

The upholsterer-decorator from 1848 to 1914 : Continuity and changes of a profession at the heart of the French furniture industry

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Additional information

Status of thesis

Defended

Defense date

05/12/2023

Research theme

[1. Decors, monuments, landscapes: global approaches to heritage](#)

[3. Transfers, exchanges, movements in European and extra-European areas](#)

[5. Materials, techniques, crafts: theoretical and practical approaches to artistic making](#)

Thesis

Summary

During the second half of the 19th century, the upholsterer-decorator was a key figure in interior decoration. This thesis takes a cross-disciplinary approach, examining both the socio-economic environment of the profession and the creative history of its members. As a furniture dealer and decorator, the upholsterer designs, manufactures and installs the entire interior decor. This includes drapes, curtains, carpets and upholstery for seats, beds and fireplaces. As well as studying the economic, technical and social aspects of the profession and its organisation, our thesis analyses the work and production of upholsterers, from the introduction of fantasy and comfort to the attempts at revival at the turn of the 20th century. We look at their role in prescribing taste through the Universal Exhibitions and, in particular, the changes in their industry as a result of competition from cabinetmakers and department stores. Upholsterers were specialists in the use of textiles, and their work was quickly associated with the abundance of draperies and fringes. Yet behind the criticism levelled at the end of the 19th century at the supposed excesses of their work lies a rich and varied output. This study sheds new light on the decorative ensembles of these upholsterers and their artistic practice at the heart of a rapidly changing furniture industry.

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