



Preparatory Sketch for Documents Décoratifs

Alphonse Mucha

Not on display

Title/Description: Preparatory Sketch for Documents Décoratifs

Artist/Maker: Alphonse Mucha (Artist)

Born: 1900 c.

Object Type: Designs, Drawing, Sketch

Materials: Crayon, Paper

Technique: Drawing

Measurements: Unframed: (h. 315 x w 456 mm) Framed: (h. 510 x w. 665 x d. 25 mm)

Accession Number: 21010

Historic Period: 20th century

Production Place: France

School/Style: Art Nouveau

Credit Line: Donated by Sir Colin and Lady Anderson, 1978

Alphonse Mucha's (1860-1939) work on paper is a preparatory sketch in blue, green and brown crayon for the publication, *Decorative Documents (Documents Décoratifs)*. Published in Paris in 1902 and comprising 72 colour lithographs, *Documents Décoratifs* became the influential source book for Mucha's Art Nouveau style, also known as 'Le Style Mucha'.

Alphonse Mucha was an early exponent of Art Nouveau in Paris. He made a living as a painter, illustrator and graphic artist. Originally from Ivančice in Moravia, Austro-Hungarian Empire (present-day Czech Republic), Mucha studied and worked in Vienna and Munich before moving to Paris in 1887. [1]

Mucha's sketch show the artist investigating the ornamental qualities and design potential of natural forms. The drawings include botanical studies, stylised circular and diamond-shaped flowerheads, rings of overlapping petals, and branching leaf-like scrolls. These organic motifs could be further transformed into patterns for metal work and furniture design, or incorporated into decorative borders.

Documents Décoratifs explores a variety of subject matter, from nudes and draped figures to functional objects such as glassware and cutlery. In *Documents Décoratifs* "the compatibility of design and material is emphasized in applications of an identical motif on tableware, lace or jewellery." [2]

It is possible to find comparative design elements in *Documents Décoratifs* that link the preparatory drawing with the published plates. For example, in one lithograph Mucha creates a repeating pattern from overlapping oval-shaped petals and flowerheads that are enclosed by angular stems. [3] Elsewhere, Mucha incorporates the angular scrolling form from the preparatory drawing into his designs for candlestick holders and stands for fireplace accessories. A variation of the floral medallion motif can also be found in Mucha's ornately decorated bellows and circular fire screen. [4]

Sir Colin Anderson's first Art Nouveau purchases included three graphic works by Alphonse Mucha. This work was bought from the Arthur Jeffress Gallery in 1960. Around the same time that Sir Colin began building his Art Nouveau collection, Britain's Pop artists were rediscovering the pioneering

illustrations of Mucha. [5]

Vanessa Tothill, March 2021

[1] Amanda Geitner and Emma Hazell (editors), *The Anderson Collection of Art Nouveau* (Norwich: Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, University of East Anglia, 2003), p. 138.

[2] Victor Arwas, Anna Dvorak and Jana Brabcova-Orlikova, *Alphonse Mucha The Spirit of Art Nouveau* (Alexandria, VA: Arts Services International, 1998), p. 310.

[3]
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Documents_Decoratifs_\(1901\)#/media/File:31_mucha_documentsdecoratifs_1901.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Documents_Decoratifs_(1901)#/media/File:31_mucha_documentsdecoratifs_1901.jpg) [accessed 18 March 2021]

[4]
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Documents_Decoratifs_\(1901\)#/media/File:69_mucha_documentsdecoratifs_1901.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Documents_Decoratifs_(1901)#/media/File:69_mucha_documentsdecoratifs_1901.jpg) [accessed 18 March 2021]

[5] Geitner, p. 51.

Further Reading

Arwas, Victor, Anna Dvorak and Jana Brabcova-Orlikova, *Alphonse Mucha The Spirit of Art Nouveau* (Alexandria, VA: Arts Services International, 1998)

Geitner, Amanda and Emma Hazell (editors), *The Anderson Collection of Art Nouveau* (Norwich: Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, University of East Anglia, 2003)

Greenhalgh, Paul (editor), *Art Nouveau 1890-1914* (London: V&A Publications, 2000)
