

Art Nouveau and National Romanticism

1890-1910 as a period of enormous artistic diversity and design creativity. **Art Nouveau** as the 1890s anti-historicist style of a youthful generation in France, Belgium; known as **Jugendstil** (literally, “youth(ful) style”) in Germany, **Secession** in Austria, **Style Liberte** in Italy. **National Romanticism**, 1880-1920: A loosely defined era known for the creation and celebration of national character in architecture. General trend: the later industrial development of Scandinavia, Germany, and Russia prompts these lands and their neighbors (Poland, the Baltic states, and many Central European territories under Hapsburg Empire) to tap their own roots in an architectural search to express ideas of a modern national culture. Examples from painting: Wilhelm Bernatzik, “Entrance to Paradise,” Mistelbach bei Wien (Vienna), 1906; Wassily Kandinsky, “The Old Village,” 1903: both suggest idealized landscapes of either future promise or lost wholeness and plenitude that need, somehow, to be regained.

France and Belgium: Immediate roots and Inspirations: In France: important influence from the French architect Eugene Emmanuel Viollet-Le-Duc (1814-1879), whose theories particularly in the book **Discourses on Architecture** (*Entretiens sur l'architecture*, 1863-72) promote iron as a material for a contemporary structural rationalism. Ornamentation, Viollet-Le-Duc argued with illustrations in the **Discourses**, was always related to decoration of construction, but it should not obscure construction. This, coupled with a post-Napoleonic French self-assertion in the 1880s, helps produce startling new, forward-looking works of engineering such as: Gustav Eiffel, **Eiffel Tower**; and C.L. Dutert and Victor Contamin, **Galleries des Machines**, both for Paris Universal Exposition of 1889. Eiffel tower as 300-meter centerpiece of exhibition commemorating 100 years of French Revolution. Symbolic and aesthetic importance of a “new art” based on engineering and iron structure, built during French Third Republic as a symbol of post-Napoleonic, new French republican society that is turning its back on the past decades of Napoleon III’s dictatorial rule from 1850-1870 (the decades when Haussmann modernized Paris w/boulevards).

The Art Nouveau becomes established as a breakaway new style: Belgian Victor Horta, **Tassel House**, Brussels, Belgium, 1893, exposes decorative iron structure based on plant stalks, and integrates traditional, axial plan with fresh modern spatial, structural, and decorative approach. Also blends the crafts and trades of metal-work, decorative painting, furniture, and interior finishing under the architect’s guiding hand (‘Gesamtkunstwerk’ design: the building as a “total work of art”). In an interesting imperialist twist, the house’s expensive materials and exotic woods all come from the Belgian Congo territory that was being colonized by the Belgians in the late 19th century. Horta, **Maison du Peuple** (Belgian Socialist Party Headquarters), Brussels, 1899, which also applies lessons of Viollet-Le-Duc by revealing the building’s iron structure; In this building the Belgian art nouveau proclaims an identity with the left-wing socialist movement, telegraphing its presence on a prominent city block as a new art for a new, multi-purpose political party headquarters, educational center, and social club in an optimistic new world where workers actually have rights and franchise (the right to vote). Henry van de Velde, Interior of the Paris shop **La Maison Moderne**, designed for Julius Meier Graefe, 1898. The house of the ‘Art Nouveau [of Sigfried] Bing’, Paris World’s Exhibition, 1900.

Scotland: Other major sources of Art Nouveau: Charles Rennie Mackintosh (w/ Margaret McDonald), **Hill House**, Helensburgh, Scotland, 1903-04. Clean stucco exteriors and exterior massing recapitulate forms and elements from Mackintosh’s studies of native Scottish vernacular house traditions, but combines them in inventive, faux-accidental ways. Interior reveals mastery of materials and craft techniques, put in the service of designing every element of the house – furniture, silverware and domestic implements, fireplaces, lighting, etc. This “total work of art” approach to architecture and interior design is known by the term originally used by Richard Wagner for his operas: the *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Mackintosh’s clean lines, white surfaces, and abstracted natural motifs prove hugely influential in Continental Europe, where Viennese architects like Joseph Maria Olbrich, Josef Hoffman, and others adapt it in their own ways (c.f. Olbrich’s design for the Ladies’ Sitting Room at the **Villa Friedman** in Vienna, circa 1898)

Like the Arts and Crafts movement and the Art Nouveau, National Romanticism draws inspiration from nature. It adds consideration for the particular natural features found in the local landscape. Folk culture and folk architecture are further major sources of inspiration in national romanticism, along with use of local building materials, and the reworking and adaptation of historical forms (such as classicism). Modern national identity becomes a project of weaving together folk tales, mythology, history, and common roots; this emphasis on commonality underplays and smooths over difference, helping forge consensus in support of the modern nation state. Examples: Eliel Saarinen, house and workshop for firm of Gesellius, Lindgren, and Saarinen, called **Villa Hvitträsk**, near Helsinki, 1901-03. Folk materials that range from local stone

to wood construction (boards, beams, and logs); the organic tie to the landscape, evocative, dramatic siting. Heinrich Tessenow, **"Dwelling for the Simple Life,"** Germany, 1905. CFA Voysey, "Perrycroft," Great Britain, 1893. Henry Hobson Richardson, **Ames Gate Lodge** (1879-81) and **Ames Memorial Library** (1877-79), North Easton, MA: Richardson's Beaux Arts training is put to excellent use in the U.S.A., allowing for his creation of institutional buildings of tremendous force and power, rooted in simple, oversized masses, rough-cut stone and structural polychromy, lending a sort of "geological inevitability" to these neo-Romanesque buildings. Richardson's huge output of work in spite of his death at age 47 helps forge an American monumental architectural vocabulary that was much-revered and reproduced across the U.S. Saarinen, Gesellius, and Lindgren, **Finnish Exhibition Pavilion**, Paris World's Exhibition of 1900. Explicit use of church architecture helps to "sacralize" (make sacred) the crafts, art, and products of Finnish culture. As historian Lawrence Levine notes, late nineteenth-century culture is converted into "**Culture**," something "spiritual...inviolable, exclusive, and eternal," and something to be set aside, revered and protected. Nineteenth-century critic and poet Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy* (1869), promotes Culture as a means of individual improvement as well as a way to reform societies. Architects as experts at interpreting and manifesting affirmative culture. Link between national myth and broader architectural traditions: Erik Gunnar Asplundh, **Forest Chapel at Woodland Cemetery**, Stockholm, Sweden, 1918-1920. In the U.S., Louis Sullivan, **National Farmers' Bank**, Owatonna, MN, 1906-08.

Austria: Similar efflorescence of applied arts in the Vienna "Secession," which is a breakaway group consisting of the painter Gustav Klimt, the architect Joseph Maria Olbrich, and others in the 1890s. Otto Wagner, Olbrich's teacher and Architecture Department Head at the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts, supports Secession as well, and in many respects pioneers its look through his campaigns for modern architecture. His textbook, **Modern Architecture**, of 1894, calls for an architecture that "responds to the conditions of modern life" (he champions rapid movement, traffic, infrastructure, for example). Otto Wagner, **Church am Steinhof**, Vienna, 1902. Illustrates tendency for Viennese Secession to follow more square, orthogonal "Jugendstil" (youth style) geometric patterning than the French or Belgians' more flowing, curvaceous art nouveau forms. Angels, wreaths, maidens – all ornament the bolted, paneled construction in which construction is revealed to serve decorative purposes. Interior stained glass and paintings by Koloman Moser and decorations by Josef Hoffmann's Vienna Workshops (Wiener Werkstätten) maintain the stylized, forward-looking aesthetic that turns away from classical, historical narrative painting and historic objects commonly produced at established academies. Wagner's **Post Office Savings Bank**, 1904, near the Vienna Ringstrasse, fulfills Wagner's maxim: "Let the bolts and rivets be the triglyphs and metopes of a new modern architecture." Decorative bolts on façade, glass blocks in banking hall floor, inlaid linoleum, explicit use of exposed metal structure as a generator of form. Joseph Maria Olbrich, Wagner's best-known student: designs **Secession Building**, Vienna, 1897-99, with Gustav Klimt assisting. Note difference between Beaux Arts-influenced early designs and final design. Exploding ball of foliage evokes nature, a "sacred spring" (*vers sacrum*, also the name of the Vienna Secession's journal), and freedom from stylistic conformity. Entry inscription: "To each time its Art, and to Art its freedom." Open plan is radical, anti-academic, flexible, and permits multiple uses.

Spain. Antonio Gaudí as a Catalan regional exponent of the Art Nouveau sensibility. **Sagrada Família Church**, 1893++, Barcelona, capital of Spanish state of Catalunya (still under construction). Gothic sensibility merged with naturalism and fervent regional identity and spiritualism.