







WRITTEN BY
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How did social change at the turn of the century impact the representation and role of women within the Art Nouveau movement?

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Abstract

This essay aims to investigate the intricate and complex relationship between women and the Art Nouveau movement. At a time of rapid social change, this essay has explored how the 'New Woman' emerged to undermine traditional values of femininity. This is achieved through the visual analysis of key Art Nouveau works, as it examines the ways in which she was celebrated, sexualised, and feared through the eyes of men. Additionally, this essay highlights the role of women as artists within the movement, evaluating both the opportunities and limitations they faced while highlighting their more layered and complex representations of women compared to those created by their male counterparts.



Introduction

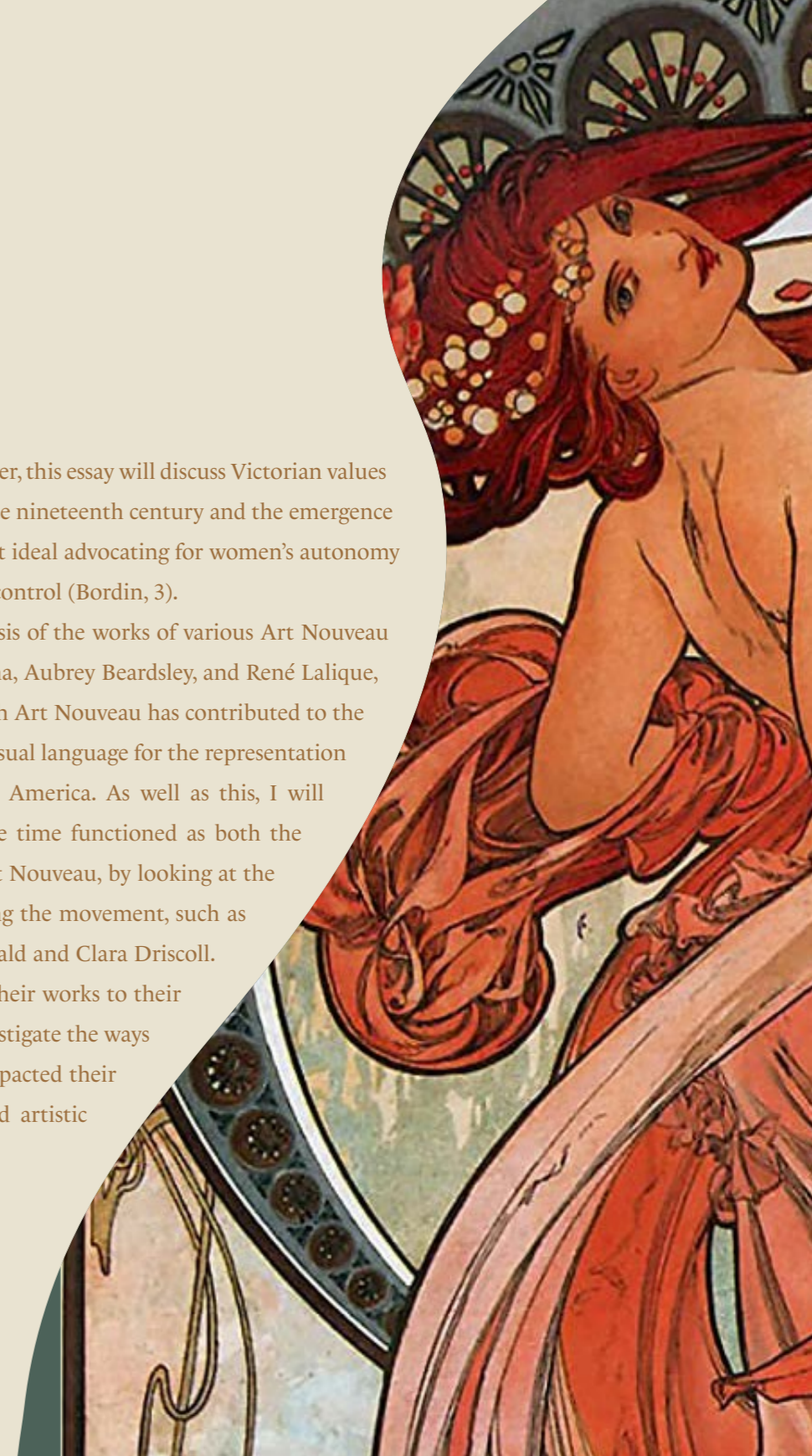
Throughout history, women have been a prominent subject of art; both as objects of beauty and as symbols of social and political commentary. The late nineteenth century marked a pivotal moment in women's liberation, shifting how women were viewed in the eyes of society - a change which was heavily reflected through the works of the prevalent Art Nouveau movement across Europe and America.

My interest in this area stems from my desire for a historical and richly researched foundation on which to build my own practice, as I aim to reference, recreate, and utilise the artistic and ornamental styles of the past. Understanding the symbolic imagery within art movements such as Art Nouveau help to provide me with a deeper understanding of how best to apply these styles in a new context. During my time researching art history, I have also adopted a growing interest in feminist theory and its application. Recognising and acknowledging the gender inequality that was ubiquitous in the past can massively help in recognising the inequality that is still prevalent today, especially in fields such as the arts.

This essay will explore the origins and influences of Art Nouveau within the context of the women's liberation movement in the decades surrounding the turn of the century. To provide context to the visual styles of Art Nouveau, I will explore how the Arts and Crafts movement has both led to and influenced Art Nouveau and, in extension, compare the ways in which attitudes towards women have evolved during the transition from Arts and

Crafts to Art Nouveau. Moreover, this essay will discuss Victorian values towards womanhood in the late nineteenth century and the emergence of the 'New Woman', a feminist ideal advocating for women's autonomy and independence from male control (Bordin, 3).

Through an in-depth analysis of the works of various Art Nouveau artists, such as Alphonse Mucha, Aubrey Beardsley, and René Lalique, I will explore the ways in which Art Nouveau has contributed to the development of a distinctive visual language for the representation of women across Europe and America. As well as this, I will investigate how women of the time functioned as both the muse and the artist within Art Nouveau, by looking at the contributions of women during the movement, such as Margaret and Frances Macdonald and Clara Driscoll. Through this, I will compare their works to their male contemporaries, and investigate the ways in which social change had impacted their representations of women and artistic careers.



Art Nouveau Theory

Art Nouveau is recognised for its sinuous, organic forms that draw inspiration from the natural world. However, the movement owes much of its aesthetic and ideological underpinnings to the Arts and Crafts movement. The section below will discuss the influence of the Arts and Crafts movement on the style of Art Nouveau.

The late nineteenth century marked a time of vigorous societal change across Europe and America. The Industrial Revolution that had begun earlier in the century propelled the emergence of new technologies and saw the rise of mass production at the expense of traditional artistry (“Origins of Art Nouveau”). In response to the rapid advances of industrial expansion, artists such as William Morris and Augustus Pugin prompted a revival in traditional craft techniques and prioritised the need for artistic aesthetics over the inexpensive, and arguably tactless, decor in the lives of the everyday Victorian (Escritt, 32). This was the Arts and Crafts movement, a progressive and largely socialist movement that was fuelled by the desire to create beautiful and functional objects that were imbued with meaning and craftsmanship, demonstrating a staunch rejection of mass production’s absence of individualistic expression. By the late nineteenth century, the British-born Arts and Crafts movement had uncovered a newfound appreciation for the decorative and ornamental arts across Europe and provided the foundation from which Art Nouveau emerged (“Arts and Crafts movement”). The movement was defined by nature-inspired motifs, florals, and organic forms, all of which heavily resonated with the artists of

Art Nouveau and were continued in their works. With its focus toward the domestic environment of Victorian homes, the Arts and Crafts movement also boasted skills that were widely considered to be feminine and henceforth encouraged the participation of female artists (Dacic). This is seen with May Morris, William Morris’ daughter, who emerged as a talented embroidery and jewellery artist within the movement. Her contributions, however, were overshadowed by that of her father and she did not receive much recognition for her work (Dacic). Given the close association of the Art and Crafts movement with Art Nouveau, it becomes imperative to explore whether women’s contributions have since gained greater recognition in the latter.

Victorian gender norms and the 'New Woman'

Perhaps the most controversial shift in the era was regarding the changing role of women and the surfacing of the 'New Woman'. During the nineteenth century, a woman's upbringing would instil the expectation that she would marry, serve her husband, and uphold modesty. In essence, the woman's role primarily revolved around men, to please them, to be useful, and to look after them and their children (Bell, Susan G, and Karen M. Offen, 470). Victorian philosopher and respected polymath, John Ruskin, illustrates the societal expectations placed upon women in comparison to those of men in his essay *Of Queen's Gardens*:

The man's power is active, progressive, defensive. He is eminently the doer, the creator, the discoverer, the defender. His intellect is for speculation and invention; his energy for adventure, for war, and for conquest, wherever war is just, wherever conquest necessary. But the woman's power is for rule, not for battle – and her intellect is not for invention or creation, but for sweet ordering, arrangement and decision. She sees the qualities of things, their claims, and their places. Her great function is Praise: she enters into no contest, but infallibly adjudges the crown of contest. (146)

In this quote, Ruskin identifies a clear distinction between the woman's passive role in the domestic sphere of life against the man's active role in wider society. This quote is evidence of how the traditional gender roles during the Victorian era have allocated men to have power over women as the sole "doers" while outlining the woman's role to passively organise what has already been done by man, as "she enters into no contest". Fundamentally, a woman may have been allowed to 'arrange' and 'order' books, findings and works already made by a man, such as her husband, however, she must refrain from transcending beyond her role of domesticated submission. Here, Ruskin provides a clear overview of the attitudes and expectations of women during that era, and from this, we can evaluate how the 'New Woman' has risen to oppose it.

John Ruskin had a close friendship with Arts and Crafts figurehead, William Morris. As previously noted, the Arts and Crafts movement largely advocated for socialist and progressive ideals. However, the movement's conservative attitudes, as exemplified by Ruskin, and the lack of recognition for female artists, such as May Morris, allude to the fact that the Arts and Crafts movement still ultimately held restrictive views when it came to women.

Ruskin's conservative sentiment toward women was widely regarded as the norm during the Victorian times and is further highlighted in Sarah Stickney Ellis' text *The Daughters of England*, where she aims to provide guidance for how young women of the time should behave. In it, she writes: "as women, then, the first thing of importance is to be content to be inferior to men – inferior in mental power, in the same proportion that you are inferior in bodily strength" (11-12). This quote further pushes the notion that men were perceived as the dominant powerholders within society while women were deemed inferior, both psychically and intellectually. This imbalance of power and perception of women being inferior to men is a key point I want to highlight, as I aim to explore how this is undermined through the 'New Woman' and the representation of her in Art Nouveau.



Figure 1. Dante Gabriel Rossetti,
Proserpine.

1874. Oil paint on canvas. 1251 x 610 mm. Tate.

Proserpine is painted to embody traditional Victorian gender norms.

These values of womanhood were reinforced through many notable works of the period, prior to the emergence of Art Nouveau, with imagery of the ‘modest maiden’ common among them (Werness, 7). Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s *Proserpine* (Figure 1) is a key example of this, as it depicts the Roman goddess as a passive melancholy figure, with her head bowed and hands crossed gracefully across her chest. In this, her body language demonstrates the Victorian ideal for women to be passive and submissive. These connotations are common among other Victorian depictions of women, such as Sir John Everett Millais’ *Ophelia* (1851-52), where Ophelia is shown to be passive and vulnerable after she has fallen into a river, accepting her death, or perhaps blissfully oblivious to it (Werness, 8). In *Proserpine*, her facial expression is similar to Ophelia’s expression of docile innocence. Her long hair is arranged into a tightly coiled style as she dons a modest gown with long sleeves, reflecting the strict Victorian dress codes enforced at the time to establish gender norms and social hierarchies, in which women were expected to cover up and dress modestly. Furthermore, the colours within the painting not only evoke those of the natural world, but also serve to reinforce the idea that women ought not to draw attention to themselves, as Proserpine blends almost seamlessly with her surroundings.

The painting overall depicts the Victorian ideal of a beautiful and graceful woman, with an emphasis on her passive and innocent nature. It is important to reflect upon how women were represented through the art preceding Art Nouveau to fully determine the extent to which social change impacted the ways in which women were represented thereafter.

Figure 2. George du Maurier, *Passionate Female Literary Types*.

1894. Punch Magazine.

Two women are illustrated to highlight the contrast between the desired traditional woman and the brutish 'New Woman.'

The traditional Victorian, idealistic view of women as modest homemakers was under threat by the late nineteenth century after new education and career prospects for women became increasingly available. Women of this time enjoyed a new sense of financial freedom, as marriage and motherhood were no longer the sole options for financial security (Buzwell). Art Nouveau historian, Debora Silverman, states how “the 1890s witnessed the first women entering the male worlds of academe and careers,” with 842 women attending the *facultés* (universities) in 1895 and 20 female doctors and 10 female lawyers beginning their careers within the decade (149).

Nothing quite encapsulated women’s emergence into the public sphere of life like the bicycle, as it quickly became adopted as the staple of the ‘New Woman.’ As a result of this, the dress reform emerged to offer women more comfortable and practical clothing to wear while cycling. Prior to this reform, women’s garments reflected their constricted lives, with tight corsets and voluminous skirts proving to be both uncomfortable and impractical (“The Rational Dress Society’s Gazette”). The dress reform brought about a significant shift in both women’s fashion and their societal standing, as it advocated for women’s greater freedom of movement and less restrictive clothing (Somers).



**PASSIONATE FEMALE LITERARY TYPES.
THE NEW SCHOOL.**

Mrs. Blyth (newly married). “I WONDER YOU NEVER MARRIED, MISS QUILPSON !”

Miss Quilpson (Author of “Caliban Dethroned,” &c., &c.). “WHAT? I MARRY! I BE A MAN’S PLAYTHING! NO, THANK YOU !”

The changing role of women and its effect on the Art Nouveau movement was felt particularly in France, where slow, yet noticeable, progress was made through political agitation by the French feminist movement (Escritt 86). However, this progress was not met without resistance, as it was thought that the emergence of the *femme nouvelle* ('New Woman') was detrimental to society. The opportunities provided to women through means of better career and education prospects meant that women now gained the luxury of choice when it came to finding marital and sexual partners, and many gained the option of not having a partner at all, without having to sacrifice financial security in doing so. Art Nouveau author, Stephen Escritt, goes on to describe how "conservatives viewed all such changes as a rejection of women's traditional roles and linked them to France's declining birthrate, which was seen as particularly worrying while Germany's population boomed" (86). Through this, we see how women's liberation in the late nineteenth century and the emergence of the 'New Woman' was perceived as a threat toward motherhood, as well as being linked to ideas of societal and national decline.

It comes as no surprise that, given the perceived threat of the 'New Woman', satirical publications such as *Punch* portrayed her in a negative light. Through such publications, the 'New Woman' was primarily depicted as an embittered, manly caricature (Buzwell). This representation can be observed in *Passionate Female Literary Types* (Figure 2). In this, the 'New Woman' is personified through the character Miss Quilpson, who is depicted as a broad, masculine woman, and who is a stark contrast against the feminine young newlywed, Mrs Blyth. With her protruding chin, large nose and blunt features, Miss Quilpson is portrayed as too unattractive and manly to have been able to find a man willing to marry her, and instead insists with false confidence that she never wanted to marry as she would not have wanted to become "a man's plaything." The connotations shown here clearly illustrate how the changing roles of women were perceived as a threat

to the traditional values of femininity and how the idea of the 'New Woman' was pushing the boundaries of the established gender norms of the time. Through this, we can visually compare how women were represented through the published media, such as newspaper articles and magazines, to how women were depicted through the works of the Art Nouveau movement.

Representation of women in Art Nouveau

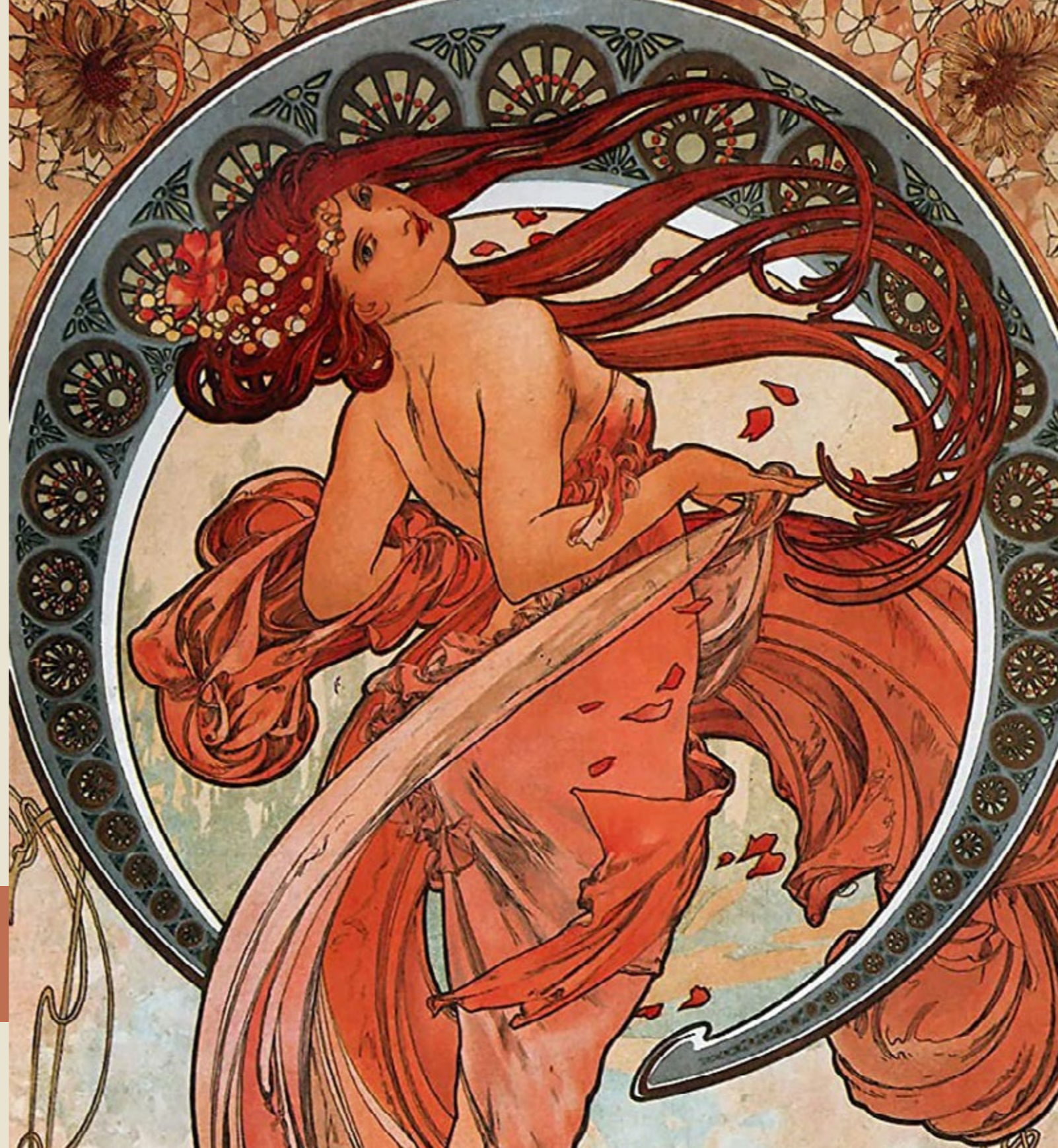
This section will discuss how male artists of the Art Nouveau movement represented women, and how the imagery in their work reflects the social change regarding women at the time.

The works of Alphonse Mucha stand out when considering the representations of women in Art Nouveau, for they were renowned for their depictions and ideals of feminine beauty. Painted at the height of Mucha's fame, *The Arts: Dance* (Figure 3) portrays a young woman posed provocatively, barely clothed with a swirling, almost translucent, dress. This dress flows into the decorative patterns framing the lone female figure, suggesting movement, freedom, and vitality – all of which are synonymous with ideas of the 'New Woman'. In contrast to the 'modest maiden' in Rossetti's *Proserpine* (Figure 1), the woman's dress in *The Arts: Dance* is much more revealing, as it boasts a dramatically lower neckline

Figure 3. Alphonse Mucha, *The Arts: Dance*.

1898. Lithography. 600 x 380 mm. Private collection.

A woman is depicted as independent but eroticized through her position and clothing.



and an absence of sleeves, exposing her bare arms, shoulders and back. This difference between the two artworks showcases the ways in which social change has impacted the arts, as the dress reform permitted less restrictive clothing. The hair of both women also forms a strong contrast between the conflicting ideals of the ‘modest maiden’ and its successor the ‘New Woman’. Proserpine’s hair is neatly styled and tied back, with its length falling into the shadows of the painting whereas Mucha woman’s hair is made a focal point within the painting, as he paints it in stylised free-flowing tendrils, giving the hair a life of its own. Both depictions clearly illustrate the contemporary views toward women of their times. Proserpine’s plain and restricted hairstyle reflects the Victorian ideal for women to be modest and unimposing, meanwhile, Mucha’s unorthodox depiction of hair is unrestrained and provides a sense of free-spirited nature, encapsulating and celebrating the ‘New Woman’.

A common theme among Mucha’s women was their overt eroticism and *The Arts: Dance* is no exception to this. The woman’s back is arched in such a way that emphasises her bare shoulders and scarcely covered breasts. This position, with aid from her flowing gown, also forms a backward ‘S’ shape within the composition, inviting the viewer’s eyes to follow the curves down to her waist and buttocks. This could be considered a homage to the subtle progress made in the sexual freedom of women of the era, as the requirements of female purity that had controlled women’s image in the past were overhauled by ideas of the autonomous ‘New Woman’. However, the woman’s facial expression in *The Arts: Dance* is one of gentle naivety and innocence, like that of Proserpine, rather than the defiant expression of confidence and independence expected of the ‘New Woman’. This provides a conflict within the piece: the woman is depicted as highly sexualised, yet she still retains a sense of innocence and purity. In her essay *Alphonse Mucha and the Emergence of the New Woman during the Belle Époque*, Sarah Blattner writes: “through symbolism, the artists of Art Nouveau revealed the idealized modern woman in a way that evoked dual qualities associated with both temptress and virgin” (5). These dual qualities are prevalent

in Mucha’s work, as his women embody the conflicting ideals of both the erotic and the innocent, which can be seen as a reflection of social tensions as it captures the complex and nuanced views toward women and femininity of the time. Blattner further remarks how social change in the late nineteenth century “cast women in new roles of sexual objectification. Men became sexually fascinated with them, now that they were out in the public sphere and subject to the male gaze” (4). While women depicted in art throughout history have arguably always been subject to the male gaze, it cannot be denied that the women’s liberation movement that brought about the dress reform gave inclination for men to paint and behold women through a new erotic lens, without much regard for the female experience and struggles of the decade. This is evident in Mucha’s representation of the woman in *The Arts: Dance*, as he presents the woman as pure and innocent, seemingly unaware of her own carnal beauty, for that is not for her eyes but that of the male viewer.

While women’s beauty and femininity were emphasised through artists such as Mucha, they were also depicted as dangerous and otherworldly through other works of Art Nouveau. This was often characterised through the *femme fatale*, a female archetype described as an “evil seductress who tempts man and brings about his destruction” (Place, 47). Fear of the female form was not a new theme in art, for it had been an underlying custom in many



Figure 4. Marcantonio Raimondi, *Adam and Eve*.

1512-14. Engraving, 242 x 176 mm. The Met. Eve is likened to a serpent, showcasing her as a *femme fatale*.

Figure 5. Aubrey Beardsley, *The Climax*.

1894. Black and white block print on Japanese vellum. V&A.
Salome is depicted as a dangerous *femme fatale* as she holds the severed head of John the Baptist.

Christian depictions of Eve, as seen in Marcantonio Raimondi's *Adam and Eve* (Figure 4), wherein the snake has a woman's face that resembles Eve's. Giving a female head to the serpent in this tale was a common occurrence among Christian depictions of Adam and Eve as it established women as the ones responsible for the 'original sin' ("The Temptation of Eve"). Works like these pushed the notion that women were temptresses and an evil force to be governed by religion, male control, and social convention (Chicago and Lucie-Smith, 128). As discussed previously, the 'New Woman' became linked to ideas of social and moral decline, so it comes as no surprise that images of the dangerous and destructive *femme fatale* resurfaced as a prominent motif during the Art Nouveau movement.

British illustrator, Aubrey Beardsley, led a controversial, yet highly acclaimed, career where he often utilized the erotic imagery of the *femme fatale* to depict women. His work was instrumental in the Decadent movement that coincided with the works of Art Nouveau, and he massively contributed to the representation of women in both. In 1893, he illustrated a series of works for Oscar Wilde in the English version of his play, *Salome* ("The Story of Aubrey Beardsley..."). One notable work from this collection was *The Climax* (Figure 5), where Beardsley presents the female Salome as a monster-like figure, with her hair billowing in such a way that is similar to Mucha's stylistic depiction of hair, yet also reminiscent of Medusa's head of snakes. This sinister imagery is further



reinforced through the two tendrils of hair that float above her head to form the silhouette of two horns, providing an ominous link to the Devil. Similar connotations can be seen in another work of Beardsley's, *Black Coffee* (1895), where the resemblance of devil horns is observed in another lady's hairstyle ("The Story of Aubrey Beardsley..."). The imagery of horns also suggests a more masculine portrayal of women, as typically only male animals would have horns. This recalls us to *Passionate Female Literary Types* (Figure 2) as, like Mrs Quilpson, Salome is drawn predominantly with masculine features, such as her large chin and dominant eyebrows. However, the connotations in both illustrations vastly differ due to the context Beardsley has placed Salome in. Rather than using the masculine features to ridicule and satirize Salome like in *Passionate Female Literary Types*, Beardsley has used them to further paint her nuance of power. There is also a Japonisme influence seen through the bold lines and sharp contrasts, emphasizing Salome's strong, masculine features, and further adding to her commanding presence. These elements contradict the Victorian ideal for women to be gentle and submissive. One of the most palpable details in this piece that portrays Salome as a powerful *femme fatale* is the way she is holding the severed head of John the Baptist with triumph and looking directly into his closed eyes. This, in a very literal sense, portrays Salome as the sole powerholder within the illustration, and the direct opposite of the unimposing 'modest maiden'.

As previously mentioned, the women's liberation movement was often perceived to be linked to social and moral decline, and the emergence of the independent 'New Woman' was perceived as a threat to traditional womanhood. Feminist art historian, Linda Nochlin, asserts how "those who have privileges inevitably hold on to them, and hold tight, no matter how marginal the advantage involved, until compelled to bow to superior power of one sort or another" (32). With that in mind, it can be argued that *The Climax*, like many of Beardsley's other works, parodies men's fear of female superiority and, by extension, their grasp of power over women weakening. This is observed through his imagery of the *femme fatale* in Art Nouveau and his attack on patriarchal conventions.

Mucha and Beardsley's work both demonstrate a newfound fascination with the female form, as women were becoming more pronounced within the public eyes of society. An interesting way in which this fascination manifested itself was through the creation of hybrid women. In typical Art Nouveau fashion, these hybrids were formed with inspiration drawn from nature; particularly flowers, insects, birds, and other animals (Mix, 1). The decorative jewellery of celebrated French artist, René Lalique, is renowned for its craftsmanship and creativity, often depicting images of women crossed with various animals, insects, and flowers. Lalique's '*Dragonfly-Woman*' corsage ornament (Figure 6) is a key example of how these hybrid depictions represented women as beautiful, yet unnerving, creatures. The brooch features a dragonfly whose gaping mouth allows for a female figure to emerge. Her arms are morphed into intricately detailed wings and her head dons a gold helmet with two large scarab beetles that together form the dragonfly's eyes. The piece also features eagle-like claws, further adding to the elaborate composition. The combination of these features creates a monstrous and grotesque depiction of the female figure, yet it also evokes a sense of ethereal beauty. Lalique's use of female hybrids in his work is unique and mystical, marking a departure from the conventional ways women and femininity are represented in art. However, the eroticism still remains throughout his many depictions of the female form as there appeared to be a "demand for jewellery with a hint of erotic danger" (Escritt, 93). This eroticism is arguably seen in the '*Dragonfly-Woman*' corsage ornament where the woman's upper torso is unclothed.

Similar to Mucha's work, Lalique solidifies the link between women and nature. His work suggests that the two concepts are inextricable as he merges the female form with insects, as seen in the '*Dragonfly-Woman*' corsage ornament, and flowers, such as his '*Woman's Face*' pendant (1898-1900). And, like Beardsley, Lalique has created the figure of the woman in an unconventional, arguably sinister, way. The use of the dragonfly can be linked back to their reputation of evil in mythology and folklore, as they were labelled "Devil's Darning Needles" and "Water Witches" (Brenner). Lalique may have been influenced by these associations when designing the '*Dragonfly-Woman*' corsage ornament, which contributes to



Figure 6. René Lalique, 'Dragonfly-Woman' Corsage Ornament.

1897-98. Gold, enamel, chrysoprase, chalcedony, moonstones, and diamonds. 230 x 265 mm. Calouste Gulbenkian Museum, Lisbon.

A decorative corsage of a beautiful, yet unsettling, dragonfly hybrid with the upper torso of a woman.

the idea of women being linked to ideas of sin and the Devil. The woman-dragonfly hybrid depicted in Lalique's brooch also shares the hybrid motif with the woman-snake hybrid in Raimondi's *Adam and Eve* (Figure 4). This parallel further evokes the shared themes of temptation and evil in Lalique's brooch. This, paired with the woman's ethereal beauty and eroticism, also contributes to the imagery of the *femme fatale* in Art Nouveau.

The 'Dragonfly-Woman' corsage ornament reflects the cultural attitudes toward women at the time. The beauty of the female form and the unconventional manner in which she is portrayed demonstrates the way in which women's increasing visibility in society aroused fascination and intrigue among men. However, underlying themes of temptation and evil, as demonstrated through the woman's grotesque amalgamation with a dragonfly, suggest that men may have felt threatened by women's growing autonomy and presence in the public sphere of life.

Woman artists of Art Nouveau

The following section will evaluate the career and works of female artists Margaret and Frances Macdonald and Clara Driscoll. Through an evaluation of their work and the contexts surrounding their practices, we can fully evaluate the extent to which social change has influenced their roles as artists and the representation of women in their work. We have previously established how the idea of the 'New Woman' emerged for women to gain autonomy and subvert Victorian gender ideals, and we have seen how these developments have influenced the ways in which women were represented through the works of some notable male Art Nouveau artists. However, we must now ask the question of whether these social changes made much difference when it came to women being recognised and valued as artists within a movement that celebrated their supposed newfound independence.

Figure 7. Margaret MacDonald, *Pool of Silence*.

1913. Watercolour and gouache on paper. 757 x 632 mm. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.
Two elongated female figures, and one reflected, with an eerie absence of limbs.



As discussed previously, the emergence of new educational opportunities for women during the turn of the century enabled female artists, including Scottish sisters Margaret and Frances Macdonald, to pursue formal training in the arts. The sisters studied at the Glasgow School of Art, where they learned to draw from the nude model. However, rather than creating realistic depictions of the human form, their art featured stylised, de-sexualized figures that subverted the conventional representation of femininity (Jones). This departure from the norm became a hallmark of the sisters' work. Significantly, the Glasgow School of Art was also where Margaret and Frances met their life partners, Charles Rennie Mackintosh, and James Herbert MacNair. The four of them formed a group which soon was dubbed the "Spook School," a moniker that aptly captured their work as they often drew inspiration from Beardsley's eerie and elongated figures (Helland, 98).

This style can be observed in Margaret's *A Pool of Silence* (Figure 7), where two haunting female figures are depicted, and a third is painted as a reflection in the lower half of the drawing. These women appear to be almost shapeless with a lack of a distinctive female form. Their shapelessness is further established by the absence of limbs, with the exception of a finger being held to a woman's mouth, asking for silence. In contrast to Mucha's sensual depictions of the female form, Margaret's work does not abide by the male gaze or a gaze of any form; if we understand the gaze as an assertion of control over a desired object through the sexual gratification derived from looking at it (Helland, 266). Art historian, Janice Helland, argues that a gaze cannot be applied to Margaret's work because "one cannot desire such disembodied creatures" (268). From this, we can interpret Margaret's work to be more complex in its representation of women as she has created a space for female representation that is free from patriarchal control.

Margaret enjoyed a successful career in the arts through her personal design work and collaboration with her husband, Charles Rennie Mackintosh. They collaborated extensively, with Mackintosh even writing to his wife: "Remember, you are half if not three-quarters in all my architectural work" (Robertson). However, the critical reception of Margaret's

work and her collaboration with Mackintosh was not without controversy. London critic, P. Morton Shand, was particularly vocal in his assessment as he expressed his hope that Mackintosh's memorial exhibition "may not be so arranged or announced as to give the impression that Mrs. Mackintosh was in any sense considered her husband's equal, or 'alter ego.'" He then went on to cast doubt on the possibility of Margaret's "rather thin talent" ever being restored to a place of honour (Shand, Letter to William Davidson). Shand then goes as far as to place blame upon Margaret for leading Mackintosh to "uxorious ornamental vulgarity" (Shand, 35). This critique highlights the persistent gender bias in the art world, wherein female artists like Margaret Macdonald were often undervalued or dismissed. This is despite the fact that both Margaret and Rennie Mackintosh shared the same formal training, and that Margaret was undoubtedly a great influence on the renowned artist's work.

Frances' work was similar to Margaret's through her representations of the gaunt, stylised depictions of the female form. However, Frances was arguably more outspoken in her work, as her ghostly depictions of the female form serve as a voice for women's continuing struggle for equality and recognition (Jones). Her watercolour painting *Man Makes the Beads of Life but Woman Must Thread Them* (Figure 8) is a visual manifestation of Frances' struggles and experiences in relation to the gender norms imposed upon her as a wife and a mother. The title alone strongly resonates with John Ruskin's ideology of how women are merely for "sweet ordering and arrangement" of the work that is done by man. The piece shows an elongated nude female figure, one that is not overtly sexualised, covering her private area with a large circle enclosing a child. On her left is a nude male figure holding out yet another circle with a child toward her, as though he were offering it as a gift. From this symbolism and the title of the piece, we can assume the message is that man makes children, and women are left to bear the responsibility of raising them; hence threading the "beads of life." Similar to the works of Mucha and Beardsley, the woman's hair is floating unnaturally above her shoulders. However, rather than drawn in free-flowing tendrils or depicted in such a way that evokes imagery of feminine power, her hair

Figure 8. Frances MacDonald, *Man makes the beads of life but woman must thread them.*

1912-15. Pencil and watercolour on paper. 345 x 416 mm. Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool.

A nude female figure holding a baby enclosed in a circle is being handed yet another baby by a nude male figure.



flows horizontally as though it is being suspended on either side of the frame to hold her in place. From this imagery, Frances suggests that motherhood is no more desired by women than it is thrust upon them (Helland, 219). These themes and social commentary against traditional gender norms were common throughout Frances' work near the end of her career, as seen in *'Tis a Long Path which Wanders to Desire* (1911) and *Prudence and Desire* (1912-15). Unfortunately, it is impossible to tell exactly how much of her work was dedicated to her experiences as both an artist and a mother since her husband, fellow artist MacNair, destroyed the majority of her art following her death in 1921 ("Frances Macdonald").

Despite the social change at the turn of the century in regard to women's liberation, Frances' work serves as proof and a direct criticism of how the woman's role had not yet evolved beyond that of the domestic mother.

In the following section, I will investigate the artistic career of American glass designer, Clara Driscoll, a prominent female artist in the Art Nouveau movement. Although her works do not feature women or the female form, she is a key example of how social change has influenced the role of women within the Art Nouveau movement.

As improved education prospects were opening up for women by the late nineteenth century, mass migration was ignited where young women moved to large cities in search of better work and opportunities, Clara Driscoll being one of many (Sentilles). She moved to New York in 1888, where she began work under Louis Comfort Tiffany, one of the sons of the Tiffany & Company's founders, to produce Tiffany lamps (Sentilles). Driscoll's Tiffany lamps were highly popular and were a quintessential example of Art Nouveau design, as they emphasised organic forms, naturalistic motifs, and the use of vibrant iridescent glass. One of her most famous designs, the *Dragonfly Lamp* (Figure 9), features a band of colourful dragonflies resting vertically around the lampshade, with intricate wings and a jewel-like body, reminiscent to that of Lalique's dragonfly brooch.

As an unmarried, financially independent working woman, Driscoll was essentially an embodiment of the 'New Woman' during her time working for Tiffany. It had even been stated how Louis Tiffany valued his female workers as much as he did men and paid them equally (Sentilles). From this, it can be argued that social change had a profound impact on the role of women within the Art Nouveau movement, as Driscoll was pursuing a successful and profitable career as an Art Nouveau artist as a direct result of the new opportunities that had opened for women.

However, the impact of this social

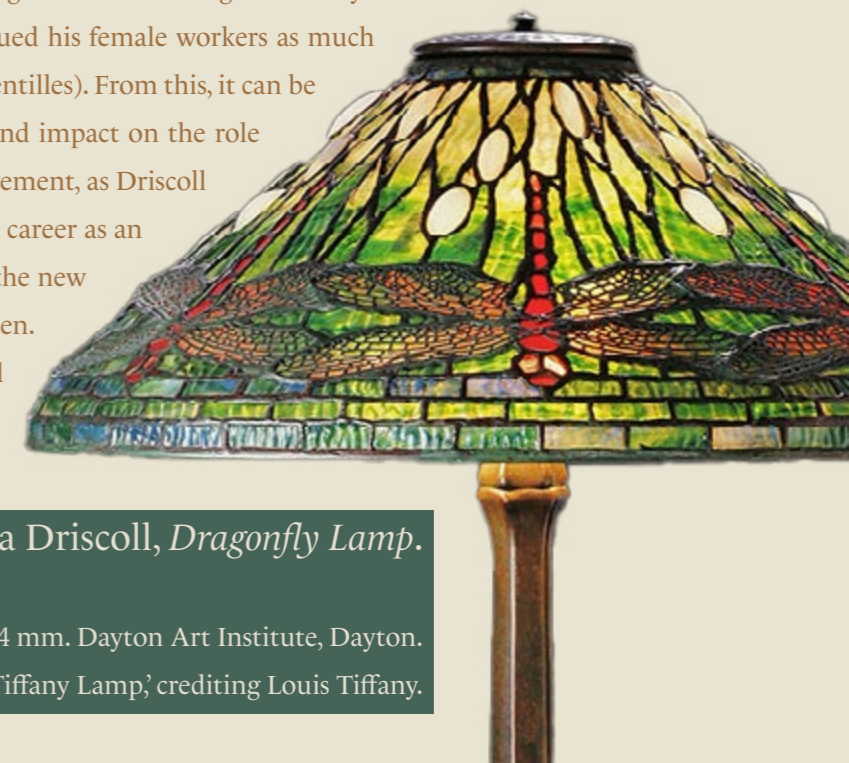


Figure 9. Clara Driscoll, *Dragonfly Lamp.*

1910. Leaded glass and bronze. 686 x 514 x 514 mm. Dayton Art Institute, Dayton.

One of a number of lamps designed by Driscoll, commonly referred to as a 'Tiffany Lamp,' crediting Louis Tiffany.

change was limited, as Driscoll's career didn't come without its misgivings. During the time in which she was married, Driscoll was required to leave her job, according to Tiffany's policy (Sentilles). Furthermore, in retaliation to the acclaimed successes of the female department, an all-male glassworkers union threatened a strike action to pressure Tiffany to shut down Driscoll's branch in 1903 (Sentilles). The actions of these men against the success of Driscoll and her Tiffany Girls provide credence to the satirical depictions of men's fear of female superiority within Aubrey Beardsley's work a decade prior. Furthermore, Driscoll and her team remained mostly anonymous and uncredited for their work, as Louis Tiffany branded himself "chief designer of the lamps" (Louie). It was only in 2005 that Driscoll was fully recognised for her work and contributions as art historians, Martin Eidelberg and Nina Gray, uncovered letters from Driscoll to her mother and sisters, outlining the work she put in when designing the lamps (Louie).

Driscoll's success as a female artist in the male-dominated field of design was a testament to the social change at the turn of the century. However, while Driscoll and her team of Tiffany Girls were well compensated for their contributions, their anonymity in their otherwise widely celebrated work contradicts the progress made in women's liberation. In a decade where women were beginning to step into the public sphere and be celebrated as powerful and established members of society, the muted accomplishments of these female artists and the backlash received from their male contemporaries allude to the fact that the changing role of women was not yet entirely welcomed, and therefore was limited in its impact on the roles of women within the Art Nouveau movement.

A commonality among the three female artists discussed above is their reliance on the status of men in order to attain success in their artistic endeavours. This issue is highlighted in Nochlin's *Why have there been no great women artists?*:

We can point to a few striking characteristics of women artists generally: they all, almost without exception, were either the daughters of artist fathers, or, generally later, in the 19th and 20th centuries, had a close personal connection with a stronger or more dominant male artistic personality. Neither of these characteristics is, of course, unusual for men artists, ... it is simply true almost without exception for their feminine counterparts. (65)

The Macdonald sisters and Clara Driscoll were able to achieve recognition and success in their artistic pursuits, largely due to their associations with accomplished male artists such as Mackintosh and Tiffany. That is not to say that the female artists were not talented or accomplished in their own right, but rather it illustrates the persistent male dominance in the field of art. Despite the social changes at the turn of the century, it was still necessary to rely on influential male figures to secure success as a female artist. Without their male connections, it is possible that the Macdonald sisters and Clara Driscoll would have been unable to break into the male-dominated art world, highlighting the limitations imposed by the prevailing patriarchal attitudes of the time.

Simultaneously, it can be argued that the careers of these women were also silenced by the men they were associated with. Margaret became marginalised in the shadow of Mackintosh's success while both Driscoll and Frances were forced to give up their career in pursuit of caring for their husbands. In extension to this, a significant amount of Frances' work was also destroyed by her husband following her death, and Driscoll's artistic contributions were originally attributed to Louis Comfort Tiffany, causing her to remain uncredited in the majority of her work. These instances provide a parallel to the experiences of Arts and Crafts artist May Morris, who also did not receive adequate recognition. This comparison demonstrates the limited progress made in the role of women as artists in the transition between the Arts and Crafts movement and Art Nouveau.

Conclusion

To conclude, social change had a significant impact on both the representation and role of women in the Art Nouveau movement. Women's pursuit of formal education and employment challenged social norms, leading to the emergence of the 'New Woman,' a concept which was initially ridiculed in publications such as *Punch*. However, the male artists of Art Nouveau attended to within this essay embraced and celebrated her sexual liberty, independence, and power. In their depictions, imagery of the dangerous *femme fatale* resurfaced, as seen in the works of Beardsley and Lalique, to further demonstrate women's power and also provide an insight into how the 'New Woman' was perceived as a threat to the patriarchy and traditional womanhood.

While women were celebrated as powerful and independent figures through many works of Art Nouveau, it is essential to note that these depictions of women did not always accurately reflect the lived experiences and struggles of women during this period. This is because the majority of these works were created by male artists and, as a result, women were often portrayed in an idealised manner that subjected them to the male gaze, as evidenced through the works of Alphonse Mucha.

In contrast to the works of the male Art Nouveau artists discussed in this essay, the representations of women within Margaret and Frances' work provide a more complex representation of the female experience; the woman is not ridiculed, celebrated, or sexualised, but is depicting a certain depth of raw emotion and experience that is directly

drawn from their lived experiences and struggles. While social change has allowed these women to pursue successful careers in the arts through means of improved formal education and career prospects, their careers were inevitably owed to and intertwined with those of their male counterparts. This resulted in their work being overshadowed, discredited, or destroyed completely. The enduring grasp of patriarchal norms further inhibited women's careers as they were expected to prioritize marriage and motherhood over their artistic pursuits, as seen with Driscoll and Frances Macdonald. As a consequence, women's perspectives on the female form and experience were comparatively scarce to those created by men at the turn of the century.

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