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Contents

Gilding the Lily: Gold Leaf and Other Metal Effects Used by Japanners in the 18th and 19th Centuries. Part 2	5
<i>by Yvonne Jones</i>	
Future Meetings	16
The Chase Revealed, Brush Stoke Wall Painting in Ashford, CT	17
<i>by Valerie Burnham Oliver</i>	
Letter from Birmingham	25
<i>by Yvonne Jones</i>	
The Bookshelf	26
<i>by Sandra Cohen</i>	
Advertising.....	31

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Front and back covers: Gothic shaped papier mâché tray showing a typical example of late bronze decoration, c. 1840. Marked for the retailer "John Mechi of 4 Leadenball Street, London." Courtesy of Deborah Lambeth.

The Historical Society of Early American Decoration

A society with affiliated chapters organized to carry on the work and honor the memory of Esther Stevens Brazer, pioneer in the perpetuation of Early American Decoration as an art; to promote continued research in that field; to record and preserve examples of early American decoration; to maintain such exhibits and publish such works on the subject of early American decoration and the history thereof as will further the appreciation of such art, the elevation of the standards of its reproduction and utilization; to assist in efforts public and private, in locating and preserving material pertinent to our work, and to cooperate with other societies in the accomplishment of purposes of mutual concern.

Vision: HSEAD will be, and will become recognized as, a preeminent national authority on early American decoration.

Mission: HSEAD will maintain a core membership of practicing guild artists supported by active programs of education, research, and exhibitions to perpetuate and expand the unique skills and knowledge of early American decoration.

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Gilding the Lily

Gold Leaf and Other Metal Effects Used by Japanners in the 18th and 19th Centuries

Yvonne Jones

Part II of a paper delivered to HSEAD on the occasion of its 60th Anniversary Celebration in Providence, Rhode Island, in April 2006. Part I of this paper focused upon gold and other metal leaf. Here, in Part II, the focus will be first upon bronzing, then upon inlaid aluminium and, finally, upon so-called "raised work."

There were two distinct periods of bronze decoration known, predictably, as early and late bronzing. Each had its own techniques and distinguishing features, but both lent themselves to strangely atmospheric and dramatic effects. George Dickinson may have had good cause to regret that "some really weird iron trays are to be met with in bronzes," he said, "picturing apocryphal beasts in savage poses"¹ but, notwithstanding, some of the finest examples of early japanned iron and, indeed, papier mâché articles were decorated by the bronze technique.

Both early and late bronzing were carried out with powders which, having been ground from various metals, gave the decoration a slight sparkle. They produced very different results from the earlier method of gilding with flaked metal (Part I, p. 9), and their outcomes were more subtle. William Hutton, writing in 1835, said it was Henry Clay who "with complete success" introduced bronze powders in the decoration of japanned goods. They "obtained so great a preference," Hutton noted, "that they came into general use, and for cheapness and beauty, cannot be excelled by any previous invention".² Although he gave no date for their introduction, bronze powders were in use, certainly, by 1804, when Charles Docker, a Birmingham japanner, supplied trays and waiters with "single" and "double bronze" borders, to Chamberlain's prestigious porcelain manufactory in Worcester. To judge from this spare description, these borders may have been no more than simple bands of bronze combined with stripes of painted color—a basic style which was perpetuated throughout the history of the japanning industry, particularly on cash and deed boxes, as well as on trays and other goods.



Plate 1: Papier mâché tray, decorated with an Arcadian landscape in bronze powders. Impressed mark of Thomas Illidge, Wolverhampton, c. 1815. Private collection.

Thus, the long-held belief that bronze decoration was invented in 1812, by two Londoners – Thomas Hubball, a japanner, and William King, a tin-plate worker – no longer holds true. However, the technique was at its most popular between about 1812 and 1820, when an entire tray-base, for example, might have been decorated with a figure subject, a scriptural or rustic theme, or a seascape, wholly carried out in bronze powders. These pictures, with their subdued coloring, often resembled Old Master paintings mellowed by age, and this may have been part of their contemporary appeal. The tea-board shown here (Plate 1) was made in the Wolverhampton workshops of Thomas Illidge, a maker who seems to have specialised in bronze effects and who produced some of the best examples.

While Hubball and King can no longer be said to have invented bronze powders, they are important, albeit by default, for having provided the earliest surviving and most detailed description of how such powders were used. It appeared in their 1812 patent (#3593) for “A New and Improved Method of Ornamenting Articles, Japanned, Painted or Sized ...” There were various ways of obtaining powders from iron ore, but Hubball and King preferred theirs to be pulverized in a mortar. First, they sized a japanned surface, and when this was nearly dry, they took a cut-paper or parchment stencil of the proposed bronze ornament, and applied the powders to the exposed parts with a soft material such as leather or cotton. Once dry, any superfluous powder was removed, and the work was given two or three protective coats of copal varnish before it was polished, first with



Plate 2: Tin tray with early stencilled bronze decoration, 1830s. Courtesy of Betty Carrie.

pumice, then with sand, and, finally with rotten-stone, until it acquired what they called “the appearance of damask.”

This was essentially the method used by other japanners, although, inevitably there were slight variations. For example, bronze powders were available in greater variety than Hubball and King implied. They were made not only from iron but from other mineral ores (either in their natural colors or chemically stained), from finely ground metals such as brass, copper, zinc, silver, and gold, and also from various alloys of Dutch metal. This enabled decorators to work with as many as 18 differently colored powders, often to striking effect.

The advantage of stencilling, according to an anonymous contributor to the *Birmingham Weekly Post*, was that being a “half-mechanical method” of working, it could be undertaken by apprentices. Writing retrospectively in 1877, the author used as an example a tray made at the Birmingham firm of Woodward & Midgley (1829-1857) to describe how bronze-work was done. The tray in question was stencilled with “a shepherd boy in a storm,” but the principle can be applied to other designs (Plate 2):

Holes of the shape of the hat, head, coat, breeches, stockings, boots, dog, &c., were all cut in different pieces of paper. The article to be ornamented was then covered with a coat of gold-size and allowed to get nearly dry, when the artist proceeded to his work ... he first took the paper containing



Plate 3: Papier mâché tray with early bronze chinoiserie decoration, 1820s. Private collection.

the hole representing the coat, laid it over the gold-size, and dipping a dry camel-hair brush in the orange bronze, dusted it through the hole until the gold-size would take no more. The paper was then lifted off and the coat showed as orange on a black ground. The dog and the hat being white bronze, were next done in a similar manner. Then through another paper the face was dusted in with “flesh” bronze, and so on, the most solid parts being done first. The bronzes might be stained or shaded with color afterwards, though, as they are themselves very varied in color and shade, this was not absolutely necessary.³³

In addition to stencilling, some artists also drew free-hand in gold size using a camel-hair pencil for fine details and “stump-like tools”³⁴ for bolder parts – a method known to HSEAD members as “free-hand bronzing.” The powders were then scattered over the sized parts and worked in with chamois leather, wool or cotton. When bronzing was completed and the size had dried, the work was buffed with a soft cloth to give a shine to the metals in the powder, then varnished and polished as above. It was a method which allowed for extraordinarily fine detail (Plate 3).

Bronzing was evidently deemed suitable for amateur japanners. This was presumably because it did not require stoving, at least not according to B. F. Gandee in his (or maybe her) epistolary book *The Artist or Young*

Ladies Instructor, published in 1835. Gandee gave particularly clear directions which, although intended for novices, were almost certainly based on earlier commercial methods:

I begin with the pale gold bronze for the middle and larger parts, and at a little distance, add orange, green or copper bronze ... To Strengthen and brighten the colors, I add more of each with a little cotton. Sometimes a pleasing rocky effect is obtained by cutting a piece of writing paper into a waved form, and rubbing the bronze over the edge of it with the cotton, and removing it a little further add more bronze and again to as many as five or six rows .⁵ (See Plate 4).



Plate 4: Tin bread basket showing the stepped effect that could be achieved according to the method described by Gandee, 1820s. Courtesy of Astrid Donnellan.

In spite of their obvious skills, there is scant information about individual decorators of bronzed goods. However, because of two attributions made by William Aitken in 1866, the name of one decorator alone, William Davis (fl.1820s), is now associated with such work. The first of these attributions showed the *Goddess of Earth* in a chariot driven by two cupids and drawn by two chained lions, and the second depicted *Daniel in the Lions' Den*. Davis, he said "gained some celebrity by his copies in the same style of subjects by Morland, in which he carefully reproduced the touches of the original artist."^{6*} That Davis executed some of the best bronze pictures, there can be no doubt, but the quantity and varying quality of many surviving examples in this style, argue against his being responsible for them all. In the absence of firm evidence, therefore, the most that can be said is that better examples may have been produced in Davis' workshop.

Alongside these early methods, two new styles emerged in about 1830 which combined bronze powders with painted and sometimes pearled decoration. They form what is now called "late bronzing."

*George Morland (1763-1840)



Plate 5: Central detail of a round papier mâché card tray, c. 1835. Courtesy of Robert Harman Antiques.

The first of these styles is seen to particularly good effect on a tray in the collection of Wolverhampton Art Galleries & Museums. Made by Walton & Co., it is centrally decorated with a spray of flowers and pelargonium leaves. The leaves at its center were individually bronzed all-over, using the same cut-paper stencil for each. Before the underlying size had dried, every vein, leaf-marking and tonal contrast was effectively “drawn” with a fine bob by lifting or wiping away the bronze powder, exposing, in some parts, the black japan varnish beneath. Even the most shaded leaves, which show more black than gold, were achieved by this means.

Gandee included a variant of this method in his instructions for amateurs. He wrote: “A very good effect is obtained by putting the dark color over large flat leaves or other surfaces, and spreading the bronzes over to produce a varied effect. They may be put on bright all over the edge of a leaf, and left dark towards the middle, and when this is dry, a few gold veins over the shaded part, will produce a particularly good effect” (Plate 5).⁷

In another less sophisticated version of this style, the motifs were similarly stencilled in dense blocks of bronze color and their details and contrasts of light and dark painted with a brush dipped in thin asphaltum varnish (Plate 6). Superimposing details in this way, as distinct from wiping or brushing away the bronze powder, was obviously much quicker, and less expensive. Another expedient involved strewing white metallic powders over painted flowers, for example, while their surfaces were still wet; in effect, it was an extension of the earlier method of applying metal powders, (Part I, p. 9).



Plate 6: Papier mâché sandwich-edge tray, c. 1830. Private collection

The second and concurrent style of late bronzing, employed similar methods, but to radically different ends. It came to be known as the “Wolverhampton style” even though its production was in no way confined to that town. A vase shown at the *Exhibition of Papier Mâché* in Birmingham in 1926, for instance, was catalogued as being in the “Wolverhampton style, by Jennens & Bettridge” of Birmingham.

The style took two forms. In the first, bronze was used as a background to an otherwise painted design (Plate 7, front cover). A typical example might show a painted and pearled Italianate landscape with plashing fountain and exotic birds, set against a heavy and turbulent bronze sky. But golden scenes, bathed in sunlight, were equally characteristic. Sometimes the bronze ground might be enhanced by “the judicious use of transparent colors upon pure gold and silver”^{** 8} – a method known as “staining” the metals. It was especially effective for rendering the iridescence of feathers, and when “combined with bronze skies,” Robert Hunt intriguingly maintained that it “made paper trays look like iron ones.”⁹ The style enjoyed such long and widespread popularity that Verdant Green, the eponymous hero of Cuthbert Bede’s satire on life as an Oxford University undergraduate, disparagingly dismissed it on account of “those offensive cockatoos, in an arabesque landscape, under a bronze sky, which usually sprawls over

^{**}However, unless the color washes protected the silver from oxidation, it is likely that “pure,” here referred only to gold metal, for as we have seen, japanners avoided pure silver leaf because of its tendency to tarnish (see Part I p. 5).



Plate 8: Gothic-shaped papier mâché tray, lettered in white script, on the underside, "Southam Hall no.1196," and impressed "B.Walton & Co. Warranted," c. 1845. Private collection.

everything that is papier mâché."¹⁰ A jaundiced view, perhaps, but otherwise accurate in its detail.

The other equally distinctive form of the "Wolverhampton-style" was introduced by Benjamin Walton at the Old Hall Japan Works in 1845. It was based on a "selection of interior and exterior views of the old baronial halls of England, and the various cathedrals,"¹¹ in which narrow slit windows or stained glass allowed for plays of dramatic shafts of light across the surfaces of the pictures (Plate 8). These, George Dickinson tells us, were achieved by using paper stencils "to correspond with patches of sunlight."¹² Such pictures, copied from contemporary engravings, are found on so-called gothic-shaped papier mâché trays – the shape known by HSEAD members as "Chippendale." Some of the best were said to have been the work of Frederick Perks, a decorator at the Walton factory, about whom little else is known. Although these trays appear to have been exclusive to Walton, the style was widely copied on a range of other goods by rival firms. It was said that the style of decoration was "much sought after for seven years" but by 1851 it had "for some time ... nearly gone to rest."¹³

Another decorator at the Walton factory, known only as "Brown," gave his name to a style of bronze and silvery-brown floral borders. They enjoyed so long a run that in about 1850, "Mr Walton was in favour of dropping 'Brown's borders' until, hearing his travelling salesmen declare them best

sellers, he quickly agreed to their continuation. Contemporary with these was a border of "sea-shells in brown and gold bronze in a row round the margin of a tray, and sometimes on the tray itself in regular pattern."¹⁴ This design, introduced in 1845, has been attributed to both David Sargent and Charles Neville.^{***} Dickinson concluded that trays with shell-borders were made in great number as they were still common when he was writing in 1925. They are less commonly found today.

We come now to a style of decoration which, known as "*inlaid aluminium*," might be supposed to be out of context here. It is, perhaps, the most troublesome of all the gilding techniques to identify. In 1865, John Bettridge & Co., successors to the Birmingham firm of Jennens & Bettridge, were said to have "patented an invention for the inlaying of aluminium and its alloys ... which adds a richness ... which can only otherwise be achieved by the use of precious metals, and being covered over with a coat of transparent varnish, will retain their brilliancy for any length of time."¹⁵

This extract is misleading on three counts. First, no such patent exists; second, it is probably wrong to impute too much accuracy to the use of the term "inlaying"; and third and most importantly, the varnishing of the aluminium indicates results similar to those created by the "staining" of metals (see above). The latter possibility is borne out by W. C. Aitken's assertion that in 1864, Bettridge & Co. *applied* aluminium "and bronze formed from it, to the decoration of envelope cases, card trays, binding for albums, &c"¹⁶ It is further endorsed by Dickinson, who described it as a "silvery bronze [made] from aluminium [which] was pretty and effective, especially with flowers and foliage," and who added cryptically that "it has no association with early bronze pictures"¹⁷ – a rider which implies, at least in visual terms, that it looked as though it might have.

The use of aluminum for decorative purposes was made possible by a reduction in the cost of the raw material. This was due to the work of H. St. Clair Deville, in France, in 1855, whose research (on refining aluminium) was published in England in 1859. Although aluminium was produced in England as early as 1860, it was another 15 to 20 years before it was generally adopted by japanners and by then, as Dickinson wryly observed, "most of the glory had gone out of the trade."¹⁸

With discussions of both gold leaf and bronze decoration in place, it is now possible to consider a further style of gilding with which each was associated in the early 19th century, namely "impasto" or, as it was called in the trade, "raised work" or "raisin[g] color."

^{***}Both Sargent and Neville were trained at the Old Hall. By 1845, Sargent had joined the Birmingham firm of Footherape & Shenton, and in 1846, Neville joined his brother at Alsager & Neville, in the same town.



Plate 9: Detail of raised-work on a rectangular papier mâché tea-board. Made by Thomas Illidge, c. 1815. Private collection

The style is recognized by its quasi-oriental landscapes in which the main parts – figures, birds, animals, flowers, trees, pagodas, etc. – were highlighted in low relief. Notwithstanding the influence of Oriental lacquer and its European imitations on the early Midlands japanning industry, raised decoration was not adopted in its factories until about 1820.

It is thought to have been introduced by Joseph Booth, the gilder who is believed to have decorated Lady Hertford's magnificent vases (see Part I, p. 14) while he was employed by Jennens & Bettridge between 1821 and 1825. The technique was widely copied in other workshops and factories, but it was Booth who was called upon in 1824 to decorate a tray in this manner for the Prince Regent. It is because of Booth's contemporary renown that examples of this style are, today, popularly attributed to him. Such attributions should be viewed with caution.

There were various recipes for making "raising composition," but the one given by Gandee and described as "Birmingham raising" may reasonably be presumed to have been the formula favored in the local industry. It consisted of flake white, vermilion and gold size. Its application was a tricky and skilful operation which would surely have defeated all but the most determined of Gandee's amateur readership.

The proposed design was traced onto the japanned surface, and its outline was lightly painted with the tip of a medium-sized brush, the hairs

of which had been dipped into the composition to only half their length. The brush needed to be frequently replenished, but not so laden with composition that it dripped on the work in hand nor “rested on so heavily as to bend the hair,”¹⁹ for that, too, would have resulted in blots. Moreover, unless the work was kept absolutely level, the composition would “flow” or run.

Subsequent layers of composition were added around the edge of the raised area and never allowed to overlap. This may seem perverse when it was the center that was to be prominent, but it allowed the composition to flow to the middle and retain its level as a skin formed, thus counteracting the tendency of the composition to sink in the middle as it set. Mistakes could be removed with spirits of turpentine. This dulled the japan varnish, but its gloss could be restored by rubbing a little lard into the surface and then a little flour to absorb any greasy residue – a remedy not mentioned in any other contemporary literature, but one to which both painters and gilders may have resorted to correct occasional mistakes or mishaps. When the raised work was complete, it was hardened in a stove, bronzed or gilded in the usual manner, and, if required, any details were “pencilled” in color onto the raised parts. A particularly fine example of this type of decoration, in combination with early bronzing, may be seen in the detail of a tray by Thomas Illidge (Plate 9). Occasionally, raised-work was carved with a fine tool to create the effect of folds in drapery, for example, or gnarled tree-trunks, and sometimes, it was used in conjunction with pearl decoration.

Impasto, although not much used after the 1830s, enjoyed a short revival in the 1860s, notably on small trays made by Henry Loveridge & Co., of Wolverhampton.

This brings our survey of gilding to an end, and it remains only to add that despite their considerable talent, gilders were generally regarded as *skilled workmen* rather than *artists*. Nevertheless, whether their work was left to stand alone without further embellishment or, as was more usual, it formed only part of the overall scheme, it was often the most eye-catching aspect of the decoration. As such, the quality of gilding was integral to the success of japanned goods.

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Close-up from the Thomas Illidge papier mâché tea-board shown on page 14.

Future Meetings

Spring 2007	Rochester, NY	May 4-6 (FSS)
Fall 2007	Killington, VT	September 27-30 (TFSS)
Spring 2008	Sturbridge, MA	May 9-11 (FSS)
Fall 2008	Killington, VT	September 18-21 (TFSS)
Spring 2009	Burlington, VT	May 1-3 (FSS)

The Chase Revealed

Brush Stroke Wall Painting in Ashford, Connecticut

Valerie Burnham Oliver



In the southeastern section of Ashford, Connecticut, there stands a late eighteenth century home with a preserved original brush stroke wall painting. The wall painting was discovered over ten years ago, between two walls, by the homeowners at that time. It now forms the south wall of the borning room, an approximately 7' x 9' room, with no windows, off the larger keeping room.

The painting was designed to cover the entire nine foot long south wall which consists of six wide boards, one 12" wide and the others from 17" to almost 19" wide. The background was originally a salmon pink color and the brush work design appears to be done solely in first white and then black brush strokes. No pencil marks or initials or signature could be located. The design is not symmetrical as other brush stroke wall paintings often appear. Instead, at the center and just slightly below eye level appears a dog chasing after a fox. (Whether it is a fox is debatable, as it well could be another dog, but that tail leads me to believe it is a fox.) They are surrounded by graceful curving stems with tulips about 4-5" long, tulip buds about 3-4" long, three sunflowers and two birds. The

scroll shaped stems and leaves seem to frame the animals and fill the wall. Brush strokes in white and black form a frame for the design as they appear along the bottom, up the sides and as a chair rail beneath the animals. There are no flowers or animals below the chair rail, just scroll work. Along the ceiling can be seen seven swags painted with the same type of brushwork, white larger strokes with smaller black accent strokes.

The current homeowners, purchased the property in November 1995; renovations completed during the first year allowed them to move in during 1996. Shortly after that time a person from Old Sturbridge Village visited to consult on ways to preserve the wall. Although he indicated it would be difficult to determine the date the wall was decorated he explained that Ashford was in what is called the “Quiet Corner” of Connecticut. This north-eastern corner of the state historically was about fifty years behind the surrounding areas in the use of technology for farming and building; it was a more isolated area. He stated that the house could easily have been built as far back as 1740 but more probably was built between 1780 and 1790. A stone building lined with panels of cork and cement used as an icehouse or possibly a spring house to store butter and milk remains on the property and is from the same period as the house.

Seeking further information, the owners sent photographs of the wall to the then Museum of American Folk Art and Jane Nylander of SPNEA. Both connected the artist to a group identified by Nina Fletcher Little as the “Brush Stroke Group.”

This was a term Nina Fletcher Little used in her 1952 book, *American Decorative Wall Painting, 1700-1850*. In the chapter *Freehand Designs in Repeat Patterns, That Much Admired Imitation of Stamped Paper*, she divides the freehand wall paintings into the Connecticut Group, Jessup Group,

Text continued on page 23.



The Ashford, Connecticut home today.



Top half of the wall.



Bottom half of the wall.

The following pages show some of the drawings.









Text continued from page 17.

Brush Stroke Group, Maine Group, and describes a few painted walls in the New England area falling outside these groups.

“The Brush Stroke Group” was characterized by the use of “carefully formed” brush strokes closely approximating those used in county tin painting. Little identified this work in Vermont, Massachusetts and Connecticut. The Stratton Tavern, Northfield Farms, Massachusetts had a wall painting (Fig. 106) with a “looped border” under the ceiling which is very similar to the one in the Ashford home. Little felt that the wall painting in the tavern was probably done about 1800 rather than the date of 1775 held by family tradition.

Since the Ashford home was built around the turn of the century, it is probable that the wall painting was done during the time period expressed by Margaret Coffin in her 1986 work, *Borders & Scrolls, Early American Brush Stroke Wall Painting, 1790-1820*. She identifies twenty-two houses with brush stroke painted walls, ten located along the Connecticut River valley and twelve in New York state along the Hudson River and west toward Canajoharie and East Bloomfield.

The Ashford, Connecticut house brush stroke wall painting is unique in that it features action – action in the fast moving chase between the dog and the fox. The animals are carefully painted in detail and are centered and located just below an adult’s eye level, above the chair rail design. Perhaps they were meant to be at a child’s eye level. In any case the two birds to the left and right, both facing left, appear aloof to the action going on beneath them. The overall design is not symmetrical nor are elements of the design located in diamonds as exhibited on other painted walls. The extremely graceful tulips are wonderfully executed while the two birds with their long beaks are obviously the same kind, but quite primitive looking.

They appear similar to a bird in Coffin's book (Plate 24) from the 1725 Chapin House in Chicopee, Massachusetts. The three happy sunflowers seem unique too. This artist used his/her own ideas or perhaps a story told by the house occupants to design a most interesting wall painting.

Perhaps it also illustrates that Ashford residents, although in the "Quiet Corner" of Connecticut, welcomed the lively artistic depiction of their natural and not so quiet surroundings.

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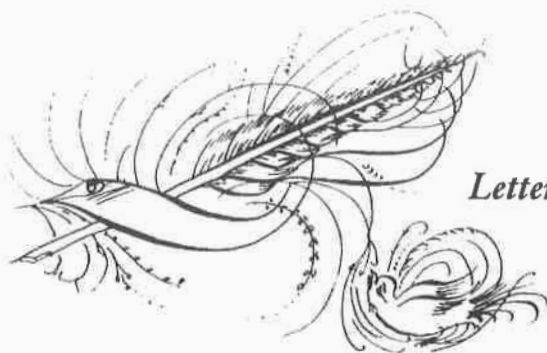
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(Little's book is dedicated "In affectionate memory of ESTHER STEVENS BRAZER whose knowledge and enthusiasm encouraged my first interest in the architectural use of paint.")

This dedication provided a wonderful way for me, as an HSEAD member, to introduce the homeowners to HSEAD and our inspirational leader.

Photos by Valerie Burnham Oliver.





Letter from Birmingham

by Yvonne Jones

The Relative Cost of Papier Mâché Goods

In the Spring 2003 edition of *The Decorator*, I wrote about the contemporary cost of Jennens & Bettridge's papier mâché goods. Since writing that piece, I have come across the manuscript journal of Catherine Martineau, cousin of Harriet Martineau whose own writings on the same factory,* I have quoted, many times.

By shedding light on the difference in price between papier mâché articles and their recently introduced rivals, electro-plated goods, Catherine Martineau went some way towards showing the severe effect this rapidly expanding industry had upon the market for papier mâché. After visiting Jennens & Bettridge's factory, she viewed the electro-plating works of Messrs. Elkington, the most prominent factory of its type in Birmingham. On August 16th, 1850, she wrote in her journal: "After dinner we visited Jennens & Bettridge's papier mâché factory & [sic] were taken round to see the different processes ... we were a long time among the beauties in the showroom all of which," the comfortably-off Miss Martineau noted, "were far beyond our means."

Contrast this with her visit, three days later, to Elkington's where she saw "their magnificent show rooms, which contain the most splendid looking plate reduced to the means of everyone." Against such competition, it is hardly surprising that the heyday of the middle to top end of the papier mache industry, peaked in the 1850s. The mass market expected goods at more moderate prices.

* Martineau, H., "Flower Shows in a Birmingham Hot-house," *Household Words*, vol. IV, 1851, p 82-85.



The Bookshelf

Love and Loss *American Portrait and Mourning Miniatures*

by Robin Jaffee Frank

*Published by Yale University Press, New Haven, CT, 2000. HC, 358 pages.
Available from the New York Historical Society, NYC.*

Remembering that beautiful gifts often come in small packages, one is initially drawn to this book's size (approximately five by seven inches and well over an inch thick). The jacket's midnight black background is a stark contrast to the miniature portrait by P. R. Vallee of Harriet Mackie, 1804, adorned in her white bridal and floral attire. Her closed eyes and lifeless yet peaceful expression confirm the title's suggestion. This composition immediately strikes a melancholic chord.

Based on an exhibition of the same name at the Yale University Gallery in 2000, *Love and Loss: American Portrait and Mourning Miniatures* by Robin Jaffee Frank savors 146 of

Benjamin West, Self-Portrait, 1758 or 1759, Yale.





Charles Wilson Peale, Matthias and Thomas Bordley, 1767, National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

these “limnings,” literally translated, “paintings in little.” These tiny treasures, valued as precious reminders of children, spouses, family members and friends, were portable and worn as jewelry. Memories may fade over distance and time. Those that don’t, share an ethereal quality that can only be experienced within the heart and mind. *Love and Loss* focuses on artists who respond to our needs and longings to have some visible and personal token of loved ones. *Love and Loss*, a gallery of miniature portraits, includes brooches and locketts framing painted portraits on ivory or needlework embroidered with locks of the deceased’s hair; ivory portraits later appear in leather daguerreotype cases.

The author begins with a brief history of miniature painting, a genre that began in England. Most were painted in watercolor on vellum and oil on copper, and later in the mid 18th century, watercolor portraits were done on thin slices of ivory from whalebone. Many American artists trained in Europe under masters of fine art.

The first known miniature watercolor on ivory, *Benjamin West, Self-Portrait*, 1758, was executed by West, America’s earliest limner who served as President of the Royal Academy of the Arts under King George III. West presented it to Elizabeth Steele along with a proposal of marriage. The rest of the anecdote surrounding his miniature self-portrait is amusing.

Mary Way, Mrs. Charles Briggs (*Eliza Bassal Meiller*), c. 1820, Yale.



Anecdotes, analysis and explanations of techniques compliment the many beautiful color plates with scholarly information presented in an enjoyable and readable text.

Charles Wilson Peale, an American Renaissance man, was a prolific portrait painter of the socially and politically prominent (Hancock, Washington and Jefferson). He studied with John Singleton Copley under West, was a member of the Sons of Liberty, fathered ten children whom he named after famous artists (e.g. Rembrandt, Raphaelle and Titian became artists), and founded a museum that encompassed his interests in natural history and art.

Peale's portrait of *Matthias and Thomas Bordley*, c. 1767, affectionately depicts these brothers, (the age difference indicated in their dress), "as if they were engaged in conversation extremely rare in American miniature painting." The hand on the shoulder, the finger indicating a tutorial exchange, the informality and the presence of a book and a classical sculpture in this domestic scene convey information that personally endeared these children to their family members.



Removed from the ranks of the anonymous is Mary Way with a portrait of Gentleman, c. 1800. Way handsomely depicts this dandy in silhouette form employing her skills of sewing and attaching fabric to a paper backing.

Leaving some of the edges free gives the portrait a three-dimensional effect. These inexpensive and unique renditions gave the artist a competitive edge. Way also painted individual portraits of *Charles Briggs*,



Above: Mary Way, Child of the Briggs Family, c. 1820, Yale.

Left: Mary Way, Charles Briggs, c. 1820, Yale.

Clarissa Peters (Mrs. Moses B. Russell), Child in a Pink Dress, c. 1850. Promised Deutsch Bequest, Yale.

Mrs. Charles Briggs, and Child of the Briggs Family, c. 1820. This grouping illustrates her skill with watercolor on ivory. The dark ruffled collar on Mrs. Briggs (a mourning affectation) and the simple curl of blond hair enclosed on the back of the child's locket may indicate the child's untimely death.

Clarissa Peters' (Mrs. Moses B. Russell) *Child in a Pink Dress*, c. 1850 tells the same sad story of infant mortality. Peters, a Boston

artist, is known for her images of children. Reminiscent of naïve folk portraiture, the bright aura surrounding the child's head, the fixed gaze, and the clutched closed rose buds symbolize a life not given the chance to "bloom."

Memorial for Henry G. Staats, c. 1802, artist unidentified (possibly Ezra Ames) depicts a common mourning landscape; a female mourner, likely the mother, near a gravestone with the inscribed initials of her deceased infant son, a hanging willow shrouding the scene, and on the back of the locket, are the initials of his brother, Richard Cuyler, with his plaited lock of hair. Their third child, christened Richard Henry, suggests that he was named after his brothers.

Frank treats the inevitable macabre that accompanies this subject with the facts and objectivity that come from research. The chapter "Not Lost but Gone Before" keeps the subject grounded in a healthy acceptance of the cycle of life. Brooches, mourning rings and bracelets with tiny skeletons (an austere symbol of death) have "precedents in



Unidentified artist, possibly Ezra Ames, *Memorial for Henry G. Staats*, c. 1820. Yale.

Memento Mori jewels of the Renaissance and late 17th century English mourning” pieces. For the more conservative, it was a constant reminder of one’s mortality and a warning not to become too invested in this world.

Love and Loss is heavily foot-noted, offers a bibliography that provides more sources for those interested in this art form, and includes an abundance of color plates that enhance this little treasury of American miniatures. The imagery of these mementos evokes admiration, love and grief. They beautifully convey their raison d’être and provide us with a tangible reminder that we share immortality with our loved ones through remembrance enhanced by token portraits.



All photos from the book: Love and Loss, by Robin Jaffee Frank.

Left: Attributed to Ruth Henshaw Bascom, Eliza Jane Fay, 1840, pastel and graphite pencil on paper, New York Historical Association, Cooperstown. Inscribed "In Memory/Geo/ Washingt" on the pendant.

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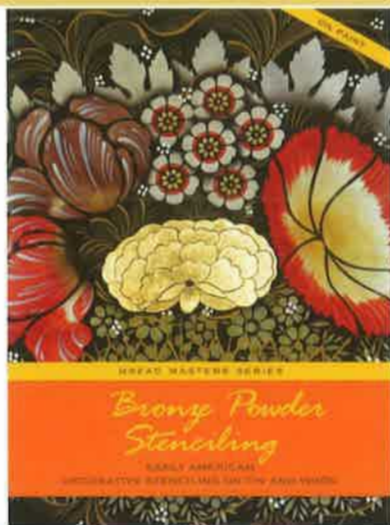
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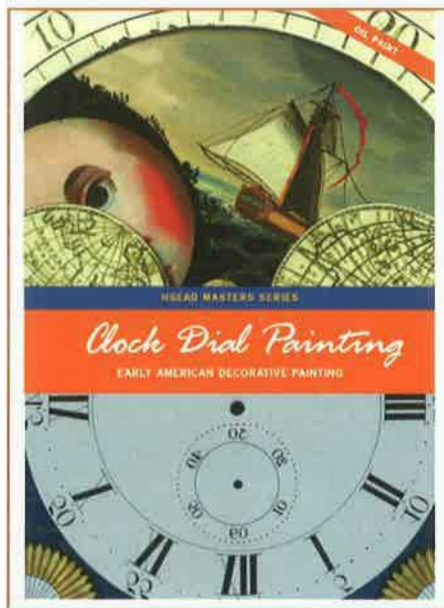
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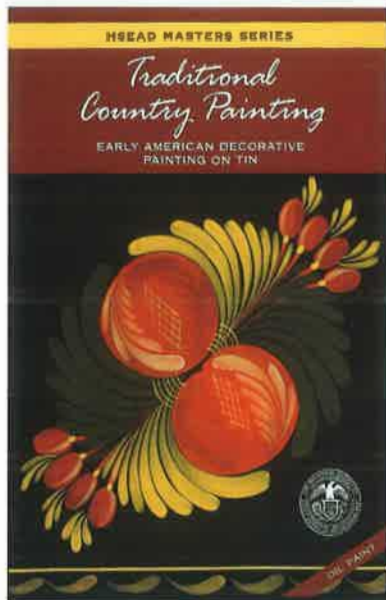
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