

GUSTAV STICKLEY

AND THE AMERICAN ARTS & CRAFTS MOVEMENT



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KEVIN W. TUCKER

with essays and contributions by

BEVERLY K. BRANDT

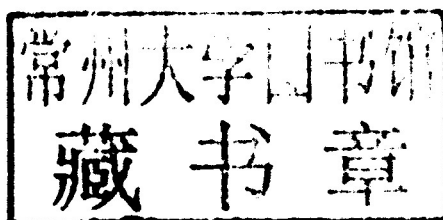
DAVID CATHERS

JOSEPH CUNNINGHAM

BETH ANN AND TOMMY MCPHERSON

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SALLY-ANNE HUXTABLE



DALLAS MUSEUM OF ART

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June 18–September 11, 2011

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Bonnie Pitman, The Eugene McDermott Director
Kevin W. Tucker, The Margot B. Perot Curator of Decorative Art and Design
Tamara Wootton-Bonner, Chair of Collections and Exhibitions
Eric Zeidler, Publications Coordinator
Sally-Anne Huxtable, Researcher, Department of Decorative Arts and Design
Kim McCarty, McDermott Graduate Curatorial Intern

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Spine: Decal (Mark No. 3), c. 1904–1908

Back cover: Employees outside Stickley's factory, Eastwood, New York, c. 1906

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DIRECTOR'S FOREWORD AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Since the founding of its decorative arts department in 1985, the Dallas Museum of Art has sought to reveal the rich legacy of progressive design of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries through a series of major exhibitions and publications exploring American silver, ceramics, and glassware. In the process of organizing these projects, the DMA began to assemble what have since become the most significant and comprehensive public collections of their type, establishing a foundation for scholarship with masterworks placed in a context of related objects. In 1994, Charles Venable, the Museum's first curator of decorative arts, presented the exhibition *Silver in America, 1840–1940: A Century of Splendor*, a recognition of both the high achievements of major silver manufacturers in the late nineteenth century and the DMA's success in acquiring vital objects of this genre. The exhibition *China and Glass in America, 1880–1980: From Tabletop to TV Tray*, in 2000, marked a related effort to explore the contributions of American tableware manufacturers. Most recently, the DMA curator Kevin W. Tucker worked with Jewel Stern, a patron and scholar, to realize the exhibition *Modernism in American Silver: 20th-Century Design*, a landmark elucidation of the most progressive designs of American silver manufacturers in the decades after 1925. The DMA has in recent years continued to build upon its strengths through the acquisition and exhibition of works in other media, thereby expanding the Museum's perspective on innovative design and focusing on particularly important works and the work of underrepresented manufacturers, craftspeople, and designers. A gift from the Museum patron Ivor Braka in 2003 toward the acquisition of works of the English Arts and Crafts movement; the anonymous gift, in 2005, of a desk by Charles Rohlf; the donation, in 2008, by the Texas collectors Mrs. Dorothy McKee and the late Dr. Edgar G. McKee, of an exceptional example of Grueby pottery; the purchase, in the same year, by the Eugene and

Margaret McDermott Art Fund, of a fine linen chest commissioned by Gustav Stickley for an exhibition in 1903; and the contribution, in 2009, of a corner chair, by Charles Rohlf, from the American Decorative Art 1900 Foundation, signaled the DMA's commitment to transforming the Museum's Arts and Crafts movement holdings through the acquisition of iconic works from the turn of the twentieth century. These and other objects already in the collection stand as exceptional examples of the artistic strength of a particular place and moment in time. As with the Museum's collections of industrially produced glass, ceramics, and silver, these pieces reflect the modern era's rapid international transmission of ideas—and the equally turbulent stylistic and cultural shifts that accompanied them.

A key figure within the history of early twentieth-century design, Gustav Stickley produced a body of work that remains a vital subject of study and one that offers important perspectives on his contributions to new styles and the ideology of the Arts and Crafts movement. Providing bold new furnishings reflecting both the concerns and aspirations of progressively minded American consumers, Stickley recognized a commercial opportunity and turned it into an artistic one. In the years around 1900, as the structure of the American city began to evolve dramatically, so too did thoughts about furnishing, design, and the ideal home, often in equally remarkable ways. In seeking to encourage a national shift in taste away from cheaply decorative production toward radically bold, structural designs, Stickley stood as both businessman and proselytizer—and his has become one of the most familiar names associated with the American Arts and Crafts movement. Through his publication of the periodical *The Craftsman* and the retailing of his firm's furniture and other products across the United States, his achievements in folding commercial ambition within the Arts and Crafts ideals

of truth, beauty, and simplicity were unparalleled, creating a touchstone for American industrial art and domestic furnishing in the first years of the twentieth century. Various difficulties, including rapidly changing tastes, also condemned his successes to be relatively short lived. By the time of his death in 1942, Stickley's accomplishments were long forgotten by the public—and his powerful oak furniture dismissed as merely the outdated fashion of another age. Not until 1966, and the publication of John Crosby Freeman's monograph, *The Forgotten Rebel: Gustav Stickley and His Craftsman Mission Furniture*, which was followed by the exhibition *The Arts and Crafts Movement in America* at Princeton University Art Museum in 1972, did Stickley's career and that of his contemporaries begin to be reappraised as major forces within the realm of twentieth-century design.

In recent years, a series of exhibitions surveying the international reach of the Arts and Crafts movement has sought to provide further context for these works, embracing an ever-widening circle of craftspeople, writers, theorists, and other individuals whose work resonated with the tenets of the movement. In 1992, Craftsman Farms mounted the exhibition *Gustav Stickley: His Craft*. The publication in 2003 of the definitive historical study *Gustav Stickley*, by David Cathers, brought new focus to the designer and his role as the foremost American proponent of the movement. The worthy topic of the broader international scope of the movement was broached by two exhibitions in 2005: in London, *International Arts and Crafts* from the Victoria & Albert Museum and, in California, *The Arts & Crafts Movement in Europe and America, 1880–1920: Design for the Modern World* from the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Even so, until now, no one effort has brought forth a comprehensive study of the most exceptional works of Stickley's career and the complex, often conflicted meanings that these objects and ideas hold as markers of the era and of the American Arts and Crafts movement. It is our hope that *Gustav Stickley and the American Arts & Crafts Movement* will provide new perspectives on the design, production, and dissemination of his firm's works,

the important contributions of his talented collaborators, and a deeper understanding of the remarkable legacy of his enterprise in transforming the vision of the ideal household of the early twentieth century.

For his dedication in conceiving and organizing this important scholarly and artistic project, we extend our sincere gratitude to Kevin W. Tucker, the Margot B. Perot Curator of Decorative Arts and Design at the Dallas Museum of Art since 2003. In addition to serving as project director and curator for this exhibition, he has been responsible for leading the continued expansion of the Museum's holdings of early modern design, including the acquisition of unparalleled works by Stickley and his contemporaries.

We also offer our appreciation of the knowledgeable and expert contributions of our essayists Beverly Brandt, David Cathers, Joseph Cunningham, and Beth Ann and Tommy McPherson. To David Cathers, we extend our additional thanks for his willingness to share the extensive knowledge gained over three decades in pursuing the subject of Gustav Stickley. For her varied contributions in assisting with the production of the catalogue and the exhibition, we thank Sally-Anne Huxtable, the project researcher. For their contributions to the publication, we also extend our gratitude to Frances Bowles, the catalogue editor; to Brad Flowers, the DMA staff photographer; to Ed Marquand, Jeff Wincapaw, Brynn Warriner, and the entire staff of Marquand Books; and, representing Yale University Press, Patricia Fidler and Lindsay Toland. The exhibition and this publication were produced through the sustained efforts of Dallas Museum of Art staff members, each of whom provided an important element of this ambitious undertaking: Jacqueline Allen, Jessica Bauge, Jill Bernstein, Marci Driggers Caslin, Giselle Castro-Brightenberg, Gail Davitt, John Dennis, Reagan Duplisea, John Easley, Sarah Evans, Diane Flowers, Carol Griffin, Jessica Harden, Denise Helbing, James Jenner, Gary Jones, Lisa Kays, Mary Leonard, Linda Lipscomb, Brent Mitchell, Erin Murphy, Kevin Parmer, Jennifer Taber, Gabriela Truly, Joni Wilson, Tamara Wootton-Bonner, Eric Zeidler, and Jeff

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Museum and Country Estate, the primary repository of the Gustav Stickley business papers.

The exhibition will travel to the Newark Museum, New Jersey, and the San Diego Museum of Art. For their engagement with the exhibition and their supportive role, we are greatly obliged to our respective colleagues there, Mary Sue Sweeney Price, Director, Ulysses Dietz, Senior Curator of Decorative Arts, and Batja Bell, Associate Registrar at Newark, and John Marciari, Curator of European Art, Julia Marciari-Alexander, Deputy Director for Curatorial Affairs, and John Digesare, Registrar, at San Diego.

We are also deeply appreciative of the many museums, foundations, and private collectors who have been so gracious as to lend objects to this exhibition. Their involvement in and enthusiasm for this exhibition have been crucial to its success, allowing us to present a range of superlative examples from Gustav Stickley's career and thereby reveal a fuller and more meaningful perspective of one of the most intriguing and gifted figures in early twentieth-century design.

Bonnie Pitman
The Eugene McDermott Director





Fig. 1 A promotional photograph of Gustav Stickley (center) in his firm's metalworking shop, c. 1904

INTRODUCTION

KEVIN W. TUCKER

In 1900, the businessman Gustav Stickley (1858–1942) revealed a new line of artistically inspired furniture, his first public effort to turn a relatively unremarkable manufacturing concern into an extraordinary vehicle for promoting both his new products and the ideology espoused by the Arts and Crafts movement. In the following year, he issued the first in a series of proselytizing furniture catalogues and began publishing *The Craftsman*, a monthly magazine. With the publications carrying the rationale for these striking new designs, the thousands of pieces of Arts and Crafts furniture, metalware, textiles, and related goods that were eventually produced by his firm over the following fifteen years remain the most pervasive and recognizable testimony to his achievements in offering the American consumer both a stylistic and a philosophical alternative to the cheaply made ornamental excesses of most commercially produced middle-class furnishings at the time. Although it was neither the first American manufacturer nor the last to offer Arts and Crafts furnishings, Stickley's firm was distinctive not only in the high quality of works produced, but also in the richly orchestrated message of their creation, which was directed to appeal to a growing taste for handcrafted, simple objects associated with the movement. To this end, after 1900 Stickley no longer simply issued examples of whichever furniture styles were transiently fashionable but, instead, lead a holistic commercial endeavor in which shaping and expressing the ideological rationale and identity for the works became nearly as important as the physical objects themselves.

In recent decades the name of Stickley has once again become almost synonymous with that of the American Arts and Crafts movement, but the transformation of the identity of his firm and, reciprocally, the larger definition of the movement itself, have often seemed unduly complicated by his firm's commercial context and been dismissed too readily as

superficially promotional, or alternately, cast as driven wholly by some unequivocal personal vision of his destiny as one of its leading figures. Neither is a fully accurate perspective on the occasionally conflicted yet vital relationship between Stickley's efforts and the tenets of the movement. Additionally, the public tendency—then, as now—to perceive the whole of Stickley's work as furniture in the so-called Mission style, when he had railed against the term as misleading and irrelevant for his sources of inspiration, lessens a richer understanding of his and his employees' multifaceted endeavors to shape American taste in the first years of the twentieth century. The particulars of Stickley's own life have been well documented in recent years, but his thoughts and passions have come to us translated into form by others, whether via ghostwritten articles within *The Craftsman* or the works designed and constructed by his workshops. Without journals or extensive correspondence to offer an intimate perspective on the movement or to present reasons for its ultimately transformative appeal to him, Stickley's persona, the Craftsman, became his identity, his carefully shaped brand, and for its individualistic and heroic associations, the guise in which he preferred to present himself. Even so, his commitment to the movement was genuine, leading him to obligate his financial resources to championing its principles and works well beyond the point when it was commercially logical to do so. Both idealistic and ambitious, Stickley can rightly be perceived as one who was particularly well suited to reconcile the progressive aspirations of early twentieth-century America with the established principles of the English Arts and Crafts movement of the nineteenth century, with its exhortation of the virtues of the simple life, celebration of the handmade, expression of natural materials, and emphasis on the unity of design, creation, and use. Beginning at least as early as 1895, he and his designers were aware and enamored of the progressive furnishings