

ANNE-MARIE THIESSE

THE TRANSNATIONAL CREATION OF NATIONAL ARTS AND CRAFTS  
IN 19TH-CENTURY EUROPE

NISE MONOGRAPHS 1





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*The Transnational Creation of National Arts and Crafts in 19th-Century Europe*

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SPIN (Study Platform on Interlocking Nationalisms) is member of the NISE Platform. SPIN aims to chart the cultural and historical root system of European nationalisms and to bring into focus those intellectual networks which carried and disseminated the emerging ideals of cultural nationalism in the Romantic period and in the long nineteenth century (1770-1914). For more information see [www.spinnet.eu](http://www.spinnet.eu).

Cover illustration: Postcard depicting a carpet weavers class from the Bezalel School in Jerusalem. The photograph on the cover and title page of this publication about a phenomenon that started in Europe during the 19th century, was taken in the Middle East in the 20th century. It thus reflects its universal and enduring influence as described in the text.

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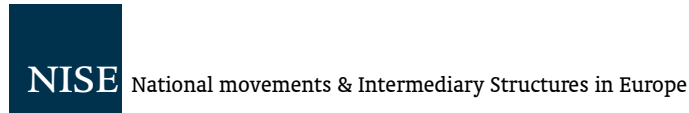
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## PREFACE

The following text by Anne-Marie Thiesse, researcher at the French Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS), describes illuminatively how so-called traditional folk art became an integral building block for the modern formation of nations. This element in the cultural construction of the nation as imagined community, part of its personification as a physical body, represented even a vital mobilising activity. The author also proves successfully that those presumably old art and folk traditions were the product of transnational cultural transfers from the 19th century onwards.

The international comparative angle of the text and its focus on the transfer of ideas, fits hand in glove with the remit of NISE, the international platform for the comparative study of national and regional movements. It is moreover not only written by one of its Scientific Council members but also the result of an activity by a NISE Network member, the SPIN project directed by Joep Leerssen from the University of Amsterdam.

Its publication by NISE coincides with the platform's transition from the preparatory stage. Time to take a look at what has been achieved so far and what the second stage implies. This short preface is therefore additional to an introductory brochure (in six languages) from 2010 as well as to a more elaborate presentational publication from the same year (please look to those publications as well as the remit section on the NISE website for a general presentation).<sup>1</sup>

NISE was established in 2008 in view of the lack of an empirical base within the formation of nationalism, to create an instrument for the comparative, transnational, historiographical study of national and regional movements in Europe. Central to the international scientific and archival platform, for scholars and archivists as well as research and heritage institutes, stands an English language, multi-contextual database, with structured and inter-related information on the intermediary structures (organisations, political parties, societies, clubs etc. as well as the people involved) of those movements and linked to four other kinds of data: bibliographical, archival, institutional and contextual. The data are gathered as a result of historiographical, heuristic and archival projects, through links with other databases and by centralised, unilateral input. The database is made available for researchers on the NISE website (which is also the location for the discussion platform and an expertise cum information centre on archival matters).

However, the infrastructure for the database, located within the ODIS framework<sup>2</sup>, becomes only operational in 2014. That has conversely allowed for more attention being paid to the archival targets of the platform, to the development of the communication channels and to the establishment of an organisational structure. Therefore, the first NISE conference was not only dedicated to the choice of initial subject of entry for the database but also focussed on the possibilities for cooperation between heritage and research institutes. This led to the first publication in the *Proceedings* series, which publishes the results of NISE workshops, conferences etc.<sup>3</sup> A project on behalf of the CMC foundation in the European Parliament, on the archives of nationalist and regionalist parties, was carried out, resulting in a publication, a database and a help desk.<sup>4</sup> As NISE offers assistance at different levels with the preservation and disclosure of archives and documentation of and on national and regional movements, the archives of a German regionalist party were safeguarded and disclosed at the ADVN.<sup>5</sup>

Also the scientific context, as part of the preparation for data entry, was provided for with two workshops being held co-jointly with SPIN (and with the help of, in turn, the department for political history of University Antwerp and the Central European University / Budapest), respectively on choral societies<sup>6</sup> and the matica.<sup>7</sup> NISE introduced its own, electronic and free access, scientific journal called *Studies on National Movements (SNM)*, to present the state of play as well as research conclusions. Its focus lies on comparative, transnational and transfer studies, with special attention to non-English language theoretical works and case studies, and in addition to heuristic and archival matters.<sup>8</sup> A website ([www.nise.eu](http://www.nise.eu)) and newsletter (called *NISELetter*) were developed as further dissemination channels.

Finally, the organisational structure was completed, with three scientific and three supporting bodies. The Scientific Council, with a more or less fixed number of members, taking responsibility for all output and scientific standards, is supplemented by Associated Members. A great amount of energy was directed at expanding the membership of the Network of institutes, organisations, projects etc. in view of covering all national and regional movements in Europe i.e. rendering the basis for comparison as representative as possible. This body is supported by Partners, i.e. those institutes and organisations whose remit does not coincide sufficiently to become a network member but with whom NISE expects to work regularly at an ad hoc basis. The Coordination Centre, based at the ADVN in Antwerp, provided the necessary organisational and administrative continuity, while the International Advisory Board assisted the editors of *SNM*. Finally the establishment of a non-profit association paved the way for further institutional and financial evolution. The annual gathering of those bodies has not only

institutional and scientific purposes, but has grown, even over such a short period, into a get-together for all scientifically or archivistically involved in the subject of nationalism.

The launch of the database infrastructure during the second stage (2013-2018) of the development of NISE, redirects the focus of its activities to the actual *raison d'être* for the platform: providing data for the comparative historiography of national and regional movements. From 2014 onwards, data input should take off, with at the end of said period a critical threshold of data to be reached for at least three separate subjects, in order to perform valuable research on them. Consequently, funding for project generated input through concerted action will be needed, besides means and ways for recurrent funding explored and put into action.

This new focus will not divert attention from the supporting activities as described before: organising conferences, workshops, seminars, debates and other events, consulting (with notably the development of the expertise and information centre) and publishing (the workshop proceedings, the scientific journal and also ad hoc monographs like the one you are holding now).

All this has to lead to the creation of a historiographical instrument for the study of national and regional movements and subsequently, nationalism, concurring with what John Breuilly, at the end of his introduction to the *Oxford Handbook of the History of Nationalism*, wrote: “Nationalism is a distinct, complex, and significant subject, and the best – perhaps the only – way of understanding it is historically.”<sup>9</sup>

**Luc Boeva**  
**NISE Coordinator**  
**29 November 2013**



Villa Koliba in Zakopane.



## THE SPIRIT OF THE 'IMAGINED COMMUNITY'

The nesting doll is famous the world over as a traditional object from Russia. We imagine it to be an ancient tradition, passed down through the centuries among the Russian peasantry. But in fact, the *matryoshka* is an invented tradition originating from the very end of the 19th century. The first one was created by a painter, Sergej Malyutin, and a sculptor, Vasily Zvyodochkin, in an artist colony patronised by a rich industrialist who wanted to encourage the creation of 'Russian Art' for a country entering modernity. Presented at the World's Fair in Paris in 1900, the nesting doll won a bronze medal and was a great success with the public, eliciting numerous commissions and triggering the development of a new large-scale arts and crafts productivity.

The birth of the *matryoshka* illustrates how folk arts and traditions, such as we know them today, are tied up in modern nation-formation in the context of

- industrial modernity;
- the promotion and transformation of 'folk' craftsmanship by artists and connoisseurs;
- the intensification of international cultural transfers concerning artistic theories and practices.

Cultural and art history have often interpreted the promotion of folk arts and traditions as a defensive reaction against transnational artistic modernity, as a 'return' to native, ancestral, and autarchic traditions.<sup>10</sup> This conception of a 'return to national origins' in fact reproduces, in simplified form, the very discourse of the theorists and promoters of these 'national arts and crafts'. In doing so it ignores the complexity of the modernity that determines the process at work in the formation of national identities.

The modern nation, as numerous studies have pointed out, is not merely a political matter, but a very emotional and aesthetic one as well. The notion of collective heritage, of specific culture, is primordial for the existence of the 'imagined community' and for its members' feeling of belonging. The modern nation is conceived as secular and sovereign: its members are unified by a bond that is neither divinely ordained, nor the common submission to a common temporal power. The modern nation is self-determined: it is conceived and imagined as a collective being inscribed in space and time. And to this collective being is therefore ascribed a

specific ‘character’, ‘spirit’, and ‘sensibility’ infusing the nation’s every expression, be it political, social or cultural. Each element of each national heritage constituted at the end of the 19th century was presented as the expression of a particular national ‘spirit’. Over the course of the 19th century, then, the expansion and transformation of intellectual and cultural production went hand in hand with its ‘nationalisation’: literature, painting, music, architecture, history etc., were from now on defined in national terms. The productions of earlier periods were ‘nationalised’ *a posteriori*, which allowed for the association of the notions of ‘French literature’, ‘German music’, or ‘Italian painting’ with centuries-old corpuses. These artistic nationalisations were related to the nationalisation of time and space produced at the same time by national historiographies and the national codification of landscapes. The nationalisation of the past, of nature, of culture was, then, performed systematically. These new conceptions were very intensively relayed by education (both within and outside the school system) and through social practices involving new forms of urban design, naming of streets, leisure activities etc.

And yet, these operations of nationalisation were effective to the degree to which they were carried out in the framework of cultural transfers, of the transnational exchange of knowledge and of know-how concerning nationalisation. Personal relationships between the artistic creators, entrepreneurs and institutions of various nations as well as deliberate imitations of foreign models were of the utmost importance. They allowed for the gradual and transnational definition of what was ‘properly national’ in terms of artistic and cultural production. The major artistic and intellectual capitals like Paris, London or Vienna were places of learning and apprenticeship for native and foreign artistic creators. It was often in these cities that artists and intellectuals from elsewhere discovered the desire and the means to work in favour of their national identity. These metropolitan centres also functioned as places of evaluation and even of a sort of ‘stock exchange’ for the valorisation of national cultures.

It seems paradoxical that arts and folk traditions as we know them today were determined by cultural transfers between nations entering into modernity. Indeed, the promotion of popular, folk culture, which begins only in the national era, rests mostly upon the ‘authentically national’ value of this culture.<sup>11</sup> I would therefore like to demonstrate, on the basis of a few examples, how transnational exchanges were decisive for the creation of an ‘authentically national popular culture’ appropriated by modernity.



Russian matryoshka dolls appeared in Russia at the end of 1890s in a Moscow craft workshop. The first Russian nested doll set was carved in 1890 from a design by Sergej Malyutin, who was a folk crafts painter at Abramtsevo. The first matryoshka was highly influenced by modernism.

## NATIONAL HERITAGE AND POPULAR CULTURE

The modern nation was conceived as a trans-social community. This implied a change in the status of the People, both politically and culturally. The People, until then, were thought of as devoid of culture. But with the beginning of the national era, popular culture was abundantly celebrated as the basis of 'truly national' culture. It was from then on presented on the one hand as a relic of the original culture of the ancestors of the nation and on the other hand as the natural expression of the intimate relationships between the nation and the space that properly belongs to it. As a result, the double anchorage of the nation in its history and its territory passed through popular folk culture. This implied not only a new interest in popular traditions on the part of the upper classes, but also an intense reconfiguration of popular practices in order to promote them as the foundation of a modern national culture.

The first collections of popular folk culture, begun at the end of the 18th century in Europe, were explicitly presented as patriotic enterprises on behalf of the national identity. Up until the 1830s, they were primarily concerned with popular songs and tales. These verbal forms of popular culture were interpreted as the authentic material allowing for the constitution of the languages and literatures of modern nations. From the 1830s on, interest in popular culture expanded to its more material objects, especially clothing and jewellery. Draughtsmen and painters represented popular costumes, which were rather different from the ones seen in paintings from previous centuries. The folklorists regularly insisted on the urgent necessity of describing these traditions.

Traditional culture, such as it was then described, had a double particularity: it had been passed down without much alteration from time immemorial over the centuries and across wars, but it was destined inevitably to disappear rapidly.<sup>12</sup> Anxiety over the loss of a centuries-old tradition has been a *leitmotiv* of folklorists and ethnologists since the 18th century. And yet the corpus of traditions and traditional objects collected over two centuries has not diminished, and, indeed, has continually increased. The Hobsbawm/Ranger 'invention of tradition' (which in many cases should be read to mean: the improvement and revival of traditions), has been highly fruitful.

From the middle of the 19th century on, folklore studies began to extend to popular domestic objects: furniture, dish-ware, carpets, as well as to rural architecture. Indeed, these popular arts and crafts products were facing more and more competition from industrial production. Craftwork production, because it was, by economic necessity, less and less the object of popular consumption, progressively changed in status. It became, rather, an aesthetically valued consumer commodity for the more comfortable social classes. This social transfer was founded on the attribution of new values to popular arts and crafts, namely, originality and rarity. While industrial production was associated with mechanical work and the uniformity of the products, the value of handcraft production, on the other hand, was emphasised as the fruit of human skillfulness and of individual creation. Crafts were invested with the values characteristic of art.



Wall cabinet by Elena Polenova, Russia, 1880-1890.

## A DESIGN FOR THE INDUSTRIAL ERA

New forms of production and consumption raised a new series of aesthetic, social and political issues, which explain the important function of popular folk art in nation-building. Industrial development very soon brought aesthetic and ethical uncertainties to the surface. How to reconcile beauty and mechanical production? How to educate the taste of a public that was becoming a consumer of industrial goods? The question of taste had exclusively concerned a small elite in the pre-national era, but this changed drastically in the national era. Because the national community was from now on 'imagined' through a common heritage, which had to be loved, protected and transmitted, it was now necessary that the members of the nation, whatever their social class, share a single basic conception of the Beautiful. It also became necessary to train 'designers' for industrial mass production.

These concerns were at the heart of the first International Exhibition held in London in 1851, when the United Kingdom was the most advanced country of the industrial revolution. Among the key personalities in these enterprises of aesthetic education one must mention the civil servant Henry Cole (1808-1882). Deeply involved in the new forms of public life, he was in charge of the organisation and management of the archives and of postal reform with the creation of the first postage stamp in 1840. As an artist, he himself created all sorts of objects destined for industrial production. He wrote books under pseudonyms on cultural pedagogy for children and in 1843 he invented a British tradition destined for global success: the greeting card. After visiting the 1849 Quinquennial Exhibition in Paris, he obtained a government mandate to organise an international exhibition in London. *The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of all Nations* was held in the Crystal Palace in Hyde Park in 1851. Cole played a decisive role afterwards in the creation of an institution intended "to improve standards of art and design education in Britain with reference to their applicability to industry". This was the South Kensington museum, of which Cole was the first director from 1857 to 1873, and which in 1899 became the Victoria and Albert Museum. With its mission to present objects from all over the world for the improvement of applied arts among producers and the public, this museum itself became the benchmark for numerous other museums of applied or industrial art that afterwards proliferated on the European continent.<sup>13</sup> In every case, the project was to train creators of applied art for the industrial age and to make an aesthetic pedagogy possible.

The great international exhibitions organised after 1851 also had, temporarily, the same function, but for a very large public. Technological innovation, the great machine halls, obviously took pride of place. Nations also came to showcase their identity and traditions in an attractive form.

In 1867, the section X of the International Exhibition held in Paris was devoted to objects allowing for the “improvement of the physical and moral condition of the population”. Classe 91 was concerned with “furniture, clothing, and food of all origins, distinguished by their useful qualities, and cheap”, intended for a popular clientèle. But artists had been commissioned to show “the last vestiges of ancient manners and customs”: they presented costumes of peasants from France and from other countries. The Swedish part, which was classed first, was hugely successful: inspired by theatrical staging, it presented models dressed in traditional costumes. The Swedish presentation was enriched at the International Exhibition of 1878 in Paris: the models in costume were placed in rooms inspired by those of rural houses, among objects of daily life.

It was precisely a Swedish institution which became the model of European ethnographic museums. The Swedish philologist Artur Immanuel Hazelius (1833-1901) undertook the creation of a museum for Swedish ethnography in 1872, today called the Nordiska museet. The national ethnographic museums which in the following years opened in the major European capitals were all conceived along the same principles of exhibition. As a complement to this first form of ethnographic institutionalisation, specialised associations were founded: they published journals and curatorial instructions.<sup>14</sup> The prototype was that of the British *Folklore Society* founded in 1878. From 1891 on, international conferences, often organised on the occasion of international exhibitions, enabled the exchange of knowledge and experiences.

Costumes and material objects were the first items presented in the exhibitions and museums because they were the handcrafted products that were facing the most direct competition from industrial production. The first central museum of folklore in Germany, founded in 1889 under the directorship of Rudolf Virchow, was named Museum für deutsche Volkstrachten und Erzeugnisse des Hausgewerbes (Museum of German Folkloric Costumes and Domestically Produced Objects).



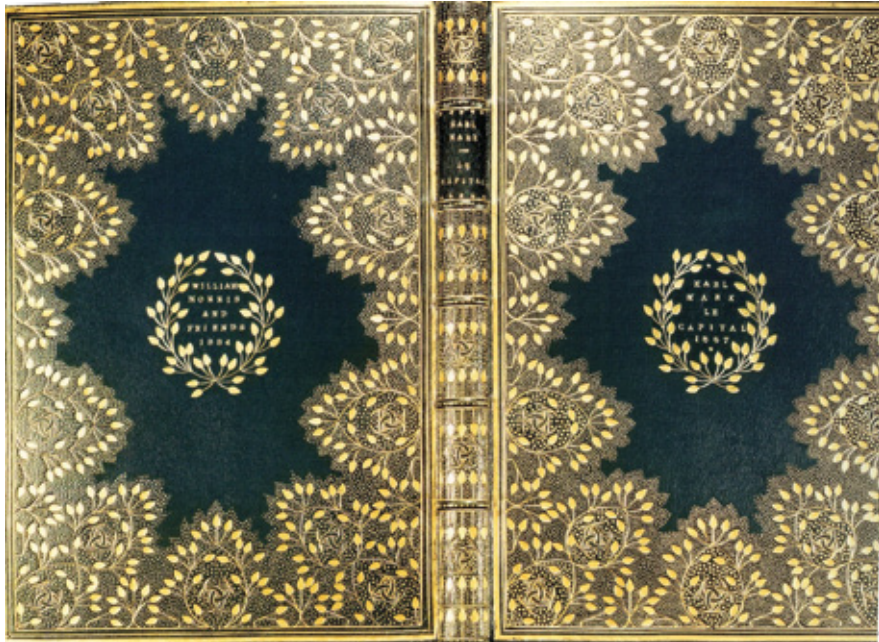
Bålstugan in Halland, an example of a typical common house in southern Sweden, bought, brought to Varberg and opened for the public already in 1879 by Alfred Bexell, whose idea of an open-air museum inspired Artur Hazelius.



In 1891 Hazelius established an open-air museum in Skansen, near Stockholm, which became the universal model for other open-air museums. For Skansen he collected entire buildings and farms. Rural architecture was thereafter regularly presented in the ethnographic villages of the international exhibitions and in open-air museums, also presenting visitors with peasant work and celebrations.

National ethnographic museums had a triple function, which was regularly repeated by the organisers:

- A patriotic function in favour of national identity. The members of the nation were supposed to visit these museums in order to familiarise themselves, and identify, with the national traditions, spirit and lifestyle.
- A scientific function: they were meant to conserve and protect the materials of traditional culture, ‘collected just before their extinction’.
- A function for the applied arts: they were meant to provide artists and artisans with models and motifs to feed modern creativity.



Copy of the French translation from 1872-1875 by Joseph Roy (with revisions by the author) of Karl Marx' *Das Kapital*. It was rebound by Thomas James Cobden-Sanderson in 1883 (as the cover had been damaged by its previous holder), by request of its present owner William Morris (an English translation only appeared in 1887).

## FROM CRAFTS TO ARTS

The Arts and Crafts movement, which developed in the United Kingdom during the second half of the 19th century, was the theoretical and practical crystallisation of reflections and practices concerning the new relations between modernity, industry, aesthetics, society and the nation. One of its dominant figures was the designer William Morris (1834-1896). The son of a London stockbroker, he became friends with Edward Burne-Jones during his studies at Oxford. He also became close to Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the artists of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. A writer, poet, and translator of Icelandic sagas, he became deeply involved in the nascent socialist movement in Britain; he was among the founders of the *Socialist League* in December 1884. Highly influenced by his reading of John Ruskin, whom he popularised, Morris gave countless lectures calling for the improvement of the living conditions of manual labourers. To this end it was above all necessary, he felt, to develop education and leisure activities, to democratise art and every type of skill associated with it, so that the worker might become an artisan and an artist. He advocated the teaching of applied arts, since for him the creation of beautiful and useful domestic items was indispensable for the full realisation of a human being. He thus called for an aesthetisation of daily life and for a democratisation of the aesthetic:

*“To give people pleasure in the things they must perforce use, that is one great office of decoration; to give people pleasure in the things they must perforce make, that is the other use of it. [...] I do not want art for a few, any more than education for a few, or freedom for a few.”<sup>15</sup>*

As an experiment to put his principles into action, Morris designed for his own use the Red House in Upton (1859): he and his artist friends saw to the construction and decoration themselves. In 1861 he established, with Charles Faulkner and Peter Paul Marshall, the firm Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co., with Rossetti, Burne-Jones, Ford Madox Brown and Philip Webb as partners. The firm produced furniture, jewelery, stained glass, embroideries, wall paperhangings, carpets etc. The work shown by the firm was presented at international exhibitions.

The Arts and Crafts movement was a major theoretical and practical point of reference in Europe and on other continents. William Morris was to Arts and Crafts what the brothers Grimm had been to philology: the model for the creators of that

artistic movement that principally manifested itself under the names of Art nouveau and National Art. Whereas its Art nouveau version clearly presented itself as an aesthetic avant-garde, often grounded in 'primitivism' and cosmopolitanism, the National Art side was predicated on its connection to national identities and on its rootedness in national and rustic references. The National Art version seems to have been more active in emerging nations, but it was also developed in artistic regionalisms of older nations such as Brittany and Catalonia. In fact Art nouveau and National Art are closely connected, with the work of numerous artists straddling both.



*The Strawberry Thief*, furnishing fabric (for curtains or draped around walls) made in 1883 by William Morris.

## ARTIST COLONIES AND ARTS AND CRAFTS WORKSHOPS

National Art corresponded to a new form of craftwork, practised by artists or else executed by manual workers under the guidance of artists. It was a matter of producing traditional, handcrafted objects, yet adapted to consumption by an urban, more or less affluent public. In many European countries at the end of the 19th century, artists set themselves up in villages that folklorists had described for the beauty of their traditions. They encouraged artisans to develop and transform original production, which they gave codified standards in order to facilitate its marketing and to guarantee its 'authenticity'. Artists took it upon themselves to create sales circuits and to promote this production through publications and presentations in national or international fairs. Design journals, such as the great English journal *The Studio*, established in London in 1893, distributed advertisements and articles about this new national art throughout the world. Often, ladies from high society patronised these new workshops to charitable ends. The workshops were supposed to encourage peasants to stay in their villages and avoid emigration to the dangerous cities, where young girls risked prostitution. In some cases, rich patrons having made their fortunes in industry or banking, encouraged, for the sake of the creation of a national art, the meeting of artists and handcraft artisans.

The Abramtsevo domain, near Moscow, was a very active centre of creation of Russian National Art. It was purchased in 1870 by Savva Mamontov, whose family had made its fortune in the rail-roads and the Baku oilfields. An art devotee, he went on a Grand Tour to Italy where he connected with numerous young Russian artists. He set about bringing together writers, musicians, painters, sculptors, dramatic artists, whom he invited to stay and work at Abramtsevo in order to foster a high-quality national art. On the estate, the artists Vasily Polenov and Viktor Vasnetsov, Ilya Repin etc. designed a tiny church, inspired by medieval Novgorod, which is considered to be the first example of Art nouveau in Russia. Drama and opera on Russian folklore themes (for example Rimsky-Korsakov's *The Snow Maiden*) were staged in Abramtsevo. The amateur performances in Abramtsevo contributed to the creation of the Russian Private Opera in Moscow (1885-1891, 1896-1899) owned by Savva Mamontov. Initiated by Yelizaveta Mamontova a collection of folk art was started in 1881. The objects presented there were intended to inspire the work of the artists at Abramtsevo. The director of the workshop, Elena Polenova, created 'handcrafted' objects in this spirit; they won prizes at prestigious exhibi-

tions. When, in 1899, Savva Mamontov was accused of financial malversations and his business came to ruin, artistic workshops based on the Abramtsevo model had been founded on the Solomenki estate, owned by Maria Yakunchikova, and on the Talashkino estate owned by princess Maria Tenisheva.



Kalotaszeg folk art (1911, village of Méra).

Another art colony famous for its creation of National Art that was inspired by the principles of the Arts and Crafts movement, was founded in Kalotaszeg. It functioned under the patronage of another rich couple of sponsors, the banker Zsimund Gyarmathy and his wife, the writer Etelka Gyarmathy. Kalotaszeg is a region in Transylvania (today in Romania) comprising around forty villages with a mixed Hungarian and Romanian speaking population. Here, Etelka Gyarmathy hosted Habsburg archduchesses as well as renowned Hungarian and foreign artists. Béla Bartók collected folk music in Kalotaszeg. The Gyarmathys created the Kalotaszeg cottage industry, providing work for men and women in the villages. The production was presented at national and international exhibitions. One of the principal figures of Hungarian Art nouveau, the painter and sculptor Aladar Kriesch (1863-1920; he had trained in Munich, Rome and the Parisian *Académie Julian*) stayed in the Kalotaszeg region at the turn of the century. In 1907, he even added to his name that of a village in the region, Körösfoi. He was also the founder of the Gödöllő artist colony, in the small town near Budapest. In this artist colony, for which he invoked the auspices of Ruskin, Morris and Tolstoy, he ran a workshop of textile crafts. The Hungarian Ethnographical Society was formed in 1889 and the Society's journal, *Ethnographia*, was launched in 1890.

*“In the following years Antal Herrmann, one of the leading organisers of the Society, leased the Jegenye Spa in Kalotaszeg and tried to make it a summer resort of intellectuals and artists, and even to develop it into an «ethnographers' colony».”<sup>16</sup>*

At the Exhibition of the Millennium (1896) where Hungary, largely autonomous within the Habsburg Empire, but not yet independent, presented its identity with fervor, the objects from Kalotaszeg were particularly emphasised. They constituted the essential elements of the ethnographic exhibition opened in Budapest in 1896. During this same period the Zakopane style was launched in the Polish Carpathians. Stanislaw Witkiewicz, an art critic, artist and architect, created a style inspired by local traditions for rich residents in this new tourist region.

The 1900 World's Fair, whose principal attractions had to do with the new uses of electricity, also marked the triumph of National Art, which was also the occasion for an entire series of ambitious presentations intended to ornament the public buildings of Nation-States.



Inside Villa Koliba in Zakopane.



## **THE UNIVERSALISATION OF THE MODEL FOR THE CREATION OF NATIONAL ARTS AND CRAFTS**

This international model of creation of a national art for modernity channelling popular tradition spread not only across Europe but also to numerous other countries. The undertakings for the creation of a Jewish national art in Palestine appeared right at the beginning of the 20th century. The Verband Jüdischer Frauen für Kulturarbeit in Palästina, founded in Hamburg in 1907, supported the opening of lace-making workshops in this way. The artist Boris Schatz, born in Lithuania in 1867, founded an art school in 1906 in Jerusalem inspired by the principles of Arts and Crafts. After studying painting at Vilnius and Warsaw, he joined the Atelier Cormon in Paris in 1889. In 1895 he was recruited as official artist of the newly established court of Bulgaria and created a Royal Arts Academy in Sofia. In 1903, after meeting Theodor Hertzl, he became a Zionist activist and chose to move to Palestine. There he opened the Bezalel school, named after the Biblical artisan who made the Tabernacle. The work of his students, who were generally Zionist activists, was presented in international exhibitions and was decisive for the creation of a Jewish art in Palestine. Inspiration was taken from the Arts and Crafts movement and combined with Biblical references and craftwork traditions from the Middle East. Closed in 1929 for financial reasons, Bezalel was reopened in 1935 as the New Bezalel School for Arts and Crafts. Today it is the main Israeli institution for fine arts training.

The British Empire was itself, from very early on, a place of active experimentation with new aesthetic and political theories concerning folk arts. Having discovered a very rich creative production in India, and worried about its possible disappearance in the face of 'Manchester products', British elites rapidly went about emphasising the value of, and protecting and developing the Indian handcraft industry, which also happened to be well represented at the South Kensington museum.<sup>17</sup> The Calcutta Mechanics' Institution and School of Art was founded as early as 1839, replaced in 1854 by the Society of Promotion of Industrial Art. In 1850, an art school was founded in Madras. The Mayo School of Art was established in Punjab in 1875. John Lockwood Kipling (1837-1911; father of the famous novelist) was the secretary of the provincial Committee responsible for collecting specimens for the Punjab Court at the Calcutta International Exhibition (1883-1884). In 1870, commissioned by the government to tour the North-West Provinces, he made a series of sketches of Indian craftsmen. In 1875, Kipling was appointed the Principal

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TELEPHONE 55. **טלפון 55**

TELEGRAMS: B. E. Z. A. L. WORKS. **טלגרמים: בעזאל-וורקס**

**ARTISTIC "BEZAEI" WORKSHOPS**  
**JAFFA ROAD, OPPOSITE POST OFFICE**  
**JERUSALEM, P.O. B. 53**  
**ALL KINDS OF ARTISTIC ORIENTAL WORKS PRODUCED IN THE COUNTRY.**

**בית, בצלאה**  
**רחוב יפו, מול משרד הדואר**  
**ירושלים, ת.ב.ת. דאר 53**  
**עבודות אמנותיות מזרחיות**  
**מכל הסוגים, הנעשות בארץ-ישראל**

Poster published by the Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design in 1929.

of the Mayo School of Arts, Lahore. Kipling was also editor of the *Journal of Indian Art and Industry*, which carried drawings of works by the students of the Mayo School.

In Japan, the Arts and Crafts movement met with great success from the end of the 19th century, when the country was going through its accelerated modernisation process. A few decades later, the *Mingei* movement was launched – the name being an abbreviation for *Minshûteki Kôgei*, which means ‘crafts of the people’. The philosopher Yanagi Sôetsu (1889-1961) developed the *Mingei* theory in the 1920s. Yanagi created a concept of the supreme beauty of handmade folk crafts for ordinary use, made by unknown craftsmen. The *Mingei* movement undertook a nationwide campaign for the revival of folk crafts from the 1930s onwards. Yanagi, who came from a rich Tokyo family, was deeply immersed in Western culture and was a careful reader of *The Studio*. He too was to create an artist colony, in Abiko, invoking the auspices of Ruskin, Morris and Tolstoy. He was interested in the folk art of Korea, then a Japanese colony. Yanagi organised the first Japanese folk crafts exhibition in Tokyo in 1927. In the same year he launched a guild of craftsmen which was similar to the firm Morris & Co. Yanagi founded the Association of Japanese Folk Crafts in 1934 and published a new magazine, *Kôgei* (“Crafts”). He carried out field research on the Japanese islands. In 1936, Yanagi established the Japan Folk Crafts Museum in Tokyo; the model was Hazelius’ Nordiska Museet.

One final, more contemporary example shows the application of this process to the population we now call ‘first nations’. ‘Inuit art’, such as we know it today, was launched by a Canadian artist. In 1948, the painter James Archibald Houston (1921-2005, trained in Paris and Japan), originally from Toronto, discovered the soapstone sculptures of the Inoucdjouac. The Canadian Guild of Crafts had already made several ethnologically motivated attempts before the war to stimulate ‘Eskimo’ crafts. It lent its support to Houston, who encouraged the Eskimos to exploit their artistic talents and to market them. In 1949, a thousand or so objects were sold in Montreal, during the first major commercial exhibition of Inuit art. Under the aegis of the Canadian authorities, artists and craftsmen were sent into the communities in order to guide the Inuit in their artistic production, and cooperatives were created. Catholic missionaries undertook to create craftwork cooperatives. By the late 1950s, the Government had sponsored tours of Inuit art throughout Eastern and Western Europe, South America, and the Middle East.<sup>18</sup>

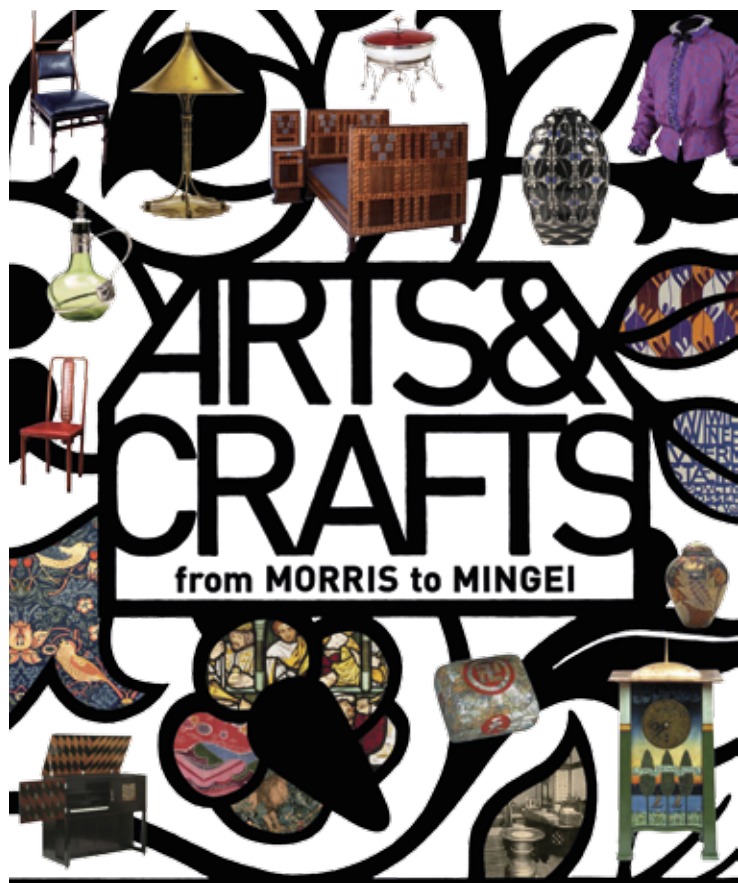


Main entrance of the Mingeikan, the Japan Folk Crafts Museum, in Tokyo, designed in 1936 by Sōetsu Yanagi.

## CONCLUSION

The first collectors of popular Arts and Crafts explained the urgency of their work by claiming to save objects that faced extinction in the advent of modernity. In fact, what disappeared were the original uses of these objects as new practices emerged. A new status was conferred on the objects: that of 'relics' in an almost religious sense, appropriate to the new 'secular religion' of modernity. National art was supposed to attest to the eternity of the 'national spirit', rooted in the soil and in changeless time. Through this function, modern national art completed and reinforced the 'historical' version of the master narrative that placed the nation in a teleological continuity through events. National art was also supposed to attest that the People, in the socioeconomic sense, did not form a specific class, but were in fact the foundation of the People in the national sense, i.e. a unity with no real divisions.

But those 'relics', destined to be preserved in museums, were also given a new life – a revival – under the effects of aesthetic change. The main criterion by which modernity assigns artistic value is innovation. This neither excludes nor undervalues tradition, on the contrary. To the extent to which tradition can itself be appropriated and transformed through innovative creation, it becomes itself a key element in the process of innovation; this is borne out by the constant usage of primitivism and archaism by the artistic avant-garde. National Arts and Crafts, for this reason, are just as cosmopolitan in their elaboration and in their evaluation as artistic goods, since they belong to the same networks. The major capitals, with their museums, galleries, art boutiques – as well as those temporary, movable capitals which consisted in the various international exhibitions hosted successively in different locations – were the places where new forms of Arts and Crafts were determined, where the objects received their value 'quotation'. Which is not in contradiction with Arts and Crafts' function relative to national identity, as the internal and external representation of the nation. Mass tourism, moreover, drove the emergence in the 20th century of a new product of mass consumption: craftwork objects representing a national identity exclusively for the use of foreigners, and which often took the form of industrially produced kitsch versions of the national identity. In a globalised world, its production is more and more concentrated in the new 'Asian Manchesters', eliciting in reaction newly-designed 'truly manual' productions and labels for more 'handcrafted', 'truly authentic' handcraft products.



「生活と芸術—アーツ&クラフツ展」ウィリアム・モリスから民芸まで

2009年1月24日(土)～4月5日(日) 東京都美術館 企画展示室(上野公園内)

LIFE AND ART: ARTS & CRAFTS FROM MORRIS TO MINGEI

Poster for the exhibition at the Tokyo Metropolitan Museum in 2009 on the expansion of the Arts and Crafts movement from England to Japan.

## REFERENCES TO ILLUSTRATIONS:

Cover & p. 1: jewishpostcardcollection.com – Stephanie Comfort. Source: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/9679871@N04>.

p. 8: Photograph from 2008. Source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zakopane\\_Style\\_architecture](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zakopane_Style_architecture).

p. 11: Muzej Ipružki (Toy Museum of the Russian Academy of Education), Moscow.

p. 14: © Victoria and Albert Museum, London, no. W.4-2004.

p. 17: Source: <http://www.ueforum.se/2005-2010/litteratur05-10/06ansvarforutstallningen.php> (scanned from Stefan Carlén, *Att ställa ut kultur. Om kulturhistoriska utställningar under 100 år*, Stockholm, 1990).

p. 18: The copy is kept at Wormsley Library, London.

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p. 26: Source: The Palestine Poster Project Archives (Dan Walsh). <http://www.palestineposterproject.org/poster/tourism-in-palestine-come-and-see-erez-israel>.

p. 28: © Mingeikan, Tokyo.

p. 30: © Asahi Shimbun.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> L. Boeva, *NISE – A database, a heuristic guide and an archival instrument for transnational comparative research into the national movements in Europe*, Antwerp, 2010; L. Boeva, *Rien de plus international. Towards a comparative and transnational historiography of national movements*, Antwerp, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> The ODIS project, the Research Interface Centre and Database for the Study of 19th and 20th Century Intermediary Structures in Flanders (Onderzoekssteunpunt en databank intermediaire structuren in Vlaanderen, 19e-20e eeuw [ODIS]), fosters interest in interdisciplinary and comparative research on civil society. It aims to promote mutual dialogue between historians, social scientists, archivists, librarians and documentation specialists. The project also develops research tools. The ODIS database, web database in a reliable technical setting, became operational in September 2001. This contextual database offers a location in which the numerous and dispersed files, research tools and collections on the subject can be centralised, correlated and updated. The ODIS database was thoroughly renewed and modernised over the past years. ODIS 2 provides a broad range of new features and functionalities. Its multilingual interface allows to construct interconnected data series, not only on organisations, persons, publications and archives, but also on families, buildings and events. Using international standards, ODIS provides many different vocabularies and thesauri, adapted to the historical context of the main European countries. The new ODIS database not only facilitates in-depth analysis and spatial representation of the data series that it contains, but also positions itself as an information node, interconnecting many other online instruments that contain relevant historical information on the subject.

<sup>3</sup> *Developing the NISE platform. Proceedings of the First NISE Conference. Skopje (Macedonia), 27-28 May 2010*, Antwerp, 2011 (NISE Proceedings 1).

<sup>4</sup> For more information about the project, look at <http://nise.eu/activities/projects/guide-to-the-archives-and-documentation-of-the-member-parties-of-the-european-free-alliance-efa-4/>. The report was published as *The need for and the needs of archives. The archives and documentation of the member parties of the European Free Alliance*, Antwerp, 2012



(NISE Proceedings 2); the database is at <http://gta.nise.eu/> and the help desk can be found at [http://eic.nise.eu/wiki/Main\\_Page](http://eic.nise.eu/wiki/Main_Page).

<sup>5</sup> The inventory, with a brief introduction, is at [http://nise.eu/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/BP\\_inventory.pdf](http://nise.eu/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/BP_inventory.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> *Choral societies and nationalist mobilization in nineteenth-century Europe*: look at [http://nise.eu/activities/event/workshops/choral\\_societies/](http://nise.eu/activities/event/workshops/choral_societies/).

<sup>7</sup> *Building cultural nations. The matica and equivalent intermediary structures in Europe*: look at <http://nise.eu/activities/event/workshops/building-cultural-nations/>.

<sup>8</sup> [Http://snm.nise.eu](http://snm.nise.eu). For the first issue (2013), see <http://snm.nise.eu/index.php/studies/issue/current>.

<sup>9</sup> J. Breuilly, *Introduction: Concepts, Approaches, Theories*, in: *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Nationalism*, Oxford, 2013, pp. 1-15 (p. 15).

<sup>10</sup> “During the second half of the nineteenth century, many Russian artists, feeling moved to develop a national art, rejected or questioned the Western models taught in the Saint Petersburg and Moscow academies. The resurge in interest in Slavic sources, myths, history and folk art, and the specifics of contemporary social and political conditions, all lent themselves to the emergence of an identifiably ‘Russian’ art.” Cf. [http://www.musee-orsay.fr/en/events/exhibitions/archives/archives/article/lart-russe-dans-la-seconde-moitie-du-xixe-siecle-en-quete-didentite-4234.html?tx\\_ttnews%5Bswords%5D=1%27art%2russe&tx\\_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=252&cHash=72ab84a731](http://www.musee-orsay.fr/en/events/exhibitions/archives/archives/article/lart-russe-dans-la-seconde-moitie-du-xixe-siecle-en-quete-didentite-4234.html?tx_ttnews%5Bswords%5D=1%27art%2russe&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=252&cHash=72ab84a731).

<sup>11</sup> “Some twenty or thirty years ago the whole of the large territory of the Ukraine, every corner of it, was still rich in peasant art. [...] While the upper classes of the ‘Little Russian’ community, forgetting whatever they possessed of their own in the province of applied art, lived in surroundings borrowed from the West, the peasant folk clung to their own national art.” N. Bilachevsky, *The Peasant Art of Little Russia (The Ukraine)*, in: C. Holme (ed.), *Peasant Art In Russia*, London-Paris-New York, 1912, pp. 15-35 (p. 15).

<sup>12</sup> “However, from the second half of the nineteenth century, when the feudal system was abolished, a change came over the social and especially the economic conditions of the country, and the old traditions of peasant life began to give way. This process was reflected in the peasant art, as it was in everything else.

*The demand for objects of adornment began to be satisfied now, not with the creations of the peasants' own artistic fancy, as was the case hitherto, but with factory-made articles which were quickly adapted to the roughly formulated requirements of the peasant. The decline of taste and the flooding of the villages with factory-made goods gradually caused at first a change for the worse in the productions of the people's art, and then the total disappearance of that art. This process is not, however, yet completed, and the life of the Ukrainian peasant is still preserving much of what is very individual, highly artistic, and strongly characteristic of the spiritual personality of the Ukrainian race." (ibid.).*

<sup>13</sup> Österreichisches Museum für Kunst und Industrie, today Museum für angewandte Kunst, opened in Vienna in 1864; Deutsches Gewerbemuseum, today Kunstgewerbemuseum, opened in Berlin in 1867; Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe opened in Hamburg in 1874; Museum für Angewandte Kunst in Budapest in 1872, in a Jugendstil building by Ödön Lechner und Gyula Pártos from 1896.

<sup>14</sup> Nordiska Museet (cf. Skandinavisk-etnografiska samlingen) (Museum for Swedish Ethnography), Stockholm, 1872; Salle de France, Musée d'Ethnographie, Paris, 1884; Danish Museum of Ethnography, Dansk Folkemuseum, Copenhagen, 1885; Museum für deutsche Volkstrachten und Erzeugnisse des Hausgewerbes, Berlin, 1889; Norsk folke museum, Oslo, 1894; Museum für Volkskunde, Vienna, 1894; Národopisné museum Československé (Museum of Czechoslovak Ethnology), Prague, 1895; Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum (National museum in Budapest, with large ethnographic exhibition), 1896.

<sup>15</sup> W. Morris, *The Decorative Arts: Their Relation to Modern Life and Progress: an Address Delivered Before the Trades' Guild of Learning (Dec. 4, 1877)*, London, 1878.

<sup>16</sup> T. Hofer & É. Szacsvey (translation: E. Antalffy), *The Discovery of Kalotaszeg and the Beginnings of Hungarian Ethnography* (1998), online at the website of the Museum of Ethnography, Budapest, <http://www.neprajz.hu/kalotaszeg/angol.htm>.

<sup>17</sup> The East India Company's Museum was founded in 1791 at the Company's headquarters in Leadenhall Street. The Company took responsibility for Indian displays at the International Exhibitions in London (1851) and Paris (1855). Many objects were then acquired for the South

Kensington Museum. In 1879 the ownership of most of the India Museum collections was transferred to the South Kensington Museum.

<sup>18</sup> [Http://www.immigrer-contact.com/main.php?action=tribune&option=lecture&mpseudo=lucanne&tid=8&t=1%27art\\_Inuit\\_-\\_Pour\\_se\\_souvenir\\_et\\_survivre](http://www.immigrer-contact.com/main.php?action=tribune&option=lecture&mpseudo=lucanne&tid=8&t=1%27art_Inuit_-_Pour_se_souvenir_et_survivre).

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