

2008

Framing, Symmetry, and Contrast in Edmond de Goncourt's Aesthetic Interior

Pamela J. Warner

University of Rhode Island, pwarner@mail.uri.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/art_facpubs

Terms of Use

All rights reserved under copyright.

Citation/Publisher Attribution

Warner, Pamela J. "Framing, Symmetry and Contrast in Edmond de Goncourt's Aesthetic Interior." *Studies in the Decorative Arts* 15 (2008): 36-64.

Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/652829>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Art and Art History at DigitalCommons@URI. It has been accepted for inclusion in Art and Art History Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@URI. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@etal.uri.edu.

Framing, Symmetry, and Contrast in Edmond de Goncourt's Aesthetic Interior

During the 1850s and 1860s, Edmond (1822-1896) and Jules (1830-1870) de Goncourt, noted writers, art critics, and collectors, earned a reputation as passionate connoisseurs of eighteenth-century French art and culture. Often seen at the *bouquinistes*' stands along the Seine, the brothers avidly hunted for prints, drawings, manuscript letters, and other pre-Revolutionary ephemera, which they used as sources for their books on the eighteenth century.¹ Hours spent in galleries and antiques shops also rewarded them with innumerable objects for their respected collection of Rococo fine and decorative arts.² Many contemporaries believed that the brothers not only collected the eighteenth century but *lived* it as well. Indeed, caricatures of the brothers in the literary press sometimes show them dressed in eighteenth-century clothing such as knee breeches, with eighteenth-century objects in the background (Fig. 1). Known for their dyspeptic remarks about the ugliness of modern life, the Goncourts are often thought to have occupied a Rococo fantasy world. More recently, scholars have extended the idea to include their home, seeing it as a reconstruction of eighteenth-century interior design principles.³ An important set of photographs of the brothers' residence, however, clearly shows that, while they certainly used art objects from the Rococo as decorative elements in their interiors, their overall design aesthetic was firmly embedded in values of framing, symmetry, and contrast. The photographs' extraordinary ensemble of visual evidence reveals how Edmond de Goncourt orchestrated a domestic experience in which aesthetic sensations dominated daily life.⁴

Edmond's personal photo album, now in the Frits Lugt Collection of the Fondation Custodia in Paris, contains forty-four interior and exterior views of the Goncourts' house in Auteuil, which the brothers purchased in 1868.⁵ While series of photographs of nineteenth-century interiors exist, apparently no single high bourgeois residence was as completely documented as the Goncourts' house. The photographs, taken between 1883 and 1895, include both public and private spaces, from the salons and study to the bedroom and bathroom. Today, they represent a precious visual record of how Edmond de Goncourt decorated the broth-

Pamela J. Warner is Assistant Professor of Art History in the Department of Art and Art History of the University of Rhode Island, Providence.

ers' interior spaces and offer a corrective to the vague notions of their house as a Rococo reconstruction.

Thorough study of the photographs is especially warranted in light of the inordinate amount of attention given to Edmond's textual account of his house, which is partly responsible for the exaggerated notion of the residence as an eighteenth-century recreation. His immensely popular book *La Maison d'un artiste*, a virtual room-by-room guided tour of the house in Auteuil, was published in 1881, both participating in and encouraging a growing craze for all things domestic.⁶ *La Maison* describes the residence at length, presenting it as a showcase for the Goncourts' collections of eighteenth-century French and Far Eastern art, beginning in the vestibule, visiting each room in the house, and emerging at the end in the garden.⁷ In between, Edmond discusses wall colors, furniture, and art objects, animating his descriptions with personal anecdotes that recount purchases, provenances, techniques, and the historical importance of some of their finest and/or favorite items. The resulting six hundred pages are an odd hybrid that belongs to no established literary genre—part interior design manual, part art history catalogue, part autobiography.

Edmond long dreamed of a luxurious illustrated edition, and many of the photographs in his album are the result of aborted projects to fulfill his wishes.⁸ At some point shortly before July 1883, the French photographer Fernand Lochard first came to Auteuil to photograph the house.⁹ Goncourt's illustrated edition never became a reality, but, at the end of his life, he constructed the photo album with forty-four images of the house, a visual *Maison des Goncourt* that provides unprecedented access to the entirety of the Goncourts' abode.

While some of the photographs were clearly intended as illustrations for Edmond's book, viewing them only in these terms subordinates them to the text and assumes an easy, one-to-one relationship between the visual and verbal representation of the house. Indeed, previous attempts to "match" the photographs to the text of *La Maison* only reveal the futility of such facile interpretations.¹⁰ Scholars tend to end their analyses after merely identifying some of the items visible in the images, routinely using the Goncourts' *Journal* and Edmond's book *La Maison* as textual authorities, as if the mere identification of Rococo objects in a room qualified it as exhibiting a Rococo design aesthetic. The creation of decorative panels, the use of symmetry and framing, and the importance of contrasts, however, results in a fully nineteenth-century appearance. These decorating principles form the meta-criteria that governed the

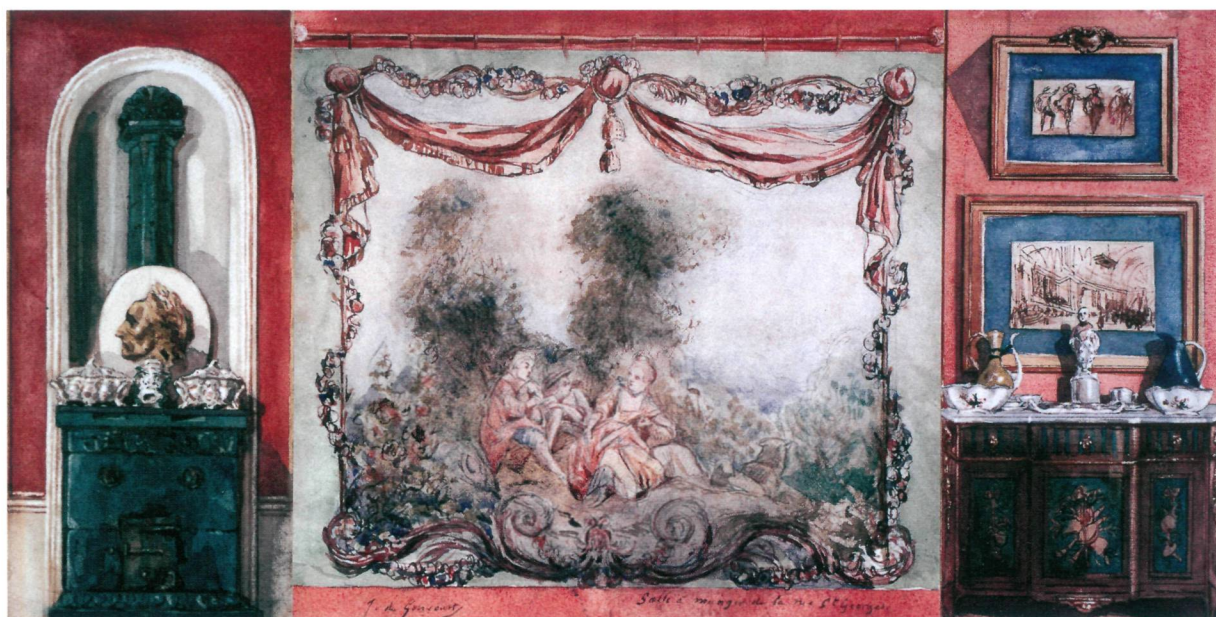


FIGURE 1
Paul Hadol, *E. et J. de Goncourt*, caricature
from *Le Gaulois* 4, no. 107 (May 1860): 5.
Bibliothèque Nationale de France,
Département des Estampes et de la
Photographie, Paris (hereafter BNF, Dépt.
des Estampes).

installation and display of the Goncourts' collections, resulting in interiors that cannot be mistaken for eighteenth-century period rooms.

The Decoration of the Goncourts' Parisian Apartment

Before analyzing the visual evidence of the house in Auteuil, however, it is important first to consider the way the brothers decorated their Parisian apartment, at 43 rue Saint Georges, where they lived together for eighteen years, from 1850 to 1868. There Edmond and Jules de Goncourt first applied principles of symmetry and framing to the interior decoration.¹¹ The brothers themselves said little about the apartment.



No photographs of it exist, and few visitors recorded their impressions of it. There is one valuable visual record, however, in the form of a watercolor by Jules that shows a wall of the dining room (Fig. 2). Of course it does not depict the entire apartment, but Jules's watercolor does reveal important aspects of the Goncourts' approach to interior design, which did not change significantly with their move to Auteuil. For this reason, it merits special attention.

The watercolor shows a now-lost Louis XV Aubusson tapestry hung prominently on the wall; it depicts a pastoral scene after drawings by Nicolas Le Prince and Jean-Baptiste Huet.¹² Two eighteenth-century drawings with blue mats are recognizable in the upper right corner: on top, *Quatre études d'homme dansant, dont une pour "L'Indifférent"* by Antoine Watteau, and beneath it, *Le Serment de Louis XVI* by Jean-Michel Moreau le Jeune. Below the drawings, a Louis XVI credenza displays eighteenth-century porcelain and a statuette, while the stove to the left holds porcelain pieces set in front of a gilded bronze medallion bust of Louis XV. Jules's watercolor emphasizes the harmony and contrast of the pink, blue, and cream colors that dominated the room. They are present in the tapestry, repeated in the tone of the sanguine drawings with their blue mats, and brought out again in the choice of a pinkish-red color for the wall behind the tapestry.

In addition to this play of tonal and coloristic relationships, the watercolor reveals a decorative strategy that will also dominate the

FIGURE 2

Jules de Goncourt, *La Salle à manger de la rue Saint Georges*, n.d. [c. 1858], pen and watercolor on paper, 22 × 45 cm. Musée Carnavalet, Département des Arts Graphiques, Paris.

installation in Auteuil: the creation of panels using framing and symmetry. Panels—subdivided sections of a wall that function as a unit—were a crucial part of the Goncourts' concept of interior decorating, and also served as the principle they used to judge other people's interiors. As early as 1857, while still living in the rue Saint Georges, they briefly mentioned the lengthy evolution of decorative panels in the *Journal*.¹³ Rather than a ready-made means of organizing an interior, panels as understood there require time (ten years in this case) and careful consideration to ripen, rarely achieving a state of completion. This idea set the Goncourts' aesthetic apart from the increasingly formulaic approach to interior decorating as marketed to a wide public through pattern books and interior design manuals. Edmond stressed the slow emergence of panels when he further defined the term in 1884:

People don't know the happiness that comes to a furniture lover from composing apartment panels on which materials and colors harmonize or contrast, from creating some kind of large artistic *tableaux* where one associates bronze, porcelain, lacquer, jade, embroidery. People have no idea how much time it takes in order to be completely satisfied, the changes and displacements that it requires.¹⁴

Goncourt's slowly evolving attitude stood in clear contrast to the easy promises of decorating manuals such as Charles Blanc's 1886 *Grammaire des arts décoratifs*, which offered readers five "general rules" that could be applied to the decoration of a person, a house, or a place of worship.¹⁵ Henry Havard, on the other hand, assured readers of his popular book *L'Art dans la maison* (1882) that they could easily learn the principles of decorating, even in the confusion of late nineteenth-century eclecticism.¹⁶ Edmond de Goncourt, by contrast, defined the work of interior design artistically. In the composing of panels, he acted as an artist and used walls as blank canvases on which he slowly explored harmonies of color and line, thereby justifying the word *artiste* in his book *La Maison d'un artiste*. The house was not merely the home of the artist: it was part of his creation, and Edmond's perpetual dissatisfaction and constant rearranging set him apart from the crowd, which sought pleasing results in a short time.

The Goncourts subjected the decorative panels of their Parisian apartment to pictorial principles of harmony and contrast, creating an arrangement meant to have a strong visual impact experienced before the appreciation of individual objects. Within the panels, the decorative principles of symmetry, framing, and contrast govern each composition.

Jules's watercolor shows how they framed the large tapestry at the center with two vertical panels of matching width. The height of the stove on the left exactly matches that of the commode on the right, creating a strong horizontal line, and each surface features artworks arranged in symmetrical groups of three, where two identical objects frame and set off a centerpiece. The symmetrical placement of objects against these flat surfaces repeats at a smaller scale the basic symmetrical pattern of the entire wall. The overall function of the panel was to highlight the obviously important pastoral tapestry, which becomes the centerpiece of this display.

The classical conception of symmetry derives from Greek architectural theories of harmony and proportion. The orderly and coherent distribution of parts around a central axis reflects the divine symmetry of the human body, with mirroring parts (eyes, ears, hands, feet), organized around a central axis (forehead, nose, neck, torso).¹⁷ Nineteenth-century writers, including Charles Blanc and Henry Havard, frequently noted this anthropomorphic character.¹⁸ Extended into the realm of interior decoration, symmetry provides a means of creating a sense of order that corresponds with what Ernst Gombrich refers to as the "human psychological demand for alignment."¹⁹

The Goncourt brothers' use of symmetry seems, however, to be of a slightly different order. Panels placed in symmetrical arrangements generally act as frames, drawing the eye to the piece placed on the center axis. They establish a pattern of regularity disrupted by the highlighted central object, which calls visual attention to itself by virtue of its placement and size. Jules's watercolor, however, suggests that the placement of objects within the framing panels subtly contrasts with the overall symmetry of the wall. Note that the bust of Louis XV and the spout of the pitcher both point away from the tapestry, providing an opening onto the broader expanse of the wall and the objects it displays. This quiet moment of rupture within the symmetrical pattern prevents the arrangement from becoming claustrophobic. The scene of the tapestry is already contained within its own decorative frame, after all, and if all of the decorative elements around it merely pointed to it, the tapestry might seem imprisoned within an overly contained environment. Turning these two framing pieces away from the tapestry keeps the viewer's gaze alerted to the other aesthetic sensations available in the objects displayed. While certainly highlighting the importance of the tapestry, the arrangement here also refuses to close in on it and render it the only point of contemplation. Each object both holds its own and simultaneously functions as part of a larger whole. There is a sense of



FIGURE 3
Fernand Lochard, *La Maison des Goncourt*
à Auteuil, 53 blvd de Montmorency, June
1886, photograph on albumen paper. BNF,
Dépt. des Estampes.

order, certainly, but only to a point. The Goncourts avoid rigidity, which might have foreclosed the impression of lively aesthetic engagement with a variety of pieces.

Throughout the *Journal* and *La Maison*, Goncourt emphasized that he collected for the artistic principles embedded in each piece, as opposed to other collectors who have merely monetary concerns.²⁰ The task of the interior arrangement is to display both the beauty and uniqueness of each piece and the visual coherence of the collection as an ensemble. The walls of the Goncourts' rue Saint Georges apartment can be seen to stage both individual objects and the collection in a coordinated aesthetic experience. Therefore, when the brothers moved to Auteuil in 1868, they must have gone with a strong notion of the aesthetics of display already in place.

A New House in Auteuil

As Paul Hadol's caricature implies (Fig. 1), the Goncourts' reputation as collectors of eighteenth-century art was well established in 1868, when the brothers purchased the Villa Montmorency in the suburb of Auteuil west of Paris (Fig. 3).²¹ Moving to a freestanding, single-family house as the Goncourts did was a socially significant step at a time when the vast majority of Parisians lived in apartments.²² To pay for the new residence, the brothers sold some family property in eastern France, spending an impressive 83,000 francs for the house, which had been built during the reign of Louis-Philippe.²³ They moved into the house on September 16, 1868, and related their pleasure in decorating it in the *Journal*:

Fifteen days spent arranging this house . . . in the dream of discoveries to decorate it, to dress it up with art, in the joy of your eyes to rediscover how its daylight illuminates and transfigures everything that you have brought to it in terms of drawings, terracottas, tapestries, [and] bronzes.²⁴

The choice of a villa in Auteuil was surely not coincidental, because the town had a reputation as a literary suburb, where three eighteenth-century authors much admired by the Goncourts had lived: Pierre de Marivaux, Jean d'Alembert, and Denis Diderot. Moreover, the Maréchal de Luxembourg, to whom the Goncourts dedicated an essay in their 1858 book *Portraits intimes*, once owned the property that became the site for the 1830s housing development of which the villa was a part. The town had an artistic reputation as well, as the painters François Gérard and Anne-Louis Girodet-Trioson were also residents.²⁵ Paul Gavarni, an artist and close friend of the brothers, lived and worked in Auteuil as well, and they were frequent visitors to him until his death in 1866.²⁶

Once they were settled in Auteuil, the reputation of the Goncourts' house-museum grew. Friends and acquaintances made special trips to visit, intrepid tourists tramped into the garden and snooped in windows, strangers wrote for permission to stop by, and reporters published newspaper and magazine articles about it.²⁷ Jules's early death in 1870, not two years after their move to Auteuil, gave a certain memorial function to these pilgrimages. Clearly, the bereaved Edmond and his house fascinated his contemporaries. The photographs in Edmond's photo album, all taken after Jules's death, document the way the rooms were laid out and permit an analysis of the decorating principles Edmond used in creating his interior.

Symmetry at the House in Auteuil

As seen in Jules's watercolor, the symmetrical arrangement of objects on the walls and flat surfaces of the Goncourts' Parisian dining room reveals their desire to highlight key objects in their collection (Fig. 2). Edmond extended this concern to the displays at the Auteuil house. Symmetry was already a part of the architectural brief of the building, as both the street and garden façades feature a three-bay design (Fig. 3). Goncourt, however, even created symmetry where it did not exist, framing a lone side doorway with large stone terms (Fig. 4). On the interior, he used symmetrical arrangements to highlight the architectural elements of the house, as in the *grand salon* (Fig. 5), where two matching Beauvais-upholstered chairs frame the central fireplace. These chairs in turn anchor vertical panels that feature two small drawings sandwiched between the chairs and larger drawings in matching frames above. The symmetrical patterning continues at a smaller scale on the mantel, where a statuette by Claude Clodion is centered between two terracotta vases, also by Clodion, on either side. A self-referential geometric grid results from such arrangements, with objects participating simultaneously in multiple symmetrical systems.

Goncourt's use of symmetry underscores the aesthetic priority of his decorating principles. More than mere commodious places for living, these rooms stage visual encounters with beautiful and refined objects. Many of the Goncourts' contemporaries disdained the use of symmetry in interior decorating, but the reasons they gave for their rejection of it were social rather than aesthetic. The comtesse de Bassanville opposed it because she felt it stanch'd conversation.²⁸ Charles Blanc, who permitted symmetry in formal receiving rooms, where it could calm visitors escaping the chaos and disorder of the city, advised against it in studies or conversation alcoves because, he claimed, the order tended to kill creativity and free thinking.²⁹ Henry Havard, returning to the biological analogy with the body's exterior symmetry, argued that our innards are not symmetrical (only one heart, one stomach, one liver, etc.), and therefore, when applied to the interior of the home, symmetry would "unnecessarily complicate the functions of life."³⁰

Here, one of the most important differences between Edmond's aestheticizing approach and the practically oriented advice of his contemporaries appears in high relief. For Goncourt, the artist's house should at all times put visual experiences and harmonies above the simple needs of the body or society. For this reason, even the Auteuil bathroom, photographed by Joseph Primoli in 1891, was highly decorated and

merited a chapter in *La Maison d'un artiste*.³¹ The contemplation of a colorful print or a sliver of pottery “tickles, brightens, and reflects light” during the “boring operations” of daily hygiene.³² Goncourt stressed here that this pleasure was “particular to my nature,” underscoring his desire to use the aesthetic impulse as something that set him apart from his contemporaries.

Symmetrical arrangements assist in aesthetic contemplation by generating a centripetal movement in the eye, contracting the viewer's field of vision. The gaze is drawn into the center because symmetry visually emphasizes the element placed on the center axis. Moreover, the gradual reduction of scale in groupings of three objects where the centerpiece is smaller than its framing elements contributes to a contraction of the field of vision, rather than expansion. This is visible in the *grand salon* (Fig. 5),

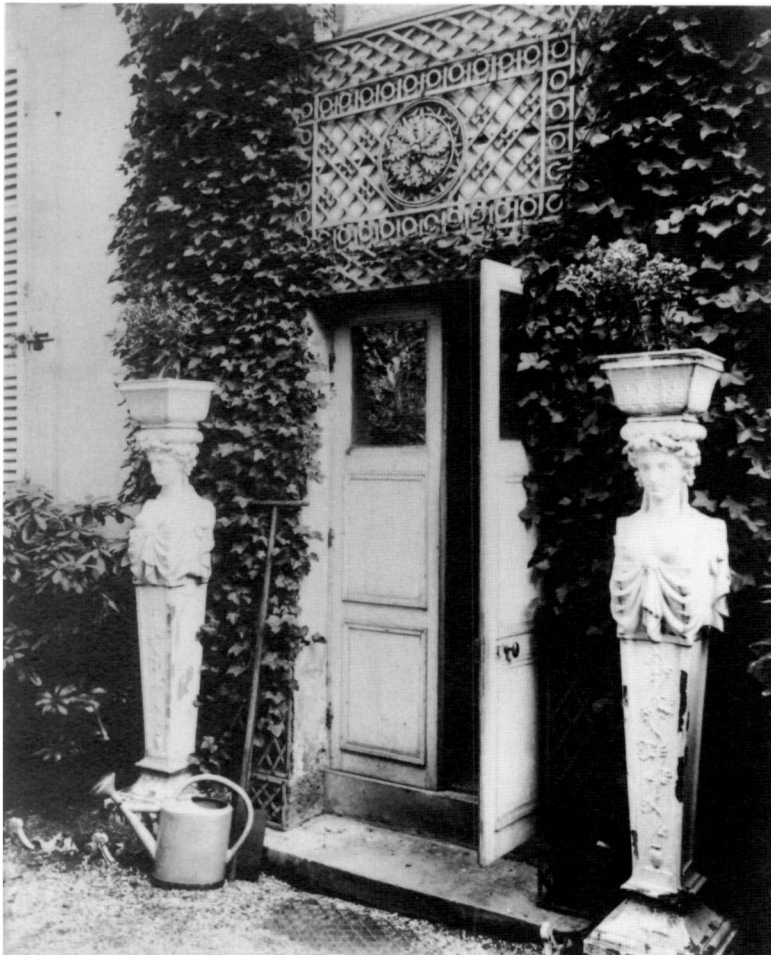


FIGURE 4
Fernand Lochard, *Porte de service sur l'allée de la grille à Auteuil*, May 1886, photograph on albumen paper. Institut Néerlandais, Paris, Fondation Custodia, Collection Frits Lugt, Paris.

where the centrally placed gouaches by Nicolas Lavreince on either side of the fireplace are smaller than the Boucher drawings hung above and the Beauvais-upholstered chairs below. The Clodion figurine on the mantel is also smaller than the vases at either side. Goncourt used this principle to accent certain cherished artworks, carrying the visitor’s attention from large expanses into increasingly smaller, restricted zones, within which the eye adjusts to explore and appreciate the aesthetic details of the highlighted object.

Consider, for example, the heart of the symmetrical arrangements on the *grand salon* wall, where Edmond placed an Asian bronze swan on the floor in front of a Japanese fireplace screen. The symmetrical placement of the Beauvais-upholstered chairs, themselves decorated with animal motifs, draws the eye into the center, where the animals move from the

FIGURE 5
 Fernand Lochard, *Grand salon de la maison d’Auteuil—Panneau de la glace sans tain*, July 1883, photograph on albumen paper. BNF, Dépt. des Estampes



flat realm of two-dimensional representation on the chairs to the three dimensions of the bronze. Once attention has been focused on the swan, the serpentine play between the bird's long, curving neck and the similarly sinuous line of the twisting trunk of the bush on the fireplace screen emerges for appreciation, carrying the eye from three dimensions back to two. These lines writhe, as it were, within their symmetrical frame, providing the type of visual stimulation that so appealed to Edmond. Discovering these visual affinities and putting them into play contributed to his pleasure in collecting and decorating.

Edmond also used symmetry as a guiding principle in the placement of drawings, as seen in the hanging of the *grand salon* (Fig. 6), where he

FIGURE 6
Fernand Lochar, *Grand salon de la maison d'Auteuil—Panneau de fond*, July 1883, photograph on albumen paper. BNF, Dépt. des Estampes.



aligned the edges of mats and frames along a horizontal. Ernst Gombrich has called such a hanging “decorative,” in that individual works are subordinated to a decorative pattern imposed on them.³³ On the lower tier, the upper edges of the mats are aligned, since the decorative frame of the large central drawing impedes an easy alignment using the frames. The upper row of drawings rests on an imaginary horizontal line that aligns the bottom edges of the frames. The space between the framed drawings is also carefully measured, and the slightly smaller Moreau le Jeune of the upper tier is self-consciously centered over the larger drawing beneath it. Such symmetrical arrangements, with correspondence and equal distribution of parts around a dividing line or center, emphasize the relationships between the individual objects of the collection, which are displayed *in relation* as part of a whole rather than as isolated objects.³⁴

The concern for symmetry and its tendency to draw the eye inward registers strongly in the photographs, but is rarely felt in Edmond’s verbal descriptions in *La Maison*. In analyzing a panel, he tends to describe the central object of an arrangement first, followed by the successive layers of framing objects, embedding within the text a centrifugal movement from center outward that directly contradicts the centripetal path the eye enacts on encountering symmetrical arrangements in the house.³⁵ If the reader of the book moves from center to periphery, the visitor to the house had a visual experience that moved in the opposite direction, as the visual function of the displays was one of framing and focusing attention on highlighted objects. Without study of the photographs, it is impossible to judge how these features of Edmond de Goncourt’s interior participate in his larger aesthetic project. The final element of his design principles—contrast—gains strength when viewed in the context of these carefully thought-out symmetrical frames, which dramatize the visual qualities of the objects on display.

The Role of Visual Contrasts

Embedded within the decorative, symmetrical arrangement of mats and frames, aesthetic relationships based on contrasts in the drawings themselves create visual interest. This can be seen in a number of examples, but nowhere more obviously than in the organization of drawings on the back wall of the *grand salon* (Fig. 6). On the lower level, Edmond hung (from left to right) Jean-Baptiste Greuze’s *Jeune femme au seuil d’une porte*, Jean Moreau le Jeune’s *La Revue du roi à la plaine de Sablons*, and Hubert Gravelot’s *L’Entretien galant*. The upper row featured

a now-lost gouache by Jean-Guillaume Moitte, Moreau le Jeune's *Serment de Louis XVI*, and Jean-Baptiste Huet's pastel *Une bergère*.³⁶ With this arrangement, Goncourt put multiple contrasts into play: large versus small drawings, crowds versus single figures, and tiny people who appear minuscule versus large bodies that fill or even surpass the page.

The contrast between the grand scale of Moreau's large drawings of public events, filled with hundreds if not thousands of miniature people, and the smaller sheets featuring large single figures in intimate settings causes the individual features of each to stand out. Moreau's small, densely crowded figures merge in vast expanses of space in the two central works, whereas the framing drawings expand the scale of the figures, at the same time reducing the perceived size of the piece of paper.³⁷ The outer drawings, in their symmetrical function as frames, focus the visitor's eye on the Moreau in the center, but, once drawn there, the retina needs to expand to take in its small details. The arrangement thus sets in motion a sort of optical dance that has the potential to enchant and thereby induce Goncourt's desired state of reverie.

The relationship between objects is not always one of formal contrasts, however. Indeed, Edmond often paired French and Asian objects with an eye to the formal and material qualities they have in common, finding aesthetic affinities where the less sensitive viewer, blocked by a cultural assumption of difference, would not be able to observe such nuances. In the *cabinet de travail*, Edmond admired the way the flesh tones of a Mayence statuette "stand out, palely pinker, against the light blue of a long and slender turquoise vase, placing on top of this piece of furniture, struck by light all day long, the icy opposition and accord of two of the most tender porcelain colorings from the West and the Far East."³⁸ The reverberation between opposition and accord creates what might be called a vibrational aesthetic, where objects hovered in delicate relationships based on subtle harmonies of hue or line.³⁹

Edmond de Goncourt's taste for the aesthetic *frisson* that resulted from unconventional but aesthetically pleasing pairings led him constantly to undermine the organizational logic of the house as declared in the table of contents of *La Maison d'un artiste*. The book suggests that the collections were divided into rooms according to media and epoch. Thus the dining room displayed their collection of eighteenth-century bronzes, the *petit salon* the eighteenth-century drawings, the *cabinet de toilette* the Saxony and Sèvres porcelains, and the *cabinet de l'Extrême-Orient* the collections of Chinese and Japanese art. In this organization, Edmond

imitated contemporary museology, which arranged collections quasi-scientifically according to place of origin and medium, like species.⁴⁰

The photographs make clear, however, that every room, in spite of its titular function of holding one type of art object (eighteenth-century drawings in the *petit salon*, for example), featured one or more complementary pieces from other parts of their collections. The table of contents announces that the *grand salon* holds “the Clodions, the Beauvais and Gobelins tapestries, the Marie-Antoinette furniture, [and] the Sèvres vases.” Edmond, however, signaled the presence of another object in the room that fit none of these categories: a Japanese bronze basin over one meter tall: “Among all of these eighteenth-century objects, in all of this *prettiness*, I thought it was a good idea to have an important piece of Far Eastern art introduce, as a contrast, its originality and its force.”⁴¹ The basin, somewhat surprisingly, does not appear in any of the photographs of the Auteuil house, but the painter Jean-François Raffaelli included it in his larger than life-sized portrait of Edmond, exhibited at the Salon of 1883 (Fig. 7). Edmond leans against the large black basin, its curvilinear base echoing the sinuous lines of the Beauvais-upholstered armchair placed in front of it. Japanese and French, large and small, bronze and wood, black and gold: all of these contrasts are united and controlled by the objects’ proximity, which brings out their underlying formal similarities.⁴² The opposition between the pretty and the strong created by this pairing allowed for a greater appreciation of the characteristics of both, their traits enhanced by their display in relationship to one another.

Raffaelli’s painting is also one of the rare representations of the color scheme of the walls in the house. They too were subject to the principle of contrast. The red, black-framed walls of the *grand* and *petit salons* (Fig. 8) were a particularly important element in Edmond’s decorating theory, as he commented in *La Maison*:

For my new small salon, I sought the way to make . . . drawings mounted in blue, stand out as best as possible. . . . After thinking about it for a long time, . . . I came to the conclusion that there was only matte red and glossy black to show off the old master drawings to an advantage. . . . I even risked a red ceiling—an audacity!—but which rewarded me and which, in the complete enveloping of the drawings in a unified and warm coloring, made the whites and all the milky clarities that a plaster ceiling kills stand out.⁴³

Not only do the red and black contrast with each other in their hue, value, and surface (matte vs. glossy), but they also contrast with the drawings on white paper and their blue mats. This family of contrasts



FIGURE 7
Jean-François Raffaelli, *Edmond de
Goncourt*, 1888. Oil on canvas, 261 ×
171.5 cm. Musée de Beaux-Arts, Nancy.

operates under the unifying umbrella of the red ceiling, which creates the “complete enveloping” of the drawings. The overall function of a decoration, Edmond argued here in this crucial passage, is to make the collections it contains stand out, to bring out, highlight, and show off to an advantage their subtle aesthetic qualities. Rooms thus disposed were spaces of aesthetic contemplation and sensation rather than mere back-



FIGURE 8
Fernand Lochard, *Petit salon de la maison d'Auteuil*, July 1883, photograph on albumen paper. BNF, Dépt. des Estampes.

drops for the other activities of life. Indeed, one of the more striking features of *La Maison d'un artiste* is the near total absence of daily life in the descriptions: conversations, meals, visits with friends, and the like play little part.

A symmetrical hanging based on aesthetic contrasts therefore allows the features of each element to attract the eye momentarily before dissolving back into the surroundings. The lively optical motion that results from the artful placement of objects seems geared to facilitate multiple contractions and expansions of the gaze as it moves across a visual field. Edmond de Goncourt's interior design strategy was one of framing and enveloping works of art in such a way as to maximize this visual play and lengthen the possibilities of optical pleasure and engagement for the sensitive viewer. The constant fluctuations among relation-

ships of symmetry, similarity, and contrast create a dense network of aesthetic relationships. While the interiors themselves have long been dismantled, the photographs serve as partial visual witnesses to this complex system, which is only partly accounted for in Edmond's lengthy book.⁴⁴ Frustrating in their lack of color, Lochard's photographs nonetheless allow a deeper understanding of Goncourt's interiors and the aesthetic coherence that governed the decoration of the entire house.

Care must be taken, however, to recall that the photographs freeze into a fixed image a decorative arrangement that was in constant fluctuation. Compare the mantel decoration in Figures 10 and 11. While the central object is washed out in the overexposed glare of Figure 11, the vase to the left has clearly been changed. Edmond de Goncourt often mentioned his pleasure in moving and rearranging objects in the house.⁴⁵ The slow transformation of the decorative ensembles means that the interiors were in a perpetual state of flux, and that the symmetrical arrangements analyzed here were only temporary. The photographs hint at the shifting symmetrical patterns, which fragment, expand, and contract as discussed in relation to the arrangements in the *grand salon*. This visual movement recalls the play of patterns in kaleidoscopes, which in fact can serve as an excellent metaphor for the house in general. Derived from the Greek *kalos* (beauty) + *eidos* (image) + *skopeo* (I see), the kaleidoscope was described in nineteenth-century dictionaries as "a physical instrument formed by an opaque tube containing mirrors arranged in such a way so that small colored objects contained in the tube produce agreeable designs with infinite variations; . . . an object that embellishes, that makes things visible in an agreeable way."⁴⁶ The action of slowly turning the cylinder provokes endless possibilities of combination and reformulation, where forms emerge into prominence momentarily and then dissolve. Rather than creating rigidly ordered systems, it seems that the symmetry of the Goncourts' interior remained open to new possibilities through shifting patterns of light, color, and object placement. This sense of emergence and absorption of visual elements corresponds to Edmond's definition of the slowly evolving decorative panel, each successive articulation of which acts as a temporary visual constellation of certain formal elements of line and color. Each subsequent arrangement is yet another "agreeable design" in the "infinite variations" that the house and its collections embody. It is in the way that the decorative arrangements "make visible" that the house *cum* kaleidoscope displays the richness of aesthetic possibilities contained within the collection. The variables of individual objects—the small colored pieces of the kaleidoscope—change and play off each other differently in each new

arrangement, but the intensity of aesthetic sensations never diminishes, providing perpetual delight.

The Question of Period Style

Further study of the photographs can also help put to rest the lingering notion that Edmond de Goncourt recreated eighteenth-century interior aesthetics in his house. The photographs prove to be all the more important for understanding his interiors given his decision to have the entire collection auctioned at his death, a choice that aroused controversy at the time and that still hampers research. Because the actual interiors are gone, scholars have tended to focus solely on the descriptions of *La Maison d'un artiste*, ignoring the additional evidence contained in the photographs.⁴⁷ In spite of its fame during Edmond's lifetime, the house, like much of the brothers' oeuvre, has fallen into a confused state of misunderstanding. This state evolved partly as a rejection of the Goncourts' reactionary social politics and what were seen as their retardataire aesthetic positions, which sometimes opposed those enshrined by later generations of art historians.⁴⁸ Modernist scholars have tended to exaggerate the Goncourts' turn to the past in order to use them as figures who fully rejected the present. When applied to the Goncourts' residence, this line of thinking interprets the house as a reconstruction of an eighteenth-century interior.⁴⁹

The efficiency of this reasoning lies in its vagueness. What period of the eighteenth century did the Goncourts supposedly recreate? An early Rococo interior or a later Louis XVI interior? Comparisons between preserved eighteenth-century interiors and the photographs of the rooms in the Auteuil house provide ample differences to help negate the idea. Most eighteenth-century interiors, which are known for the use of expanses of light colors, multiple mirrors, gilding, irregularly shaped panels, and asymmetrical decorative motifs, do not employ the decorating features visible in Edmond de Goncourt's rooms. His small fortune did not permit the luxury of acquiring entire historical schemes to re-install in the Auteuil home. Moreover, his use of framed drawings as a primary decorating element knows few eighteenth-century precedents.⁵⁰ The dark red and black color scheme of Edmond's walls also contrasted sharply with the light and airy effect of earlier rooms, and was designed to make certain objects in the room stand out rather than blend in.

It is this use of symmetry and color contrasts to highlight specific objects in the collection that ultimately seems furthest from eighteenth-century decorative harmonies, in which every aspect of a room's deco-

ration blends to create a unified aesthetic experience. Rather than generate an overall sensuous effect, Edmond staged a series of aestheticized encounters with cherished objects. Avoiding the Rococo tendency toward asymmetry in his decorative arrangements, he permitted complex visual nuances to emerge for contemplation and appreciation. Viewers may indeed acquire a greater understanding of and admiration for the fine and decorative arts of the French Rococo, but Edmond did not lead them to that conclusion by imitating or recreating Rococo decorating patterns. Rather, he sought the best installation possible to make beloved features stand out.

The concept of period rooms, where historical imitation governs an ensemble of authentic elements, such as paintings, sculptures, and tapestries matched stylistically to furnishings such as chairs, desks, tables, wall paneling, and carpets from the same period, did not really emerge until a generation after Edmond de Goncourt's book.⁵¹ Period rooms, stressing historical authenticity, go beyond the mere accumulation of objects from a single period. Designers of them take the further step of arranging those items in a manner that mimics the presumed appearance of rooms from the period in question, using prints, paintings, and other visual representations as documentary evidence for the distribution of art and furniture within a room. Edmond de Goncourt did this kind of reconstruction work in his history books, especially in *La Femme au dix-huitième siècle* (1862, with Jules de Goncourt), but such was not his concern at his home in Auteuil.

As a comparative example, the early twentieth-century home of the avid Rococo collector Moïse de Camondo (1860-1935) matches the appearance of late eighteenth-century interiors to a much greater extent. Having set as his goal the reconstitution of the ideal eighteenth-century home, Camondo recreated an eighteenth-century-style set of panels to frame his suite of decorative paintings by Jean-Baptiste Huet; and in his *Salon des Huet*, the large paintings and gilded mirrors were installed into these carved wooden panels copied from the Hôtel Jean du Barry, of about 1775, in Toulouse.⁵² In the *grand bureau* (Fig. 9) he installed an authentic set of wooden panels purchased in 1911, outfitting them with Aubusson tapestries and more Rococo mirrors.

For the creation of these rooms, Camondo benefited from a number of factors that distinguished his activities from those of Edmond de Goncourt. First, he inherited a great deal of the collection from his father, Nissim de Camondo. The family's immense fortune far surpassed Goncourt's buying power and permitted Moïse to purchase entire suites of large paintings, huge eighteenth-century carpets and tapestries, and

hundreds of *objets d'art* by the finest artists. Moreover, Moïse hired a team of educated consultants for his project, including the architect René Sergent, famous for his knowledge of the eighteenth-century architect Ange-Jacques Gabriel. His team of consultants assisted in the research and installation of the collection in spaces specifically designed in a historicist manner. The Camondo interiors doubtless benefited from the Goncourt brothers' own publications on eighteenth-century life and art.

The Goncourts, on the other hand, disposed of smaller means and had to arrange their collections within a house with July Monarchy stylistic elements. (Camondo built his house from scratch, in late eighteenth-century Neoclassical style.) Telling details in the Auteuil residence betray the absence of a period room mentality. Tapestries, which themselves included elaborate framing devices of floral garlands, ribbons, or *trompe-l'oeil* curtains surrounding a central scene, were cut down to fit around doors and mirrors (Fig. 10), leaving garlands that loop into an open door, rather than back into a central gathering point, and figures awkwardly squeezed into tight spaces. The wooden frames for tapestry panels seen in the Camondo interiors were absent from Goncourt's smaller rooms. Furthermore, Goncourt violated the pictorial field of at least one tapestry, in the dining room, by putting a clock in the middle of it and by installing a pair of sconces on it at either side of the central panel, which could not have been done without cutting holes in the tapestry (Fig. 11, note that the tapestry here is the same one seen in the watercolor in Fig. 2, but there without the two narrow side panels).⁵³ Edmond's rooms were simply too small for the grandeur of the works he displayed there, creating a sense of containment and enclosure that was not part of the airy and open eighteenth-century aesthetic.

Other details, such as Goncourt's systematic placement of numerous small statuettes, vases, and other objects on shelves further contributed to a nineteenth-century sense of crowding, and the dark red and black walls of the large and small salons visible in Raffaelli's painting (Fig. 7) had no equivalent in the eighteenth century. Indeed, Edmond's one clearly articulated rule about interior decorating contradicted the stylistic brief of the Rococo:

At the heart of things, let's pose in principle that the only harmonious apartment is one in which the pieces of furniture stand out in contrast and in opposition to two largely dominant tonalities, and red and black are still the most pleasing combination that a decorator has found as a *repoussoir* to bring out the value of that which furnishes a room.⁵⁴



FIGURE 9
René Sergent, architect, townhouse for Moïse de Camondo, *Grand bureau*, 1910-1914, Paris. Photo: Marc Walter, Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Musée Nissim de Camondo, Paris.

This passage reveals that, for Edmond de Goncourt, the collections of drawings and furniture remain distinct from the room that surrounds them. He does not pursue the fusion of interior elements that marked Rococo interiors and that would transform later Art Nouveau interiors, for example, into environments of seamless, all-over ornament. The primary concern of Edmond's interior design was to create the most beautiful setting possible for his collections, particularly his eighteenth-century drawings. The aesthetics of framing and contrast were his motivating forces, not historical accuracy or recreation. While it may be



FIGURE 10
Fernand Lochard, *Salle à manger de la
Maison des Goncourt à Auteuil*, July 1883,
photograph on albumen paper. BNF, Dépt.
des Estampes.

true that Edmond often assembled drawings, furniture, statuettes, tapestries, and other art objects from the same period in close proximity, he did not attempt to display them in a way that recreated eighteenth-century modes of interior decoration.⁵⁵

The house at Auteuil, then, should not be considered a mirror of the past. It was a fully nineteenth-century product, a three-dimensional montage that expressed Edmond's taste for contrasts emphasizing the material qualities of the pieces in his collections of French and Asian art and heightening the aesthetic experience. Even as he insisted on the ontological separation of the collection from its envelope, Edmond demanded that the envelope perform a function: to highlight, to enhance, and to make more beautiful the objects it enclosed. The collections on their own were not enough for him: he required that the conditions of viewing them accentuate their visual and emotional im-



pact. “Beautiful things are only beautiful for me on the condition that they are well dressed,” he wrote in the *Journal*.⁵⁶ The attraction of the values of framing, symmetry, and contrast thus lay in part in their ability to enhance the beauty of his collections, allowing him to emphasize both the exquisite nature of each object in and of itself, as well as the ongoing pleasure of discovering visual connections between them. This pleasure was continuous in his activities of arranging and rearranging displays using the principles analyzed here.

In creating his interior decor, Edmond metaphorically enacted the actions of both the collector and the artist. As a collector perusing the *bouquinistes* and antique shops on the quais of the Seine, he was drawn to certain features in drawings, porcelains, tapestries, and statuettes. As

FIGURE 11

Freuler, *Edmond de Goncourt dans sa salle à manger à Auteuil*, 1890, photograph on albumen paper. Institut Néerlandais, Fondation Custodia, Collection Frits Lugt, Paris.

a decorating artist, he then creatively employed these objects as compositional elements in harmonious ensembles (or “panels”) that were governed by the principles of symmetry and contrast. It was the care he lavished on the thoughtful arrangement of his interiors, in which a myriad of experiences of aesthetic beauty rotated as in a kaleidoscope, that made Edmond’s home a point of reference for his contemporaries. His sensitivity to the artistic qualities and craftsmanship of decorative art objects, combined with the creativity he brought to their framing and display, inspired others after him to pursue an even greater degree of decorative integration, either in the historical accuracy of period rooms or in the modern aesthetics of Art Nouveau.

The photographs collected in Goncourt’s private album partially preserve the visual impact of his interiors, where framing, symmetry, and contrast represent the criteria used for the installation of his large collections of French and Asian decorative and fine arts. The photographs, in a curious parallel to Edmond’s interiors, make visible the subtle qualities of display that went unmentioned in *La Maison d’un artiste*. Edmond’s ongoing desire to publish an illustrated edition suggests that he understood that it is not enough to read about the artist’s house: one has to see it in order to appreciate it fully.

NOTES

Research for this article was supported in part by the Samuel H. Kress Foundation, New York; the Center for the Advanced Study of the Visual Arts, Washington, D.C.; and the Deutsches Forum für Kunstgeschichte, Paris. I wish to thank Nina Kallmyer, Elisabeth Launay, H. Perry Chapman, and the anonymous reader for this journal for their helpful comments in the development of this topic.

1. The Goncourts’ history books include *Révolution dans les moeurs* (1854), *Histoire de la société pendant la Révolution française* (1854), *Histoire de la société française pendant le Directoire* (1855), *Sophie Arnould* (1857), *Portraits intimes du dix-huitième siècle* (1857), *Histoire de Marie-Antoinette* (1858), *Les Maîtresses de Louis XV* (1860), and *La Femme au dix-huitième siècle* (1862). Perhaps their most influential work was a set of biographical essays on eighteenth-century artists, first published between 1857 and 1870 in art periodicals such as the *Gazette de Beaux Arts*, and later gathered into a single work titled *L’Art du dix-huitième siècle* (1873-74). A number of later titles, such as *Ma-*

dame de Pompadour and *L’Amour au dix-huitième siècle*, represent updated versions of chapters or sections of these primary books. These revised excerpts attest to the popularity of the Goncourts’ history books, which were often reprinted throughout the second half of the nineteenth century.

2. For a good overview of the Goncourts’ collection, see Elisabeth Launay, *Les Frères Goncourt, collectionneurs de dessins* (Paris, 1991).

3. This line of thinking informs recent work on the Goncourts’ house, including that of Debora L. Silverman, who wrote about the Goncourts’ “reconstitution” of eighteenth-century interiors in *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France: Politics, Psychology, and Style* (Berkeley, Calif., 1989), 19-23; see also Michel Beurdeley and Michèle Maubeuge, *Edmond de Goncourt chez lui* (Nancy, France, 1991).

4. See n. 11.

5. I wish to thank Hans Buijs, of the Institut Néerlandais, Paris, for making the album avail-

able for extended study and for granting permission to reproduce the photographs. Edmond de Goncourt gave smaller sets of unbound photographs of his house to the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Département des Estampes et de la Photographie, and to the Musée Carnavalet, both in Paris.

6. Edmond de Goncourt, *La Maison d'un artiste*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1881). Historical and sociological scholarship exploring the growing importance of the domestic sphere in the nineteenth century is vast and includes as a major reference Philippe Ariès and Georges Duby, eds., *Histoire de la vie privée: Des feux de la Révolution à la Grande Guerre*, 4 vols. (Paris, 1985-1987). See also Suzanne Nash, *Home and Its Dislocations in Nineteenth-Century France* (Albany, N.Y., 1993); and Sharon Marcus, *Apartment Stories: City and Home in Nineteenth-Century Paris and London* (Berkeley, Calif., 1999). Recent art-historical work that deals specifically with representations of the domestic sphere includes Christopher Reed, ed., *Not at Home: The Suppression of Domesticity in Modern Art and Architecture* (London, 1996), and Susan Sidlauskas, *Body, Place and Self in Nineteenth-Century Painting* (Cambridge, U.K., 2000).

7. Dominique Pety recently analyzed the book in *Les Goncourt et la collection: De l'objet d'art à l'art d'écrire* (Geneva, Switz., 2003). Highly sophisticated in its contextual and literary approach to the Goncourts' collecting and writing, Pety's account does not engage the visual qualities of the house's content or display, and she provides no analysis of the interior beyond Edmond's verbal descriptions.

8. A passage from the Goncourts' journal, written shortly after *La Maison* was first published in 1881, confirms Edmond's intentions: "Cette nuit, j'avais la fièvre et chaque fois que je me retournais dans mon lit, je trouvais près de ma figure, sur mon oreiller, un des objets dont je venais de dresser le catalogue pour la publication illustrée de *La Maison d'un artiste*, que doit faire Gauchez. Et me retournant de l'autre côté, c'était un autre objet. Et cela durait ainsi toute la nuit." Edmond et Jules de Goncourt, *Journal: Mémoires de la vie littéraire*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1989): vol. 2, 925 (February 15, 1882). Edmond mentions other projects to illustrate *La Maison* several times in the *Journal*. See vol. 2, 1224 (January 13, 1886); vol. 3, 1144 (June 19, 1895); 1149 (June 29, 1895); 1184 (October 23, 1895); 1264 (April 10, 1896); 1265 (April 15, 1896); and 1273 (April 28, 1896).

9. Little is known about Lochar's practice, other than that he had his studio at 39 rue Laval in 1886. He exhibited photographic enamels (*émaux pho-*

tographiques) in the 1869, 1870, and 1878 Salon exhibitions, according to Jean-Marie Voignier's *Répertoire des photographes de France au dix-neuvième siècle* (Paris, 1993), 166. *Émaux photographiques* were either enameled photographs or photographs transferred to ceramic plates, in both cases to increase their permanency. Which process Lochar used is unknown. Stephen Pinson, curator of photography at the New York Public Library, in a private e-mail communication of August 14, 2007, stated that there is a long history of photography (and attempts at photography) on ceramic or vitreous surfaces, beginning with Thomas Wedgwood, although the first practical processes were probably after the middle of the century, with the introduction of collodion. In such processes the exposed gelatin was transferred to a ceramic surface, developed, and heated to fuse the image to the plate. There were also processes of "enameling" daguerreotypes and photographic prints, also usually with collodion, in an attempt to render them more permanent. I have not been able to locate the works Lochar exhibited in these Salons, and therefore cannot be precise about the exact nature of his technique. Lochar received a commission to photograph the interior displays of the Immobilier National in 1882. A group of approximately thirty albumen prints from this campaign are held under Lochar's name in the collection of the Département des Estampes et de la Photographie of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France in Paris. This work may have given him a reputation as an interior and furniture photographer, motivating Edmond to contact him. The exact circumstances under which he came to photograph the house in Auteuil are also unknown.

10. Beurdeley and Maubeuge, *Edmond de Goncourt chez lui*, is particularly problematic from this point of view.

11. A potential problem in describing the interiors, and indeed in analyzing most of the Goncourts' work, is the attribution of certain arrangements to one or the other of the two brothers. Jules lived in the Auteuil house for just two years and died in June 1870. With the exception of the attic, which Edmond transformed architecturally in 1885, and which can therefore be attributed solely to him, it is difficult to say to what extent Jules may have participated in the arrangements captured in the photographs taken thirteen or more years after his death. In the *Journal*, Edmond occasionally recorded the transformations and nearly constant state of redecoration of the rooms of the house, speaking of his pleasure at rearranging objects in display cases or on shelves. For the initial decoration of the Auteuil house, see *Journal*, vol. 2, 177

(September 30, 1868). Edmond's later decorating activities are mentioned in vol. 2, 475 (November 28, 1871); 750 (September 20, 1877); 1044 (January 23, 1884); vol. 3, 33 (April 26, 1887); and 1005 (August 29, 1894). Edmond was also obliged to remove most of his collection from the house during the Prussian occupation of Paris in 1871. The extent to which he recreated any arrangements that Jules may have participated in is impossible to determine. Significantly, Edmond chose to use the singular *un artiste* in the title of his book on the house, suggesting that he saw it as his own creation. Even for the years they lived together, however, there is no way of knowing how much each brother participated in the decorating decisions. While acknowledging this potential difficulty here, I will use the plural for descriptions of the brothers' apartment in Paris, reserving the singular for the design and arrangement of the interiors at Auteuil.

12. Because the Goncourts' collections were auctioned in 1896 on Edmond's death, their reconstitution proves particularly difficult. I invite anyone with knowledge of objects having Goncourt provenance to contact me through the editor of this journal.

13. "Je regarde mon salon où il y a tant de clous, tant d'or et tant d'argent. À peine en dix ans peut-on faire un panneau. Je me console avec ceci, que je n'ai jamais rien vu de complet." *Journal*, vol. 1, 237 (February 20, 1857).

14. *Journal*, vol. 2, 1044 (January 23, 1884): "On ne sait pas pour un passionné de mobilier, le bonheur qu'il y a à composer des panneaux d'appartements, sur lesquels les matières et les couleurs s'harmonisent ou contrastent, à créer des espèces de grands tableaux d'art, où l'on associe le bronze, la porcelaine, le laque, le jade, la broderie. On se doute peu du temps qu'il faut pour que ça vous satisfasse complètement, et les changements et les déplacements que cela demande." All translations from the French are my own.

15. Charles Blanc, *Grammaire des arts décoratifs: Décoration intérieure de la maison* (Paris, 1886), i-xl. The five rules (*lois générales*) are: repetition, alternation, symmetry, progression, and confusion.

16. Henry Havard, *L'Art dans la maison: Grammaire de l'ameublement* (Paris, 1884), vii: "Toutes les personnes, soucieuses de la correction de leur logis, ont un guide sûr pour les préserver des fautes graves, une grammaire dont les préceptes sagement déduits peuvent les prémunir contre de fatales erreurs." Later, he emphasizes the amount of historical research he has done, synthesizing it for the

reader, who can more easily learn this “language of good taste”: “les enseignements, nous permettant de reconstituer l’ensemble de connaissances indispensables, sont singulièrement dispersés. Rien que pour parcourir ce qui a été écrit sur la matière, c’est quelques centaines de volumes à lire et à résumer. . . . Sans trop en avoir l’air, nous avons bien déjà fouillé ensemble plus de trois cents volumes de *Lettres* et de *Mémoires*, pour saisir le secret de nos ancêtres. . . . [N]ous nous trouverons, à la fin de notre travail, en possession d’une grammaire d’un nouveau genre, bien fournie en règles certaines s’appuyant sur une suite d’expériences concluantes, et qui nous permettra d’imprimer à notre intérieur, luxueux ou modeste, le cachet du bon goût,” 43-44.

17. On the history of symmetry as an architectural principle, see Werner Szambien, *Symétrie, Goût, Caractère: Théorie et terminologie de l’architecture de l’âge classique, 1550-1800* (Paris, 1986), 61-78.

18. Blanc, *Grammaire des arts décoratifs*, xiii-xviii: “En passant du règne végétal au règne animal . . . on voit se produire avec constance une manière de répétition qui, sans être absolument nouvelle, est tout à fait singulière, la *symétrie*. Dès que nous sommes en présence d’un être animé, il nous apparaît comme composé de deux parties qui ont été soudées le long d’une ligne médiane, et ces deux parties, semblables sans être identiques, se correspondent de telle façon que celles de droite, repliées sur celles de gauche, les couvriraient exactement, comme une main de l’homme peut couvrir son autre main. Cette similitude, ou plutôt cette parfaite correspondance, est justement ce que nous appelons d’ordinaire la *symétrie*”; and Havard, *L’Art dans la maison*, 244: “Considérez, en effet, le corps humain; son admirable symétrie extérieure n’a nullement, comme corollaire obligé, une symétrie intérieure qui compliquerait inutilement les fonctions de la vie. Le cœur est un viscère unique, dont le pendant n’existe pas. L’estomac est un sac informe, et les poumons sont inégaux. Pour les mêmes raisons, la *coupe* d’une maison, qui est en quelque sorte l’autopsie de cette maison, nous montre des pièces diversement distribuées suivant les besoins de l’habitation, et ne répondant pas aux divisions extérieures.”

19. Ernst Gombrich, *The Sense of Order: A Study in the Psychology of Decoration* (London, 1979), 17-20. He claims that the use of symmetry preserves reason and order in decoration, and defends it against accusations of over-indulgence in sensuality and childish delight.

20. See, e.g., *Journal*, vol. 2, 1005 (May 5, 1883): “Tous des vaniteux, les collectionneurs d’à présent,

les Haviland, les Gentian, et *tutti quanti*. Acheter un objet dans l’ignorance de tout le monde, à une vente complètement inconnue et emporter cet objet chez soi, où personne ne venait le voir: c’est ce que moi et les amateurs de mon temps faisaient. A ces conditions, aucun des amateurs d’art du moment présent ne dépenserait cinquante francs pour un objet d’art, fût-il le plus parfait des objets d’art.”

21. The house currently belongs to the city of Paris. The Académie Goncourt hopes to use it as both an administrative and a study center. See Ange-Dominique Bouzet, “On éménage chez les Goncourt,” *Libération* no. 7364 (January 13, 2005): viii.

22. See Marcus, *Apartment Stories*, 3-5.

23. The archives of the Académie Goncourt at the Archives Municipales de Nancy, France, contain documents relating to both the sale of the family farm in Goutes and the purchase of the villa in Auteuil. The property at Auteuil was first mentioned in the *Journal*, vol. 2, 165 (August 4, 1868). The purchase, preparations for the move, and their installation can be traced in vol. 2, 170 (August 9, 1868); 170 (August 16, 1868); and 175 (September 12, 1868). André Billy gives the provenance of the property in his biography *Les Frères Goncourt: La vie littéraire à Paris pendant la seconde moitié du XIXe siècle* (Paris, 1954), 213-14.

24. “Quinze jours passés dans l’arrangement de cette maison . . . dans le rêve de trouvailles pour l’orner, la parer d’art, dans la joie de vos yeux à retrouver tout ce que son jour y illumine et y transfigure de ce que vous y avez apporté de dessins, de terres cuites, de tapisseries, de bronzes.” *Journal*, vol. 2, 177 (September 30, 1868).

25. See Eugène Guinot, “Revue des Environs de Paris. Auteuil,” *Le Pays* (July 11, 1858): 1-2.

26. See Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, *Gavarni: L’homme et l’oeuvre* (Paris, 1873), 277-78 and 294-95.

27. In the *Journal*, Edmond tells the story of finding two women taking pictures of his house one day, vol. 3, 419 (May 1, 1890). Frantz Jourdain’s article, “Intérieurs d’artistes: Edmond de Goncourt,” *La Construction Moderne* (February 11, 1888): 205, is one of many about the house published in the popular press.

28. Comtesse de Bassanville, *L’Art de bien tenir une maison* (Paris, 1878), 88: “Une conversation amusante . . . ne pouvant jamais naître dans un endroit où les meubles sont rangés symétriquement, car cet ordre symétrique des sièges fait que les femmes sont

assises ensemble et que les hommes, n’osant pas déplacer les chaises qui semblent collées au murs, restent debout et discutent entre eux.”

29. Charles Blanc, *Grammaire des arts décoratifs*, 188: “Mais l’arrangement symétrique des meubles n’est pas nécessaire partout. Autant il donne un air de repos et de dignité aux appartements de réception, autant il serait froid et déplacé dans un cabinet d’études, de retraite ou de conversation. . . . Même chez un homme d’une humeur rassise et d’un esprit méthodique, la régularité ne serait pas longtemps possible. . . . [car il] a besoin d’être entouré d’objets variés et nombreux, qui favorisent la liberté de son esprit et qui la provoquent par l’inattendu de leurs rapprochements, par l’étrangeté de leurs contrastes.”

30. Havard, *L’Art dans la maison*, 244.

31. The chapter on the “Cabinet de toilette” can be found in *La Maison*, vol. 2, 189-96.

32. Goncourt, *La Maison*, vol. 2, 189.

33. Ernst Gombrich, *The Uses of Images: Studies in the Social Function of Art and Visual Communication* (London, 2000), 108-35.

34. Dominique Pety discussed the ways in which the text of *La Maison* also multiplied ties between objects in *Les Goncourt et la collection*, 229-32, but this form of decorative hanging represents a visual metaphor for the notion of collection.

35. See, e.g., his description of the fireplace mantel in his study in *La Maison*, vol. 1, 350.

36. These drawings are all illustrated in Launay’s catalogue *Les Frères Goncourt collectionneurs*, figs. 163, 26, 159, pl. 12, and fig. 174, respectively.

37. Another example of a similar game of contrasts is found in the terracotta statuettes by Clodion placed on the fireplace mantel in the same room (see Fig. 5). The small, sinuously wrapped limbs of the young girl’s body in the central statuette contrast with the smooth, straight edges and low relief of the vases placed on either side of it. Although the statuette is smaller than the vases in overall size, the scale of the human figure represented is much larger than that on the vases.

38. *La Maison*, vol. 1, 349-50: “L’aimable statuette de Mayence détache ses chairs, pâlement rosées, du bleu pâle d’un long et fluet vase bleu turquoise, mettant sur ce haut de meuble, frappé toute la journée de lumière, l’opposition et l’accord glacial des deux plus tendres colorations de la porcelaine de l’Occident et de l’Orient.” The *Journal* contains a number of expressions of appreciation for French

eighteenth-century art in terms of Japanese art and vice versa: vol. 1, 730 (September 14, 1861); 2, 620 (January 22, 1875); 2, 678 (January 11, 1876); 2, 1249-50 (May 9, 1886); 3, 219 (January 24, 1889); 3, 367 (January 7, 1890). The way Edmond articulated the similarities between the two types of art would make a fascinating subject for further investigation, which might also explore the astonishing coincidence of the time of year (January) when Edmond tended to make such comparisons.

39. Edmond de Goncourt's theories of color contrast demand more attention than can be given here. A sophisticated vocabulary for color, expressing subtle nuances in hues, dominates his writing in the *Journal* and *La Maison*, as well as the analyses of paintings he and Jules wrote together for *L'Art du dix-huitième siècle*. Many of his color terms are neologisms or deformations of other nouns used to designate colors and their relationships with each other. While the color pairings he focuses on do not match those of the well-known theories of complementary colors (blue/orange, red/green, violet/yellow) articulated by Eugène Chevreul, he seems to conceive of the interactions of colors in a similar way, exploring vibrations and chromatic auras created by chromatic juxtapositions. A tantalizing potential connection between the two men nonetheless exists, because Chevreul supervised the production of dyes for the Gobelins tapestry manufacture, where Edmond was a frequent visitor.

40. On nineteenth-century attitudes towards museological classification and display, see Charlotte Klonk, "Mounting Vision: Charles Eastlake and the National Gallery of London," *Art Bulletin* 82, no. 2 (June 2000): 337-40.

41. *La Maison*, vol. 1, 190: "Parmi tous ces objets du XVIIIe siècle, dans tout ce joli, j'ai estimé bon qu'un important morceau de l'art de l'Extrême-Orient apportât, comme contraste, son originalité et sa force." Emphasis in the original.

42. The same type of contrast can be found in the vestibule, where in the midst of the collection of Japanese embroideries, Edmond placed a bas-relief by Clodion. See *La Maison*, vol. 1, 12. Another example, where two eighteenth-century French gouaches by Moreau le Jeune are hung near a Japanese lacquer panel, characterized this time as a *contraste bizarre*, can be found in the chapter on the *cabinet de toilette*, vol. 2, 190. In almost all of the photographs of Edmond's house, French and Asian art objects appear together. The exception to this is the *cabinet de l'Extrême-Orient*, which housed only Asian objects and did not contain any works of French art.

43. *La Maison*, vol. 1, 25-26: "J'ai donc cherché mon nouveau petit salon de façon à faire ressortir le mieux possible . . . des dessins montés en bleu. . . . Après avoir longuement médité . . . je suis arrivé à la conviction qu'il n'y avait que le rouge mat et le noir brillant pour faire valoir les dessins anciens. . . . Je risquai même le plafond rouge, une audace! mais qui m'a réussi, et qui, par l'enveloppement complet des dessins dans une coloration unie et chaude, en fait saillir les blancs et toutes les clartés laiteuses que tue un plafond en plâtre."

44. Goncourt seems aware of the difficulty of fully representing with words the visual qualities he admires. After a long enumeration of the aesthetic qualities of a Clodion, he writes: "qui pourra bien le dire?" *La Maison*, vol. 1, 13. I elaborate on the dynamics of word and image throughout the Goncourts' critical writing in my dissertation "Word and Image in the Art Criticism of the Goncourt Brothers" (Ph.D. diss., University of Delaware, 2005).

45. See *Journal* entries mentioned in n. 11.

46. Pierre Larousse, "Kaléidoscope," *Grand dictionnaire universel du XIXe siècle* (Paris, 1864-1879), vol. 9, 1149. "Instrument de physique formé d'un tube opaque contenant des miroirs disposés de façon que de petits objets colorés contenus dans le tube y produisent des dessins agréables et variés; . . . ce qui embellit, ce qui fait voir les choses sous un aspect agréable."

47. In fact, one passage in *La Maison* seems to have caused the most confusion. Edmond describes his bedroom, decorated with eighteenth-century tapestries: "Un ensemble d'objets qui, le matin, lorsque j'ouvre les yeux, me donne l'impression de me réveiller, non dans mon temps que je n'aime pas, mais bien dans le temps qui a été l'objet des études et des amours de ma vie: en quelque chambre d'un château d'une Belle au Bois dormant du temps de Louis XV." *La Maison*, vol. 2, 200. This passage was translated by Debora Silverman in the following terms: "My bedroom . . . is an authentic room of a château, where I become a sleeping beauty from the era of Louis XV," in *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France*, 23. Nowhere in the original does Edmond specifically say that he becomes a sleeping beauty, nor does he use the word "authentic." The accumulation of qualifiers (*quelque chambre d'un château d'une Belle*) specifically places this sentence in the realm of fantasy, and the vague impression that one might have on waking seems far from a scientific interest in reconstruction—an interpretation by scholars that has crept into the perception of the house.

48. This issue is examined in detail in the introduction to my dissertation.

49. See n. 3.

50. Kristel Smentek studied the growth in taste for drawings in the eighteenth century in her essay "An Exact Imitation Acquired at Little Expense: Marketing Color Prints in Eighteenth-Century France," in *Colorful Impressions: The Printmaking Revolution in Eighteenth-Century France*, exh. cat., ed. Margaret Morgan Grasselli (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 2003), 9-21. To my knowledge, no substantial work on the hanging and display of drawings, which were normally kept in portfolios or drawers, has been done.

51. Francis Fosca discussed the period room phenomenon in relation to the Goncourts in his book *Edmond et Jules de Goncourt* (Paris, 1941), 348. Beurdeley and Maubeuge also discussed this in *Edmond de Goncourt chez lui*, 118-19.

52. On the Camondo house, see Nadine Gasc and Gérard Mabilbe, *Le Musée Nissim de Camondo* (Paris, 1991).

53. Before condemning Edmond too harshly for such abuses, a better understanding of the cultural practices with tapestries should be undertaken. A print by Abraham Bosse (1602-1676) of the Foolish Virgins, e.g., shows framed paintings hung within the pictorial field of tapestries. The Bosse print is reproduced in Gombrich, *The Uses of Images*, 125-26. Charissa Bremer-David, curator of European tapestries at The J. Paul Getty Museum, had this to say: "It was customary to hang pictures and light fixtures over tapestries up until about 1720 or so. Tapestries were even hung over doorways, with long cuts made into the weavings to accommodate the swinging door frame. This wasn't done to high-end, expensive tapestries. There are many contemporary painted and printed interiors showing this custom, but in these cases, the tapestries are usually verdure or hunts in landscapes. I can't say exactly when or why the custom died out. One can still see such interiors preserved from the 17th C in Rosenberg Castle, Copenhagen, and in some English country houses." E-mail communication to author, February 2, 2004.

54. *La Maison*, vol. 1, 26: "Au fond, posons en principe qu'il n'y a d'appartements harmonieux que ceux où les objets mobiliers se détachent du contraste et de l'opposition de deux tonalités largement dominantes, et le rouge et le noir est encore la plus heureuse combinaison qu'un tapissier ait trouvé comme repoussoir et mise en valeur de ce qui meuble une chambre." For a

more general discussion of the use of red as the background color for works of art, see Klonk, "Mounting Vision."

55. I would argue that the same could be said regarding a potential *japonisant* aesthetic in the interior. While Edmond clearly emphasizes the Asian art in his collection, the Japanese decorating

principles of asymmetry and irregularity are absent in his installation of the collection. Brigitte Koyama-Richard discusses Edmond's refusal to use Japanese interior decorating principles in her book *Japon rêvé: Edmond de Goncourt et Hayashi Tadamasu* (Paris, 2001), 23. On *japonisme* as an interior decorating principle more generally, see Ellen E. Roberts, "A Marriage of 'the Extreme East and the

Extreme West': Japonism and Aestheticism in Louis Comfort Tiffany's Rooms in the Bella Apartments," *Studies in the Decorative Arts* 13, no. 2 (Spring-Summer 2006): 2-51.

56. *Journal*, vol. 2, 493 (February 9, 1872): "Les belles choses ne sont belles pour moi qu'à la condition d'être bien habillées."