

ornament that would distinguish their new style from those taken in the past.

While this nuanced interpretation of their position may seem like a defense, it is their assumed break with tradition that needs further discussion here. Some of the latest scholarship on the symbolic function of ornament, in both historical styles and in modern architecture, lead us to critique one of the most damaging foundational myths about the international style to date—the assumed distance that can be perceived between so-called “primitive” and “modern” world cultures when one engages in a close reading of architectural form. To put this another way, the excising of ornament in modern architectural theory was in part based on a racialized interpretation of what it represented: for architects from Adolf Loos to Le Corbusier, ornament became a visual marker of “primitive” or pre-modern man that needed to be eliminated through visual abstraction. It was only through this erasure of arrested development that modern man could embrace the life he deserved; the life that was waiting for him under the guise of global industrialization. As a sign of arrested cultural development, ornament was negatively associated with a stage of cultural progress that was reserved for the people of the colonies; the nonwhite, nonwestern folk who stumbled into modernity but were unprepared for its rigors in contemporary society. This interpretation was slow and gradual but was heavily legitimated by the “International Style” exhibit at MoMA in 1932.

In 1856, when Owen Jones published his *Grammar of Ornament*, there was a latent appreciation for the visual complexity of certain nonwhite material cultures. Books such as Gottfried Semper’s *Style* followed this trend as well, going so far as to isolate the tattooing of Papua New Guineans as visual evidence of native artistic genius in all mankind. Images of Islamic Art were very popular, either as referents to Saracenic or Jewish derived art or as ethnographic evidence of the evenness with which western and eastern cultures employed ornament to refer to the hidden geometry that organized the natural world. The recurring patterns of the Alhambra were just as important as the botanical forms of Greco-Roman column orders for a comprehensive ethnographic account of the past. It provided evidence that nature