

JOURNAL

OF THE AMERICAN ART POTTERY ASSOCIATION

SEPTEMBER / OCTOBER 2008
VOL. 24 NO. 5





ARTS AND CRAFTS POTTERY FROM THE TWO RED ROSES FOUNDATION

MARTIN EIDELBERG and JONATHAN CLANCY, with Photography by RUDY CICCARELLO

Were it not for a fortunate turn of events a decade ago, the Two Red Roses Foundation might never have been created and its important collection of American Art and Crafts pottery would not have been formed. The initial spark was struck in 1997 when Rudy Ciccarello, the founder of this organization, chanced upon a copy of a Gustav Stickley bookcase being built in the shop of a local Florida furniture restorer. Attracted by the cabinet's clean-lined simplicity as well as its richly grained oak, he began collecting Arts and Crafts furniture. The more he acquired and the more he read, the more enthusiastic he became. His interests rapidly expanded to include Arts and Crafts lighting and metal work, ceramics, and prints. A momentary insight was soon transformed into a collection of hundreds of objects, extending from cabinet-size vases to an entire bathroom lined with extraordinary Grueby tiles. Pride of ownership also entails the responsibility of caring for the collection and planning its future preservation. Thus the Two Red Roses Foundation was created.

An exhibition, "Beauty in Common Things," on view at the St. Petersburg Museum of Art from October 4, 2008, through February 2009, displays some eighty ceramic vessels from the collection of the Two Red Roses Foundation. The companies are familiar ones, with particular focus on works from the Grueby and Newcomb potteries, but there are also many examples from Marblehead, Paul Revere, Rookwood, and Van Briggle, as well as some from Overbeck, Robineau, Rhead, and Walrath. Their geographical diversity—from the Northeast, Midwest, South, and Far West—mirrors the way in which the Arts and Crafts movement was embraced across this country.

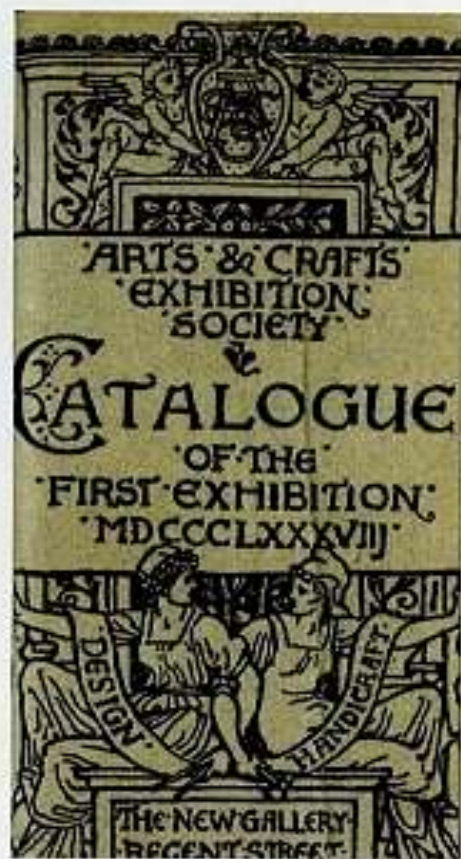


Fig. 2: Cover of the catalogue for the first exhibition of London's Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society, 1888 (photo courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York).

FIRST EXHIBITION OF THE ARTS & CRAFTS COPLEY HALL BOSTON

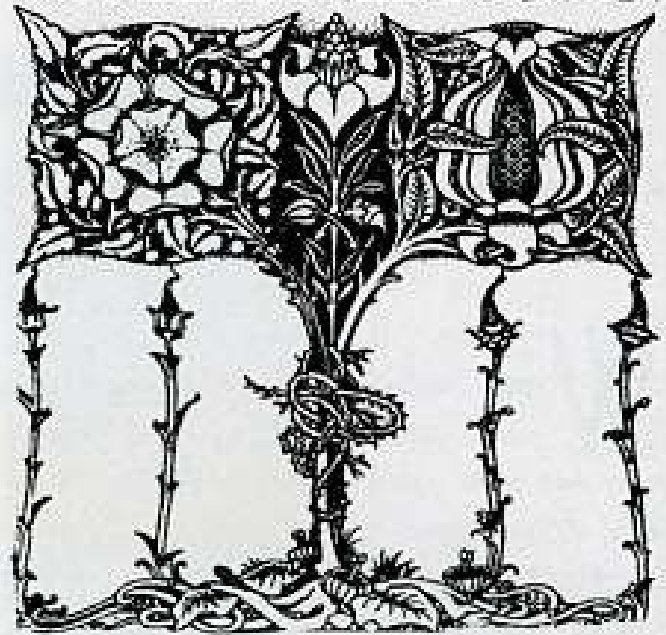


Fig. 3: Cover of the catalogue for the first exhibition of Boston's Society of Arts and Crafts, 1897.

The term "Arts and Crafts" is frequently employed to designate the decorative arts of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, yet most enthusiasts would be hard pressed to explain its specific origin and meaning. Like many such terms which are in use today, "Arts and Crafts" evolved in a very specific context. Issues of design reform, the state of industrial labor, and the revival of handicraft had been the subject of discussion in England even before the middle of the century, although the phrase "Arts and Crafts" did not yet exist. "Handicrafts," "the lesser arts," "applied arts," "decorative arts," and "industrial arts" were the terms commonly in use. It may surprise some to learn that "Arts and Crafts" was not a phrase coined by William Morris, the movement's leader—acknowledged because of the inventiveness of his designs and the eloquence and power of his writing.

One of the ideas put forth by members of the Art Workers Guild in London was to stage an exhibition of handmade decorative arts in the manner of an art exhibition, fully identifying the designers and the artisans. There had already been exhibitions of industrial arts in England and on the Continent, but these exhibitions often hid the workers' identities, and only trumpeted the companies' names. At one of the discussions in 1887, the English bookbinder T.J. Cobden-Sanderson proposed that the group charged with creating such an exhibition be named "The Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society" and thus the term "Arts and Crafts" was born.

The first exhibition, staged in 1888, was accompanied by public lectures and an impressive catalogue with essays (fig. 2). It was a great success and became an annual event, causing the term "Arts and Crafts" to soon be on everyone's lips. Over the next few years the phrase was used increasingly in magazines such as *The Studio*, where it was applied to any



Fig. 4: Grueby Faience Company, Vase with a design of conventionalized leaves, c. 1898, designed by George Prentiss Kendrick. Two Red Roses Foundation, Tarpon Springs, Florida.

exhibition of this type. Soon, though, it was extended to embrace the whole of the handicraft revival movement. Although the term started to come into general use in the United States only around 1892, as in England, there already were various guilds and craft associations in place. For example,

The Architectural League of New York had already begun holding annual exhibits which included decorative arts but almost exclusively as they related to architecture. A similar idea was promulgated on the West Coast, with the founding in San Francisco of an Arts and Crafts Society. Its carefully

chosen name, of course, has great significance. It staged its first exhibition in 1894 and another the following year, but then disbanded.

The year 1897 proved to be pivotal for the establishment of the term "Arts and Crafts" in the United States. That year a group in Boston staged what was claimed to



Fig. 5: Three vessels by the Newcomb Pottery; all designed and executed by Harriet (Hattie) Coultter Joor and potted by Joseph Meyer. Left to right: vase with a design of gladiolus, c. 1901; jug with a design of conventionalized daffodils, 1903; vase with a design of conventionalized berries, 1902. Two Red Roses Foundation, Tarpon Springs, Florida.

RIGHT: Fig. 6: Rhead Pottery, Vase with a design of a conventionalized landscape, c. 1914-17. Two Red Roses Foundation, Tarpon Springs, Florida.





Fig. 7: Walrath Pottery, Vase with a design of conventionalized roses, 1911, Two Red Roses Foundation, Tarpon Springs, Florida.

be the first “Arts and Crafts” exhibition, which it clearly was not (fig. 3), and a similar impulse gripped artisans and reformers in Chicago. Then, with incredible rapidity, Arts and Crafts societies sprang up across the country—in large metropolitan centers

and small towns—and the term became a catchword across the country, perhaps more so than in England.

One of the questions which has intrigued modern historians is whether the term’s meaning was more oriented to social or aes-

thetic issues. In truth, it was both. As *Handicraft Magazine* reminded readers: “The motives of the true craftsman are the love of good and beautiful work as applied to useful service, and the need of making an adequate livelihood.” The charter of Boston’s Society of Arts and Crafts called for cooperation between designers and workmen, as well as sobriety and restraint in forms and decoration.

Qualities of sobriety and calm are central to the American ceramics made at the turn of the century. A quarter of a century earlier, the leaders of the crafts movement such as Louise McLaughlin and Maria Longworth Nichols treated pottery as an extension of the painter’s canvas, with three-dimensional effects and bravura flourishes of color. By 1900, however, a chaste aesthetic predominated. The introduction of mat glazes in muted, closely related tones helped to create a calming effect. The austere modeled leafy décor of Grueby’s ware, the flattened renderings at the Newcomb Pottery, and the architectonic structure of Frederick Walrath’s stylized

RIGHT: Fig. 8: Adelaide Alsop Robineau, Vase with crystalline glaze, c. 1910, Two Red Roses Foundation, Tarpon Springs, Florida.



decoration all speak of a new attitude toward design (figs. 4, 5, 7, 10, 13). Much of this stems from the idea of "conventionalization," a term used by both English and American design manuals to explain how natural motifs should be adapted and abstracted to meet the demands of the decorative arts. The same approach can be seen in Gustav Stickley's furniture; when compared with the elaborately carved "art furniture" made twenty-five years earlier, the same qualities of sobriety and restraint are apparent.

It may seem strange to speak of simplicity, given the omnipresence of pattern on turn-of-the-century ceramics but we must consider the context of that day. Today's

sense of simplicity is colored by the experience of the twentieth-century's Modernist movement and aphorisms such as "Less is more." American ceramists of 1900 had not experienced a Bauhaus austerity of bare cylindrical and spherical forms. Their understanding of simplicity entailed both the shape of the vessel and the treatment of carefully considered ornament. The resulting vessels were certainly constrained in comparison with the florid excesses of the late-nineteenth century, excesses which had provoked such a strong bias towards sobriety.

In seeking to explain American turn-of-the-century decorative arts, there is a tendency to intone the words of the great English writers such as William Morris, Thomas Carlyle,



Fig. 9: Overbeck Pottery, Vase with a design of Joe Pye weed, c. 1911-15, designed and executed by Hannah Overbeck and potted by Elizabeth Overbeck, Two Red Roses Foundation, Tarpon Springs, Florida.





Fig. 11: Decorators posed at work in the Grueby factory, Boston, c. 1900 (photo: Two Red Roses Foundation, Tarpon Springs, Florida).

John Ruskin, and Charles Ashbee as though they all represented a single body of thought. There were divergences among these thinkers, just as there were among the Americans who inherited this body of writing. A curious amalgam of ideas about design and attitudes towards industrialization came to the United States in the 1890s, and Arts and Crafts

reformers drew freely from this material. Rather than resulting in a unified movement, the American Arts and Crafts movement encompassed a broad spectrum of thought, and this is reflected in both the theoretical tracts of American essayists and in the workshop practice of the various potteries. Although Biloxi's George Ohr stands out as perhaps

the best example of a potter who united all aspects of the profession in a single person, he was an exception rather than the rule. Some operations were small, one- or two-person operations, and others were family operations between husbands and wives, or among sisters. These would include Louise McLaughlin's porcelains (though she required male





assistants to help grind the clay and fire the kiln) as well as those of Adelaide Alsop Robineau (fig. 8), who relied on her husband for preparing the glazes and the firing. Perhaps no endeavor matched the cooperative, family spirit of the Overbeck sisters (fig. 9) of Cambridge City, Indiana, although even here there was specialization among them. Another option was to form a small business with different people assuming their special roles as designer, thrower, decorator, or kiln man. The Marblehead Potteries was organized this way (figs. 14, 15); its founder, Dr. Herbert J. Hall, described it as "somewhere between the factory and the individual craftsman," forming a community where "mutual respect and co-operation combine with a friendly rivalry." The same could be applied to the Van Briggles pottery in its first years when Artus Van Briggles and his wife Anne worked together with a small staff.

The Rookwood and Grueby potteries, by contrast, represented very different organizational systems. Here there was a traditional division of labor, but arranged differently in each place. At the Grueby factory, there was just one principal designer: then there were professional potters who threw the vessels, a large staff of modelers who executed the established designs, others who fired and glazed the ware (fig. 12). At the Rookwood factory, although stock shapes were often designed by the decorators, they were thrown by professional potters, painted and occasionally sculpted by the professional decorating staff, and glazed and fired by still others. The company's management even boasted that a vase often passed through twenty-one different sets of hands.

Such divergences of practice reflect differences of thought among both the English founding fathers of the Arts and Crafts Movement and their American followers. English and American proselytizers frequently extolled the virtue of craftsmen designing and making objects single-handedly. Ruskin had lamented that, "The separation that had occurred between the artist and the artisan had worked injury to both kinds of products. The artists had become effeminate

because they were not used to handle rough materials; workmen had become debased because they could not exercise their faculties in designing." Tellingly, these words were repeated by the Chicago-based writer Oscar Lovell Triggs. Likewise, Morris had written, "The artist came out from the handicraftsmen, and left them without hope of elevation, while he himself was left without the help of intelligent, industrious sympathy. Both have suffered; the artist no less than the workman." Such ideas were seized upon by many American theoreticians and practitioners. Writing from Boston, Dora Morrell proclaimed: "The divorce between arts and crafts... is due in great measure to the separation of the craftsman and designer. Every designer should have the skill of the craftsman, and every craftsman should be a designer as well."

Yet as we have seen, few ceramists were able to be both designer and executor. This occurred only in private shops, occasionally at the Marblehead or Van Briggles potteries, and virtually never

at either Rookwood or Grueby. The question that is often implied but rarely asked is whether these well-known firms are somehow less “Arts and Crafts” because of how they were run. Put more bluntly: can our understanding of the movement accommodate individuals like McLaughlin and Robineau alongside factories like Grueby and Rookwood? Do these larger endeavors represent the Arts and Crafts movement and how? We would answer in the affirmative, especially since by the late 1880s many realized that there would always be a separation between the artist and the artisan. Not only were some more gifted as designers while others were more skilled in fabricating, but also this was an inevitable necessity in creating an economically viable operation. In fact, such distinctions in abilities and interests lie at the very basis of the term “Arts and Crafts.” This dualism is allegorized on the cover of the catalogue issued for the first Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society (fig. 2) where, at the bottom of the design, emblematic figures labeled “Design” and “Handicraft” are given their separate attributes: a compass for the designer and a hammer for the artisan. While the two figures recline back to back, facing in opposite directions, their arms are linked, a subtle statement of an inextricable bond between “Arts” and “Crafts.”

Public recognition of the designer and the artisan were key issues in the Arts and Crafts movement but, once again, a wide range of ideas rather than a single solution predominated. There was no problem, of course, when it was a one-person operation but it was problematic at large concerns, such as

at the Rookwood, Grueby, and Newcomb potteries. Although united by common aims, different strategies were devised at each place. At the Rookwood factory, each vase was marked with the decorator’s monogram and these were widely publicized in the company’s promotional materials. While the decorators were praised for their painting and sculpting abilities, other contributors—such as the designer of the shape, the potter, and the glazer—remained anonymous. At Newcomb College, both the potter’s and the decorators’ marks personalized each work and this was exceptional since potters’ marks were rarely given. At the Grueby plant, the modeler’s initials were often incised and occasionally the glazer painted his personal cipher, but neither the designer’s nor the potter’s identity was recorded on the vase. Oddly, despite these personalizing marks, Grueby rarely promoted the names of decorators and as a result, a fair number of these creators remain unknown. At Marblehead, quite exceptionally, the initials of both the designer and decorator were included but, as at Grueby, there was little effort by the pottery to help the buying public decode these initials. The paradox of these potteries—stressing the individual nature of signed works but rarely revealing the identities of the creators—suggests that recognition of individuals was less an issue of moral duty than clever marketing.

Although we treasure our ability to recognize and identify the artists’ marks and monograms, and look with great delight at the photos of the craftsmen in the various workshops, we know surprisingly little about





Fig. 15: Four vases by the Marblehead Potteries, all decorated by Sarah Tutt. Left to right: design of stalking panthers by Arthur Irwin Hennessey, c. 1911; design of conventionalized flowering plants by Hennessey, c. 1911; geometric design by Arthur E. Baggs, c. 1910-20; design of conventionalized trees by Maude Milner, c. 1907-10. Two Red Roses Foundation, Tarpon Springs, Florida.

these people. Their personal lives and their careers are, for the greater part, lost to us. Except for some prominent figures such as Adelaide Alsop Robineau, Louise McLaughlin, and George Ohr, we do not even know very much about many of the most important ceramists. Their personal documents

and the record books of most potteries have not come down to us. The miraculous survival of so much of Rookwood's archival material is a notable exception but, even then, the extant material sheds little light on the individual employees. We lack the birth and death dates for many of the decorators,

and know very little about their careers outside of their employment at Rookwood. The same is true for most workers at Grueby and Newcomb, although attempts at basic biographies have been initiated. Clearly, much still needs to be done and, ironically, the technological innovations of the digital age are

helping greatly. Easier access to census records and street directories, the possibility of searching newspapers and magazines electronically, and the digitization of some turn-of-the-century magazines offer the promise that in the future we will be able to know more about these craftsmen.

The case of Frederick Walrath offers a good example of what can be uncovered. Although there have been some recent studies of his career, we had been led to believe that he was born in 1871, whereas he was actually born a year earlier. We had known that early in his career, after he studied with Charles Fergus Binns at Alfred University, he held various positions: some months at the Grueby factory, teaching at the Chicago School of Education, a brief return to his hometown of Jasper in upstate New York, and then a position at the Mechanics Institute in Rochester where he remained for the major portion of his career. We now discover that at the very beginning he taught at the Chautauqua Institute. Also newly learnt is that even

after he was established at Rochester he worked in the summers at different venues, including Teachers College in New York City and in a small New England town. Such insights not only round out the details of his life but also help to integrate him more fully within the context of American ceramics and design.

The Marblehead Potteries is another good example. Just its very name is something of a surprise since collectors and historians always refer to this establishment as "Marblehead Pottery" rather than "Potteries." Yet exhibition records and Marblehead street directories show that the plural form was used consistently, once the name was established about 1908. (Prior to then, in its first years of inception, it was called "The Handicraft Shop.") The pottery began as one of several workshops attached to a sanitarium run by Dr. Herbert Hall, a believer that work was a better treatment than simply rest. His attitude is in itself an extremely interesting outgrowth of the Arts and Crafts movement and the emphasis upon the positive, beneficial gifts of handwork. In 1908, Dr. Hall published a short article in *Keramic Studio* wherein he carefully enumerated the members of the pottery's small staff:

Mr. Arthur E. Baggs, now well known in Ceramic circles, is the leading spirit.... The other designers are Mr. A. I. Hennessey, and Miss Maude Milner. The decorator is Mrs. E. D. Tutt, the thrower Mr. John Swallow and the kiln man Mr. E. J. Lewis.

There are two artists not of the staff but friends of the pottery who occasionally contribute a clever and effective design or suggestion; they are Miss Annie E. Aldrich and Miss Rachel Grinwell. Mrs. John Swallow sometimes assists during rush times at especial detail work.

Although the importance of this listing of the Marblehead staff has long been recognized, little attention has focused

on the individuals other than Baggs who, after all, had an immensely successful career. But the other workers, surprisingly, have not been of interest until now. Mrs. E. D. Tutt was misidentified as Hannah Tutt, especially because of the initials "HT" on the undersides of so many vessels from the Marblehead Potteries. Actually, she was Sarah T. Main (1859-1947), a clerk and teacher who in 1891 married Edward D. Tutt. How she came to work at the pottery is not known, but once there she worked as its sole decorator until about 1935. Little is known about Arthur Hennessey, who with Baggs, was a chief designer at the pottery. His initial "H" coupled with Sarah Tutt's "T" form the previously misunderstood "HT" on all the vases. Hennessey, not Baggs, proves to have been the designer of some of Marblehead's most sought-after vases today, such as the one with the crouching panther and the one with a marshy landscape reminiscent of the compositions of Arthur E. Dow (figs. 14-15). Hennessey, who also designed metal objects, worked at the pottery for another decade, and then seems to have turned his attention to the local boat industry. Of the other designers, Annie Aldrich can be identified as a painter active in Boston and Roxbury; she was in Marblehead by 1907 but had left by 1912. Maude Milner (born in England in 1870) was an art teacher in North Andover and also had only a brief tenure in Marblehead, moving to Connecticut by 1911. While these brief bits of data afford us a greater understanding than before, still, we have almost no insight into these people's artistic personalities or lives. How much richer our understanding would be if only we knew something about their later careers.

Most collectors and historians of American pottery have focused on the major names and larger companies of that day, partly because they enjoyed greater publicity and their works survive in greater numbers. But there were also many independent potters whose names we know only through exhibition notices and illustrations of their work in then-contemporary magazines. Their works remain to be recov-

ered and their lives charted. What sorts of careers did they have? Knowing this might also help us to assess the strength or the weakness of the Arts and Crafts movement, and judge whether it was a sustainable reality or merely a Utopian dream. The list of forgotten Arts and Crafts potters is long and expansive. Consider Jane Hoagland who worked closely with Charles Volkmar in New York, or Frank Hazenplug and William Bulger in Chicago, or Sarah Thresher, William Cochrane, and Albert Loose who founded the Miami Pottery in Dayton, Ohio. Until we open our lines of inquiry still further and learn something about the lives and personalities of these people, those employed by large companies, and those who worked independently, only then will we have achieved one of the principal goals of the Arts and Crafts movement, namely to honor its craftsmen and craftswomen, and to give their work proper recognition.