

# Art around 1900 in Central Europe

## #7

## Art Nouveau

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# Art around 1900 in Central Europe

In this popular culture series we will examine one of the most inspiring moments in the history of European culture.

The turn of the 19th and 20th century was a **special period for the art of Central Europe**, with various artistic trends occurring in a short time and an intensified cultural exchange between countries politically connected with the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

We will deal with paintings, architecture and sculpture, but also other important cultural phenomena, such as international exhibitions and art collections. We present a panorama of **the Belle Époque** by comparing artists from Central European countries.

Alphonse Mucha (CZ), *Music*, 1898,  
Museum of Applied Arts in Prague



# A new style

**Art Nouveau** was developed primarily in France and England (Arts & Crafts movement), but quickly became popular on the rest of the continent. The style was popularized by the **world exhibition in Paris in 1900**.

In Central Europe, its **epicentre was in Vienna**, but local trends also remained important. Artists emphasized other elements of the style; i.e. in Austria, Art Nouveau style architecture quickly paved the way for modernism, while in Poland it was more so associated with symbolism.

Printed textile *Honeysuckle* designed by William Morris (GB), 1876, MAK – Museum of Applied Arts, Vienna



# Applied arts

Importantly, Art Nouveau permeated virtually **all areas of art**: from architecture, through painting, to graphics and applied arts. The smooth lines of Art Nouveau made appearances on everything from wardrobe doors, lamp shade, advertisements, wallpaper, to elegant fabrics.

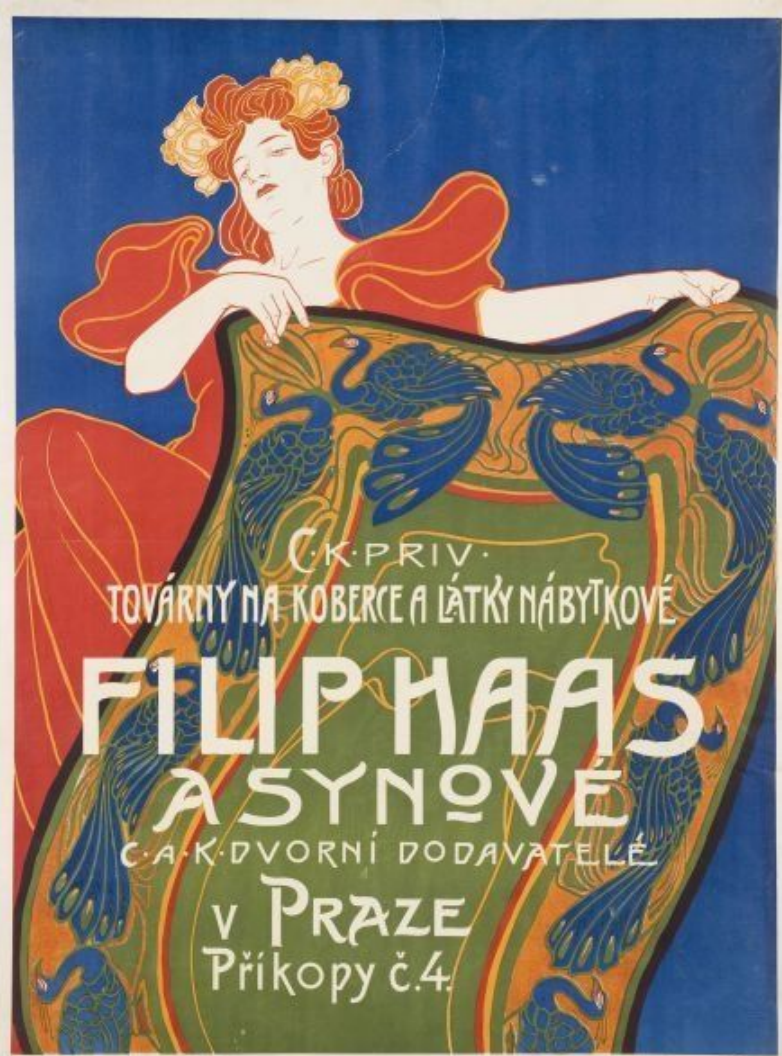
One of the postulates of the movement was to **abandon the mass production** of artistic objects. Undoubtedly, this contributed to an increase in their quality, but also made them **expensive luxury products** and therefore inaccessible to the wider public.

Vase designed by Antonija Krasnik (HR),  
produced by E. Bakalowits und Söhne Glassworks, Vienna,  
1902–1905, Museum of Arts and Crafts, Zagreb





Edward Okuń (PL), illustration for Jan Kasprowicz's poetry book *Miłość* (*The Love*), 1902, National Library in Warsaw



August Patek (AT), poster for carpet factory, 1908, Museum of Applied Arts in Prague



Croatian postcard with Art Nouveau illustration, circa 1900–1904, Museum of Arts and Crafts, Zagreb



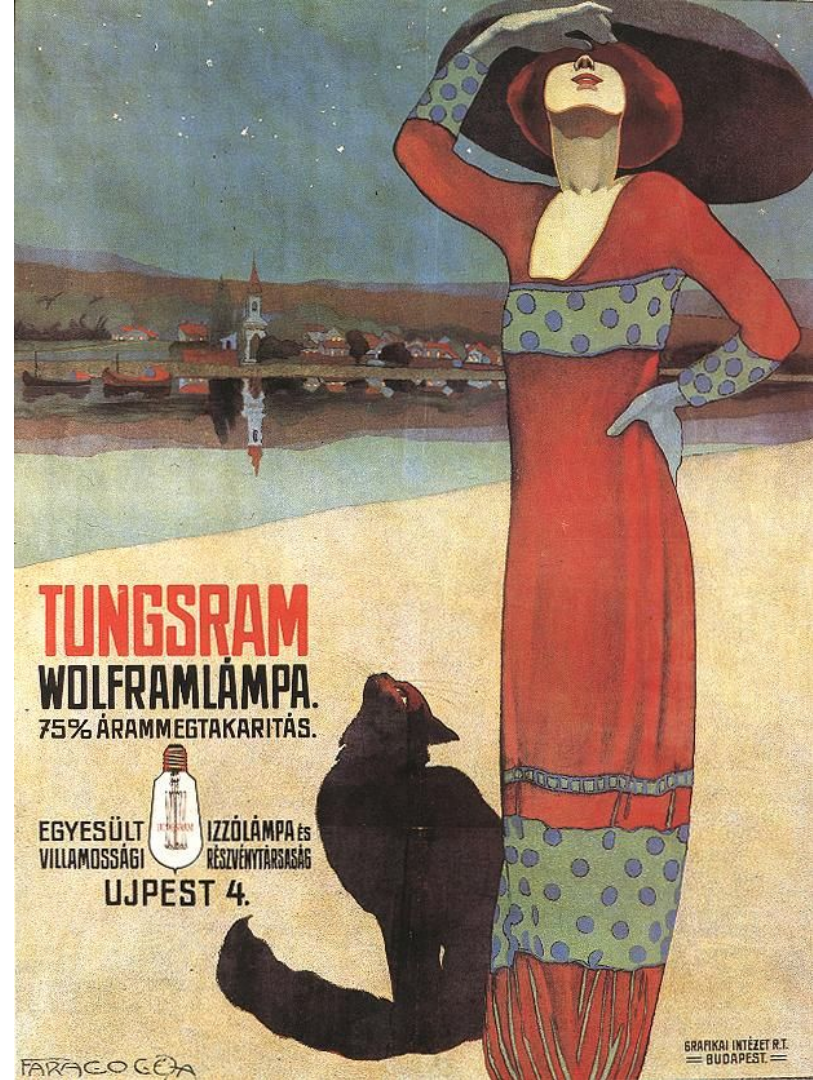
Wardrobe with paintings of Robert Auer (HR), 1908–1917, private collection

# Terminology

Over time, **Art Nouveau** became a the widely accepted term for this European style, however local terminology varies in relation to a given country.

The countries of Austria-Hungary were strongly influenced by Viennese patterns; therefore the Hungarian “**Szecesszió**”, Polish “**secesja**”, Croatian “**secesija**” or Czech “**secese**” all derived from the Austrian “**Secessionstil**” (Secession style). This name, in turn, came from the Vienna Secession movement, which we will soon discuss.

Faragó Géza (HU), poster for Tungstram Light Bulbs, circa 1910, Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest



FARAGÓ GÉZA

GRAFIKAI INTÉZET R.T.  
BUDAPEST

The German name for the style, **“Jugendstil”** (Youth-style), was inspired by the name of a popular magazine, “Jugend”.

In Poland, the term **“Młoda Polska”** (Young Poland), also referenced the style, but it covered a wider range of artistic phenomena in this period, including poetry.

Josef Rudolf Witzel (DE), cover of magazine “Jugend”, 1896, Heidelberg University Library





# Art around 1900

Art Nouveau co-created a **rich panorama of artistic trends** around 1900, which, as we know from previous presentations, coexisted at one time.

It also happened that Art Nouveau included artists who worked with other styles at the same time. Therefore, it is very **difficult to precisely separate** all these artistic currents, as artists found inspiration from many of them simultaneously.



Max Kurzweil (AT), *The Cushion*, 1903,  
Albertina, Vienna

# Line, ornament and nature

Art Nouveau is one of the styles of which the practice was closely related to **theoretical assumptions**, discussed primarily in art magazines. On this basis, we can distinguish three main ideas.

First, the **line** was considered the most important element of a work of art. Its importance has been compared with the nervous system of the body.

In its own way, it was a response to earlier trends in art, especially impressionism, where a colour spot was given a special role. The plane of the work was also emphasized.



János Vaszary (HU), poster for Permanent Exhibition of the National Salon, 1900, Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest

Second, the **ornament** was linked to the entire work. The idea of it being “put on” or a “costume” was rejected – now it was used to truly **co-create a work** and became an **integral element**.

Third – and what connected the former two – people **admired the organic power of plants** and their imagery. The stem was considered one of the most perfect lines – a life carrier, a structure derived directly from nature.



Stanisław Wyspiański (PL), *Motherhood*, 1905,  
National Museum in Cracow



Ex-libris of Gertrud Krauss, circa 1900–1910,  
Samobor Museum, Croatia



Koloman Moser (AT), poster for “Österreichische Illustrierte Zeitung”, circa 1900, Albertina, Vienna



Ladislav Šaloun (CZ), *Jan Hus Memorial*,  
1915, Old Town Square, Prague,  
photo source: Wikimedia Commons



Otto Wagner (AT) and Joseph Maria Olbrich (AT), 1899,  
Karlsplatz Stadtbahn Station, Vienna,  
photo source: Wikimedia Commons

# Symbols

Although Art Nouveau may be regarded as a direction focused primarily on form, its symbolism cannot be overestimated. For example, flowers were perceived not only as a decorative element, but also as a carrier of certain meanings – the stem (i.e. the line) playing a primary role, or the general **vitality of the flowers**.

In the symbolism, **aquatic animals** and insects played an important role since their streamlined shape aligned with the artistic assumptions. Quite often, we see swans (with long flexible necks) or dragonflies (water insects with a refined shape).

Józef Mehoffer (PL), *The strange garden*, 1903,  
National Museum in Warsaw





Printed textile, after 1900, Museum of Applied Arts in Prague



Brooch designed by Josef Ladislav Němec (CZ), 1902, Museum of Applied Arts in Prague



Josef Wenig (CZ), poster for cabaret in Prague, beginning of 20th century, Museum of Applied Arts in Prague



Bela Čikoš Sesija (HR), *The triumph of innocence*, 1900, Modern Gallery, Zagreb



Calendar designed by Vojtěch Preissig (CZ), 1908, Museum of Applied Arts in Prague



Vase designed by Anna Boudová-Suchardová (CZ), 1900, Museum of Applied Arts in Prague





Otto Wagner (AT), Majolica House,  
1898–1899, Vienna,  
photo source: Wikimedia Commons



# Associations

**Artistic associations** and groups played a key role in shaping the style. They organized exhibitions, published **manifestos, catalogues, and magazines**. Moreover, they allowed for an exchange of inspiration between united artists with similar views on art.

The Mánes Union of Fine Arts operated in Prague, while the Society of Polish Artists “Sztuka” was founded in Krakow. In Hungary, artists inspired by the Art Nouveau aesthetic circulated in the Gödöllő Art Colony, which we mentioned in previous presentations.



Vojtěch Preissig (CZ), poster for 3rd exhibition of Mánes Union of Fine Arts, 1900, Museum of Applied Arts in Prague



Joža Uprka (CZ), *Moravian Slovak Madonna*  
(*Moravian Song*), 1902, National Gallery Prague



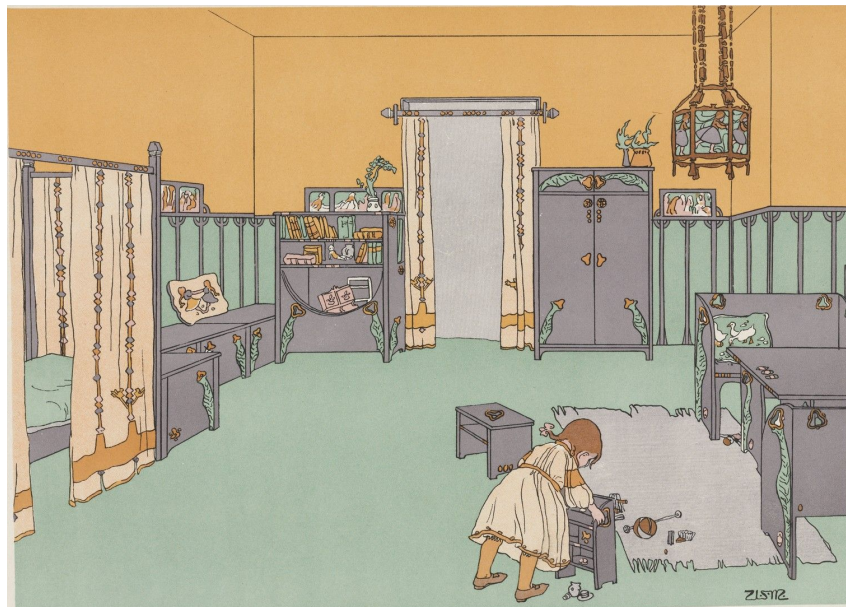
Stanisław Wyspiański (PL), poster for exhibition of  
Society of Polish Artists "Sztuka" in Vienna  
(Hagenbund), 1908, National Museum in Cracow

POLNISCHE AUSSTELLUNG  
"SZTVKA"

HAGENBVND:9'6VHR:1:K



Aladár Körösfői-Kriesch (HU), *The Story of Klára Zách I*, 1911, Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest

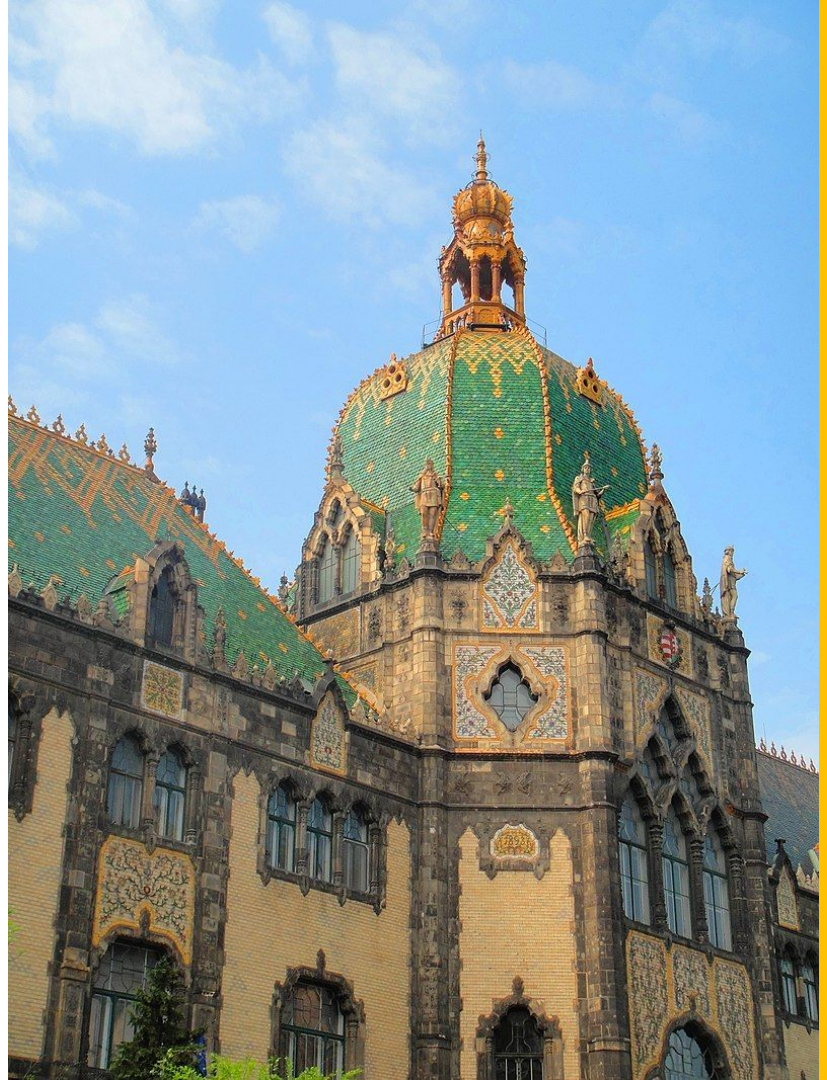


Mariska Undi (HU), *Design for children's room*, 1903, Museum of Modern Art, New York

In addition to associations, **public institutions** were also established; such as the Museum of Applied Arts in Budapest, whose headquarters has become one of the most interesting examples of Art Nouveau style architecture.

And what about Vienna? We will look at the **main organizations** operating in the Austro-Hungarian capital: the **Vienna Secession**, the **Hagenbund**, and the **Wiener Werkstätte**.

Ödön Lechner (HU),  
Budapest Museum of Applied Arts, 1896,  
photo source: Wikimedia Commons



# Vienna Secession

The Vienna Secession was founded in 1897 by a group of artists; including painters Gustav Klimt and Max Kurzweil, designer Koloman Moser, and architects Josef Hoffmann and Joseph Maria Olbrich.

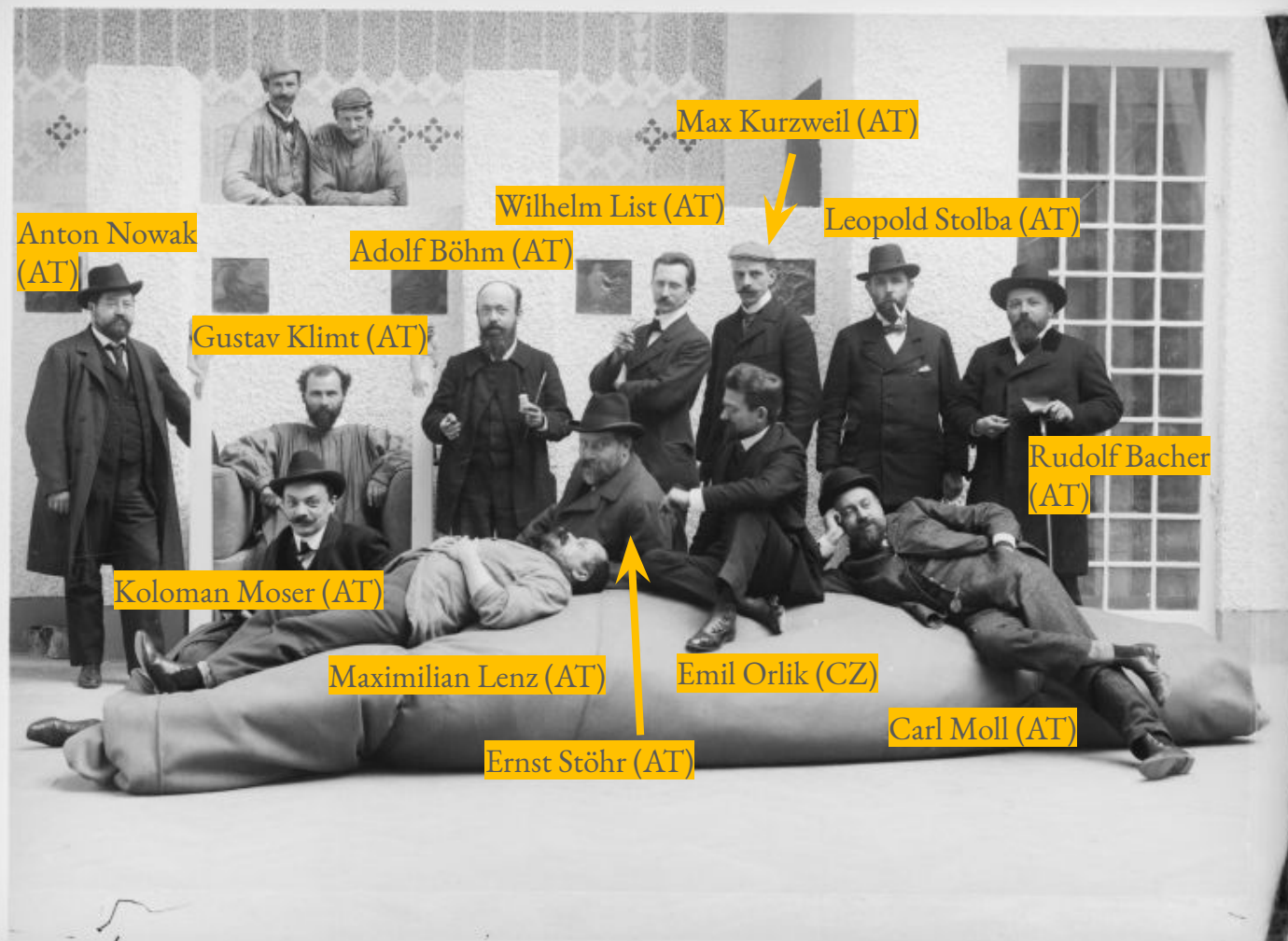
These **artists left the more traditional and conservative** Association of Austrian Artists. They were **looking for a new style** that would combine many styles of art. The name derived from a similar association in Germany: the Munich Secession.

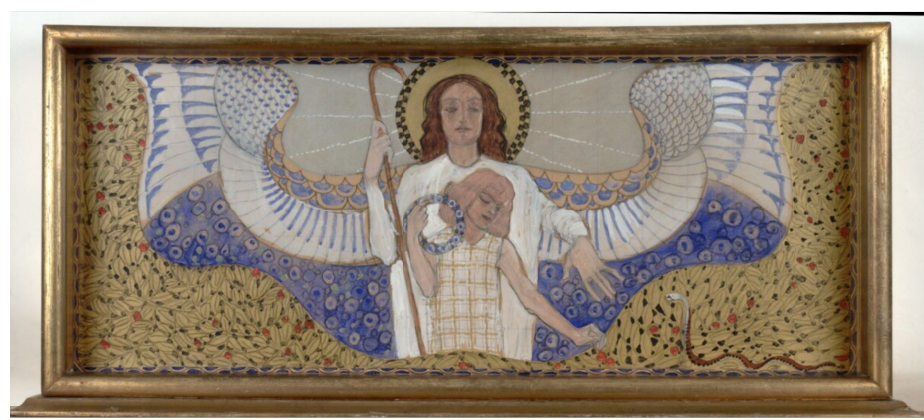
Soon, artists of other nationalities – Poles or Czechs – joined the association.

Gustav Klimt (AT), poster for the 1st Secession exhibition (censored version), 1898, Museum of Modern Art, New York



14th Vienna Secessionist  
exhibition in Secession Building,  
members of Vienna Secession,  
photo by Moriz Nähr, 1902,  
Austrian National Library





Koloman Moser (AT), altar design for the Kirche am Steinhof in Vienna, 1904–1905, Albertina, Vienna



Max Kurzweil (AT), *Lady in yellow*, 1899, Vienna Museum



Kirche am Steinhof (also called the Church of St. Leopold), 1903–1907, Vienna – architecture: Otto Wagner (AT); mosaics and stained glass: Koloman Moser (AT), photo source: Wikimedia Commons



# Secession Building

Among the flagship works of the Vienna Secession was the Secession Building – an exhibition hall designed by Joseph Maria Olbrich, erected in 1898.

A characteristic **ball decorated with golden leaves** was placed over the white building. On the façade is written the motto: *Der Zeit ihre Kunst. Der Kunst ihre Freiheit* (**To every age its art, to every art its freedom**).

Rudolf Jettmar (AT), poster for the 27th Vienna Secessionist exhibition in Secession Building, 1906, National Library of France



SECESSION  
XXVII·AUSSTELLUNG·NOV·DEC  
GEOFFNET·9·7·



Joseph Maria Olbrich (AT), Secession Building in Vienna, photo source: Wikimedia Commons

The building acted as an **artistic manifesto of the movement**, one of the assumptions of which was the desire to dissociate itself from the existing artistic practices considered out of date.

The **14th Vienna Secessionist exhibition** in 1902 was especially important. It was dedicated to **Beethoven**, whose statue was standing in the centre of the building. The walls were decorated with a frieze made by Klimt.



Gustav Klimt (AT), part of *Beethoven Frieze* in Secession Building in Vienna, 1901, Österreichische Galerie Belvedere, Vienna



14th Vienna Secessionist exhibition in Secession Building, main hall with Beethoven statue by Max Klinger, 1902, Austrian National Library



**This type of architecture**, often branching from the Viennese pavilion, **appeared in other parts of Austria-Hungary.**

An example is the Palace of Art in Krakow.



Palace of Art in Cracow, Poland, architecture: Franciszek Mączyński (PL),  
frieze: Jacek Malczewski (PL), photo source: Wikimedia Commons

# Gustav Klimt

Gustav Klimt – painter and graphic artist – was one of the **most outstanding artists** to use the aesthetics of Art Nouveau.

He is famous for his decorative portraits of the crème de la crème of Vienna society, and allegorical representations, often of biblical or mythological characters. He combined **realistic face painting** with **very decorative background planes**. He sometimes even used gold flakes for lavish compositions.

Gustav Klimt (AT), *The kiss*, 1908,

Österreichische Galerie Belvedere, Vienna

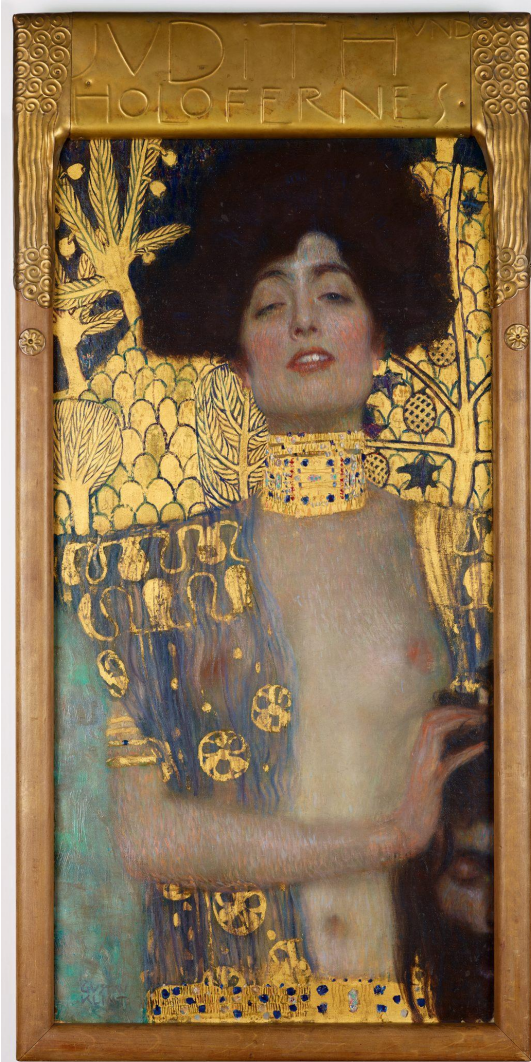


GUSTAV  
KLIMT

Gustav Klimt (AT), *Portrait of Fritza Riedler*, 1906,  
Österreichische Galerie  
Belvedere, Vienna

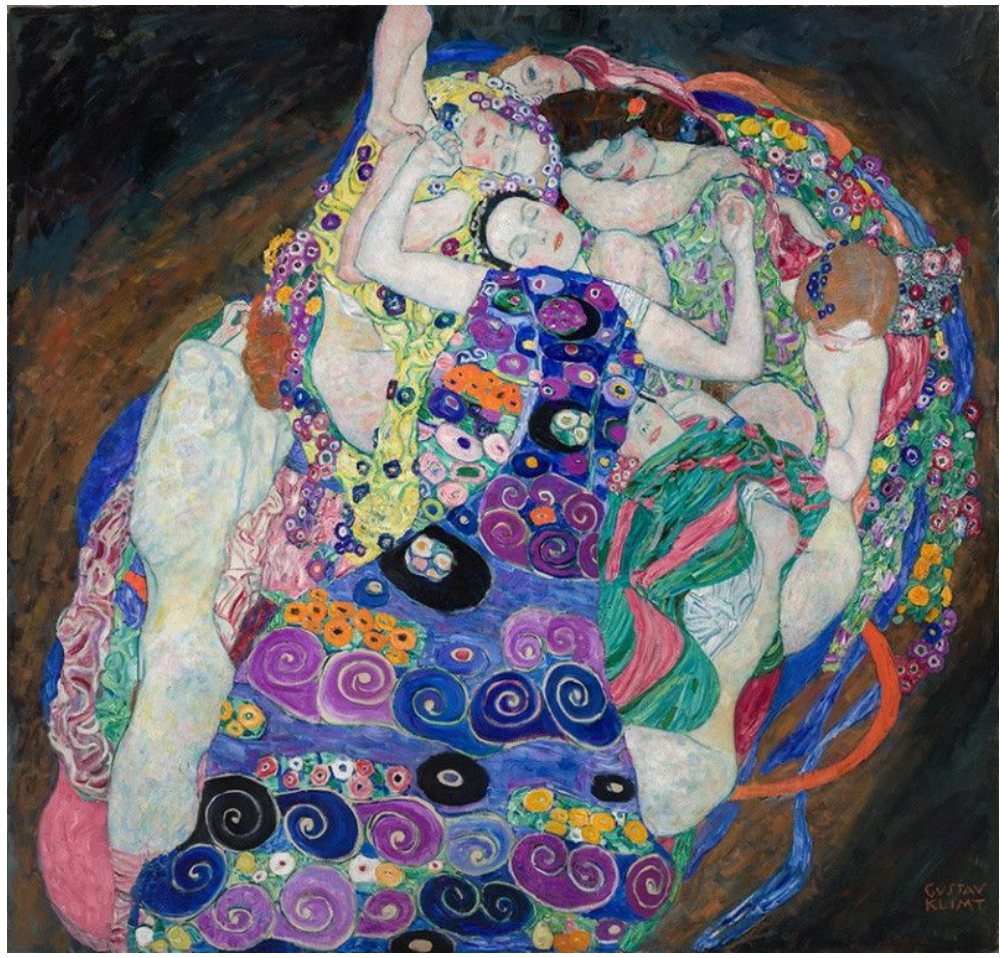


Gustav Klimt (AT), *Judith I*, 1901,  
Österreichische Galerie Belvedere, Vienna

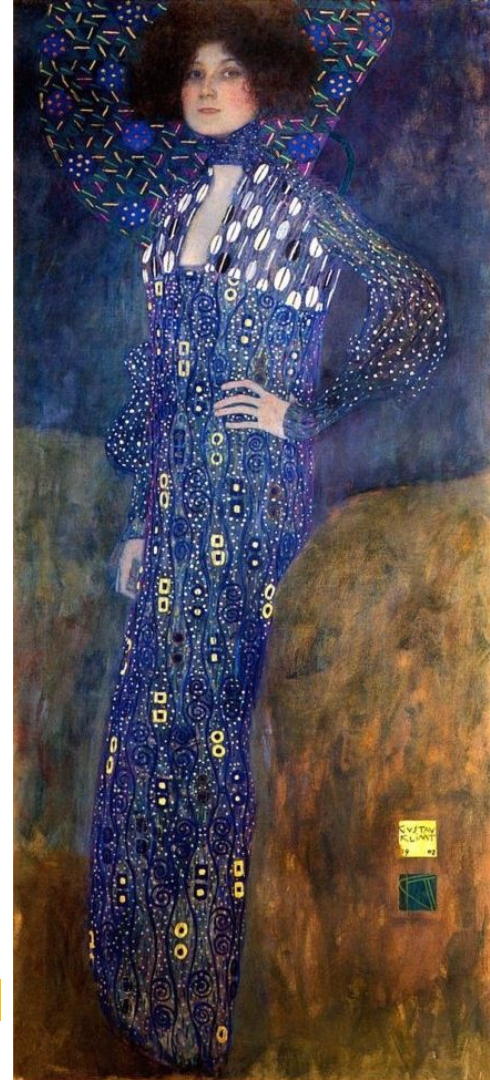




Gustav Klimt (AT), *Virgin*,  
1913, National Gallery Prague



Gustav Klimt (AT), *Portrait of Emilie Louise Flöge*,  
1902, Vienna Museum



# Hagenbund

The Hagenbund was founded in 1900. Its name referred to Josef Haagen, the owner of the Viennese property where the artists met.

Like the Vienna Secession, Hagenbund was founded as a sign of **opposition to conservative art circles.**



Heinrich Lefler (AT), poster for the Hagenbund exhibition, 1902, MAK – Museum of Applied Arts, Vienna

# Wiener Werkstätte

The Wiener Werkstätte, or **Vienna Workshop**, was founded in 1903 by Koloman Moser and Josef Hoffmann. The initiative was financially supported by the entrepreneur Fritz Wärndorfer.

The idea was to closely **combine the work of craftsmen and artists-designers**. The workshops produced, among other things, furniture, fabrics, jewellery, and postcards.

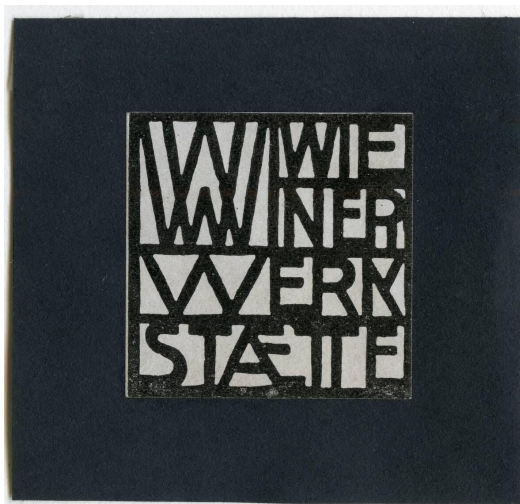
Although the Vienna Secession was a strong inspiration for the creators of the Wiener Werkstätte, their projects tended towards heralding new directions in art, i.e. **geometrization**.

Metal workshop of Wiener Werkstätte, circa 1904,  
MAK – Museum of Applied Arts, Vienna





Evening shoes designed by Edith Schiele (AT),  
Wiener Werkstätte, 1912, Albertina, Vienna



Logo of Wiener Werkstätte, after  
1903, Österreichische Galerie  
Belvedere, Vienna



Menu designed by Wiener Werkstätte,  
1905–1907, MAK – Museum of  
Applied Arts, Vienna



Clock designed by Josef Hoffmann (AT) and Carl Otto Czeschka (AT), produced  
by Wiener Werkstätte, 1905–1907, MAK – Museum of Applied Arts, Vienna

# Zsolnay

At the beginning of the 20th century, Zsolnay (founded in Pécs) was the **largest ceramics factory in the entire Austro-Hungarian Empire**, known for their porcelain, tiles, and stoneware.

At the end of the 19th century, the company developed **its own production technology** for **frost-resistant** coloured ceramic elements. They began to be widely used as **architectural decorations** (i.e. roofing) in Hungarian Art Nouveau.

Zsolnay also produced distinctive artistic glassware with intense colours, oval shapes, and decorative lines.



Vase produced by Zsolnay, circa 1900,  
Museum of Applied Arts, Budapest



Tile with blooming branch  
produced by Zsolnay, circa 1890,  
Museum of Applied Arts, Budapest



Bottle with stopper produced by  
Zsolnay, circa 1900, Museum of  
Applied Arts, Budapest



Vase with red poppies designed by Tadeusz (Tádé)  
Sikorski (PL) and produced by Zsolnay, circa  
1900, Museum of Applied Arts, Budapest

# Magazines

Magazines were an important element in bringing together a given community. It was in them that artists could **fully implement the ideas** of interpenetration of arts, **present the effect** to a wider audience, and **exchange inspirations** between artists from different countries. During this period, over 100 periodicals were created in Europe!

The artists designed **covers, illustrations,** and decorative **vignettes**. The subjects of these graphics complemented each other with the texts of prominent writers and poets. Even the advertising was styled to match the overall look.

Edward Okuń (PL), cover of artistic magazine  
“Chimera”, 1905, National Museum in Cracow



OKUŃ. 1903.

CHIMERA—TOM IX—ZESZ. 27.  
REDAKCJA—WARSZAWA, NOWY ŚWIAT, 22.

One of the most important was the “**Ver Sacrum**” –the official magazine of the Vienna Secession. Rainer Maria Rilke or Maurice Maeterlinck were among those who contributed.

In Germany, the new style was popularized by the aforementioned “**Jugend**” (Youth) magazine, published in Munich. In Prague, “**Volné směry**” (Free Currents) was the magazine of choice, while in Warsaw it was the “**Chimera**”.

Alfred Roller (AT), detail from artistic magazine “Ver Sacrum”, 1898, Heidelberg University Library



Alfred Roller

Unter Blumen nach meiner Flöte tanzt eine nackte Circassierin;  
ihre Brüste zittern.

Das rothe Haar, der goldne Kranz. . .

Über dicht verschneiten Fichten  
dämmerte der Winterhimmel,  
mein Herz war krank.

Da, plötzlich, durch meine dunkelste Nacht, loderten deine Rosen!

Blau blitzt das Meer, ich bin ein Grieche,  
schwarze Lorbeeren recken sich glitzernd um mich ins Licht!



Cover of magazine  
 “Volné směry”, after  
 1896, Museum of  
 Applied Arts in Prague



Vojtěch Preissig (CZ), cover for magazine “Jaro. Almanach pro mládež”, 1900, Museum of Applied Arts in Prague



# Alphonse Mucha

The best example of an artist who perfectly used the Art Nouveau aesthetics in applied graphics (but not limited to) is the Czech, Alphonse Mucha, who operated in **Paris**.

The artist developed a very distinct style – his trademark compositions depicting beautiful women with long, curling hair, surrounded by floral ornaments.

He presented such characters both on luxurious, extremely **decorative graphics** (such as the famous *Four seasons*) and **elegant advertising posters**.

Alphonse Mucha (CZ), poster of beer company,  
1897, National Library of France





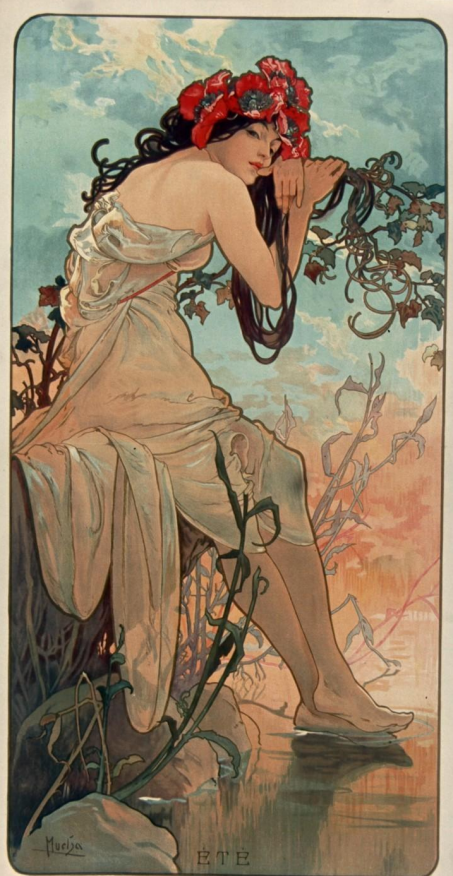
Alphonse Mucha (CZ), poster of champagne company, 1896, National Library of France



Alphonse Mucha (CZ), *Dance*, 1898, Museum of Applied Arts in Prague



Alphonse Mucha (CZ), poster of Nestlé, 1897, National Library of France



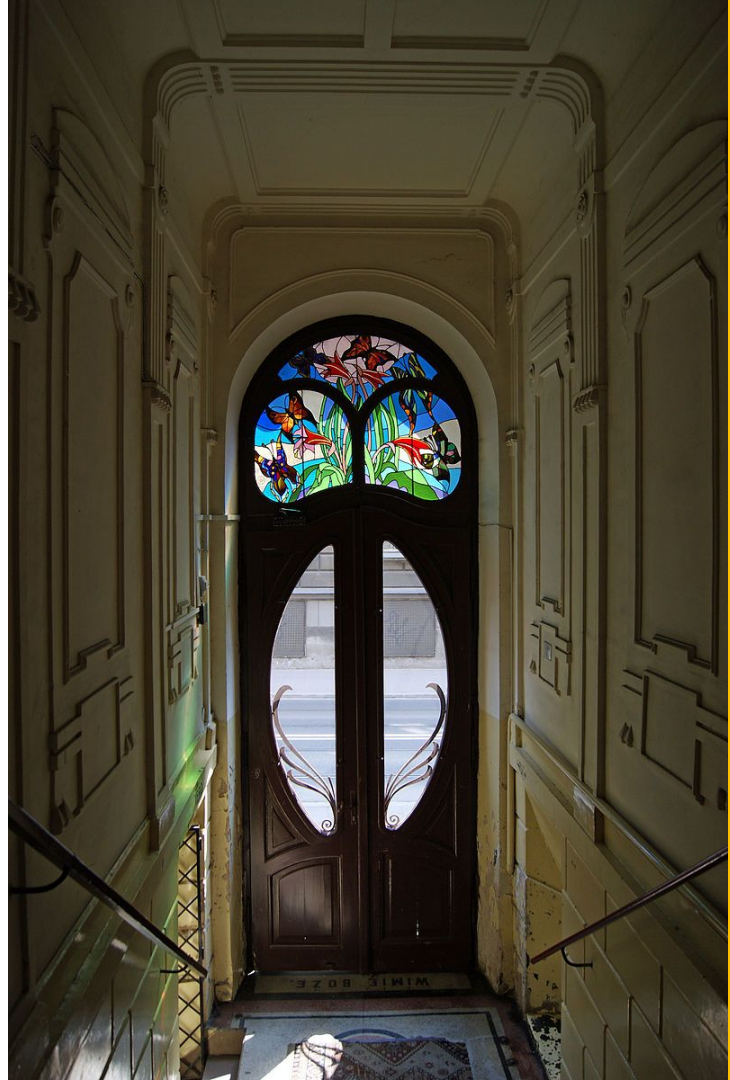
Alphonse Mucha (CZ), *Four seasons*, 1896,  
National Library of France

# Architecture

Art Nouveau was **short-lived** in architecture – it appeared around 1892, and practically disappeared after World War I. It is worth adding that since 1898 the competing modernism coexisted with it.

Particular attention was paid to **ornamentation**; hence its lines sometimes ran through several storeys of the facade. Rectangular **windows** were abandoned – Art Nouveau buildings had **various, rounded shapes**, which today make them easy to distinguish, i.e., the tenement houses built in this style.

Benjamin Torbe (PL), interior of tenement  
at Pilsudski St. in Cracow, photo source:  
[Wikimedia Commons](#)





Osvald Polívka (CZ) and Antonín Balšánek (CZ), 1905–1912, Municipal House, Prague, photo source: Wikimedia Commons





Otto Wagner (AT), Medallion House, 1898-1899,

Vienna,

photo source: Wikimedia Commons





Ferdinand Fellner (AT) and Hermann Helmer (AT), Art Pavilion in Zagreb, authors' private archive

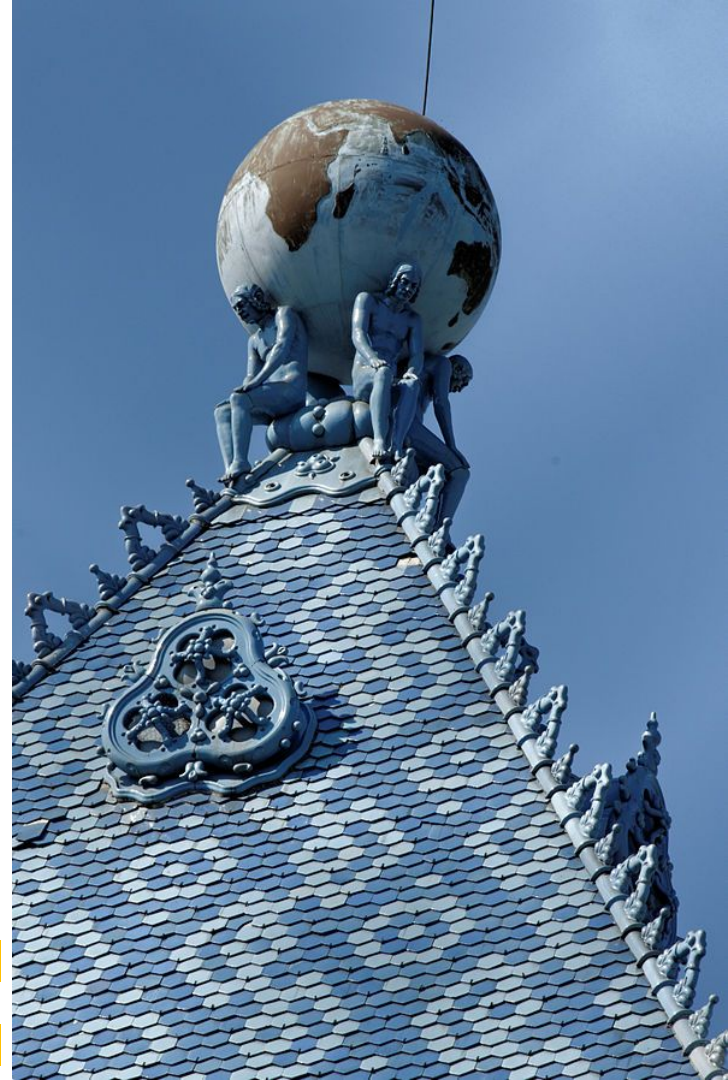


Vjekoslav Bastl (HR), Kallina House in Zagreb, authors' private archive



The **colour of architectural details** was also important, which is why many multi-coloured **mosaics** and **ceramics** appeared.

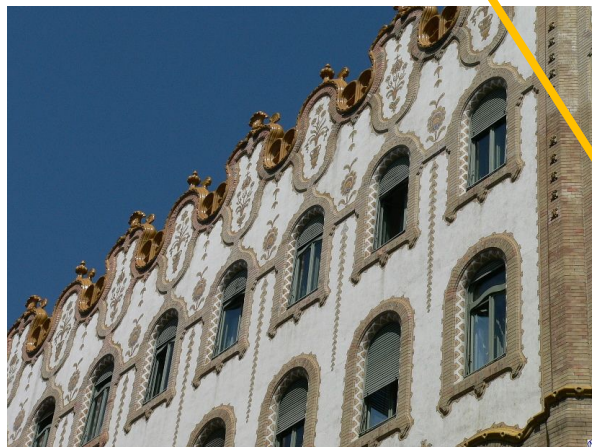
Various materials were also combined – **iron** ceased to be only a construction element, it now became an important part of the decoration.



Ödön Lechner (HU), Hungarian Institute of Geology and Geophysics, 1896, photo source: Wikimedia Commons

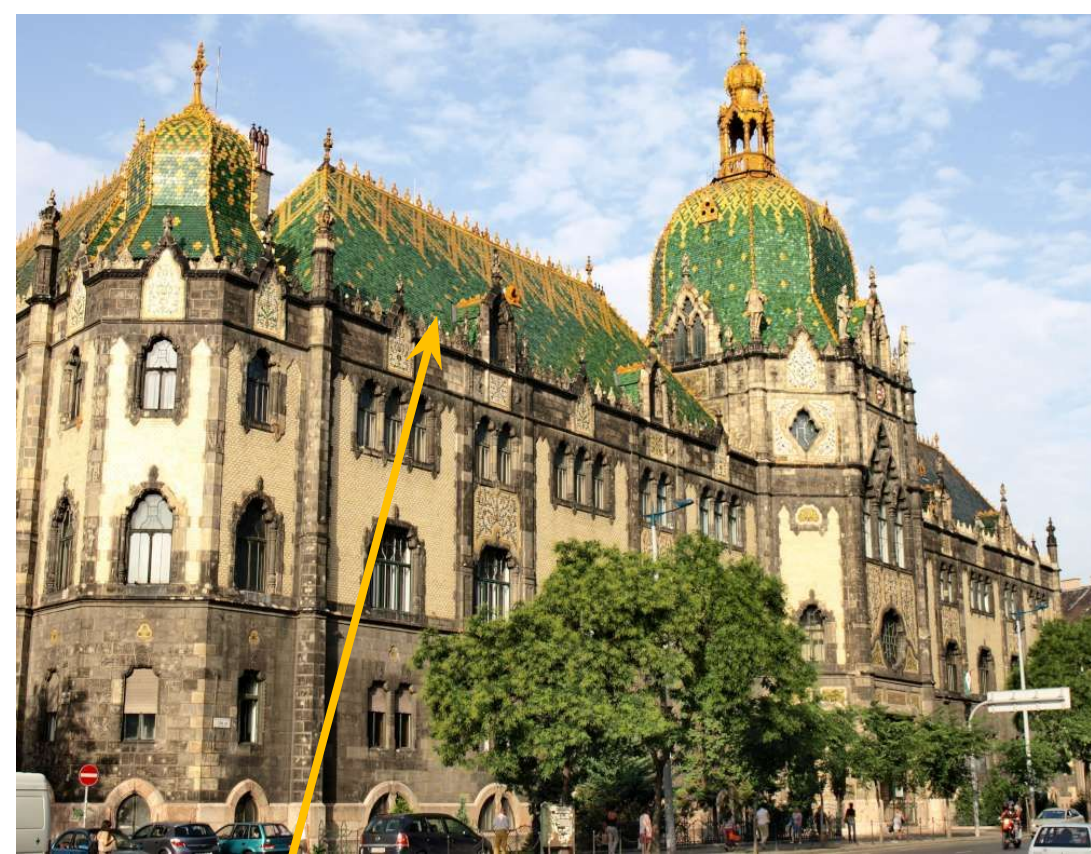


Ödön Lechner (HU),  
Building of The Postal  
Savings Bank, 1899-1901,  
Budapest, photo source:  
Wikimedia Commons



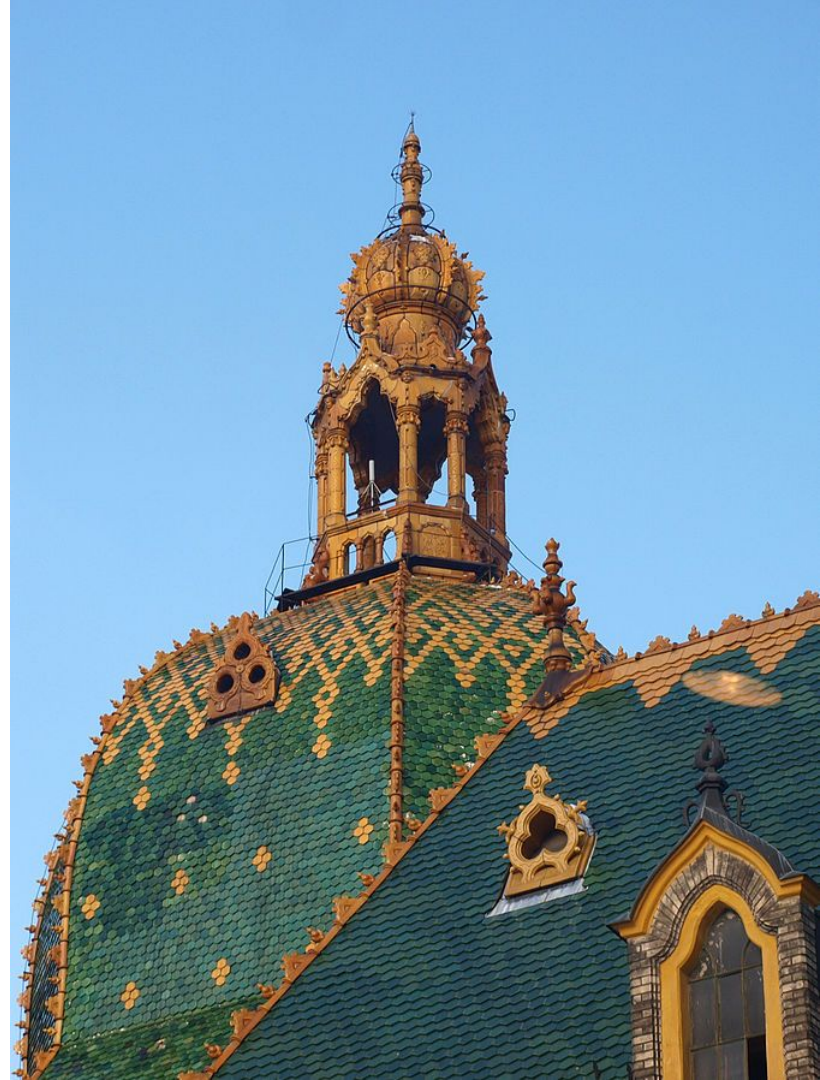
Ödön Lechner (HU), Hungarian Institute  
of Geology and Geophysics, 1896, photo  
source: Wikimedia Commons

Zsolnay roof tiles



Zsolnay roof tiles

Ödön Lechner (HU),  
Budapest Museum of Applied Arts, 1896,  
photo source: Wikimedia Commons



# Art Nouveau today

Although Art Nouveau was short-lived, its role cannot be overestimated. It has become **one of the most important styles of European art**, co-creating the canon of modern art.

Gustav Klimt and Alphonse Mucha are one of the most recognizable painters in the world today. Their works are **mass-reproduced**, seen on mugs and socks.



Socks with Gustav Klimt's *Kiss*,  
authors' private archive

Due to its influence, Art Nouveau also became **the last common style for Austro-Hungary**.

Looking at the Art Nouveau style tenement houses in Krakow, Budapest or Prague, one gets the impression that they could well be in Vienna.



Otto Wagner (AT), Majolica House,  
1898-1899, Vienna, photo source:  
Wikimedia Commons

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