

**STOP 9: The Lady with the Camellias 1896. Alphonse
MUCHA**



Music: from *La Traviata*

Narrator

This is Sarah Bernhardt - the greatest and most recognisable stage personality of the era. She formed a long and fruitful professional collaboration with the Paris-based, Czech artist, Alphonse Mucha - from whom she commissioned stage and costume designs, and numerous posters, including this one promoting Bernhardt's starring role in *La Dame aux Camélias* - The Lady with the Camellias. Mucha's association with

Bernhardt propelled him into the limelight, and he became one of the most famous practitioners of the Art Nouveau style.

It was chance that brought the actress and artist together. Mucha was a humble illustrator, correcting proofs at a printing workshop, when Bernhardt called with an urgent order for a new poster. All the printer's regular artists were on holiday, so Mucha offered his services. Despite his lack of experience, Bernhardt was delighted with the result. The new posters went up all over Paris, and quickly became much sought after by collectors.

Music: from *La Traviata*

The play, *La Dame aux Camélias*, was adapted from a novel by Alexandre Dumas – which was also the inspiration for the composer Giuseppe Verdi's opera, *La Traviata*. It told the tragic love story between Marguerite Gautier, a courtesan, suffering from consumption, and Armand Duval, a middle class young man. The role of the tragic Marguerite was greatly coveted by actresses. And it was Bernhardt's most performed - and her most famous role.