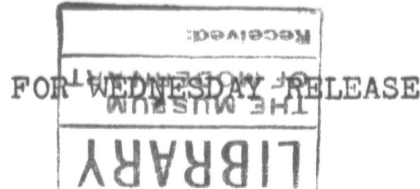


THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

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EXHIBITION OF FURNITURE AND DECORATIVE OBJECTS OF ART NOUVEAU PERIOD



Art Nouveau objects recently acquired by the Museum will be exhibited on the first floor of the Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, from July 13 to August 21. The curved and ornate style of this period is generally regarded with horror, yet the Museum believes that the best Art Nouveau work merits revaluation because of its universality of influence and because it represented a reaction against revivalism which opened the way to subsequent movements in modern design.

The Art Nouveau style was first formulated in the 1880s. It continued until the second decade of the 20th century, affecting all facets of design from fashions to architecture. It was the first movement to reject historical imitations so universal in preceding periods. In only one decade it conquered the Western world with its revolution against the eclectic, and with this major progressive step it broke the way for all later modern experiments.

Started by the French painters, and especially apparent in the work of Toulouse-Lautrec and Gauguin, the Art Nouveau movement both in painting and in the decorative arts is typified by the breakdown of the rectangle, the use of double lines which approach and diverge, often ending in a whiplash swirl, and based largely on natural forms such as waves, plants or flowers. This is particularly evident in Toulouse-Lautrec's Jane Avril with the repeated double curves of the outline of the body, and in van Gogh who has been called the greatest painter of the Art Nouveau.

The only modern style that is basically ornamental, it drew chiefly on three sources: the Arts-and-Crafts movement in England led by William Morris, a reaction against eclecticism that stimulated a search for the modern; the new interest in Japanese prints, and the native primitivism that attracted Gauguin to Tahiti. Characteristic of the aims of the designers was an over-all uniformity: the leg of a table "grew" into the top like a plant; the walls, the ceiling, the room and all its contents were conceived within a harmonious decorative pattern. Hence these designers were called upon to create everything from a drawer handle to an entire house.

An outstanding figure of the movement was the architect Hector Guimard, famous for his designs for the Paris Metro stations but less

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well known here for his furniture and decorative objects. A number of his pieces, given to the Museum by his widow, will be on exhibition in this country for the first time. Some of his free forms - the desk top, for example - almost foreshadow the shapes of Jean Arp. This top is edged with a rippling decoration based on the designs made by water at the edge of a pool; growing forms enclose the drawer fronts. Characteristic of the scope of these designers' work is the ring included in the exhibition designed by Guimard as his wife's engagement ring.

Better known in this country is the decorative iridescent glass work created by Louis Tiffany, the one American contributor to the Art Nouveau movement. In small glass and metal objects, the movement was perhaps most successful. The objective was to make ornament organic rather than applied. Hence a Tiffany vase in the exhibition, instead of being decorated with flowers, has the integral shape of a flower with spread roots as a base and a narrow stem swelling into an open blossom at the top. A jade green glass vase covered with swirling branches of carved oak leaves, by the French designer Emile Gallé, shows the Japanese influence particularly strong in France at the time. A silver jewel box of the period, which was made in England, came to the Museum from the estate of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Other objects shown include picture frames, posters, jewelry, and photographs of interiors and exteriors of buildings of the period.

Commenting on the Art Nouveau exhibition, Mr. Philip C. Johnson, Director of the Department of Architecture and Design, says:

"Art Nouveau was important as a movement for its quality of craftsmanship and proportion, and for its consistency as a decorative style based on the whiplash curve.

"The Movement's historic importance is clear: for, although the modern movements that followed Art Nouveau were non-ornamental and reacted against it, they could not have moved forward without the original break with the past accomplished by this earlier movement. It is in keeping with the functions of the Museum of Modern Art that it should interpret the sources of modern movements in design through exhibitions such as this one."

A revised edition of Nikolaus Pevsner's famous book, Pioneers of Modern Design from William Morris to Walter Gropius, which contains a careful analysis of the history of Art Nouveau, has just been published by the Museum of Modern Art and will be released on August 12.