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Art Nouveau, Arts and
Craftsmanship in Luxembourg

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| Photograph of the ornamental metalwork workshop at the Handwierschoul, c. 1900 – M. Galowich Collection

Intro

Jugendstil or Art Nouveau

Innovative Concepts in Arts and Crafts

“Jugendstil”, a term already coined by contemporaries, first appeared on the occasion of the Industrial and Commercial Exhibition in Leipzig in 1897. Its origins trace back to the German illustrated cultural magazine “Jugend”, established in Munich in 1895. The stylistic departure from tradition-bound historicism promoted therein was accompanied by a sense of optimism, a drive for renewal, while rejecting the influence of industrialisation on art and craftsmanship. Jugendstil, thus, emerged as a movement to be newly created by artists open to innovation, one inspired by nature and intended as an authentic expression of its time and modernity. It represented a deliberate search for new possibilities in decorative art. By emphasising beauty in everyday life and a return to traditional craftsmanship, nothing less than a better world was meant to be created. The magazine’s title – and thus the term “Jugendstil” – expressed how closely this artistic movement was intertwined with contemporary social issues. These were also present in Luxembourg, which had developed into an industrial state during the nineteenth century.

The French term “Art Nouveau” comes from the Parisian gallery “Hôtel de l’Art Nouveau”, run by Hamburg-born Samuel Bing (1828-1905), where works of this new style were exhibited and sold. Bing’s ideas of modern art and craftsmanship were shaped by a number of artistic trends from around the world, beginning with the Arts and Crafts movement in the United Kingdom. These convictions, together with his admiration for Asian and American art, which he popularised in Europe, as well as his desire to revitalise French craftsmanship, played a decisive role in bringing recognition to the modern style now known as Art Nouveau.

By focusing on fascinating and innovative works – primarily in the applied arts – produced in or widely appreciated throughout the Grand Duchy, the period of Art Nouveau, or Jugendstil, is explored in detail. Design drawings as well as historical photographs – equally insightful as they are artistically accomplished – complement this overview. Collectively, these materials illustrate the various forms of Art Nouveau that came together in Luxembourg around 1900, the ambitions pursued by the local art scene and its contributions to relevant social issues.



| Art Society Yearbook, title-page illustration
by E. Simminger, 1902-1903 – MNAHA

Art Nouveau and Luxembourg

A Spirit of Optimism in the Art Scene

An analysis of Luxembourg's arts and crafts during the Art Nouveau period reveals a strong adherence to tradition, evidenced by the preservation of long-established forms of expression and an ongoing alignment with artistic developments, especially from neighbouring countries such as Germany, France and Belgium. Simultaneously, however, there was a notable openness to innovation, mirroring the economic and political transformations occurring in Luxembourg around 1900, which was reflected in its artistic production.

For Luxembourg's art scene, the increasing global rapprochement between craft and art in particular offered an opportunity for renewal.

In 1893, the Cercle Artistique de Luxembourg (CAL) was founded, which thereafter regularly organised Salon exhibitions. Above all, however, it was the founding of the École d'Artisans de l'État in 1896 where aspiring visual artists and craftsmen were trained together that invigorated Luxembourg's art scene. Antoine Hirsch (1868-1934), an internationally experienced engineer, architect and art theorist, was appointed as the first director of this so-called Handwierserschoul in 1897. He significantly shaped the direction of the state institution from the very beginning, drawing inspiration from foreign role models and demonstrating considerable foresight. He also served as president of the Cercle Artistique from 1901 to 1904. Under his leadership, the Luxembourg art prize Prix Grand-Duc Adolphe was initiated in 1902. This prize is awarded in turn to practitioners of the applied and fine arts as well as architecture – an eloquent testimony to the collective efforts of all artists to establish a vibrant local art scene in Luxembourg.



| Friendship, marble sculpture by Jean Mich, c.1900 – MNAHA

Craftsmanship and Art in Harmony

The Prix Grand-Duc Adolphe

The newly established École d'Artisans de l'État taught a range of trades, including decorative painting, blacksmithing and carpentry. For such fields, instruction in drawing and perspective, various painting techniques and sculpture or carving provided indispensable foundations while also providing knowledge in artistic styles. For men, enrolment at this school frequently marked the beginning of their artistic training, which was often further pursued through study abroad.

Although Antoine Hirsch had already distinguished himself in 1905 as the author of a book entitled "Die bildenden Künstlerinnen der Neuzeit", which also mentioned Luxembourgish female artists, women were not allowed to attend the school he directed during the Art Nouveau period. However, they regularly participated in the Salon exhibitions hosted by the Cercle Artistique. The first woman to receive the Prix Grand-Duc Adolphe was the Belgian painter Angéline Drumaux (1881-1959), who was awarded the prize in 1913 alongside artist-blacksmith Étienne Galowich (1872-1925).

The first ever recipients of this art prize were two Luxembourgish artists who, at the time, engaged with the Art Nouveau style in their works: sculptor Jean Mich (1871-1932) in 1902 and, two years later, painter Dominique Lang (1874-1919), who received the prize alongside the significantly older artist Frantz Seimetz (1858-1934).

In 1905, the Prix Grand-Duc Adolphe was awarded for the first time to an artist working in the field of applied arts: goldsmith Albert Breisch (1870-1926), who had trained in Paris.

Breisch's award-winning jewellery, crafted in the style of French designer René Lalique (1860-1945) according to written sources, has unfortunately not survived or can no longer be attributed to him.



| Photograph of wrought-iron grilles, taken in the early 20th century – Provenance: Archives of the Lycée des Arts et Métiers, Luxembourg (repr. Y. Klein)

Between Tradition and New Beginnings

Artistic Metalwork

Étienne Galowich, an award-winning artist-blacksmith from Hungary, founded a workshop affiliated with the Handwierkerschoul at the request of Director Hirsch. The initiative aimed to revive this specific craftsmanship within the Grand Duchy, as it was particularly important for Art Nouveau.

Galowich's works, renowned for their exceptional technical mastery and marked by inventive classical forms as well as a gradual shift towards Art Nouveau, laid the foundation for the revival.

Michel Haagen (1893-1943), a pupil of Galowich, carried out numerous commissions in collaboration with his mentor. However, his early works already revealed both a desire to move beyond his teacher in stylistic terms and a search for artistic collaborations with representatives of Art Nouveau. For example, he integrated the glass art of Auguste (1853-1909) and Antonin Daum (1864-1930) from Nancy, or that of their workshop, into his wrought metalwork. For the first time in 1917, Luxembourgish artist-blacksmith Marcel Langsam (1891-1979) presented his works, which were also influenced by French Art Nouveau, alongside pieces by Galowich and Haagen at the Cercle Artistique Salon exhibitions. Langsam's wrought-iron everyday objects featured flowers such as mistletoe or thistles as well as fir branches, which set new technical and stylistic standards in Luxembourg.



His creations closely resemble the work of French artist-blacksmith Émile Robert (1860-1924). For instance, Robert's entrance gate for the Musée des Arts décoratifs in Paris, inaugurated in 1905, also features the thistle motif of dynamic elegance which are skilfully executed.

The juxtaposition of both traditional and modern styles, as illustrated by artistic metalwork, is characteristic of Luxembourgish craftsmanship which depended on the wishes of its clientele. Participation in the Cercle Artistique Salon exhibitions was surely driven by the hope of introducing visitors to emerging artistic trends.

| Candelabrum in bronze and pewter by Étienne Galowich, c. 1900 – MNAHA



Art Nouveau pewter plate, engraved in 1909 by Marie-Thérèse Glaesener-Hartmann in commemoration of the inauguration of the Dicks-Lentz Monument on 11 October 1903 – MNAHA

New Time, New Style?

Politics, Economy and Society around 1900

Works from the applied arts created around 1900 in particular reflect both progressive ideals and a respect for tradition. They demonstrate continued engagement with artistic trends from neighbouring countries while simultaneously serving as a reflection of Luxembourgish society in its search for a distinct national identity. The Grand Duchy had only gained full independence in 1890 with the establishment of its own dynasty, a development that further strengthened this aspiration characteristic of the nineteenth century. Economically, the prevailing sense of optimism was supported not only by a thriving iron industry from around 1890 onward, but also by internationally successful sectors such as Luxembourgish rose cultivation, glove manufacturing, tobacco industry and fine earthenware production.

Paul Eyschen (born 1841), who served as Minister of State (equivalent to today's Prime Minister) of Luxembourg from 1888 until his death in 1915, also had a significant impact on society and cultural development.

Established traditions of history, art and culture were employed to foster a sense of national identity, while, on the other hand, modern stylistic movements such as Art Nouveau were actively promoted.

The government's progressive educational legislation enabled the creation of new schools across diverse disciplines. In the field of art, Eyschen notably paved the way for the founding of the École d'Artisans.

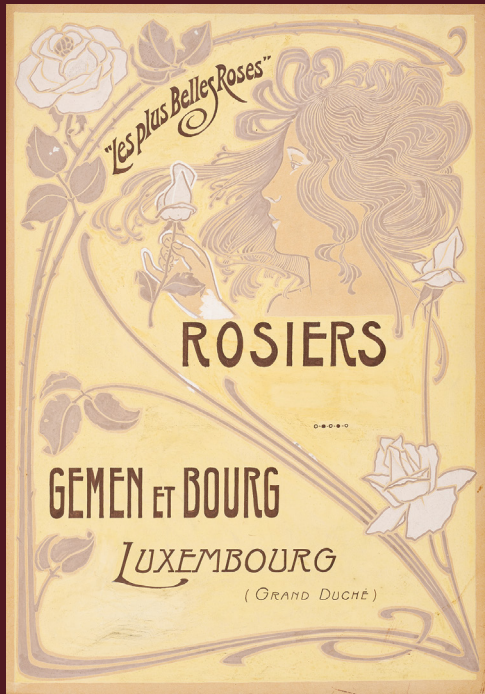


1 Wall tile, designed by Jean-Pierre Lanser and made of fine earthenware by Vereinigte Servais-Werke AG, Ehrang, c. 1904 – MNAHA, originally used in Mamer

Art Nouveau, however, did not receive any particular support under Grand Duke Guillaume IV (1852-1912), who ascended the throne in 1905, nor under his wife Marie-Anne (1861-1942), who acted as regent from 1908 to 1912 due to his illness. Grand Duchess Marie-Adélaïde (1894-1924), who ascended the throne on her eighteenth birthday in 1912, abdicated in 1919, shortly after the end of the First World War. Her brief reign, coupled with her young age and the challenges posed by the war, limited any possible influence on artistic style during this period.

Rather, public taste was shaped by internationally active industrial enterprises, such as the progressive Luxembourgish rose growers Gemen & Bourg, which introduced Art Nouveau designs to Luxembourg through their promotional brochures.

The products of the ceramic factory, co-founded by Luxembourgish native Paul Servais (1848-1908) and located in Ehrang near Trier, are testament to the lively exchange of current stylistic trends with Belgium and France. The Grand Duchy was an important market for the company, further promoting the dissemination of Art Nouveau in Luxembourg. Notably, a large ornate vase produced by Lamberty, Servais & Cie in Ehrang for the 1900 Paris World's Fair was presumably later gifted to Paul Eyschen, who subsequently donated it to the city of Mondorf, where it remains a prominent attraction of the thermal park to this day.



| Graphic design for an advertisement
by the firm Gemen & Bourg,
Luxembourg, c. 1900 – MNAHA

Art Nouveau on a Small Scale

Graphic Design in Private and Public Spaces

Although Art Nouveau aimed to elevate the aesthetics of everyday life for all, only a limited number of people could afford to furnish their entire homes in this distinctive style. Many had to content themselves with incorporating individual pieces to enhance their living spaces. Nonetheless, the prevalence of Art Nouveau in art and advertising indicates it enjoyed far greater popularity than the comparatively rare presence of traditional furnishings might suggest.

It was often graphic design that introduced Art Nouveau to a broad public.

By incorporating characteristic stylistic elements – such as floral motifs, flowing lines or abstract patterns derived from them – into graphic design, Art Nouveau gained visibility in public spaces. These artistically crafted advertising materials such as posters, shaped in particular by their flowing typographies, promoted a wide variety of events. The influence of international designers was significant in this field; local artists, such as Dominique Lang, Pierre Blanc (1872–1946) and the two 1907 art prize recipients Auguste van Werveke (1866–1927) and Jean Curot (1882–1954), only contributed occasionally.

The introduction of graphic design also made it possible for virtually everyone to acquire examples of this emerging style. A striking number of postcards featuring tourist attractions or portraits of the grand ducal family were widely distributed during this period, distinguished by their use of prominent Art Nouveau design forms. These postcards enjoyed considerable popularity and were often preserved in folders that themselves featured Art Nouveau motifs on their bindings. Luxembourgish photographers such as Charles Bernhoeft (1859–1933) also embraced the Art Nouveau aesthetic. The backs of the photographic prints that advertised their services were made to look modern, so that people would entrust them to capture their special occasions.



PARIS 1900 MEDAILLE D'OR
 STUTTGART " "
 FRANCFORT " "
 LUXEMBOURG " "
 ANVERS PARIS ANVERS
 3 MEDAILLES D'ARGENT
 LUXEMBOURG
 DIPLOME D'HONNEUR.

CH. BERNHOEFT

• PHOTOGRAPHE • DE • LA • COUR •
 • GRAND • DUCALE •



LA NOUVELLE MAISON BERNHOEFT.

LUXEMBOURG

• COIN • RUE • DE • L'ARSENAL •
 • ET • BOULEVARD • ROYAL •

MAISON FONDÉE EN 1878.



GRAND'RUE.

RUE DE L'ARSENAL.

BOULEVARD ROYAL.

G. JANSSEN & C. KOENIG.

| Art Nouveau-style advertisement for the photographer Charles Bernhoeft, c. 1900 – MNAHA

Created with the same aesthetic aspiration, the Luxembourg-born glove maker Guill. Junker (1870-1940) produced two lovingly handcrafted albums from 1902 onward. They commemorate his work at the Luxembourgish glove factory established by Albert Reinhard in 1882. Above all, the Art Nouveau design highlights the harmony between art and craftsmanship, a relationship that was central to the manufactory's approach. The pages, which he created using leather scraps, photographs and printed materials, as well as his own drawings, also document Junker's notable pride in his homeland and its dynasty.



Tiles for a wall frieze, made of fine earthenware by Villeroy & Boch, Septfontaines-lez-Luxembourg, c.1900 – G. Freimann Collection, Luxembourg

Art Nouveau as a Gesamt- kunstwerk

Interior Design Options

In the spirit of the Gesamtkunstwerk, Art Nouveau aimed to create stylistic unity across all elements of an interior, bringing not only furnishings but also permanent decorative features into focus. Alongside stained-glass, elements such as tile friezes or paintings, wood panelling, stucco decoration and wallpaper were thoughtfully integrated to harmonise with the furniture. Luxembourgish decorative painters, including Émile Goldschmit (1885-1958) and Corneille Lentz (1879-1937) – the latter an interior designer, artist and owner of a painting supplies shop on Grand-Rue in Luxembourg – created wall designs, friezes and other ornamental details for this purpose. The training provided at the École d'Artisans placed particular emphasis on this form of artistic expression.

Tiles produced by the earthenware manufacturers Utzschneider & Jaunez in Wasserbillig and nearby Sarreguemines, from Villeroy & Boch in Mettlach – where tiles designed by Henry van de Velde (1863-1957) originated – or the factory in Ehrang, were particularly highly regarded. Art Nouveau tiles from these companies frequently appear on the walls or floors of building entrances and were distributed through the companies' sales offices in Luxembourg or created as commissioned pieces, such as the cityscape from the Grand Café on the Place d'Armes. By contrast, Art Nouveau tiles manufactured by Villeroy & Boch in Septfontaines are comparatively rare.

The biographies of several artists demonstrate significant cultural exchange in the production process between Luxembourg and its neighbouring countries. Ceramic painters Jean-Pierre Lanser (1866-1931) and Antoine Jans (1868-1933) completed their training together in Echternach under the instruction of the Zens brothers. Their mentor, August Kunz (1831-1878), had previously worked at Villeroy & Boch in Mettlach before assuming the role of senior painter in Echternach. Lanser subsequently made important artistic contributions at the factory in Ehrang, while Jans went on to become senior painter at the Luxembourgish branch of Villeroy & Boch. These are just some of the many examples of the extensive connections and artistic influences that crossed national boundaries.



| Photograph of a stained-glass window in the former house of the jeweller Link, built 1901-1903; photographed by Tom Lucas (MNAHA), 2025

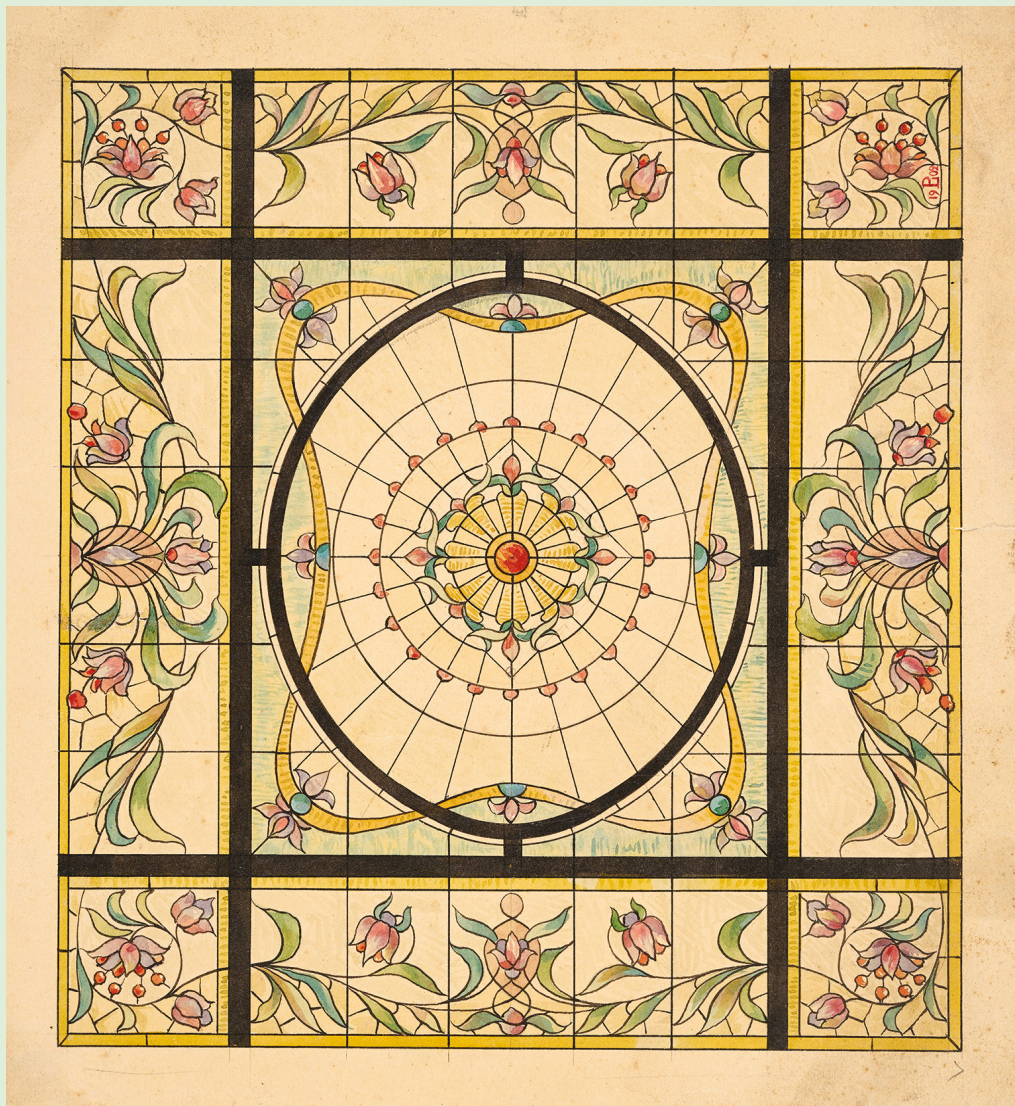
Luminosity Within and Beyond

Luxembourgish Stained-Glass

Several stained-glass workshops – notably, and certainly foremost among them, the Atelier Linster & Schmit established in Bad Mondorf in 1891 and its successors – produced remarkable work. Pierre Linster (1863-1906), a co-founder of the company, frequently created work for sacred spaces and adhered to traditional styles. In these stained-glass pieces, Art Nouveau elements are generally limited to decorative features that accompany the main motifs.

Nevertheless, Linster's highly elaborate and magnificent design drawings clearly show his openness to and talent for the then-modern Art Nouveau.

It can, therefore, be assumed that many stained-glass windows featuring striking Art Nouveau designs in private residences, hotels or public buildings came from this workshop. These installations served as decorative focal points inside and, when illuminated in the evening hours, enhanced the Art Nouveau façades with characteristic backlighting. Sylvère Linster (1894-1973), the founder's son, pursued his studies in Paris and later on became acquainted with works by Jacques Gruber (1870-1936), a notable figure of the École de Nancy. Sylvère soon turned towards Art Deco. This style dispenses with all the finishing paint touches inside the monochrome glass panels that form the motifs.



| Design for a stained-glass window, drawn by Pierre Linster, 1902 – Vitraux d'art Bauer Collection

Jean-Pierre Koppes (1866-1941), another notable glass painter from Luxembourg, like Pierre Linster, presented several works at the Cercle Artistique Salon exhibitions. In 1909 and 1910, the stained-glass pieces he exhibited were described as modern, presumably reflecting the Art Nouveau style. His surviving works created for sacred spaces are generally historicist in character, with only occasional references to Art Nouveau, such as floral motifs found in the windows produced in 1910 for the church of Saint André in Biwer. In contrast, his former villa in Altwies still features remarkable stained-glass windows that display a wide variety of Art Nouveau design forms.

During an industrial exhibition in Luxembourg, the glazing company Bradtké presented a collection of Art Nouveau stained-glass works.

These pieces featured floral motifs and geometric designs typical of Art Nouveau, sometimes combined with more traditional pictorial elements.

The selection of sample windows illustrates the full range of Luxembourg's stained-glass production during the Art Nouveau period, with designs ultimately tailored to reflect the distinct preferences of individual clients.



| Art Nouveau folding screen, designed and made by Dominique and Pierre Lang, oil on canvas and oak, c. 1900 – Private collection

Art for Everyone

More than Furniture

Photographs from the École d'Artisans document a deep engagement with the design principles of Art Nouveau. The pieces produced during class were displayed either by department – such as carpentry – or collectively within an appropriate setting. These curated presentations, modern at the time, contributed significantly to highlight the furniture.

Renowned carpenters such as Jacques Lentz (1883-1933) from Rollingergrund, Luxembourg, also produced furniture with intricate floral inlays and surface ornamentation characteristic of Art Nouveau. Similarly, Jean Flammang expertly carved water lily tendrils on a display cabinet designed by Albert Breisch to showcase his jewellery in proper style both in Luxembourg in 1904 and at the Liège World Exhibition in 1905. Albert Dumont (1902-2000) promoted modern furniture by using company signs and sample books, drawing on his early experience in the workshops of Louis Majorelle (1859-1926), a founding member of the École de Nancy. Majorelle's works were also featured at the "Lorraine-Luxembourg" exhibition organised by the Cercle Artistique in 1921. The remarkable room divider was produced by Dominique Lang together with his brother, Pierre Lang, a skilled carpenter who also crafted the carved frame for the 1902 painting "Death and the Maiden".

Carpenters Nicolas Birnbaum and Pierre Kipgen (1868-1934) were awarded the Prix Grand-Duc Adolphe in 1914. Several pieces of furniture displayed at Salon exhibitions during the 1910s were crafted in the style of the École de Nancy. The small table by Léon Nosbusch (1897-1979) is believed to have been crafted in the early 1920s. Nosbusch received his initial training in carpentry at the École d'Artisans before pursuing further studies in sculpture in Brussels. Working together with Amédée Hamoir (1884-1930), he produced several pieces of furniture such as this small table featuring intricate Art Nouveau inlays composed of rare woods and metal water lily motifs. It represents a relatively late example of Art Nouveau.



| Photograph of marquetry furniture by Jacques Lentz, taken in the early 20th century – Provenance: Archives of the Lycée des Arts et Métiers, Luxembourg (repr. Y. Klein).

An interior could also be given a modern Art Nouveau look with other objects acquired either in Luxembourg or abroad. Cast-iron stoves featuring Art Nouveau relief designs were particularly prevalent. Additionally, popular glass vases by Daum Frères – also shown in the 1921 exhibition – or those created in the style of Émile Gallé (1846-1904), another notable member of the École de Nancy, were available for purchase at establishments such as the Grands Magasins Sternberg Frères department store, founded in 1909.



| Vase, designed and hand-painted by Antoine Jans, made of fine earthenware by Villeroy & Boch, Septfontaines-lez-Luxembourg, after 1895
– MNAHA, gift of the Origer family

Nature-Inspired Concepts

Ceramics Featuring Art Nouveau

Nature served as the principal model and primary source of inspiration for Art Nouveau. Starting from realistic depictions of lilies, dragonflies and various other flora and fauna, artists developed expressive and flowing lines that shaped both the forms and decorative patterns of this style.

This progression is notably evident in ceramic painting.

Antoine Jans, who received training at the Zens Frères manufactory in Echternach and began working as a senior painter for Villeroy & Boch in 1895, initially hesitated to embrace this direction, remaining faithful to naturalistic depictions. However, several of his works – some likely produced independently and others created during his time at the Luxembourgish earthenware manufactory – demonstrate his mastery of Art Nouveau, both in its floral and geometric expressions. During that period, there was a noticeable shift away from repetitive decorative patterns, which had been employed at Villeroy & Boch in Luxembourg since the early nineteenth century through serial printing techniques. In line with Art Nouveau, efforts were undertaken to strengthen craftsmanship within industrial production by reintroducing hand-painted ceramic techniques.



| Vase, designed by Pierre Blanc, hand-painted by Antoine Jans and made of fine earthenware by Villeroy & Boch, Septfontaines-lez-Luxembourg, after 1895 – MNAHA

Among various artists, including international contributors, Luxembourgish painter Pierre Blanc – who also was a teacher at the École d'Artisans and who was awarded the Prix Grand-Duc Adolphe in 1911 – developed several Art Nouveau vases for Villeroy & Boch, likely executed either by Jans or ceramic painters working under his supervision. Although these Art Nouveau vases were showcased at events such as Luxembourg's Exposition du Métier et de la Petite Industrie in 1904 and featured in sales catalogues, the limited number of surviving examples suggests this particular line of production was relatively modest in scale. Furthermore, plans to establish a ceramic painting workshop at the École d'Artisans de l'État under the direction of Antoine Jans were not realised. A workshop like this would likely have allowed greater creative freedom than what was possible within the commercially driven ceramics factory. Additionally, consistent collaboration with other artists at the institution might have provided further inspiration for the development of Art Nouveau in this field.



| Vase, designed and hand-painted by Antoine Jans, made of fine earthenware by Villeroy & Boch, Septfontaines-lez-Luxembourg; exhibited at the CAL Salon in 1914 – MNAHA, gift of M.-J. Nilles



| Vase, designed and hand-painted by Antoine Jans, fine earthenware, after 1895 – Jans family collection



| Design for a decorative scheme, drawn by Antoine Jans, after 1885 – MNAHA, gift of the Origer family



| Photograph of Villa Clivio, taken by the architect Mathias Martin in 1908 – J.-P. Martin Collection

Art Nouveau Within the Urban Landscape

Architectural Developments in the Grand Duchy

Several Luxembourgish architects, including Jean-Pierre Koenig (1870–1919), Georges Traus (1865–1941) and Mathias Martin (1882–1943), have created remarkable architectural works within the Grand Duchy, some of which are still standing today. These buildings not only reflect influences of Jugendstil or Art Nouveau, but also demonstrate a consistent implementation of its various stylistic forms. For instance, in the capital, the jeweller Link's residence, constructed from 1901 to 1903 on Rue du Curé according to Koenig's plans, exemplifies the floral Art Nouveau style. Similarly, Villa Robur on Rue Albert 1^{er} demonstrates geometric influences inspired by the architecture of Darmstadt's Mathildenhöhe. The villa was designed by Mathias Martin, who is also responsible for Villa Clivio, notable for its singular façade, as well as Villa Pier in the Gare district. Among Luxembourgish architects, he was likely the most successful at realising his design concepts. Nevertheless, architects could not afford to adhere to a single style, as economic realities required adapting to the preferences of their clients, regardless of personal convictions. Consequently, their modern architectural ideas did not lead to widespread changes to construction practices in the Grand Duchy. A variety of architectural styles remained prevalent and continued concurrently into the twentieth century. Nevertheless, across the country, many townhouse façades in different styles incorporate Art Nouveau elements, including wrought-iron grilles, lamps, distinctive window reveals, door lintels, stained-glass and intricately carved front doors.

Additionally, foreign architects introduced unusual residences in characteristic Art Nouveau styles that differed markedly from existing buildings within the Grand Duchy. Prominent examples are Villa Olivo in Esch/Alzette, modelled after a Parisian example, and the row of houses on Avenue des Bains in Mondorf, constructed by Belgian architect Eugène Fichet (1854–1908) in 1901. In these instances, it appears that the stylistic direction was primarily determined by the preferences of clients or investors.

Summary



| Design for a decorative scheme, drawn by Antoine Jans, after 1895 – MNAHA, gift of A. Wiltgen

Applied and Fine Arts

Transforming Ordinary Objects into Art

A closer look at applied art and handcrafted objects produced in Luxembourg around 1900 reveals both an openness to Art Nouveau and at least partial efforts to establish a distinct national artistic identity.

The country's artistic landscape oscillated between maintaining traditional values, which intended to position the Grand Duchy within a framework of historical continuity, and embracing innovative styles such as Art Nouveau, which sought to capture the evolving spirit of the time and reflect a modern society.

During this period, decision-makers aimed to anchor artistic expression within craftsmanship and facilitate the transmission of technical and artisanal skills to artists across various disciplines. This led to the establishment of the first state educational institution dedicated to artistic education in what is now Luxembourg, fostering close collaborations with the broader art scene. Joint exhibitions and awarding the Luxembourg art prize to representatives from all artistic fields – painting, sculpture, applied arts and architecture – attest to cooperative effort. The growing international appreciation of craftsmanship during the Art Nouveau era was thus seen as an opportunity for Luxembourg's art scene.



| Vase, designed by Pierre Blanc, hand-painted by Antoine Jans and made of fine earthenware by Villeroy & Boch, Septfontaines-lez-Luxembourg, after 1895 – MNAHA

At the same time, many artists continued to introduce design concepts from abroad to Luxembourg, influencing both individual works and serving as enduring theoretical foundations for art education and stylistic development. The extent to which Art Nouveau was adopted, however, depended largely on the preferences of clients and buyers. This dynamic led to a coexistence of a wide variety of artistic styles, a phenomenon also observed in neighbouring countries.

While a unified or distinctly independent form of Art Nouveau did not emerge in Luxembourg, the style nevertheless played a significant role within the Grand Duchy, resulting in noteworthy and promising works that helped overcome the previously dominant historicism across all artistic disciplines.

The outbreak of the First World War put an abrupt end to the optimism and sense of renewal in Luxembourg's art scene. Yet Art Nouveau had opened a door, paving the way for Luxembourg's artists in the interwar period to embrace modern styles such as Art Deco, which proved far more influential at the national level than Art Nouveau.

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Design for a decorative scheme, drawn by Pierre
Blanc, 1896 – MNAHA, gift of A. Wiltgen

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Information

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Opening Hours

Tuesday–Sunday: 10:00–18:00

Thursday: 10:00–20:00

Monday: closed