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# Choreographing Modernity: Loie Fuller and Her Influence on the Arts

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**CHOREOGRAPHING MODERNITY:  
LOÏE FULLER AND HER INFLUENCE ON THE ARTS**

by

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**SUBMITTED TO SCRIPPS COLLEGE IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
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## INTRODUCTION

When she discovered the effect of light on sheer silk, Loïe Fuller was enchanted. Inspired by the stained glass windows of a cathedral and the way the light played on the stones around her, Fuller saw how colored light could play on fabric as well. She wrote, “Man, past master of the musical realm, is to-day still in the infancy of art, from the standpoint of control of light” (Brown 12). In her work, she strove to develop the use of light and incorporate it seamlessly into her dance. She invented new technologies to create better lights for her dances, colored and patterned lights that electricians changed during the performance. Acknowledged by many to be one of the pioneers of modern dance, Fuller self-identified as a scientist, an engineer, and a technological pioneer. However, despite her advances in dance and theatrical lighting techniques, she continued to push herself, becoming a “pioneer in film as well as in dance, [making] movies for Pathé using slow motion, shadows, and negative printing” (Mazo 22). When Fuller reached Parisian audiences in the late 1800s, she took their nightclubs and theaters by storm with her swirling dresses and colored lights, revolutionizing the evening spectacle and making it an event the whole family, artists, dancers, and scientists alike could enjoy.

Born Marie Louise Fuller in Fullersburg, Illinois in 1862, Loïe Fuller was not just a woman, nor was she simply a dancer. She was “something of a paradox:” French and American, dancer and scientist, subject and object (Current 4). Never at ease in her own country, this American fled after a marriage gone awry for the more accepting Paris. There she performed with great success, creating a style all her own and warding off imitators (Current 53). At the Universal Exposition of 1900 in Paris, she put herself on display as a dancer and innovator of the new century. However, she was not there as a delegate of the United States; neither was she there

as a treasure of the French collection. She existed outside of national barriers and outside of the barriers usually placed on women of her time.

When she was at the Folies-Bergères, and in her own theater at the Universal Exposition of 1900 in Paris, she wore a dress she designed for herself (Current 47). As a skirt dancer in burlesque and vaudeville shows in America, she had felt restricted by the relatively short skirts that were the norm. As she took on her own roles in theater, such as her debut in *Quack MD* in 1891 in the States, where she played a ghost with a long, swirling outfit, she lengthened her skirt and raised the waistline to an empire level around her chest, until, eventually, her dress simply hung from her collar to create the widest and longest skirt possible (Anatole France, Fuller x). Throughout her career, she continued modifying and adapting her dresses to her needs and to create the best performance possible. Thus Fuller's evolution into the dancing woman Paris would come to know was one she undertook very intentionally.

By the time she reached the French capital in 1892, she had created and defined a style uniquely hers. With a robe that twirled around her, she looked like a butterfly, a flower, or a flame. Since her arms were not long enough to reach the end of her expansive garment, she controlled her dresses with long batons, which she constructed, and patented herself. She employed a team of fifty electricians and hired six men to test out new ideas in her laboratory. To light her dances, she created "magic lantern technology," which allowed her technicians to change the lighting, specifically the color of the lights projected on her dress, during her performance (Mazo 22). To create *Fire Dance*, she replaced the stage floor with glass so she could project light from underneath giving her dance a magical effect. Although the sheer dress swirling around her covered her completely, in artistic representations it was sometimes portrayed as a flimsy gauze wrapping her nude body. And though certain artists, critics, and

reviewers have sexualized her in their work, it was never Fuller's intention to create an erotic dance (Garelick 334). She was in an open and committed relationship with her longtime partner and manager, Gabrielle Bloch, and led a social life filled with dinner parties and famous friends. With her scientific advances and fiercely independent spirit, Fuller was not to be dominated or controlled by anyone else. As an entity on a stage, and the object of spectators' attention, she was at once objectified and in control of her situation. She was putting herself on the stage not just for dancing's sake alone but with a clear idea of what she was hoping to accomplish with her placement and performance. She not only controlled her image by dancing with great intention, but she went so far as to commission specific artists to represent her in their works. When she liked the way a painter, lithographer, or sculptor worked, she requested pieces by him so she could have a say over the way her public perceived her, even if they did not attend a performance. At once a Renaissance and Modern woman, she became the creator of her own story and image.

It was at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with the arrival of the Paris Exposition of 1900, that her popularity boomed and artists of all varieties interpreted her movement in their works. Dr. Harvey Young, professor of Theater, African American Studies, and Film at Northwestern University, defines the World's Fairs, in part, as a forum to show the majesty of a nation. These Fairs, which lasted from 1850 to 1937, grew out of a period of great technological advancements. Many things now considered to be commonplace were invented during these years, such as the refrigerator, the Ferris wheel, the moving sidewalk, film, and the metro (Garelick 80). Bud Coleman claims, in his article "The Electric Fairy," that the 1900 Paris Exposition "celebrated two main themes, modern scientific advancement and colonial expansion" (Schanke 322). Established with the intent of showing people the progress of society, the fairs simultaneously

gave them a sense of wonder. Harvey Young speaks about the “gaze” at the Fairs (Young). Those performers who put themselves on display, like Fuller, were clearly inviting others’ gaze, but so too were the spectators. They were there to see and to be seen. Loïe Fuller was always aware of the image she was creating and how others were perceiving her upon the stage. She crafted the way her audience viewed her with the use of light, costume, and movement, always maintaining control over her performances.

One of the artistic movements the Universal Exposition of 1900 relied upon most heavily was Art Nouveau, showcased in its exhibitions, architecture, and artisanal work. Art Nouveau lasted from about 1890 to World War I and focused on representations of nature, curving lines, and intricate designs. Primarily a decorative and architectural style, it was most prevalent in Western Europe and America. Spectators and organizers at the Exposition of 1900 had differing views on the role and importance of Art Nouveau. Some critics argued that artists should be encouraged to use machines to accomplish their works, which would allow for mass-production at a lower cost, thereby benefitting the artists. However, others claimed that the Art Nouveau emphasis was used as a “correctional tool” at the Exposition. At a time when mass-produced items were gaining popularity, some feared that individuality and the independence of artists were being lost, and they thought an emphasis on Art Nouveau could serve to empower those marginalized by the machines. Additionally, the advent of the products of the Industrial Revolution, which relied heavily on machines and mass-production and were so celebrated at World’s Fairs, created items that were shoddier than those known before (Greenhalgh). Thus, in showcasing Art Nouveau pieces, the Exposition organizers were putting the control back into the hands of small-scale artisans and hand-crafted items. One of these individual innovators was Fuller herself. Debora Silverman, scholar of Art Nouveau and turn-of-the-century France, argues



that Fuller's beautiful lines were themselves an example of how Art Nouveau was used at the fair to tone down the dehumanizing aspects of the international industry (Garelick 80). Her dances were so entrenched in Art Nouveau and revealed such an individuality and beauty to her audiences that they served as a kind of balance to the harsher world of machinery that was quickly growing at the time.

Although the movement lasted from 1890 to 1914, Art Nouveau reached its height at the Paris Exposition of 1900. There, it was established as the first new decorative style of the twentieth century. The Art Nouveau movement "aimed to elevate the decorative arts to the level of fine art by applying the highest standards of craftsmanship and design to everyday objects." It was a concerted attempt to create an international style based on decoration, where all the arts should work in harmony to create a "total work of art," or *Gesamtkunstwerk*, encompassing buildings, furniture, textiles, clothes, and jewelry that all conformed to the principles of Art Nouveau (Greenhalgh). However, to see the glory of Art Nouveau at the Exposition of 1900, "one really had to look for examples from outside France" (Mandell 76). One of the pioneers of the movement was Alfonse Mucha, Czech painter and poster maker for such notable performers as Sarah Bernhardt, Parisian star and good friend of Fuller's (Current 90). All forms of art were included in this attempt to represent life in an elegant fashion. It demanded a return to natural forms with a reliance on color, and its most popular images being butterflies, lilies, and orchids. Emphasizing movement, these wavy lines and curlicues were "almost rococo with its unrelenting activity" (Mazo 26). Just as Loïe Fuller and her swirling skirts moved relentlessly about the stage, Art Nouveau posters, lamps, furniture, and architecture featured lines that seemed to swirl incessantly. For the Exposition of 1900, French architect Henri Sauvage created an entirely new theater for Fuller's performances. As the whitewashed curves of the theater moved in unison

with the flowing shapes created by Fuller's dresses, it became evident that Fuller's movements espoused the artistic movement sweeping Europe at the time.

Almost all of the texts concerning Loïe Fuller mention that she is the physical representation of Art Nouveau. Rhonda Garelick in *Electric Salome* claims that "Fuller was hailed as an icon of Art Nouveau, a living embodiment" (40) and "Fuller seems to have had a curious spongelike quality in aesthetic matters, absorbing and embodying the influences around her" (42). She also states that "Fuller's theater announced a deep (albeit tacit) connection to Art Nouveau" (81). Jean Morrison Brown in her article "Light and the Dance" in *The Vision of Modern Dance* describes Fuller's role in shaping modern dance and gives background on the cultural ideas of her time, stating that "The artists of Art Nouveau accepted the American dancer as a revolutionary artist" (11). Richard and Marcia Current continue along the general thread with their assertions that "Purely by chance, the dancer was to emerge as its personification... Loïe's dance was the Art Nouveau of choreography" (120). While other artists represented Art Nouveau in paintings, sculpture, architecture, or drawings, Fuller did so in dance. They assert that, "Books on Art Nouveau were appearing more and more frequently, and almost every one of them contained at least a single Loïe Fuller illustration or some reference to her as the personification of the movement" (338). All these authors claim that Fuller was merely the "personification" of the movement, a representation of an artistic ideal. They see her, rightly, as someone who embodied all that Art Nouveau cherished. However, she, too had an effect on the movement. Loïe Fuller was not only the physical embodiment of Art Nouveau; she herself was key in shaping the movement.

A huge number of artists across Europe are responsible for developing Art Nouveau. For the first time since Rococo and the era of Louis XV<sup>th</sup>, the popular artistic style emphasized

movement, which is one of the aspects that made it so suited to Fuller. A figure constantly in motion, Fuller was not only an excellent example of Art Nouveau beauty, but she served as an ideal inspiration for numerous artists. She gave them a way, through her dances, to represent movement in a static art form. There are posters, paintings, sculptures, ceramic pieces, and glasswork by numerous artists from the time period. Overall, more than seventy artists from about ten countries represented her in their works (Current 128). She was so beloved, she could be seen in “Loïe Fuller posters, scarves, jewelry, handkerchiefs, skirts, and lamps” (Schanke 323). In her dances, Fuller transformed herself into stylized impressions of natural objects, like flowers and flame, and in using her in their pieces, artists were continuing the conscious choice on the part of Fuller to have a lasting impact on the world of art and culture. Émile Gallé and Louis Comfort Tiffany were two notable artists who found inspiration in Fuller.

By representing her in their works, Art Nouveau artists were making Fuller a driving force in this new artistic movement. Émile Gallé, the most celebrated glassworker in France at the time of her performances at the Folies-Bergère and the Exposition, embraced her use of color, trying to emulate her rainbow-like effect in his works (Mazo 26). American artist Louis Comfort Tiffany, son of Charles Lewis Tiffany, founder of Tiffany & Co. in New York City, was also influenced by Fuller. Louis, who studied glasswork in Paris, produced numerous glass vases notable for their luminous quality and for giving the impression that they were in fact “veiled dancers frozen into glass” (Current 132). By drawing inspiration from Fuller for their works, these artists were not only accepting that her performance was an example of Art Nouveau, but they were giving her a lasting impact on the course of the movement. And she was fully aware of the impact she was having. Some of the best-known artists who chose to portray Fuller, and with whom Fuller at times collaborated, are Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, Will Bradley, and Jules

Chéret in posters, paintings and drawings; Raoul Larche, Agathon Léonard, and Pierre Roche in sculpture; and Henri Sauvage and Stéphane Mallarmé in architecture and poetry respectively. These artists, and many more, were inspired by Fuller. In the words of Joseph Mazo, “Paris adopted her; it adored her, praised her and imitated her” (26). But she did so much more for Paris. Loïe Fuller had a tangible impact on Art Nouveau, on the arts and artists in Paris, and on the history of art throughout the world. A closer examination of these eight artists will show just how she accomplished this feat.

## CHAPTER 1: POSTERS, PRINTS, AND PAINTINGS

### Toulouse-Lautrec

One of the most famous artists to represent Loïe Fuller was French Post-Impressionist painter Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec. Born in 1864, this notable artist rose to fame in the last few decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when he became known for his bold and colorful portrayals of Parisian nightlife. A regular at the cafés and cabarets of Montmartre, the Moulin Rouge in particular, he was fascinated by the artists and entertainers of his time, and he portrayed them with a disconcerting vitality and clarity (Britannica). Characterized by his use of bright colors and free brush strokes, his paintings often have a sort of rough, possibly unfinished look. Violent strokes are left bold and unsoftened, standing confidently on their own. His paintings are filled with moments of extreme precision and soft blurring: the fine, strong lines of eyelids and eyebrows on faces stand out from the great fusion of colors and fabric in the sheets of a bed (*In Bed*), while a jet-black leg sticking out from a skirt stands alone in the middle of fluid, flowing fabric (*Marcelle Lender Dancing the Bolero*). Also an *affichiste*, Toulouse-Lautrec was able to catch in a few simple lines and bold colors the feeling of a movement and the identity of a dancer or entertainer. Known for his representations of Jane Avril and Yvette Guilbert, Lautrec became well-known as a lithographer in his later years before his collapse into alcoholism and mental instability in 1899, around the start of the Universal Exposition of 1900 in Paris. Toulouse-Lautrec, fascinated by the entertainers of his era, was always striving to portray movement in his works, which led him naturally to American dancer and artist Loïe Fuller.

Although he died one year after the Exposition, where she reached her height of fame, he had already become familiar with her during her time at the Folies-Bergère. The Folies-Bergère,

established in 1869, became immensely popular in the early 1890's, and it was there that Toulouse-Lautrec created some of his best-known works of Fuller. These *Miss Loïe Fuller* prints (approx. 40 x 28 cm), released to the public in early 1893, were then reproduced, in December of 1893, in *L'Echo de Paris* (Current 130). Toulouse-Lautrec made fifty prints in black, which he tinted by hand with watercolors, each one a different color and shade, with bronze, gold, or silver dusting (351). These images show the way her skirts appear to change color in the light and the way they flow, as if by magic, above her head and all around her body (Fig. 1, Fig. 2, and Fig. 3). In the prints, the dancer is alternately bright yellow, bold blue, hot pink, and also an assortment of browns, grays, muted yellows, and rusty reds. The background is a mottled gray with red tints. And the dancer stands on a shaft of light, or white, that emerges from the back right corner of the image and moves downwards, under her feet, to open up onto the left-hand side of the page. There is a streak of darkness under this light, which gives the impression of a stage beneath her feet. And there is some sort of object of the same color that emerges on the right side of the frame, further situating her in a stage-like location. What seems at first to be a blob of color in the middle of grayness, reveals, upon closer inspection, not only a dancer but the stage on which she performs as well.

The drawing itself is a simple outline of her skirt rising up around her, with her head, shins, and feet visible, as they emerge from the masses. Her head is tilted back as she looks into the fabric over her head, and the dress swirls all around her, enveloping her body. Her feet remain side by side, placed firmly on the ground for stability. Each of the prints is bordered by a frame of a color slightly different from the background, but the light beneath her feet and the top of her moving dress are not confined by this frame and extend into it. With each image showing the same dancer but in a different color, viewers have the impression of seeing one of Fuller's

dances for themselves. When she danced, lights changed color and intensity over her flowing dresses, and, though the dress stays the same in the prints, the spectator can see just how the lights would have moved across her fabric. Yet Fuller never favored these pieces, which were so popular with viewers.

Although Fuller fascinated Toulouse-Lautrec, and his portrayals of her remain the way many people discover her today, she did not care for his interpretation of her work. Although he was never commissioned by Fuller to represent her in his work, her dances captivated him (Current 130). And although Fuller saw the benefits in partnering with other artists of her time, she and Toulouse-Lautrec never formed the partnership she knew with other artists, such as Raoul Larche and Jules Chéret (Albright 68). Critics claim Fuller's distaste for the prints could come from Toulouse-Lautrec's attempt to represent her as an individual person rather than an abstraction of movement. He tried too hard to represent Loïe, the woman behind the dance, the woman she was trying so hard to obscure with her swirling fabrics (Current 130). Yet it could also be argued that his representations are faulty because they are too caricaturized. He chose one image of her and reproduced it dozens of times, and though the color changes, the woman remains the same. This portrayal of her dance is stagnant and therefore altogether different from what it was in reality. In her dances, she was attempting to represent a movement greater than the one made by the swirls of her dress. The focus was not on her body or her identity as an individual. In her performances, Fuller did not attempt to "glorify the body... Instead, she glorified the triumphs of her time; the ingenuity of the mind placed at the service of the body, the transcendence of daily concepts of time and darkness, the dignity of women, the power of the machine" (Mazo 34). Fuller wanted to represent the Art Nouveau movement with her dance. It

was not a dance to flaunt her body, her technique, or herself as an individual. It was a selfless dance created to reflect and impact the style she evoked.

This physical representation of Art Nouveau, which she portrayed so gracefully on the stage, in turn influenced the style itself. In portraying her in his work as an individual woman, Toulouse-Lautrec was going against everything Fuller was striving for in her work. Although his concept is creative and visually appealing, it is not true to her dance or to her agenda. In his tinted watercolors, Toulouse-Lautrec showed her the same way over and over again, with only a variation in color; whereas, in reality, her dance changed from performance to performance and was experienced differently by each viewer in the audience. Toulouse-Lautrec's pieces show the static image of a woman rather than the physical representation of a movement. And, displayed as a woman alone, not as the embodiment of Art Nouveau, Fuller cannot begin to have an impact on the movement as a whole. The way Fuller presented herself to the world through her dance was very intentional, and since Toulouse-Lautrec did not respect that intentionality, she could not accurately or honestly influence the movement. So it should come as no surprise that she did not approve of the very works by which so many modern viewers know her dance.



## Will Bradley

Known for his posters and magazine covers, Will Bradley was one of the proponents of Art Nouveau. An American artist born in 1868, he learned from the art of Europe and had a considerable influence on it himself. Self-taught, he combined the styles of Art Nouveau and Arts and Crafts to create a style of visual imagery heavily influenced by Aubrey Beardsley yet still his own (Britannica). Beardsley, English illustrator and author who pioneered the Aesthetic and Art Nouveau movements and who in turn, was influenced by Toulouse-Lautrec, had a large impact on Bradley's work. Bradley made use of the new photoengraving technology, available by the 1890s, which allowed him to make exact replicas of works without recopying them each time. Largely responsible for bringing Art Nouveau to the United States, this American painter, poster designer, and illustrator took Fuller's work back to her home country (Britannica). In an article reviewing Bradley's artwork, a critic called him, "one of the cleverest decorative artists" in the United States (Albright 39). His distinctive style, which relied heavily on simple, clean black and white images, gained increasing recognition in the late 1890s. He had much in common with Fuller: they were both relatively untrained in their professions and yet very intentional about their work, their role in Art Nouveau, and the image they were creating (40).

Will Bradley, like Toulouse-Lautrec, attempted to represent the dancing Loïe Fuller. In 1894, he created "The Serpentine Dance" (19 x 11.4 cm), clean and crisp in only black and white, which was published in *The Chap-Book* (Current 344). He drew Fuller as he saw her – in simple terms, with an emphasis on the flowing materials of her dress (Fig. 4). His "Serpentine Dance" is characterized by three great sweeps of striped white on a black background. These white streaks, filled at times with a few thin, black lines, cut across the page in graceful

swooshes denoting the sweeping movements of her dress. The drawing is really very simple. Without the bottom inch of the image, it would look to be nothing more than black and white swirls on a page. But the bottom inch situates the whole piece and gives it much greater meaning. In the lower right corner, Fuller's feet are just visible, crossed at the ankle. These two little black ovals, linked at the top and highlighted with white to give the impression of feet, reveal to the viewer that the entire piece is in fact a representation of a woman hidden behind fabric. A plain, thin, black line surrounds the image, framing the fabric and feet and providing a snapshot of the dance to the spectator.

These crossed feet have sparked much controversy as they are interpreted in many ways. They could be viewed simply as an accurate depiction of Fuller's dances. Oftentimes, her dresses were so voluminous and lifted so far above her head that the only parts of her body visible were her feet. Perhaps, at the moment the drawing takes place, she was spinning, and her crossed feet show her turning movement. It could also be argued that the crossed feet only serve to better represent Fuller. In diminishing the importance of the dancer and putting the focus on the swirling dresses and the movement, Bradley is conforming to Fuller's goal of portraying Art Nouveau in her dance. He is staying true to Fuller's intention and, in aptly portraying her in his work, he is helping to turn her into, not only the embodiment of Art Nouveau, but an active shaper of the movement as well.

However, Bradley's simple portrayal of the dancer, though arguably truer than that of Toulouse-Lautrec, was not warmly received by all. Some critics, notably Ann Cooper Albright, have problematized her crossed feet, arguing that they indicate the drawer's lack of respect for the amount of effort required for her dances and the involvement of the dancer (Loïe Fuller) in the piece (41). Alternatively, it could appear to the viewer that she is so much in control of the

dance that she finds herself at leisure, with the ability to relax and cross her feet, even while her dresses swirl around her. Whether Fuller's feet in the piece are taken as a sign of her passivity or a mark of her strength, it is clear that she inspired Bradley. And Bradley, in turn, had an effect not only on French Art Nouveau drawings but on the European and American world of art as well.

## Jules Chéret

Jules Chéret was one of the forefathers of modern poster-making. Born in 1836, he rose to fame in 1867 when he made his first poster of theatrical sensation Sarah Bernhardt. With designs for Rimmel perfumes, Chéret was able to amass enough money to open his own lithography shop in Paris (Britannica). Ownership allowed him to experiment with his own artistic inclinations without worrying about commissions and clients' approval. Chéret eliminated many of the middlemen of the lithography process, choosing instead to do all the work himself in order to have complete control over the finished project. In his iconic images, he paired soft, watercolor-like swaths of color with bolder splashes to make his posters even more eye-catching to viewers. Influenced by Rococo painters Antoine Watteau and Jean-Honoré Fragonard, Chéret embraced the romantic, sweeping lines of another era. Creator of thousands of posters ranging from theatrical posters to advertisements for lamp oil, Chéret clearly made a large impact on the future of modern poster-making. In public recognition of his avant-garde efforts, he was awarded the French Legion of Honor in 1890 for his contributions to French art and industry (Britannica).

One of the best-known images of Loïe Fuller was, in fact, a poster made by the renowned Chéret. To celebrate her appearance at the Folies-Bergère in 1893, Fuller went to him to commission a poster (Albright 89). With much foresight, she chose the man who would come to be known as the father of modern poster-making. His triumph, *Folies-Bergère/La Loïe Fuller*, which was made in four different color combinations, can be seen in tourist shops across Paris (124.2 x 85.5 cm). This iconic poster has come to symbolize Art Nouveau to a certain extent and is among the most reproduced of Chéret's works (Fig. 5). Prominently displayed in many

textbooks on Art Nouveau, the most popular version of the image shows the lightly-clothed Fuller on a black background. In other versions, the background is shades of bright blue, olive green, or a deeper forest green. In all of the prints, the dancer is completely naked behind a mass of transparent, swirling fabrics, which she is holding in her raised hands. Her body faces away from the viewer, but her back is bent, her head twisting slightly to look confidently at the viewer. She holds the hem of her dress to better move the fabric, which seems to be more draped around her nude body rather than in the shape of a dress. In all four color combinations, Fuller is identifiable by her shock of red hair sticking out from her head at all angles. And in each, her dress is accentuated with hues of bright orange, pinks, and yellows that make it stand out from the darker backdrop. The shadows at the back of the dress are made of the same color as the background but in lighter hues. Her body, too, stands out from what surrounds it. Instead of portraying her body as it would have been, completely covered by her dress, Chéret chose to reveal much more skin than entirely acceptable at the time. Her glowing arms, chest, face, and legs stand out from the dress and the background, making the image striking in color and content.

Although the title of the poster and the subject matter make it clear that this is an image of Fuller, the woman created by Chéret looks nothing like the American dancer. Known to be plump and not especially attractive, Fuller looked little like the woman on the poster, with her charming, generic face. And with little formal training, it is unlikely Fuller would have been found in a balletic *attitude*, a posture in which the dancer bends the raised back leg and raises the arm, like the one demonstrated in the image. Her dance required such strength that both feet would need to be planted firmly on the ground. It is unlikely that she would be able to stand and move her massive dress while lifted on the toes of one foot, and she certainly did not wear the

*pointe* shoes that would have facilitated the posture. The extreme *cambré*, or backbend, the dancer performs in the poster, however, was a move characteristic of Fuller's dances. It is possibly, due to this poster, that she became so known for that distinctive pose. The woman in the image, complete with exposed bosom, a slender figure, and rosy lips, is clearly overly-sexualized and out of sync with the actual dancer.

Although it has little likeness to the real Fuller, this image has come to represent her work to a certain extent, and she would, most likely, take no issue with it. However, what Chéret was able to portray that many other artists of the time missed, was the movement of the dance and the graceful swirls of the fabric. It is for this reason that Fuller appreciated his work. Although he failed to represent her accurately as a woman, he accomplished what was most necessary. He captured the movement of her dances, which is exactly what she had hoped for. If he had captured the woman behind the dance, as Toulouse-Lautrec did, she might have been less satisfied with his work.

Motivated by his success, Chéret continued making posters for Fuller at her bequest. The well-received *Folies-Bergère/La Loïe Fuller* was reproduced in 1897 for *Les Maîtres de l'affiche* in a new format (38.9 x 29.2 cm). And in 1897, he created *Folies-Bergère/Loïe Fuller* (123 x 87 cm), and *Folies-Bergère/La Danse du feu* (122.5 x 83.5cm) (Garelick 344). *Folies-Bergère/Loïe Fuller* showed a Fuller different from the one in the earlier print (Fig. 6). With fewer colors, this pastel dancer was almost entirely white against a black background. She can be seen stepping forward towards the viewer, legs crossed, with her right hand raised to daintily lift a swath of fabric and her left hand curled at her side. Her dress swirls out around her knees and around her torso, and she seems to carry a great scarf, which floats over her head. The edges of this dress are more jagged than in the original, and there are flecks of light, possibly denoting movement, that

fly off her dress and into the blackness. The woman behind the veils, though more clothed than in the original, still reveals her legs, arms, and head, as well as the contours of her body through the translucent fabric. Her face somehow appears younger than before and almost childlike in its eagerness to dance and frolic with the flowing silk. Her hair still moves around her head, but in a more realistic and less stylized way than before. Overall, the image, tinted with soft greens, pinks, and yellows, is paler, more innocent, and less erotic than the one that came before.

*Folies-Bergère/La Danse du feu*, too, is more toned down than its predecessor. In this print, the dancer emerges from darkness in a mass of lightness and swirling colors (Fig. 7). Her dress changes from red to orange to yellow to violet as the colors move up her body. Again, the contours of her body show through, with her legs, arms, face, and part of her chest, either completely visible or masked only by a sheer layer of fabric. Her face, again, looks almost childlike in its simplicity and with its big blue eyes and rosy lips. Although the colors are relatively intense at the base, with a deep blue background and bright orange dress, the top, including her arm, hair, and face, is almost white. Her Fire Dance or *Danse de feu*, was remarkable for its special lighting. Fuller replaced part of the floor in the music hall with glass so she could shine light from below. This lighting feature could explain Chéret's decision to use bright colors at the base of her dress and paler ones on top half of her body.

Of all his beloved works, Chéret's representations of Fuller were among his best loved. And since Fuller herself approved of them, they were, for her, a way of controlling the way audiences and critics alike perceived her. These posters were key to establishing Chéret's dominance in the Parisian art world of the turn of the twentieth century. They worked incredibly well to spread the fame of Fuller and demonstrate her impact on the world of Art Nouveau. Although they originated as advertisements for shows, they quickly came to be seen as works of

art and were bought by collectors. A prolific artist, Chéret produced more than 1000 poster images between 1866 and 1900 (Mazo 129). In an 1899 article by *The Poster*, an English magazine, a critic exclaimed that, “In his long career as an *affichiste*, Chéret has produced nothing more successful than his designs for Loïe Fuller” (120).



## CHAPTER 2: SCULPTURE

### Raoul Larche

Born in Saint-André-de-Cubzac, Gironde on October 22, 1860, Raoul Larche was best known for his sculptures (d. June 2, 1912). In 1878, at the age of eighteen, he began his studies at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris, where he worked with instructors and collaborators such as François Jouffroy, Eugène Delaplanche, and Alexandre Falguière. He was foremost an artist rather than a manufacturer, creating works classified as “art-edition” pieces rather than more practical, everyday pieces, as some of his contemporaries did (ArtFact.com). Some of his sculptures, such as the group *La Loire et ses affluents*, were bought by the state and placed around Paris. Using pewter and bronze, the founders of Siot-Décauville reproduced some of his smaller pieces, such as lamps, vases, goblets, centerpieces, inkwells, and ashtrays. The subjects of his work ranged from peasant girls to mythical creatures. Starting in 1884, Larche exhibited widely in the official salons of Paris, and in 1886, he won the Second Grand Prix at the Prix de Rome competition. But his best-known works then and now are his sculptures of Loïe Fuller. At the Universal Exposition of 1900, he received a gold medal, presumably for his lamp statue of Loïe Fuller (MackloweGallery.com). His lamps of her were on sale inside her theater during the Exposition, where guests could purchase them as souvenirs. They can now be viewed in such diverse locations as the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts and the Villa Stuck Museum in Germany (MackloweGallery.com).

Larche made a total of four sculptures of Fuller in the early years of the twentieth century. They were all table lamps, in either bronze or brass, and they varied in size, ranging from 33 to 45.5 cm (13-18 in). In 1901, he made the first gilt bronze table lamp, named *Loïe*

*Fuller* (Current 346). This lamp is among the smallest, measuring 33 cm, and with only one light. Also in 1901, Larche created another *Loïe Fuller*, which stood 45.5 cm tall and featured two lights (MackloweGallery.com). Just before 1909, he made a gilt brass table lamp, which was 33 cm tall. And later, he created a gilt bronze table lamp titled *Loïe Fuller (Fond Memories, 1883-1908)*, height 45 cm.

Larche's pieces have an easy appeal to audiences. Elegantly composed, they are both aesthetically appealing and functional. Sarah Bernhardt, acclaimed actress and star of European and American stages, was also notably a friend of Loïe Fuller's. Both she and Fuller owned one of the Larche lamps, and Fuller had hers featured prominently on a shelf in her small apartment (Current 132). The sculptures feature a Fuller unrecognizable but for her dress, which hugs her body tightly in the middle and billows into masses of fabric around her feet and above her head. In the best-known sculpture, a curvaceous Fuller can be seen stepping out from the drapery that envelops her (Fig. 8). The contours of her body are plainly visible beneath what seems to be a sheer tissue. The viewer can see her arms, chest, slender waist, and hips almost as clearly as if she were nude. With her right leg, she steps forwards towards the viewer, bringing with it a mass of swirling fabric that ripples around her like a wave. Resembling the Venus de Milo stepping out of the ocean, this representation of Fuller moves forward to the audience as if out of the water. But, most strikingly, her head is completely enshrouded by a mass of dress that defies gravity, caught in the air permanently by the sculptor. As the metal waves and arcs elegantly over her head, Fuller controls the material with her outstretched and curved arms. She seems to welcome the viewers into her graceful embrace. Her head is leaning forward and tilted at an angle, as she peers out from under the cloud of cloth to examine those watching her. This Fuller

both welcomes her spectators and studies them from within the cocoon of her dress. And the viewers cannot help but become entranced themselves by her enchanting dance.

The other three lamps vary in popularity and availability. The second-most available today is very similar to the most popular one. However, it features a Fuller with her back on display (Fig. 9). It seems, at a glance, that the two sculptures are in fact the same turned different directions. But closer examination reveals the difference. In the second, her face is almost completely hidden by her scarves as she peeks out from underneath them to look at the viewer. Her dress flows around her feet and over her head, forming great swirls of fabric in which the light bulbs are hidden. As she raises her arms over her head to control her dress, her body is left completely visible, tightly swathed in flowing bronze fabric. Her unrealistically svelte figure reveals a graceful Art Nouveau line to form the base of the lamp. The two brass lamps that are the hardest to find today are noticeably different from the other two but are almost identical to each other. They display a Fuller unabashedly nude, with torso, including breasts, and legs fully visible. She leans on what seem to be swirls of her dress, and more fabric rises straight up over her head. However, her arms remain stationary by her side, not having any control over the movement of the fabric. She smiles and looks over her shoulder, inviting the viewer's gaze. And though her body is curved and the material around her is clearly in motion, she seems static, with more the air of a posing Greek goddess than of a dancing woman. Fuller's hair varies slightly in the two sculptures, and her body tilts in opposite directions, forming a sort of mirroring effect when placed next to each other. The two are so close to identical that one could be the reflection of the other. Whereas the more common lamps show Fuller in an active role, shaping her dress and controlling her dance, the less common ones render her role more passive. The way Larche presented Fuller in his various pieces varied immensely. Sometimes, by showing her as

independent of her swirling fabric, as he did in the two pieces that are the least common, he unknowingly undermined her control over her dances. However, his most popular piece did show a very bold Fuller, and thus he portrayed her as a powerful shaper of her movement and her role in Art Nouveau.

Although not always faithful to Fuller's strong role in the creation of her work, Larche did make one advancement in his portrayal of her that separated his pieces from other sculptures of her at the time. True to Fuller's dances, and with great innovation, Larche incorporated lighting into his sculpture. Behind her head, hidden in the folds of the fabric, Larche placed one or two lights to make the sculpture into a functioning table lamp. This light serves numerous purposes. Most evidently, it can act as a functional lamp for a room. But interestingly and more importantly, it serves to illuminate the sculpture. Larche intentionally lit his sculptures much in the same way as Fuller lit her dances. Both artists saw the importance of lighting to their art form. Both were interested in the way light played off the folds of fabric and created their art with light in mind. Larche's sculptures of Fuller approach genuine representations of her dance by the inclusion of light, such a crucial element to her work. Frederick Brandt argues that Larche combined his vision with "the swirling movement and excitement of Loïe Fuller's dance that also suggest the bustling ambiance of Paris, the busy array of pavilions at the 1900 Paris Exposition. ... [and] the new scientific wonder of the late nineteenth century – electricity" (Brandt 46). Electricity, and therefore lighting, was not only crucial to Fuller's own work; it was one of the most popular inventions of the time. That Fuller incorporated this new technology into her dances played a large role in the widespread appeal and modernity of her work. With her use of this technology, she was actively inserting herself into the new century and the modern world. Thus Larche, with his forward-thinking inclusion of electricity in his sculptures and his

faithfulness to Fuller's own artistic inclinations, was able to create an artistic representation of Fuller that paid tribute to what she hoped to accomplish herself.

According to Ann Albright, author of *Traces of Light: Absence and Presence in the Work of Loie Fuller*, the Larche works represent Art Nouveau "in its most domesticated, reactionary phase, a decorative phantasmagoria" (101). She claims that the body doesn't seem to be moving, that only the fabric can be seen swirling around a stagnant body. However, Albright ignores the fact that the movement of the fabric is clearly the result of a moving body caught for a moment in eternal stillness. In the most popular sculpture, the tension in Fuller's neck and the turn of her head show the viewer that she is in fact active, moving through space and engaging her audience (Fig. 8). She does not play a passive role in the piece. She is active, shaping the cloth around her and the Art Nouveau style she embodied.

A good friend of Fuller's and a prominent Art Nouveau artist, Raoul Larche had a large impact on the art world of his time. Fuller recognized his talent and was happy to support him as an artist. His works featured prominently in the gallery and gift shop at her theater for the Paris Exposition of 1900. His sculptures today are regarded as sublime examples of Art Nouveau artwork, and a preliminary search for Raoul Larche will reveal images of the *Loie Fuller* lamp before all others. By choosing Larche's works to sell at her theater during the Exposition, Fuller was controlling the image the public had of her. She was dictating how they perceived her. And she was attracting attention for exactly what she wanted to be known for and nothing else. Although she did not commission works by Larche, as she did with *affichiste* Jules Chéret, by promoting only certain sculptures by certain artists, she was defining her identity and marking her place to a certain extent.

## Agathon Léonard

Agathon Léonard, né Van Weydveldt, was born in Lille, France in 1841 (d. 1923). Léonard quickly became known as a sculptor adept at crafting graceful women draped with scarves. Working with porcelain, marble, quartz, and ivory to achieve his desired effects, Léonard created pottery, medallions, and statuettes, all in the style of Art Nouveau. A student of Delaplanche at the School of Fine Arts in Lille, Léonard quickly ascended to a position on the Académie de Beaux Arts in Lille and became a member of the Salon des Artistes Français in 1887. It was only in the late 1880s that ceramics came to be seen as an artistic form and became popular among state manufacturers and artists alike. The French National Manufacture at Sèvres was a great supporter of Léonard's work in its greater mission to "revive and celebrate the French tradition" (MackloweGallery.com). Many of his works can be found today in the Victoria & Albert Museum, the Art Institute of Chicago, the Abbeville Museum, the Nantes Museum, and the Hermitage Museum (from a gift given to Nicolas II).

Agathon Léonard, though not as well known as some of his contemporaries, was nevertheless a very accomplished artist. In the words of the Currents, it would be "impossible to estimate the number of Art Nouveau works that would be influenced by her," and it is important that Léonard's contributions not be omitted from the collection (128). Although the pieces he made of her were completed a full two years before the Exposition, Fuller's dancing style was much the same throughout the last decade of the twentieth century. By the time Loïe Fuller arrived in Paris, she had already modified the design of her dress so that it no longer resembled street clothes and was unquestionably part of a costume. And by the turn of the twentieth century, she was relying heavily on her patented batons to help her move the fabric all around her body.

Consequently, Léonard's portrayal of her in his most famous work, *Jeu d'Echarpe*, or *Scarf Dancer*, is very odd (Fig. 10). *Jeu d'Echarpe*, created in 1898, portrays women traveling around a central figure as they play music and dance in a fashion that is a blend of classical dance and the new dance form Fuller pioneered (Raizman 87). Although this series of fifteen dancers, which can be "identified specifically as representing Loie herself," were among the most popular entries at the Exposition of 1900, they are not immediately recognizable as her (Current 128). So unlike her actual costume, the Fuller in this piece wears a simple dress with nothing but a thin bit of fabric like a scarf held above her head. Léonard chose to show the dancers wearing empire-waisted robes with elbow-length sleeves that open out at the ends. The dancer in the middle wears a dress that not only reveals the entire arm but is bunched in near the knees, restricting movement. She is shown standing tall with a helmet or hat on and a torch in each hand. This woman would be incapable of dancing. Only the flames on the torches indicate and stirring in the still world of porcelain, and this motion seems to be due to wind, not dance. It is possible that this central figure, so absolutely unlike the flowing Fuller, is more a symbolic reference to Art, Progress, or any of the great number of ideals the Exposition of 1900 strove to display. The surrounding dancers seem relatively stationary, too, with their bodies motionless despite arms raised to play a tambourine or lift a scarf. None of these dancers resembles Loie Fuller, especially not the central figure so devoid of movement and free-flowing fabric. Though aesthetically pleasing, this set does not show Fuller's real dance.

First displayed at the Universal Exposition that propelled Fuller to stardom, this piece was heralded as the "best known Sèvres production of the turn of the twentieth century" (MackloweGallery.com). Extremely popular, this piece was reproduced in various sizes and media over the years that followed. It was sold during the Exposition of 1900 and was even

reissued when the originals sold out. The Parisian foundry Susse Frères Editeurs were so impressed with the set's popularity that they commissioned a new set in bronze. Since so few were produced and those that were exist in such a variety of sizes, they have come to be the most coveted of Léonard's works.

With the creation of her theater at the Exposition and the growing popularity of her dances, Fuller knew the impact she was having on Art Nouveau. However, for her work to have the influence she wished, artists needed to first understand what she was presenting. Léonard is also known for his *Bat Woman* or *Femme Chauve Souris*, which was an example of the darker side of Art Nouveau. Showing a woman as “anthropomorphic, erotic, and fatal,” Léonard pushed the boundaries of what was accepted from artists of the time and the ways women could be portrayed (MackloweGallery.com). It seems Léonard was determined to present Fuller the way he chose, not the way she did. And, consequently, it is no surprise that she did not commission him to create works for her, as she had done with poster-maker Jules Chéret, architect Henri Sauvage, and sculptor Pierre Roche. Although Léonard's work was met with much acclaim – he won a silver medal at the Universal Exposition in 1889 and a gold in 1900 – Fuller never openly supported him. In 1900, he was made a Chevalier of the Légion of Honor, but Fuller still felt no compulsion to commission a work from him. In choosing not to support his works, she was shaping the way the public viewed her.

Valérie Thomas composed the catalogue for *Danseuse de l'art nouveau*, an exhibition on Loïe Fuller at the Musée de l'École de Nancy in 2002. In it, she wrote, “At the end of the nineteenth century, the curved forms, the undulating hair, the loose clothing, all these lent themselves easily to adaptation and transformation into art object, both in terms of form and design” (16). Thomas saw clearly the connection Fuller had with the artists of her time. But she,



like so many others, saw Fuller in a passive role, referencing how her dances and her body “lent themselves easily,” making Fuller’s role in the Art Nouveau style seem accidental. From Thomas’ words, the reader gets the impression that the artists were lucky to find her because she just happened to be doing something they already liked, whereas in reality, Fuller took a much more active role in shaping the way the public perceived her. When she liked the work of an artist, she encouraged him, offering him a place in the small museum of her theater at the Exposition of 1900, or commissioning works by him. However, when she did not feel his representations of her were accurate, her lack of sponsorship, which featured so heavily in the way she was viewed by the public, was equally noticeable. Although Agathon Léonard had an illustrious artistic career, he is not very closely linked with Fuller since he failed to portray her authentically in his works.

## Pierre Roche

Sometimes known as Fernand Massignon or Pierre-Henri-Fernand Massignon, Pierre Roche was born on August 2, 1855 in Paris (d. January 18, 1922). Sculptor, painter, designer, and medalist, Roche was also a student of medicine and chemistry, which he abandoned to pursue the arts. Registered at the Académie Julian in Paris from 1873 to 1878 and again in 1889, Roche worked with painter Alfred Roll. He also exhibited from 1884 to 1889 at the Paris Salon. And upon the announcement of a competition for a monument to Danton, Roche decided to make his foray into sculpture. When Jules Dalou, French sculptor and virtuoso, with many sculptures currently in the Musée d'Orsay, noticed Roche's sculpture produced for this competition, he decided to take on the budding artist and support him in his burgeoning career (ArtFacts.com). Pierre Roche created the greatest number of sculptures based on Loïe Fuller of any artist, with pieces made of porcelain and bronze. He also produced a number of medallions and paper estampes (Garellick 169). Commissioned to create a number of works for Loïe Fuller's theater at the Universal Exposition of 1900, Roche worked closely with the dancer and respected her opinion highly.

As Fuller's theater was being completed for the Exposition, Roche joined Henri Sauvage, the architect, to create the plaster decorations for the exterior (Albright 100). He shaped a life-sized statue of Fuller to adorn the roof of the building, right over the entryway (Fig. 11). This figure leans to the right as she looks up to the sky. Her arms are outstretched, forming a diagonal line across her body, and the fabric of her dress flows from one hand to the other. Her dress forms a sort of cape that she uses to envelop the people arriving through the doorway beneath her. This woman, perched high above the entering guests, seemed to have been sweeping her dress forward at the exact moment Roche sculpted her into stone. She appears to be taking a step

forward as she moves, her dress rippling around her feet and behind her. This is the image that welcomed the audience to her performances, the sculpture Fuller chose to serve as the beacon on her theater. Roche also completed the figures of two dancing girls, one on each side of the entrance to the theater. These curving figures, in bas-relief, reach up to create the archway that went over the door. They twist, covering themselves with swirling dresses and lifting them up with outstretched arms to create ripples that hang over the entryway. The two dancers, each seeming to be Loïe Fuller, mirror each other and smile as they welcome the audience to the shows (Albright 99). There are also two round plaster images resembling plate-sized medallions that featured Fuller's face as drama on one and as comedy on the other (Current 137). Her face, arm, and shoulder emerge from the *Comédie* medallion beneath her grinning face rimmed with hair (Fig. 12). In *Drame*, she looks like a different woman (Fig. 13). Her shoulder, arm, and hand still protrude, but her glaring face stares with such intensity as to cause fear in its viewer. Her hair is no longer loose and free but neatly pulled back behind her head. These two opposing portrayals of Fuller demonstrate her versatility as a performer.

But Roche did not limit himself to three-dimensional representations of Fuller. In addition to his sculptures, he also did oils, medal, and gypsographs (bas-reliefs in paper that were then painted), which he himself invented. He produced, in 1904, a selection of gypsographs with Loïe Fuller and Art Nouveau as its subject. These gypsographs resemble water-colored raised stamps, where the paint falls into the crevices formed by the stamp. An avid artist and a good friend of Fuller's, it is only natural that he should choose her as the subject of one of his gypsograph creations. Composed of twenty-seven unbound pages, these embossed color prints were complemented by an essay entitled "Paeans to Loie" by Roger Marx, another friend of Fuller's. A reviewer wrote, "not only can an ornament, seeking a style for the future, derive

original decorative themes from it; but all poets of design, all those who bring inert materials to life, can benefit from its refreshing hints as to shape and hue” (Current 139). This selection of gypsographs was an ode to Fuller and all she strove to accomplish with her dance. Since two friends of the dancer’s, Roche and Marx, created it, it is clear she approved of the work they did.

Pierre Roche found in Fuller the “living embodiment of the *femme-fleur* or *femme-papillon* motif” that was so popular at the time of the Exposition of 1900 (Garelick 81). She represented the pinnacle of Art Nouveau, and Roche was heavily inspired by what she brought to the style. A longtime friend of Fuller’s, he is credited with having made the greatest quantity and variety of pieces featuring her. One of the reasons she may have so enjoyed his representations of her is that he was one of few artists to sculpt portraits of her that were consistently both accurate and flattering. Although he sculpted her for years, throughout their long friendship, he chose not to modify his model of her face as she aged, which, much to her pleasure, gave her a consistently youthful look throughout his work and her life (Current 131). Fuller considered him to be an “old friend and admirer” (236). She trusted him completely, and they shared a mutual regard for each other as artists. When looking for drawings to give to admirers and fans, Fuller often turned to Roche, who appreciated her patronage. She gave him work, and in return, acted as inspiration for his future creations.

By actively seeking Roche to create pieces for her, Fuller was determining the way others viewed her. And in hiring him to complete the sculptures for her theater, which represented the culmination of her successes at the Exposition of 1900, she was taking control over a very visible declaration of all she represented. She trusted Roche to portray her accurately in his pieces, and he, in turn, was honored to have her as a very active muse. The *Revue blanche* from May 15, 1899 states, “How one would like to contemplate for a long time, for a very long time, Pierre

Roche's 'Loïe Fuller,' that marble gem sculpted to the glory of the capering magician" (Current 131).

Pierre Roche's representations of Loïe Fuller came to be so characteristic of her style and Art Nouveau on the whole that she became, to a certain extent, the emblem of the Exposition of 1900. The Porte Binet, the great archway that acted figuratively and literally as the entryway to the Exposition and the climax of Art Nouveau, was topped with *la Parisienne*, the image of a woman standing "stiff as a dress-maker's dummy" (Jullian 90). Philippe Jullian in *The Triumph of Art Nouveau* argues that Loïe Fuller, instead of this static figure, should have graced the entrance to the Exposition. He saw her, and rightly so, as a much more active and dynamic heroine to lead the Exposition in its pursuit of modernity. Who represents the arcing, sweeping movements of Art Nouveau, the advent of electricity, and the grace of Paris better than Fuller herself? And who would have been better suited to create the statue than Pierre Roche, the man Fuller herself chose to deck the pinnacle of her theater at the same Exposition?

## CHAPTER 2: OTHER MEDIA

### Henri Sauvage

Born in Rouen in 1873, Henri Sauvage began his studies at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris in 1890. There, he worked with Louis Majorelle, Charles Plumet and Francis Jourdain, forming a group of progressive artists. When he married Marie-Louise Charpentier in 1898, daughter of sculptor Alexandre Charpentier, his place in the world of Art Nouveau was firmly established. After the Universal Exposition of 1900, Sauvage collaborated with Charles Sarazin, a friend from the École des Beaux-Arts. Together, they created salons for the Café de Paris and the Villa Majorelle in Nancy with the help of Charpentier, Majorelle, and Frantz Jourdain, Francis' father and constant supporter of Sauvage (ArtFact.com). One of the more notable works of Sauvage's is the theater he created for Loïe Fuller's performances at the Universal Exposition of 1900 in Paris.

Around 1897, as preparations for the Universal Exposition were getting under way, Loïe Fuller decided that she would not be satisfied performing in someone else's theater, along with other artists, for the duration. She was scheduled to dance at the Palais de la Danse as a part of the *danses lumineuses* but refused to be one of a line-up of dancers and demanded her own location (Garelick 87). She consequently decided to construct her own theater, choosing a site in the section called L'Art dans la Rue. However, she later relocated to a place on Rue de Paris, centrally located on the Left Bank of the Seine, a heavily-trafficked area of the Exposition, where she was the only non-French performer to hold a space (Albright 98). Although many of the other shows on Rue de Paris were erotic in nature, hers was devoid of the sensuality so many artists tried to find in her dances. Around that time, Henri Sauvage opened a studio where he

produced wallpaper, furniture, decorations, and architecture projects. He was twenty-seven years old and a good friend of Auguste Rodin and Roger Marx, a friend of Fuller's who encouraged her to establish her own theater (Current 134).

Fuller and Sauvage had much freedom in the creation of the theater because the structure, like so many at the Exposition, was meant to be temporary (Fig. 14). However, Fuller was not prepared to let someone else dictate the design and construction of her theater, and she maintained tight control over the whole process. Arsène Alexandre called her, "a very pushing woman" due to her need to insert herself into every aspect of the construction (Current 135). From the first plans to the completion of the project, she stayed on top of the production, inspecting every decision Sauvage made to ensure tasks were accomplished on time and on budget. She had hoped it would cost her no more than ten thousand dollars, and after a few months the bill had passed fifty thousand (Current 134). She was disappointed with the cost and length of the process, and when she realized it would cost her more than expected, she took on extra dancing engagements at the Olympia to pay for it. She even went to court, suing Sauvage, to sort out exactly how much she should be charged. Yet, under her strict eye, the construction was completed in only six weeks instead of the expected six months. Never content to sit by and watch, Fuller made her role and importance clear, warranting Alexandre's description in "Le Théâtre de la Loïe Fuller," "Miss Fuller was architect, painter, decorator, mechanic, electrician, manager, and everything else" (136). Although she hired Sauvage as her architect, she felt heavily responsible for the creation of her theater and inserted herself into every aspect.

Her theater, built with the goal of portraying Fuller in architecture and drawing viewers to her show, was very much centered on the dancer. Composed of layer upon layer of Fuller-inspired artwork and design, the theater had "an air of narcissism about it" (Current 137). The

front of the theater looked like a great stage curtain parting at the start of a show. It was covered in white plaster made to look like great sweeps of fabric (Fig. 15). There were lights at the base, which were lit at night to illuminate the structure from below, much as she lit her dances. Francis Jourdain, renowned French artist and friend of Sauvage, decorated the interior of the theater, and he won a gold medal at the exposition for his achievement (MackloweGallery.com). There were stained glass windows on the sides, which gave the interior the same lighting effect as her performances, with swirling colored lights reflecting and bouncing off the shapes moving within. Fuller describes her first encounter with the magical qualities of light in her autobiography, stating that upon her first visit to Notre Dame, “what enchanted me more than anything else was the marvelous glass of the lateral rose windows, and even more, perhaps, the rays of sunlight that vibrated... intensely colored” (63). Thus it was imperative that this building, created in her honor and in her image, contain this aspect that was so central to her work. Inside all the ornamentation and the carefully-designed exterior, the theater housed a museum, a gift shop, and a small stage for an audience of no more than two hundred people (Current 136).

Fuller’s theater was not only meant to be a location for her to perform but also an advertisement and publicity venture in its own right. Exposition attendees, walking by her theater, could not help but remark on the woman dancing over the entrance and the whitewashed curves covering the sides and would get a sense of her dance without reading a sign or seeing a poster. The entrance to the theater housed a souvenir shop and a museum, which solely featured works based on Fuller. There were photographs of her performances, paintings, sketches, and small sculptures both to be viewed and for sale (Albright 101). Although she did not commission any of the items herself, she did purchase reproductions of some of her favorites to give to friends and to put on sale for fairgoers. Among the most popular of the sculptures for purchase



were the lamps by Raoul Larche, notable for their incorporation of light into sculpture and his masterful rendering of her incessant movement.

She did commission the poster for the entryway, a piece by Manuel Orazi, who had made the first poster Sarah Bernhardt in Paris (Fig. 16). His creation for Fuller is considered to be one of his three best pieces (Current 138). It, like so many representations of Fuller, shows an unrealistically svelte and naked Fuller with flowers and bubbles rising from her body. Purples, oranges, and yellows move around her like the folds of her dress. This, and the front of the theater itself, so thoughtfully designed by Sauvage, both served as publicity for Fuller and her work. Another artist to contribute to the theater was Pierre Roche. Known for his sculptures and his works in plaster, he created a life-sized statue of Fuller for the peak of the theater. Roche also designed medallions and sculptures for the interior and the decorations for the entrance, which he sculpted to look like two dancers welcoming the public.

When the theater opened in June 1900, Fuller celebrated with an extravagant and decidedly American celebration. Although she was widely accepted by the French and regarded as much of the culture as a native, most of the guests at the opening were Americans supporting their fellow countrywoman. The majority of the audience was comprised of her friends, and at least half were from the United States. There were even American college students, young men, who endeavored to create a red, white, and blue show to demonstrate their national pride.

Loïe Fuller shared her theater with Sada Yacco, a Japanese dancer she mentored, and a strong Japanese influence can be seen on Fuller's dance and in the posters that portray her, including the poster by Orazi. This Japanese influence can be seen in the changing and flowing shapes, the role of nature, and the importance of the curving line. Fuller performed, in total, four dances at the Exposition: *La Danse du feu*, *La Danse de lys*, *Le Firmament*, *Lumières et*

*tenèbres*. In the first dance, *La Danse du feu*, she attempted to represent fire. She did so by embedding a glass panel within the floor of the stage through which she projected red and orange lights during the show. This effect gave the audience the impression that she was not a woman but a flame. Her second dance, *La Danse de lys*, was characterized by the moment when she raised her arms over her head and spun in circles. The way her white dress, devoid of color, fell in this dance resembled the lily flower for which it was named. Her third dance, *Le Firmament*, was her attempt to demonstrate the celestial in dance. And her final dance, *Lumières et tenèbres* celebrated the contrasts between lightness and darkness, which she portrayed with the use of new lighting technology. These dances were made possible by the machines and crew she installed in her theater. And as she attempted with each dance to embody a different concept linked with Art Nouveau, she was effectively drawing from Art Nouveau's Japanese influences as well (Garelick 84). Books on Art Nouveau often cite Sauvage's theater for Fuller as the "apotheosis of Art Nouveau architecture" (Albright 100). And with Fuller as the dominating force behind this architectural feat, her impact on Art Nouveau cannot be denied.

## Stéphane Mallarmé

Stéphane Mallarmé was born on March 18, 1842 in Paris (d. 1898). A founder of Symbolist poetry, along with Charles Baudelaire and Paul Verlaine, this French poet hoped to find another world in his poetry. He lived a difficult life, filled with the deaths of those dear to him, and it was only in his poetry that he was able to attain a degree of success and an escape from the world around him. Known for *Hérodiade* (1864) and *L'après-midi d'un faun* (1865), Mallarmé established a community of intellectuals and artists in Paris that would come to collaborate on a number of impressive works. Mallarmé believed that behind reality lies nothingness except for the essence of each real thing and that it is the job of the poet to discover and describe these perfect forms. To accomplish this feat, Mallarmé became a master of the French language, using each word very carefully to evoke certain ideas (Britannica.com). Known for his commentaries on theater, mime, and dance, Mallarmé wrote sections for *Crayonnée au théâtre* called “Ballets” and “Les Fonds dans le Ballet,” both of which feature Loïe Fuller. In his sections and his articles inspired by Fuller, Mallarmé details his interest in how dancers represented ideas, which to him was a real artistic expression and an intellectual endeavor (Albright 42). Calling her “la mystérieuse interpretation sacrée,” Mallarmé strove to understand her dances, their more philosophical implications, and how she represented ideas without words (“Ballets” 305).

In 1892, Mallarmé published “Considérations sur l’art du ballet et la Loïe Fuller” in the *National Observer* (Kerman 160). In it, he describes Fuller as “the theatrical form of poetry *par excellence*” (Mallarmé). Mallarmé only saw her perform during the last years of his life, but her dance had a profound impact on him and his attitude towards art. He viewed her dances as “an artistic intoxication and, simultaneously, an industrial achievement” (Mallarmé 307). However,

his respect for Fuller was not simply for her dancing and technical prowess. He saw her as a part of something much larger. Both Mallarmé and Fuller attempted to “express the inexpressible, to surmount the limitations of language,” and Mallarmé recognized this shared trait (Current 54). To him, her dances were like wordless poetry. And to a Symbolist poet, this was an impressive feat. The Symbolist movement, which began in the mid-nineteenth century, focused on emotions, dreams, and the role of the artist. Crucial themes in Symbolism, which Mallarmé also noticed in the dances of Fuller, are “the heavens, the ocean, nighttime, [and] perfume” (Mallarmé 309). Mallarmé, one of the most influential poets of his time, saw how Fuller presented such Symbolist ideals as “fantasmagorie..., délice, deuil, colère” or “phantasmagoria..., delight, mourning, anger,” in her works (308). When she danced onstage, her dresses produced a dreamlike quality that entranced her viewers and inspired Mallarmé. He tried so hard in his own work to express the inexpressible that he was impressed with her ability to navigate that other realm of nothingness without the aid of words in either prosaic or poetic form.

One of the most crucial parts of what her dances accomplished for Mallarmé was, as Felicia McCarren describes in *The Female Form*, “a divine presence manifested in the audience but not represented onstage” (225). He argues in his “Ballets” that Fuller was, in fact, not a woman who dances because she neither was a woman nor was she dancing. He wrote, “*elle n’est pas une femme mais une métaphore... et elle ne danse pas*” (Mallarmé 304). He believed that she was not really a woman but a metaphor for what she strove to represent and that she was not dancing but rather she was suggesting greater concepts to her viewers. Mallarmé was interested in how people imagine nothingness and the essential ideas behind everyday objects and concepts, the ability to portray something without showing it literally. This idea that he put forward applies to literature, language, and, as Fuller demonstrates, dance as well.

Symbolist poets strove to reveal to the ordinary masses the heightened senses and understandings they possessed. They do so using carefully constructed language in their poetry and prose. Mallarmé believed that Fuller was accomplishing the same thing but with her wordless choreography. He reads Fuller's dancing as a "hieroglyph," a symbol to be decoded by the viewers, and a symbol to inspire them. Since the shapes she creates in her dances "never solidified into literal representations," the viewer is free to imagine what he or she pleases (Albright 204). Although her dances often have literal names, *La Danse du feu* or *La Danse de lys*, she never endeavored to create literal representations. She did not don a flower costume for *La Danse de lys*, nor did she put real fire on the stage for *La Danse du feu*. Her dances were her interpretations of the ideas, movements she devised to give the impression of the subject to her viewers.

Mallarmé appreciated that Fuller's works demanded a new role for the audience. At a time when most dances were intended to showcase the female body or tell a story, Fuller's dances revealed "a hidden body giving itself over to the representation of something beyond it," and the viewers had to work to understand the dance's significance (McCarren 62). Mallarmé saw her as giving "meaning and visual abstraction [to] aesthetic dancing" (Albright 16). To Mallarmé, Fuller was the perfect embodiment of this idea of nothingness because in her dances, her body became invisible in the midst of the swirling fabrics. The emphasis was no longer on her physical form but on what she represented. She was no longer simply the embodiment of Art Nouveau but the embodiment of any concept she chose to represent. Her dances gave the audience the power to imagine what they liked, just as poetry does for the reader. She was Mallarmé's ideal, "a poem disengaged from all writing apparatus" (Mallarmé 304). To him, she

was but a “métaphore” summarizing one specific aspect of life, such as a flower or a flame, which was what Mallarmé strived to accomplish himself in his poetry (304).

Some critics claim that Mallarmé and Will Bradley, American illustrator, erased Fuller from her dances and rendered her passive by focusing on her dance and dress and not on her as an individual. However, in highlighting her swooshing fabrics instead of her woman’s body, they were in fact supporting her and all she was trying to accomplish. She was a source of inspiration for Mallarmé and proof that what he was attempting to achieve was indeed possible. She could do with dance what he never truly completed with words. Her dances furthered what he started and accomplished what he never could. But her performances fueled Mallarmé to never give up on his mission to describe the ideal forms that exist beyond reality.

Mallarmé described Fuller in “Les Fonds dans le Ballet,” as so many mistakenly did at the time, as “Ma très peu consciente ou volontairement inspiratrice,” insinuating that she was unaware of the influence she had on her audience and on the progress of art (Mallarmé 308). However, although she may have not been thinking about Symbolism and the essence of ideas in exactly the same framework as Mallarmé, it is clear that Fuller was conscious of what she was doing. Her stages were left bare except for a dark velvet backdrop. She chose to use minimal scenery, and the lights always focused on her dance, not on her surroundings. All this was with the intention of drawing attention to her creation and away from peripheral distractions. She wanted what she was portraying with her dance to take precedence over everything else, to transport and inspire her audiences. And, in doing so, she was accomplishing exactly what Mallarmé, too, strove for in his art. Thus she was not a passive dancer who just happened to fulfill one of Mallarmé’s dreams. Everything she did was intentional.

## CONCLUSION

It is impossible to separate Loïe Fuller from Art Nouveau and Art Nouveau from Loïe Fuller. And to say, as so many do, that Fuller was but the physical representation of the movement is an understatement. Marcia and Richard Current quote M. Harris in *Loïe Fuller: Goddess of Light* as saying that, “it was not Loïe Fuller as a person who was the Art Nouveau dream but rather the vision she created” (129). For this reason, she could not abide by Toulouse-Lautrec’s representations of her work, which stressed her as an individual rather than the Art Nouveau movement she strove to present to her audience. Jules Chéret, one of the most talented lithograph poster-makers of the time, can be found in almost every Art Nouveau reference book, with the images he created of Loïe Fuller’s dances. For the most part, when artists like Chéret featured her in their pieces, it was not Loïe Fuller the woman they were portraying but what she represented. When Fuller stepped onstage, she was no longer a dancing woman; she was this a representation of all she believed in. And when artists portrayed her in their works, they were representing the identity Fuller chose for herself, and as such, Fuller was able to shape her work and the movement. When she went so far as to commission lithographs of her work, it was to prevent being passively represented by the artists of the time. She was forcefully inserting herself into Art Nouveau and leaving a trail.

Her impact on Art Nouveau and the world of art has lasted long after the movement itself has passed. Many of the artists who portrayed her in their works were men, but she, a woman was able to have her say in the progress of art through dance and scientific innovations. Will Bradley’s attempt to present her as he interpreted her dance, while offensive to some can also be construed as empowering and supporting the position Fuller herself took in her drive to shape the

future of art. Richard Mandell in his *Paris 1900: The Great World's Fair*, describes the “whiplash lines, vegetable curves, female hair, peacocks, sea weeds, lily pads, and swans,” so characteristic of Art Nouveau, as “timeless” (74-5). He argues that the artists of the day were unaware that the Art Nouveau movement was fading at the time of the Exposition. However, Loïe Fuller’s representation of Art Nouveau in her performances transcends time. The effortless quality of her movement and the gentle flow of her dresses create an image and a feel that lives on after her dancing has stopped. Through her relentless work, she became not only the personification of Art Nouveau, but the inspiration for countless artists who, “idealizing her, portrayed her more often than any other woman of her time” (Current 4). When a current student of Art Nouveau, modern dance, national identity, World’s Fairs, or any number of topics searches for pictures from the time, it is Loïe Fuller’s twirling body that appears time after time. Her image and her impact remain strong to this day.



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## APPENDIX

Figure 1:

[http://4.bp.blogspot.com/-iP-ZSJE\\_K7c/TjT3HRK4QsI/AAAAAABX70/VPIYuEKmCHM/s400/Henri%2Bde%2BToulouse-Lautrec%2B-%2BMiss%2BLoie%2BFuller.jpg](http://4.bp.blogspot.com/-iP-ZSJE_K7c/TjT3HRK4QsI/AAAAAABX70/VPIYuEKmCHM/s400/Henri%2Bde%2BToulouse-Lautrec%2B-%2BMiss%2BLoie%2BFuller.jpg)

*Miss Loïe Fuller*

Henri de Toulouse Lautrec

Figure 2:

[http://mimt.jp/lautrec2011/en/images/pic16\\_big.jpg](http://mimt.jp/lautrec2011/en/images/pic16_big.jpg)

*Miss Loïe Fuller*

Henri de Toulouse Lautrec

Figure 3:

<http://cache2.artprintimages.com/lrg/21/2130/GSWED00Z.jpg>

*Miss Loïe Fuller*

Henri de Toulouse Lautrec

Figure 4:

<http://art-nouveau.style1900.net/images/loiefuller/bradley.jpg>

*Serpentine Dance*

Will Bradley

Figure 5:

<http://www.yaneff.com/images/plates/pl73.jpg>

*Folies-Bergère/La Loïe Fuller*

Jules Chéret

Figure 6:

<http://imgc.allpostersimages.com/images/P-473-488-90/17/1733/12C3D00Z/posters/jules-cheret-loie-fuller.jpg>

*Folies-Bergère/Loïe Fuller*

Jules Chéret

Figure 7:

[http://www.postersplease.com/images/image.php?id=36\\_263&a=1](http://www.postersplease.com/images/image.php?id=36_263&a=1)

*Folies-Bergère/La Danse du feu*

Jules Chéret

Figure 8:

[http://p2.la-img.com/523/16926/5637799\\_1\\_1.jpg](http://p2.la-img.com/523/16926/5637799_1_1.jpg)

*Loïe Fuller*

Raoul Larche

Figure 9:

<http://www.treadwaygallery.com/ONLINECATALOGS/DEC2004/acWEB/0451.jpg>

*Loïe Fuller*

Raoul Larche

Figure 10:

<http://2.bp.blogspot.com/-f25sI-L-UBs/TeVOkONSDSI/AAAAAAAAA4Q/IhTr9Ma29qA/s1600/Agathon-Leonard-van-Weydenfeld.jpg>

*Jeu d'Echarpe*

Agathon Léonard

Figure 11:

<http://ic2.pbbase.com/g5/58/673958/2/99672417.Y4F2Izfl.jpg>

Representations of Fuller

Pierre Roche

Figure 12:

[http://farm1.staticflickr.com/80/224558051\\_6716366fa0\\_o.jpg](http://farm1.staticflickr.com/80/224558051_6716366fa0_o.jpg)

*Comédie*

Pierre Roche

Figure 13:

[http://farm1.staticflickr.com/77/224558061\\_dbec7ab10e\\_o.jpg](http://farm1.staticflickr.com/77/224558061_dbec7ab10e_o.jpg)

*Drame*

Pierre Roche

Figure 14:

[http://www.tarpaulinsky.com/Fall06/LP\\_images/theatr\\_700W.jpg](http://www.tarpaulinsky.com/Fall06/LP_images/theatr_700W.jpg)

*Théâtre de Loïe Fuller*

Henri Sauvage

Figure 15:

[http://data0.eklablog.com/leschaussonsverts/mod\\_article24352052\\_7.jpg?6788](http://data0.eklablog.com/leschaussonsverts/mod_article24352052_7.jpg?6788)

Photograph of Theater

Figure 16:

[http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/a/ae/Loie\\_fuller\\_manuel\\_orazi.jpg](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/a/ae/Loie_fuller_manuel_orazi.jpg)

*Loïe Fuller*

Manuel Orazi