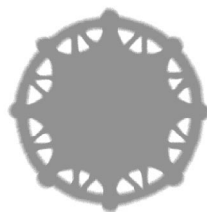
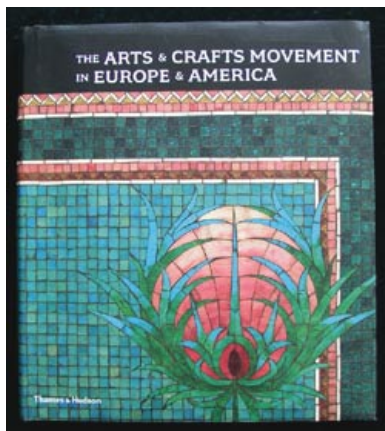


Robert Reviews

02-14-05

THE ARTS AND CRAFTS MOVEMENT IN EUROPE & AMERICA: DESIGN FOR THE MODERN WORLD
WENDY KAPLAN, EDITOR
PUBLISHED IN 2004, BY THAMES AND HUDSON, NEW YORK
IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE LOS ANGELES COUNTY MUSEUM OF ART



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Arts and Crafts in Europe and America

Exhibition and catalogue produced by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art

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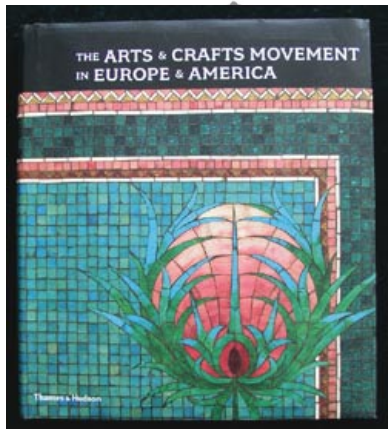
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George Washinton Maher mosaic on cover of LACMA catalogue



George Washington Maher mosaic in V&A Art Nouveau catalogue

The Arts and Crafts Movement was neither fish nor fowl. It was not just a movement to change art, as Impressionism was, nor was it just a movement to change society, as Communism was. Its hybrid nature will make it fodder for many more museum shows and books before efforts to refine a definition of it begin to seem redundant.

*In 2000 the Victoria and Albert Museum produced a leviathan show called "Art Nouveau, 1890-1914." Paul Greenhalgh's introduction to the exhibition catalogue makes the claim that, "Art Nouveau was the result of intense and flamboyant activity in the visual arts by individuals wishing to change the character of European civilization." Designers like England's William Morris and Archibald Knox, Scotland's Charles Rennie Mackintosh and Jessie King, France's Emile Gallè and Auguste Delaherche, Germany's Peter Behrens and Hermann Obrist, Austria's Joseph Hoffmann and Koloman Moser, the United States's Louis Tiffany and Frank Lloyd Wright were included along with representatives from countries like Hungary, Belgium, and Norway. The exhaustive catalogue translated the British Arts and Crafts movement to *Le Style Anglais* so it could be considered as a subset of Art Nouveau. The "Ladies and Animals" sideboard painted by Edward Burne-Jones and the Robie House dining suite designed by Frank Lloyd Wright were surprising inclusions.*



Frank Lloyd Wright furniture in V&A Art Nouveau catalogue

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Alexander Fisher scone in V&A's "Art Nouveau" and "International Arts and Crafts"



Frank Lloyd Wright urn in V&A's Art Nouveau and Arts and Crafts and LACMA's catalogues



Archibald Knox silver is in both V&A catalogues and LACMA's book.

The Victoria and Albert will launch "International Arts and Crafts," March 17, 2005. The exhibition and catalogue promise to be nearly as inclusive as "Art Nouveau" and will travel to the United States. Designers and objects that were in "Art Nouveau" will be featured. Among them, William Morris, Alexander Fisher, Archibald Knox, Charles Rennie Mackintosh, Joseph Hoffmann, Emille Gallè, Frank Lloyd Wright, Charles Rohlf's, and George Washington Maher. Although the arts of Japan were necessarily discussed in "Art Nouveau," a new fillip of "International Arts and Crafts" will be the inclusion of Japan's Mingei movement. I will be interested to find out if this exhibition reverses the previous one by turning Art Nouveau into a subset of Arts and Crafts. Meanwhile Wendy Kaplan got her show "The Arts and Crafts Movement in Europe and America, 1880-1920: Design for the Modern World" up at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art on December 19, 2004 and the catalogue is on sale at Wal-Mart.

*Aside from being a showcase for a lot of pretty things paid for by Max Palevsky, Kaplan's show attempts to describe the Arts and Crafts movement in terms of its international influence thus trumping the V & A effort. Los Angeles County Museum director Andrea Rich says "The Arts and Crafts Movement in Europe and America is a groundbreaking exhibition, the first to assess the influence of the Arts and Crafts movement internationally." To my way of thinking, "best" would be a more worthwhile goal than "first," but I can't see how this catalogue is either. Many Arts and Crafts histories published since Gillian Naylor's "groundbreaking" *The Arts and Crafts Movement: A Study of its Sources, Ideals, and Influence on Design Theory* appeared in 1971 have assessed international influence. The Naylor book included furniture designed by Baillie-Scott for the Palace of Darmstadt as does Rüdiger Joppien in his essay for Kaplan. Naylor's broader study also discusses how Arts and Crafts influenced designs for the modern world like Hoffmann and van de Velde linoleum designs and German locomotives and automobiles. Even though the Arts and Crafts movement was very much involved with industrial design, Kaplan's narrow view, which is more concerned with elegant art objects than with the products of industry, does not have much to say about how the movement changed unlovely trains and boats and planes.*

I don't think definitions of either Art Nouveau or Arts and Crafts should be manipulated to include all styles in all nations. The current rush to change the Arts and Crafts movement from the humble linen smock of the British shepherd to a brilliant coat of many international colors makes me wish for a more limited definition. There may be a tipping point where the movement, weighed with so much universality, begins to lose meaning. Of course I would not have the temerity to claim to be the first to make this point.



Writing about Boston's 1897 Exhibition of the Arts and Crafts in the winter (1897) number of "Modern Art," editor Joseph Moore Bowles warned:

"Never to call it 'Arts and Crafts'! I rebel at the thought of it. The phrase is irrevocably associated in my mind and, I am sure, in the minds of many others, with the small, earnest group of pioneers in England. Our exhibit and possible society will, I fear, not deserve to receive the mantle of their name."

The article suggests that "We ought to know what is being done abroad; we ought to see the best that is being done in France, England and Germany. For the present England and France, at least, are leading, we [U.S.] following." That same issue also included an appreciation of Emile Gallé, who is today usually ensconced among the Art Nouveau designers. Had Amy Ogata discussed the Arts and Crafts aspects of Gallé's work in her essay about France and Belgium in Kaplan's book, we might better understand the differences between Art Nouveau and Arts and Crafts. Bowles writes, "Like William Morris, who, assisted by Rossetti and Burne Jones, made art furniture, glass windows, leather work, and tapestry, Gallé is one of the few who have applied themselves with equal success to various decorative arts." So as early as 1897, people were aware of the need to limit the boundaries of the Arts and Crafts movement, yet the LACMA production expands the boundaries.

Just a decade after the phrase "Arts and Crafts" was coined, Bowles made a plea to distinguish the movement's founding English philosophers from the international design style. He separates Morris's "art furniture" from the burden of Morris's romantic ideals and then compares it to Gallé's furniture. He shows that in its day Arts and Crafts international influence was circular and not linear. The French contribution was seen as different from but equal to the English and, with Germany, it could provide inspiration for the United States. His assessment of Americans as followers carried with it a list of craftsmen that is quite different from our modern pantheon. I use bits and pieces here, but his article is worth publishing again in full so I have reproduced the original magazine pages below. Bowles said Tiffany's glass forms were not consistently as artistic as Koepping's (Karl Koepping, 1848-1914, working in Berlin, Germany) and some of his stained-glass windows were over-rich and "marred by his false principle of reproducing pictures." Howard Pyle and George Wharton Edwards are listed as worthy "book decorators". "Most of our [wallpaper] is atrocious." "Embroidery is sadly weak and needlessly feminine." "We have no one, as far as I know, who always makes good furniture, whose every piece is even simple and of good proportions." "Then we have a Mr. Fosdick who burns designs in panels of wood with success--when he is not too ambitious."

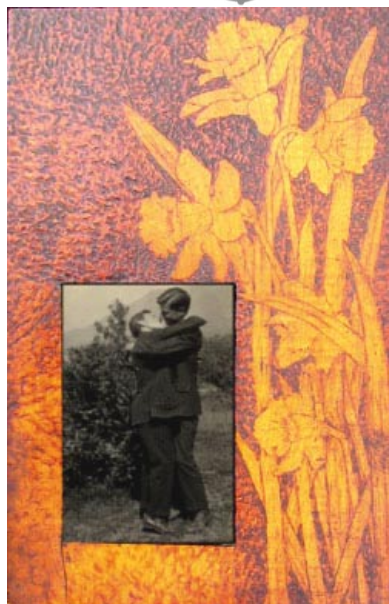


Karl Koepping



Examples of wood burning or “pyrography” are seldom included in modern surveys (“poker work” is mentioned once without definition in Kaplan’s book) although it was held in high regard in Bowles’ time. The pyrography of his “Mr. Fosdick” (James William Fosdick, 1858-1937) was often published in design magazines and it was even collected by art museums. St. Gaudens is praised as a “decorative sculptor” (an interesting category) and particularly for his medallions for the Boston Public Library. Medallion making was itself considered an art and Bowles had the highest praise for the polychrome medallions made by “an old man in Pawtucket, R.I.”

I mention the now little known crafts and craftsmen because the separation of Arts and Crafts philosophy and the art produced by adherents to that philosophy was problematic even before 1897. It remains so today. As the rarified objects chosen for the Kaplan/Palevsky exhibit demonstrate, art museums may appropriately attend to the art in Arts and Crafts. It may not be appropriate for art museums to try to define the movement, as has so often been the case in the United States. The craft process is paramount in Arts and Crafts philosophy whereas aesthetics are relatively unimportant. One hopes that the opposite is true in art museums and for this reason I look forward to an exhibit produced by a design museum like the Victoria and Albert.



A pyrography photo frame, c. 1895

*In her capacity as the exhibition curator and catalogue editor, Kaplan set the book up with scholarly essays about decorative arts in the United States, the United Kingdom and a select group of European countries. Italy (where the Cantagalli pottery produced ceramics designed by William De Morgan) and Spain (which had a huge influence on American Arts and Crafts and where Gaudi’s Sagrada Famiglia may be seen as an example of Arts and Crafts process) are notable omissions—all the more so because Kaplan was once curator of Mickey Wolfson’s propaganda museum where Italian decorative arts are featured. While at the Wolfsonian she produced *Designing Modernity: The Arts of Reform and Persuasion, 1885-1945*. That 1995 show/book was also based on one man’s collection and must have been good practice for the LACMA production. Both books scrutinize the “romantic nationalism” of Norway, Germany, England, and Finland. In the earlier book Kaplan writes “The influence of the British Arts and Crafts movement protagonists [on European romantic nationalism] can hardly be overstated.” Although left out in the introduction where Kaplan codifies the theoretical premise of the exhibition, the Wolfsonian book does include essays about Italy’s contribution. Even though they fit into Rich’s “influence of the Arts and Crafts movement internationally,” places like Russia, Japan and the Near East (where C. R. Ashbee taught design) are absent from the LACMA book perhaps because they are not in Europe. I realize limits must be set since anything designed and produced in its own time must, perforce, be a design for the modern world.*



A jardiniere made by the Cantagalli workshops in Florence, Italy.



In his short “Sponsor’s Statement,” Max Palevsky takes space to document his credentials by noting that he has been collecting Arts & Crafts since the early 1970s. In making an apt comparison of today’s computer technology to the 19th century’s industrialization, he stakes a claim as founder of one of the earliest computer companies. Likening himself to William Morris, who wished to mitigate the effects of “the great intangible machine of commercial tyranny,” which alienated people from “pleasure in labour,” Palevsky believes that what he sees as the good aspects of computer technology (to “expedite work and solve serious problems,”) has been perverted. He writes: “I, too, oppose the depersonalization that comes from the hypnotic quality of computer games, the substitute of a Google search for genuine inquiry, the instant messaging that has replaced social discourse.” Such moral-values elitism extends the comparison to Morris. Most of the society Morris and his cohorts hoped to improve did not have the luxury of appreciating the beauty in tending a flock of mud and dung encrusted sheep. Nor does most of today’s society have the will, the way, or the need to use its computers to solve “serious problems, from space travel to record keeping.” I would like to argue the seriousness of space travel sometime, but, for now, I will say only that Google is one tool I use to escape the drudgery and waste of time in researching minutiae, a necessary part of my “genuine inquiry.” I am no longer nimble enough to master instant messaging so I see it as “social discourse” in which I do not engage. Computer games could not exist without computer graphics programs like Adobe’s Photoshop. As an artist, I have found my medium in computer technology just as W.A.S. Benson found his in lathe production of metal objects.

The LACMA catalogue begins with Alan Crawford’s “United Kingdom: Origins and First Flowering.” Crawford is a subtle subversive who eschews hyperbolic concepts of “modernity,” “innovative,” or “groundbreaking” so he can more objectively help us explore the era of Arts and Crafts. He is willing to qualify with phrases like “more or less”—“The technique [of glazing with lusters] had been more or less lost, but De Morgan experimented until he had re-created it.” In fact the technique was very much less lost. As with so many craft techniques “revived” by Arts and Craftsmen, its invented, romantic associations to the old ways being ideologically important. Many artisans in the United States put endless hours into experimentation to rediscover techniques already mastered centuries earlier in other societies. Hugh Robertson worked obsessively to achieve a red glaze that had already been perfected in China and in Europe. The Rookwood pottery couldn’t get its glazes to “fit” its clay and its “Tiger Eye” glaze was considered a “happy accident” though it had been achieved intentionally for centuries in Japan and elsewhere. By characterizing John Ruskin’s as but one among many “voices raised against the industrial spirit of the age,” Crawford begins to delineate a context for the Arts and Crafts movement whereas most modern American writers make the movement seem like it was the only game in town. We in the decorative arts tend to dump Morris when he began to pay more attention to socialism than to rugs and wallpaper,



Jane Morris trapped in an altered state



An oxblood glaze devised by Ralph Whitehead for use on White Pines pottery



but Crawford points out that Morris, Crane, and Ashbee were socialists before and while they developed their concept of an Arts and Crafts movement.

The first essay (Crawford's) and the last (Kaplan's "America: The Quest for Democratic Design") set up the parameters of the book's chronological, geographical premise. The middle essays take one part way around the world in 177 pages. In Kaplan's world, the hot air balloon of British origins drops down in the United States without allowing for a pre-existing context that was already fertile ground for Arts and Crafts. Shakers and Quakers as well as Ralph Emerson, Henry Thoreau, and Bronson Alcott had already experimented with the utopian simple life, which included rethinking industrialization and education. Periodicals like *The Godey's Lady's Book* were already publishing designs for the "model homes" of Samuel Sloan as well as instructions for crafts like embroidery and china painting that were identical in every way to those in later publications like *Ladies Home Journal* or *The Craftsman*, which in Kaplan's view were "progressive" and "modern." The middle class was the target audience for the earlier lifestyle magazine just as it was for Arts and Crafts influenced magazines.



Needlework design from 1867
Godey's lady's Book

That being said, some qualification of the target is needed. Kaplan paints with too broad a brush when she writes, "the largest middle class in the world" had "the leisure necessary to pursue crafts as personal fulfillment—a domestic hobby apart from the white-collar world." Less romantic descriptions of the middle class in the United States suggest that it was not just or even mostly "white collar" and I believe only a small fraction of the middle class had the leisure necessary for hobbies. While some middle class farmer's wives did embroider pretty things that were not necessities, studies show that few took the time to make "darned net curtains" from instructions they found in *The Craftsman*. When Kaplan characterizes Gustav Stickley, the magazine's publisher, as "hugely influential," it isn't clear that she means only among a few of the elite of the upper part of the middle class of the United States of America. Contrary to Kaplan's spin, no part of the Arts and Crafts was ever pervasive in United States culture because the styles in which it was clothed were not appealing to the population in general. Countless magazine articles were written criticizing the severity of the mission style. The illustrations in trend-setting magazines such as *American Homes and Gardens* or *House Beautiful* indicate that, then, most people preferred gilded French styles. Today, though, the popularity of Arts and Crafts in its day need not be used to validate the Arts and Crafts movement and to make it worthy of our consideration as the splendid objects in this exhibition attest.



Country house for a moderate-sized family by Samuel Sloan for *Godey's Lady's Book*, 1862



A middle-class New England parlor filled with handmade arts and crafts

Often, when we want to study an early aspect of America's material culture, we resort to a fairly rigorous discipline like archaeology, and analyze shards found in dumps and back yards. Although archeological studies have been consulted to describe usage patterns of things like Rockingham ware (see Jane Perkins Claney, *Rockingham Ware in American Culture, 1830-1930: Reading Historical Artifacts*, University Press of New



*England, 2004), this has, to my knowledge, never been done to understand usage of Arts and Crafts objects. This is perhaps because we think the movement's influence is already accurately depicted in the period source material so often cited in art histories like *The Arts and Crafts Movement in Europe and America*. Had I been a little brighter fifty years ago, I would have searched for matte green Grueby pottery shards among the iridescent art glass fragments (doubtless carnival, not Tiffany, for it was a middle class neighborhood) we used to collect from the ravine stream that ran behind our circa 1900 cottage. But we didn't know our house was Arts and Crafts and we didn't think crockery bits without gold and roses were worthy of our windowsills.*

Kaplan seems to have waited to write her essay about America until all the others were complete so she could quote from them. The problem with recycling other people's thoughts becomes apparent when she writes that the essays all "have demonstrated the inaccuracy of a common perception about the Arts and Crafts movement—that it was monolithically anti-industrial and antimodern." Such a perception may have existed before Robert Judson Clarke's 1972 Princeton exhibition. It may even have existed before Kaplan's 1987 Boston exhibition, but what on earth is the point of all that time and text if the perception is still common in 2005? She is beating dead horses with tired concepts by repeating stuff like the idea that there was anything democratic about Prairie School design, or that those designs expressed fundamental Arts and Crafts principles like "truth to the 'nature of materials'," "honest structure," or "simplicity." Frank Lloyd Wright's only experiment in democratic design, Unsonian houses, was certainly not embraced by America's "vast middle class." What actually is meant by truth to the nature of materials or honest structure or simplicity? What is true or honest or simple about stucco, which was used from coast to coast to cover structures that were wood or hollow tile or metal and that had complex floor plans and windows "leaded" in intricate zinc-came patterns, which were often plated with golden or bronze colors? If we hope to change common perceptions, we need to question rather than merely accept what Arts and Craftsmen wrote.

*A leitmotif of this book is the concept of *Gesamtkunstwerk* or, as Kaplan puts it, "a complete work of art perfectly integrated with, and indeed of, its surroundings." Most of the essayists latch on to the word when they write about the Palais Stoclet or Pressens Villa or the Rózsavölgyi Music Shop. Even Crawford applies it to Seddings' Holy Trinity Church, but I guess "Holy Trinity" deserves as much. Kaplan is happy to have the word to describe Greene and Greene's Blacker House. Surely the concept is applicable to all these situations, but it is not the result of Arts and Crafts ideas nor is it "modern." One might not approve of the taste exhibited at the Breakers, an 1893 Richard Morris Hunt "cottage" in Newport, R.I., but that house is undeniably an exemplar of *Gesamtkunstwerk*. So too are many of Robert Adams' great houses in the United Kingdom and Ludwig's castles in Bavaria. There have always been examples of *Gesamtkunstwerk* in every part of the world so it is something of a moot point when applied to Arts and Crafts.*



Myriad dishonest materials like decorative lathe applied to stucco on the complex facade of the E. P. Irving house



Intricate wisteria window with gold-plated zinc came, Darwin Martin house



Gesamtkunstwerk in Newport, Rhode Island, 1893, Richard Morris Hunt



But I want to get back to the Greene brothers on the West Coast. Kaplan often makes comparisons that are non-sequiturs:

“California also provided the movement with its most potent symbol of the democratization of art—the bungalow. Although built throughout the country, the bungalow has always been associated with California; its open interior, one-story plan, prominent porch, and low-pitched, over-hanging roof offered ventilation and protection from the sun suitable to the state’s climate, and its rapid assembly, affordability, and informality made it particularly advantageous for the state’s mobile society.”

There are several bits of truth here, but they don’t add up the way Kaplan wants them to. First off, I would agree that Greene and Greene “bungalows” were and continue to be classified as art, but hundreds of thousands of other bungalows had nothing to do with designers’ lofty ideas about the democratization of art. Most were slapped up by anyone interested in saving a buck from real estate developers, to factory owners building worker housing, to farmers, to do-it-yourself homeowners. Like Greene brothers houses, bungalows usually had more than one story. They usually had cramped rooms made all the more dreary by their porches and eaves. Their informality was probably more a symbol of the inhabitants’ low economic status than of a choice of lifestyle. I don’t always associate bungalows with California perhaps because my grandparents lived in a wood-framed bungalow (“one manifestation of the local vernacular in California”), which was, being in Old Orchard Beach, Maine, far from the heavenly West Coast.

Kaplan writes that California’s sleeping porches, pergolas, and patios were “features almost unknown in inclement Great Britain.” This odd observation must come from her idea that Arts and Crafts came all neat and pre-packaged from the United Kingdom. Parts of California such as Santa Barbara were often treasured for their likeness to parts of Italy where pergolas (an Italian word from the Latin: pergula) and patios are commonplace. I am sure that there have been exhibitions in which 1950s “mobile homes” were treated as art. They too have a certain informality, affordability, and rapid assembly that is advantageous to California’s mobile society. But what if the Airstream, like many pre-fab bungalows, was made in Ohio and dragged to California? Perhaps the most that should be said about a California bungalow is that it is a bungalow in California.

The amount of handwork in Arts and Crafts in general and in Gustav Stickley’s furniture in particular has been mythologized by art museum curators with little knowledge of production techniques. The observation that the moldings, complicated chamfering, and inlaid tile on Stickley’s



“The house of the democrat,” a two-storey stucco bungalow with dark, damp cramped interiors designed by Will Price and built in Rose Valley, PA



A two-storey bungalow with “prominent porch” and “over-hanging roof” in Oxford, PA



One of several pergolas designed by Will Price and built in Rose Valley, PA, which has a climate that gardeners often liken to Great Britain



Damascus plant stand were labor-intensive and expensive to produce is inaccurate. Grand Rapids had hundreds of factories that spewed out thousands of stands like Stickley's and the most labor-intensive touch of the human hand they got was the flip of a switch unless a child's hand got mauled in the dangerous machinery. The theory that Stickley's designs evolved from more handwork to less as he began to accept machinery is also flawed. Stickley was trained in his uncle's mechanized furniture factory. Kaplan quotes David Cathers, who accurately states, "This shift in emphasis towards plainness and standardization enabled Stickley to streamline his production process..." Cathers does not equate simplicity and streamlining with reduction of handwork as Kaplan does. She claims that a 1901 serving table required a "good deal of hand work," and that Stickley "compromised" some standard with the 1905 introduction of a serving table designed with greater rectilinearity. The implication is that the 1901 piece required more handwork than the 1905 piece, which is not the case. The now rare 1901 table may in fact have more handwork, but not because more handwork was required to produce it. Early Stickley furniture was made in small numbers and some was experimental so handwork was efficient. Hundreds of the 1905 model were made making handwork unwise and impractical although Stickley himself continued the ruse of the use of handcraftsmanship.



The relatively crude leading forms a dragon in this unique fixture that was made for use in Tiffany's own home.

One might better understand the Arts and Crafts cult of handwork if a rug knotted by William Morris himself had been chosen to illustrate the book. His lack of technical skill coupled with his determination to experience beauty in the process of making a rug shows in the finished product. This is what Arts and Crafts honesty means and it doesn't show in the slick objects made by professional craftsmen that dominate the exhibit. The grillage in Koloman Moser's Wiener Werkstätte plant stand has nothing to do with handwork. While handwork is evident in some examples of Tiffany's leaded glass, it is not important in the commercial poppy table lamp in the Palevsky collection, which was manufactured in multiples. Many of the things illustrated that have the look of handwork are merely poseurs and as such they are anathema to Arts and Crafts. Handwork is only symbolic on Shreve & Co. silver and it has no meaningful effect on Grueby pottery. There were countless amateur hobbyists who carried forth the Morris ideal, but their honest efforts are nowhere to be found in this book.



LACMA's Byrdcliffe desk

Although Rich says the catalogue "fully documents the exhibition," it is difficult to know which of the illustrated objects are actually in the exhibition as there are no photographs in the checklist. Few of the objects photographed are referenced in the essays making their inclusion in the exhibition more difficult to understand. For example, the Byrdcliffe Arts and Crafts Colony is nowhere mentioned in the text, but LACMA owns an important Byrdcliffe desk, which is in the show and rates a full-page color illustration. The catalogue entries for the desk are inaccurate. I know of no documentation that connects Ned Thatcher to the brass hinge escutcheons and I do not believe that Zulma Steele designed the whole

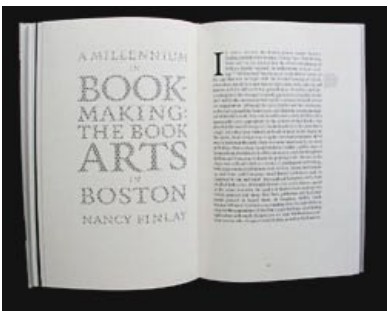


desk as indicated on page 314. Annoyingly, color illustrations are out of registration on pages 110 and 199 and, while I'm at it, the lace in 5.15 would have more significance if it were identified as a fan panel rather than as "lace trimming." By 1904 when the piece was made, a fan with handmade lace was certainly a luxury object used only by the relatively rich. Mere "lace trimming" might have been made by the user and found on clothing worn by women of both the middle and upper classes.



The Arts and Crafts in Europe and America

In order to convey the feeling of Arts and Crafts style, *The Arts and Crafts in Europe and America* uses two Arts and Crafts-style type faces that do nothing to enhance the design of the book. Designed in 1910, *Hobo* is a bloated font that isn't much good for combining with other fonts because it doesn't integrate well. The body of text is printed in a heavy *Fairplex* font, which is a modern alteration of a *Morris* font, while the inconsistently-used italics are printed in a font with very thin elements causing the eye to stumble over each title or foreign language callout. By contrast, the book *Inspiring Reform: Boston's Arts and Crafts Movement* (1997, Harry Abrams, Inc.) was designed using an Arts and Crafts sensibility that resulted in beautiful clarity.



Inspiring Reform: Boston's Arts and Crafts Movement

LACMA's catalogue dust jacket trumpets that the more than 300 objects have never been displayed together before and therefore they make a visually stunning, definitive survey. Laura Bush and her visually stunning Oscar de la Renta inaugural ball gown had never been displayed together before either, but, if that's all there is my friend, then let's keep dancing.





In the interests of full disclosure, in place of endnotes and in defense of Google, I list information I found using Google instead of my own or a public library. In most cases, I needed only to enter search words and did not need to open any particular site to obtain the information I sought. Google was no help in discerning if the above constitutes a genuine inquiry:

Details of “International Arts and Crafts” from www.vam.ac.uk/exhibitions/future_exhibs/artscrafts/

Japan’s Mingei movement: www.e-yakimono.net/guide/html/mingei.html

*Cheapest price for “The Arts and Crafts Movement in Europe and America”:
www.walmart.com/*

Max Palevsky: www.rottentomatoes.com/p/max_palevsky/

Karl Koepping: www.cmog.org/index.asp?pageld=551

William James Fosdick: <http://carverscompanion.com/Ezine/Vol2Issue1/Mendez/>

Rockingham Ware in American Culture: www.upne.com/1-58465-412-0.html

Date for “The Breakers”: www.bc.edu/bc_org/avp/cas/fnart/fa267/19house2.html

Museum exhibition of mobile homes: www.mjt.org/exhibits/trailers/trailers.html

To check the derivation of “pergola”: www.dictionary.reference.com/search?g=pergola

*Fonts: <http://www.linotype.com/535/hobo-family.html>
<http://www.fontpool.com/fonts/emigre/fairplex.html>*

Laura Bush’s gown: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/firstlady/inauguration.html>



As a recent review of “The Arts and Crafts Movement in Europe and America” shows, there is potential danger in changing “common perceptions” about the Arts and Crafts movement with spin instead of “genuine inquiry.” Excerpts from Frances McQueeny-Jones Mascolo’s article for the January 21, 2005 issues of Antiques and the Arts Weekly eloquently illustrate the problem:

“[The exhibition] is accompanied by a scholarly catalog that will serve as the definitive text on Arts and Crafts for collectors and scholars for some time to come.”

Let us hope not! This book is more about itself than it is about the Arts and Crafts movement.

“This groundbreaking exhibit explores one of the most influential design movements ever...”

I have already shown that the exhibit is not groundbreaking. Those familiar with earthly design movements past and present might also question McQueeny-Jones Mascolo’s assessment of the influence of a fuzzy movement like Arts and Crafts.

“The new Arts and Crafts objects were perceived as stunningly simple after the more lurid excesses of the Victorian age. The attention to detail and line was confounding after the coarseness of much of the mass-production of the time. The homely objects were met initially with skepticism, then acceptance and finally great enthusiasm... The focus was on free-flowing naturalism, a welcome relief after the mechanism of much of the previous century.”

I don’t know who was perceiving a Morris & Co. interior as “stunningly simple.” The Arts and Crafts movement may have sought to reform industry, but in retrospect we should be able to see it as part of the Victorian age. One can find Arts and Crafts objects that are no less excessive or more homely than other nineteenth-century objects. There was no opposition between “free-flowing naturalism” and “mechanism.” “Great enthusiasm” applies only if you accept “one of the most influential design movements ever.”

*“Gustav Stickley, influenced dramatically by the writings of Morris and Ruskin, and on the strength of his publication, *The Craftsman*, was the undisputed leader of the American Arts and Crafts movement. No fool, he introduced his simple and sturdy New Furniture line in 1900 at the furniture fair in Grand Rapids, Mich.”*

Stickley probably was “no fool”, yet much of his New Furniture line was not sturdy. Joseph McHugh, among other furniture manufacturers, disputed Stickley’s position. Surely none of these businessmen was more influential than philosophers like Charles Elliot Norton. It is only modern dealers and aficionados who have made his leadership undisputed.



“Although many of their houses were built on a grand scale, the [Greene] brothers are credited with having devised the bungalow, a style particularly suited to California but that was adapted easily throughout the country.”

“Bungalow” as a specific term and as the style we now associate with the Arts and Crafts movement existed around the world long before Greene and Greene began to build even their most modest houses.

“A major part of the Arts and Crafts movement in America was the pottery designed to be incorporated into the homes of the period. Generally organic in nature, the pieces proved to be extremely popular with the public.”

I need to do a genuine inquiry into the pottery that was not designed to be incorporated into the homes of the period. I suppose that since pottery is generally made of clay, it might be considered to be organic in nature. But the designs of potteries like Teco, Marblehead, or Paul Revere/S.E.G. were not generally organic if “organic” means “developing in a manner analogous to the natural growth and evolution characteristic of living organisms.”

If Adelaide Robineau can be trusted, one has to assume that the artiest art pottery was not extremely popular with the public. She published many articles in *Keramic Studio*, which admonished the public for its taste that favored realistic cabbage roses over her idea of good design. The overblown blossoms painted on Rookwood vases pandered to an audience of Victorian Philistines and so Robineau had a very difficult time selling her exquisite pots.

An American "Arts and Crafts." By Joseph Moore Bowles

Prospectus
EXHIBITION OF THE
Arts and Crafts
Copley Hall: Boston
Representing the ap-
plication of Art to In-
dustry and comprising
manufactured articles
and original designs
for the same

Design
and Initial for
a Prospectus.
By Theodore
Brown Hap-
good, Jr.



BOSTON occasionally stumbles in to priority in a matter of art progress, thanks to the taste and perseverance of some of her citizens. The Library was one instance of such precedence, and the so-called "Arts and Crafts" exhibition is another.

Of course, a broad movement like this does not spring full-armed from the head of Jove, and this exhibition is no exception to the rule. Impulses toward a show of this character could have been traced several years ago in the minds of a group of young designers and architects, or rather men who combine both of these professions. More or less influenced by the real "Arts and Crafts," and always in touch with its admirable exhibits, it was but natural

that they should have dreamed of a small show built closely upon the lines of the English one, and indeed have secured the promise of several members of the society from which the present movement has borrowed its name to send things over when the time, in the estimation of the critical projectors, was ripe for such an exposition in these United States.

However, the genuinely artistic temperament is contemplative and creative, rather than active, and the sad truth is it tends to what the prompt and pushing man of affairs calls procrastination, either this or it was felt that it was too early in the day of

America's growth in decorative art, to talk of exhibits; in fact, that there was not yet enough material to make a worthy one. So it came about that no definite steps towards getting one up, or forming a society, ever came about from this group. Though occasionally talked over, the whole matter lay dormant until this winter, when the idea was approached from an entirely different direction, being taken up and worked out by Mr. H. L. Johnson, a young man whose especial field has been printing; the devising of high-class commercial work, much of which has been of artistic quality. Mr. Johnson has with quiet devotion and persistence brought about the first American "Arts and Crafts," in spite of many obstacles and some indifference. He has had the assistance of a committee — rather cleverly named an Advisory Board — composed of architects, amateurs and gentlemen holding official positions in the Boston art "world." It is perhaps a little unfortunate that

this board bears the name of but one artist and no genuine craftsman on its list of members. I cannot help feeling that the exhibit might be helped by the presence of a practical worker or two, fresh from the field, and in every-day communication with the active art life which is to be represented.

All that remains now, of course, is to see what kind of a show this first one will be. For my part I cannot think that, for a few years at least, a really interesting and useful, not to say beautiful, exhibit as large as the one planned can be given. The great amount of good material which such an exhibit must be able to draw upon is not in sight, though it is true, of course, that this show may result in a general stirring up of things which will bring to light many excellent workers of whom we do not now know. In that case a second exposition will be more interesting, and even more of a novelty, than the first.

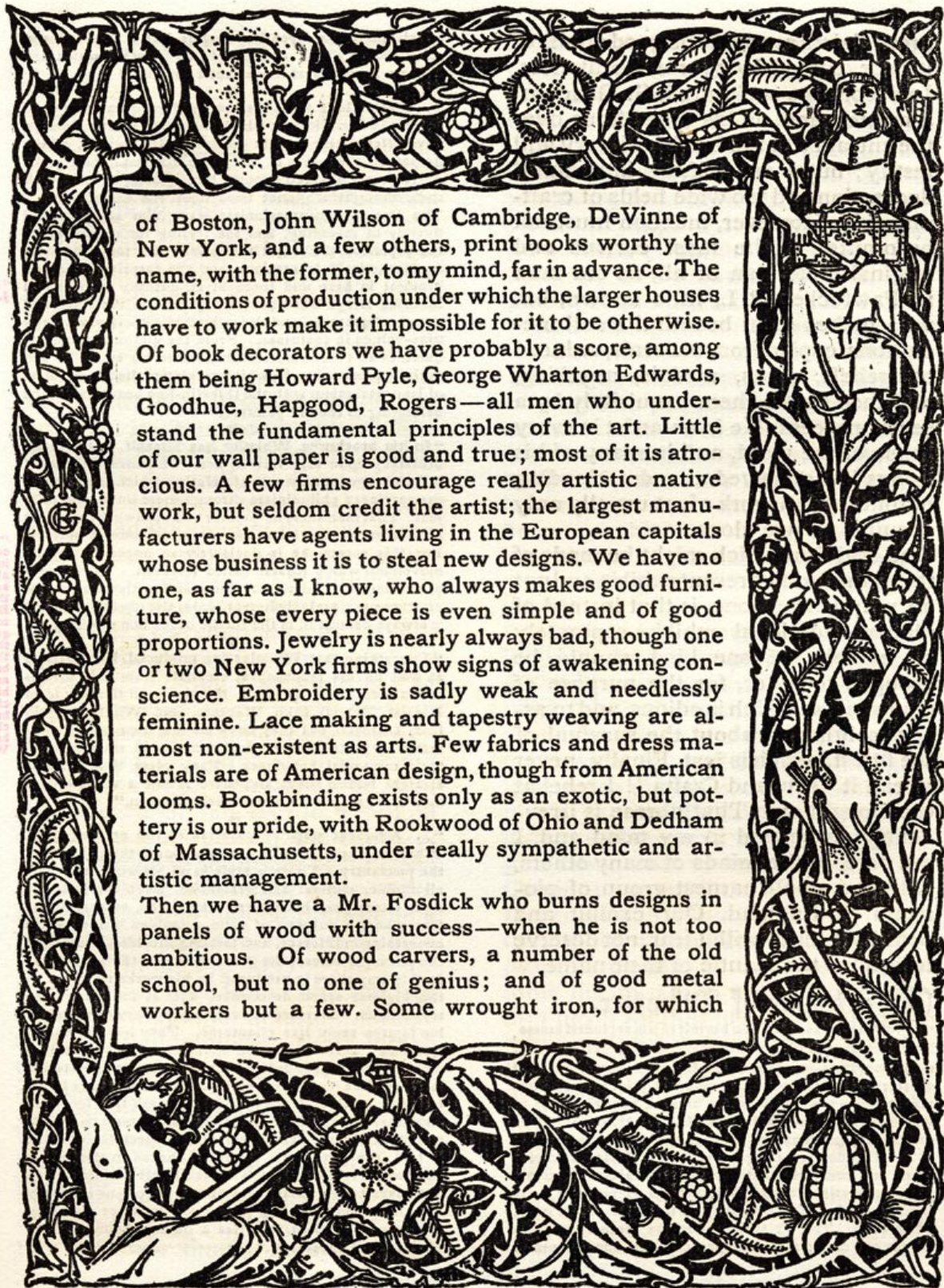
I fancy that the best plan to adopt for the first exhibit or two would be to draw heavily on foreign work, while showing, of course, the best of our own. We ought to know what is being done abroad; we ought to see the best that is being done in France, England and Germany. For the present England and France, at least, are leading, we following. It is folly for us not to be well acquainted with the work of our competitors. It would be edu-

cation for us first of all to become familiar with their production.

As one sums up the list of desirable American exhibitors the result is not deeply encouraging. We have a Tiffany working in glass, probably the most conspicuous of our craftsmen, owing to the multiplicity and attractive character of the costly experiments he has been able to indulge in. We have not, however, a Koepping, even more consistently artistic as regards form. In stained glass, Tiffany comes first to mind again with his windows, some beautiful, some over-rich, some marred by his false principle of reproducing pictures. Of makers of books there are a plenty, but the case need not be large to hold all the properly planned, printed and bound volumes that have been issued from American presses. Updike



Decorative Design from the Cover of the Catalogue. By Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue.



Border for
a Circular An-
nouncement.
By Bertram
Grosvenor
Goodhue.

of Boston, John Wilson of Cambridge, DeVinne of New York, and a few others, print books worthy the name, with the former, to my mind, far in advance. The conditions of production under which the larger houses have to work make it impossible for it to be otherwise. Of book decorators we have probably a score, among them being Howard Pyle, George Wharton Edwards, Goodhue, Hapgood, Rogers—all men who understand the fundamental principles of the art. Little of our wall paper is good and true; most of it is atrocious. A few firms encourage really artistic native work, but seldom credit the artist; the largest manufacturers have agents living in the European capitals whose business it is to steal new designs. We have no one, as far as I know, who always makes good furniture, whose every piece is even simple and of good proportions. Jewelry is nearly always bad, though one or two New York firms show signs of awakening conscience. Embroidery is sadly weak and needlessly feminine. Lace making and tapestry weaving are almost non-existent as arts. Few fabrics and dress materials are of American design, though from American looms. Bookbinding exists only as an exotic, but pottery is our pride, with Rookwood of Ohio and Dedham of Massachusetts, under really sympathetic and artistic management.

Then we have a Mr. Fosdick who burns designs in panels of wood with success—when he is not too ambitious. Of wood carvers, a number of the old school, but no one of genius; and of good metal workers but a few. Some wrought iron, for which

great claims are made, is good; most of it poor, cursed by over-elaborateness. In decorative sculpture is St. Gaudens, a masterhand, as his medallions over the entrance to the Public Library will testify; but I am drifting into mural decoration and too wide fields of craftsmanship. However, mention must not be omitted of the most curious and original craftsman of all, an old man in Pawtucket, R. I., little known, but who makes most beautiful small medallions, copied from old seals, reduced bas-reliefs, coins, medals, anything, and then colors them exquisitely by a secret process. He is an artist in every sense of the word, and in many of his things has achieved a tender blending of tones that a work of art usually only acquires by age alone.

One criticism which might be made of the plans for the present exhibit, and not an unimportant one, is that instead of placing individual exhibits separately all exhibits of one kind should be grouped together, for the purpose of comparison, which is odious, and to assist in bringing about the survival of the fittest, which is just. Finally, never to call it "Arts and Crafts"! I rebel at the thought of it. That phrase is irrevocably associated in my mind and, I am sure, in the minds of many others, with the small, earnest group of pioneers in England. Our exhibit and possible society will, I fear, not deserve to receive the mantle of their name.

An estimate of Whistler.

"... Whistler seems like a hermit in his secluded house, like the monarch of a far kingdom peopled only with his own thoughts — a realm where he reigns in the midst of mysterious landscapes and grave and quiet men and women, who have stood near him in mind and spirit, and to whom his brush has given new life. The thoughtful eyes of women gaze upon you; fair hair, black and grey furs, pale, fading flowers, and grey felt hats with black feathers stand out from dusty canvases placed carelessly to one side, — sometimes taking definite form, sometimes melting intangibly and indistinctly as if seen through grey, silky veils. The air which envelops them is at once bright and dark; the atmosphere of this silent room in

which the painter sees his models has a subdued and shrouded daylight, an old light as it were, which has become harmonious like a faded Gobelin."

"... Whistler's art is the most refined quintessence of all that is finest in that which the most recent decades have offered the artistic gourmet. In London, where he passed the years of his youth, the feminine figures of Rossetti hovered around him, gazing at him with their thoughtful glance fixed upon the world beyond. The Parisian Impressionists gave him softness and fluency of modeling, and the feeling for atmosphere; the Japanese, the bright harmony of their tone, the taste for fantastic (*) decorations, and the surprises of detail brought in here and there in an entirely wayward (*) fashion; Diego Velasquez, the great line, the black and grey backgrounds, and the refined black and silver-grey tone-values in costumes. From the quaint and bizarre union of all these elements, he formed his exquisite and entirely personal style, which combines the acquisitions of Impressionism with the Gobelin-like beauties of tone belonging to the old painters."

* I object.
J. M. B.

"In his brochures, Whistler has himself written with brilliancy upon this view of art. The antithesis to art is, in his eyes, every sort of painting which is placed at the service of philistinism through mere interest of subject. That man alone is 'painter' who draws the motives for his harmonies from the accord of colored masses. For this reason he is decisively an opponent to the movement which Ruskin called Realism. The uncompromising reproduction of the model, without selection or attempt at embellishment, from the idea that nature is always beautiful, is the theme of his fine mockery."

"Everything that Whistler has produced, his portraits as well as his landscapes, emanate from this aristocratic sentiment of art. Millais is different from Bonnat, Bonnat from Wauters, and Wauters again from Lenbach, but they have all one element in common: in portraits they depict men and women in all their corporeal heaviness. They place their models straight before them, and there is not a wrinkle or a hair that escapes their remorseless vision."

"Nature indeed contains the element in color and form of all pictures, as the key board contains the notes of all music. But the artist is born to pick and choose an group, with science, these elements, that the result may be beautiful — as the musician gathers his notes and forms chords, until he brings forth from chaos glorious harmony."
WHISTLER.

"... Amongst portrait painters of the present time, Whistler stands as Millet does amongst the painters of the peasantry. There is style in all his work, and it is all simple, earnest and grandiose. Even the subdued light enveloping his figures like a veil, serves, in the first place, a purpose of style — enables him to avoid everything indifferent, and to bring into his picture only the principal values, the great lines, the 'living points.' In this way there is produced in his works an effect in the highest sense decorative, and at the same time mysterious. Divested of everything paltry or material, his figures seem like phantoms. They have lost their shadows; shadows indeed themselves, they live in a delicate ashen-grey milieu; they are almost immaterial, as if set free from the weight of the body; they hover between earth and heaven, like a breath that has been compressed and will soon dissolve once more as swiftly as it took shape. They remind the spectator of what is told of spiritualistic séances; spaces in the air are seen to compress themselves; the spirit is materialized and takes bodily shape, and stands before us infinitely calm, a reflective being, with a meditative or a gravely self-conscious mien, just like a human being, and divested of all substance."

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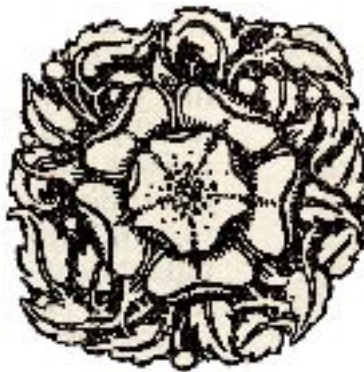
Robert Edwards has assembled the information on the web site
AmericanDecorativeArt.com to share his interests.

Important figures like Jane and Ralph Whitehead of the
Byrdcliffe Arts and Crafts Colony and Will Price of Rose Valley
are featured. This site also explores the work of artists

WHITE PINES POTTERY: THE CONTINUING ARTS AND CRAFTS EXPERIMENT

by
John Scott Bradstreet, Whatton Esherick, Max Kuehne,
Norman Arsenault, and many others who were active between
Jane Perkins Clane
1860 and 1960.

footnotes numbered as such : **20**
appear on page 13



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