

***HENRI LABROUSTE: STRUCTURE BROUGHT TO LIGHT* EXPLORES LABROUSTE'S WORK AS A KEY MILESTONE IN THE EVOLUTION OF MODERN ARCHITECTURE**

**Labrouste's First Solo Exhibition in the United States Includes Over 200 Original Drawings, Vintage and Modern Photographs, Films, and Architectural Models**

***Henri Labrouste: Structure Brought to Light***

March 10–June 24, 2013

Special Exhibitions Gallery, third floor

**Press Preview:** Tuesday, March 5, 2013, 10:00 a.m.—12:00 p.m.  
RSVP (212) 708-9401 or [pressoffice@MoMA.org](mailto:pressoffice@MoMA.org)

**New York, January 29, 2013**—*Henri Labrouste: Structure Brought to Light*, the first solo exhibition of Labrouste's work in the United States, highlights his work as a key milestone in the evolution of modern architecture, libraries in particular. The exhibition is on view from March 10 to June 24, 2013. Over 200 works, from original drawings—many of them watercolors of haunting beauty and precision—to vintage and modern photographs, films, and architectural models illustrate the power of his works, the uniqueness of their decorative details and the prominence he gave to new materials, in particular to iron and cast iron. The exhibition is organized by Barry Bergdoll, The Philip Johnson Chief Curator of Architecture and Design, The Museum of Modern Art; Corinne Bélier, chief curator, Cité de l'architecture & du patrimoine; and Marc Le Cœur, art historian, Bibliothèque nationale de France, département des Estampes et de la photographie. *Henri Labrouste: Structure Brought to Light* is presented by MoMA, the Cité de l'architecture & du patrimoine, and the Bibliothèque nationale de France, with the participation of the Académie d'architecture and the Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève.

Henri Labrouste (French, 1801–1875) had a dramatic impact on 19th-century architecture through his explorations of new paradigms of space, materials, and luminosity in unprecedented places of great public assembly. His two magisterial glass-and-iron reading rooms in two Parisian libraries—the Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève (1838–50) and the Bibliothèque nationale (1859–75)—gave form to the idea of the modern library as a machine for knowledge and a space for contemplation. Labrouste also sought a redefinition of architecture by blending art and constructive innovation with new materials and new building technologies. His spaces are overwhelming in the daring modernity of their exposed metal frameworks, exquisitely and austere detailed masonry walls rethought for the age of iron construction, new mechanical systems and forms of heating, and stunning luminosity, using gas lighting to create spaces that are immersive and timeless. The exhibition concludes with an examination of Labrouste's diverse and extensive influence, from his students and early followers to contemporary practitioners.

*Henri Labrouste: Structure Brought to Light* is divided into three sections: The Romantic Imagination; Spaces of Knowledge; and Prosperity and Affinities.

## **The Romantic Imagination**

The exhibition's first section covers the period from 1818, the start of Labrouste's artistic training, to 1838, tracing the development of Labrouste's philosophy of architecture and practice in two settings—ancient Rome and modernizing Paris—which Labrouste conceived of as architectural laboratories. During the five years Labrouste spent at the French Academy in Rome, he began to explore a notion of architecture as the product of layers of history, societies in evolution, and of historical change, and he proposed a new approach to architecture's capacity to carry social meaning.

On his return to Paris, Labrouste initially focused on the ephemeral architecture of public ceremonies. With their ability to temporarily rewrite the experience of the city, Labrouste saw them as fundamental in finding an architecture of social relevance for modernity. During this time, Labrouste directed the Return of the Ashes of Napoleon I in December 1840, proposed a project for the imperial tomb in the church of Les Invalides, and won two important international competitions for the construction of an insane asylum in Lausanne and a prison in Alexandria, near Turin. Drawings of these unbuilt but influential projects are included in the exhibition.

This section is punctuated with some of Labrouste's most beautiful works, measured drawings and reveries on the diverse architectural and daily landscape of Italy, both ancient and modern. These include drawings and studies of ancient monuments and Etruscan tombs that had just been discovered in the early 1800s, and of urban compositions, as seen in his hypothetical reconstruction of an ancient city and in a projected reconstruction of the ancient port at Antium (modern Anzio). These studies illustrate Labrouste's methods and the uniqueness of his approach, which would later characterize his particular architectural style—great attention to the relationship of the forms of architecture to changes in building materials and methods, fascination with the evolution of permanent ornaments from festivals and ceremonies, and an interest in the coexistence of different historical periods. This relativism and progressive vision of history—framed in the very years in which the term *avant-garde* first was employed as a term of artistic strategy—would lead to Labrouste to being considered part of the romantic architectural movement that eventually rallied a new generation of architects in 1830.

## **Spaces of Knowledge**

The second part of the exhibition is devoted to Labrouste's principal works as a public architect in the period of Paris's great urban transformation in the mid-19th century, most notably two remarkable libraries: the Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève (1838–1850), and the restoration and extension of the Bibliothèque nationale de France (1854–1875). In each of these projects, Labrouste deployed novel materials and techniques of both construction and information storage and retrieval. He also sought to create an immersive environment of study and reflection in the midst of the city. The buildings were admired as much for their efficient solutions to the issues of

nascent library science—including layout, flow of readers and books, and space and light, but also for their creation of veritable monuments to the role of knowledge and information in modern society. The vaulted reading rooms of the two libraries were astonishing for their lightness of structure and luminosity, and for the creation of exalted spaces for large groups of students and readers to work individually, yet in a group setting. These buildings, among the most extraordinary spatial creations in European architecture, have been touchstones for library design ever since.

More than any architect at the time, Labrouste was able to make the most of pre-existing urban and historical surroundings. The monumental Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève connects in this way with the neighboring Panthéon as the first self-contained public library fitted out within an ornate structure. Its facades are mainly decorated with a seemingly endless list of names that, forming a catalog of writers and leaders in all domains of intellectual pursuit, coalesce into a symbolic history of mankind's intellectual progress. The inscribed names clearly display the purpose of the structure in making writing itself a means of public ornament on the great plaza of Sainte-Geneviève. Inside, the abundant use of industrial materials (iron and cast-iron), the quality of the inner spaces and interior decoration, and the use of gas lighting (making the Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève the first library that could admit readers in the evening), were revolutionary achievements at the time.

The restoration and extension of the Bibliothèque nationale de France developed the solutions used by Labrouste at the Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève. His penchant for the combination of iron, cast iron, and light are noticeable, as are the meaningful decorative details, but in a very different context. As a result, the reading room in the Bibliothèque nationale de France—a great square room composed of nine square domed bays crowned by ceramic vaults held aloft by four slim 33-foot-high columns—is one of the most dazzling yet reposeful expressions of the new possibilities of iron construction in modern architecture. Where the upper walls could not be pierced to maximize daylight, Labrouste had painted landscapes of trees, simulating a peaceful garden setting to create a calm ambience for study in a space at once vast and intimate.

In contrast to the ornamented structure of the reading room, the great central book stacks, visible through a monumental archway, were entirely conceived in functionalist iron expression, in everything from the superstructure of the stacks, sky-lit from above, to the shelves, walkways and staircases, all pierced to allow natural light to penetrate through five levels of book storage. A pneumatic tube system serviced this area to assure rapid delivery of books from stacks to readers, a process library visitors could glimpse through a great wall of glass separating the reading room from the stacks.

The evolution of these two designs is documented in Labrouste's own exquisite drawings of everything from the cutting of the masonry, to the ornamentation of the iron members of the vaults, to the handling of the bookcases and the purpose-designed furniture for these rooms. The building contractor drawings for the realization of the novel iron framework of the nine cupolas of

the Bibliothèque nationale de France's reading room are on view as well, alongside newly made analytical models, historical photographs, and modern large-scale projections of the two reading rooms, including one that simulates the effects of gas lighting in the Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève.

Labrouste's explorations of architecture for collective purposes are also shown in a small number of lesser known but influential buildings, such as the seminary of Rennes (1854–1875).

### **Prosperity and Affinities**

The exhibition's final section traces Labrouste's extensive and varied influence on his peers and subsequent generations both through many decades of teaching but mostly through the example and wide acclaim of his two libraries. His students worked throughout France, and key figures emigrated to the United States, the Netherlands, Turkey, and Peru. *Henri Labrouste: Structure Brought to Light* presents the works of several of Labrouste's students, such as Juste Lisch (1828–1910), and Gabriel Toudouze (1811–1854), as well as a few of the buildings constructed later on by former students of Labrouste: the Library of the Law School of the University of Paris, one of the great losses of the 1960s, designed by Louis-Ernest Lheureux (1827–1898), schools by Charles Le Cœur and the Parisian Post Office by Julien Guadet (1834–1908)—buildings that were markedly influenced by Labrouste's teaching and practices.

The influence of Labrouste can also be seen in the development of metallic architecture, particularly in the mid-19<sup>th</sup>-century dream project of the Great Hall of Public Assembly. The exhibition juxtaposes Labrouste's designs with other projects by leading architects—such as the work of E.E. Viollet-le-Duc, designs for a monumental church made entirely of prefabricated metal elements by Louis Boileau, and a project for roofing Parisian boulevards in iron and glass by Hector Horeau, and a series of built works in the last decades of the 19th century, notably the work of Jules André, who was Labrouste's inspector on the construction site of the Bibliothèque nationale de France and who succeeded him at the head of his workshop before designing the extraordinary gallery of Zoology at the Museum of Natural History, in Paris.

After examining the impact of Labrouste's works abroad, particularly in the area of libraries, the exhibition continues with work by an international array of architects, including Labrouste's pupils and followers in France, the Netherlands, and the United States. In addition to well-known designs such as the Lenox Library, in New York, or the Boston Public Library, the influence of Labrouste in key projects of important but lesser-known American architects, such as Henry Hornbostel (designer of numerous New York City bridges) are shown. (Of special note is Hornbostel's great library in the State Education Building, in Albany, NY.) Projects with more distant echoes of inspiring work, by architects such as Louis Sullivan, Frank Lloyd Wright, and Pier Luigi Nervi, are also featured. A series of filmed interviews with contemporary practitioners, including the French architect Manuelle Gautrand, who discuss Labrouste's legacy and immensely rich body of work, concludes the exhibition.

**SPONSORSHIP:**

*Henri Labrouste: Structure Brought to Light* is presented by MoMA, the Cité de l'architecture & du patrimoine, and the Bibliothèque nationale de France, with the participation of the Académie d'architecture and the Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève.

The exhibition is supported by The International Council of The Museum of Modern Art, Cetie Nippert Ames and Anthony Ames, and the French Heritage Society.

**PUBLICATION:**

Published in conjunction with the first exhibition devoted to Labrouste in the United States—and the first anywhere in the world in nearly 40 years—*Henri Labrouste: Structure Brought to Light* is the result of a four-year research project into the entirety of Labrouste's production. The volume presents nearly 225 works in a variety of mediums, including drawings, watercolors, vintage and modern photographs, film stills, and architectural models. Essays by a range of international architecture scholars explore Labrouste's work and legacy, offering fresh historical perspectives on the architect and his structural innovations. 9.5"w x 11.75"h; 232 pages; 225 color illustrations. Hardcover, \$55. Published by The Museum of Modern Art in conjunction with the Cité de l'architecture & du patrimoine, Paris, and the Bibliothèque nationale de France. Available in March at the MoMA Stores and online at MoMAstore.org. Available to the trade through ARTBOOK | D.A.P. in the United States and Canada, and through Thames & Hudson outside the United States and Canada. *Henri Labrouste: Structure Brought to Light* is edited by Barry Bergdoll, Corinne Bélier, and Marc le Coeur, with essays by Neil Levine, David van Zanten, Martin Bressani, Sigrid de Jong, Bertrand Lemoine, and Marie-Hélène de la Mure.

**PUBLIC PROGRAM:**

**Revisiting Henri Labrouste in the Digital Age: A Symposium**

Thursday, March 28, 2013, 10:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m.

Theater 3 (The Celeste Bartos Theater), mezzanine, The Lewis B. and Dorothy Cullman Education and Research Building

Held in conjunction with the exhibition *Henri Labrouste: Structure Brought to Light*, this symposium acts, in part, as the fourth section of the three-part exhibition. It explores how a 19th-century architect and his work, and particularly his innovative use of materials and light in spaces of contemplation and public assembly, are relevant in contemporary culture and architecture. Young and mid-career architects and scholars examine Labrouste's inclusion in a 1975 exhibition at MoMA and how today's context is different; and how issues such as the library in the information age, the collective expression of individual experience, and the rational ornament apply to contemporary practice.

**Tickets** (\$12, \$8 members and corporate members, \$5 students, seniors and staff of other museums) can be purchased online or at the information desk in the main lobby, the film desk or in the Education and Research Building lobby on the day of the program.

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**Press Contact:** Margaret Doyle, (212) 408-6400, [margaret\\_doyle@moma.org](mailto:margaret_doyle@moma.org)

**For downloadable high-resolution images, register at [MoMA.org/press](http://MoMA.org/press).**

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**Public Information:**

**The Museum of Modern Art**, 11 West 53 Street, New York, NY 10019, (212) 708-9400, [MoMA.org](http://MoMA.org).

**Hours:** Wednesday through Monday, 10:30 a.m.–5:30 p.m. Friday, 10:30 a.m.–8:00 p.m. Closed Tuesday.

**Museum Admission:** \$25 adults; \$18 seniors, 65 years and over with I.D.; \$14 full-time students with current I.D. Free, members and children 16 and under. (Includes admittance to Museum galleries and film programs). **MoMA.org:** No service charge for tickets ordered on [MoMA.org](http://MoMA.org). Tickets purchased online may be printed out and presented at the Museum without waiting in line. (Includes admittance to Museum galleries and film programs).

**Film and After Hours Program Admission:** \$12 adults; \$10 seniors, 65 years and over with I.D.; \$8 full-time students with current I.D. The price of an After Hours Program Admission ticket may be applied toward the price of a Museum admission ticket or MoMA Membership within 30 days.

**Beginning May2013, the Museum will be open 7 days a week.**

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