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Gottfried Semper: Architect of the Nineteenth Century

By Harry Francis Mallgrave



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During his life, the German architect, scholar and political revolutionary, Gottfried Semper (1803-1879) experienced early fame, political exile from his homeland, international prominence, and seeing European architecture transformed by his influential body of ideas. In this biography Harry Mallgrave presents an account of the life, buildings and writings of the man he describes as a colossus of the 19th century.



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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Living through one of the most tempestuous periods in German history--from the Napoleonic Wars through unification--Gottfried Semper produced some of the monuments of Prussian architecture: the Hoftheater at Dresden, the Kunsthistorisches Museum, and the Hofburg Theater in Vienna. He also produced two classic works of art history: *The Four Elements of Architecture* and *Science, Industry, and Art*, which influenced contemporaries from Richard Wagner to Louis Sullivan. The tumult of 20th century Germany has more or less overwhelmed Semper's memory and reputation, so this new biography is a welcome addition to the history of 19th century architectural history. Harry Francis Mallgrave is the Willard K. Martin Distinguished Visiting Professor at the University of Oregon.

From Publishers Weekly

Semper is probably as well known for what he didn't build as for what he did. Architects know him best for his theoretical writings, while many laypeople know him for his work on Wagner's pipedream, the Munich Festspielhaus, elements of which (most notably the second proscenium) were appropriated for Bayreuth. Born in 1803, Semper was eventually appointed to the Academy of Fine Art in Dresden, where he socialized with Wagner, Schumann and others and began a prolific building career that included the Dresden Synagogue, the Art Gallery and, most famously, the Hoftheater. But the structure that most influenced his career was the "Semper barricade," built when (encouraged again by Wagner) he sided with the republicans against the Saxon king in 1849. Exiled from his country, he spent six years in Paris and London and the subsequent 14 in Zurich?once more lured there by Wagner. As an architect without a patron, he built almost nothing for 20 years until, as an old man, he began work on Vienna's Art and Natural History museums. During that time, much of his effort went into writing, and it is here that Mallgrave, who teaches architecture at the University of Oregon, is likely to lose his lay audience. Semper's crucial *Style in the Technical and Tectonic Arts* is difficult enough without adding the extensive publishing history and theoretical antecedents. It's also curious that such academic concerns share space in a volume that defines *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Semper deserves to be known better among an educated general audience, but this volume will only go partway to making the introduction. 131 b&w illustrations, 22 in color.

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From Library Journal

Semper was the premier architectural theorist of 19th-century Germany and a widely admired architect as well. He is best known as the author of the "Bekleidungs" theory of architecture, in which he speculatively traced the beginnings of architecture back to fabric weaving and textile design, used in the tents and carpets of nomadic peoples. Semper's colorful, anthropological theory of architecture is as valuable today as it was 100 years ago. This very fine scholarly monograph examines Semper's life and all the issues his work engaged. It is a wonderful book, thoroughly researched and felicitously written by Mallgrave (architecture, Univ. of Oregon), who has examined innumerable archives, sifted incalculable opinions, and arrived at subtle, sensitive conclusions. This book will long stand not only as an essential resource on the life of Semper but also as a basic book on 19th-century architecture in general.?Peter Kaufman, Boston Architectural Ctr.

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