The Decorator

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Front cover: New England Empire looking glass with reverse painting, ca. 1830. Collection of Shirley Baer.
Back cover: Fragment of églomisé mirror tablet ca. 1815. Collection of Joseph Rice.

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Editor's Notes

The photograph of the New England Empire looking glass on the front cover of this issue is an example of what we (in HSEAD) usually think of when referring to reverse painting on glass. We love it for its simplicity and somewhat primitive qualities. However, long before the production of these American and English painted pieces, artists in other countries were using glass instead of canvas as background for their masterpieces.

Frances Binnington delves into the history of this art form in her article, "Reverse Painting and Gilding Behind Glass." It is informative and interesting.

In the past few issues, *The Decorator* has published Jessica Bond's research on New England stenciled walls. Without her tireless pursuit to investigate and document every decorated wall that she found, many of the patterns of those early stencilers would have been lost.

Jess Bond passed away on Thanksgiving day 2001 surrounded by friends, while listening to Beethoven's Pastoral Sympathy. She was 93 years old.

Jess was motivated by a love of this craft, and in this issue, as a tribute to her, we are providing a final installment, discussing the often derelict buildings she entered, and the manner in which she documented the original designs.

Also in this issue, a brief article by Martha Wilbur reveals some painted shades she found in the "Stonewall" Jackson House. Every little bit of information we find on this subject is helpful in our research on painted shades.

As students of early American decorating, we tend to accumulate fragments as examples of motif and technique. Since the events of September 11, 2001, the symbolism of the tablet fragment shown on the back cover has special significance. Liberty is shown with her shield under the broken but still protective arm of the American eagle.

God bless America!

Jess Bond as she appeared a few years ago, sitting on the porch of her home in Dorset, Vermont. Photograph by Polly Forcier.

knife. Repeat this process on all the layers of paper until you come to the last soaked layer. Do not use the putty knife to remove it because it could damage the stenciling underneath. Instead, lift it off with your fingers. Sometimes wallpaper is already hanging off in large sheets. There is little you can do except tear it off.

Photographing the Walls

Take photographs of all four walls, then closer for particular sections, overmantel, etc. and then close-ups.

Tracing the Designs

The frieze design is usually twenty inches long before it repeats. Buy a sheet of Mylar semi-matte .005 thick. Cut a piece wide enough to include some of the repeat and tape it to the frieze with masking tape. Trace on the matte side with extra-fine pens and permanent ink in the colors of the designs. Where the stenciling is not clear, leave it blank and later move the tracing to a section that shows the missing part. After completing the tracings put them in a folded posterboard and weigh down to keep flat.

How to Cover Up Part of Wall

Whatever has been decided to do with the wall, leave part of it as found and cover it up. Select a place in the room by a door or window frame and make that part of the wall as clean as possible. Carefully remove any scraps of wallpaper without taking off any stenciling. Buy a piece of plywood about three feet wide and high enough to fit from the ceiling to the top of baseboard. Put hinges down one side of it and on

The Dutton House from Cavendish, Vermont now at Shelburne. Courtesy of M. Link.

A Treasury of Old Stenciled Walls 1810-1840 (Part 8)

by Jessica Hill Bond

How to Restore an Old Stenciled Wall

These very early stenciled upright designs with freehand painted imitation drapery along the top were found in an abandoned tavern called "Cutler Stand." This Glocester, Rhode Island building is no longer standing.

Restoring an old stenciled wall is both gratifying and necessary because the designs and the way they were combined to decorate a room more than one-hundred and fifty years ago tell us much of the artistic tastes and fashions of the first three decades of the 19th century in New England. If you have taken wallpaper off part of an old wall and found stenciling underneath, you know the thrill such a discovery can bring. You may also be faced with walls that are cracked, faded and defaced with age and wonder what to do about them. A craftsman with a knowledge of stenciling, matching colors and a desire to preserve the old-time stenciler's work will find the following suggestions helpful.

First, a good way to remove several layers of wallpaper is with a bucket of warm water to which some vinegar has been added. Dip a paint roller into it, give it a shake, and starting at the top of the wall, roll on the water as though you were painting it. Roll the same area many times until it is thoroughly soaked and lift the paper off with a putty

From the abandoned home in Stockbridge, Vermont shown on page 8. Frieze was revealed by tearing down the insulation board and molding.

the door or window frame. The outside of the plywood can then be stenciled, painted, papered, or whatever is to be done with the rest of the room, and when opened like a door it will show the old wall in its original condition.

Restoring the Old Stenciling

Start with the frieze stencil cut for the predominating color and tape it at the top over the old frieze, leaving the bottom corners untaped in order to lift the stencil up to check your work. Open the package of paint for this color, and with palette knife, take out about an inch of paint and put it on the palette, folding the rest of the paint up again. Place the jar lid of turpentine on the palette and put it on ladder shelf. Put a surgical finger on your stenciling finger, center a piece of flannel smoothly around it, and tuck the ends tightly into your palm. Dip your flannel finger tip a little way into turpentine, then into a bit of paint and on a clean place on palette, rotate fingertip until the paint has lost its wetness and is almost dry. Rub your flannel finger tip lightly over that part of the stencil where the old paint is missing. At this point you can tell if your flannel finger tip is too wet or too dry and make the necessary adjustments before proceeding. Do not try to correct any of your own errors at this point. Untape stencil, clean both sides if necessary with turpentine, and retape it to the next repeat and across the wall where needed.

When your touch-up is completely dry, go back to where you started and correct any of your own errors by painting over them with background paint and a small watercolor brush. When dry, it can then be re-stenciled correctly. Remove stencil and clean both sides with a soft cloth and turpentine on newspaper; when dry, place it between a folded newspaper, and then into a folded posterboard to keep flat.

The second color is done in exactly the same way with a clean piece of flannel, a new surgical finger, clean palette, turpentine, etc. When all the wall is finished, sign and date the wall when the restoration was done.

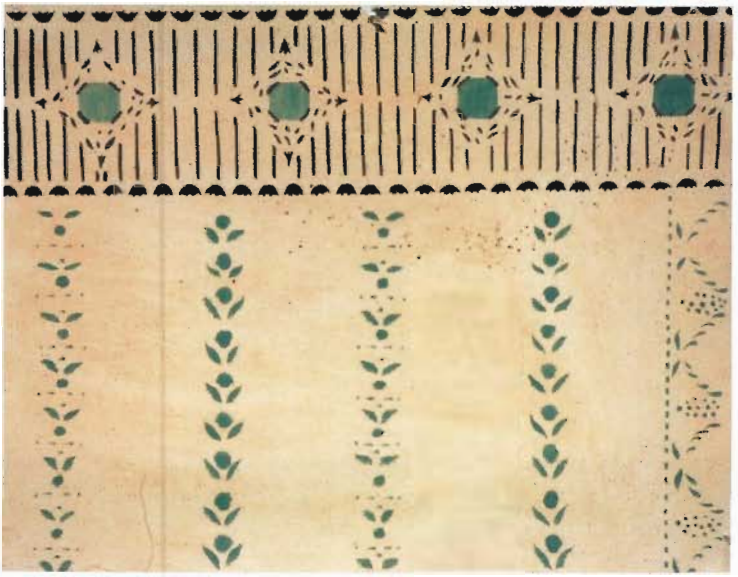
Stockbridge, Vermont

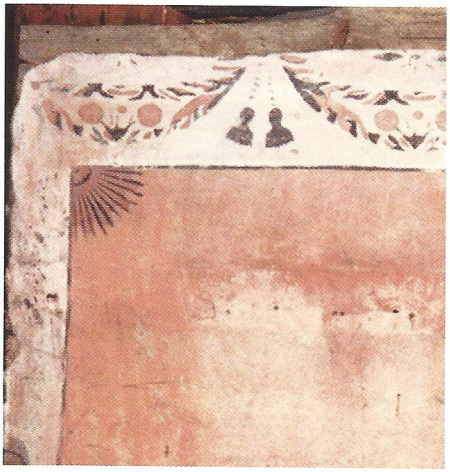
Shoreham, Vermont. The Pond House was used to store hay.

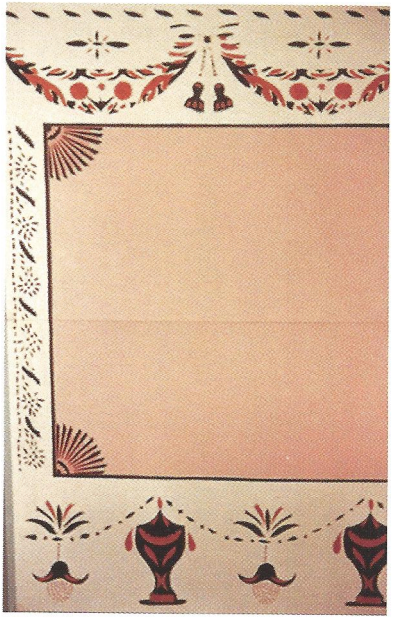
Chester, Vermont. Stenciling was found upstairs in two back rooms.

Editor's notes: I think the stories Jess Bond could have told about her adventures finding and recording these stenciled walls would have been as exciting as the history she uncovered. On the opposite page are examples of some of the abandoned houses in which she worked. On this and the following pages are photographs of what she found and samples of her facsimiles after recording the original designs. These are just three of the many houses she investigated and a small reminder of the contribution she made to our Society and to the history of decorated walls in New England.

Once the home of Col. Josiah Pond, this abandoned house (opposite) was used to store hay in Shoreham, Vermont. "J Pond 1806" was found stenciled over a window. The house no longer stands. Above is a photograph of an upstairs chamber with dim but traceable walls. Notice the hay in the doorway. Below is a facsimile of the design Jess found.

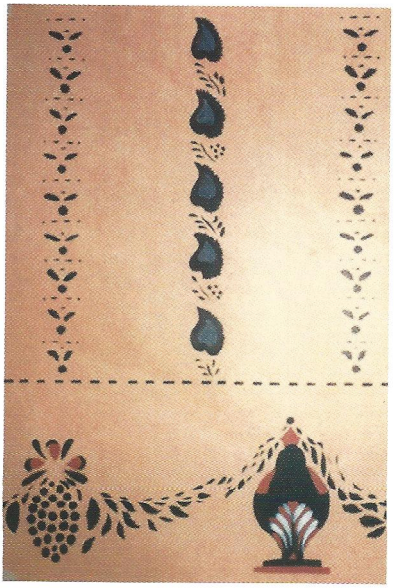






Above: Chester, Vermont. An upstairs chamber with the remains of Borderman's stenciling found in the abandoned house shown on page 9, bottom photograph. Right: The facsimile.

Below left: Quechee, Vermont. The "Inn at Marshland Farm" built in 1793 was the home of Col. Joseph Marsh. During extensive renovation in 1973, stenciling by Borderman was discovered in the parlor. It was too faint to show in a photograph, but a facsimile was made (not shown). A clearer design was found in the front hall which Jess was able to photograph and reproduce. Her facsimile in on the right.



Reverse Painting and Gilding Behind Glass

(The story of a nearly lost art, from the late Middle Ages to World War 1)

by Frances Binnington

St. Katherine, 19th century, 50 x 40 cm, from Augsburg, reverse glass painting, no gold. Interesting frame, mirrored inserts in corners. Courtesy Schlossmuseum, Murnau, Bavaria, Germany.

From about the time of Columbus' discovery of America (1492) and continuing up to the 1st World War (1914), there existed in Europe an industry producing vast numbers of painted and gilded panels for export all over the world. This article will discuss the complex historical, artistic and technical aspects of this art form.

Since the days of the Counter Reformation in the second half of the 16th century, Catholic Europe craved ornate religious motifs. Most homes were decorated with religious or secular glass panels. In addition, thousands of churches and chapels in Germany, Austria, Romania, Czechoslovakia, Spain, Portugal and Italy maintained a constant demand for quantities of reproduction paintings, glass being a beautiful substitute for the real thing. By the 18th century, reverse glass paintings were being shipped around the world in huge quantities, with some of the most beautiful reverse painting ever done coming from China. The Chinese taught the Eastern Indians, and so it spread around the world. It is estimated that during the 18th and 19th centuries some sixty million pieces of reverse glass painting were produced in Central Europe alone; that is 300,000 panels per year

Largely due to their fragility, many panels have been lost to us, but the derivative nature of the work also prevented it from being valued sufficiently to be either documented properly or preserved. It is hardly any wonder that the accidental discovery in the early 20th century in the Bavarian mountains (as discussed later) should have triggered such romantic thoughts.

In German studies, distinctions of style and history have been made from region to region, centering on the areas around Nuremberg and Augsburg. Pieces have been carefully examined and attributed wherever possible. Apart from these publications and a few other out-of-print texts, there is little documentation.

Die Magier deuten ein Schicksal, 90 x 70 cm. Courtesy of Schlossmuseum, Murnau, Bavaria, Germany.

Terminology

In order to discuss this subject with clarity, it is important to have an understanding and definition of the terminology.

The German term for this art is *Hinterglasmalerei*, painting behind glass. This embraces all aspects of cold painting and gilding behind glass, as opposed to painting on glass and fusing the paints for permanence to the glass in a kiln. The closest we can get in English to the German term is "reverse painting on glass." Frieder Ryser categorizes his collection with a term he has devised and which does not appear in Cassell's German Dictionary: *amelieren*. He defines it as any painted or gilded decoration on the reverse side of glass that is bonded to the glass (not fired). He says the special characteristics of this work are its reflective qualities derived from viewing the work through a panel of glass. He specifies that for this definition there should be NO SPACE at all between pigment, and/or engraved metal leaf, and the glass support. He has made the word from "malen", to paint. It remains to be seen whether the opinions of this eminent scholar will influence the terminology of the art in the long run.

The French have a term for the work, *fixés sous verres*, or *fixés*. The French term many readers will be familiar with is *verre églomisé*, taken from Jean-Baptiste Glomy, an 18th century Parisian antique dealer who devised ways of enhancing his prints and embroideries with glass mats painted black, with strips of gold paper for borders. The gold paper was later replaced with a water-gilded band, still popular with print dealers today. The term came into usage when dealers referred to such work as being 'Glomyised.' There is debate amongst students of the subject regarding this term, as it is often misused. It really should apply only to those works incorporating engraved gold or silver leaf, unfired, on the glass, but the truth is that the term is becoming known and appearing, often inappropriately, in fashionable design magazines and do-it-yourself books. I have no problem with this; I would rather see the term misused in the public eye than not used at all. At least the expression becomes part of the language, reflecting an increased interest in the subject, and eventually curiosity will drive people to find out more about the subject.

Hinterglasmalerei remains a well-known, well researched activity in the German speaking world, but finding written material on the subject in English, or in French for that matter is very difficult, as some readers may have already found.

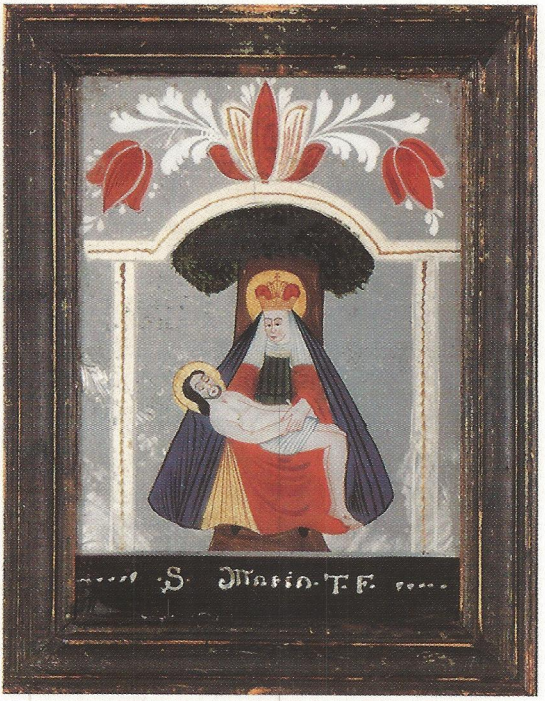
Early History

The story starts in Augsburg, an important city in the Roman world. Nürnberg, its neighbor, was also important. By the late 15th century, both centers were known for their fine cabinetwork, metalwork, all kinds of trades, and painting. In Europe during the Middle Ages, the population lived mainly from the land, as there were few towns or cities. As Rome was the seat of the Holy Roman Empire, which included most of Europe, a pilgrimage route developed that served in addition as a main thoroughfare for trade. Villages grew into towns and cities, as permits for trade were given, and regular markets allowed for the exchange of goods and ideas. What we today call Germany consisted of more than 300 large and small independent states. Amongst them were the "Free Cities" of Augsburg and Nürnberg, each with special privileges and more freedom than other states. They had the liberty to run with new ideas, and run they did.

Both cities sat right on the trade route from Venice and the Adriatic to England and Holland in the north. As new designs arrived from Italy, they were adopted immediately. Objects such as silver ware, gold, jewelry, paintings and embroidery, together with countless printed designs would arrive, on their way north, and the German designers lost no time in absorbing these new conceptions and republishing them. The two cities had many brilliant goldsmiths and designers, in addition to the latest printing establishments, and became famous not so much for the spread of innovative design, as for the reproduction,by the hundreds, of "new"designs. It is not only our age that is so attracted to the "new."

The Mother of God Hogedetria, end of 19th century, 45 x 34 cm, from Banat/ Serbia. Black outlines give this work its characteristic Byzantine look. Courtesy of Schlossmuseum, Murnau, Bavaria, Germany.

With no means of reproducing fine paintings in color, the glass painter would take what was available to him–black and white prints from copperplate engravings. Laying a sheet of glass over one



Santa Maria Taferl. *Buchers, after 1800, 32 x 26 cm. Courtesy of Schlossmuseum, Murnau, Bavaria, Germany.*

of these, the glass painter would trace the main outlines and early stages of the painting in watercolor using fine brushes. The painting was completed with pigments ground in oil, painting in reverse order; highlights first, then foreground, middle ground and finally background. All lettering was in reverse, too. The reproduction work tended to use very little, if any, precious metals. For religious work, which constituted an enormous portion of reverse glass painting, outline patterns were made with painted black lines on thick white paper, and these were used over and over again. Metal leaf was commonly incorporated for cheap, mass-produced icons, in imitation of the burnished backgrounds in traditional icons. For work of a better class, gold and silver leaf was used, especially for pieces with a religious purpose.

There were many techniques; *verre églomisé* (engraved gold leaf on glass) was but one. The Romans used this technique, finely engraving the leaf with metal needles using microscopic strokes. They protected the work with a layer of molten glass over the gold, fused to the first layer, but it was a tricky process that often damaged the gold. It was later abandoned.

In Central Europe, gold was engraved either with the image showing positive or negative. That is, the gold was sometimes used for the background, with the motif scratched out, and sometimes the gold was scratched away from the background leaving only the motif in place.

In both cases the gold was backed up with either oil paint or lacquers, to protect and color. In many cases (and this is where it gets really interesting) gold leaf was used not only as a color in itself, as in the case of icons, but placed behind thin paint, to reflect light back and to give extra depth to the picture. Very often smooth or crinkled tin foil was used for this purpose.

There are also examples of this work using "faux gilding." This was the practice of applying a gold-colored lacquer to the glass, and backing with tinfoil. And what was considered to be magnificently skilled reverse painting turns out also to be 'faux', regular painting on paper, cut out and applied to the glass as découpage, with genuine reverse painting and gilding around it. They were not above taking short cuts in the 16th century.

A 20th Century Revival

In the years before the First World War, popularity of reverse glass painting reached its lowest point. But the art was to experience a short-lived resurgence.

During their frequent summer walking tours in the mountains of Bavaria, Vassily Kandinsky and Gabriele Münter, members of the German group of painters *"Blaue Reiter"* (Blue Rider), stumbled across examples of glass painting in the village of Murnau, south of Münich, close to the Austrian border. Discovering Murnau to have been an important center of this little-known art, they were captivated not only by the charm of painting on glass, but also by the fact that the craft had all but died out. Münter bought a house in the village where she and Kandinsky lived together for a period, experimenting in the medium, and each left a substantial body of work. The beauty of the glazed work, its glowing, rich colors, together with the fact that the art was clearly dying, appealed to their romantic souls.

They became acquainted with Heinrich Rambold, still painting, and one of the last surviving members of an important glass-painting family whose history went back several generations. Maybe it was the old man who planted sentimental ideas into their heads, but their perceptions of the art, illustrated by Max Picards' comment, *"Die Hinterglasbilder sind das Volkslied in der Geschichte der Malerei"* (reverse glass paintings are the folk songs in the history of painting), only tell part of the story.

The Glass Painting Industry

The art does not go back thousands of years, as they thought, nor is it sufficient to say it was only practiced by farmers in the winter when they were unable to fix their fences and paint their houses. On the contrary, in this and many other central European regions it was generally a year-round, highly commercial activity that can be divided into three distinct groups: the urban professional, the rural painter, and the cottage industry or small factory.

1. The Urban Professional

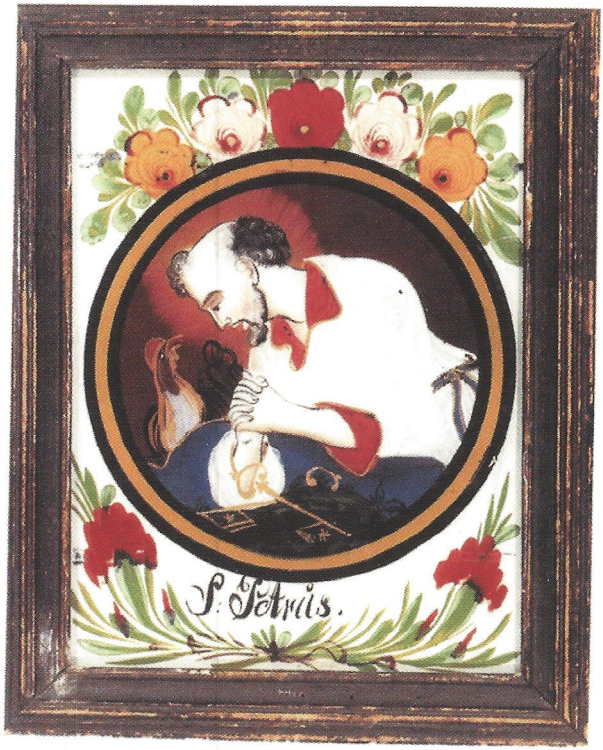
Visual art in Central Europe during the 16th century was flourishing as never before; patronage was strong, demand for fine objects high, with lavish use of gold and costly pigments. The principle centers of production and innovation were the German cities of Augsburg and Nürnberg, where unfired, decorative work on glass was equal to the finest contemporary goldsmith work, metal-engraving or furniture inlay.

No name had been given to painting and gilding on the back of glass as a distinct and separate activity until the first record of the art appeared in the account book of a Nuremberg patron, Dr. Christoph Scheurl, in 1532: "Let me have from Augustin Hirsvogel, out of friendship, for 2 and one half florins, 4 coats of arms, 'geamaliert' (a mix of the old German terms meaning to paint and to enamel)."

Hirsvogel was prominent amongst no fewer than eight first rate artists working at that period in this field in Nuremberg alone. Although attributions have been made to individual artists (by close examination of their different styles), it was not yet the custom to sign work, and no signed pieces exist. On glass it was usual to reproduce oil paintings that were being created at the time. Copperplate engraving was the only means of mass reproduction of paintings, and these were usually used as patterns, placed beneath the glass with the contour lines being painted in first. From as early as the fifteenth century Augsburg prided itself with an established art Academy, and by the seventeenth century it was the city custom to display the skills of artists and craftsmen on specially made ornamental cabinets. Cities were competitive and justly proud of their skills. These were the days of patronage, and generous support of the arts. The doors, drawer fronts, and sides of these extraordinary constructions were decorated with panels executed by the famous painters, ivory carvers and gilders of the day. By backing their painting either with the finest beaten silver leaf, or with gold, glass painters adhered (in reverse) to the tradition of painting over a metal ground, and so produced highly reflective surfaces. The Augsburg historian, Paul von Stetten, is quoted as saying these panels were used for mirror frames, wall lights, little chests and similar *quinquaillerie.*

2. The Rural Painter

During the sixteenth century the eternal problems of pestilence and war were never far away, and both phenomena greatly affected the development of the arts. In addition to restrictions imposed on the numbers of practicing craftsmen in any single city, the Thirty Years War in the first half of the seventeenth century wreaked havoc across Europe and drove industry from the centers. Fine artists and craftsmen fled their



Petrus. von Joseph Mangold (1787-1850), Oberammergau, 30 x 24 cm. Courtesy of Schlossmuseum, Murnau, Bavaria, Germany.

homes, but in the process, as was ever the case in such circumstances, they spread their skills and experience to new areas. The influence of Nuremberg and Augsburg diminished as artistic centers, while the emphasis of the glass painting business shifted from city to country, and to the remote mountain villages.

Prior to the war, perhaps *Hinterglasmalerei* was regarded as a cheaper alternative to enameling or to stained glass, both of which depended on kilns and plants for production. Subcontracting of this work to the countryside was out of the question, whereas "straightforward" painting and gilding on the back of glass could be more easily carried out by country craftsmen. Whether the art was considered inferior remains to be seen. Certainly lack of written information on the subject suggests it was considered less worthy of attention.

Communications had always been poor in the mountains. The Roman roads built on the boggy plains of the Northern Alps running east to west eroded because of lack of maintenance, leaving Southern Bavaria and Italy divided from the rest of Germany. This was bandit country and since the end of the Thirty Years War, out-of-work mercenaries roamed the mountains and boggy plains looking for trouble. Guides were needed not only to show the way through the mountains, but to supply horses, clothes, weapons and armed escort along the route. Priests were needed to give comfort and guidance, and the sale of "protective" amulets and portraits of favorite patron saints, customarily painted on the back of glass, became a lucrative business.

During times of the plague, villages went into enforced isolation, depriving the locals of income not only as traders, but also as guides.

The end of the plague in 1633 was celebrated the following year with the first performance of the Passion Play at Oberammergau. It was this festival that drew visitors to the area, with money to burn on souvenirs, as they still do today. Now the former guides had a new occupation: producing painted glass mementoes.

The distribution of the work from the countryside was carried out by *Kraxenmänner,* men with enormous baskets packed with framed panels of glass on their backs. They walked from village to village over the mountains, regardless of the weather. In this way, glass panels were distributed as far as the Black Sea in the east, and to England and Holland in the west. From there, panels were shipped by the thousands to the colonies in the New World, India and the Far East. The first records listing *Hinterglasmalerei* as an independent trade appeared in Augsburg in 1684.

3. The Cottage Industry/Small Factory

In the mountainous areas of Bavaria and Bohemia, there was little opportunity for farming. However by the early 18th century there were many cottage industries established, such as shoe making, building, and all the usual trades, as well as the subsidiary back-up jobs related to the glass industry. Much of the area was thickly wooded, with good concentration of minerals conducive to glass production, in particular with lead necessary for the famous clear, hard, heavy glass suitable for engraving. There were

Anna Selbdritt, c 1800, 32 x 26 cm, from Raimundsreuth. Painted mirrors made from the late 18th century in Eastern Bavaria incorporated brilliant cutting into the back of the glass to give extra depth and interest to the mirrored surface. The trellis on the columns, central plant form above and ovals in this frame are cut and polished on the back of the glass prior to the oil gilding. Courtesy of Schlossmuseum, Murnau, Bavaria.

"The Good Shepherdess" from the catalog: Reverse Paintings on Glass: the Ryser Collection, China, about 1760, 40.7 x 30.5 cm. Courtesy of The Corning Museum of Glass.

many glass factories giving work, and numerous cottage industries involved in some way in the enhancement of glass products.

As the 18th century wore on, plagues and wars continued to ravage the cities in particular, but in some respects the countryside began to prosper. There is documentation of individual relocated artists who founded dynasties of glass painters that, through judicious intermarriage and careful husbanding of resources, continued right up until the years before the First World War.

By the turn of the 18th into the 19th century, populations had increased. The small-holdings that most families owned in the mountainous villages of Bavaria and surrounding areas had been subdivided to such an extent that they were too tiny to sustain a family. The advent of

these glass-associated cottage industries was a godsend, saving many families from starvation.

With a plentiful supply of glass from the many local glass factories and a strong folk-painting tradition, it was not a huge step to start glass painting as a small industry. There was division of labor with whole families involved in the production, from tracing the design to framing. Factories were built for mass production.

One case illustrates the kind of numbers we are talking about: in April, 1814, an order was placed with an Upper Bavarian factory for 4,000 framed glass paintings for a jubilee festival at a church. Delivery was to be in June, at the latest. This would mean an average production of 40-50 paintings per day. This kind of output is impressive, but it also tells us a lot about the quality of the work and the level of skills at the time. This was a pinnacle for production, but a low point for the art. The work produced was, frankly, crude. It provided a living for people who had minimal, if any, artistic skill, who only needed to be able to manipulate a paintbrush reasonably competently to contribute to the process. Every stage of the work was broken down into small bites that a child could understand. Things could only improve, which they did, in time.

Judith mit dem Haupt des Holofernes, c 1850, Spanish, 44 x 36 cm. Courtesy of Schlossmuseum, Murnau, Germany.

Observations from the Museums at Murnau and at Oberammergau in Austria

As I noted earlier, it seemed at first glance (with the exception of the *verre églomisé* examples) that very little leaf or silvering was used in combination with *Hinterglasmalerei.* A more careful examination, though, revealed quite a generous sprinkling of leaf in general, and a good deal of silvering in particular, carried out behind painting. I had already seen the catalogue for this exhibition, but had not realized that many of the paintings were backed with mirror. The mirror had been photographed as a light grey, which I had assumed was paint, neglecting to read the captions carefully. In addition, gold does not show particularly well in pictures, but tarnished leaf, either silver or Dutch metal, can be impossible to recognize. When I came to walk through the gallery, it was a pleasant surprise to discover the group of mirrored paintings, but also very interesting to see so much evidence of leaf in its various forms. However, in many cases the leaf was so disfigured and dark I could sometimes hardly distinguish it.

The Augsburg glass paintings, made for export from the 1750s until the 1790s, were reproductions of oils on canvas, and no leaf was used. It appeared to be the tradition to decorate frames for these pictures, with set-in strips of mirrored glass, the joints being covered with shaped, glazed, pressed tin. The effects of these and all reflective surfaces cannot be appreciated in photographs, as reflection would distract from the painting, whereas in actuality our slightest movement registers in the mirror and gives *life* to the whole piece.

In the mid 18th century, Eastern Bavarian glass workers were encouraged to emigrate south, to within the Hapsburg Empire, in order to avoid duties on their exports. Many grinders, polishers and etchers had already made the move, but by 1775 these skills, together with brilliant cutting, had all but disappeared, leaving only painting on glass as a surviving trade.

For this reason, the painted mirrors made during this time, incorporating brilliant cutting, gilding and silvering represent a stepping stone in the history of Eastern Bavarian glass painters. Examples in the exhibition come from Raimundreuth, Aussergefild and Buchers. Brilliant cutting into the back of the glass gave extra depth and interest to the mirrored surface, while in many cases no silvering was done, but the ground and polished areas were oil gilt before painting.

A well-painted pair of portraits of the Prince and Princess of Prussia from 1800 makes use of the combination of paint with silvering, at that date still the mercury and tin process, but in this case unfortunately much of the paint has been damaged. All the painting would have been done first, followed by the silvering. This last but not particularly gentle process, probably broke through the finer painted lines causing the losses.

Notes on the techniques using paint with silvering, gold and metal leaf

From Udo Dammerts' collection from around the world, I will look at specific examples of the use of gold leaf, metal leaf or gold powder in the glass pictures.

Southern Italy. In the mid 1800s, examples showed extensive outlining with a metal powder in a vehicle of some sort. Otherwise I saw no leaf. An example from *Spain* from the 1850s, showed a painted black pattern leaving clear areas for Dutch metal. In other cases a glaze was painted first onto the glass, prior to the laying of leaf, which appeared to be crinkled, tarnished and delaminating. This situation to a greater or lesser extent was common to much of the work on exhibit. In addition, one of the Spanish pieces showed the technique of scraping through the thin, wet paint with a stick, with metal leaf laid behind. Like many pieces in the collection, these glass paintings were a commercial proposition, carried out extremely fast by teams of workers who had little or no artistic input into the process. The metal, in some cases, looked as if it were thrown on, held in place by a wing and a prayer.

From *Franken*, one of the German Principalities, an interesting technique was used with gold leaf behind paint from the 1750s to 1800. This was a kind of "reverse *verre églomisé*" technique. Paint was applied, in this case only one color, a Van Dyke brown. It was applied carefully in places, and in other places right across the glass. Everything that was to be gold was scratched away, using a variety of tools for a variety of lines. Then gold, not Dutch metal, was applied across the entire back. I imagine the design was transferred by scratching through the holes of a punctured pattern. Without close examination and tests I cannot tell what the mordant was.

Silesia, early 1800s, Dutch metal used as another color. Outlines of yellow with a little brown or green glaze.

Sandl, Moravia. Same as above, but with red or black outlines.

Rumania, Banat, Serbia. Black outlines give these works their characteristic Byzantine look. The most tarnished Dutch metal I have found is on work from this region. Some of the work is reasonably tight, but some is very sloppy, with the outlines being generally followed with paint, leaving spaces for the leaf.

Ukraine, extremely crude, with untarnished metal that looks like the cheapest, nastiest chocolate wrapping. No painting beforehand to mitigate its gaudy effect. Yet, amazingly, in one example, the overall effect was one of strong personality, brimming with brazen, masculine confidence (it was a picture of a male). I am reminded at the Oberammergau Heimatmuseum, which holds some 1200 examples of local productions,

Girl dancing, from a Regency Period églomisé panel for a tabernacle frame. Engraved gold leaf backed with asphaltum and tinted gesso. Trellis pattern is silver leaf backed with gesso. Typical piece brought in for restoration. Courtesy of the author.

of the enormous output of these items, and of the inevitability of compromise of quality over quantity.

China 18th century. These are by far the finest painting on glass that have ever been produced. Responding to Western demand for all things Oriental, painting production lines were here, too, set up for maximum profit. Closely following Western engravings, such as those made by the explorer Carl Gustav Ekeberg (1716-1784)[1], paintings were produced on canvas, porcelain and paper, in addition to glass. Ekeberg made accurate engravings of views of the Pearl river, with its western factories built on its banks and where the city of Canton, the only trading port with the west, was situated. These were faithfully copied until the western manner of painting was thoroughly integrated by the Chinese, and they were able to adapt and alter their pictures as they chose. They also produced numerous portraits and domestic scenes on glass. From Europe, mirrors were exported to China where the silvering was carefully scratched away to create spaces for painting. Water was often represented, as was sky, by mirror.

Examples in the exhibition showed paintings that were finely outlined with two colors of bronze powder, white gold and what we refer to now as "moon" gold, a light bronze color. At the same time all the decoration on fabrics was beautifully painted with flowers and ornamentation such as appears in their conventional painting. Backing up then was with solid colors and black.

1."The Magazine Antiques," March 1998

Techniques on use of gold, silver and imitation metal leaf in reverse glass painting.

Walking through the one and a half rooms of *Hinterglasmalerei* (reverse glass painting) at the Schlossmuseum in Murnau, Bavaria, in Southern Germany it appeared at first sight that very little use was made of precious leaf. A closer look told a very different story, one that taught me more about these techniques, and one that told me once again not to make assumptions. Half of one room displayed a history of the techniques of unfired painting and gilding behind glass, with a concentration on Murnau and district, and the main room displayed a selection of an enormous collection of work (courtesy Udo Dammert) from around the world, from the 16th century to the present day.

Murnau was the center of the rural glass painting business in Central Europe from around 1680 until the advent of lithography, roughly two hundred years later. I have written about the development of the art in this part of the world in previous articles, but here I will describe quite briefly a variety of techniques, applicable just as much today as are traditional signwriting techniques.

Verre Églomisé: Usually the gilding is the first operation. The design is then engraved, removing the gold with a sharpened stick, excess gold removed and the whole painted.

Method: mark areas to be gilded with felt tip pen on the FRONT of the glass. All the work is now carried out on the BACK. Lay the gold leaf using gelatine size in the form of capsules, sheet, or powder. Burnish when dry, and engrave with a stick, sharpened ivory, bone or a pencil. Back up with oil based paints. That is the basic technique.

Engraving on a verre églomisé panel (one of two), backed with a dark green, surrounding a pier glass, c 1699. English mirror, probably Huguenot craftsmen. Courtesy the Stair & Co., New York.

Traditional method for making a pattern from a copperplate engraving.

A sheet of glass was laid over the print, and the contours painted with black oil-based paints. While the paint was still wet, a sheet of white paper was laid across the paint and lifted off. When dry this sheet of paper could be used repeatedly as a pattern. Alternatively, tracing paper could be laid over the engraving, the contours drawn in pencil, the tracing paper laid over a sheet of strong, white paper, the lines pricked with a stylus, tracing paper discarded and the lines painted in black on the white paper. Once the pattern was on the white paper, it was simply placed beneath the clear glass panel that was going to be the support for the painting, and the black lines transferred onto the glass, with water color. From then on oil color would be used.

Transferring a design for *verre églomisé.* If you make your own drawing, and this is preferable, try to find carbon paper that works on gold. If you cannot, take tracing paper and trace your design. Prick the traced contours, place over the gilded glass, and with a sharp metal point scratch sufficiently into the gold, later joining up the scratches. Work on a small area at a time. Practice makes perfect, and also teaches you your own favorite techniques.

Back up with paint (usually oil-based paints). Oil keys better to the glass. Back up paints can be opaque, or transparent. Sign writers use paint that is heavy in pigment and short on oil which has the advantage of drying very fast, but is so soft that protection with a good varnish is imperative. Sign writers matte paint, known as Ronan Japan, USA, or Bolloms (formerly Keeps) paint, UK. You can add some varnish to increase transparency.

Water gilding over this oil painted surface will not work well with a water-based size as the surface will now be very uneven and the water will be repelled by the paint surface. A non-greasy vitreous or extremely polished surface is needed to adhere metal leaf this way. But after at least two good coats of varnish, and if you can break the surface tension with some detergent in the water, it is possible to water gild. Otherwise, satisfactory choices for mordants for gold, silver and metal of any variety are oil-based gold size, with or without the addition of Japan gold size, or acrylic size.

Reversibility is important, not just from the conservation aspect, but for the person who is creating new work and may well wish to change his/her mind as the piece progresses. Once dry, though, changing one layer without disturbing the previous one will not always be possible, especially with acrylics.

Shellac can be used to isolate one medium from another, or to stabilize a delicate paint layer. To color, add aniline dyes, wetting the powder with a little alcohol first. Shellac on glass is not a particularly simple process, so you need to learn well about your materials or find a teacher.

Shellac gives marvelous deep, transparent glazes, which are enhanced by gilding with precious metal leaf or with imitation, simulating transmitted light. Shellac is reversible with alcohol, after drying, leaving previous paint layers unharmed, *if* you are careful; abrasion will remove anything, even if you use the "right" solvents.

Caution: Do not breathe the aniline powder, it is highly toxic.

Exhibition catalogues and very abbreviated bibliography:

Amalierte Stuck uff Glas/Hinder Glas gemalte Historien und Gemäld, Frieder Ryser, Brigitte Salmen, Schlossmuseum, Murnau, Germany, 1995

Reverse Paintings on Glass: The Ryser Collection, Corning Museum of Glass, Corning, New York 1992

Form and Decoration, Peter Thornton, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1998

Images of Faith, Helen Waddy Lepovitz, University of Georgia Press, 1991

World Mirrors, Graham Child, Sothebys, London, 1991

Frances Binnington has been practicing, researching and teaching gilding on glass in England and the United States since the early 1980s. She was born in London where she became a partner in an antique furniture restoration business whose clients included museums and private collectors. A resident of the United States since 1992, she is a member of the Society of Gilders and the editor of their magazine, The Gilder's Tip. *This article appeared in three installments in the Gilder's Tip (2000-2002). It has been edited for* The Decorator.

Letter from Birmingham

by Yvonne Jones

Plate with elaborate mother of pearl and fine gold work, 10 3/4" diamenter. Eight of the twelve points on the rim have been repaired. Stamped "Jennens & Bettridge" on the back. Courtesy of Shirley S. Baer.

Following a visit to the Birmingham factory of Jennens & Bettridge in 1851, Harriet Martineau vividly described the products she saw and the various processes involved in their making; she noticed particularly how few women were employed in the decorating departments, and her comments make interesting reading:

> ...the nicest parts of the work are usually done by men. We were rather surprised by this, till we heard the reason. The decorative parts of this manufacture seem to suit women's faculties of head and hand; and it looks strange, at first sight,

that only about a fourth of the three hundred people employed in this establishment are women; and that the women do the coarser parts of the work - having, necessarily, lower wages than the men. The reason is that women do not learn the business and stick to it, as men do. A boy serves an apprenticeship of seven years; and then regards the business as the main employment of his life. Girls come for months, or years, as it may happen: and it never does happen that they look upon it as the one settled business of their lives. They marry, or they think or marrying. They are, sooner or later, more or less unsettled; and it commonly happens that a home and a baby call them from the manufactory, as soon as they have become thoroughly trained to their work. It is therefore, most probably a man who has to inlay this tray with pearl.

"Flower Shows in a Birmingham Hot-house"
Harriet Martineau
Household Words no. 82, vol. IV, 18th Oct., 1851, pp 82-85.

Small (8" x 6.5") unsigned portfolio with a named scene, "Guy's Cliff House," surrounded by intricate floral decoration worked in mother of pearl. Harriet Martineau would probably have attributed this to a male worker. Courtesy of Shirley S. Baer.

Painted Shades – The "Stonewall" Jackson House

by Martha M. Wilbur

Thomas Jonathan Jackson, a teacher at Virginia Military Institute and better known as "Stonewall" Jackson, bought his only home on East Washington Street in Lexington, Virginia. He lived in the house from 1859-1861. The house has since been restored and is open to the public.

One of the many interesting features in the house is a pair of window shades in the study. They were found in a tailor shop in a small town near Cooperstown, New York and were still in the original container when purchased. They had never been used.

These types of blinds were popular in the mid 1800s. They were made of several types of material and painted either by professional artists (Renoir was at one time a window shade artist) or they were painted by the housewife from directions published by Rufus Porter and others. There were several periods of painting styles. Between 1820-1840, the entire shade was usually covered with a landscape scene. From 1840-1860, the design was frequently limited to a central medallion with scenic or nature studies, along the borders. The Jackson shades are of later period and have a border with a small rural scene in the cartouche at the bottom.

The purpose of the decorative shades was to keep the sun from injuring the furnishings, to add visual interest to the room, and to insure privacy.

The study in the Jackson house with a close-up of the painted window shade shown above. Courtesy of the "Stonewall" Jackson House.

The Bookshelf

"Reverse Painting on Glass"

Edited and translated by Rudy Eswarin

Based on the book Verzauberte Bilder by Frieder Ryser. Catalogue of the *Ryser Collection at the Corning Glass Museum*, New York, 1992, more than 100 color illustrations, 168 pages.

Reviewed by Sandra Cohen

I would like to preface my review with the following observation. This issue's feature article Reverse Painting and Gilding Behind Glass *by Frances Binnington has prompted me to reintroduce the catalogue of the Ryser Reverse Glass Exhibition that was briefly reviewed by Jane Bolster, Fall/Winter, '92-93. The dearth of books which feature the fine art of reverse glass painting and research and define this technique, increases the value of information that we have, and demonstrates the importance and need for further study of this style of painting.*

Reverse Painting On Glass by Rudy Eswarin is a catalogue of the Ryser Collection that was exhibited at the Corning Museum in 1992. This catalogue, admittedly, only scratches the surface of the history of reverse glass painting. However, the dearth of writing on this type of painting makes this catalogue both valuable and desirable by collectors, researchers and artists. Neither this book, nor this reviewer intends to take you step-by-step through almost eighteen centuries. However, Eswarin gives us a brief yet comprehensive overview of this discipline and its history in thirty-nine pages of text, and he also includes a section on technique and on criteria for each of the several categories of reverse glass painting. Eswarin gives us just enough information to make this catalogue fascinating and easy to comprehend by novices of this technique. By helping us understand the intricate process of reverse painting on glass, he increases our appreciation of these beautifully complex and fragile works of art.

Reverse glass painting techniques have been discovered in Western Civilization from the time of the Roman Empire, 3rd and 4th centuries, A.D., and a relic from this time depicts a colorfully painted reverse scene of *The Judgment of Paris* on a glass dish. Artists during these ancient times are considered the pioneers of the more sophisticated techniques we discover in examples from the 13th century. The different techniques of applying gold leaf to glass are recorded in the 12th century manuals of Heraclius and Theophilus. The gold leaf was painted prior to fixing it to the glass. "...The ornamentation was not applied to the back of the glass, but was attached to the front and subsequently covered with a layer of hot glass. "...the adhesive evaporated, leaving the gold leaf in position without developing cracks upon cooling." The difference between ancient objects with gold leaf on glass and similar relics from the Medieval Period is that the latter were engraved instead of painted and the need for the hot glass was eliminated. It was during the 13th- through the 16th centuries that the techniques we use today for reverse glass painting were developed.

Most of the early reverse glass portrayed religious scenes and was found in churches and monasteries until the clergy who took vows of

"Christmas," about 1650, from the catalog Reverse Paintings on Glass: the Ryser Collection. Courtesy of The Corning Museum of Glass.

poverty resented this elaborate decor. Later, during the Renaissance, reverse glass painting moved away from narrative and religious painting and was used to create decorative motifs. This style of painting on artifacts attracted the eye of a growing, merchant middle class as well as wealthy patrons. Reverse glass began to appear in the form of ornamentation, jewelry and other items such as tankards, mirrors, frames and portraits, landscapes and seascapes, and paneled furniture. Examples of these are featured in large, colorful plates. There are also detailed descriptions of each plate.

It was during the 17th century that reverse glass painting developed into gallery art, and *The Death of Adonis* from the workshop of Luca Giordano is an obvious example of using reverse glass painting techniques to create Fine Art. *Christmas* depicts the nativity in a typically Dutch fashion, reminiscent of the works and techniques of Brueghels. These vivid colors and realistic images constantly challenge your conceptions of reverse glass painting. Portrait of a Boy, believed to be painted by Meyer in 1760, reminds one of an oil painting by Carravagio. While you are looking at these paintings, you need to remind yourself that you are looking at reverse glass and not at oil painting on canvas. These skills will be appreciated even more by those who practice these techniques. This collection is truly awe-inspiring. In a *Still Life With Fruit* from the 18th century, the highlights and the translucency of the grapes are remarkable, considering that highlights, which are usually painted last on a canvas, are painted first using this technique. The complexity, skill and forethought to accomplish this imagery are impressive. I think it would be easier to pull a rabbit from a hat. The author reminds us that the plates do not do justice to the originals, because the light on the glass plays such an intricate role in the way this art is perceived. Nothing compares to viewing the originals, but this catalogue comes close.

This generous and select representation from the Ryser Collection, which includes ninety-three color plates, will most definitely enhance your appreciation of reverse glass painting. There are English, African and Chinese genre scenes, animals in their natural habitat, silhouettes, etchings in gold leaf and more.

If you don't have this book, you should check the cover of *The Decorator*, Spring/Summer of 1994. *Portrait of a Lady*, China, 1770, from the Ryser Collection should whet your appetite for this book and for the aesthetic possibilities that one can achieve through reverse glass painting.

Editor's note: Our Bookshelf editor, Sandra Cohen, owns and operates Legacy Books.

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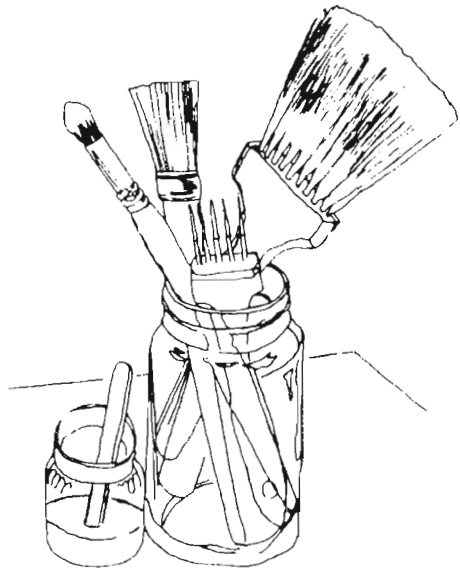

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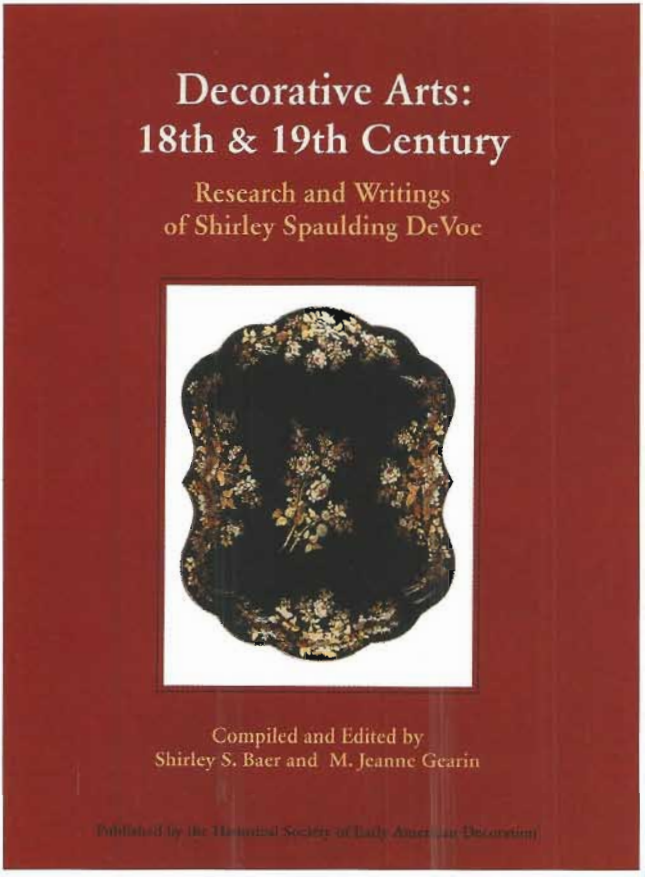

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