

The role of sculpture in Parisian decorative arts (Paris, 14–15 Mar16)

Paris, Mar 14–15, 2016

Deadline: Nov 4, 2015

The Low Countries Sculpture Society, Low Countries Sculpture Society

The role of sculpture in the design, production collecting and display of Parisian decorative arts in Europe (1715-1815)

International Conference Part II, following the first held on 29 August 2015 at Mons, European Capital of Culture

Between 1715 and 1830 Paris gradually became the capital of Europe, “a city of power and pleasure, a magnet for people of all nationalities that exerted an influence far beyond the reaches of France”, as Philip Mansel wrote, or as Prince Metternich phrased it, “When Paris sneezes, Europe catches cold”. Within this historical framework and in a time of profound societal change, the consumption and appreciation of luxury goods reached a peak in Paris.

The focus of this one-day international conference will be to investigate the role of the sculptor in the design and production processes of Parisian decorative arts, from large-scale furniture and interior decoration projects to porcelain, silver, gilt bronzes and clocks.

In the last few years a number of studies were carried out under the auspices of decorative arts museums and societies such as the Furniture History Society and the French Porcelain Society. It now seems appropriate to bring some of these together to encourage cross-disciplinary approaches on a European level and discussion between all those interested in the materiality and the three-dimensionality of their objects of study.

The relationships between, on the one hand, architects, ornemanistes and other designers, and on the other sculptors, menuisiers, ébénistes, goldsmiths, porcelain manufacturers, bronze casters and other producers, as well as the marchands merciers, will be at the heart of the studies about the design processes.

A second layer of understanding of the importance of sculpture in the decorative arts will be shown in the collecting and display in European capitals in subsequent generations, particularly those immediately after the French Revolution, as epitomised by King George IV.

Overall, the intention of this conference is to attempt to shed light on the sculptural aspect of decorative arts produced in Paris in the long 18th century and collected and displayed in the capitals of Europe. Without pretending to be exhaustive, this study day – and its publication – hopes to bring together discussions about the histories and methodologies that could lead to furthering the

study of hitherto all too often neglected aspects of the decorative arts.

Research questions may include (non-exhaustive list):

- What are the specificities of the Parisian approach to three-dimensional sculptural design that made it collectable, or was it only collectable in Europe due to its availability at vastly reduced prices when the art market was flooded by the revolutionary auctions?
- What relationships can be established between the “Frenchness” of sculptural designs produced in Paris and the large number of “foreign” designers and craftspeople there (coming in particular from the Low Countries and Germany)?
- What was the impact of public authorities (e.g. guilds and schools), intermediaries (marchands merciers, agents, etc.), private salons, societies and other networks, on the three-dimensional design aspect decorative arts produced in Paris?
- Taste leaders: the role of the monarch, the court, Paris vs. Versailles, and their interest in “sculptural” decorative arts
- Taste disseminators: the role of prints and treatises regarding “sculptural” decorative arts
- The collaborative efforts between architects, designers, sculptors, cabinet makers, “porcelainiers”, bronze casters, goldsmiths, engravers, etc. were they specific to luxury items produced in Paris? Were certain disciplines more appropriate for “sculptural design”?
- How do case studies inform us about the role of sculptors in the design and production processes for decorative arts?
- How is sculptural illusionism in painted decorative panels, such as those by Tournai-born Piat-Joseph Sauvage (1744-1818) or in the Casa del Labrador at the royal palace of Aranjuez, related to the design and perception of Parisian decorative arts?
- What was the impact of collectors of old/existing Parisian decorative arts on the design of spaces to display these in European capitals?
- Are centre-periphery theories applicable to the interpretation of decorative arts produced in Paris and its hinterland? Is the work of Abraham Roentgen and his bronze casters an appropriate case study for this?

Potential speakers are invited to submit proposals for conference papers. These should be limited to a maximum of 300 words, should be accompanied by a brief CV (no more than a few lines) and should be sent to the Low Countries Sculpture Society by Wednesday 4 November 2015. A scientific committee drawn from the Society and invited scholars will take a decision on selected speakers shortly after that date. For foreign participants one hotel night in Paris and modest travel expenses can be covered.

Please note that this conference is planned shortly after the opening on 10 March 2016 of the TEFAF Fair at Maastricht to encourage American colleagues to attend.

Reference:

CFP: The role of sculpture in Parisian decorative arts (Paris, 14-15 Mar16). In: ArtHist.net, Oct 23, 2015 (accessed Oct 15, 2025), <<https://arthist.net/archive/11336>>.