

GLASGOW COLOUR STUDIES GROUP

Notes following the Twenty-Fifth Meeting, 18th February 2015

The twenty-fifth meeting of the GCSG took place in Room 1, English Language, University of Glasgow. Thanks are due to Carole Biggam who organized the meeting and introduced the speaker, to Christian Kay who designed the poster, and to Christian Kay and Carole Hough who organized the refreshments.

Our speaker was Duncan Chappell, Academic Liaison Librarian, Glasgow School of Art.

Duncan Chappell spoke on 'Lost and Found: Colour Resources at the Glasgow School of Art'

His abstract is as follows:

On 23 May 2014 the Mackintosh Building at the Glasgow School of Art was devastated by fire. This disaster destroyed the School's world-famous Mackintosh Library and its historical collections, along with many objects from its museum collections. The School's archives, though saved, were damaged by smoke and water. This talk will highlight some of the resources that were lost and saved across the library, archives and collections, with a particular emphasis on resources for the study of colour and its perception.

Commentary (by Carole Biggam; checked by Duncan Chappell)

Duncan began with pictures of the Glasgow School of Art (GSA) library before the fire of 2014. The GSA was designed by Charles Rennie Mackintosh, and the west wing, which contained the library, was built between 1907 and 1909. The library had a mezzanine level on all four sides, was constructed almost entirely in wood, principally oak, and was lit by massive windows which James Macaulay compared with those of York Minster. Every detail was designed by Mackintosh, including the much admired Windsor chairs and the periodicals desk. Macaulay described it as "the translation of philosophical thought into three dimensions" (*School of Art, Glasgow*, Phaidon, 1993).

The 2014 fire caused devastation, destroying the wooden facing back to the brickwork, and causing the mezzanine level to collapse. Many books were lost, some dating back to the sixteenth century, and also runs of journals such as *Ver Sacrum*, the official magazine of the Vienna Secession. A proportion of the foundation collection was also lost. Many of these books came from South Kensington, where the curriculum was once decided. Losses include a book on artistic dress which included designs by Jessie Newberry who studied, and later taught in the GSA; *Macao et cosmage* (1919) by Edy Legrand, an important example of the pochoir technique; an 1851 work about the use of colour on Ancient Greek buildings and sculptures, written by Jacques Ignace Hittorff, a German-born architect who worked in France; and *Studies of Ornamental Design* (1848) by C. J. Richardson. About 22% of the special collections were lost.

Thankfully, many important books were saved, and Duncan presented a particularly colourful selection of these. *Polychromatic Ornament* (1873), translated from the French of Albert

Racinet, illustrates two thousand examples of ornament from across the world and from the past. It contains one hundred chromolithographed plates of various styles of ornament such as Egyptian, Medieval, Chinese, and Byzantine, all interpreted in a western manner. This book had a didactic aim which suited well the purpose of the GSA which had been founded in 1845 to train designers for industry. *Grammar of Ornament* (1856) by Owen Jones, containing over one hundred chromolithographs, formulated the key principles of the decorative arts, and most art schools would own several copies. Also saved were *The Art of Decorative Design* (1862) by Christopher Dresser, a Glaswegian and key figure in the Aesthetic Movement; and his *Principles of Decorative Design* (c.1875) which quickly went into four editions.

The GSA library has an excellent collection of books illustrating the *pochoir* technique of stencilling which is a labour-intensive, hand-drawn process, typically French. It was a reaction against mechanised printing, and was at its peak in 1920s and 1930s Paris. Jean Saudé was a pre-eminent master who wrote *Traité d'enluminure d'art au pochoir* (1925). The library has copies of *Inspiration*, published in Paris in the early 1900s, a portfolio of designs in a modernist style, inspired by fractal mathematics and crystallography, thus illustrating a cross-over between science and art, and of *Formes et couleurs* by Auguste Thomas (1921). Edouard Benedictus was a chemist and artist who exhibited at the 1925 Paris exhibition. He published *Relais* in 1930 which contained some startlingly bright designs. Duncan also showed some pages from *Or et couleurs* by G. Darcy (1923), and *Fleurs* by Serge Gladky (1929), the latter in the cubist style of geometric forms abstracted from nature. Possibly the greatest exponent of pochoir is Émile-Alain Séguéy, and the GSA holds nine of his volumes, in which stylized flower forms feature particularly prominently. Examples include *Samarkande* (1920), *Prismes* (1930?) and the famous *Papillons* (1925).

The GSA library holds other categories of colourful books. Firstly, on interiors, there are trade catalogues and pattern books such as those of John Line & Sons of 1950s London, and books such as *Color Schemes of Adam Ceilings* (New York, 1928) which reproduces the original studies by the Adam brothers. Secondly, on artists' books, the GSA holds over one thousand examples. These are books produced by an artist for mass distribution, thus democratizing art. Examples are: *Spring Snow* (c.2002), a visual translation by Alison Turnbull of Yukio Mishima's novel; and *English Coloured Papers* (2009) in which poems by Simon Cutts accompany colour swatches.

A third category in the library is costume and textiles, examples of which include *The Setts of the Scottish Tartans* by Donald Calder Stewart (1950), and other books on tartans. Also in stock are various textile swatch-books including those issued by the British Colour Council (London) to provide standards for industry, horticulture and other subject areas. Fourthly, the GSA has books on colour theory, vision science and visual perception. Examples include: *Suggestions for the Study of Colour* by H. Barrett Carpenter (1915); *Colour Harmony and Contrast* by James Ward (1912); *An Introduction to the Study of Colour* by J. Littlejohns for Winsor & Newton (1928); and sets of the Ishihara colour blindness tests, first issued in 1917. Finally, a fifth category of colour books held by the GSA is children's books, including *What Colour is Your World*, by Bob Gill (2008); *Colours* by Jan Pienkowski (2008); and *The Sun is Yellow* by Kmeta Pacovska (2012).

News

Our next meeting will be on Wednesday, 22nd April 2015, at the same place, when Emma Armstrong, Stage Technician, Renfrewshire Arts and Museums will speak on ‘Lighting Up Shakespeare: The Metamerism of Jacobean Stage Lighting Using Modern LED Technology’.

If you have suggestions for, or offers of GCSG meetings (any format), please contact Carole Biggam at c.p.biggam@btinternet.com Please note that we attempt to produce a balanced programme (i.e. different disciplines) and do not necessarily accept talks in the order in which they are offered. Nonetheless, all offers are most welcome and will be acknowledged.

Please report any new publications (books or articles) or other colour-related news on our discussion list at ColourStudies@jiscmail.ac.uk