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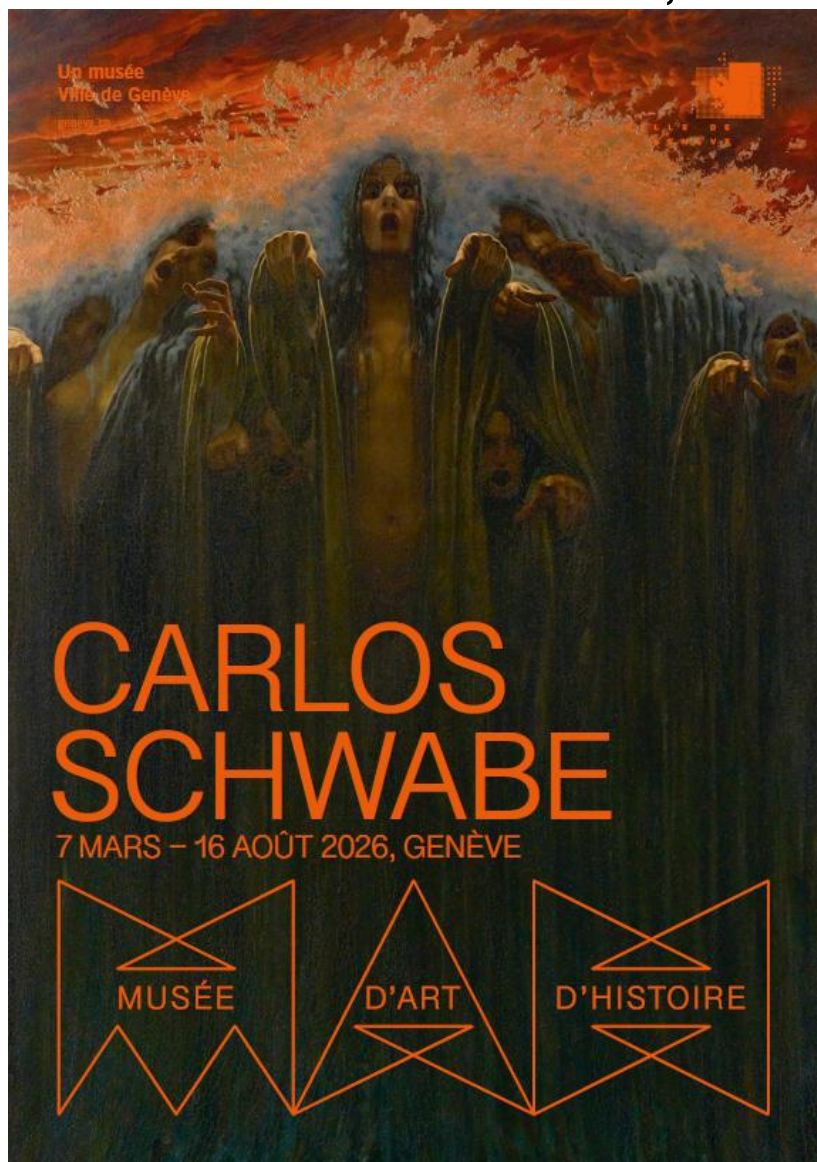
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## PRESS KIT

CARLOS SCHWABE

MARCH 7 – AUGUST 16, 2026



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## CARLOS SCHWABE

Geneva, March 2026 – Marking the centenary of the death of Carlos Schwabe (1866–1926), the Musée d'art et d'histoire (MAH) pays tribute to this singular figure with a retrospective designed as a journey of discovery and musical experience. Bringing together some fifty works, the exhibition invites visitors to explore the artist's most cherished themes. The display creates a dialogue between the MAH's collection—the most significant public holding of the artist's work in the world—and rarely seen pieces from Swiss and French private collections.

Carlos Schwabe distinguished himself through his prolific work as an illustrator for the leading literary circles of his time—Zola, Baudelaire, Mallarmé, and Maeterlinck—as well as through his own major pictorial compositions. Deeply immersed in the mysticism of Joséphin Péladan's Rosicrucian Circle and a frequent exhibitor in Paris and at the Munich Secession, his pieces continue to exert a powerful fascination one hundred years after his death.

Born near Hamburg in 1866 but raised in Geneva from the age of four, Schwabe developed his artistic sensibility at the city's School of Industrial Arts. This enduring bond with Geneva, a place he returned to throughout his life, serves as the guiding thread of a journey exploring the transition from artistic craftsmanship to metaphysical quest.

Through iconic illustrations and Symbolist masterpieces, the exhibition explores the tension between the tangible and the uncanny, culminating in the enduring influence of Schwabe's aesthetic on contemporary visual culture—specifically the Metal scene. This multi-faceted retrospective traces the evolution of his style within a sonic scenography. A curated soundscape featuring the compositions of Erik Satie, Claude Debussy, and Maurice Ravel offers a deep immersion into the artist's lyrical universe. In a striking contemporary counterpoint, visitors are invited to use headphones to discover the world of Metal, featuring albums by bands such as Varathron, Gorement, Concrete Block, Vomitose et Gomorra draw direct inspiration from Schwabe's haunting imagery.

### 1. Esotericism and piety

In the late 1880s, Carlos Schwabe left Geneva for Paris. Supported by a circle of fellow Genevans—including the engraver Maurice Baud, critic Mathias Morhardt, and artists Rodo and Albert Trachsel—he established a network that secured him frequent exhibitions. His talent caught the eye of Joséphin Péladan, the "Sâr" and founder of the Order of the Rose+Cross. This esoteric society held its inaugural Salon at the Galerie Durand-Ruel on March 10, 1892, featuring a roster of luminaries such as Hodler, Vallotton, Bourdelle, Rodo, or Satie. Schwabe's iconic poster for the event is a centrepiece of this section.

The following years saw Schwabe illustrate key works of the era's mysticism, whether secular, such as Emile Zola's *Le Rêve*, Charles Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal* and Catulle Mendès' *Hesperus*, or religious,



with *Paroles d'un croyant* by Abbé de Lamennais. These works are included in this part of the exhibition.

## 2. La Vague

In 1906, Schwabe sought to create a large-scale adaptation of a plate from Abbé de Lamennais's *Paroles d'un croyant*, in which a wave is personified by three female figures. This work continued the themes he first explored in his illustrations for *Les Fleurs du Mal*, specifically the poem *Don Juan aux Enfers*. This section of the room brings the viewer face-to-face with seven compositions, each exploring the personification of these female forms.

While Schwabe may appear aesthetically distanced from the burgeoning avant-garde, his work remained deeply rooted in the contemporary zeitgeist. His studies mirror the birth of psychoanalysis and Charcot's photographic research into hysteria. Furthermore, as a staunch Dreyfusard, Schwabe's commitment to justice cost him many of his patrons; for him, this was an era of revolt. At the heart of the room, his masterpiece, *La Vague*, stands as a commanding presence over the entire space.

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## 3. Tragic compositions

Upon arriving in Paris, Schwabe was introduced by the philosopher Gabriel Séailles to the composer Guillaume Lekeu, with whom he forged a deep friendship based on shared visions of art and existence. He also connected with Vincent d'Indy, leading to the creation of several iconic musical posters. Displayed in this section are his commemorative tribute to Lekeu, who died prematurely in 1894, his 1898 design for d'Indy's opera *Fervaal*, and his 1904 poster for Camille Erlanger's *Le Fils de l'étoile*, on a libretto by Catulle Mendès.

In 1912, Schwabe illustrated Maurice Maeterlinck's *Pelléas et Mélisande*, twenty years after its publication, as well as various musical adaptations of the text: those of Gabriel Fauré, Arnold Schönberg and Claude Debussy, whose famous *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un Faune* he saw in 1913.

While Maurice Ravel's *Daphnis et Chloé* — based on the work by Longus — premiered that same year, it was not until 1926 that Schwabe produced his own illustrated version, which is presented in the display cases of this section.

## 4. Pure landscapes

Schwabe's shift towards more bucolic themes undoubtedly owes much to his passion for music, as well as to numerous commissions from prominent bibliophiles. In this section, his pictorial language serves as an aesthetic manifesto against what he described as the "appalling vulgarity and coarseness sown by Hodler and his gang." This stance directed his art toward an increasingly profound search for a philosophical ideal.

The landscapes found here, centred on the places he visited – Île-de-France, Normandy, Brittany – are entirely distilled, stripped of the heavy Symbolist undertones that had defined his depictions of nature a decade earlier.



This shift toward a more serene style contributed to his renewed success, notably marked by a 1920 tribute exhibition at the Galerie Moos in Geneva. This resurgence led him to illustrate *Pelléas et Mélisande*, for which his daughter Maria posed wearing the very dresses worn by Mary Garden, the legendary creator of the role in Debussy's opera.

#### 5. The lament, in the distance, of the Faun

The exhibition then turns to the figure of the Faun that has haunted Schwabe since he illustrated *Poésies* by Stéphane Mallarmé in 1887. In 1876, the poet had composed *L'après-midi d'un faune*, which sparked many of the musical adaptations that followed.

In 1894, Debussy composed his *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*, which served as the catalyst for Nijinsky's 1912 ballet. It was readapted in 1922 with costumes and sets by Picasso, who painted his famous canvas, the *Flûte de Pan*, in 1923. This era of "Faun-centric" creativity also saw Paul Dukas compose *La Plainte, au loin, du faune* as a tribute to the late Debussy in 1920.

Schwabe's own *Le Faune* emerges in 1923 as a poignant self-portrait. It evokes the spirit of Nijinsky, depicting the artist in harmony with the natural world and music, yet strikingly alone amidst a barren landscape.

#### 6. From classical music to metal

Concluding this dreamlike journey, the exhibition examines the enduring presence of Schwabe's work in contemporary culture through the ongoing circulation of his imagery. Once used to adorn feminist journals and fine-press editions, his engravings have now found a new home within the visual lexicon of Metal culture.

By drawing parallels between Schwabe's dark, epic aesthetic and modern album art, the exhibition invites visitors to discover a musical repertoire that continues to resonate with the artist's vision.

In many ways—and as a distant descendant of the classical traditions Schwabe loved—Metal emerges as a true heir to the dramatic power of Symbolism.



<b>Curator</b>	Marie-Eve Celio-Scheurer, curator in charge of the graphic arts collection Milan Garcin, curator in charge of the fine arts collection
<b>Lenders</b>	Jean-David Jumeau-Lafond, descendant of Carlos Schwabe, Paris; Sonja & Michel Langenstein, Porrentruy
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<b>Practical information</b>	Musée d'art et d'histoire 2, rue Charles-Galland – 1206 Genève Open Tuesday to Sunday, from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m., Thursday from 12 p.m. to 9 p.m. Free price  Website: mahmah.ch Ticketing: billetterie.mahmah.ch 📄 📱 📺 @mahgeneve



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With all our thanks.

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