

Introduction. Buildings and objects: the Rococo and after

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Buildings have always been in dialogue with objects, but modern historians have not always attended to their exchange. Art and architectural historians have been inclined to separate architecture from art and to downplay the significance of the so-called decorative or minor arts to their respective fields of inquiry. The papers published here participate in the recent rethinking of the disciplinary divide between architecture and crafted things. They do so by addressing the eighteenth century, a period in which the material and conceptual links between buildings and objects were more intuitively obvious than they are today.

Studies of the architect Johann Bernhard Fischer von Erlach's *Entwurff einer historischen Architektur* exemplify how scholarly slighting of the applied arts has informed our histories. Composed of five books and first issued in Vienna in 1721, Fischer von Erlach's publication presented a remarkably inclusive history of important buildings ranging from biblical times to Safavid Isfahan to eighteenth-century Vienna. The last of the five books was dedicated to vases. It opened with a reconstruction of the 'brazen sea' (a large metal basin) before Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem and concluded with Fischer von Erlach's own designs for vases. The last book thus followed a similar chronological order as its predecessors and contributed to the project's overall historical aims. This book, however, remains the least examined component of the *Entwurff*. The marshalling of vases as historical evidence in a publication explicitly dedicated to architecture assumes a relation between the two arts that is not immediately evident to modern understandings.

As Fischer von Erlach's inclusion of his own designs shows, vases were not only of historical interest but a vital area of practice. Indeed it has been claimed that the eighteenth century was seized by a veritable '*vasomanie*'.¹ On the other hand, some eighteenth-century artists more familiar today as creators of decorative objects, such as the rococo silversmith Juste-Aurèle Meissonnier, considered themselves architects and drew no strong boundary between making things and designing buildings. Most celebrated now for his marvelously inventive and technically sophisticated silver tureens and candlesticks, Meissonnier designed several buildings, though most remained on paper, and planned to publish a *Traité sur l'architecture universelle* (1740-50). Meissonnier, who was also a painter, described

¹ Werner Oechslin et al., *Die Vase*, Zurich: Kunstgewerbe Museum, 1982, 129; Heather Jane McCormick et al., *Vasemania: Neoclassical Form and Ornament in Europe. Selections from The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004.

himself as an *'architecte'* and his contemporaries considered him to be one.² Another renowned eighteenth-century metalsmith, Thomas Germain, was called upon to design the church of Saint Louis du Louvre. Located in the very center of Paris, it was built to Germain's plans around 1740. Earlier, Germain had prepared the designs for a church in Livorno.³ Such commissions suggest eighteenth-century practitioners and patrons saw continuities where art and architectural historians have tended to project distinction. Fischer von Erlach, Meissonnier, Germain and their admirers assumed an equivalence between the kinds of knowledge required for crafting objects and the making of buildings that subsequent separations of art from architecture and of the fine from the applied arts have obscured.

This blurring of the boundaries between architecture, art and objects was not unique to the eighteenth century. As scholars have shown, formal and conceptual movement across the scales and materials of sculpture, portable objects and buildings characterized Medieval and Renaissance art and architectural practice.⁴ It also informed theory. Modifying Vitruvius' origin story for the Corinthian order, Leon Battista Alberti posited a tall vase as its progenitor, a thematic that was perpetuated in the eighteenth century.⁵ Looking forward in time, an understanding of the shared materiality of buildings and crafted things, vases among them, undergirded Gottfried Semper's object-based theory of architecture in his *Der Stil* (1860-63), just as thinking across the separation between the high and decorative arts informed the work of modern architects like Le Corbusier.⁶

At the same time, the eighteenth century is commonly understood as the period in which the fine and applied arts were discursively distinguished from one another and an aesthetic hierarchy of art and craft was consolidated. Some of the tension between theory and practice, however, is captured in a comment made by Alexandre Brogniart, son of the architect Alexandre-Théodore Brogniart. Writing in 1814, Brogniart *fills* simultaneously recognized an emergent, distinctive field of design—what would later be termed the applied arts—while also arguing there was

² Peter Fuhring, *Juste-Aurèle Meissonnier: un génie du rococo, 1695-1750*, 2 vols., Turin: U. Allemandi, 1999, vol. 1, 141-48.

³ Jacques-François Blondel, *Architecture française, ou Recueil des plans, élévations, coupes et profils des églises, maisons royales, palais, hôtels, édifices les plus considérables de Paris*, 4 vols., Paris, 1752-56, vol. 3, 63-66.

⁴ Scott Redford, 'Portable Palaces: On the Circulation of Objects and Ideas about Architecture in Medieval Anatolia and Mesopotamia', *Medieval Encounters* 18: 4-5, 2012, 382-412; Eva Hoffman, 'Pathways of Portability: Islamic and Christian Interchange from the Tenth to the Twelfth Century', *Art History* 24: 1, March 2001, 17-15, esp. 33-41; Alina Payne, 'Materiality, Crafting, and Scale in Renaissance Architecture', *Oxford Art Journal* 32: 3, 2009, 365-86; Michael W. Cole, *Ambitious Form: Giambologna, Ammanati, and Danti in Florence*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2011.

⁵ Payne, 'Materiality', 368; Oechslin et al., *Die Vase*, 130-31.

⁶ Nancy J. Troy, *Modernism and the Decorative Arts in France: Art Nouveau to Le Corbusier*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991; Alina Payne, *From Ornament to Object: Genealogies of Architectural Modernism*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012. See also the review of Payne's book by Spyros Papapetros, 'Ornament and Object—Ornament as Object', *Journal of Art Historiography*, 7, December 2012.

neither a name for it nor for its practitioners. What we now commonly call the decorative arts were, in his view, the domain of the architect:

In addition to his numerous purely architectural works, [my father] made many others related to the art of giving furniture agreeable and practical forms and of composing ornaments to decorate furniture and monuments. This art, which does not yet have a name nor artists who specialize in it, is an immediate dependent of architecture both because of the qualities and studies it requires and the frequent occasions [supplied by architecture] for its application.⁷

The papers that follow probe the affinities between objects and architecture in the long eighteenth century through analyses of materiality, design and representational strategies that cut across the building/object divide. Michael Yonan examines the material interrelationships between humble souvenirs of the pilgrimage church of Die Wies in southern Bavaria (1745-54), and the magnificent architecture of the site they commemorate. Recasting Dominikus and Johann Baptist Zimmermann's Wieskirche into portable form, the souvenirs unsettle the distinction between the natural and artificial in ways akin to the rococo church interior itself. Turning his attention to later eighteenth-century France, Jean-François Bédard articulates how the shift from the king's bed to his throne as the locus of royal ceremonial fundamentally reshaped palace planning at the end of the ancien regime. Alexis Cohen's study of the outline drawing, a graphic convention widely adopted by artists and architects around 1800, problematizes the hierarchy between the beautiful and useful that accompanied the discursive separation of the fine from the applied arts. Arguing that the outline drawings mobilized by Jean-Charles Krafft and Thomas Hope united the aesthetic and the utilitarian, Cohen highlights the continuing conceptual and formal interrelationships between the crafted object and architecture. Notable here is the precedent provided by the ancient vase, a vessel that itself complicates the boundary between use and beauty. In the text cited by Cohen at the beginning of her article, Pierre d'Hancarville directly correlated the vase making of the ancients with their architecture. He thus made explicit in 1767 what has often remained implicit in modern art historical analyses: that objects and buildings are, and always were, inextricably linked.

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⁷ Alexandre-Théodore Brogniart, *Plans du palais de la Bourse et du cimetière Mont-Louis*, Paris, 1814, 11; Peter Fuhring, *Design into Art. Drawings for Architecture and Ornament: The Lodewijk Houthakker Collection*, 2 vols., London: P. Wilson, 1989, vol. 1: 21.

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