H-France Salon, Special Issue: The Myth of French Taste

Deadline: Oct 15, 2024

Oliver Wunsch

Call for Papers for a special issue of H-France Salon: The Myth of French Taste edited by Oliver Wunsch (wunscho@bc.edu).

The French have taste in all they do
Which we are quite without ;
For Nature which to them gave goût
To us gave only gout.

–Thomas Erskine (1750–1823)

The concept of "goût français" first became a subject of sustained critical inquiry during the eighteenth century, integrating the discourse of aesthetic experience with new forms of national identity. Enlightenment theories of the nation as something both perfectible and corruptible gave rise to the idea of French taste as something requiring both cultivation and protection. Usage of the term "le goût français" grew gradually through the early twentieth century, peaking during the interwar period before dropping precipitously. Few scholars today would speak of "French taste" as a coherent entity, and the national chauvinism implicit within the term make it an awkward fit for an era of research that emphasizes cultural relativism and global interconnection. But even if we believe that "French taste" represents an outdated and jingoistic myth, we still need to contend with its historical impact. How did the mythology of French taste shape cultural experience in the greater Francosphere between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries? How was French taste defined, whom did it exclude, and what purpose did it serve? And can scholars today characterize French cultural tendencies without reinforcing an essentializing understanding of national character? This special issue of H-France Salon welcomes essays that approach these questions from a range of disciplinary perspectives, including cultural history, literary studies, sociology, art history, and the history of collecting. Contributions could analyze specific works of art or literature that shaped concepts of French taste, or they might examine the theorization of French taste in the writing of a particular philosopher or cultural critic. Essays might also consider how scholarly specialization in French culture and the existence of professional organizations such as H-France serve to reinforce or challenge historical conceptions of French taste.

Interested contributors should e-mail an abstract (max. 500 words) to Oliver Wunsch (wunscho@bc.edu) by October 15, 2024.

Reference:

CFP: H-France Salon, Special Issue: The Myth of French Taste. In: ArtHist.net, Sep 10, 2024 (accessed Nov 16, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/42554>.