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Chantal Zheng, dir. *L'Art nouveau et l'Asie*. Aix-en-Provence: Presses Universitaires de Provence, 2016. 294 pp. Figures and bibliographies. 26€ (pb). ISBN 979-10-320-0029-8.

Review by Chelsea Foxwell, University of Chicago.

Art Nouveau, born in part of artists' and designers' engagement with Chinese and Japanese things in the Paris shop of Siegfried Bing, is an ideal theme for an international collaboration uniting historians of European and Asian art. *L'Art nouveau et l'Asie*, the result of one such effort, features essays by thirteen scholars from France and beyond. As described by Breda Mihelic in the preface, the idea for this collaboration and the resulting book grew out of two presentations on Asian Art Nouveau at a 2011 colloquium in Milan organized by RANN, the Réseau Art Nouveau (Art Nouveau Network), an international association of individuals dedicated to the study and preservation of Art Nouveau in its many forms. Scholars affiliated with RANN collaborated with specialists in East and Southeast Asian studies at Aix-Marseille Université to produce the volume. As noted by editor Chantal Zheng, the book is "la première en Europe mais aussi en Asie à embrasser une aussi vaste aire culturelle pour offrir un panorama tout à fait représentatif" of Art Nouveau in European and Asian countries (p. 5).

Art Nouveau, variously defined and named depending on the geographic context, is associated with Siegfried Bing's Parisian shop (Maison de l'Art Nouveau, founded 1895) and with the British Arts and Crafts Movement, the Viennese Secession, Jugendstil, and modern architecture in places like Barcelona, and was followed by the more geometric Art Deco style. Both Art Deco and Art Nouveau were design movements encompassing a wide range of materials and functions, from architecture and architectural ornament to painting, illustration, ceramics, and other crafts. While not originally tethered to a single artistic style, Art Nouveau, like Art Deco, aimed to respond to modern lifestyle needs and to disrupt the monotony of modern urbanization by importing motifs from other parts of the world, especially East and Southeast Asia and the Middle East, and from ancient civilizations. Art Nouveau is generally associated with scrolling organic or vegetal forms, exuberant ornamentation, and references to an idealized Orient.

In addition to its focus on Asia, *L'Art nouveau et l'Asie* is also distinguished by its focus on architecture (as was Art Nouveau itself): of the thirteen essays, eight concern architecture or interior design. This strong commitment to architecture may reflect the background of the East Asian art program at Aix-Marseille Université; it also bespeaks the collaborators' connection to RANN, a group that was "founded on the initiative [sic] of the Brussels Regional Department of Historic Monuments and Sites" in order to share information on "research, conservation, evaluation, and promotion of the art nouveau heritage" in the built environment across Europe. In comparison to Art Nouveau craft objects and works on paper, many of which are preserved in museums and libraries, Art Nouveau architecture and interior design elements face many threats of loss or damage (pp. 255, 276). By expanding its network of Art Nouveau scholars and supporters into places like Hanoi, the Philippines, and Taiwan, RANN has supported the preservation of modernist art there. This book, uniting scholars of modern art and architecture in Europe and Asia, appears as the next step in expanding the scholarly purview and is therefore of great service to the field.

*L'Art nouveau et l'Asie* might be called an early attempt to unite scholars of East and West. The volume's two main parts focus on European and Asian art respectively, but there is minimal emphasis of common scholarly themes between the two sections, perhaps because most of the studies are focused on one particular city or region. The question of defining Art Nouveau is not thoroughly addressed, and as a result, the essays tend to describe Art Nouveau in simple terms of the number of cases present in a region or city. RANN began as a collaboration between thirteen European cities which were known for their Art Nouveau style. As RANN has expanded to take on the vital task of documenting Art Nouveau architectural remains, however modest, in other cities across Europe and Asia, the broader question of how Art Nouveau functions locally in each place deserves serious consideration. A better understanding of the individual Art Nouveau character of each of these localized cases may proceed to reshape our overall understanding of the movement worldwide. Such cross-cultural analysis and synthesis awaits future endeavors.

One recurring theme in the volume is the admission that Art Nouveau is not prominent in the urban landscape under consideration or that it is often found in conjunction with other styles, especially in Asia where, as Jean Baffie points out with respect to Thailand, the original progressive position of Art Nouveau as a rejection of Classicism and Neo-Classicism did not fully apply. This book also contains studies of European places that are not among the best-known centers of Art Nouveau. In these cases, too, we see architectural Art Nouveau as supplemental to other styles, or as a potent decorative strategy applied in a limited number of cases. In her essay "L'Art nouveau à Nice," for example, Véronique Thuin-Chaudron notes that "les édifices ostensiblement Art nouveau sont rares," but "les édifices qui en empruntent des touches sont fréquents" (p. 25). Art Nouveau in Nice, she continues, seems like "le parent pauvre" between "deux productions prolifiques," namely, Eclecticism and Art Deco (p. 27). In another essay, Mika Tanaka observed that Art Nouveau elements in Japan were most commonly found combined with other styles. Tanaka concludes that "L'Art nouveau dans l'architecture japonaise est modeste par rapport à ce qu'il fut en Occident" as well as being "pas toujours facile à disintiguer" (p. 214). The essay on the Philippines similarly notes that "maisons conçues comme une seule unité intégrée et qui s'inspirent de l'Art nouveau sont rares" (p. 251). In sum, this volume provides an overview, in Europe and in Asia, of where and how architectural Art Nouveau functioned in cities outside the main crucibles of Art Nouveau experimentation, such as Brussels or Paris.

Some of the essays in part one address the related question of how *Japonisme* traveled beyond Paris to interact with explorations of ornament and design in other parts of the world. For example, Katalin Keszé's essay on Hungarian architectural ornament describes "Art Nouveau tendencies" (p. 59) that meld with Islamic, East Asian, and "naïve Hungarian" design elements to create what visitors would then savor as a largely invented "characteristic Hungarian feeling" (p. 62). The broader Art Nouveau movement was significant in lending credence to the idea that "the stylized ornamentation of folk art was not alien to the 'modern style' using natural motifs" (p. 62).

Reading parts one and two in conjunction shows that Asia and Europe witnessed similar patterns in cultural flows in the nineteenth century. In his essay on the Art Nouveau style in Thailand, Jean Baffie alludes to the Eurocentric mindset among early to mid-twentieth-century Western scholars, who once saw the mixture of Art Nouveau and other styles in places like Thailand as yielding little more than "architectural incoherence" (p. 183). From the 1890s through the 1920s, the period of Asian Art Nouveau, Baffie points out that Thailand's successive rulers made architectural decisions according to personal preference and in response to the rise and fall of foreign threats. As a result, Art Nouveau (a word that was only recently introduced into the Thai language) assumed an ambiguous status—as modernity, as a symbol of wealth and power, or as the threat of Western domination. In Taiwan and Manchuria (although the latter is not covered by the volume), meanwhile, architectural Art Nouveau was a colonial style imposed by the Japanese, who were cognizant of the fact that many Art Nouveau themes could be interpreted as a European glorification of Japanese art and design. The question of whether Art Nouveau could be modified in local contexts was raised in the essay by Erik Akpedonu and

Fernando Nakpil-Zialcita, who describe the flourishing in the Philippines of Art Nouveau's "floral style" or "tropical interpretation." The authors recount how Art Nouveau was used for residential and commercial architecture but never for government buildings, which adhered to Neo-Classicism. While much of the broader academic synthesis is yet to come, the fascinating details and monuments described in this volume will allow scholars to launch a more probing inquiry into the nature of Art Nouveau as a truly global style or movement. I hope that researchers and educators can draw on these detailed studies in order to transcend the one-sided narrative of European references to a generalized Japanese or Oriental fantasyland. Finally, in the sense that Art Nouveau encouraged the embrace of a less rigid and more international decorative program, the movement itself provided refreshing support for local specificity and irregularity in place of the regularizing forces of Neo-Classicism and modernity. It is for this reason, too, that we should join the creators of this volume in supporting the study and preservation of localized versions of Art Nouveau.

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