

# Alphonse Mucha

## Poster Design

1860-1939

Art Nouveau.

MORAVIA (Czech Republic)

"Alphonse Maria Mucha is most often remembered for the prominent role he played in shaping the aesthetics of French Art Nouveau at the turn of the century. As a struggling and relatively unknown artist of Czech origin living in Paris, Mucha achieved immediate fame when, in December 1894, he accepted a commission to create a poster for one of the greatest actresses of this time, Sarah Bernhardt. Though the printer was apprehensive about submitting Mucha's final design because of its new unconventional style, Bernhardt loved it and so did the public. 'Le style Mucha', as Art Nouveau was known in its earliest days, was born. The success of that first poster [Gismonda](#) brought a 6 years contract between Bernhardt and Mucha and in the following years his work for her and others included costumes and stage decorations, designs for magazines and book covers, jewellery and furniture and numerous posters. Mucha returned to Czechoslovakia in 1910, where he dedicated the remainder of his life to the production of a an epic series of 20 paintings depicting the history of the Slav people, the Slav Epic"

(Mucha Museum, Prague)



**Title:** Gismonda

For Mucha, proponent of Art Nouveau, woman was a subject of reverence, even worship, and nowhere, did he express it more eloquently than in his first poster for the immortal actress Sarah Bernhardt. 'Gismonda' was a biblical period piece whose Palm Sunday procession in the third act allowed Mucha to cloth the actress in a gown of Byzantine opulence and to give her a wonderful expression" "...at the appearance of Gismonda on the billboards, Paris was bowled over; an odscure illustrator (Mucha) became an overnight celebrity, and posters were suddenly discussed seriously as art form in circles which would have before not even deigned to grant them a passing mention... Mucha's masterly composition, his unereing eye for decorative detail, flawless draftsmanship and an exquisitely delicate sensitivity for muted colours combined with his skill in lithography to produce a masterpiece"

# Aphonse Mucha

## Poster Design



**Title:** Papier a Cigarettes Job

The "Job" is the most rare, most expensive, and most sought after of all the "Maitre de L'Affiches" along with the [Moulin Rouge](#) by [Toulouse Lautrec](#)

"Jane Abdy called it "a secular icon," and indeed it is a magnificent production, considering that it advertises cigarette paper. "The background, in a dull imperial purple is a perfect foil for the golden curls of the smoking girl, whose locks are spread over the poster like the delicate filigree work of an Indian bracelet.

One of Mucha's all-time winners, this poster helped to popularize the "Mucha girl" with the luxuriant hair, which became the artist's instantly recognized trademark... Note the meticulous attention to detail, for example the letters JOB worked ingeniously into the purple background"

**Title:** Salon des Cent / XXme Exposition

This poster is one of the artist's first works to follow his standard archetype. It advertises the twentieth exhibition of the group of artists who exhibited at the premises of the art journal 'La Plume.' The members were famous Parisian artists: Toulouse-Lautrec, Bonnard, Steinlen, Ensor, Grasset, Rassenfosse, and the American Louis Rhead. Mucha's ambition was to become a member of the group, and he succeeded with this poster, which attracted the attention of the gallery owner Leon Deschamps. He visited Mucha in his studio while he was designing the poster. Fascinated by what he saw, he persuaded Mucha to print it in this unfinished version, according to the artist. Mucha agreed, and the publisher's feeling, that this lightly outlined, impressive poster would make Mucha famous, proved to be correct (

"The Salon of the Hundred, was a small gallery on the premises of the magazine 'La Plume' where promising designers displayed their work. The publication's marketing arm, Editions d'Art, also issued these posters and decorative panels in various editions, often on quality paper as art for the home. The bottom half of these



# Alphonse Mucha

## Poster Design



### **Title:** La Samaritaine - Sarah Bernhardt

"La Samaritaine (Woman of Samaria) was a play with a biblical theme, written by Edmond Rostand for Miss. Bernhardt and introduced by her during the Easter season of 1897. She played Photina, a girl from the Samaria district of ancient Palestine, who become a supporter of Jesus and leads her whole tribe in converting to Christianity. For his poster, Mucha chose a scene from the second act in which the girl carries around a large water jar...Edmond Rostand was one of several playwrights who became admirers as well as lovers of Sarah Bernhardt during her career...To catch the mood of the play, Mucha put a mosaic with Hebrew lettering (Jehova) into his customary halo around Sarah's head. A seemingly random scattering of stars follows the convolutions of her hair, and stylized flowers adorn the corners



### **Title:** Lorenzaccio

" The character of Lorenzaccio, in the play by Alfred de Musset, is based on Lorenzo the Magnificent (1449-1492), the most powerful of the Medicis, who ruled the city-state of Florence. In the play, Lorenzaccio struggles desperately to save Florence, which had grown rich during his reign from the grip of a power-hungry conqueror. Mucha represents this tyranny by a dragon menacing the city coat of arms and portrays Lorenzaccio pondering the course of his action. Sarah Bernhardt adapted the play, first written in 1863, for herself, and the new version, for which this poster was produced, opened December 3, 1896. Never afraid to tackle a male role, Bernhardt made Lorenzaccio into the classic roles of her repertoire"(The high water mark of Art Nouveau is attained in this brilliant Mucha poster which invites us to ponder each intricate design segment that in harmony creates a masterpiece.

