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## Historical and cultural aspects of Art Nouveau style in object design

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### Abstract

Art Nouveau appeared as a style in the early 1880s, and existed at the peak of popularity almost before the First World War. The distinctive features of the style are the elegance of lines and curved shapes, the use of muted natural shades, the appeal to romantic motifs, the use of compositional completeness, the author's uniqueness of each product, the combination of natural and precious materials, and soft light. Art Nouveau is appreciated for its sophistication, the atmosphere of comfort it creates, environmental friendliness, built by the style into a principle, and the easy compatibility of Art Nouveau products with other styles. Having arisen at the end of the century before last, Art Nouveau, while preserving its historical and cultural appearance, has had an impact on modern subject designers. The article examines the historical and cultural aspects of Art Nouveau, which influence the work of modern designers. The article presents the factors of influence (and borrowing) of the Art Nouveau style on various branches of subject design: jewelry, interior design, fashion design; the influence of style on the subject-spatial environment. First of all, the heritage of Art Nouveau in modern object design includes a special color scheme, a choice of shapes (ovals, triangles), imitation of natural materials, and a certain arrangement of elements of a design product characteristic of Art Nouveau as a stylistic trend in the cultural and historical aspect. The advantages of the modern period in the development of object design are also considered separately, which consist in the fact that new technologies, techniques, and materials are emerging that allow the most daring sketches of artists, architects, and sculptors of the historical period of the emergence and development of the Art Nouveau style to be embodied in object design.

**Keywords:** Art Nouveau; Style; Object design; Modern design; Designer; Product

### 1 Introduction

Art Nouveau (also known as Modern Style) emerged and existed as a style in the late 19th to mid-20th century—a relatively short period in time. However, this style has made a significant mark on the history of product design. Historically, Art Nouveau is associated with the Belle Époque era (the period from 1890 to 1910), when this artistic movement made its presence known. Art Nouveau as a style originated in Belgium, then spread across Europe, and eventually reached the United States. The style is characterized by its opposition to the cold and strict lines of classical art, focusing more on artistic images from nature, feminine beauty, and floral decorations. The cultural aspects of Art Nouveau absorbed influences from Japanese woodblock printing, Victorianism, and the philosophy of wabi-sabi. As a cultural phenomenon, Art Nouveau modernized design, allowing it to move away from rigid historical styles and transforming decorative arts into higher forms of creativity.

Art Nouveau managed to absorb and creatively reinterpret many styles, yet none of them arguably have as strong an influence on the state of product design. Product design involves the process of developing artistic solutions for items such as technology, furniture, tableware, toys, and jewelry. Today, product design is undergoing significant transformations due to the introduction of new coatings, polymers, and materials, and the possibility of applying unusual techniques and creative solutions through technological advancements.

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## 2 Materials and Methods

The methodological and theoretical basis of this study is comprised of research by domestic scholars dedicated to the adaptation of Art Nouveau's achievements in modern product design within its historical and cultural aspects. The article employed comparative analysis methods, methods of analysis and synthesis, generalization, systematization, and graphic methods.

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## 3 Results and Discussion

The potential applications of Art Nouveau's achievements in product design are widely discussed in contemporary research.

In the study by D.N. Bezborodikh, the main historical and cultural aspects of Art Nouveau as a style, that influences modern product design, are highlighted [1].

In the contemporary context, this style is characterized by its planar representation of patterns, using contrasting color combinations, fluid forms, and whimsical silhouettes. These elements are complemented by natural motifs, a sense of decorativeness, and images of animals and birds. Traditionally, the style's linearity is based on the oval and its various transformations. However, the oval is never overtly presented as a form but is combined with other possible shapes and details.

Culturally, compositions built on the ellipse belong to the organic style, making Art Nouveau items pleasing to the eye (it is believed that the ellipse causes the least irritation when perceived). Besides the pure ellipse, hidden triangles and spirals can be found in such items, primarily reflected in naturalistic images—these can be the wings of butterflies and dragonflies or peacock feathers. Peacocks, dragonflies, and flowers of triangular-oval shapes are historical and cultural aspects of Art Nouveau that can be recognized in modern practical design. The traditional palette also persists—just as in the early 20th century, contemporary Art Nouveau works often feature dissonant pairs, such as blue-violet and orange, with gray as a neutral color.

In the overall color scheme of Art Nouveau, there is a contrast between yellow-orange and blue-violet, giving the color of the product "fluidity" and dynamism. An example of the Art Nouveau color palette is shown in Figure 1 [1].



**Figure 1** Art Nouveau color palette, example [1]

As before, the fluidity of color and line remains formal, typical means of Art Nouveau as a style, which is confirmed in modern design products.

The secret of Art Nouveau and its influence on contemporary product design lies in its establishment of the unity of the visual artistic environment, which then extends to the human habitat as a whole.

The adoption of the style from Art Nouveau by modern design helps it penetrate the everyday life of today so deeply that, according to P.P. Gladkov, we almost cease to notice the continuity of Art Nouveau and practical design in our days [2].

In S.I. Galanin's article, the possibilities of Art Nouveau as a style with a significant place in jewelry design are presented [3].





Historically, Art Nouveau began with the use and combination of materials previously non-traditional for jewelers, through the combination of semi-precious and precious stones, diamonds, and enamels. Art Nouveau as a style allowed the artistic image and individual design to dominate over the value of materials.

These cultural features of Art Nouveau, according to S.I. Galanin, are inherited by contemporary product design, where stones of unequal material value are combined, traditional Art Nouveau stone carving (gems and cameos) are widely

represented, and stone inlays of unusual shapes are made. As was historically typical for Art Nouveau, today enamels are combined with various inlays and metals, but today's technological complexity of making items is compensated by the possibilities of applying new technologies. According to S.I. Galanin, the creation of masterpieces in product design today is impossible without relying on the stylistic features of past eras [3].

In A.M. Smirnova's research, the continuity of Art Nouveau references by artists and designers of the past and present is traced [4]. A.M. Smirnova provides a comparative table of the use of Art Nouveau in jewelry design materials (Table 1) [4].

**Table 1** Art Nouveau in different eras in jewelry design [4]

No. n/a	Name, country, and years	Product Description	Appearance
1	"Orchid Cattleya," tiara. France, Paris, 1903-1904.	Materials, technologies: horn, ivory, gold, stained glass enamel and carving	
2	"Two Peacocks," France, Paris, 1897-1898, brooch.	Materials: gold, bone, topaz, enamel	
3	A piece from the Carte Blanche collection, Holographique, 2021.	Materials: gold, mother-of-pearl, opal. The technology of spraying silver and titanium on rock crystal and ceramics	
4	Ring from the LES OISEAUX LIBÉRÉS collection, 2021, Cartier	Materials: white gold, emeralds, mother-of-pearl, sapphires, diamonds	

From Table 1, it is evident how the classical Art Nouveau pieces resonate with the works of contemporary designer-masters: the trend of utilizing whimsical and expressive forms, material combinations, and complex techniques

continues. Modern design introduces current trends and employs innovative techniques, based on the classic Art Nouveau principles of attention to minute details, reference to unusual images, and combining various materials to create highly artistic images.

Sometimes, echoes of Art Nouveau are found in rather unexpected techniques, such as sgraffito. P.G. Vasilenko writes that although the sgraffito technique originated in Italy in the 15th century, its revival occurred during the Art Nouveau era [5]. In Russia, sgraffito as an interior design technique began to appear only at the end of the Soviet period, adorning building facades. Today, this technique is used not only externally but also indoors, with sgraffito wall decorations in apartments and private homes considered particularly chic. Here, we again intersect with the historical and cultural context of Art Nouveau, as the traditional Art Nouveau ornamental compositions are most popular, where artists work on lime-sand plaster. Additionally, the sgraffito technique is actively used to create wall panels and ceiling decorations (Figure 2).



**Figure 2** An example of the use of the sgraffito technique in the interior design of an apartment [5]

Modern interiors are enriched by the development of various design solutions that significantly draw historical and cultural references from the Art Nouveau style.

Art Nouveau continues to be reflected in contemporary product design, such as in clothing design. N.V. Kotlyarevskaya in her research presents facts about the influence of Art Nouveau architecture on fashion collections based on stylistic elements [6]. Couturiers typically employ the borrowing method, i.e., directly transferring the most significant visual elements of the source, which affects both the clothing model's construction and its formative elements. The creative reinterpretation of the Art Nouveau style is more complex because, in addition to stylizing the characteristic forms and elements of the style, it requires the designer's unique perspective on interpreting the formal features of Art Nouveau as a style.

In the clothing collections of Ziad Nakad, Valentino, Christian Lacroix, and Alexander McQueen, Art Nouveau motifs in their original architectural and pictorial forms are realized as prints, stylized constructive shapes of costumes, ornaments, and color solutions. All this is used by designers to complete the image in the creation of shoes and accessories. Here, just like the Art Nouveau artists, modern designers aim to create an ideal and artistically expressive image. Art Nouveau forms are transformed into new constructive images and ideas, revealing the bright features of Art Nouveau architecture in clothing models.

N.V. Kotlyarevskaya provides an example of a coat-dress model, where the designer meticulously balanced the architecture of the costume parts in their interaction, with significant elements being the sleeves with multiple folds. The created image echoes the composition of the "Dragon's Gate" at the Güell Estate, designed by Antoni Gaudí. This is achieved through the use of complex cascading forms from denim-like fabric, which are created based on the

combination of volume in the sleeves and the monumentally falling (while creating structure) folds of the skirt. McQueen draws from Gaudí's large forms, complementing his denim fabric with eco-leather accessories (Table 2) [6].

**Table 2** Comparison of Art Nouveau design solutions [6]

	
<p><b>Figure 1</b> Model of the Alexander McQueen collection</p>	<p><b>Figure 2</b> Dragon Gate, by Antoni Gaudí</p>

The clothes designed by McQueen, inspired by the Art Nouveau style, are distinguished by the unity of fabric texture and decorative details, as well as the rhythm in the coherence of lines. For McQueen's collection in the Art Nouveau style, it is characteristic to reinterpret the main elements of clothing decoratively, striving for unusual forms and picturesque effects. Clothing models created by designers under the influence of Art Nouveau almost always feature well-balanced proportions, a celebration of women's beauty, and creative handling of material, form, and overall image. This leads designers to create original costumes that continue the legacy of Art Nouveau in contemporary costume design.

Like the Art Nouveau creators who aimed to make a strong aesthetic and emotional impact on people through architecture, sculpture, and painting, modern fashion designers make their clothing designs objects of interest to the masses. The reason designers turn to the origins of Art Nouveau lies in the style's ability to perceive artistic intent in a philosophical generalization, in the unity of its form and content, celebrating beauty based on natural forms and decorative elements with unique functionality [6].

The concept of product design called "ecodesign" emerged in the 1970s as a reaction to the scientific and technological revolution. Y.K. Agalyulina writes that bionic design became one of the directions of ecodesign. Bionic design is derived from the Art Nouveau style in that it focuses on designing products based on natural forms [7]. During this period, there was mass production of utilitarian items that copied natural objects. Biomorphic principles in shaping, laid down by the Art Nouveau style, are relevant today not only for architecture but also for sculpture, interior design, and jewelry art, as the plastic principles for their embodiment in objects are quite similar. Mastering knowledge about the Art Nouveau style is essential for all modern designers who create a harmonious object-spatial environment [7].

According to T.A. Mitryagina, we now live in a period of symbiotic connections between designers, cultural scientists, and architects who create the design of contemporary items [8]. Following the complex lines of Art Nouveau in creating design projects and items is significantly technologically simplified. New materials for interior decoration, such as flexible stone, blooming wallpaper (where the pattern changes with rising air temperature), wood composite, liquid

wallpaper, self-cleaning smart glass, digital mirrors, methacryl (a type of plastic with great mechanical processing capabilities), carbon fiber (ultra-light and mega-strong material) - all open new possibilities for designers in solving interior and product design issues, while the aesthetic ideal was set by the Art Nouveau style.

As A.N. Moshelkov writes, modern designers are returning to the ideas of early 20th-century Art Nouveau, combining the economy of forms with emphasized simplicity in their structural components [9].

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#### 4 Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be noted that the legacy of the Art Nouveau style, representing a synthesis of architecture, painting, graphics, and decorative arts, remains in demand and relevant for product design today. Art Nouveau introduced new ideas and aesthetics into design, sharpening the designer's attention to decorative details, and asymmetry, and focusing on natural motifs. The principles of Art Nouveau are still relevant today, as evidenced in products of various profiles. The popularity of Art Nouveau today is partly due to the cultural context, where people accept familiar, previously seen models and forms. On the other hand, the aesthetically precise and conceptually rich organization of the environment (costume, household items) created under the influence of Art Nouveau meets the demands of mass culture and contemporary design.

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