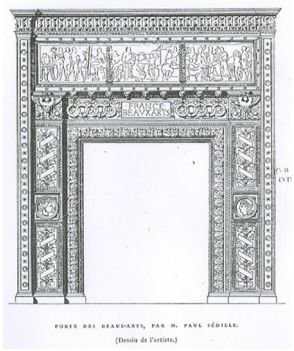
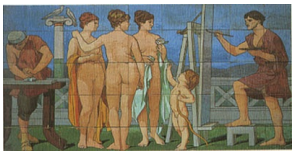
MARC MAISON

120, rue des rosiers
93400 Saint Ouen
(France)
tel: +33.(0)6.60.62.61.90
contact@marcmaison.com



The monumental door of the Fine Arts Pavilion of the 1878 World's Fair



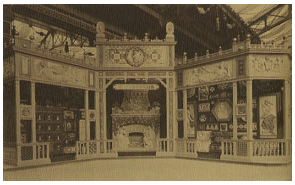
Detail of the monumental door, Painting



Detail of the monumental door, Architecture



Detail of the monumental door, Sculpture



Jules Loebnitz' exhibition, World's Fair, 1889

Polychrome Architecture

In London in 1886, Paul Sédille declared before the members of the British Royal Institute of Architects that "architecture is a direct emanation of Nature […] colour is the very manifestation of Nature." He concluded his talk asking if polychrome was not the source of Antique architecture's perfection. Since 1871, in the line of Hittorff, he constantly championed the principle of colour in architecture, repeating over and over that polychrome was a universal principle in architecture, and that its eclipse in France since the 18th century could only be a short term phase. He recalled that Greek and Roman architecture were polychrome; spoke of Viollet-le-Duc's attempts to restore the inside and outside of Notre-Dame de Paris to its original polychrome state; and declared that Della Robbia's enamels were his perfect idea of architectural ceramics, although he himself refused to use the human figure in his large scale polychrome pieces.
To defend his thesis, Sédille drew his sources from all countries and civilizations. The progress in History and Archeology (the discovery of Darius' palace in Susa and the glorious exhibition of the friezes of his palace in the Louvre) was a solid base for his argument, as were his travel journals and sketches, and enabled him to ultimately propose guiding principles for modern polychrome architecture.
Colour was an expressive addition to architectural form and in order to demonstrate this in his talks, Sédille invoked Mexico, Peru, the enamelled décors of India and more specifically those of the fortress in Gwalior. But it was the Far East that was the essential basis of his demonstrations, like many of the artists of the times. The West showed a renewed fascination for the East ever since the Romantics of the early 19th century. Paul Sédille, also a painter, exhibited his work inspired by the Barbizon school almost every year at the salon. He particularly appreciated the work of Albert Pasini who often represented doors of palaces or mosques with brightly coloured ceramic tile decorations, inspired by his trips to Turkey and the Middle East. Sédille knew most of the richly illustrated albums coming from the more and more frequent diplomatic or artistic journeys, which were a powerful inspiration.
All his life, Sédille followed closely the archaeological research in North Africa and the Middle East, thus nourishing his study and passion for monumental polychrome architecture.
Two travel books inspired Sédille's musings and sense of mystery : Voyage en Orient (Journey to the East) by Lamartine and Un Voyage en Espagne (Journey to Spain) by Théophile Gautier (1843), and other books such as:Grammar of ornament by Owen Jones, l'Ornement polychrome (Polychrome ornament) by Alfred Racinet, Architecture et décorations turques au XVème siècle (Turkish architecture and decoration in the 15th century) by Léon Parvillée,Monuments anciens de la Perse (Antique monuments of Persia) (1844) and Monuments modernes de la Perse(Modern monuments of Persia) (1867) by the architect Pascal Coste.
Paul Sédille's intimate conviction was that the ceramic medium was the king of polychrome architecture materials and Jules Loebnitz' earthenware satisfied this ideal. To him, modern polychrome needed to last as long as the building, which made his collaboration with Loebnitz so interesting. Indeed, the ceramicist had two large factories in Paris, with 130 square feet of workshops allowing him to create with his secret unbreakable earthenware technique the pieces he and Sédille imagined. Loebnitz also deposited patents for new techniques such as "embossed décor" plates and "terra cotta tiles with recessed enamelled ornaments" just like the ones he made in 1863 for the restoration of the chateau in Blois.
The major architectural products manufactured by Loebnitz were, either, encrusted sandstone or Neo-Medieval style enamelled terra cotta paving tiles (such as those made for the restoration of the Loire valley chateaux), or, stove tiles and decorative plates with flat, incised or relief enamelled polychrome décors for use on interior or exterior walls, in an eclectic style often of Renaissance inspiration.

A trip to Spain : a revelation

Wanting absolutely to experience Arab art with his own eyes Paul Sédille took a trip to Spain to admire Grenada, Seville and Córdoba. Sédille was rendered breathless by the Alhambra in Grenada, the Alcázar and the Casa de Pilatos in Seville, and most of all by the mosque in Córdoba. Inside the Mezquita (mosque), both the Mihrab and the Maqsura – the most holy place – entranced the architect. This is what he wrote about the mosaic of the Maqsura: "This mosaic, made of very small cubes of glass adorned with beautiful Kufic writing and arabesques of the most noble and elegant design, set against a gold and blue background, far surpasses in beauty, harmony and richness of hues anything Venice, Rome of Ravenna has to offer of the kind. This mosaic is sister to the weaved and embroidered marvels created by the Genius of the Orient." He spent hour sketching and filling his note books.
The influence of this trip on Sédille was instantaneous. Upon his return, his collaboration with his friend Jules Loebnitz began by the villa Dietz-Monnin, rue la Fontaine in Paris, which is unfortunately no longer there.
Based on what he had seen in Seville in the patio of Las Doncellas in the Alcázar and the courtyard and stairway in the Casa de Pilatos, in the factories of Triana in the outskirts of the town, he gave Jules Loebnitz Arabic style models that were used in several of his projects, on the main façade of the Boisrond villa (1879), the backyard façade of the Weber villa (1885) or the guesthouses of a private mansion 11 rue Vernet in Paris (1885,unfortunately destroyed).
In Arabic art, Paul Sédille had found the abstract floral ornamentation and the simplified range of shades of colour that he considered fit for monumental decoration.

Paul Sédille (1836-1900) and Jules Loebnitz (1836-1895) : a fruitful encounter

A friendship was born in 1867 between Paul Sédille, the architect of the Printemps department stores and the Basilica of Bois-Chenu in Domrémy-la-Pucelle, and Jules Loebnitz that would lead to a tight long lasting professional, artistic and intellectual collaboration. This was an important meeting between the theorist of polychrome architecture and the man who had pushed French ceramic art considerably forward, allowing for the creation of large enamelled earthenware plates decorated with very bright and long lasting vitrifiable colours, to quote the words of Brongniart.

Many architectural projects were born from the collaboration of Sédille and Loebnitz: World's fair pavilions, apartment buildings, villas, hotels and monuments.

A reporter covering the 1878 World's fair described the monumental door of the Fine Arts Pavilion in the following words: "Nothing is more beautiful than the monumental door of the Fine Arts entrance made by Mr. Loebnitz and designed by Mr. Sédille […] everything about it is grandiose, with an elegant and crafty décor, an enamel that can withstand our cold wet winters […]" Indeed the portico of the Fine Arts section designed by Sédille included some earthenware elements that measured at least 1.2 metres square, made by Loebnitz. This collaboration was rewarded with a medal.
In 1884 at the Decorative Arts Central Union exhibition, Paul Sédille created the entry door adorned with a shield bearing the emblem of the Central Union and a décor inspired by Luca della Robbia, with two reclining female figures modelled by the sculptor André Allar that symbolize Spring and Fall. As he stood admiring the two panels he had made [and for which he had already received the Medal of Honor in the Amsterdam Fair in 1882] he had the following reflection, "with regards to ceramics, I (modestly) believe that these are remarkable. In all the exhibitions I have visited, I have never seen another equivalent" (written in August 25, 1884).
Jules Loebnitz commissioned Sédille to renovate his workshop on 4 rue de la Pierre-Levée in Paris between 1880 and 1884. The façade was adorned with large ceramic panels drawn by Lévy, a winner of the Grand Prix de Rome. In 1883, Sédille asked his ceramist friend to create the enamelled earthenware sign plates for the new Le Printemps department store to go with mosaics he had gotten from a Venetian workshop.
"You will need to carefully marry the ceramics with the other materials and specially fit the powerful colons of your enamels harmoniously with the range of colours." was the advice Paul Sédille gave to Jules Loebnitz in preparation for the World's Fair of 1889 in Paris. This is how his letter ended:

« Finally I hope that together we will see the generalization of our common dream, of a decoration that is authentic, colourful and everlasting by the grace of earth and enamels emerging from the fire in an inalterable state."

During this exhibition, as member of the jury, Jules Loebnitz presented an "exhibition of earthenware applied to architecture", it was an *"elegant portal adorned with enamelled tiles and terra cotta. The centre piece was a monumental brick mantel, adorned with enamelled ornamentation and under the arch two groups of life size terra cotta natural coloured figures; architecture by Mr. Paul Sédille, figures by André Allar"*. The exhibition of 1889 was the height of the golden age for iron and ceramics.
The common dream of Sédille and Loebnitz was expressed in the polychrome architecture of the former and made possible by architectural ceramics of the latter. Loebnitz used unbreakable earthenware to create genuine architectural elements, which were inherent parts of the construction, resistant to thermal shock and acting as a perfect foundation for traditional tin-glazed enamels. This gave birth to architectural ceramics.

Discover our website dedicated to Paul Sédille and his creations

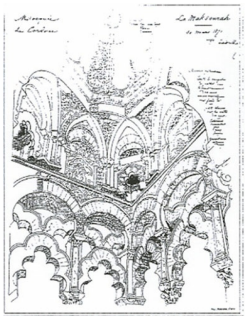
See also

Pichenot-Loebnitz — Émile Müller — Eugène Viollet-le-Duc — Renaissance style — 1878 World's Fair — 1889 World's Fair — 1900 World's Fair

See our exterior architecture



Portrait of Jules Loebnitz in 1886 by A. Bidot on white enamel



Sketch of the Maqsura in the mosque of Córdoba, by Paul Sédille, March 30th 1871



In 1872, was the first time Jules Paul Loebnitz used architectural curved elements and flat earthenware engraved tiles for a house in Auteuil, built by architect Paul Sédille



1900 World's Fair, Jules-Alphonse Loebnitz presented a fountain with the collaboration of Paul Sédille