

Historic Wallpapers, 1750-1949, January 17, 2003-April 6, 2003

In the 18th century, European and American interiors were transformed by the rise of a new kind of wall treatment. Wallpaper – mass-produced, affordable, and highly practical – reached a broader audience than fine prints and paintings. This wide distribution prompted wallpaper artists to heed the contemporary interests of the expanding consumer class. As a result, wallpaper often recorded social changes as they were expressed in the shifting relationship between high art and popular culture throughout the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries.

This exhibition is the result of a collaboration between the Department of Decorative Arts at The RISD Museum and participants in a graduate seminar directed by Professor Catherine Wilkinson Zerner, Department of the History of Art and Architecture, Brown University. The seminar is part of a RISD Museum program supported by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation; the exhibition is supported in part by the Felicia Fund and the Sachem Foundation.

CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Xavier Mader, French, 1789-1830
Joseph Dufour et Cie, 1797 - 1835
Judgement of Paris, from *The Galerie Mythologique* series, 1814
Wood-block printed
Mary B. Jackson Fund 34.996



Mythological narratives, as well as classical architecture and ornament, were popular decorative subjects in post-Revolutionary France, which sought to associate itself with the democratic principles of the republics of ancient Athens and Rome. The Judgment of Paris, one of four narratives in the "Galerie Mythologique" series, features the famous beauty contest among the gods in which Paris names Venus as the winner. Minerva and Juno, defeated, stand near Mercury in his winged helmet. Six trophy or accessory panels were designed to frame the scenes, and there were paper borders above and below the panels. The resemblance of the panel to the stone frieze of an ancient temple reinforces its classical associations.

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British; American; Possibly
Wallpaper fragment, ca. 1880
Printed with metallic powder on paper
Gift of N. David Barry Scotti 2002.39.1.1

The 1870s and 1880s saw a surge in the production and popularity of wallpapers incorporating metallic colors. This example was hung in the Providence home of Miss Esther Hinckley Baker at 179 Hope Street (designed by Stone, Carpenter and Willson and completed in 1883). Tiny copper-colored crescents create a shimmering three-dimensional surface. This effect was achieved by driving small pieces of metal into the printing cylinder or block. Instead of ink, an adhesive was printed onto the paper. A metallic powder was then sprinkled over the surface, and it adhered only to the areas printed with glue. The use of such elaborate production techniques points to the innovative and highly competitive nature of the wallpaper industry in America and abroad.

British
Wallpaper Fragment, 1882
Embossed and printed on paper
Gift of N. David Barry Scotti 2002.39.4.1

A flamboyant, stylized chrysanthemum dominates the composition of this wallpaper, which once decorated the walls of the Esther Baker House in Providence. Like William Morris's 1877 Bower wallpaper design, this pattern achieves an illusion of shallow depth. The tawny flowers appear to sit atop a layer of large light-green leaves, which in turn hovers above a flat, geometric background of dark-green scrolling vines. This particular floral design appears more sinuous than others of the era, pointing to the Art Nouveau style that was to gain popularity around the turn of the century.

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Père Boulard, French, active 1730-1770

Blue and white Domino with floral sprays, ca. 1750

Printed ink on paper

Mary B. Jackson Fund 34.868

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Much of the inspiration for patterned Dominos came from printed cotton textiles imported from India and China, primarily through French Mediterranean ports. The exotic foliage of the Museum's Dominos recalls Indian chintz textiles. When a number of Dominos were pasted to the wall, they mimicked rooms decorated entirely with fabric. Such "chintz rooms" were fashionable in the early 18th century, but because the fabric was imported and often heavily taxed, French-produced paper provided a reasonably priced alternative. Single-sheet Dominos adorned walls until continuous rolls of printed paper were developed and sold in the late 18th century by large manufacturing firms.

Huard & Chasset, French, early 20th century

Jardins de Palais Royal, Jardin du Palais Royal, ca. 1805-10

Block print on paper

Mary B. Jackson Fund 34.952

The Jardins du Palais Royal was considered one of the supreme achievements of the French wallpaper industry between 1800 and 1865. The precedents for the nonrepetitive designs of scenic wallpapers include murals, tapestries, stage sets, imported Chinese wallpapers, and the recently invented panorama rotunda, in which patrons viewed a top-lit panoramic painting of Paris or other cities.

Subjects for scenic wallpapers were often drawn from famous literary works, accounts of battles or daring voyages to distant lands, and the popular pastimes of contemporary life. Unlike the creators of contemporaneous romantic literature, art, and drama, however, the manufacturers of scenic papers presented only idealized images of



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tranquility, natural beauty, and social harmony. Conspicuously absent in the Jardins du Palais Royal are any signs of the Napoleonic Wars then raging. Also missing are the crowds of prostitutes and other loiterers who frequented these palace arcades, as seen in a popular 1787 series of engravings.

Xavier Mader, French, 1789-1830

Joseph Dufour et Cie, 1797 - 1835

Trophy with Bust of a Woman, from *The Galerie Mythologique* series, 1814

Wood-block printed

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Xavier Mader, French, 1789-1830

Joseph Dufour et Cie, 1797 - 1835

Trophy with Bust of Homer, from *The Galerie Mythologique* series,
1814

wood-block printed

Mary B. Jackson Fund 34.997

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Tomita, Chinese

Wallpaper panel, mid 1800s

Hand painted on paper

Museum Collection 49.135A

This brightly colored panel is a late example of a type of wallpaper that enjoyed tremendous popularity in Europe and America in the 18th and 19th centuries. The Chinese produced such wallpaper specifically for export. There was no market for them in China, where walls were typically hung with plain white paper, if at all.

The design combines the highly detailed drawing of traditional Chinese bird-and-flower painting with aspects of Western naturalism, such as modeling and cast shadows. Through this blending of conventions, Chinese manufacturers created products that were recognizably Asian to the Western eye, yet familiar to Western consumers and easily integrated into European and American homes. Customs declarations record large quantities of wallpaper shipped to Providence from China in the first decades of the 19th century. The Edward Carrington House on Williams Street in Providence (ca. 1812) retains its original Chinese wallpaper.



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Eugène Ehrmann, French, 1804-1896

Georges Zipelius, French, ca. 1802

Joseph Fuchs, French, ca. 1802

Zuber & Company, French

El Dorado, ca. 1848

Black print on wove paper

Gift of Richard and Inge Chafee in memory of Zechariah and Mary

Dexter Chafee and their daughter, Mary 1994.101.2

Illusionistic wallpapers such as *El Dorado* allowed armchair travelers to imagine themselves in distant and exotic places. In the words of 20th-century critic and philosopher Walter Benjamin, scenic wallpapers turned an ordinary room into a “box [seat] in the theater of the world.”

When complete, *El Dorado* features four sets of panels depicting imaginary vistas of buildings, rivers, valleys, and mountains framed by a foreground of trees, broadleaf plants, and flowers. While the title refers to the mythical city of gold sought by the Spanish in the New World, the four subject groupings of *El Dorado* each represent one of four continents. From right to left, lengths one to six depict the Vera Cruz region of Mexico (panel number six is on view); seven (also on view) to thirteen, a terrace beside an Italian lake; fourteen to nineteen, Turkish buildings near the Bosphorus strait; and twenty to twenty-four, Egyptian antiquities near the Nile River. Over fifteen hundred separate woodblocks were used to hand print the entire masterwork.

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Tomita, Chinese
Wallpaper panel, mid 1800s
handpainted on panel
Museum Collection 49.135B

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Alexander Calder, American, 1898-1976
Laverne Originals, American, 1938-
Splotchy, 1949
Screenprint on paper
Abby Rockefeller Mauze Fund 82.098

Splotchy exhibits a playful title and a whimsical design, as well as the expansive, "all-over" kind of abstraction associated with New York School painters. Calder's creation resembles the work of Jackson Pollock, but is a wry inversion of Pollock's high-minded seriousness and existential posture. The deceptively spontaneous mark-making in *Splotchy* recalls not only abstract expressionist artists, but also some of their surrealist precursors, particularly Joan Miró.

The design, which appears random at first, is a regular pattern of two rectangular repeats joined together in reverse. It demanded a separate stencil for each color in the screenprinting technique that Calder employed. The use of screenprinting in 1949 was associated



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with the mass production of popular images, not with fine art, and suggests a statement on Calder's part about the divide between high and low culture. The producers of Splotchy, Erwin and Estelle Laverne, established Laverne Originals in 1938 after studying at the Art Student's League, New York, under Hans Hofmann. Throughout its existence, Laverne Originals attempted to bridge the gap between fine and applied arts, in the process fostering the creative talents of many.

Etienne de Lavallée, French, ca. 1733-1793

Jean-Baptiste Réveillon, French, 1725-1811

Wallpaper panel, ca. 1790

Printed and hand-painted in tempera on paper

Mary B. Jackson Fund 34.959

This paper may be one of the Lavallée-Poussin panels sold by the famed manufacturer Réveillon in 1788. Such designs were immensely popular in France in the late 18th century, where the infant wallpaper industry was contemporaneous with the neoclassical revival. Early mass-produced wallpapers often contain abundant references to Greek and Roman subjects. This vogue for classical decorative schemes was due to a renewal of interest in the ancient past that accompanied the accidental rediscovery of the Roman cities of Herculaneum (1713) and Pompeii (1748). The beautifully preserved wall paintings found in homes at these sites inspired many formal characteristics of the Museum's papers. Original examples of the types of ancient Roman wall painting that inspired this wallpaper may be found upstairs in the Museum's Greek and Roman galleries.



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Joseph Dufour, French
Zuber & Company, French
Base and capital, ca. 1810-1820
Block print on laid paper
Mary B. Jackson Fund 34.1125

Wallpapers imitating classical architectural elements were popular decorative devices in the 19th century. Illusionistic cornices, balustrades, and columns framed larger decorative panels, such as the Judgment of Paris in this exhibition. Architectural elements provided depth to a given scene, which extended the perceived space of the room they graced. These elements also reinforced the suggestion that the underlying paper was to be considered a work of art.

This ornate gold capital with base – replete with classical acanthus leaves, rosettes, and dolphins, but not modeled after any of the classical orders – was printed separately from the column shaft. Buyers of these details would match colors and designs from the seller’s selections and would then have the parts trimmed and pasted together into a composite column. This allowed purchasers to fit the elements to the available space.

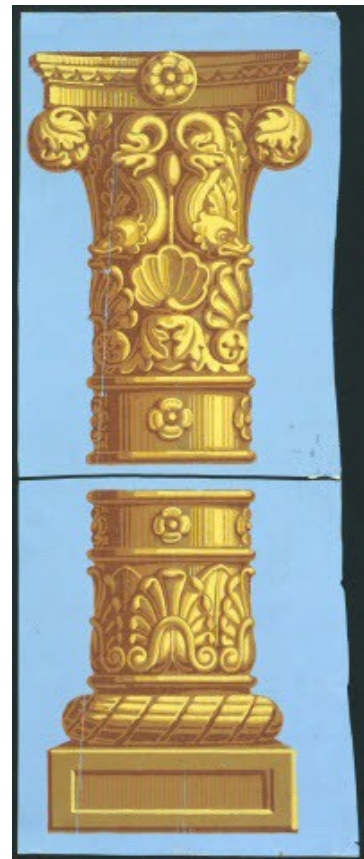


RISD MUSEUM

Joseph Dufour, French
Zuber & Company, French
Base and capital, ca. 1810-1820
Block print on laid paper
Mary B. Jackson Fund 34.1126

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Jean Baptiste Pillement, French, 1728-1808

Wallpaper panel, ca. 1780

Block print on paper

Mary B. Jackson Fund 34.875

Chinoiserie wallpaper abounded in France during the reign of Louis XV (1715-74), in conjunction with a booming market in objects imported from China. Often an entire room would be decorated in what was perceived to be the Chinese fashion (*à la chinoise*) and dedicated to the display of Chinese lacquerware, porcelains, and textiles. Panels like this one were typically framed, rather than mounted directly on the wall, so that they could be preserved, rearranged, and relocated.

European-made chinoiserie designs often reflected the cultural biases of their time. In the central group of figures, for example, the Chinese person assumes a subservient position to the Western woman, mirroring the sense of cultural superiority that marked this period of European colonial expansion. The single reclining figure below also typifies Western assumptions of the time. His garb appears more Turkish than Chinese, suggesting the European tendency to combine all Eastern cultures into a single stereotype.



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Eugène Ehrmann, French, 1804-1896
Georges Zipelius, French, ca. 1802
Joseph Fuchs, French, ca. 1802
Zuber & Company, French
El Dorado, 1890-1900
Block print on wove paper
Gift of Richard and Inge Chafee in memory of Zechariah and Mary
Dexter Chafee and their daughter, Mary 1994.101.1

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Chinese; Qing
Court Scene, ca. 1770
Hand painted on rice paper
Mary B. Jackson Fund 34.862

This fragment of wallpaper was created specifically for export to Europe. It depicts an imaginary scene of contemporary daily life among the Chinese elite. The dress and posture of each person in the scene indicate their social position. The mustached man in the upper left is the master of this wealthy household. Close behind him stands one of his children (?). A family consultant stands to his right; a servant lingers in back of them. To their right, the master's sons enliven the scene as they playfully fight with each other over a porcelain (?) fish. The courtly setting testifies to the family's prestige, which in turn would have echoed the wealth and status of the paper's purchasers.



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The colors and composition demonstrate an aesthetic connection between traditional Chinese ink painting and the Chinese commercial wallpaper industry. Wallpaper designers in China were regarded not as artists but as minor craftsmen. Unlike Chinese painters and calligraphers, who were well-educated and enjoyed high social status, these artists came from the lower ranks of society and were often illiterate.

British

Wallpaper fragment, 1882

Embossed and printed on paper

Gift of N. David Barry Scotti 2002.39.14

The second half of the 19th century witnessed responses to poorly designed and cheaply made factory goods, which embodied the alienation felt by both laborers and consumers in an increasingly mechanized world. The Arts and Crafts movement – including the English critics and artists John Ruskin and William Morris – sought to counteract the depersonalization of mass production by reviving fine design and handicraft. Although the best-known British wallpapers of the late 19th century were printed by hand at firms such as Morris and Company, they were prohibitively expensive and could never compete with machine-made papers on the open market. They did, however, influence the design quality of machine-made papers such as this one, which decorated the Providence home of Esther Baker.



Dagobert Peche, Austrian, 1887-1923

Flammersheim & Steinmann, ca. 1919-60

Spitze (Lace), 1920

Roller print on wove paper

Gift of Norman Herrreshoff 84.235.1

In the early 20th century, Dagobert Peche reinvigorated the Morris tradition of lush floral wallpaper with a cutting-edge modernism. While preserving some of the organic complexity associated with the English Arts and Crafts movement, Peche's work reflects the stripped down look preferred by early 20th-century Northern European designers.

Spitze was part of a series of wallpapers designed for the Flammersheim & Steinmann Company while Peche was with the

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Wiener Werkstätte. His work defines a second phase of the Werkstätte (Vienna Workshops), when the group moved away from the pure geometry of its founders, Josef Hoffmann and Koloman Moser, toward more dynamic, asymmetrical compositions.

Père Boulard, French, active 1730-1770

Blue and white Domino with floral sprays, ca. 1750

Printed ink on paper

Mary B. Jackson Fund 34.867

These printed papers, known as Dominos, are among the earliest examples of wallpaper. They could either be pasted sheet by sheet onto a wall or could serve smaller-scale purposes as endpapers for books or linings for wardrobes, drawers, or boxes. Because they could be printed in quantity, they were a less expensive decorative wall treatment than the traditional textiles or paintings. Initially, they tended to serve as ornament in humble settings. By the turn of the 18th century, however, Dominos had evolved into valued decorative papers used by every social class.

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