



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, Pencil

Technique: Drawing

Measurements: Unframed: (h. 311 x w. 511 x d. 1 mm) Framed: (h. 510 x w. 660 x d. 25 mm)

Accession Number: 21011

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 pencil and red 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 shows the artist exploring the dynamic qualities of a rhythmic flowing line, enjoying both its angular and spiralling properties. This circular design motif is characteristic of Mucha's style and appears to have evolved from the looser whiplash curves visualised by Hermann Obrist in his cyclamen inspired wall hanging of 1895. An image of wall hanging with cyclamens (*Wandbehang mit Alpenveilchen*) was reproduced in the Berlin journal, *Pan*, in 1896 (Feb-March) and shaped the aesthetics of Art Nouveau. [2]

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 emphasised in applications of an identical motif on tableware, lace or jewellery." [3] In this publication Mucha's preparatory sketches were transformed into patterns for metal work and furniture design, or incorporated into decorative borders.

It is possible to find comparative design elements in *Documents Décoratifs* that link this preparatory drawing with several of the published plates. Two of Mucha's lithographs incorporate a scrolling border pattern that closely resembles the rhythmic lines developed in his preparatory sketch [4 and 5]. One example of applied design demonstrates how the motif could be used to embellish the border of a textile. [5] The energetic spiralling motif is also used by Mucha to ornament the handles of silver ware. [6]

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. [7]

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] https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Wand_Decoration_Obrist_1895.png [accessed 28

January 2021]

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

[4]
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Documents_Decoratifs_\(1901\)#/media/File:54_mucha_documentsdecoratifs_1901.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Documents_Decoratifs_(1901)#/media/File:54_mucha_documentsdecoratifs_1901.jpg) [accessed 18 March 2021]

[5]
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Documents_Decoratifs_\(1901\)#/media/File:73_mucha_documentsdecoratifs_1901.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Documents_Decoratifs_(1901)#/media/File:73_mucha_documentsdecoratifs_1901.jpg) [accessed 18 March 2021]

[6]
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Documents_Decoratifs_\(1901\)#/media/File:61_mucha_documentsdecoratifs_1901.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Documents_Decoratifs_(1901)#/media/File:61_mucha_documentsdecoratifs_1901.jpg) [accessed 18 March 2021]

[7] 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)
