

A BRASS MENAGERIE
Metalwork of the Aesthetic Movement

JULY 12 — OCTOBER 14, 2007

THE BARD GRADUATE CENTER FOR STUDIES IN
THE DECORATIVE ARTS, DESIGN, AND CULTURE





LEFT Floor Lamp, c. 1886

Brass, bronze, silver plate, earthenware, glass, replacement burner
R. Hollings & Co.
Tiles: J. and J. C. Low Art Tile Works
Collection of Munson-Williams-Proctor Arts Institute Museum of Art, Utica, N.Y.

ABOVE Clock, c. 1880

Patinated copper, silver, brass, other metals, fiber rope
Attributed to Reed & Barton
Collection of Munson-Williams-Proctor Arts Institute Museum of Art, Utica, N.Y.

ABOVE RIGHT Clock, c. 1880-85

Brass, silver plate, other metals, glass
Bradley & Hubbard Mfg. Co.
Collection of Robert Tuggle and Paul Jeromack

RIGHT Candelabrum, c. 1880

Brass, glass, cast iron
Maker unknown
Collection of Barrie and Deedee Wigmore

FAR RIGHT Sliding Door Escutcheon, c. 1880

Bronze
Russell & Erwin Mfg. Co.
Designed by Rodolphe Christesen
Collection of Robert Tuggle and Paul Jeromack



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A Brass Menagerie: Metalwork of the Aesthetic Movement is being presented at The Bard Graduate Center for Studies in the Decorative Arts, Design, and Culture from July 12 to October 14, 2007. Organized and curated by Anna Tobin D'Ambrosio, curator of decorative arts at the Munson-Williams-Proctor Arts Institute Museum of Art in Utica, New York, where the exhibition originated, it contains more than 75 pieces of brass and mixed-metal furniture as well as accessories ranging from chandeliers and andirons to door hardware, hanging shelves, and clocks. The exhibition continues the Bard Graduate Center's examination of the Aesthetic Movement, this time with the focus on the United States. It is the first in-depth examination of this multifaceted aspect of the Aesthetic Movement in America.

BACKGROUND

The Aesthetic Movement was a late-19th-century artistic movement in England and America. Formed in reaction to the perceived philistine tastes of the middle class, it espoused art for art's sake while denying any social or moral value in art. (Both James McNeill Whistler and Oscar Wilde were advocates, and were thoroughly lampooned in Gilbert and Sullivan's *Patience*.) In America the movement was introduced at the Centennial celebration in Philadelphia in 1876. It remained popular in this country through the 1880s and was particularly evident in the decorative arts, as manufacturers created innovative and artistic applications of industrial metals that were visually and materially complex and called "art brass" or "artistic bronze goods."



THE EXHIBITION

Most of the pioneering manufacturers of aesthetic-style metals—such as The Charles Parker Company and Bradley & Hubbard Manufacturing Co., both of Meriden, Connecticut—are represented in the exhibition by numerous objects that show the range and diversity of their products. Among the imaginative objects in the exhibition are Parker Company hanging shelves, tables, and a lamp, all with silver-plated surfaces outlined in brass and embellished by gold- and silver-plated, three-dimensional decoration. The furniture design is an interesting mixture of Anglo Japanese and Modern Gothic forms executed in interchangeable elements with Japanese surface finish and ornamentation.

Many motifs found on aesthetic metals are derived from Japanese art, such as the dragon-like creatures and butterflies that adorn a table by Ansonia Copper & Brass Company of Ansonia, Connecticut, or the stylized Japanese crest images that embellish other tables. The crane motif, also derived from Japanese art and culture, where it symbolizes longevity, pervaded the ornamentation of art brass goods. R. Hollings & Co. of Boston incorporated this theme into an exotic-looking floor lamp made about 1886 and accented by earthenware tiles patented by J. and J. G. Low Art Tile Works of Chelsea, Massachusetts.

Japonisme is even more dominant in the door hardware made during the same period. Richly decorated doorknobs, escutcheons, and hinges that feature fully articulated Japanese figures and architecture highlight *A Brass Menagerie*.

Vibrant polychrome ceramics and exotic flourishes drawn from Moorish and Persian designs accent other wares, such as tables made by Bradley & Hubbard and lamps by a host of other companies. Art brass maximized mass production techniques and helped to set the stage for 20th-century decorative arts that would also utilize tubular metals and other industrial materials in the creation of decorative household goods.





CATALOGUE

A fully illustrated, 96-page catalogue, the primary essay written by Anna Tobin D'Ambrosio, accompanies the exhibition and has been published by Munson-Williams-Proctor Arts Institute with major funding by the Barrie and Deedee Wigmore Foundation. The publication, with more than 100 color images, discusses the development of the American art brass industry, the use of these accessories in the home, and the background of many of the most important manufacturers of these objects.

RELATED PROGRAMS

An array of lectures, panels, and other offerings will be presented in conjunction with *A Brass Menagerie: Metalwork of the Aesthetic Movement*. For further information, please call 212-501-3011 or e-mail programs@bgc.bard.edu.

EXHIBITION TOURS

Group tours of *A Brass Menagerie* may be scheduled Tuesday through Friday between 11:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. and on Thursdays until 7:00 p.m. Reservations are required for all groups. For further information, please call the Bard Graduate Center Gallery at 212-501-3013 or TTY 212-501-3012, or e-mail gallery@bgc.bard.edu.

LOCATION

The Bard Graduate Center is located at 18 West 86 Street, between Central Park West and Columbus Avenue, in New York City. Gallery hours are Tuesday through Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Thursday from 11:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. Admission is \$3 general, \$2 seniors and students (with valid ID), and free on Thursday evenings after 5:00 p.m. For further information about the Bard Graduate Center and upcoming exhibitions, please visit our website at www.bgc.bard.edu.

UPCOMING EXHIBITION, FALL 2007

Meissen Porcelain for Foreign Courts in 18th-Century Europe



LEFT Table with Flowerpot, c. 1880–85

Brass, earthenware, tin, other metal, paint
Bradley & Hubbard Mfg. Co.

Collection of Robert Tuggle and Paul Jeromack

ABOVE Table, c. 1880–85 (detail)

Brass

Maker unknown

Collection of Barrie and Deedee Wigmore

RIGHT Floor Lamp, c. 1886

Bronze, brass, glass

P. E. Guerin

Collection of the Brooklyn Museum of Art, gift of
Mrs. Clifford D. Mallory in memory of Mr. and
Mrs. Henry Rogers Mallory, by exchange

FAR RIGHT (COVER) Escutcheon, c. 1880

Bronze

Russell & Erwin Mfg. Co.

Designed by Rodolphe Christesen

Collection of Robert Tuggle and Paul Jeromack

All photographs by John Bigelow Taylor, New York

BGC

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