

LESSON FOUR: Popular Culture



IMAGE TWELVE: François-Raoul Larche. *Loie Fuller, the Dancer*. c. 1900. Bronze, 18 1/8 x 10 1/8 x 9 1/8" (45.7 x 25.5 x 23.1 cm). Gift of Anthony Russo



IMAGE THIRTEEN: Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec. French, 1864–1901. *Divan Japonais*. 1893. Lithographed poster, composition: 31 1/8 x 23 7/8" (80.3 x 60.7 cm); sheet: 31 7/8 x 24 1/16" (80 x 62.4 cm). Publisher: Édouard Fournier, Paris. Printer: Edward Ancourt, Paris. Edition: unknown. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Fund, 1949

INTRODUCTION

The end of the nineteenth century in France is known as the Belle Époque (literally, “beautiful age”) because of the high cultural development that occurred at that time. Entertainment for the general public was a fairly new phenomenon, and artists created images in a variety of mediums and techniques of celebrities and of audiences enjoying popular culture.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

- Students will be introduced to one new medium and one new technique: bronze sculpture and lithography.
- Students will consider the ways in which popular culture is recorded or disseminated in society.
- Students will consider the ways in which art and popular culture may be integrated in advertising.

INTRODUCTORY DISCUSSION

- Discuss the idea of popular culture with your students. Ask them to create a list of definitions or examples of popular culture that they have seen. How do we learn about popular culture? Ask your students to consider the idea of celebrity. What is the role of the media (TV, newspapers, the Internet) in creating the idea of celebrity?

- The poster created by Toulouse-Lautrec (preceding page) was commissioned as an advertisement. Show your students a videotape of a commercial (or focus the conversation on a commercial that they have all seen), or have some advertisements from magazines or newspapers available for review. Ask the students to identify the product that is being advertised and the strategy that is being used to sell the product. Ask them to consider the link between advertising and popular culture.

IMAGE-BASED DISCUSSION

- Give your students a moment to look closely at *Loïe Fuller, the Dancer*. Begin the conversation by asking your students to describe what they see. Have them create a list of words to describe the sculpture.
- Inform your students that this is a sculpture of a well-known American dancer named Loïe Fuller, who moved to Paris and became a regular performer at a famous music hall called the Folies Bergères. She was celebrated for her twirling dances and flowing, silky costumes. A number of artists created images of her in a variety of mediums.
- Ask your students to look closely at *Divan Japonais*. Inform them that the owner of the cabaret depicted in the work, the Divan Japonais, commissioned Toulouse-Lautrec to make this poster to celebrate the cabaret's reopening after it had been refurbished. Ask your students to examine the three figures in the poster. These people would have been recognized by the public at the time. The man was an art critic and founder of a literary magazine. The central female figure was a famous cancan dancer. The figure onstage, whose head is cropped, was a well-known singer. Although her face is not visible, she would have been recognized by the long black gloves that were her signature accessory.
- Break your students up into pairs. Ask them to list all of the similarities they can find between *Loïe Fuller* and *Divan Japonais*. Once they have come up with a number of similarities, go around the room and have each pair name one. Tell students that they cannot repeat an idea that has already been stated, so they must listen closely to each other. How many similarities are related to background information and how many are purely visual ones.

Both *Loïe Fuller* and *Divan Japonais* are in the style of Art Nouveau. As described on p. 10 of this guide, nature was an important source for Art Nouveau artists and designers. Vines and vegetation inspired the curvilinear lines and rhythmic patterns typical of the style. The unique swirling movements that were characteristic of Loïe Fuller's dancing extended through her filmy costumes, creating organic, fluid forms that embody the Art Nouveau sensibility.

Divan Japonais is a lithograph. Lithography, invented in 1798, is a form of printmaking in which an artist can draw directly onto the surface of limestone (now usually aluminum plates) with an oily medium. The artist's drawing is "fixed" to the surface of the plate with an acid. Water is then used to cover the areas of the plate that the artist has not drawn on so as to repel the medium (water and oil do not mix). Thus, when the medium is applied to the plate, it adheres only to the actual image the artist has drawn. Damp paper is then placed onto the plate, which is sent through a press to create the image. (For more information and to see a demonstration of this process, see <http://www.moma.org/exhibitions/2001/whatisaprint>.)

ACTIVITIES/PROJECTS

Ask your students to create a poster advertising a popular student hangout at school. Will they include people that they can all recognize? Ask how they think they could make people recognizable without showing their faces. They can make their poster using many different mediums, such as drawing, painting, and/or collage.

In addition to being a pioneer of modern dance, Loïe Fuller held several patents in stage lighting and costume design. Research Loïe Fuller and her impact on these various aspects of modern dance.