



ITINERARIO LIBERTY



Paris

In the last decade of the nineteenth century, in the Parisian exhibitions, products of the applied arts appeared, with greater and greater importance. In 1895 the shop-gallery of Samuel Bing "Art Nouveau" which, together with "Maison Modern" of Julius Meyer-Graefe, was a decisive environment for the new tendencies, so much so as to give the name to the whole movement, was inaugurated. Bing brought together works of English, American and Belgian artists - we would mention that the furnishing of the shop was taken care of by Henry Van de Velde - beside those of the principle French artists. Among these the most important was, without doubt, the architect Hector Guimard (1867-1942), made famous by the realization of the central stations of the Paris Underground, considered so emblematic of French Art Nouveau that this was often also denominated Métro Style. He agreed with the decorative motifs of the string line of Horta, interpreting it in an original and exuberant manner, turning to phytomorphic forms of great vitalism.

In the field of decorative arts, Guimard planned furniture inspired to the same symbolism as his architecture, in which the structural lines assumed plastic and fluid forms which seemed to disappear on the surfaces. In 1900 Bing prepared a pavilion at the Paris Exhibition in which, in the field of furnishing, George De Feure (1868-1928), Eugène Gaillard and Eugène Colonna asserted themselves. De Feure produced elegant and refined furniture, often resorting to the use of varnishes and gold-plating and to decorative motifs derived, above all, from the vegetable world. Gaillard e Colonna designed furniture with plastic and sinuous forms, but relatively simple, in which curved elements similar to plants and flowers composed a symmetrical totality.

Auguste Delaherche, whose objects are characterized by the covering of low fusion enamel in deep and brilliant colours and by attention to particulars, like the handles of the vases in the form of stems of flowers, distinguished himself in ceramics. A place of importance is deserved by René Jules Lalique (1860-1945) who, besides being considered one of the major exponents of Art Nouveau, was, between 1900 and 1914, the top jeweller in Europe. He produced a great quantity of jewels, unique pieces and in series, many for the famous actress Sarah Bernherdt, a real icon of the style thanks, too, to the numerous placards which Alphonse Mucha produced for her performances.

Lalique was an innovator in the sector of goldsmith's art. From the technical point of view, he perfected the processes of mechanical reproduction of models. He was the first to use materials like horn, semi-precious stones and glass, proposing unusual combinations with gold and enamel, then very much in fashion. He revolutionized the way of estimating the value of a piece of jewellery until that moment determined only by the value of the materials used, giving, instead, decisive importance to the design. His decorative motifs derived from the vegetable and animal world; they are snakes, insects, butterflies and swans, but the favourite was, without doubt, the female figure, of which the face often appears, either half-length or the whole figure completely nude. At the end of his career he devoted himself to glass, which he had already used in goldsmith's art, producing vases, perfume bottles and lamps, in which the decorative motif of the female figure, embossed or engraved, is emphasized by the colouring of the surfaces or by the contrast between transparent and opaque.