Towards a cultural history of the decorator (Paris, 7–8 Oct 16)

Institut national d'histoire de l'art, INHA, Paris, Oct 7–08, 2016
Deadline: Apr 1, 2016

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Towards a cultural history of the decorator (18th -20th century)

International symposium organized by the Institut National d'Histoire de l'Art and Les Arts Décoratifs, 7-8 October 2016

This symposium will propose a reevaluation of the traditional history of Western styles from the late 18th to the late 20th century by examining the figure of the interior decorator. While the historiography has mostly focused on the logical chain of formal and technical innovations and the notion of avant-garde, this symposium will highlight the socio-economical context in which the work of the decorator was rooted. This approach sheds new light on the visual culture of certain generations or social groups at a specific moment in time. It also helps shape the definition of notions such as the collective gaze (oeil collectif) or visual tolerance, still under-studied, and provides clues to understanding the alternation of over-furnishing and soberness. This approach may also explain the numerous variations regarding, for example, the intensity of colour and light, or the occupation of space.

To contribute to this cultural history of the interior decorator, this symposium will give priority to trans-historical and interdisciplinary proposals over monographic approaches. Proposals which fit into one of the themes detailed below will retain our attention:

1 - Identity of the decorator
The decorator is generally associated with the figure of the architect in the 18th century, with the upholsterer in the 19th century, and the ensemblier in the 20th century. This session's aim is to analyze and perhaps reconsider these categories.

2 - Spaces
This will be the opportunity to think about the complex relationship between the decorator and the various spaces in which s/he works (public/private space, scenography, etc.).

3 - Diffusion of the work of the decorator
This session will examine the numerous means available for the decorator to diffuse and promote his/her work.From pattern books to magazines, how have these media brought to light the decorator's work? To which extent can the descriptions found in literature inform his/her work?

4 - Fashion-maker or follower?

If the work of the decorator seems to epitomize the tastes of a class or a social category at a specific moment in history, the relationships between the decorator and the patron needs to be further examined in order to evaluate their respective role and responsibility in the creation and diffusion of a trend.

Proposals in French or English, about 2000 signs (space included) should be sent by April 1st 2016 to the following
persons:
- philippe.thiebaut@inha.fr ;
- etienne.tornier@inha.fr ;
- sebastien.quequet@lesartsdecoratifs.fr

The papers will be given either in French or English.

Reference:
CFP: Towards a cultural history of the decorator (Paris, 7-8 Oct 16). In: ArtHist.net, Feb 12, 2016 (accessed Nov 2, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/12198>.