

**International Baccalaureate Extended Essay**

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**Visual Arts**

**CAUSALITY OF THE ART NOUVEAU MOVEMENT STYLE REVIVAL  
IN THE SIXTIES IN THE USA**

*The sixties and seventies saw a revival of the style originally associated with the late 19<sup>th</sup>/early  
20<sup>th</sup> century Art Nouveau movement.*

*Why did Art Nouveau style experience resurgence in popularity in the sixties in the USA?*

**Extended Essay in Visual Arts**

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**Pierre Genet**

**International School of Ho Chi Minh City**

**Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam**

**Extended Essay Supervisor: Laura Thompson**

**Candidate:**

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## **Abstract**

Several Art Nouveau and sixties pieces were analysed to highlight the main visual characteristics and compare patterns, palette, iconography and fonts. This essay proved that the art style in the sixties borrowed heavily from Art Nouveau imagery, reinterpreting shapes and colors with a psychedelic twist. Because Art Nouveau was creative in pioneering commercial communication, artists in the sixties appropriated it.

The Art Nouveau and sixties movement were documented, the main research done using English and French websites and books on multiple subjects including: paintings, design and history. Because of personal interest in graphic arts and product design, visits were made to: The Horta Museum, Brussels, Belgium; The Owl House, Brussels, Belgium; and Sonia Delaunay Exhibition, Tate Gallery, London, England. Videos on the Art Nouveau Movement and Art of the sixties were also used as resources. Researching information regarding a direct relationship between the two periods was challenging - little supporting documentation was available directly relating to causality. The “Art Nouveau Revival” exhibition curator in Paris was even contacted.

The finding indicated that indeed, the Art Nouveau style experience resurgence in popularity in the sixties in the USA. The Art Nouveau movement and the revival of the sixties were driven by reactions from the young generation to the then existing dominating schools of thought on art; that they were both responses to a perceived lack of expressive artistic creativity in a world dominated by mass production and consumerism; and both were rebels intent on redirecting society back into a more nature centered and peaceful harmony aspiring to modernity. Perhaps that is the answer to *Why did Art Nouveau style experience resurgence in popularity in the sixties in the USA?*

## Introduction

The sixties were a time of change, a period where the North American youth proudly questioned the morals of their country as can be seen with the Vietnam War, which was crucially influenced by the counterculture movement through domestic protests. Art Nouveau tied into this. Intensive research of the Art Nouveau and sixties artistic productions demonstrated that the art style in the sixties in the USA borrowed heavily from Art Nouveau imagery. From a graphic arts perspective, Art Nouveau was the first artistic movement giving serious credibility to the graphic arts posters and it was revived in the sixties as poster was the media of choice. Artists from the sixties appropriated the rich Art Nouveau graphic environment as it had been designed for visually impactful communication they themselves needed to implement fast. From a historical perspective, the fact that during Art Nouveau and the sixties rebellious youth were challenging society may explain why the style revived. Indeed Art Nouveau and the sixties were both counter cultures and breaking similar barriers to reach new heights may have revive Art Nouveau in the sixties. Art Nouveau and the sixties artists were familiar with using drugs to alter their perception of colors, shapes and textures which may also explain why Art Nouveau experience a revival in the sixties. Both Art Nouveau and the sixties were extensive experimentation years and aspirational times. The long forgotten Art Nouveau style changed the world in a way, and the question I will answer in this extended essay is **why did Art Nouveau style experience resurgence in popularity in the 1960s in the USA?**

**Intensive research of the Art Nouveau and sixties artistic productions showed me that the art style in the sixties in the USA borrowed heavily from Art Nouveau<sup>1</sup> imagery.**

The psychedelic art style of the sixties revived Art Nouveau's de-saturated colors into intense colors. The following pictures at the right was originally designed by Mucha to promote Job cigarette papers in 1898. The exact same design on the left was Mouse's revival in 1966 to promote a music concert for Big Brother and the holding company. The "femme fatale" lady elaborated hair style and languish posture iconic of Art Nouveau appear vividly sixties by the use of psychedelic colors.



*"The Woman with Green hair" by S. Mouse & A. Kelley 1966*



*Job, poster by Mucha 1898*

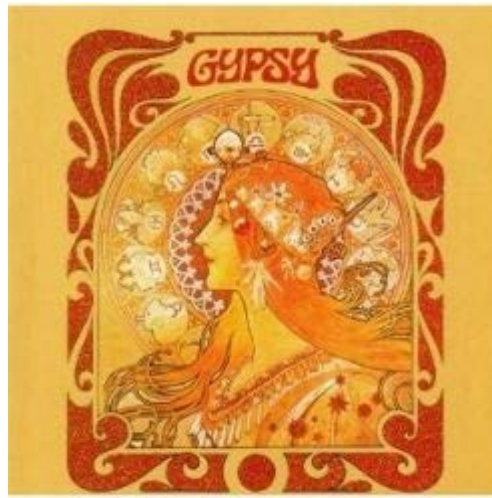
American artists from the sixties were most inspired by Alfons Mucha; Gypsy's rock band covers below

<sup>1</sup> Despite being short lived, Art Nouveau (new art) movement had a wide influence from the last decade of the 19th century until the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The launch in 1880 by the English designer William Morris of the Arts and Crafts movement could be considered as the start of the Art Nouveau in the United Kingdom since his movement was rejecting Victorian-era historical decorative art. Other sources attribute the start of art nouveau there to a book jacket featuring floral motif similar to Japanese-style woodblock prints on 1883 volume Wren's City Churches written by Arthur Heygate Mackmurdo, an English architect and designer. Since Art Nouveau is an international style impacting daily life from art to architecture, different countries have different origins and different dates at which art nouveau started and ended, this extended essay will mainly be using the French interpretation. In France, Art Nouveau was officially born in 1893 and Czech graphic designer Alphonse Mucha was one of the most influential artists living in Paris at the time. Vincent van Gogh's flowing lines, Paul Gauguin's flowery painting in vivid colors or Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec's lithographs also marked the start of Art Nouveau.

borrowed his “Zodiac calendar” art piece from 1896 to design their vinyl studio album covers.



“In the Garden” album by “Gypsy”, 1972



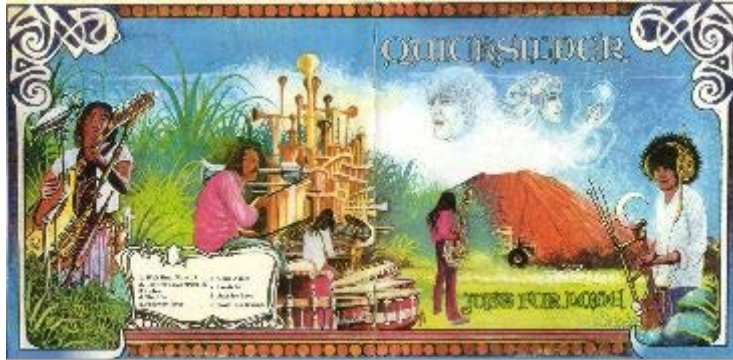
“Gypsy” debut album by “Gypsy”, 1971

## Characteristics of Art Nouveau

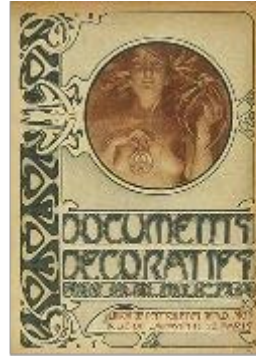


The captions above on Mucha’s “borrowed” piece highlight Art Nouveau characteristics. Iconic Art nouveau elements were elegant, organic, floral and flowing lines. Art Nouveau features whiplash Motif, asymmetrical lines, serpentine and elongated Lines, female form, elegant shapes, always sinuous lines, curvilinear, French curve, geometric shapes such as parabolas, crescents, solar discs, circles, usually

abstract shapes, usage of bugs or flowers, usage of selective palette (warm colors, desaturated to simulate a romantic / fantasy feeling). “Just for love” album from 1970 below used French Art Nouveau curve.

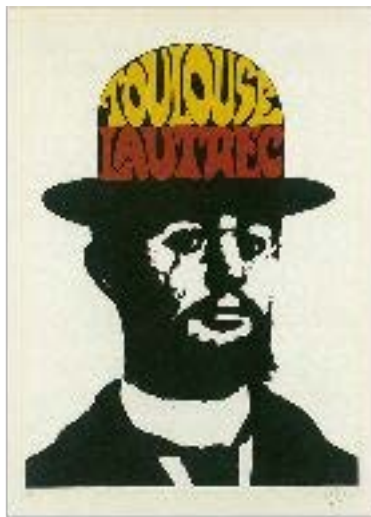


"Just for Love" album by "Quicksilver Messenger Service", 1970



"Documents Decoratifs" by Mucha, 1901

In 1966 when the first psychedelic posters appeared in San Francisco promoting rock and pop concerts organised by Bill Graham, psychedelic graphic designers like Wes Wilson, Hapshash and the Coloured Coat group, Victor Moscoso introduced basically everything that Art Nouveau had invented into the domain of signs and images. American graphic artist Peter Max below openly paid their respect to French



"Toulouse Lautrec" by Peter Max, 1966

Art Nouveau artist ToulouseLautrec.



Grateful Dead concert poster by Alton Kelley & Stanley Mouse 1967



Gismonda poster by Mucha, 1894

Stanley “Mouse” Miller, artist and founder of The Family Dog, confirmed he was inspired by Mucha and even declared “In 1966 we learned how to play with Art Nouveau motifs and infuse them with our own sense of humor”<sup>2</sup>. Thus why did American artists from the sixties revived Art Nouveau?

One of the reasons for this Art Nouveau revival to happen in the USA could be the “Art Nouveau. Art and design at the turn of the Century” exhibition in 1959 at The Museum Of Modern Art in New York which showcased Art Nouveau to the public in the USA. This could have potentially influenced artists and designers such as Wes Wilson whose work is influenced by the masters of Art Nouveau. Similarly the circulation of the Beardsley exhibition<sup>3</sup> in the USA after the U.K. could also have triggered the Art

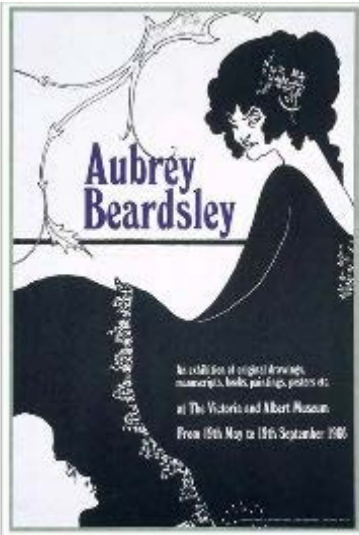
<sup>2</sup> Muse & Kelley, Paris AMP 1980, page 11

<sup>3</sup> Beardsley, Aubrey, born 1872 - died 1898

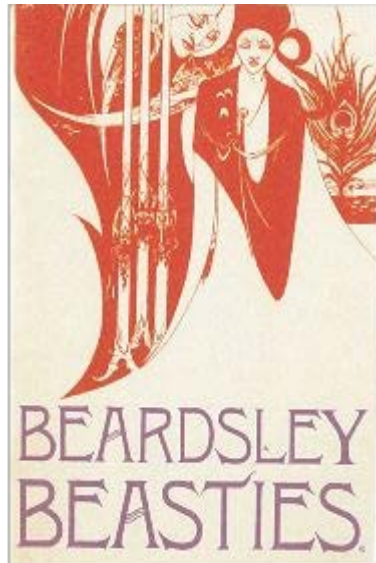
Aubrey Beardsley, Poster, London, England, 1966 H. M. Stationery Office (designer), Colour offset lithograph, Museum number: E.2430-1966, Gallery location: Prints & Drawings Study Room, level C, case Y, shelf 62, box D



Nouveau appeal to American graphic designers and the start of the counterculture in the USA.



"Aubrey Beardsley" Poster by Aubrey Beardsley, 1966



"Beardsley Beasties " by Patch Carradine, 1967

Before in the United Kingdom, Alfons Mucha and Audrey Beardsley's exhibitions<sup>4</sup> at the Victoria & Albert Museum in London respectively in 1963 and 1966 had highly appealed to young people to the point that it may have initiated the start of the "underground" culture.

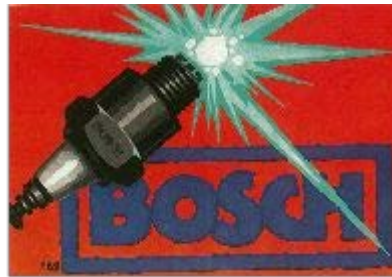
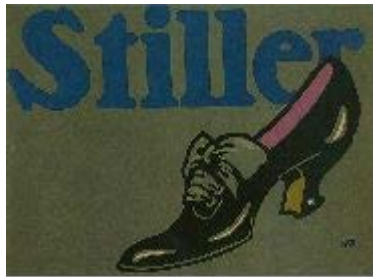
**Looking with a visual arts perspective, Art Nouveau was revived in the sixties because it was the first artistic movement giving serious credibility to the graphic arts posters.**

Art Nouveau was the first commercial art form to communicate on a wide scale promotional messages to a rising middle class. New printing technology and the economic development made it possible to produce posters and disseminate for an affordable price Art Nouveau to a large audience. Commercial posters flourished especially in France where the law dated July 29<sup>th</sup> 1881<sup>5</sup> on press freedom allowed posters display everywhere it was not expressly forbidden. Mass exposure supported the fast acceptance of Art Nouveau by the public and the use of commercial communication as an art channel. The wider audience and support from companies promoting - today we would say advertising - their products fueled

<sup>4</sup> according to George Melly "Poster Power" The Observer Magazine, December 3<sup>rd</sup> 1967

<sup>5</sup> "Legifrance - Le Service Public De L'accès Au Droit." Loi Du 29 Juillet 1881 Sur La Liberté De La Presse. French Government, n.d. Web. 08 Oct. 2015.

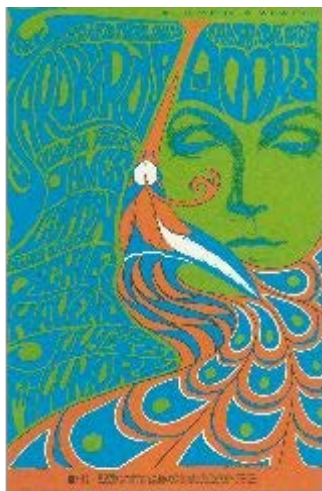
graphic arts creativity to unprecedented levels. Indeed Art Nouveau and the sixties enjoyed years of strong economic growth. During the period 1870-1913 a number of countries caught up their economic development through industrialization. Art Nouveau period experienced prosperity through industrialization. (See Appendix A) During both the Art Nouveau and the sixties periods, the Middle class rose from the economic growth. (See Appendix B) Art Nouveau was the first artistic movement to give serious credibility to the graphic arts, especially posters as an art form to communicate promotional messages to the rising middle class. Thanks to modern printing making poster printing possible, commercial art started on a bigger scale and became the opportunity for the artists to become visible and democratize Art Nouveau to the masses with the financial support of brands promoting their products as the Art Nouveau posters below from Germany illustrate.



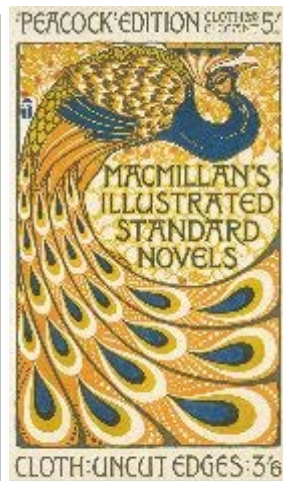
*Promotional Posters by Lucian Bernhard, 1908 and 1914*

In the sixties, brands continued and became (pop) cultural actors. Graphic artists of the sixties were most inspired as they also needed to mass communicate consumer products in a fast growing consumerism environment. American pop art in the sixties amplified the baby boomers aspirations to consumption and was fed from magazines, posters, packaging, cinema, television, vinyl albums covers. Pop art was also fed from new materials like plastics and resin as well as industrial process like silkscreen printing. Consumer culture branded American invaded billboards, photographs, magazines and packaging designs: advertising appeared on the street, in the home, through print and celluloid. Seduction and visual impact facilitate appropriation so like for Art Nouveau, turning popular products into icons with an artistic twist has been

the way for brands to communicate. Artists and designers tried to remain true to their values by turning products into an art piece. Commercial communication in the sixties also disseminated new artistic values which contributed to change society. Artists from the sixties appropriated the very rich Art Nouveau graphic environment as it had been designed for visually impactful communication they themselves needed to implement fast. The example below shows such recycling of visually appealing main image -



"The Yardbirds" concert poster, by B. MacLean 1967  
here peacock - in the sixties.



Peacock Edition Macmillan's illustrated standard novels Poster, by Albert A. Turbayne, 1903

Graphic frames and other elements of Art Nouveau style - so called noodle-shapes in the sixties - had also such a strong visual impact for posters and a large palette availability that they were promptly and widely revived as the examples below from 1967 and 1898 show.



Magazine "Mademoiselle Age Tendre" unknown, 1967



"Tropen" by Henry van de Velde, 1898

The sixties artists used Art Nouveau color palette updated from de-saturated to intense colors. Wes Wilson for Jefferson airplane concert poster in 1966 revived vividly the orange, green and light yellow. Mucha used for Moet & Chandon in 1899.

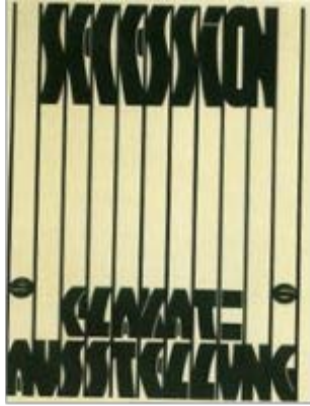


"Jefferson Airplane" concert poster, by Wes Wilson, 1966



"Moet & Chandon" by Mucha 1899

Art Nouveau artists were extremely modern and creative in generating fonts, blending typography with the visual and playing with distortion to generate visual impact as can be seen below.



"Seession" by Ernst Eck, 1912



"Cabaret" by Franz Karl Delavilla, 1907

Such visually disruptive approach was revived because it was also the sixties quest for visual impact. Wes Wilson's concert poster below from 1966 shows the psychedelic font he invented to make the letters look like they were moving or melting.



The style he created for Bill Graham of The Fillmore in San Francisco, became synonymous with the peace movement, psychedelic era and the sixties. Art Nouveau was revived by artists from the sixties because it was modern and fitted their purpose.

**Looking from a historical perspective, Art Nouveau and the sixties were rebellious youth challenging society which may explain why the style was revived**

Values of the fifties included rigid social hierarchy, subordination of women to men and children to

parents, repressed attitudes to sex, racism, unquestioning respect for authority in the family, education, government, the law, and religion, and for the nation-state, the national flag, the national anthem, Cold War hysteria, a strict formalism in language, etiquette, and dress codes. To the contrary, the sixties experienced an extraordinary social upheaval triggered by postwar prosperity and adolescent defiance. The end of WWII in 1945 generated an enormous spike in the birth rate, known as “the baby boom”.<sup>6</sup> Between 1945 and 1957 nearly 76 million babies were born in America most of whom were young adults in the sixties. Social class, money and power were challenged. Social and religious rules crumbled. In 1963 the Cold War protagonists sought a truce, the race into space accelerated, feminists and civil rights activists strived for higher political involvement. Governments were challenged in unexpected ways such as President John F. Kennedy’s assassination. The pop art paintings below illustrate the mindset of the time.



"American Interior No.1" by Erró, 1968



"Socialist Realism and Pop Art in the Battlefield" by Equipo Cronica, 1969

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<sup>6</sup> “This amorphous new aristocracy rose mainly from the working- and lower-middle classes to represent the baby boomers’ ideals and aspirations—and their heroes were duly anointed. Music, fashion, and the arts challenged, defied and even transcended class, politics, and religion, and in doing so began to redefine humanity. No longer were family, formal education, an old school tie, or the long climb up a career ladder the only routes to success. Horizons expanded as fast as vinyl could be pressed and airtime filled. Hot on the heels of music and fashion came film, books, and art. Young people shed convention to express themselves in a subversive riot; they stormed the barricades of a bemused, reactionary old order that thought laws, conventions, and cops could be deployed to corral the counterculture.”

To avoid the failings of the previous generation, young people agitated for a better world in the face of the rapid urbanization of the West. The sixties were years of black civil rights, youth culture and trend-setting by young people, idealism, protest, and rebellion. Popular music based on Afro-American models triumphed and emerged as a universal musical language.<sup>7</sup> Indeed the culture of the sixties was good at appropriating and reinterpreting black people music, especially blues, into white people pop-rock music. The youth movement went into collective social conscience and pursuit of sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll. Posters became the favorite communication protest media for the young generation. To quote Robin Morgan, "For the first time in history, youth mattered, youth had serious social, political and commercial power."<sup>8</sup> In France, social unrest started in May 1968 and reached a peak in Paris. "*Be young and shut up*" The policeman represents the shadow of the French President General de Gaulle, expressing the restriction of freedom and personal expression due to authoritarian figures<sup>9</sup>.



"Be young and Shut Up" poster, by unknown, 1968

Art Nouveau and the sixties were counter cultures hence the revival. The young generation in the sixties attempted to blur the distinctions between elitist culture and popular culture rejecting "good" taste and

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<sup>7</sup> Morgan, Robin, and Ariel Leve. 1963 *The Year of the Revolution How Youth Changed the World with Music, Art, and Fashion*. N.p.: n.p., n.d. Scribd. It Books, 19 Nov. 2013. Web. 15 Oct. 2015.

<sup>8</sup> "1963 The year of the revolution How youth Changed the World with Music, Art, and Fashion" Robin Morgan and Ariel Leve Dey Street Books, 2013

<sup>9</sup> image from © Archives Larbor. "Encyclopédie Larousse En Ligne - Affiche De Mai 1968." *Encyclopédie Larousse En Ligne - Affiche De Mai 1968*. Larousse.fr, n.d. Web. 09 Oct. 2015.

social norms prevalent in the fifties<sup>10</sup>. Artists attempted to break down the barriers between “high” (old-fashioned) art and “low” contemporary culture. “Pop art” movement in the United States emphasized the kitschy elements of popular culture as a protest against the elitist art culture and the seriousness that surrounded it. Marking a return to paintwork and representational art, it glorified unappreciated objects and ordinary business to make art more meaningful for everyday people and came to target a broad audience.

In a similar way, Art nouveau was an artistic and intellectual break with the art education academic system from the 19th century which believed that media such as painting and sculpture were superior to crafts. Art nouveau artists challenged that view. To be considered an artist, students would need to study textures, lines, forms and shapes to paint idealized figures and landscape. Some artists felt that art should not be studied like an academic subject, since doing such restricted arts only to the privileged and upper class. These “rebel” artists driven to shape their own style in the art world, were the innovators of Art Nouveau. To showcase their work, a group of one hundred young artists gathered into “Le Salon des



“Salon des Cent” by Andrew Kay Warrath, 1897

Cent” commercial art exhibition in Paris.

There was never a precise list, participation varied; the salon had no jury and no prizes. The artists could



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<sup>10</sup> *Pop culture - reflexions sur les industries du reve et l'invention des identites Richard Memeteau Editions La decouverte*

choose what they wanted to exhibit within the available space. The Salon<sup>11</sup> sold color posters, prints and reproductions of artwork to the general public at reasonable prices which contributed to make art nouveau an affordable art entering every aspects of daily life.<sup>12</sup> The Salon des Cent constantly changing exhibition of its members' works exerted considerable influence on development of the Art Nouveau poster.<sup>13</sup> Started as a counter art culture movement inspired by Japanese woodblock print art.<sup>14</sup> Art Nouveau modern approach to arts and society was cast in full light at the Exposition Universelle (*Universal Exhibition*) in Paris from 15 April to 12 November 1900 organized to celebrate the coming of the new century. From the exhibition buildings architecture, to arts and furniture, Art Nouveau received international media exposure and benefited from the 50 million visitors increasing its international influence.<sup>15</sup> Both Art Nouveau and the sixties artists were rebels aspiring to modernity which may explain why the Art Nouveau style was revived to challenge the values of society.

### **Breaking similar barriers to reach new heights may have revive Art Nouveau in the sixties.**

In the sixties many youth sought spiritual experiences through religions of the Orient and psychedelic drugs. Massive changes in personal relationships and sexual behavior, frankness in books and in the media, relaxation in censorship, the new feminism and gay liberation, the emergence of 'the underground' and 'the counterculture', optimism and genuine faith in the dawning of a better world were key values. In San Francisco LSD was widely used by artists and Haight-Ashbury became the acid rock culture capital until LSD was prohibited<sup>16</sup> in 1966.

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<sup>11</sup> The Salon des Cent (Salon of the hundred) - established in February 1894 by Léon Deschamps, founder of La Plume (The Pen) an avant-garde literary and artistic magazine – promoted Art Nouveau.

<sup>12</sup> according to Millman, Ian, and Georges De Feure. *1892-1894 La Première Période Symboliste. Georges De Feure: Maître Du Symbolisme Et De L'art Nouveau*. Courbevoie, Paris: ACR, 1992. 57-59. Print.

<sup>13</sup> according to Clausen, Meredith L. *Exposition 1889 and the Emergence of Art Nouveau. Décoration & Le Rationalisme Architecturaux a L'Exposition Universelle. Illustrated ed. N.p.: Brill Archive, 1987. 92-94.*

<sup>14</sup> Due to the opening of foreign relations with Japan, a German-French art dealer - Siegfried Bing (26 February 1838 – 6 September 1905) - living in Paris introduced Japanese art and artworks to the West. By 1888 Bing published in France "Le Japon Artistique" (*Japan Artistic*) monthly journal, which influenced art nouveau artists like Gustav Klimt.

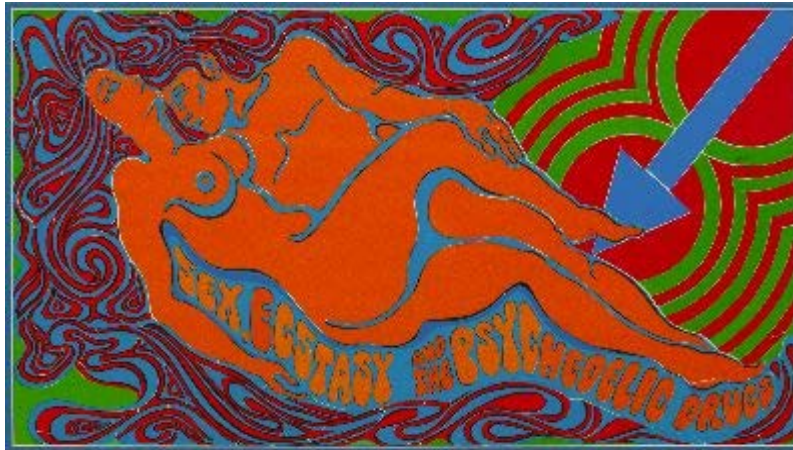
<sup>15</sup> according to Jullian, Philippe. *The Triumph of Art Nouveau: Paris Exhibition 1900*. London: Phaidon, 1974. Print.

<sup>16</sup> according to "Au temps de l'art nouveau" by Alain Weill, published by Editions Hazan

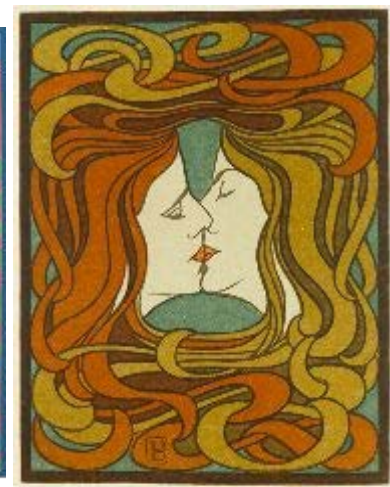


Victor Moscoso's posters from the sixties above highlight that psychedelic art image for concert posters started together with music and drugs. "Underground poster is not so much a way to communicate than a way to promote traveling to an artificial paradise ( ) it is evolving between life and art"<sup>17</sup>

The Art Nouveau influence in the graphic design of the poster from the sixties below is obvious - refer to the common theme "the kiss" and the curving lines - and the message is clearly on sex and drugs.



"Sex, Ecstasy and the Psychedelic Drugs" illustration for Playboy magazine, by Chet Susky, 1967



"Der Kuss" by Peter Behrens, 1898

"The creative works, whose aesthetic attributes were enhanced through LSD, appealed more to the senses than to reason. They were based on the interplay of curves and counter curves, wild and soft arabesques, and distending the line and liberating color. Lettering ceased to be independent, following the rhythm of the composition to become part of the fluidity of the image, suggesting the sound waves from rock and

<sup>17</sup> according to George Melly's "Poster power"

pop concerts.” added Philippe Thiébaud Curator of the Art nouveau Revival exhibition in Paris.

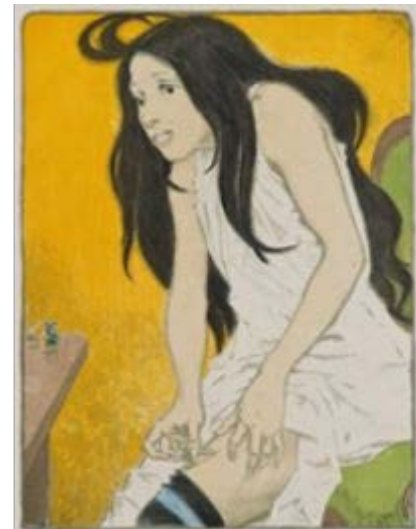
Drugs were available too at Art Nouveau time. In “Absinthe, morphine and the gates of hell”, Adrian Searle qualifies Art Nouveau as decadent; “Vitriol and morphine, absinthe and opium begat art nouveau's florid forms, as much as nature ever did. There's something morbid about so much here - Lalique's beetles and winged female figures, his dragonfly brooches which make you think of awful transmutations of the human and the insect worlds; Mucha's electroplated female heads”.<sup>18</sup> Victor Emile Prouvé's *L'Opium*<sup>19</sup> is a lithograph of a zoned-out woman entwined with a poppy plant. “The subject would have been so common that viewers had no doubt what an opium poppy looked like” co-curator Burlingham said. Absinthe, morphine and opium were used by some art nouveau artists to expand their perception.



“L'Opium” by Victor E. Prouvé, 1894



“Absinthe Robette” by Georges P. Livermont, 1896



“La Morphinomane ” by Eugène Grasset, 1897

Eugène Grasset’s shocking, lithograph of a woman<sup>20</sup>, shooting up in her leg was considered an emblem of the time. It is striking to realize that art pieces from both periods reflect similar sinuous lines, optical design, twisted shapes and contrasted colors. The fact that both artists from Art Nouveau and the sixties

<sup>18</sup> Searle, Adrian. "Absinthe, Morphine and the Gates of Hell." *The Guardian*. The Guardian, 11 Apr. 2000. Web. 9 Aug. 2015.

<sup>19</sup> Victor Emile Prouvé, *L'Opium*, 1894, color lithograph, COLLECTION UCLA GRUNWALD CENTER FOR THE GRAPHIC ARTS, HAMMER MUSEUM. PROMISED GIFT OF ELISABETH DEAN. PHOTO: BRIAN FORREST.

<sup>20</sup> Eugène Grasset, *La Morphinomane* [The Morphine Addict], 1897, color lithograph. COLLECTION UCLA GRUNWALD CENTER FOR THE GRAPHIC ARTS, HAMMER MUSEUM. PROMISED GIFT OF ELISABETH DEAN. PHOTO: BRIAN FORREST.

knew and used drugs substance to alter their perception of colors, shapes and textures may be another reason why Art Nouveau was considered appealing and revived by artists in the sixties.

### **Art Nouveau and the sixties were extensive experimentation years**

“Many pop artists, not just in the USA but all over the world, emerged from a design background, and the convergence in pop of graphics, design, architecture and art is a direct result of this crossover.”<sup>21</sup>

Art Nouveau artists liked to experiment all kinds of materials—stone, wood, ceramics, metal, and glass, exotic woods. In both Art Nouveau and the sixties periods, manufacturers of mass-produced furniture realized that the new generation was no longer interested in travesties of former style and wanted the best they can afford from the designers of their age. In the sixties, bold new concepts were explored in interior design, molded fiber glass chairs still copied today expressed the elegance and the original use of a new material.<sup>22</sup>



“Kunst im Handwerk Fauteuil” armchair by Bruno Paul & Vereinigte Werkstätten, 1901



“Panton Chair” chair by Herman Møller, 1967



“Blow” first inflatable chair by (J. De Pina, O. Urbini, P. Lomazzi, C. Scobari, 1967)

Design in the sixties continued to become more stylistically diverse allowing greater personal choice and freedom of expression: inflatables, malleable soft sculptures and brightly coloured plastics, which offered human associations tinged with the sinister threat of the unnatural, or even, in the omnipresent shadow of

<sup>21</sup> Jessica Morgan is Director of Dia Art Foundation and co-curator of The EY Exhibition: The World Goes Pop

<sup>22</sup>“The “Swinging sixties were years of unprecedented experimentation in architecture and design, during which new materials and increasingly casual ways of living helped fuel the evolution of extraordinary forms.” quoting from “The Decorative Arts” yearbook

war, dismemberment<sup>23</sup>. The youth movement experimentation of the sixties found a resonance with Art Nouveau rebels sharing a similar vision to the future. “Constantly breaching the codes he (Andy Warhol) was saddled with, he compelled recognition as a master of excess: in all the many forms he explored, his relationship to the artwork always tended towards the breaching of boundaries”<sup>24</sup> Artists from the sixties clearly revived the Art Nouveau style because it was in line with their values towards a different view of modern society.

### **Both Art Nouveau and the sixties were aspirational times**

Art Nouveau was the style of the new industrial era, of the young generation with new ideas, and of the new bourgeoisie, which wanted a style to distinguish itself from the old, wealthy nobility. Art Nouveau resonated with the new bourgeoisie—sometimes the pieces were even richer in their detail and choice of materials than the objects made for the noble class. Art nouveau was the aspirational style of the new generation. It was not the style of the nobility or conservative society. Art Nouveau artists, architects, designers challenged the existing and were looking at the future. Art Nouveau dreamy, aspirational and romantic values went out of fashion with the coming of World War I. Until after World War II, there was a lot of industrialization, the growth of urban centers, the gritty and awful realities of war, and the first stages of living in a post-nuclear world. Only in the sixties the mood became again optimistic with back to the earth hippie movements whose aesthetic and attitudes towards beauty for the sake of beauty fit much more closely with Art Nouveau. And as their aesthetic and attitude became more popular, so did Art Nouveau.

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<sup>23</sup> “Like during Art Nouveau, the divisions between art and design became increasingly blurred, with established artists such as Victor Pasmore and Eduardo Paolozzi dabbling in design, and designers such as Ettore Sottsass executing symbolic “art-like” furniture. In the sixties, color and form changed rapidly and interacted unexpectedly to produce sensory stimulation. For better or worse, momentous and irreversible cultural change had taken place in the sixties like art nouveau looking at the future.” according to 60s decorative arts: A source book by Charlotte Fiell

<sup>24</sup> quoting from Sébastien Gokalp & Hervé Vanel - Exhibition curators WARHOL Unlimited

## Conclusion

In the course of this essay, we saw that Art Nouveau artists tried to blur the distinction between fine and applied arts to make art present in harmonious lifestyle yet aspire for modernity. The analysis of several Art Nouveau pieces identified that the main visual characteristics related to patterns, composition, color palette, iconography, fonts and themes. Indeed the art style in the sixties borrowed heavily from Art Nouveau imagery, reinterpreting and bringing that style to the next level with a psychedelic twist. To me the aspirations of the youth generation who accessed power and envision a new society represent one of the main reasons why Art Nouveau style was revived in the sixties. Both Art Nouveau and artists from the sixties were rebels aspiring to modernity. They valued freedom of expression and shared a common approach to extensive experimentation - new materials, designs and artistic experience. They both moved away from a traditional era to shape their own time of freedom. They shared art form as a way to communicate and poster as a dynamic independent media. They benefited from economic growth and the subsequent emergence of the Middle-Class. They both subversively - sometimes in a decadent way using drugs - contributed to shape a different vision of society. To me, Art Nouveau appears to have pioneered commercial communication and expanded to a wider scale with the rise of consumerism in the sixties. Yet what struck me was that Art Nouveau fine craftsmanship resulted in long standing inspirational quality pieces whereas the sixties rarely generated such long standing quality production. It is true that the values of the sixties period focused on the instant. The experimentation of new materials available - unfortunately low quality plastics in the sixties - did not contribute to quality products evolving as well over time. Art Nouveau used art to express individuality which the sixties amplified and one may wonder how to express individuality when the same products are sold to everybody. To conclude, artists from Art Nouveau and the USA in the sixties were creative souls yet subversive rebels with aspirations to modernity and freedom of expression using art posters to communicate like a loud minority their values to change society.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Booming economies

The table below shows also that over 1950-1973, France's economy boomed. There this period is referred to as "les trente glorieuses" (the thirty glory years).

#### Gross Domestic Product per capita in selected European countries 1870-1913 - pre-1913 boundaries

- and 1950-1973 - post war boundaries\* - (\$ in 1990 international prices)

	1870	1890	1913		1950	1973
Belgium	2,722	3,443	4,263		5,472	12,398
France	1,746	2,212	3,245		4,943	13,035
Spain	1,189	1,634	2,057		2,200	7,653
United Kingdom	3,328	4,055	5,030	6,879	12,222	
USA	2,454	3,392	5,301		9,561	16,689

**Source:** AGGREGATE AND PER CAPITA GDP IN EUROPE, 1870-2000: CONTINENTAL, REGIONAL AND NATIONAL DATA WITH CHANGING BOUNDARIES by Stephen Broadberry - Department of Economics, University of Warwick, Coventry CV4 7AL, United Kingdom  
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## Appendix B: Rising consumerism

The table below illustrates the fast rising consumerism in the sixties and seventies. Car ownership in France increased eight times in 15 years from 37 cars in the fifties to 290 cars per thousand inhabitants in 1975.

### The spread of the car and the TV in postwar Western Europe and the USA (units per thousand population)

	1950		1960		1965		1970		1975		
	Car	TV	Car	TV	Car	TV	Car	TV	Car	TV	
Belgium	32	-	82	68	142	163	213	216	267	252	
France	37	-	121	41	196	131	252	201	290	235	
Spain	3	-	9	8	26	55	70	174	119	174	
United Kingdom	46	11	105	211	165	248	209	293	249	315	
USA		266	-	347	-	387	289	436	321	495	571

**Source:** Therborn, Göran. "European Modernity and Beyond." *European Modernity and Beyond: The Trajectory of European Societies, 1945-2000*. London: Sage Publications, 1995. 135-37. Print.