

Sarah Bernhardt: Muse of Art Nouveau

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ABSTRACT

Sarah Bernhardt has long been praised for her contribution to the world of theatre. However she played an important role in the world of the arts in a much broader sense. Through her extraordinary life she inspired many including a number of the finest French artist designers of the Art Nouveau period, she also brought many of them to positions of prominence. Through her renowned position in the theatre she introduced numerous works of writers, painters, illustrators, designers, and jewellers to the general public.

Through an examination of the history of Sarah's life it is evident that many of the finest examples of Art Nouveau may not have come to fruition without Sarah as the inspirational starting point. To date, Sarah has not been given due credit for this, perhaps the most important, *role* she was to play.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

Born in Paris in 1844, Sarah Bernhardt is widely regarded as the most famous and influential actress of her time. She arrived into the fast moving rapidly changing world of industrialisation. The advances brought about by the Industrial Revolution greatly affected her life and career. These dramatic changes were also reflected in the arts. It was from this background that the Art Nouveau movement emerged.

By the end of the nineteenth century the image of Sarah Bernhardt was a familiar one in France and many other parts of the world. Her image is frequently observed as a reflection of the artistic times in which she lived and it encapsulates the spirit of Art Nouveau in France. However Sarah's role was far more influential as she also in part at least motivated the Art Nouveau movement in her native land.

Through her charismatic presence on the stages of Paris and the world, and her role in the artistic society of the time, she inspired many artists. "Certainly, Sarah Bernhardt has not been given due credit for her role both as patroness and inspiration."¹ She was an inspirational starting point for much of what we know as French Art Nouveau.

Sarah was patron to some of the most important artists of the period including Mucha, Lalique and Fouquet who in turn produced some of the most important and influential works of art from the Art Nouveau period.

The following is an attempt to describe some of the salient features of Art Nouveau, Sarah Bernhardt's life and times and how Sarah's full and flamboyant life and style influenced Art Nouveau. Her enormous popularity gained through her work in the theatre is a key elements. Whatever Sarah did became the fashion, and this was widely disseminated through her prominent position in theatre.

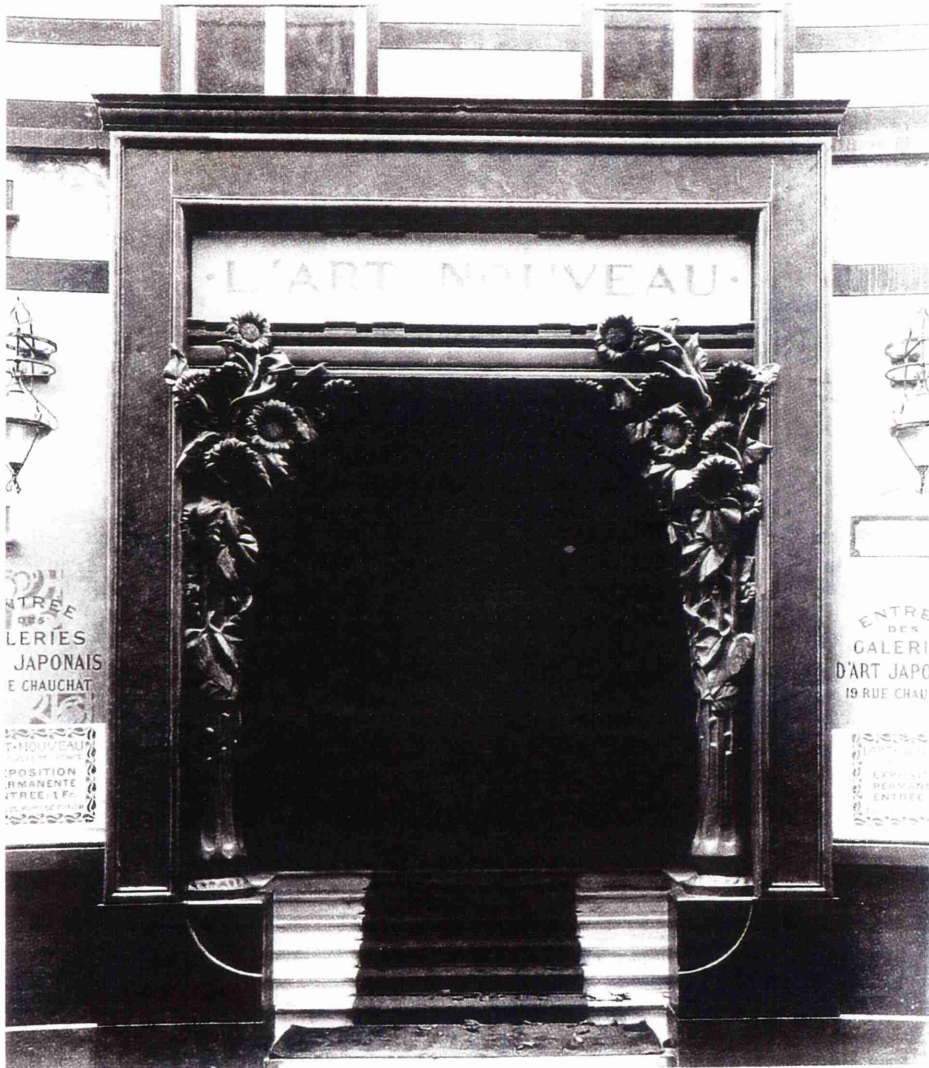


Plate 1: The facade of Sigfried Bing's shop *L'Art Nouveau*, Paris 1895.



Plate 2: An Art Nouveau interior at the Exposition Universelle Paris
1900 when the style reached its peak.

THE ART NOUVEAU STYLE

Art Nouveau is the term given to a style that emerged in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The term which translates literally from French as 'new art' was coined in 1895 by Sigfried Bing with the opening of his Paris shop *L'Art Nouveau*. (Plate 1) The style reached its peak at the turn of the century with the *Exposition Universelle* in Paris in 1900. (plate 2)

The precise origins of Art Nouveau are difficult to pinpoint since they are widespread and varied. The *fin de siècle* period was one of great change. It was a symbolic moment in time - the end of a century of much traumatised change and rapid progress, and the dawn of a new century, a new age. It is clear that , in part, Art Nouveau was a reaction against the Victorian styles of Historicism and Revival and a strong desire for the new now prevailed. Society was reacting to the effects of the Industrial Revolution and in so doing began to re-examine nature. The Art Nouveau style is deeply rooted in this re-examination of nature as its inspiration. This is evident in many works from the period with strong organic elements.

The Industrial Revolution produced a powerful middle class who created the demand for consumer goods on a much larger scale than had ever previously been experienced. The age of the machine helped fulfil these demands with mass produced products.

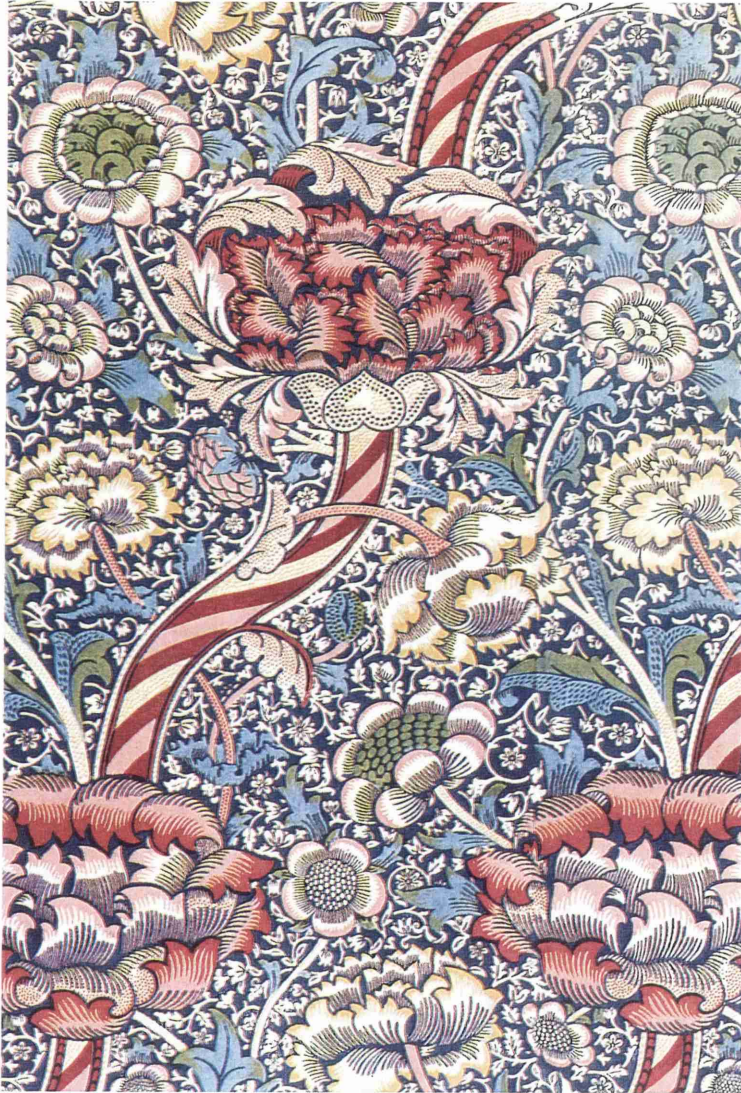


Plate 3: An example of a furnishing textile designed by William Morris.

A characteristic of these products was that they almost inevitably lacked beauty, individuality, and quality.

In Great Britain, for example, part of this reaction was the evolution of the Arts and Crafts Movement. This was largely inspired by Ruskin, Morris (plate 3) and De Morgan who theorised that the designer's influence should not be separated from the finished product. In England this gave rise to amongst others the British Art Pottery Movement. In Glasgow, the work of Charles Rennie Mackintosh, Architect-designer from the Glasgow School, also reflects similar principles of design. (plate 4) The paintings of the Pre-Raphaelites and Symbolists, such as Rossetti and Burne-Jones, were also influential on Art Nouveau.

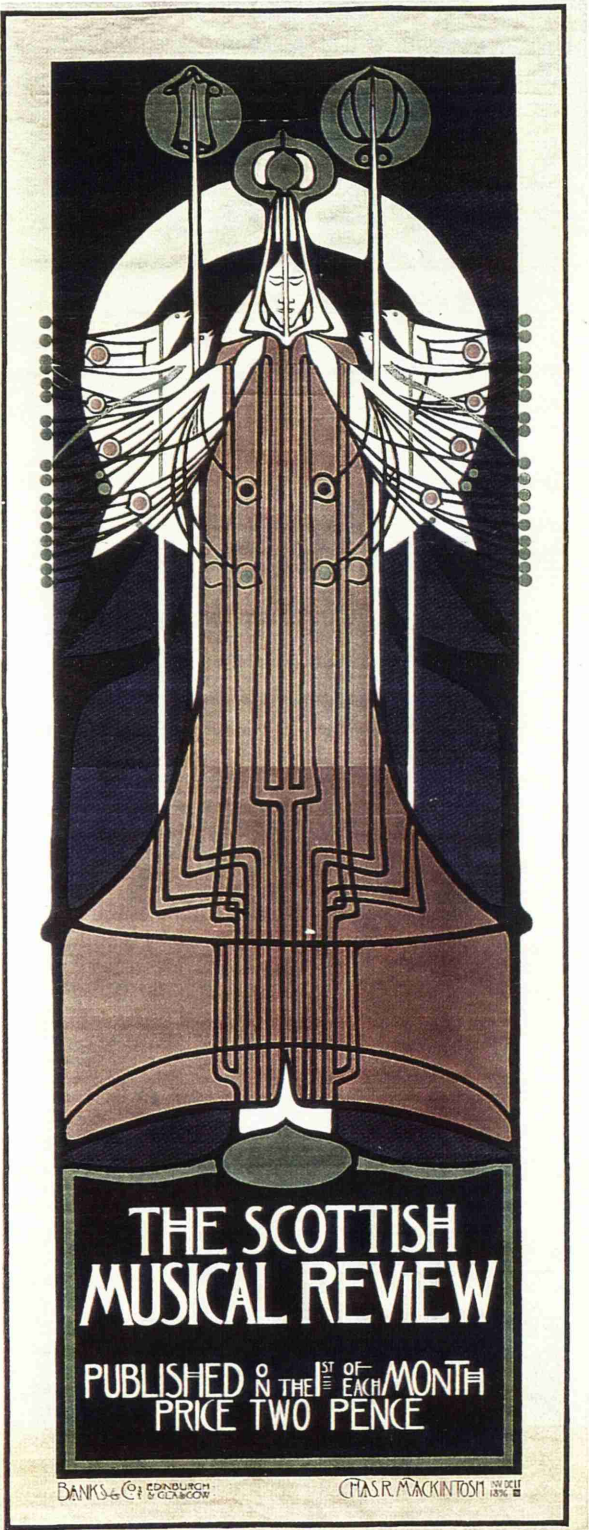
The Art Nouveau movement in France was reacting to the same situation but produced very different results. Unlike the work of Mackintosh, which is more linear, French Art Nouveau was primarily based on sinuous curves, asymmetry, and re-examination of nature influenced by Japanese art. In each country, however, Art Nouveau was an attempt by various artists and designers to produce a new style that owed nothing to the European past. (plate 5)

A strong Japanese influence can be seen in French Art Nouveau. Japan had been a closed country since 1637 but in 1854 a treaty was signed that ended its seclusion. Japanese art arriving in Europe

Plate 4: This Chair by Rennie Mackintosh illustrates a more typically British interpretation of Art Nouveau.



Plate 5: This Mackintosh poster displays a more linear interpretation of Japanese art.



went first to France since the French had been the first to invest heavily in Japan. Before anywhere else in Europe "Japanese decorative art, wood-block prints, and fine fabrics [were] being sold in Paris shops"² such as Bing's *L'Art Nouveau*. (plates 6 & 7) These works inspired many of the French artists of the period.

Art Nouveau was "the first deliberate, internationally based attempt to transform visual culture through a commitment to the idea of the modern."³ The movement was all encompassing and even literature was "vitally important for the development of Art Nouveau. French Symbolism was especially significant for the imbuing of a sense of mystery and psychic depth to objects and images."⁴ French artist-designers such as "Alphonse Mucha, Emile Galle, and Rupert Carabin were deeply affected by the Symbolist heritage."⁵ (plates 8)

The French Art Nouveau style was extremely versatile. Its influence was felt throughout all of the arts including among others architecture, (plate 9) furniture, sculpture, and painting, jewellery design, literature, and the stage. This new style was not bound by class or country, and its influences were socially and geographically widespread. "Art Nouveau was both elitist and populist, private and public, conservative and radical, opulent and simple, traditional and modern."⁶ It was a "multi-faceted, complex phenomenon that defied - then and now - any attempt to reduce it to singular meanings and moments."⁷ However, within this complex 'movement' or 'style' there



Plate 6: An example of the type of Japanese decorative arts which were influential on Art Nouveau.

Plate 7: A typical Japanese print depicting swirling lines that can also
 be seen in French Art Nouveau

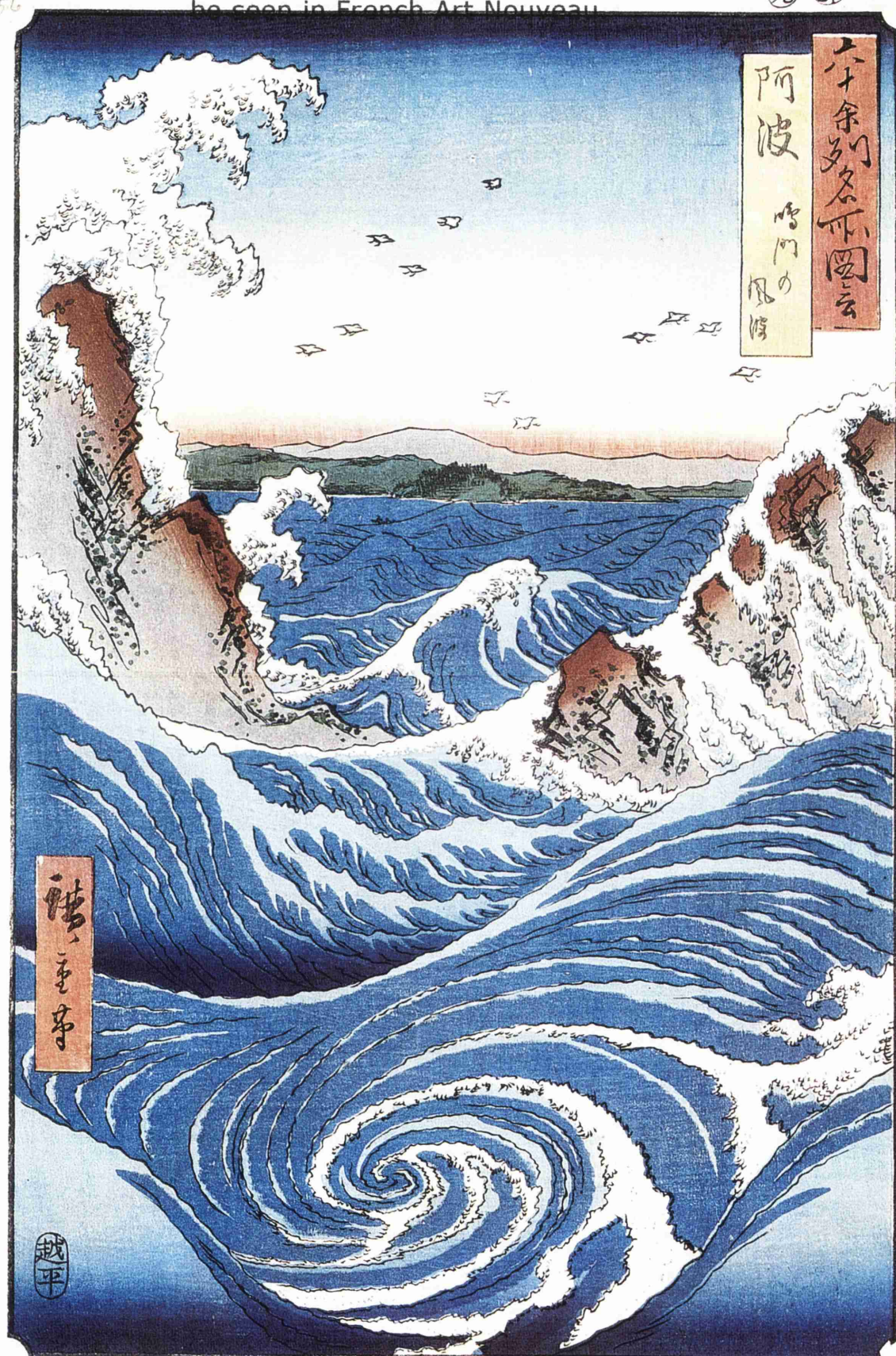




Plate 8: A Carbin chair to illustrate how all encompassing art Nouveau was in the field of decorative arts.



Plate 9: Guimard's Metro station as an example of Art Nouveau in architecture. This represents the spread Art Nouveau into all areas of the arts.

are certain themes that can be identified.

The publication of Darwin's *The Origin of the Species* in 1859, and *The Decent of Man* in 1871 changed the way nineteenth century men and women viewed their world and their place therein. Nature was now being approached as a science. "Art Nouveau intellectuals related evolutionary theory to cultural processes, suggesting that evolution in nature was analogous to progress in culture."⁸ As a result, nature is a strong theme in Art Nouveau. In France, in particular, the depictions of nature were strongly influenced by those from Japan. (plate 10)

Women were also an important theme in Art Nouveau. *Feminine Attitudes in the Nineteenth Century*, discusses the 'Symbolic 80's' and how young girls in 1883 are coming to realise that, "marriage is not the aim and end of their existence. They are no longer content to idle away the best part of their lives in waiting for a future which may never arrive."⁹ This gives great insight to the age where women, for the first time in history, were beginning to assert themselves and their independence. This was the world in which the young Sarah Bernhardt lived in and in her we also see a struggle for independence.

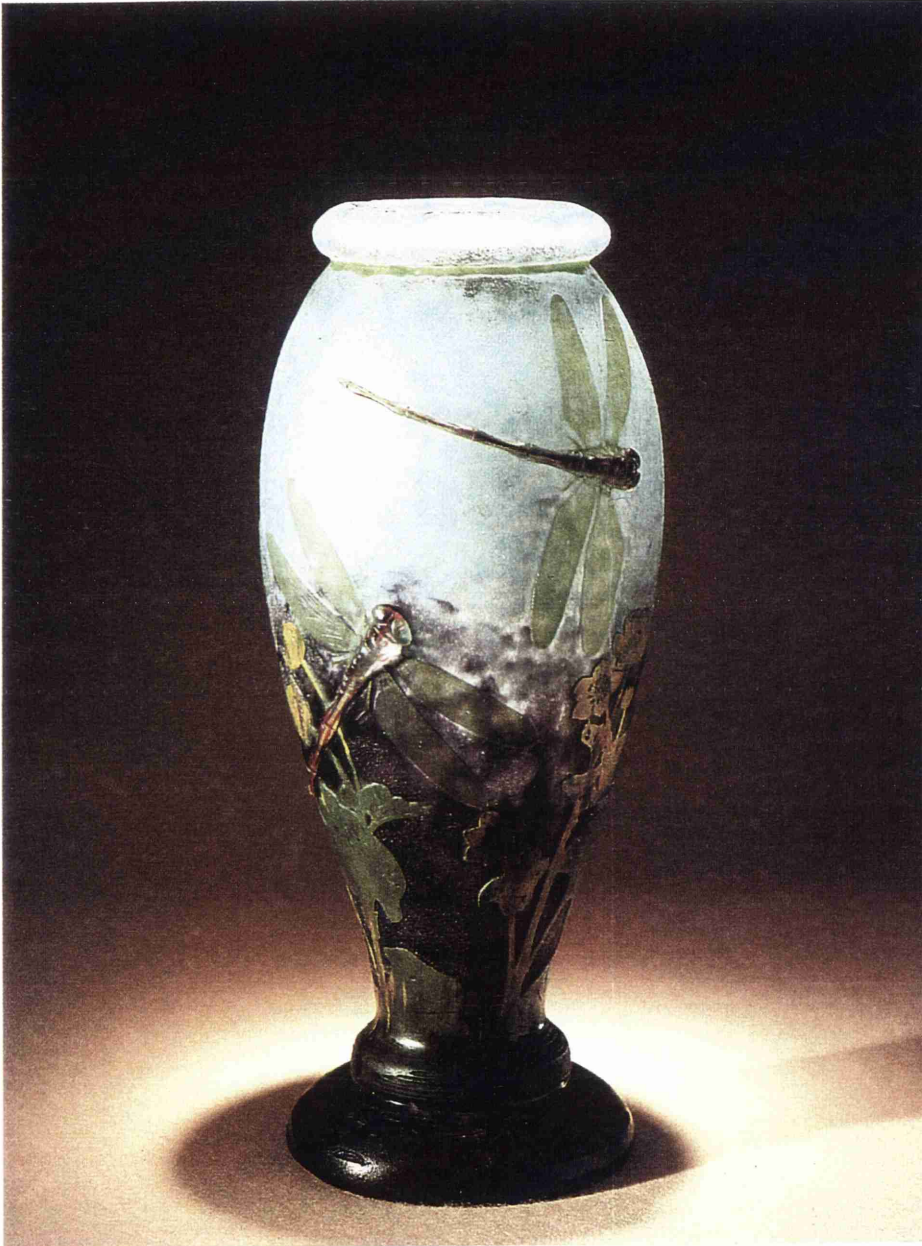


Plate 10: Nature was a strong theme within French Art Nouveau. The Japanese influence is also evident here.

The women of France at this time, and in particular Paris, were enjoying their newly found liberation and emancipation. The *demi-monde* of Paris was quite a unique situation in Europe. The new presence of strong, liberated and influential women explains in part the male fascination with women and the emergence of the *femme fatale*. Men were at once drawn to and frightened by these liberated, erotic creatures of the *demi-monde*. These women were not only courtesans but also actresses such as Sarah Bernhardt. The images of these women are a key element in French Art Nouveau. The spirit of the *belle époque* woman was captured in the works of leading artists such as Mucha, Lalique and Fouquet. "The erotic potential of the female body was fully exploited to express many different concerns... women became the site for the expression of many millennial fears and anxieties."¹⁰

The Japanese city of Edo contained an enclosed brothel quarter, this was called the *Yoshiwara*. "The *Yoshiwara* was also the centre of art and culture, with sex at its economic and social core. Here eroticism and sexuality [were] inseparable from the rhetoric of the city's culture. This statement could equally well apply to *fin de siècle* Paris"¹¹ which was one of the widely acknowledged artistic and cultural centres of Europe.

These themes of nature and women often "became interchangeable entities in many Art Nouveau objects. Rene Lalique's dragonfly

corsage ornament binds woman and insect."¹² This is a good example of women being depicted in an almost sinister manner. As a *femme fatale*, she is simultaneously alluring and threatening. This metamorphic form can be seen to represent woman's changing position in society.

Another important Art Nouveau artist whose work provides a good example of these themes is Aubrey Beardsley. In *J'ai Baisé ta bouche Iokanaan* an illustration for Oscar Wilde's 1893 *Salome*, written for Sarah Bernhardt, we have the highly dramatic climax of the play depicted. This woman is the ultimate *femme fatale*, with the head of John the Baptist in her hands she is surrounded by a stylised floral background providing evidence of the influence of Japanese woodblock prints. This commission "gave Beardsley the opportunity for his most notable treatment of the *femme fatale* theme."¹³ (plate 11)

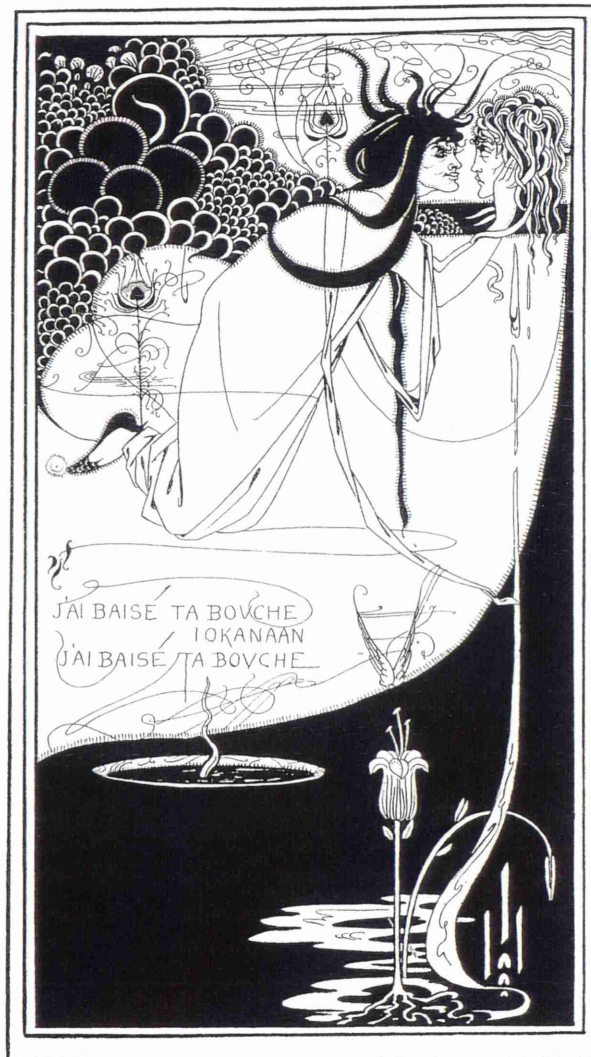


Plate 11: Beardsley's illustration from *Salome* depicts the female as femme fatale. A popular theme within French Art Nouveau.

The World She Lived in

Cunnington states that the fashions of the day reflect that the English women of the 90's, were not in harmony with their environment. The previous decade had been a struggle for women and their position now was, for many, still not clear. Sarah Bernhardt, living in the more liberated Paris, was what the English would have described as a 'New Woman'. "the papers glowing with descriptions of the New Woman and her dreadful behaviour; the *Fin de Siecle* literature and its shocking implications of Free Love; and, of course, the New Art, with its disclosures of the obscene."¹⁴ With this prevailing attitude, it is no wonder that Sarah was in such popular demand in London, the curiosity of such a 'New Woman' must have made her irresistible.

The positions and attitudes of women in Paris by the late 90's were largely different to those in England. Octave Uzanne, writing in 1898, discusses how "a breath of liberalism passed over the land. Virtue came to be considered - as the great playwright mercilessly put it - a woman's capital. Thence arose the practice known in Paris as flirtage, and, in due time, the *demi-vierge* appeared, in society, in literature, and on the theatre boards."¹⁵ Quite unlike England, "sensual, gratification of every kind was the sole object of society"¹⁶ in Paris.

A description by Alexander Dumas the younger described this

modern woman as "a mysterious and alluring sphinx."¹⁷ He alludes to Sarah as the ultimate modern woman. The women represented in the art of the Art Nouveau period, and Sarah in particular, fit well the descriptions of this disturbing beauty. Burne-Jones also provides us with a description of modern woman in a similar vein. He reaches an interesting conclusion... "Who can say whether the Parisian of the present day represents the end of a race, the last expression of a state of being shortly to disappear? or whether she should be accepted as an evident type of evolution, an embryonic form of the woman of the future, called to play her part in the birth of a new society."¹⁸ These contemporary male attitudes emphasise how the position of women in society was dramatically changing as they gained more freedom and power. It also shows how threatening yet alluring men found this. Thus providing some insight as to where the idea, and image, of the *femme fatale* arose.

Burne-Jones knew Sarah personally. She was a great admirer of his work and visited his studio on many occasions. Burne-Jones held equal admiration for the great Sarah. "She was... more a symbol than a woman; she was the wan, flame-robed queen of his '*Laus Veneris*,' she was Morgan-le-Fay, and he was delighted to meet her among the, to him, uninteresting surroundings of nineteenth-century London."¹⁹ (plate 12) In Burne-Jones' letters to Graham Robertson he always alludes to Sarah with a capital letter as a mark of his great admiration for her. One example will suffice to show what remarkable

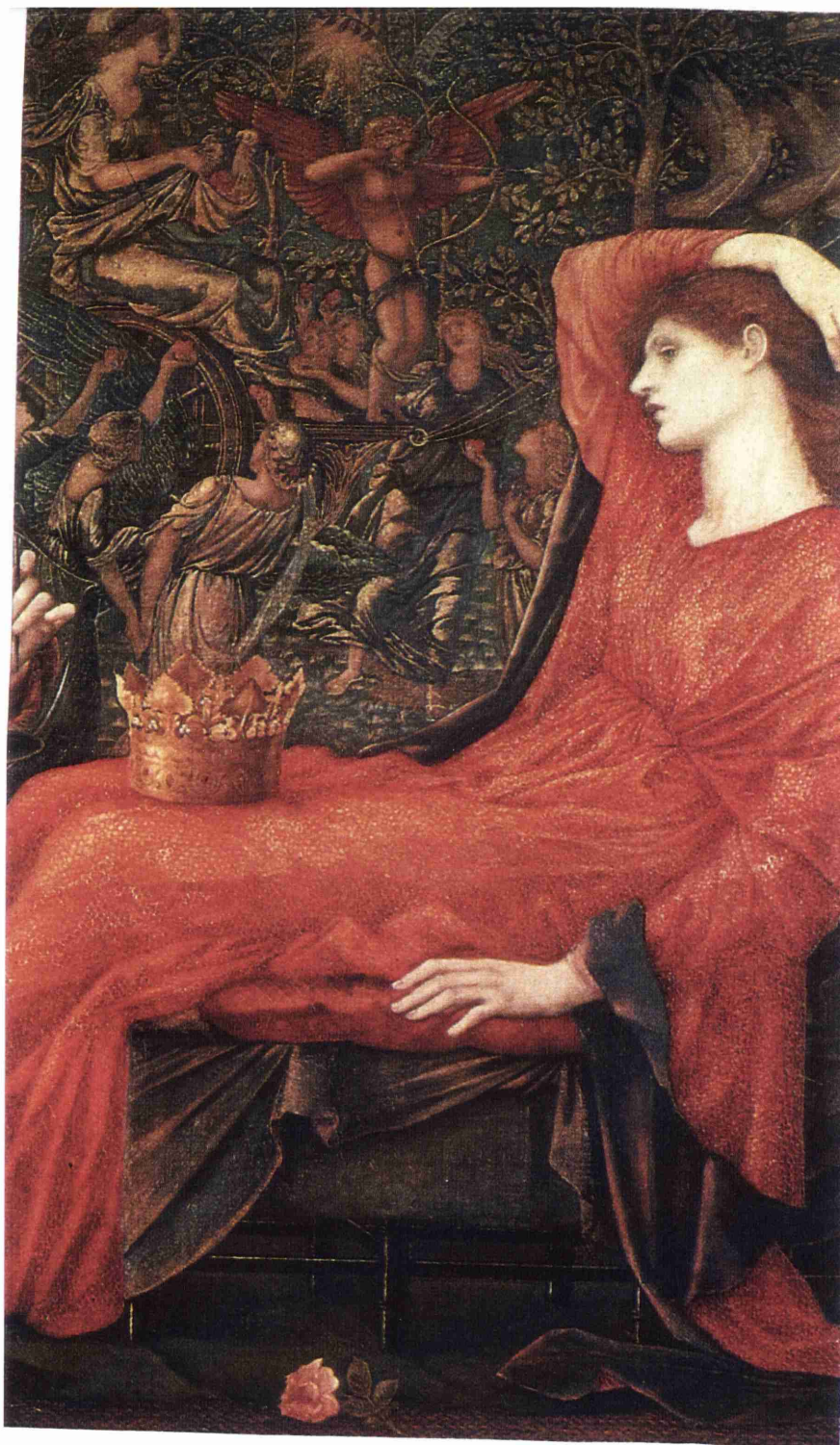


Plate 12: A detail from Burne-Jones' *Laus Veneris*.

effect Sarah had on Burne-Jones... "Will you give the enclosed to the Supreme and Infinitely Glorious One, kneeling as you give it. She is not to dream of troubling to answer. Who am I, great powers, that She should take a moments trouble!"²⁰ Sarah requested in a letter that Robertson ask Burne-Jones to paint her portrait, a mark of her admiration of his work.

The period from the middle of the nineteenth century until the First World War saw the rise of many notorious '*Grandes Horizontales*' such as Cora Pearl, La Paiva, and Lillie Langtry, who were all perceived as *femmes fatales*. "It became fashionable to be ruined by one of these women. Indeed their reputations were based on the numbers of lovers they had ruined and the vast fortunes they had devoured."²¹ However, it is noted that "the most famous and often desirable mistresses were invariably actresses or dancers, icons of the 'feminine.'"²² Two of the most famous *fin de siècle* courtesans, Liane de Pougy and Cleo de Merode, were dancers. They achieved status and wealth through their positions. "It is significant that the great actress Sarah Bernhardt, in one of her most famous roles, played the ultimate romantic courtesan, '*La dame aux Camelias*', to huge success in 1896."²³

These women working in the entertainment industry "became the signifiers of a modern, dynamic and consumable world. The theatre, a realm where culture and the *demi-monde* come together, could

provide alternative constructions of femininity."²⁴ Sarah provided many of these "alternative constructions" in the roles she played, and the life she led.

Bade discusses how "hybrid monsters - half animal, half woman - formed a special category of femme fatale. The Sphinx took on a new lease of life and artists were extraordinarily inventive in adding new creatures to the repertory, joining the heads and breasts of women on to the bodies of insects, reptiles, snakes, various members of the cat family... These creatures were representations of the base or animal side of woman, rather as the centaur and the satyr were of man in classical art. Most of the animals used in these transplants were chosen for their repulsive and predatory characteristics - qualities which were also attributed to women."²⁵ An appropriate example of this is Lalique's dragonfly corsage ornament. The predatory yet fragile nature of the dragonfly makes it ideal for representation of the *femme fatale* and acts as a signifier of her dualistic nature. This type of representation is also seen creatively depicted in the inkwell by Sarah Bernhardt.

According to Bade "the female faces and forms seen everywhere in Art Nouveau decoration are still clearly related to the Pre-Raphaelite ideal. They are rarely specifically 'fatal', but they are often siren-like, with many of the physical features of the femme fatale - in particular the entangling luxuriant hair, which lent itself well to the linear

arabesques of Art Nouveau and the tendency to merge into and engulf the surrounding forms."²⁶ This well describes Sarah Bernhardt, who he refers to as "the most famous actress of the age... who played the role of *femme fatale* to the hilt in her much publicised private life. Her scandalous love affairs, the Byzantine luxuriousness of her surroundings, her ever-attendant menagerie of wild beasts, the famous satin-lined coffin in which she was reputed to sleep... Victorien Sardou, who wrote a series of meretricious plays designed to exploit Bernhardt's flamboyant personality, said, 'If there's anything more remarkable than watching Sarah act, it's watching her live.'"²⁷ (plate 13)

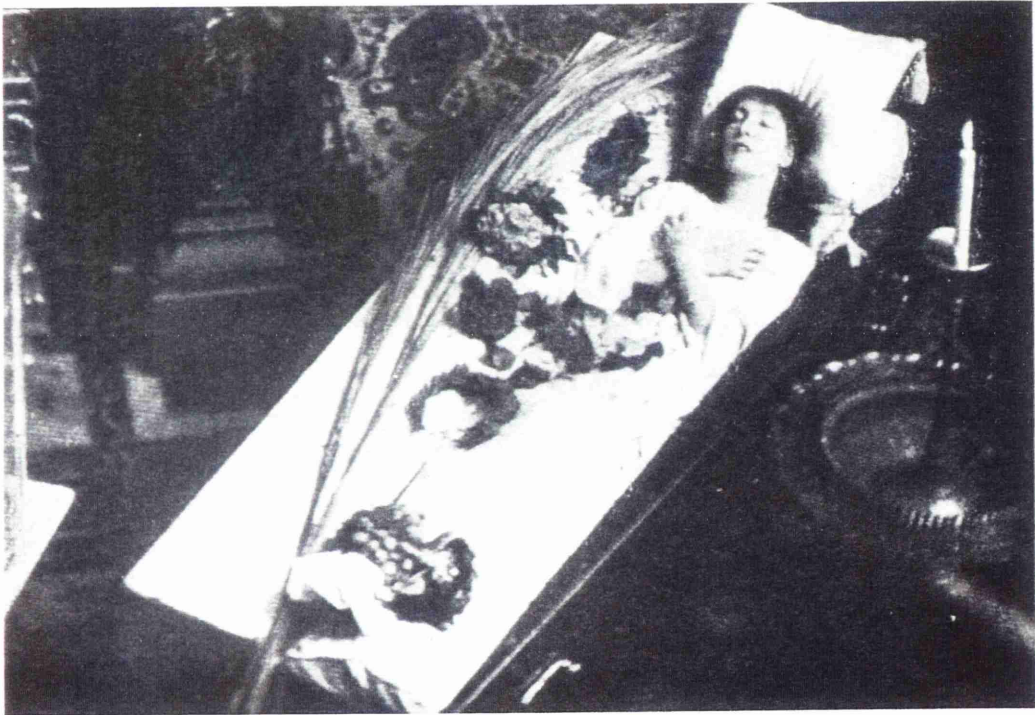


Plate 13: A photograph of Sarah Bernhardt in her coffin living the role of *femme fatale*.

A Brief Biography of Sarah as Actress and Artist

Sarah Bernhardt was born Henriette-Rosine Bernard, in Paris on the 22nd October 1844, the daughter of Judith van Hardt, a Dutch Jewess and Parisian courtesan. The identity of her father is unknown. The details of Sarah's childhood are vague and what she expresses in *Ma Double Vie* has been highly dramatised. (plate 19)

Sarah studied at Madame Fressard's pension, Quimperle and spent two years there before moving to the convent boarding school of *Grand-Champs*, in Versailles. Her desire to return and join the convent after her time here reflects how happy she had been there.

In Ruth Brandon's book, an account is given of a family meeting about Sarah's future. It was put forward that Sarah must marry to receive her dowry left by her father. Refusing marriage, a career was chosen for Sarah. It was never Sarah's wish to follow in the footsteps of her mother as a courtesan. According to Brandon it was the duc de Morny who suggested that Sarah should be sent to the Conservatoire. That night Sarah was brought to the Theatre Francais, the home of the Comedie-Francaise to see Racine's *Britannicus*.²⁸ She prepared for entry to the Conservatoire, by reading and rehearsing classical pieces.

Morny arranged an interview for Sarah, and after a successful

audition she gained entry to the Conservatoire. The Conservatoire had strong ties with the Comedie-Francaise. When her two year course of studies finished she took part in the annual competition deciding whom should be admitted to the Comodie. Sarah came in second place for the tragedy, and gained entry at the age of seventeen.

Months later, Sarah left the Comedie and moved to the Gymnase Theatre. This engagement was short lived as Sarah departed for Spain in the April of 1864. In her memoirs Sarah fails to mention that on the 22nd of December of this same year, her son Maurice was born. It is likely that she departed for Spain due to her pregnancy.

Maurice's father's identity is unconfirmed although it was said to have been the Belgian Prince de Ligne. She met the Prince de Ligne at a masked ball in Brussels in 1863. Brandon discusses in chapter nine how this *demi-monde*, unique to Paris, made her lifestyle acceptable. Here the worlds of a courtesan and an actress were not well distinguished.

She achieved true fame in 1869 when she played the male lead, *Zanetto*, in Francois Coppee's *Le Passant* at the Odeon. Sarah was in demand, in society and the theatre alike, the Odeon's leading attraction.

When the Franco Prussian war broke out on the 19th of July 1870, Sarah removed her family from the dangers of Paris and opened a military hospital at the Odeon. This act of patriotism added enormously to Sarah's popularity in France. In 1871 after the war, Sarah resumed performances at the Odeon.

An insight to Sarah's immense popularity at this time comes from Brandon's account of how the *Saradoteurs* "unharnessed the horses from her carriage and insisted on pulling her home themselves."²⁹ This became a familiar scene.

Sarah reached such a level of fame it was thought by many that her place was no longer at the Odeon, but at the Comedie-Francaise. The need to earn more money to support her family, and the infamously indulgent lifestyle she had become accustomed to forced her to move. Her opening play at the Comedie was *La Faustin* in November 1872, once more a success. It was at this time that Sarah began to sculpt. This interest was possibly developed as a distraction from the Comedie, or to increase her income. Sarah had a studio in Paris and one at her summer home in Belle-Ile, Brittany.

In 1874 Sarah played *Phedre*. A challenge for the style of acting that Sarah best suited. Given little time to prepare, she played the role to suit her voice and style of acting, a way the audience had never seen *Phedre* portrayed before, once more, she achieved great success.

Sarah did "what nobody has dared to do before: she plays with her whole body. This is something quite new... she is not afraid to bring forward, if I may put it this way, the most intimate and secret parts of her feminine personality... she puts into her roles, not just all her soul and wit and physical grace, but all her sex as well. Such daring would be shocking in anybody else; but... her light and ideal grace offsets all her audacities and makes them exquisite."³⁰ In this same year Sarah exhibited her art publicly for the first time at the Paris Salon.

In the January of 1875 Sarah became a *societaire* member of the Comedie-Francaise. Again Sarah exhibited her work at the Paris Salon of that year. It is noted that she "showed a certain aptitude for sculpture, and it soon became her ruling passion; she showed up at the theatre only when she had to rehearse or perform. Perrin, predictably, was extremely annoyed at this new departure. 'I wouldn't mind,' he grumbled to Francisque Sarcey, 'if it was a question of an actress who did a bit of sculpture in her spare time. What worries me is that I seem to be employing a sculptress who does a little acting when she happens to have a moment.'"³¹ Sarah won the silver medal for her work at the Salon of 1876.

In 1879 she performed a season in London with the Comedie. She received her full membership before departing for London.³² Sarah was much demand in London, as much for her personality as her

performances. Sarah used this opportunity to exhibit her work individually for the first time at the William Russell Galleries. This was a successful exhibition with a high profile attendance including Gladstone and Prince Leopold.

Her most important sculpture emerged when in 1880 she "shed the art of the Salon for that of the Symbolists."³³ She sculpted an inkwell held by a self-portrait where she daringly represented herself as a sphinx. The inkwell is held by two large claws. (plate 14) "The symbolism is compounded by the bat's wings and mermaid's tail."³⁴ She presents herself in an embryonic form as the ultimate *femme fatale*. Her art was unlike that of other female artists of the day who were predominantly depicting women in domestic scenes.

The first American tour of 1880 was a huge success. This type of international touring was a recent phenomenon only made possible by the steam engine. Her arrival in America was surrounded by great anticipation and numerous rumours. The general public in New York warmed to Sarah the night of her opening performance of *Adrienne Lecouvreur*. In New York she held another individual exhibition at the Union League club. Her success and popularity with the general public spread from New York to Boston.

Popularity and public interest in Sarah was intense during the following seven months touring across America, and into Canada.



Plate 14: Sarah Bernhardt's highly symbolic sphinx self-portrait
inkwell.

The plays were performed in French, the attraction was Sarah herself, undeniably charismatic. "Bernhardt was the first of this new breed, the royalty of popular culture; and in her lifetime her position as a new kind of ex-officio queen... remained quite unique."³⁵

Fedora was written for Sarah by Sardou, her then lover, and rehearsals commenced in the October of 1882. For the opening night of *Fedora* on the 12th of December 1882 Sarah performed in Paris to a full house once more. Sardou wrote *Theodora* for Sarah the following year. Opening in December 1884, it enjoyed immediate success. The following summer of 1885 Sarah toured North and South America.

In 1891 Sarah embarked on a sixteen month tour of Australia. The following year she performed in London, parts of Europe and South America. When she returned to Paris she bought the lease on the Renaissance Theatre. Her performances here were hugely successful. "Sarah had become a Phenomenon."³⁶

Sarah thrived as manager and became involved in every aspect of production. She had extraordinary energy and enthusiasm. Her progressing years seemed to have no effect on her she appeared untouched by age, "at the moment when age might have been expected to start its depredations, Sarah stepped, if one may put it this way, outside age."³⁷ (plate 15) Sarah was still sculpting and painting and took part in the *World's Columbian Exposition* in

Chicago in 1893 and the Paris *Exposition Universalle* of 1900.

Rostand wrote *L'Aiglon* for Sarah. Which premiered on the 17th of March 1900, for this Sarah moved from the intimate Theatre Renaissance to the Theatre des Nations, which was renamed the Theatre Sarah Bernhardt. There was a full house for opening night, this new play had been greatly anticipated as Sarah, now fifty-six, was to play the role of a young boy. The subject of the play itself held great interest for the audience - a story of "the exiled son of the great Napoleon who is unable to follow in his fathers footsteps - spoke to an audience still considered with many of the same issues, in particular the role of the army, and of foreigners."³⁸ Bravely, the play presented a political agenda as well as an artistic performance. The result was "a theatrical triumph to rival any of the triumphs of her early days, a *tour de force* in a role which no one else has ever been able to play."³⁹

An American tour was arranged for 1905/6 under the management of the Schubert Brothers. By now Sarah had reached such a phenomenal height of fame, she became almost isolated by it. "Jacques Porel, the son of Rejane and Paul Porel, also remarks upon her isolated social position at this time: 'more than an empress, a sort of divinity... Victor Hugo is the only person with whom she could be compared. She was so famous that relations with other people became difficult, resulting in a sort of holy but desolate solitude.'"⁴⁰



Plate 15: Sarah Bernhardt approaching sixty yet still 'Divine'.

Sarah's only private life was at her second home at Belle-Ile, Brittany.

'La Journee Sarah Bernhardt', held in Paris on the 10th of December 1896, was a gala event held in honour of the by now legendary Sarah Bernhardt. A lunch for five hundred people in the Grand Hotel was followed by performances by the legend herself in the Renaissance Theatre. She was at the height of her fame and beauty. There were three menus designed for the grand event, one by her new discovery, Alphonse Mucha, and a small number of commemorative silver medals were commissioned by Parisian artist jeweller and friend, Charles Rene Lalique.

Sarah was deeply involved in the world of the arts, as patroness and artist. There is evidence to support the existence of fifty pieces of sculpture by Sarah although the whereabouts of only twenty five is known. Sarah played the role of artist as she would any on stage "as the sculptress in her studio she wore an exquisite white silk pyjama suit made by Worth designed by Sarah. (plate 16) As to what happened when it got spotted with clay, one did not enquire."⁴¹

Although Sarah "was a sculptor of most original talent.... her work shows great skill, and at its most imaginative makes a fascinating contribution to the history of Art Nouveau,"⁴² it is noted that sculpture was not her only venture into the artistic world since she commenced painting under the guidance of Alfred Stevens and Gustave Dore

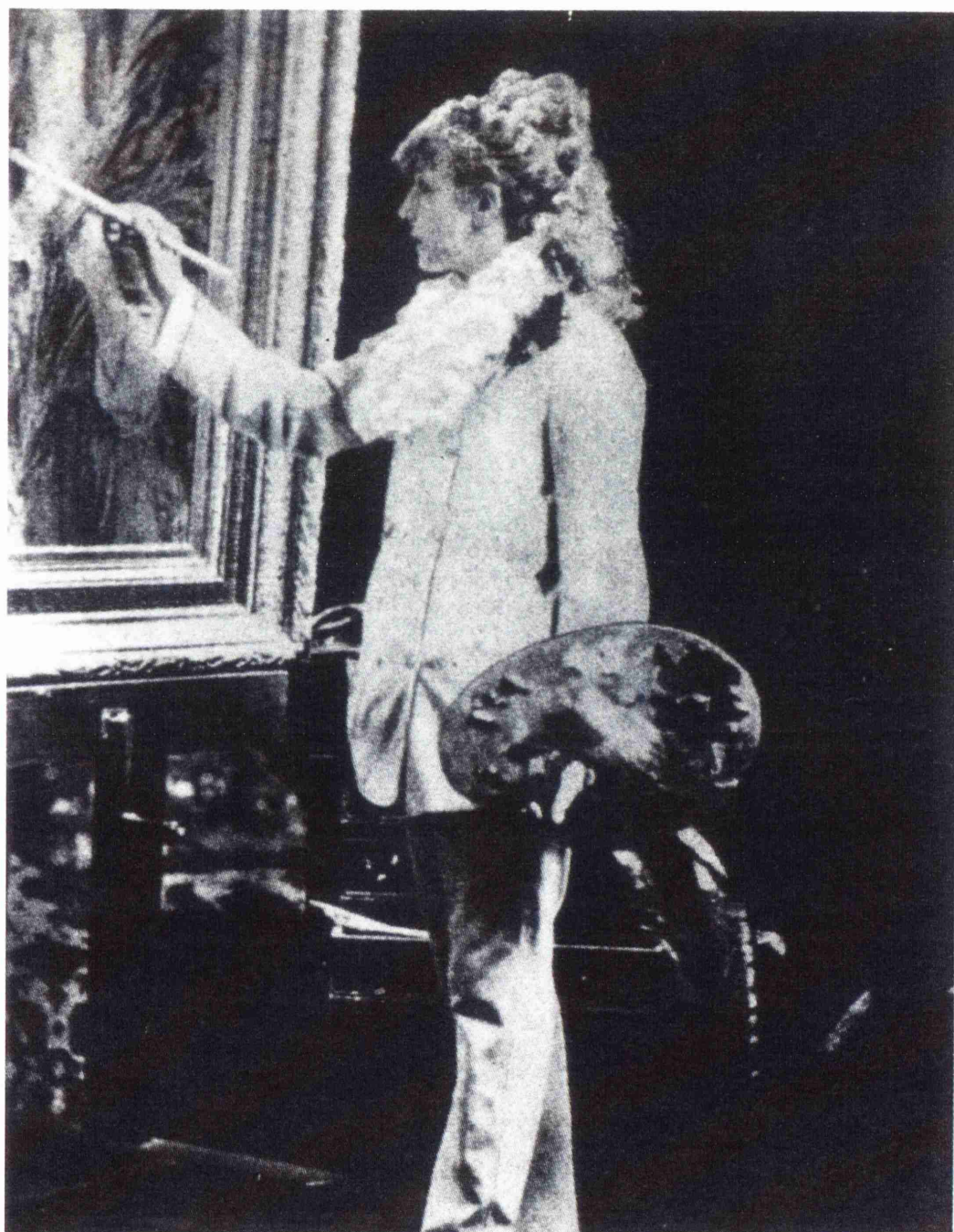


Plate 16: Sarah the artist at work in her white silk suit.

during the 1870's. Her painting *La Jeune Fille et la Mort* illustrates her talent as a painter. At the 1878 Paris Exhibition she participated in a balloon ride. Sarah saw this as yet another chance to explore her artistic side and wrote a book about her adventure the book was illustrated by her close friend the artist Georges Clairin. The book was called *Dans Les Nuages* and this again shows Sarah to be an artist in a broad sense and not one whose talents could be restricted to the stage. (plate 17)

Sarah's place in theatre history should not be underestimated. Her career spanned over fifty years, and during this time many plays were written for the great tragedienne by some of the most important French playwrights of the period. Her particular style of acting was catered to. She travelled the world with the plays of important playwrights indeed, she increased their importance by doing so. "Naturally this meant that a great many playwrights aspired to have her present their plays. And the result was that Sarah's particular requirements had a considerable effect upon French theatrical writing during the last quarter of the nineteenth century."⁴³

Many of the roles she played were of an operatic nature, with drama on a grand scale. A number of Sarah's most famous roles were later, with great success, to be turned into opera's such as, *La Dame aux Camélias*, *Fedora* and *La Tosca*. This operatic style of Sarah's acting

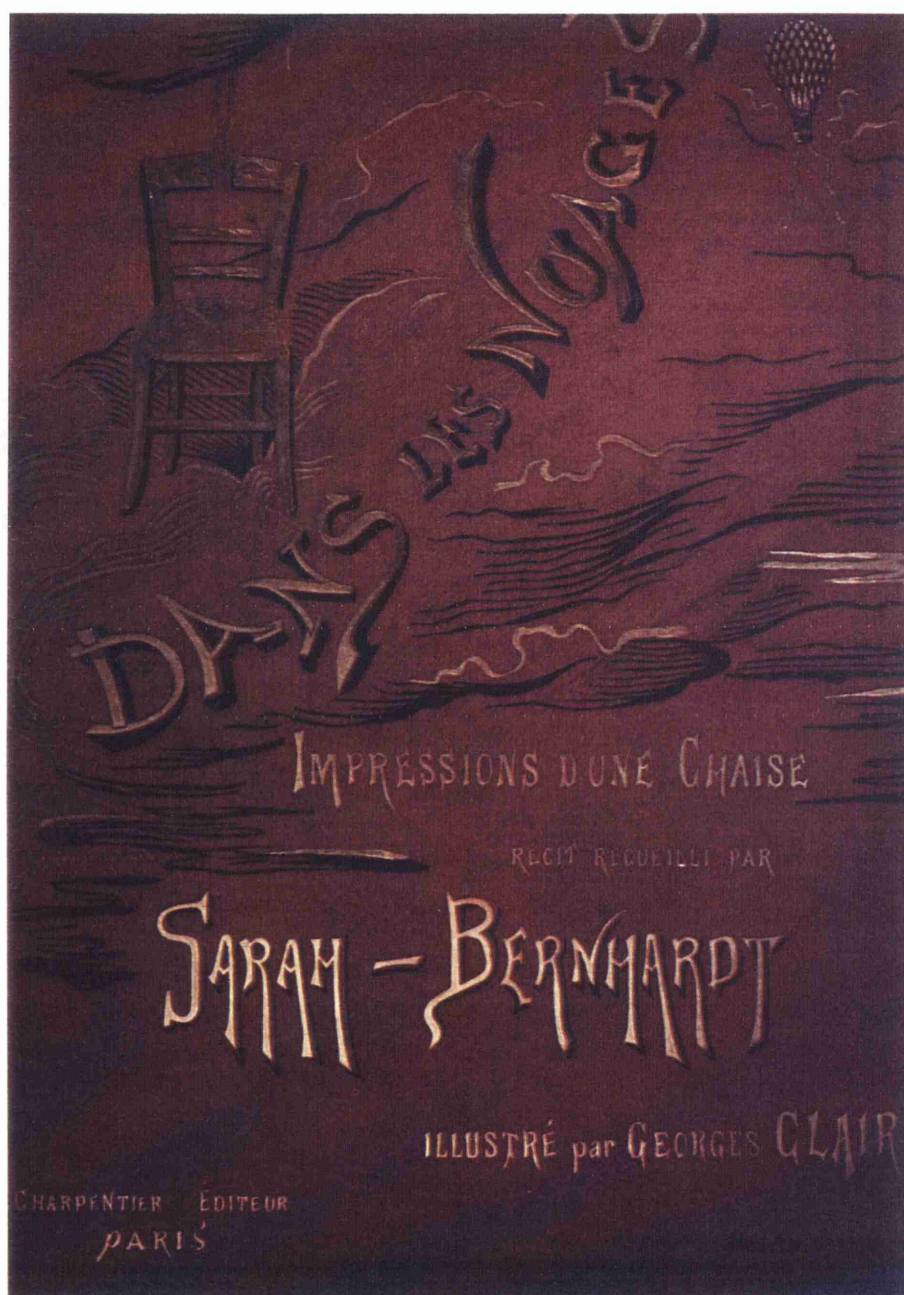


Plate 17: The cover of Sarah's Book.

accounts for her great success in countries where language presented itself as a barrier.

The majority attending the theatre in the nineteenth century France would were members of high society. The theatre influenced, directly or indirectly, the tastes of the higher echelons of society, whose influence in turn, set the tone for the tastes of the whole country. Through her position as an actress who travelled extensively, Sarah's influence on fashion, writing, and the arts as a whole, was incredibly widespread. At the end of the nineteenth century the theatre was the most widespread and popular form of entertainment. A powerful tool for the dissemination of ideas, and promoting styles. Sarah, through her career, brought to public interest the works of other artists, such as Mucha who's posters she used to advertise her performances, and Lalique who's jewels she wore during her performances.

Women's Fashion in the Nineteenth Century

Not only was Sarah an inspiration for many artists of the Art Nouveau period, but also an influence on the women's fashions of the day. As early as 1935 this was noted by C. Willett Cunnington writing in London. Paris was then starting to lose some of its hold as the leader of fashion, and many "smart Americans [were] beginning to prefer the make of London tailors to that of Parisian modists for their morning costume,"⁴⁴ yet Sarah could still influence the trends in fashion.

"In Sardou's play *'La Tosca'* Sarah Bernhardt, with her stayless figure, astonished the fashionable world in a series of Directoire and Empire costumes. The charm of those simple undraped skirts swept over Europe. She had abolished the overskirt and threatened the long waist. The new French style outbid the English tailor made."⁴⁵ What Sarah wore on stage set the fashion trends for not only the fashionable of Paris but the rest of Europe. Her "influence in leading to the simplification of the skirt must be acknowledged. Sarah Bernhardt had shown how to get rid of a superfluous garment. It also encouraged the open bodice and the loose-fitting blouse, and it gave the bustle its death-blow. Moreover it shortened the day skirt almost to the ankle."⁴⁶ (plate 18)



Plate 17: Sarah with her son Maurice. Wearing a simple skirt and loose-fitting blouse and a belt slung low on her waist.



Plate 19: Sarah in a loose fronted gown.

There are a number of other fashion trends which Sarah has also be credited with, "the graceful loose fronted gown," (plate 19) and "the long 'sling-sleeve' cloak which for a time was called the '*Bernhardt Mantle*.'"⁴⁷ What was known as the 'French gigot sleeve,' which was pointed at the back of the hand, has also been attributed to Sarah. This would have elongated the arm and added dramatic effect. "It was enough for Bernhardt to wear something for it to become the mode. People copied her little high collars, (plate 20) her undulating dresses with their unmistakable line. (plate 21) When, ten years later, her arms grew so thin that she had to conceal them even when she wore evening dress, she invented shoulder-length gloves, which immediately became the rage."⁴⁸ (plate 22)

Sarah's originality in dress which on occasion she designed herself, expressed her artistic character. For Mucha, Sarah became the ideal woman everything from her features and her hair to the way she dressed herself "in flowing robes spiralling round her slim figure."⁴⁹ These flowing robes were the inspiration for the spiralling and curving lines of Mucha's designs. The loose fronted gowns inspired by Sarah can also be seen in many of Mucha's later works. In fact Mucha's first encounter with Sarah was to draw illustrations of her costumes for a periodical. Later they worked together to design her costumes. (plate 23)



Plate 20: A portrait of Sarah in profile wearing a high collared dress.



Plate 21: Sarah in an undulating dress.

Plate 22: A fashion plate with women in shoulder-length gloves.



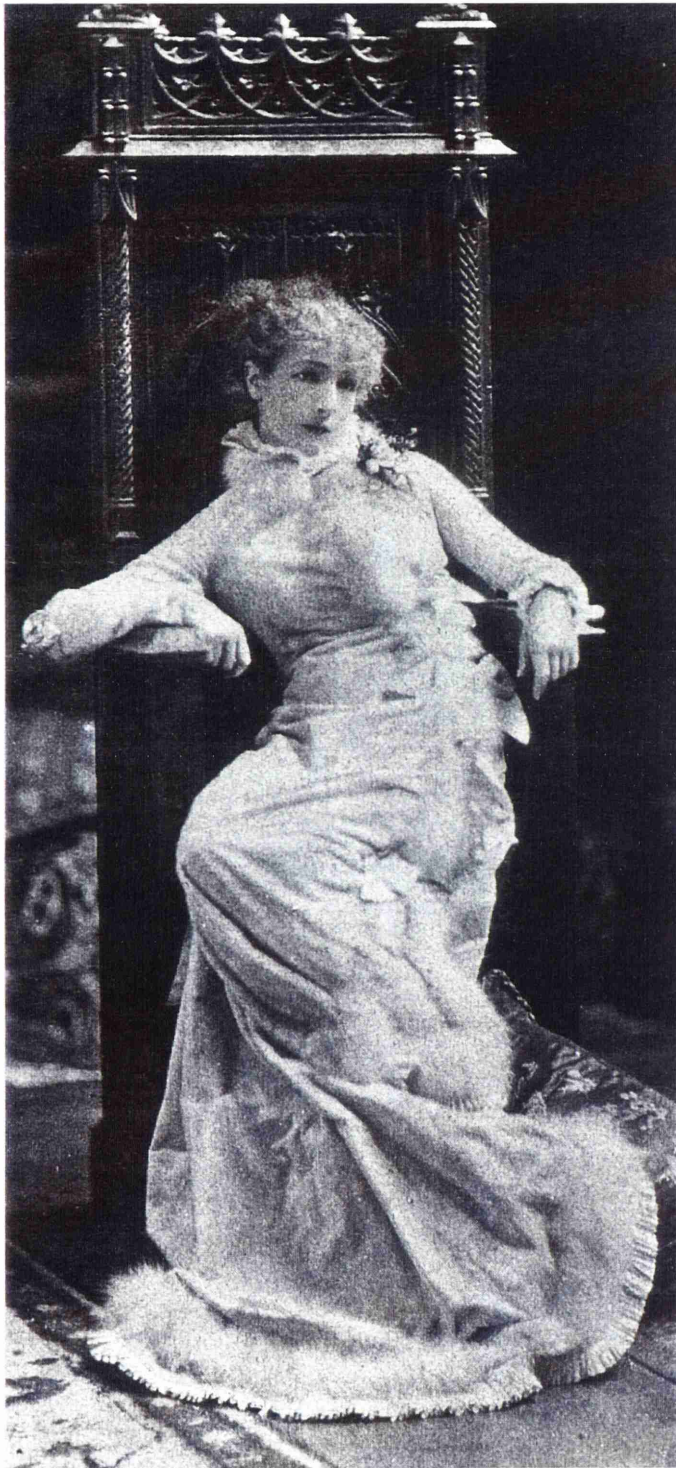


Plate 23: Sarah seated, her dress displays the sinuous line of Art Nouveau.

MUCHA

Alphonse Mucha was one of the most important graphic artists of the Art Nouveau period. Born in South Moravia in 1860 he later moved to Paris where he worked predominantly as an illustrator prior to his encounter with Sarah Bernhardt. His later posters which depict the ultimate images of the *fin de siecle* woman were largely inspired by Sarah.

Mucha first sketched Sarah in 1890 in a production of *Cleopatra* by Emile Moreau, whilst drawing costumes for the periodical '*Costume au Theatre*'. At this time he focused on the costumes and not the actress. This was not the starting point for '*Le Style Mucha*' which only emerges after the production of the famous *Gismonda* poster of 1895. His work prior to this encounter shows little of '*Le Style Mucha*' which was to follow. (plate 24)

The story of this poster, and the successful career it launched, is as coincidental as that of Sarah's return to the stage in 1865. Mucha, working in the printing house of Lemercier during the Christmas holiday of 1894, was the only available artist when a last minute order came for a poster for Sarah Bernhardt's revival of *Gismonda*, due to open on New Year's Day 1895, at the Theatre de la Renaissance. Up to this point Mucha had been regarded primarily as a book illustrator although he had produced a small number of



1256 Plate 24: An example of Mucha's work prior to his encounter with Sarah.



Plate 25: *Le Style Mucha* a transformation from his earlier work.

posters.

Although this period represents the height of poster art in Paris with the talents of Toulouse-Lautrec (plate 26) and Cheret to mention only two artists, gracing the public billboards of Paris, Sarah up to this point had used relatively undistinguished advertising posters. (plate 27) This was all to change with the meeting of Mucha and the divine Sarah. In a book by his son, Jiri Mucha, there is a touching description by Alphonse of his first meeting with Sarah... "They brought me to Sarah in her dressing room, and there I was face to face with her for the first time. But I immediately felt a clear, clean atmosphere, and this gave me hope. My poster was up on the wall, Sarah was standing in front of it, unable to tear her eyes away. When she saw me she came and embraced me."⁵⁰ This was the start of what proved to be an important partnership for both Sarah and Mucha, one which was to last for six years.

The *Gismonda* poster was a revolution in poster advertisement. When it appeared on the Paris billboards it caused a sensation. Its full length was a daring move on the part of Mucha and one which much impressed Sarah. According to Jiri Mucha what made this poster so exceptional "was more than just her outer appearance, for the first time somebody had succeeded in rendering her soul, the elusive magic of her personality on the stage. The poster for *Gismonda* and those that followed were equal to her own art which, irrespective of

Plate 26: The colours displayed here dramatically contrast those of Mucha.





Plate 27: One of Sarah's posters prior to her collaboration with Mucha.

the value of the play, made each an event."⁵¹ Unlike the other poster artists of the day such as Toulouse-Lautrec, Mucha chose a palette of pastel colours for many of the posters he produced for Sarah, once again, a bold move, and one that proved successful.

The importance of the *Gismonda* poster should not be understated since it launched the career of Mucha on to a totally new plane. He was now linked to the most celebrated stage personality of the era and he became deeply involved with the theatrical world but most importantly he gained through association with Sarah "the stature of an influential art personality."⁵² Sarah was so impressed by this first poster Mucha did for her she ordered four thousand for advertising and to sell. So too did the printer Lemercier and this led to a court case with the result Sarah never worked with Lemercier again. The poster had been so successful that Sarah used an altered version, where the theatre name was replaced with the words American Tour, for her 1896 American tour. (plate 28) The poster was later again altered and used by Fanny Davenport an American actress aspiring to be a Sarah Bernhardt. "It is thus safe to say that, both for its intrinsic merit and for events that were associated with it, *Gismonda* is unquestionably one of the most fateful posters created by any artist anywhere."⁵³ The *Gismonda* poster immediately became a collectors piece.

Plate 28: Variations of this poster produced emphasises not only it's importance but also it's popularity.



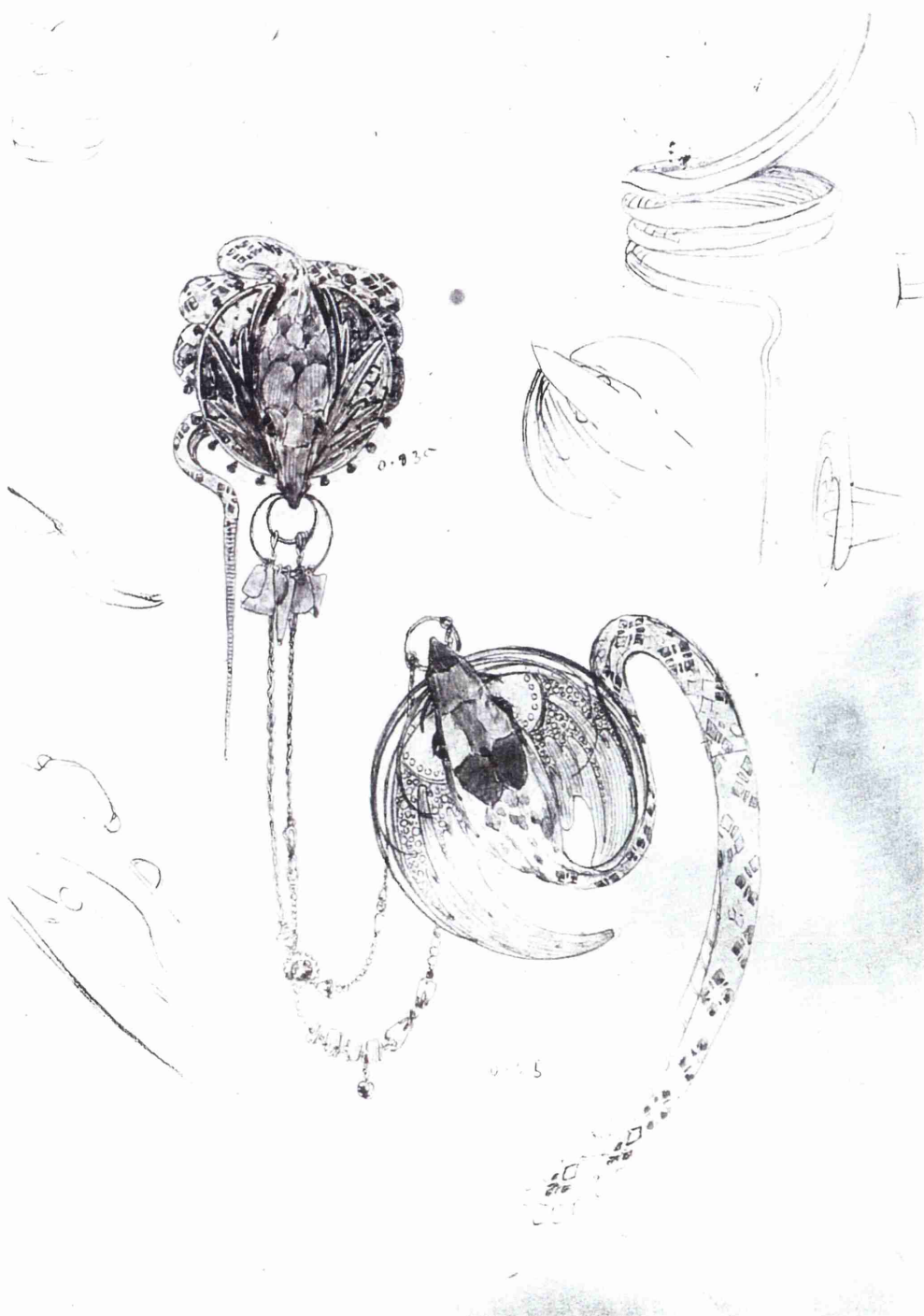


Plate 29: A Sketch of the snake bracelet Mucha designed for Sarah.

It was this collaboration of two great artists, Sarah and Mucha, that produced what was to become known as '*Le Style Mucha*'. It is clear from examining works by Mucha prior to the *Gismonda* poster that in Sarah he found true inspiration. She was at the top of her career when their contract launched his career. "This collaboration produced some of the most beautiful works by the artist who was surely fascinated by her spellbinding personality."⁵⁴

The strong influence Sarah had on Mucha's work and imagination can be seen early on. In a poster he designed for the periodical '*La Plume*' the woman's head depicted was thought to be that of Sarah Bernhardt, but Mucha is recorded to have said "I just drew a girl from memory, arranging her so as to be able to make the most of her hair."⁵⁵

The nature of Sarah's stardom meant that any man with whom she worked would be the subject of gossip and speculation in the newspapers and Mucha was no exception to this. Many suggested that they were lovers as was often the case with Sarah and the men with whom she worked closely. This is of course a possibility although it is thought to be more likely they simply remained close friends. Their business relationship came to involve much more than the production of Sarah's promotional posters she was so impressed by his work that she involved him in her theatrical work across the board. He "sketched her jewellery, designed her hairstyles and



Plate 30: One of Mucha's sketches for Sarah's costumes. This expresses the level of involvement he had in her productions.

selected materials for her dressmaker."⁵⁶ (plates 29 & 30)

For Sarah Mucha designed nine promotional posters scenery for several of her plays, costumes, assisted directing and acted as Sarah's 'right hand man' for a time. Working within such a broad area of the arts as theatre much appealed to Mucha and he could follow the creed of William Morris (an artist he much respected). Here he had the scope for diversity of design and "his ideas could be propagated to the largest possible number of people."⁵⁷

This collaboration of two great artists also created what has been called "one of the all time masterpieces of poster art,"⁵⁸ the poster for *La Dame aux Camelias* used for Sarah's 1896 revival of the piece. This poster was so successful that Sarah also chose to use it for an American tour. (plate 31) Mucha's involvement in this play went far beyond the poster design. The play was historical and up to this time had been presented by Sarah as such whereas now in a bold move Sarah decided to revamp the play by modernising it. Mucha was commissioned to design the contemporary costumes and stage set - "exercising an important influence on fashions of the day, as well as on stage craft."⁵⁹

What has been described as 'The Mucha Woman' is clearly an image of woman that was inspired by Sarah Bernhardt and it is for many the ultimate image of the *femme fatale* and the *fin de siecle* Art



Plate 31: The use of this poster for Sarah's American tour reflects its success when first used in France for *La Dame aux Camélias*.

Nouveau woman. This woman is "Young, sensuous yet apparently virginal, his provocative women display their bodies in a series of elegant, voluptuous poses designed to enhance the natural curves of the feminine figure: curves echoed and developed in the complex arrangement of their impossibly luxuriant hair."⁶⁰ Mucha's female figures always seem to retain an otherworldly element, which again seems to have been inspired by Sarah herself. "They are symbols, unattainable dreams, like Sarah when she came on to the stage, or died in the role of *La Dame aux Camélias*."⁶¹

Jiri Mucha was fully aware of the importance of Sarah to his father's career not only as a patron but more importantly as an inspiration, he stresses this in his book entitled *Alphonse Mucha*; "I can only suggest that it was the power of Bernhardt's personality and emotional force... which acted as a catalyst on the diverse strands which must have contributed to his artistic development. Certainly, Bernhardt occupied a unique position in my father's life, her patronage had been the instrument of his success, her plays provided a showcase for his designs and it was the force of her personality more than anything else which led to the famous transformation of his style in 1895."⁶² Again in *Alphonse Mucha: The Master of Art Nouveau*, Jiri reinforces the importance of Sarah as the inspiration to his father's particular style that was to become so popular and so much the style of the Art Nouveau period. He points out how his father had previously made posters and *Gismonda* was

not his first but “only now, under the impact of the living personality on the stage, everything he had so far done disappeared and in its place appeared a new style with new meaning.”⁶³

Looking more closely at some of his other work the effects of this influence are more than evident. Certain motifs that were first used in posters for Sarah become almost trademarks of his work, such as his stars which were first used to surround Sarah in the poster for *La Dame aux Camélias* and her long flowing highly stylised hair in the poster for *La Samaritaine*. It is important to note the influence these works had on the Art Nouveau movement as a whole. The style which Mucha had created became so widespread that “it was impossible to tell what came directly from Mucha, what was plagiarism and what was simply created in the same spirit.”⁶⁴ (plates 32)

Mucha also played a role in *La Journée Sarah Bernhardt* on the 9th of November 1896. “Friends and admirers of the fifty-two-year old living legend gave a festival banquet at the Grand Hotel with special music, presentations and tributes to her by the elite of the artistic community of Paris.”⁶⁵ For the special day the Theatre de la Renaissance distributed a gold stamped souvenir book, there were three special menus, and a number of Mucha’s designs were used here.

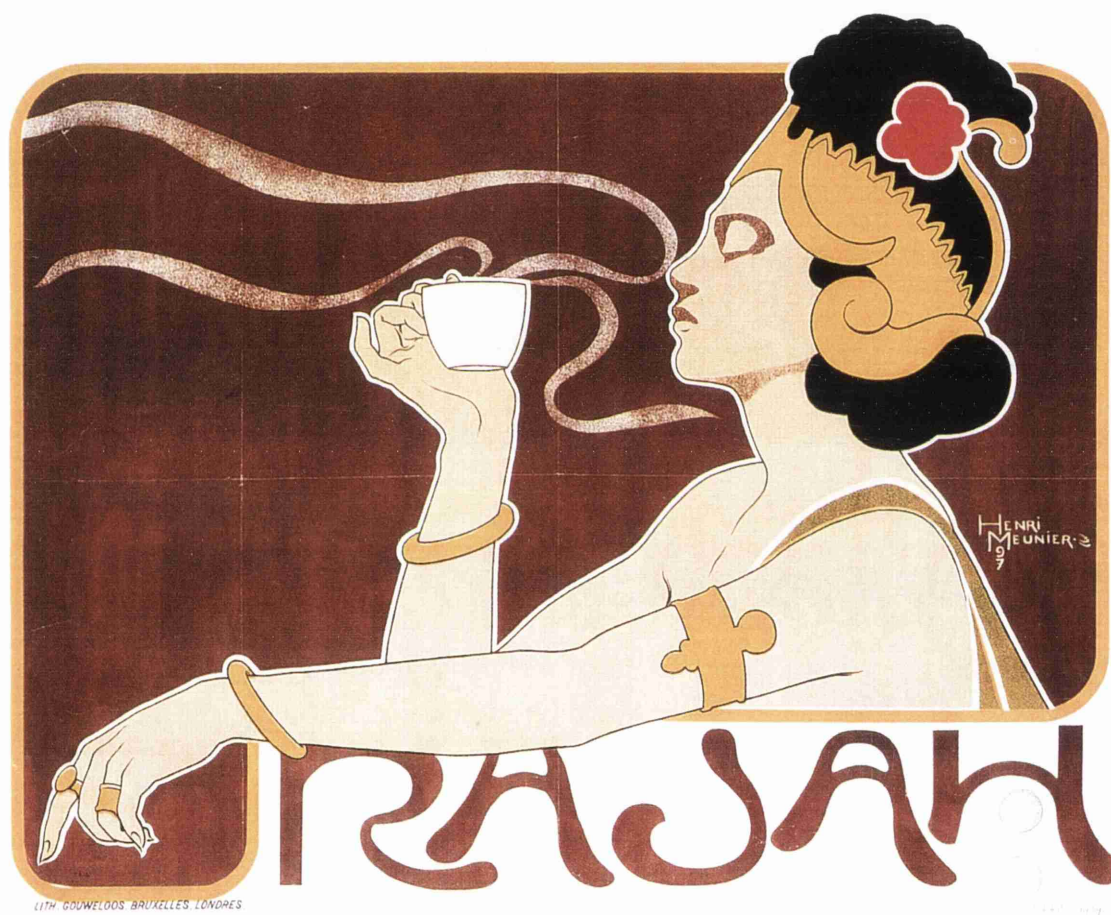


Plate 32: This poster shows how influential Mucha's work was on contemporary artists in Europe.

FOUQUET

Mucha collaborated with other artists of the period to produce pieces for Sarah. The most notable of these collaborations was with the Paris jeweller Georges Fouquet. Georges' father Alphonse Fouquet had moved to Paris in 1840, and it was in Paris that he learned the goldsmith's trade, Alphonse also drew and wrote verse. Once established in Paris "he eventually set up a workshop and he became one of the exclusive jewellers working from his own designs for individual customers. Considering himself primarily an artist he was deeply grieved when his son turned into what he called a shopkeeper, deciding after 1900 to open up a fashionable boutique opposite Maxim's in the rue Royale where he would both make and sell jewellery, designed by leading artists."⁶⁶ (plate 33)

The partnership between Mucha and Fouquet was established prior to the opening of Fouquet's shop and only lasted two years from 1899 to 1901. Their first project together was a serpent hand and finger ornament made for Sarah in 1899. The bracelet had featured in the Mucha poster for Sarah's production *Medee* the previous year in 1898 and Sarah had commissioned Fouquet to make the piece to Mucha's designs. "It was fashioned as a serpent coiled around the wrist with its head resting on her hand and was joined by chains, as in some antique jewellery, to a fingering also in the form of a snakes head. The craftsmanship of the piece was remarkable not only for

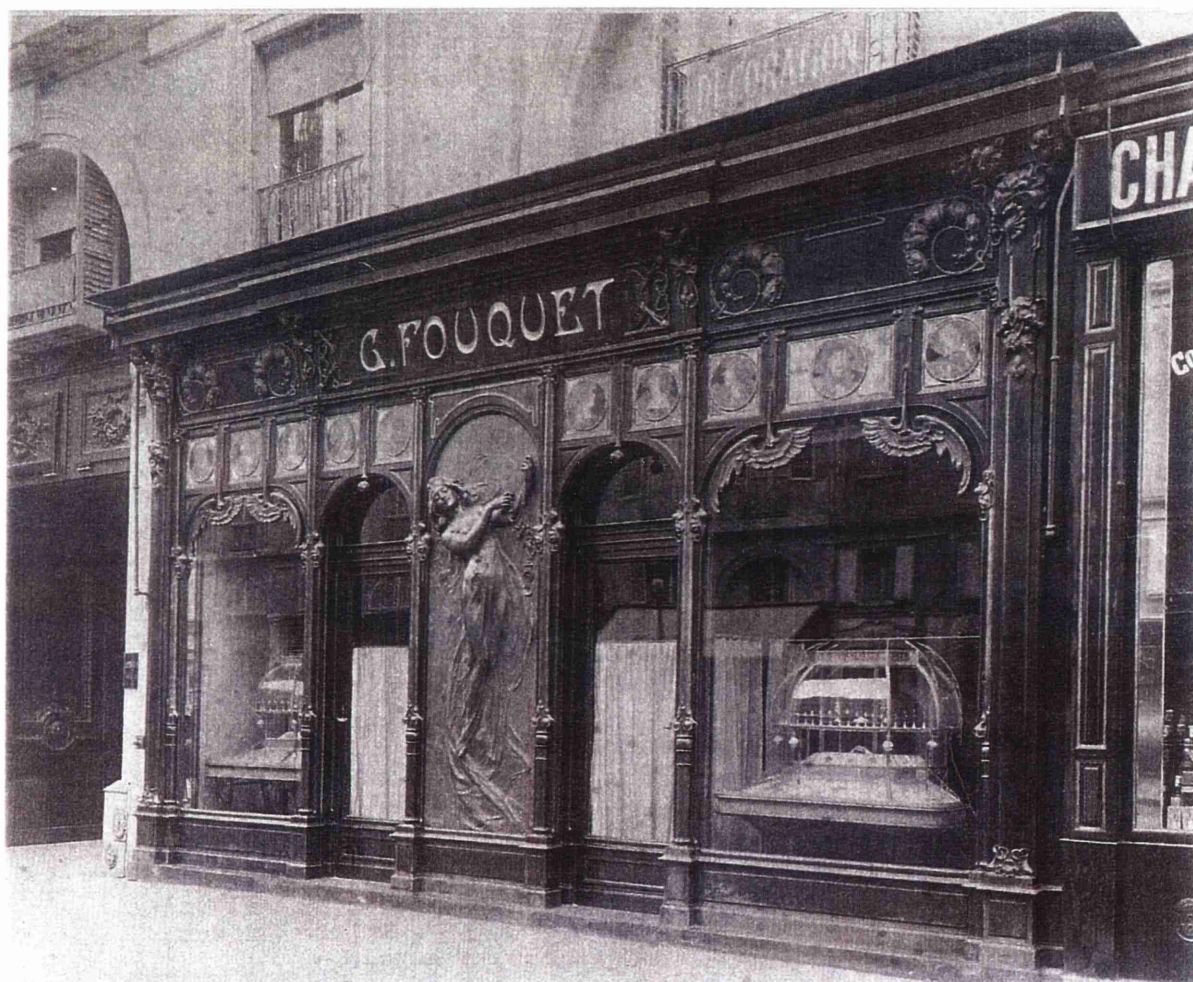


Plate 33: The facade of the Fouquet shop designed by Mucha.



Plate 34: A replica of the snake bracelet made for Sarah Bernhardt.

Fouquet's work with gold, enamel and opals, but also for the system of hinges which gave it its suppleness."⁶⁷ This piece was such a success that Fouquet made a replica of this elaborate and intricate piece. (plate 34)

Sarah herself was a dominating force in the style of the jewellery of the period, with many pieces made in her image and inspired by her image. However "her own taste was in fact not for Art Nouveau as a cohesive style, but for the curious, the dramatic, for all things oriental and symbolist. It was these qualities that Mucha understood so well and distilled into his jewels, using his distinctive stylistic elements, curvilinear and crescent motifs; the flaring diamond set wings, all tinged with a strong Byzantine flavour."⁶⁸ This bracelet is certainly a highly dramatic piece in terms of its size and execution. The serpent, although not a new motif in jewellery is used creatively here the highly stylised curving head is not how the motif had been presented up to this time in jewellery making. It also has a sense of the danger and eroticism of the *femme fatale* which Sarah perceived herself to be. and she portrayed herself as such in some of her own sculptural work, such as her inkwell.

Mucha and Fouquet worked well together and after working on this project Fouquet asked Mucha to design his display for the *Exposition Universelle* of 1900, in Paris. There were two other known jewellery projects undertaken by Mucha and Fouquet for Sarah.

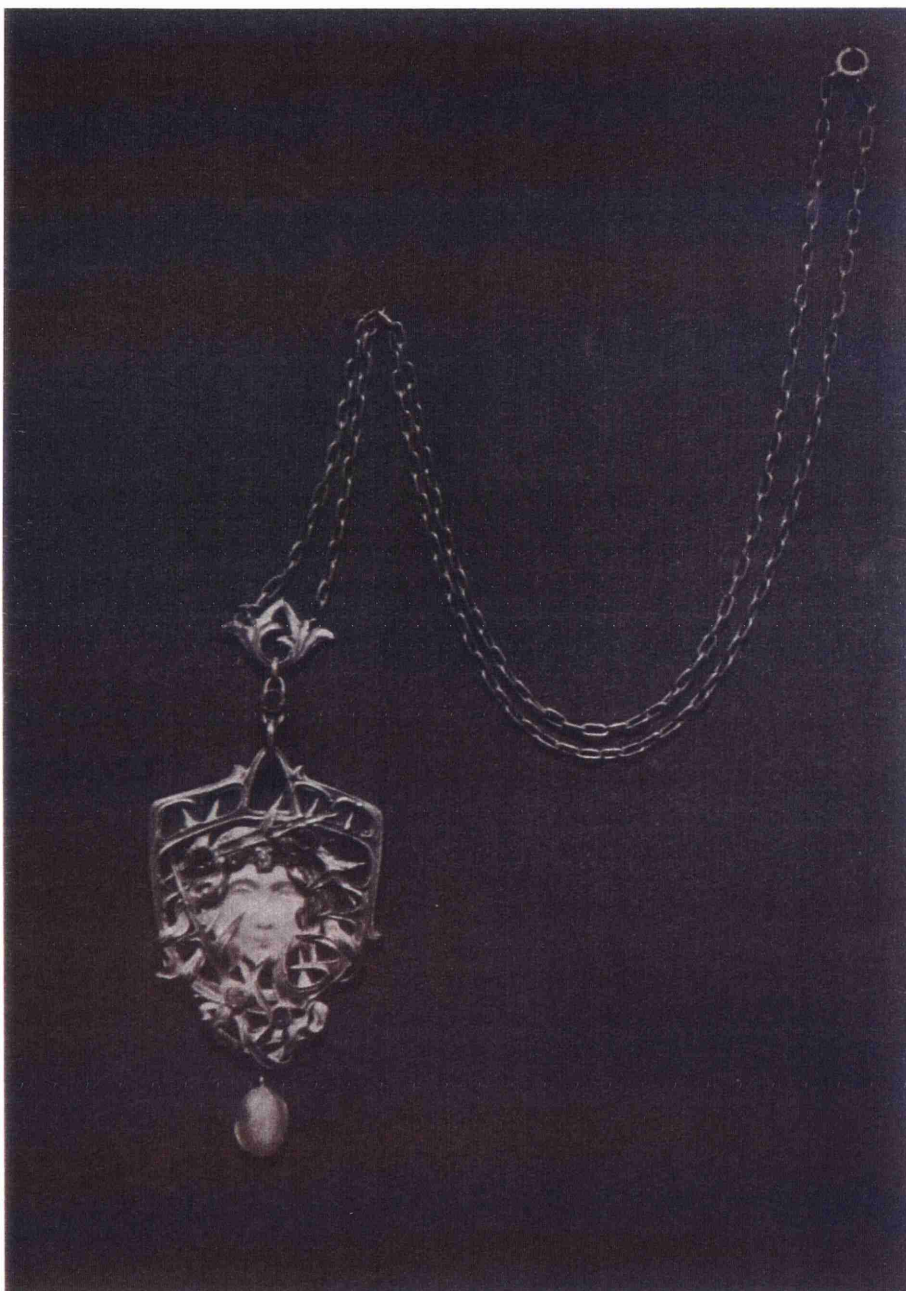


Plate 35: A pendant made for Sarah depicting her as Melissande. This became a widespread popular motif for jewellery of the period.



Plate 36: These jewels illustrate Sarah's popularity and influence on the Art Nouveau style.

One was a gold gold brooch with an enamel pendant which bore a round miniature of Sarah in the role of Rostand's heroine *Melissinde* from *La Princess Liontaine*. (plate 35) The final piece is another brooch representing Sarah's head, again in the role of Melissinde, "cast in yellow and green gold, the face painted in natural colours and framed with lillies of white enamel. The head-dress consists of a ruby and six diamonds. On the lower part of the brooch is a pear shaped pearl under a diamond."⁶⁹ The huge success of *La Princess Liontaine*, and the image of Sarah with her head surrounded by a wreath of lillies "became a sort of Sarah Bernhardt trade mark and began to appear in countless variations in jewellery and ornamentation."⁷⁰ (plate 36)

The large serpent corsage ornament made by Fouquet in 1902 illustrates the lasting influence the collaboration with Mucha had. It also demonstrates the inspiration Sarah provided, he re-uses the serpent theme Sarah had requested for the hand ornament. The dramatic nature of jewels such as this was clearly inspired by the stage, this is also reflected in the size of the piece.

Fouquet commissioned Mucha to design the interior of his shop on the rue Royale. This interior was to become one of the most renowned Art Nouveau interiors. (plate 37) Mucha designed everything from the counters and show-cases, to the chairs, all fashioned in Mucha's gentle Art Nouveau curves. "Fouquet's shop



Plate 37: The interior of Fouquet's shop executed in Le Style Mucha which came about as a result of his encounter with Sarah.

was such an important milestone in the development of interior decoration at that time, that the Armand Coiln Encyclopaedia used a picture of its facade to illustrate the entry, '*style moderne*.'"⁷¹ The interior of the shop was later removed and placed in the Musee des Arts Decoratifs and the Musee Carnavalet, which emphasises its importance as a fine and important example of Art Nouveau design. This *style moderne* employed by Mucha was, as has been pointed out, heavily inspired by Sarah and indeed the collaboration of these artists may not have occurred if Sarah had not been the original instigator.

For the interior of this shop Mucha also produced two pieces of sculpture. One of these is in the Musee Carnavalet, namely a statue of a nude female surmounting a fountain (plate 37) and in the Musee des Arts Decoratifs is the other which is a bronze bust of a woman. The bronze stands at three quarters of a meter high and bears clear resemblance to Sarah Bernhardt. Jiri Mucha remarks (in reference to Sarah Bernhardt) "his memory must have been haunted by this girl as she clearly re-appears in the bust executed for Fouquet's shop some five years later."⁷²

LALIQUE

Another important Art Nouveau jeweller was Charles Rene Lalique. Like many of the greatest artists of the Art Nouveau period he was linked to Sarah Bernhardt. Jiri Mucha notes "Lalique also used my fathers designs; at other times creating in the same spirit, he arrived at very similar results. It is perhaps unique in the history of art that a single artist has so impressed his unmistakable imprint on a style, but since his contribution became public property, it was no longer of importance who was the originator. The supreme master became the style, and the other artists complied with it."⁷³ But was Sarah the Bernhardt the inspiration for all of these artists and not Mucha? She was Mucha's inspiration for his new style and since Lalique was also one of those in Sarah's 'little court' it is possible Sarah was the inspiration.

Lalique was a French born jeweller from Ay in the Champagne district of France. Born in 1860 he studied at Sydenham Art College London and spent the early 1880s working for well established Paris jewellers such as Aucoq, Cartier and Boucheron. He acquired the work shop of Jules Destape in 1885, and in 1890 he married and opened his new business premises at 20 rue Therese in Paris. The following year he created his first jewels for Sarah Bernhardt who was to become his first important patron.

From 1891 to 1901 were the principal years during which Lalique created stage ornaments for Sarah in her roles as *Iseyl*, *Gismonda* and *Theodora* and for these received great praise from public and press alike. Henri Vever described the jewels as "large-scale parures, diadems, necklaces and belts (which) were destined to be seen from a considerable distance and on a high stage; therefore they were sumptuously designed and greatly admired."⁷⁴

Lalique's work was certainly innovative in terms of his techniques and his uses and combinations of materials, he was the first artist jeweller to use semiprecious and precious material combined. Also his approach to his subject matter was rather unique. He was inspired by Japanese art which was only at this point becoming more readily available with the opening of Japan to the West in the 1850's. His work led to the birth of modern jewellery. "Writing on the jewellery shown at the *Exposition Universelle* in 1900, the curator of the Muse du Luxembourg identified the 1895 salon, the first public showing of Lalique's work, as the origin of the change 'which has profoundly altered the basic condition and appearance of modern jewellery... (and) it was Lalique who was the veritable originator.'"⁷⁵ He is viewed by many as the most prominent jewellery designer of the Art Nouveau period and he was undeniably at the heart of the radical transformation jewellery design in France encountered at that time.

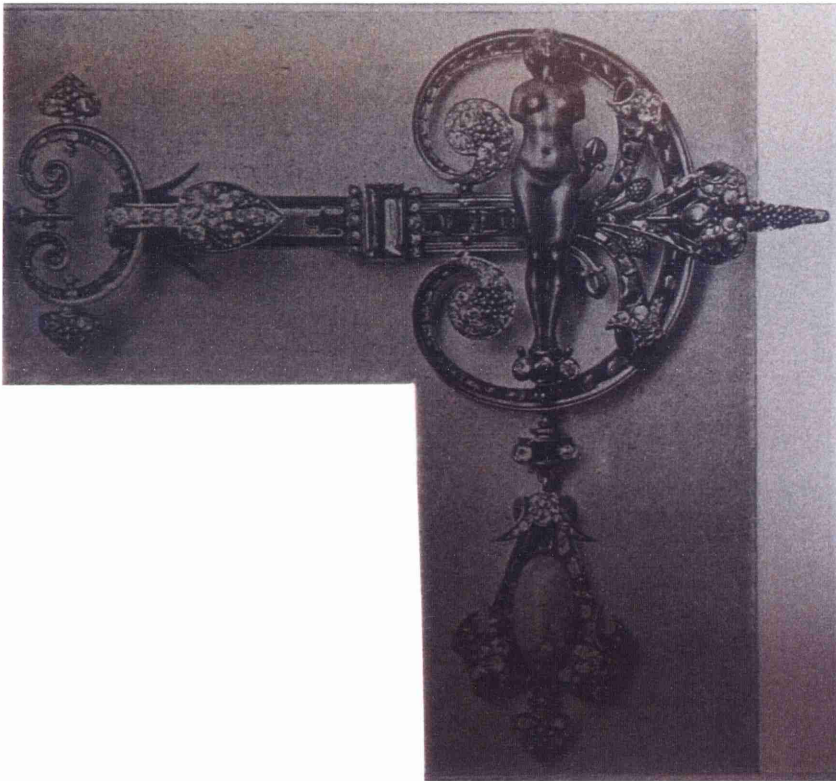


Plate 38: Lalique's Renaissance style brooch which had a dramatic impact on the world of jewellery. This was executed after he had first encountered Sarah.

"Rene Lalique was the undisputed genius of Art Nouveau jewellery and in my opinion the greatest artist jeweller ever known. A leader of the Art Nouveau movement, and instigator of an entirely new approach to jewellery, he was a man of exceptional talent, and astonishing versatility."⁷⁶ Again it is interesting to note how this artist, like Mucha and Fouquet, considered to have been a leader of the Art Nouveau movement was also closely linked to Sarah. Undoubtedly she helped his career at a crucial point as she helped those of Mucha and Fouquet. "Her flamboyant and adventurous personality acted as a catalyst on Lalique's fertile imagination at a crucial point in his career."⁷⁷ Sarah not only encouraged the young talented artists with whom she came into contact with as a patron, but also inspired them in her own inimitable way.

Like Mucha and Fouquet, in Lalique's work there is the recurring motif of the female form and again the emphasis here is on the female as *femme fatale*, "including a bizarre blend of sexuality and death,"⁷⁸ such as in the dragonfly corsage ornament. Sarah, the ultimate *fin de siecle* woman and *femme fatale* with her fascination with death, evidenced by her rumoured habit of sleeping in a coffin was clearly inspirational in this sense. At the Salon of 1895 Lalique presented a large brooch clasp in an interpretation of the Renaissance style. (plate 38) In the centre of this brooch was a female nude figure and this naturally caused great controversy as had many of the nude female images produced by Mucha. However,

"Lalique's example was soon followed; jewellers of all countries, even those known for their unwavering principles, incorporated the female form into their work."⁷⁹ Interestingly this occurred after his first encounter with Sarah.

It was Georges Clairin the painter who introduced Lalique to Bernhardt and in turn it was Sarah who was to introduce Lalique to his most important patron Calouste Gulbenkian, the famous Armenian collector. Gulbenkian purchased over 100 pieces of Lalique's jewellery and these magnificent jewels can be seen today at the Gulbenkian Foundation in Lisbon. The importance of Sarah's patronage cannot be disputed especially when one considers it was through Sarah that Lalique was to meet Gulbenkian, but also it is evident that Sarah had a great influence on the unique style of jewellery Lalique produced.

Lalique's association with Sarah attracted wide publicity as did all of her activities. "The jewels were much admired and brought Lalique's name to the attention of the public."⁸⁰ Undoubtedly the work Lalique executed for Sarah and in particular the pieces for the stage "encouraged his own impulse towards fantasy and drama in jewels, and freed him from the usual inhibitions of size, cost and materials."⁸¹ Vever records how in 1890 Lalique "who is bold enough to try anything, had modelled a life-size portrait of Sarah Bernhardt in profile."⁸² Since this large scale work was carried out without

commission, Lalique, like Mucha was clearly haunted by the image of this extraordinary woman. Later in 1896 Lalique made reductions of this piece for the commemorative silver medals presented to a select few at '*La Journee Sarah Bernhardt*'.

Lalique is also thought to have assisted Sarah with her own work as a sculptress. At the 1900 *Exposition Universelle* in Paris Sarah along with Mucha, Fouquet and Lalique exhibited some of her work namely "bronzes sculpted in the form of stylised pulsating sea plants, modelled on sea plants found at her home in Belle-Ile and created, it would seem, with Lalique's guidance."⁸³

CONCLUSION

Art Nouveau a movement which straddled the last quarter of the 19th century and the first quarter of the 20th century reflected a sinuous style of design including exotic and even erotic influences in art and decoration. It emphasised natural beauty and quality as a reaction to industrial mass production.

Sarah's work as an artist is noted as it demonstrated her deep understanding of the work of those she patronised. She was not merely a wealthy and influential individual with a passing interests in the fine and decorative art.

As with many other notable movements throughout history it is not possible to pinpoint comprehensively the precise roots and influences of Art Nouveau. One can however draw inferences from historical events and having perused the life and times of Sarah Bernhardt it is not unreasonable to conclude the 'Divine Sarah' merited the title Muse of Art Nouveau.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ V. Becker, The Jewellery of Rene Lalique, p.20
- ² S.A. Sternau, Art Nouveau Spirit of the Belle Époque, p.15
- ³ P. Greenhalgh, Essential Art Nouveau, p. 8
- ⁴ *ibid.* p.21
- ⁵ *ibid.* p.35
- ⁶ S. Escritt, Art Nouveau, p.5
- ⁷ P. Greenhalgh, Art Nouveau 1890-1914, p.17
- ⁸ P. Greenhalgh, Essential Art Nouveau, p.65
- ⁹ C.W. Cunnington, Feminine Attitudes in the Nineteenth Century, p.239
- ¹⁰ G. Wood, Art Nouveau and the Erotic, p.8
- ¹¹ *ibid.* p.9
- ¹² P. Bade, Femme Fatale, p.16
- ¹³ *ibid.* p.17
- ¹⁴ C.W. Cunnington, Feminine Attitudes in the Nineteenth Century, p.283
- ¹⁵ O. Uzanne, Fashion in Paris 1797-1897, p.161
- ¹⁶ *ibid.* p.162
- ¹⁷ *ibid.* p.165
- ¹⁸ *ibid.* p.165
- ¹⁹ W.G. Robertson, Time Was, p.124
- ²⁰ *ibid.* p.128
- ²¹ P. Bade Femme Fatale, p.9
- ²² G. Wood, Art Nouveau and the Erotic, 40
- ²³ *ibid.* p.43
- ²⁴ *ibid.* p.44
- ²⁵ P. Bade Femme Fatale, p.8
- ²⁶ *ibid.* p.32
- ²⁷ *ibid.* p.36
- ²⁸ R. Brandon, Being Divine, p.40
- ²⁹ *ibid.* p.155
- ³⁰ *ibid.* p.182
- ³¹ *ibid.* p.174
- ³² *ibid.* p.216
- ³³ Dictionary of Women Artists vol.i p.251
- ³⁴ *ibid.* p.251
- ³⁵ R. Brandon, Being Divine, p.290
- ³⁶ *ibid.* p.334
- ³⁷ *ibid.* p.337
- ³⁸ *ibid.* p.377
- ³⁹ *ibid.* p.378
- ⁴⁰ *ibid.* p.348
- ⁴¹ *ibid.* p.176
- ⁴² Dictionary of Women Artists vol.i p.250
- ⁴³ R. Brandon, Being Divine, p.368
- ⁴⁴ C.W. Cunnington, Feminine Attitudes in the Nineteenth Century, p.342
- ⁴⁵ *ibid.* p.342
- ⁴⁶ *ibid.* p.343
- ⁴⁷ *ibid.* p.341
- ⁴⁸ R. Brandon, Being Divine, p.385
- ⁴⁹ J. Mucha, Alphonse Mucha His Life and His Art, p.12
- ⁵⁰ *ibid.* p.131
- ⁵¹ *ibid.* p.133

- ⁵² J. Rennert & A. Weill, Alphonse Mucha The Complete Posters and Panels, p.48
- ⁵³ ibid. p.50
- ⁵⁴ ibid. p.10
- ⁵⁵ J. Mucha, Alphonse Mucha His Life and His Art. p.11
- ⁵⁶ ibid. p.134
- ⁵⁷ ibid. p.22
- ⁵⁸ ibid. p.22
- ⁵⁹ J. Rennert & A. Weill, Alphonse Mucha The Complete Posters & Panels, p.76
- ⁶⁰ J. Mucha, Alphonse Mucha His Life and His Art. p.19
- ⁶¹ ibid. p.23
- ⁶² ibid. p.37
- ⁶³ J. Mucha, Alphonse Mucha The Master of Art Nouveau. p.75
- ⁶⁴ ibid. p.135
- ⁶⁵ J. Rennert & A. Weill, Alphonse Mucha The Complete Posters & Panels, p.110
- ⁶⁶ J. Mucha, Alphonse Mucha His Life and His Art. p.245
- ⁶⁷ K. Snowman, The Master Jewellers. p.169
- ⁶⁸ Christie's, The Sarah Bernhardt Snake Bracelet. p.16
- ⁶⁹ J. Mucha Alphonse Mucha The Master of Art Nouveau. p.181
- ⁷⁰ ibid. p.167
- ⁷¹ ibid. p.147
- ⁷² ibid. p.147
- ⁷³ ibid. p.135
- ⁷⁴ H. Vever, French Jewellery of the Nineteenth Century. p.1226-7
- ⁷⁵ P. Greenhalgh, Art Nouveau 1890-1914 , p.137
- ⁷⁶ V. Becker The Jewellery of Rene Lalique. p.15
- ⁷⁷ ibid. p.20
- ⁷⁸ ibid. p.22
- ⁷⁹ H. Vever, French Jewellery of the Nineteenth Century , p.1235
- ⁸⁰ V. Becker Art Nouveau jewelry p.65
- ⁸¹ H. Vever, French Jewellery of the Nineteenth Century. p.1235
- ⁸² ibid. p.1236
- ⁸³ V. Becker , The Jewellery of Rene Lalique , p. 20
- ⁸⁴ V. Arwas, Alphonse Mucha the Spirit of Art Nouveau. pg 142
- ⁸⁵ Christie's, The Sarah Bernhardt Snake Bracelet. p.16
- ⁸⁶ Christie's, The Sarah Bernhardt Snake Bracelet. p.17
- ⁸⁷ J. Mucha Alphonse Mucha The Master of Art Nouveau. p.181

CATALOGUE ILLUSTRATIONS

1. **Gismonda:** Arwas V., Barbcova-Orlikova J., Dvorak A. 1998, Alphonse Mucha: The Spirit of Art Nouveau. p 143.
2. **La Dame ox Camelias:** Arwas V., Barbcova-Orlikova J., Dvorak A. 1998, Alphonse Mucha: The Spirit of Art Nouveau. p 146.
3. **La Samaritaine:** Arwas V., Barbcova-Orlikova J., Dvorak A. 1998, Alphonse Mucha: The Spirit of Art Nouveau. p 148.
4. **Medee:** Arwas V., Barbcova-Orlikova J., Dvorak A. 1998, Alphonse Mucha: The Spirit of Art Nouveau. p 151.
5. **The Sarah Bernhardt Snake Bracelet:** Christie's International Geneva, 1987, The Sarah Bernhardt Snake Bracelet. p 13.
6. **Bronze Female Bust:** Mucha J. 1966. Alphonse Mucha The Master of Art Nouveau. p164.
7. **Sarah Bernhardt Silver Medal:** Christie's New York, 1995, Highly Important Works of Art by Rene Lalique. p 90.

8. **Winged Serpent Corsage Ornament:** Greenhalgh P. 2000, Art Nouveau 1890-1914. p 241.
9. **Dragonfly Woman:** Greenhalgh P. 2000, Art Nouveau 1890-1914. p 83.
10. **Bronze Bernhardt Sculpture:** Becker V. The Jewellery of Rene Lalique. p 108.
11. **Bernhardt Lotus Jewel:** Becker V. The Jewellery of Rene Lalique. p 110.
12. **Princess Lointaine Pendant:** Greenhalgh P. 2000, Art Nouveau 1890-1914. p 236.
13. **Serpent Handbag:** Becker V. The Jewellery of Rene Lalique. p 113.

CATALOGUE

1. Gismonda

1895

French

colour lithograph

2153 x 762 mm (84 3/4 x 30 in.)

signed at bottom left: Mucha

printed by Lemercier

Park South Gallery at Carnegie Hall,

New York

An advertisement poster for the 100th performance of Sarah Bernhardt's production of the Victorien Sardou play *Gismonda* performed at the Theatre de la Renaissance, Paris in 1895.

This is the first poster that Sarah commissioned from Mucha. It launched the career of Alphonse Mucha as a famous poster artist, and the birth of '*Le Style Mucha*'. "The poster provided the basic archetype for Mucha's subsequent posters"⁸⁴ for Sarah. It is the first time we see him use this vertical format which becomes the staple of the works he subsequently produced for her promotional posters.

Sarah is depicted in a scene from the last act of the play. The palm

held in her right hand signifies her participation in the Easter procession. The verticality of the palm emphasises that of the overall poster. Her costume is decorated in a flat pattern style that becomes an integral part of '*Le Style Mucha*'. Sarah's head is surrounded by a semicircle, almost in the manner of a halo, bearing her name. The colours used are pale and delicate. Again this becomes a feature of many of the subsequent posters designed by Mucha for Sarah. The mosaic pattern used in the lettering echoes the Byzantine setting of the play.

Sarah's long robe is draped down almost coming out of the picture plane. The sides of the central section of the poster have been left quite bare. This is a possible indication of the limited time Mucha had to work on the piece. This is the only poster Mucha produced for Sarah at Lemercier printers.

Exhibited: (in reference to this specific poster)

Alphonse Mucha: The Spirit of Art Nouveau exhibition 1998

San Diego Museum of Art

Charles and Emma Frye Art Museum, Seattle

Norton Museum of Art, West Palm Beach

North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh

Philbrook Museum of Art, Tulsa

Worcester Art Museum, Massachusetts

The Dixon Gallery and Gardens, Memphis

Literature: (in reference to this specific poster)

Arwas V., Barbcova-Orlikova J., Dvorak A. 1998,

Alphonse Mucha: The Spirit of Art Nouveau. p 142, ill. 143.



2. La Dame ox Camelias

1896

French

colour lithograph

2050 x 720 mm (81 x 28 3/4 in.)

signed at bottom left: Mucha

printed by Champenios

Richard Driehaus,

Chicago

An advertisement poster for Sarah Bernhardt's production of Alexandre Dumas fils' play *La Dame ox Camelias*, performed at the Theatre de la Renaissance, Paris, 1896.

This is perhaps one of the most famous posters of all time. Mucha has again used the vertical format for this poster and a similarly pale palette of colours. Sarah's head is again surrounded by a semi-circle, and the background of the poster has been filled with a scattering of small stars, which are a reoccurring theme in Mucha's later works.

Sarah is depicted in a white dress, leaning with her right hand on a balustrade. The end of sarah's dress is again draped down into the forefront of the picture plane. Her hair has been held back by a simple camellia. This flower motif is repeated on the bottom left side of the poster held vertically by a male hand. This emphasises the

verticality of the poster. The corners above Sarah's head show two heart shapes surrounded by thorns, these symbolise the tragic theme of the play.

There is also an original *Gismonda* poster in the *Victoria and Albert Museum*, London. (V & A: E.515-1939.)

Exhibited: (in reference to this specific poster)

Alphonse Mucha: The Spirit of Art Nouveau exhibition 1998

San Diego Museum of Art

Charles and Emma Frye Art Museum, Seattle

Norton Museum of Art, West Palm Beach

North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh

Philbrook Museum of Art, Tulsa

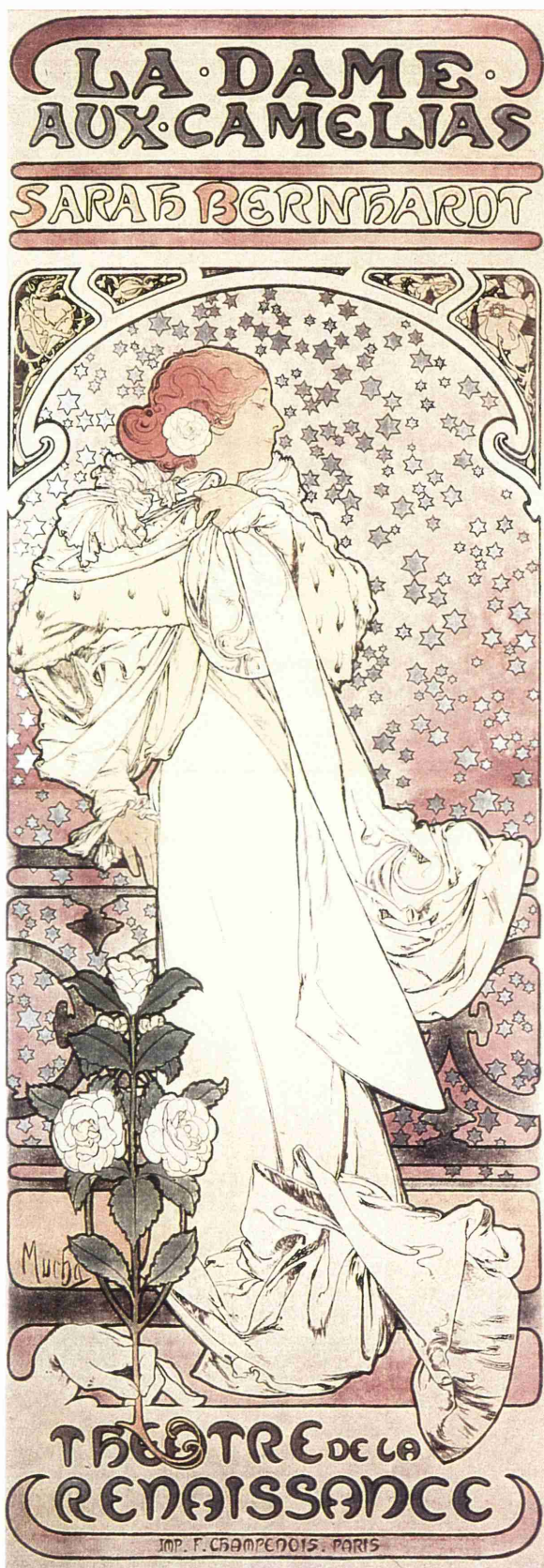
Worcester Art Museum, Massachusetts

The Dixon Gallery and Gardens, Memphis

Literature: (in reference to this specific poster)

Arwas V., Barbcova-Orlikova J., Dvorak A. 1998,

Alphonse Mucha: The Spirit of Art Nouveau. p 146, ill. 146.



3. La Samaritaine

1897

France

colour lithograph

1520 x 594 mm (59 7/8 x 23 3/8 in.)

signed at bottom right: Mucha

printed by Champenois

Collection of Albert Malumed and Jacqueline Morris,

New York

An advertisement poster for Edmond Rostand's play *La Samaritaine* written for Sarah Bernhardt and performed at the Theatre de la Renaissance in 1897.

This poster has been executed in the typical vertical format, again using the pale palette which became a recurring element in '*Le Style Mucha*'. Sarah is leaning forward on an amphora. Her head is once more surrounded by a circular mosaic motif which contains the word *Jahweh* in Hebrew script, and is surrounded by her name written in the style of Hebrew script. The typically Mucha stars are again visible in this poster. Also Sarah's hair is highly stylised in long sinuous Art Nouveau spirals. Sarah's robe has been adorned with beautiful jewelled belts. On her left foot, which comes forward almost out of the picture plane, are two anklets.

Exhibited: (in reference to this specific poster)

Alphonse Mucha: The Spirit of Art Nouveau exhibition 1998

San Diego Museum of Art

Charles and Emma Frye Art Museum, Seattle

Norton Museum of Art, West Palm Beach

North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh

Philbrook Museum of Art, Tulsa

Worcester Art Museum, Massachusetts

The Dixon Gallery and Gardens, Memphis

Literature: (in reference to this specific poster)

Arwas V., Barbcova-Orlikova J., Dvorak A. 1998,

Alphonse Mucha: The Spirit of Art Nouveau. p 148, ill. 148.

THEATRE DE LA RENAISSANCE



LA SAMARITAINE

EVANGILE EN TROIS TABLEAUX EN VERS
DE M^{RE} EDMOND ROSTAND
MUSIQUE DE M^{RE} GABRIEL PIERNE

F. CHAMPENDIS. PARIS

4. Medee

1898

France

colour lithograph

2075 x 750 mm (81 58 x 29 1/2 in.)

signed at bottom left: Mucha 98

printed by Champenois

Park South gallery at Carnegie Hall,

New York

An advertisement poster for Sarah Bernhardt in *Medee*, Catulle Mendes' modified version of the classical greek drama *Medea*. Performed in 1898 at the Theatre de la Renaissance, Paris.

This poster is in the vertical format, and again uses a soft palette. Mucha depicts Sarah as *Medee* at the moment just after she has slaughtered her children. She holds in her right hand a dagger covered with the blood of her dead children which lie at her feet, in the forefront of the picture plane.

Her left arm is decorated with a coiled serpent ornament. Sarah's head is again placed upon a circular backdrop of a melancholic red setting sun. The expression on the face of Sarah captures the horror of the play. Mucha uses a mosaic format for the lettering to emphasise the classical theme and setting of the play.

This poster has special significance as it was this drawing that inspired the snake bracelet which Sarah subsequently commissioned Mucha to design and Fouquet to execute.

Exhibited: (in reference to this specific poster)

Alphonse Mucha: The Spirit of Art Nouveau exhibition 1998

San Diego Museum of Art

Charles and Emma Frye Art Museum, Seattle

Norton Museum of Art, West Palm Beach

North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh

Philbrook Museum of Art, Tulsa

Worcester Art Museum, Massachusetts

The Dixon Gallery and Gardens, Memphis

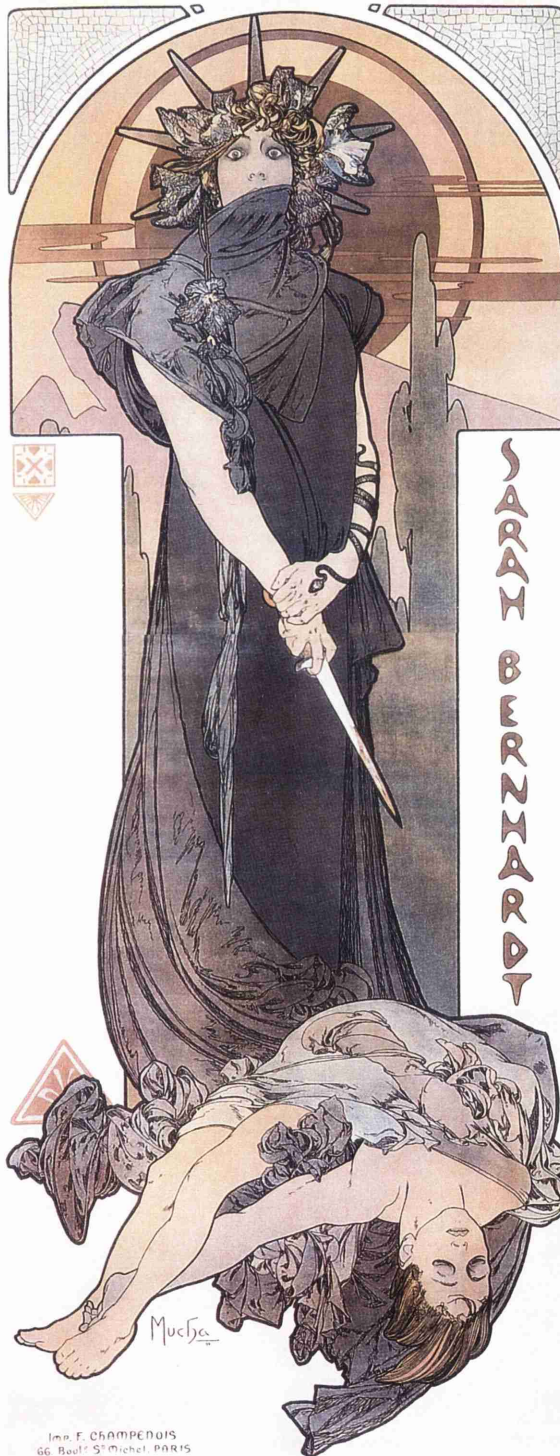
Literature: (in reference to this specific poster)

Arwas V., Barbcova-Orlikova J., Dvorak A. 1998,

Alphonse Mucha: The Spirit of Art Nouveau. p 151, ill. 151.

MEDEE

THEATRE DE LA RENAISSANCE



Ima. F. CHAMPELOIS
66 Boul. St Michel PARIS

5. The Sarah Bernhardt Snake Bracelet

1899

French

hand ornament executed in gold, diamonds, rubies and opals.

designed by Alphonse Mucha and executed by Georges Fouquet

signed on both the bracelet and the ring: G. Fouquet

Private collection

This piece was executed in gold, and consisted of three parts. The larger serpent's head is attached to the arm section, designed to curve around the arm three times. There is a series of delicate gold chains to link the smaller serpent head to be worn on the finger as a ring. The serpent's head markings have been carried out in an intricate mosaic of opals with cabochon rubies inset to represent the eyes. The serpent head on the bracelet section is surrounded by flaring sinuous wings set with small diamonds. The coiled serpent body displays cloisonné enamelling with graduated yellow, green, blue and red enamels. The suppleness of the articulated tail is provided through a complex system of hinges. The linking gold chain has been ornamented with small enamel and gold charms.

This piece was a result of a collaboration between Alphonse Mucha and Georges Fouquet. The piece was commissioned by Sarah Bernhardt after the production of the *Medee* poster in which Mucha depicts Sarah wearing a similar piece on her left arm. For

Fouquet this piece was a new departure from his past more conservative style.

The theme of serpents depicted in jewels was not a new one, but one that was used frequently in the ancient world "where it was associated with sexuality, fertility and femininity... Serpents were also regarded as guardian spirits, and yet they had a predatory, sinister connotation, expressing the same disturbing element of contradiction that runs throughout the most compelling pieces of Art nouveau jewellery."⁸⁵

Serpent jewels were also popular in the Victorian period. However, Mucha's interpretation is more original the design appears to have been influenced by an Indian *hathpool*. This is a traditional woman's marriage ornament. They were usually worn one on each arm, and consisted of bangles joined to a ring by delicate chains in a similar manner.⁸⁶

Exhibited:

Exposition Universelle Paris, 1900

Liege 1905

Milan 1906

Le Bijou 1900, Brussels 1965

Europa 1900, Ostende 1967

Mucha 1860-1939, Paris 1980

Literature:

Becker V. London 1998. Art Nouveau Jewelry. p 21, ill. 21.

Bury S. Suffolk 1997. Jewellery the International Era. vol.ii. pp 753-757, ill. 754, 755.

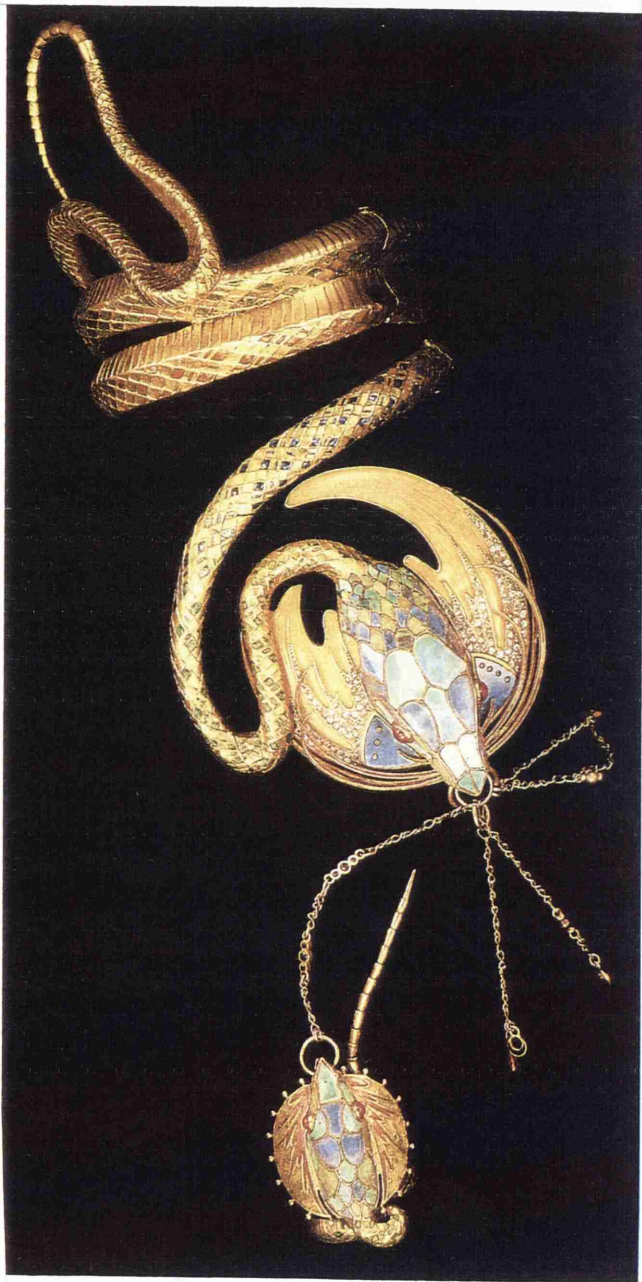
Miller J. & M. Oxford 2000. Understanding Antiques. p 189, ill. 189.

Mucha J. Prague 1966. Alphonse Mucha The Master of Art Nouveau. pp 180, 181, ill. 180.

Phillips C. London 1997. Jewelry from Antiquity to the Present. pp 163-164, ill. 164.

Catalogue:

The Sarah Bernhardt Snake Bracelet 1987. Christie's Geneva,
Becker V.



6. Winged Serpent Corsage Ornament

1902

France

corsage ornament executed in gold, enamel, diamonds, pearls and emeralds

18.8 x 12.4 cm

Fouquet

Private Collection

New York

A large highly decorative and dramatic corsage ornament. The upper section represents a stylised winged sea serpent. Held in the mouth of the serpent is a series of three graduated decorative rounded links, terminating in a baroque pear shaped pearl.

The splayed tail of the serpent displays purple and green enamels. The main curving section of the serpent body has been executed in dark and light green cloisonné enamelling, with small diamonds set along the spine. The head of the serpent has a triangular shaped cabochon emerald at its centre, surrounded by small square cut emeralds. From the sides of the head emerge large wings enamelled in pale greens, pinks and purples, and a scattering of small diamonds. The three gold graduated links display asymmetrical stylised coral sprays, with small in set diamonds. Each has two flower heads terminating in two sea pearls on each side. The triangular link

which holds the pearl has a small diamond at each corner, from this hangs a large pear shaped baroque pearl.

This piece was made after Fouquet worked with Mucha on projects for Sarah Bernhardt. The size, and dramatic quality of the piece show the lasting influence this collaboration had on Fouquet. The serpent theme of the piece also echo's the Snake Bracelet made for Bernhardt.

Exhibited:

The *Art Nouveau 1890-1914* exhibition London 2000

Literature:

Greenhalgh P. *Art Nouveau 1890-1914*. pp 240, ill. p241.

Becker V. *Art Nouveau Jewelry*. pp 70-71, ill. p 77.



7. Bronze Female Bust

1900

French

bronze sculpted bust

29 1/2 x 5 1/2 in. (78 x 15.5 cm)

executed Alphonse Mucha

Musee des Arts Decoratifs

Paris

inv. 38135

A bronze bust of a woman with her head turned slightly downwards. Her long flowing, stylised hair leads down to the supporting base.

This piece was one of the sculptures made by Alphonse Mucha for the interior of Georges Fouquet's Paris shop designed by Mucha, which was completed in 1901. This female bust bears a clear resemblance to Sarah Bernhardt. Bernhardt had been the instigator for '*Le Style Mucha*' she represented what was to become the typical 'Mucha Woman'. This bust is "a replica of [Mucha's] ethereal woman in a rather more solid, three-dimensional form."⁸⁷ The arrangement of the hair is typical of Mucha's work.

A copy of this piece was made for the reconstruction of the Fouquet shop interior in the *Musee Carnavelet*, Paris in 1989.

Literature:

Arwas V., Barbcova-Orlikova J., Dvorak A. 1998,

Alphonse Mucha: The Spirit of Art Nouveau. p 126, ill. 128.

Mucha J. Prague 1966. Alphonse Mucha The Master of Art Nouveau.
pp 147, 181, ill. 164.



8. Sarah Bernhardt Silver Medal

1896

France

silver medal

3 1/2 in. (9.5 cm)

signed on the front bottom left: R.Lalique and RL monogram crossed

Private Collection

This silver medal has been cast with a relief portrait of Sarah Bernhardt in profile with her head to the right. Her long hair has been swept up at the back of her head, and her curled fringe is loose on her forehead. The back of the piece bears an inscription and the date 1896.

The medal was one of a small number commissioned to commemorate '*La Journee Sarah Bernhardt*'. A celebration for the great tragedienne held at the Grand Hotel, Paris. On the 10th of December, five hundred guests were invited to a lunch, after which Sarah performed scenes from her most famous plays at the Theatre de la Renaissance. This medal was made in a limited number for a select few of those who attended the event.

The medal was made after a life-size portrait of Sarah that Lalique had completed in 1890. Employing the technique of *tour a reduire*, Lalique reduced the original portrait to produce the medals.

Exhibited:

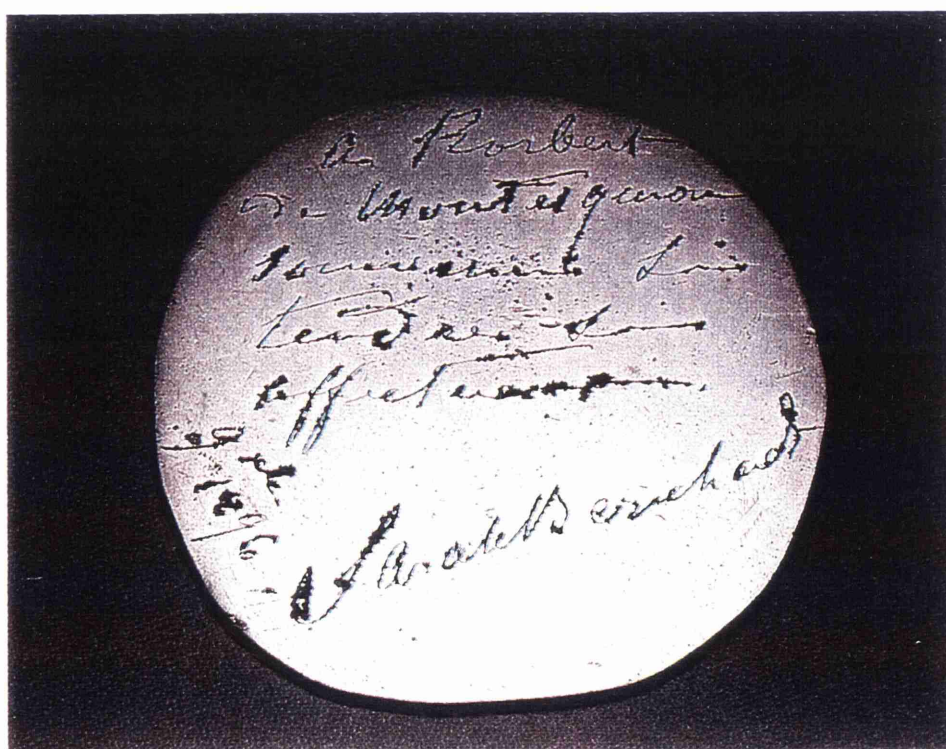
The Jewellery of Rene Lalique A Goldsmith's Company Exhibition,
London 1987

Literature:

Catalogue:

Becker V. London 1987. *The Jewellery of Rene Lalique*. p 112, ill.
112.

Highly Important Works of Art by Rene Lalique. 1995. Christie's New
York 8340 p 90, ill. 90.



9. Dragonfly Woman

1897-98

France

corsage ornament executed in gold, enamel, chrysoprase, moonstones and diamonds.

27 x 26.5 cm

signed: LALIQUE

Calouste Gulbenkian Museum

Lisbon

This magnificent jewel consists of a hybrid dragonfly woman with griffin's claws and large spanning wings. The wings are those of a dragonfly, yet they emerge from the shoulders of the helmeted female, whose bare breasts and head emerge from the mouth of the griffin. The long body is that of the dragonfly and the large claws are those of the griffin. The helmet on the female head consists of a scarab on either side. These also represent the eyes of the dragonfly.

The immense hinged wings are of gold and the most exquisite iridescent blue green *plique a jour* enamel. There are three wing markings on each wing, these are formed from ovals of enamel and surrounded by diamonds and moonstones. The wings are so thin, and delicately crafted they are translucent. The long articulated narrow body and tail of the dragonfly have been executed in gold

and inlaid with blue enamel and chrysoprase cabochons. The griffin's head is gold with a delicate inlay of chrysoprase, from this stem the large gold webbed griffin claws. The female figure that emerges from the mouth of the griffin is carved chrysoprase. Her eyes are closed and her expression disturbingly peaceful. Her helmet is gold with two blue and green enamelled scarabs.

This is one of the most important jewels of the Art nouveau period. It represents the female in a bizarre metamorphosis. It is an embodiment of the three main influences of French Art Nouveau, the *femme fatale*, nature, and Japanese art. Its size, and dramatic nature give it the feel of a theatrical stage piece, reflecting Lalique's association with Sarah Bernhardt.

Exhibited:

The Jewellery of Rene Lalique A Goldsmith's Company Exhibition,
London 1987

The *Art Nouveau 1890-1914* exhibition London 2000

Literature:

Greenhalgh P. *Art Nouveau 1890-1914*. pp 81-82, ill. p 83.

Becker V. *The Jewellery of Rene Lalique*. p 103, ill. pp 103-105

Becker V. *Art Nouveau Jewelry*. p 65, ill. p 55.

Bury S. *Jewellery The International Era*. vol.ii pp 718, 757. ill. p 769.



10. Bronze Bernhardt Sculpture

1900

France

bronze sculpted paper knife

49 cm

signed: Sarah Bernhardt 1900

A highly stylised sculpted paper knife. It is vertical in its execution, with the upper half smoothly polished and terminating in a point. The central section is of sinuously folded bronze, at the base is a roughly textured collection of sea anemones.

This piece was inspired by the sea anemones and sea plants from Sarah Bernhardt's summer home at Belle-Ile, France. Lalique is thought to have assisted Sarah in making this piece.

Exhibited:

The Jewellery of Rene Lalique A Goldsmith's Company Exhibition,
London 1987

Literature:

Becker V. *The Jewellery of Rene Lalique*. p 108, ill. pp 108.



11. Bernhardt Lotus Jewel

1894

France

corsage ornament executed in metal and enamel

8.7 x 15.4 x 16.7 cm

attributed to Lalique

Garrick Club

London

This large nelumbo lotus is made out of metal and opalescent blue green enamel. There are five large open petals. The metal displays two chased lines terminating at the points of each petal. There are four smaller petals placed inside the five larger ones. These have been chased in the same manner. All of the petals have been fully coated with a pale blue green enamel inside and out. The centre displays a cluster of stamens, these have also been individually chased, there are four to five on each individual stem. The back of the piece has a long hook from which to hang the flower on to a dress.

Sarah Bernhardt wore this piece in Armand Silvestre and Eugene Morand's play *Iseyl*, performed at the Theatre de la Renaissance in 1894. The piece is not signed, however Lalique is known to have made some of the other stage jewels for this production of *Iseyl*. The dramatic size of the piece, the use of enamel and the interpretation

of the flower all point to the piece having been executed by Lalique.

Exhibited:

The Jewellery of Rene Lalique A Goldsmith's Company Exhibition,
London 1987

Literature:

Becker V. *The Jewellery of Rene Lalique*. p 110, ill. pp 110.



12. Princess Lontaine Pendant

1898-99

France

pendant and chain executed in gold, enamel, diamonds, amethyst

pendant: 11.7 x 5.7 cm chain: 62 cm

Rene Lalique

Private Collection

London

This large scale pendant is of oval shape, with a pear shaped faceted amethyst is set in gold. The top and bottom of the oval section are decorated with two stylised leaves, these provide the links for the chain and the amethyst drop. The right hand side of the oval displays three large round brilliant cut diamonds mounted in gold stylised leaves. The leaves at the top and bottom have enamel detailing on the tips. The central picture is of a woman and dog, with a forest in the background. This is executed in dark, and pale blue enamels, and delicately outlined in gold. The shank which holds the amethyst is constructed of three stylised leaves. The faceted pear shaped amethyst has an open-backed setting.

The inspiration for this piece comes from Edmond Rostand's play *La Princess Lontaine*, written for Sarah Bernhardt and first performed at the Theatre de la Renaissance in 1895. The play was incredibly popular. Bernhardt played the lead role of *Melissinde*, who is depicted

in this pendant.

Exhibited:

The *Art Nouveau 1890-1914* exhibition London 2000

Literature:

Becker V. Art Nouveau Jewelry. ill. p 22.

Greenhalgh P. Art Nouveau 1890-1914. pp 237-238, ill. p 236.

Mucha J. Prague 1966. Alphonse Mucha The Master of Art Nouveau.
pp 178, ill. 178.



13. Serpent Handbag

1901-03

France

ladies handbag executed in silk and silver

21.3 x 17.9 cm

signed: LALIQUE

A ladies evening bag of triangular shape with rounded corners, made in grey silk with silver thread embroidery, a silver clasp, and a weaved silk handle. The silver thread embroidery depicts a coiled serpent, which is again echoed in the chased silver clasp with two open serpent mouths.

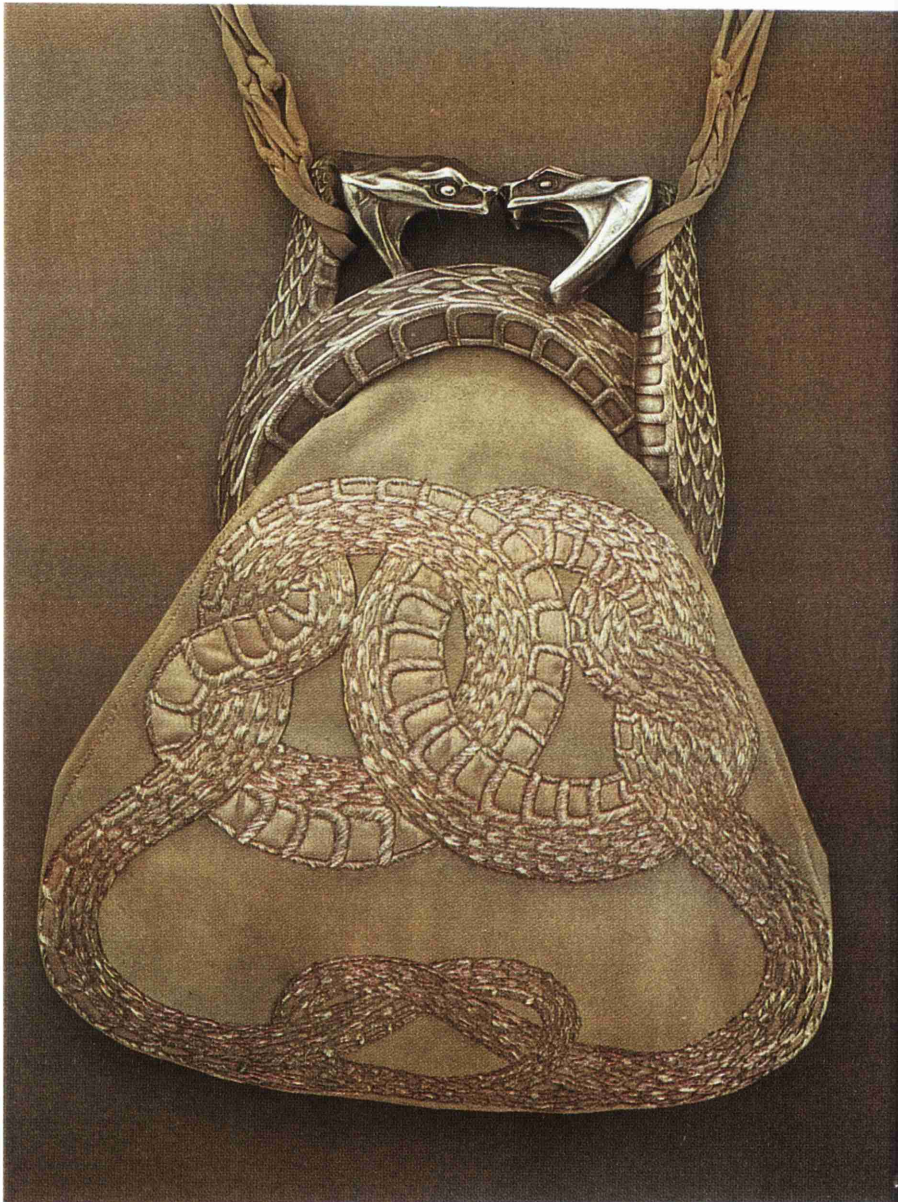
This bag was possibly made for Sarah Bernhardt. "This courageous ornament to a ladylike fashion accessory would have appealed to the actress."

Exhibited:

The Jewellery of Rene Lalique A Goldsmith's Company Exhibition,
London 1987

Literature:

Becker V. *The Jewellery of Rene Lalique*. p 113, ill. pp 113.



GLOSSARY

Arabesques: An intricate stylised decoration of floral ornaments.

Art Nouveau: Translates from the French as 'new art', used to denote the prevalent style from 1890's to 1914.

Arts and Crafts Movement: A 19th century British movement led by William Morris, a reaction to Industrial Revolution.

Baroque pearl: A natural or cultivated pearl of irregular shape.

Belle Époque: Translates from the French as 'beautiful period', used to denote the lavish styles of the Art Nouveau period.

Bernhardt Mantle: A short, loose fronted, collared cape with sling sleeves, named after Sarah Bernhardt.

Boulevard du Crime: Translates from the French as 'street of crime', used to refer to a specific theatrical area of Paris in the late 19th century.

Cabochon: A domed and highly polished precious or semiprecious stone.

Centaure: A man-horse figure from ancient mythology.

Chrysoprase: A precious stone of either yellowish-green, olive-green, or apple-green colour.

Cloisonné: An enamelling technique whereby the enamel has been outlined on a metal plate, with strips of metal to separate small sections to be filled with enamel.

Courtesan: A refined or high-placed harlot.

Demi-Monde: Translates from the French as 'half-world', used to refer to the situation that arose within the artistic circles of Paris in the late 19th century.

Demi-vierge: Translates from the French as 'half-virgin', referring to the more liberated women of the late 19th century who engaged in many social activities with men.

Diadems: An ornamented head band, or tiara.

Directoire: A style that was prevalent from 1795 to 1799, a simplification of the Louis XVI style.

Empire: A style inspired by ancient Roman Empire, and the later

Napoleonic Empires.

Enamel: A decorative technique using coloured metal oxides.

Exposition Universalle: An international exhibition held in Paris in 1900.

Faceted: A decorative technique where the surface is cut into sharp edges reflect light.

Femme Fatale: Translates from the French as 'fatal woman'.

Fin de Siecle: translates from the French as 'end of the century'. This usually refers to the end of the 19th century in particular.

Flirtage: Translates from the French as 'flirtation'.

Griffin: a mythical animal with a lions body and the head wings, and claws of an eagle.

Hathpool: A traditional Indian hand and ring ornament worn by the bride at her wedding.

Hybrid: An off-spring of two animals or plants of different species.

Le Style Mucha: The term give to the style inspired by Alphonse Mucha.

Lithograph: A polychrome print where the design has been executed in ink on a stone surface and then transferred to the paper.

Modists: Translates from the French as 'clothes designer'.

Mosaic: The term used to denote the decoration of an object with a number of small inlaid coloured pieces to create a picture or design.

Nelumbo: A type of lotus flower sacred to the Hindus.

Parure: A matching suite of jewellery, comprising necklace, earrings and a brooch.

Plique a jour: A term used to denote open-backed enamel work, a highly skilled technique.

Pre-Raphaelites: A group of artists who painted in the manner of the artists prior to Raphael.

Relief engraving: A method of engraving which leaves the design standing proud.

Saradoteurs: Sarah Bernhardt's faithful student based fans.

Satyr: An ancient mythological hybrid half human and half animal.

Societaire: Translates from the French as 'associate', it refers to a type of membership.

Sphinx: An ancient Egyptian mythological animal with a lions body and the upper body of a woman.

Stamens: The pollen bearing organs in flowers.

Style Moderne: Translates from the French as 'modern style'. This usually refereed to Art Nouveau.

Tour a reduire: A reducing technique employed by Rene Lalique for the production of the Bernhardt medal.

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