ART NOUVEAU

Art Nouveau is an international philosophy and style of art, architecture and applied art—especially the decorative arts—that was most popular between the last decade of 19th century and the first decade of the 20th century. English uses the French name Art nouveau (new art), but the style has many different names in other countries. A reaction to academic art of the 19th century, it was inspired by natural forms and structures, not only in flowers and plants, but also in curved lines. Architects tried to harmonize with the natural environment.

Art Nouveau is considered a “total” art style, embracing architecture, graphic art, interior design, and most of the decorative arts including jewellery, furniture, textiles, household silver and other utensils and lighting, as well as the fine arts. According to the philosophy of the style, art should be a way of life. Artists desired to combine the fine arts and applied arts, even for utilitarian objects.

At the end of the 19th century an american fleet sailed into the harbour of Nagasaki. After centuries of isolation Japan was forced to open her borders to trade, and Japanese goods start to flood into Britain. Collected avidly by artists, these goods inspired a new approach in British design, where a new form of sensuality began to emerge from its shapes and curves.

London didn’t embrace the erotic curves of Art Nouveau quite as rapturously as Paris. But Oscar Wilde did, especially the drawings of daring young Aubrey Beardsley. Then Wilde was carted off to jail for “gross indecency”, leaving both their reputations in tatters and straitlaced Victorians with a deep mistrust for this continental smut masquerading as art.

F. Goldscheider, Salome.
Aestheticism (also the Aesthetic Movement) is an art movement supporting the emphasis of aesthetic values more than social–political themes for literature, fine art, music and other arts (Art for Art’s sake). It was particularly prominent in Europe during the 19th century.

Aestheticism was related to other movements such as symbolism or decadence represented in France, or decadentismo represented in Italy, and may be considered the British version of the same style.

In Britain the best representatives were Oscar Wilde and Algernon Charles Swinburne, both influenced by the French Symbolists. Visual artists associated with the Aesthetic style include James McNeill Whistler, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and Aubrey Beardsley.

James Abbott McNeill Whistler (July 11, 1834 – July 17, 1903) was an American-born, British-based artist active during the American Gilded Age. Averse to sentimentality and moral allusion in painting, he was a leading proponent of the credo “art for art’s sake”. His famous signature for his paintings was in the shape of a stylized butterfly possessing a long stinger for a tail. The symbol was apt, for it combined both aspects of his personality—his art was characterized by a subtle delicacy, while his public persona was combative. Finding a parallel between painting and music, Whistler entitled many of his paintings “arrangements”, “harmonies”, and “nocturnes”, emphasizing the primacy of tonal harmony. His most famous painting is “Arrangement in Grey and Black No. 1” (1871), commonly known as Whistler’s Mother, the revered and oft-parodied portrait of motherhood. Whistler influenced the art world and the broader culture of his time with his artistic theories and his friendships with leading artists and writers.
Aubrey Vincent Beardsley (21 August 1872 – 16 March 1898) was an English illustrator and author. His drawings in black ink, influenced by the style of Japanese woodcuts, emphasized the grotesque, the decadent, and the erotic. He was a leading figure in the Aesthetic movement which also included Oscar Wilde and James A. McNeill Whistler. Beardsley’s contribution to the development of the Art Nouveau and poster styles was significant, despite the brevity of his career before his early death from tuberculosis, at the young age of 25.

The quality of his drawings is exquisitely calligraphic, as they are realised simply with a pen splashed in ink. The precise and confident gesture of his hand was impossible to be replicated by other artists, but the technique of photogravure, invented by Fox Talbot in 1852, did the trick.

In 1893, the teenager Beardsley heard that Wilde was writing a play about the biblical temptress Salome. He produced an illustration on spec and hoped that it might impress Oscar and his publisher. In this illustration Aubrey transforms with whiplash curves the character of Salome into a femme fatale. Wilde was impressed not just by the visual style, but also for the sensuality and amorality of the illustration, and therefore decided to commission Beardsley to illustrate the first Salome edition in English.

For Aubrey: for the only artist who, besides myself, knows what the dance of the seven veils is, and can see that invisible dance.

– Oscar Wilde, in an inscribed copy of the original Salome, 1893.*

The Gentle Art Of Making Enemies is a book by the painter James McNeill Whistler, published in 1890. The book was in part a response to, in part a transcript of, Whistler’s famous libel suit against critic John Ruskin. Ruskin, in a review of the inaugural showing at the Grosvenor Gallery, had referred to Whistler’s painting Nocturne in Black and Gold – The Falling Rocket as “flinging a pot of paint in the public’s face.” The book contains Whistler’s letters to newspapers chronicling his many petty grievances against various acquaintances and friends.

Whistler’s ideas on books were as original as his paintings. The “butterfly” pictogram is used like a signature throughout the book to distinguish Whistler’s quotations and comments from the other annotations featured in the marginalia of the book.

Whistler’s butterfly signature.
The 1894 English translation of Oscar Wilde’s *Salomé*, illustrated by Aubrey Beardsley, is surely the most controversial book of its time. This collaborative work of art has most frequently been scrutinized in terms of Freudian castration theory and the sexual fetish. Moreover, it has been widely assumed that Beardsley’s drawings are incongruous with Wilde’s text. More probably, instead, these artists meshed their respective mediums to create a parody of nineteenth-century aestheticism, and of the gender politics of fin-de-siècle England; in *Salomé*, components of aestheticism are exaggerated and parodied, as are the era’s stereotypes of women and homosexuals.

The influence of Whistler, both as an aesthetic icon and as an interpreter of Japanese prints, can be found throughout Beardsley’s drawings for *Salomé*. In 1893, around the time Beardsley was working on *Salomé*, he produced a caricature of Whistler. He sits on a Japanese-style bench and appears to be talking enthusiastically to a butterfly. The butterfly evokes Whistler’s stamp, which was derived from signatures on Japanese woodblock prints. By representing Whistler in this manner, Beardsley seems to be commenting not only on Whistler’s legendary ego, but on the aesthetic movement and its appropriating of Japanese imagery. Whistler is lecturing to his favorite and most devoted audience: himself.

Beardsley further parodies Whistler’s butterfly signature by placing butterflies in five of the drawings: the title page, the list of pictures, The Black Cape, John and Salomé, and The Eyes of Herod. Not surprisingly, the drawings that contain butterflies also contain roses, equating Whistler with femininity.

Beardsley was for sure the *enfant terrible* of his time and nobody around him could be considered safe from his witty caricatures. In *Salomé* Wilde had compared the moon to an fat pleasure-seeking old woman, and Beardsley, in his illustration the Woman in the Moon, gave to the moon Wilde’s features; having been in the same cultural circle, surely Beardsley knew the rumors circulating about Wilde’s sexual preferences.
1894  LUCIAN’S TRUE HISTORY

Illustrated by William Strang, J. B. Clark, and Aubrey Beardsley. It was originally published in 1894 with parallel Greek text and privately printed. The booksize is a quarto and it is printed in 54 copies on Japanese vellum.

List of Illustrations

AFTER THE TEMPEST (Strang)
ADORATION (Clark)
A SNAKE OF VINTAGE (Beardsley)
SPIDERS OF MIGHTY BIGNESS (Strang)
THE BATTLE OF THE TURNIPS (Clark)
THE SUPPER OF FISH (Strang)
UNDERPROPPING THE WHALE’S CHOPS (Clark)
SOCRATES’ GARDEN (Clark)
THE BANQUET OF BEANS (Strang)
THE PILLAR OF BERYLSTONE (Clark)
OWLS AND POPPIES (Strang)
DREAMS (Beardsley)
THE HALCYON’S NEST (Strang)
THE FLOATING FOREST (Clark)
THE ISLAND WOMEN (Strang)
WATER INCARNADINE (Clark)

1896  THE SAVOY

*The Savoy* was a magazine of literature, art, and criticism published in 1896 in London. It featured work by authors such as W. B. Yeats, Max Beerbohm, Joseph Conrad, and Aubrey Beardsley. Only eight issues of the magazine were published. The publisher was Leonard Smithers, a controversial friend of Oscar Wilde who was also known as a pornographer.

*The Savoy* was originally founded as a competitor to *The Yellow Book* and to provide work for members of the the Decadent movement as it began to decline with the imprisonment of Oscar Wilde. The magazine was started by the publisher Leonard Smithers, the writer Arthur Symons, and
the artist Aubrey Beardsley. It is considered a little magazine, and was described as “a manifesto in revolt against Victorian materialism”. The name was inspired by the Savoy Hotel, a glamorous hotel in London which opened in 1899 and became infamous for being the location for Oscar Wilde’s trysts.

1897 THE HOUSES OF SIN

Beardsley’s contribution for O’Sullivan’s book of poems, *The Houses of Sin*, is limited to the stunning cover design. Describing his drawings to Smithers as “very pretty! I think you will like it”, Beardsley dispatched the finished cover urging to print it “in gold upon black smooth cloth. No other way. Purple however might be an alternative to print upon”.

Depicting a column bearing the book’s title and a winged, cherublike pig’s head (clearly female), the decentred design has been termed “one of Beardsley’s most daring and most successful covers”.

1897 THE RAPE OF THE LOCK

*The Rape of the Lock* is a mock-heroic narrative poem written by Alexander Pope, first published anonymously in Lintot’s Miscellany in May 1712 in two cantos (334 lines), but then revised, expanded and reissued under Pope’s name on 2 March 1714, in a much-expanded 5-canto version (794 lines). The final form was available in 1717 with the addition of Clarissa’s speech on good humour.
1899  A SECOND BOOK OF FIFTY DRAWINGS

A Second book of Fifty Drawings by Aubrey Beardsley appeared in February 1899, almost one year after his death. According to the printed statement of limitation, the edition consisted of 100 copies printed on art paper, and 50 copies on Japanese vellum. In addition to the half-tone frontispiece of Beardsley, A Second Book of Fifty Drawings contained 49 full-page plates and a tailpiece printed in line block, halftone, and photogravure. The ordinary issue was bound in scarlet cloth with the design - a slightly modified version of Beardsley’s self-portrait - stamped in gold.

The vast majority of these books have been printed by the Chiswick Press.

The Chiswick Press was founded by Charles Whittingham I (1767-1840) in 1811. The management of the Press was taken over in 1840 by the founder’s nephew Charles Whittingham II (1795-1876). The name was first used in 1811, and the Press continued to operate until 1962. C. Whittingham I gained notoriety for his popularly priced classics, but the Chiswick Press became very influential in English printing and typography under C. Whittingham II who, most notably, published some of the early designs of William Morris. The Chiswick Press deserves conspicuous credit for the reintroduction of quality printing into the trade in England when in 1844 it produced “The Diary of Lady Willoughby”.

The typeface Basle Roman was cut for the Chiswick Press in 1854 by William Howard and cast at his foundry in Great Queen Street.