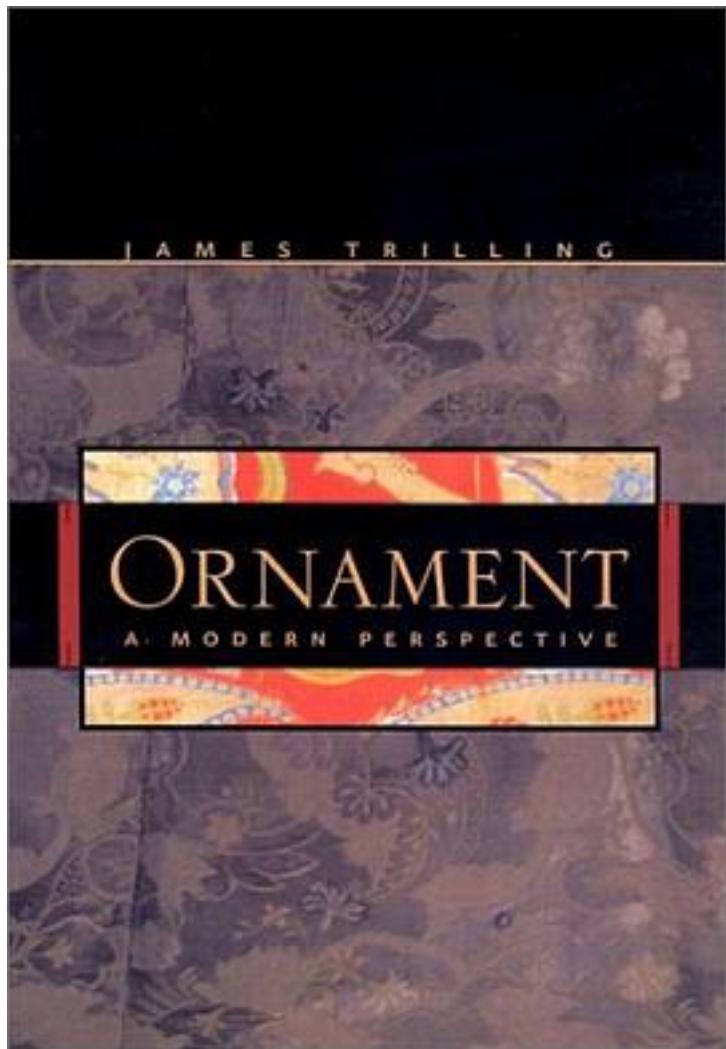


Ornament



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Ornament - "the art we add to art," as James Trilling defines it - makes people happy; it stands for everything that makes life worth living. But ornament was effectively banned from our world almost a century ago, with modernism's doctrine that ornament was a betrayal of the beauty of function. Devotion to modernism stripped away our historical awareness of ornament and broke the tradition of craft that once kept ornament alive. Now that modernism is itself receding into history, ornament is again acceptable, but moving forward seems to mean reinventing the wheel. "Not since the artists and connoisseurs of fifteenth-century Italy set out to rediscover classical antiquity has a culture been so completely on its own in relation to the past," Trilling writes. This engaging, generously illustrated book - part visual guide, part cultural history - is a wide-ranging consideration of the cultural and symbolic significance of ornament, its rejection by modernism, and its subsequent reinvention. Trilling explains how ornament works, why it has to be explained, and why it matters. His discussion of ornament - in textiles, ceramics, metalwork, architecture, manuscripts, and books - is enhanced by insights drawn from religion, science, ancient and modern literature, political history, and moral philosophy. The result is a resoundingly original, highly readable contribution to art history and, more broadly, to cultural and social history. James Trilling is a writer and art historian. He is former associate curator of Old World textiles at The Textile Museum, Washington, D.C., and has taught at the Rhode Island School of Design. He lives in Providence, Rhode Island

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