

M. Lit Tour by Megan Strickland

Tour Title: Women Amongst Nature

Location: Art Nouveau & Art Deco and South East Asian Galleries

Introduction:

Welcome to the VMFA! My name is Megan Strickland. I am a participant in the VMFA's Museum Leadership in Training program. Our tour theme this year is Social Trends: Beauty and Vanity. This evening I will be taking you on a tour discussing how a woman's power or strength is portrayed, and defined, through her beauty.

Beauty and vanity are both very relevant in our society. How do we see beauty and vanity in our society? *Audience:* ... The idea of beauty and vanity is not unique to our culture and society today. Follow me and we'll see how these social trends have influenced the qualities looked for in the ideal woman.



Object 1:

Object Number: 85.349

Present Location: Lewis Decorative Arts Galleries

Artist: de Feure, Georges --Muller-Hickler, Hans (maker)(?)

Culture: French

Title: Window

Period: 20th century

Medium: stained and leaded glass, wood

Date: ca. 1901-02

Credit Line: Gift of Sydney and Frances Lewis

Our first stop is in the Art Deco & Art Nouveau gallery. Georges de Feure was an artist, designer and interior decorator who worked from Paris in the early twentieth century. He was one of three artists chosen by Siegfried Bing to design interiors for Bing's pavilion at the World's Fair in Paris in 1900. De Feure designed stained-glass windows, glassware, and furniture. In 1901 he was nominated for the Chevalier de la Legion d'honneur for his contribution to the decorative arts.

De Feure's work is dominated by symbolism in the Art Nouveau style. Art Nouveau is French for "new art" translates from its German counterpart as "youth style." It is characterized by organic, especially floral motifs as well as stylized, flowing and curved forms. Known for his paintings and decorative art, this stained glass window depicts an ideal woman of the time. What adjectives would you use to describe the woman? *Audience: glamorous, elite, beautiful, graceful, mysterious, elusive etc.*

The woman in the window captures your attention. Though her attire is ostentatious, she is among nature, showing a harmony with her surroundings. Do you think this woman looks powerful?

Transition: Moving on to another decorative Art Nouveau piece, we'll explore a more obvious depiction of women in nature.



Object 2:

Object Number: 72.13

Present Location: Lewis Decorative Arts Galleries

Artist: Mucha, Alphonse --Pinédo, Émile (cast by)

Culture: Czechoslovakian

Title: Nature

Period: 19th-20th century

Medium: bronze, gilding, silver, marble

Date: ca. 1900

Credit Line: Sydney and Frances Lewis Art Nouveau Fund

Alphonse Mucha a Czech painter and decorative artist, was widely known for his illustrations, advertisements and postcards depicting woman in nature. He is perhaps the most well-known artist of this movement and his paintings are often copied and used in today's media. Mucha often rejected the idea that his art was part of a greater movement, saying that all his inspiration came purely from within and traditional Czech art.

This bust, made from silver, bronze, and gilding, and featuring a marble topped headpiece, was cast in the early 1900's, just when Art Nouveau was reaching its peak. It's titled "Nature". Who do you think this sculpture might represent? *Mother Nature, a goddess, etc.* Though the materials are all hard and solid, there is definite softness in this piece. What shapes and features give the sculpture movement? *Hair, the base, etc.* What do you think about the choice of medium?

Transition: Next we will be entering the South Asian gallery. Follow me and we'll see an example of women in Indian art.



Object 3:

Object Number: 2007.24

Present Location: South Asian Galleries

Artist: Unknown

Culture: Indian, Rajasthan, Jaipur

Title: A Lady After Her Bath, Holding a Lotus Bud that She Has Received from a Winged Messenger

Period: 19th century

Medium: opaque watercolor and gold on paper mounted on an album page, the borders of which are decorated with gold flowers

Date: early 19th century

Credit Line: Gift of Friends of Indian Art, VMFA and Museum Purchase, The Robert A. and Ruth W. Fisher Fund

Though the artist is unknown, art of this period was more of a reflection on religious and mythical tales and stories than on daily life. Entitled “A Lady after Her Bath, Holding a Lotus Bud Received from a Winged Messenger” this watercolor dates to the early 1800’s. Created nearly a century before the past two works we’ve seen, this piece also portrays a woman’s vanity. What do you think the fact that it is watercolor and gold on paper tells us about the culture in which it was created? *Audience: It was rich, heavy in natural resource etc.*

Conclusion: Throughout the tour we’ve seen how a woman’s strength or power may be portrayed through her beauty. In the three pieces, all of the artists chose scenes among nature, and all had very specific qualities based upon the societies in which they were created. What features are considered to enhance a woman’s influence today?

Thank you for joining me tonight, and I hope you will take some time to join other M.LiT students on their tours before you leave.