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Review of The Papered Wall: The History, Patterns and Techniques of Wallpaper by Lesley Hoskins

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Lesley Hoskins, ed. *The Papered Wall: The History, Patterns and Techniques of Wallpaper*, 2nd ed. London and New York: Thames & Hudson, 2005. 272 pp., 216 color pls., 153 b/w ill., bibliog., gloss., index. Paper, \$34.95, £19.95.

In 1994, the publication of *The Papered Wall*, a collective endeavor under the direction of Lesley Hoskins, then and now curator at the Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture, Middlesex University, U.K., filled the need for a new, serious, and complete work dealing with the overall history of wallpaper. Bringing together international specialists, Hoskins's volume analyzed the technical as well as the stylistic evolution of the medium, from its origins to our own time. The closest comparison then was the German book *Tapeten: Ihre Geschichte bis zur Gegenwart* by Heinrich Olligs, a vast study in three volumes, published in 1970. Now Thames & Hudson, noting renewed interest in wallpaper and its support among certain designers, has issued a new edition of *The Papered Wall*, augmented by a chapter on recent trends as well as by an updated reference section, which includes wallpaper collections open to the public, suppliers of historic patterns, and additional sources of information. The volume is otherwise closer to a second printing, however, but it offers a moment to revisit the importance of the original edition and to consider the contributions of the new chapter. It is regrettable that this new edition adds nothing about research on wallpaper during the last ten years. Indeed, since 1994, this field has evolved considerably. For instance, the contributions of two French dissertations, that of Christine Velut, which has just been published in a reworked version,¹ and by Bernard Jacqué,² could have been taken into consideration. Swedish wallpaper, about which a sumptuous and voluminous book has recently been published,³ could have been considered. In addition, several errors known to have slipped into the first edition could have been corrected—but they were not.

The question of the origins of wallpaper remains complex. In a clear and organized manner, Geert Wisse, a Dutch art historian specializing in wallpaper, treats this problem in the first chapter of the Hoskins book. He quotes a number of rare accounts, from the Germanic world to Great Britain, attesting to the use of papers to decorate ceilings and walls during the Renaissance, and then emphasizes the considerable late seventeenth-century European production of sheets of paper printed with motifs and hung one next to each other to constitute a mural decoration. These productions are generally called *dominos*, but the author judiciously notes

that the expression *papiers de tapisserie*, originated by the wood engraver Jean Michel Papillon (who claimed that his father, Jean Papillon II [1661-1723], invented wallpaper in 1688; p. 15) and designating papers of higher quality, should also be taken into consideration in any history of the precursors of painted and printed papers.

From the sheet of paper to the roll, England was the country that saw the fastest evolution that the field would experience, which is the subject that Anthony Wells-Cole addresses in chapter 2. He clearly analyzes the appearance as well as the invention at the very end of the seventeenth century of lengths made of sheets joined together. Moreover, from technical and commercial points of view he surveys the history of British wallpaper through the first third of the nineteenth century, noting the growing importance of flocked papers. He does not, however, forget the stylistic questions following such fashions as the imitation of textiles and the Gothic Revival taste.

The rapid development that the field enjoyed in Europe, however, does not cause Hoskins to overlook the simultaneous importance of Chinese wallpaper imported into the Western world via the various East India companies. In chapter 3 Gill Saunders, the wallpaper curator at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, traces the production and marketing of these Oriental products, the great majority of which were hand-painted, through their different designs, such as scenes of daily life, flora, and fauna, and their Western imitations. The author concentrates on Great Britain, but perhaps a more international understanding of the question would have been preferable in a book intended for a general audience. More attention could have been paid, for example, to the most complete work on the subject, by Friederike Wappenschmidt,⁴ which is cited summarily in a note here.

The importance of the development of wallpaper in France during the late eighteenth century and nineteenth centuries is then treated in no less than three chapters, 4-6. Hoskins's strong point is again to have called on the best specialists in the field. First of all, in chapter 4, Bernard Jacqué, curator of the Musée du Papier Peint in Rixheim (Alsace, France) since its opening more than twenty years ago, describes how all of France enjoyed its golden age in wallpaper production. Manufacturers multiplied and produced mostly luxury wallpapers with innovative motifs for the *haute bourgeoisie*, and their output enjoyed international supremacy and influence. Jacqué also emphasizes the new creativity of the motifs that were printed then, and finds their richness in three areas: flowers, imitations of textiles,

and ornamental motifs, such as architectural elements, trophies, or statues. Moreover, he does not forget to consider the important pilaster-and-panel sets of the 1840s and the nonfigural compositions, always highly luxurious, produced during the same period.

In chapter 5 these decorative scenes are also mentioned by Véronique de Bruignac-la Hougue, curator of the wallpaper department at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris. Though the lack of a transition from the previous chapter is noticeable here, her contribution is valuable in considering the great variety of decorative ensembles produced between about 1760 and about 1830. Her chapter conveys the entire fashion of an era, from the important vogue for papers painted with arabesques—notably, the famous creations of Jean-Baptiste Réveillon's manufacture (1725-1811)—to allegorical representations, as well as products destined for ceilings. Finally, chapter 6, by Odile Nouvel of the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, is dedicated to scenic wallpapers. At that museum she supervised the catalogue of a vast exhibition on the topic in 1990,⁵ and here she appraises these decorative ensembles, exclusively produced in France during the nineteenth century, and conscientiously summarizes what was at stake in their development, including the desire to make a major genre of wallpaper, as well as technical, iconographic, and stylistic matters.

Careful to approach the history of wallpaper internationally, *The Papered Wall* next explores the use of these wall coverings in the United States. This is documented from the very beginning of the eighteenth century, as Richard C. Nylander shows in chapter 7, from the early importation of painted papers from England and France, to the progressive development of American manufactures beginning in the 1780s. This chapter is very rich in sources, and notable in accounting for the workings of the market. This part of the book closes with the development of mechanical production of wallpaper in the United States (following that of Europe), which this time ensures an adequate transition to the next chapter.

Chapter 8, by Joanna Banham, of the Tate Britain, tackles central questions for the nineteenth century, such as the development of mechanization in the English production of wallpaper, with the introduction of cylinder printing and, above all, the considerable renewal in the market during the second half of the century. Banham examines the manner in which England responded to the predominance of French wallpapers, as well as the native response—from Owen Jones to William Morris and others—to the banality of industrially produced products. Unfortunately the author

does not escape the tendency to see all things modern as deriving from England, even if it is undeniable that British production had a wide influence during this period. Research remains to be done on the real impact of aesthetic reforms on the effective distribution of Arts and Crafts wallpapers in interiors of the era. The author nonetheless rightly states that the ideas of Arts and Crafts artists could only fail in this domain, because their revival of traditional plate printing techniques could not compete with the much lower cost of articles that were mechanically mass-produced.

The three authors of chapter 9 explore precisely this question of production means during the last decades of the nineteenth century, when the supply and demand for wallpaper saw an important expansion. This proliferation is studied from a number of different points of view, including the numerous and rapid technical innovations—for example, the development of “sanitary” wallpaper in Great Britain—to the increasingly fierce competitive market. (“Sanitary” wallpapers were washable and were printed with engraved copper rollers, making it possible to produce large quantities at a low cost.) This analysis focuses on the production of three countries that still have an active industry today: England, covered by Christine Woods, curator of wallpaper at the Whitworth Art Gallery of Manchester; the United States, examined by Joanne Kosuda Warner, former wallpaper curator at the Cooper-Hewitt Museum, New York; and France, explored by Bernard Jacqué. If the book here is not exhaustive from a geographic point of view, something that would have been difficult to achieve, it nonetheless has the merit of underlining the great stylistic diversity of wallpapers that were then put on the market, between an always preponderant historicism and the modernities of Arts and Crafts and Art Nouveau, which were at first only timidly adopted.

Art Nouveau, an important transition toward modernism, would have an important impact on the production of wallpaper in the very first years of the twentieth century. In chapter 10, by Sabine Thümmel, curator at the Deutsches Tapetenmuseum in Kassel, Germany, and Mark Turner, the transition toward modernism in the early twentieth century could have been more developed, as scholarship on this period has considerably advanced since the first edition of *The Papered Wall*. The first milestone marked by an exhibition on the subject was organized at the Musée du Papier Peint in Rixheim in 1997,⁶ and there is university work currently in process.⁷ Art Deco production, for which much research still remains to be done, is handled better in this chapter, which notes in the section headed “Art Deco” the

desire of wallpaper manufacturers to move in the direction of modern art, while it also addresses the “crisis of the motif,” that is, the hostility toward ornament in the context of a desire for the purification of decoration from Le Corbusier to the Bauhaus and the preference for all-white walls.

A fairly complete panorama of the wallpaper industry from the end of the Second World War to 1970 is presented in the eleventh chapter, in which Joanne Kosuda Warner describes the United States and Lesley Hoskins surveys Europe. Here the reader will find a good deal of information concerning the postwar revival of wallpaper, the numerous technological innovations that it experienced, such as flexography (or flat-screen printing), and the diversity of motifs, which as ever reflected designers’ evident artistic research in relation to fashions. Given the authors’ interest in style, they could have said more about the catering to consumers that began in the middle of the 1960s, particularly in the context of the development and mass diffusion of Pop-inspired products.

Nonetheless, the important longevity of Pop wallpapers in the seventies is presented in the twelfth chapter, by Mary Schoeser, a well-known textile specialist. She treats wallpaper through 1994, in a history that began with the success of this type of wall covering with large flowers and strong colors in the early 1970s to the crisis felt beginning in the 1980s. The author explains concisely how the industry viewed important changes, as motifs became largely run-of-the-mill and wallpaper products, now sold in department stores, played with material effects deriving from new technical investigations, such as vinyl, plastics, and fake fabric textures produced through thermal molding.

Schoeser is also the author of the new chapter, 13, added to this second edition of *The Papered Wall*, covering the state of the field since 1995. As her title “Limited Editions” suggests, she focuses on creations of an artistic nature, revealing the renewal of interest in wallpaper among designers and decorators in the 1990s. Throughout these pages are reproduced some very beautiful examples attesting to this important renewal. Beyond the artistic milieu, however, the wallpaper products aimed at a wider audience could have been described more fully, specifically because the

impact of what is shown in shelter magazines remains to be defined. Similarly, the creativity of German producers has been important in recent years, and, while it is mentioned here and exemplified by AS Creation, it could have been emphasized, since manufacturers there have called on talented designers such as Ulf Morritz at Marburg, who deserve citation in these pages. Schoeser wants to be optimistic about the future of wallpaper but primarily in elitist settings: producers, beset by persistent economic difficulties, are still waiting for a true renewal of interest on the part of the consumer, in spite of a certain return to what is considered good taste in motifs.

The book closes with a “Postscript” by Sarah Mansell, in a few judicious pages about the conservation and restoration of wallpaper. She is sensitive to the inherent difficulties in the preservation of this fragile patrimony, which seems most often destined to disappear too quickly. Finally, following the notes and the bibliography, the reader will find important practical information, notably a glossary and an updated list of places where wallpaper collections are accessible. (The most important collections, such as those of Rixheim and Kassel, could have been starred as a help to the reader, but this is a minor point.)

Because *The Papered Wall* addresses the technical and artistic history of wallpaper in a clear and reasoned manner, while attempting to be as complete as possible, it remains a major reference work today, as much for the amateur as for the connoisseur. It also features one of the richest illustrations available of the diversity of the subject. This second edition is therefore welcome, but relative to the 1994 edition, all it adds is the supplementary chapter on developments since 1995 and updated lists of wallpaper collections, additional sources of information, and suppliers of historic patterns at the end of the book. Nonetheless, *The Papered Wall* remains an essential work for a better understanding of the subject, as much for the quality of its texts as for the multiplicity of viewpoints its authors employ.

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(Translated by Pamela J. Warner)

NOTES

1. Christine Velut, *Décor de papier: Production, commerce et usages des papiers peints à Paris, 1750-1820* (Paris, 2005).

2. Bernard Jacqué, *De la manufacture au mur: Pour une histoire matérielle du papier peint (1770-1914)* (Université de Lyon 2—Lumière, 2003).

3. Ingeld Broström and Elisabet Stavenow-Hidemark, *Tapetboken: Papperstapeten i Sverige* (Stockholm, 2004).

4. Friederike Wappenschmidt, *Chinesische Tapeten für Europa: Vom Rollbild zur Bildtapete* (Berlin, 1989).

5. *Papiers peints panoramiques*, exh. cat. (Paris: Musée des Arts Décoratifs, 1990).

6. *Papiers peints Art nouveau*, exh. cat. (Gingins: Fondation Neumann; Rixheim: Musée du Papier Peint, 1997).

7. The author of this book review is currently working on a doctorate about wallpaper around 1900.

Neil Kamil, *Fortress of the Soul: Violence, Metaphysics, and Material Life in the Huguenots' New World, 1517-1751*. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005. 1,058 pp., 185 b/w ills., 2 maps, index. \$75.

Neil Kamil's *Fortress of the Soul* demands deep respect from its reader—nor is that all it demands. Over 1,000 pages long and written in dense, knotty language, so learned as to be nearly cryptic, the book is quite evidently the product of decades of scholarly labor. Kamil writes in his introduction that he has addressed his text to “historians of science as well as historians of religion, technology, art and artisanry, sexuality (and the body), agriculture, human geography, textual criticism, the book, ecology, and, I hope most of all, the colonization of pluralistic New World societies” (pp. xix-xx). In fact, this is only a partial list of potential readers, so wide is this volume's chronological, geographical, and disciplinary range. When the phrase “material culture” was first devised in the 1960s, its pioneers might have had something exactly like *Fortress of the Soul* in mind—a synthetic master narrative in which ideas, artworks, biographies, themes of sociopolitical change, and especially objects are woven into a matrix that feels as complex as history itself. Now that it has arrived, how to do it justice?

Kamil hasn't made it easy for us. His subject, the diaspora culture of the Huguenots following the catastrophic fall of their redoubt at La Rochelle in 1627-1628 and again after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, offers every opportunity for convolution. Kamil's central thesis, indeed, is predicated on the idea of difficulty. He argues that French Protestant culture, in the crucible of persecution that was Catholic France in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, developed a threefold strategy for evading violent oppression: silence, secrecy, and self-sufficiency. The objects the Huguenots created were purposefully hermetic texts, illegible to outsiders. For this marginalized culture, artisanal skills were the prime guarantor of safety, a kind of armor that allowed individuals to support (and hence protect) themselves. When the Huguenots emigrated to Holland, England, and the New World in the seventeenth century, they carried with them this precept. Craft was central to their

story of survival, because it was seen as analogous to and inseparable from spiritual practice. The slow, patient work of the Huguenot artisan was not just practical, Kamil writes, but an equivalent to and an extension of the work of the soul. This equation between work and worship was in turn conditioned by alchemical ideas about transformation and purification, so that Huguenot potters and furniture makers understood themselves as “soulful reformers of matter” (p. xix). Their products would have been viewed “through code-obsessed eyes” (p. 442) in their own time, and must be interpreted accordingly. Thus Kamil has done more than contribute to the already sizable literature on the Huguenots. *Fortress of the Soul* is a model analysis of the early modern craftsman as a self-conscious actor in cultural, historical, and intellectual struggle.

The relationship between the hermetic and the artisanal—the secret knowledge of the laboratory and the trade secrets of the workshop—has been a favored subject among historians of science recently, most notably Pamela H. Smith, Lawrence Principe, William R. Newman, William Eamon, and Pamela O. Long.¹ These scholars have described alchemical practice as a craft in its own right, which was not antithetical to modern science, but rather formed the bedrock of progressive experimental methods. Smith in particular has written of alchemy as a conceptual template for other sorts of transformative work, other “arts.” To this important argument, which is only beginning to attract the attention of decorative art historians, Kamil adds a vast and historically specific narrative about the Huguenot diaspora. Given that community's tremendous influence in Northern Europe, England, and America, and their frequent association with both the hermetic and artisanal arts, what he has to say about their metaphysical worldview should be of interest to any student of early modern material culture.

In practice, Kamil apparently believes that his core convictions about Huguenot culture give him license to read into objects creatively, and the result will probably be a constant strain on the credulity of some readers. Like the alchemists among the Huguenots he studies, Kamil pores over seemingly self-explanatory or incidental matters in the hunt for hidden meanings. Thus, for example, he portrays the natural decorative motifs on wares made by the famous