

Editorial: Émile Gallé

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Recent years have witnessed a remarkable revival of interest in the belle époque period, from the vogue for costume dramas to the passion for Charles Rennie Mackintosh. Design, and art nouveau in particular, have been a key focus of this revival as the enormous attendance figures at the 2000 *Art nouveau 1890-1914* exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum attested. This special issue considers the contribution of a key protagonist within this complex historical moment: Émile Gallé. The articles embrace a diversity of methodological approaches, synthesising visual and textual analysis to throw light upon different aspects of his oeuvre helping to reveal the cultural history of the period's shifting artistic, scientific, institutional and political identities. The commitment amongst a growing sector of art historians to widen the canon beyond the confines of the 'high arts' of painting, sculpture and architecture to include the visual cultures of design and material culture has also informed many of the interventions in this volume.

This special issue derives from a conference held on the centenary of Gallé's death in September 2004 at the University of Bristol. I wish to signal our gratitude for the generous funding and moral support of the Centre for the Study of Visual and Literary Cultures in France at the University of Bristol and the Design History Society. Without their help with funding international speakers travel and accommodation, this event would not have been possible. The conference was enriched by the contributions of twelve additional speakers and a number of delegates beyond the four authors included in this necessarily brief issue to whom we are greatly indebted.¹

The project was conceived as an attempt to redress the paucity of analyses of Gallé and the Ecole de Nancy published in English.² There have been a number of groundbreaking and widely disseminated English language studies of French Art Nouveau in the last two decades, most notably the work of Debora Silverman, Nancy Troy and Gabriel Weisberg; however, these texts, understandably given their stated wider remit, offer a chapter at best to Émile Gallé and the Ecole de Nancy.³ French scholars have been more prolific and focused on this career and context. Any discussion of Gallé scholarship must begin with the work of Françoise Thérèse Charpentier, long standing Conservator of the Musée de l'Ecole de Nancy and Philippe Thiébaud of the Musée D'Orsay whose scholarship from the 1960s onwards will always remain core sources for those researching



Gallé.⁴ The republication of the posthumous 1908 collection of Gallé's writings *Écrits pour l'art* and a new edition of the correspondence between Gallé and Roger Marx are invaluable resources.⁵ Since the centenary, there has been a renaissance in French scholarship devoted to Gallé; a second generation of researchers have shone light on new, fascinating approaches to Gallé. François Le Tacon has made a unique contribution to our understanding of Gallé as a scientist as well as more broadly, whilst Bertrand Tillier's analysis of Gallé's committed Dreyfusardism is a paradigm shifting source.⁶ The centrality and vibrancy of the Musée de l'École de Nancy as a centre for innovative research and exhibition displays dates from its inception with the Eugène Corbin gift in 1936. Valerie Thomas, Conservator of the Musée de l'École de Nancy, and her numerous colleagues in Nancy's museums and other civic institutions have instigated an era of innovation and collegiality, making these collections, their publications and exhibition displays a place of inspiration and scholarly excellence. The plethora of focused catalogues, displays and colloquia staged under their auspices have highlighted an extraordinary range of previously neglected careers as well as new approaches to the work of less widely celebrated members of the École de Nancy, and Émile Gallé.⁷ The determination of Mme Thomas and her staff to introduce the Musée de l'École de Nancy collection, its archive and the region to a wider public has transformed awareness and study of this unique repository of visual culture. Regrettably, many undergraduate and even postgraduate students of the History of Art and Design are no longer required to have foreign languages skills to undertake their study and as such these resources are inaccessible to them; it is to be hoped that this special issue might help to offer an initial bridge over this gap and to encourage a renewal of commitment to the vital tools of language study and the world of treasures it can unlock for cultural historians.

These four articles devoted to this fin de siècle polymath contrast a range of new critical approaches to Gallé's oeuvre, highlighting its complex visual sources, its rootedness in distinctive and under-examined institutional and regional histories, whilst also engaging with the nuanced, yet under-scrutinised theorising with which Gallé underpinned his work in a wide range of media. The issue begins with Valerie Thomas's evocation of Gallé's scientific and artistic fascination with botany and horticulture which combines precise scientific knowledge with a Symbolist engagement with nature in his glass. Robert Proctor considers the innovative marketing strategies of many fin de siècle designers and the sites of these interactions, examining the spaces of consumption in Paris where Gallé and Louis Majorelle sold their works. My article speaks to the discursive intersections between Gallé's departure into a new medium, wood, and his aesthetic and political stances in the troubled final decades of his life, focusing particularly on his distinctive 'borderland' perspective on the vexed issue of annexation and his, until recently under-scrutinised, political activism in the face of social injustice. Béatrice Dammame-Gilbert explores how Gallé's legacy was evoked within the vast final swansong of the École de Nancy, L'Exposition Internationale de l'Est de la France of 1909 organised by Louis Lafitte.

It is to be hoped this modest first effort will help to foster much more scholarly understanding and interest in this multi-talented individual, his beloved region of Lorraine and the role of design and its histories in recovering and analysing the rich and complex impact of visual culture and identity.



¹ The other speakers and the titles of their paper for the 2004 conference were Jessica Dandona (University of California at Berkeley) *The Politics of Eclecticism: Émile Gallé and the Question of Regional and National Identity in France, 1871-1889*; Ursula Harter (Offenbach am Main) *Émile Gallé and Oceanography*; Claire Leblanc (Musées Royaux d'Art et Histoire, Brussels) *Gallé and Belgium: Reception and Reaction*; Valerie Mainz (University of Leeds) *Orientated towards France?*; Eva Mendgen (Saarbrücken) *Émile Gallé – an early example of regionalism*; Elizabeth K. Menon (Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana) *Femme/Fleur: Émile Gallé's Vessels and Floral Symbolism* and Jason Ney MLA (Atelier JBN Milwaukee, Wisconsin) *'The Fertile Principles of Our Method': The Theories of Émile Gallé and the Ecole de Nancy as a framework for Landscape Architecture* and Barbara von Orelli-Messerli (University of Bern) *Gallé's Ceramics*. My colleagues Richard Hobbs (Director of the Centre for the Study of Visual and Literary Cultures in France, University of Bristol) Stuart Evans (Central St Martins, London) and Nichola Hebditch (Nottingham Trent University) are particularly to be thanked for their contributions to the weekend's discussions and the many years of amiable collegiality which helped bring this to fruition. The greatest thanks and debt is to my husband and colleague Mike O'Mahony (University of Bristol) who has been tireless in his support of this project from the first conversation over a morning cup of coffee about organising the conference to the final edit of these articles.

² The core publications in English devoted to Gallé to date are: Tim Newark, *The Art of Émile Gallé*, Grange Books, London, 1995, William Warmus, *Émile Gallé Dreams into Glass*, The Corning Museum of Glass, New York, 1984 and Philippe Garner, *Émile Gallé*, Rizzoli, New York, 1976 as well as a translated French source which places Émile Gallé into a wider context of the work of the Ecole de Nancy: Christian Debize, *Émile Gallé the Ecole de Nancy*, Éditions Serpentine, Metz, 1999.

³ Debora Silverman, *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France Politics Psychology and Style*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1989, Nancy Troy, *Modernism and the Decorative Arts: From Art Nouveau to Le Corbusier*, Yale University Press, London, 1991, Gabriel Weisberg and Elizabeth Menon *Art Nouveau: A Research Guide for Design Reform in France Belgium England and the United States*, Garland, New York, 1998 and Gabriel Weisberg, Edwin Becker and Evelyne Posseme (eds), *The Origins of L'Art Nouveau: The Bing Empire*, Cornell University Press, Cornell, 2005.

⁴ Most notably the first major post-war exhibition and catalogue devoted to Gallé: Musée de Luxembourg, *Gallé*, Réunion des musées nationaux, Paris, 1985, but also through countless articles in academic journals and the two most recent books by Thiébaud: Musée D'Orsay, *Gallé le testament artistique*, Hazan, Paris, 2004 and Philippe Thiébaud, *Émile Gallé Le magicien du verre*, Gallimard, Paris, 2004.

⁵ Émile Gallé, *Écrits pour l'Art Floriculture – Art Décoratif – Notice d'Exposition (1884-1889)*, (1908) Lafitte Reprints, Marseilles, 1999 and Émile Gallé and Roger Marx, *Lettres pour l'Art Correspondance 1882-1904*, La Nuée Bleue, Strasbourg, 2006.

⁶ For Le Tacon's important contributions, see particularly: François Le Tacon, *Émile Gallé Maître de l'Art Nouveau*, La Nuée Bleue, Strasbourg, 2004; François Le Tacon, *Émile Gallé ou le mariage de l'art et la science*, Messene, Paris, 1995; François Le Tacon, *L'oeuvre de verre d'Émile Gallé*, Messene, Paris, 1998 (and works listed in note below). Tillier's meticulously detailed archival study is: Bertrand Tillier, *Émile Gallé le verrier dreyfusard*, Les Éditions de l'Amateur, Paris, 2004.

⁷ The city of Nancy, its institutions and its entrepreneurs have hosted a number of important colloquia on Gallé and art nouveau; the colloquium at the Académie Stanislas held in honour of the Gallé centenary generated an important new contribution to Gallé studies: François Le Tacon, *En hommage à Émile Gallé*, special issue Annales de L'Est 2005. Committed local scholars and conservators, particularly at the Musée de l'Ecole de Nancy, have profoundly widened the frame of scholarship to consider less familiar works and practitioners from Musée de l'Ecole de Nancy, *Céramiques végétales Ernest Bussière*, Imprimerie Hilt, 2000 to this year's exhibition Musée de l'Ecole de Nancy, *Verrerie art nouveau l'exemple des frères Muller*, Somogy Éditions de l'Art, Paris, 2007, whilst also greatly enriching the depth and range of core publications devoted to Gallé and the Ecole de Nancy including: Musée de l'Ecole de Nancy, *Le Musée de l'Ecole de Nancy dévoile ses réserves oeuvres méconnues ou inédites*, Fages editions, Lyons, 2007; Musée de l'Ecole de Nancy, *Couleurs et formes l'héritage du XVIIIe siècle dans l'Ecole de Nancy*, Somogy Éditions de l'Art, Paris, 2005; Valérie Thomas and Helen Bieri Thomson, *Verreries d'Émile Gallé De l'oeuvre unique à la série*, Somogy Éditions de l'Art, Paris, 2004; Musée de l'Ecole de Nancy, *Émile Gallé et le verre La collection du musée de l'Ecole de Nancy*, Somogy Éditions de l'Art, Paris, 2004; *Nancy 1900 Rayonnement de l'Art Nouveau*, Gérard Klopp, Metz, 1999; Galeries Poirel, *L'Ecole de Nancy, Art nouveau et les Industries de l'art*, Éditions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, Paris, 1999; Musée



de l'École de Nancy, *Fleurs et ornements Ma racine est au fond des bois*, Réunion des musées nationaux, Paris, 1999. The Association des Amis du Musée de l'École de Nancy have been supportive patrons for new avenues of research both through their own journal *Arts Nouveaux* and an impressive series of dossiers including three volumes which speak particularly to the concerns of this special issue: *Émile Gallé et Victor Prouvé Une alliance pour le mobilier*, Imprimerie Moderne, Pont à Mousson, 2002, Philippe Bouton-Corbin, *Eugène Corbin collectionneur et mécène de l'École de Nancy*, Imprimerie Moderne, Pont à Mousson, 2002 and François Le Tacon and Flavien De Luca, *L'usine d'art Gallé à Nancy*, Association des Amis du musée de l'École de Nancy, Nancy, 2004. Many important related colloquia, exhibitions and catalogues have also been produced by Nancy's Musée des Beaux Arts; *Roger Marx un critique aux côtés de Gallé, Monet, Rodin, Gauguin...*, Éditions Artlys, Cesson-Sévigné, 2006 was especially useful to this study.