

Alphonse Mucha



Norman Rockwell



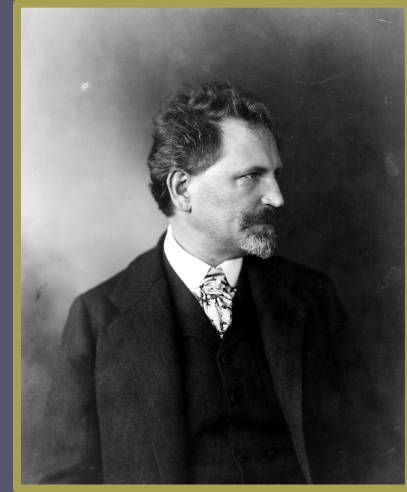
Comparative Study

BY KATHRYN AKIN

In this case study I will analyze two works by the Czech painter Alphonse Mucha and two works by the American painter Norman Rockwell. The focus of my study will be comparing the themes in their work that was influenced by the changes in culture in the two countries and comparing the use of the formal qualities such as **color**, **line**, **shape** and **space**. Even though I live in a different time than Mucha and Rockwell, the themes about western society and identity used in their pieces are similar to my own perspectives. The themes of gender norms and western cultural issues with the details that highlight these themes in the artists' artwork will be analyzed in this comparative study

Evaluation of Cultural Context OF ALPHONSE MUCHA

Art Nouveau was an art movement popular across Europe and the United States from 1890-1905. The French term means “new art” and was created to challenge the much older, historical and academic art of the 19th century. Alphonse Mucha, an artist from the Czech Republic, helped the movement gain its popularity. As a strong believer in the people, Mucha created commercial forms of art that were accessible by the common people of his time and helped the artist to rise in popularity among his viewers and patrons.



ALPHONSE MUCHA



“The artist must remain faithful to himself and to his national roots.” -Alphonse Mucha

Mucha’s love for the people stemmed from his patriotism towards his country. One of the most common themes in his work is the traditional patterns that he employs in his pieces.

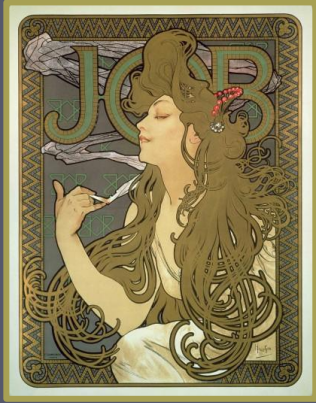
Mucha also created art that challenged the political status of the Czechs and other Western-cultured countries that faced political turmoil. Because of Mucha’s popularity as an artist and how accessible he made his art for the regular people, his art was a major platform for his ideas of patriotism and addressing the political challenges facing Western cultures.

MUCHA, ALPHONSE. *RÊVERIE*, 1898.

COLOR LITHOGRAPH.

MUCHAFOUNDATION.ORG

Analysis of Formal Qualities OF ALPHONSE MUCHA



MUCHA, ALPHONSE. JOB, 1896. COLOR LITHOGRAPH. MUCHAFOUNDATION.ORG



MUCHA, ALPHONSE. POSTER FOR 'WAVERLY CYCLES', 1898. COLOR LITHOGRAPH. MUCHAFOUNDATION.ORG

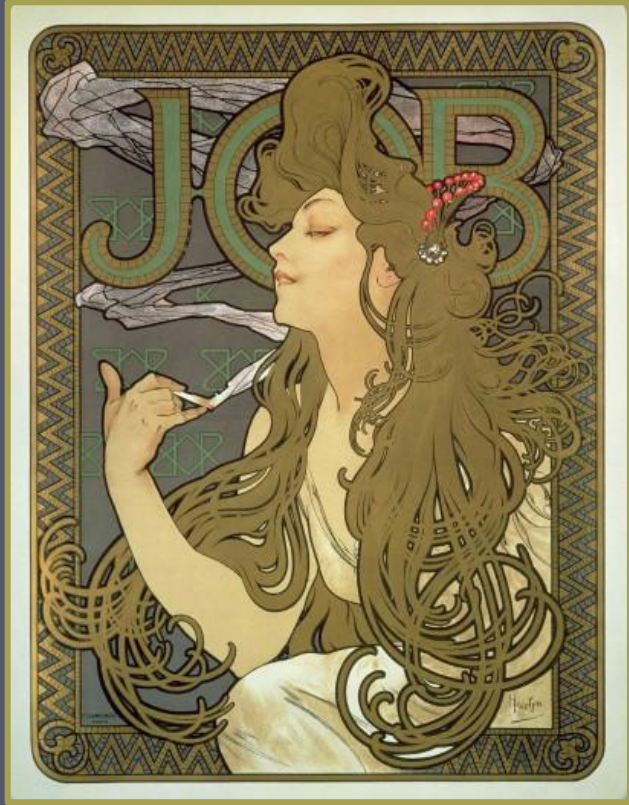
In Mucha's pieces he uses bold, black **lines** to outline certain figures in the artwork and make the figures the central focus of the pieces. The **lines** also help to emphasize the figures and contrast them from the detailed backgrounds in his works. This creates the illusion of a foreground versus a background in a two-dimensional piece. Similar to other Art Nouveau artists, Mucha relies on the use of **organic shapes** more often than he relies on the use of **geometric shapes**.

In most of Mucha's pieces he also uses the element of **space** by creating **positive space** with the figures and the words or props surrounding them, and **negative space** with the solid-colored backgrounds of his works. Another common tool in Mucha and Art Nouveau pieces is the use of muted, warm **hues**, with the central figure often adorned in in the warmer tones while the use of cool **colors** was used to draw more attention to the warmer **hues**. The use of tempera and colored lithographs as mediums created a smooth **texture** in Mucha's painting and prints.



MUCHA, ALPHONSE. LOTTERY OF THE UNION OF SOUTHWESTERN MORAVIA, 1912. COLOR LITHOGRAPH. MUCHAFOUNDATION.ORG

Interpretation of Purpose OF 'JOB' (1896) BY ALPHONSE MUCHA



MUCHA, ALPHONSE. *JOB*, 1896. COLOR LITHOGRAPH. MUCHAFOUNDATION.ORG

Alphonse Mucha created *Job* when he was commissioned by the Joseph Bardou Company to create an advertisement for their cigarette papers. Although many of Mucha's posters were done through some form of commission, many of his pieces still contained a message to or about society at the time.

In *Job* Mucha takes the ideas of Art Nouveau and challenges the societal norms of the time by using a sensual-looking woman as the focus of the advertisement. During the 19th century smoking was a male-dominated habit, which contrasts to the ideas shown in Mucha's piece, which portrays an erotic, beautiful woman who appears to be enjoying her smoking habit.

Mucha's ideas on women sexuality reflected the emergence of the "new woman" who was no longer docile and had roles within society that were different than the predetermined roles in the old society. Using beautiful figures, Mucha's attempts to break the social stigmas was overall successful as *Job* became one of his most popular works.

Annotation of Function OF 'JOB' (1896) BY ALPHONSE MUCHA

Mucha does not rely on one type of shape for the creation of the piece *Job*. He tends to use both **geometric** and **organic shapes** in his work.



With the border, Mucha creates a sense of **unity** by using **geometric shapes** (see image above) and contrasts the woman from the background by using **organic shapes** (see image below).



Mucha utilizes bold, dark **lines** to **emphasize** the woman from the background and aspects of the piece that have similar **color**.



Often in pieces like *Job*, Mucha uses muted, non-vibrant **colors** in his pieces. This gave *Job* a calming feeling and a great sense of **unity**.

Mucha's use of line is also used to emphasize his use of **negative** and **positive space**. The **negative space** in *Job* is more in the background in the blue where there is less detail in order to draw attention to the detailed parts of the piece in the foreground. The **positive space** in *Job* is more so in the foreground of the piece and the border.

MUCHA, ALPHONSE. *JOB*, 1896. COLOR LITHOGRAPH. MUCHAFOUNDATION.ORG

Interpretation of Purpose

OF 'LOTTERY OF THE UNION OF SOUTHWESTERN MORAVIA'
(1912) BY ALPHONSE MUCHA

Alphonse Mucha was very much a nationalist who loved his country. This passion for his homeland led to many pieces of his being either political in nature or using aspects of the traditional life such as the patterns that are common themes in his work. Many of his political pieces instilled a nationalistic feeling in the people and encouraged them or the government to take action for some type of cause.

When Czechoslovakia was under the control of the Austrian Regime, the Czech language was only allowed to be taught in private schools that were run by the communities that they were in. The oppression of the Czech culture and the fight to maintain his home country's language was one of Mucha's main inspirations for the *Lottery of the Union of Southwestern Moravia* piece.

By creating the *Lottery of the Union of Southwestern Moravia*, Mucha promoted a lottery that was being held in order to help raise funds for the schools trying to keep the culture of the people. This piece depicts a schoolgirl staring at the viewer harshly while the woman in the back, representing "Mother Nation," crouches in despair in the tree over the elimination of her culture. The poster was meant to make an emotional appeal for the survival of the nation's culture and education.



MUCHA, ALPHONSE. *LOTTERY OF THE UNION OF SOUTHWESTERN MORAVIA*, 1912. COLOR LITHOGRAPH. MUCHAFOUNDATION.ORG

Annotation of Function

OF 'LOTTERY OF THE UNION OF SOUTHWESTERN MORAVIA' (1912) BY
ALPHONSE MUCHA

While Mucha utilizes some **geometric shapes** in this piece, he mainly focuses on the use of **organic shapes** to create a fluid and natural-looking piece that has a greater sense of unity overall.

Like in his piece *Job*, Mucha utilizes a great amount of **negative space** in the background of the piece and more **positive space** in the foreground. By adding less details and creating **negative space** in the background, Mucha makes sure his piece is not crowded and **emphasizes** the people in the foreground with the simplification of detail.

Like in *Job*, Mucha utilizes bold, dark **lines** to create a greater **contrast** between the colors of similar **hues** and **colors**.



MUCHA, ALPHONSE. LOTTERY OF THE UNION OF SOUTHWESTERN MORAVIA, 1912. COLOR LITHOGRAPH. MUCHAFOUNDATION.ORG

Warm, brighter hue



Cool, darker hue



Mucha also utilizes muted cool colors and brighter hues of **color** for different types of yellows within his piece. The **contrast** between the two different uses of color in this piece help to **emphasize** the main figure of the piece, the girl who is staring at the viewer. The emphasis on the girl is not too large that it ruins the overall **unity** of the piece. The color scheme used is still very similar with yellows and browns and whites, but the **hues** are what creates the **emphasis** on the girl.

Evaluation of Cultural Context OF NORMAN ROCKWELL

Post World War II, abstract art was one of the popular forms of art in America. At this time artists like Norman Rockwell and other figurative painters were being criticized for their interest in storytelling with their artworks. With the heated debates between the merits of abstract, realist, and illustration art, Rockwell was often caught in the middle of the debate. Even though his work was criticized, Rockwell's art eventually grew in popularity.

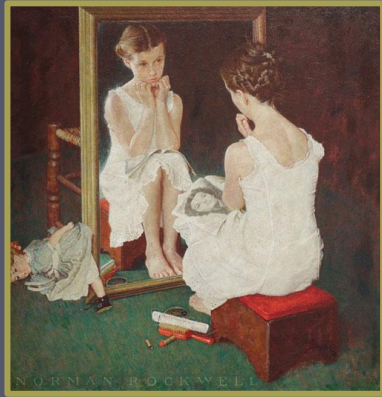


NORMAN ROCKWELL

"My fundamental purpose is to interpret the typical American. I am a storyteller." -Norman Rockwell

Rockwell considered himself a commercial illustrator before anything else. He hesitated to even call his works art because of the popularity of abstract art at the time. This often led to him having deep insecurities in his own work. Despite these insecurities, Rockwell's illustrations embodied the country's nostalgia for a time that was simpler and kinder. His works often featured normal people from everyday American life representing the American dream and other aspects of their ideals. Many of his works were also prompted by the social issues of America at the time such as civil rights, poverty or even political problems.

Analysis of Formal Qualities OF NORMAN ROCKWELL



ROCKWELL, NORMAN. *GIRL AT MIRROR*, 1954. OIL ON CANVAS.
NORMAN ROCKWELL MUSEUM.

Mucha's works were often made using paints of faded, lighter hues, giving his paintings a sense of nostalgia and a calm familiarity. His works were usually made with certain color palettes including reds, browns, whites, and yellows. Warmer hues of these colors, especially yellow, were used to draw the viewer's attention to certain aspects of the pieces. Most of Rockwell's works rely on the contrast created by using cool, darker hues versus warm, brighter hues. Like other illustrators, Rockwell uses both geometric and organic shapes, but relies more on the use of organic shape in order to create the people who are the main focus of his pieces. His use of organic shapes creates a realistic piece of art, which was necessary for some of the social issues in society or the nature of the country which Rockwell tried to depict in his pieces.

Rockwell's use of color also creates implied lines in the areas that the color dramatically shifts from a lighter to darker hue. This adds to the realism of Rockwell's pieces and creates a large sense of unity between the contrasts in color and shape within the piece. Another thing that

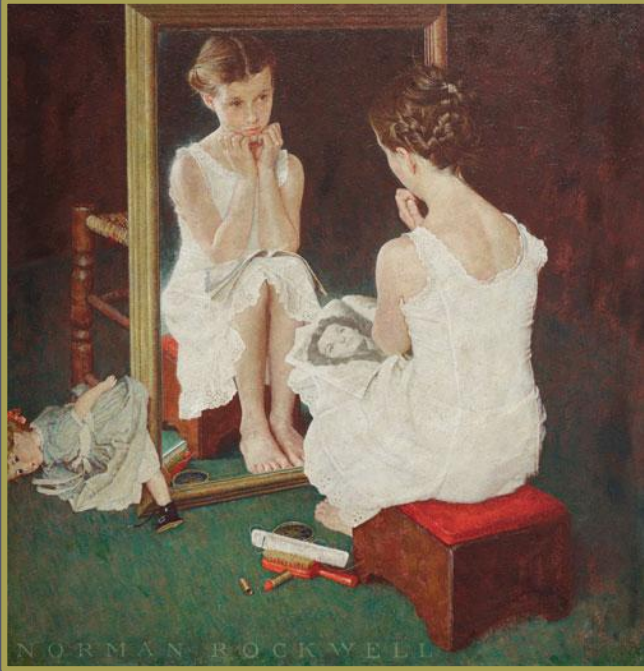
Rockwell tends to rely on to create unity is the use of positive and negative space. In his pieces, the main figure(s) will often be centered or close to the center, creating a heavy sense of positive space in those areas compared the the negative space surrounding the main figure.



ROCKWELL, NORMAN. *THE PROBLEM WE ALL LIVE WITH*, 1963. OIL ON CANVAS.
NORMAN ROCKWELL MUSEUM.

Interpretation of Purpose

OF 'GIRL AT MIRROR' (1954) BY NORMAN ROCKWELL



ROCKWELL, NORMAN. *GIRL AT MIRROR*, 1954.
OIL ON CANVAS. NORMAN ROCKWELL
MUSEUM.

Girl at Mirror was originally created as the cover for the March 6th, 1954 issue of the *Saturday Evening Post*. In the image, it features a little girl who is sitting in front of a mirror, comparing her features to actress Jane Russell from the movie *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*. She has makeup strewn next to her, as her doll is carelessly tossed to the side by the mirror.

The model for the image did not know the original intentions for the piece, but Rockwell's symbolism of the makeup and doll were instead used to help Rockwell with the depiction of societal pressures on young women of the time as they grew up. The young girl in the image is comparing herself to the movie star and seemingly letting go of her childhood in exchange for growing up.

This piece shows the struggles that children, especially young girls face with having to grow up or wanting to grow up and be a certain way. Although the model did not understand the meaning of the piece at the time, Rockwell captured the uncertainty that people faced when growing up, especially within the influence of the media.

Annotation of Function

OF 'GIRL AT MIRROR' (1954) BY NORMAN ROCKWELL

The main figure, the girl, in the piece uses organic **shapes** with smooth edges to create a sense of **unity** with the geometric **shapes** used for the mirror and the stool.

Warm, brighter hue

Cool, darker hue



In the positive **spaces** of this piece, Rockwell uses warm, brighter **hues** of color to **emphasize** the girl and other materials versus the cool, darker **hues** of **color** that he uses in the backgrounds. This **contrast** creates a feeling of familiarity for the viewer and a connection to the piece's message.



ROCKWELL, NORMAN. GIRL AT MIRROR, 1954.

OIL ON CANVAS. NORMAN ROCKWELL MUSEUM.

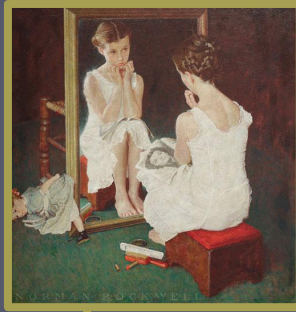
Rockwell's use of positive versus negative **space** is strong in order to draw **contrast** between the subject and background of the piece. The foreground has a strong sense of positive **space** to draw attention to the girl and the materials that represent innocence and growing up.

With the use of light versus dark hues in the piece, Rockwell creates a sense of implied line.

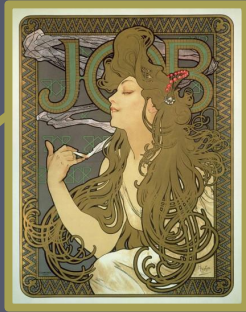
Compare &

Contrast

Purpose



- ❖ Made for the cover of March 6th, 1954 issue of the Saturday Evening Post.
- ❖ Reveals the societal pressures on women.
- ❖ Shows the **contrast** between innocence and having to grow up.



- ❖ Discussed the ideal images of women at the time
- ❖ Challenged the idea of the ideal woman

- ❖ Made as an advertisement for Joseph Bardou Company cigarette papers.
- ❖ Challenged societal ideas and norms for women.
- ❖ Promoted the idea of a “new woman”.

- ❖ Commissioned by a company.
- ❖ Advertisement purposes

- ❖ Made to advertise/promote a company or event

- ❖ Made to show societal issues of the country that the artist lived in.

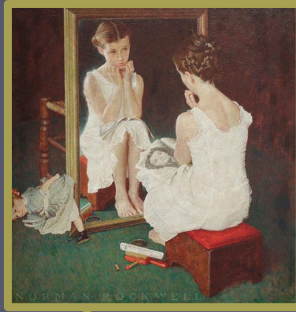


- ❖ Made to promote a lottery that was going to support schools that taught Czech culture while the country was under Austrian Control.
- ❖ Pushed nationalistic ideas as a “call to action.”
- ❖ Called attention to the oppression of Czech culture.

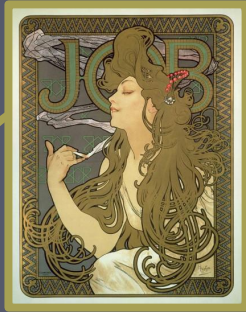
Compare &

Contrast

Color



- ❖ Warmer, brighter **hues** vs cool, dark **hues**.
- ❖ Emphasizes the girl and materials in the foreground versus the mirror and other things in the background.
- ❖ Creates a warm feeling of familiarity and connection to the message



- ❖ Uses brighter **hues** to emphasize the girl figure in the foreground from the background

- ❖ Uses yellowish tones to **emphasize** the girl.

- ❖ Uses dark brownish **hues** for the background of the piece to **contrast**



- ❖ Uses yellowish **colors** throughout to create a sense of **unity**

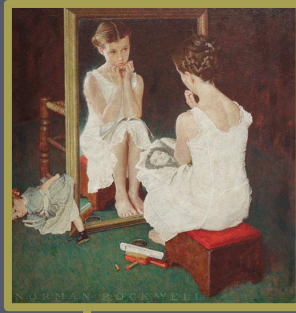
- ❖ Brighter, rich **hues** of yellow used to **emphasize** the girl in the foreground.
- ❖ Darker, muted browns are prevalent in the background of the piece.
- ❖ Draws a sharp **contrast** to **emphasize** the girl and her call to action from the background of the dying country.

- ❖ Muted, non vibrant **colors**.
- ❖ Used to give a calm, familiar feeling to promote the picture's message.
- ❖ Colors used promotes a sense of **unity**.
- ❖ Uses a lot of rich, yellowish tones.

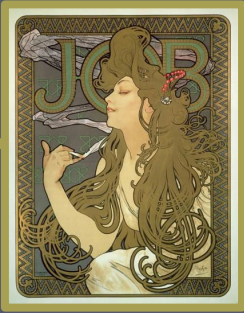
Compare &

Contrast

Line



- ❖ Implied **line** created by the **contrast** of cool, dark colors versus light, warm colors.
- ❖ A sharp **contrast** in **colors** causes the implied **line** to make an implied background and foreground as well.



- ❖ **Line** is created by separating contrasting **colors** or to separate **colors**.
- ❖ Bold, dark **lines** are used to create **contrast** between areas of the piece with similar **hues** of **color**.
- ❖ The dark **lines** help imply a background and foreground between areas that have similar **colors** such as the woman's hair and the border.

- ❖ All three create a sense of **line**, whether it is implied or actual **line**.
- ❖ Uses dark, bold **lines** to **contrast** parts of the piece.

- ❖ **Line** is used to separate the background from the foreground and focus on the girl

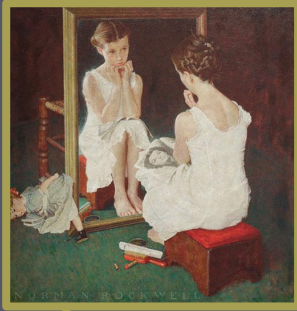


- ❖ Uses bold, dark **lines** in order to create **emphasis** between the girl in the foreground from the figures in the background.
- ❖ **Contrasts** the woman and the trees in the background from each other to bring attention to the woman without taking away from the girl.

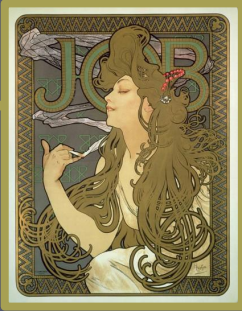
Compare &

Contrast

Shape & Space



- ❖ There is a good balance between the organic and geometric **shape** but the warm **hues** of the girl makes the organic stand out more.
- ❖ Strong sense of positive **space**, but there is also a good amount of negative **space** in the background.



- ❖ Have a mix of negative and positive **space**
- ❖ Geometric **shapes** mainly in background
- ❖ Geometric shapes in background **contrasts** to the organic **shapes**, but still **balances** enough to create a sense of **unity**.
- ❖ Heavily positive piece in terms of **space**. The piece is mostly positive but does have some areas in the background where there is a little negative **space** used.

- ❖ Foreground is mainly positive **space**.
- ❖ Both organic and geometric **shape** is used
- ❖ Strong positive **space**.
- ❖ Organic **shapes** in foreground

- ❖ Mainly organic **shapes** used.
- ❖ The background is both positive and negative **space**



- ❖ Mainly organic **shapes** but that makes it look more fluid and natural overall.
- ❖ More negative **space** in the background than *Job*.
- ❖ There is positive **space** in both the foreground and the background of the piece.