



L'AFFICHOMANIA
THE PASSION FOR
FRENCH POSTERS

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ARTS AND ARTISTS

L'AFFICHOMANIA

THE PASSION FOR FRENCH POSTERS

These pioneering artists defined a never-before-seen and never forgotten art form: the color poster.



Celebrating the inexhaustible spirit of fin-de-siècle Paris, *L'Affichomania: The Passion for French Posters* features approximately 62 lithographic posters, ephemera, and videos by the five grand masters of the medium: Jules Chéret, the father of the modern poster; Eugène Grasset, who explored feminine beauty in rich, medieval settings; Alphonse Mucha, known for depicting sensuous women and the whiplash curves of their tresses; Théophile-Alexandre Steinlen, creator of some of the best-loved images of the era; and finally Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, who pointed the way to modernism. These pioneering artists defined a never-before-seen and never forgotten art form: the color poster. *L'Affichomania* explores the achievements of these artists in concert with the poster's role in French society, which includes its effect on the life of the Parisian street, the rise of advertising, the entertainment district of Montmartre, and the changing representations of women.

Showcasing some of the most iconic images of the time, the exhibition is composed of six groupings, five of which are devoted to the artistic contributions of each artist. A sixth section recreates the era of public performances in Paris, with posters featuring the celebrated singers and dancers that appeared at such venues as the Folies Bergère, Les Ambassadeurs, and Le Chat Noir. The posters date from 1875 to 1910, an exuberant

era known as the Belle Époque. Drawn from the Driehaus Collection of Fine and Decorative Arts, and organized by the Richard H. Driehaus Museum, Chicago, *L'Affichomania: The Passion for French Posters* presents an exceptional selection of works that conveys the visual power and scale of posters, and the range of expression by the medium's best-known artists working in turn-of-the-century Paris.

Cover Alphonse Mucha, *Princess Hyacinth*, 1911 color lithograph, photograph by John Faier, © The Richard H. Driehaus Museum, 2015 1 Jules Chéret, *Folies-Bergère/La Loïe Fuller*, 1893, color lithograph, photograph by John Faier, © The Richard H. Driehaus Museum, 2015 2 Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, *Jane Avril*, 1893, color lithograph, photograph by John Faier, © The Richard H. Driehaus Museum, 2015 3 Eugène Grasset, *Cycles & Automobiles*, 1899, color lithograph, photograph by John Faier, © The Richard H. Driehaus Museum, 2015



POSTERS AS ART

From the early 1880s to the late 1890s, Paris witnessed the first great era of poster art, sometimes called its Golden Age. Although founded and led by Jules Chéret (who is often acknowledged as the movement's artistic leader), the medium's immense success was due to a convergence of technological, economic, and legal developments, all of which helped make the poster an inescapable presence on the streets of Paris. Perhaps the most important factor in the poster's rise was the passage of the Law on the Freedom of the Press of 29 July 1881, which greatly relaxed the strictures on printing and publishing. The timing coincided with Chéret's advances in color lithography. As a result, color-printed posters were exhibited in the most public of galleries—the street—where they began to blur the boundaries between fine and popular art. Parisians strolling the city soon found themselves on an urban stage with posters as the backdrop to their daily lives.

The color poster was heralded as a new art form as artists took hold of the commercial printing process known as chromolithography and adapted it to their creative needs. In their hands, the color lithograph became a thrilling new means of creating visual excitement in the form of posters as well as the domestically-scaled colored print. Some called it a "color revolution." As pedestrians encountered this lively new medium posted on the walls and kiosks of Parisian boulevards, the tempo of modern life seemed to beat faster.

By the mid-1880s, a thriving business was firmly in place for advertising all manner of goods and for vividly evoking the sensory experience of a live show or other event using the color poster. With the advent of devoted collectors, public exhibitions soon followed, securing the medium's place as a newly respected and enthusiastically received art form.



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4 Eugène Grasset, *Salon des Cent: Exposition Grasset, 1894*, color lithograph, photograph by John Faier, © The Richard H. Driehaus Museum, 2015 5 Théophile-Alexandre Steinlen, *Lait Pur Stérilisé*, photograph by John Faier, © The Richard H. Driehaus Museum, 2015 6 Alphonse Mucha, *Zodiac, 1896*, color lithograph on silk, photograph by John Faier, © The Richard H. Driehaus Museum, 2015



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AFFICHOMANIA

The sudden popularity of posters fueled a passion for collecting them, called *affichomania*. Some collectors surreptitiously removed them from walls or illegally purchased them from billposters, but most sought out dealers who had begun to specialize in them. Starting in 1886, Edmond Sagot had the foresight to become the first and best-known poster dealer of the age when he began selling them in his gallery. Sagot acquired them in various ways, whether through his connections to the venues where the posters were hung, from the distributing agencies, or occasionally from the billposters themselves.

By 1890, acknowledging the emergence of *affichomaniacs*—a new breed of poster collectors with an interest in the artistic value of the works,

and thus in their preservation—Sagot introduced a series of twelve color lithographic posters by Jules Chéret that were printed on high-quality paper in a limited edition of fifty: a practice increasingly common for art prints but a radical one for posters, which typically were mass-produced and printed on cheap paper.¹ Shrewdly prescient of their appreciating value, Sagot arranged for Chéret to sign each print, which helped advance the poster as an art form.

Bright and bold and found everywhere along the boulevards of fin-de-siècle Paris, the color poster was a brilliant fusion of art and commerce. It advertised cigarette papers and milk, immortalized stage stars and bohemian cabarets, and won the adoration of passersby and art collectors alike. Subject as it was to wind, rain, and

obstruction by posters from rival firms, the ephemeral poster nevertheless became the subject of passionate collecting in its own time.



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⁷ Théophile-Alexandre Steinlen, *Le Journal/La Traite des Blanches (The White Slave Trade)*, 1899, color lithograph, photograph by John Faier, © The Richard H. Driehaus Museum, 2015 ⁸ Jules Chéret, *Yvette Guilbert, Au Concert Parisien*, 1891, color lithograph, photograph by John Faier, © The Richard H. Driehaus Museum, 2015

¹Catalogue d'affiches illustrées anciennes et modernes, No 30: Paris, Librairie Ed. Sagot, 1891.

FIVE GRAND MASTERS

Jules Chéret (French, 1836–1932)

Widely viewed as the father of the poster craze, Jules Chéret harnessed the techniques of chromolithography—formerly a commercial medium used for reproductions—and brought them into the realm of fine art. Chéret was born to a working-class family, the son of a typographer. Though he received no formal art education, he showed some artistic talent as a youth and began apprenticing for a lithographer at the age of thirteen. For the next seventeen years he studied the exacting craft of lithography, gaining nuanced skill with color and form.

After designing some posters in the prevailing commercial model that

employed densely clustered figures and ornate text, Chéret began to develop his own style. He imposed a bolder, simplified graphic approach, and strove to integrate subject and text.

In time, Chéret had revolutionized the use of color in lithographic posters, departing radically from the dour black-and-white prints that had long been *de rigueur* in France. He used three lithographic stones to print in blue, red, and yellow, applying various techniques to add texture or surface interest. Taken as a whole, his methods culminated in dynamic compositions that prioritized the image while balancing its text.

In 1890, Chéret reached the apex of his profession when he received the prestigious Legion of Honor, one of the highest distinctions in French society. It was a great triumph to be heralded in his own time as a “creator of an art industry,” and to be crowned in the popular imagination as the “roi de l’affiche” or “king of the poster.” Chiefly credited with elevating posters to an art form, Chéret remains the first master of the medium and a presiding figure in the field. His bold imagery and colorful style inspired a new generation of artists—one in which the other four masters featured in this exhibition played a crucial role.

Chéret remains the first master of the medium and a presiding figure in the field.



9 Jules Chéret, *Folies-Bergère/Lo Loie Fuller Émilienne d'Alençon*, 1893, color lithograph, photograph by John Faier, © The Richard H. Driehaus Museum, 2015 10 Jules Chéret, *Théâtrophone*, 1890, color lithograph, photograph by John Faier, © The Richard H. Driehaus Museum, 2015





Eugène Grasset (Swiss, 1841–1917)

Eugène Grasset designed posters in a medieval style popularized by the Arts and Crafts movement in Britain. He favored jewel-toned colors, intense patterns, and black outlines that emulated stained glass. His imaginative compositions sometimes included tilted planes and oversized flowers in an Art Nouveau style.

Grasset's talents extended beyond posters to encompass all of the decorative arts. He worked in a range

of media, designing medieval-style furniture for Le Chat Noir (the famed Montmartre cabaret frequented by Grasset, Steinlen, Toulouse-Lautrec, and other members of the Parisian avant-garde) and imaginative compositions for wallpaper, tapestries, stained glass, ceramics, and even postage stamps. He also designed spectacular jeweled ornaments that were fabricated by Maison Vever for the Exposition Universelle of 1900.



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Alphonse Mucha (Czech, 1860–1939)

Born in Moravia (now the Czech Republic), Alphonse Mucha burst upon the poster scene in the late 1800s when he became the favored designer for the actress Sarah Bernhardt, then the reigning queen of the stage.

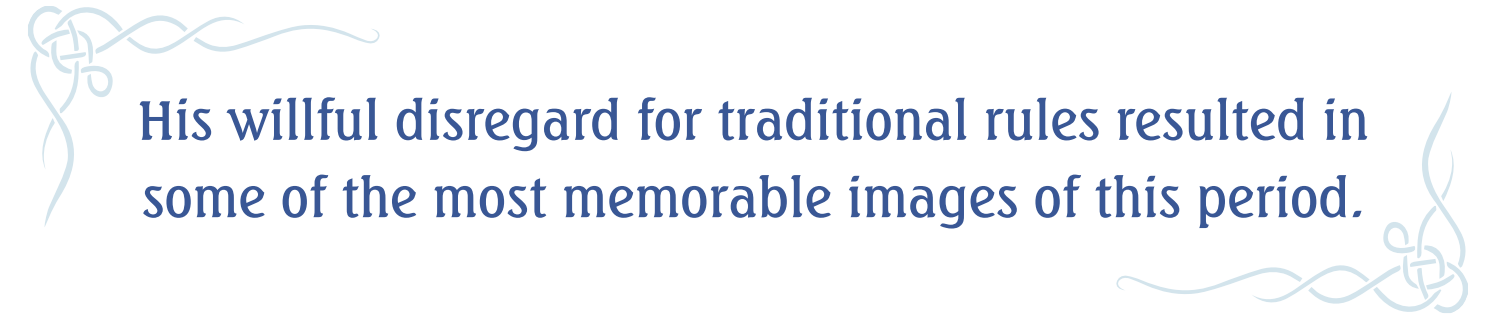
Mucha worked in an immediately recognizable style of entwined, coiling lines and subtle colors, using flowing hair instead of vines in an Art Nouveau style, with gold accents for his haloed figures, and Byzantine mosaic designs adding an exotic touch. Mucha preferred to work on an imposingly tall and narrow format to heighten the drama of his posters, often printing with two lithographic stones placed end-to-end to create his unique effects.

More than any other poster designer of the period, Mucha's work was iconic of the Art Nouveau style, with characteristic sinuous lines and subtle colors.

11 Eugène Grasset, *Coquette*, 1897, photograph by John Faier, © The Richard H. Driehaus Museum, 2015 12 Alphonse Mucha, *Princess Hyacinth*, 1911, color lithograph, photograph by John Faier, © The Richard H. Driehaus Museum, 2015



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Théophile-Alexandre Steinlen

(French, born Switzerland, 1859–1923)

Théophile-Alexandre Steinlen was among the most prolific printmakers of the Belle Époque, reaching a wide cross-section of Parisian society through his work in posters, journals, and a host of other printed formats. In his 40-year career, Steinlen produced an astounding 4,300 images, of which only 37 were posters.

Steinlen depicted Parisians from all walks of life going about their daily business, though some of his most popular works featured his red-haired daughter Colette with the family's housecats in advertisements for sterilized milk. Steinlen based himself in the bohemian environs of Montmartre, working constantly. By virtue of his long and active career—which also included music sheets, book covers, and innumerable journal illustrations—Steinlen's images may have reached more levels of Parisian society than those of any other artist of his generation. His memorable design for Le Chat Noir cabaret club is among the most iconic of the era.



Théophile-Alexandre Steinlen, *Le Chat Noir*, photograph by John Faier, © The Richard H. Driehaus Museum, 2016

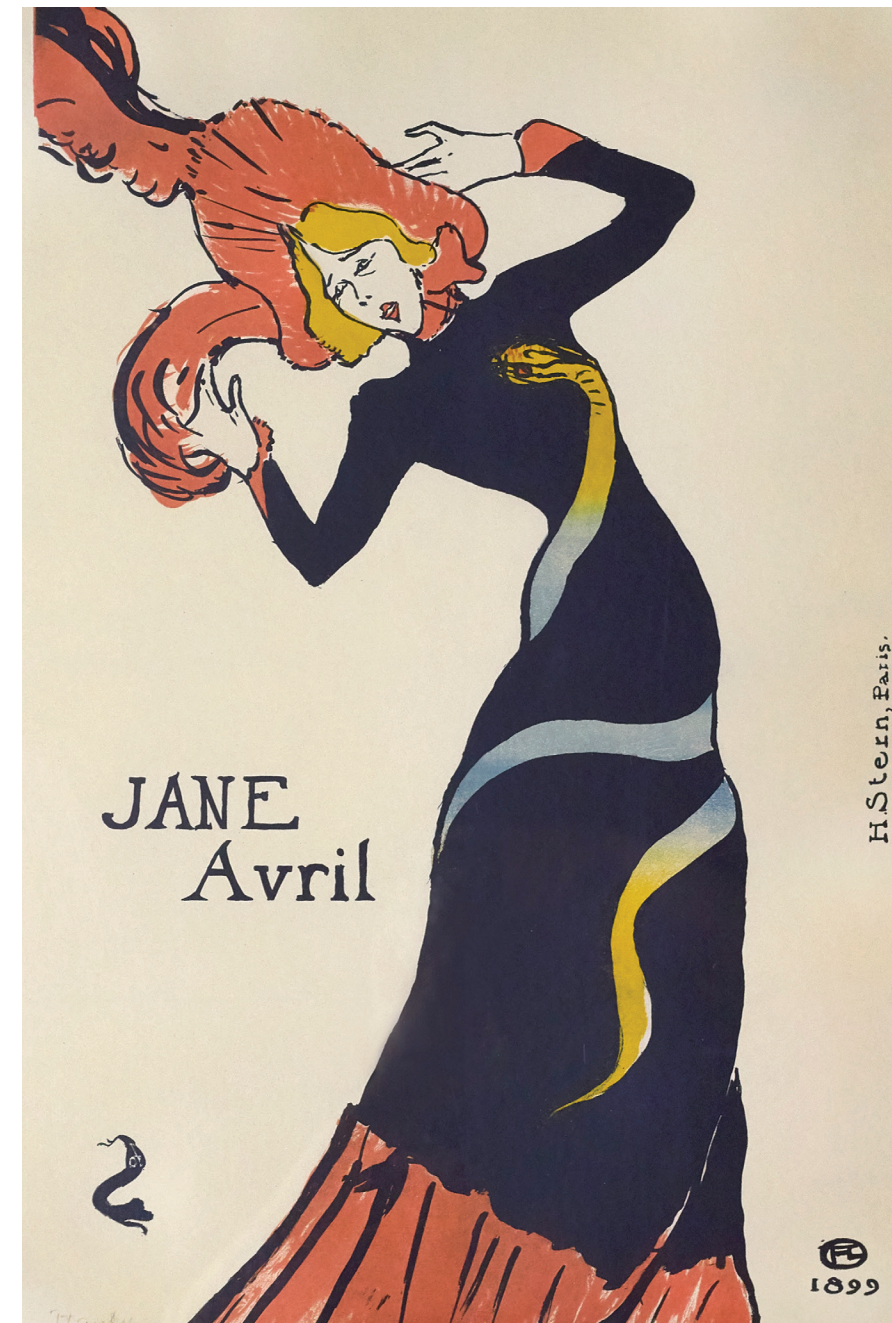
His willful disregard for traditional rules resulted in some of the most memorable images of this period.

Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec

(French, 1864–1901)

Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec was a central figure in Montmartre's bohemian nightlife scene. Born to an aristocratic family, Toulouse-Lautrec struggled with physical deformities from his youth, and found solace in artistic pursuits. He studied with Léon Bonnat (1833–1922) and Fernand Cormon (1845–1924), and in the process also became friendly with Vincent van Gogh (1853–1890).

Toulouse-Lautrec settled in Montmartre, painting his friends and a wide variety of female models, many of them drawn from the ranks of performers and prostitutes in the Parisian demimonde of music halls and cabarets. His genius for capturing a vivid likeness, often in the form of caricature, made him an ideal visual publicist for stage performers, who were dependent upon public recognition for box-office success. His sympathetic, even tender, depictions of marginalized performers and prostitutes, and his willful disregard for traditional rules of representation, resulted in some of the most memorable images of this brilliant period of French poster art.



Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, *Jane Avril*, 1899, color lithograph, photograph by John Faier, © The Richard H. Driehaus Museum, 2015

THE RICHARD H. DRIEHAUS COLLECTION

In 2003, the Richard H. Driehaus Museum was founded in Chicago to preserve and publicly exhibit American and European fine and decorative arts of the Gilded Age (1870–1900). Today the Museum is a stunning showcase for late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century art and design, displayed against the magnificent backdrop of the historic Samuel M. Nickerson Mansion (1879–83), which opened to the public in 2008 after an extensive five-year restoration. The Museum is a premier example of historic preservation, offering visitors an opportunity to experience through its architecture, interiors, collection, and exhibitions how the prevailing design philosophies of the period were interpreted by artists, architects, and designers at the waning of the nineteenth century and dawn of the twentieth century.



Installation of *L’Affichomania: The Passion for French Posters* at the Richard H. Driehaus Museum, © 2017, courtesy of the Richard H. Driehaus Museum

ABOUT THE CURATOR

Jeannine Falino is an independent curator and museum consultant.

Formerly Curator of American Decorative Arts and Sculpture at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, she has created exhibitions and produced catalogues for many institutions. Recent exhibitions include *Crafting Modernism: Midcentury American Art and Design* (Museum of Arts and Design, 2011–12), *Gilded New York: Design, Fashion & Society* (Museum of the City of New York, 2013–17), *New York Silver, Then & Now* (Museum of the City of New York, 2017–18), and *L’Affichomania: The Passion for French Posters* (The Richard H. Driehaus Museum, Chicago, 2017–18).



Eugène Grasset, *Anxiété*, 1897, watercolor, photograph by John Faier, © 2015, courtesy of the Richard H. Driehaus Museum



Installation of *L’Affichomania: The Passion for French Posters* at the Richard H. Driehaus Museum, © 2017, courtesy of the Richard H. Driehaus Museum

EXHIBITION SPECIFICATIONS

Number of Works

Approximately 62 objects, including posters, ephemera, videos, and one kiosk

Organized by

The Richard H. Driehaus Museum

Curator

Jeannine Falino, independent curator and museum consultant

Requirements

High security; 3,500–4,000 square feet or 300–500 linear feet

Participation Fee

Please Inquire

Shipping

International Arts & Artists makes all arrangements; exhibitors pay courier and outgoing shipping costs within the contiguous U.S.

Booking Period

12 weeks

Tour

2019–2021

Publication

L’Affichomania: The Passion for French Posters by Jeannine Falino, preface by Richard H. Driehaus, photographs by John A. Faier, published by The Monacelli Press, January 2017

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