AN ICON YOU SHOULD KNOW...

Jules Chéret

French poster artist and lithographer, 1836 to 1932

Jules Chéret was a French artist who made more than a thousand color posters for music halls, theaters and products. He drew straight onto the printing stone and built each poster around one big, lively figure. His work helped convince Paris that an advertisement could also be art. Read this page in about five minutes, then use the links at the end to look deeper.

FURTHER LOOKING

Musée Carnavalet: The record for his Loïe Fuller poster. parismuseescollections.paris.fr
Britannica: A short biography of Chéret. britannica.com
BnF Gallica: Scans of his posters held by the French national library. gallica.bnf.fr
Video: Always New: The Posters of Jules Chéret



Jules Chéret. Wikimedia Commons, CC0 1.0. Full credit on page 3.

01 Fact Sheet

1836	Born May 31 in Paris.
1849	Starts an apprenticeship with a lithographer at age 13.
1858	Gets his first major poster job, for Jacques Offenbach's operetta *Orpheus in the Underworld*.
1859	Moves to London, where he designs posters and book covers until 1866.
1866	Opens his own lithography firm in Paris, with money from the perfume maker Eugène Rimmel.
1881	Sells his firm to the printer Imprimerie Chaix.
1889	Makes a poster for the new Moulin Rouge dance hall.
1890	Receives the Legion of Honor for an art form that served commerce and industry.
1895	Starts editing *Les Maîtres de l'Affiche*, a series of small prints of the best Paris posters.
1932	Dies September 23 in Nice.

Life and career Milestones tied to the key works

THREE KEY WORKS, PAGE 2

1889
Bal au Moulin Rouge

1893
Folies-Bergère, La Loïe Fuller

1893
Saxoléine

02 Three Key Works

Chéret made posters for places, performers and products. The three below, one of each, are all public domain.

1889: *Bal au Moulin Rouge*

A dance hall sold by its crowd

The Moulin Rouge opened in Paris in 1889, and Chéret made this poster for it that year. A red windmill sits behind the title, and a laughing woman in yellow rides a donkey through a swirl of dancers. Britannica notes that by the 1880s his posters were built around large central figures, hand-lettered titles and simple backgrounds. Here the title curves across the top like a banner, and the dates and times run along the bottom.

LOOK FOR Hand-drawn letters that bend and bounce | One bright figure against a pale crowd



Bal au Moulin Rouge, 1889. Wikimedia Commons, public domain.

1893: *Folies-Bergère, La Loïe Fuller*

A dancer turned into motion

The American dancer Loïe Fuller was famous in Paris for her Serpentine Dance, in which she swirled long folds of fabric. Chéret made this poster for her shows at the Folies-Bergère music hall. Her dress becomes a cloud of loose strokes that seems to spin. The Musée Carnavalet notes that the poster was printed in four different color combinations.

LOOK FOR Loose strokes that suggest spinning fabric | A dark ground that makes the figure glow

See the Musée Carnavalet record for this poster →



Folies-Bergère, La Loïe Fuller, 1893. Wikimedia Commons, CC0 1.0.

1893: *Saxoléine*

Selling lamp oil with a smile

Saxoléine was a brand of lamp oil sold as safe, odorless and non-flammable. In this poster a woman in yellow and blue holds up a glowing lamp under a big pink shade. Britannica lists lamp oil among the products Chéret advertised, along with drinks and medicines. The product name sits at the top in large letters, so the brand reads first and the details read second.

LOOK FOR A product shown in use, not on a shelf | A warm red ground behind the figure



Saxoléine, 1893. Wikimedia Commons, public domain.

TRY THIS

Cover the figure in one of his posters with your hand. What do the type and the background still tell you? Then design a poster for a local event built around one big figure and a hand-drawn title.

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REFLECT

Think About It

Chéret made more than a thousand posters for many different clients. What stays the same across his music hall posters and his product posters, and what changes?

03 Sources

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