

2001: A Frame Odyssey

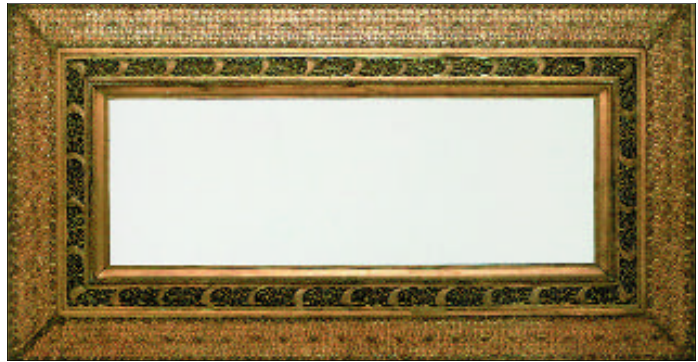
by Margery Schwartz

The year 2001 will certainly be a Space Odyssey—for framers, that is. In May through July 2001, the Columbus Museum of Art in Ohio will host The International Institute for Frame Study's traveling exhibit, "The Frame in America: 1860-1960." This will show the importance of the space of the frame on a wall, on a painting and in a museum. An added factor in the 2001 viewing of the Columbus venue is that it is being sponsored by Reed Arts, Inc., a local gallery.

The majority of the sixty historic frames from a private collection, will be hanging alone, without paintings so that the viewers will see the full impact of the frame itself. The exhibit focuses on one of the most creative periods of American frame design and on the tools, materials and methods used in frame manufacturing. Text panels and label copy will explain how each frame was made and what art it may be best suited to frame.

Among the famous designs included in the show are an original James McNeil Whistler reeded frame, Stanford White's Renaissance-inspired frames, and John Marin and Lee Gatch's painted frames. William B. Adair, curator of the exhibit, feels the Prendergast Dreamwold Frame (see photo) is his favorite and most important in the exhibit. "It has everything—carving, gilding, punchwork. It also tells a story. The frame is symbolic because the commission was the catalyst that allowed the

Prendergast brothers to move to New York and pursue their art careers. The frame was commissioned by Thomas Lawson, the entrepreneur of



Joseph and Alexander Cabus, designed by Stanford White, (detail), n.d., oil-gilded composition on pine, 35" x 66". Collection David and Ann Sellin.



Dreamwold Frame, 1908. Designed and fabricated by Charles and Maurice Prendergast. Basswood and 23k gold leaf, 40 3/4" x 108". Lent by the Terra Museum of American Art, Chicago, Illinois; Gift of Salander-O'Reilly Galleries.

his day, who obviously understood the value of fine art."

Nannette Macijunes, senior curator of the Columbus Museum, feels this exhibit is very unique and important. "This museum thinks that most people that come to the exhibit will learn something they don't already know. We're so used to concentrating on the painting that this will be a refreshing new way to focus on the frame."

Educational programs such as "How Frames Are Made" are being planned in conjunction with the exhibit. The museum has many

hand-crafted frames on hand now in permanent exhibits and is also considering giving a guided tour of these to show how paintings interact with frames.

Especially exciting and refreshing is that Reed Arts, Inc., in Columbus is the main sponsor for this venue. Barbara Baker, owner of the gallery became attracted to the show when she attended an exhibit and seminar in Washington, D.C., at the show's first venue sponsored by The Fine Arts Program of the Federal Reserve Board in 1995. Baker waited to meet Adair and pur-

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sued the idea by contacting ExhibitsUSA, the show's organizer.

Reed Arts' gallery specializes in upper-end work for galleries, collectors and museums, framing original art or fine signed and number pieces. They have corporate accounts and do have a small commercial following. They do not mass produce. Reed's does frame restoration on the premises. They also make their own frames, do gilding, leafing and custom staining.

Baker looks forward to the exhibit. "It is an opportunity to show our industry in an interesting yet important way to the public." The gallery intends to have in-house promotions and workshops prior to the show. One possibility is to have Adair speak or lead a workshop. Baker would also like to focus on educating children in the area about the framing and art world, and hopes to incorporate some classes for them as well.

Reed's is allocating a piece of their advertising budget over the next four years to pay for the sponsorship of the show, a total cost of \$7,000. ExhibitsUSA is hoping to gain additional sponsorship from distributors of moulding who have a vested interest in educational activities.

ExhibitsUSA, a nonprofit exhibition touring service is handling the details for the "Frame in America" exhibit. ExhibitsUSA is responsible for all costs and logistics of the show. The frames, coming from public and private collectors, will be shipped to ExhibitsUSA preparation facilities in Kansas City, Missouri, where they



Tabernacle Frame, c.1900. Designed by Stanford White, manufactured by Newcomb-Macklin Co., Chicago Pine, composition, and 23k gold leaf, 59" x 47". Private collection..



Fireman's Trophy Frame, c.1856; Fabricated by James S. Earle and Son, Philadelphia (attri.). Pine, composition, wire and 23k gold leaf, 45" x 25". Lent by Historic Alexandria, Virginia.

will be boxed and crated for travel. Adair is working on a book to be published by Smithsonian Institution Press.

We won't have to wait until the year 2001 to see the show. The exhibit is traveling throughout the U.S and Canada beginning in 1998 at the Memorial Art Gallery in

Rochester, New York. It will continue to travel for the next couple of years to the Lakeview Museum of Arts & Science, Peoria, Illinois; Ball State University Museum of Art, Muncie, Indiana; Texas A & M University, College Station, Texas; and the Musee du Quebec in Canada.

Adair sums up the value of his exhibit to the framer. "The reason why every framer needs to look at this show is that the history of the frame is as important as the history of art. The proper frame can make or break a painting. Knowing what the proper frame is can only be achieved by studying history.

Therefore, framers must go and look at the aesthetic lessons from the past. Every frame is a barometer of taste from that period. That's why the show's important. The frame is the most under-appreciated and under-valued antique today."

2001 may seem far away, but the details and planning that go into the show are forever in the works. If you are interested in exhibit details or even sponsoring a show call ExhibitsUSA at (800) 473-3872.

By displaying the frames alone, without the paintings, in their own beauty, people will be able to improve their understanding of frames and realize how invaluable they are to a painting. Adair hopes this message gets across in "The Frame in America: 1860-1960" exhibit's odyssey around the country. ■

Photographs courtesy of Gold Leaf Studios, Washington, D.C.