

Arts and Crafts today

Summary

The Arts and Crafts movement was characterised by a desire to merge art and crafts and can be considered as a source of design. Led by theorists, artists and architects, the movement focused on several issues that could be finding new relevance in contemporary art and design. A relationship with the history of art consisting not of ruptures but of revivals, a critical attitude taken to concrete utopias in connection with ecology, an unapologetic relationship with technique and craftsmanship, a blurring of the boundaries between art, decorative art and design are all questions that have particular resonance in art and design today.

Arguments

The Arts and Crafts utopia, which was embodied in communities of artists and craftsmen, proposed a form of alternative modernity, quite distinct from avant-garde programmes. The aesthetics promoted by this movement are not a projection into a universalist, absolute ideal built on a break from the past; instead it advocates a process of creation of forms tied to a historicity. This does not make the Arts and Crafts project any less political, but its utopia takes a concrete form in working communities connected to nature, a manifestation of an early concern for ecology. However, the Arts and Crafts movement consisted of a fusion of art, crafts and ornament, which is more than a mere continuation of the tradition of the decorative arts. The motifs of the tapestries and paintings of Dante Gabriel Rossetti merge in the same aspiration toward a decorative unity that reconsiders the use value of the work, as do the stained glass windows and paintings of Edward Burne Jones. In contrast to notions of the autonomy of art, these productions brought about a two-way flow between the work of art and the everyday object. This ornamental approach is also accompanied by an insistence on the importance of know-how, which also runs counter to one of the conventions of modernity. This results in forms with an appealing singularity even though they fail to meet a certain number of the criteria of taste of the modern project.

These few quickly brushed traits represent some of the questions and avenues for reflection to try to comprehend the revival of Arts and Crafts in the current period. Some clarification will be gained by studying the writings of William Morris and the creations of the movement's protagonists. These few elements nevertheless allow some hypotheses to be advanced about the persistence of these issues, which are finding a particular resonance today. Since the 1970s, many artists have included furnishing items in their work and have moved into the area of decoration. These works reflect a kind of ambiguity (between object and painting most notably) and therefore of impurity that is distinct from the modernist reduction towards the autonomous form. The appropriation of craft techniques in certain approaches, such as textiles from the 1970s onwards and the current revival of ceramics might be fully understood through a contemporary phenomenon of reminiscence about Arts and Crafts. These issues can also be seen in a historiographic revision that consists of a re-assessment of approaches or areas of an artist's production that modernism had tended to underestimate. The recent interest in the ceramics of Lucio Fontana amply illustrates this renewed perspective. In the field of design, the contemporary heritage of Arts and Crafts is real and is often clearly stated as in Dutch design since the beginning of the 2000s. References to William Morris can also be used by designers wishing to situate their practices in a register that is critical of the contemporary system of production and consumption. This will also be an opportunity to question the political and anthropological connotations that could accompany the indexing of certain artistic approaches to craftsmanship, the decorative or raising the issue of the status of the object arising out of the exhaustion of the modernist narrative.

This overview therefore reveals the topicality of certain issues crystallising around Arts and Crafts that we would like to address in this colloquium:

- a relationship with history based on resurgence rather than rupture
- a critical attitude in relation to concrete utopias
- an unapologetic relationship with technique, know-how or craftsmanship
- an expansion of the work into the decorative and design which is tending to challenge the standards of taste

Scientific committee

Christophe Bardin (Professor of Theory of Art, member of the CIEREC, Université Jean Monnet), Annie Claustres (Senior lecturer accredited to supervise research in History of Contemporary Art, member of the LARHRA, Université Lumière Lyon 2), Karim Ghaddab (Lecturer in Theory of Art, ESADSE (Saint-Étienne Higher School of Art and Design)), Denis Laget (Artist, lecturer at ESADSE), Romain Mathieu (Lecturer in Art History, ESADSE), Philippe Roux (Lecturer in Theory of Art, ESADSE and the Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain de Saint Étienne), Didier Semin (Lecturer in Art History, Ecole nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts de Paris), Aurélie Voltz (Director of the Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain de Saint Étienne)

Submission of proposals for contributions

Interested persons are requested to submit proposals for contributions (max. 2000 signs) accompanied by a biographical sketch and brief bibliography by 15 January 2019, to this address: ARTSandCRAFTS@esadse.fr

All proposals will receive a response by 1 February.

Organisation

The colloquium is due to take place on 13 and 14 March at ESADSE.

It is part of a research programme led by ESADSE's Laboratoire d'Expérimentations des Modernités (LEM). It is being developed with the members of the LARHRA, Université Lumière Lyon 2, the CIEREC at Université Jean Monnet, the Ecole Supérieure des Beaux-Arts de Paris and in partnership with the Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain de Saint Étienne. It will be preceded by a cycle of seminars and followed by a publication containing the different contributions to the seminars and the colloquium and an exhibition at the Cité du Design in 2020.

Persons interested in attending the event can register (free of charge)

using our form at [https://docs.google.com/forms/d/](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSc8fLNomLO4q0kQU-4tqbqPsqU7IY6zBj0EanL8NCOTQx4Czg/viewform)

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