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**FROM ACADEMIA TO CULTURAL TOURISM: NEW APPROACHES TO THE
HISTORIOGRAPHY OF ART NOUVEAU**

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When I was first asked to chair this session on the historiography of art nouveau it did cross my mind that trying to condense anywhere between fifty and a hundred years' of academic research, the development and delivery of groundbreaking national and international exhibitions, together with the more recent impact of cultural and heritage tourism on the subject would be quite a difficult thing to deliver in just over thirty minutes!

My concerns over the limited time available to me in this introduction then got me thinking about the importance of time and place in an historical sense. After all, much of what we know and understand today about art nouveau has its origins in the recent past.

Time spent by the earliest academics and scholars researching the subject has inevitably made life easier for those of us who have followed on, including me. We have benefited and continue to benefit from their groundbreaking research that more often than not allows us, today's academics, to pursue newer, more in depth analysis of art nouveau – its origins, artistic and cultural impact and importantly its lasting legacy.

And then I started to think about the significance of this particular international congress and how the time was perhaps now right for this to happen and how Barcelona was probably the most appropriate city to host such an event.

But would we have all gathered here ten years ago, discussing the very same things? My thoughts are – most definitely yes, after all it's just a decade ago, but what about twenty years ago? Once again, I am confident my colleagues here in Barcelona could

have organised something quite substantial but perhaps without quite the level of knowledge and understanding of the subject that the past two decades has delivered.

And would we have gathered here forty, fifty or even sixty years ago? Then in this instance I am sure the answer would have been no; but that is not to say that a small group of focussed individuals could not have put together an interesting and informative programme. But would it have attracted the same international profile that these events have today? Once again, I suspect not.

As I will explain shortly, much of the leading research on art nouveau carried out in the immediate post war years of the late 1940s, 1950s and into the early 1960s was showcased with publications and exhibitions in cities such as London and New York rather than in the cultural destinations responsible for creating the style in the first place - such as Barcelona, Brussels, Vienna, Nancy or even Glasgow.

And of course one other thing to bear in mind is that these early post war researchers were working at a time when the heyday of art nouveau was still within living memory. The likes of Victor Horta, René Lalique and Hector Guimard lived into the 1940s whilst further contemporaries such as Josef Hoffmann, Henry Van de Velde and Josep Puig i Cadafalch outlasted them all and were still enjoying their retirement into the 1950s so there was always a chance that these earliest academics had the opportunity to benefit from either direct or indirect contact with the very artists, designers and architects they were setting out to research.

So rather than looking at contemporary accounts of art nouveau, either side of 1900, I thought it more relevant to consider as a starting point those academics whose early ground-breaking research has proved the catalyst for much of what is being discussed at this congress this week.

Perhaps the most obvious starting point would be the research and associated publications linked to Nikolas Pevsner, the German-born British art and architectural historian.

Pevsner's book *Pioneers of the Modern Movement: William Morris to Walter Gropius*, first published in 1936 is frequently cited as one of the very first titles to address the birth of Modernism and has long been recognised as an important text for students. It

was one of the first publications to set aside a dedicated chapter purely on art nouveau but more importantly Pevsner contextualised its artistic merits. He explained its emergence, in part from the arts and crafts tradition of the late 19th century, praised its important but short-lived period of international recognition and then its gradual dissipation with the arrival of new modernist approaches in the years immediately after the First World War.

Although the book proved commercially popular, it did not as Pevsner had perhaps hoped, open an immediate floodgate of new research in the field although much of this ‘academic inertia’ can be put down to the start of the Second World War just three years later.

But there was a slow and steady increase in related research in the late 1940s, early 1950s and writing in the forward to the third edition of his book in 1960 (proving if nothing else that there was a commercial market in this type of academic publication), Pevsner stated:

“It is gratifying to see that a subject which, when I first tackled it, in 1936, was shunned by serious scholars has now become the happy hunting ground for American and German and indeed some English students busy on theses, dissertations of otherwise”

Of these so-called ‘serious scholars’ the most significant was probably the Norwegian born Stephan Tschudi-Madsen who I had the good fortune of meeting on a couple of occasions in his capacity as [Director-General](#) of Norway’s [Directorate for Cultural Heritage](#).

Tschudi-Madsen had been a student of Pevsner’s in London and his PhD thesis, published in 1956, *Sources of Art Nouveau* is without doubt the most influential study from the period and a resource (published in many editions and in multiple languages) that continues to be cited almost sixty years later.

Illustrated throughout, its bibliography and early exhibitions listing proved invaluable for those scholars and academics who then took on the subject from the 1960s onwards. Like Pevsner writing in the preface to an updated version of his own book in 1974, Tschudi-Madsen wrote:

“It is twenty years since this book (Sources of Art Nouveau) was first written and a new edition would have meant rewriting the book. Research in the field has been so rich that it would actually have been a totally new book.”

And having already researched and written a follow up title in 1967 simply called *Art Nouveau*, Tschudi-Madsen went on to say:

“I feel better to leave Sources of Art Nouveau as a document of its time”.

The 1950s, early 1960s are sometimes wrongly labelled as being unexceptional in terms of the historiography of art nouveau but in fact nothing could be further from the truth.

In 1952, an exhibition entitled *Um 1900 Art Nouveau und Jugendstil* opening at the Kunstgewerbemuseum in Zurich, followed shortly after by a similar exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London which then went on tour to the Royal Museum of Art and History in Brussels. Both exhibitions, like Tschudi-Madsen’s research, had chosen to examine Art Nouveau as a pan-European response and at least in Brussels the city’s architecture and streetscape would have provided a complimentary contextualisation of the exhibition beyond the gallery’s limited walls.

Meanwhile there were a small but growing number of similar exhibitions whose focus was on the work of an individual artist or designer or a specific national response such as an exhibition on the School of Nancy held in Nancy in 1947 and an exhibition at the Stedelijk museum in Amsterdam on Dutch art nouveau.

As Pevsner stated in his later book, this period also saw a growing interest in the subject from both American academics and museums.

1957 saw the first international exhibition on the work of Gaudi held at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Three years later the same venue hosted an exhibition entitled *Art Nouveau: Art and Design at the Turn of the Century*. This saw over three hundred exhibits brought together from nearly fifty public institutions and over thirty private collectors for an exhibition that then went onto tour to Pittsburgh, Los Angeles and Baltimore.

The exhibition was curated by the German émigré Peter Selz, the Museum of Modern Art’s curator of paintings and sculpture. Pevsner would have viewed Selz as one of the new generation of ‘serious scholars’ following in his own footsteps and Selz’s

accompanying catalogue for the show, almost two hundred pages long, and extensively illustrated, was the first such book of its type to grace the shelves of some of America's leading art galleries and museums.

Although there was a substantial presence from American institutions and private collectors in this later the Museum of Modern Art show the bulk of the exhibits were, understandably perhaps, sourced from European galleries (with over thirty Europe collections represented). Whether there was ever any intention to take the exhibition to Europe I do not know but this would seem to have a missed opportunity.

What is particularly ironic is that the Glasgow style representation in this New York exhibition, or more particularly the works of Charles Rennie Mackintosh and his wife Margaret Macdonald, relied on loans from just two Glasgow institutions - Glasgow School of Art and Glasgow University and at a time when neither of these two organisations or in fact any public gallery or museum in Glasgow had chosen to celebrate Mackintosh's talent over the preceding two decades years.

Back in 1933 Glasgow had staged a memorial exhibition to Mackintosh in the city's McLellan Galleries, prompted not so much by Mackintosh's own death (that had been five years' earlier) but by the death of his wife Margaret Macdonald who died in January 1933 but this exhibition had been very much a low key event pulled together by friends, family and colleague.

Meanwhile Pevsner's book *Pioneers of the Modern Movement* had failed to generate any real subsequent interest in Mackintosh life and work until after the Second World War when Thomas Howarth's PhD research *Charles Rennie Mackintosh and the Modern Movement*, found support and was subsequently published in 1952. Linked, in part, to the book launch, a small Mackintosh exhibition was staged in Edinburgh some 80km away from Glasgow where almost all of Mackintosh's work was created and where most of it remained. It was surely a missed opportunity for Glasgow?

A quarter of a century later in 1968 a much larger exhibition was staged to celebrate the centenary of Mackintosh's birth in 1868. On this occasion the exhibition was curated by a historian from Glasgow, from Glasgow University and of the three hundred and fifty exhibits well over half came from same two organisations that eight years earlier had

helped represent Mackintosh and Glasgow in New York. Yet even now this substantial exhibition failed to showcase in the most obvious of places i.e. Glasgow. Instead it showed once again in the Scottish capital of Edinburgh before travelling to the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, and such was the perceived interest in the subject that a reduced version of the show then travelled to Zurich and Darmstadt and Vienna – the first time that so many Mackintosh works had left Scotland.

So why did Glasgow miss out on hosting at least this larger centenary exhibition?

The perception would appear to have been that Glasgow simply was not ready for Mackintosh. It certainly had a suitable venue for an exhibition on this scale in the city's municipal gallery at Kelvingrove, but for the ordinary man and women in the streets of 1960s Glasgow Mackintosh remained an unknown quantity.

As the writer Alan Crawford remarked more recently in 1996:

“In 1960s Glasgow, Mackintosh’s buildings were at risk in the ever changing post industrial landscape with large swathes of the city being demolished and rebuilt, serviced by the arrival of a new motorway that in itself tore at the very heart of what had been a once proud Victorian City”

More importantly whilst the city was able to call upon a small but vocal group of enthusiasts eager to make public the issue of Mackintosh’s architectural legacy being at risk, there were not enough influential people to provide immediate solutions within his native city. But by showcasing Mackintosh’s work elsewhere in Scotland, then London and importantly across Europe the consensus was that this external profiling would be better for the Mackintosh cause in the long run.

And I want to use Glasgow as a good example of how changing attitudes within a wider social and political context have been critical in establishing the status of art nouveau on an international platform. And how even the very best academic research on its own can only do some much in widening the appeal of the subject and by default how complex the historiography of art nouveau really is.

Had Glasgow fully grasped or perhaps better embraced the significance of Mackintosh and his late 19th century contemporaries back in the 1960s would our current

appreciation of Mackintosh and his contribution to the wider art nouveau movement be any different today?

I suspect not, although despite Mackintosh's global profile, there is still some fairly fundamental research being carried out on as we speak.

At the University of Glasgow, a project entitled, *Mackintosh Architecture: Context, Making and Meaning* aims to list, on-line, all of Mackintosh's surviving architectural drawings and related documents, something that has not been done before.

Now for someone who's recognised primarily as an influential architect and designer, the lack of an existing catalogue raisonné (even in printed form) could be seen as an embarrassing omission. But once again, if Mackintosh had been fully appreciated twenty or thirty years earlier than he actually was, then there is every possibility that this perhaps obvious strand of research could have already been delivered.

But I know that Glasgow is not alone in coming late to recognising its cultural heritage. After all, it could be argued that it was only after winning the accolade of European City of Culture in 1990 did Glasgow finally recognize the true value of its cultural legacy, and particularly its built architectural heritage.

In many respects the past quarter of a century has seen Glasgow trying to make up for lost time so much so that the promotion and marketing of Glasgow is now inextricably linked to the continued rise in the popularity of Mackintosh as a cultural icon.

Here too in Barcelona, city-wide recognition of its built 'modernista' heritage was for many people a long time coming. It's fairly common knowledge that hosting the Olympics here in 1992 had a massive impact on the city's tourism profile and with it its cultural legacy but as it happens, work on restoring one of its iconic landmarks, La Pedrera had been approved prior to Barcelona being chosen for the Olympics anyway. And whilst the opening of La Pedrera would always have been a significant contribution to the story of Gaudi and Modernism in Barcelona, the fact that it was able to 'piggy-back' on the subsequent popularity of the city, post-Olympics, could not have been better timed. How many subsequent visitors to Barcelona's cultural attractions over the past twenty years were first introduced to the city through their love of sport?

And whilst those individuals involved in La Pedrera's highly successful refurbishment would have been hoping for a positive response from academics and tourists alike, I am sure that they could only have imagined that one of the biggest problems would have been trying to satisfy the growing demand to visit the building without the public accessibility impacting too greatly on the original fabric of the structure and without upsetting the building's other residential tenants.

This careful balance has I believe been achieved very successfully and whilst it would have been all too easy to promote La Pedrera as some mass-tourist themed experience to the detriment of its academic importance, the creative use of the building's attic space is to be applauded. Here an engaging exhibition curated Daniel Giralt Miracle provides well-researched, new information that succeeds in adding value to our knowledge and understanding of both the building and its architect.

Of course, any discussion on the historiography of art nouveau at the end of the 20th century has to recognise the important role played by academics and cultural historians whose task has been to bring to the public's attention the work of art nouveau artists, designers and architects working in locations far removed from the more obvious destinations of say, Barcelona, Brussels and Vienna. For years now there has been widespread recognition that the artists, designers and architects working in cities such as a Riga, Budapest, Prague and even Moscow deserve to better recognised, both nationally and internationally.

That is not to say that the academic communities within these cities were neglecting their own art nouveau heritage; far from it. The issue here of course was that the political landscape of the time provided limited opportunities to disseminate this research beyond national borders and certainly to the West.

Clearly since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the subsequent break-up of the Soviet Union things have changed radically. Who would have imagined thirty years ago that leisure trips to some of the most influential cultural capitals of the former Eastern bloc would have been so common-place today? The type of cultural visitor who first ventured to Barcelona in the late 1970s, early 1980s tracking down Gaudi's finest

buildings now spend their weekends trawling the streets of Riga or Ljubljana looking for the Latvian or Slovenian equivalent.

But to truly service this new found public appetite for art nouveau these Eastern European cities like Barcelona and more recently Glasgow have begun to actively promote this unique home grown resource. Academic research, once mainly restricted to the confines of Soviet-era institutions or at best shared amongst university professionals has been dusted down, updated for the 21st century and rolled out for the benefit of new widely available publications (including the ubiquitous guide books), public exhibitions and even new museums and visitor centres.

How times have changed and changed so fast.

But enough of the past, what about the future of art nouveau or more correctly, what direction will the history of art nouveau likely take over the next few decades? Well I think it is safe to say that it will remain high on the public agenda thanks in part to the growing demand for cultural tourism. But this needs to be supported and the role played by academics and researchers will remain critical and many of the next generation of historians following in the tradition of Pevsner, Tschudi-Madsen, Howarth and Selz are here at this Congress this week.

I am sure interest in today's global figures of art nouveau such as Mackintosh, Gaudi, Horta will continue unabated and the volume of recent research and the seemingly endless number of new exhibitions is testament to this. However, as we know all too well, these individuals did not work in isolation. Instead, in most cases they were part of wider artistic circles or groups and there is a growing call to see many of these lesser known contemporaries far better recognised.

In Glasgow a design work by Mackintosh can easily sell for tens, if not hundreds of thousands of euros; a similar piece of equal quality but by a lesser or unknown contemporary might only be worth a few hundred – if that.

But such research inevitably takes time and whilst many fellow artists, designers and architects, will never justify the level of attention afforded to say Mackintosh or Gaudi,

it remains imperative to create a wider, more informed context into which these so-called cultural icons or star-architects can be placed.

But can I end with a word of caution?

Firstly, much academic research relies on the plentiful supply of suitable archives and collections. In recent years this cultural material has, by and large, been given a high profile within museums, galleries and other cultural institutions. However, without this accessible resource such research would be difficult if not impossible to pursue.

In these chastened times of limited financial budgets etc it remains imperative that museums and galleries are encouraged to support the further promotion of art nouveau. Without this support, collections are at risk of being returned to the dusty, back shelves of distant storerooms and the positive efforts made over the past half century will be increasingly forgotten.

My second concern is that we have, in general, come to expect that the promotion of Art nouveau through cultural tourism is pretty much the answer to most, if not all of our prayers; it raises the profile of the subject and with luck brings in much needed revenue.

One only has to look at how Barcelona has embraced this over the past two or three decades and how smaller destinations such as Helsinki, Brussels, Riga, Avenio in Portugal, Bad Neuheim in Germany and even Glasgow with the coming together of all its attractions to form the Mackintosh Heritage Group, now aspire to this Barcelona model.

But what happens if this cultural bubble bursts? What happens if a large percentage of today's cultural visitor rejects such destinations? Valuable income will inevitably be lost and whilst public institutions might be able to withstand such financial shortfalls, at least in the short term, those who run buildings or visitor attractions based mostly upon tourist-generated income will find it hard to continue. And there is also a risk that businesses that are involved or support this heritage in any number of ways might find themselves in a position where they can no longer be so supportive.

Here I am thinking about the current global banking crisis and the effect that it had on the charitable activities of many of Spain's leading banks. Thankfully the situation is

gradually improving but it has proved to be a painful lesson not least for the former Caixa Catalunya and its support of La Pedrera. But I'm sure there are many more examples where the situation was even more severe.

And as recently as a few weeks ago, the famous Mackintosh Willow Tea Rooms in Glasgow was threatened with closure following the demise of another, unrelated business with which it held a tenancy agreement. Thankfully, the threat of closure to the Willow Tea Rooms has now passed as a new contract between the Tea Rooms management and the building's ultimate owner, a major property developer with little interest in heritage has since been agreed. But this experience only goes to serve that we can take nothing for granted.

So in conclusion:

- Go out and support your local museum and gallery and encourage them to display their art nouveau collections.
- Pursue that strand of new research that you have always wanted to undertake
- And encourage continued investment in cultural tourism and look for opportunities to link and collaborate with cross border partners such as with the Réseau Art Nouveau Network and the Modernist Route.

Do that and we add another complex layer to the historiography of Art Nouveau for future generations to enjoy.