

MARKETING MODERNISM TO THE MAITRESSE DE MAISON:
ART NOUVEAU AND THE FEMALE CONSUMER

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Dedicated to my family especially Mom, Grandma Sue and Laura. Thank you for supporting my journey down this long and winding road.

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INTRODUCTION

The design reform movement known as Art Nouveau developed in the last two decades of the nineteenth century. Its popularity peaked in 1900 at the Paris Exposition Universelle and waned around 1910 with the advent of true abstractionist Modernism in both the fine and applied arts. Art Nouveau appeared simultaneously in multiple European nations and the United States with iterations found mainly in architecture and the decorative arts including domestic goods, personal items like jewelry and graphic design. The disparate strains of the movement developed individual formal styles, but shared a common theoretical foundation based on the desire to create objects which reflected the characteristics of modern society. These artists and designers reacted against the historicist revivalism of Victorian-age design, advanced the dissolution of the hierarchical structure among the arts and protested the poor quality of manufactured goods generated by mass production.

The present study discusses the Art Nouveau movement as a whole as it pertains to its theoretical foundations. I intend to counteract the historiographical definition of Art Nouveau as merely a visual style of ornamentation, a simplification that contradicts the intentions of the movement's originators who aspired to create an art that would affect social change. In this sense, Art Nouveau illustrates the perception of ornamentation as a communicative tool rather than a purely decorative aesthetic device. The established historiography of Art Nouveau encompasses several perspectives. The literature is overwhelmingly connoisseurial; academic texts are often surveys that include brief

overviews of the assorted factions of the movement in a geographical arrangement. The extreme individualism of Art Nouveau artists presents a problem for scholars attempting to summarize the movement's visual elements. Nonetheless, early interpreters adhered to a strict formalism in order to interpret the movement as a decorative style. A few pivotal texts examine the movement in a thorough manner by connecting it to contemporary political and social currents. These authors seek to understand Art Nouveau in the context of a specific cultural, political and economic moment in history. In order to accomplish this goal, these authors typically limit themselves geographically, which negates the internationalism of the movement. Cross-national exchanges influenced both the theory and visual aspects of the movement. In 2000, an exhibition jointly produced by the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. and the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, celebrated the centennial of the 1900 Paris Exposition Universelle. The exhibition and its catalog, the most comprehensive survey of the movement, were organized geographically and by materials with sections addressing objects in wood, glass, metal, textiles and jewelry. This event successfully showcased the multi-faceted Art Nouveau movement in an innovative and holistic manner.

I intend to follow the example of those authors who have treated Art Nouveau as a movement rather than a style. Similar to previous studies, this intention limits the scope of my examination geographically. My socio-historical argument centers on the Parisian version of the movement and its relationship to the practice of mass consumption among bourgeois women. Many authors address the movement's theoretical and stylistic concerns, but few have interpreted Art Nouveau as a commercial enterprise, with the exception of scholars examining the Parisian entrepreneur Siegfried Bing (1838-1905).

Artists and art dealers, exemplified by Bing, promoted the movement as a means of modernizing the domestic interior that for them would accomplish the goal of modernizing the society that inhabited those interiors. In France, the domestic sphere was the purview of bourgeois women who created the ideal interior through their practice of consumer capitalism. A woman's home reflected the bourgeois social status of her family but could also express her individual artistic sensibility. The Art Nouveau movement was primarily aimed at the bourgeois class. Discretionary income allowed the bourgeois the economic freedom to express their modernity through consumption. Consumerism and expression of one's individual identity were long-established components of the bourgeois identity.

This objective of this thesis is to demonstrate that Parisian participants in the movement marketed Art Nouveau to the female bourgeoisie because she was charged with arranging the interior of the middle-class home. I discuss the moral, economic and political ramifications of the role of the woman as bourgeois housewife in private and her performance of the cultured persona, the Parisienne, in public. This duality complicated the function of the bourgeoisie in the Parisian society and economy. An emphasis will be placed on domesticity as an element of the bourgeois identity used to differentiate the middle class from the aristocracy. Art Nouveau functioned in the aesthetic education of bourgeois women; this is demonstrated through an examination of their relationship to the department store, a modern paradigm which had become the public domain for women. Female consumerism, which allowed women a sense of economic and psychological independence, was fueled by the new temples of secular social life – department stores. Frantz Jourdain (1847-1935), a primary theorist of Art Nouveau, used

the department store as a physical manifesto for the architectural expression of the movement.

Social and economic historians recognize the emergence of consumer culture in conjunction with the Industrial Revolution. Mass production generated a discourse regarding the moral, political and ethical implications of mass consumption. Pioneering economist Thorsten Veblen defined consumerism as it related to the new middle-class in the United States as “conspicuous consumption.”¹ “Leisure class,” the appellation given to the American bourgeoisie by Veblen, indicates the distance from production that defined the nineteenth-century middle classes. Veblen casts consumption “beyond the minimum required for subsistence and physical efficiency” as a method through which the leisure class could mark themselves as honorable and respectable.² Veblen indicates a second condition of conspicuous consumption in order to successfully mark one as a member of the leisure class. He writes, “... [the leisure-class man] must also cultivate his tastes, for it now becomes incumbent on him to discriminate with some nicety between the noble and ignoble in consumable goods.”³ It is the cultivation of taste which translated from Veblen’s American middle class to the French equivalent, the petite bourgeoisie. The cultivation of taste not only connected the petite bourgeoisie to their class status, but it was vital to their French national identity as well.

The objective of the Industrial Revolution concerned the mass production of consumer goods that were only previously available to the limited population in

¹ Thorstein Veblen, “Conspicuous Consumption.” From *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899). Reprinted in *The Rise of Fashion: A Reader*. Ed. Daniel Leonhard Purdy. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 262.

² Veblen, “Conspicuous Consumption,” 263.

³ Veblen, “Conspicuous Consumption,” 265.

possession of the funds necessary to patronize individual craftsmen. The proliferation of consumer goods precipitated design reform in the mid-nineteenth century. Previous scholars have established Art Nouveau as a derivative of the English Arts and Crafts movement. Stylistically, the strains of Art Nouveau ranged from the abstract forms of the Scottish designer Charles Rennie Mackintosh (Fig. 1) to Alphonse Mucha's exuberant graphic designs featuring beautiful women with swirling masses of hair and drapery (Fig. 2). Theoretically, the disparate visual forms are linked through a desire for modernization and democratization within the arts and society. According to art historian Maurice Rheims, "All were in revolt against a century of mediocrity and pastiche, yet each was free to express his opposition as he chose."⁴ The English Arts and Crafts movement stressed an idolization of the artisan and handcraftsmanship, while the Art Nouveau movement accepted modern methods of production and materials while rejecting the mediocrity of designs produced by industrial means.

Art Nouveau artists accepted new methods of machine manufacturing but they never succeeded in establishing mass production of Art Nouveau objects. Initially, artists created their original designs by hand with the intent of submitting them for mass production. Manufacturers were reluctant to initiate mass production of a new style that was not supported by an established consumer demand. Therefore, objects had to be produced through expensive and inefficient handcrafting, which caused the objects to be unaffordable for consumers. Many members of the bourgeoisie and working classes possessed only a limited income, which forced them to be conservative in their consumption. Therefore, Art Nouveau objects gained an association with those

⁴ Quoted in Alastair Duncan, *Art Nouveau* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1994), 7.

consumers in the haute bourgeoisie that could afford the handcrafted goods. This result went against the intentions of Art Nouveau designers who set out to create goods which were available to all strata of the economy.

Design reform was necessitated by the advances made in the mass production of domestic goods. Industrialized mass production of domestic goods was promoted in nineteenth-century Europe through the organization of international expositions. In Paris, objects designed in the Art Nouveau style were distributed through modern retail institutions such as department stores and international expositions. The Exposition Universelle of 1900, held in Paris, is considered to have been the pinnacle of achievement of the Art Nouveau movement.

Periodic Expositions held in Europe and the United States were both an entertainment venue for visitors and a marketing opportunity for manufacturers and entrepreneurs. Historically, art and commerce have been positioned in a contentious relationship that became even more complex upon the introduction of the “Art for Art’s Sake” theory in the mid-nineteenth century. In previous centuries, art patronage and collecting was an expression of one’s wealth and cultural status. Gradually, over several centuries, a commercial art market developed in which artists created works on speculation more frequently than after the execution of a contract with a specific patron. In the early nineteenth century, an artistic identity concerned with personal expression developed concurrently with the bourgeois emphasis on individuality. Commercial success, while still vital, became secondary to embracing experimental artistic methods or articulating psychological, political or social messages.

Nineteenth-century fine artists, especially painters, broadened their methods of expression to include techniques characteristic of Realism, Impressionism and Symbolism. Still, art remained a fundamentally commercial enterprise, the primary objective being to sell artistic products. The consumer base for art expanded greatly as amount of disposable income among the middle class increased. In France, the bourgeoisie emulated consumption of art by the aristocratic class while simultaneously establishing themselves as the moral and political antithesis of the titled nobility.

The rapid development of mass production necessitated a reassessment of design standards in the applied arts. The talent of the worker was less important in a market where machines replicated objects with precision at a lower cost than objects produced by an individual craftsman. Often, machine-produced objects intentionally recreated the effects of handwork in order to satisfy consumer tastes. Nancy Troy has noted that the consequence of using machines to reproduce the effects of handwork caused “the average person [to find] it difficult to distinguish between antique objects fashioned by hand and modern objects made with the aid of machines.”⁵ James Trilling agrees with Troy, stating that machine-based production combined with “ubiquitous bad taste...destroyed not only the skills needed to create good ornament but the ability to recognize it.”⁶ The Industrial Revolution not only transformed the processes of production, but precipitated consumer education in the practice of good taste as well. For the French, this meant patronage of handcrafted products that met their standard of good taste.

⁵ Nancy Troy, “Toward a Redefinition of Tradition in French Design, 1895-1914,” *Design Issues*, Vol. 1, no. 2 (Fall, 1984), 53-54.

⁶ James Trilling, *The Language of Ornament* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2001), 185.

Like the Industrial Revolution, design reform began in Great Britain with writers such as John Ruskin and William Morris. British theorists advanced handcraftsmanship over machine production, believing that human artistic output was considerably more valuable than factory fabrications. A socialist concern for the craftsman as a member of the working class buttressed their emphasis on human production. Art Nouveau artists considered the social status of the working class as well.

Cultural critic Walter Benjamin addressed the effect of mass production on the understanding of art objects in his influential essay, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.”⁷ He designated photography as the first truly mechanical process for reproducing art because the camera has replaced the artist’s hand as the method of production. Benjamin supposed that prints of photographs are inherently inauthentic because they are always reproductions and not endowed with the aura of an original. Benjamin defined the aura of an object as its “unique existence” or “its presence in time and space.”⁸ He theorized that the aura of an object is always depreciated through mechanical reproduction; the authenticity of the original is eroded through the plurality of the copies.

Art Nouveau artists and theorists understood Benjamin’s concept long before he expressed it in 1935. Like their peers in the Arts and Crafts movement, they advocated the integral role that artistic design played in the creation of decorative art objects. Still, they were not opposed to the use of modern methods of production or materials, provided

⁷ Walter Benjamin. “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.” (1936). UCLA School of Theater, Film and Television. Trans. Andy Blunden (1998), Last modified February, 2005. Accessed 25 March 2010. <http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/ge/benjamin.htm>

⁸ Benjamin, “Work of Art.” Marxists.org.

that the object produced met their high standard of aesthetic quality and originality. Mass reproduction, as described by Benjamin, would contradict the Art Nouveau movement's tenet of artistic quality in the decorative arts because duplication would denigrate the aesthetic standing of an original object produced through the skill and creativity of the artist.

The connection between domestic interiors and the Art Nouveau movement caused the Parisian version of the style to become gendered feminine in its historiography. Art Nouveau is often described in terms that can also be applied to the ideal bourgeois woman: elegant, beautiful, chic. The works of the movement are populated with images of women. Wood nymphs with flowing hair and angelic features populate numerous examples in many disparate media. Often, women's bodies are entwined in floral settings, connecting them with the iconography of nature used by Art Nouveau artists.

Multiple images of women as *femme fatales*, a conventional trope in nineteenth-century art, can be found in the works of Art Nouveau artists. This study will explore an alternative image of the modern Parisian woman in which she is depicted as a consumer of artistic and domestic goods. Siegfried Bing established a primary retail outlet for Art Nouveau objects in Paris in 1895. L'Art Nouveau was designed as a boutique but also as a facility for the dissemination of Art Nouveau's theoretical platform. Bing eventually organized a workshop for the production of Art Nouveau objects. The specimens examined in this thesis were created by Georges de Feure (1868-1943), a chief designer in Bing's atelier. Objects designed by De Feure were both inventory for the boutique and decoration for the store's facilities. These objects depict a lone, sophisticated, beautiful

woman in a public setting, her costume often an exaggerated model of the most modern fashion ornamented with abstract motifs. Her clothing and surroundings mark her as a chic Parisienne who has ventured into the public realm to fulfill her role as consumer. De Feure's images acted as advertisements without text, drawing real-life women to Bing's store. Bing anticipated that bourgeois women would be attracted to Art Nouveau because of its modernity. Art Nouveau became a method through which bourgeois women could transform themselves into the ideal, modern Parisienne.

LITERATURE REVIEW: ART NOUVEAU HISTORIOGRAPHY

The historiography of Art Nouveau addresses the movement through several perspectives that demonstrate the incongruent current methodologies of art historical scholarship. An abundance of publications addressing the movement are aimed at connoisseurs and collectors interested exclusively in the beauty of Art Nouveau as a visual style. These texts rely on pure, formal analysis to describe Art Nouveau as style of ornamentation. Art Nouveau lends itself well to formal analysis by virtue of its decorative qualities and its focus on applied art objects rather than paintings. The lack of true academic exploration demonstrates the difficulty of the art history discipline in analyzing objects that do not fall into the traditional hierarchy of the fine arts. Scholarly treatment of Art Nouveau has recently expanded to include a broader understanding of the culture in which the movement developed. This segregation in the historiography also exemplifies the demarcation between the fine arts and the decorative arts, a divide that the Art Nouveau movement's progenitors fought to erase.

This section of this thesis features a review of selected texts that represent the historiography of Art Nouveau. I begin with early, formalist assessments and provide an overview of survey texts, the most prevalent theme in the historiography. The review concludes with an overview of texts which place Art Nouveau in its social and historical context.

One of the earliest volumes to treat Art Nouveau in an historical manner is Nikolaus Pevsner's *Pioneers of Modern Design*, which was published in 1936. Pevsner designates Art Nouveau as a precursor to the Modern Movement. He recognizes the Art Nouveau progenitors' acceptance of machine manufacturing. The author refers to Henry van de Velde of Belgium as one of the "first architects to admire the machine and to understand its essential character and its consequences in the relation of architecture and design to ornamentation..."⁹ Pevsner recognizes the modernity of Art Nouveau by calling it "free from period revival, unencumbered and uncompromising."¹⁰ His chapter on the movement details the geographic disbursement as it moved outward from Belgium, focusing on comparing and contrasting the visual characteristics of the art created in each location. Pevsner created a coterie of artists, whom remain the most recognized names associated with Art Nouveau: Arthur Mackmurdo, Aubrey Beardsley, Louis Sullivan, Victor Horta, Émile Gallé, Henri Guimard, Otto Eckmann, Hermann Obrist, Antonio Gaudi and others. Pevsner recognizes the importance of journals and exhibitions in publicizing the movement. This author's text appeared approximately thirty years after the movement began to fade from the European artistic spotlight. As

⁹ Nikolaus Pevsner, *Pioneers of Modern Design*, 4th ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 19.

¹⁰ Pevsner, *Pioneers of Modern Design*, 59.

such, his inclusion of Art Nouveau in a foundational text of modern design evidences the success of the movement's objective to classify itself as explicitly modern.

Stephen Tschudi-Madsen's *Sources of Art Nouveau* (1955) exemplifies the influential, early scholarship that instituted an understanding of Art Nouveau as a strictly decorative style. Like later surveys, this text is arranged geographically and discusses only the major centers of the movement that the author narrowly locates around the English Channel. Tschudi-Madsen examined the historical influences on Art Nouveau. Whereas later authors describe Art Nouveau as a more general term, Tschudi-Madsen divided Art Nouveau into separate 'neo' styles, including Neo-Rococo and Neo-Baroque. He saw neo-Baroque themes, evident in the Jugendstil movement of Germany, as the "most important source of Art Nouveau's plastic conception of form in the French cultural sphere."¹¹ The author expanded the English influences on Art Nouveau beyond Ruskin and Morris by including Owen Jones, writer of a treatise on ornamentation, and the revolutionary abstract designs of Christopher Dresser. Tschudi-Madsen helped to establish the femininity of Art Nouveau especially in the work of Georges de Feure, writing that "his neat objects are designed so gracefully and so airy (sic) as though they were all intended for a female hand."¹² Although he avoided an in-depth exploration of the cultural and historical situation surrounding Art Nouveau, Tschudi-Madsen provided a painstaking observation of the formal character of the major threads of the style.

Paul Greenhalgh, former Head of Research at the Victoria and Albert Museum, orchestrated the 2000 exhibition at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. and the

¹¹ Stephan Tschudi-Madsen, *Art Nouveau* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), 129.

¹² Tschudi-Madsen, *Art Nouveau*, 365.

Victoria and Albert Museum, London. This encyclopedic presentation traced the fourteen years during which Art Nouveau appeared in Europe and America. The catalog to the exhibition is a beautifully illustrated volume commemorating the centennial of the 1900 Paris exhibition, which marked the pinnacle of the Art Nouveau movement. The exhibition catalog is divided into five parts, including an introduction and conclusion.

Part two addresses the origins of the movement, including its relationship to Symbolism, historicism, nature and Orientalism. Similar to previous books on Art Nouveau, part three concentrates on the different materials employed by Art Nouveau artists. The essays in part four cover the various places where the movement flourished. Paul Greenhalgh served as editor for this book and wrote the introduction and conclusion.

The director's foreword summarizes the Art Nouveau movement as "quintessentially modern" and "self-consciously international," and specifies that the artists involved viewed all arts as "essentially equal."¹³ These phrases qualify Art Nouveau as a democratic movement, emphasizing its intention of making artistically-crafted objects available to all levels of society and restoring the equality between the fine arts and applied arts. This volume often portrays Art Nouveau as a political and cultural movement that used art and design as their tools of communication.

Stephen Escritt wrote a commendable survey of Art Nouveau for the *Art & Ideas* series by Phaidon Press. His book was published in the same year as the National Gallery catalog. Escritt divides the book into sections based on nationalist divisions that occurred within the Art Nouveau movement. He emphasizes that Art Nouveau was a movement

¹³ Alan Borg, "Director's Foreword." *Art Nouveau 1890-1914*. Paul Greenhalgh, ed. (London: V & A Publications, 2000), 1.

and not a single style with unifying formal characteristics. Escritt focuses on the theoretical and cultural factors that bonded the distinct versions of Art Nouveau applied arts happening throughout Europe during the fin-de-siècle.

Escritt's introduction and first chapter addresses the artistic developments in Europe that led to the creation of the Art Nouveau movement. He follows the conventional thinking that Art Nouveau emerged from the English Arts and Crafts movement initiated by William Morris. He also recognizes the theoretical contributions of two English designers: Owen Jones, author of *Grammar of Ornament* (1856), and A.W.N. Pugin, a significant figure in Gothic Revival style architecture. Both Jones and Pugin promoted the use of natural motifs in their ornamental designs. Escritt also cites the Aesthetic movement and Decadent literature of England as sources for the exoticism and appreciation of beauty seen in Art Nouveau, specifically using the art of Whistler and Beardsley as his visual evidence.

Chapters two through five of Escritt's survey address the evolution of Art Nouveau in various locations including European countries and the United States. Escritt profiles the important figures in each country and details their contributions to the movement. Chapter two surveys those countries whose Art Nouveau formal style was based on sinuous curves and themes from nature. Politically, these countries witnessed organized support of the working classes, which highlighted Art Nouveau's theme of access to art for every level of society. Chapter three focuses on Vienna, Austria, and Glasgow, Scotland, which had smaller movements with similar, formal characteristics based on square geometry. Chapters four and five focus on the countries where Art

Nouveau served to bolster their national identity by allowing the art to stand for the new and modern outlooks of participating artists.

The author's most interesting conclusions are located in the final three chapters, which inform the topic of this study. Escritt examines Art Nouveau as a commercial enterprise including the interactions of artists and specific patrons and its adoption as a mass-produced commodity. He correctly identifies the elitist vein in the patronage of Art Nouveau, which was seen by the benefactors as avant-garde: "The typical patron of Art Nouveau was not just rich but also saw him or herself as culturally or socially-enlightened."¹⁴ In this regard, Art Nouveau shares a common characteristic with much of Modern Art. In chapter seven, Escritt considers how Art Nouveau artists integrated the concept of handcraftsmanship and industrial production. He singles out Émile Gallé as an example. Gallé owned factories that mass-produced glassware while he simultaneously produced unique signature pieces in his personal studio. Escritt concludes his study by contradicting the seemingly brief life of the Art Nouveau movement by describing incidents of its use in the twentieth century, including significant sculptural and architectural examples in Prague and revivals in American graphic design of the 1960s and 1970s.

Two examples of books that address the Art Nouveau movement in a more theoretical manner are Jurgen Sembach's *Art Nouveau: Reconciling the Irreconcilable* (1991) and Debora Silverman's *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siecle France: Politics, Psychology and Style* (1989). Both of these texts attempt to place the movement in its contemporary cultural context. Sembach relates the movement to subsequent Modernist

¹⁴ Stephen Escritt, *Art Nouveau* (London: Phaidon, 2000), 300.

trends. Silverman examines the political support the movement received from the Third Republic government as well as contemporary psychological and gender issues that influenced the Art Nouveau artists.

Sembach begins his study by equating Art Nouveau with another art form that was developing at the same time: cinema. Although, cinema was considered more a technological advance at the time, Sembach suggests that cinema represented the same modernity for which Art Nouveau was striving. According to the author, both cinema and Art Nouveau were concerned with portraying the rapidly-increasing motion of the modern world. Sembach shows that Art Nouveau visualized this phenomenon through the symbolism of flowing hair and whiplash curves.

Like other authors, Sembach recognizes contradiction within Art Nouveau. The movement was trying to reconcile artistic integrity and originality with modern industrial methods of production. The predecessors, Ruskin and Morris, believed the two were absolutely incompatible and suggested a return to craftsmanship as the only method for creating art. Sembach promotes the Art Nouveau style as the appropriate complement to advances in architecture and construction techniques, which seemed incongruous with the prevailing historicism. Art Nouveau's light, airy swirls augmented the efficiency and modernity of rail stations and other iron-boned structures. Sembach says that Art Nouveau, which precedes true modernist theory, was trying to combine form and function without sacrificing aesthetic beauty. Modernist theory preaches that 'form follows function' meaning that the formal characteristics of an object should not conceal or inhibit the function of the object. Art Nouveau was a transitional phase, a growth spurt

in the shift from nineteenth century eclectic historicism to the stark, austere appearance of modern architecture.

Part two of Sembach's book is divided into sections focusing on the cities that played a role in the life of the Art Nouveau movement. Rather than selecting the metropolises which are typically covered in books on Art Nouveau, Sembach examines those smaller cities that have received less attention than Paris and Munich. The last part of this text does cover one of the major cities of Art Nouveau, Vienna, which as the home of both the Wiener Werkstätte and Adolph Loos, was a pivotal site in the transition from Art Nouveau to Modernism.

Debora Silverman has written an extensive cultural study on the Art Nouveau movement in France, focusing on the external forces that contributed to its popularity and style. The scope of her study is limited to activity in France occurring between 1889 and 1900. The author states her thesis in the opening paragraphs of her introduction: “[This book] aims to reconstruct as precisely as possible the motives and meanings associated with a particular development: the definition of modern style as a nature style of interior decoration.”¹⁵ Silverman theorizes that Art Nouveau began as a public endeavor to display France's modernity, exemplified by the Eiffel Tower and the 1889 exposition for which it was built. She theorizes that French cultural phenomena, including the Rococo revival, the advancement of the *femme nouvelle*, and scientific studies of human psychology, led to a redefinition of Art Nouveau as an application for private interior spaces.

¹⁵ Debora Silverman, *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France: Politics, Psychology and Style*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989) 1.

Chapter one casts the Brothers de Goncourt as the re-interpreters of the eighteenth-century aesthetic through a nineteenth century approach. The brothers used their historical research to understand the eighteenth-century definition of an *ensemble*, a room designed completely on one theme, then melded it with nineteenth-century understanding of the interior psychology of the nerves. Silverman says, “As psychological beings, the Goncourts projected into the rococo space the vibrations and complications of the interior life of the nerves.”¹⁶ Silverman shows the importance of the brothers by analyzing of their art critical writings.

Silverman makes another important observation regarding the Goncourts’ assessment of the eighteenth century’s view of the decorative arts and interiors. She notes their focus on the involvement of aristocratic women in the characterization of interior spaces. Silverman writes that, “...the *style moderne* of the eighteenth century filled the new private aristocratic spaces with diminutive objects and furnishings vested with forms and functions that were conceived as explicitly feminine.”¹⁷ The feminine character of the eighteenth-century interior informs the judgment of the nineteenth-century interior in the same manner.

In the second section, Silverman examines the political and economic conditions created by the French government that promoted the production of luxury goods as a way to differentiate France from the European and American industrial complexes. She also discusses the social ramifications of the *femme nouvelle* and her role in the creation of private interior spaces and family life. In chapter five, she discusses the revolutionary

¹⁶ Silverman, *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siecle France*, 36.

¹⁷ Silverman, *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siecle France*, 28.

psychological advances of Jean Charcot and Emile Bernheim as the inspiration of the focus on interiority in Art Nouveau.

Section three addresses the specific ways in which the conditions discussed in the first two sections contributed to the advent of the French Art Nouveau style. She begins with a history of the Central Union of the Decorative Arts, the government entity that promoted artisanal craft production and exhibition. She also looks at reforms within the Salons and the role of Siegfried Bing in the promotion of Art Nouveau. Her concluding chapter examines the 1900 Paris exhibition, which has been commonly regarded as the climax of the Art Nouveau movement.

Overall, Silverman's book is the most in-depth assessment of Art Nouveau using social, cultural and historical methodologies. Focusing on France allows Silverman to overlook the complications of the disparate versions of Art Nouveau present in the other artistic centers of Europe. One weakness in her methodology is her lack of specific examples of artists who employed the style. She addresses Émile Gallé, an accepted member of Art Nouveau movement, and Auguste Rodin, a French sculptor who is not traditionally associated with Art Nouveau, and the influence of the new psychology on their work, but does not cover any of the other major players.

LITERATURE REVIEW: THE FEMALE CONSUMER

The following section reviews the literature supporting my socio-historical argument regarding the role of bourgeois Parisian women as consumers focused on the domestic interior. Bourgeois women embodied the aesthetic authority of France in the fin-de-siècle. Individually, they served as models for their husbands and children; as a

group, they represented the economic and moral orientation for the nation. France's aesthetic authority stabilized the country's social and political standing in the European community. Women created aesthetic standards through their practice of consumption, which replaced production as women's contribution to national economic stability.

Lisa Tiersten details the role played by bourgeois women in the establishment of the modern consumer society in her book, *Marianne in the Market: Envisioning Consumer Society in Fin-de-siècle France* (2001). She also constructs a history of the development of modern retailing and marketing practices in Paris. Tiersten describes the constitution of marketplace modernism, which she defines as imbuing the act of consumption with aesthetic integrity. Tiersten asserts that consumption by the bourgeois female was an artistic endeavor through which the woman could express her individuality. Expression of individuality was a key component of the formation of bourgeois identity.

Tiersten emphasizes that individualism was not the only reason that female bourgeois consumerism was advocated by cultural leaders and agents of the market. The female consumer could hone her aesthetic discernment through participation in the market. The market was thus an educational tool for the betterment of French society. The domestic role of the *maitresse de maison* made her responsible for the moral well-being of her family. The market allowed her to practice self-discipline and resist her baser instincts of egotism and vanity. By learning how to appropriately apply good taste, the bourgeois female was learning to resist the excess of independence available to her

outside of the domestic sphere. The function of taste as a regulatory force in society is a main theme of Tiersten's book.¹⁸

In her opening chapter, Tiersten examines the development of the modern market under the new bourgeois political regime. The author acknowledges the potential for new forms of commercial activity provided by Baron Haussmann's wide boulevards, especially the advent of the department store, which she terms as the "self-enclosed feminine metropolis."¹⁹ By moving production facilities and tenement housing to the outskirts of Paris, Haussmann introduced the space needed to create a shopping area where the new consumerism could thrive. Department store owners took advantage of this remodeling of the city infrastructure to expand their buildings.

In the section titled "Origins of the Conflict," Tiersten recalls the relationship to consumption present in France prior to installation of the Third Republic. She begins by contrasting France's middle class with the middle class of Britain, where a weaker central government allowed commerce to grow with less regulation. The British middle class came to identify itself with commerce and relish its economic role, but she notes that the French bourgeoisie were more ambivalent toward commerce. Perhaps, and Tiersten also raises this point, the early French bourgeoisie's reluctance to accept their economic role was due in part to the emphasis placed on luxury by the *Ancien Regime* aristocracy. Tiersten references Rousseau's denigration of luxury as a contributing factor in the formulation of the gender identities of the bourgeois. She states, "Thus, bourgeois ideal of masculine civic and military virtue were defined in opposition to the image of the

¹⁸ Lisa Tiersten, *Marianne in the Marketplace: Envisioning Consumer Society in Fin-de-Siècle France*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001) 3.

¹⁹ Tiersten, *Marianne in the Marketplace*, 17.

effete nobleman, while ideals of feminine virtue and its place within the domestic sphere were constructed against a conception of aristocratic women as frivolous, self-indulgent, unscrupulous manipulators...”²⁰ The bourgeoisie established themselves as morally superior to the nobility for whom consumption was a primary tool for expressing their social and financial status. The concept relevant to this study is the second in this quote in which Tiersten indicates that eighteenth-century aristocratic women were considered “self-indulgent,” a negative trait that was seen as natural to women’s disposition. This unfavorable characterization was transferred onto the haute bourgeois woman as the upper classes gained political and economic agency.²¹ During the fin-de-siècle, this negative egoism would be tempered by the bourgeois women’s appropriate application of good taste and chic to the practice of consumerism, which she used to visualize her individualism through the design of her domestic sphere.

Tiersten defines taste as related to fin-de-siècle France as a combination of “the idea of a detached aesthetic judgment governed by reason and moral disinterestedness” and “the notion of a uniquely subjective relation to objects.”²² Leora Auslander addressed taste as a social and political apparatus in her book, *Taste and Power: Furnishing Modern France* (1998). Auslander describes the social function of taste as “judgments of aesthetic value [that] emerge from a complex interaction of desires for emulation, distinction and solidarity.”²³ These authors express the importance of taste in class definitions; the French bourgeoisie differentiated themselves from the aristocracy

²⁰ Tiersten, *Marianne in the Marketplace*, 19.

²¹ For more information on the haute bourgeoisie, see Bonnie G. Smith, *Ladies of the Leisure Class: The Bourgeoises of Northern France in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton University Press: 1981).

²² Tiersten, *Marianne in the Marketplace*, 238, n. 2.

²³ Leora Auslander, *Taste and Power: Furnishing Modern France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 2.

by developing their own relationship to the practice of tastefulness. For the petite bourgeoisie of the Third Republic, the advent of the department store provided a forum for their practice of tastefulness.

Tiersten asserts that the establishment of the Third Republic, “a polity built on the bonds of civic and domestic virtue,”²⁴ enhanced the bourgeoisie’s economic power because their political power had been solidified in the new governmental structure. The marketplace individualism of the bourgeois consumer came into conflict with the social responsibilities of the republican citizen. Consumerism was a threat to the moral fiber of the new administration, but the economic stability of the nation depended on the expansion of the bourgeois market. Economically, France was in a precarious position after its losses during the Franco-Prussian War and due to its lack of natural resources such as coal. Returning to Debora Silverman’s text, she details the French government’s bolstering of economic recovery through craft production. She argues that the Republican elite intended to “[counter] industrial rivalry with traditions of quality.”²⁵ The French economic controllers understood their country’s success would be based on their tradition as the provider of luxury goods to the world market.

Tiersten defines France’s traditional aesthetic authority as the ability of its aristocratic citizenry to make aesthetic choices based on “a disinterested discernment of beauty”²⁶ as opposed to the self-interested motives of the materialistic bourgeois whose aesthetic choices were based on the desire for personal gain. The fear among the French cultural elite, as Tiersten writes, was that “the entrenchment of a bourgeois republic in

²⁴ Tiersten, *Marianne in the Market*, 2.

²⁵ Silverman, *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France*, 53.

²⁶ Tiersten, *Marianne in the Market*, 3.

1877 had put France's aesthetic patrimony in jeopardy by launching the presumably tasteless bourgeoisie into a position of political power from which it threatened to squander that inheritance."²⁷ The solution to the potential downfall of French aesthetic authority was the artistic education and promotion of consumption among the bourgeois women who would in turn buttress the aesthetic intelligence of their social class as a whole.

An examination of France's delayed engagement in industrialization is required in order to understand the environment which precipitated the Art Nouveau artists' desire for change. Whitney Walton appraises France's industrialization through its contribution to the 1851 Crystal Palace exhibition held in London in her book, *France at the Crystal Palace: Bourgeois Taste and Artisan Manufacturing in the Nineteenth Century* (1992). Walton employs critiques of the Crystal Palace exhibitions and contemporary cultural authorities to build a profile of French industrialization and consumption practices. Her primary thesis considers that manufacturers in France were slow to mechanize their productions because bourgeois consumers' taste demanded products of a higher level of quality that could be achieved only through handcraftsmanship. The scholarship on nineteenth-century French consumerism overwhelmingly highlights the role of good taste as a cardinal determinant in consumer preferences regarding objects, both luxury items and utilitarian objects that might reflect their social or psychological identity.

Centuries-old antagonism between the French and English played out in the manufacturing of domestic goods during the mid-nineteenth century. Walton points out that French critics denigrated English manufacturers for sacrificing quality in order to

²⁷ Tiersten, *Marianne in the Market*, 3.

deliver less expensive goods to their customers. She quotes Baron Charles Dupin, the head of the French exhibition jury, who emphasized the concentration of British manufacturers on profit over product quality. He wrote: “What did it matter to English and Scottish [consumers] whether [manufacturers] wished to spin a fine thread or weave a beautiful cloth! That they can make a fortune if they can...will be their reward.”²⁸ The discriminating taste of French consumers elevated them in cultural status above their foreign counterparts.

SOCIAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Whitney Walton established that France lagged behind the other European nations and the United States in the modernization of production methods during the nineteenth-century Industrial Revolution. The political and economic instability of post-Revolutionary France may account for their insufficiency in this area. The initial revolution of the bourgeois and working classes against the aristocrats and the monarchy began in 1789 and continued until Napoleon Bonaparte took power in 1799, eventually crowning himself emperor whilst establishing the First Empire. Bonaparte focused on empirical domination rather than building up the infrastructure of his own nation. The country underwent two more bloody revolutions before Napoleon III was elected president in 1848; his immense popularity and promises of peace lead to his election as the emperor of a reinstated hereditary monarchy in 1852. Under Napoleon III, France entered the Industrial Revolution and Baron Haussmann rebuilt Paris creating the wide boulevards that allowed the city to become a true metropolis. Napoleon III’s crushing

²⁸ Whitney Walton, *France at the Crystal Palace: Bourgeois Taste and Artisan Manufacture in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992) 39.

defeat in the extremely unpopular Franco-Prussian War and his subsequent death permanently ended monarchism in France and ushered in the Third Republic in the 1870's.

The political upheavals of post-Revolutionary France involved the stratification of society beyond the simplified arrangement of the feudal landowner/peasant structure. The emerging bourgeois class initially gained power through emulation of the aristocratic lifestyle, but asserted their specific identity after the original fall of the monarchy instigated by the 1789 revolution. Multiple characteristics divided the bourgeois into levels based on a more intricate composition of identity. Roger Magraw has noted that the bourgeois identity was defined by “good manners and *savoir vivre*, not mere wealth.”²⁹ In general, the bourgeois class came to be divided into two main segments: the haute bourgeoisie and the petite bourgeoisie. The haute bourgeoisie consisted of the industrialists and high government officials, whereas the petite bourgeois were those citizens who were employed by the haute bourgeoisie. The petite class possessed the pecuniary means to avoid employment in industrial labor, but did not control the means of production. The haute bourgeoisie also enjoyed more political power than the petite bourgeoisie. The practice of emulation began with the haute bourgeoisie and the aristocracy, but Veblen points out that each successive class emulated the class immediately above it.³⁰ Consumption played an integral role in the practice of emulation and the establishment of class identity.

²⁹ Roger Magraw, *France 1800-1914: A Social History*, (New York: Longman, 2003) 14.

³⁰ Veblen, “Conspicuous Consumption,” 265.

For the bourgeois, aesthetic sensibility and a cultivation of artistic culture were concepts originally included in the practice of emulating the aristocracy, but evolved into a means to differentiate themselves from the upper and lower classes. These concepts are integral to the establishment of the bourgeois class's identity. Critics of the bourgeois created a characterization of the *classe moyenne* as "boring, philistine, cowardly, materialistic, hypocritical, banal, pompous and self-satisfied."³¹ Above all, the worst insult heaped upon the French bourgeois was their lack of aesthetic sensibility, a defining characteristic of the French national identity since the reign of Louis XIV and the institution of Versailles as the palatial birthplace of European chic. Not only did the French bourgeoisie emulate the French aristocracy, but aristocrats from other nations were influenced by the aesthetic decisions made at the French court.

The importance of the French aesthetic authority will be explored in the context of Art Nouveau's internationalism as a cause of the short-lived existence of the movement in Paris. Discrimination in aesthetic judgment played an integral role in the definition of France's national identity. Joan De Jean credits Louis XIV with establishing of the conception of France as the style-setter of the European aristocratic community. The economic mission of Louis XIV's reign focused on cornering the luxury goods trade; she writes that, under the Sun King, "France had acquired a reputation as the country that had written the book on elegant living."³² The monarch was supported by his minister of finance, a mastermind of modern economic policy, and a generation of inventors and artists who set standards of quality for all types of luxury objects. Louis and his team

³¹ Magraw, *France 1800-1914*, 15.

³² Joan E. DeJean. *The Essence of Style: How the French Invented High Fashion, Fine Food, Chic Cafes, Style, Sophistication and Glamour*. (New York: Free Press, 2005) 9.

were so successful in cementing France's reputation that luxury accessories for women became known as *articles de Paris*, which by the mid-nineteenth century constituted the largest share of France's export economy.³³

Domestic space was transformed during the Industrial Revolution; as production moved out of the home, the domestic zones of middle and working class homes became spaces of leisure and privacy. Space was further divided within the home into levels of privacy, bedrooms being the most veiled from visitors. The petite bourgeois home was defined by its focus on the family, whereas the homes of the aristocrats and haute bourgeoisie were designed for impressing visitors. The bourgeois home was no longer a site of economic production, but rather a location intended solely for domestic activities, such as cultural and moral education of children, which was the purview of bourgeois women.

Bourgeois identity was also intrinsically linked to the domestic sphere because of the bourgeoisie's emphasis on the home as a center of moral decorum. Domesticity differentiated the bourgeois from the aristocrats, who were defined by their public displays of wealth. Domesticity also characterized the identity of the *maitresse de maison*, or bourgeois housewife. Her reputation and moral aptitude reflected the status of her husband and family. The bourgeois wife's negotiation between the public sphere of consumption and domestic sphere indicated her respectability within her community and within society at large. Lisa Tiersten writes, "Contemporaries feared not only that the efflorescence of the market posed a menace to the establishment of a civic public, but that

³³ Whitney Walton. "To Triumph before Feminine Taste: Bourgeois Women's Consumption and Hand Methods of Production in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Paris." *The Business History Review*, vol. 60 no. 4 (Winter, 1986) 561.

the bourgeois woman consumer now threatened to contaminate the domestic interior, the last and most sacred sanctuary from brute individualism, with the taint of self-interest.”³⁴

The establishment of the Third Republic gave political and cultural power to the petite bourgeoisie; they were now more responsible for the moral fabric of their nation than ever before. Growing internationalism placed pressure on the bourgeoisie to maintain propriety in the face of marketplace individualism and capitalist materialism.

Although participation in the marketplace was prompted by her role as creator of the domestic sanctuary, civic republicans feared that exposure to the masculine realm of the capitalist marketplace would enflame the baser instincts of the bourgeois woman. The biological imperative of women intrinsically related them to the realm of nature, which was seen as the opposite of the realm of universal rationalism promoted by Enlightenment philosophy. This relationship to nature informed the nineteenth-century classification of women as the center of the domestic sphere. Women were biologically predisposed to domestic success because the imperative of the domestic sphere was the comfort and advancement of the family. When women ventured into the public realm, they needed to be directed by male superiors who were better equipped to manage the activities of the marketplace. Tiersten writes that, “The new consumer marketplace seduced women away from the moral sanctuary of the home and, by cultivating their baser instincts of egotism, vanity, and pleasure-seeking, inured them to maternal and wifely sentiment and rendered them indifferent to the concept of social duty.”³⁵ Third Republic civic leaders were attempting to substantiate social order while advancing

³⁴ Tiersten, *Marianne in the Market*, 2-3.

³⁵ Tiersten, *Marianne in the Market*, 4.

economic prosperity in the capitalist marketplace. The female consumer was both a threat to social order if she did not fulfill her role in the domestic sphere and a boon to the financial advancement of French retailers and producers.

Women have always represented a dichotomy in western tradition; they are both good and evil. Therefore, they must be controlled by the more civilized and rational male citizens. They must be directed toward activities that are innate to their character: motherhood and domesticity. The Enlightenment promoted universal rationality as a means to arriving at perfection in society; Enlightenment writers promoted rationality and culture as the exclusive sphere of men. The public realm was a place of culture and capitalism and was thus populated by men. In contrast, women were tasked with creating a refuge for their men in the domestic interior. Moralization and democratization of the home, through the efforts of the bourgeois mother, would contribute to the successful formation of an ethical Republic of citizens. Philip Nord recognizes that importance placed on the married *femme de foyer*, the angel of the hearth, in the bourgeois home. He casts the domestic interior as the “principal theater of moral life,” through her “simplicity” and “modesty” of taste, the bourgeois wife and mother arranges a felicitous home environment for her family.³⁶ Nord says she should “mold the home, its look and décor, and the adult character might be molded in the process.”³⁷

The nineteenth century transformed the political and social structure of France, and spawned the rise of a capitalist market system as well. Hausmannization moved industrial production out of the Parisian city center, which opened the city for the retail

³⁶ Philip Nord, “Republican Politics and Bourgeois Interior,” in *Home and Its Dislocations in Nineteenth-Century France*. ed. Suzanne Nash (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1993) 197.

³⁷ Nord, “Republican Politics and Bourgeois Interior,” 205.

revolution. France excelled in modernizing the processes of merchandising and marketing, evidenced by the international expositions held in Paris in the second half of the century. These events displayed wares of the modern market in a combination of shopping and entertainment, contradicting the “made-to-order” style of retailing practiced in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Aruna D’Souza notes that the department store, a tool of modern merchandising, was “a product of Haussmannian renovations as well as of economic and social transformations that would profoundly transform the way life was organized for working- and middle-class inhabitants of [Paris].”³⁸ The department store changed shopping from a household chore to a social pursuit for the bourgeoisie. Each store often included areas for dining, a library and a billiards room for the husbands.

The advent of the department store also changed the way consumers purchased goods. These institutions established fixed pricing structures which they displayed on tags attached to their inventory. Rosalind Williams, explaining this phenomenon writes, “The seemingly contrary activities of hard-headed accounting and dreamy-eyed fantasizing merged as business appealed to consumers by inviting them into a fabulous world of pleasure, comfort and amusement.”³⁹ The bourgeois consumer had become accustomed to theatricality and spectacle through their exposure to café-concerts and operas. Entrepreneurs used similar methods to entice the bourgeois consumer to spend their discretionary funds in a particular store. Much like the theater curtain, department

³⁸ Aruna D’Souza, “Why the Impressionists Never Painted the Department Store.” *The Invisible Flaneuse? Gender, Public Space, and Visual Culture in Nineteenth-Century Paris*. ed. Aruna D’Souza and Tom McDonough. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006) 129.

³⁹ Rosalind H. Williams, *Dream World, Mass Consumption in Late Nineteenth-Century France*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982) 66.

stores and exposition grounds were marked by a grand entrance, which separated the banal space of the street from the exotic space of consumption. (Fig. 3) The department store revolutionized consumption, turning shopping from an everyday activity to an entertainment experience.

The ideal of the chic, bourgeois *maitresse de maison* was used in multiple ways to advance French fin-de-siècle society. She was a method for asserting French aesthetic patrimony, which was threatened by the success of British and German mass-produced domestic goods in the world marketplace. The *maitresse de maison* shored up the French national identity after disheartening defeat in the Franco-Prussian War. The Third Republic government advanced the participation of bourgeois wives in the economy through the *Union Centrale des Arts Decoratifs*. Debora Silverman recognizes the impetus of the *Union Centrale des Arts Decoratifs* was to define the domestic interior as “distinctively feminine.”⁴⁰ She also asserts that the organization’s objective was the “promotion of women of carriers and creators of the *craft moderne* style.”⁴¹ Silverman’s examination of the Union Central establishes the government’s promotion of the *maitresse de maison* as a domestic decorative artist aligned with the ideology of republican familial feminism. Bourgeois women who participated in this version of feminism included haute bourgeois socialites and the wives of influential government officials. Silverman defines familial feminism as acceptance of “the sexual division of labor in society and the family, while using the concept of equality in difference to

⁴⁰ Debora Silverman, “The New Woman in Fin-de-Siècle France.” in *Eroticism and the Body Politic*, ed. Lynn Hunt (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 147.

⁴¹ Silverman, “The New Woman”, 148.

enhance women's designated role in the home."⁴² In order to subvert the rising radical feminist movement led by the *femmes nouvelles*, republican women emphasized their role as domestic managers and consumers.⁴³ The *maitresse de maison* discussed in this study is a social type advanced by the ideology of familial feminism.

By practicing the art of interior decoration, a female consumer could augment her own artistic understanding of the world. Through consumption, the *maitresse de maison* asserted her psychological independence from her social class, therefore developing her individual identity as represented by the objects with which she chooses to decorate her domestic interior. Art Nouveau was gendered feminine because it focused on the design of the modern home. Women were long associated with domestic interiors in France.

Aesthetic reformers saw the *maitresse de maison* as the educator of her less artistic husband as well as that of her children (who would carry the French aesthetic authority into the forthcoming century). The *maitresse de maison* was able to express her artistic sensibility, not through the creation of her own body of work, but through the artful arrangement of her domestic interior. The *maitresse's* practice of artistic expression bolstered the Art Nouveau tenet of 'art for all' because it showed that art can be accessible at every level of life and that, through education, anyone can practice discriminatory aesthetic decision making. The personalization of the domestic interior was an inherently bourgeois activity as the aristocratic home was a showcase for displaying wealth. Tiersten shows that hiring a professional decorator was the common

⁴² Silverman, "The New Woman", 148.

⁴³ For further information on feminism in fin-de-siècle France, see Karen Offen "Depopulation, Nationalism and Feminism in Fin-de-Siècle France," *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 89, No. 3 (Jun., 1984), pp. 648-676.

practice for aristocratic hôtel, but that the “*maitresse de maison* was the primary aesthetic arbiter in the intimate setting of ‘le home.’”⁴⁴ The bourgeois home was a place of comfort and privacy.

The leisure time of the bourgeoisie increased as their class moved further away from production. New leisure activities developed in order to meet the new demand for entertainment. Shopping became a principal recreation for the bourgeoisie, especially for middle-class women. As production moved out of the home, consumption became the method through which urban women could provide for their families.

The excursion of women into the public sphere was a recognized social concern for the bourgeois class of nineteenth-century Paris. The distinction between the public and private sphere created by separating the male work-space from domestic space was quite evident among the petite bourgeois of Paris. Industry was no longer located in the home; men went to work in offices or factories. Production was no longer based in the family structure, but rather in the public sphere inhabited by men. This social change removed women from the processes of production. Thus, an emphasis was placed on her as consumer rather than producer.

Venturing into the public sphere of men was morally dangerous for the respectable bourgeois woman. She risked the male gaze of the flaneur, whose regular interactions with women hinged on the perceived sexual availability of said woman. Visiting the department store was considered a safe method of public participation for the respectable bourgeois woman. I argue that the department store became a haven for women in public because it uniquely blended the public and private spheres. The

⁴⁴ Tiersten, *Marianne in the Market*, 157.

population of the department store with female 'shop-girls' facilitated the feminization of the department store environment. When the consumer is male, a sexual component exists in the department store transaction. However, when a female consumer interacted with the shop-girl, a motherly or sisterly bond may be implied between the women of differing classes. Shopping for the bourgeois woman may have allowed her to venture into public alone, but it also created camaraderie between women who met in the department store to socialize in public. Much like visits to each other's salons, bourgeois women used their shopping excursions as opportunities to interact with their peer group and assert their social status over working-class department store employees.

Aesthetic sensibility is a significant part of the French national identity. The nobility of other European courts emulated the aesthetic choices of the *Ancien Regime*. France was surpassed by the British and Germans in the industrialization process and France began suffering economically and culturally. The French government wanted to industrialize without losing the aesthetic quality of their output. The bourgeois female consumer who was known for her lack of taste and chic was perceived as a threat to the aesthetic patrimony of France. Stereotypically, she was more apt to follow the latest fashion rather than to make aesthetic decisions characteristic of a proper Parisienne. The Parisienne was attracted to the artistic integrity she perceived in Art Nouveau.

The femme fatale trope populated nineteenth-century art and was usually depicted as a sexual seductress. The female consumer can be compared to the femme fatale stereotype. As the bourgeoisie participated more in the public arena, the moral implications of her absence from the domestic sphere caused distress among the Republican politicians and social reformers. The designation of the domestic interior as

the sphere of women was solidified for the French during the eighteenth century. Writers, such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, further consolidated the ideology of domesticity which had been established as far back as ancient Greece. It is not surprising that the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie, who were enamored with ancient civilizations, furthered the ideal that families structured around the stability of the ideal mother would strengthen society as a whole.

After the establishment of the Third Republic, the bourgeois needed to institute an identity for their own rank not based on emulation of the aristocratic class. In eighteenth-century Paris, the conception of beauty was integral to the aristocrats' identity. They defined themselves through comparison to the newly-formed bourgeois class. By denigrating the bourgeoisie's understanding of beauty, the aristocrats claimed luxury, the incarnation of beauty in objects, for themselves, which in turn made luxury the dominion of the elites. In Third Republic France, the bourgeois transformed the conception of beauty to suit their identity and situate it within the modern marketplace. Tiersten confirms this idea, writing that, "The nineteenth-century bourgeois came to embrace a popular version of the modernist notion of beauty as subjective, one which located aesthetic value in the individual's discernment rather than in external objects."⁴⁵ Bourgeois recognition of the modern artist's version of subjective beauty confirmed France's aesthetic authority within the context of the modern marketplace. Reinforcing the ideal of subjective beauty allowed the bourgeois to assert their individualism while serving their civic duty by advancing France's aesthetic authority within the wider European market for domestic goods.

⁴⁵ Tiersten, *Marianne in the Market*, 7.

In the culture of mass production, France could have used its aesthetic authority in the production of luxury goods to develop a reputation for fabricating affordable domestic goods designed to meet high aesthetic standards. Instead, French consumers were unwilling to accept that objects made by machines could meet the same aesthetic expectations as an object made by the hand of a skilled artisan. Whitney Walton wrote that nineteenth-century political economists promoted handicraft as the reflection of “the creative and artistic temperament of French workers.”⁴⁶ French manufacturers were able to organize their workshops in an efficient manner, using skilled workers rather than the inflexible methods of early mechanized production. Hand manufacturers were able to meet consumer demand, as long as consumer taste was predicated by the concept that “art and beauty in manufactured goods diminished proportionately with technological advances in production.”⁴⁷ Machine production allowed details and finishes to be recreated perfectly so that each consumer could possess an identical version of an object. Repetition of ornamentation characterizes a lack of authenticity in both visual and decorative arts. James Trilling recognized that perfection was an indicator of quality, but in the reverse manner of the definition of perfection common to our contemporary consumer assessments. “Perfection in ornament continues an older tradition...equating visual spontaneity and boldness with authenticity, originality, inspiration,” Trilling writes.⁴⁸ These characteristics, identified by imperfection in an artwork, delineated between an original and a copy. An original is more highly valued than a copy, and the

⁴⁶ Walton, *France at the Crystal Palace*, 208.

⁴⁷ Walton, *France at the Crystal Palace*, 118.

⁴⁸ James Trilling, *Ornament: Modern Perspective* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003) 185.

perfect repetition of forms and finishes created by machine production was a sure indication of the object's status as a copy.

Ruskin argued that the skilled worker could achieve the same perfection in a finish through the employment of "patience and sand paper," allowing the object to be more highly valued because it was a product of the laborers' invention and skill.⁴⁹ This focus on labor rather than machines also conforms to the Art Nouveau tenet of the democratization of society and art. Art Nouveau reformers tried to democratize the arts by increasing the artistic quality of consumer goods available for display in a domestic context.

ART NOUVEAU THEORY

The historiographical literature often defines Art Nouveau as a style, denoting works which share a specific set of formal traits, rather than as a movement defined by theoretical underpinnings. The main tenets of Art Nouveau theory reflect the cultural changes of the nineteenth century during which, after a long struggle, many European nations became democracies. Art Nouveau artists promoted democratization within the arts and among consumers and producers of art. They felt that all types of art were equally valid; that the hierarchy of the academic traditionalists echoed the social hierarchy of the overthrown aristocracies. Art had not been the exclusive province of the elites for over two centuries; consumerist capitalism created a system for valuing art objects based on a hierarchy in which the 'fine' arts of painting, monumental sculpture and architecture were placed above the functional objects of the 'applied' arts.

⁴⁹ Trilling, *Ornament: Modern Perspective*, 183.

FRANTZ JOURDAIN AND LA SAMARITAINE

Art Nouveau artists, unlike their Arts and Crafts predecessors, accepted that mass production and consumerism would play a vital role in disseminating artistically-designed objects to all levels of society. Department stores would play an integral role in the distribution of objects and provide opportunities for architects to create public works of art to decorate the streets of Paris. Art Nouveau became popular during the early heyday of department stores. The success of department stores was directly influenced by their ability to sell the most fashionable and modern household items at a profit. Jourdain and his fellow Art Nouveau architect, Hector Guimard, founded the Société du Nouveau Paris in 1903, which “campaign[ed] for enlightened modernization of the city to make it more visually stimulating.”⁵⁰ The aim of the Art Nouveau movement was to expedite the arrival of a utopian future using their artistic products to educate and influence the social climate.

Art Nouveau represents a transitional style that occurred between nineteenth-century historicism and twentieth-century modernism. It retained the ornamental techniques of historicism while striving for an architecture that reflected the modern society of fin-de-siècle Paris. One architect and critic, Frantz Jourdain, promoted Art Nouveau as the optimum path to socially-determined architecture. Jourdain brought this objective to fruition upon completion of the La Samaritaine department store in 1910. (Fig. 4) Focusing on his use of ornament, this chapter will examine La Samaritaine as the embodiment of Jourdain’s progressive theory of Art Nouveau architecture. Jourdain’s

⁵⁰ Edward Welch, “Zola, Jourdain and the Architectonics of Modernity.” *Visions/Revisions: Essays on Nineteenth Century French Culture*, Malcolm Cook and James Kearns, eds. (New York: Peter Lang, 2003) 45. [my translation]

work functions as a case study that demonstrates the ability of Art Nouveau ornamentation and architectural theory to precisely reflect the modernity of contemporary society. Jourdain declared his style more able to define modernity than the classicism displayed by architects working in the École des Beaux-Arts style.

The search for a modern architecture began long before Jourdain's lifetime. Eighteenth-century intellectuals advanced the concept of society as a succession of epochs, each period possessing its own unique cultural characteristics. If the past could be subdivided in this manner, then the nineteenth century would have had to develop into a society, through which its own modernity was reflected in its cultural products, including architecture. Many nineteenth-century theorists illustrated the need for a modern architecture but were unable to formulate the visual language that would communicate modernity. Ernst Gombrich affirms that "Man can only be creative in relation to problems which he seeks to solve."⁵¹ Most critics of nineteenth-century architecture condemn the practitioners for searching for their inspiration in the past rather than in the world around them.⁵²

It is difficult for a twenty-first century viewer to recognize the Art Nouveau style, and La Samaritaine specifically, as modern architecture because the building's design does not visually relate to the International Style that has since become synonymous with modernism in architecture. Underneath its ornamental scheme however, the theoretical basis and methods of construction employed in Jourdain's design are related to the stark style of the 1920s. Jourdain and the pioneers of modern design, to borrow a phrase from

⁵¹ Ernst Gombrich, *The Sense of Order: A Study in the Psychology of Decorative Art*. (London: Phaidon, 1979) 64.

⁵² William J.R. Curtis, *Modern Architecture Since 1900*, 3rd ed. (London: Phaidon, 1996) 11.

Nikolaus Pevsner, were both in search of an architecture that would reflect humanity's political, economic, intellectual and technological progress. They were searching for forms that would suit the needs of the modern society, hunting for a new visual language that would define the nineteenth century.

It is through Jourdain's theoretical essays that his desire to create an architecture correspondent to the needs of Paris's progressive fin-de-siècle civilization can be identified. Jourdain synthesized the reformist architectural ideals already circulating in Parisian intellectual circles. Meredith Clausen attributes Jourdain's influence to his inspirational personality and writing style rather than to any revolutionary theories he generated himself.⁵³ Louis-Charles Boileau, a conservative critic and contemporary of Jourdain's, called him the "valiant champion of artistic causes."⁵⁴ His theoretical articles reflect the influence of rationalism, which was already being advanced by Hippolyte Taine and others. Taine, a professor at the École des Beaux-Arts beginning in 1864, fostered a more analytical view of art and architecture wherein judgment of a work is based on the merits of the individual piece rather than an arbitrary classical standard of beauty. Taine recognized that styles, like the cultures within which they exist, change from generation to generation. Jourdain, like Taine, proposed that style is a historical phenomenon, a product of the culture in which it is created.⁵⁵

Nineteenth-century École training advanced the idea that only classical forms were appropriate for significant architectural structures, such as public buildings like

⁵³ Meredith L. Clausen, *Frantz Jourdain and the Samaritaine: Art Nouveau Theory and Criticism* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1987) 54.

⁵⁴ L-C Boileau, *L'Architecture*, XIII (1900) 251. Quoted in Franco Borsi and Ezio Godoli, *Paris 1900: Architecture and Design* (New York: Rizzoli, 1976) 151.

⁵⁵ Clausen, *Frantz Jourdain*, 60.

department stores. Taine's socio-historical determinism and rationalism allowed Jourdain and others to reject the École's strict adherence to the classical standard of beauty and promote a style that reflected their own time. In 1884, Jourdain wrote that "Beauty is unique, all that approaches ideal Beauty is great and true, all that becomes estranged from it is small and false."⁵⁶ Clausen interprets his words as derision of the École's promotion of an artificial beauty based solely on Classical Greek and Roman forms. She argues that, "...emulating such an artificial ideal was inappropriate because it was an ideal derived from a historical form no longer suited to or expressive of contemporary life."⁵⁷ As such, Jourdain attempted to produce an architectural style that was both beautiful and expressive of the needs of contemporary society.

In order to further his promotion of rational architectural theory, Jourdain was a member of many cultural societies and served as an officer in several. He was a founding member of the progressive Salon d'Automne, serving as president and overseeing the 1903 inaugural exhibition. Through these organizations, he spread modernist theories throughout the artistic community. His acquaintance with the writer, Émile Zola, is a significant source for analyzing Jourdain's philosophy on department store design. Jourdain supplied Zola with inspiration for the department store depicted in the writer's novel, *Au Bonheur des Dames* (*A Ladies' Paradise*). Zola wrote that department stores represented the "poetry of modern activity."⁵⁸ Therefore, it was appropriate that Jourdain would design a retail outlet based on his desire to promote architecture that reflected the

⁵⁶ Clausen, *Frantz Jourdain*, 60.

⁵⁷ Clausen, *Frantz Jourdain*, 61.

⁵⁸ Michael B. Miller, *The Bon Marché: Bourgeois Culture and the Department Store, 1869-1920* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981) 5.

needs of modern society. In an 1882 letter to Zola, Jourdain wrote about his desire to design buildings that were “the most sincere manifestation of the logical mind of a people and an epoch.”⁵⁹

Many of the attributes documented in Jourdain’s notes to Zola were realized in the construction of La Samaritaine.⁶⁰ The monument to Zola in Montmartre cemetery is an example of Jourdain’s other Art Nouveau works. (Fig. 5) Although classical elements such as a stylized cartouche and acanthus leaves frame Zola’s bust, one can see how the ornament is allied to the structure rather than additive which is fundamental to Jourdain’s theory of Art Nouveau ornamentation.

Another tenet of Jourdain’s theory and practice that supports the notion of the democratization and modernization of architecture is his willingness to work in a team setting. Jourdain promoted the division of labor at his construction sites. He tried to break down the image of the architect as an elitist academician, seeking to modernize the profession by urging architects to educate themselves in the new construction techniques. In his opinion, iron/steel construction allowed for faster, more economical building. Stone construction required more preparation to the material, work which cost time and money. Jourdain not only believed that the forms and designs of buildings should reflect modern ideals, but that the industry should modernize as well. The concepts of mass production and prefabricated interchangeable parts that modernized the production of consumer goods could make construction more economical.

⁵⁹ Quoted in Welch, “Zola, Jourdain and the Architectonics of Modernity,” 39. [my translation]

⁶⁰ Clausen, *Frantz Jourdain*, 20.

Architectural rationalism provided a framework for the development of Art Nouveau's ornamental visual language. François Loyer recognized that a primary attribute of Art Nouveau movement in architecture was the focus on ornamentation that rationally accentuated the form of the structural plan.⁶¹ This theme is also present in Jourdain's writing and designs. In 1893, Jourdain published the autobiographical novel, *L'Atelier Chantorel*. The plot of the novel follows a young architectural student in a fictional atelier that closely resembles the École. Jourdain used his novel to assert many of his architectural premises, including his opinion on ornament. He wrote, "The decoration and structure of a building must be tackled together as a single concept; the one explaining the other, defining it, adorning it, without mendaciously disguising it; working and acting together to diminish and soften the roughness of matter and idealize the harshness of reality."⁶² The ornamental scheme of La Samaritaine was integral to the intended function of the building. The ostentatious decorations of the façade were meant to draw the attention of the many passersby who populated the busy commercial district in which the building was situated.

James Trilling compares the development of ornament to the establishment of a language. Art Nouveau artists promoted nature as a universal language of symbols, and Jourdain used it as an inspiration for La Samaritaine's ornamental scheme. Trilling argues that "ornament communicates primarily through form."⁶³ Generally, Art Nouveau style, especially as it developed in France, features forms that are languid and sensual. Nikolaus Pevsner recognized the graphic work of Arthur Mackmurdo as the earliest

⁶¹ Quoted in Yvonne Brunhammer, *Art Nouveau: Belgium/France* (Houston: Rice University, 1976) 379.

⁶² Borsi, *Paris 1900*, 153.

⁶³ Trilling, *The Language of Ornament*, 6.

example of the style. (Fig. 6) In 1936, Pevsner listed the characteristics that he identified as the leitmotif of Art Nouveau: “long, sensitive curve, reminiscent of the lily’s stem ... a slender flame, the curve undulating and flowing, and interplaying with others, sprouting from corners and covering asymmetrically all available surfaces.”⁶⁴ With these words, Pevsner imbued Art Nouveau with a natural mannerism that has defined Art Nouveau ornamentation. Many times, natural forms are replicated exactly, but, more often, they are abstracted into fanciful, decorative shapes that are only translated as natural through the viewer’s perception. Trilling’s book, *The Language of Ornament*, traces the combination of natural and abstract forms throughout the history of ornament that he believes is an “art of intense if elaborately veiled emotion.”⁶⁵ Pevsner’s early, defining text described Art Nouveau using emotional words, such as sensitive, delicate, slender, sinuous and elegant. Ernst Gombrich recalls William Hogarth, the eighteenth-century artist who theorized that beauty was embodied by a curved line. Hogarth wrote that “the serpentine line...leads the eye in a pleasing manner;” Gombrich saw the wavy line as suggestive of motion and brings awareness of negative space in the pattern to the attention of the viewer.⁶⁶

Art Nouveau’s visual language is dependent on ornament. La Samaritaine is a consummate example of Art Nouveau ornament in architecture. Trilling notes that Art Nouveau’s visual language realized two characteristics that distinguished it from the École des Beaux-Arts’ historicism: “an emotional explicitness that is probably unsurpassed in the history of ornament, and the near total integration of figure, ornament,

⁶⁴ Pevsner, *Pioneers of Modern Design*, 81.

⁶⁵ Trilling, *The Language of Ornament*, 6.

⁶⁶ Gombrich, 137. William Hogarth, *The Analysis of Beauty* (1753).

and design.”⁶⁷ Both of these elements can be detected in La Samaritaine. Jourdain’s lush floral ornamentation introduces metaphysicality into the design, creating a dream world of consumption. He deemphasizes the structural walls by using large expanses of plate glass which demonstrate Art Nouveau’s theoretical tenet of integration of ornament and form. Art Nouveau architects embellished the structural and functional elements of a building, underscoring the modern technology used in construction. Jourdain described Henri Sauvage’s use of ornamented construction elements as “designed artistically, even decoratively, to enhance rather than conceal the functional role they played.”⁶⁸ One can see examples of Jourdain’s ornamented structural elements in La Samaritaine where steel support beams and stair railings are bent into curving, flowing flourishes. (Fig. 7) The architects of the École des Beaux-Arts preferred to disguise construction elements under stone or plaster facings, denying the authenticity of modern construction techniques in favor of imitating historic details. Jourdain disagreed with this practice of camouflage, writing in *L’Atelier Chantorel*: “To be concerned only with the external design, the image, in the belief that, beneath the conventional muscular system, the skeleton will take care of itself, is to omit the very essence of an art which is the expression of social needs and the composite effect of the normal aspirations of humanity.”⁶⁹ Jourdain saw the potential for architecture to reflect society if it was truthful to its modernity rather than trying to recall the ancient past.

The common practice of hiding the engineered structure under a false face outlined the disdain that École architects felt for what they termed as the “engineer’s

⁶⁷ Trilling, *Ornament: A Modern Perspective*, 206.

⁶⁸ Clausen, *Frantz Jourdain*, 67.

⁶⁹ Borsi, *Paris 1900*, 153.

aesthetic.” Jourdain railed against the autocrats of the École des Beaux-Arts who emphasized the distinction between architecture and the “engineer’s aesthetic.” Jourdain’s review of the buildings designed by École architects for the 1900 exhibition exposed his derision for historicism:

“This architecture of confectionary and icing sugar assembled to indulge a tribe of [primitives], cynically insults both good taste and good sense; it is the logical consequence of the baneful doctrines taught at the École des Beaux-Arts, and it ingenuously demonstrates, under a hotchpotch of mendacity and falsehood, the impotence of academic teaching.”⁷⁰

Jourdain preferred the metal and glass structures of the 1889 exposition over the plaster constructions of the 1900 fair. He called these designs of “youth, vitality, daring, rationalism, [exhibiting] confidence in the future...”⁷¹ The metal and glass structures of the great Expositions and Paris’s train stations were dismissed by the École as works of engineering rather than true architecture. Their strict definition of ‘architecture’ adhered to their revivalist aesthetic based on stone facings with historically-inspired ornament. The historicism of the École hindered the modernization of architectural exteriors in Paris, but not construction techniques. École architects often used steel framing to span larger distances in their buildings. However, they covered the steel structural members with plaster or stone in an effort to realize the eclectic style they desired. In 1889, Jourdain reprimanded École architects for this practice, writing that, “The plaster or brick will no longer hide, under a liar’s veil, metal which, victorious over the prejudiced imbecile, solemnly received the consecration of the monumental art.” Jourdain was

⁷⁰ Frantz Jourdain, “L’Architecture à l’Exposition universelle. Promenade à bâtons rompus,” *Revue des Arts Décoratifs*, XX (1900) 245. Quoted in Borsi, *Paris 1900*, 33.

⁷¹ Borsi, *Paris 1900*, 33.

vehemently calling for an architecture that authentically reflected the modernity of the era. While the *École* architects accepted the benefits of the new engineering for advancements applicable to structural design, they denied the need for an aesthetic representative of their own time.

A celebrated example of academic eclecticism is the Paris Opera House designed by Charles Garnier and inaugurated in 1875. (Fig. 8) The size and shape of the structure was not possible without a steel skeleton underneath. Garnier and other *École* architects took advantage of the new metal construction but camouflaged the frame to resemble stone construction as seen in construction photographs. (Fig. 9) Jourdain actually praised Garnier for allowing the functional spaces of the interior to dictate the building's rational exterior form.⁷² Garnier's project represents a middle ground in that the building's function is not hidden by its shape and ornament; as the premier entertainment venue of France, the function of the building warranted an extremely-ornamented façade. Garnier has related the ornamental details to the function of the building as well, featuring busts of great composers and classical symbols representing the arts. The antithesis of Garnier's national Opera House is the Opera-Comique, which embodies the false façades of the *École* architects. (Fig. 10) From the outside, the structure's boxy and symmetrical shape hides the theatrical occupation of the interior. The ornament replicates many details of Greek temples and Roman palaces, but in a more generic scheme than Garnier's design. While both buildings are designed in the eclectic historicism of the *École*, Garnier's project comes closer to a 'modern' architecture because he considered the function of the building when planning its form.

⁷² Clausen, *Frantz Jourdain*, 63.

The Galeries des Machines of the 1889 Paris Exposition exemplifies the so-called “engineer’s aesthetic.” (Fig. 11) The building was designed as a temporary exhibit hall. The École found temporary structures and buildings with strictly utilitarian functions, such as train sheds, as acceptable uses of the “engineer’s aesthetic.” Jourdain admired the Galeries des Machines because it represented the new machine-inspired modern aesthetic but it also represented the more economical construction processes of modular design.

The department store had become a well-established architectural archetype by the time La Samaritaine was constructed. Previous architects designed these new buildings in the same historicist styles as public buildings like the Paris Opera House. In general, these structures were large open shells designed to maximize the amount of light permitted into the interior. Before electric lighting became common, sunlight was the most efficient way of lighting the interior of these massive structures. The construction of these spaces was dependent on their underlying metal skeleton which was typically covered with masonry. Bon Marché, considered the first true department store, began as a small haberdashery in the 1820s and expanded into a modern, diversified retailer by the 1860s. (Fig. 12) The enterprise inhabited a large building that featured the details that would come to define the department store: elaborate public entrances, decorative billboards on the exterior advertising wares for sale inside, glazed light courts to light the bulky multistoried structure and a grand interior staircase. The most advanced technological techniques were used in construction, including an iron structural frame, plate glass windows and skylights. One of the most recognizable features of the

department store type was the corner tower, which marked the location of the building in the skyline of the city.

The concept of the department store belonged to the second half of the nineteenth century. It was an important element of the ‘dream world’ created by the petite bourgeois and Hausmannization. Urban planners attempted to modernize Paris and create an innovative city out of the layers of several centuries’ of building campaigns. Edward Welch writes that the department store “represents capitalism’s most effective and pernicious trick: the harnessing of the power of the dream world for the purposes of wealth creation.”⁷³ The concept of the dream world references the utopian fantasy that the bourgeois preferred to see in their contemporary society. The department store’s advancement of the utopian ideal will be addressed below.

Meredith Clausen recognizes that Jourdain’s design was revolutionary, not in his use of glass and metal framing that had become a standard in the department store type, but in his treatment of the building’s façade.⁷⁴ (Fig. 13, 14) We can understand Jourdain’s relationship to ornament through examination of La Samaritaine’s façade. Jourdain removed the thick stone walls and replaced them with glass and a thin, metallic grid. The grid is adorned with floral decoration in both wrought iron and polychrome ceramic tiles. Ornamental signs inform the public of the merchandise available inside, but their ornamental function overshadows their informative one because the wide glass windows allow the passerby to see the inventory for themselves. New construction techniques and modern materials allowed Jourdain to underplay the utilitarianism of the

⁷³ Welch, “Zola, Jourdain and the Architectonics of Modernity,” 41.

⁷⁴ Clausen, *Frantz Jourdain*, 243.

metal structure without concealing the function of the building. According to Kent Bloomer, Italian Renaissance architect, Leon Battista Alberti, considered that ornament's function in architecture was to emphasize the beauty and utility of the architectural space and that ornament should adorn walls.⁷⁵ Jourdain has removed the base object and created a building made purely of ornament.

Ornament was Jourdain's solution to the regularity of the rectilinear grid of the steel structure, using floral forms and carved wooden panels to soften the space visually. If taken as a whole, the ornamental scheme is used as a division between the street and the interior space. The ornament becomes imperative because of the transparency of the plate glass windows. The geometry of the structure and the placement of the ornament frame the merchandise on display inside. Bloomer writes that "ornament is active and mobile, while its objects are rigid and stable."⁷⁶ By ornamenting an object that is transparent, hence invisible, Jourdain made his building into a living, active entity.

Large plate glass windows allowed a person on the street to be enveloped by the world inside the building. With only an invisible barrier separating consumer and consumption, the merchandise displayed in the windows was seemingly within the grasp of the passerby. Interior activity and merchandise become additional layers to the exterior ornamental scheme. Fashionably-dressed female shoppers seen through the windows become an ornamental symbol of modernity. The merchandise in the window is a layer of the permanent ornamental scheme, but the mobility of the merchandise adds a temporal quality to the ornament because the merchandise can be changed regularly.

⁷⁵ Kent Bloomer, *The Nature of Ornament: Rhythm and Metamorphosis in Architecture* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 2000) 19.

⁷⁶ Bloomer, *Nature of Ornament*, 93.

This detailed reading of the window display benefits the viewer who is adjacent to the building. Consider the viewer who is several blocks away. The purpose of the ornate “onion” dome was to attract the attention of this distant consumer; it marked the building in the skyline of the city. (Fig. 15) The dome’s exoticism and color made it distinct from the surrounding stone buildings. A viewer could distinguish their destination from the adjacent dullness as if it was the first bloom in a garden waking from its winter hibernation.

Ornament was also integrated into the interior trappings of the building, as seen in a light fixture that grows out of the railing of a stairway. (Fig. 16) ‘Grows’ is an appropriate description of the naturally-inspired form of the iron structure. The imagery of nature speaks to all levels of society, regardless of their education. Understanding classically-inspired or Gothic revival ornament is dependent upon the exposure of the viewer to historical architectural types. Styles of ornament based on academic historicism can form an exclusionary wall between the passerby and the building. These styles also disguise the function of the building. Jourdain’s lively floral forms and polychrome marquees warm and open the façade of La Samaritaine, inviting the viewer inside. This showed that ornament successfully served its function of attracting customers to the store.

Even though Jourdain castigated the École architects for their misrepresentation, he also manipulated his materials into assuming the form of natural entities. Fashioning vines and flowers from iron challenges the strength of the material. The ornament features a weightlessness that denies the solidity of the iron structure and emphasizes the mutability of the material made possible by modern industrial manufacturing processes.

The effect of delicately shaped iron contradicts the ‘truth to materials’ tenet of modernism, which Jourdain himself promoted in his anti-École writing. Trilling proposes that the ‘truth to materials’ tenet offers the designer a creative choice – to work with the material or against it.⁷⁷ Jourdain was working *against* his material by showing the extremity of metal being shaped into elegant forms. Prior to Art Nouveau ornamentation, plaster and wood were considered ideal materials for easily creating intricate forms of architectural decoration, as seen in Garnier’s Paris Opera House. Trilling elaborates on his statement, asserting that working with the material produces simple ornament, whereas a designer that is willing to challenge his own skill and the properties of the material can create complex ornament that heightens the beauty of the substance.⁷⁸ As a contradiction to the lightness of the bent ornamental forms, Jourdain does nothing to hide the rivets of his steel support beams. The rivets, fundamental traits of metal construction, become an authentic homage to the modern construction technique.

The ornamental use of metal demonstrates the economic benefit of using metal rather than traditional stone ornament. Metal is cheaper and easier to produce than hand-sculpted stone, making ornament more available to less affluent segments of society. The democratization of art, including fine architecture, was a primary goal of the Art Nouveau movement and is evident in Jourdain’s writing and intellectual activities. Jourdain wanted to educate the working class in the appropriate application of good taste so that the less affluent consumer could comprehend fine art on the same level as the

⁷⁷ Trilling, *Language of Ornament*, 174.

⁷⁸ Trilling, *Language of Ornament*, 175.

formally educated, prosperous bourgeois consumer. The desire to educate the public is another explanation for Jourdain's interest in department store design. The store is designed for a public audience composed of various socio-economic groups. Jourdain's objective of disseminating art to the masses blended well with the department store's aim of profitable sales. The target audience for the department stores often depended on the population of the area of Paris in which the building was located. The suburban Bon Marché catered to the upper echelons of the bourgeois, whereas La Samaritaine, located in the city center, focused on the working classes.⁷⁹

Natural forms represent metamorphosis through the cycle of life, but the metal and polychrome flowers of La Samaritaine's façade and interior are in permanent coloration. Bloomer locates ornament in the transitional spaces between our real world, a place of utility, and the location of our dreams and desires.⁸⁰ The department store represented an opportunity for the working-class consumer to transition into a middle-class existence, either through employment or consumption. Shopping becomes a path to social metamorphosis just as religion is a path to sacred metamorphosis. The working class consumer can transform into a proper bourgeois gentleman or lady by shopping at La Samaritaine. The store offers an added benefit of participating in the avant-garde and modern lifestyle, indicated by the Art Nouveau ornament, which was not available to patrons of the more conservative Bon Marché. Jourdain designed the glass ceiling structure so that light pervaded the interior of the building creating a fantasy land similar to the way Gothic architects used light to create sacred space in the interiors of their

⁷⁹ Meredith L. Clausen, "The Department Store: Development of a Type." *Journal of Architectural Education*, v. 39, no. 1 (Fall, 1985) 26.

⁸⁰ Bloomer, *Nature of Ornament*, 88.

cathedrals. Jourdain further emphasized the ethereal experience of the interior by allowing guests to float on clear glass tile floors. (Fig. 17) This floor design was only possible through the use of steel grid construction. Jourdain used the architectural language of religion to inspire awe in the consumer.

The comparison between cathedral architecture and department store architecture can be expanded if one considers Michel Foucault's concept of the heterotopia. Bloomer relates that Foucault theorized that people desired to sanctify the space around them in one of two ways. Either they create a utopia, which is "severed from its physical and cultural context", or they opt to create a heterotopia, which has the sacred "benefits of the utopia while remaining in vital contact with the utilitarian space of the unperfected society."⁸¹ Foucault recognizes the duality of these spaces, calling them "a sort of simultaneously mythic and real contestation of the space in which we live."⁸² Bloomer applies this to the "architect's identifying and articulating the boundaries between utopian dreams and realms of necessity."⁸³ Jourdain employs this concept through the glass façade, which allows the viewer to peer into the utopia from the reality of the street. Another feature that accentuates the transformative power of the department store is the elaborate main entrances that open onto the transcendental and light-filled interior. These portals serve the same capacity as the doors of cathedrals, separating the sacred space from the secular space.

⁸¹ Foucault, Michel. "Of Other Spaces." *Architecture – Mouvement – Continuité*. (1967). Quoted in Bloomer, *Nature of Ornament*, 132.

⁸² Foucault, "Of Other Spaces." Quoted in Bloomer, *Nature of Ornament*, 132.

⁸³ Bloomer, *Nature of Ornament*, 132-133.

Both the cathedral and the department store fall under the category defined by Walter Benjamin in his *Arcades Project* – collective architecture or “public buildings where the collective gathers, and its spaces of transit, spectacle and commerce especially.”⁸⁴ It was not Jourdain’s intention to replicate a medieval cathedral, but to borrow the psychological effects of sacred architecture in order to inform the viewers’ experience of the new commercial space of the department store. By using elements of cathedral design in La Samaritaine, Jourdain transformed shopping and secular social interaction into an activity that would contribute to the moral education of the consumer. In his analysis of Zola’s *Au Bonheur des Dames*, Edward Welch recognizes that the “phantasmagoria is a function of the container as much as its contents.”⁸⁵ A phantasmagoria is defined as a “shifting series of illusions as in a dream or as created by the imagination.”⁸⁶ Jourdain attempted to engage the viewer’s imagination through his design allowing them to envision the utopia of the modern society that was suggested by the department store.

Hausmannization fashioned an efficient circulation system of streets in order to move people and goods around the city. The system was designed to accommodate modern consumerism. Jourdain’s plan for the fictional department store of *Au Bonheur des Dames* used inefficient circulation to create a space through which the viewer could wander and be exposed to many other products available for purchase. This circulation plan opposed the staid geometric grid of the city streets, thus emphasizing the idea of the

⁸⁴ Welch, “Zola, Jourdain and the Architectonics of Modernity,” 38.

⁸⁵ Welch, “Zola, Jourdain and the Architectonics of Modernity,” 38.

⁸⁶ Dictionary.com. “Phantasmagoria.” <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/phantasmagoria>. Accessed 7 January 2010.

interior as a wonderland divorced from the reality of the outside world. In the actual La Samaritaine, Jourdain renounced the elaborate grand staircase in favor of additional display space, directing circulation with a series of side staircases and elevators. The walk-around plan became standard in department store design. Some critics questioned its ability to protect the stores' customers and assets. The *Draper's Record*, a nineteenth-century British trade publication, published an article in 1888 examining the viability of the Parisian model. The article illustrated the "moral threat [posed by the enclosed plan] to women customers, shoplifting and the tendency of male customers to become too familiar with women assistants."⁸⁷ Jourdain's plan may have created a wandering circulation pattern, but it may have caused logistical problems for the store's practical operations. This quote also speaks to the understanding of the department store's role in moral education of the public in that it shows the opinion of some critics that store design promoted abhorrent behavior among its customers.

A distinctive difference between La Samaritaine and the traditional masonry buildings that surrounded it is the vibrant use of color on the façade. Clausen draws attention to the coincidental occurrence of the Fauves' first public exhibition at the 1905 Salon d'Automne, which was the year that construction began on Jourdain's La Samaritaine. Jourdain as president of Salon d'Automne, would have been involved in organizing the Fauves' exhibit. Presumably, the majority of the designs had been finalized before ground was broken, but some details may still have been in flux. As such, Jourdain may have been influenced by the bright colors of these painters. Influence follows logically because of the relative timing of the Fauvist show, especially in light of

⁸⁷ Bill Lancaster, *The Department Store: A Social History* (London: Leicester University Press, 1995) 56.

Jourdain's encouragement of the democratization of the arts. According to Jourdain's theory, painting should influence architecture, which should influence design, and so on. Conversely, architecture and design should be reflected in the work of modern painters.

Jourdain recognized the benefit of a colorful façade in attracting customers. In a 1912 response to criticism of his vibrant design, he wrote:

“Do not forget the tempter role a department store is called to fill. Just as the pretty passerby knows to add the spice of paint to her natural grace and charm and provocative note of shimmering color to a suit; so a store of our time should not be afraid of being conspicuous: it is instead advisable to attract and entice the eyes of the customer. This explains the brightness, the violence if you will; this decor is unusual perhaps, but it was researched and devised with intent.”⁸⁸

In this passage, Jourdain likens the department store to a beguiling woman who uses color to draw attention to her appearance in a seductive manner. Lisa Tiersten also describes the department store as a seductress in the Sapphic manner. Department store owners defined their establishments as sexualized feminine entities. Tiersten quotes from Zola's *Au Bonheur des Dames*; the writer's fictional retail magnate, Octave Mouret, “tried to think of every possible way to satisfy women, to give them what they might want, to envelop them with a caress...”⁸⁹ Fin-de-siècle critics defined the goal of the department store as “envelop[ing] Frenchwomen in an atmosphere of desire,” and to “seduce women.”⁹⁰ Seduction was a crucial tool of new marketing techniques; Jourdain used color and ornament for temptation. Bing and De Feure, as will be seen in

⁸⁸ Frantz Jourdain, *Construction Moderne*, 1912, 316. Quoted in Clausen, *Frantz Jourdain*, 262. [my translation]

⁸⁹ Tiersten, *Marianne in the Market*, 29.

⁹⁰ Tiersten, *Marianne in the Market*, 29.

subsequent chapters, progressed to using the stylized image of the chic Parisienne herself to seduce her living counterpart.

Unfortunately, scholarly study of La Samaritaine's color scheme is limited because of the lack of color photographs of the 1905-1910 renovations. The building exists today, but Jourdain's façade was dismantled in 1937 and replaced by masonry wrappings. Jourdain's use of architectural ceramic panels, not a new material but one not commonly used by École classicists, added to the availability of further coloration in the design. The color scheme of the exterior was dominated by a blue-green metal structural grid. Accents of gold and warm wood tones contrasted with the coolness of the blue-green metal. The ceramic panels were decorated with white flowers and leaves in several shades of green with red accents and yellow-orange backgrounds. Some of these panels remain on the extant building. The panels are meticulously decorated which would have demanded the viewer make a closer examination to absorb the details.

Additional color is located on the stained glass domes. The exoticism of the shape of the dome and the use of electric lights to adorn it show the influence of the buildings of the 1900 exhibition that Jourdain admired: the Palais d'Electricité (Fig. 18) and La Porte Monumentale (Fig. 19), both of which were lit with multi-colored electric lights so festivities could continue after dark. The purpose of the dome was to draw customers from distant parts of the city. Its uniqueness marks the building in the city skyline, especially at night, when interior electric lights create a glowing beacon of color. This technique has been revived by the twenty-first century store through the use of colored lights reflected on the masonry covers, which were added in the 1937 renovations of La Samaritaine. (Fig. 20)

Jourdain attempted to achieve a new visual language by using the department store as his base form. If we consider the texture created for the distant viewer, Jourdain differentiates his building through the use of negative space. Color assists in drawing the attention of the distant viewer, but the open negative areas created by the plate glass windows contrasts sharply with the masonry facades of the surrounding buildings. If taken as a whole, the façade becomes Gombrich's attention-grabbing 'break' in the geometric pattern created by the buildings of the Rue de Rivoli.⁹¹ (Fig. 20) Gombrich defines his 'attention-grabbing break' as "a contrast in color, texture, form or, most of all, movement which suggests the presence of a separate object or an event meriting attention."⁹² La Samaritaine fits Gombrich's statement on several levels. The major contrasts between La Samaritaine and its Rue de Rivoli neighbors are the change in material, from stone to iron, and the contrast of the amount of open negative space represented by the windows on La Samaritaine's façade and the stone facings of the other buildings. If the façade is dissected into separate registers, Jourdain also achieves his 'accent-break' with the flatness of the middle register. The plate glass windows and the decorative panels covering the thin, metal structural supports created a flat plane with noticeable symmetrical organization. This register becomes a geometric grid of negative spaces framed by decoration.

Even though Art Nouveau retained the ornamental character of Beaux-Arts architecture, its new approach to ornament reflected the modernist objective of aligning form and function. Jourdain, for instance, applied a rationalist scheme to the manner in

⁹¹ Gombrich, *Sense of Order*, 100.

⁹² Gombrich, *Sense of Order*, 100.

which he applied ornament to La Samaritaine. Jourdain's space is a fantastic world created by the effusive use of natural ornament planned in a rational manner to complement the building form. Jourdain felt that ornament was an essential tool for communicating the function of the building because ornament was an expression of the character of a building.⁹³ Jourdain wished to elevate the artistic sensitivities of the store's working class audience. The ornamented character of La Samaritaine was for the benefit of the consumer as well as its owner, Ernest Cognacq. By creating a distinct character for the building, Jourdain differentiated La Samaritaine from other department store buildings. La Samaritaine, through its modern character, appealed to a shopper who desired the most fashionable, modern goods. The working-class patron of La Samaritaine may not have been able to afford to renovate their home in the modern style, but could assert their personal artistic tastes by shopping at the most modern department store.

Frantz Jourdain was an architect, designer and champion of modern artistic causes. La Samaritaine exemplifies his theory of Art Nouveau, using the department store as a statement to underline his struggle to push Parisian architecture into an equivalent relationship with the modern society surrounding it. His writing singled out the École des Beaux-Arts for its reticence to explore any visual language other than previously-mastered historicist forms. He berated the École architects for denying the modernity of iron and steel frame construction by covering the structural members with false fronts of masonry, plaster and wood. Jourdain and his Art Nouveau colleagues suggested that a new visual language was to be found in the universality of nature. Jourdain's fervor for new ornamental shapes, new materials and new construction

⁹³ Clausen, *Frantz Jourdain*, 69.

techniques developed into a building type suited for the modern Parisian society – the department store. He believed in the department store’s ability to transform Paris into a democratic utopia by disseminating art to the masses and educating them in the proper bourgeois tastes and fashions. Art Nouveau may be recorded by historians as simply a floral style that enjoyed a short-lived fashion in fin-de-siècle Europe, but Jourdain’s work defines it as a movement based on the search for a modern style of architecture without sacrificing the communicative tool of ornament.

SIEGFRIED BING: MARKETING THE ‘STYLE MODERNE’

Jourdain’s involvement with the department store exposed the visual characteristics of Art Nouveau to the public, and his writings expressed the theoretical tenets of the movement. The propagation of the movement continued through the retail activity of Siegfried Bing, a primary advocate of Art Nouveau in Paris. He created a maison d’art after his 1895 trip to Brussels in the company of German art critic, Julius Meier-Graefe. Bing modeled his shop on the Maison d’Art operated by Edmond Picard where modern art paintings and sculptures were displayed alongside decorative art objects.⁹⁴ During this trip, Bing was introduced to pioneering Art Nouveau designer and theorist Henry van de Velde. Although previously an importer of *japonisme*, Bing fully devoted his retail efforts to Art Nouveau after his trip to Brussels. Van de Velde designed many of the initial offerings in L’Art Nouveau’s inventory.

The Art Nouveau movement promoted the development of a modern style created with modern techniques and materials; department stores were modern tools for

⁹⁴ Robert Jensen. *Marketing Modernism in Fin-de-Siècle Europe* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994) 209.

dissemination of style. Despite the modern forms of retailing, Bing set up his shop as a small boutique specializing in “modern art.” This format set his store apart as a participant in the elitist culture of the aristocrats and haute bourgeoisie. Bing employed his own artisans and designers to create works in the Art Nouveau style. This cottage-industry model alienated his operation from the petite bourgeoisie, which frequented the department stores.

Bing advanced the use of “new” materials but denigrated mass production methods that may have produced poor quality objects. Other participants in the Art Nouveau movement did not agree with Bing’s anti-mass production stance. Émile Gallé, leader of the Nancy school of Art Nouveau, was able to utilize the stylistic qualities of the movement in his widely-available, mass-produced vases. While promoting the style to the populist shopper, Gallé maintained his personal studio, where he produced individual pieces for haute bourgeois patrons. It must be noted that Gallé benefited from his inheritance of his father’s ceramic factories. In contrast, Bing did not have access to established facilities for mass production.

In 1899, Julius Meier-Graefe, Bing’s young German acquaintance, established his own retail outlet, La Maison Moderne, specializing in modern artworks. Meier-Graefe was especially supportive of the mass production of Art Nouveau objects. Nancy Troy recognizes the Art Nouveau movement’s relationship to mass production: “[Bing] and certain of his contemporaries came to believe that the decorative arts suffered not so much from the dehumanizing circumstances of industrialization...but more precisely from the disjunction between the style of any given object of design and the means by

which that object was produced.”⁹⁵ In Nancy Troy’s estimation, Bing and his compatriots were not concerned with designating any specific visual style as the ultimate modern style but with desired objects that would reflect the modernity of their method of production.

Before the Art Nouveau movement, historic revivalism was the prevalent mode of design in the ornamentation of functional objects for the home. Bing argued against this practice just as Frantz Jourdain argued against the same practice in architecture. Troy summarizes this argument succinctly, writing that, “appropriation of historical styles...effectively divorced those styles from the historical conditions of production in which they had originally been defined.”⁹⁶ Rather than denouncing historicism outright like Jourdain had, Bing suggested that ornamenting modern objects, produced with modern techniques, with a historical style denies the modernity and functionality of the object. In this regard, Bing promoted the agreement between ornamentation and function with regard to object design.

Bing argued against the historicist revivalism of the *École des Beaux-Arts*, but his view is supported by different motives than Jourdain. He saw the dissolution of the guild system during the French Revolution as the collapse of the evolution of style in France.⁹⁷ Terminating the practice of educating apprentices through the guild workshop effectively ended the growth of design knowledge for French artisans. Under the guild system, French decorative artists learned the skills of the master craftsman and proceeded to build

⁹⁵ Nancy Troy, *Modernism and the Decorative Arts in France: Art Nouveau to Le Corbusier* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991) 8.

⁹⁶ Troy, *Modernism and the Decorative Arts*, 9.

⁹⁷ Troy, *Modernism and the Decorative Arts*, 10.

upon those skills to express themselves in a style that reflected their generation. Bing wrote: "...the initiators of L'Art Nouveau sought beneath the accumulated ashes of old systems the spark of that former life which had developed the arts of the people, slowly, generation after generation..."⁹⁸ Bing maintained that the Revolution stunted the growth of style and the artisans of his era had grown too dependent on historical revivalism to develop a style reflective of their generation. This argument leads Bing and others, such as the Brothers de Goncourt, to support the renewal of the rococo aesthetic of curved, sinewy lines. Art Nouveau designers considered the rococo to be the last style in the uninterrupted line of French traditional aesthetic development. The furniture designs of Georges de Feure, whose career as a furniture designer will be addressed in depth in the next section, was singled out for his success in continuing the visual style of the eighteenth century.⁹⁹

Bing played a significant role in reporting the developments in American decorative arts to the French government and public. His communicative function is evidenced by his role as the European distributor for Louis Comfort Tiffany and his writing on American art for French publications and French art for American journals. In June 1894, Bing presented a written account of his recent trip to America to the director of the Administration des Beaux-Arts, which was subsequently published as *La Culture artistique en Amérique*.¹⁰⁰ Nancy Troy understands this publication as a summary of Bing's attitudes toward decorative art. She quotes Bing as expressing what he saw as the American "formula for success": "place old and tried knowledge in the service of an

⁹⁸ Quoted in Troy, *Modernism and the Decorative Arts*, 10.

⁹⁹ *Le reve dans l'art* (1903). Quoted in Troy, "Toward a Redefinition", 55.

¹⁰⁰ Troy, *Modernism and the Decorative Arts*, 13.

entirely new spirit, with no guidelines other than those of intuitive taste and natural laws of logic.”¹⁰¹ Later, Bing asked, “Why, instead of continuing to reproduce the forms of earlier art, not try to equal the creative genius that gave them birth?”¹⁰² Once again, Bing called for a renewal in art. He recognized the Americans’ ability to be inspired by tradition without slavishly repeating historical patterns and he championed the same action in French design.

Bing also praised the eclecticism he found in American interior design, which corresponds well with the eclecticism practiced by the *maitresse de maison* in her efforts to express her individual artistic abilities in designing her domestic space. Bing described his example of this harmonizing eclecticism in his passage on the home of Henry O. Havemeyer, decorated by Bing’s acquaintance, Louis Comfort Tiffany. He wrote, “...the lighting fixtures reveal a Byzantine influence and the furnishings, although obviously reflecting individual taste, suggest the severe forms of our beautiful Louis XIII lines. Yet in spite of this amalgam, the visitor is struck, from the moment he enters, by the charming atmosphere of calm and repose.”¹⁰³

This passage demonstrates that Bing was aware of and supported aesthetic individualism in domestic interior design, even though the evidence of his retail practices seems to contradict this written praise of the eclectic interior. Both in his shop and his pavilion at the 1900 exposition, Bing displayed ensembles of furnishings – complete rooms designed in the Art Nouveau visual style including upholstery fabrics and wallpapers. Eugene Gaillard designed a bedroom suite for Bing’s pavilion at the 1900

¹⁰¹ Troy, *Modernism and the Decorative Arts*, 13.

¹⁰² Quoted in Troy, *Modernism and the Decorative Arts*, 13.

¹⁰³ Quoted in Troy, *Modernism and the Decorative Arts*, 14.

Exposition Universelle that featured a carefully constructed floral aesthetic. (Fig. 21) The curves in the vines of the wall mural are repeated in the prominent wood grain of the bed's headboard and footboard. The round and organic shapes of the bed and matching mirrored armoire reflect the foliage design of the wall covering. It appears that the handles of the armoire's drawers repeat the embroidered decoration of the chair's upholstery. These 'mock' rooms are Bing's preferred method of display, as the technique was used at both the pavilion and L'Art Nouveau.

Bing expressed the definition of Art Nouveau as a modernist movement in 1902-03 by stating that L'Art Nouveau was "opened as a meeting ground for all ardent young spirits anxious to manifest the modernness (sic) of their tendencies..." Gabriel Weisberg, one of the leading scholars on Bing and Art Nouveau, wrote that Bing's dream was "to modernize the interior of the contemporary home in order to make it both practical and aesthetically pleasing."¹⁰⁴ The second half of Bing's statement underlines the movement's tenet of democratization of the arts, "and opens also to all lovers of art who desired to see the working of the hitherto unrevealed forces of our day."¹⁰⁵ Bing exhibited modern paintings alongside the decorative art objects in his maison d'art, an action that evidenced his dedication to dissolving the division between fine art and decorative art.

Bing understood that the "Frenchness" of his individual version of Art Nouveau, as a selling tool, was necessary to appeal to the French consumer. By gratifying aesthetic

¹⁰⁴ Gabriel Weisberg. "Lost and Found: S. Bing's Merchandising of Japonisme and Art Nouveau," *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide*, vol. 4, no. 2 (Summer, 2005) Accessed 25 March 2010. <http://19thc-artworldwide.org/index.php/summer05/212-lost-and-found-s-bings-merchandising-of-japonisme-and-art-nouveau->

¹⁰⁵ Quoted in Troy, *Modernism and the Decorative Arts*, 7.

discrimination, which was vital to the French national identity, Bing acknowledged the entrepreneurial need to overcome the international flavor of the Art Nouveau movement. Robert Jensen highlights this tactic as a difference between Bing and his peer, Julius Meier-Graefe who opened a competing store in 1899. According to Jensen, Bing “capitulated to the nationalist-inspired resistance to German encroachments in design and the organization of industrial production, and came to produce increasingly French and increasingly elitist decorative objects...”¹⁰⁶ In contrast, *La Maison Moderne*, Meier-Graefe’s venue, “came under fire as a German import and a threat to French cultural traditions.”¹⁰⁷ Ian Millman writes that, “Bing’s internationalism was taken as an affront to the supremacy of French taste.”¹⁰⁸ Business acumen, for Bing, would win out over loyalty to the internationalist tenet of Art Nouveau theory.

Adamant French nationalism was fueled by industrial competition from Great Britain and collective memories of territorial losses to Germany as consequences of the Franco-Prussian War. The inherent “Frenchness” of Art Nouveau’s objects was a component of its potential success in Paris. According to Millman, Bing understood the need to appeal to the French consumer’s nationalist sympathies. Millman argues that Bing knew he had to offer merchandise that was “characteristically French” in order to be financially successful.¹⁰⁹ Bing’s intent was to offer a “French style that was genuinely modern yet respected traditional values and virtues.”¹¹⁰ Unfortunately, the amount of

¹⁰⁶ Jensen, *Marketing Modernism*, 241.

¹⁰⁷ Jensen, *Marketing Modernism*, 241.

¹⁰⁸ Ian Millman. “Georges de Feure.” *Magazine Antiques* (1971) v. 167, n. 3 (March, 2005) 68.

¹⁰⁹ Millman, *Magazine Antiques*, 68.

¹¹⁰ Millman, *Magazine Antiques*, 68.

inventory left in the stock of both *La Maison Moderne* and *L'Art Nouveau* testifies to the failure of these shops to disseminate Art Nouveau objects to French consumers.¹¹¹

In order to fulfill the French customer's requirement, Bing eventually installed an atelier to produce items in the true Art Nouveau idiom. For the inaugural exhibition in 1895, he recruited artists who were already ensconced in modern fine art movements. The Nabi were involved in designing a series of stained glass panels produced by the Tiffany Studios in New York. A drawing by Henri Toulouse-Lautrec (Fig. 22) depicts the design for the stained glass panel by Tiffany, *Papa Chrysanthème*. (Fig. 23) The Nabis' use of vibrant color lent itself well to Tiffany's new techniques in glass production. Bing hoped to encourage technical innovation in French production by displaying the designs of French artists created using Tiffany's processes.¹¹² Bing's actions underline his support of Art Nouveau's tenets of democratization of the arts because he encouraged fine artists to work in applied art mediums.

The design of L'Art Nouveau's facility demonstrates Bing's belief that modernization would be accomplished through the domestic interior. The entrepreneur engaged several artists, including Henry van de Velde, to design exemplar rooms wherein the scheme would express the unified vision of an Art Nouveau interior. (Fig. 24) This room also advances the Art Nouveau tenet of collaboration and democratization as the wall decorations were completed by Paul Ranson and the table features a dining service by Edouard Vuillard; both men were Symbolist painters. Bing advanced the "art for all" tenet of Art Nouveau theory by including all types of art objects in these designs:

¹¹¹ Jensen mentions the closing of *La Maison Moderne*, *Marketing Modernism*, 242.

¹¹² Gabriel Weisberg, *Art Nouveau Bing: Paris Style 1900* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1987) 49.

painting, ceramic, sculpture, textiles and furnishings. Consumers were shown how they could incorporate all types of artistically-designed objects into their own domestic spaces. The ‘mock-room’ technique was also used by department stores in their *en suite* displays of furniture. The main sales floor and architecture of Bing’s shop resembled the interior of a modern department store with balconies, a grand stair and display cases. (Fig. 25) L’Art Nouveau also featured a glass skylight to allow the main space to be flooded with light; this same architectural feature was used by the department stores. The exterior turret with glass dome resembled slightly the ornate onion domes of La Samaritaine. (Fig. 26) The entrance to the store was designed in the theatrical manner that designated the division between the street and the dream world of contemporary retail establishments. (Fig. 27) The overall design of Bing’s facility reflected his emphasis on the potential for the domestic interior to advance the dissemination of Art Nouveau.

Bing certainly recognized the need to appeal to the French consumer, but more specifically to the French female consumer, who was the designer of the domestic interior. Bing participated in the feminine gendering of the Art Nouveau movement by decorating his 1900 exposition pavilion with images of chic bourgeois women. The Art Nouveau retailers attracted female patrons by depicting glamorous women smartly appreciating the Art Nouveau aesthetic. Gabriel Weisberg also discusses the relationship between Bing and Meier-Graefe, presuming that Meier-Graefe initiated the use of images of women to market both Art Nouveau retail outlets. Weisberg offers the first poster for L’Art Nouveau as evidence that Bing did not focus on female consumers as his target patrons at the formation of his boutique. At Bing’s request, Félix Vallotton, a Swiss artist, designed an image based on organic, reed-like forms to be used on business cards,

a modern advertising tool. (Fig. 28) In 1900, both Bing and Meier-Graefe began to use images of chic Parisiennes in the advertisements for their boutiques. Meier-Graefe's advertisements used specific female performers from the Montmartre cabarets in posters which Weisberg calls "personifications of the new, liberated woman" who is "dressed in the modern style while they visited a gallery where modernity was the key guiding concept."¹¹³ (Fig. 29) Weisberg recognizes that Bing began using Meier-Graefe's "brilliant conceit" in the decoration of his pavilion at the 1900 Exposition. Weisberg explains that Bing "had to demonstrate visually that he understood that women, especially women of fashion, were the ones who would have the means to fill their homes with the furniture, the art objects and sculptures, and the paintings, he sold in his gallery."¹¹⁴ The design of the 1900 pavilion expresses Bing's objective of courting the female consumer during her excursion to the Exposition.

Initially, the international exhibitions were billed as industrial showcases geared toward a masculine audience. The British exhibition of 1851, known for the construction of the Crystal Palace building, was well attended by female consumers. Whitney Walton quotes a contemporary critic who wrote: "Women are in the majority here..."¹¹⁵ By 1900, the organizers understood the entertainment value of the exhibitions. Glamour and modernity were the organizing principles of Paris's 1900 event. Electric lights created a fantasy land but also extended the amount of hours in the day that spectators could visit the fairgrounds. (Fig. 30)

¹¹³ Weisberg, "Lost and Found," 11.

¹¹⁴ Weisberg, "Lost and Found," 11.

¹¹⁵ Walton, *France at the Crystal Palace*, 66. It should be noted that this critic found women an intrusive distraction in the male public sphere.

The theoretical basis of the Art Nouveau movement in Paris did not take hold as its promoters had intended. A distinction between the fine and decorative arts still exists today along with a disparity in quality between handcrafted objects and the results of mass production. Handcrafted objects continue to be held in higher regard than objects produced by machines. The assessment of handcrafted objects is often less concerned with functional quality and aesthetic standards than with the fact that the objects were produced through the labor of a single craftsman. In today's contemporary era, handcrafted objects are a rarity and will therefore be valued more highly because of their limited availability relative to that of ubiquitous mass-produced objects. Art Nouveau may have failed because it contradicted itself. It advanced modernism in design and accepted the reality of mechanical production, but objects were valued higher if produced by artisans who were trained in the aesthetic theory behind the style and the ornamentation of the object did not challenge the function of the object. The theorists advanced the visual expression of modernity without abolishing the use of ornament, which was previously "bound up with wealth and display, with power, luxury and personal magnificence."¹¹⁶ Art Nouveau advanced access to artistic domestic goods for the lower classes, but their emphasis on ornament visually connected their objects with the wealthy upper classes. They educated the lower classes through art in public, such as Jourdain's exterior for La Samaritaine and the common use of the Art Nouveau aesthetic in advertising posters. Nonetheless, they could not overcome their lack of access to mass production, which would have facilitated a lowering of retail prices.

¹¹⁶ Trilling, *Ornament: A Modern Perspective*, 12.

Multiple factors worked against the mass production of Art Nouveau objects. Automatically higher regard for handcrafted objects was driven by bourgeois consumer taste and Art Nouveau's theoretical uneasiness toward mass production. Limited access to mass production facilities was hastened by the unwillingness of manufacturers to risk capital investment on a style that had encountered a problematic critical reception. The dependence on craftsmanship increased the cost of original Art Nouveau objects, placing them out of reach of the *maitresse de maison* of the petite bourgeois and working classes. Without mass production, Art Nouveau was not able to become a standard option for the *maitresse de maison*'s domestic interior.

CASE STUDY: GEORGES DE FEURE

Art Nouveau manifested itself in functional objects rather than in painting; it is often associated with the Symbolist movement in an attempt to find a corollary to Art Nouveau in painting. Symbolist painters visualized psychological interiority and emotional expression through the use of the elements of art. Robert Goldwater wrote a prominent text on the Symbolist movement in which he elaborates on the comparison between Symbolism and Art Nouveau. Unfortunately, Goldwater derides Art Nouveau as the shallow, decorative version of Symbolism's concern with surface texture. He calls Art Nouveau "a style unconcerned with either philosophic idealism or individual, emotional conflict."¹¹⁷ Goldwater uses words like 'decorative' and 'utilitarian' with a negative connotation common to scholarship that focuses on Art Nouveau's narrow definition as a visual style. Rather than adopt this unhelpful perspective, this paper argues that Art Nouveau and Symbolism are related because Bing recruited modern

¹¹⁷ Robert Goldwater, *Symbolism* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1980) 17.

painters who participated in Symbolism and other movements. Bing's recruits brought the same visual characteristics of modern painting to the decoration of functional objects that created a formal analogy between the two mediums. The hierarchy of arts, which informs Goldwater's opinion of the movement, casts functional objects as inferior to paintings. Art Nouveau's originators fought to reverse the subordination of functional objects to paintings.

The oeuvre of one artist, Georges De Feure, specifically represents the connection between the two artistic movements. De Feure began his career as a Symbolist, often working in the new medium of artistic posters rather than the traditional oil-on-canvas format.¹¹⁸ He initially displayed his works in small exhibitions in the artistic district of Montmartre, which led to commissions for advertising posters for the café-concerts. De Feure, came under the influence of Siegfried Bing in late 1899, extended his repertoire to include furnishings, ceramics, upholstery fabrics and stained glass panels.¹¹⁹ In his works for Bing's atelier, the new subject of the Parisienne emerged, personifying the female consumer addressed above. An especially significant group of works featuring the chic Parisienne character was a set of stained glass panels created by De Feure as decoration for the interior of Bing's pavilion at the 1900 Exposition Universelle. Corresponding painted panels decorated the exterior. (Fig. 31) These panels and other objects support this study's argument that the image of the chic Parisienne was used to lure the *maitresse*

¹¹⁸ Often, De Feure created his initial work in oil or another medium, but with the intention that the work also be sold as a poster. Millman, *Magazine Antiques*.

¹¹⁹ Ian Millman indicates that the circumstances of De Feure and Bing's first meeting are unknown, but that it probably occurred in late 1899. Millman, *Magazine Antiques*, 70.

de maison into Bing's retail establishments and thus to participate in the consumption of Art Nouveau objects.

De Feure, born Georges Joseph van Sluÿters in Paris in 1868, was the son of a Dutch architect and the architect's Belgian wife.¹²⁰ De Feure's affluent upbringing lent him an understanding of the bourgeois lifestyle and it also made it possible for him to receive some academic education as an architect and designer in Dutch schools. De Feure's family, like many, was economically devastated by the Franco-Prussian War which left De Feure on his own financially. In the late 1880's, then in his early twenties, De Feure settled in Paris and began his artistic career. His early work reflects the influence of the Symbolist artists with whom he socialized in the café-cabarets of Montmartre.¹²¹ After a short term dedicated solely to Bing's atelier, De Feure opened his own workshop in the spring of 1901. The artist collaborated with other entrepreneurs on many projects, including commissions for Julius Meier-Graefe's *L'Art Moderne*. Millman notes that advertisements for De Feure's atelier appeared in the art journals in April, 1901; the artist also offered art lessons with a session reserved especially for ladies.¹²² This offering is continued proof of the marketing of Art Nouveau to women. De Feure understood that bourgeois women, his target audience, were striving to assert their personal expressiveness through art and artistically-arranged interiors. He actively promoted the artistic education of bourgeois women.

¹²⁰ Information about De Feure's choice of pseudonym is unavailable, but it is important to note the significance of a non-French artist working in Paris having adopted a French-sounding pseudonym. This supports my conclusion that artists needed to address French nationalism in order to be commercially viable. Millman, *Georges de Feure*.

¹²¹ All biographic information attained from Ian Millman, *Georges de Feure 1868-1943*, (Amsterdam: Van Gogh Museum, 1993) 5-7.

¹²² Millman, *Georges de Feure*, 23.

During his early Symbolist period, many of De Feure's works display the *femme fatale* and Sapphic love archetypes common among the Symbolist painters. Ian Millman recognizes that a diversification occurred in De Feure's oeuvre in approximately 1895 when the young artist began to concentrate on artistic posters as his primary medium.¹²³ These works feature a lone woman of cultivated status which is indicated by her dress and activities. One example of his poster work is *Paris-Almanach*, initially designed as the cover illustration for a tourism guide. (Fig. 32) The subject of this image is an elegantly-dressed woman in a fur-trimmed cape and a fashionable hat adorned with a large bow. She is holding a copy of the guide indicating that she has traveled into the public sphere on her own. The men in the background look at her with suspicion. She holds her head aloft with determination; she takes no notice of the man in the top hat who slyly glances at her. Millman notes that many of these works were also cast as advertisements but that the artistic version were often printed without type and "were destined for the [collector's] portfolio rather than the street..."¹²⁴ These artistic posters, and later his works of decorative art, appeal to the *maitresse de maison* as a consumer of domestic goods. Millman elaborates further, describing De Feure's female subjects as "somewhat emancipated and independent, belonging to a small elite of free-thinking young women..."¹²⁵ The artist's images of the bourgeois woman are empowering to the female consumer in search of fiscal independence and artistic control over her domestic domain. They are also seductive in their elegance and beauty; the Art Nouveau aesthetic endowed these women with originality and excitement.

¹²³ Millman, *Georges de Feure*, 14.

¹²⁴ Millman, *Georges de Feure*, 15.

¹²⁵ Ian Millman. "De Feure: Fantasy and Fashion in Fin-de-Siècle Paris." *Affiche*, n. 7 (Sept. 1993) 55.

Bing sold artistic posters at L'Art Nouveau. This may have brought De Feure to the attention of the art dealer.¹²⁶ Advances in lithographic printing made high quality posters a suitable replacement for paintings for petite bourgeois matrons who could not afford fine artworks. Millman points out that the medium coordinated well with the tenets of Art Nouveau theory. Color lithography, Millman writes, is a “totally new art form whose technical possibilities invited exploration and innovation”¹²⁷ that meets with Art Nouveau’s principle of modernism and innovative use of materials. Millman also calls the poster “the perfect application of the philosophy of ‘art in everything’.”¹²⁸ Lithography facilitated access to art for consumers at all levels of economic prosperity fulfilling an important objective for the Art Nouveau theorists. De Feure’s participation in the artistic poster medium made him an ideal recruit for Bing’s atelier.

Not only were posters a method for making art more accessible to less economically-prosperous consumers, but they also fulfilled another objective of the Art Nouveau movement – the artistic education of the general public. In a public arena, posters were educational tools used to expose the masses to higher aesthetic standards of design. The commonality of the Art Nouveau style in poster design evinces the aim of the aesthetic education of the consumer. The work of De Feure, as well as of the more well-known Alphonse Mucha, demonstrates the propagation of Art Nouveau through the medium of the poster. A comparison of the work of these two artists illustrates the different uses of the female image in Art Nouveau design. Mucha’s wood nymphs support the connection of Art Nouveau and nature, one famous example of his oeuvre

¹²⁶ Weisberg, *Art Nouveau Bing*, 75.

¹²⁷ Millman, *Affiche*, 51.

¹²⁸ Millman, *Affiche*, 51.

being the set of posters depicting women as allegories of the Four Seasons. (Fig. 33)

Mucha's women are voluptuous and scantily clad in sheer, shapeless gowns, surrounded by foliage and flowers referencing the individual seasons. Each woman's face wears a different emotion, but none feature the independent, defiant countenance of the woman in Paris-Almanach. Winter shivers and pulls her cloak around her shoulders inviting the male viewer to protect her from the ravages of the cold. Spring daintily clasps her hands in front of her and looks lovingly at the unbloomed buds. Summer is the most seductive, with her lips slightly parted and one hand behind her head in sexual abandon. Her red hair signifies her status as a wanton woman. Fall is the embodiment of bountiful harvest with her shift open to display her décolletage. Mucha's women are connected to nature, making a subtle reference to the female biological imperative. Prior to De Feure's association with Bing, he also created a series of women represented as flowers. (Fig. 34)

Tuberose depicts a single woman staring out confrontationally at the viewer. Only her head and décolletage are visible through the dense foliage, setting her up as the blossom on the green vine. Light emanates from the face of the woman; her blonde hair frames her blue eyes. Her countenance is blank and expressionless; she confronts the viewers, whereas Mucha's women are seductive and inviting. De Feure departs from the typical female stereotypes even when treating a common visual trope. As will be addressed in closer detail below, De Feure completely abandons the 'wood nymph' archetype as he explores a new image of the undeniably bourgeois woman.

De Feure exemplifies the Art Nouveau theoretical tenet of unity in the arts because he was first recognized as a painter and printmaker but also found success in the decorative arts. De Feure tried his hand at decorative art objects with furniture and

ceramic submissions to the Salon de la Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts in 1894 but came fully into the Art Nouveau movement with his work for Bing's ateliers.¹²⁹

Common visual characteristics are found in both his works of fine art and his Art Nouveau objects. Female figures of his lithographic works were translated into stained glass panels based on decorations created for a restaurant interior.¹³⁰ De Feure's panels were recognized by Charles Torquet in 1901 as an improvement in the medium: "...the lead lines had been reduced to a minimum with the effect of lightening the composition and increasing the luminosity."¹³¹ The stained glass medium provides De Feure's color with a glow that he could not achieve on an opaque paper or canvas foundation. The thin leading allows De Feure to create an abstract, ornamental effect in the woman's dress while maintaining the power of the figurative image. Two examples of De Feure's stained glass objects are all that remains of this category of works. The panel contained in the collection of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (Fig. 35) is a more exuberant design than its compatriot from a private collection.¹³² (Fig. 36) The woman is dressed in a pale gown with a contrasting dark red hat. The dark background is broken by a brownish, glowing patch of color, which creates a perspective effect. The light yellow tone of her dress and the stylized floral decorations underscore De Feure's understanding of the benefits of this medium over his opaque works on paper or canvas. The light yellow rarely recurs in his oil or gouache works. The extremes of light and dark create drama, which is also reflected in the woman's facial expression. The red dress of the

¹²⁹ Weisberg, *Art Nouveau Bing*, 151. De Feure also designed furniture which was included in the 1897 and 1898 Salon de la Societe nationale des Beaux-Arts (Millman, *Georges de Feure*, 16).

¹³⁰ Millman, *Georges de Feure*, 88.

¹³¹ Millman, *Georges de Feure*, 88.

¹³² Ian Millman, *Georges de Feure: Maître Du Symbolisme et De L'Art Nouveau* (Paris: ACR Édition Internationale, 1992) 158-159.

companion panel, a detail common to women in his other mediums, fails to allow light to pass through the glass. In the VMFA panel, the woman leers at the viewer while resting her chin on her hands, drawing attention to her long, elegant fingers. Her eyes lend an air of danger and complicate this image of the chic Parisienne. In the companion panel, the woman has an identical face, indicating the use of the same model, but her expression is more sweet and demure. The leading for this panel is silver as opposed to the black used in the VMFA panel. The silver reflects light and contrasts with the dark tones of her red dress. An orange scarf streams around below the woman's waist, lending motion to the scene. The details of her dress, including the rosettes, are rendered in a more realistic manner than the highly stylized and abstract flowers in the VMFA panel. The stained glass panels are informed by his Symbolist works, but De Feure makes opportune use of the properties of glass. Their emphasis on surface, color and line recall De Feure's paintings and lithographic works but the use of light imbues the images with an additional dramatic dimension.

De Feure also created illustrations for many of the artistic journals associated with the Art Nouveau and modern art movements. Two illustrations depict elegant Parisiennes in their domestic interiors; these can be read as educational tools for the *maitresse de maison*. These two illustrations affect the viewer's understanding of the solitary women of De Feure's other decorative works as his women are typically dressed in the same stylish clothing. Millman recognizes the dramatic tension in *La Visite* (Fig. 37); he suggests that the narrative in this scene implies the Sapphic love scenes of De

Feure's Symbolist works.¹³³ *La Visite* illustrates a woman accepting a call from another bourgeois woman. The room exhibits an overabundance of Art Nouveau ornamentation; rugs, tables, chairs, architectural features of the room each feature an abstract floral pattern that is also seen in De Feure's decorative art pieces. The extreme perspective indicates the influence of Japanese prints, and the watercolor medium provides the individual forms with blurred edges and transparent color that recall the technique of the Impressionists. The dramatic light falling from the window, which features an Art Nouveau iron grate, highlights the floral abstract design on the floor. The light casts the arriving woman in dark shadow, which adds drama and mystery to the narrative. The stylish women are dressed in fashions that demonstrate their knowledgeable and tasteful aesthetic decisions. The arriving woman wears a muff, a chic hat with ornamental feathers and a light blue traveling coat. She carries a traditionally-male accessory, a walking stick, in her hand. The tailored coat and walking stick points to the complicated male-female dichotomy of women's costumes meant to be worn in public. The second print, *L'Intérieur*, features a lone woman in the act of arranging her domestic space. (Fig. 38) As in *La Visite*, this interior is drenched in Art Nouveau decoration. De Feure created an instructional guide for the bourgeoisie who desires an Art Nouveau design. The image demonstrates the appropriate method for applying the Art Nouveau aesthetic to every aspect of the *maitresse's* parlor and trousseau. The maitresse places a vase of flowers on a high shelf; her elaborate gown features a corseted detail along the woman's spine and huge gathers of fabric flow around the woman's feet. The details of her dress mark her as a bourgeois woman who does not perform any manual tasks that would be

¹³³ Millman, *Georges de Feure: Maître Du Symbolisme*, 198.

compromised by her excessive costume. A figurine sits on the table in front of the *maitresse*, which brings to mind the inhabitant of De Feure's cover of *Lithographies Originales* in that both figures are reading. (Fig. 39) The repetition of this form underscores the democratization of the arts, a theoretical tenet of Art Nouveau. The same female figure is reproduced in two-dimensional form for the coversheet and in two-dimensional representation of a three-dimensional figurine in *L'Intérieur*. De Feure continues this replication even further by actualizing the figure of the elegant woman in ceramic. (Fig. 40)

Another image of De Feure's chic Parisiennes combines the Sapphic love theme with elegantly-dressed women and the Art Nouveau aesthetic. A work on paper dated to 1901-1905 depicts two women leaning toward each other in an intimate position. (Fig. 41) A shawl with Art Nouveau decoration encircles them and adds movement to the image that assists in setting the scene in the outdoor environment. The women stand in front of a tree, a rose bush filling the extreme foreground. The building and street behind the tree places the women in a public park. Millman recognizes that De Feure's works created after 1900, subsequent to his association with Bing, are "now devoid of all sinister connotation, [they] stroll in their gracefully flowing Art Nouveau gowns in timeless wooden glades."¹³⁴ De Feure depicts his women as the elegant, chic Parisienne. Another example of this trope, the artist's most well-known lithograph, *Le Journal des ventes* (*The Auction Journal*), depicts an opulently-dressed bourgeois woman holding aloft a vase as she assesses its quality. (Fig. 42) The artist created this image for Charles Vos in 1898 as the cover of a sales catalog. It is direct evidence of the Art Nouveau

¹³⁴ Millman, *Magazine Antiques*, 70.

movement's marketing efforts toward bourgeois women. On the occasion of a retrospective of De Feure's work at L'Art Nouveau in 1903, one critic wrote: "Over the amphora of the feminine form he has draped all the precious fabrics which, little by little, his fancy has evolved. But always it has been the pure, decorative beauty, never the sensual, degenerate side, which he has lovingly treated."¹³⁵ This critic has denied the subtle, dramatic subtexts of De Feure's images. De Feure endows his women with the agency and discriminating taste of a proper female consumer.

Not only did De Feure create two-dimensional visions of the modern, bourgeois woman, but his decorative objects also feature these images. A clock designed in 1901-02, which we can assume was included in the 1903 retrospective at L'Art Nouveau, features an elegantly-dressed woman waving to a departing sailboat. (Fig. 43) Although her dress lacks the ornamentation of De Feure's other women, the shape of her silhouette and the detail of her hat mark her as a bourgeoisie. The function of the clock and the decoration work together to create the dramatic narrative of a woman awaiting the return of a loved one who has gone to sea. The sinuous, ornamental arcs accentuate the curves of the woman's body and the abstract foliage above the woman's head associate her with the woodland settings of De Feure's contemporary graphic works.

De Feure's women embody the chic *maitresse de maison*, but they also insinuate the femme fatale trope of his early Symbolist work. Bing and De Feure recast the *maitresse* as the ideal bourgeois consumer, moral mother and responsible citizen, in contrast to the earlier stereotype of the female consumer as a wonton, frivolous corruptor. Sharon Hirsch proposes a shift in the Symbolist depiction of the femme fatale in the

¹³⁵ Rene Puaux, *Brush and Pencil* (1903). Quoted in Millman, *Georges de Feure*, 61.

1890's. She advances a convention of the "should-be mother," which she defines as a "city woman who engaged in a flight from maternity."¹³⁶ The 'should-be mother' represents the Symbolist reaction to the advent of the New Woman, a more radical figure in fin-de-siècle feminism than the familial feminist associated with the Union Central. The New Woman, as theorized by nineteenth-century conservatives, was a result of the woman's more frequent involvement in the public sphere in an inappropriate manner.¹³⁷ De Feure's city women can be read as the moral *maitresse de maison*, the chic Parisienne and the Symbolist's 'should-be mother.' The possible danger represented by the 'should-be mother' femme fatale lends an air of seductive exoticism to De Feure's images without offending his bourgeois target audience. The complicated subtext of danger makes these images attractive to multiple consumer bases; their elegant seduction draws a crowd of customers to Bing's retail outlets and the Art Nouveau movement in general.

CONCLUSION

Historiography has gendered the Art Nouveau movement as a feminine, graceful style due to the abundance of curved lines and female figures in its aesthetic. Art Nouveau appeared as a design option in the Parisian domestic interior at a time when France advanced the bourgeois housewife as the aesthetic savior of their national identity. Domesticity was a defining quality of the bourgeois identity, especially for the housewife. The progenitors of Art Nouveau aimed to modernize their society through modernization of the domestic interior. They advanced the democratization of the arts by

¹³⁶ Sharon L. Hirsch, *Symbolism and Modern Urban Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) XV.

¹³⁷ Hirsch, *Symbolism and Modern Urban Society*, 166. For more information on the New Woman and the Art Nouveau movement, see Debora Silverman, "The New Woman".

elevating functional objects to the same level of esteem as painting and sculpture. Increasing the design quality of domestic goods allowed consumers with fewer financial resources access to more aesthetically pleasing environments. Art Nouveau artists and entrepreneurs also increased access to goods by employing modern retail techniques such as the department store. Frantz Jourdain's design for La Samaritaine exposed Art Nouveau ornamentation to the working-class public and his writings defined the theoretical foundations of the Art Nouveau movement. Siegfried Bing encouraged young artists to experiment with alternative mediums like ceramics, textiles and furniture design. Georges de Feure courted the female bourgeois consumer by depicting her in Art Nouveau interiors. Art Nouveau was a self-consciously modern movement, involving artists, consumers, and entrepreneurs who wished to visually express their fashionability.

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