

MUCHA

MASTER ARTIST OF ART NOUVEAU

STUDENTS QUESTION STUDENTS

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Alphonse Mucha, *Banknotes and Stamps*, first issued February 1920

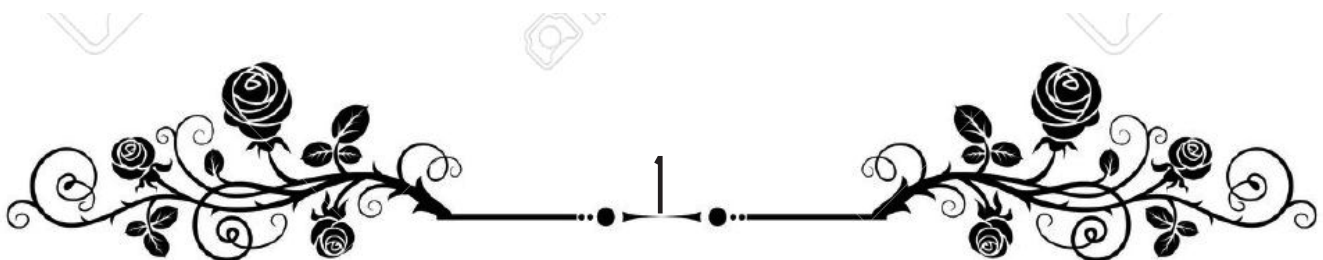
Just as World War I was coming to a close, Czechoslovakia, later to become Slovakia and the Czech Republic, gained its independence and became a new country. Alphonse Mucha, native to one of the areas included in the new Republic of Czechoslovakia, was eager to lend his services to the creation of this nation. He was tasked with designing the banknotes and stamps of this upstart country, and his ideas were exceedingly well liked. Mucha was a patriotic man who was devoted to his homeland, and so strived to create a design that would embody the soul of the new nation, one that would be synonymous with the country for which it was created. His designs were filled with floral motifs and beautiful

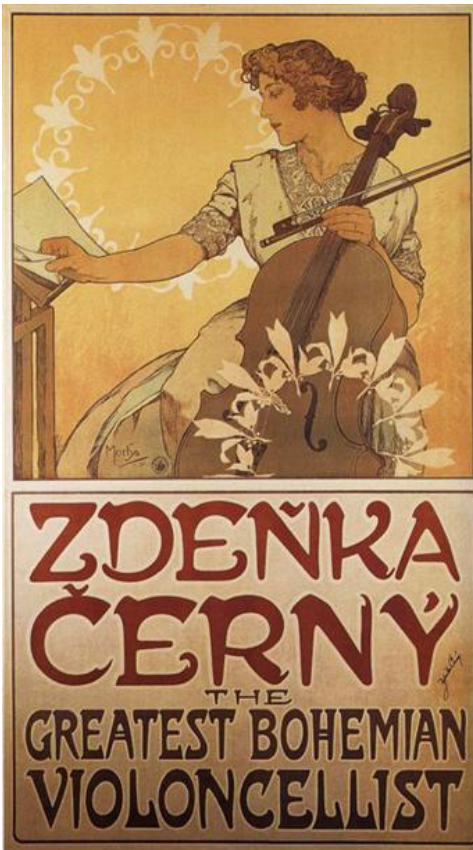
young women with flowing hair. To make the artwork even more personal, Mucha used his wife Maruska and daughter Jaroslava as models for his banknotes. How does the detailing and imagery on the banknotes convey the personal connection Mucha had with the country? What do you believe is the significance of using floral motifs and young women as part of the design? How are the symbols seen on these banknotes different from the imagery that appears on United States dollar bills?

In the banknotes and stamps designed for the Czech Republic, Mucha expressed what this new country meant to him. He created symbols that also represented his fellow countrymen for years to come. Mucha's art became a staple of Czechoslovakia and appeared on coat-of-arms and police uniforms of the nation. How might today's viewers interpret the art differently than a member of the original audience? Do you think being a native of the Czech Republic would help to better understand the motifs seen on the banknotes and insignias?



Alphonse Mucha, *50 Crown Banknote of the Republic of Czechoslovakia*, first issued February 1920

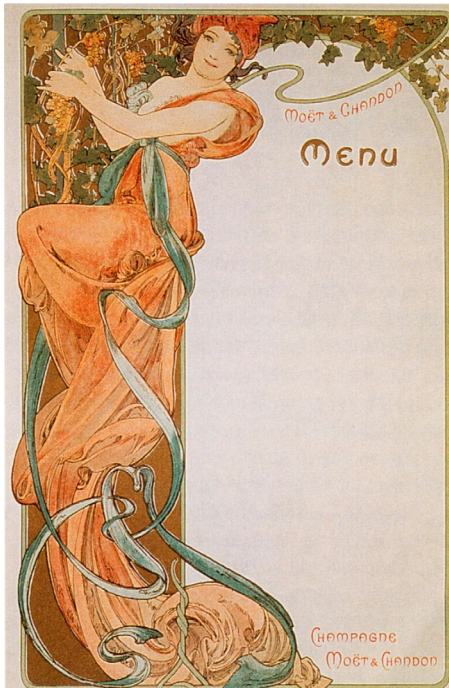




Alphonse Mucha, *Zdeňka Černý*, 1913

Mucha created this poster to serve as an advertisement for an upcoming European tour by a Czech-American cellist Zdeňka Černý. While in Chicago, Mucha befriended the cellist's father, a music teacher, and promised Zdeňka that he would paint her portrait when she became a virtuoso concert artist. Unfortunately, the concert tour was cancelled due to the outbreak of the First World War. Mucha worked from a photograph of Zdeňka with a cello and idealized certain elements in his portrait of her. How has Mucha oriented his portrait of Zdeňka? It has been suggested that the softening of her face, the lightening of her hair, and her gaze towards the sheet music pages she is turning convey a spiritual quality – the cellist's love of music. Mucha also implemented two circular patterns – one consisting of lilies and another of laurels.

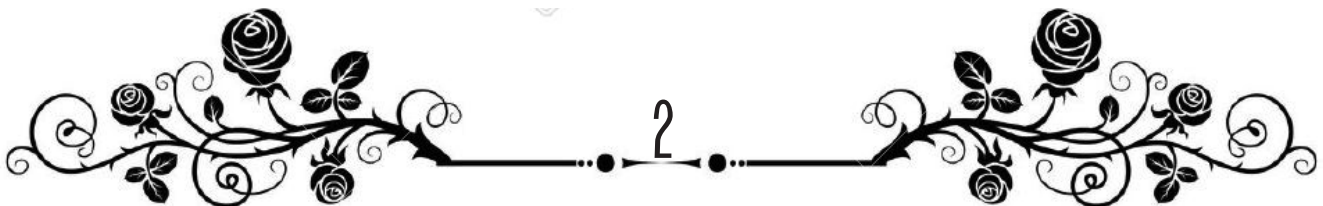
What is the symbolic significance of these circle motifs? Are they purely decorative additions or do the lilies and laurels serve a purpose? Alphonse Mucha expressed his opinion that art exists only to communicate a spiritual message. What connection does this artwork make between the spiritual and the discipline of musical performance? What sort of overall spiritual message do you think Mucha wanted to communicate with this artwork?



Alphonse Mucha, *Moët et Chandon Menu*, 1899

Shown left is Alphonse Mucha's *Moët et Chandon Menu*, 1899. As a famous Czech decorative painter, Mucha was commissioned for various artworks including posters, postage stamps, banknotes, and even menus. Mucha collaborated with Moët et Chandon, a French wine company, on multiple projects including this one. He created art that promoted both their company as a whole and also their specific wines and champagnes. In this particular artwork, Mucha paints an idealized woman wearing an elaborate, flowing dress and in the upper left portion of the page holding a vine covered with lush foliage and ripe grapes. This design frames the card, leaving the right portion blank so that the menu can be hand-written.

Furthermore, the woman is depicted in a sensual and alluring manner. Why do you think Mucha displayed the woman like this? What is the symbolism of the vines and foliage entwined in her fingers and surrounding her? What is the mood behind this print and how is it successful as a promotional menu?





Alphonse Mucha, *L'Illustration*,
December 1896



Hishikawa Moronobu, *Young Man
with Two Courtesans*, 1682



Aubrey Beardsley, *The Stomach
Dance*, 1893

Alphonse Mucha was commissioned to illustrate the cover of the periodical, *L'Illustration*. The Christmas-themed cover, *1896-Noel-1897*, marked the changing of time. The woman dying in the foreground symbolizes the prior year, while the woman above her is the hope for renewal for the new year. The band of motifs on the left of the image consist of hands and branches of a Christmas tree. How did the artist use the motifs of the hands and the snowy branches to convey his meaning? Characteristics of the Art Nouveau movement consisted of decorative elements, sinuous line, and organic rhythm. Influences included Japanese prints and other artwork, such as Aubrey Beardsley's *The Stomach Dance*. How are these influences apparent in this image? How else are these elements consistent with the Art Nouveau style?



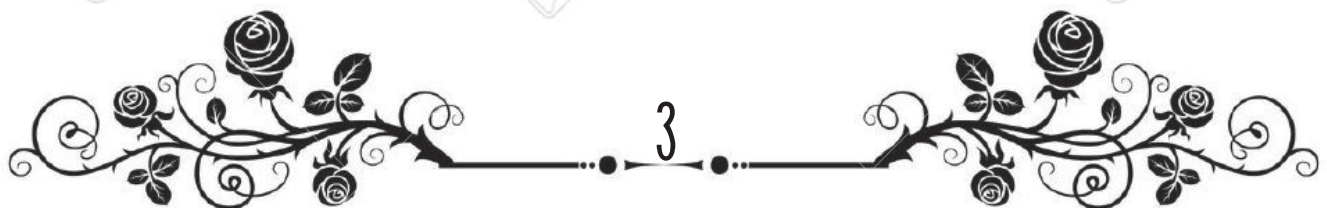
Alphonse Mucha, *Salon des Cent*,
1897

Mucha and other Art Nouveau artists were very familiar with doing commercial work. They frequently created pieces for magazines, menus, posters, and other commercial products. The *Salon des Cent* illustration was created by Mucha for the *Salon of the One Hundred* show that was established by Léon Deschamps, who also was the founder of the magazine *La Plume*, for which Mucha also created many pieces.

Mucha did create more personal pieces as well. For instance, he painted a portrait of his daughter Jaroslava. In the two pieces, the *Portrait of Mucha's Daughter, Jaroslava* and the illustration for the *Salon of the One Hundred*, are there any visible differences between them that would indicate a difference in the level of thought and a difference in the level of connection between Mucha and the subject. Do the styles of the pieces show this difference? What other indications are there in the pieces that support this difference?



Alphonse Mucha, *Portrait of Mucha's
Daughter, Jaroslava*,
1927-1935





Alphonse Mucha, Postcard (*Russia Restituenda*), 1922

Mucha created *Russia Restituenda* (*Russia must Recover*) after the collapse of the Russian government to the Soviets. In the years following, Russia was in a civil war, which created a crippling economic situation. Not including war deaths, millions died from starvation and disease during this time. Mucha wanted to use this postcard, and this image recreated on a poster, as a call to Western powers to help Russia by sending grain and other foods. How does this image help spread Mucha's message to Western countries? How does this image make you feel? Does this image represent Mucha's message effectively?

Mucha was known for his use of Art Nouveau, a style of decorative art, architecture, and design prominent in Western Europe and the US from about 1890 until World War I. It was characterized by intricate linear designs and flowing curves based on natural forms. Mucha's subjects were principally women in Neo-Classical robes, surrounded by flowers, and halos. How does this image differ from Mucha's usual style? Does this deviation from his usual style help Mucha get his message across? Does this image remind you of other Art Nouveau paintings?

