

REPRESENTATIONS OF WOMEN IN FIN-DE-SIÈCLE FRENCH ADVERTISEMENTS

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ABSTRACT

This thesis analyzes the depictions of women as highly idealized, feminine, and/or seductive figures in Art Nouveau style advertisements in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century France. Ultimately, I demonstrate how these advertisements developed the now widespread phenomenon of using idealized women and sexually appealing imagery in order to sell products. Specifically, lithographic posters created by male artists such as Jules Chéret, Alphonse Mucha, and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec and will be examined. My research will therefore encompass the works of various art historians to explore the representation of the female form in the Art Nouveau style and how artists used the female body to sell lifestyles and products to consumers. Furthermore, this thesis will analyze the cognitive strategies that such images deployed, many of which continue to appear in French advertisements today. Research regarding the use and effects of sexually appealing imagery in contemporary mainstream advertising is well documented. However, my research hopes to offer a nuanced analysis of the origins of such advertising strategies that can be found in French lithographic advertisements during the Art Nouveau movement.

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INTRODUCTION

Although the sexualizing and objectification of women in mainstream advertising is often considered a twentieth century development, the phenomenon can be traced to fin-de-siècle France, when Art Nouveau artists revolutionized the lithographic poster as an advertising tool. These artists, such as Jules Chéret, Alphonse Mucha, and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, established the precedence of using women and the feminine form as a way to promote and sell lifestyles and products. Their posters often depicted women as sexually appealing, but were ultimately confined to one of two archetypal Art Nouveau style representations: women as highly idealized and feminine or as the femme fatale. The sexually appealing imagery and the sophisticated color techniques made possible by the lithographic printing press were particularly striking amidst the overabundance of advertisements that lined the streets of France. Moreover, the use of visuals rather than text to convey messages necessitated simplified designs made more salient with novel illustration techniques and subject matter. The modern iterations of these advertising posters similarly depict attractive and sexually appealing women as highly idealized and feminine or the femme fatale, as well. Despite the passing of more than a century, modern iterations of fin-de-siècle lithographic posters also utilize similar cognitive strategies to the gain attention of onlookers or passersby and create lasting impressions in an oversaturated market.

THE ART NOUVEAU MOVEMENT

ORIGINS OF ART NOUVEAU

Art Nouveau, “new art” in French, was a movement in art and architecture popular in Europe and the United States during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. The term initially appeared in the 1880s in the Belgian journal *L’Art Moderne* to describe the work of *Les Vingt*, twenty painters and sculptors seeking reform through art (Metropolitan Museum of Art). After first emerging in England, the Art Nouveau movement was quickly promulgated across Europe, often through the pages of art magazines enriched by the innovative techniques of photographic illustrations and color lithography. Art Nouveau evolved in each country where it became popular, assuming distinctively unique characteristics reflecting local styles and conventions. The various names coined for the style as it made its triumphal progress—Art Nouveau, Liberty Style, Jugendstil, Secession Style, Arte Joven—all seem to emphasize its newness and its break with the past.

The movement was the result of an intense, conscious effort to deviate from the historical styles of the past century and a desire to change the very character of European civilization. Many European artists had become “disillusioned with the declining quality of the decorative arts,” which were considered inferior to the fine arts (i.e., painting and sculpture), and the subsequent deterioration of artisanship (Lasky). In an effort to escape the trends dominating the Victorian Era, English art critic John Ruskin and designer William Morris championed a new form of the decorative arts: the Arts and Crafts movement. Morris, in whose floral designs lay the roots of the movement, is quoted as saying, “Apart from my desire to produce beautiful things, the leading passion of my life has been and is hatred of modern civilization” (Crawford 15). The Arts and Crafts movement, fundamentally concerned with social reform, was motivated

by the desire to dismantle the hierarchy in which the arts were structured and celebrate the actual craftsmanship necessary to create art and furniture. Aesthetically, the designs reflected ornamentalism reminiscent of medieval art and manuscripts, and showcased a fascination with nature.

Although Art Nouveau lacked the emphasis on social reform, its preoccupation with dynamic portrayals of nature is indeed rooted in the Arts and Crafts movement. Featuring ornamental designs typified by the use of long, fluid lines and natural forms, the influence of the decorative arts is clear, though the ornamentation illustrated by the English Art Nouveau designers evokes the ornamentalists of the Renaissance (Bade 20). Additionally, artists of the movement were very influenced by Japanese woodblock prints, called *ukiyo-e*, which had gained popularity during the wave of *japonisme* that swept across Europe after the United States Navy forced Japan to open up to international trade in 1853 (Bade 98). Exhibitions and periodicals that acted as platforms for the Art Nouveau movement also fostered an appreciation for Eastern art. The principal leaders of the movement, notably Franco-German art dealer Siegfried Bing who opened the *Maison de L'Art nouveau* in 1895, were collectors and enthusiasts of Eastern art (Bade 95). This fascination with the exotic made oriental art one of the paramount influences on Art Nouveau.

CHARACTERISTICS OF ART NOUVEAU

Metal is twisted into the most weird and unnatural shapes. Chairs appear as clumps of gnarled tree roots; twisted boughs conspire to form a bedstead; electroliers appear to be boxes suspended by innumerable strings; walls show trees with their roots in the skirting boards, and foliage on the ceiling; sea serpents chase each other around the walls and entrance doors are guarded by appalling dragons.... The electric lights must masquerade in pools under the eyes of a nymph; ... snakes twisted into ingenious knots for stair

balusters threaten you as you ascend; the door knocker becomes a grinning satyr and even the carpet casts a malevolent eye at you as you traverse it.

—J.H. Elder-Duncan on Art Nouveau

The Art Nouveau style is characterized by its fascination with nature and organic forms, reflected in the decorative splendor and elegance expressed in fluid lines and in the presentation of beautiful bodies in distinguished poses (Vajda 74). These characteristics could be found in every constituent of the movement; the fine arts and architecture, music, and literature of fin-de-siècle Europe all saw the merge of naturalism and symbolism. Highly stylized representations of flora could be found twisting around staircases and on the façades of buildings, as well as decorating furniture and jewelry. Art Nouveau music and literature, especially lyrical poetry, sought to embody undulating waves and rhythms—in much the same way Tiffany lamps did (Vajda 74). In the graphic arts, the line dominated all other design elements—form, texture, space, and color. The key motif was a sinuous, undulating line called the “whiplash curve,” a concrete and often chaotic manifestation of dynamic rhythms (Lancaster 298). The trademark whiplash curves—as exemplified by Hermann Obrist's wall-hanging *Cyclamen* (1892), which became a seminal piece in the Art Nouveau movement—have been described as “sudden violent curves generated by the crack of a whip” (Duncan 27–28). These curves are often the abstract embodiment of natural forms, depicting “flower stalks and buds, vine tendrils, insect wings, and other delicate and sinuous natural objects” (Encyclopedia Britannica). The whiplash lines could also render vibrantly rhythmic movements, such as the sinuous curling of long hair or the whirl of a woman’s skirt.

This preoccupation with organic lineation and natural imagery lent itself well to another principal characteristic of the Art Nouveau movement, its affinity for symbolic representations of women. Many artists working in the Art Nouveau style portrayed women mystically and

symbolically, either as the embodiment of purity or the opposite, the femme fatale. Dolf Sternberger (1907-1989), a German philosopher, described Art Nouveau as an “animal-vegetable fairyland” populated by primitive life and fertility symbols, nymphs, sylphs, mermaids, and fauns (Vajda 80). When depicted as ethereal and mythical beings, women evoked nymph-like innocence and deadly sexuality, in equal measure. The drawings created by English illustrator Aubrey Beardsley (1872-1898) for *Salomé* by Oscar Wilde, with their bold lineation and fluid eroticism clearly influenced by Japanese prints, exemplified the synthetization of the whiplash curves and emblematic imagery (see figure 1). His portrayal of the titular female as a symbol of demonic and perverse sexuality, accentuated by “his cloistral tableau of nudes and imps, his tortuous line, his macabre ornamentation,” reflected the character’s deadly seduction carried out in the play (Gilbert 135). Beardsley’s *Salomé*—shown in one illustration holding the decapitated head of Jokanaan as if to kiss him, hair curling around her like the snakes of Medusa—embodied the femme fatale, an oft used representation of women in fin-de-siècle Art Nouveau. This coalescence of nature and the feminine form illustrated in incredibly detailed and intricate designs became iconic characteristics of the Art Nouveau style.



Figure 1. Beardsley, Aubrey, illustrator (1872-1898). *Aubrey Beardsley's Illustrations to Salomé by Oscar Wilde*. 1906-07, process prints from line blocks, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/345737>.

ART NOUVEAU EMERGES IN FIN-DE-SIECLE FRANCE

Although the Art Nouveau movement began in the ateliers, workshops and galleries of the art world, it quickly spread to all levels of fin-de-siècle French culture. In 1911, J.H. Elder-Duncan, an undistinguished English writer on household design, recognized the territorial triumph of Art Nouveau, stating that “the chaos in design has spread all over France, Germany, Austria and Italy, upon which countries the creed of l'Art Nouveau lies heavily” (Elder-Duncan 13). The style gained prominence in the Parisian scene in 1895 with architect Hector Guimard’s design for the Castel Béranger, the first Art Nouveau style residential building constructed in the city (Bade 98). The apartment complex received recognition for its beauty and originality, granting Guimard the prestige of designing the entrances of the new stations of the Paris Metro and establishing him as one of the most celebrated figures in French Art Nouveau.

Essentially, Art Nouveau existed in dichotomy: it was simultaneously vulgar and elite, loved and hated; it could be found decorating the façades of state monuments and magnificent architecture, as well as embellishing simple packaging and children’s toys. In 1901, Henri Cazalis, a French symbolist poet who wrote under the pseudonym of Jean Lahor, praised the style in his book *L'Art nouveau*:

Et à leur suite ou près d’eux, se leva, se forma toute une génération étonnante de dessinateurs, d’illustrateurs, de décorateurs, qui vraiment par leur science, leur art de l’ornementation, par la science, par l’art des entrelacs, de ces compositions, de ces arabesques, où se marie, ainsi qu’en un rêve panthéiste, a la fugue savante et charmante, à la délicate mélodie des lignes, à tous les caprices de la flore décorative, la faune animale ou humaine, et par l’ingéniosité aussi de leur invention sans cesse renouvelée, font songer parfois à l’exubérante et merveilleuse école des maitres ornemanistes de la Renaissance. (Lahor 6-7)

Other critics also admired art dealer Siegfried Bing's exotic collections and exhibitions that displayed the new decorative art movement. An article published on April 4th, 1903 in *La Chronique des arts et de la curiosité*, a supplement of the *Gazette des beaux-arts*, applauded the exposition held at Bing's *Maison de l'Art nouveau* of artist Jean de Feure—of whom the writer extolled, “Architecte, peintre, sculpteur, lithographe, il évoque le héros de Bacon.” The article further describes the exposition, praising the Art Nouveau style characteristics:

Les décorations murales du pavillon de l'Art nouveau Bing... ont laissé pressentir quel peintre pouvait être, à ses heures, ce raffiné et ce délicat; c'est l'aquarelliste prestigieux, le porcelainier de cuirs, l'inventeur de cadres, l'orfèvre, que met en lumière la présente manifestation, et l'on se réjouit de la devoir à M. Siegfried Bing, qui discerna, parmi les premiers, quels espoirs pouvaient être fondés sur les dons échus à M. G. de Feure. Son modernisme du meilleur aloi, tout en s'appuyant sur la tradition, fait état des découverts des Outamaro et des Beardsley, que M. de Feure a poursuivies, prolongées ; l'arabesque des silhouettes féminines offre, dans ses ouvrages, des qualités d'une passionnante séduction, et on retiendra encore, comme individuelles entre toutes, les interprétations de forêts, de bois, de montagnes, qui prennent, sous les pinceaux de M. de Feure, des aspects féériques ou fantasques. (111)

The novel use of ornamentally sinuous lines to depict female forms and whimsical naturalism are particularly noted, an indication of its appeal to the public.

In spite of this enthusiasm, Art Nouveau also elicited a fair amount of skepticism and hostility. This attitude reflected the common perception that movement was imported from elsewhere and distinctly alien. In Germany, for instance, it was denounced as the “Belgian tape-worm style” (Bade 95). France and Britain, traditional rivals, tended to blame each other for creating this aesthetic; the British began using the French term “Art Nouveau” and the French often employed the *franglais* term, “le Modern Style” (Bade 95). The enmity was not lessened

by the fact that the two most important promoters of the style in the city of Paris, Siegfried Bing at the *Maison de l'Art nouveau* and Julius Meier-Graefe at the *Maison moderne*, were both German Jews (Bade 95). French art critic Arsène Alexandre made clear his disdain, stating that “all this reeks of the depraved Englishman, the drug-addicted Jewess, or the cunning Belgian, or a charming mixture of these three poisons” (Bade 95).

While galleries are often credited with the popularization of the movement, the Art Nouveau style was largely disseminated to an international audience through vibrant graphic arts printed in such periodicals as *The Savoy*, *La Plume*, *Die Jugend*, *Dekorative Kunst*, *The Yellow Book*, and *The Studio* (Metropolitan Museum of Art). Influential graphic artists published in such periodicals included Jules Chéret, Alphonse Mucha, and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec. Their effervescent and bold posters showcased the variety of representations of women in Belle Époque society—from the *femme nouvelle* (a “‘new woman’ who rejected the conventional ideals of femininity, domesticity, and subservience”) to the *demimonde* (women who were excluded from respectful society due to a perceived lack of morality) (Metropolitan Museum of Art). However, these depictions of women and the often erotic or even pornographic imagery in advertisement posters inspired passionate moral critiques, as well. In 1896, the conservative Catholic commentator Maurice Talmeyr (1850-1931) argued that the “grimacing and licentious” spectacle of posters epitomized the degradation of everyday life and the commercialization of society that had occurred in the late-nineteenth century (Carter 122). In Talmeyr’s criticism, the poster symbolized the frenzied pace and commercialist values of the fin-de-siècle that he maintained were tantamount to prostitution. Likely inspired by the earlier criticism written by Joris-Karl Huysmans (1848-1907), Talmeyr targeted the work of Jules Chéret, who he claimed was “le créateur de l’affiche,” in his piece, *L’âge de l’affiche* (1896). Talmeyr described the

women depicted in the posters created by Chéret as “frissonnantes sous leurs transparences chiffonnées, coiffées d’ébouffemens incendiaires, se tordant comme des couleuvres ou passant comme des comètes” (Talmeyr 203). These women, for Talmeyr, embodied the evils of the modern, commercialized society, namely the erosion of moral values by industrialists. Many fin-de-siècle writers agreed with Talmeyr, describing the poster as “aggressive, overwhelmingly ubiquitous and sexually contaminating symptom of decadent modernity” (Carter 123). As will be discussed, many posters did in fact commercialize sexually appealing imagery, depicting women as highly idealized and feminine or the femme fatale in advertisements for products such as alcohol and cigarettes, as well as household items like soap, biscuits, and books.

WOMEN IN FIN-DE-SIÈCLE FRENCH ADVERTISEMENTS

Everyone has been able to follow the metamorphosis. The poster of the old days, lacking seduction, with its ugly typography, slow to decipher, has become a veritable art print whose colorfulness delights the eye, whose symbolism is directly understood.

—Roger Marx, 1896

In the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century, advertisements in the form of lithographic posters began to use the female body to sell lifestyles and products to a growing metropolitan middle class. These posters united the characteristics of the Art Nouveau style (e.g., dynamic lineation, text as a design element, and symbolic representations of women) and the innovations made possible by color lithography (e.g., sophisticated use of color and the ability to produce en masse) to revolutionize advertising. Reflecting both traditional portrayals of women in art and literature—which relied heavily on the virgin or whore dichotomy—and the changing perspectives of the public at the time, fin-de-siècle advertisements depicted women as highly idealized, feminine, *and/or* seductive figures. French lithographic posters, in particular, promulgated the phenomenon of using sexually appealing imagery in depictions of women as highly idealized and feminine or as femme fatales.

DEPICTIONS OF WOMEN AS HIGHLY IDEALIZED AND FEMININE

Known as the “Watteau of the streets,” Jules Chéret (1836-1932) is often considered to be the first great master of the Parisian poster. He developed a highly distinctive style that—despite its influence from eighteenth-century painters such as Watteau, Tiepolo, and Fragonard—seemed thoroughly modern. His use of flat, abstracted forms and bright colors to depict the gaiety of the Belle Époque and the vibrancy of Parisian life characterized his posters. Published in 1895,

Chéret's lithographic poster for Job rolling paper (a popular brand of cigarette paper produced by Republic Tobacco in France) exemplifies the idealization of the modern Parisian woman employed as an advertising tool (see figure 2). The poster is dominated by a female figure, seemingly turned to look coyly over her shoulder at onlookers, posed before a dark background and framed by large text. Like many lithographic pieces from this era, Chéret's poster boasts a limited color palette consisting of primary colors—red, yellow, and blue. Despite the lack of variance, the use of primary colors renders the poster vibrant and striking. Recognizing that the posters were remarkably large and that the bright colors would seem garish in a gallery, Jules Chéret stated in 1894: "My posters are not intended for close or detailed examination, but to be looked at from a distance of five or six meters" (Iskin 156). Chéret's posters developed a style suitable for their purpose of captivating and leaving an imprint on passersby. The placement of the female subject, illustrated in lighter hues and a sunny yellow, in front of a dark blue background produces contrast and naturally focuses the gaze on her form. Furthermore, the fluid, sinuous lines used to define her body and dress accentuate her figure by directing the eye to the most attractive parts of her body—her bared back and cinched waist. The curvilinear lines of her body and dress suggest dynamic movement, as if the artist captured her in the middle of a coquettish twirl. Her playful expression reinforces this suggestion of flirtation without indicating any perverseness. The yellow dress, simultaneously dramatic and simple, evokes joy and gaiety while similarly avoiding suggestions of darker seduction.

Posed in a playfully charming way and smoking a cigarette, she evokes the spirit of the Belle Époque and the modern Parisian woman. She personifies happiness and the natural beauty of the *nouvelle femme*; women wish to have the freedom she possesses and men look on covetously. Regarding the design of the poster, Chéret further utilized color contrast and fluid,

curving lines to draw the gaze to the product—a cigarette. The eye naturally follows the slope of the woman's back to the cigarette resting between her lips, emphasized by the cloud of white smoke juxtaposed with the dark blue background and her red hair.



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

Figure 2. Chéret, Jules (French graphic designer, 1836-1932). *Papier à cigarettes JOB*. 1895, color lithographic poster. Bibliothèque nationale de France, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b9015379j/f1.item.r=cheret%20job>.

Jules Chéret used similar techniques in his *Fleur de Lotus* lithographic poster commissioned in 1893 by the Folies Bergère cabaret music hall for the Ballet Pantomime (see figure 3). This poster is likewise dominated by a central female figure, whose bared skin and yellow dress are made all the more prominent in contrast to the darker blue background. The yellow color of her dress prevents her state of partial undress from appearing too provocative, as well. The organic, curvilinear forms illustrated on the poster evoke a natural sensuality and dynamic movement—her hair and dress even seem to undulate as if underwater. This style of line work also emphasizes her youthful allure, elongating shapely legs and adding a lush elegance to her *croisé derrière*. The gracefully leaping dancers are reminiscent of images of nymphs and ethereal beings of mythology. The incorporation of floral imagery, as if the subjects themselves are flowers come to life, radiates a natural beauty and femininity.

Although illustrations by Jules Chéret characteristically portray women using sinuous lines, the dynamic and elegant movement represented in this poster is particularly suitable. As an advertisement for a dance hall, the poster naturally emphasizes the grace and allure of the dancers. The advertisement promises a beautiful and lively performance, embodied in entirety by the central female figure. Much like his poster for cigarette rolling papers, Jules Chéret has depicted a woman who incarnates an effervescent happiness—a feeling that could seemingly be achieved by attending the ballet at the Folies Bergère dance hall.



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

Figure 3. Chéret, Jules (French graphic designer, 1836-1932). *Folies Bergère, Fleur de Lotus*. 1893, color lithographic poster. Bibliothèque nationale de France, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b9015548p/f1.item.r=cheret%20folios>.

As his large posters displaying modestly free-spirited women became more popular, some began calling Chéret the “father of the women's liberation” (Presbrey 496). Women had historically been depicted in art as prostitutes or puritans, but the women of Chéret's posters (i.e., “Chérettes,” as they were popularly called) were neither. These Chérettes were joyous and effervescent, all while still exhibiting grace and elegance. Although there was some criticism of his advertisements,¹ Ruth Iskin notes that “Chéret’s inspiration from Rococo art led numerous critics to regard the women in his posters as tasteful, charming, and delicate, even though they were highly sexualized” (Iskin 55). They were widely seen and recognized in the public sphere, prompting a writer of the time to remark that “it is difficult to conceive of Paris without its Chérettes” (Presbrey 496). However, this type of depiction, while freeing for the women of Paris, who were beginning to engage in formerly taboo activities, such as wearing low-cut bodices and smoking in public, was nonetheless idealized and one-dimensional. The Chérette lacked complexity, and her seemingly liberated sexuality was ultimately wielded by a man for his own purposes. The perpetually joyful Chérettes were therefore superficial representations of the modern woman, capitalizing on the liberalization of French society to appeal to consumers.

Moreover, there was a specific and confined disposition she was allowed to display—always beautiful and attractive, but never too provocative. These depictions reflected the particular types of spaces where these women were available. The Chérettes, with their graceful gaiety, did not occupy the same spaces as the femmes fatales depicted in other posters. The elegant dancer in Chéret’s *Folies Bergère* poster, for example, occupied and reflected an entirely

¹ In an early example of art criticism devoted to mass-produced advertising posters published in *Certains* (1889), Joris-Karl Huysmans interpreted the poster imagery of Chéret as “capturing the sexual allure of the colorful female figures represented” (Carter 122).

different social space than the cabaret dancer in Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec's *Moulin Rouge* poster (1891). Rather than highlighting the bawdier aspects of the dance hall in fin-de-siècle France, Jules Chéret illustrated the genteel and fashionable tradition of attending the ballet.

DEPICTIONS OF WOMEN AS FEMMES FATALES

In the late 1890s, Job rolling papers commissioned another Art Nouveau artist, Alphonse Mucha (1860-1939), to design lithographic advertising posters for their brand. Mucha, a Czech artist born in a province of the Hapsburg Empire, had become one of the foremost figures of the Art Nouveau movement in fin-de-siècle France after the success of his work for actress Sarah Bernhardt (Bade 79). His representations of women—which, “in accordance with contemporary mythology, oscillated between *femme fatale* and dreamy princess”—were instantly recognizable among the posters that covered the streets of Paris (Ulmer 10). The iconic poster he created in 1896 for Job cigarette rolling papers exemplifies the depiction of women as *femmes fatales* in French lithographic advertisements during the Art Nouveau movement (see figure 4). The lithographic poster, dominated by a woman smoking a cigarette, utilizes a dark color palette than Chéret's version; where Chéret evoked the gaiety of the Belle Époque with vibrant primary colors, Mucha arouses a more dangerous and mysterious sensuality. Modeled after Dante Gabriel Rossetti's painting *Beata Beatrix* (c. 1864-1870), the woman in the Job poster—boasting a “strong chin and abundant hair derived from the Pre-Raphaelite type”—is similarly posed with her head raised, lips ecstatically parted, and eyes half-closed (Bade 118). Interestingly, whereas Rossetti's painting embodies *liebestod* (a German term that refers to the theme of erotic death), Mucha has visually magnified “the momentary pleasure afforded by a drag on a cigarette” (Bade 118). When compared to the version created by Jules Chéret, wherein the woman retains a

breezy *joie de vivre*, Mucha's poster "highlights the pleasure of his female smoker, sexualizing her in ways that exceeded middle-class propriety" (Iskin 278). Her ecstatic expression and her provocative posture seemingly invite someone to gaze upon her. The dark background and her abundance of dark hair accentuate the expanse of bare skin on display, naturally drawing the eye up her exposed neck and to her face. However, unlike the Chérettes, whose daring poses and revealing dresses evoke playful coquettishness, Mucha's femme fatale is dangerously ensnaring.

From her wild hair and rapturous expression to her breadth of bare skin broken only by a fluidly draped dress, Mucha has designed a female whose sole purpose is to capture the attention and imagination of onlookers. Patrick Bade and Victoria Charles, in their book *Alphonse Mucha*, make particular note of her hair in their analysis of the poster:

The most striking feature of the Job poster is the girl's tentacle-like hair that looks as though it has a life of its own and might reach out to wrap itself round the neck of any passing male.

Mucha was one of many fin-de-siècle artists from Rossetti onwards, who were fascinated by the erotic and the threatening aspects of women's hair. The obsession with women's hair reached epidemic proportions in the late-nineteenth century. This can be laid down partly to the fact that respectable women would no more dream of letting their hair down in public than they would have of lighting up a cigarette, and most men only saw women's hair unleashed in moments of sexual intimacy. (118)

The whiplash curves of the Art Nouveau style used by Mucha to illustrate hair perfectly symbolize the dangerous sexuality characteristic of the fin-de-siècle femme fatale. Mucha's son believed that his depictions of women were "influenced by the fashionable misogyny" that saturated this period of time (Bade 118). In an article examining depictions of women smoking in art, Dolores Mitchell argues that the phallic cigarette, which the woman wields for her own pleasure, "serves as a castration symbol—it becomes the women's substitute lover" (Mitchell 4).

Fittingly for this advertisement, her hair also resembles a cloud of smoke atop her head, as if she herself embodies the product.



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

Figure 4. Mucha, Alphonse (Czech graphic designer, 1860-1939). *JOB (papier à cigarettes)*. 1896, color lithographic poster. Bibliothèque nationale de France, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b90050886.r=mucha%20job?rk=21459;2>.

A significant moment in the evolution of the poster as an advertisement tool was the appearance of a startling poster for the cabaret singer Aristide Bruant created by Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec (1864-1901) in 1892. The poster, with its iconic red scarf and intense juxtaposition of bright and dark colors, drew every eye on the streets of Paris and quickly became infamous within the city. Toulouse-Lautrec's caricatures of fin-de-siècle France, often illustrated using theatrically harsh colors and lines, deviated entirely from the idealized depictions of the Belle Époque by Jules Chéret, who was seen as the preeminent poster artist at the time. Félix Fénéon, writing in the anarchist journal *Le Père Peinard*, nonetheless praised Toulouse-Lautrec's critical perspective of modern life:

That Lautrec's got a hell of a nerve, and no mistake. No half measures, the way he draws, or the way he colors either. Great flat dollops of white, black and red—forms all simplified—that's all there is to it. He's got them off to a tee, those gaga old capitalists, completely past it, sitting at tables with clever little tarts who lick their snouts to get cash out of them. . . . What's so fantastic is the single-minded way he does it, the bare-faced cheek of it, the humor. It's one in the eye for all those halfwits who can never bear to taste anything stronger than marshmallow. (Iskin 60)

Fénéon's allusions to "gaga old capitalists" and "clever little tarts" referred to Toulouse-Lautrec's lithographic poster (see figure 5) created in 1892 as an advertisement for *Reine de Joie*, a novel written by Victor Joze (Iskin 60). The poster, depicting a dinner scene from the book, "lays bare a joyless reality of sexual commerce between the bald, coarse-featured, pot-bellied Jewish banker, portrayed as lascivious and undignified, and the red-lipped pale courtesan, who is planting a kiss on his nose" (Iskin 60-61). The courtesan, as Fénéon described, embodies the femme fatale who cunningly uses her sexuality to seduce men, likely to their ruin. The courtesan's red dress brazenly broadcasts her station as a prostitute, and her clinging form is unnervingly reminiscent of a spider.

Unlike the atmosphere of decadent pleasure in found in the posters created by Chéret, or even the otherworldly sensuality favored by Mucha, the *Reine de Joie* poster illuminated the vices and perils of modern Paris. Certainly the novelty of Toulouse-Lautrec's visually striking posters proved to be adept advertising tools. Art critic Gustave Coquiot remarked of Toulouse-Lautrec's dual depictions of sexual imagery and the grotesque that "he made people uncomfortable but they also shivered with pleasure" (Iskin 62). The effervescent gaiety, free of anxiety or other troubling emotions, of the Belle Époque is absent from Toulouse-Lautrec's work. Ruth Iskin observes that "it was in the poster that he simplified form, flattened color masses, avoided any modulation, used brilliant colorations and prominent outlines, emphasized the surface, and used bold compositions and striking points of view" (59). There are no traces of Rococo elegance or Pre-Raphaelite naturalism to be found—rather, the novelty of Toulouse-Lautrec's posters emanates from his uniquely modern style.



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

Figure 5. Toulouse-Lautrec, Henri de (French graphic designer, 1864-1901). *Reine de Joie par Victor Joze, chez tous les libraires*. 1892, color lithographic poster. Bibliothèque nationale de France, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b52506916x/f1.item.r=lautrec%20reine>.

L’AFFICHE ILLUSTRÉE: POSTERS AS ADVERTISING TOOLS

A poster aims to seduce, to exhort, to sell, to educate, to convince, to appeal.

—Susan Sontag, 1970

Susan Sontag, in an essay published in 1970, characterized the poster as a “visually aggressive” promotional tool that emerged under capitalism as a way to attract the attention of “members of society [who] are defined primarily as spectators and consumers” (Sontag 2). This function of the poster to sell lifestyles and products developed with particular force in response to the burgeoning consumer economy in fin-de-siècle France. The late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries saw the golden age of the lithographic poster, specifically, for which artists such as Jules Chéret, Alphonse Mucha, and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec achieved unprecedented celebrity. The lithographic poster arose in France as a result of changes in printing technology and the liberalization of poster distribution (*liberté de l’affichage*) instituted by the Press Law under the Third Republic in 1881 (Carter 15). Dawn Adès, a British art historian and academic, echoed Sontag’s argument, maintaining that “the poster belongs to a specific phase in the age of mechanical reproduction: for seventy or eighty years it was the most conspicuous, accessible and familiar form of pictorial production” (Carter 11). Historically and presently, advertisement posters utilize a number of cognitive strategies, namely to capture the attention of consumers in a memorable fashion. The use of color and provocative imagery, the elimination or simplification of detail, and even the size of the poster can be advantageous advertising strategies. Similarly, strategies such as novelty, the bizarreness effect, and salient imagery create visuals that are memorable.

COGNITIVE STRATEGIES UTILIZED IN POSTERS TO GAIN ATTENTION

The pictorial poster, which could convey content in a glimpse, emerged to appeal to the urban spectator—the foot pedestrian. The urbanization and commercialization of society necessitated an advertisement strategy that could successfully compete with the “inundation of printed material in the streets of Paris” (Carter 15).² In his book, “The Poster: An Illustrated History from 1860,” Harold F. Hutchinson emphasizes characteristics needed to attract and inform consumers in his definition of posters:

A poster is essentially a large announcement, usually with a pictorial element, usually printed on paper and usually displayed on a wall or billboard to the general public. Its purpose is to draw attention to whatever an advertiser is trying to promote and to impress some message on the passer-by. The visual or pictorial element provides the initial attraction--and it must be striking enough to catch the eye of the passer-by and to overcome the counter-attractions of the other posters, and it usually needs a supplementary verbal message which follows up and amplifies the pictorial theme. The large size of most posters enables this verbal message to be read clearly at a distance. (Sontag 3)

For a poster, in which the visual elements eclipse its textual ability to convey information, the most important function is to attract the attention of passers-by. In practice, elements such as color, simplification or elimination of detail, and physical size became more important than the actual written material on the poster. In fact, text emerged as part of the overall visual composition.

² In 1901, Georges D’Avenel estimated that “25 million francs were being spent annually on posters in France, counting all posters in public spaces including streets, train stations, omnibuses, boats, theaters, kiosks, and many other sites” (Iskin 18).

One of the most important visual elements of an advertisement poster is color. Unlike the mounted public notices that were used in premodern societies to circulate news, however, the advertisement poster necessitated “the invention of a far cheaper and more sophisticated color printing process ... and the development of the high-speed presses which, by 1848, could print ten thousand sheets an hour” (Sontag 2). The solution to this demand for an inexpensive, color printing process: lithography. The printing technique of lithography was discovered by Alois Senefelder (1771-1834), a German writer and actor, in the late-eighteenth century (Bade 98). This technique made it possible to reproduce color drawings and paintings extremely cheaply *en masse*. The advent of color lithography was significant for the development of the poster because color attracts attention, makes the visual seem more realistic or appealing, and elicits an emotional response through color association and interpretation (Schindler 70). Although color is used in advertising to appeal to onlookers, “indiscriminant use of color can sacrifice contrast, thereby reducing legibility and readability, and decreasing the effectiveness of the [advertisement]” (Schindler 69). Color combinations can also influence the visual performance of an advertisement. According to research on the effects of color combinations on legibility of advertisements, “white or yellow text on a blue background lead to the best reading performance” (Ya-Hsien Ko 34). Notably, lithographic posters in fin-de-siècle French seemed to employ these color combinations with some frequency and the technique is still prominent today.

In addition to the color elements, the simplified designs of fin-de-siècle advertisement posters are also reproduced in modern iterations. The development of the poster, as an art form and advertisement strategy, was further made possible in the last decades of the nineteenth century with the “increasingly sophisticated use of color techniques and the influence of Japanese woodblock prints,” which flooded Europe in ever increasing quantities as East-West

trade flourished (Bade 99). Despite the differences in technique between Japanese woodblock printing and lithography, both require a separate block or plate for each color (Bade 99).

Western artists, inspired by Japanese prints that used a limited number of colors to create rich and varied effects, realized that the limitations of color lithography could be utilized to their advantage (Bade 99). The simplification or even elimination of detail, for example, followed the principle that the urban spectator “would have had his attention drawn to so many visual elements that eventually he would have stopped paying attention altogether” (Carter 15). Instead, the pictorial poster allowed him to practice extensive viewing, in which he could consume content with barely a glimpse (Carter 15). These Japanese prints also demonstrated how text could be incorporated into pieces of fine art. The combination of linguistic and pictorial design elements became key traits of the advertisement poster.

Provocative and sexually appealing imagery also serve to catch the attention of onlookers. Examples of sexually appealing imagery used in advertising include double entendre, sexual attractiveness, nudity, and suggestiveness (Biswas et al. 74). French advertising, although it “has been labeled as sophisticated because it is more artistic and the finish is of extremely high quality,” is known for its use of sex appeal as an advertising strategy (Biswas et al. 75). In a study on the effects of Freudian sexual symbolism (i.e., phallic and vaginal symbols) in liquor advertisements, results indicated that “observers became sexually aroused when exposed to the liquor advertisements containing genital symbolism even though they were not consciously aware of the presence of such stimuli” (Mosatche and Ruth 187). The sexually appealing imagery found in fin-de-siècle advertisements, whether in the form of highly idealized and feminine depictions of women or the femme fatale, is replicated in modern advertising.

COGNITIVE STRATEGIES UTILIZED IN POSTERS TO APPEAL TO MEMORY

Novel advertisements are those that are original and unique, and often utilize unexpected techniques or visuals. Some researchers argue that novelty, the deviation from the norm, “should be the first criterion considered when deciding whether a product is creative” (Ang and Low 837). According to a study on novelty in advertising, “creativity plays an instrumental role in advertising, which often involves developing new and innovative messages to communicate a ‘unique selling proposition’ to its target audience” (Lee et al. 214). The effectiveness of advertisements largely depends on the perceived creativity displayed. Research shows that advertisements “were found to be effective contingent on unexpectedness and the feelings elicited” (Ang and Low 849). Furthermore, novelty in advertisements accentuates the effects of positive feelings (Ang and Low 849). For the modern consumer who is inundated with advertisements, unexpectedness can leave a lasting impression.

However, research has also shown that consumer reactions to novelty in advertising is equally influenced by perceived levels of meaningfulness and emotional connection. A study by Swee Hoon Ang and Sharon Y. M. Low (2000) of the National University of Singapore indicates that “unless the creative element conveys some meaning about the advertised product, unexpectedness does not necessarily mean creativity” (837). Novelty alone is therefore insufficient in creating a salient image. Meaningfulness renders the advertisement truly creative and useful in conveying information about the advertised product (Ang and Low 837). Furthermore, the novel aspect of an advertisement must elicit emotional reactions from the viewer to be effective. Ang and Low (2000) note that “people react emotionally to an unexpected stimulus and these emotional experiences color evaluations of novelty, suggesting that the emotional responses elicited play an important role in determining whether or not the ad

will be accepted or resisted by consumers” (838). Ultimately, advertisements that display unexpected visuals or visuals in novel ways are most successful in producing positive reactions from consumers and creating memory links to the product advertised.

MODERN ITERATIONS OF THESE TECHNIQUES

The phenomenon of using sexually appealing imagery in order to sell lifestyles and products continues to appear in French advertisements today. Despite the advancement of technology, modern print advertisements still clearly draw on the same traditions and strategies seen in Art Nouveau style lithographic posters of fin-de-siècle France. In particular, modern visuals similarly use depictions of women as highly idealized and feminine or as the characteristic femme fatale as advertising strategies to promote or sell a product or brand. Furthermore, modern advertising still uses similar cognitive strategies of appealing to passersby in memorable ways amidst an inundated market.

MODERN DEPICTIONS OF WOMEN AS HIGHLY IDEALIZED AND FEMININE

In April 2014, Air France—the French flag carrier and subsidiary of Air France-KLM Group—launched a new advertising campaign called “Air France: France is in the air.” This campaign, aimed at printed, online, and social media platforms, consisted of several visuals created by Argentinian photographers Mauro Mongiello and Sofia Sanchez to illustrate services offered by the airline and to depict “strong iconic destinations served by Air France” (Air France). The airline’s press office stated that the campaign wished to “create an effect of surprise by mixing heritage and modernity, while echoing Air France’s past as a renowned poster specialist. ... The airline’s eminently French character and the notion of the pleasure of traveling with Air France are illustrated in a fun, lively and exciting message, in line with the French lifestyle” (Air France). Among the campaign’s visuals, the poster advertising “les prix mini” (see figure 6), or discounted fares, exemplifies the modern iteration of the traditional French

poster—most noticeably the posters of Jules Chéret. Despite the advancement of modern technology and techniques, the poster harkens to the tradition of Art Nouveau lithography through its simplification of detail and limited, though vibrant, color palette, as well as its reliance upon typography as a design feature. The poster, like those of Chéret, primarily relies upon just a few bold colors: shades of blue and red, with some white, dominate the visual. The design is similarly simple, favoring a single, central female figure that acts as the focal point of the poster. Indeed, the simplicity of the visual is particularly notable as a deliberate design choice; whereas the lithographic printing process demanded simplified designs, the modern iteration has purposefully forgone the use of more complex elements. As noted, the simplification of the visual serves as a cognitive strategy used to gain attention and facilitate the conveyance of a message. However, the parallels between the Air France visual and the posters of Jules Chéret could further appeal to memory as it evokes meaningfulness and an emotional connection. This seemingly contradicts the use of novelty as an appeal to memory, but novelty in advertising is primarily effective when unexpected visuals hold meaning and connection—either to the product or to the viewer. In this case, the clear influence of Art Nouveau lithographic posters, particularly those created by Chéret, is meaningful in that the visual invokes France’s rich cultural history and promotes the message of the campaign.

The Air France model’s dynamic posing and the movement of her dress is also highly reminiscent of Jules Chéret’s poster for the Folies Bergère dance hall. With the photographer catching her mid-leap, her dress floating around her as if suspended in water, she is the modern iteration of Chéret’s nymph-like dancer. Furthermore, the model used in the poster advertising “les prix mini” embodies a similarly youthful effervescence. When the visual campaign was launched, Air France emphasized that “international models ... were used to personalize that

youth and vitality carried by the posters” (Air France). She is beautiful and joyful, captured in a leap that highlights her feminine figure and graceful comportment. The literal interpretation of the campaign’s new signature, “France is in the air,” with her fluttering dress made of the tricolor, she embodies the idealized spirit of France. The notable differences between this female model and the original Chérettes, namely skin color and hairstyle, serve to highlight her portrayal as the *modern* feminine ideal of France. Rather than the dark background emphasizing the color of her bare skin (as is illustrated in Chéret’s posters), the white of her dress and her jubilant smile creates the most striking contrast and enhance the advertisement’s visual performance. Her short hairstyle—completely different from the tendril-like hair characteristic of Art Nouveau representations of women—boldly declares her modernity and freedom from traditional conventions.

This idealization of the female model as the contemporary Chérette helps promote Air France as a modern and chic airline that is, nevertheless, brimming with the traditional French charm. Her happiness, mirrored by the light and airy feeling reminiscent of flight elicited by the poster, seems contagious. The poster suggests that flying with Air France Air France stated that their objective was to reinforce their “customer promise to enjoy a little piece of France while traveling with the airline” (Air France). Certainly, the model draped in the colors of the French flag personifies this promise. The airline also expressed their objective of conveying a “bright and offbeat tone [which] creates a form of affinity and proximity with the public” (Air France). The visually striking photographs utilized in this campaign, coupled with simple but bold color palettes, brazenly demand attention from onlookers.

AIRFRANCE
FRANCE IS IN THE AIR

VIVE LES PRIX MINI 49€^{TTC}
LA FRANCE À PARTIR DE

AIRFRANCE_KLM AIRFRANCE.COM

Figure 6. Mongiello, Mauro and Sofia Sanchez, photographers. *Advertisement for Air France: France is in the Air Campaign, Vive les prix mini.* BETC Paris, advertising agency. 2014, digital print advertisement, *La Réclame*, <https://lareclame.fr/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/af-prixmini.jpg>.

MODERN DEPICTIONS OF WOMEN AS FEMMES FATALES

In the summer of 2010, the French distilled beverages company Pernod Ricard launched a new advertising campaign for their product Pacific, a non-alcoholic aniseed aperitif. The campaign, which consisted of visuals by famous fashion photographer Hans Feurer, casted the model Nevena Dujmovic to portray “la belle naïade au célèbre maillot de bain jaune, mythe Pacific des années 80” (Ricard). In a particularly striking visual (see figure 7), Dujmovic is photographed against an idyllic tropical background as she seemingly emerges from turquoise water, brandishing a bottle of Pacific over her head like a trophy and a knife between her teeth. Above her, the campaign’s new signature flirtatiously asks, “Résisterez-vous longtemps à sa fraîcheur?” The typography, perhaps less bold and eye-catching than the lettering used in many fin-de-siècle French posters, is still very simple and clear. Like its lithographic predecessors this visual employs a limited color palette of bright yellow and blue taken directly from the design of the product. The combined use of white text and the yellow swimsuit over a blue background lends itself to the overall visual performance of this advertisement. The photographer, Feurer, has captured the model in a remarkably dynamic moment of movement, reminiscent of Jules Chéret’s posters featuring dancing women. Rather than a twirling skirt, however, the model’s dynamism is denoted by the water cascading off of her. The fluid lineation created by her pose draws the gaze her body to the product, the bottle of Pacific she is holding. This technique of using organic lines created by the female form to direct an onlooker’s attention to the purpose of the poster is derived from Art Nouveau style lithographic advertisements.

In this campaign, and especially in this specific visual, the model Nevena Dujmovic is depicted as the modern femme fatale. Wearing an updated version of the iconic yellow swimsuit that reveals more bare skin than the original, she is portrayed as “aventurière et sportive,

spontanée et glamour” (Ricard). The distilled beverages company has referred to the campaign as relaunching “le mythe Pacific” and to the woman in the visuals as a naiad (Ricard). Bernice Slote, a professor of English at the University of Nebraska, examined the literary and thematic significance of naiads in her article “La Belle Dame as Naiad.” According to Slote, naiads in mythology “were life-giving water-maidens presiding over a stream, a lake, a fountain” (Slote 22). However, naiads could also become destroyers of life, seducing men to delirium with their beauty and luring them into the water, where they would be drowned (Slote 23). Slote cites a particularly apt ballad of Goethe, “The Fisherman,” as described by Madame de Staël:

A poor man, on a summer evening, seats himself on the bank of a river, and as he throws in his line, contemplates the clear and liquid tide which gently flows and bathes his naked feet. The nymph of the stream invites him to plunge himself into it; she describes to him the delightful freshness of the water during the heat of summer, the pleasure which the sun takes in cooling itself at night in the sea, the calmness of the moon when its rays repose and sleep on the bosom of the stream: at length the fisherman attracted, seduced, drawn on, advances near the nymph, and forever disappears. (Slote 24)

The distilled beverages company almost directly parallels this passage with their new campaign slogan (“Pacific. Résisterez-vous longtemps à sa fraîcheur?”), which they state “traduit ainsi le contraste entre la chaleur de l’atmosphère et le rafraîchissement du produit” (Ricard). Her dangerous sexuality is more literally accentuated by the knife she holds perilously with her mouth. This message is possibly reinforced by subliminal sexual imagery reminiscent of Mucha’s Job rolling papers poster. Like the cigarette, the knife resembles phallic imagery often found in advertisements—although the castration symbolism discussed by Mitchell is made even more obvious in this visual.

Combined with her intense facial expression and eye contact, the overall effect is both an invitation and a threat. The blatant sex appeal is visually aggressive and, enhanced by the vibrant color palette, memorable. Pernod Ricard says of the visual, “cette jolie naïade qui part à la conquête du Pacifique évoque d’emblée les valeurs de la marque: naturalité, fraîcheur, plaisir” (Ricard). The association between the model’s sexual attractiveness and the product, made blatant by the double entendre of the campaign slogan, suggests that slaking one’s thirst with Pacific aniseed aperitif on a hot summer day would be as pleasurable as engaging in sexual activity with the model.



Figure 7. Feurer, Hans, photographer. *Advertisement for Société de Ricard: Relancement de Pacific Campaign, Résisterez-vous longtemps à sa fraîcheur.* Young and Rubicam, advertising agency. 2010, digital print advertisement. *Société de Ricard*, http://www.societe-ricard.fr/marques/_resisterez-vous-longtemps-la-pub-pacific.

CONCLUSION

The Art Nouveau artists who revolutionized the lithographic poster as an advertising tool established the precedence of using women and the feminine form as a way to promote and sell lifestyles and products. These posters often depicted women as sexually appealing—reflecting the liberalization of fin-de-siècle French society and the emergence of the modern woman—but even these were ultimately confined to one of two archetypal Art Nouveau style representations: women as highly idealized and feminine or as the femme fatale. The attractive and sometimes provocative visuals, coupled with the sophisticated color techniques made possible by the lithographic printing press, were conspicuously striking amidst the sea of advertisements that lined the streets of France. Moreover, the reliance on visuals rather than text to convey messages necessitated the use of physically large posters that boasted simplified designs made more salient with novel illustration techniques and subject matter.

Emulating research on the effects of using cognitive strategies to attract attention of consumers and convey an enduring message in the twenty-first century market, which is even more saturated with advertisements, modern posters rely on colors and color combinations that can be found in early lithographic posters. The obvious influence of lithographic posters from fin-de-siècle France is even more striking considering the advancement of modern technology. Despite the ability to create highly complex and intricate visuals, many advertisements instead utilize simplified yet bold designs and typography to convey messages. The modern iterations of these advertising posters similarly depict attractive and sexually appealing women as highly idealized and feminine or the femme fatale, as well. Although the sexualizing and objectification of women in mainstream advertising is often considered a twentieth century development, the phenomenon can be traced to the Art Nouveau style posters created by artists such as Jules

Chéret, Alphonse Mucha, and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec. Whether echoing the perpetually effervescent Chérettes or the femme fatales created by Mucha and Toulouse-Lautrec, the representations of women in contemporary advertising can be viewed as modern, twenty-first century iterations of their fin-de-siècle counterparts.

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