



Left: Savoy vase. Alvar Aalto, ca. 1936. Photo by John White. Right: Teakettle and stand. Joseph Richardson, Sr., 1745–55. Photo courtesy Yale University Art Gallery, Mabel Brady Garvan Collection.

## Rococo: The Continuing Curve, 1730–2008

Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, New York City  
March 7–July 6, 2008

“Rococo design — exuberant, opulent, theatrical and sensuous...” begins the notes provided for *Rococo: The Continuing Curve*. If voluptuous liveliness, often expressed through whimsical asymmetry, was the essence of Rococo, the objects from its first flowering (roughly 1730–1780) succeed admirably. A Meissonnier tureen, a French console table, ironwork commissioned by Stanislaus for Nancy, a Ballin candelabrum, an Italian writing desk are triumphs.

Rococo fell out of favor during the Neoclassical revival and the birth of the Empire style, only to experience a renaissance in the 19th century in England, the United States, and France. Through the Arts and Crafts movement, it contributed to the development of Jugendstil/Art Nouveau, which shares a vocabulary of organic, sinuous, enfolding forms with Rococo, but also represents an evolution in expression and meaning.

The exhibition includes pieces from the last 50 years, striking for what nearly all of

them lack: the spirit that defined Rococo. Works by Cindy Sherman and Jeff Koons are statements, not celebrations. The furniture is an uneven mix, and a sconce by Dale Chihuly may appear organic, but in a biological sense of spermatozoa swarming.

The exception might be four concert posters from the psychedelic era by Wes Wilson and others. Had the exhibition organizers been interested in the evolution of styles, there might have been an interesting progression from Rococo to Art Nouveau to the psychedelic era. However, the modern pieces end up confusing the intention of the exhibition. Most of them either imitate Rococo forms directly or are so tenuously linked to Rococo that one begins to tire of justifying their presence. As the attentive visitor learns, Rococo was more than an “s” curve.

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## Parti Wall, Hanging Green

90 Wareham Street, Boston  
May 16–July 8, 2008

On a brick wall in Boston’s South End hangs “Parti Wall, Hanging Green.” This temporary installation — like a green roof that’s been cut up to hang on its side — is promoted as an experiment into the viability of such vertical gardens in Boston. Artists and architects have proved that vertical gardens can thrive in Europe; can they do so in our environmental, economic, and cultural climate, too? “Why not?” asks the Young Architects Boston Group, the name given to the team of 10 young design firms that created this work — which served as a focal point for one of the AIA National Convention’s liveliest parties. Nearly two months after the convention left town and several weeks after it was slated to come down, “Parti Wall, Hanging Green” is still both hanging and green. Let’s hope this serves as a catalyst for more — more vertical gardens, more collaborations, more visibility for young firms, more innovative public art. (For more information: [www.pinkcomma.com](http://www.pinkcomma.com) and [www.yaboston.org](http://www.yaboston.org).)

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▼ Photo courtesy Young Architects Boston Group.



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CITIES & CLIMATE CHANGE SYMPOSIUM

## Symposium II: June 9, 2008

The concluding session of this two-part symposium on climate change took place on an auspiciously hot and muggy day. Sponsored by the BSA and MIT, the program examined the role that cities play in the complex problem of climate change, with a goal of formulating a design and policy agenda for the Boston region. Symposium II, entitled *Energy and Mobility in the Green City*, focused on transportation impacts and possibilities.

Symposium II began in a cautiously optimistic tone, as representatives of cities including New York, Chicago, Winnipeg, Toronto, and London shared best practices that are making measurable differences. Keynote speaker Nicky Gavron, former deputy mayor of London, described recent measures implemented in London as examples of what is possible. Aggressive

policies under a Labour mayor, notably including “congestion pricing,” which levies a charge on all vehicles entering central London, have cut carbon emissions significantly in the past six years. Initial public resistance has melted away; she noted that there are “pin-stripe suits on buses now.” Noting the staggering rate of urbanization in the world — two-thirds of the planet’s population will reside in cities by 2050 — she emphasized that urban sustainability can enhance quality of life and improve regional economies, too.

The economic value of sustainable urban development was a common theme. Several speakers urged a focus on economic benefits rather than moral or aesthetic ones to combat NIMBYism and “green fatigue” and to convince political leadership. The president of corporate sponsor Holcim noted that business interests are beating the sustainability

drum, waiting for political leadership to fall in step. He argued that businesses want clarity, and regulation can help.

Another theme: technological advances are very promising but political will and human behavioral patterns lag behind. Cleaner, more efficient modes of transportation, such as plug in-hybrids, are available today; folding electric cars promise cleaner alternatives; hydrogen fuel cells are viable in buses and automobiles; and existing low-tech technologies like “work bikes” for short-distance/light-duty hauling can dramatically reduce energy consumption.

What happens next? Co-organizer (and former BSA president) Hubert Murray AIA, RIBA says the proceedings will be published and welcomes suggestions for next steps. Reaching the goal of transforming Boston into a leader in urban sustainability may ultimately be a test more of our civic leadership than of sustainability.

Tom Parks AIA is an architect in Boston and director of the Distance Master of Architecture program at the Boston Architectural College.

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