

ART NOUVEAU

1890–1914

National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC 20565 • October 8, 2000 – January 28, 2001

The exhibition is organized by the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, in association with the National Gallery of Art, Washington

Deborah Ziska, Information Officer

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
April 25, 2000

CONTACT: (202) 842-6353
Rebecca Coleman, Publicist
r-coleman@nga.gov

MOST COMPREHENSIVE ART NOUVEAU EXHIBITION EVER MOUNTED

AT THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART, OCTOBER 8, 2000–JANUARY 28, 2001

Washington, D.C. – Art Nouveau, 1890–1914, the largest and most comprehensive exhibition on the subject ever organized, will present one of the most innovative and exuberant of all modern art styles and the places where it flourished. More than 350 masterpieces in painting, sculpture, graphics, glass, ceramics, textiles, furniture, jewelry, and architecture will be featured including a Glasgow luncheon room designed by Charles Rennie Mackintosh, a Paris Métropolitain entrance by Hector Guimard, and a double parlor from a Turin villa by Agostino Lauro. The two rooms are among the unique features of the Washington venue.

At the National Gallery of Art this vibrant fin-de-siècle era will be celebrated with an overview of highlights from the World's Fair of 1900 in Paris, followed by sections presenting sources of the new style and examples from eight of the cities in which Art Nouveau flourished: Paris, Brussels, Glasgow, Vienna, Munich, Turin, New York and Chicago. The exhibition, on view in the National Gallery of Art, East Building, October 8, 2000 through January 28, 2001, is organized by the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, where it is on view through July 30, 2000, in association with the National Gallery of Art. After Washington, the core of the exhibition travels to the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, from April 21, 2001 through June 8, 2001.

"The beginning of this new millennium is an ideal time to present the most complete examination of an innovative international style that fascinated the world at the turn of the last century," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art. "The Art Nouveau style was self-consciously international and American artists and architects in New York, Buffalo, Boston, Cincinnati, and Chicago readily adapted the style. As interpreted by architects such as Frank Lloyd Wright, the movement in America set the stage for a modernism that in turn had a great influence on progressive art and architecture in the United States, Europe, and Japan."

SUPPORT

The exhibition is made possible by DaimlerChrysler Corporation Fund.

"DaimlerChrysler is proud to support the National Gallery of Art in presenting Art Nouveau, 1890–1914," said W. Frank Fountain, president, DaimlerChrysler Corporation Fund. "DaimlerChrysler has a unique understanding of the special features of Art Nouveau as our roots date back to the beginning of the movement."

-more-

The exhibition is made possible by **DaimlerChrysler Corporation Fund**

Additional support is provided by the Terra Foundation for the Arts, Robert P. and Arlene R. Kogod, and Eleanor and Donald Taffner

We are grateful to DaimlerChrysler Corporation Fund for making this exhibition possible through their generous support," said Powell. "Special thanks also go to the Terra Foundation for the Arts, Robert P. and Arlene R. Kogod, Eleanor and Donald Taffner, and The Fund for the International Exchange of Art for their additional support."

EXHIBITION: Background

The Art Nouveau (French for "new art") movement grew as a reaction to the excesses of other more academic nineteenth-century revivals. Art Nouveau proponents reinterpreted their sources of inspiration—the art of Japan, nature, and geometry—in their efforts to reform the arts and create a new visual vocabulary suited to modern life. These designers sought to create a *gesamtkunstwerk*—a total and complete decorative style that combined all of the arts, including painting, graphics, sculpture, decorative arts, and architecture, in a single, expressive whole.

Expressing both the nostalgia and decadence of its fin-de-siècle period and the modernism of the dawning twentieth century, Art Nouveau spread throughout Europe and major American cities from about 1890 to World War I, when it fell out of fashion. By rejecting rote repetition of historical styles from the past and incorporating modern materials and themes, Art Nouveau liberated the arts. The streamlined designs favored by many Art Nouveau artists paved the way for the abstracting tendencies that would dominate twentieth-century art and design.

EXHIBITION: Organization

Works by more than 150 artists and designers such as Charles R. Ashbee, William Bradley, Carlo Bugatti, Daum Frères, Eugène Gaillard, Emile Gallé, Hector Guimard, Victor Horta, Gustav Klimt, René Lalique, Charles Rennie Mackintosh, Louis Majorelle, William Morris, Alphonse Mucha, Edvard Munch, Louis Sullivan, Louis Comfort Tiffany, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, Henry van de Velde, Philippe Wolfers, and Frank Lloyd Wright will be featured.

The World's Fair in Paris, 1900: Visitors to the exhibition will be introduced to various aspects of the style through a display of masterpieces of Art Nouveau design that were shown at the 1900 World's Fair in Paris. Among the highlights are French jewelry designer Lalique's elaborate Dragonfly woman corsage ornament (c. 1897); a suite of gilded furniture by Georges de Feure shown at Siegfried Bing's pavilion; Italian Vittorio Valabrega's enormous, elaborately carved Chimneypiece (1900); and Tiffany's leaded favrile glass Three-panel screen (c.1900).

Sources of the New Style

The second section of the exhibition examines seven design sources upon which Art Nouveau drew and interpreted:

Celtic and Viking Revivals: Enthusiasm for Celtic and Viking motifs, triggered by mid-19th century archaeological discoveries, is reflected in facsimiles of Celtic metalwork, Celtic-inspired architectural ornaments by Chicago architect Sullivan, and Scandinavian furniture in the "Viking" or "Dragon" style. Most of the works will be shown in Washington only.

Rococo: Among the selection of eighteenth-century decorative arts and furnishings in the rococo style is a spectacular chest of drawers designed by Jean-Mathieu Chevallier, from the National Gallery of Art's collection. Art Nouveau design reflecting the influence of the rococo is demonstrated by a fanciful wall clock created by innovative Catalan designer Antonio Gaudi.

Japan and China: The enormous impact of Asian art on the rise of Art Nouveau, as exemplified by lacquerware, textiles, and woodblock prints by artists such as Utagawa Hiroshige and Katsushika Hokusai, as well as Chinese furniture and jades, is reflected in objects such as a silver buckle with irises by Lalique and posters throughout the exhibition by artists including Toulouse-Lautrec, Pierre Bonnard, and William Bradley.

Islamic World: Documenting the influence of Islamic decorative arts, examples of Persian and Syrian glass, Turkish tiles, and textiles will be displayed in the company of Art Nouveau interpretations. Inlaid furniture by Italy's Carlo Bugatti is shown alongside carved wooden and ivory panels from the Arab world, and a swan-necked vase by Tiffany will be flanked by Persian prototypes.

The Arts and Crafts and Aesthetic Movements in England: The section focusing on the English Arts and Crafts and Aesthetic Movements and their crucial roles in the development of Art Nouveau includes paintings, drawings, furniture, textiles, metalwork, ceramics, and stained glass by principal artists and designers. Examples run the gamut from Burne-Jones's leaded glass window The Viking Ship (1883); James McNeil Whistler's canvas, Variations in violet and green (1871); Morris's curtain with peacock and dragon design (1878); and E. W. Godwin's elaborate, ebonized mahogany sideboard (1876).

Symbolism: Symbolist thinking, concerned with mysticism, myth, spirituality, and the subconscious, directly influenced turn of the century artists such as Gauguin (Self-portrait, 1889), Signac (Portrait of Félix Fénéon, 1890), and Ferdinand Khnopff The Blue Wing, 1894). A favorite symbolist theme was the femme fatale, seen here in Munch's The Vampire (1893) and Sarah Bernhardt's bronze inkwell Self-portrait as a sphinx (1880).

Art Nouveau and the Cult of Nature: In the wake of discoveries by Charles Darwin, nature—in all its manifestations—became a unifying influence on Art Nouveau artists. Illustrating links between art and nature are beetle and frog ornaments by Lalique, a series of plant and insect-inspired vases by Emile Gallé, a sinuously curved desk by Louis Majorelle and Daum Frères, and Tiffany Studios's Eighteen-light lily table lamp (c.1902)

Cities

Paris: After ascending the steps to the third and largest section of the exhibition, which explores the Art Nouveau phenomenon in eight cities, visitors pass through a 14-foot high, cast iron Paris Métropolitain station entrance (c.1898) designed by Hector Guimard, which came to symbolize the modern style's bold use of modern industrial materials to express the new aesthetic. An opulent Guimard buffet (Washington only), a Bonnard poster, Toulouse-Lautrec lithographs, jewelry by George Fouquet and Lalique, and furniture by Rupert Carabin suggest the manner in which the chic, modern Art Nouveau style permeated the City of Light.

Brussels: Architectural elements by Victor Horta as well as furniture and other decorative arts by Horta, Henry van de Velde, and Gustave Serrurier-Bovy portray the sinuous curves of Belgian Art Nouveau designers. Posters, sculpture, and paintings round out the presentation and show the importance of symbolism for Belgian artists.

Glasgow: In contrast to the curvilinear Art Nouveau style of Paris and Brussels, the more rectilinear furniture and architecture of artist/designer Charles Rennie Mackintosh, which became icons of the New Art and altered the cityscape of his native Glasgow dominate that city's section. The centerpiece is his reassembled Ladies' Luncheon Room from Miss Cranston's Ingram Street Tearooms.

Vienna and Munich: Designers such as Koloman Moser's and Josef Hoffmann's geometric forms are seen in the posters, furniture, and furnishings shown in the Vienna section. Paintings by Gustav Klimt will also be featured. Furniture designed by Richard Riemerschmidt highlight Munich, along with graphics and sculpture by Thomas Theodor Heine.

Turin: This section (exclusive to the Washington venue) is devoted to Turin, which hosted the largest exposition of modern decorative arts in 1902. It is highlighted by a curved chair, variously called the "Snail" or "Cobra" chair, which was designed by Bugatti. The completely furnished double parlor from a villa outside the city, designed by Agostino Lauro, replete with swirling vines and tendril motifs will also be on view.

New York: The diverse output of Louis Comfort Tiffany and his Tiffany Studios, seen throughout the exhibition, is prominently displayed in the section devoted to his native New York City. Spectacular objects—glass, ceramics, metalwork, and jewelry—document why Tiffany came to epitomize Art Nouveau in this country and why his impact was so pronounced in fin-de-siècle New York. Most of the works in this section will only be on view in Washington.

Chicago: Chicago was one of the few cities that employed both the curvilinear as well as the rectilinear approach to modern design. The use of nature in ornamentation and design is evident in the architectural elements of Louis Sullivan, furniture, and a mosaic panel designed by George Washington Maher, and the graphic art of William Bradley. Frank Lloyd Wright's rectilinearity stands out in the dining room table and chairs he designed for Chicago's famed Robie House. This section is unique to the exhibition in Washington.

CATALOGUE

A lavishly illustrated, 464-page catalogue, the most comprehensive study of Art Nouveau ever published, was edited by Paul Greenhalgh, head of research at the Victoria and Albert Museum and curator of the exhibition. It includes contributions from twenty-two leading scholars in the field, from Europe and America. The book will be available for \$35.00 (softcover), and \$75.00 (hardcover) in the Gallery Shops and through the Gallery Web site at www.nga.gov. To order by phone, call (301) 322-5900 or (800) 697-9350.

General Information

The National Gallery of Art and its Sculpture Garden, located on the National Mall between Third and Ninth Streets at Constitution Avenue, NW, is open Monday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Sunday from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Admission is free of charge. For general information, call (202) 737-4215 or the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) weekdays from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. at (202) 842-6176 or visit the National Gallery of Art's Web site at www.nga.gov.