

Eugene Grasset

Eugène Grasset was born in Lausanne, Switzerland, on May 25, 1845. He was raised in an artistic environment as the son of a cabinet designer/maker and sculptor. He studied drawing under Francois-Louis David Bocion (1828-1890) and in 1861 went to Zurich to study architecture. After completing his education, he visited Egypt, an experience that would later be reflected in a number of his poster designs. He became an admirer of Japanese art which too influenced some of his creative designs. Between 1869 and 1870, Grasset worked as a painter and sculptor in Lausanne but moved to Paris in 1871 where he designed furniture fabrics and tapestries as well as ceramics and jewelry. His fine art decorative pieces were crafted from ivory, gold and other precious materials in unique combinations and his creations are considered a cornerstone of Art Nouveau motifs and patterns.

Grasset's poster for Mark Twain's Joan of Arc

In 1877 Eugène Grasset turned to graphic design, producing income-generating products such as postcards and eventually postage stamps for both France and Switzerland. However, it was poster art that quickly became his forté. Some of his works became part of the Maîtres de l'Affiche including his lithograph, "Jeanne d'Arc Sarah Bernhardt." In 1890, he designed the "Semeuse" logo used by the dictionary publishers, Éditions Larousse.

With the growing popularity of French posters in the United States, Grasset was soon contacted by several American companies. In the 1880s, he did his first American commission and more success led to his cover design for the 1892 Christmas issue of Harper's Magazine. In 1894 Grasset created "The Woolly Horse" and "The Sun of Austerlitz" for The Century Magazine to help advertise their serialized story on the life of Napoleon Bonaparte. The "Woolly Horse" image proved so popular that Louis Comfort Tiffany recreated it in stained glass. Grasset's work for U.S. institutions helped pave the way for Art Nouveau to dominate American art.

At the end of the 19th century, Grasset was hired to teach design at École Guérin and École Estienne in Paris. Among his students were Maurice Pillard Verneuil, Augusto Giacometti, Paul Berthon, Eliseu Visconti and Otto Ernst Schmidt. At the Universal Exhibition of 1900 in Paris, the G. Peignot et Fils typefoundry, introduced the "Grasset" typeface, an Italic design Eugène Grasset created in 1898 for use on some of his posters.

Eugène Grasset died October 23, 1917 in Sceaux in the Hauts-de-Seine département southwest of Paris.

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