

Style Snapshot

A look at a frame, its characteristics, and history

by Bill Adair

What style frame is this? German Arts and Crafts

Where is it from? (Stamp on the Verso reads: Fabricated by H. Grunewald, Munich, Germany.)

What time period is it from? It is circa 1900.

Who was instrumental in developing this style of frame? At the turn of the 19th century, Franz Von Stuck (1863-1928) was one of the most famous and popular artists in Europe, and his name is inseparable from the youthful rebellion of the Munich Secession. *(Editor's Note: In 1892, more than one hundred artists founded the Association of Fine Artists in Munich Secession. Many of them had been members of the established Privileged Royal Artists' Association of Munich. One of its maxims, characteristic for Art Nouveau worldwide, was: art concerns the whole man and whole social life.)*

The frames that Von Stuck designed were individualistic expressions linked to a specific painting. Here, the title carved on the frame tells us what once was inside—Die Taenzerin, or The Dancer. Many American artists were influenced by the Munich School (Thomas Eakins and Frank Duveneck, for example). Their frames took on a style that can be linked to this kind of frame, acting as a prototype for the simpler, more rustic Arts and Crafts movement in the United States.

What are the defining/common characteristics of this style? The profile of the moulding has a distinctive flat shape with low relief ornamentation. It often features an inscription that identifies the subject—in this case, the dancer.

What design departures might be seen on some frames of this style? The variation on the oak panel, which we typically call Stickley (after Gustav Stickley) or Mission Style, is also seen in variations with the Pre-Raphaelite painters such as Rosetti and Burne-Jones. In some cases, it is embellished with inscriptions that relate to the subject matter; in other cases, an incised corner design of Celtic origins. Others have embellishments of a brass escutcheon with pierced areas exposing inlaid peacock feathers. Sometimes they have inlaid semi-precious stones and hammered copper with bosses and rivets. The unifying aspect of all these frames is the flat moulding profile—the chief characteristic of the Arts and Crafts design aesthetic.

What type of artwork would this frame most likely house? Figurative paintings with high contrasts of light and dark

What furnishing styles accompanied these frames? Arts and Crafts interiors with oak trim and William Morris fabrics

Additional comments: During this period, many Americans attended the German art academies where they would have been exposed to, and influenced by, unique expressions of frame design, such as this fine example of a framemaker's art. In characteristic form, the shape and style were modified to suit the American penchant for simplicity and strength of design. ■



William B. Adair received his B.F.A. in Studio Art from the University of Maryland in 1972. For the next 10 years he worked for the Smithsonian Institution's National Portrait Gallery as a museum conservator specializing in the treatment of picture frames. In 1982 he formed his own company, Gold Leaf Studios, for the making of frames and the conservation of gilded antiques. Over the years his clients have included the U.S. Department of State and the National Park Service. He is the founder of the International Institute for Frame Study, a non-profit archive dedicated to collecting and disseminating information on the history of frames. He can be reached via e-mail at bill@goldleafstudios.com.