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Currents | Suzanne Slesin

Ennobling The Everyday

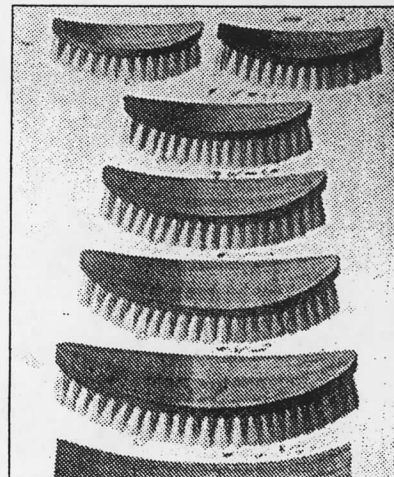
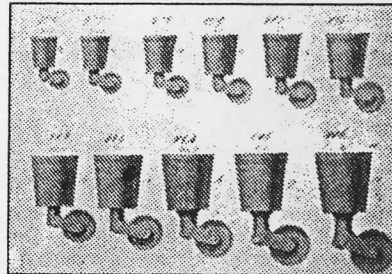
A VISIT to a small but stirring exhibition at the Bard Graduate Center for Studies in the Decorative Arts could make you want hold on to your next Williams-Sonoma catalogue.

Despite its rather forbidding title, "Form, Function and Beauty: Early 19th-Century French Watercolors of Domestic Objects" sparkles, with 50 hand-painted pages from early-19th-century French catalogues that served as salesmen's portfolios.

The beautiful paintings depict everyday items (below) like chair casters, door hinges, fireplace tools, cruet sets, spigots, candlesticks, lamps, spoons, coffee cups, sewing baskets and dozens of brooms and brushes. "These are the consumer products that were made for the emerging middle class after the French Revolution," said Susan Weber Soros, the director of the center, at 18 West 86th Street.

The show, organized last year by the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris, continues here through May 8.

It reflects historians' growing interest in less obviously high-style items. And today, not even the catalogue pages are for sale.



Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris