

A Grand

*W*e at Riegler & Son's have always prided ourselves and indulged our customers with unique hand-carved and gilded pictures frames. This approach to framing has led to many fun-filled and challenging projects

by Peter Riegler

over the years, which in turn has brought serious patrons of the arts to our front door.

The frame featured in this article is one that particularly challenged us artistically and, because of its size and proportion, mentally and physically as well. It all started when we were commissioned to frame a large work on canvas—a self-portrait of an artist named Pike. Her style is expressionistic and dark as she painted herself from the shoulders up, using immediate strokes and building the paint to almost 2" high in some areas. The finished portrait is extremely bold and measured 76"x66".

The completed frame and art was planned to hang in the customer's 9,000 square foot home gallery in Washington state. To begin with, we had to decide what was the right frame style—for both the art and our customer's tastes. They have a large collection of Early California art and tend to favor

frames of that period. So we began in that direction.

After many drawings to scale were presented, one was agreed upon and we started—expecting the frame to take about three months to complete. It actually took six months. When all was said and done, the outside dimensions of frame were 104"x94" and it weighed 400 pounds.



Photo 1: The finished frame with a small version of the portrait it was built to house.

Gilde



Photo 2: The frame was carved from basswood planks.

Step 1: We ordered wood in rough planks to be planed and joined in four hand shaped sections. 14'x $\frac{3}{4}$ " basswood planks were our choice.

Step 2: The wood was planed and laid one atop another. The profile was drawn on the end pieces.

Frame



Photo 3: A total of eight people worked on the frame. Shown here are four of them with the newly carved framed.

Step 3: Each piece was roughly shaped with a router and laid back on top of each other to make sure the general profile was continuous.

Step 4: Each piece was drilled and bored from the bottom up to lighten the completed work. Since the carve was deep, particular care was taken not to take too much wood away. The frame needed to be structurally sound but have less weight and allow our carver to do a deep carve without creating a hollow.

Step 5: The profile pieces were glued, screwed, and clamped together using dowels of basswood to cover each fastening hole. This ensured the carver would have solid wood to carve his design.

Step 6: Once the pieces were in place, we fine tuned the profile using hand sanders and the frame was chopped to size.

Step 7: The frame was joined using 24" dowels, glue, and clamps. The milling and joining took about two weeks to complete.

Step 8: After the frame was joined and the glue was allowed to settle and dry (about seven days), the clamps were removed. We did more sanding to reach its final shape before the carving began.

Step 9: The carver drew his design on the frame and started generally gouging out areas to see how deep to go. After an overall concept was reached it took two carvers about five weeks to complete their sculptural design.

Step 10: Final sanding of the raw wood then a thin coating of gesso (sprayed on warm), then set aside to dry a little. Before the first coat was completely dry, a second thin coat was applied and set aside to dry overnight. This was the first step in building a solid, strong, smooth base for the gilding.

Step 11: The frame was completely sanded again; then sprayed with a base of yellow clay. Then we set it aside again to dry overnight so it could be sanded again (400-grit) in preparation for the red clay.

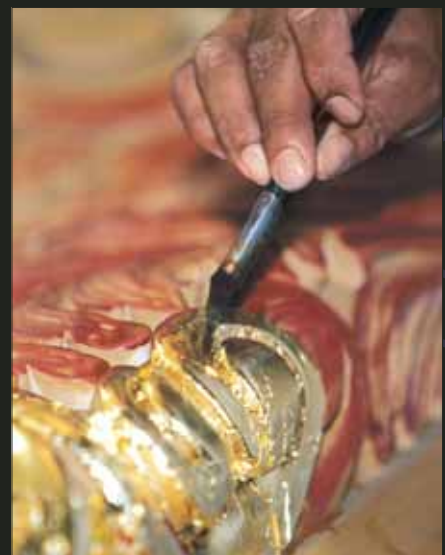
Step 12: The red clay was brushed onto the raised areas of the carve. This was the final base coat and again was sanded



Photos 4 and 5: After the frame was carved and sanded, the frame was sprayed with a base of yellow clay. The carving was also defined one more time at this stage.



Photo 6: Red clay was brushed onto the raised areas of the carving in preparation for gilding.



Photos 7 and 8: The frame was gilded with 22 karat gold leaf using a 4" size hair tip.

with 400-grit sandpaper after drying.

Step 13: The frame was then ready for gilding. A 4" size hair tip was used to pick up the 3/8"x3/8" square of 22 karat gold to be laid down on the surface and into the deep carves.

Step 14: After the gold had dried, it was rubbed with cotton balls soaked in isopropyl alcohol. This was done to remove any grit that might be on surface in preparation for burnishing the gold and the clays beneath. Agate stones were used for burnishing.

Step 15: After burnishing was complete, a thinned out solution of gesso was lightly rubbed over the surface and allowed to dry. Then the dried gesso was wiped off with a soft cloth. This process removes some of the gold exposing a little of the clay colors beneath which gives the gold more depth.

Step 16: The gold was then sprayed with a clear bar top to seal it from outside contaminants.

Step 17: The antique was applied (in this case an oil-based UV colorant) to mellow out the brightness of the gold. After it was applied evenly with a soft brush, a 4" Chinese bristle brush was used to softly stipple the surface and give it an even tone.

Step 18: After completely drying (about two days), the antique was wiped with soft rags to smooth out the finish a little more. Then two thin coats of paste wax were applied—which also helped to smooth out the finish a little more. The frame was then buffed to its final stage and luster. ■



Photo 9: The frame in the midst of the gilding process. It took one person approximately two weeks to complete the task.



Photo 10: This gilded corner shows the swirling carving on the immense frame.



Photos 11 and 12: Once the frame was gilded and burnished, it was antiqued to achieve the desired sheen.