

Strand 5: Crafts in the Origins of Design

Definitive abstract for paper presentation at the *coupDefouet* International Congress

Sex, Skill, and Politics: Art Nouveau and French-English Relations

If we argue that Art Nouveau was the first self-conscious Modern movement in design and architecture, and the starting point for virtually every Modernism in those spheres of practice up to the Second World War, then we also must accept that it simultaneously *affected* and *reflected* the major motor-forces of the period. Modernism and modernisation are part of the same story, and if Art Nouveau makes claims to being part of the former, then necessarily it encroaches on the latter: technology, economy, politics, and psychology. Indeed, in recent years, interesting work has positioned Art Nouveau in all these areas of the material world. In this spirit, this paper will compare English and French attitudes to Art Nouveau between 1896 and 1911, not simply from the perspective of aesthetics, or the ideas and work of individual designers – as important as these were – but from the wider perspective of what the style meant in the two countries, how attitudes toward it formed and unfolded, and how it related to the moral, economic and political spheres. At the time, London was looking at Paris, which was in turn looking at London, and Art Nouveau was both a product and a victim of this mutual gaze, but in interestingly different ways in each city.

Curriculum Vitae

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