



Enhance, Develop, Expand

30 years of acquisitions at the Museum of Wallpaper

The Museum of Wallpaper and its Collections

The idea of creating a museum of wallpaper at Rixheim was born at a meeting in 1969 between Jean-Pierre Seguin, Director of the Department of Prints and Engravings at the *Bibliothèque Nationale* and Pierre Jaquet, CEO of the wallpaper manufacturer Zuber. More than ten years were needed to bring this project to fruition. The Museum was officially founded on 23 September 1982 as part of the Mulhouse Museum of Printed Textiles, and, after a year of work, it opened its doors to the public on 24 September 1983. The town of Rixheim took over the ownership of the collections in 1996 and the association which runs the Museum was created on 13 February 1997. In 2010, cultural responsibility was transferred by the town of Rixheim to the new metropolitan district of Mulhouse Alsace Agglomeration.

The Museum team has organised more than fifty exhibitions in thirty years, presenting a wide range of approaches to wallpaper whether technical, historical or aesthetic. This permanent renewal of the displays was only made possible by regular additions to the collections. From the start, the aim was to go beyond mere local interest and create a world-class reference collection in the field of wallpaper. The basis of this was made up of the archives of the Zuber factory and the collections kept at the Museum of Printed Textiles and over the last thirty years, 13,000 items have been added to the original 120,000. In addition to the many donations and materials salvaged from walls, the acquisition policy has been guided by two overriding imperatives: develop the collection by targeting important works and enhance it by ensuring diversity in terms of the manufacturers, the centuries and the countries.

This year, 2015, the team thought it would be interesting to revisit these thirty years of acquisitions and, with this new exhibition, let you share, not only in a few must-see works of art, but also in the many items which have never been shown, or at least not for a very long time...

We dedicate this exhibition to the memory of Pierre Jaquet (1919-1986), too soon departed, and Jean-Pierre Seguin (1920-2014), recently deceased, who, together with Bernard Jacqué, honorary curator, were the founders of the Rixheim Museum of Wallpaper.

Acquisitions

In the world of the art market, wallpaper used to be looked upon as just one form of decoration among many others, interesting primarily for its panoramic scale. Several works published in the early 1980s, and the sale of the Follot collection in 1982, changed this view by making wallpaper a decorative art in its own right. That collection, put together by the Follot family and shown at the *Paris Exposition Universelle* of 1900, comprised the most beautiful private collection of wallpapers in the world and was used to illustrate leading articles and publications on the subject. Before its official inauguration, the Museum of Wallpaper acquired a large part of this collection including some masterpieces. Since then, although there are fewer items available, several public auctions have been organised every year in Paris. The Museum attends these sales and tries to take an active part within the limits of its financial resources.

The same applies to acquisitions from private individuals. Every year between 1984 and 2014, the Museum of Wallpaper bought new items ranging from domino wallpaper in 1987 to several hundred sketches dating from 1950-1970 in 2011. The largest acquisition was that of the Louis Marc collection. Established at the beginning of the 20th Century by a designer and shown at an exhibition in Toulouse in 1946, no one else had seen it until the heirs assigned it to us in 1998. Thus our collections were further enhanced with this addition of more than 120 items including several panoramics and scenes by major manufacturers.

In the last decade, the use of the internet has profoundly changed the way we work. On the one hand, it enables anyone, anywhere in the world, to provide information about what they have available and to sell it quickly via on-line sites. On the other hand, it allows us to use monitoring systems to keep up to date with what is coming onto the market. A fast response is crucial!

In making its acquisitions, the Museum of Wallpaper regularly receives funds from the Fonds Régional d'Acquisitions pour les Musées (FRAM), a public financial support scheme which mobilises equal amounts of both state and regional aid.

Donations

Whilst the Museum pursues a targeted policy in making its acquisitions, when it comes to donations the situation is somewhat less organised. To list them would produce an inventory worthy of Prévert; a motley assortment of objects which often causes us to ask ourselves whether we should accept everything or be more selective. Experience has allowed us to adopt a simple method whereby, in principle, we refuse nothing which could be shown in an exhibition but remain uncompromising when it comes to eliminating any items which, due to their poor condition, could pose a risk to the collection.

Among the most unusual or touching items likely to be included in the Prévert-style inventory are the printing rollers found buried at the bottom of a garden close to the Museum, the tools belonging to the last engraver working at Rixheim or the car-loads of rolls ... to be sorted, brought in by an enthusiast exploring the city recycling bins. Companies support our work by sending us their latest products and, in 2014, as a result of changes of location, we were able to recover hundreds of albums dating back over the last fifty years. Several of the descendants of dealers or decorators have offered items which they had kept as a reminder of their ancestors. And we have lost count of the family donations providing us with boxes of ends of rolls "stored away just in case!!" These are the most touching and interesting because there is always a story behind the gifts; information about places, periods and uses communicated by way of decorative materials which portray an invaluable wealth of personal history to be recorded.

In thirty years we have been offered many items usually originating locally or from the surrounding region but sometimes coming from further afield. The prominence and recognition which we gain by our work, encourages these donations but of vital importance to our quest remains the network of friends and contacts that we have patiently built up since the Museum was opened.

This exhibition, which showcases some of these donations, allows the team at the Museum of Wallpaper to express their thanks once again to all those individuals, professional and private, who have entrusted us with the conservation of part of their heritage and have thereby contributed to the expansion of the Museum's collection.

Salvage Materials

Removing old wallpaper is work which we have all carried out at some time when preparing to redecorate. A wallpaper remover, some water, steam and a scraper and you can soon reduce everything to shreds without too much difficulty. Removing old wallpaper with the aim of salvaging it is another matter entirely and actually requires a professional: a restorer. Skill and patience are the two qualities needed to succeed. Ideally, you need time to prepare for the operation and carry out tests to assess the most suitable removal techniques to use. Not many of the Museum's salvage operations have been like that; such work is generally carried out at the last minute, in abandoned houses or on building sites, in the cold of winter and surrounded by rubble. Going out in these conditions may seem risky and we have often made long trips for nothing, but there are sometimes lovely surprises.

Experience has taught us that every beautiful house, however pitiful its condition, may prove interesting; it is certain to have been decorated with wallpaper during the most splendid periods. Experience has also taught us that the presence of wallpaper from the end of the 20th Century is a very bad sign; the advice of manufacturers and methods used by decorators over the last fifty years having been to prepare the wall by completely stripping off all existing materials. On the other hand, if the house has not been renovated for a very long time, there is a possibility of finding up to as many as ten layers of old wallpaper on top of one another. Thus we begin by taking a sample to determine the interest of the whole set and, depending on the result, we take at least enough specimens to preserve the memory of the décor existing in that location. Where the discovery is an interesting one, the method is to remove all the layers from a wall face in one go so that they can then be separated elsewhere under more suitable conditions.

For the Museum of Wallpaper, salvaging wallpaper has to be a measure of last resort to avoid destruction. In the case of decoration which is clearly of interest and which is in a suitable condition, we always recommend safeguarding and restoring it *in situ*.

18th Century

When the Museum was first set up, the 18th Century, which is the century which saw the birth of wallpaper as we know it today, was only represented in the collection by two small albums of domino wallpaper and a few dozen samples from Zuber. Conscious of this deficiency, the founders of the Museum took the decision to make this period a priority in their acquisition policy. As luck would have it, they managed to acquire one lot of fifteen wallpapers in New York in 1981 and twenty others at the Follot sale in Monte-Carlo in 1982. Subsequent years also proved prolific; two sets of arabesque panels were found on the art market, fifteen domino wallpapers, including several whole sheets, from private collectors and 86 sheets originating from Réveillon sample albums obtained directly from the heirs of the Follot family. With other wallpapers arriving in batches, both acquired and donated, the Museum team, at the instigation of Bernard Jacqué, decided it was possible to organise the first exhibition of our 18th Century collections based around the very particular patterns of arabesque wallpaper.

The exhibition "*Arabesques: late 18th Century Arabesque Wallpaper*" was presented in Rixheim in 1993, then in Zurich, Lyon and Manchester. A great deal of documentation work took place, both in order to study this type of pattern and how it became adapted for use in the wallpaper industry, as well as in order to make a world-wide inventory of the collections, especially those still *in situ*, sources which provided a huge amount of information about the use of these wallpapers in interior decoration. All this research was put together in the book published in 1995: "*Les papiers peints en arabesques de la fin du XVIII^{ème} siècle*", which, 20 years on, remains the benchmark publication in the field.

Far from being an end in itself, the exhibition and the book were just a beginning; research continues in this area and a great deal of information comes in every year to supplement our documentation. At the same time, the museum continues, year after year, to acquire 18th Century items such as most of the works shown in this room, including the two exceptional screens exhibited here.

Documentation and Research

Among the aims set out in the Museum's statutes, coming just after conservation, presentation and enhancement of the collections, is the desire to be a place of documentation and study, a place which promotes research and inspires publications about wallpaper, its history and its techniques.

To begin with, the Museum team had very little to go on; a dozen publications in a cabinet and an almost blank field of investigation. Year after year, by way of acquisitions, donations and salvage work, we have patiently collected works both old and new; publications, journal articles and academic works, originals and photocopies in the case of rarer items. Today, the Museum library contains close to 4,000 reference books relating to wallpaper and has become an essential location for researchers from all over the world. Methods of consultation have also moved on; today it is the internet that is used to get in touch as well as for most correspondence, making reference enquiries and sending out information.

Every exhibition has provided an opportunity for undertaking research, the results of which have contributed to the build-up of our documentation. The largest exhibitions have involved the creation of specific files which are always regularly supplied with new discoveries. Domino wallpaper, arabesque patterns, panoramics and *in situ* collections are the most important but there are also many files on more specialist subjects. Apart from highlighting the work carried out by the Museum team, all this documentation is placed at the disposal of individuals and specialists so they can obtain answers to their questions. The Museum of Wallpaper has many contacts in France and abroad; its advice is regularly sought for the purpose of identifying wallpaper and contributing to its conservation by helping to put together files on protection and restoration.

Since 2010, we have been working to computerise the stock and digitise the collections in order to improve the knowledge of the collection and to manage it better. In view of the size of our collections, this work will go on for many years but eventually, the Museum of Wallpaper will be equipped with a modern and effective research tool.

19th Century

When the Museum was founded, the 19th Century, which was a century marked by development and technical change for wallpaper, was the best represented in the collection in terms of quantity. The Zuber archives constitute a complete collection allowing us to recount the story of how this manufacturer's production developed. The only disadvantage is that it covers the production of a single manufacturer and is therefore inconsistent with the ambition of the Museum's founders to set up a collection which is representative of wallpaper as a whole. The collections from the Museum of Printed Textiles in part make up for this deficiency by their diversity. The collection was representative of traditional production but lacked more prestigious items such as those which established the reputations of the top manufacturers at the great exhibitions.

The sale of the Follot collection in 1982 allowed us to acquire several works of art, even some which had been shown at the *Exposition Universelle* in Paris in 1900. The Follot heirs subsequently sold us items from the Paris manufacturer Dufour: a series of wall hangings and the artwork for the panoramic "*Renaud et Armide*". After acquiring the Louis Marc collection in 1998, we were able to showcase all these new acquisitions in 2000 with the exhibition entitled "*Versailles at home: wallpaper decoration*". Unfortunately, due to lack of funds, no major publication was produced on that occasion.

We have to admit that, since then, no such wonderful opportunity has presented itself; some items of décor have been acquired at auction and from collectors but they are becoming scarce on the market and high in price. On the other hand, with the aid of our documentation, it has been possible to identify and document many panoramics and décor *in situ*, both in France and around the world. This exhibition allows us to show, in this room, several of these prestigious items, panels and wall hangings: the last five panels of the panoramic "*Renaud et Armide*" and the first scene of another less well-known panoramic, in monochrome, "*Les Quatre âges de la vie*".

20th and Early 21st Century

The 20th Century, the century of mass production which towards the end somewhat fell out of love with wallpaper, was only represented in the collections by the Zuber archives. Although there were many sources of information, no publication existed providing an overview on which to base a collection policy. Many donations of varying quality have arrived at the Museum in the course of thirty years and each one adds to the collection. The items thus collected have formed the basis of some lovely exhibitions such as "*20th Century Wallpaper*" in 2003 and more recently "*In the realm of the little prince: wallpaper for children*" in 2011. The absence of these productions on the art market is a trend which has reversed in the last few years with *vintage* styles coming back into fashion. Public auctions and internet sales sites today provide many opportunities to make acquisitions; the difficulty is making the right choice at the best price.

The early 21st Century has seen a return to form; patterns have come back into fashion and are bringing wallpaper back to life. Non-woven materials make hanging easier and digital printing technology allows for production control, which has given rise to an unprecedented proliferation of creativity. Traditional manufacturers have either adapted or disappeared and a number of new, highly specialised organisations, small design or manufacturing workshops, have appeared. The world of wallpaper has developed more in the last fifteen years than over the whole of the previous two centuries. The team at the Museum of Wallpaper would like to thank all those involved in the wallpaper industry for their support. By responding to our requests for donations they have allowed contemporary production to take its place in most of our exhibitions.

The interest in 20th Century wallpaper which exists today is unique. People are much less interested in the techniques and manufacturers and much more interested in the designers. This final exhibition room is devoted in large part to them, from the Art Déco period up to the present day. We would like to give a special mention to Zofia Rostad, a hugely important designer and supporter of the Museum since its inception.