



BORDER IN GESSO WORK, FOR PIANO, ETC.

## GESSO WORK.



PANEL FOR DOOR.

ing as they most undoubtedly are. My intention is simply to introduce gesso work as an art which is altogether charming when applied as a decoration for articles of present-day use. Its adaptability to interior house decoration is practically unlimited, whilst for the beautifying of small objects for bazaars, which forms the staple work of many a woman's life, it seems to me, in these days, it cannot be surpassed. And it is a novelty here as yet, a fact that in itself carries all before it.

I can best liken it, I fancy, to an ivory carving in high or low relief laid on a wooden surface. The decoration is tinted with colours, or silvered or gilded, in parts or entirely. The surface on which the decoration is executed is stained, polished, or lacquered. In the latter case so many tints are available that great variation of effects is obtainable.

To Mr. Walter Crane belongs the honour of bringing it prominently before the notice of the English in its modern guise of usefulness. He says of it, "The

art is capable of endless development and variation." And he is right. The decoration can be carried out in styles too numerous to mention severally. Workers will discover for themselves a hundred different ways of treating the decoration and surface. For instance, a gesso decoration can be partly gilt and partly painted on panel of stained or polished wood. Again, the gesso work may be flat, then the tinting becomes of the first importance. A surface of green lacquer may be beautifully ornamented with a slightly modelled design silvered and gilded. Yet again the gesso decoration may be gilded and lacquered.

When figure subjects are carried out in gesso, the elaboration of the design becomes such as a great artist would not disdain to occupy his time upon. The figures should be exquisitely modelled, the colouring harmonious, and the background may be enriched with set patterns incised and gilded.

It would be entering into another branch of the work to describe the casts in gesso which are so beautiful when created by a master-mind and master-hand. The casts also are silvered and lacquered, and the results are exquisite. But for simple decorations modelling with the brush is all-sufficient.

I will now give my readers some practical information on the subject of gesso work, and I feel sure that having once started they will not readily give up the pursuit, for as they proceed they will find avenues for the display of originality opening up that they cannot choose but enter. A failure or two will only incite them to renewed endeavours. This is no mere pastime of which they will easily tire, but true art work, and



DESIGN FOR CABINET DOOR.



the enjoyment of following it will increase the more they learn of its possibilities.

Fine Italian plaster of Paris is the foundation of gesso; this is mixed with glue and reduced to the consistency of cream with water. There is, however, a "composition for gesso work," and I certainly advise my readers who are commencing to avail themselves of the preparation; it will lighten their toil considerably. The materials are in two separate bottles, and the white powder has to be mixed with the composition in proper proportions. A brush is used in applying the gesso, which may be laid flat or modelled with

for overmantel for description. The design—a leafy scroll—is carried out on an emerald ground, with set pattern of conventionalised roses slightly raised from the surface. First sketch the design on paper eighteen inches square. Now all over the background draw the small set pattern of roses, leaving half a rose here and a quarter one there, close up to the scroll, so as to give the impression that the latter is laid over them. The sketch being finished, get a panel of wood eighteen inches square. Give this a coat of gesso and model the set pattern, raising the flowers about the sixteenth of an inch above the ground. Then model



PANEL FOR OVERMANTEL. (Scale, one-fourth.)

a fine brush as the artist chooses. After the gesso is laid on it is sized, and is then ready for tinting, silvering, or gilding.

Metallic colours form pleasing backgrounds for gesso work. A good effect is secured by shading the background—say from gold to green, or from light blue to dark blue, and so on. The metallic colours are sold in bottles ready prepared by the same firm that supplies the "composition for gesso work," the Society of Artists, 53, Bond Street, W.

I think I can best help my readers by describing minutely the execution of a piece of work from commencement to completion, but it must be remembered this is only one manner of proceeding. It shall be a rather elaborate piece, but not too difficult for a beginner to manage well. I select the illustrated panel

the scroll, using the palette knife for laying on the gesso in the parts that are to be in the highest relief, and continue the modelling with the brush. Keep the idea of the cast before you while doing the scroll; in fact it might be a help to copy a simple cast in gesso for practice.

Let the gesso set, which it will do in about half an hour. Now the panel is ready for tinting with metallic colours, gilding and silvering. Perhaps I should say here that gold and silver are sold with the colours, but some artists may choose to use gold-leaf, or to have a background silvered and to tint that with the lacquers; but this is a hint to the more advanced. Students just beginning should keep to the metallic colours, they can easily make other experiments when they have accustomed themselves to the work. Now



to continue the panel. Give the whole of the gesso a coat of size, the colours can be applied then with greater ease. Gild the set rose pattern entirely. Then silver the scroll, and touch it up here and there with colour in the indented parts to bring out the forms. Next cover the flat surface of the background with emerald metallic colour. Now the panel is quite completed, no sizing or varnishing is necessary. But you may wish to get a certain effect of brightness, say on the gold set pattern, or on the background, or on both. In this case cover the portions you wish to be brighter with first a coat of size, then one of varnish. To return for a moment to the silvered background. Mr. Walter Crane advised me, in a letter he wrote to me on the subject of gesso work, to follow this method. As he is a high authority on the subject, I repeat the suggestion for the benefit of my readers. He says: "If you want a colour effect in lacquer it is better to have the work *silvered*, with leaf, and then tint it with the coloured lacquers."

To secure greater relief cotton wool is occasionally employed; this is dipped in the preparation, then laid on the design where required, and modelled.

The character of the design naturally varies according to the style of the article to be decorated. Flowers, insects, dragons, figures are one and all admirable for the work. As far as possible, it is best in learning any fresh method of decoration to keep to the subjects over which we have already obtained a mastery. Not, for instance, to attempt a figure in gesso unless we can draw one thoroughly well and understand anatomy. Beginners often increase the difficulties in their path by attempting subjects beyond their powers. To most amateurs it comes easier to represent flowers than figures, and in a hundred instances to one they will be

every whit as pleasing and as well adapted for such gesso work as amateurs will be able to accomplish well at first starting.

A few suggestions concerning the articles that can be enriched with gesso, and the designs suitable for their decoration, will be useful. It is well to begin on something small, as if failure results no regret need be felt about waste of materials and time. Panels for cabinet doors, and for doors of bracket cupboard, look well ornamented in this style, with a light centre group of flowers; on the framework there should be a pretty conventional border. Small pieces of furniture, such as occasional chairs and tables, music cabinets, work-tables, writing-tables, overmantels, *étagères*, fire-screens, will all be enhanced in beauty and rendered more valuable when embellished with gesso designs artistically executed.

Gesso work is so thoroughly effective for decorations of rooms, in the way of friezes and panels, that there is little doubt that the work will ere long become most popular. Those who delight in surrounding themselves with things beautiful will not fail in acknowledging the power a competent gesso worker possesses to beautify the woodwork of a room by introducing panels with conventional floral devices. Mr. Walter Crane has shown already its perfect adaptability to frieze decoration in his panels "St. George and the Dragon."

Much of the success must necessarily depend on the designs and their arrangement. The overcrowding of flowers is fatal to the realisation of a good effect. Decorations, if they are to be of any value, must show well at a distance, and a multiplicity of objects in a design is certain to defeat this end, which an artist should always keep in view.

E. CROSSLEY.

---

## THE CAREER OF JOSEPH JOACHIM.

---



LOVERS of music in England no name is better known than that of Joseph Joachim, the greatest violinist of recent times. Since his first appearance in London in 1844, his visits have been one of the regular features of musical life, not only in the metropolis, but in most of the leading towns throughout the country. His continued success as a solo and quartet player is, indeed—extending as it does over a period of more than forty years—probably without a parallel in the history of musical art. Since the Monday Popular Concerts were started in 1859, he has been the principal violinist at these excellent entertainments, which have perhaps "done more than any

other musical institution in England towards popularising that highest branch of the art—classical chamber-music." To him especially the warmest thanks of musical amateurs are due for his early and cordial championship of the best works of some modern composers, notably those of Brahms and Dvůřák; and it should be remembered also that he has been mainly the means of bringing about the *débuts* of several other artists of merit now well known in the musical world. Thus, not only is Herr Joachim entitled to be placed in the front rank of living musicians, but he is also entitled to praise for the valuable services he has rendered during more than forty years by fostering in the country the highest branch of musical talent and art. An outline of the career of one who is so celebrated and who has done so much can hardly fail to be of interest to many readers.