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Japantastic

Japanese-inspired patterns for the British home 1880-1930

Catalogue for the exhibition held at the
Museum of Domestic Design & Architecture (MoDA)
Middlesex University
15th September 2009- 1st August 2010

Introduction

This exhibition looked at the way that Japanese-inspired design ideas were adapted for British homes by one company, the Silver Studio, between around 1880 and 1930. Designers working for the Silver Studio incorporated Japanese motifs and methods into wallpaper and textile patterns for British consumers. They took various design ideas which they saw as 'Japanese' and adapted them to suit their customers' tastes. The resulting patterns are not straightforwardly 'Japanese', but are instead the result of a fascinating process of cross-cultural fertilisation of design ideas.

Britain first experienced a craze for all things Japanese in the 1870s and 80s. Japan opened up to trade with the West after a long period of isolation. Europeans saw Japanese art and design as exciting and exotic, because it was so different from Western culture.

An interest in Japanese style and design motifs is strongly associated with the Aesthetic Movement which emerged in the 1860s. The movement was concerned with 'art for art's sake' and its followers cultivated individual enlightenment through the pursuit of beauty and beautiful surroundings. They dismissed the moralising narratives of Royal Academy painting, and rejected Victorian aspirations towards technological achievement, mass-production and industry. During this period, the decoration of the home became regarded as the focus of moral debate, framed as a contrast between 'good taste', as favoured by design reformers and aesthetes, and 'bad taste', as favoured by the majority of British consumers. Consumption of particular domestic items thus became a marker of moral superiority, and by filling their homes with Japanese items (fans, peacock feathers and sunflowers), and choosing Japanese motifs (cranes, dragons, chrysanthemums and key patterns), Aesthetes were making a statement about their rejection of the overstuffed sofas and other excesses of Victorian homes¹.

By the 1870s, an interest in Japanese art had ceased to be the preserve of individual collectors and Aesthetes, and had become the fashion among design-conscious consumers more generally². Manufacturers such as Warner (which opened in 1870) produced luxury textiles incorporating Japanese motifs³. By the 1880s and 90s, Japanese motifs were regularly, and sometimes indiscriminately, incorporated into cheaper, mass-produced items, drawing regular criticism from design elites. Japanese-inspired motifs gradually lost favour with the design-conscious elite, as they sought to disassociate themselves from their social inferiors. Middle-class consumers became increasingly familiar with Japanese art through international exhibitions and department stores, and wanted to incorporate it into their own homes. The influence of Japanese art on British domestic design can be seen as part of an ongoing discourse of taste and of class⁴, with designers taking a set of design references and modifying them over time to suit their customers. The Silver Studio, as a commercial design studio operating over a long period, played a key role in negotiating these discourses.

What was the Silver Studio?

The Silver Studio was a commercial design practice, based in West London, founded by Arthur Silver in 1880. Silver was a

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professional designer who trained at Reading School of Art. The company enjoyed commercial success for a long period, with more than 20,000 schemes for items such as furnishing fabrics, wallpapers, tablecloths, rugs and carpets produced by the Studio between 1880 and 1963. Silver was fortunate to open his Studio at a time when an expanding and increasingly popular middle class meant there was a growing market for domestic furnishings.

Arthur Silver came from a Reading family of upholsterers. His upbringing probably gave him an understanding of the interior decorating trade, and of the need to satisfy the changing tastes of customers. Like his contemporary, Christopher Dresser, Silver fully understood the need for high quality in design intended for mass production of wallpapers and textiles. However, unlike many of his peers, he acknowledged that as industrialisation progressed there would be an ever-increasing demand for new and different designs for different markets on the part of manufacturers. More specifically, he understood that manufacturers needed designs for wallpapers and textiles that would translate easily into the methods of mass

production, and which would also satisfy customers⁵.

In an article of 1889, Arthur Silver described himself as *“a professional designer who is well aware of the movements in public taste, as well as familiar with the mechanical requirements of the factory...”* He argued that this enabled him to produce designs that *“would satisfy the most artistic critic and yet be likely to prove commercially profitable”*⁶. This was an implicit criticism of those who designed for wallpapers and textiles without understanding the technical constraints of producing a satisfactory repeating pattern, or of the other limitations of the manufacturing process⁷.

Similarly, in an interview of 1894 Arthur Silver commented that certain design ideas were simply not saleable, and that there was no point in a manufacturer producing a design which would not sell. As a designer, he saw it as his role to provide what the consumer wanted while at the same time *“to do the very best to make the design as artistic as possible...One must face the problem boldly, which is to supply saleable designs of artistic merit”*⁸.

1. The Silver Studio and the Art of Japan

By 1870 “Every mantelpiece in every enlightened household bore at least one Japanese fan, parasols were used as summer fire screens, popular magazines and ball programmes were printed in asymmetrical semi-Japanese style and asymmetry of form and ornament spread to pottery, porcelain, silver and furniture.”⁹ Many Japanese items could be bought in London during the 1860s and 70s. Shops such as Liberty in Regent Street sold silks, fans, china and porcelain, textiles and lacquer ware in great quantity, imported to feed British consumers’ demand for all things Japanese. Arthur Lasenby Liberty opened his shop on Regent Street in 1875. The shop did much to foster interest in Japanese art, and artists such as Morris, Burne-Jones and Rossetti were among the regular customers who went to gain inspiration from the silks and talk about ‘art for art’s sake’¹⁰.

British designers, manufacturers and retailers soon realised that there was a vast demand for Japanese goods, which could not be wholly supplied by Japanese production methods. In addition, ‘authentic’ Japanese style was somewhat at odds with British tastes. By the mid-1880s Liberty was commissioning designs for wallpapers and textiles from British designers, which referenced Japanese sources while modifying them to Western tastes. Liberty’s range of ‘Art Fabrics’

included a design called ‘Mooltan’ (illustration 8) attributed to Christopher Dresser¹¹. Liberty also commissioned designs for wallpapers and textiles from the Silver Studio (illustration 2).

Arthur Silver and the designers he employed almost certainly never visited Japan themselves, but they were avid collectors of Japanese source material¹². In an article in *The Studio*¹³ Magazine of 1894, the Silver Studio was described as being full of visual reference material similar to that collected by artists: “*Photographs after Botticelli and other old masters, panels of lustrous enamels and gesso-work, scraps of fine fabrics, and books of Japanese drawings...*”¹⁴ Using these sources, the Silver Studio designers incorporated Japanese ideas into their designs for wallpapers and textiles, while adapting them to appeal to British consumers¹⁵.

Some of the most popular Japanese-inspired designs were those based on geometric motifs. These frequently incorporated Japanese roundels, known as *mon* (illustration 5). Designs for wallpapers and textiles by the Silver Studio incorporating *mon*-shapes and fans (illustrations 6 & 7) are typical of the patterns intended for the mass market in the 1890s.

Arthur Silver's insight was that it was not sufficient for a pattern design to be judged 'good' by critics. Rather the only test was that it was sufficiently appealing to the furnishing-buying public to make a profit for the manufacturer, and hence guarantee repeat business for the Silver Studio. The Studio's customers were retailers and manufacturers of wallpapers and textiles at all levels of the market, both in Britain and abroad. Surviving records for the 1890s, for example, indicate that designs for wallpapers were sold to Essex & Co, Jeffrey & Co, Sanderson and Wylie & Lochhead, amongst others. Clients for printed textile designs included Stead McAlpin and GP& J Baker, as well as Liberty & Co., and designs for woven textiles were sold to a number of companies including the French firms Leborgne and Vanoutryve et Cie¹⁶. In order to satisfy these customers the Studio's designers needed to maintain their awareness of current trends and fashions, and this included their enthusiasm for Japanese art.

However, the Silver Studio's interest in Japanese art was not only derived from an interest in exotic motifs for their own sake. Japanese art was favoured by influential designers such as Christopher Dresser and Lewis F Day, because it relied on flattened, stylised motifs, rather than the naturalism common within Western design. Since the

publication of Pugin's *True Principles* in 1841 and Owen Jones' *Grammar of Ornament* in 1856, pattern drawn according to the rules of geometry and which emphasised the flatness of surface of the walls, carpets and fabrics they adorned was considered aesthetically and morally superior to the busy, floribunda excess of mid-century chintzes and carpets¹⁷. Such was the influence of these publications that 'conventionalised' (that is, 'stylised' as opposed to 'naturalistic') ornament became the standard mode for large-scale 'reformed' artistic manufactures¹⁸. The geometric elements and two-dimensional depictions of nature and landscape in Japanese design chimed with these ideals of restraint and decorative integrity.

Within the context of the design reform debate, Arthur Silver needed to tread a careful path between satisfying the demands of designing for industrial production, and maintaining a professional standing among his peers, many of whom were protégés of the social and artistic ideals of the Arts and Crafts movement and as such, rhetorically at least, favoured craft production¹⁹. His interest in Japanese art, with its evocation of simple natural materials and forms and the values of a non-industrialised society, can be seen as one of the ways in which he sought to reconcile these competing interests.

1.

2. *Katagami* in the Silver Studio Collection

The Silver Studio Collection contains around four hundred Japanese stencil plates or *katagami*. It is not known how they were acquired, but it is possible that Arthur Silver bought them at the London store Liberty in the 1880s, or that they were given to him by his friend and business partner, Alexander Rottmann.

Katagami stencils are a method of applying designs to fabric, primarily for kimonos²⁰. Western travellers to Japan at the end of the nineteenth century became fascinated with this example of Japanese craft, and they imported *katagami* to Europe in great numbers. In Japan *katagami* were seen as part of the textile printing process only, and were not considered an art form in their own right until much later.

Many Victorian artists and designers were avid collectors of these stencil plates. They were impressed by the stylization of the stencil motifs and the technical brilliance of the cutting. *Katagami* generally include geometric shapes, animals and plant forms, and most were constructed to form repeating patterns. The European fashion for *katagami*

was encouraged by Siegfried Bing (1838-1905), an importer of Chinese and Japanese art. He edited a magazine called *Artistic Japan* and owned the Paris shop *L'Art Nouveau*. Western artists and designers including Van Gogh, Whistler, Frank Lloyd Wright and Charles Rennie Mackintosh were inspired by Japanese stencils, as well as Arthur Silver.

MoDA's Silver Studio Collection includes *katagami* dating from the 1860s and 70s²¹. The Silver Studio designers created direct prints of some of the *katagami* they owned, probably as part of the process of becoming familiar with the motifs (see illustrations 11 & 12). They also incorporated some of the stencil motifs directly into their designs for wallpapers and textiles (illustrations 13 and 14). For their British customers, the inclusion of motifs from *katagami* in these patterns added a touch of the exotic to otherwise conventional designs.

13.

3. Exotic Florals

At the end of the nineteenth century, a number of new plant forms were introduced into Britain from Japan, including some new species of irises and hydrangeas previously unseen in Europe²². It is easy to forget that these garden plants which are now so familiar would have once seemed exotic and novel to British consumers.

Knowledge of Japanese flora was disseminated in the West through the importation of the plants themselves, through their representation within decorative art objects such as ceramics, and through botanical drawings, seed catalogues and photographs. In the 1890s, the Silver Studio's designers acquired three volumes of collotypes by the Japanese photographer Kazumasa Ogawa (1860-1929). Ogawa is considered one of the pioneers of photography and photomechanical printing in Japan. These books, *Chrysanthemums of Japan*, *Flowers of Japan* and *Lilies of Japan*, containing very beautiful images of flowers, were almost certainly some of the Silver Studio's key sources in the development of new designs²³ (see illustration 15).

Botanical drawings are intended to provide a clear and accurate representation of the form of a plant, but the challenge for designers of textiles and wallpapers is slightly different. Floral motifs must be recognisable as a particular species, but must also work as a satisfactory repeating pattern²⁴.

The Silver Studio's use of exotic plant forms from Japan is interesting, because they took new and – to Western eyes - unfamiliar flowers, but depicted them in conventional Western ways. For example, the chrysanthemum is highly symbolic within Japanese culture (being the seal of the Imperial family and the national flower), yet illustration 17 shows the chrysanthemum given a naturalistic treatment in the tradition of English chintzes.

Similarly, illustration 18 features a climbing hydrangea that would have been unknown in Europe before the late nineteenth century. But though the inspiration was Japanese in origin, the treatment of the motifs was not. It seems that the Silver Studio's clients wanted patterns which gestured towards Japanese ideas (in order to provide a hint of something new, fashionable and exotic), but which were not out of place within British domestic interiors.

2.

4. **The Rottmann–Silver Stencil Venture**

In the early 1890s, Arthur Silver developed a new technique for stencilling for wallcoverings. His use of stencils was probably inspired by his knowledge of Japanese *katagami*. The intention was that these wallcoverings could be used instead of wallpaper. Their selling point was that they enabled consumers to achieve an effect similar to that of hand stencilling directly on to the wall, but without the inconvenience and expense that the process entailed.

Arthur Silver developed a partnership with Alexander Rottmann, a well regarded businessman and importer of Japanese products²⁵. By the early 1890s, Rottmann and Silver had already worked together; the Silver Studio supplied many of the designs for Rottmann's 'leather papers'²⁶, which were produced at Rottmann's factory in Yokohama. In around 1893, Rottmann and Silver set up a new joint venture, producing stencilled wallcoverings. It seems likely that Rottmann provided the materials (papers made from grass and jute), probably imported from Japan, and the Silver Studio provided the design expertise.

Arthur Silver was perhaps attracted to the technique of stencilling because it represented a marriage of hand craft production process with mechanisation. Commentators liked the idea that the stencilling process successfully utilised a semi-mechanised production method while retaining the advantages of hand production:

"Stencilling is handwork rendered expeditious and, therefore, more economical by certain mechanical

*appliances, which take the name of stencil plates...a graduated wash, which is the distinctly 'hand-worked' quality of a stencil is used with good effect... A notable departure in the embellishment of our walls has been initiated, and stencilling...may be placed midway between the cheaper wall-papers and the costly fresco."*²⁷

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Some of Silver's contemporaries were experimenting with stencil techniques at the same time²⁸. But critics agreed that Silver had most successfully 'acclimatised' a Japanese method for British tastes:

*"At 28 Garlick Hill, Mr Arthur Silver lately exhibited a new departure in stencilled fabrics, which he has worked out in conjunction with Messrs Rottmann. The novel treatment of jute with transparent washes of colour, and dark arras cloth with opaque pigments, opens up a new style of interior decoration that may be adopted for a cottage or a palace, and look fine in either... The hint offered by Japanese stencils is here acclimatised finally, and we wish it all success."*²⁹

The word 'acclimatised' is an interesting one, and it recurs several times in contemporary articles about Silver's stencilling venture³⁰. It seems to imply approval for the successful modification of both a foreign technique and foreign motifs, in order to be suitable for British tastes in domestic furnishing. The critics also applauded the fact that this was a collaboration between designer and manufacturer:

*"It is a pleasure to recognise Mr Rottmann's share in the production of these successful designs, the more so because complete unity of purpose between the manufacturer and the designer is one of the objects peculiarly desired by The Studio..."*³¹

Although the stencilling method was inspired by Japan, the Rottmann-Silver stencils

differed from *katagami* in a number of ways. The motifs used were more anglicised, with the names of the designs, 'Verona', 'Holbein', 'Argosies', and so on, giving them a distinctly European flavour (illustrations 20-23). In addition, perhaps to emphasise their hand-worked aspect, the designs utilised areas of graduated colour³².

The Rottmann-Silver stencil venture brought Arthur Silver wide critical recognition. An article in the *Journal of Decorative Art* of 1895 praised him as a "consummate draughtsman", and applauded the wide variety of materials used (canvas, jute, grasscloth and so on), to create different effects³³. Several commentators also noted Silver's skill in incorporating the stencil 'ties' into the designs, rather than attempting to disguise them as others had done³⁴, which perhaps resulted from his familiarity with the *katagami* stencils.

The stencil decorations were exhibited at Rottmann's showrooms in Garlick Hill, London in 1895. The following year Arthur Silver gave a lecture on stencilling to the Architectural Association, which was reprinted in several different publications³⁵. Despite the general critical approval it is not clear whether this would have been a commercial success. Arthur Silver died in October 1896, before his partnership with Rottmann had an opportunity to become established.

5. Blossoms and Birds

Arthur Silver died in 1896, but the Silver Studio continued to flourish under the

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management of his son Rex. The Studio developed a new range of stencilled wallpapers in the early 1900s, but by then Japanese-inspired furnishings were becoming less fashionable.

After the First World War, designers again looked to the East for inspiration, and an interest in Japanese motifs re-emerged, albeit in a different form. In this period, the Silver Studio's designers appear to have relied less on genuine Japanese sources, but instead worked with vaguer notions of the Orient that derived partially from the 'chinoiserie' style of the eighteenth century.

During this period wallpaper itself was not considered to be in good taste. It represented the complete antithesis of modernism which argued for a lack of decoration and ornamentation³⁶. Wallpaper was therefore shunned by many who saw themselves as 'design conscious', but it was still seen as an essential element of home decoration by the majority of ordinary consumers.

A proliferation of feminine cherry blossom and bird designs appeared during this period (illustration 27). The cherry blossom is the national flower of Japan, and is richly symbolic. It is used as a metaphor for the ephemeral nature of life, with its extreme, fleeting beauty and quick demise. In an echo of the late nineteenth-century craze, these symbolic Japanese flowers were again used in the West as simply an effective 'exotic' motif, and incorporated into a traditional Western design aesthetic.

Throughout its long history, the Silver Studio mainly produced designs for wallpapers and furnishing fabrics. In the 1930s, however they also produced dress fabrics for clients such as Liberty. Designers such as Winifred Mold (who worked for the Silver Studio

during the 1920s and 30s) produced delicate, feminine designs using Japanese motifs such as cherry blossom and parasols³⁷ (illustrations 29 and 30).

6.

7. Landscapes and Lanterns

The Silver Studio Collection includes a number of small pieces of embroidered textile, doubtless accumulated for visual inspiration. Decorative circles, sleeve bands and other items like these were available from London department stores including Liberty's. They were a common feature of British drawing rooms in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. They were in fact more often Chinese than Japanese, but British consumers were indifferent to the distinction; embroidered textiles became another symbol of cultural appropriation, used within British domestic interiors as markers of domesticity far removed from their original cultural meanings³⁸.

Chinese embroideries were commonly cut up and re-made into domestic items, and a number of the examples from the Silver Studio Collection appear to have been re-modelled in this way (illustration 36). However, the Silver Studio designers seem to have been less interested in the tactile quality of the silks, or in the technical details of the stitches, than in their use as purely visual reference.

The value of these embroidered fragments as design inspiration can be seen in the visual

links between, for example illustrations 35 and 36. Wallpapers such as these, featuring silhouetted landscapes and pagodas, are typical of the Silver Studio's output in the oriental style which was popular during this period. They were frequently printed in the brilliant colours of the 'jazz' era which lent an air of luxury and exoticism. Popular colours included jade green, purple, red, orange, midnight blue and black. Richly coloured and exotic designs were considered particularly appropriate for parlours, halls and staircases.

Despite being unfashionable with the design elites, the Silver Studio's continuing success was evidence of the ongoing popularity of wallpapers with the wider market. The commercial success of the company over an extended period showed that the designers were able to satisfy a wide range of design demands. By the 1920s and 30s signifiers of 'Japanese-ness' and exoticism had shifted but the Studio was still producing what customers wanted. The designers continued to collect reference material as design inspiration, and also to return to design sources collected many years before. The resulting patterns are not straightforwardly 'Japanese', but are instead the result of a fascinating process of cross-cultural fertilisation of design ideas.

Catalogue Entries for exhibition held at the Museum of Domestic Design & Architecture, Middlesex University, September 2009- August 2010.

1.1

Mon books, late nineteenth century

1.2

Design for a linoleum floor covering, by Arthur Silver, 1885

This design makes use of a Japanese inspired pattern of squares containing geometric motifs. The colours are typical of the Aesthetic Movement.

SD 1221

1.3

Cotton textile sample, by Arthur Silver for Liberty & Co, ca. 1890

1.4

Design for a wallpaper, by Arthur Silver, ca. 1885

1.5

Design for a wallpaper by Arthur Silver, 1888

In this wallpaper design, sprays of blossom are interspersed with a Japanese print giving a trellis or fretwork effect.

SD 9013

1.6

'Mooltan' reversible furnishing fabric, attributed to Christopher Dresser, for Liberty & Co, ca. 1880
check

1.7 & 1.8

Printed fabric samples, by Christopher Dresser for Liberty & Co, ca. 1890

This fabric design, in two colourways, uses Japanese designs of birds, flowers, leaves and butterflies, on a tightly spaced geometric background.

ST 286A, ST 286B

1.9

12

Design for decoration of door and wall, by Arthur Silver, ca. 1885

Very few examples of designs for whole schemes of interior decoration by the Silver Studio have survived. The influence of Japanese art can be seen in the dado, and in the decoration of the frieze which features cranes (a symbolic bird within Japanese culture). The overall effect is one which is typical of the Aesthetic movement, in design, colour and in the use of objects such as the fan.

SD3

1.10

Design for a drawing room, by Arthur Silver, ca. 1885

SD 4

1.11

Wallpaper sample, ca.1890

See illustration 3, page 5

An example of cheap Aesthetic Movement wallpapers with a crowded pattern of Japanese motifs including fans, chrysanthemums, roundels and fretwork.

SW2004

1.12

Design for a wallpaper, by Arthur Silver, 1884

An Aesthetic Movement wallpaper, influenced by EW Godwin's designs, especially his 'Peacock' wallpaper of 1873. This design has a Japanese geometric ground, featuring black and grey crosses with stylised blue flower motifs in roundels reminiscent of *mon*.

SD 1523

2.1

Katagami print design for a wallpaper, by Arthur Silver, ca. 1890

This is a print made from a *katagami* similar to the one shown here. It is presented as a design, which was probably intended for wallpaper.

SD 11658

2.2

An illustrated version of this catalogue is available from www.blurb.com

Katagami stencil depicting small daisy-like flowers, late nineteenth century

K3.4

2.3

Katagami stencil depicting butterflies, late nineteenth century

2.4

Print from a katagami stencil, by the Silver Studio, ca. 1890

2.5

Katagami stencil depicting birds, late nineteenth century

K 2.1

2.6

Design for a printed textile, by the Silver Studio, ca. 1890

This design featuring crabs and plants amongst swirling water is clearly heavily influenced by *katagami*.

SD 1262

2.7

Katagami stencil depicting butterflies arranged to form floral motifs, late nineteenth century

2.8

Katagami stencil depicting fish, late nineteenth century

2.9

Katagami stencil depicting flowers, late nineteenth century

K 3.32

2.10

Bordered design for a printed muslin or voile curtain, by the Silver Studio, 1892

For the Silver Studio's customers, the inclusion of motifs from *katagami* added an exotic look to otherwise conventional designs.

SD 1257

2.11

Bordered design, by the Silver Studio, 1893

See illustration 14, page 14

2.12

Katagami stencil, late nineteenth century

2.13

Print from a katagami stencil, late nineteenth century

3.1

Image of an iris from *Flowers of Japan* by Kazumasa Ogawa, 1895

See illustration 15, page 16

3.2

Design for a wallpaper, by Arthur Silver, 1891

Delicate, feminine designs such as this were much admired by writers on decoration in the 1880s and 1890s. This pretty blossom design for a wallpaper was probably intended for Liberty & Co.

SD 9011

3.3

Design for a rug, by Arthur Silver, 1892

See illustration 16, page 16

3.4

Design for a printed textile, by Arthur Silver, 1890

A delicately coloured design of chrysanthemums, in pinks, oranges, blues and greens.

SD 8791A

3.5

Design for a wallpaper, by the Silver Studio, 1892

3.6

Cotton textile sample, by Arthur Silver for Liberty & Co, 1891

See illustration 2, page 4

Silver Studio records show that this Japanese design of irises on a white ground design was sold to Liberty & Co in July 1891 for three guineas.

ST918

3.7

An illustrated version of this catalogue is available from www.blurb.com

Design for a printed textile, by the Silver Studio, 1895

New types of iris were introduced into Europe from Japan at end of the nineteenth century. They were popular with Western designers because their distinctive shape meant it was easy to stylise them successfully.

SD 3568

3.8

Design for a printed textile, by Arthur Silver, 1891

4.1

Design for 'The Argosies' wallcovering, by Arthur Silver, 1894

4.2

'The Argosies' jute wallcovering, by Arthur Silver, 1894

4.3

'Holbein' wallcovering, by Arthur Silver, 1894

4.4

Rottmann's catalogue of Silver Studio stencilled designs, 1895

4.5

Catalogue for an exhibition of stencilled designs by the Silver Studio, held at Rottmann's showrooms in Garlick Hill, 1894

SE 1316

4.6

'Verona' wallcovering, by Arthur Silver, ca. 1895

4.7

Design for a wallcovering, by Arthur Silver, ca. 1895

4.8

Grass paper wallcovering, by Arthur Silver, ca. 1895

5.1

Wallpaper, ca.1925

Designs such as these took the traditional Japanese cherry blossom motif and treated it in a very feminine and Western manner.

SW 308

5.2

Wallpaper, probably by the Silver Studio for Potters of Darwen, ca. 1925

5.3

Wallpaper, by Wallpaper Manufacturers Ltd, ca.1928

SW 343

5.4

Wallpaper frieze, ca.1925

5.6

Wallpaper by Arthur Sanderson & Sons Ltd, 1928

5.7

Wallpaper, ca.1928

SW 351

5.8

Wallpaper by Canon, ca.1925

SW 1232

5.9

Design for printed textile by Winifred Mold at the Silver Studio, 1919

5.10

Printed silk by Winifred Mold at the Silver Studio, 1930

5.11

Design for a wallpaper, by Winifred Mold at the Silver Studio, ca. 1925

SD 10305

5.12

Design for a wallpaper or textile, by Winifred Mold at the Silver Studio, ca. 1925

SD 10236

5.13

Design for a furnishing textile, by the Silver Studio, 1920

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SD 7191

6.1

Wallpaper with frieze, by Cole & Hill, 1926

Gold geometric motifs on a black ground are softened with a more feminine companion frieze featuring butterflies and roses on a trellis.

SW 15.83

6.2

Wallpaper, 1928

6.3

Wallpaper by John Line & Sons, 1928

The designer of this paper has played with scale by placing large stylised floral groups amongst landscapes and pagodas.

SW 375

6.4

Design for a dress silk, by the Silver Studio, 1926

SD 2322

6.5

Wallpaper, ca. 1925

6.6

Wallpaper, ca.1928

SW 466

6.7

Wallpaper by Arthur Sanderson & Sons Ltd, ca.1925

6.8

Wallpaper by George H. Willis at the Silver Studio, for Allan, Cockshut & Co, ca.1925

6.9

Wallpaper by WPM, 1927

The common chinoiserie landscape format is here used in conjunction with floral groups that

appear more traditional and Western in appearance.

SW 160E

6.10

Wallpaper, ca. 1920

6.11

Wallpaper by Heffer Scott, ca. 1920

SW 1141

6.12

Woven textile, ca.1920

The use of gold on a black ground in this crane motif repeat design conjures up the glamour and exoticism that typified the fashion for Japanese design.

ST 3152

6.13

Embroidered silk fragment

The items shown in this exhibition are only a small proportion of MoDA's Silver Studio Collection. For more information see www.moda.mdx.ac.uk

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Notes

- 1 C. Gere & L. Hoskins, *The House Beautiful: Oscar Wilde and the Aesthetic Interior* (London, Lund Humphries, 2000), pp35-40; D. Brett, *On Decoration*, (Cambridge, Lutterworth Press, 1992), pp 63-64
- 2 E. Aslin, *The Aesthetic Movement : Prelude to Art Nouveau* (London: Ferndale Editions, 1981); T. Sato & T. Watanabe, *Japan and Britain, An Aesthetic Dialogue 1850-1930*, (London, Lund Humphries, 1991)
- 3 E. Kramer, "From Luxury to Mania: A Case Study of Anglo-Japanese Textile Production at Warner & Ramm, 1870-1890", *Textile History* (2007) Vol 38 (2), pp 151-164
- 4 D. Brett, *op.cit.*, p3
- 5 Manufacturers sometimes employed artists to create designs for wallpapers, but artists did not necessarily have an understanding of industrial processes, nor were they always inclined to submit their artistic vision to the clients' requirements. The Silver Studio, in contrast, provided a professional design service, which combined artistic talent with the ability to produce designs which would translate well to industrial production methods. See MoDA leaflet describing workings of the Silver Studio: <http://eprints.mdx.ac.uk/3103> . L. Hoskins, *The Papered Wall* (London, Thames & Hudson, 1994), p163. See also Gleeson White (ed.), *Practical Designing, a handbook on the preparation of working drawings*, (London, George Bell & Sons, 1894), to which Arthur Silver contributed chapters on the design of printed and woven fabrics, and floorcloths.
- 6 See handwritten notes by Arthur Silver, outlining the thinking behind his *Silvern Series* of photographs, 1889 (Silver Studio Collection, MoDA). The *Silvern Series* was a collection of images of items chosen by Silver from the South Kensington Museum (now the V&A), which were produced in large format and sold to manufacturers as design inspiration. His point was that as a professional designer he knew which designs would translate well into modern manufacturing methods.
- 7 The National Schools of Design trained new designers through a process of copying 'ideal' examples of historic or non-western design at institutions such as the South Kensington Museum. Although this method produced accomplished and eclectic draughtsmen in the art and history of ornament, their training did not include an understanding of the technical constraints and economic implications of manufacturing that the apprenticeship-style training, gained in factories and commercial studios offered. The debate of whether designers should be trained at art-schools or as industry apprentices was a key-one in the English design reform movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.
- 8 See, "A Studio of Design: An Interview with Mr Arthur Silver", *The Studio Magazine*, Vol III (June 1894), pp 117-122
- 9 Aslin, *op.cit.*, p79
- 10 B. Morris, *Liberty Design, 1874-1914*, (Secaucus, Chartwell Books, 1989), p16
- 11 Morris, *op. cit.*, pp 18-19
- 12 Photographs in the Silver Studio Collection indicate that the Silvers' own home was decorated with Japanese woodcuts, leather papers, and other items; Arthur Silver was also a member of the Japan Society. See Turner M., et al, *A London Design Studio 1880-1963: the Silver Studio Collection* exhibition catalogue (London, Middlesex Polytechnic, 1980)

13 *The Studio Magazine* was founded in 1893, and carried articles on themes such as furniture, glassware, textiles, metalwork and ceramics. It was the first publication to allow the decorative arts a similar status to that enjoyed by fine art, architecture and sculpture. The magazine promoted the ideals of the Arts & Crafts movement, as well as championing Art Nouveau. It was edited by Gleeson White, a friend of Arthur Silver, and thus the Silver Studio featured in several articles in the 1890s.

14 *The Studio Magazine* (1894), op.cit.

15 It is possible that other designers amassed similar collections of visual reference material; however, the Silver Studio is unique in that it has survived as a museum collection, and it is therefore possible to trace design influences through the works which survive in the collection.

16 For a general overview of the Silver Studio's work see L. Jackson, *Twentieth Century Pattern Design; Textile and Wallpaper Pioneers*, (London, Mitchell Beazley, 2002), pp 16-19

17 Design reformers saw the decoration of flat surfaces (textiles, walls and carpets) with three-dimensional, naturalistic designs as essentially dishonest, and even potentially psychologically detrimental. Brett, op.cit., pp 3-4

18 J. Lubbock, *The Tyranny of Taste The Politics of Architecture and Design in Britain 1550-1960*, (New Haven, London, Yale University Press, 1995), pp 261-7

19 Tanya Harrod has noted the uneasy relationship between the anti-industrial stance of the founders of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society and their practice of working with large-scale firms and producing designs for mechanised manufacture. See T. Harrod, *The Crafts in Britain in the 20th Century*, (New Haven, London, Yale University Press, 1999) pp 16-17

20 Katagami stencils were developed in the Nara period (710-794) and continued to be used until the Taisho period (1912-1926). The technique was formally recognised as an important part of Japan's intangible cultural heritage in 1955. See *Katagami, Les pochoirs japonais et le japonisme* (Japan Foundation, 2006); C. Hornung (ed), *Traditional Japanese Stencil Designs*, (New York, Dover Publications, 1985)

21 Similar collections are held by the V&A Museum in London and a number of museums elsewhere in the world, for example: the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris; the Austrian Museum of Applied Arts, Vienna; the Edo Katagami Museum, Tokyo; the Cooper Hewitt Museum, New York and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

22 See A. Farrer, (ed.) *A Garden Bequest: Plants from Japan Portrayed in Books, Paintings and Decorative Art of 300 Years*, (The Japan Society, 2001)

23 K. Ogawa, *Chrysanthemums of Japan* (Tokyo, 1892); *Flowers of Japan* (Tokyo, 1895); and *Lilies of Japan* (Tokyo, 1896), Silver Studio Collection

24 Arthur Silver was clear in his view that there were some plants, such as the fuschia, which would never translate well into patterns for the domestic interior. See interview in *The Studio Magazine* (1894), op.cit.

25 Rottmann was himself an avid collector of Japanese items. See illustrations of his studio and offices in, "Round the Trade", *The Cabinet Maker and Art Furnisher* Vol IX (Sept 1888), p72 and p76

26 Japanese leather paper or *Kinkarakami* (literally 'gold foreign paper') was a kind of embossed wallpaper made to look like gilt leather. It was produced in Japan as the result of a fusion of European and Japanese production methods and design influences. It became popular in the West in last two decades of the nineteenth century. See J. Crittenden, *Alexander Rottmann's "leather paper": a technical history*, (unpublished MA dissertation, Camberwell College of Arts, 2008); Y. Suga, "Designed Authenticity: Japanese Leather paper and Inter/National Representation" in: Y. Suga (ed.) *Historical Research on the Production and Distribution of Japanese Leather Paper in Japan, Europe and America*, Tokyo: Ministry of Education, Science, Sports and Culture [Project no. 16018202] pp39-47; Anonymous, "The Making of Japanese Leather Papers: some views of Messrs Rottmann's factory, Japan" *Journal of Decorative Art*, Vol XIV (Aug 1894), pp 200-202

27 Anonymous, untitled press clipping, *The Builder* (June 1895), Silver Studio Collection

28 See TR Spence, "Wallpapers and Stencilling", *Journal of the Society of Arts*, (March 1893), pp362-375; for discussion of friezes by William Shand Kydd see C. Woods, *"The Magical Influence of Mr Kydd": Blocked and Stencilled Wallpapers 1900-1925* (Manchester, Whitworth Art Gallery, 1991) n.p.

29 Anonymous, untitled press clipping, *Art Journal* (Aug 1895), Silver Studio Collection

30 For example: "*The Japanese originals have in some cases furnished the motif; but in acclimatising the idea furnished by an exotic craft much freedom has been exercised, and modern English tastes have been duly recognised.*" Anonymous, untitled press clipping, *Building News*, (June 1895), Silver Studio Collection

31 *The Studio Magazine*, Sept 1895,

32 By the early 1890s it was possible to achieve these effects by means of an Aerograph Spray Painter, by which colour could be applied by means of compressed air. See Woods, op. cit., n.p.

33 Anonymous, "The Rottman-Silver Studio Stencils", *The Journal of Decorative Art*, (July 1895), p152

34 Anonymous, untitled press clipping, *Daily News* (June 1895), Silver Studio Collection

35 A. Silver, "The Modern Stencil and its Application to Interior Decoration", *The Journal of Decorative Art*, (1896), p152. Reprinted in *The Building News*, (1896), pp305-307; *The Architect*, (Feb 1896), pp 141-4; and *The Journal of Decorative Arts* (June 1896), pp 152-5

36 Hoskins (1994), op. cit., p190

37 K. Protheroe, "Bloom and Blotch: The Floral Print and Modernity in the Textile Designs of Winifred Mold and Minnie McLeish, 1910-1930" (forthcoming PhD dissertation, Kingston University, 2010)

38 S. Cheang, "Dragons in the Drawing Room: Chinese Embroideries in British Homes, 1860-1949", *Textile History*, Vol 39, No 2 (2008), pp 223-249

History of the Silver Studio Collection

The Silver Studio Collection is the archive of one of Britain's leading commercial design studios. The Studio was based in Hammersmith, West London, and was active between 1880 and 1963. Founded by Arthur Silver in 1880, the Studio employed a varying number of in-house and freelance designers throughout its long history. The Studio produced designs for wallpapers and textiles which it sold to manufacturers and retailers across Britain and abroad. The designers were responsive to the fashions and tastes of the moment, designing in all the major styles such as the flat stylised Art Nouveau of the late nineteenth century, as well as the perennially popular traditional and historical idiom. The Silver Studio closed in the 1960s, and the contents were given to the Hornsey College of Art, which subsequently became part of Middlesex University. The Collection contains over 40,000 original designs on paper, 5,000 wallpaper samples, 5,000 textile samples and the Studio's working records. Now part of the Museum of Domestic Design & Architecture, the Silver Studio Collection was awarded **Designated Status** in 2008, in recognition of its national and international quality and significance.

For more information about the museum and its collections please see the website: www.moda.mdx.ac.uk

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