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## **Largest Collection of Mucha at Auction Sells 93% at Swann Galleries' First 2017 Sale**

**New York**—On Thursday, January 26, **Swann Galleries** opened their 2017 season with a landmark sale of **Alphonse Mucha & Masters of Art Nouveau: The Harry C. Meyerhoff Collection**, the largest private collection of works by the artist and his circle ever to come to auction. Of the over 200 posters, sketches and ephemera, more than half of which were by Mucha; many of the pieces were unique, previously unrecorded, or had never before appeared at auction.

Swann President and Principal Auctioneer Nicholas D. Lowry, who is also the director of the Vintage Posters department, sold works to a packed room, with all bidding phones occupied. All but one of 136 offered works by Mucha found new homes, leading to a 93% sell-through rate for the entire sale. Mr. Lowry noted, “By all metrics the auction was a huge success. It was the highest sell-through rate of any major posters sale anywhere in the world since 1999.”

The top lot of the sale was the complete set of five volumes of *Les Maîtres de l’Affiche*, which was published periodically in Paris from 1896 to 1900. The art critic Roger Marx compiled what he believed to be the best Art Nouveau posters of the time from Europe and the U.S., with full-color lithographs of works Jules Chéret, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, Théophile Alexandre Steinlen, Mucha and others. This set, in its original binding designed by Paul Berthon, was purchased by an institution for \$47,500\*.

The highest-value lot by Mucha was a rare set of silk panels depicting allegories of *The Seasons*, 1900. The designs mark a shift in the artist’s style away from pastels and towards realism. The set garnered \$35,000. Other examples of Mucha’s work printed on fabric were two red panels, one on satin and one on velveteen. The satin example more than doubled its high estimate to sell for \$7,500.

Many posters made their auction debut, including the ethereal *Parfumerie Gellé Frères / Sylvanis Essence*, 1899, in its scarce pre-text format (\$27,500), and *Krinogen*, an unusual circular advertisement, circa 1928, which was purchased by a collector for \$2,500.

One outstanding section of the sale was a run of original sketches for *Documents Décoratifs* and *Figures Décoratifs*, two books of guides by Mucha for people to decorate their homes in an Art Nouveau style. Each of the eight sketches by Mucha sold for several times their high estimates, with the highlight being a single circa 1902 pencil sketch that sold for \$15,000, above a high estimate of \$2,000.

All seven of the offered posters Mucha designed for the actress Sarah Bernhardt performed well, led by the dramatic life-size depiction of *Medee / Sarah Bernhardt*, 1898, which sold to a collector for \$23,750. Bernhardt helped to launch the artist’s career when she commissioned him to create a poster for her 1894 production of *Gismonda*, which was so successful she reused the design in her 1896 *Sarah Bernhardt / American Tour* (\$6,000). Another Bernhardt highlight was the 1908 *Leslie Carter*, which fetched \$18,750, a record for the work, above a high estimate of \$7,500.

Several works in the sale broke previous auction records, including a *La Vague*, 1897, by Privat-Livemont. The previous record for the well-known work, which was heavily inspired by Japanese Ukiyo-e prints, was \$5,760, set in 2012; the new record is \$9,375.

“With 93% of lots sold, this proved to be our most successful poster sale by lot and our third best by value,” said Mr. Lowry later that day. “We had the highest attendance we’ve ever had at a preview, a standing-room only special event, a full auction room and active bidding on almost all of the lots. As an auctioneer I can only say that every aspect of the auction was a pleasure, and that our diligent work was validated by such strong numbers is an extra pleasure.” He added, “It was a real event, in the old-fashioned sense of an auction being an event.”

Harry C. Meyerhoff was the owner of champion racehorse “Spectacular Bid” and a vintage poster collector based in Easton, Maryland. He began collecting fin de siècle posters in the 1970s with his wife and soon turned his focus to Alphonse Mucha. His main advisor for the collection was William J. Tomlinson, the highly regarded Baltimore art dealer and appraiser. Harry C. Meyerhoff died on February 11, 2016 at the age of 86.

The next auction of Vintage Posters at Swann Galleries will be held on March 16, 2017. For more information, or to consign materials to future sales, contact Nicholas D. Lowry at [posters@swanngalleries.com](mailto:posters@swanngalleries.com) or via phone (212) 254-4710, ext. 57.

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