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H-France Review Vol. 15 (August 2015), No. 110

Claire Jones, *Sculptors and Design Reform in France, 1848 to 1895: Sculpture and the Decorative Arts*. Surrey and Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2014. xiv + 226 pp., with 4 color and 35 black and white illustrations. Notes, bibliography and index. £ 60.00 (hardcover). ISBN: 978-1-4724-1523-3.

Review by Caterina Y. Pierre, City University of New York at Kingsborough Community College.

The large majority of scholarly texts that are published on the subject of French decorative arts are focused, heavily, on either eighteenth-century production or that of the Art Nouveau period; books that cover decorative arts during the Second Empire and the early years of the Third Republic are astonishingly few in number. Yvonne Brunhammer and Catherine Arminjon's *L'Art de vivre: Decorative Arts and Design in France, 1789-1899* (Vendome, 1989) is a general survey that covers a great expanse of time and artworks, and other publications on French decorative arts consist of exhibition and collection catalogues of specific decorative arts holdings in Western museums. Thus, Claire Jones's *Sculptors and Design Reform in France, 1848 to 1895: Sculpture and the Decorative Arts* works to fill a clearly existing gap in this area of scholarship. The lack of a specific book on decorative arts in France from this era is astonishing because there is otherwise a glut of publications, scholarly and otherwise, that focus on French fine art sculpture from the second half of the nineteenth century, the bulk of which covers the life and career of the artist Auguste Rodin (1840-1917).

Rodin actually plays a large role in Jones's book. The "father of modern sculpture," as he has oft been referred, began his career, and as Jones shows, continued throughout his career, making decorative artworks and objects. Jones begins the book with an introduction on the "problems" within Rodin scholarship that have compromised the study of the decorative arts in a more general sense. According to Jones, scholars of Rodin's oeuvre have "marginalised" any of his decorative work that does not conform to their understanding of, or the accepted art historical view of, "modernity" (p. 3). If any specific pieces of Rodin's decorative work do not fit neatly into the highly mythologized story of his rise to avant-garde greatness, then those works tend to be left out of discussions of his oeuvre. However, Jones makes a convincing statement early on that Rodin's training in the decorative arts helped him conceive of fragments and small works (like those used on vases and sideboards) for his masterpiece *The Gates of Hell* (p. 6). Decorative arts in general, which are "economically driven," are usually considered to be less important than works that sculptors made that were "independent" and thus unique (p. 5), and Jones argues that Rodin scholars have retained this bias. I would argue that few artworks of any type created during this period were made without some nod to the economic market for art, and this was especially true for sculptors, who remained heavily dependent on governmental and private commissions. In her introduction, Jones questions who has decided what types of art have been deemed worthy of study; she sets out to "reveal complex and nuanced relations between fine art and other objects" (p. 12); and she wants to show how sculptors played a crucial role in design reform during the five decades under discussion in her book.

The core of the book is comprised of three chapters, organized chronologically. The first chapter, entitled "Sculptors and Industrial Art, 1848-1870," begins with a discussion of the economic state of affairs in France after the 1848 Revolution. The situation was dire, and sculptors and decorative artists were hurt most by the economic downturn that ensued, because they worked primarily in luxury goods,

fine furniture, building projects, and public art, all sectors for which money was not easily available (p. 17). The government threatened to defund and close the state-funded manufacturing entities now treasured, including those at Gobelins and Sèvres. The Great Exhibition of 1851, held at the Crystal Palace in Hyde Park, London, prompted France to prove their eminence in decorative production, and afterwards the country did restore fine and decorative arts to their proper standing in French culture (p. 20). Jones explains that the Great Exhibition “cemented the place of sculpture in industry as it was more integrally [*sic*] connected to its materials and mechanical processes than painting” (pp. 44-45).

In this chapter Jones also introduces a thread that runs throughout the book, in which she states that sculptors were not always given their rights to authorship when they passed their works on to manufacturers, such as bronze founders or decorative arts manufacturers, who usually had the upper hand from a legal standpoint. For example, sculptors could not prevent manufacturers from using their models and ideas in other works; so a design originally produced, let us say, for a sideboard, could be recycled and used in a mantle clock or an inkstand (p. 24), without the need to obtain permission from the original artist. Sculptors who sold their models to one manufacturer were, in essence, selling them the rights to reuse the model in any way they saw fit, in perpetuity. Whoever owned the physical model for a design had the right to reproduce it and sell it; obviously this caused some strife between manufacturers and artists, and Jones gives these legal tie-ups significant attention in her text. The decorative art of the Swiss-born sculptor James Pradier (1790-1852), in particular the “lives” of his most famous sculpture *Standing Sappho* (1848), is also discussed here (pp. 31-33) as well as the career of the little-known sculptor Constant Sévin (1821-1888, pp. 67-71). This first chapter also discusses the famous foundry of Ferdinand Barbedienne (1810-1892) and his role as a major figure in the revival of French Renaissance-inspired decorative arts. Again Jones alludes to an interesting idea that a decorative bookcase exhibited by Barbedienne in 1851 has links with Rodin’s later *Gates of Hell*; unfortunately this enticing morsel is not more fully developed by the author (pp. 52-54).

There are some other issues in this early chapter that will also strike the reader as being somewhat underdeveloped. A series of quotes on page 56 seems to suggest that even during the Second Empire, ornamental and decorative sculpture was given a low standing amongst other forms of sculpture. Thus, if ornamental sculptors were at the time considered “subordinate” to sculptors who worked more closely with the fine arts (p. 57), it is not clear why some of the blame for relegating decorative arts to a lower status is placed on more recent scholars and scholarship. Jones’s points that decorative sculpture and fine art sculpture were often practiced by sculptors who worked simultaneously in both fields, and that art historians should discuss the two types of sculpture production as a more fluid whole, are good ones. But it was clearly the case that the separation between fine and decorative has been in place for a long time. As the song states, we didn’t start the fire.

It may have also been useful to explore, early in the book, why women were kept out, and if they were in fact kept out, of design work. Jones notes that she found no references to female sculptor-ornamentists (p. 58), but then later mentions a situation wherein a thirteen-year old girl was working as an apprentice burnisher of gold and silver in an atelier run by a woman (p. 64). It is well known that women in Western Europe were involved in craft production, documented from the Renaissance period onwards, and since there was a state-funded school of decorative arts for girls in France (*L’Ecole Gratuite de dessin pour les jeunes filles*, established in 1803), it strikes the reader as odd that absolutely no women were mentioned at all in any of the primary sources that Jones consulted. The role of women in the decorative arts may have presented, however, an even more complicated study and sexist history of why decorative arts were considered “low,” and clearly she thought it best, for better or worse, to keep that bag of worms securely closed.

The second chapter, entitled “Decorative Sculpture and the Third Republic, 1870-1889,” focused primarily on the national manufactories, especially after the effects of the Franco-Prussian War and the Commune, and the relationship between Albert-Ernest Carrier-Belleuse (1824-1887) and Auguste

Rodin. Once again, the French government considered whether the state should continue funding the national manufactories (pp. 91-92). As so many artists defected to England during the war and the Commune, France suffered the nationalist fear that England was stealing its best artists. The best of the French decorative artists, Carrier-Belleuse, therefore had to be retained. He had worked in England and Belgium, and in 1874 he was appointed as the director of the Department of Works of Art at Sèvres. He earned a salary of 4,000 francs per year, but as his attendance at work was a bit spotty, he was offered 6,000 francs per year if he would agree to show up at Sèvres at least three days per week (p. 94). Carrier-Belleuse was spreading himself a bit thin: while he worked at Sèvres, he was also working for Minton and Christofle, as well as on his “individual” works that were unrelated to his decorative designs. Jones states that “Carrier-Belleuse’s work at Sèvres has not, until now, been the subject of serious study” (p. 109), but this statement ignores June Hargrove’s long-standing work on the artist, and Jones’s book was published at almost the exact moment as the exhibition and catalogue *Carrier-Belleuse: Le maître de Rodin* was released by Editions de la Réunion des musées nationaux (by June Hargrove and Gilles Grandjean, 2014), which produced significant work on the artist’s Sèvres period and his relationship with Rodin. Jones’s chapter does focus on Carrier-Belleuse’s most important vases for Sèvres, and the work of his son-in-law, Joseph Chéret, brother of the more famous poster designer Jules (p. 108).

Rodin, who had worked with Carrier-Belleuse in Belgium, was hired in 1879 as part of the “external staff” at Sèvres, where he worked on important vases created in the wet-clay engraving technique and the *pâte-sur-pâte* technique, the latter of which Jones discusses in detail (pp. 98-100). It was at Sèvres that Rodin made the acquaintance of Edmond Turquet (1836-1914), under-secretary for public fine arts instruction in France from 1879 to around 1886, who commissioned the *Gates of Hell*. In fact, Jones notes that “parallels have been drawn between [the vases he was working on at Sèvres] and Rodin’s *Gates of Hell*” (100), and thus it was the work and the connections that Rodin made at Sèvres that made the *Gates of Hell* possible. Rodin used his work at Sèvres as a way to convince Turquet to give him a government commission, first for work on the rebuilt Hôtel de Ville, and then for the planned decorative arts museum (p. 111). Jones makes the convincing argument that Rodin may have stalled finishing the *Gates of Hell* so that he could make some money from the models and individual figures planned for the doors before turning it over to the state, which would then have immediately owned the copyright (p. 114). Jones convincingly reestablishes the importance of Rodin’s decorative work and his involvement with manufacturers, and with the Union centrale des arts décoratifs (UCAD), aspects of his career usually ignored by Rodin scholars.

The final chapter, “Decorative Sculpture and the Fine Arts, 1890-1895,” discusses, in part, the role of materials and methods in which art objects were made, and how these aspects contributed to the divisions between fine and decorative sculpture. Jules Desbois (1851-1935) made works in pewter, which frightened manufacturers because it was easy to cast and reproduce independent from a foundry (p. 149). Desbois was a member of L’Art dans Tout, an artistic movement that strove to legitimize decorative arts after 1896, which Jones makes brief reference to a few times (pp. 91, 149, 161-2), but which she never fully explores because it falls outside of the date parameters of her book. It would have been useful to allow the book to cover the period to 1901 and so that she could have discussed L’Art dans Tout more fully, especially since some of the artists she mentions were a part of it. Nonetheless, one of the more astute points Jones makes in this chapter is that the Société nationale des beaux-arts (SNBA) was created in part by sculptors to distinguish themselves from industry, while at the same time giving them the freedom to pursue works that would benefit them through industrial markets (p. 171). The sculptors’ main concerns at the end of the century were to obtain some control over their authorship and copyright, and Jones does a fine job of tracking their obstacles and rare victories over the course of the book.

The conclusion of the book consists of a comparison between a cabinet from 1895 by François-Rupert Carabin (1862-1932) with an earlier cabinet from 1867 by Henri-Auguste Fourdinois (1830-1907). Jones

points out that Carabin's work was more sculptural, more free, and not classicized, while Fourdinois's work subordinates the sculpture within the architectural structure of the cabinet, which was more readily acceptable for this type of cabinetry. Jones continues with a discussion of a poem published in a German magazine, *Lustige Blätter*, in 1899 called "Der neue Styl." The poem was accompanied by a drawing that contained references to Carabin's works, and apparently there are numerous sexual and psychological references in the drawing that suggest madness and rape, and the idea that Carabin's works could drive a person insane. Jones explains that "critics at the time did not comment on the inherent sexuality of Carabin's work" (p. 189), and frankly, I couldn't see any of it either. A better place for this comparison might have been in chapter one, around page 54, right after the discussion of Barbedienne's cabinets. Unfortunately, this final part of the book does not do much to help conclude it, and seems to deviate from the real strong point of the book, which was that the separation made between fine and decorative sculpture, in the past and now, has obscured their actual close interrelation over the five decades discussed in the book.

Overall, however, *Sculpture and Design Reform in France, 1848 to 1895: Sculpture and the Decorative Arts* makes an important contribution to the field of late nineteenth-century ornamental sculpture and the sculptors who worked within this field. Jones also settles some misinformation on Rodin's decorative career, especially on whether he actually ever stopped making decorative art. Future research on Rodin will have to now consider Jones's study when discussing his career. Her archival research into design reform and the legal issues that plagued sculptors for most of the century was revealing, and is crucial to the understanding of how sculptors managed their careers. The text will undoubtedly inspire future studies on women in the decorative arts, the L'Art dans Tout movement, and how sculptors managed to gain greater rights to their authorship and copyright in the century that followed.

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ISSN 1553-9172