

Monstres végétaux, plantes décoratives ou œuvres d'art ? Les arbres nains japonais à Paris (1873-1914)

This research aims at understanding the socio-economic, scientific and artistic reception of Japanese dwarf trees, after their breakthrough in Europe during the 1873 World Exhibition in Vienna. They first fascinated horticulturists, who saw them as plant monsters, then became an object of desire for the upper classes and, finally, were traded on a global scale, from Osaka to London and Paris. From 1902 through 1914, thirteen auction sales of Japanese dwarf trees took place at the Hôtel Drouot, in Paris, in which these decorative plants were raised to the level of artworks. However, this market did not take root as some French horticulturists managed to grow their own dwarf trees. This paper thus explores the circulation and the understanding of these “boundary objects”.

Keywords: dwarf tree; bonsai; market; boundary object; cultural transfer; Japonism; horticulture.