

Symbolism

Symbolism was a late nineteenth-century art movement of French, Russian and Belgian origin in poetry and other arts.

In literature, the style originates with the 1857 publication of Charles Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal*. The works of Edgar Allan Poe, which Baudelaire admired greatly and translated into French, were a significant influence and the source of many stock tropes and images. The aesthetic was developed by Stéphane Mallarmé and Paul Verlaine during the 1860s and 1870s. In the 1880s, the aesthetic was articulated by a series of manifestos and attracted a generation of writers. The term "symbolist" was first applied by the critic Jean Moréas, who invented the term to distinguish the Symbolists from the related Decadents of literature and of art. In the *Symbolist Manifesto* ("*Le Symbolisme*") published in *Le Figaro* on 18 September 1886, he announced that symbolism was hostile to "plain meanings, declamations, false sentimentality and matter-of-fact description", and that its goal instead was to "clothe the Ideal in a perceptible form" whose "goal was not in itself, but whose sole purpose was to express the Ideal."

Symbolism was not a style but a series of aesthetic attitudes which have underwritten the major developments of 20th-century art. It was a reaction in favour of spirituality, the imagination, and dreams, which came about as a reaction to the prevailing fashion for naturalism and realism. Realism (as represented in literature by Balzac and Zola and by Courbet in painting) attempts to represent reality in its gritty particularity, and to elevate the humble and the ordinary over the ideal. It was increasingly felt that naturalism and its insistence that descriptions of aspects of the world were only approachable through the senses had debased art by depicting the physical world to the neglect of imagination, idealism, dreams and the life of the subconscious mind.

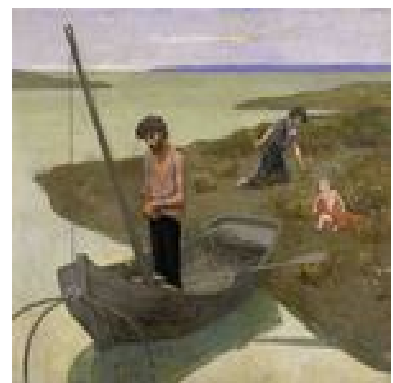


Puvis de Chavannes (1824-1829) was a pivotal figure poised at the threshold of modernism (who came to be known as 'the painter for France') whose murals adorn public buildings in Paris. Their classically-inspired allegorical themes invoke a timeless, pre-industrial past, adhering to the rules of painting established in the Renaissance. However their shallow, collapsed spaces and broad swathes of colour do not adhere to these rules, thwarting proportion and perspective. His own style incorporates bits and pieces of the new and the old, and achieves the transcendent effect that was his goal. Toulouse-Lautrec, Van Gogh, Gauguin, Matisse and Picasso (the list reads like a "Who's Who" of modernism) recognised him as a visionary, and he in turn admired the new generation of anti-academics.

Young Girls by the Seashore 1879

Young girls by the seashore proposed a completely different relation between the body and painting from the one entrenched in the academic paradigm of idealisation and transcendence. *With Young Girls by the Seashore*, Puvis posed a visual challenge to the academic nude.

Under a grey sky, a fisherman stands at the prow of his boat, arms folded, as if in prayer. Behind him are a naked child and a mother gathering the sparse dandelions that grow on the shore. Whether the child will be fed or has already starved is unclear. Although Puvis indicated that he wanted the painting to be regarded in "human, natural terms," with no religious, mystical, or philosophical symbolism, nevertheless paintings of fishing had Christian overtones in European art.



The Poor Fisherman 1881

In 1886, Puvis received the commission from the architect of the Sorbonne's Henri Paul Nétot, for a hemicycle mural in the university's main amphitheater celebrating the secularisation of schools in Paris, and depicting the breadth of disciplines in the modern curriculum. Nétot wanted a single

outdoor composition recalling Raphael's *School of Athens*, with the humanistic disciplines on the opposing side of the theoretical and applied sciences.



***The Sacred Wood Cherished by the Arts and the Muses* 1884-89**

The central figure, a secular Madonna, the "Virgin of Science" refers to the laicisation (withdrawal from clerical control) of the educational system. Two figures on either side of her lend a grounded, human aspect to the composition amidst references to abstract concepts. History appears as a figure landing upon archaeological ruins, emphasising the importance of material evidence and analysis in a contemporary approach to studying the past. Here Puvis used mural painting as a means of communicating ideals in a highly visible, central location that hosted public speeches and performances.

Because it was "bounded by high black rocks that close off the horizon," the landscape offered the deep peace of serene solitude." Another critic suggested that it was here in this benevolent space, with the "calm" sensuousness of a perfumed wood and the protection of mountains, that creativity could take place as the Muses came "to dream and sing." Another noted that in the foreground "a clearing amenable to walking" invited viewers to imagine entering this landscape and partaking in the reverie.

Gustave Moreau (1826–1898) was a major figure in French Symbolist painting whose main emphasis was the illustration of biblical and mythological figures. As a painter, Moreau appealed to the imaginations of Symbolist writers and artists. By developing the academic tradition of romantic idealism, he transformed his mythical subject matter into intense metaphors that pointed to the individual psyche. Thus, his pictures were primarily ideas dressed in exotic clothes and populated with fantasy figures.



In this work Moreau deliberately rejects the realism and naturalism in vogue in mid nineteenth century France, instead adopting a deliberately archaic painting style and mythological subject matter.

The painting depicts Oedipus meeting the Sphinx at the crossroads on his journey between Thebes and Delphi. Oedipus must answer the Sphinx's riddle correctly in order to pass. Failure means his own death and that of the besieged Thebans. The riddle was: "What walks on four feet in the morning, two in the afternoon and three at night?". Oedipus answered: "Man: as an infant, he crawls on all fours; as an adult, he walks on two legs and; in old age, he uses a walking stick". Oedipus was the first to answer the riddle correctly and, having heard Oedipus' answer, the Sphinx was astounded and inexplicably killed herself by throwing herself into the sea. The Sphinx in the painting may be seen as a form of *femme fatale*, a common theme in late nineteenth century arts and particularly of Symbolist painting.

***Oedipus and the Sphinx* 1864**

The Apparition shows the biblical character of Salome dancing in front of Herod Antipas with a vision of John the Baptist's head.

Moreau himself described Salome as a "bored and fantastic woman, animal by nature and so disgusted with the complete satisfaction of her desires (that she) gives herself the sad pleasure of seeing her enemy degraded." His sensual presentation of Salome and innovative interpretation of traditional historic and mythological themes caused his art to be regarded as eccentric and provocative. Emphasising instincts over reason, subjectivity over objectivity and suggestion over definition. The scene's morbidity and underlying themes of necrophilia, incest and sadism associate it with the decadent movement and *Fin de siècle* art.



***The Apparition* 1876**



***Galatea* 1880**

Galatea, in Greek mythology, was a Nereid who was loved by the Cyclops Polyphemus. Galatea, however, loved the youth Acis. When Polyphemus discovered Acis and Galatea together, he crushed Acis to death with a boulder. Galatea is also the name, in some versions of the Pygmalion story, of the statue that Pygmalion creates and then falls in love with.

Galatea, whom the artist depicted on several occasions, is the principal figure in this work from Moreau's final years. Her languid figure, reclining in the foreground, is set in a rocky landscape with lush, exotic vegetation. These plant forms are inspired by the marine plants that particularly fascinated Moreau.



***Galatea* c1896**

The cyclops Polyphemus, who has changed colour to match the dark, crepuscular setting, is depicted as a crouching giant observing Galatea from a distance. The brilliant pictorial surface and the richness of the textures derive from Moreau's innovative method of applying the pigment and from the use of a combination of techniques.

Charles-Marie-Georges Huysmans (1848 – 1907) was a French novelist and art critic, and one of the major champions of Symbolism.

In 1884 Huysmans published his most famous novel *À Rebours* (published in English as *Against the Grain* or *Against Nature*) considered a significant work in the history of symbolism in which its hero, des Esseintes, personifies Baudelaire's cult of the decadent dandy. Baudelaire formed the theory of correspondences between experiences of nature and states of mind, in which feeling and not description was paramount in a work of art. In this abstract fashion, the artist could suggest a more authentic picture than straightforward depiction. Above all, Huysmans drew attention to painters like Odilon Redon and Gustave Moreau who seemed to touch on this hidden reality.



***Guardian Spirit of the Waters* 1878**

Odilon Redon (1840 – 1916), although now regarded as one of the greatest of French symbolist painters, remained an obscure provincial figure until his mid 40s. Redon resisted the rising Impressionist movement and criticised naturalists and impressionists "those who remain within these narrow limits commit themselves to an inferior goal" he wrote. The subject of art, to Redon, was the inner world of imagination.



***The Crying Spider* 1881**

His acquaintance with the botanist Armand Clavaud, who became friend and mentor, inspired his imaginative interpretation of nature and introduced him to philosophy, Hindu poetry, and Greek, mediaeval and Indian art. Through Clavaud he came to know the work of Baudelaire, Flaubert and Edgar Allen Poe. During the 1860s and 70s Redon worked alone, producing charcoal drawings of astounding originality. Their strange repertoire of subjects – plants and insects with human faces, severed heads, flying creatures, skeletons and masks – were loosely derived from the art and literature of the Romantic movement, but he succeeded, by the simplicity of his design and subtlety of his tonal textural effects, in giving them a novel and striking resonance.



Caliban 1881

He spent most of his early life on the family estate North of Bordeaux, an area of wild windswept heathland. Even as an established artist he returned to the estate in summer It's melancholy memories of his lonely childhood there continued to haunt his work.

Redon's works were described as "a synthesis of nightmares and dreams", as they contained dark, fantastical figures from the artist's own imagination. His work represents an exploration of his internal feelings and psyche. He himself wanted to place "the logic of the visible at the service of the invisible".

Although his association with the symbolist and decadent movements brought him recognition he always felt that his aims as an artist were misunderstood by them, that they made the error of seeking precise meanings in his work." My drawings inspire and are not to be defined. They do not determine anything. Like music they take us into the ambiguous world of the indeterminate".

Although he became associated with the decadent movement, gaining a reputation as a master of sickness, delirium and depravity, he always felt that his aims as an artist were misunderstood by them, that they made the error of seeking precise meanings in his work. "My drawings inspire and are not to be defined. They do not determine anything. Like music they take us into the ambiguous world of the indeterminate".



In Orthodox Christian thought, the snake is a symbol of evil, but it also has been used to signify fertility, wisdom and the power to heal. Redon was possibly inspired by Hindu philosophy, in which he had a great interest.

Christ and the Serpent 1907



Butterflies, c1910

After his marriage in 1880 the loneliness and isolation of his early life came to an end, and his paintings took on a lighter more colourful tone, giving rise to his visionary paintings of flowers and butterflies. However, his life was still marked by periods of melancholy and episodes of tragedy, (the death of his first child in 1886) and family disputes over property following his fathers death.

In the early 1890s he suffered a serious illness and underwent a kind of religious crisis which seems to have marked a watershed in his life. As he recovered, he proceeded to shake off his previous melancholy introspection and religious anxiety. After the sale of the family property which had been the source of many disputes "he gained a sense of liberty, and the door was opened wide to life and light. A new and beautiful existence began. After so many dark days it was the dawn of a long and happy period."

During the last 20 years of his life Redon created a new oeuvre of joyful optimistic images – portraits, flower pieces, fantasies in radiant colour – from which the horrific macabre obsessions of his earlier work are banished.

Madame Redon was very supportive of her husband, taking care of all their affairs so that he could concentrate on his painting; she was the model for this quiet work. One of Redon's first oil paintings to treat the subject of 'the inner life', it marks a new departure in his work. The head rising from a tranquil sea, is a metaphor for spiritual awareness, suggesting a spiritual state of mind. The closed eyes became a favourite motive and a visionary symbol of contemplation.



Closed Eyes 1890



Portrait of Violette Heymann 1909

In his later portraits Redon often combined the head in profile surrounded by flowers. The juxtaposition of the observed portrait and the aura of fantastic blooms forms a luminous, other-worldly concordance of the real and the imagined, demonstrating his dazzling virtuosity in the use of pastels on coloured paper.

Looking back on his career as an artist, Redon claimed that his originality consisted of putting "the logic of the visible at the service of the invisible" In his diary he noted Corot's advice to him: " beside a certainty, place an uncertainty."

Maurice Denis, a leader of the group of younger painters known as *Les Nabis* (The Prophets) who were admirers of Redon, once remarked "the lesson of Redon is his powerlessness to paint anything which is not representative of a state of soul, which does not express some depth of emotion, which does not translate an interior vision."



The Cyclops 1914



Landscape 1881

Arnold Böcklin (1827 – 1901) was a Swiss symbolist painter. Influenced by Romanticism his painting is symbolist with mythological subjects often overlapping with the Pre-Raphaelites. His pictures portray mythological, fantastical figures along classical architecture constructions (often revealing an obsession with death) creating a strange, fantasy world.

The Arnold Böcklin typeface was named in his honour.

Böcklin is best known for his five versions (painted 1880 to 1886) of the *Isle of the Dead*, which partly evokes the English Cemetery, Florence, close to his studio and where his baby daughter Maria had been buried.

All versions of *Isle of the Dead* depict a desolate and rocky islet seen across an expanse of dark water. A small rowboat is just arriving at a water gate and seawall on shore. An oarsman manoeuvres the boat from the stern. In the bow, facing the



Isle of the Dead 1880 3rd version

gate, is a standing figure clad entirely in white. Just behind the figure is a white, festooned object commonly interpreted as a coffin. The tiny islet is dominated by a dense grove of tall, dark cypress trees – associated by long-standing tradition with cemeteries and mourning – which is closely hemmed in by precipitous cliffs. Furthering the funerary theme are what appear to be sepulchral portals and windows on the rock faces. A number of small islands with buildings have been suggested as the inspiration for this series.



Isle of Life 1888

Roger Freeing Angelica illustrates a scene from the 16th century epic poem *Orlando Furioso*, by the Italian Ariosto, in which the Muslim knight Roger saves the pagan princess Angelica from a sea monster. It has been the inspiration for paintings by Delacroix, Tiepolo, Redon, Ingres and Doré.



Roger Freeing Angelica 1873



Playing in the Waves 1883

Symbolism was initiated by and closely related to literature, poetry and music, so symbolist painters often chose their motives from these areas. The style is characterised as: "refined, elegant, subtle, intellectual, and elitist"

Böcklin exercised an influence on Giorgio de Chirico, and on Surrealist painters like Max Ernst and Salvador Dalí. When asked who was his favourite painter, Marcel Duchamp controversially named Arnold Böcklin as having a major influence on his art. Whether Duchamp was serious in this assertion is still debated.

The American critic Clement Greenberg wrote in 1947 that Böcklin's work "is one of the most consummate expressions of all that was now disliked about the latter half of the nineteenth century."



Franz Stuck (1863 – 1928) was a German painter, sculptor, engraver, and architect. Stuck's subject matter was primarily from mythology, inspired by the work of Arnold Böcklin. Large forms dominate most of his paintings and indicate his proclivities for sculpture.

His seductive female nudes are a prime example of popular Symbolist content. Stuck paid much attention to the frames for his paintings and generally designed them himself with such careful use of panels, gilt carving and inscriptions that the frames must be considered as an integral part of the overall piece.

The present version of "*Sin*" is one of many versions of the theme, which were painted between 1891 and 1912 and usually deviate only slightly in composition.



The Sin 1893



Handlung (Action) plate 2

Max Klinger (1857 – 1920) was a German symbolist painter, sculptor, printmaker, and writer.

His best known work is a series of ten etchings entitled *Paraphrase on the Finding of a Glove* (printed 1881). These pictures were based on images which came to Klinger in dreams after finding a glove at an ice-skating rink. In the leitmotiv device of a glove – belonging to a woman whose face we never see.



Ängste (Anxieties) plate 7



Entführung (Abduction) plate 9

Klinger anticipated the research of Freud and Krafft-Ebing on fetish objects. In this case the glove becomes a symbol for the artist's romantic yearnings, finding itself in each plate, in different dramatic situations, and performing the role that we might expect the figure of the beloved herself to fulfil.

The plates suggest various psychological states or existential crises faced by the artist protagonist (who bears a striking resemblance to the young Klinger).

Gustav Klimt (1862 – 1918) was an Austrian symbolist painter and one of the most prominent members of the Vienna Secession movement. Klimt is noted for his paintings, murals, sketches, and other objets d'art. Klimt's primary subject was the female body, and his works are marked by a frank eroticism. In addition to his figurative works, which include allegories and portraits, he also painted landscapes. Among the artists of the Vienna Secession, Klimt was the most influenced by Japanese art and its methods.

Klimt's *Judith* is a *femme fatale*, a theme popular amongst Symbolist painters and writers. (Definition: an attractive and seductive woman, especially one who will ultimately cause distress to a man who becomes involved with her.)



Judith and the Head of Holofernes 1901



Félicien Rops (1833 – 1898) was a Belgian artist, known primarily as a printmaker in etching and aquatint. He is noted for his drawings depicting erotic and Satanic themes. Rops is furthermore important for being a pioneer in Belgian comics.

Pornokratès 1878

Like the works of the authors whose poetry he illustrated, his work tends to mingle sex, death, and irreligious images. According to the critic Edith Hoffmann, the "erotic or frankly pornographic" nature of much of Rops's work "is at least partly due to the attraction these subjects had for a provincial artist who never forgot his first impressions of Paris".

Europe's first talking film *The Blue Angel* was largely inspired by a figure by Rops that impressed director Josef von Sternberg.



***The Temptation of St. Anthony* 1878**



***Satan Sowing Seeds* from *Les Sataniques*, 1882**

The Decadent movement was a late-19th-century artistic and literary movement, centred in Western Europe, that followed an aesthetic ideology of excess and artificiality. The visual artist Félicien Rops's body of work and Joris-Karl Huysmans's novel *Against Nature* (1884) are considered the prime examples of the decadent movement. It first flourished in France and then spread throughout Europe and to the United States. The movement was characterised by self-disgust, sickness at the world, general skepticism, delight in perversion and employment of crude humour and a belief in the superiority of human creativity over logic and the natural world.

Fernand Khnopff (1858 – 1921) was a symbolist Belgian painter.

In the 1890's Khnopff regularly visited Britain and established friendships with G.F. Watts, Edward Burne-Jones and their circle. The title of the painting is a quotation from a Christina Rossetti poem.

“God strengthen me to bear myself;
That heaviest weight of all to bear,
Inalienable weight of care.

All others are outside myself;
I lock my door and bar them out
The turmoil, tedium, gad-about.

I lock my door upon myself,
And bar them out;
But who shall wall
Self from myself, most loathed of all?



***I Lock the Door Upon Myself* 1891**

In this enigmatic portrait of his sister Marguerite, Khnopff, in his response to Rossetti's lines, is not concerned with a descriptive interpretation of the poem, rather, as a Symbolist, he is striving for an enigmatic evocation of the atmosphere evoked by the poet's writing. A young woman sits behind some sort of ledge or shelf, her arms extended and fingers clasped so as to support her face. The viewer's gaze is immediately transfixed by the blank stare of her extraordinary eyes – their colourless pupils seem to bore into one's soul. These blank eyes exhibit the sort of intense introspection engendered by the poem. Their profoundly unsettling engagement is intensified by the spatially incoherent space within which she sits. Is the scene to the right a vision through a window or a reflection – or a painting suspended by cords which extend upwards to the edge of the composition? What is happening further to the left? A circular mirror shows a blurred view of a window (across the room?); directly behind the woman's head another window is set at an angle next to panelling, or a door, which look as though they are extending away from us behind the shelved area with the prominent bust.

This white sculpted bust is a copy of a bronze head in the British Museum – part of a lost statue of Hypnos, the Greek god of sleep, showing wings sprouting from his temples. Khnopff was fascinated by this artefact; he sculpted several versions of it and indeed it formed the focal point of an altar of Hypnos which he installed in the Secessionist style house he built for himself in Brussels. Sleep is required before one can enter the realm of dreams – an anti-rationalist area of the human experience that interested the Symbolists. The presence of Hypnos who was the brother of Thanatos, the god of death, chimes with this Symbolist preoccupation with dreams and death. The three withered Lilies, arranged across the foreground are again symbolic of the passing of time and eventual Death. Text by Geoffrey Smith



***The Sphinx or The Caresses* 1896**

The Sphinx or The Caresses, depicts a cheetah-bodied Sphinx holding a languid and mesmerised Oedipus in a sensuous and foreboding embrace, as though she's considering devouring him in just a minute.

Symbolist art took many forms, from Gauguin's colourful abstractions to Khnopff's single-minded revival of old Flemish technique, including painting on wood panels, a practice utilised by 15th-century artists. Typically, the ever perverse Khnopff went backward in order to be avant-garde.

A stunningly accomplished draftsman over a range of media, he was masterful also in avoiding the two major pitfalls for artists of his time. The first was obsessive realism, dramatically illustrated by Khnopff's older contemporary, the Pre-Raphaelite artist William Holman Hunt, who once starved a goat and drenched it in whitewash after he discovered he could not find a thin-enough white goat to sit for his painting *The Scapegoat*. Rigid adherence to a narrowly conceived reality was the second danger. Gustave Courbet, a Realist from the generation prior to Khnopff's, famously declared that if someone would only show him an angel, he would gladly paint it. Khnopff and other Symbolist artists had no trouble painting angels – and in some cases "seeing" them. Jeffery Howe author of *The Symbolist Art of Fernand Khnopff* (Michigan, 1982).



Nicholas Roerich (1874 – 1947) was a Russian painter, writer, archaeologist, theosophist, philosopher, and public figure, who is regarded by some people as a spiritual teacher and guru. He was interested in hypnosis and other spiritual practices and his paintings are said to have hypnotic expression. Roerich was influenced by apocrypha and medieval sectarian writings such as the mysterious *Dove Book*.

And We are Opening the Gates, from the "*Sancta*" Series

Roerichism is a spiritual cultural and social movement that emerged in the United States in the first half of the twentieth century, centred on the teachings transmitted by Helena and Nicholas Roerich. It draws on ideas from Theosophy, Eastern and Western religions, and Vedic and Buddhist traditions, moulding them into the Russian culture and Russian cosmism. They traveled to India, met Nehru, and founded the Agni Yoga society in New York.

For the symbolists, art had an immense power because it could reveal the real world unclouded by the world of perceived phenomena which they saw as illusory. Art was something independent, obeying new rules; and became perhaps superior to everyday life.

Roerich initiated the **Treaty on the Protection of Artistic and Scientific Institutions and Historic Monuments**, known as the Roerich Pact. The most important idea of the treaty is the legal recognition that the defence of cultural objects is more important than the use or destruction of that culture for military purposes, and the protection of culture always has precedence over any military necessity.

The Roerich Pact, signed on 15 April 1935 by the representatives of American states in the White House, was the first international treaty signed in the Oval Office.



Guests from Overseas 1901



In 1969 Roerich had a minor planet named after him.

The minor planet 4426 Roerich in the Solar System



The Messenger 1922
from the "Sancta" Series

Mikhail Aleksandrovich Vrubel (1856 – 1910,) is usually regarded amongst the Russian painters of the Symbolist movement and of Art Nouveau. In reality, he deliberately stood aloof from contemporary art trends, so that the origin of his unusual manner should be sought in Late Byzantine and Early Renaissance painting.

The large painting of *Seated Demon* brought notoriety to Vrubel. Most conservative critics accused him of "wild ugliness", whereas the art patron Savva Mamontov praised the Demon series as "fascinating symphonies of a genius" and commissioned Vrubel to paint decorations for his private opera and mansions of his friends. Unfortunately the Demon, like other of Vrubel's works, doesn't look as it did when it was painted, as the artist added bronze powder to his oils in order to achieve particularly luminous, glistening effects, which deteriorated over time.



Demon Seated 1890



While in Kiev, Vrubel started painting sketches and watercolours illustrating the demon, from a long Romantic poem by Mikhail Lermontov. The poem described the carnal passion of "an eternal nihilistic spirit" for a Georgian girl Tamara. At that period Vrubel developed a keen interest in Oriental arts, and particularly Persian carpets, and even attempted to imitate their textures in his paintings.

Pan 1899

In 1890, Vrubel relocated to Moscow where he could best follow the burgeoning innovations and trends in art. Like other artists associated with the Art Nouveau style, he excelled not only in painting but also in applied arts, such as ceramics, majolicas, and stained glass. He also produced architectural masks, stage sets, and costumes.

Six-winged seraph (Azrael) 1904



Léon Bakst (1866 – 1924) was a Russian painter and scene and costume designer. He was a member of the Sergei Diaghilev circle and the Ballets Russes, for which he designed exotic, richly coloured sets and costumes.

The Firebird 1910, costume design for the ballet by Igor Stravinsky

Programme for the ballet **L'après-midi d'un faune**, 1912



The dancer Vaslav Nijinsky was the principal dancer in Diaghilev's Ballets Russes, and one of the greatest dancers of all time. Here he is shown in the costume of the faun for the ballet *L'après-midi d'un faune*, to the music by Claude Debussy, and inspired by the poem of the same name by the symbolist poet Stéphane Mallarmé.

The only film of Nijinsky performing is a recreation of him dancing in this role.

(copy or click on this link for a translation of the poem, and more poems by Mallarmé with illustrations by Odilon Redon.

https://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/French/Mallarme.php#anchor_Toc223495077)



Beginning in 1909, Bakst worked mostly as a stage-designer, living in western Europe because, as a Jew, he did not have the right to live permanently outside the Pale of Settlement in the Russian Empire. Despite his reputation mainly as a stage designer he was also commissioned by various English families during the Art Deco era, producing such works as the *Sleeping Beauty* series for James and Dorothy de Rothschild at Waddesdon Manor in 1913. The story is depicted in seven panels that line the walls of an oval, theatrical styled space in the Buckinghamshire manor house.

Sleeping Beauty
1913-22 Panel 3

Jacek Malczewski (1854 – 1929) is regarded as the father of Polish Symbolism. In his creative output, Malczewski combined the predominant style of his times, with historical motifs of Polish martyrdom, the Romantic ideals of independence, Christian and Greek traditions, folk mythology, as well as his love of the natural environment.



Melancholia 1894

Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis (1875 – 1911) was a Lithuanian painter, composer and writer.

Čiurlionis contributed to symbolism and art nouveau, and was representative of the *fin de siècle* epoch. He has been considered one of the pioneers of abstract art in Europe. During his short life, he composed about 400 pieces of music and created about 300 paintings, as well as many literary works and poems.

Čiurlionis felt that he was a synaesthete; that is, that he perceived colours and music simultaneously. Many of his paintings bear the names of musical pieces: sonatas, fugues, and preludes.



Andante (Sonata II) 1907

Edvard Munch (1863 – 1944) was a Norwegian painter, whose best known work, *The Scream*, which exists in four versions, plus a number of lithographs, has become one of the most iconic images of world art. He said: "Just as Leonardo da Vinci studied human anatomy and dissected corpses, so I try to dissect souls."

With *The Scream* Munch met his stated goal of "the study of the soul, that is to say the study of my own self". Munch wrote of how the painting came to be: "I was walking down the road with two friends when the sun set; suddenly, the sky turned as red as blood. I stopped and leaned against the fence, feeling unspeakably tired. Tongues of fire and blood stretched over the bluish black fjord. My friends went on walking, while I lagged behind, shivering with fear. Then I heard the enormous, infinite scream of nature." He later described the personal anguish behind the painting, "for several years I was almost mad... You know my picture, 'The Scream?' I was stretched to the limit – nature was screaming in my blood... After that I gave up hope of ever being able to love again."

Scholars have located the spot to a fjord overlooking Oslo, and have suggested other explanations for the unnaturally orange sky, ranging from the effects of a volcanic eruption to a psychological reaction by Munch to his younger sister Laura's commitment at a nearby lunatic asylum.



The Scream 1893



The Sick Child 1907

His youth was defined by anxiety and tragedy. In 1868 (aged five) his mother died, followed a year later by his sister. His home life in Kristiania (now Oslo), where his father was the medical officer, was claustrophobic and oppressive. A sickly child himself, he was confined within the family flat for considerable periods of his youth, while his father's religious fervour, which had intensified after the death of his wife, was bringing him to the brink of insanity - for hours at a time, he would pace up and down the room in prayer.

The Sick Child, exists in a number of versions from 1885. It is a memorial to his elder sister, who had died of tuberculosis aged fourteen.

Munch is a major exponent of symbolism and the forerunner of the expressionists. The tragic loss of his mother and sister in his childhood brought a morbid tone to much of his work. Initially, his friendship with the bohemian circle of the Norwegian capital steered him towards Impressionism. But trips to Paris from 1889 onwards put him in touch with the symbolists.



Separation 1896

One of Munch's younger sisters, Laura, was diagnosed with mental illness at an early age. Of the five siblings, only Andreas married, but he died a few months after the wedding. Munch would later write, "I inherited two of mankind's most frightful enemies: the heritage of consumption and insanity." His breakdown and episodes of self-destructive behaviour affected his personal relationships.

Munch later wrote of his childhood, "illness, madness and death were the Black Angels that kept watch over my cradle and accompanied me all my life."

The Frieze of Life is a cycle of paintings which he worked on over a number of years.

At the core of the frieze was his view of female sexual power, which he depicted in three stages – as awakening innocence, voracious sexuality and as an image of death.

The Dance of Life, from the frieze, shows several couples dancing in a luminous summer night. The central element of the composition is a couple, of whom the woman is wearing a bright red dress that wraps itself around the feet of her dancing partner.



The Dance of Life 1899–00

With her loose hair swirling about him, they seem to become a single entity. This couple is flanked by two other women, one of them young and radiant in a white dress, the other pale, with sunken cheeks and dressed in black. It is as if a story were being told about various stages in a woman's life. Munch has set the scene on the seashore, a landscape with elements from Åsgårdstrand, the coastal village where he bought a fisherman's cabin which he returned to nearly every summer for 20 years, and which inspired many of his works. Many of the pictures in Munch's protracted "Frieze of Life" project were inspired by Åsgårdstrand's curving shoreline and characteristic landscape.

Munch never married, he wrote in the third person: "Ever since he was a child he had hated marriage. His sick and nervous home had given him the feeling that he had no right to get married." The fair haired woman on the left of *The Dance of Life* has been identified as Tulla Larsen, a "liberated" upper-class woman with whom Munch began an intimate relationship in 1899. She was eager to marry him but he ended the relationship, citing his drinking and poor health as a reason. A brief attempt at reconciliation led to an argument with another artist, an accidental shooting which injured two of his fingers, and her leaving. Her marriage to a younger artist he regarded as a betrayal.



Starry Night 1893

Munch wrote, "My father was temperamentally nervous and obsessively religious – to the point of psychoneurosis. From him I inherited the seeds of madness. The angels of fear, sorrow, and death stood by my side since the day I was born." His father, Christian, reprimanded his children by telling them that their mother was looking down from heaven and grieving over their misbehaviour. The oppressive religious milieu, Edvard's poor health, and the vivid ghost stories helped inspire his macabre visions and nightmares; the boy felt that death was constantly advancing on him.

