

The Juxtaposition of a Woman's Role in Art Nouveau and Pop Art

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The Art Nouveau movement was a reaction to the academic art of the 19th century and was part of the decorative arts. The style spanned from the 1890s to 1910s. At this point in time, designers did not want to look to the past. Instead, they are inspired by characteristics such as natural forms and structures, the femme fatale, as well as dreams, fantasy, and the subconscious.<sup>1</sup> During the Pop Age movement, designers presented a challenge to traditions of fine art. The style was prominent in the 1960s. They included imagery from popular and mass culture, such as advertising, comic books and mundane cultural objects.<sup>2</sup>

My design is a pair of women's lingerie with a silhouette from the 1890s. These silhouettes included a corset with a flowy a-line skirt. Some elements from this time period were lace, silk, and ruffles — a traditionally feminine design. However, this concept was an oxymoron as a woman was considered to be a femme fatale at the same time. While they were sexualized, they were also not given the same freedom as women in the pop age, for example. The “cultural shift that [was present] refuted the traditional representation of femininity as domestic and compliant. [...] the modern woman's progression [moved] into the public realm and an adoption of more liberated sexual expression.”<sup>3</sup> The lingerie from the Pop Age were tighter and smaller, showing more skin.<sup>4</sup> I updated the older lingerie with characteristics from the 1960s. The textile is different because by using prints or logos from brands that were bold and colorful from a prominent woman designer, it adds another layer of feminist activism. This juxtaposition would

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<sup>1</sup> Raizman, David. “Design Reform in France: L’Nouveau.” *History of Modern Design* (Pearson Prentice Hall, 2010), 120-128.

<sup>2</sup> Charlotte and Tim Benton, “The Style and the Age,” in *Art Deco, 1910-1930*, edited by Charlotte Benton, Tim Benton, and Ghislaine Wood (London: V&A, 2003), 12-27.

<sup>3</sup> Blattner, Sarah (2015) "Alphonse Mucha and the Emergence of the “New Woman” during the Belle Époque (1871–1914)," *Ursidae: The Undergraduate Research Journal at the University of Northern Colorado: Vol. 4 : No. 3*, Article 1. Available at: <http://digscholarship.unco.edu/urj/vol4/iss3/1>

<sup>4</sup> “100 Years of Lingerie,” YouTube video, 4:20, posted by “Glamour Magazine,” October 27, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UKW5E2Gut7c>.

show the feminine side to a woman. However, unlike being feared in the Art Nouveau period, the lingerie embraces the woman's confidence by using the bold color and pattern to attract attention. In the 1890s, men were threatened by the woman's ability to enter the workforce and have voting rights. Therefore, by using a prominent woman designer, it asserts her power. By applying some of the fundamental characteristics of Art Nouveau with those of Pop Art, we can fulfill today's desires and needs such as the goal of making strides in the feminist movement in regards to equality in the workplace.

We are able to see how artwork from the Art Nouveau era and from the Pop era embody the characteristics described and the way relate to my new design. One example from 1896, designed by Alfred Mucha, is his color lithograph *Job Cigarette Papers*.<sup>5</sup> It shows bold imagery that hadn't been seen previously. In addition, women are the subject or object and by advertising cigarettes, the poster equates them to being mysterious and dangerous. Another example from 1897, designed by René Lalique, is his *Dragonfly Woman Corsage Ornament*.<sup>6</sup> It shows a woman portrayed as a dragonfly with claws. She is beautiful, but in a more obvious way, she is fatal. An example from 1959, designed by Althea McNish, is her screen-printed cotton satin *Golden Harvest*. By "bringing tropical colour to Britain, she became the country's first black textile designer of international repute. [...] McNish's career as a prominent black and female presence in 1950s Britain helped develop recognition of multicultural issues in the then conservative design world."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Mucha, A. (1896). *Job Cigarette Papers*. [Color Lithograph] Paris, France: Mucha Foundation.

<sup>6</sup> Lalique, R. (1897). *Dragonfly Woman Corsage Ornament*. [Gold, Enamel, Chrysoprase, Moonstones, Diamonds] Paris, France: Calouste Gulbenkian Museum.

<sup>7</sup> McNish, A. (1959). *Golden Harvest*. [Screen-Printed Cotton Satin] Manchester, England: The Whitworth Art Gallery.