

CALL FOR PAPERS

Thursday 22 and Friday 23 November 2012 – Lyon, musée Gadagne

The Trade in Luxury and Luxury in Trade. The production, display, and circulation of precious objects from the Middle Ages to the present day

SUMMARY

Call for papers for an international interdisciplinary conference, ‘The trade in luxury and Luxury in Trade. The production, display, and circulation of precious objects from the Middle Ages to the present day’, organized by the Laboratoire de Recherche Historique Rhône-Alpes (UMR 5190) to take place at the musée Gadagne in Lyon, on Thursday 22 and Friday 23 November 2012.

How were luxury objects produced, displayed, disseminated and consumed? The aim of this conference is to return to the question of progressive specialization in a trade devoted to precious objects. The chronological, spatial and disciplinary boundaries are flexible, open in order to encourage the participation of specialists from different backgrounds – history, art and design history, economics, literature, sociology, etc.

The objective is to reveal the richness and diversity of what the term ‘luxury’ embraced (and embraces) and to consider how specialist markets were gradually created and defined. Two specific approaches will be developed. On one hand, the focus will be on people and goods; on the other, it will be on points of sale and the material and symbolic power deriving from this particular sector of the economy.

PRESENTATION

The methods of production, display, circulation, and consumption of luxury goods will be the subject of this conference. The aim is to raise questions about growing specialization in a trade devoted to precious objects which are designed to make people and their surroundings more attractive. Specialists from different backgrounds will deal with these questions from many chronological, spatial and disciplinary perspectives. Diverse academic fields will thus be represented, among them history, art and design history, economics, literature, sociology, etc.

This interdisciplinary approach to the luxury market across a long period of time, from the Middle-Ages to the present day, will make it possible to contrast different experiences and underline continuities as well as changes. Luxury has often been discussed merely with reference to fine arts production. Here, in contrast, the objective is to reveal the richness and diversity of a phenomenon referred to as ‘luxury’, and the progressive emergence of specialized markets. Two specific approaches will thus be developed in the conference: on the one hand, a focus on people and goods, and on the other hand, a focus on points of sale and the material and symbolic power deriving from this particular sector of the economy. Indeed, luxury does not only derive from the methods and forms of the material economy; it is also a controversial value, a symbolically charged trade, a political argument, a religious controversy. These facets of luxury are either linked with or remote from the circuits of consumption, leading or following consumption practices. The papers, which may refer to French or foreign examples, should contribute to the following topics and perspectives:

I Luxury markets, merchants and goods.

- People (biographies, careers); middlemen, from producer to consumer (merchants, agents...); the professionalization of the sector, from workshop to specialized business (gallery owners, establishments selling luxury goods...).
- The organization of the luxury trade (administrative and professional methods, regulations and constraints, etc); growing specialization and the division into different trade associations (producers/merchants); from craftsmanship to luxury industry, from shops selling luxury goods to brands, from commercial houses to holding companies, to the creation of luxury groups on a global scale (LVMH, PPR, Richemont, Prada...) to industrial techniques (mass advertising, etc); the globalization of the luxury market.
- Raw materials and production; import and transformation; local know-how versus globalization; industrial techniques and processes; forms of subcontracting and delocalization; workers, technicians, industrialists, inventors of luxury and semi-luxury.
- The democratization of luxury objects (copies, fakes, plating, counterfeits, secondhand, fake luxury, semi luxury); traffickers (forgers, conmen, secondhand dealers, merchants).
- Categories of luxury: the notion of luxury goods across time, relativity of and fluctuations in the definition of luxury, levels of luxury (accessible, intermediate, prohibitive); case studies (jewellery, tapestry, clothing, watch-making, fine leather craft, car industry, wine, even services such as tourism or real estate).
- The art market (painting, sculpture, engraving) and commercial art (semi-luxury); luxury and the fine arts; a picture's trajectory from the studio to the museum.

II The urban and architectural dimension of the luxury market.

- Display, staging, promotion: the luxury market and architectural innovation.
- The luxury business in urban space (streets, districts...); points of sale or storage and typical urban and social sites (shops, workshops, fairs, bridges, markets, salesrooms, galleries, biennials, society life, artists' associations, show rooms, megastores...); interactions between professional, technical, and socio-psychological constraints (maker's labels, the image of a district).
- Promotion through the media, different publicity strategies (trade cards, shop signs, the 'Golden Triangle', advertising, specialist magazines, journals sponsored by gallery-owners, the internet...).

III The circulation and uses of luxury.

- Socio-professional and geographical networks of the luxury market, from places of production to places of consumption; vertical relations (merchants, producers, wholesalers, industrialists, financiers, retailers...), and horizontal relations (networks of professional collaboration, from the local to the global), etc.

-The interplay of size and territorial dynamism in the luxury market: which circuits for which goods (catchment areas)? The limits of the city, the region, the country; luxury goods, the dynamics of the local and global, etc.

-The perpetuation, democratization, depreciation, reinvention of luxury; which sources account for the growing market, variations in the notion of luxury and the circulation of goods in society ? (luxury in the countryside, popular luxury...); mechanisms for the circulation of luxury, the relationships between imitation / invention / distinction: the relations between the evolution of luxury and the evolution of society.

IV The intellectual economy of luxury

-Conceptions and socio-political uses of luxury: from the private to the public sphere, visible and intimate luxury (royal and bourgeois households), ostentation (coaches, coats of arms, clothing...).

-Multifaceted luxury in all its forms: munificence, extravagance, glory, and preciousness etc.

-The luxury of others: in travel writing, utopias.

-Luxury and its opponents: the reception and criticism of the development of luxury commerce; luxury - a cultural necessity or social plague? Is luxury good or bad? The luxury debate in the Enlightenment and its continuation into the 19th century.

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Proposals for papers should be sent to Alain Bonnet, Lecturer in the History of Art at the University of Nantes and to Natacha Coquery, Professor of History at the University of Lyon 2.

Closing date for proposals is 1 January 2012

Organisers: Laboratoire de Recherche Historique Rhône-Alpes

Scientific committee who will choose the papers

Marco BELFANTI, University of Brescia

Bruno BLONDÉ, University of Antwerp

Alain BONNET, University of Nantes

Stéphane CASTELLUCCIO, University of Paris IV

Adeline COLLANGE, Art Museum, Nantes

Natacha COQUERY, University of Lyon 2

Damien COULON, University of Strasbourg

Jean-Claude DAUMAS, Institut universitaire de France, University of Besançon

Pascal JULIEN, University of Toulouse

Yannick LEMARCHAND, University of Nantes

Yann LIGNEREUX, University of Nantes
Lesley MILLER, Victoria and Albert Museum
France NERLICH, University of Tours
Maria-Anne PRIVAT-SAVIGNY, Gadagne Museum, Lyon
Pierre VERNUS, University of Lyon 2
Patrick VERLEY, ex-University of Genève