Art practice and art history in fin de siècle Alsace: the art journal *Das Kunstgewerbe in Elsass-Lothringen*

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A crucial moment in both the history of art theory and that of artistic production at the turn of the 19th to the 20th century is the concerted elaboration of an aesthetic doctrine based on analysis of the past on the one hand and on observation of Nature on the other, a doctrine that promoted the status of applied arts as equal to fine arts. In German-speaking countries, in particular, this evolution was accompanied by the emergence of a new type of artistic publication. In their content and appearance, these Kunstzeitschriften (art magazines) founded at the turn of the century were simultaneously a ‘testimony and factor of [their] time’, confronting contemporary artistic changes and participating in the collaborative definition of a modern style. While it is not certain that Jugend, the art journal published in Munich from 1896 – one of the most famous among these publications – was indeed the source for the name Jugendstil, it undoubtedly channeled a revolution in taste by setting out ‘to discuss and to illustrate [everything] of interest, everything that affects people’s minds’.

One of the driving ambitions of these magazines was a desire to share views on contemporary ‘artistic life’ (Kunstleben). They also championed a broad definition of art, such as the one given by Berlin’s art magazine *Pan* in its first volume in 1895: ‘an organic concept of art that encompasses the whole of artistic beauty and conceives only of a true artistic life in the deep coexistence of all arts neighbouring one another’, or illustrated by the subtitle of *The Studio*, a major voice in the Arts and Crafts movement, published in London from 1893: *An Illustrated

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2 *Jugend: Münchner illustrierte Wochenschrift für Kunst und Leben*, 1:1, 1896, 2: ‘Alles besprechen und illustrieren, was interessant ist, was die Geister bewegt’.

3 *Pan*, 1, May-June 1895, i: ‘im Sinne einer organischen Kunstausfassung, die das gesamte (sic) Bereich des künstlerisch Schönen umfasst und ein wirkliches Kunstleben nur im starken Nebeneinanderwirken aller Künste erbliekt’.

Magazine of Fine and Applied Arts. Art and trade journals formed a platform for a positive reassessment of applied arts or Kunstgewerbe, aiming to educate artists, dealers and the wider public, but also ultimately to solve an international artistic crisis, which the editors of these publications perceived to be imminent. In the first editorial to Dekorative Kunst (Decorative Art), created by art historian Julius Meier-Graefe and publisher Hugo Bruckmann in 1897 as an ‘Illustrierte Zeitschrift für angewandte Kunst’ (illustrated journal of applied arts) and merged with Die Kunst für alle (Art for Everyone) in 1899/1900, Siegfried Bing stated that in order to ‘open up new sources of life that would prevent the ultimate decline of our applied arts, blessed with such a glorious past’, one needed to realise ‘the great danger (…) there is in letting oneself fall into contemplative lethargy while facing the heritage of a past that quietly watched as one generation followed another, without leaving any trace of its own art’. Historicism was seen by artists as a burden weighing on their creativity, as they had to cater for the public’s taste, which was focused on the imitation of previous artistic movements. The title of Bing’s essay, ‘Wohin treiben wir?’ (Where are we drifting to?), looking towards the future of crafts, echoed the approach advocated by Kunstgewerbeblatt (Applied Arts Bulletin), which had begun in 1885 as a supplement to Zeitschrift für bildende Kunst (Journal of Visual Arts) and which was the official organ for thirteen Kunstgewerbevereine or associations for applied arts:

Even more so than works of architecture, sculpture and painting, the products of minor arts are apt to awaken a love and an interest for art; we are therefore entitled to consider them as the apostles, paving the way to the comprehension of monumental art and preparing the ground for the eye and the senses to be receptive to beauty.5

If, the argument proceeded, instead of surrounding their homes with objects imitating styles of the past, art patrons gradually learned to appreciate innovation and new shapes, they would also be more inclined towards modern fine arts. For this reason, Kunstgewerbeblatt – even though it was subtitled ‘Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Literatur der Kleinkunst’ (Monthly Journal of the History and Literature on Minor Arts) – mainly focused on contemporary and recent production.

4 Siegfried Bing, ‘Wohin treiben wir’, Dekorative Kunst, 1:1, October 1897, 1-3, 1, ‘unseren mit so glänzender Vergangenheit gesegneten gewerblichen Künsten neue Lebensquellen zu erschließen, die dem endgültigen Verfall vorbeugen konnten (...). [Zuerst mussten die Augen wieder sehen lernen und] die riesige Gefahr [offenbar werden], die in der beschaulichen Trägheit lag, mit der man auf dem Erbe der Vergangenheit schlummerte, die ruhig zusah, wie eine Generation der anderen folgte, ohne eine Spur ihrer Eigenart zu hinterlassen’.

The same could be said of *Kunst und Handwerk* (Art and Handicrafts), created by the Bayerischer Kunstgewerbeverein (Bavarian Association of Arts and Crafts) in 1897, or of *Das Kunstgewerbe: illustrierte Halbmonatsschau* (Applied Arts: a Biweekly Review, 1890-1895), which were similarly trade journals in a narrower sense.

In its inclusive, object-oriented approach, the art journal *Das Kunstgewerbe in Elsass-Lothringen* (Arts and Crafts in Alsace-Lorraine) (fig. 1) published in Strasbourg between 1900 and 19066 shared many common features with the publications presented above. The joint project of artist Anton Seder (1850-1916), director of the city’s Kunstgewerbeschule (School of Applied Arts), and art historian Franz Friedrich Leitschuh (1865-1924), professor at the Kaiser-Wilhelms-Universität and a teacher at the school, *Das Kunstgewerbe* illustrated and promoted a way of life inspired by the Jugendstil movement, albeit adapted to the emerging elements of a specific cultural identity in the Reichsland Elsass-Lothringen, the Imperial territory of Alsace-Lorraine, created in 1871 following the German Empire’s victory in the Franco-Prussian War. Like publication on arts and crafts of its kind, it can be defined as a medium at the crossroads between discourse and practice. However, what mainly distinguished *Das Kunstgewerbe* from its counterparts, apart from its being local in scope but international in its pedagogical ambition, was its clear intention, not to do away with the past, but rather to include art history in its editorial program, an approach that intuitively seems at odds with the objective of supporting the development of a style for the modern age. (Fig. 2)

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6 From now on referred to as *Das Kunstgewerbe*. 
In the introduction to the first issue, Leitschuh presented *Das Kunstgewerbe* as ‘an organ produced professionally, with the intention to represent the products of old and modern applied arts in word and image’. In this statement, the interaction between the notions of *Wort* and *Bild* generates questions on how a trade journal could become the framework for a dialogue between theoreticians and practitioners and what art historical discourse might result from this combination of aesthetic expectations and concrete commercial needs. Moreover, the juxtaposition of past and present, or even future artistic production, as announced by the adjective ‘modern’, shows that *Kunstgewerbe*’s main objective in looking back was to influence contemporary art discourse and practice. Finally, this essay will focus on the concepts of professional craftsmanship and expertise and show that the publication’s art historical approach provided tools for craftsmen in the Reichsland Elsass-Lothringen to position themselves against the backdrop of an artistic legacy.

**The art journal as a space for dialogue between scholars and makers**

The unique nature of *Das Kunstgewerbe* resided in its strong ties to the Strasbourg School of Applied Arts, by which it was funded. The journal’s creation was announced in the school report for the year 1900/1901, which stated that the teaching staff would contribute artworks and writings to a journal to be edited by Leitschuh and Seder. Formerly Staatliche Schule für Kunsthandwerker (State School for Craftsmen), from 1890 the school underwent a reform led by Auguste

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Schricker (1838-1912), the director of the Strasbourg Kunstgewerbemuseum (Museum of Applied Arts). Schricker’s major decision was to hire a new director. He chose Seder, a decorator and a painter who had built a strong reputation for his work at the Technische Schule in Winterthur, and was a versatile artist in Munich, the scene of a major Secession movement in the 1890s. He also collaborated with his brother, the architect Adolf Seder (1842-1881), at the beginning of his career. Moreover, in the Allgemeines Lexikon der bildenden Künstler, he is designated as a ‘specialised writer’ (Fachschriftsteller), on account of the numerous essays published throughout his career to establish the theoretical basis of his take on the Jugendstil aesthetics.

In 1894, Seder sent a request to the mayor of Strasbourg for the school to be renamed Kunstgewerbeschule, arguing that it would signal both a change of social status, attracting students from wealthier backgrounds, and of professional focus, in that the training provided would then not only be aimed at apprentices. In 1892, he had launched major reforms, alongside the relocation of the school to a new building, which was supervised by the city architect, Johann Karl Ott (1846-1917). The architecture of the new school building symbolised the version of Jugendstil promoted by Strasbourg and its functional purpose:

By introducing the workshop into the school, Seder made concrete in the institution’s pedagogy the intention to abolish the distance between art and crafts, between theory and practice, between artist and craftsman. The call for a merging of art and use made by the Art Nouveau movement, was enacted from the training stage.

The observation of Nature, enabled by the gardens and conservatories built on the school grounds, would help to develop a fully-rounded artistic perception in the students, while the organisation of teaching in workshops was based on the principle that a craftsman must be able to draw and plan his projects and fabricate the final product.

Leitschuh was hired in 1889 as Professor extraordinarius (not affiliated to a chair) in Medieval and Renaissance art at the university that had been founded in

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10 Anton Seder, 10 July 1894, Archives municipales de la ville de Strasbourg (AMVS), 5MW3.
Strasbourg in 1872, and began lecturing at the Kunstgewerbeschule on the evolution of styles throughout history at the turn of the century. His weekly courses were optional, however, and in a correspondence with the Reichsland’s authorities, he strongly advocated that they should become compulsory for advanced students, insisting on the importance of intellectual formation and claiming that practical courses alone were not sufficient to give future craftsmen the means to comprehend stylistic developments. His proposal was adopted in November 1899. From then on and until 1905, he was in charge of a more fully-fleshed ‘Kursus für Stillehre und Kunstgeschichte’ (Course on the Study of Style and on Art History), in which he drew bridges between the history of crafts and more traditional topics related to fine arts. In the curriculum for the year 1902/1903, for instance, a course was announced on ‘History of the stylistic Evolution of the Arts in Modern Times: The age of the Thirty Years War; Italian and French Baroque styles; Rococo and Louis XV, with particular focus on techniques in crafts’. Leitschuh’s lectures at the Kunstgewerbeschule and other public talks were collected and published in 1909 with the title Einführung in die Allgemeine Kunstgeschichte (Introduction to a General History of Art). This book was significant in building his profile as a populariser who engaged with matters of cultural politics. He also contributed to the catalogue Elsässische und Lothringische Kunstdenkmäler – Monuments d’art d’Alsace et de Lorraine (Art Monuments in Alsace-Lorraine), selecting the artworks and monuments that would build the fundamentals of the region’s artistic heritage.

In 1895, Leitschuh praised the work of the Kunstgewerbeschule in Kunstgewerbeblatt: Strasbourg boasted a glorious past in the field of arts and crafts, and it had given grounds to the foundation of a worthy museum that would ‘prove itself as the major source for the various currents feeding into the production of applied arts’. The museum’s success, however, had made the absence of a school that would complement its work all the more noticeable. In the municipal school, created in 1890, Leitschuh saw the institution that would bring Strasbourg and the Reichsland to the forefront of artistic modernity. He expressed the same, practical ambitions in his inaugural essay for Das Kunstgewerbe in 1900:

Above all, our journal strives for even closer contacts between the Strasbourg School of Applied Arts, with its excellent workshops, and the whole network of producers in Alsace-Lorraine; its aim is to become a source of stimulation for all the branches of industry for the production of artistic goods, and

14 AMVS, 5MW2.
16 Franz Friedrich Leitschuh, Einführung in die allgemeine Kunstgeschichte, Munich: Kösel, 1909.
further, to supply the workshops of the region with designs that will outlast even the dominant fashions.\textsuperscript{19}

This agenda was carried out in articles on topics that were common to publications on applied arts: state of the art industry, the evolution of techniques, art education reforms, and reviews of books (including art historical books), events and exhibitions. (Fig. 3)

With its rich illustrations, \textit{Das Kunstgewerbe} also offered visual stimulation to the practitioners, starting with the cover page designed by Seder himself, which echoed a motif on the façade of the school building and emphasised the pledged complementarity between pedagogy in words and in images. The journal contained a wealth of reproductions, drawings and photographs, mostly of objects produced in the various workshops at the school: ‘While these artworks that are brought to your attention are achievements from our students, they also form an image of our constant striving and of the earnest artistic principles of our school itself.’\textsuperscript{20} These principles were presented by Seder at the beginning of \textit{Vorlagen für das Kunstgewerbe}, a collection of models and samples designed for the Strasbourg School of Applied Arts, which he edited and published in 1901, allegedly after several visitors to the


school had praised its quality and wished for a visual record of its achievements. This book was destined to offer to the reader ‘on the one hand, a wealth of motifs from the most diverse branches of arts and crafts, and on the other hand (…) a clear image of a school established and led in a spirit of modernity, which sets itself the task, above all others, of thoroughly studying Nature’.

The display of the modernity in students’ and teachers’ contributions was alternated with reproductions of antiques, ‘masterpieces’ and buildings, that together formed a catalogue of the region’s Kunstdenkmäler (monuments). Old and new crafts collided within the pages, enabling comparisons and acknowledgment of a shared commitment to an art inspired by Nature, a point that was made all the more striking since the thematic clusters into which the images were arranged were not systematically related to the essays’ topics, and interacted with the texts in a creative way. The journal functioned as a printed platform, constructing an artistic repertoire for a new era, and in a reflexive process, simultaneously enabling its review and its analysis.

The dual nature of the illustration ran in parallel with the journal’s double approach to the subject of applied arts: alongside topical issues, it featured essays on art history, archaeology and heritage in almost equal proportions. The list of contributors included practitioners – Strasbourg architects Bodo Ebhardt (1865-1945) and Karl Statsmann (1862-1930), sculptor Waldemar Fenn (1877-1955), teachers Rudolf Trunk (technical drawing, decorative painting, perspective and geometry), Hugo Höpfnner (drawing and composition) and Georg Daubner (1865-1926), who also worked for the Strasbourg theatre – and scholars of art history or archaeology, such as Ernst Polaczek (1870-1939), Alfred Lichtwark (1852-1914), Robert Forrer (1866-1947), or Gustav Pazaurek (1865-1935). Their joint presence allowed two modes of thinking about the creative process to coexist: documenting and reflecting the evolution that led to the present situation and delivering opinion pieces that fed into a manifesto of the potency and modernity of crafts.

Scholarly contributions (not exclusively written, it must be noted, by trained academics) reflected this collusion of aesthetic and practical preoccupations: in ‘Die ersten Anfänge elsässischen Kunstgewerbes’ (The Beginnings of Crafts in Alsace), Forrer reported on the recent discovery in the region of artefacts that he described as:

practical objects made by a producer for whom creation was not simply about “a form in the service of a purpose”, but who, at the same time, expressed the aspiration to make the object appear particularly pleasing to the eye of the beholder through the addition of ornamental elements.


22 Robert Forrer, ‘Die ersten Anfänge Elsässischen Kunstgewerbes’, Das Kunstgewerbe in Elsass-Lothringen, 1, 1900-1901, 30-33, 30: ‘Gebrauchsobjecte, bei deren Schaffung der Hersteller es sich nicht bloß an der „zweckdienlichen Form” hatte genügen lassen, sondern
Polaczek, *Privatdozent* in art history and assistant to Georg Dehio (1850-1932), wrote an essay on glass painting, pointing out: ‘Even more so than in other branches of crafts, the style of glass painting is conditioned by technique, or more precisely, by the particular stage that technique has reached’.23 The following year, in his review of a book by Pazaurek on the same topic, Polaczek hoped for the development of a history of glass painting ‘which, in a sense, if considered from a broad perspective, could even become a history of human culture’.24 Writing the history of crafts seemed to invite and facilitate the broadening of the scope of analytical tools. It allowed the inclusion of technical or even socio-political implications – as suggested by Georg Wolfram (1858-1940), archivist at the Strasbourg Kaiserliche Landes- und Universitätsbibliothek (Imperial University Library), in his overview of the history of applied arts in Metz – in the analysis of artistic production. Wolfram stated in his introduction: ‘The history of art and crafts is generally too much seen as an evolution conditioned by itself, while it depends entirely for its ascension, as for its decline, on economic and political factors’.25 The journal thus proposed a version of art history written with the practitioners and their customers in mind, a version with which these practitioners themselves were invited to engage on paper.

**Art history paving the way to modernity**

In *Das Kunstgewerbe*, Leitschuh saw an opportunity to rise to the challenge of a time defined as a ‘period of Sturm und Drang, which will bring us nothing short of the style of the future’.26 He agreed with his contemporaries on the direction that the arts might take – asking, as had Bing in *Dekorative Kunst*, ‘Wohin treiben wir?’27 This was a time of transition and of taking stock, a goal that had been attempted, for instance, by painter and art critic Friedrich Pecht (1814-1903) in a series of articles entitled ‘Die deutsche Kunst an der Wende des Jahrhunderts’ (German Art at the Turn of the Century) and published in 1900 in *Die Kunst für alle*. Pecht wrote that, in reaction to a classical art movement, a naturalist school had emerged in the German states over the course of the century which, unlike classicism – with its ties to

gleichzeitig auch das Bestreben zum Ausdruck brachte, das Object durch Anfügung ornamentaler Zuthaten dem Auge des Beschauers besonders gefällig erscheinen zu lassen’.


27 Bing, ‘Wohin treiben wir?’, 173.
Ancient Rome and Greece, and the foreign influences they revealed – was a truly native art. German artists perfected the study of details and gestures in order to represent life in its most individual expression. He also noticed the increasing presence of art in everyday life, which manifested itself in the fast development of crafts and the pursuit by artists and prominent patrons alike of the promotion of art to be shared by all (‘Gemeingut’ or ‘common good’).

Art discourse was assigned the task of identifying what could constitute the fundaments of modernity. Historicism, seen as the imitation of a series of different historical styles in rapid succession (which Trunk described as a ‘spirit of tedium’), was deemed responsible for contemporary turmoil and the impoverishment of art. In 1895, in the first issue of PAN, Lichtwark had written: ‘School teachers that we are, we created a learned version of crafts. The craftsman learns to know all the historical styles, he “can do” Renaissance, Rococo and “Pigtail”; but he does not know how to respond to the demand for a living art.’ A departure from the teaching of the masters seemed to be in order, to allow for a ‘living’ art to thrive, and apparently rendered art discourse obsolete.

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28 Friedrich Pecht, ‘Die deutsche Kunst an der Wende des Jahrhunderts’, Die Kunst für alle, 8, 1900, 172. For all his welcoming the development of naturalism in art, however, it must be noted that Pecht’s definition of Nature was still conservative and did not extend to encompass the experiments of the Art Nouveau movement.


30 Alfred Lichtwark, ‘Zur Einführung’, PAN 1, 1895, 97-100, 98: ‘Als Schulmeister, die wir sind, haben wir ein gelehrtes Kunstgewerbe erzogen. Der Handwerker lernt alle historische Stile kennen, er “kann” Renaissance, Rococo und Zopf; wie es verlangt wird, dass es eine lebende Kunst gibt, weiß er nicht.’
Four years later, Hermann Obrist (1862-1927) even asked provocatively ‘Wozu denn über Kunst schreiben?’ (Why write about art?) in his essay of the same title:

Did it ever serve any purpose? Was not all art made by artists who painted, sculpted, composed, as they were driven to without preoccupying themselves to know whether it would suit people, whether people desired it or not? Isolated strong minds show new ways, other artists follow, the public is struggling to catch up, to understand, meanwhile yet another new thing comes along. The public hurries behind, panting in vain.31

However, while the proponents of the Jugendstil movement called for a departure from tradition, or even a radical stand against tradition, artists contributing to Das Kunstgewerbe in the first years of the new century, in this instance the sculptor Waldemar Fenn, also criticised the ‘overhasty, hurried chasing of the New and the even Newer (…) in fine and in applied arts’.32

The journal intended instead to offer itself, as Leitschuh put it, as ‘a benevolent counsellor and a prudent leader’,33 providing art historical analysis to help differentiate between what Fenn called ‘transient moods or fads’34 on the one hand, and style on the other: ‘The characteristic of a style lies not so much in the choice of the envisaged motif, but in its mode of treatment and design, its vital force lies in the richness of the forms taken by the stylistic development, and its lasting value, in the achievement of ideas.’35 Quoting physicist Adolf Zeising’s theory of the golden ratio as an example, Fenn identified Nature, the driving force that provided harmony and proportions, as the most stable and reliable constant in the history of how styles were formed:

For a style that is still in an early stage of its development, nothing but natural conditions are permissible, because adopted dogma that lacks sound justification, or claims based on a priori conclusions which are likewise pure

matters of opinion, would be the least appropriate here. Applying the aesthetics of classical art can only influence a burgeoning style (and, in parts, taste) with regard to its natural justification, not as a model or as a law, however pure.36

Ultimately then, the same conclusion was reached as had been reached by the promoters of Jugendstil, that Nature should be placed at the centre of artistic creation. However, this would not be achieved by doing away with the past of crafts, but by drawing lessons from it. This argument was defended by Seder in the foreword to Vorlagen für das Kunstgewerbe in 1901: ‘[It would] only be possible to initiate a new stylistic direction corresponding to our modern time by going back to the study of Nature and trying to adapt its ever fresh forms to our present needs.’37

Natural forms were at the core of Seder’s practice and of the new canon that was forming at the Kunstgewerbeschule, with the significant feature that Seder opposed the Secessionists’ claim to have achieved an art that was absolutely new, without reference to previous styles, an attitude that is also particularly evident in his introduction to the catalogue of patterns Die Pflanze in Kunst und Gewerbe (Plants in Art and Crafts): ‘we neither copy slavishly the Old, nor do we steer towards the utopia of a new style to be invented, we behold in modernity only the return on a colossal inherited capital, benefiting the present.’38 (Fig 5)

36 Fenn, ‘Zur ästhetischen Krisis’, 148: ‘Für einen noch im Anfangsstadium seiner Entwicklung stehenden Stil sind keine anderen als natürliche Bedingungen zulässig, da übernommene Dogmen, die jeder stichhaltigen Begründung entbehren, oder auf aprioristische Schlüsse gestützte Behauptungen, die ebenfalls reine Anschauungssache sind, hier am allerwenigsten angebracht wären. Die angewandte Ästhetik der klassischen Kunst kann einen zu bildenden Stil (und teilweise Geschmack) nur in Hinsicht auf ihre natürliche Begründung, nicht jedoch rein vorbildlich oder gesetzlich beeinflussen.’
A parallel could here be drawn with Franco-Swiss graphic artist Eugène Grasset (1845-1917), who wrote in the introduction to the collection *La Plante et ses applications ornementales* (Plants and their Ornamental Applications) of 1899: ‘nothing can be based on nothing and whoever wants to work soundly, must master a method based both on reasoning and on ancient experience of past eras.’ Grasset also recommended, however, that the contemporary craftsmen should try to set themselves back into the state of ‘ignorance archéologique’ (archaeological ignorance) in which past artworks were originally produced. On the contrary, an awareness of the past was presented in *Das Kunstgewerbe* as being indispensable, and the journal clearly saw itself as the one medium that would enable a balanced approach to the creative process, according to Leitschuh:

What German crafts need today is an organ that points on every occasion to the natural development of crafts, and does not favour only those talents that emancipate themselves from all historical convention, but that also aims for an acknowledgment, a timely and purposeful revival of the best from times past, in full knowledge of the fact that this material will always be indispensable to our crafts, technically and aesthetically.

**Writing the legacy of a ‘Strasbourg School’ of applied arts**

The collective formulation of an aesthetics of the Jugendstil needs to be considered in the context of the crystallisation of national consciousness around a shared cultural identity. Historicism was not the only foil against which a new style was conceived. The taste for foreign patterns, particularly English ones, was heavily criticised. In spite of PAN’s international influences, Lichtwark had written that the future evolution of German art should be connected to its surroundings: it could only thrive ‘when it finds a home in the capital cities of the old tribes’.

Even more explicit was the opening statement by Alexander Koch in the first issue of *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration* (German Art and Decoration) in 1897: ‘the idiom of a native,
individually German artistic language threatens to be lost to us!”42 It is no surprise to find these national undertones in Das Kunstgewerbe, since the school itself, like the Kaiser-Wilhelms-Universität in Strasbourg, was supposed to act as a flagship for German culture in the Reichsland: ‘Art must grow out of the needs of a people and embody all of its thoughts and feelings, and voice them eloquently. (…) It is also completely natural that all the objects used by us, which surround us every day, all the decorative forms with which we equip our rooms, must represent our own character’43.

Over the six issues of the journal, however, its contributors refined the definition of this ‘own character’, and attempted to present the Reichsland, and Strasbourg in particular, as a cultural centre that played a major part in the definition of artistic modernity, like Munich, Berlin or Darmstadt: ‘Our local crafts must not be led by a blind craving for imitation, (…) even if it was the “modern style”, but by the genuine ambition to provide proof that our crafts are no artificially-grown plant, but a plant that today is still rooted in its ground, as in older times’.44 Firmly rooted both in a genius loci and in a long tradition of crafts, the Strasbourg School of Applied Arts would follow the principles set out by the journal, based on Seder’s statement in 1897: ‘first, by applying what we have learned from the time before us, then, by proclaiming in the language of our time what we have nurtured in this noble school.’45

From this perspective, an article by Leitschuh following the trace of Dürer in Alsace provides an example of how this intention was translated into the journal. Archival evidence was used to establish Dürer’s presence in the region, and to demonstrate the impact that this experience had on his practice. Influenced by Martin Schongauer, Dürer in turn became a powerful inspiration, (‘the genuine teacher and leader’) for artists and craftsmen in Alsace, starting with Hans Baldung Grien and Wendel Dietterlin.46 This 16th-century painter and printmaker himself was also the subject of several articles which, like the ones on Dürer, presented

45 Seder, ‘Einleitung’: ‘erstens indem wir anwenden, was wir von der Vorzeit gelernt, und zweitens, indem wir in der Sprache unserer Zeit verkünden, was wir in jener edlen Schule in uns aufgenommen haben’.
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themselves as complements to recent scholarship on these artists, offering and building up a regional focus. Dietterlin was credited with a double legacy, not only through the very existence of his art, but also as ‘the first representative of the thoroughly modern idea to publish a catalogue of forms that would have a rich effect on several branches of crafts’. Following the thread from each article to the next, one can observe the formation of a genealogy of craft: Seder evoked Dietterlin, along with Schongauer and Matthias Grünewald, in what he interpreted as an artistic trinity that had provided models for a ‘second German Renaissance’, which had taken place in Munich in the 1860s. Not only was Alsace reinstated in the historiography of applied arts in German territories, its artists had produced works ‘in an independent artistic spirit’, according to Leitschuh. (Fig. 6)

The engagement of Das Kunstgewerbe with contemporary artistic production was therefore accompanied, and largely conditioned, by a sense of continuity that ran throughout the journal. Alluded to in the art historical essays quoted above, this continuum was explicitly expressed in Leitschuh’s substantial article ‘Eine moderne Kunstgewerbeschule’ (A Modern School of Applied Arts), in which he placed the recent achievements of the Strasbourg school under Seder’s directorship in a historical context, tracing back their principles to Dürer’s or Jan Brughel’s studies of Nature. It was ensured that the students of the Kunstgewerbeschule were constantly aware that they were following in the footsteps of worthy predecessors: ‘no modern

47 E. Hoffmann, ‘Wendel Dietterlin und seine Nachfolger’, Das Kunstgewerbe in Elsass-Lothringen, 1, 1900-1901, 4-8; 66-74, 8: ‘der erste Vertreter der durchaus modernen Idee, einen Formenschatz zu veröffentlichen, der für verschiedene Kunstgewerbe eine ergiebige Ausbeute bieten sollte’.

48 See Anton Seder, ‘Wendel Dietterlin’, Das Kunstgewerbe in Elsass-Lothringen, 1, 1900-1901, 53-6, 56.

school of applied arts can do without inspirational material from the old masters: it can barely cope without their forms, but not at all without the lessons they taught.\textsuperscript{50} Through reminders of this legacy, the self-affirmation of the craftsman was made possible; one that could take pride in being, not an imitator, but a successor, in a long line of masters. From these considerations emerged the portrait of the ideal artists trained at the school:

Masters who are able, on the basis of thorough study of the achievements of the previous centuries and a well-used knowledge of Nature, to bring about really beautiful innovations with their very own heartfelt characteristics and refined depth of thought. The duty of our artists is to build further on these foundations.\textsuperscript{51}

Seder himself embodied this reflexive attitude to the past, and the growing perception and self-perception of the craftsman as an artist. He had developed his artistic sensibility in his training as a theatre decorator,\textsuperscript{52} and wrote a history of theatrical and set designs for Das Kunstgewerbe, from Ancient Greece onwards, via an evocation of Passion plays and mysteries, where aesthetic and socio-cultural analysis converged in a reminder that the production of theatre sets used to be an artistic form in its own right. Seder deplored the recent decline of this art form,\textsuperscript{53} all the more so as it could be a powerful component in a mission of artistic education carried out by the Kunstgewerbeschule, among other institutions: ‘a stage that is artistically set with regard to its decorations, its historically faithful costumes and objects [is] a deeply influential factor, not to be underestimated in people’s artistic education.’\textsuperscript{54} It is interesting to note that this article was followed by a piece by theatre decorator Georg Daubner entitled ‘Über Bühnenmalerei’ (On Stage Painting). Seder’s historiography of theatre decoration opened onto Daubner’s self-affirming text: far from his form of crafts being a mere detail, he argued that it actually took a fully rounded artist to bring a play or an opera to its full effect, calling on the Jugendstil ideal of a Gesamtkunstwerk, in a new canon that would

\textsuperscript{50} Leitschuh, ‘Eine moderne Kunstgewerbeschule’, Das Kunstgewerbe in Elsass-Lothringen, 1, 1900-1901, 16-20; 46-8; 88-94; 186-89, 18: ‘keine moderne Kunstgewerbeschule kann das Anregungsmaterial der alten Meister entbehren – schwerlich ihre Formen, auf keinen Fall aber die Lehren, die sie geben.’


\textsuperscript{52} See Friedrich Pecht, Geschichte der Münchener Kunst im neunzehnten Jahrhundert, Munich: Verlagsanstalt für Kunst und Wissenschaft vormals Friedrich Bruckmann, 1888, 447.

\textsuperscript{53} Anton Seder, ‘Ueber Bühnenausstattung’, Das Kunstgewerbe in Elsass-Lothringen, 2, 1901-1902, 113-20, 118.

abolish the boundaries between fine and applied arts. For this to be made possible, claimed Das Kunstgewerbe, the reform of artistic training needed to go hand in hand with the reformulation of an inclusive art historical discourse.

Conclusion

For all its ambitions to be on a par with similar publications showcasing the artistic Secessions in Munich or Berlin, the art journal Das Kunstgewerbe in Elsass-Lothringen had never really gone beyond the boundaries of the school in its circulation and was discontinued after six years. The end of this experiment seems to echo the fall from grace of School director Seder, and the deterioration of the relationship with Leitschuh. The two men apparently fell out because of financial tensions, which reached a climax when Leitschuh claimed compensation for damaged demonstration equipment and proposed to sell the rest of his art history slides to the school. Both requests were rejected by Seder. This apparently trivial anecdote reveals, crucially, that the innovative teaching of art history in a Kunstgewerbeschule had been dependent on the lecturer providing his own material. Reports show that Seder came to speak of Leitschuh’s art history classes in increasingly derogatory terms and ended up deeming them ‘accessory’ in 1903. The art historian was replaced by an instructor in architectural drawing, Alfred Erdmann. From 1905-1906, financial difficulties led to the Seder system being questioned by the municipality. There were talks of reforming the school to tone down the Jugendstil approach. In the meantime, Das Kunstgewerbe was discontinued, and in his Étude sur le mouvement d’art décoratif en Allemagne (Study of the Applied Arts Movement in Germany) in 1912, Charles-Édouard Jeanneret aka Le Corbusier ignored Strasbourg’s Kunstgewerbeschule. Although Polaczek reaffirmed the kulturpolitische significance of the school in his memoirs, written after Seder’s death, he pointed out that most of its students had later pursued their training in Munich or Paris. Polaczek seemed to think that no artistic identity, no Strasbourg school (in the sense given to ‘École de Nancy’), had actually crystallised around it. It had been a step in the evolution of the arts and crafts in the early twentieth century, yet, as he put it, ‘motifs of Alsatian landscapes simply did not suffice’. Das Kunstgewerbe remains as a testimony of an attempt at the collective elaboration of a modern aesthetics suited to the future of the Reichsland, while based on observation and analysis of its past.

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56 Charles-Édouard Jeanneret, Étude sur le mouvement décoratif en Allemagne, La Chaux-de-Fonds: Haefeli, 1912.
57 Ernst Polaczek, Straßburg, Leipzig; Seeman, 1926, 214: ‘elsässische Landschaftsmotive reichen dazu nicht aus’.
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