

PAN

AMSTERDAM

INTER-ANTIQUARIAAT MEFFERDT & DE JONGE



"La Plume"

Lithograph in colours after the design by Alphonse Mucha (1860 – 1936) printed in 1899 by F. Champenois in Parijs. Signed in the print in the lower left. Size: 71,5 x 27,5 cm.

Alphonse Mucha was born in Moravia (now Czech Republic) and is inseparably associated with Art Nouveau, initially called 'le style Mucha'. Like no other, he knew how to depict the Slavic soul with a light melancholic touch. In 1887, Mucha moved to Paris. The entire city was overwhelmed by his work, and the posters were even stolen from the streets. The graceful lines, fresh pastel colours, and lavish motifs in his illustrations of sensual women became the icons of the *fin de siècle*.

In gaining wider public recognition as the 'Master of the Art Nouveau poster', Mucha's success in a new genre – decorative panels (*panneaux décoratifs*) – played a significant part. *Panneaux décoratifs* were posters without text, a prototype of today's art posters, designed purely for artistic appreciation or decorating interior walls. It was the printer Champenois who invented this idea from the business point of view: to maximise business opportunity by recycling Mucha's designs for

many different editions. However, it was Mucha who transformed them into a new art form, affordable and available to the wider public, whereas, traditionally, works of art were available only to the privileged few.

It was Mucha's belief that through the creation of beautiful works of art the quality of life would be improved. He also believed that it was his duty as an artist to promote art for ordinary people. He was able to fulfill both of these objectives by means of his innovative concept of the mass-produced *panneaux décoratifs*. Of the *panneaux*, Mucha later wrote: 'I was happy to be involved in an art for the people and not for private drawing rooms. It was inexpensive, accessible to the general public, and it found a home in poor families as well as in more affluent circles.'

The *panneaux* illustrate all the typical qualities of the Mucha poster – the beautiful women with suggestive gestures, the decorative use of flowers and flowing hair, the subtle yet striking colours – all combine to create a compelling harmony of vision whose intention is to inspire and elevate the viewer. Of which 'La Plume' is a beautiful example.

Literature: Ann Bridges (ed.), "Alphonse Mucha the complete graphic works" (1980), P27