

A.W.N.

Pugin

Master of
Gothic
Revival

November 9, 1995

February 25, 1996

**"A.W.N. PUGIN: MASTER OF GOTHIC REVIVAL"
AT THE BARD GRADUATE CENTER
FOR STUDIES IN THE DECORATIVE ARTS
FROM NOVEMBER 9 - FEBRUARY 25**

In this first American retrospective devoted to the brilliant English designer and architect, approximately 144 objects illustrating Pugin's career will be displayed.

The career of A.W.N. Pugin (1812-1852) will be celebrated at the Bard Graduate Center with an exhibition featuring 144 examples of Pugin's ceramics, furniture, metalwork, textiles, woodwork, wallpaper and works on paper. The exhibition will be on view from November 9 - February 25.

Susan Weber Soros, Director of the Bard Graduate Center, said: "We are delighted to have this opportunity to display the genius of one of the most talented architects and designers of the 19th century. Pugin is remembered today primarily as the designer of the interiors of the Houses of Parliament. But, as this exhibition demonstrates, he was the single most influential artist in defining the 19th century Gothic Revival in England. And, because his talents were so eclectic, he was able to exercise the style in every form imaginable, ranging from cathedrals and secular buildings to religious vestments and designs for wallpapers, furniture and stained glass."

The Exhibition

The exhibition is divided into five sections that reveal Pugin's incomparable role as a designer in the formation of the Gothic Revival idiom.

The first section examines the pre-Pugin Gothic Revival in England, highlighting such notable monuments as Strawberry Hill, the famous home of Horace Walpole. The house is shown in a group of drawings and its furnishings are represented by the renowned Strawberry Hill Chair, on loan to the Bard Graduate Center from the Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University. Its distinct Gothic sensibility is revealed in the striking design of the chair back inspired by medieval tracery decoration.

For Pugin, the new Gothic was dependent upon the correct use of sources and materials, based on detailed studies, particularly of Gothic architecture in France where he traveled often throughout his lifetime. On sketching trips with his father as a young boy he demonstrated a remarkable drafting skill and compiled sketchbooks and drawings which are well represented in the exhibition and serve to document the ideas he eventually assimilated into a distinct aesthetic idiom. Pugin was also an avid collector of medieval artifacts; medieval objects from his collection are included in the exhibition.

The second section of the exhibition focuses on Pugin's ecclesiastical designs. Pugin worked avidly to take the Catholic liturgy back to its medieval roots, and he produced an extraordinary range of designs including spectacular metalwork and sacred vestments. Among the most visually striking works in the exhibition are vestments embellished with a stunning array of Gothic ornament in styles and materials suitable for the new Catholic liturgy and reflecting his masterful use of pattern, color and ornament.

The Houses of Parliament, rebuilt after the 1834 fire by architect Charles Barry and Pugin, are examined in the third section of the exhibition. From the floor coverings to the ceramic tiles, decorative carving, woodwork, furnishings, metalwork and stained glass, he codified the Puginian Gothic Revival idiom in this landmark public building. Among the works on view from the Houses of Parliament are the House of Commons Chair, the House of Lords X-Frame Chair and the Chair of State made for Prince Albert. Encaustic tiles designed by Pugin and manufactured by Minton & Company, carpet and wallpaper are also displayed to illustrate the total design scheme Pugin so successfully conceived.

Domestic commissions make up the fourth section of the exhibition. Pugin's most famous design in this area was his own residence, The Grange, Ramsgate, Kent, which embodies his faith in Catholicism: it was conceived beginning in 1843 as a tripartite structure composed of residence, church and monastery. The exhibition offers a watercolor of The Grange as well as objects from the house. A magnificent series of drawings show Pugin's inventive design skills for a whole range of domestic, secular and industrial projects, and his work as a pioneering interior designer.

Ceramics in this section of the exhibition include one of the hallmarks of Pugin's career, the Motto Bread Plate of 1850, produced by Minton & Company, with "Waste Not Want Not." It has become an icon of the Victorian Gothic Revival.

The final section of the exhibition is devoted to Pugin's last great work, the Medieval Court at the Great Exhibition of 1851. It was the consummation of the Gothic Revival idiom he had struggled so long and hard to create and disseminate. A selection of ceramics and metalwork from the original installation are on view in the exhibition. The most important example from this seminal event, however, is the Cabinet designed by Pugin and manufactured by George

Myers in 1846. Originally designed for The Grange, Ramsgate, the cabinet epitomizes the finest quality carving and cleverly adapts the form of its medieval prototype to a modern use.

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"A.W.N. Pugin: Master of Gothic Revival" has been curated by Paul Atterbury, a well-known art historian, lecturer and writer in the fields of architecture and design history, ceramics and other aspects of the decorative arts. He has been editor of Sotheby's Publications, Historical Advisor to Royal Doulton and editor of *The Connoisseur Magazine* and is the author of several books and many articles. Paul Atterbury also was the curator of the 1994 Pugin exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.

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