

SOURCES OF ART NOUVEAU*

For readers of this journal, Sources of Art Nouveau is of the greatest interest, for it takes care of the complicated strands that went into the making of an art movement having its origin in the Arts and Crafts workshops and the pre-Raphaelite poetry and painting of Victorian England.

In the preface to this reprint of a work written twenty years ago, the author explains that he wrote a later book in 1967 which takes advantage of the research that had accumulated since the earlier study. Not having access to the later book, the reviewer feels that the reprint tells the reader, either lay or specialist, all that he could possibly want to know not only about its sources but about the movement itself, going so far as to give also all the basic dependable information as to how long it lasted and why and when it stopped. In fact, all subsequent monographs devoted to the subject have depended heavily on Madsen's material; but they lack the wealth of primary sources, privileged communications from widows, children and other relations of the concerned artists, not to mention the close co-operation of two of the pioneer historians in the field of English and Scottish Victorian art and architecture, Nicolaus Pevsner and Thomas Howarth. The only other place where readers could find the same concentration on the English origins of Art Nouveau would be in Robert Schmutzler's article in The Architectural Review, 1955, which lacks, however, the detailed documentation and vast supporting material of the present work.

Art Nouveau was essentially a European style of decoration which developed during the period from 1892 to 1902-3, but with precursors further back in the 19th Century. It had a number of national variants, but in general it emphasized the ornamental value of the line, a "line of undulating movement and rhythmic force," and was "asymmetrical in nature," a characteristic extending to "the disposition of flat surfaces and to distribution of masses." One of its salient attributes was "the well-balanced relation between ornament and surface." It was in the field of interior decoration that "the style [was] applied with absolute consistency." This style "emerged suddenly and with precocious maturity bursting the bonds of the two-dimensional plane," "reach[ing] its climax at the Paris Exhibition of 1900" and then as suddenly petering out. It continued to enjoy

*Stephan Tschudi Madsen. SOURCES OF ART NOUVEAU. Oslo: H. Aschehough and Co., 1956. 488 pp. Rprt. A Da Capo Paperback, 1976. \$7.95.