

Style Snapshot

A look at a frame, its characteristics, and history

by Tracy Gill

What style frame is this? What time period is it from? This is a rare American painting frame that dates from the 1860s. I have only seen three examples of this style frame. Two are in the Gill & Lagodich Collection, and one is hanging in the Philadelphia Museum of Art. This is one of the most popular and amusing frames in [the Gill & Lagodich] collection.

What are the defining/common characteristics of this style? The frame displays an unusual combination of decorative elements and fabrication techniques. The applied ornament is made of carved wood elements (corners, centers, and finials) and cast composition (diamond pattern detailing). The spotted ogee frieze is actual sand, applied in a stenciled pattern. This frame is in excellent original condition so one can really get a good idea of the characteristic paler karat of gold and sanded textures of American frames of this period.



What design departures might be seen on some frames of this style? We have another frame of this style in our collection that has additional carved wood decoration at the corners and the spindles at the sides are more delicate.

What type of artwork would this frame most likely house? When I first saw this frame and studied the motifs I imagined that it would most likely surround an American genre painting. I pictured an interior scene, perhaps someone reading, with furniture styles that coordinated with the neo-Gothic finials that are so prominent in the frame. Later, I saw a much larger version of this frame in the Philadelphia Museum surrounding a landscape painting by Sanford Gifford entitled, “A Coming Storm” (1863). In spite of the frame’s pronounced architectural and furniture-like detailing, the style is also appropriate to a landscape because of the prominent stenciled sanded pattern that was meant to resemble scattered rocks.

What furnishing/interior styles accompanied these style frames in their time? This frame closely relates to the Gothic-revival style furniture that had proliferated in America by the early 1840s. Its gilded carved rosettes and turned-wood finials at the corners hark back to Colonial architecture, as well as hand-turned Elizabethan-revival decorations and neo-Gothic interiors contemporary to the frame. The attached ornament also has a Moresque quality—a precursor to the full-blown adaptation of Moorish and Arabesque patterns that Americans came to adore later in the century. ■

Tracy Gill is a frame scholar and consultant to museums and private collectors; co-owner of Gill & Lagodich Fine Period Frames & Restoration, New York City. Together, she and her partner, Simeon Lagodich, have collected, studied, restored, and sold period frames for over 25 years. Their period and replica frames can be seen in the permanent collections of such museums as the Art Institute of Chicago, Brooklyn Museum of Art, and The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Gill is the author of “Forget Me Nots: A Victorian Book of Love” (Workman Publishing, 1990). She curated the frames and wrote the exhibition catalogs for: *One Hundred Years on the Edge: The Frame in America 1820 to 1920* (1996); *Frames of Reference: From Object to Subject* (2000); and *The American Frame: From Origin to Originality* (2003). She will be appearing later this month in the season finale episode of *FIND!* on PBS Television.