

H-France Review Vol. 19 (July 2019), No. 142

Jessica M. Dandona, *Nature and the Nation in Fin-de-Siècle France: The Art of Emile Gallé and the Ecole de Nancy*. New York and London: Routledge, 2017. xiii + 214 pp. Figures, notes, works cited, and index. \$126.00 (cl). ISBN 978-1-4724-6261-9; \$49.46 (eb). ISBN 978-1-3151-7611-6.

Review by Peter Clericuzio, University of Edinburgh.

The political activism of Emile Gallé (1846-1904) is not a new story. At the end of the nineteenth century, an age when cutting-edge fine artists in France were turning away from history and contemporary politics, leaving these fields to commercial illustrators and photographers, the Nancy-based furniture manufacturer and glassmaker rushed in to fill the void.^[1] Gallé's geographic location (on the redrawn eastern frontier) and personal experience (he had fought in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71) meant that he witnessed with great sorrow the dismemberment of his native region of Lorraine between France and the newly-formed German Empire as decreed by the hated Treaty of Frankfurt ending the conflict. Outspoken and filled with conviction, Gallé determined to use his skills and talents with glass and wood to address the tumultuous issues that he saw eating at the belly of the Third Republic as it struggled for survival during its first three decades. His leadership in the development of the *fin-de-siècle* style called Art Nouveau in the decorative arts ensured Gallé's place in history before his death at age fifty-eight, now thought to have been caused by exposure to hazardous chemicals that he pioneered the use of in his glassmaking.^[2]

Jessica Dandona's concise monograph focuses on four primary arenas of intersection between Gallé's decorative art and contemporaneous French politics over the last twenty years of the artist's life. It is one of only two books in English (besides exhibition catalogues) focusing almost exclusively on the Nancy artist to be published in the past quarter century, the other being a translation of Christian Debize's *Emile Gallé et l'Ecole de Nancy*, whose release anticipated a flurry of French publications that appeared during the municipally-sanctioned cultural year of 1999 highlighting Nancy's Art Nouveau.^[3] As such, it fills a lacuna in Gallé scholarship for English-language readers, but only to a certain extent does it broaden the perspective cast by a bevy of French scholarship that has appeared regularly on Gallé, Nancy, and more generally French Art Nouveau since the 1960s.^[4] Dandona's book does not purport to serve as a scholarly biography of Gallé himself (though arguably it might be read as such), and declines to provide any semblance of a catalogue raisonné of the artist's oeuvre. Rather, it seeks to heighten our understanding of Gallé as a distinctly political artist, more so than any other in France at the time, through its selection of key moments where the artist and his colleagues of the Ecole de Nancy used their art to "define what it meant to be French" (p. 1).

The heart of the book is divided into four central chapters, which successively treat Gallé's art as it explores the concept of French national identity through its engagement with the Alsace-Lorraine Question, Japonisme in France, the Dreyfus Affair, and the founding of the Ecole de Nancy—the latter being the regional association of artists, architects, industrialists, journalists, and cultural officials in Lorraine whose creation Gallé spearheaded in February 1901 and which functioned as a major cultural bastion of French regionalism at least up until the beginning of the First World War.[5] The strongest parts of the book are chapters one and three, though chapter two, on Japonisme, also provides an important and thorough examination of Gallé's location within contemporaneous discourse in France concerning the appropriation of ideas and motifs from Far Eastern cultures in order to reinvigorate a national art. Dandona is at her best unpacking the iconography of Gallé's most renowned pieces, particularly his massive 1889 inlaid oak table *Le Rhin* ("The Rhine") and engraved glass jug from 1900 called *Les Hommes Noirs* ("The Dark Men")—each of which was produced for display at its respective year's Exposition Universelle—and explicating their meanings and broader connections to the two biggest national political *clous* of the era. Though Gallé had run his family's successful glassmaking firm since the early 1870s and added a furniture section in the 1880s, *Le Rhin*, the central subject of Dandona's first chapter, was the piece that catapulted him to international prominence. With its allegorical tabletop frieze designed by Gallé's friend Victor Prouvé that depicts a fictional skirmish between ancient Germanic and Gallic warriors, it defiantly declares, in the face of the Treaty of Frankfurt, that the Rhine is the natural eastern border of French territory and demands the return of Alsace-Lorraine from the Germans who had taken it as the spoils of war. As Dandona indicates, *Le Rhin's* studding with symbols of Lorraine such as eagles and thistles discloses how Gallé conceptualized French nationalism and regionalism as fully compatible and harmonious attitudes, a unity and resolve that was necessary if France was ever to recapture the lost provinces. Her analysis probes how Gallé sought to use the table as a rallying cry in the aftermath of the Boulanger crisis and demonstrates that Gallé's rooting of the work in much older traditions of French ceremonial furniture design, combined with his exploitation of naturalistic ornament, placed him at the forefront of the search for a modern French artistic style. Meanwhile, *Le Rhin's* emphasis on the peacefulness of the Gallic warriors and aggressiveness of the Germans served as a rebuke to German militarism and its commemorative monuments (pp. 17-34). Having galvanized the French press and public with this patriotic statement, Gallé would further develop this aesthetic (with his fellow artists in Nancy) into a regional strand of Art Nouveau by the dawn of the new century.

The coalescence of Art Nouveau in Nancy, however, proceeded slowly through the 1890s. Dandona, wisely, does not truly address the issues surrounding it until chapter 4. In Chapter 3, she vividly locates Gallé's work for the 1900 Exposition Universelle within the larger context of the Dreyfus Affair, parsing the scandal's polarizing power as it became manifest on both national and local levels. In the latter arena, Gallé, a Protestant Dreyfusard who mounted an impassioned defense of the twice-wrongly-convicted Jewish army captain, found himself in the extreme minority, as Nancy's citizenry overwhelmingly supported both the Catholic Church and the army, whose 8,000-man military garrison protected the city. Gallé's friendship with the prominent regionalist Nancy politician Maurice Barrès broke down publicly when the two found themselves on opposite sides of the debate in the late 1890s, even trading barbs in Georges Clemenceau's newspaper *L'Aurore*, which had published Zola's "J'accuse!" (pp. 97-99 and 108-110). Particularly valuable here is the way that Dandona evaluates Gallé's electrically-illuminated tableau of vases and other glasswork placed around a furnace, called *Le Four verrier*, at the Exposition Universelle of 1900 as a subtle and complex compendium of his pleas for the

Republic's high-level officials to see that justice was done and Dreyfus finally exonerated (an event Gallé did not live to see). Dandona meticulously explicates the various pieces displayed in *Le Four verrier*, beginning with *Les Hommes Noirs*, whose cool colors and nearly opaque surface depict a set of grotesque figures, representing the church and the anti-Dreyfusards, threatening the central grimacing figure—likely referencing Dreyfus himself—and crowned by an engraved legend reading, “Dark men, from where do you come?/We come from under the earth.” No less useful, particularly for students of the decorative arts and material culture, is her guidance through the tedious and nerve-wracking process of the jug's creation. Yet Gallé's spectacular exhibit, as she notes, proved a doubly frustrating affair for the artist—not only was it a financial disaster, but Gallé bemoaned the likelihood that the symbolism he employed in the works may have been too subtle for visitors, with the political message embedded within it too difficult to detect.

Soon after the 1900 fair, Gallé gathered together his fellow Lorraine artists to form the Ecole de Nancy, or *Alliance Provinciale des industries d'art*, the subject of Dandona's fourth chapter. A remarkable organization, the Ecole de Nancy constituted one of the most successful unions of visual arts professionals created at the end of the *belle époque*. It arguably outpaced the Wiener Werkstätte in Vienna and the Darmstadt Artists' Colony in Germany in terms of the quality and breadth of its members' production, which spanned virtually all media, from the glass and furniture for which it remains most famous, to embroidery, graphic arts, leatherworking and bookbinding, painting, architecture, and textiles. Its reliance specifically on industry rather than craft (with scions like Gallé, Louis Majorelle, Antonin and Auguste Daum, Eugène Vallin, Oscar Berger-Levrault, Jules Royer, and Albert Bergeret among its members who operated huge factories and turned out their own work), as well as those of numerous other Ecole de Nancy designers, both allowed it to cater to customers from a wide socioeconomic range and distinguished it from the craft-based enterprises in Paris as outlined many years ago by Debora Silverman and Nancy Troy.^[6] The group's creation predated by six years the German Werkbund as a pioneer example of the vertical integration of art and industry created by the modern age as it coalesced in the years immediately preceding the First World War.^[7]

Appropriately, as the Ecole de Nancy's 1901 statutes explicitly declared its fidelity to Art Nouveau, Dandona eventually turns to discussing the style's complicated history in France, though she neglects to mention that Nancy's artists preferred to call their strand of the style *art lorrain* in order to distinguish it from the pejorative labels assigned to Art Nouveau virtually everywhere else, especially in Paris (p. 168).^[8] It is here where one really might demand an extended discussion of the broader relationship between Gallé and contemporaneous Parisian and Alsatian furniture and glassmakers—one thinks of Rupert Carabin, Charles Spindler, Eugène Gaillard, and Georges de Feure, but also the artists of L'Art dans Tout, a Parisian group similar to the Ecole de Nancy to which Gallé's cohort cultivated close ties.^[9] Also curiously, Dandona truncates her analysis of the Ecole de Nancy to 1904, the year of Gallé's passing, and claims in the very abbreviated conclusion that “[i]n the wake of the artist's premature death...the Ecole de Nancy quickly dwindled in size and influence, disappearing altogether by the eve of World War I” (p. 188). This statement, however, contradicts the greater body of both English and French scholarship on the group, which has shown quite clearly that under the leadership of its new president Victor Prouvé, the Ecole de Nancy carried on successfully for nearly a decade longer. Its apex came in 1909, well after Gallé's demise, in Nancy's Exposition Internationale de l'Est de la France, a major event in the history of French regionalism. The fair demonstrated the success of Nancy in its longstanding push to decentralize political, economic, and cultural power

from the capital, a movement throughout the provinces which, as Dandona notes in her earlier analysis, the city spearheaded (pp. 137-38 and 142-43). Arguably, the exposition was responsible for reawakening the idea of recapturing Alsace-Lorraine in the minds of the greater French public after it had lain nearly dormant for some two decades. At the 1909 fair, the Ecole de Nancy's own pavilion took center stage, capped by the display of *Le Rhin* and Prouvé's portrait of Gallé that is also featured on the cover of Dandona's monograph. Most of the group's artists and architects were involved in the planning, design, and official branding of the exposition, none more so than Prouvé himself.[10]

Ironically, an exploration of the subsequent history of the Ecole de Nancy in chapter four would only bolster Dandona's overall thesis, as it provides ample continuity with her analysis that Gallé and his comrades sought to reconcile the allegiances to both nation and region that they saw as synergistic, not oppositional. In such a conception of French citizenship, also mentioned briefly by Dandona in her introduction, the nation gained strength from its regions' development of their human and material resources for their own benefit (as opposed to their requisitioning by the capital, as had been done on a regular basis, most notably for each of the five nineteenth-century Parisian world's fairs).[11] Such an extended discussion would also provide an explanation as to why Art Nouveau flourished in Nancy under Gallé and Prouvé's leadership until the outbreak of the First World War, while in Paris its popularity evaporated by 1905. Furthermore, it would enrich both Gallé and the Ecole de Nancy's own legacies in the English historiography as major players in the politicization of the decorative arts in Europe throughout the first half of the twentieth century.[12] Dandona closes, however, with the declaration that Gallé and the Ecole's work was "quickly discarded as an evolutionary dead-end in the search for a style to represent France's triumphal entry into the modern era" (p. 188), a statement that is both of dubious veracity and hardly sympathetic to the broader significance of the book's subject matter.

Written in a straightforward manner, the monograph is quite readable and generally well-produced by Routledge, though not free of errors: Guy de Maupassant's surname, for example, is omitted on page 108 where he is introduced to us. One wishes the publisher had allowed Dandona to include a greater number of illustrations, along with a larger image of Prouvé's portrait of Gallé on the front cover. For English readers, the book nonetheless provides the first succinct analysis of all the key works of Gallé's career.

NOTES

[1] On this trend in the fine arts in France, see François Robichon, "Representing the 1870-1871 War, or the Impossible Revanche," trans. Olga Grlic, in June Hargrove and Neil McWilliam, eds., *Nationalism and French Visual Culture, 1870-1914* (Washington, DC/New Haven: National Gallery of Art/Yale University Press, 2005): 82-99; T.J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and his Followers* (New York: Knopf, 1985); and Robert Allen Jay, "Art and Nationalism in France, 1871-1914," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1979).

[2] Originally, Gallé's death was thought to have been caused by leukemia, but recent research suggests that his frequent contact with elements such as arsenic, cadmium, fluorine, lead, uranium, and manganese used in his glassmaking were the causes of his final illness, whose symptoms first appeared around the time of the 1900 Exposition Universelle and progressively worsened in spite of Gallé's attempts to seek effective treatment. See Aline Wagner, "Recherches

et hypothèses sur les causes du décès d'Emile Gallé," (Thèse de doctorat en médecine, Université Henri Poincaré, Nancy 1, 2002).

[3] The English version of Debize's book is *Emile Gallé and the "Ecole de Nancy,"* trans. Ruth Atkin-Etienne (Metz: Serpenoise, 1998). Numerous exhibition catalogues on Gallé and the Ecole appeared in Nancy's cultural year of 1999. Among them see *L'Ecole de Nancy, 1889-1909: Art Nouveau et Industries d'Art* (Paris: RMN, 1999); *L'Ecole de Nancy: Fleurs et ornements* (Paris: RMN, 1999); "*Ma Racine est au Fond des Bois*" (Paris: RMN, 1999); and *L'Ecole de Nancy: Peinture et Art Nouveau* (Paris: RMN, 1999).

[4] In addition to Debize's book above, see Claire Aptel, Henri Claude, et. al., *Nancy 1900: Rayonnement de l'Art nouveau* (Thionville: Gérard Klopp, 1991) and Françoise-Thérèse Charpentier, et. al., *Art Nouveau: L'Ecole de Nancy* (Metz: Serpenoise, 1987); Philippe Garner, *Gallé* (Paris: Flammarion, 1977; English ed. London: Academy, 1990); Philippe Thiébaut, *Emile Gallé: Le magicien du verre* (Paris: Gallimard, 2004); and Bertrand Tillier, *Emile Gallé: Le verrier dreyfusard* (Paris: Editions de l'Amateur, 2004), among other works. Several monographs also exist on Gallé's colleagues in the Ecole de Nancy, including Louis Majorelle, the Daum Brothers, Emile André, and Eugène Vallin. See Alistair Duncan, *Louis Majorelle: Master of Art Nouveau Design* (New York: Abrams, 1991); Roselyne Bouvier, *Majorelle: Une aventure moderne* (Paris: Bibliothèque des Arts/Serpenoise, 1991); Christophe Bardin, *Daum, 1878-1939: Une industrie d'art lorraine* (Metz: Serpenoise, 2004); Hervé Doucet, *Emile André (1871-1933): Art Nouveau et modernités* (Arles: Honoré Clair, 2011); and Frédéric Descouturelle, *Eugène Vallin: Menuisier d'art industriel (1856-1922)* (Nancy: AAMEN, 1998), along with numerous exhibition catalogues.

[5] Frédéric Descouturelle has asserted that the Ecole's treasury was turned over to a fund for wounded French soldiers in August 1914; meanwhile the journalist Emile Nicolas was still signing articles as a member of the Ecole de Nancy's steering committee as late as 1915. See Descouturelle, *op. cit.*, 51-52; and Nicolas, "A propos de l'art de l'Ecole de Nancy," in *La Grande Revue* 89 (November/December 1915): 187-89.

[6] Debora Silverman, *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France: Politics, Psychology, and Style* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989) and Nancy Troy, *Modernism and the Decorative Arts in France: Art Nouveau to Le Corbusier* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1991).

[7] For this fundamental aspect of the German Werkbund, see Joan Campbell's early text *The German Werkbund: The Politics of Reform in the Applied Arts* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978).

[8] On Art Nouveau's pejorative labels, see, for example, Bruno Girveau, "Henriette ou l'architecture française entre profanes et initiés," in *1900*, dir. Philippe Thiébaut (Paris: RMN, 2000): 22-30. On the Ecole de Nancy's use of "Art lorrain," to describe its members' work, see Emile Hinzelin, "L'Art en Lorraine," in *Idées Modernes 3: Nancy et Lorraine* (July 1909), esp. pp. 196, 199-200.

[9] On L'Art dans Tout, see Rosella Froissart-Pezzone, *L'Art dans Tout: Les Arts décoratifs en Europe et l'utopie d'Art nouveau* (Paris: CNRS Editions, 2004). There is good evidence to suppose that L'Art dans Tout was one inspiration for Gallé in founding the Ecole de Nancy. L'Art dans

Tout's leader, the architect Charles Plumet, was a native of Cirey-sur-Vezouze, near Nancy and often received praise whenever the provincial press got wind of his success in the capital; both Gallé and Plumet espoused socialist or left-leaning tendencies. Louis Majorelle himself cultivated very close ties to all the members of the Parisian group, and even hired one of its members, Henri Sauvage, to design his sumptuous Art Nouveau villa in Nancy; subsequently, the style spread like wildfire among Nancy's architects. The Parisian group folded in late 1900, thus seemingly handing the torch to the Ecole de Nancy when it coalesced in 1901.

[10] Nanciens, even a century later, are still extremely proud of their success in hosting what they like to call the 1909 World's Fair. See Frédéric Descouturelle, et. al., *Nancy 1909: Centenaire de la grande Exposition Internationale de l'Est de la France, triomphe de l'industrie, de la science et de l'Art nouveau* (Nancy: Editions Place Stanislas, 2008); Aptel and Claude, et. al., *op. cit.*; and Charpentier, et. al., *op. cit.* Also see Peter Clericuzio, "Modernity, Regionalism, and Art Nouveau at the Exposition Internationale de l'Est de la France," in *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide* 10, no. 1 (Spring 2011), <https://www.19thc-artworldwide.org/>.

[11] On the complicated relationship between Paris and the provinces, see especially Alain Corbin, "Paris-Province," in Pierre Nora, dir., *Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past*, vol. 1: *Conflicts and Divisions*, ed. Lawrence Kritzman, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996): 427-64; and Richard Mandell, *Paris 1900: The Great World's Fair* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967), 41-50.

[12] Such politicization of the decorative arts is well-documented, particularly through the phenomenon of international expositions. See especially Regina Lee Blaszczyk, et. al, *Inventing the Modern World: Decorative Arts at the World's Fairs, 1851-1939* (New York: Skira Rizzoli, 2012); Tag Gronberg, *Designs on Modernity: Exhibiting the City in 1920s Paris* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013); and Paul Greenhalgh, *Fair World: A History of World's Fairs and International Expositions, 1851-2010* (London: Papadakis, 2011).

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