Limouaire Frères, Heyn Frederich, Moulinas Jules, Richer Frères, Coppier Marius, Bayol Gustave. *Carousel of wooden horses*, 1900, carved, decorated and painted wood, Jean Paul Favand Collection, Pavilions of Bercy, Paris. © Erika FIORELLI

Recognition and Appreciation of Objects: Fairground Art of French and Belgian Schools in Pavilions of Bercy's collection.

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Abstract

While large collections of fairground art have been built up across Europe, sometimes within reputable institutions such as the Pavilions of Bercy in Paris (France), the MuCEM in Marseille (France), the Alsace Ecomuseum in Ungersheim (France), the Pare National des Expositions et Circus Archive in Sheffield (England) or at the Munich Stadtmuseum (Germany). We note, however, that there remains a certain ignorance to this type of production. We can even speak of a lack of interest on the part of the public and more generally of the art world, often in favor of a more "traditional" artistic production such as painting, sculpture or drawing, in most of the major European cultural institutions.

This research work is therefore oriented around the production of fairground art objects, mainly small, medium and large fairground constructions, such as fairground games, amusement rides, carousels and "carousels-salons" as well. as the main musical instruments of the fair: the fairground organs. The objects studied all belong to the collection of the Pavilions of Bercy in Paris.

This research traces the context of the effervescence of the Belle-Époque fairgrounds, as well as the history of the French and Belgian fairground sculpture schools and more particularly the history of the artists who were important for this type of production within these two countries. A precise analysis of the piece of art in the Pavilions of Bercy collection has shown the proximity that exists between artistic production and fairground production, while the debate remains for a distinction between art and craft. It is also about investigating the issue of recognition of fairground heritage. Recognition has been in place for several years.

Keywords

Art - crafts - Belle-Époque - fairground art - fairground culture - funfair - French school - Belgian school - merry-go-round - carousel - fairground organ - fairground games.

Caillebaut et Decauck, *Bike of velocipedes carousel*, v. 1900, carved, molded, decorated and painted wood, copper plate, bronze pedals, leather saddles and wooden handles, Jean Paul Favand Collection, Pavilions of Bercy, Paris. © Erika FIORELLI

Introduction

This dissertation was oriented around the production of fairground art objects, mainly small, medium and large fairground constructions, such as fairground games, merry-go-round subjects, carousels and carousels-salons as well as the main instruments of music of the fair : the fairground organs. These are all objects belonging to the collection of the Pavilions of Bercy in Paris with which I have an active collaboration in the writing of my dissertation. This is one of the main collections of fairground art in France, it was therefore necessary to make a choice as to which pieces to study. This research consists of a precise analysis of fairground art objects produced by French and Belgian schools; by the main production workshops of these two countries during the "Belle Époque" (1880-1914), this period marking the height of fairground creation. The analysis of these objects tried to reveal the proximity that exists between artistic production and fairground production at the same time, while the debate still remains for a distinction between art and crafts. These objects too often considered as full-fledged pieces of craftsmanship also give rise to the question of recognition of fairground heritage, a work of recognition put in place for several years now, by specialists in fairground arts.

My ambition was to write a research dissertation on fairground arts, on the way in which they were considered from their creation to their exhibition, but also the manner in which fairground artists were registered with their productions in a similar dynamic from those of the great artistic movements which saw the light of day at the same time, I acquired a particular taste for the marvelous and the enchantment which exists within this production. In France, the culture of parties and major events is important, it has in a way forged the identity of a country and a people who like to have fun. Studying the artistic or craft creation movements that were born parallel to and even in response to this party society has always greatly interested me. In addition, through the study of fairground art objects, a particular aesthetic emerges which highlights all the know-how of professionals in the fairground industry. These objects surprise not only by their beauty but also by their dimensions: the carousels-lounges, for example, impress with their monumentality, while the jewelry rides or rides for children bear witness to particular thoroughness. For this subject, I have chosen to focus primarily on objects from the Pavilions of Bercy collection. This collection was born from the ambition of Jean Paul Favand (creator of the Pavilions of Bercy) to have fairground production recognized in the eyes of all as an artistic production in its own right. It is this same ambition that drives my research and that is why I chose this collection. As for the fact of taking an absolute interest in the production of French and Belgian schools in the heart of the "Belle-Époque", this choice is motivated by the fact that this is the most documented period, which facilitated in a way the research work.

Anonymous, *Shooting booth*, late 19th century, wooden structure, metal target, rifles, Jean Paul Favand Collection, Pavilions of Bercy, Paris.

The research already carried out on the question of fairground arts is substantial, however, it has often been interested in questions of context or of forms not to mention the real influences existence between the two. As for the question of recognition of this production, it was also raised on numerous occasions without really reaching any real conclusions until then.

This study was therefore aimed to understand what the forms and influences were adopted for the production of objects of French and Belgian fairground art during the Belle-Époque, but also to understand how it was organized then and nowadays as well as, the process of recognizing or promoting fairground arts.

Materials and Methods

I organized my dissertation writing into three main parts, all divided into sub-parts representative of the issues of my research.

The first part of the dissertation, entitled: "A context of effervescence for the fairground world" is devoted to the contextualization of the Belle-Époque funfair as well as that of the production of fairground art objects from French and Belgian schools.

First of all, it was a question of understanding the heritage of modern fairgrounds by looking for the first appearances of festivals combining the mercantile aspect of fairs with a playful aspect which made it possible to trace their heritage to popular festivals in the Middle Ages.

After studying the heritage of the fairgrounds, we had to understand what forms they adopted and what influences were at the origin of their development between the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century.

The second step was to focus more specifically on the production of fairground objects by studying the operating principle of two major European fairground production schools: the French school and the Belgian school. This made it possible to highlight the existence of extremely active production centers for each of these two countries.

Finally, this part also allowed to present the artists or craftsmen behind the creation of the pieces in the corpus. The presentation of these artists took the form of short biographies to highlight their training, the way they were initiated to fairground art and how they managed to rise to the rank of important artists for fairground production.

It should be noted that the development of my first part is due almost primarily to documentary research through the various specialized works on fairground art and sometimes even more specifically on fairground production schools.

The second part entitled: "Towards a study of the forms of French fairground art: the collection of the Pavilions of Bercy."

Is devoted to the study of the corpus. My dissertation corpus consists of around thirty pieces, all from the collection of the Pavilions of Bercy. I organized my analysis following a particular logic, which is to present the largest structures and finish with the smallest.

Consequently, I started by studying large-scale structures such as merry-go-rounds, carousels, carousel-lounges as well as fairground shooting huts. Then I analyzed the merry-go-round subjects by revealing the different typologies that may exist within this repertory. It was then necessary to analyze the fairground organs and finally the small fairground constructions such as fairgrounds games.

The purpose of this part was to highlight the relationship that exists between artistic production and fairground production by showing that there is a repertory of form similar to that used by the artists of the great European artistic movements. This type of parallel has been established thanks to a formal and iconographic study of the different pieces.

The development of this second part also made it possible to take photographs of the different pieces that make up my corpus since all of them had not necessarily been photographed, in any case not in detail.

The challenges of my third and last part entitled: "Fairground art, the difficult journey towards the recognition of collections." were the following:

First, to understand how the Pavilions of Bercy entered into a process of promoting and communicating fairground heritage through the presentation of fairground art objects. I focused on seeing the vision and organization of the museum as well as the strategies used to promote and communicate the collection. In addition, I interested by see how more widely, at the national and international level, the recognition of fairground heritage was organized, in particular with the phenomenon of classification of few pieces but also of the recent process of registering fairground heritage in the intangible heritage of UNESCO. It was also a question of making a first approach of the fairground art market by studying the product of certain sales in order to understand the enthusiasm that exists for this type of production and even to address the question of the imitation of Belle-Époque fairground art.

The development of this part was notably made possible thanks to the testimonies of certain specialists in fairground arts such as Éloïse Galliard (curator of the Pavilions of Bercy), or Zeev Gourarier (former scientific director and curator of the MuCEM collections in Marseille), as well as by studying certain documents already established such as the Pavilions of Bercy website, the UNESCO file, the sales catalogs, etc.

Results

Findings and results were indeed established as a result of my research. First of all, this research has enabled me to understand that fairgrounds are rooted in an ancient legacy already started by popular festivals in the Middle-Ages and the development of the first rides even before the creation of fairgrounds.

From the 1880s, we see the development of an architecture specific to the fairground, deeply influenced by the development of architecture in general and by the Universal Exhibitions. The phenomenon of fairground production schools is determined only a posteriori by specialists such as François and Fabienne Marchal (collectors) or Zeev Gourarier (former scientific director and curator of the MuCEM collections in Marseille). This school classification is based on the study of forms of fairground art. However, if the classification in school only arrives after what was already established at the end of the XIXth and the beginning of the XXth century, in both France and Belgium we see two major production poles appear: Angers in France and Ghent in Belgium. Research has also made it possible to reveal the fact that some fairground craftsmen have followed academic or even artistic training, which may explain the influence of artistic movements on the production of fairground objects. These are the same artists who created influential workshops at the origin of the creation of two major production centers in France and Belgium. As I was able to explain, it became clear fairly quickly that there was a repertory of form similar to that used by artists of the great European artistic movements for the production of fairground objects. For example, we see the expression of forms close to the baroque, rococo or Art Nouveau repertory through the use of certain motifs specific to each of these movements. During my research I also understood that the dynamic of recognition of fairground arts established in France from the 1980s had given rise to many initiatives, sometimes inconclusive, like the initiatives of the State for the creation of a national museum or sometimes on the contrary much more conclusive such as the creation of the Pavilions de Bercy through a private initiative, the classification of certain pieces or the process of recognizing fairground heritage in the intangible heritage of UNESCO. The reader should also know that the many sales that have taken place and still take place legitimize the significance of these pieces as exceptional objects. Sales, such as the sale of the Marchal collection in 2011, are very successful and the pieces are sometimes sold at very high prices.

Discussion

The subject of my dissertation was: " Recognition and Appreciation of Objects: Fairground Art of French and Belgian Schools in Pavillons of Bercy's collection." With the research problem: " What were the forms and influences adopted for the production of fairground objects in French and Belgian workshops during the "Belle-Époque" (1880-1914) ? How was it organized and how is the process of recognizing or promoting the fairground arts organized today? "

Many difficulties were encountered during my research and the writing of my dissertation. Regarding the content, it was difficult to stop and narrow the subject but also to find a collection among those that exist. Access to the sources necessary for the study of artists and objects was also difficult since, on the one hand, fairground heritage which has practically only been transcribed orally but also because very few sources have come to light, victims to a lack of interest on the part of public opinion. The attribution of the objects of the corpus and the identification of their origins have been problematic and sometimes had to be abandoned. As for current efforts to create a guide and UNESCO's process for recognizing fairground heritage as international intangible heritage, the information wasn't always accessible.

The study of the fairground art market has also proved to be complicated since the training in art history in Grenoble does not include any education concerning the art market.

As for new research perspectives, I can affirm that they are numerous since a multitude of avenues remain to be explored on the subject of fairground arts. The existing works are often old, not a lot of work has been written recently on the subject, yet there is currently a very strong desire to recognize this heritage.

The Pavilions of Bercy, for example, have communicated their desire for me to write a subject that would make it possible to establish specific parallels between certain objects in their collection and works of art.

However, for my part, I would like to take a greater interest in the Hippo-Palace carousel-salon, in particular by attempting to attribute certain elements but also by providing a precise iconographic study since this has never been done. In my view this perspective would perhaps also allow me to respond to their desire for a parallel between art and fairground art by taking a specific interest in this carousel-salon of masterful scope.

Other research perspectives concern the fairground art market, with a particular interest in the new market for imitations, its functioning and the influence it may ultimately have on the process of recognition of fairground art.

Bayol Gustave, *Prancing Horse*, n.d., sculpted and painted wood, Jean Paul Favand Collection, Pavilions of Bercy, Paris. © Erika FIORELLI

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Devos Alexandre, *Equestrian group in medieval style*, v. 1890, carved and painted wood, h. 350cm, Jean Paul Favand Collection, Pavilions of Bercy, Paris. © Erika FIORELLI

Caillebaut and Decauck, *Velocipede carousel*, v. 1900, carved, molded, decorated and painted wood, copper plate, bronze pedals, leather saddles and wooden handles, Jean Paul Favand Collection, Pavilions of Bercy, Paris. © Erika FIORELLI

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