



Le Lys

Alphonse Mucha

Not on display

Title/Description: Le Lys

Artist/Maker: Alphonse Mucha (Designer)

Born: 1898

Object Type: Lithograph, Print

Materials: Ink, Silk

Technique: Lithography, Printing

Measurements: Unframed: (h. 1050 x w. 448 mm) Framed: (h. 1120 x w. 516 x d. 30 mm)

Inscription: 'Mucha'

Accession Number: 21012A

Production Place: France

School/Style: Art Nouveau

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

This colour lithograph in a narrow vertical format is titled *The Lily (Le Lys)* and was designed by Alphonse Mucha (1860-1939). *Le Lys* is one of four panels from a series called *The Flowers (Les Fleurs)* that includes three other compositions titled *The Rose* (object number 21012B), *The Carnation* and *The Iris*. [1] Mucha exhibited two of the original watercolours from this series in his solo exhibition at the Salon des Cent in 1897. The complete set was published as chromolithographs in 1898.' [2]

Printed directly onto silk satin, *The Lily* depicts a young woman surrounded by lilies. Crowned with lilies, Mucha presents the viewer with an elegant personification of the fresh beauty of the flower. The design betrays all of the classic Art Nouveau motifs associated with Le Style Mucha. Draped in fabric that clings to the sensuous curves of the female body, the woman is positioned at a slight angle to the viewer with her face tilted upwards.

Alphonse Mucha was an early exponent of Art Nouveau in Paris, where 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. [3]

Mucha designed chromolithographs for the new 'panneau décoratif' genre that had been invented by the printing firm, Champenois. More affordable than paintings, decorative panels appealed to a broad public and sold rapidly. Decorative panels resemble today's art posters and were designed 'purely for artistic appreciation or decorating interior walls.' [4] The absence of text distinguished them from other forms of graphic art that served as advertising.

The format of 'The Flowers' series is fairly flexible, allowing each design to be enjoyed separately or displayed as part of a quadriptych. Other popular series that followed this pattern included: *The Seasons* (1896), *The Arts* (1898) and *The Precious Stones* (1900).

Sir Colin Anderson's first Art Nouveau purchases included graphic works by Alphonse Mucha. Sir Colin acquired his first three works by Mucha in 1960 from the Arthur Jeffress Gallery. He went on to buy *Le Lys* and *La Rose* from Green and Abbot in 1964. 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] <http://www.muchafoundation.org/en/gallery/themes/theme/art-posters/object/271> [accessed 19 March 2021]

[2] <http://www.muchafoundation.org/en/gallery/themes/theme/art-posters/object/271> [accessed 19 March 2021]

[3] 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.

[4] <http://www.muchafoundation.org/en/gallery/themes/theme/art-posters/object/271> [accessed 19 March 2021]

[5] Geitner, p. 51.

Exhibitions

Flowers - Flora in Contemporary Art & Culture, Saatchi Gallery, London, 12/02/25 to 05/05/25

Further Reading

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)

