

ARTFORUM

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HECTOR GUIMARD, Museum of Modern Art; **JEAN CROTTI**, Cordier and Ekstrom Gallery; **HOWARD MEHRING**, Sachs Gallery; **PETER YOUNG**, Goldowsky Gallery; **WILLIAM PETTET**, Whitney Gallery; **TOM HOLLAND**, Elkon Gallery; **ROBERT MOSKOWITZ**, French and Company; **RICHARD ROTH**, O.K. Harris Gallery:

The Museum of Modern Art's survey of the work of **HECTOR GUIMARD** (1867-1942) is a disciplined and admiring resumé of the work of a great Art Nouveau architect-designer-decorator and opens issues that are not so immediately concerned with the purely formalistic or empiricist issues which have dominated most of the large body of research and opinion of the style. This kind of examination usually traces the serpentine contours and eccentric flat shapes of

Art Nouveau back to the circle of Gauguin at Pont-Aven. This view is, of course, incontestable but it is also a wild commonplace which F. Lanier Graham, the organizer of the exhibition, has gratefully avoided, focusing instead on the architectural issues of Guimard's work and how it relates to the engineering tradition in France at the end of the 19th century, particularly as it was affected by the writing and teaching of Viollet-le-Duc. Moreover, though this was not Mr. Graham's concern, what emerges from his passionately assembled array opens up the equally intriguing question of the meaning of Art Nouveau form as symbol.

It is obvious, for example, that the egg and bud motif or the roseball of Anglo-Scottish Art Nouveau mean something apart from purely formal readings—and what they mean as form relates in part to British medieval history as well as the anglophilic Rosicrucian style. Similarly, the ab-

stract plant motifs, say, of Henry van de Velde or Jan Toorop, or the innumerable abstract colophons and vignettes of Art Nouveau book production, are an attempt to formulate a static sign for a generative and organic experience. I signal these possibilities because nowhere more than in Guimard are aquaceous, vortex-like figures in evidence. Such motifs adorn Guimard's exquisite fruitwood furniture, his cast iron balconies, the rims and lips of his urns, bottles and jugs, the designs of his wallpapers and books. They supply as well the decorative basis of his jewelry, not to mention his most famous production, the designs for the entrance structures of the Paris subway, *ligne Vincennes-Étoile*, on the basis of which Art Nouveau in France is often called "style Guimard" or "style Métro." I believe that it was his attachment to the vortex-like interlace that led Guimard into the many "eccentricities" of his architec-

ture, an eccentricity marked to our eyes not only because of the foreignness of the style but the resistance of industrial usage to the motif which Guimard was at such pains to impose on it. It would be a curious problem of psychology to determine what the figure meant to Guimard — in his head, I mean — so assiduous was its application and so often strained the results. Guimard, after all, is a French architect of the generation of Eiffel. The engineered struts, beams, nuts and bolts of the latter, often led to bizarre comic effects when altered and decorated by Guimard, such as in the many villas in the "style Guimard" of which the most extraordinary was the barbarously demolished Castel Henriette in Sèvres, razed last year. And, if Guimard's greatest engineered edifice, the Humbert de Romans Concert Hall, had not been dismantled early in 1905 it would probably have come to enjoy the illustrated preeminence of Victor