Modern and Contemporary Architecture

Architecture and the Art Nouveau Movement

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Introduction

Art Nouveau, ornamental style of art that flourished between about 1890 and 1910 throughout Europe and the United States. It was a deliberate attempt to create a new style, free of the imitative historicism that dominated much of 19th-century art and design. The major objective of Art Nouveau was to break down the traditional distinction between fine arts (especially painting and sculpture) and applied arts.

Art Nouveau was a reaction against the academic art, eclecticism and historicism of 19th century architecture and decoration. It was most widely used in interior design, graphic arts, furniture, glass art, textiles, ceramics, jewellery and metal work. The style responded to leading 19-century theoreticians, such as French architect Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc (1814–1879) and British art critic John Ruskin (1819–1900). In Britain, it was influenced by William Morris and the Arts and Crafts movement. German architects and designers sought a spiritually uplifting Gesamtkunstwerk (“total work of art”) that would unify the architecture, furnishings, and art in the interior in a common style, to uplift and inspire the residents.

Figure 1: Beardsley, Aubrey: illustration for Le Morte Darthur (Art Nouveau illustration by Aubrey Beardsley for an 1893 edition of Sir Thomas Malory’s Le Morte Darthur).

Figure 2: The façade of the iconic Casa Battlo, designed by Antoni Gaudí.
The term Art Nouveau was coined in Belgium by the periodical L’Art Moderne to describe the work of the artist group Les Vingt and in Paris by S. Bing, who named his gallery L’Art Nouveau. The style was called Jugendstil in Germany, Sezessionstil in Austria, Stile Floreale (or Stile Liberty) in Italy, and Modernismo (or Modernista) in Spain. In Britain, the French term Art Nouveau was commonly used, while in France, it was often called by the term Style Moderne (akin to the British term Modern Style), or Style 1900. In France, it was also sometimes called Style Jules Verne (after the novelist
Jules Verne), Style Métro (after Hector Guimard's iron and glass subway entrances), Art Belle Époque, or Art fin de siècle.

Figure 4: Paris metro station Abbesses, by Hector Guimard (1900).
Characteristics

Art Nouveau is characterized by its use of a long, sinuous, organic line and was employed most often in architecture, interior design, jewellery and glass design, posters, and illustration.

![Coup de Fouet or whiplash motif, depicting the stems of cyclamen flowers, by Hermann Obrist (1895).](image)

The distinguishing ornamental characteristic of Art Nouveau is its undulating asymmetrical line, often taking the form of flower stalks and buds, vine tendrils, insect wings, and other delicate and sinuous natural objects; the line may be elegant and graceful or infused with a powerfully rhythmic and whip like force. In the graphic arts, the line subordinates all other pictorial elements—form, texture, space, and colour—to its own decorative effect. In architecture and the other plastic arts, the whole of the three-dimensional form becomes engulfed in the organic, linear rhythm, creating a fusion between structure and ornament. Architecture particularly shows this synthesis of ornament and structure; a liberal combination of materials—ironwork, glass, ceramic, and brickwork—was employed, for example, in the creation of unified interiors in which columns and beams became thick vines with spreading tendrils and windows became both openings for light and air and membranous outgrowths of the organic whole. This approach was directly opposed to the traditional architectural values of reason and clarity of structure.

Other floral forms were popular, inspired by lilies, wisteria and other flowers, particularly in the lamps of Louis Comfort Tiffany and the glass objects made by the artists of the School of Nancy and Émile Gallé. Other curving and undulating forms borrowed from nature included butterflies, peacocks, swans, and water lilies. Many designs depicted women’s hair intertwined with stems of lilies, irises and other flowers. Stylized floral forms were particularly used by Victor Horta in carpets, balustrades, windows, and furniture. They were also used extensively by Hector Guimard for balustrades, and, most famously, for the lamps and railings at the entrances of the Paris Metro.
Early Art Nouveau, particularly in Belgium and France, was characterized by undulating, curving forms inspired by lilies, vines, flower stems and other natural forms. used in particular in the interiors of Victor Horta and the decoration of Louis Majorelle and Émile Gallé. It also drew upon patterns based on butterflies and dragonflies, borrowed from Japanese art, which were popular in Europe at the time.

Figure 6: Stained glass window Veranda de la Salle by Jacques Grüber in Nancy, France (1904).

Figure 7: Railings by Louis Majorelle for the Bank Renauld in Nancy
In the second phase of Art Nouveau, following 1900, the decoration became purer and the lines were more stylized. The curving lines and forms evolved into polygons and then into cubes and other geometric forms. These geometric forms were used with particular effect in the architecture and furniture of Joseph Maria Olbrich, Otto Wagner, Koloman Moser and Josef Hoffmann, especially the Palais Stoclet in Brussels, which announced the arrival of Art Deco and modernism.

Figure 8: First issue of The Studio, with cover by Aubrey Beardsley (1893)

Figure 9: Dancer with a Scarf by Agathon Léonard, made for the Manufacture nationale de Sèvres, France (1898)

Figure 10: Chair by Gaspar Homar, Spain (1903)

Figure 11: Trencadís mosaics in Park Güell by Antoni Gaudí in Barcelona (1914)
Propagation

The first Art Nouveau houses and interior decoration appeared in Brussels in the 1890s, in the architecture and interior design of houses designed by Paul Hankar, Henry van de Velde, and especially Victor Horta, whose Hôtel Tassel was completed in 1893. It moved quickly to Paris, where it was adapted by Hector Guimard, who saw Horta's work in Brussels and applied the style for the entrances of the new Paris Métro. It reached its peak at the 1900 Paris International Exposition, which introduced the Art Nouveau work of artists such as Louis Tiffany.

From Belgium and France, it spread to the rest of Europe, taking on different names and characteristics in each country. It often appeared not only in capitals, but also in rapidly growing cities that wanted to establish artistic identities as well as in centres of independence movements.

By 1914, and with the beginning of the First World War, Art Nouveau was largely exhausted. In the 1920s, it was replaced as the dominant architectural and decorative art style by Art Deco and then Modernism. The Art Nouveau style began to receive more positive attention from critics in the late 1960s, with a major exhibition of the work of Hector Guimard at the Museum of Modern Art in 1970.

Art Nouveau and Modernism

Art Nouveau has a distinctive appearance; and, unlike the artisan-oriented Arts and Crafts movement, Art Nouveau artists readily used new materials, machined surfaces, and abstraction in the service of pure design.

Art Nouveau does not avoid the use of machines, as the Arts and Crafts movement did. For sculpture, the principal materials employed were glass and wrought iron, resulting in sculptural qualities even in architecture. Art Nouveau architecture made use of many technological innovations of the late 19th century, especially the use of exposed iron and large, irregularly shaped glass for architecture.

Art Nouveau tendencies were also absorbed into local styles in various countries across Europe.

Art Nouveau and Architecture

Also known as Jugendstil, Stile Floreale, and Sezessionstil, the decorative arts-and-architecture movement flourished in Europe throughout the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Architects such as Hector Guimard and Antoni Gaudi became famous for their expressive, organic-inspired designs, which commonly featured colourful flourishes and detailed iron- and glass work. The interiors of Art Nouveau buildings were as ornate as their exteriors, and were decorated using exquisite materials, custom furnishings, and hand-painted wall treatments. Filled with romantic flair, the style emphasized craftsmanship over the industrialization that was occurring at the time. From Latvia to Scotland, gorgeous examples of Art Nouveau architecture can still be found around the world.

Following are a few examples of architecture during the Art Nouveau period:

Antoni Gaudí brought his exuberant take on Art Nouveau to Barcelona, creating many of the city’s architectural landmarks. Casa Batlló, situated on the Passeig de Gràcia, is one of his best-known works and features allusions to the legend of St. George and the Dragon. Its exterior is sheathed in colorful pieces of broken ceramics, while the roof is covered in scalelike tiles.

Similarly, designed by architect Paul Saintenoy, the Old England building was constructed in 1899 and is considered one of Brussels’s Art Nouveau gems. The former department store now houses the Museum of Musical Instruments. Architect Otto Wagner was a key figure in the reinvention of Vienna at the turn of the 20th century. One of his most beloved works is the Majolikahaus apartment building, which was completed in 1898 and is decorated with vibrant floral motifs.
Figure 12: Casa Batlló, Barcelona

Figure 13: The Old England Building, Brussels

Figure 14: Majolikahaus, Vienna
Figure 15: The Secession Building, Vienna
Popular Architects

There were a great number of artists and designers who worked in the Art Nouveau style. Some of the more prominent were the Scottish architect and designer Charles Rennie Mackintosh, who specialized in a predominantly geometric line and particularly influenced the Austrian Sezessionstil; the Belgian architects Henry van de Velde and Victor Horta, whose extremely sinuous and delicate structures influenced the French architect Hector Guimard, another important figure; the American glassmaker Louis Comfort Tiffany; the French furniture and ironwork designer Louis Majorelle; the Czechoslovakian graphic designer-artist Alphonse Mucha; the French glass and jewelry designer René Lalique; the American architect Louis Henry Sullivan, who used plantlike Art Nouveau ironwork to decorate his traditionally structured buildings; and the Spanish architect and sculptor Antonio Gaudí, perhaps the most original artist of the movement, who went beyond dependence on line to transform buildings into curving, bulbous, brightly coloured, organic constructions.

The Decline

After 1910 Art Nouveau appeared old-fashioned and limited and was generally abandoned as a distinct decorative style. In the 1960s, however, the style was rehabilitated, in part, by major exhibitions organized at the Museum of Modern Art in New York (1959) and at the Musée National d’Art Moderne (1960), as well as by a large-scale retrospective on Beardsley held at the Victoria & Albert Museum in London in 1966.

Such exhibitions elevated the status of the movement, which had often been viewed by critics as a passing trend, to the level of other major Modern art movements of the late 19th century. Currents of the movement were then revitalized in Pop and Op art. In the popular domain, the flowery organic lines of Art Nouveau were revived as a new psychedelic style in fashion and in the typography used on rock and pop album covers and in commercial advertising.
Assignment

Write an essay on the topic *Art Nouveau in India: Architecture Practices.*

The essay should not be more than 1500 words, and should include a summary of the advent and practice of Art Nouveau in India, be it in architecture, furniture design, textile design, product design, etc. As this is the first assignment as a part of online learning, the write-up need not have citations.

Due by : 5:00 pm of 18th April, 2020.
Email : arfarazfarooq@gmail.com
File : MS Word format (either .doc or .docx)