

FINE ART FASCINATING FACTS

"You may crush an artist by telling him that what he has just done may be quite good in its own way, only it is not 'Art' ".
(Gombrich, 1950)

Albert Goodwin (1845-1932), a Maidstone watercolourist eagerly collected today, exhibited his first painting at the Royal Academy when he was just fifteen.

There are over 10,500 continental old master paintings in 233 public collections in the United Kingdom, representing the work of 1,750 different artists.

18th Century artists obtained a red pigment from cochineal insects, purple from shellfish, golden yellow from cattle gallstones, white from bird's eggshells and black from burnt bone and horn.

ILLUSTRATIONS

- 1 - Mrs Burbridge. Oil on Canvas. Nathaniel Dance-Holland (1734-1811)
- 2 - Kathleen. Bronze. Jacob Epstein (1880-1959)
- 3 - Maidstone High Street 1829. Watercolour. G.S. Shepherd (1784-1858)
- 4 - The Stray Kitten. Watercolour. Helen Allingham (1848-1926)
- 5 - Winter Scene. Oil on Panel. Nicolaes Molenaer (1630-1676)

looked, or their status; some pictures have a social or satirical comment; and art was the only visual reportage before television or photography was available. Contemporary art often challenges people to rethink important issues, sometimes raising the artist to a media star.

Historically, artists were commissioned by the Church or State to provide images to educate, inform or persuade a largely illiterate population. Subjects were biblical, or heroes and gods from

classical legend, and styles were controlled by academies, established masters and wealthy patrons. When a country's trade and economy boomed, the 'bourgeoisie' demanded art celebrating the good life, and bombastic portraits demonstrating success.

Museum art collections are often founded on bequests of the personal collections of wealthy, local Victorian benefactors. Frequently, a memorial gallery and trusteeship were set up to ensure preservation for posterity. Contemporary museums have the complex task of updating

their collections through committees, grants and competitive fund raising,

whilst retaining the philanthropic spirit of the original gift.



Fine art is usually taken to mean oil or acrylic paintings on panels or stretched canvas, including drawings on paper in watercolours, pencil, ink and coloured chalks. Two-dimensional art includes prints - both 'relief', such as lino or wood block, and 'intaglio' such as etching and engraving.

In the past, prints were cheaper, mass-produced versions of paintings or illustrations to literature. Increasingly artists have produced them as valid fine art media in their own right. Three-dimensional art can be in any medium, including sculpture in wood, metal, stone or plaster. Recently, 'installations' and time-based media (like video and sound recordings) have extended art into a performance, and the viewer into a participating audience.

'Fine art' sometimes seems have no function other than aesthetic, but all art has a purpose. Portraiture shows how someone

DECORATIVE ART FASCINATING FACTS

Quilt comes from the Latin word 'culcita' - a stuffed sack, a term used from the 13th Century. The Victorian poor had quilts stuffed with paper.

Glass is acid-proof, except against the powerfully corrosive hydrofluoric acid made of fluorine and hydrogen, which is used to etch it.

'Bone' china is a porcelain modified in the late 18th Century at Bow, when up to 50% animal bone ash was added to the clay to make it less likely to collapse wastefully in the kiln during firing.

Maidstone Museum owns an ebony and ivory inlaid 'director's chair' said to have been sat in by Henry VIII during a visit to Allington Castle in 1530.

ILLUSTRATIONS

- 1 - Silver Rose Bowl by Omar Ramsden, 1920
- 2 - William & Mary Delftware Plate. Late 17th Century
- 3 - 'Boyes & Crownes' Detail of Walnut Chair Back. About 1670
- 4 - Glass 'Cockatoo' Car Mascot. About 1920
- 5 - 'Log Cabin' Patchwork Quilt. Late 19th Century

instruments. Due to restricted space and varying demand from visitors, only a limited range is displayed in the Galleries.

Durable furniture carved from wood is uncomfortable to use without padded and decorated textiles to add luxury and visual interest. For the successful Victorian, a set of elaborately woven or painstakingly hand-embroidered soft furnishings emphasised that the household was wealthy, and that there were spare, skilled women producing art for the home. Similarly, antiques or expensive craft objects displayed around the house proclaimed connoisseurship, travel opportunity and a competitive lifestyle.

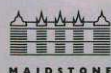
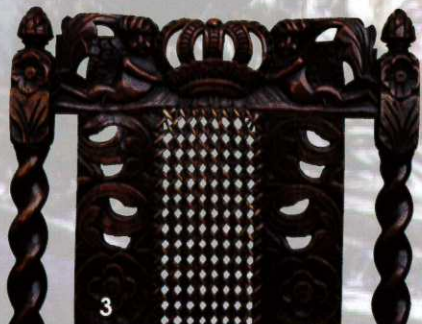
Collections of decorative art bequeathed by local philanthropists, formed the basis of most museums from the 18th up to the early 20th Century. Possibly this fact encouraged the outdated preconception that museums were dusty, inaccessible

collections of treasures meant primarily for the educated specialist. Contemporary museums are emphatically for everyone to enjoy, especially the decorative arts collections - familiar objects transformed by the skilful application of art.



Decorative arts encompass a wide range of art techniques involved in the production and decoration of utilitarian objects, commonly found in our domestic and urban environment. Crafts such as textiles, ceramics and metalworking are often thought of as decorative arts, though many contemporary makers are crossing the divide between 'decorative' and 'fine' art. For example, a very large, extraordinary pot could be termed a 'sculpture'.

Maidstone Museum's decorative art collections cover ancient civilisations up to recent times, emphasising the 18th and 19th Centuries. The Museum has examples of furniture and accessories such as embroideries and samplers, ceramics and glass from Europe and the Orient, a range of base and precious metalware and jewellery from Western and Eastern cultures, enamel and lacquerwork from Japan, stained glass and musical



HAIDSTONE
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