fashion, while the arm of the “L” in “Glasgow” appropriates the baselines under “as” as it runs horizontally across the poster. The text is not directly integrated with the image, but rather formed into a geometric block that creates a plinth on which the figures above are perched, as if they are sculpted. The entire composition is made up of a series of boxes that encase more organic forms. The simple, flat forms bounded by bold black contour lines are indicative of the prevailing Japanese influence.

### Charles Rennie Mackintosh

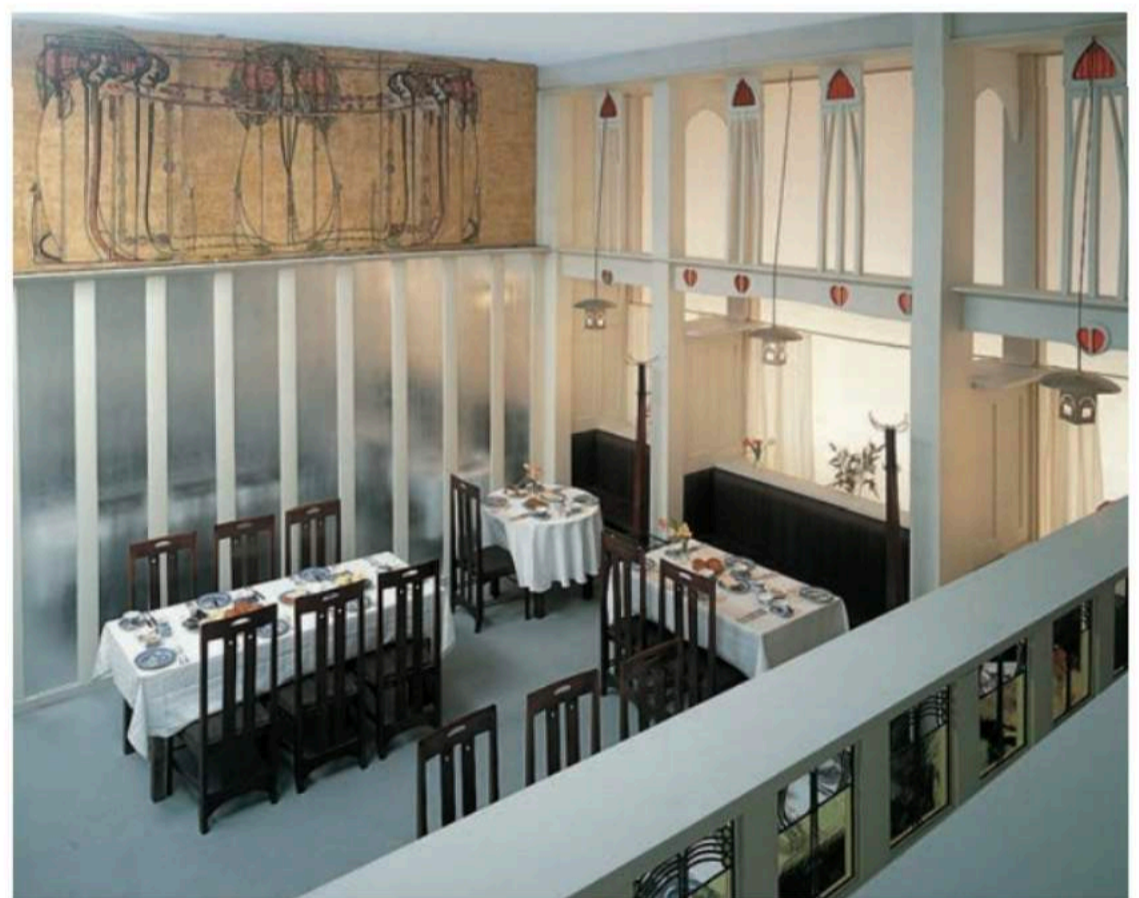
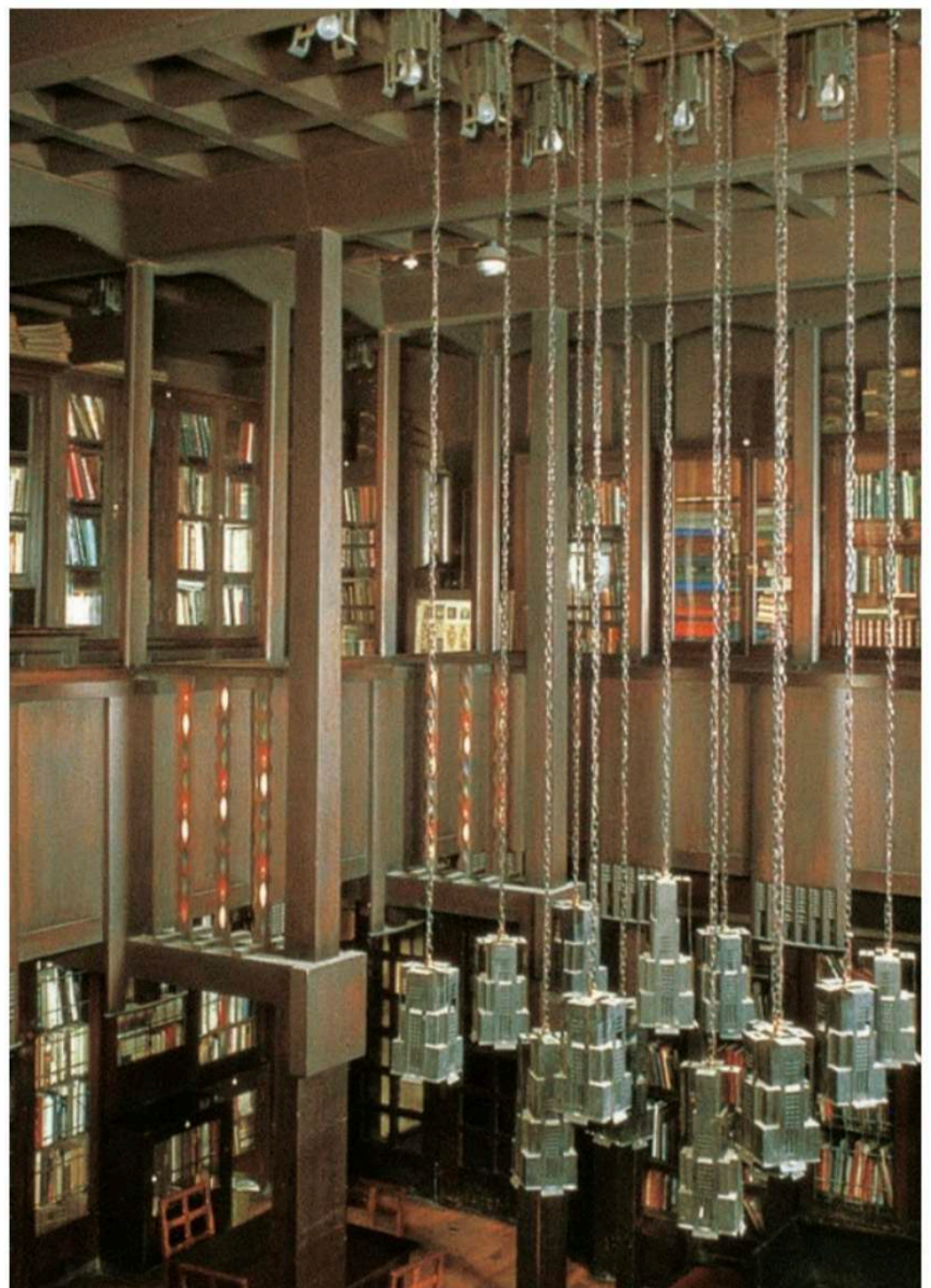
Charles Rennie Mackintosh was the last addition to The Four’s collaborative group. Trained as an architect, he had met MacNair

in 1889, when they both worked at an architectural firm. Between 1889 and 1894, MacNair and Mackintosh took classes at the GSA. Later, Mackintosh worked as an architectural draftsman in the small Glasgow architectural firm of Honeyman & Keppie. By 1895 The Four were complete. Mackintosh’s 1896 poster advertising *The Scottish Musical Review*, a periodical, features much of the same mix of curvilinear and rectilinear elements visible in the earlier posters (fig. 2.34). It also features the “Scottish” palette of purple and green as well as the use of the text box as a pedestal for the centralized image of a figure. However, perhaps because of his architectural training, Mackintosh’s style leans more heavily on geometric, architectonic elements and so appears weightier than the other works. *The Scottish Musical Review* poster has a very strong phallic element in the shaping of the figure as well as its erect bulb and stem floral combinations, introducing an element of sexuality to the work.

The Four exhibited their work outside Glasgow for the first time in 1896. At the fifth exhibition of the Arts and Crafts Society in London, they found their works harshly criticized by both academic conservatives and members of the society. Followers of William Morris at this time were still wedded to the idea of the pre-eminence of historicist styles, and they rejected the fluid abstractions of The Four. Only *The Studio* had anything positive to say about the group, recognizing their allegiance to Art Nouveau, which the journal backed. In the same year, a critic at the conservative *Magazine of Art* was to invent a memorable label for the works produced at the GSA, calling the institution the “Spook School” because of the preponderance of wraith-like figures in pieces such as *A Pond*. The Four found much greater acclaim in 1900, when the eighth **Vienna Secession** exhibition featured the Scottish Room. When Margaret Macdonald and Mackintosh visited the show, they were widely celebrated by the Secession artists, who shared many of their ideals—such as a rejection of the hierarchical distinction between fine and applied art—as well as their interest in pursuing decorative Art Nouveau graphics.

A compelling parallel to The Four’s graphic work may be found in Mackintosh’s interior designs for the GSA itself. In 1897, the firm of Honeyman & Keppie, using a project created by Mackintosh, won the competition for the design of a new building for the GSA. The resulting interior spaces, such as the Library (fig. 2.35), feature much of the complex mix of symmetry and asymmetry that characterizes the work of The Four. The coffered grid of the ceiling is balanced with the sometimes irregular curves of the beams and arches to form a composition that has a graceful, linear feel. The library calls to mind the words of the architect Edwin Lutyens (1869–1944), who said of another Mackintosh work that it was “all very elaborately simple.” While Mackintosh’s library was destroyed by fire in 2014, a meticulous reconstruction is currently underway.

Scottish tearooms provide an excellent example of a new type of establishment that reflected changes in social class as a result of the Industrial Revolution. Tearooms, sometimes called “Ladies’ Luncheon Rooms,” provided a new social space where women could socialize in public while avoiding unwanted association with the sordid reputation of the city’s pubs and nightclubs. Macdonald and Mackintosh found their most loyal patron in the owner of a number of successful tearooms, Catherine Cranston (1849–1934). Cranston, a supporter of the temperance movement, wanted her establishments to project a refined elegance, yet also to suggest the excitement of the modern city. Macdonald and Mackintosh eventually produced designs for four of her tearooms, attempting to create an overall vision that would integrate all the different elements of each room, from chairs to wall coverings, in a single aesthetic. The Ingram Street Tearoom was decorated with Macdonald’s gesso panel *The May Queen* (fig. 2.36), which had already garnered a great deal of praise from the Secession artists when it was shown in Vienna in 1900. Featuring a strong linear element that would appear to have been influenced by Beardsley, the panel harmonizes this curvilinear element with a blocky rectilinear composition. Mackintosh’s Argyle Chair (1897), designed to make a dramatic statement at Cranston’s Argyle Street Tearoom, was also exhibited at the Vienna Secession. The oak chair shares the vertical emphasis of the posters made by The Four, and translates the graphic conventions they developed,



top: 2.35 Charles Rennie Mackintosh, Library, Glasgow School of Art, 1899.

above: 2.36 Charles Rennie Mackintosh and Margaret Macdonald Mackintosh, *The May Queen* panel, Ingram Street Tearoom, 1900. The Burrell Collection, Glasgow, Glasgow City Council (Museums).

especially in the shaping of the large ellipse that forms the top rail, and the thin posts that support the curving shape.

An important point concerning the historical reputation of The Four is the manner in which their original collaborative ideal, which resonated with the medieval revivalism of the Arts and Crafts movement, was later effaced because of the modern focus on the individual. During their lifetimes, the sense that first the Macdonald sisters, and then Margaret Macdonald and Mackintosh, had worked synergistically, was a given, even though they did not receive much acclaim in their native Scotland. In Vienna in 1900, Macdonald and Mackintosh were equally feted as accomplished Scottish artists. In the 1960s, when interest in Art Nouveau was revived, a new generation of design historians focused on Mackintosh to the almost total exclusion of the other artists. In exhibitions held in Zurich, New York, Paris, and London during the 1960s, Mackintosh was given a progressively greater place, celebrated as an individual genius. Today, he is a cornerstone of design history, while the other three of The Four have been pushed somewhat out of the picture. In particular, Margaret Macdonald's contribution to the couple's work is woefully understated in many design histories.

## VIENNA SECESSION

In Vienna, graphic design was an integral part of the Secession movement, led by Gustav Klimt (1862–1918). The artists' group that came to be known as the Vienna Secession was formed in April 1897 by an initial group of 18 who felt that the two artists' organizations in Vienna, the Vienna Academy of the Arts and the Genossenschaft Bildender Künstler Wiens, were out of touch with the newer styles and artistic theories spreading across Europe. In the eyes of the Secessionists, the academy was an aged institution hopelessly wedded to the academic art of the past. The Genossenschaft, a word that refers to its status as an artists' "cooperative," was founded in 1870 and devoted to contemporary art. Sometimes referred to as the Künstlerhaus, or "home of the artists," it was controlled in the 1890s by men with somewhat conservative taste. Because the academy and the Genossenschaft controlled the only public exhibition spaces in Vienna, the Secession artists' first goal was to create an alternative organization with an exhibition venue through which more progressive artists, from both Vienna and abroad, could present their work to the public. This original break with the Genossenschaft inspired the name of the movement, the term "secession" meaning a "withdrawal." Like Art Nouveau artists throughout the rest of Europe, the Secessionists felt that the experience of modern industrial society could be successfully interpreted only by artists open to new aesthetic strategies. And, in fact, the term *Secessionstil* became yet another synonym for the Art Nouveau style.

### Gustav Klimt

The first item of business for the Secession artists was to hold an exhibition. This first Secession show met with an indifferent public, and its rented venue, the headquarters of the Viennese Horticultural Society, was unremarkable. Gustav Klimt, who had been elected president of the Secession, produced a poster for the show that set the tone for much of the art that would follow



2.37 Gustav Klimt, *Secession I*, 1898. Poster. Color lithograph, 38 × 27 in (96.5 × 68.6 cm). Gift of Bates Lowry. 207.1968. Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York.

(fig. 2.37). In terms of style, Klimt adopted the vertical format, asymmetrical design, and empty spaces that had been a key part of Aubrey Beardsley's designs in England. The figure on the right-hand edge is Athena, ancient goddess of Wisdom, whose armor references the Secession's struggle to free itself from conservative tradition. In a band across the top of the poster the mythical struggle of Theseus with the Minotaur is played out as yet another allegory of heroic artistic struggle against philistinism. The monochrome drawing of Theseus is contained in a horizontal band that is balanced at the bottom of the poster by another colorless band, this one containing the text publicizing the exhibition. The sumptuous color of the figure of Athena neatly ties the two elements together. In the upper left of the image, the words *Ver Sacrum* ("Sacred Spring") appear, an oft-repeated slogan of the Secession that refers to yet another mythological story, in which ancient citizens experience newfound abundance after a calamity. The fact that French Symbolist ideas influenced Secession artists is clear in the subject matter of this poster—mainly, the sense that the underlying message is mysterious, ambiguous, and gives priority to the subjective emotional responses of the artist.

It may seem paradoxical that a Secession artist such as Klimt, who valued his own novelty and avant-gardist views on art and culture highly, would choose to represent the Secessionist struggle in seemingly archaic, mythological terms. However, in 1890s

Vienna, Classical myths were often used to explain quite modern situations, most notably in the work of the Viennese psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), whose developing theories of sexuality often relied on analogies with Classical mythology as an explanatory tool—as in the “Oedipus complex.” The *fin de siècle* ambience of Vienna was enhanced by a palpable sexual atmosphere that informed much of the graphic work done there, as well as the emerging psychoanalytic theories of Freud. It was in fact the strong sexual undercurrent in the poster, manifest in the exposed genitals of Theseus, that caused the authorities to censor it. Klimt then produced a second version in which the offending organs were covered with the trunk of a tree.

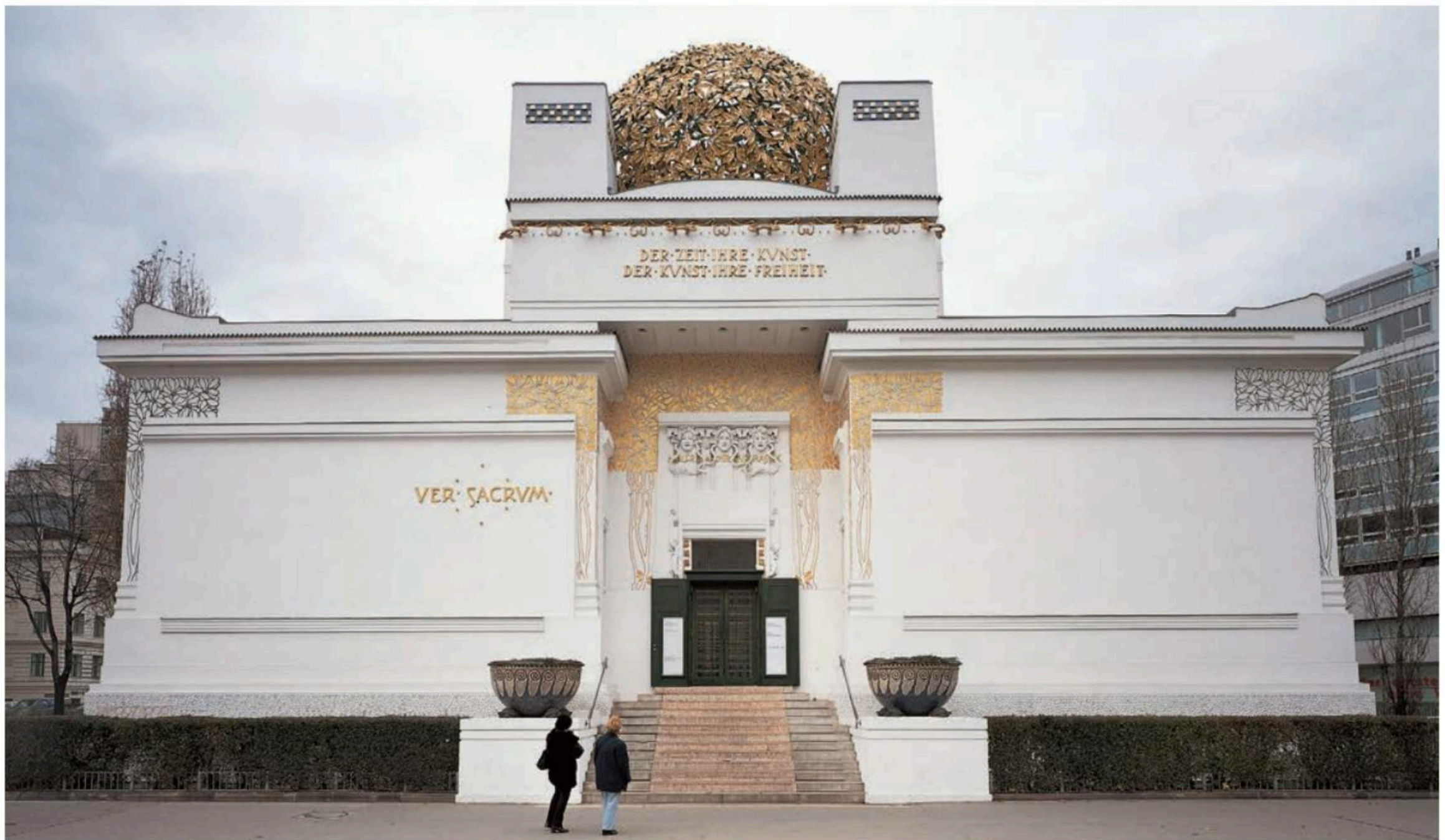
### The Secession Building

As mentioned above, a key goal for the Secessionists was to control an exhibition space of their own. The young architect Joseph Maria Olbrich (1867–1908) was chosen to design the building (fig. 2.38), which was to be located on the Ringstrasse, Vienna’s most fashionable avenue. The Ringstrasse had been constructed as recently as the 1860s, and the style of its architecture was particularly anathema to the Secessionists. They objected to the fact that it was made up of a series of historicist structures that quoted from all manner of past styles. The Secession artists wanted to make a public statement by locating their innovative exhibition hall and headquarters right in the thick of what they saw as an eclectic mass of tired-looking Neoclassicism. However, because of some official displeasure with Olbrich’s design, the building was soon moved to the less fashionable Karlsplatz. It is important to note that despite this setback, as well as the artists’ antagonistic

stance toward official culture, the Secession group generally found the government of the city of Vienna to be willing to help them reach their goals. Additionally, Secession artists quickly found patrons among the wealthy bourgeoisie. These included luminaries such as Karl Wittgenstein (1847–1913), scion of a powerful industrial family, who financed the construction of the Secession building.

Olbrich’s design was executed in a matter of months, and it was soon recognized as one of the most notable manifestations of Viennese Art Nouveau architecture. Combining geometric clarity with a garland of gold over the main entrance, Olbrich’s creation appeared startlingly severe with its strong axial symmetry. The building creates an unusual contrast between the blank spaces on the cube-shaped walls of the exterior façade and a roof whose elaborate decorations and skylights evoked to its critics both a “gilded cabbage” and a “greenhouse.” More notable is the way the blank spaces on the façade resonate with the comparable void used in Klimt’s poster for the first Secession exhibition. Both artists valued the startling effect of so much emptiness in the midst of a design that is otherwise rich with decoration.

The effort made by Secession artists to unify different media with a holistic aesthetic represented an important part of most Art Nouveau movements. The underlying principle at work was that of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or “total work of art,” a concept originated by the German composer Richard Wagner and made popular by the French Symbolist movement. A *Gesamtkunstwerk* is an artwork that encompasses every possible type of aesthetic expression. Wagner felt that he could attain this goal through his operatic compositions, which combined elements drawn from literary,



2.38 Joseph Maria Olbrich, Secession building, 1898.

musical, and visual artistic traditions. The French Symbolists, most of whom revered Wagner and his work, emphasized the mystical and spiritual elements of a unification of the arts. For visual artists, the *Gesamtkunstwerk* was more of a theoretical goal than a concrete reality. Nonetheless, Secession artists and others with their same goals sought to implement the idea of a unification of the arts in as many ways as possible.

While some of the decorative relief panels that edge the blocky mass of the Secession building feature dramatic curvilinear elements, the organic lines are always more tightly controlled by the compositional scheme that they are in, for example, French Art Nouveau. Above the lintel of the main entrance a carving reads, "To each age its art. To art its freedom," a credo that resonates with the spirit of revolution and embrace of the modern that was an integral part of Art Nouveau artistic theory. The dome of cascading laurel leaves above this inscription evokes the wreath worn by Apollo, allegorical patron of the arts. Combined with design elements reminiscent of Egyptian temple architecture, the building was suggestive of the spiritual attitude that the Secessionists had to their work. Inside, the most innovative part of Olbrich's design was immediately evident: the exhibition space featured movable panels, creating an "open plan" that could be rearranged in order to allow the space to take on new forms in short order.

### Ver Sacrum

The Secession journal *Ver Sacrum* was the locus of a great deal of experimental graphic work. The journal had been proposed at the first general assembly of the Secession artists in June 1897, as an Austrian answer to the popular Art Nouveau periodicals in Germany, *Pan* and *Jugend*. Koloman Moser (1868–1918), one of the founders of the movement, was chosen to organize the journal. The first issue, edited by Alfred Roller (1864–1935), appeared early in 1898. An introductory essay declared that *Ver Sacrum* "aims to show other countries for the first time that Austria is an independent artistic entity. ... [I]t is meant to be a clarion call to the artistic sense of the people, to inspire, promote, and spread artistic life and artistic independence." In this manner, the Secessionists identified their own work as representative of national identity. (Austria was, of course, the dominant part of the larger Austro-Hungarian Empire under Emperor Franz Josef.)

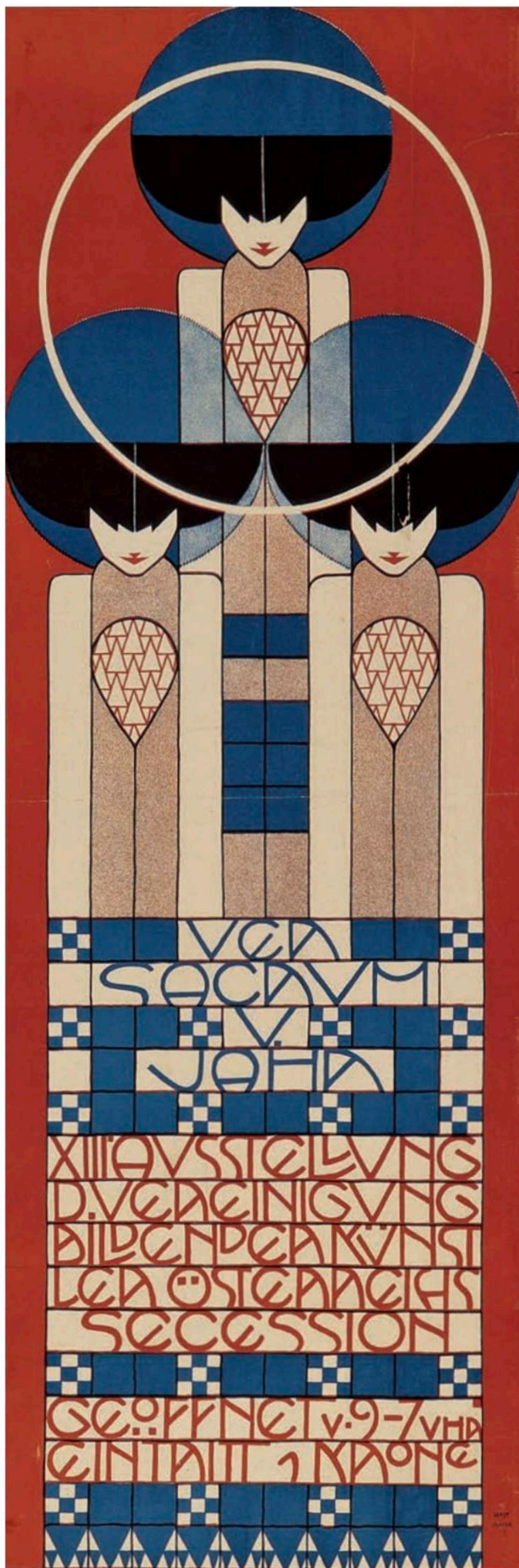
The editors of *Ver Sacrum*, influenced by the concept of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, sought to integrate typography, ornament, and image into a unified artwork on the page. Each issue generally sported a single theme, and the implementation of a unified visual style extended even to the advertisements, which were usually designed by Secession members themselves. A striking example of the type of innovative design produced for *Ver Sacrum* is Moser's cover for February 1899, volume 2, issue 4 (fig. 2.39), for which he drew an allegorical female figure emerging from lush tendrils that create powerful abstract forms. The flattened planes of her face suggest the influence of Japanese aesthetics, while the subject resonates with the Japanese tradition of *Bijin-ga*. In fact, Japanese art also held a special fascination for the Secession artists, who dedicated their sixth exhibition (in 1900) to it. The decorative lettering features the same sense of flow as is found in Japanese art. The unusual square format of *Ver Sacrum* also garnered attention, and is suggestive of the cubic spaces in Olbrich's building and Klimt's exhibition poster.



2.39 Koloman Moser, *Ver Sacrum*, vol. 2, issue 4, February, 1899. Lithograph, 11 $\frac{1}{8}$  × 11 $\frac{1}{8}$  in (29.5 × 28.2 cm). Leipzig, Verlag von E.A. Seemann. Stiftsbibliothek Klosterneuburg.

Koloman Moser also contributed a poster publicizing one of the Secession exhibitions, this one for the thirteenth show, held in 1902 (fig. 2.40). By then, many of the Secession artists had shifted to a decorative scheme built on orthogonal structures. Partly influenced by the Scottish design principles that had made a huge splash at the eighth Secession exhibition in 1900, a subset of the Secessionists adopted not only a new style but also a new tone, in which subjective, Symbolist-influenced flights of fancy were eschewed in favor of a more straightforward subject matter. At the same time, geometric pattern, which does not lend itself to the sort of sensual atmosphere favored by Klimt, became a more important visual element. In this poster, Moser used a scheme of three figures arranged symmetrically in a vertical format that is clearly reminiscent of Scottish graphics. The text is used in the Scottish manner as a plinth for the figures, yet it is better integrated by passages of ornament that allow text and image to flow together. In contrast to all of this geometric clarity is the fanciful lettering, which features scarcely legible abstract forms. Some of the letters bulge, some serve as passive foils to the more exuberant letters, while the "R"s in "Österreichs" (fourth line from the bottom) look like deformed "A"s. Though replete with curved elements, especially the stems, the curves are not irregular, like those of the French Art Nouveau, but rather seem to be geometric in their baseline shapes. The geometric pattern and extreme simplification of the figures in this poster are distinctly unsexual and un-Symbolist, a far cry from the decorative sensuality of French Art Nouveau.

Another poster that bridges the curvilinear style of the early Secession with the post-1900 concern with geometry was made by Alfred Roller in 1903 for the sixteenth Secession exhibition (fig. 2.41). At the top of the lithograph, the three "S"s in the



2.40 Koloman Moser, *Seccession XIII*, 1902. Poster. Color lithograph, 69 × 23 in (177.2 × 59.7 cm). Museum für Gestaltung, Zurich.



2.41 Alfred Roller, *Seccession 16 Ausstellung*, 1903. Poster. Color lithograph.



word “Secession” display short, blunt curves that descend into long sinuous spines, elongated and stylized like the traditional allegorical figure. The field behind them is made up not of lavish floral ornament, but of a geometric pattern. The plinth-like block of text at the bottom features an incredibly dense, bold decorative type, in which the letters expand to fit into every nook and cranny of the box that circumscribes them. These striking letterforms will make a dramatic reappearance in the psychedelic graphic design of the 1960s.

## WIENER WERKSTÄTTE

Around 1903, Josef Hoffmann (1870–1956)—the Viennese architect, designer, and member of the Secession—and Moser began to develop a new organization that would focus its efforts on promoting high standards of manufacture for Austrian crafts. (The term “crafts” in the early twentieth century denotes the decorative arts associated with architecture such as furniture and textile design, metalwork, bookbinding, graphic design, and even the creation of industrial products; it should not be confused with the uniquely American notion of “crafts” as amateurish art projects with ephemeral materials, such as collages made by children.) With the financial support of the industrialist Fritz Wärndorfer, they named their organization the **Wiener Werkstätte**, translatable as the “Viennese Workshops.”

Hoffmann and Moser, who were both professors at Vienna’s **Kunstgewerbeschule**, the School of Arts and Crafts, wrote in the 1905 manifesto of the Wiener Werkstätte: “So long as our cities, our houses, our rooms, our furniture, our effects, our clothes and our jewelry, so long as our language and feelings fail to reflect the spirit of our times in a plain, simple and beautiful way, we shall be infinitely behind our ancestors.” The artists of the Wiener Werkstätte, influenced by the principles of the Arts and Crafts movement, as well as by the concept of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, sought to create works in a variety of media that would beautify modern urban society. Between 1903 and 1905, a schism gradually deepened between artists committed to the collapse of the traditional arts and crafts hierarchy, and those who felt that painting was the most exalted form of art produced at the Secession. This led to a gradual decline in the cohesiveness of the Secession movement and, after 1905, it was eclipsed by former Secession artists’ new commitment to the Werkstätte. While a number of Secession artists had earlier desired to pursue the production of crafts, they had never before successfully formed relationships with manufacturers.



2.42 Josef Hoffmann and Koloman Moser, Wiener Werkstätte logotypes, 1903.

## Werkstätte Style

In terms of style, the artists associated with the Werkstätte rejected the irregular, organic style of the early Secession and focused their efforts on the geometric clarity of form that had become a major part of *Secessionstil* around 1900. All of the products of the Werkstätte were harmonized to fit this restrained style, one that was in a way summarized by the two **logotypes** produced to adorn its goods in 1903 (*fig. 2.42*). In tune with the medieval spirit of collaboration that had characterized the Arts and Crafts movement in England, it was never revealed whether Moser or Hoffmann had designed the logos or if they were a communal project. The “rose” logo features the eponymous flower depicted in a severe rectilinear design, its bloom made up of squares within squares, each part of the flower boxed in by a rectangle, while the “Twin Ws” logo displays the superimposed letters contained within a perfect square. An important part of the Werkstätte ideology was that the designers, most of whom were graduates of the Kunstgewerbeschule, would be paid royalties from their work, and not have to suffer the lowly status and desperate poverty of wage laborers.

The square shape that is a distinguishing characteristic of many Werkstätte designs was employed equally by Moser and Hoffmann, although the latter used it so prominently that it became known by the nickname the “Quadrat-Hoffmann.” For example, in 1905, Hoffmann designed a poster for the Werkstätte that regularly intersperses the Twin Ws logo with the words “Wiener Werkstätte” centered and justified into a square block of text (*fig. 2.43*). Here, the use of orthogonal schemes to advertise the elegant functionalism of Werkstätte products is in resounding contrast to the idiosyncratic designs of the Secession—designs that had effectively signified the Secession artists’ interest in Symbolism and mysticism.

Hoffmann and Moser also designed the interior of the fashion house owned by Emilie Flöge (1874–1952), an important patron and longtime companion of Klimt. The Schwestern Flöge opened in 1904, sporting an interior with an overarching orthogonal design. Klimt, in turn, designed a number of textiles for the Werkstätte as well as fashion designs for Flöge. Owing partly to its financial success in designing textiles, the Werkstätte opened branches in Zurich, Switzerland, and New York City as well as a new headquarters in a fashionable district of Vienna in 1907. As had been the case with the Arts and Crafts movement in England, the espoused ideal of making the entire world of mass-produced goods beautiful was fine in theory, but overall the output at the Werkstätte consisted of handmade goods for the wealthy bourgeoisie. Moser left in 1907 to pursue a career as a painter while Hoffmann remained a part of the organization he had co-founded until its dissolution in 1932.

## Austrian Expressionism: Oskar Kokoschka, Egon Schiele

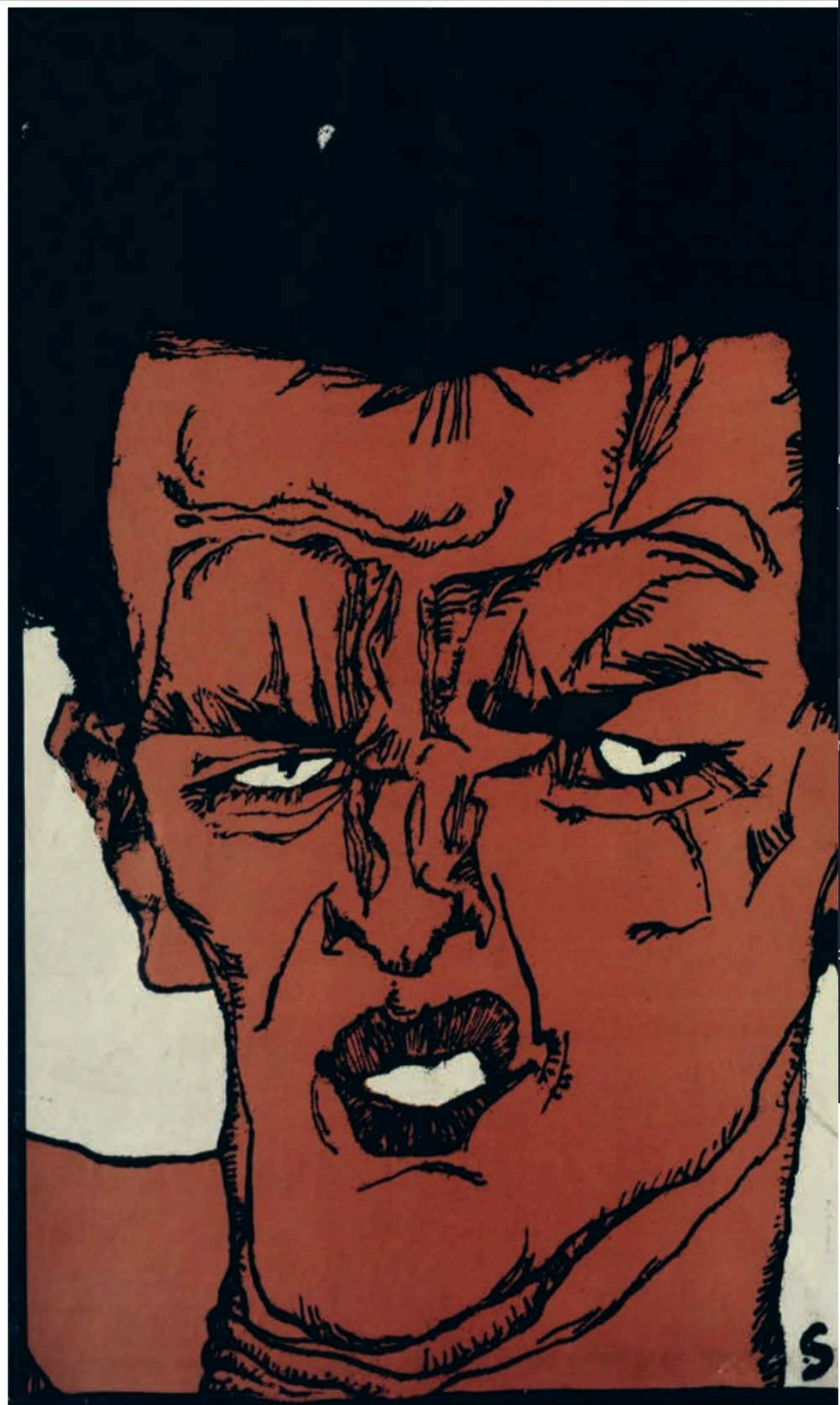
Another trend in graphic design that grew out of the Viennese Secession movement was **Expressionism**. Expressionism is neither a defined movement like the Werkstätte, nor is it a unitary style. Instead, it is a mindset whereby the artist seeks not to show what the world looks like, but rather how it feels. Along these lines, many Expressionist artists sought to represent the storm and stress of a tortured soul or a trying situation. Not all



2.43 Josef Hoffmann, *Wiener Werkstätte* ("Viennese Workshops"), 1905. Poster. Color lithograph, 29 ft 6 in x 20 ft (9 x 6.1 m). The Albertina Museum, Vienna.



2.44 Oskar Kokoschka, *Self-portrait*, from *Der Sturm*, 1st issue, March, 1910. Poster. Lithograph in black, brown, and old rose, 26 × 17 in (66.7 × 44.6 cm).



Expressionism has a specific, directed feeling in mind; often it articulates a type of generalized anxiety or unease about the world. While Expressionist artists in Vienna were associated with the *Werkstätte*, their styles stand in stark contrast to the *Werkstätte* style of compositional simplicity. In its place, they used distortions of form, color, and space that were designed to increase the emotional impact on the viewer. Viennese Expressionist style has much in common with the expressive power of French Symbolist art as well as Art Nouveau. The art historian Peter Selz recognized this consonance but also elucidated an important distinction: “Symbolism, Art Nouveau, and expressionism share above all their emphasis on form and its evocative potentialities, ... Frequently, where symbolism merely suggests and understates, Expressionism exaggerates and overstates.” Furthermore, Expressionists eschewed the polished finish and ornamental elegance of Art Nouveau.

The foremost Expressionist artists associated with the *Werkstätte*, Oskar Kokoschka (1886–1980) and Egon Schiele (1890–1918), were both protégés of Gustav Klimt. While Schiele and Kokoschka specialized in painting, they also produced a number of striking posters and other graphics. As a student at the *Kunstgewerbeschule*, Kokoschka had produced bookbindings and illustrations as well as ceramics for the *Werkstätte* as early as 1907. Kokoschka took expressive intensity to a high level with the self-portrait he painted in 1910, which was reproduced as a lithographic poster for *Der Sturm*, a Berlin art journal dedicated to the Expressionist cause (fig. 2.44). Kokoschka had shaved his own head that year and reveled in his striking appearance, while also displaying his almost religious commitment to Expressionist art. Of course, in the poster he has exaggerated the shapes of his features in order to emphasize a sort of misshapen ugliness that exudes

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MUSIK  
FESTWOCHE**

**ZWEI KONZERTE  
LEBENDE ÖSTERR.  
KOMPONISTEN**

**25. UND 29. JUNI  
GROSSER BEETHOVENSAAL**

**ARNOLD ROSÉ, QUARTETT  
ROSÉ, WINTERNITZ-DORDA,  
DRILL- ORRIDGE, GOLD-  
SCHMIED, ŠTĚPAN, SCHÖN-  
BERG, ZEMLINSKY, SCHREKER,  
NOVÁK, SUK**

**KARTEN ZU K 10.-, 6.-, 4.-, 3.-, 2.-, 1.- BEI  
KEHLENDORFER, WIEN, I., KRUGERSTRASSE 3.**

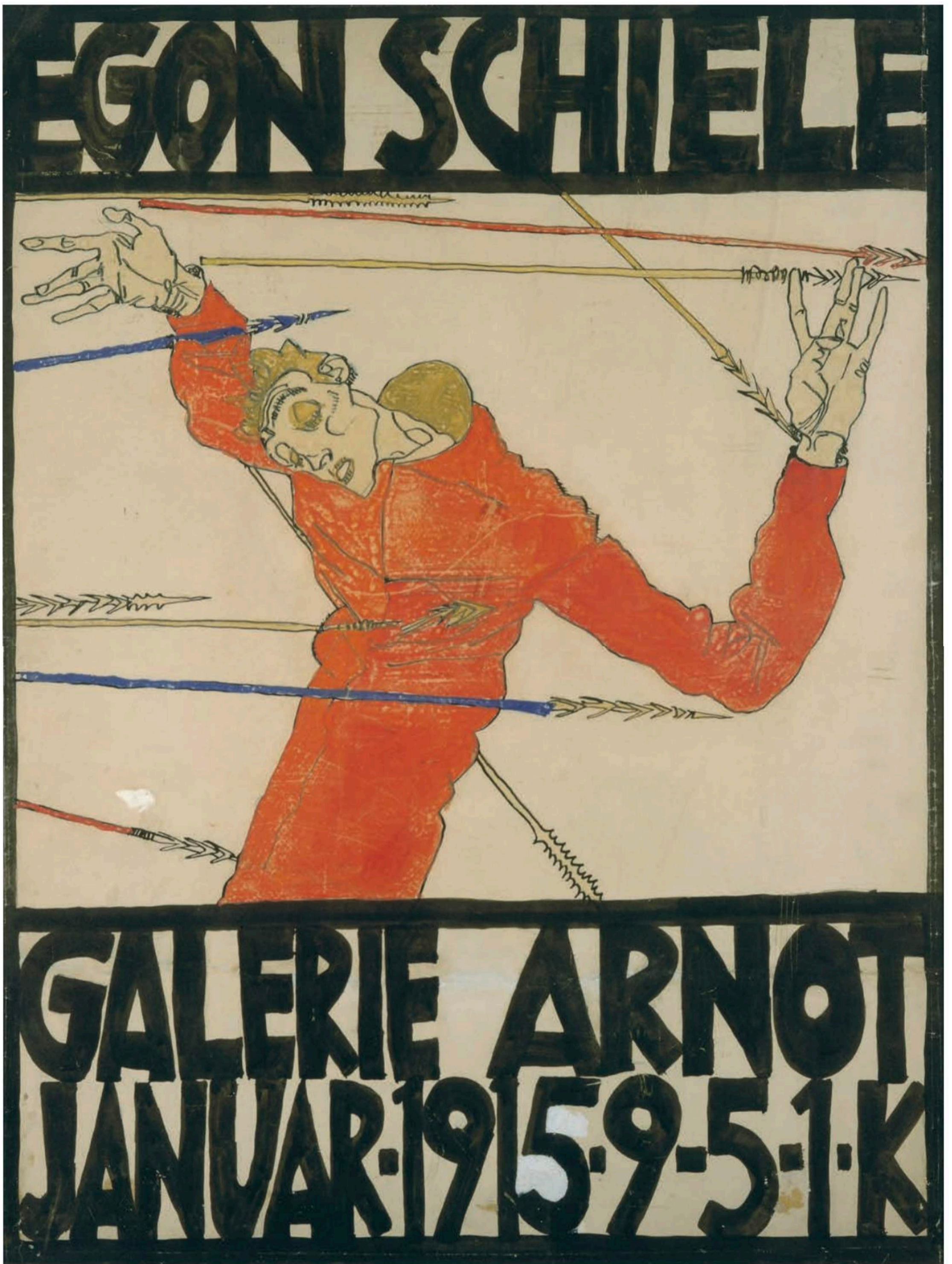
2.45 Egon Schiele, *Musik Festwoche*  
("Music Festival"), 1912. Poster.  
18 $\frac{3}{8}$  x 24 in (47.5 x 61.5 cm). MAK-  
Austrian Museum of Applied Arts/  
Contemporary Art.

emotional intensity, like that of a biblical prophet. The religious motif is continued in his pose, as Kokoschka presents himself in the guise of Jesus, poking at a wound in his chest. He attempted to unify the image and text by placing his initials, "OK," and the words "*Neue Nummer*" ("new issue") on his body itself, like a slogan carved into his chest. Like many Expressionist works, this self-portrait is emotionally raw, reveling in the power of human feeling.

Egon Schiele's torturous emotional life is well represented in the art he produced. Schiele had a traditional art education, having studied at both the Kunstgewerbeschule and the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna. When Schiele was a child, his father had degenerated into insanity as a result of a syphilis infection, and Schiele's difficult youth caused him to come into almost constant conflict with authority. Schiele was obsessed with the depiction of sexuality and psychosexual conflict, often mixed together with

morbid fantasies of death and decay. He was, of course, a great devotee of Freud's work in this area. Schiele's explicit images of adolescents (the age of sexual consent in Vienna at this time was 14) made him notorious, and he was briefly imprisoned in 1912 under an obscenity statute.

The commemorative poster shown here was issued in support of a music festival held in 1912 as a celebration of Austrian composers (fig. 2.45). Like Kokoschka in his poster for *Der Sturm*, Schiele used a self-portrait as his Expressionist vehicle. The self-portrait was in many ways the natural subject of these two artists, because their art tends to look inward, at their own minds, as opposed to documenting the outer world. Schiele has distorted his own face into a terrible grimace that is complemented by the blood-red color. There is no direct correlation between the image and the traditional event that it promotes, suggesting the



2.46 Egon Schiele, *Galerie Arnot*, 1915. © Wien Museum, Wien.

widespread acceptance of the Expressionist idiom as signifying “culture” in its broadest sense.

In 1915, Schiele was granted the first solo exhibition of his paintings and drawings in Vienna, at the Galerie Arnot (fig. 2.46). He designed this poster to publicize the show. Displaying his ongoing propensity for narcissism as well as religious imagery, Schiele also represented himself in a Christian image; pierced by arrows, he resembles Saint Sebastian. While the elongated proportions of the figure have their roots in the Art Nouveau style, here they form part of a disjointed body, an assemblage of distorted parts that do not seem to fit together. This damaged body torn apart by arrows says more about Schiele’s internal psychological state than about the actual condition of his corpus. While the image depicts Schiele himself, the viewer is not expected to empathize with the specific facts of his suffering so much as to feel this powerful vision of emotional pain.

In 1915, Schiele married Edith Harms (1894–1918), a young woman who lived with her family across the street from the artist, and it appeared that both his personal and professional lives were now finally in place. Tragically, in October 1918, Schiele and his wife, now pregnant, both succumbed to the Spanish influenza that killed many millions of Europeans. Klimt and Moser also died that year, while Kokoschka had long ago settled elsewhere. An era of Viennese art came to an end.

## ART NOUVEAU IN GERMANY

The German Art Nouveau movement, called *Jugendstil*, represents another example of artists’ desire to cast off the eclectic historicist styles that had dominated the nineteenth century. Artists in Germany became aware of the French and British movements through publications such as *Das Moderne Plakat* (“The Modern Poster”), a bound volume of 52 lithographic reprints including work by Toulouse-Lautrec, Steinlen, and the Beggarstoffs. While *Das Moderne Plakat* was printed in Dresden in 1897 by Gerhard Kuhtmann, German artists also circulated copies of the French series *Les Affiches Illustrées* and *Les Maîtres de l’Affiche* between 1886 and 1900.

Beginning in 1894, a series of new magazines helped to galvanize a group of young German designers to pursue the styles that were sweeping across Europe. The issue of national identity played a large part in the public discussion of the new art in Germany, as more conservative artists and intellectuals objected to the international, and especially French, aesthetic innovations that underlay Art Nouveau. As was the case in other countries, Art Nouveau in Germany represented something of a clash of generations. This conflict is indicated by the term *Jugendstil*, which means “youth style” and was derived from the name of one of the new German art periodicals founded by progressive young artists.

### *Pan* and *Jugend* Magazines

The first periodical to promote Art Nouveau in Germany as part of an international phenomenon was *Pan*, launched in Berlin in 1895. Its founders included the 27-year-old art critic Julius Meier-Graefe (1867–1935), who in later decades would become one of the most esteemed historians of modern art in Europe. The title of the journal is suggestive of the international tastes of its editors,



2.47 Josef Sattler, *Pan*, 1895. Portfolio reproduction from *Les Maîtres de l’Affiche*. 18 $\frac{3}{8}$  × 13 $\frac{3}{8}$  in (48 × 34 cm).

as the Greek god Pan, half-man and half-goat, was a familiar reference to followers of the Symbolist and Aesthetic movements in France and England. Pan was associated with creativity, music, and poetry, as well as with Dionysian sexuality and visionary nightmares, and therefore encompassed many of the favorite themes of Art Nouveau. Over its five-year run, *Pan* published a wide range of Art Nouveau graphics from France, including works by Toulouse-Lautrec, Steinlen, and the painter Maurice Denis (1870–1943).

A poster by Josef Sattler (1867–1931) advertising the journal shows the god emerging from a watery environment with his characteristic mischievous grin (fig. 2.47). At the same time, the stamens of a waterlily spell out “Pan,” uniting text and image in the fashion of many French posters. This *Jugendstil* image is rife with Japonisme; both the orange and blue palette, with its juxtaposition of complementary colors, and the flat space attest to the Japanese influence. Meier-Graefe, who was serving as both art director and financial manager of the journal, was forced to leave soon after the first issue was published, as the conservative patrons who had financed the venture objected to his French-inflected taste. Meier-Graefe was singled out for criticism partly because of anti-Semitic feelings. After his dismissal, the co-founder Otto Bierbaum (1865–1910) continued at *Pan* and managed to fend off the attempts by his wealthy backers to make the journal beholden to German national identity. It is important to remember that



Münchener illustrierte Wochenschrift für Kunst und Leben. — G. Hirth's Verlag in München & Leipzig.

2.48 Fritz Erlor, *Jugend*, 1898. Printed periodical, 12¼ × 9¼ in (31 × 23.5 cm). Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich.

national identity was a prominent issue in Europe at this time, not just in Germany (a useful parallel exists in the French Symbolists' embrace of Richard Wagner, which upset French people who wanted to shut out German aesthetics). Also, the young editors of *Pan* wanted to revive the high standards of German arts and crafts just like their patrons, but they disagreed over the issue of espousing an international trend, as opposed to building a strictly homegrown tradition. Meier-Graefe continued to spread the gospel of Art Nouveau in Berlin, where he founded the influential journal *Dekorative Kunst* in 1897, and in Paris, where he opened a gallery called La Maison Moderne in 1899.

The use of the term *Jugendstil* as a German synonym for Art Nouveau began with a periodical called *Jugend: Illustrierte Wochenschrift für Kunst und Leben* ("Youth: Illustrated Weekly for Art and Life"), first published in January 1896. The publisher of *Jugend*, Georg Hirth (1841–1916), was committed to modern graphics from the very start. He hired over 70 illustrators to work for the journal, producing a wide variety of Art Nouveau graphics. He employed the Munich-based illustrator Fritz Erler (1868–1940) to create over 50 covers for *Jugend*, including one for the eleventh issue, published in 1898 (fig. 2.48). Hirth wanted each cover to reference the theme of youth indicated by the journal's title. Here, Erler has drawn a sinuous figure of a warrior with a sword, looking outward toward some confrontation, emblematic of the aggressive persona of young men. Somewhat paradoxically, he usually chose to represent "youth" through medieval references, drawing on the long-standing admiration for that period both in Germany in particular and more broadly in Europe in the nineteenth century. The black figure is complemented by the bold red lettering in a **planar** scheme, again replete with traces of the Beggarstoffs and Japonisme.

### Blackletter

The flowing text that spells out "Jugend" at the top of the image represents an important compromise between *Jugendstil* aesthetics and the traditional German script called "blackletter." In the 1890s, much of German printing utilized blackletter, which was also called Fraktur. Compared to roman faces, blackletter's narrowly proportioned letters, stylized ligatures to connect letters, and small spaces between words and between lines of text, may appear illegible and even unreadable to those unfamiliar with it. In truth, this is not the case. There is no reason to believe that readers familiar with blackletter read at a slower speed than readers of roman typefaces, and the design of the letters helps to facilitate readability in terms of the specific orthography of the German language (in which, for example, the first letter of every noun is capitalized). The conflicts that arise in Germany during the twentieth century over the use of blackletter versus roman type reappear in several later chapters.

It is important not to confuse the characteristics of the sometimes ornamental, yet highly functional, blackletter script—which was in everyday use in Germany through to the middle of the twentieth century—with the sometimes illegible, unreadable letters of many decorative typefaces. Erler's heading, "Jugend," is typical of German Art Nouveau in that it combines elements of blackletter with curvilinear, decorative elements of modern hand-drawn lettering. These elements can be hard to separate from one another for someone only familiar with roman lettering. However,



2.49 Otto Eckmann, Eckmann typeface, from *Schriften und Ornamente*, 1900.

blackletter generally has spikier, more angular modeling, as opposed to the elongated undulating elements that are dominant in Art Nouveau. Obviously, the synthesizing of new styles had a significant political component because by the twentieth century, blackletter had become an important signifier of German national identity, so an artist who merged its forms with script that was recognizably influenced by Germany's European rival, France, was sure to offend traditional Germans.

Another excellent example of how young artists sought to merge national tradition and *Jugendstil* aesthetics in typography comes by way of the designer Otto Eckmann (1865–1902). Eckmann was a versatile artist from Hamburg who had academic training in both the fine and the applied arts. Knowledgeable regarding everything from French Symbolist aesthetics to Japanese woodcuts, he focused his work after 1894 on decorative graphics. He produced a large number of illustrations—as well as ornamental borders, headings, and the like—for journals including *Pan* and *Jugend*. In 1900, he collaborated with the foundry owner Karl Klingspor (1868–1950) to create Eckmann, an elegant typeface whose styling borrows elements from both the blackletter and Art Nouveau traditions (fig. 2.49). While the undulating, swelling shapes of the letters bespeak Otto Eckmann's interest in Art Nouveau, the "open bowls," or incomplete boundaries that circumscribe negative space in a letter such as the lowercase "g," reference a calligraphic root in blackletter.

### *Simplicissimus* Magazine

The same year that *Jugend* was founded in Berlin, 1896, Munich saw the introduction of a satirical magazine called *Simplicissimus*, which would commission some of the most striking images to appear in Germany that decade. *Simplicissimus* was co-founded by the artist Thomas Theodor Heine (1867–1948) and the publisher Albert Langen (1869–1909). A poster by Heine, published in 1897, became the most enduring image associated with *Simplicissimus*, and was revived several times in different



# SIMPLICISSIMUS



TH

ways to promote the journal (fig. 2.50). It features a startlingly red bulldog that has broken its chain, and stands confrontationally in an ambiguous field of black. The sturdy bulldog is neatly complemented by the restrained heading at the top, which stays away from the curvilinear exuberance typical of Art Nouveau. The strength of Heine's balanced use of the blank space between dog and title is particularly notable. This dog served to capture the spirit of sharp, biting commentary that made *Simplicissimus* one of the most famous magazines in Germany.

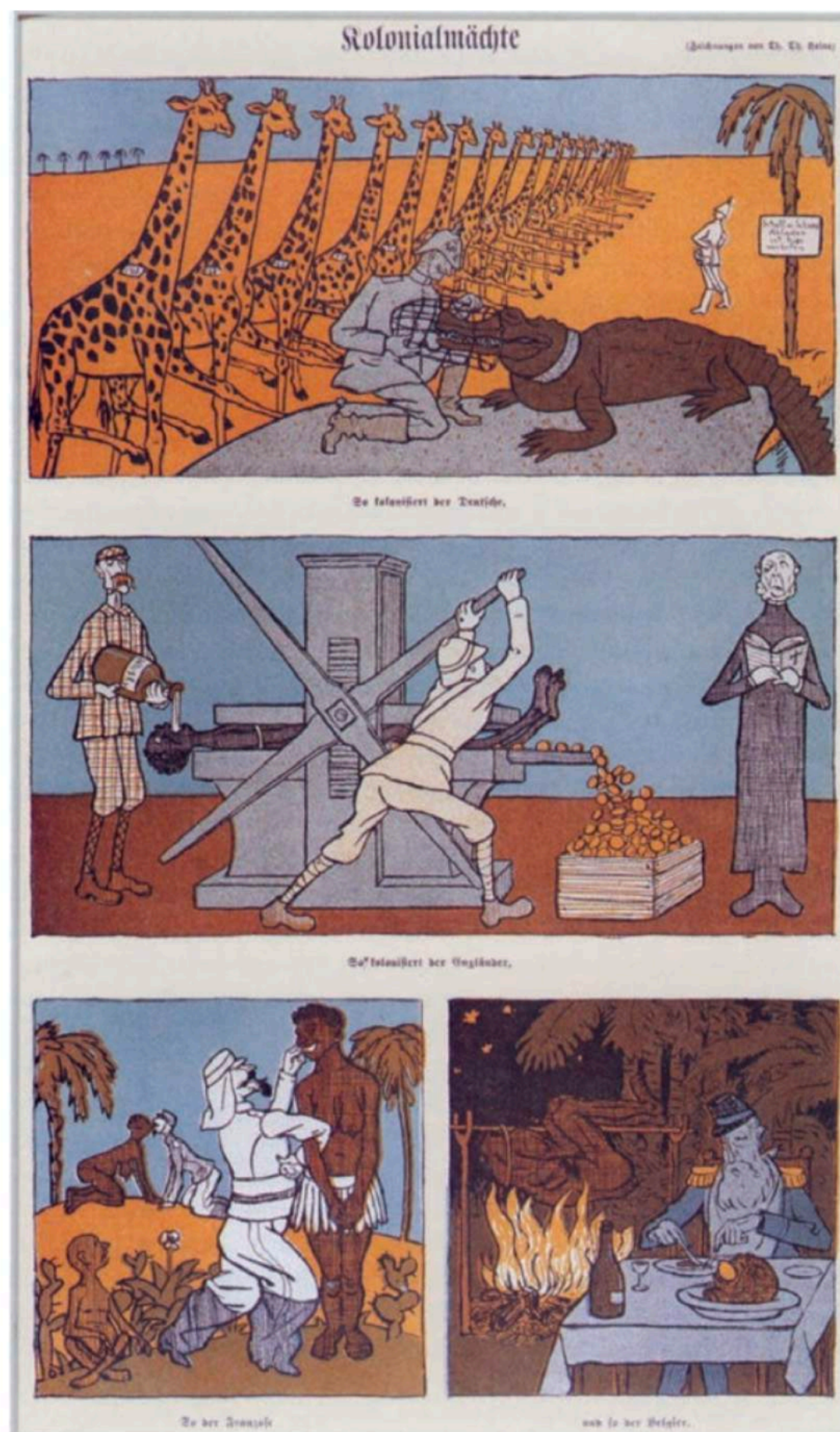
Heine's cartoons helped turn *Simplicissimus* into one of the most daring satirical magazines of the day. Then, in 1899, Heine met the same fate as Honoré Daumier (see Chapter 1) before him, and was imprisoned for six months because of a cartoon that had been published the previous year. The charge was an archaic one then still in force in Germany, *lèse majesté*, or offending the sovereign. The scandal in some ways worked in *Simplicissimus*'s favor, as the notoriety of the case caused an enormous jump in circulation. Heine was largely undeterred by his incarceration, and went on to produce hundreds of additional satirical cartoons for *Simplicissimus*.

One of Heine's most famous subsequent works, *Kolonialmächte*, or "Colonial Powers," appeared on May 3, 1904 (fig. 2.51). In this image Heine directly mocks the "Scramble for Africa" that Germany had joined in 1884 in an attempt to expand its imperial influence. The caption reads, "Here is how the German colonizes, Here is how the Englishman colonizes, And the Frenchman, and the Belgian." In the early twentieth century, the European population was gradually awakening to the extent of the brutality visited upon Africans—brutality that was most viscerally illustrated by Heine in the lower right of his cartoon, which shows Belgium's King Leopold II in the guise of a cannibal feasting upon a native African. Sadly, Heine's ironic assessment of European conduct was all too close to the truth as only three months later, in August of 1904, German troops carried out the genocidal destruction of the Herero people in Namibia.

### Henry van de Velde

Despite the movement's strong nationalist inflection, one of the most successful *Jugendstil* designers in Germany in the 1890s, Henry van de Velde (1863–1957), was Belgian. Van de Velde began his artistic career as a painter, winning some praise as a Symbolist-inspired member of the Belgian group called Les XX ("the Twenty"). Like many Art Nouveau artists, van de Velde focused on the decorative arts after a short time spent as a fine artist. Of course, the decorative arts were enjoying a new elevated status and social significance at the time because of the influence of Arts and Crafts theorists. Van de Velde first joined the Art Nouveau movement by way of Paris, where in 1895 he designed three rooms for Siegfried Bing's gallery L'Art Nouveau. Under the tutelage of Bing and Meier-Graefe, who was now living in Paris, van de Velde embraced the concept of a new art that would represent a synthesis of international, mainly European and Asian, aesthetics.

In 1897, van de Velde's Bing rooms were exhibited at the Arts and Crafts exhibition in Dresden. That exhibition cemented van de Velde's reputation in Germany, where he was soon receiving commissions for a variety of design projects from patrons in Munich and Berlin. The candelabrum that he created in 1898–99 is a wonderful example of the whiplash curve as a fundamental design



2.51 Thomas Heine, *Colonial Powers*, in *Simplicissimus*, May 3, 1904.

opposite: 2.50 Thomas Heine, *Simplicissimus*, 1897. Poster. Color lithograph, 30 × 20½ in (76.2 × 52 cm). Museum für Gestaltung, Zurich.

principle (fig. 2.52). The flamboyant arms of the candelabrum, derived from natural forms, exude the dynamic energy of a whip about to strike. “Line is a force,” van de Velde stated, when asked to summarize his aesthetic. The historian Debora Silverman has recently argued that part of the magic of the whiplash curve for Belgians came out of its invocation of the *chicotte*, a flogging whip that was used brutally as part of Belgium’s colonial empire in the African Congo. As a symbol of imperial power, the whiplash curve was not a disinterested formal device, but a displacement of the exercise of violence on bodies of color. Silverman quotes van de Velde: “We seized line like one seizes a whip. A whip whose sonorous cracks accompanied our adventurous course, and whose blows lashed the skin of an indolent public.”

While he on occasion paid lip service to their views, van de Velde did not share the same commitment to raising the standards of everyday, mass-produced objects through communal workshops professed by Arts and Crafts designers. Instead, he often asserted that his individual talent was paramount, and was best used in the creation of handcrafted objects for the carriage trade. Perhaps because of these beliefs, van de Velde created only one design for a mass-produced poster during his career. In 1898, he produced an advertisement for the Tropon food company, a European manufacturer of food concentrates based in Cologne. The poster was among the first to be used in different versions in multiple European countries, with the slogan at the bottom translated into the appropriate language (fig. 2.53). Here, the familiar plant forms of Art Nouveau actually represent the cracked shells of eggs, the key ingredient in Tropon’s signature product, powdered egg whites. While the eggs are still recognizable, the poster comes daringly close to pure graphic abstraction. Van de Velde’s design

maintains the powerful energy of the whiplash, which contrasts with the gentler, less muscular curves seen in other Art Nouveau works such as Guimard’s Métro stations.

There is a strong contrast between the decorative flourishes of the eggs or the sinewy letters of the slogan “the most concentrated food” on the one hand, and the rather staid lettering at the top of the poster on the other. Although the letters of the firm’s name, “Tropon,” feature elongated descenders in the “R” and “P,” it is otherwise remarkable for its clean design. This brings up two issues that influenced the possible use of *Jugendstil* and its ilk for advertising purposes, and which have substantial implications for the field of graphic design in general. First, does the decreased legibility of the lettering have an impact on the effectiveness of the poster? It is likely that the patrons at Tropon thought so, and instructed van de Velde to draw their corporate name in a simplified fashion. This question of legibility repeatedly challenged graphic designers throughout the twentieth century. Second, is the investment in an “artistic” poster by a named designer worth the cost? Will it be proportionally more effective than an advertisement that does not use a progressive style by a celebrated designer? This second issue is discussed at length in Chapter 3.

Van de Velde’s continuing successes in Germany and personal relationships with wealthy patrons precipitated a move to Berlin in 1899, followed by another to the small German city of Weimar in 1902. In Weimar, he was appointed the director of a new Kunstgewerbeschule by a powerful local aristocrat, Wilhelm Ernst, the grand duke of Saxe-Weimar. The patronage of *Jugendstil* artists by ruling families such as Ernst’s was especially important in Germany, where aristocrats had managed to preserve much of



2.52 Henry van de Velde, Candelabrum, 1898–99. Silver. Brohan-Museum, Berlin.



2.53 Henry van de Velde, *Tropon*, 1899. Color lithograph, 31½ x 21½ in (80.5 x 54.3 cm). Private Collection.



2.54 Henry van de Velde, *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, 1908. Title spread. The British Library, London.

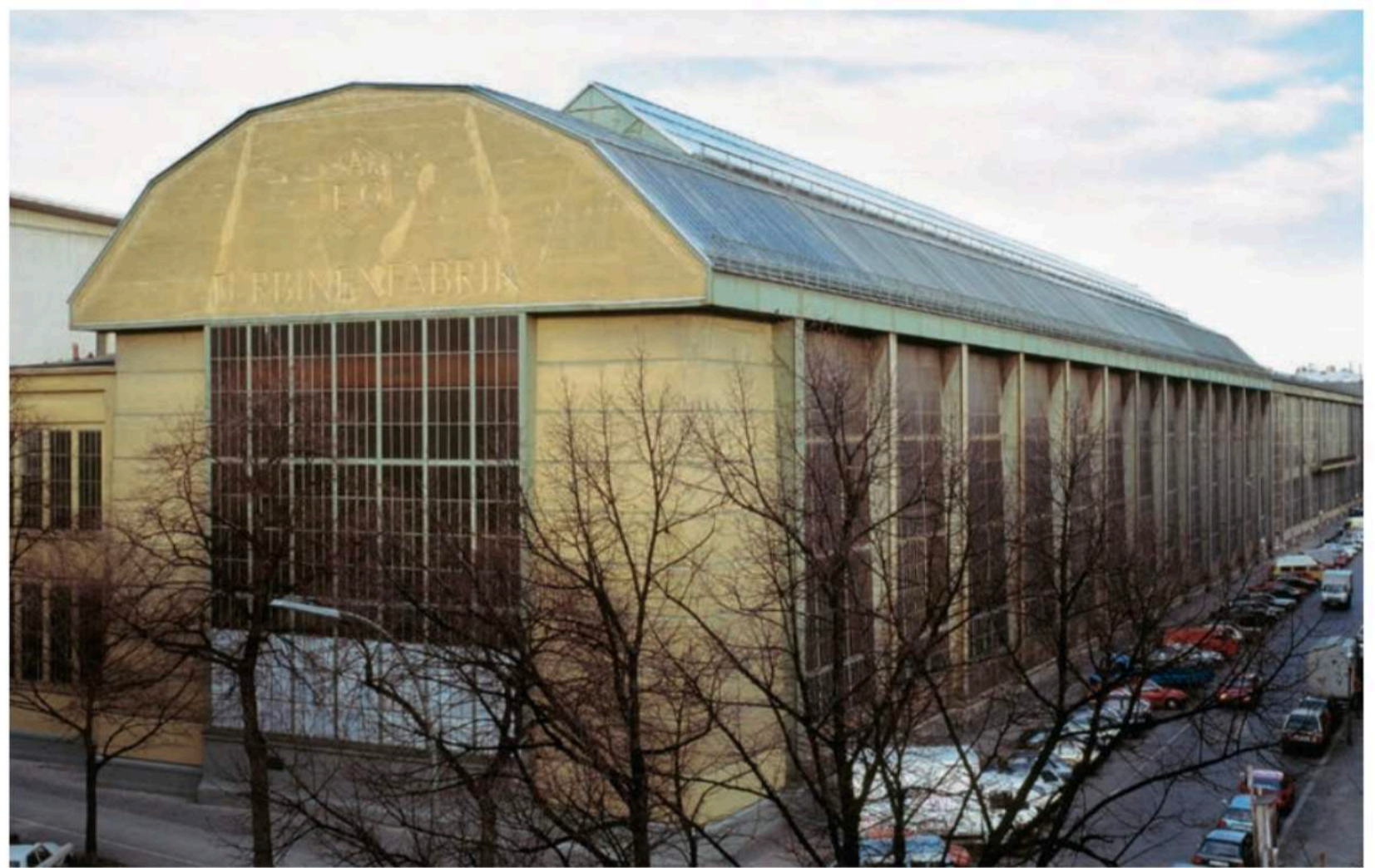
their authority over public life. In 1907, van de Velde also became one of the founding members of the **Deutscher Werkbund**, an association of designers, architects, and industrial firms based in Munich. The published goal of the Werkbund was based on Arts and Crafts principles learned in England by one of its founders, Hermann Muthesius (1861–1927): “the ennobling of commerce through the collaboration of art, industry, and craftsmanship.” The Werkbund nearly split apart in its early years, as members debated the importance of standardized, functional designs, favored by industry, as opposed to the more elitist individual work of artists such as van de Velde. Many industrialists who supported the Werkbund wanted to rid the organization of its more daring styles and their practitioners. The architectural historian Mark Jarzombek has asserted that the Werkbund after 1910 sought to promote a national identity that would conform to the rather conservative tastes of the German bourgeoisie.

During his time in Weimar, van de Velde produced one of his most esteemed graphic works, an edition of *Also Sprach Zarathustra* (1908; fig. 2.54) by the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900). Van de Velde had a personal connection to the philosopher, having befriended one of Nietzsche’s siblings, Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche (1846–1935), who had encouraged the artist’s move to Weimar. Van de Velde’s edition of *Zarathustra* represents the theory of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or total work of art, on a small scale. He attempted to harmonize every aspect of the book, including its ink, illustrations, and typography. The dense patterns

on the cover surely must have been influenced by William Morris’s designs for the Kelmscott Press, which tended toward similarly tightly packed compositions. Furthermore, van de Velde’s aesthetic philosophy, emphasizing the powerful vision of an individual creator, was heavily influenced by Nietzsche’s own writings on art. When the First World War began in 1914, van de Velde’s status as a foreigner in Germany, which had already complicated a commission he received for the Werkbund, caused him to be dismissed from his post at the Weimar Kunstgewerbeschule. He recommended that the German architect, and his Werkbund colleague, Walter Gropius (1883–1969) be appointed to replace him (see Chapter 6). Van de Velde left Germany in 1917, and spent the rest of his career in Switzerland and the Netherlands.

### Peter Behrens

The art colony established in 1899 at Darmstadt by the grand duke of Hesse-Darmstadt, Ernst Ludwig (1868–1937), sought to promote high standards for crafts made in the region. Led by the Viennese Secession architect Joseph Olbrich, who designed most of the buildings at the colony’s headquarters in Mathildenhöhe Park, the artists at the Darmstadt colony were important promoters of *Jugendstil*. One of the more accomplished designers at the colony was a German architect named Peter Behrens (1868–1940), who had spent the 1890s living in Munich. There he had pursued both the fine and the applied arts while becoming a key player in the Munich Secession (1893), a group like the Viennese equivalent



2.55 Peter Behrens, AEG Turbine Factory, Assembly Hall, Berlin, 1908–9.

**Vom Schlechten kann man nie zu wenig und das Gute nie zu oft lesen: schlechte Bücher sind intellektuelles Gift, sie verderben den Geist. Um das Gute zu lesen, ist eine Be-**

2.56 Peter Behrens, Behrens-Antiqua typeface, 1908.

that was dedicated to the spread of new, non-academic styles in the fine arts. Behrens was also well acquainted with the circle of artists around the journal *Pan*, through which he became acquainted with Julius Meier-Graefe and Eckmann. In 1897, as his interest in the applied arts strengthened, Behrens co-founded an Arts and Crafts group in Munich.

In 1903, Behrens was appointed the director of the Kunstgewerbeschule in Düsseldorf, a move that coincided with his gradual shift from the organic, curvilinear *Jugendstil* style to one marked by greater simplification and geometric forms. At the school, Behrens restructured the curriculum in order to place greater emphasis on design for industry. Three years after his appointment, Behrens was approached by Emil Rathenau (1838–1915), the founder of the electrical utility and industrial producer called Allgemeine Elektrizitäts Gesellschaft (AEG). In 1881, Rathenau had bought the German rights to the electrical generation system invented by Thomas Edison (1847–1931), and in succeeding decades had developed his company into an industrial giant. Showing considerable foresight, Rathenau wanted his company to be at the vanguard of marketing as well as technology, so he hired Behrens to create a unified design style that would eventually encompass all of AEG's buildings, facilities, and graphic materials.

One of Behrens's first tasks was to design a new building to house the production of electrical generation equipment at the company's headquarters in Berlin (*fig. 2.55*). This turbine

building was constructed only of industrial materials—concrete, steel, and glass. Behrens used these to create a balance between classical tradition, seen in the dignified, monumental form of the building, and the new abstract styles. He eschewed almost all ornament for his creation, following the Art Nouveau credo that all beauty must be inherent in the form, not come from applied decorative elements. The shape of the building is exemplary of the reductive geometric style typical of post-1900 *Jugendstil* art. It is nearly impossible for the modern viewer to recognize how startling this type of bold, industrial architecture appeared at the time. It is also notable that three architect–designers who will play prominent roles in later chapters—Charles-Édouard Jeanneret, Walter Gropius, and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe—all worked for Behrens during the time that he was developing the AEG style.

The corporate logo that Behrens designed for AEG is visible on the flat plane at one end of the turbine building. This so-called “honeycomb” logotype features three hexagons containing the company's initials. The three geometric shapes are further contained within a larger hexagon. This simple, declarative logo speaks to the seriousness of purpose and power that an electrical company wants to project. The lettering in the logo is derived from a typeface that Behrens created for AEG, one of the first times that a corporation had ever acquired its own lettering. This face was called Behrens-Antiqua when it was released to the public by the Klingspor foundry some years later (*fig. 2.56*). As the title suggests, Behrens-Antiqua represents another of Behrens's syntheses of the



2.57 Peter Behrens, Electric Tea Kettle, 1909. Private Collection.

old and the new, as he attempted to update roman lettering of the modern style with some geometric stylizations.

Through his work for AEG creating mass-produced electrical appliances, Behrens became one of the first “industrial designers,” a profession that had been acclaimed without many practical results since the onset of Morris’s Arts and Crafts movement in the 1860s. His Electric Tea Kettle (1909; *fig. 2.57*) features the Spartan elegance and geometric schemes typical of the Wiener Werkstätte, yet here applied for the first time to an inexpensive, industrially produced item. The octagonal body, reminiscent of the roof of AEG’s turbine hall and its logo, and the rectilinear handle of the kettle, are balanced by the dramatic curve of the spout. In this kettle, Behrens synthesized a style that combined modern abstract elements with a traditional Prussian classicism.

In 1910, Behrens designed a poster advertising AEG’s newest product, a technologically advanced lamp (*fig. 2.58*). The orthogonal design is overlaid with an equilateral triangle that contains the lamp and an abstract pattern representing its brilliant output. The lines that make up the poster are a linear variant of the dots that represent light. The text boxes at top and bottom are reminders of past posters, but here the more typical allegorical figure has been replaced by a lamp.

At AEG, Behrens succeeded in creating a unified aesthetic for every aspect of the company’s visual environment. This process represents one of the first sustained examples of “corporate identity,” a concept that would come to dominate the design professions, especially graphic design, after 1945. It is important to remember that Behrens had been introduced to the concept of

the *Gesamtkunstwerk* in Munich as early as the 1890s, and it had also been a founding principle of the Darmstadt colony under Olbrich. At Darmstadt, Behrens had designed his own home and its furnishings in a manner consistent with the concept of the “total work of art.” However, Behrens’s work for AEG represents perhaps the most consistent application of the principles of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*. There is perhaps some irony in the fact that the concept of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* was developed amid the Symbolists’ dream of a utopian future, in which all the arts—and even all of humanity—would be unified in aesthetic radiance, and yet its greatest deployment turned out to be a commercial project, the corporate identity of an electrical utility company. This process of transformation is called “reification” by scholars, meaning that an abstract concept, in this case the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, is made into a concrete reality in such a way that an artistic vision ends up coopted by commercial interests.

## THE DECLINE OF ART NOUVEAU

By 1910 the Art Nouveau movement was in decline. This process was evident in the polemical speech, later published as an essay, given in 1908 and titled “Ornament & Crime.” The speaker was the Viennese architect Adolf Loos (1870–1933). Therein, Loos asserted that there was an evolutionary trajectory to design history whereby more advanced civilizations minimized the amount of ornamental decoration of their environment. Ornamental styles such as Art Nouveau were backward and degenerate according to Loos, and had no organic connection to modern life.

As far as I am concerned, and this goes for all cultivated people, ornament does not give zest to life. If I want to eat some gingerbread, I choose a piece that is quite plain, and not in the shape of a heart or a baby or a horseman, and gilded all over. The man from the fifteenth century will not understand me. But all modern people will.

In this famous diatribe, Loos also argued that ornament, because it would surely go out of style at some point, was an immoral waste of time and effort. Loos’s negative view of Art Nouveau was destined to become commonplace among the next generation of modern designers, as they focused more on the style’s retrograde tendencies than its forward-thinking accomplishments.

The demise of Art Nouveau was ensured by a number of factors, including the social changes wrought during the First World War (1914–1918). It had really become a populist, widespread style only in the graphic arts, because many of the best works in other media, while intended for mass production, were exorbitantly expensive to produce and therefore unsuited to mass manufacture. Art Nouveau would be rediscovered by collectors in the middle of the twentieth century, with a series of exhibitions in London and New York fueling a renaissance and eventual reevaluation of the movement. As a press release from one of the first Art Nouveau revival exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art put it in 1949, “The curved and ornate style of this period is generally regarded with horror, yet the museum believes that the best Art Nouveau work merits reevaluation because . . . it represented a reaction against revivalism which opened the way to subsequent movements in modern design.”

# ALLGEMEINE ELEKTRICITÄTS GESELLSCHAFT



A·E·G·METALLFADENLAMPE

ZIRKA EIN WATT PRO KERZE

HOLLERBAUM & SCHMIDT · BERLIN N. 65

2.58 Peter Behrens, *AEG Lamp*, 1910. Poster. Lithograph, 26 $\frac{1}{2}$  x 20 in (67.7 x 50.8 cm). Merrill C. Berman Collection.