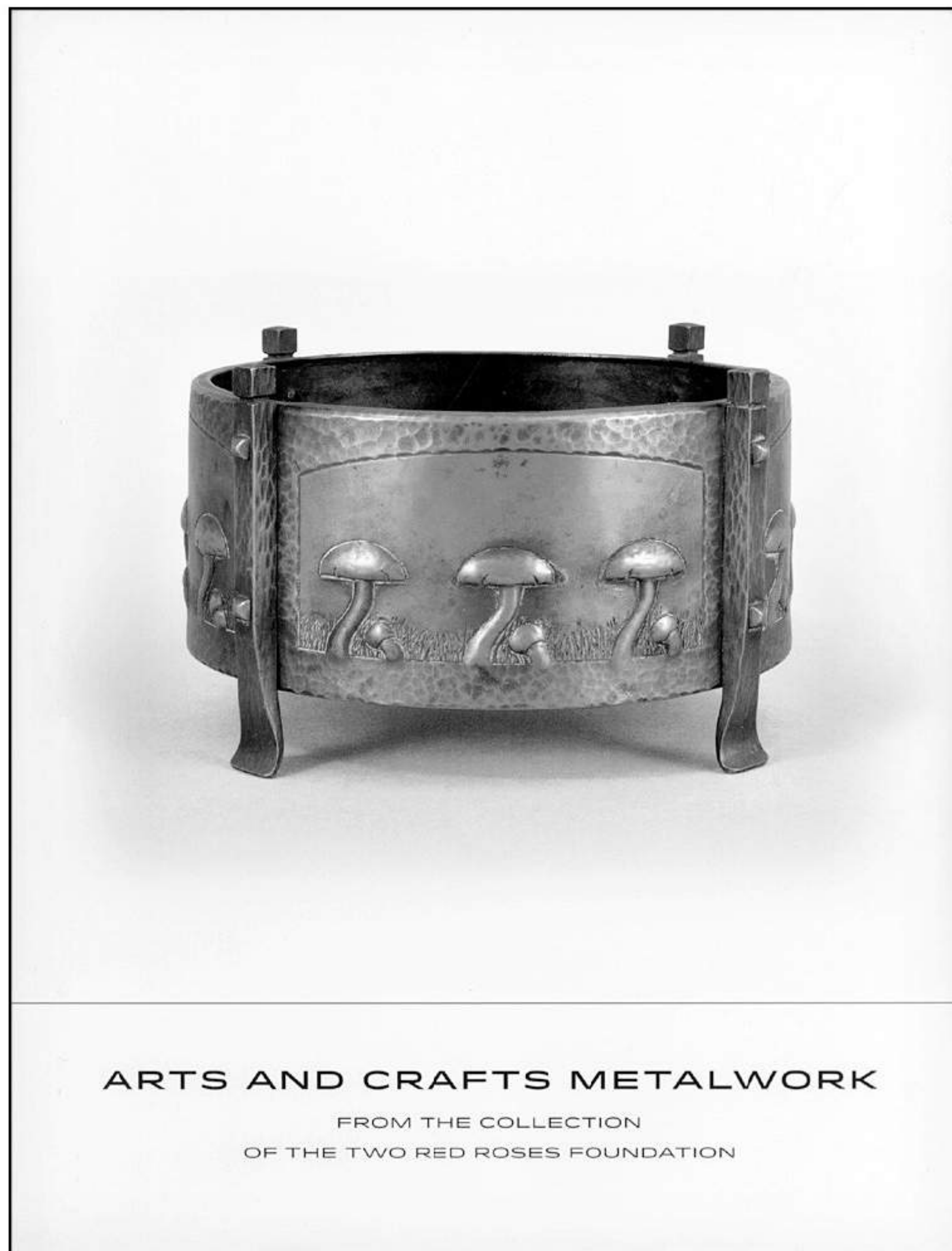


Arts and Crafts Metalwork

by Lita Solis-Cohen

"These Humbler Metals": American Arts & Crafts Metalwork from the Two Red Roses Foundation, the first in a series of catalogs devoted to the collections of Rudy Ciccarello's Two Red Roses Foundation, presents objects made of "the humbler metals" that demonstrate "the simplicity in style and honesty in construction" that is the core tenet of the Arts and Crafts movement in America. These objects made of hand-hammered copper, molded bronze, and cast silver exemplify the dignity of labor and good design as promulgated by the Arts and Crafts philosophy.

David Cathers, the author of books, catalogs, and articles on Gustav Stickley and the Arts and Crafts movement, wrote the introductory essay that puts Arts and Crafts metalwork in context by discussing 19th-century sources of design. He believes that the appeal of textured surfaces arose from the popularity of Japanese decorative art exhibited in Philadelphia at the 1876 Centennial Exhibition, which was central to the Aesthetic Movement in the 1870s into the 1890s. Cathers points out that both Tiffany & Company and Gorham Manufacturing Company offered trays and vessels made of silver with other metals with hammered and chased surfaces, generally as grounds for applied naturalistic insects, frogs, birds, vines, leaves, and branches. Cathers admits that Tiffany and Gorham craftsmen were skilled in handicraft and that they on occasion embraced the humbler metals. On the other hand, he suggests that what is missing from the Aesthetic Movement objects is the "morality" or "honesty" of handicraftsmanship that would emerge during the Arts and Crafts period, pointing out the dishonesty of goods made to give the appearance of handiwork. (However, nowhere in the literature can this reviewer find evidence that hammered work from Gorham and from the Tiffany workshops was done by machine. It was indeed handmade and did not just give



the appearance of handiwork as did many pieces of Arts and Crafts furniture!)

Cathers then suggests that in their search for authentic handmade things, people began to collect antique metal objects such as old brass and copper vessels, basins from Brittany, English candlesticks, Mexican cooking pots, and "brass and copper from old Russia" brought to America by immigrants.

In this context the Arts and Crafts artisans consciously chose to make simple shapes, of humble metals (copper and brass) using humble methods of making them. Popular magazines stressed plain forms and utility. Marshall Field in Chicago advertised reproduction 18th-century forms in "more chaste design"

now known as Colonial Revival.

Cathers finds it unsurprising that Chicago artisan Robert Jarvie chose brass as his metal and the Stickleys chose copper, giving these materials new and different forms. Between 1904 and 1906 Stickley Brothers offered a metalware line cataloged as "Russian Hand-Beaten Copper." L. & J.G. Stickley and Gustav Stickley and the Roycroft Shops also offered copper vases, candlesticks, floor and table lamps, and lanterns, often based on English Arts and Crafts prototypes. The reform-minded Arts and Crafts artisans sold to customers already looking for home-based handicrafts modeled from the pre-industrialized past.

Moreover, manual arts had

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become part of the educational curriculum, and craft articles for amateurs appeared in magazines, although, with the exception of the Art Institute of Chicago, there were not many places that offered metalworking skills before 1900. Many Arts and Crafts artisans were self taught.

Turning away from historical revival styles fashionable in the 19th century, the Arts and Crafts artisans created plain forms suitable for the simple life. Taking the hammered surfaces from the Aesthetic Movement and the popularity of old and worn metalwork and its reproductions in the Colonial Revival, they created objects of new and often original forms.

Ciccarello asked David Cathers to pick six of these objects from the collection and write about them. Cathers chose three candelabra; one pair of candlesticks; a single candlestick; and a weed vase. The "Lily" candelabrum by Jessie M. Preston is an asymmetrical Art Nouveau cast bronze object unlike the others. The candelabrum of hammered and curved copper by Charles Rohlf is an idiosyncratic, complicated design like his furniture. The Roycroft candelabrum by Karl Kipp of hammered copper buttressed with scrolls of heavy-gauge German silver wire shows Viennese influence, and so do the pair of Kipp candlesticks with small German silver squares soldered onto their disk-shaped bases. Cathers attributes the randomly hammered copper candlestick, 20 5/8" high, with a husk-shaped candle socket above a square bobèche, its hammered strap sides ending in V-shaped tips riveted to a pyramidal base, to Victor Toothaker, possibly during his irregular tenure at Gustav Stickley's Craftsman Workshops. Cathers's sixth object was designed by Frank Lloyd Wright, a tall and narrow "Weed Holder" vase, 1893-1900, with a dark green patina, its minimal ornament inspired by a seed pod. Cathers suggests that the "Weed Holder" vase"

evokes "the world of nature and thus broadly observes the ideals of Arts and Crafts metalwork."

The most useful parts of the book are Jonathan Clancy's short biographies of the artisans whose work is represented in the Two Red Roses collection, and the illustrations of their well-designed objects. Arranged alphabetically, examples are shown of works by Elizabeth Ethel Copeland, Gustav Stickley and the Craftsman Workshops, Harry Dixon, Robert Jarvie, Karl Kipp, Onondaga Metal Shops/Benedict Art Studios, Jessie M. Preston, the Roycroft Shops. Stickley Brothers/Grand Rapids School, Dirk van Erp, and Marie Zimmermann. They make an impressive collection.

Using published research by pioneer authors, Clancy, who is program director for American fine and decorative arts at Sotheby's Institute of Art in New York City and the author of several books on pottery, corrects their mistakes and includes current connoisseurship along with photographs of makers' marks in color. (Some of the photographs of marks could be clearer, but he may have been trying to print them to size.)

Susan Montgomery, an independent decorative arts scholar, added some essays on rare framed tiles and bookends by Dirk van Erp.

Students, collectors, curators, and auctioneers will find the illustrated essays on Karl Kipp (the Tookay Shop) and the Roycroft Shops are particularly enlightening, and so are the discussions of work by the lesser-known makers Harry Dixon, Elizabeth Copeland, and Jessie Preston. The few typos in the text and captions are annoying, and the provenance of only a few objects is given; nevertheless, this book with its up-to-date bibliography of books, catalogs, and vintage magazine articles is a good addition to any decorative arts library.

