

Art Nouveau

What is Art Nouveau?

The name Art Nouveau means 'new art', and was taken from the name of a gallery (La Maison de l'Art Nouveau) in Paris in the 1890s. An international movement, Art Nouveau swept through Europe and the USA for about twenty years until the First World War as a deliberate attempt to create a modern style. Artists, designers and architects looked to nature for inspiration and the distinctive results combine elegant curving lines and plant forms.

In general it was most successfully practiced in the decorative arts: furniture, jewellery, and book design and illustration. The style was richly ornamental and asymmetrical.

Art Nouveau Artists and Designers

Emile Galle
Gustav Klimt
Charles Rennie Mackintosh
Alphonse Mucha
Louis Comfort Tiffany



Three Mackintosh Chairs, highlighting the use of natural plant forms, combined with more formal, straight lines.



Charles Rennie Mackintosh

One of the best-known Art Nouveau designers. Best known for his design of the Glasgow School of Art, which he designed both inside *and* out.

His use of natural form and integration of these shapes into his designs make his work some of the most instantly-recognisable in the world.

Above, stained glass window. Charles Rennie Mackintosh.

Alphonse Mucha

French artist and designer, best known for his decorative, Art Nouveau styled poster designs. Mucha's ideas were based on a strong composition,

sensuous curves derived from nature, refined decorative elements and natural colours. He was

commissioned to design posters, including the one shown here, advertising the play 'Gismonda'.

He became an overnight success at the age of 34.



Louis Comfort Tiffany

American decorative artist and designer Tiffany was widely known for his colourful **Art Nouveau** glassware which proved both influential and fashionable on both sides of the Atlantic.

He worked in a wide range of fields including textiles, wallpaper, ceramics, jewellery, interiors, and lighting. Tiffany was born into an artistic background, the son of Charles Tiffany, founder of Tiffany Jewellery and Silversmiths in New York. The company was awarded a number of highly prestigious commissions, including the redesign of a number of rooms at the presidential White House in Washington, DC, in 1882 to 1883. Tiffany also established a reputation for the design of textiles, wallpapers, and other surface patterns and developed expertise in decorative glass.

Tiffany was perhaps best known for his opalescent glass-making, known as 'Favrile'.

This technique meant that the glass was made to look partly cloudy or milky, by adding more particles to the compound. In the case of the lightshade below, this allowed light to glow through the colours, rather than being harsh.



Dragonfly Lamp, 1902 (Louis Comfort Tiffany)

Emile Gallé

Born in Nancy, France, in 1846, Emile Gallé is considered one of the most outstanding glass artists of his time. He greatly contributed to the development of the art of glass making and to the Art Nouveau Style. He was following William Morris's precepts before 1880 and was so inspired by Chinese cameo glass that he created glassware that was to influence Tiffany in the United States.

The works of Emile Gallé had a major influence on the Art Nouveau movement. Clear and enamelled or engraved, acid etched or wheel-carved, his glass was very elaborate.

Nature inspired his designs, which were mostly floral, some with foliage, or landscape decorations and some with a strong Japanese feeling. He developed a technique for the production of cut and incised flashed glass and enameled designs, enhanced by bright colours and transparency of the material.



Vase with Iris,
1900.
Emile Gallé.