Lecture summary:

Art history is filled with representations and allegories of women that follow the age-old biblical dichotomy of saint or sinner. But toward the end of the 19th century, the figure of the femme fatale; the woman of a treacherous, yet alluring sexuality, became an iconographic obsession and a central figure of meaning in the work of Symbolist artists. At the hand of the Symbolists, and in their search for expressions of the subconscious, the figure of the femme fatale became more potent, more sinister and more perverse than images of evil women in the past. Through such imagery, perceptions of female malevolence became embedded in the western psyche.

This lecture explores reasons why the figure of the femme fatale became so prevalent in fin de siècle culture using examples of Symbolist artists across the western world who in their work fashioned the femme fatale into her myriad guises.

Slide list:

1. Pierre Puvis de Chavannes *The Poor fisherman*, 1881, oil on canvas, Musée d’Orsay, Paris
2. Paul Gauguin *The lost virginity*, 1891, oil on canvas; The Chrysler Museum, Norfolk
3. Fernand Khnopff *I lock myself upon myself*, 1891, oil on canvas, Neve Pinakothek, Munich
4. Bertram Mackennal *Circe*, 1893, bronze (life-size) National Gallery of Victoria
5. Carl Larsson *Eve’s daughter*, 1888/1894, oil on canvas, The Zorn Collections, Mora, Sweden
6. Fernand Khnopff *Vivien*, 1896, polychromed plaster, Oesterreichische Galerie, Belvedere, Vienna
8. Félicien Rops, *Sentimental initiation*, 1887, pencil and watercolour, Musée d’Orsay, Paris
10. Alphonse Osbert *Vision*, 1892, oil on canvas, Musée d’Orsay, Paris
12. Jacek Malczewski *Moment of creation – Harpy in a dream*, 1907, oil on canvas, Private collection
13. Odilon Redon *Closed eyes*, 1890, oil on canvas, Musée d’Orsay, Paris
14. Paul Gauguin *Vision of the sermon (Jacob wrestling with the angel)* 1888, oil on canvas, National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh
15. Prins Eugen *The forest*, 1892, oil on canvas, Göteborgs Konstmuseum, Sweden
17. Fernand Khnopff *The abandoned town*, 1904, charcoal, pencil and pastel, Musée d’Art Moderne, Brussels
18. Léon Spillaert, *Royal Galleries, Ostend* 1908, ink, wash, pen, coloured pencil, Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Brussels
20. Gustave Moreau *Oedipus and the sphinx*, 1864, oil on canvas, Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY
21. Arnold Böcklin *Odysseus and Calypso*, 1883, oil on canvas, Kunstmuseum, Basel, Switzerland
22. Alfred Kubin *The flame*, c1900, pen and ink and pencil, Galerie Wurthle, Vienna
25. Félicien Rops, *Mors syphilitica (Death on the pavement)* 1905, etching, Bibliothèque nationale de France
26. Edvard Munch, *Death and the maiden*, casein on canvas, 1893, Munch Museum, Oslo
27. Félicien Rops *Death at the ball*, 1865-75, oil on canvas, Kröller- Müller Museum, Otterlo, The Netherlands
28. Ferdinand Hodler *Night*, 1890, oil on canvas, Kunstmuseum, Bern, Switzerland
29. Franz von Stuck *Sin*, 1899, oil on cardboard, Cologne, Wallraf-Richartz-Museum
32. Franz von Stuck, *Sphinx*, 1904, oil on canvas, Hessisches Landesmuseum, Darmstadt
34. Gustav Klimt, *Judith I*, 1901, oil on canvas, Oesterreichische Galerie, Belvedere, Vienna
35. Gustave Moreau *L’Apparition*, 1876, watercolour, Musée du Louvre, Paris
36. Aubrey Beardsley *The climax from Illustrations to Salome* 1907, Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto
37. Gustav Klimt, *Salome*, 1909, oil on canvas, Galleria d’Arte Moderna, Venice
38. Lucien Lévy-Dhurmer, *Salome embracing the severed head of John the Baptist*, 1896, pastel, Private collection
39. Rupert Bunny, (Salome), c1898, monotype, Art Gallery of New South Wales
40. Julius Klinger *Salome* 1909, colour lithograph, Michael Pabst Gallery, Munich
41. Edvard Munch *Woman (The sphinx)*, 1895, Rasmus Meyer und Bergen Billedgalleri, Bergen
42. Edvard Munch, *Ashes*, 1894, oil on canvas, National Museum of Art, Oslo
43. Edvard Munch *Vampire*, 1893, oil on canvas, Göteborgs Konstmuseum, Göteborgs, Sweden
44. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Lady Lilith*, 1864-8, oil on canvas, Delaware Art Museum
46. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Astarte Syriaca*, 1877, oil on canvas, Manchester Art Galleries
47. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Proserpine*, 1877, oil on canvas, Tate Gallery
48. Charles Conder *Hot wind*, 1889, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Australia
49. Arthur Streeton *Spirit of the drought*, c. 1895, oil on wood panel, National Gallery of Australia
50. Bertram Mackennal *Sarah Bernhardt* c.1892-3, bronze relief, Art Gallery of New South Wales

Reference:
Michelle Facos *Symbolist art in context* University of California Press, Berkeley, 2009

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