

AAH Dissertation Prize Winners 2011

BA Winner

Ness Wood (University of Brighton)

It's So New Fashioned

Hille from Tradition to Modernity

Hille was a family-run furniture manufacturing company, which traded from 1906 to 1983. Using archive material including research from MoMA and interviews with surviving family members as sources, my emphasis has been to discover why Hille changed their design and production methods, from manufacturing traditional reproduction furniture to a more contemporary style.

The period 1942 to 1952 represents a unique moment in English furniture history. Furniture was rationed and the industry was in the unusual position of being under complete government control in the form of the Utility Scheme. Salomon Hille arrived in Britain with his family at the beginning of the century, and he established and successfully maintained the furniture company Hille with his daughter Ray, initially producing hand-crafted, reproduction furniture. Ray was eventually promoted to Managing Director, even though social attitudes in the 1930s towards women in the workplace would have made this unusual.

During the War, the lack of timber, government restrictions, and bombing of the Hille factory could all have led to the closure of the company. In spite of these challenges, Ray's skill and drive enabled her to keep the business and to open a new factory after the War, continuing to specialise in the restoration of antique and bomb-damaged furniture. However, in 1949, the collaboration between Hille and the designer Robin Day developed, becoming increasingly significant for both parties, and the company's relationship with Day grew to be an extremely successful one, including the design and production of the polypropylene chair.

Discarding the past was key to Hille's modern success, and they went on to create new designs and make changes to the production methods within the business. Hille's transformation into a manufacturer of mass-produced modern furniture was pioneering at this time. An analysis of this one company from the theoretical perspective of material culture provides a vivid case study in the emerging and developing ideas of modernity and post-war design.

BA Prize Shortlisted Entries

Elizabeth Jordan (Edinburgh) 'he Edinburgh Mirror

Imogen Wiltshire (Birmingham) John Bratby's Courtyard with Washing (1956)

Entries for both prizes were read, examined and shortlisted by the AAH Student Committee, with the final judgements being made by senior members of the trustee body.

Masters Winner

Alison Goudie (University of Oxford)

The wax portrait bust as trompe-l'oeil?

A case study of Queen Maria Carolina of Naples

Reproduced in black and white, and cropped to hide its plinth, a wax portrait bust of Queen Maria Carolina of Naples has the uncanny effect of confronting its viewer with what, before rationality has a chance to intervene, appears to be a photograph of someone who died before photography's discovery. Encountered in the flesh, the very format of this portrait, as a bust, naturally precludes such a trompe-l'oeil experience. Nevertheless, the trompe-l'oeil proves a highly productive theoretical tool in reconstructing the contemporary significance of a portrait that has otherwise received scant scholarly attention.

Wax portraiture's longstanding traditional association with death ritual lends itself particularly well to an extension of Jean Baudrillard's understanding of trompe-l'oeil as essentially metaphysical in nature. The events of the French Revolution, however, saw the metaphysics of the wax portrait bust undergo a fundamental shift. While the viscerality of the wax portrait had served the ancien régime rhetoric of the double-bodied monarch, it just as readily sustained the ultimate symbolic gesture of executing the monarch, being the medium in which the King and Queen of France's guillotined heads were reproduced. Indeed, the traditional art historical binary between extreme realism on the one hand and symbolism on the other is challenged by both the waxen royal portrait bust, and the gruesome product of what Daniel Arasse describes as the consummate 'portrait machine' in the guillotine.

The execution of Maria Carolina's sister, Queen Marie Antoinette, had a profound impact on her personally and politically, to the extent that any understanding of her wax portrait cannot but be considered in light of it. So highly charged with associations of the rhetoric of both the ancien régime and its abrupt end, the wax portrait bust of Maria Carolina can, quite feasibly, be understood within the context of a hallucination of the Queen's own death, precisely that which Baudrillard defines as *trompe-l'oeil*. Considered thus, the reproduction of her bust in a photograph begs fundamental questions as to the nature of the portrait as image.

MA Prize Shortlisted Entries

Amy Knight (Sussex) *The Apparitional Girl of the Fin de Siècle* Philip Wilson Steer's female figures and the sexuality that haunts the vacant body

Tim Satterthwaite (Sussex) *VU magazine and the patterns of utopian modernism*