

Canadian Leathercraft

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ORIGINAL, COPIED or ADAPTED?

Student artists and craftsmen are often confused by the terms "original" "copy" "adaptation" This confusion as to how these terms should properly be defined or explained remains, unfortunately, in the minds of many who have practised a craft for years Perhaps the confusion is made greater by the volume of "art language" spoken and written on the subject

Discussions of the pros and cons of original or copy work are often engaged in by either of two groups: 1) a group of trained artist-craftsmen who have demonstrated their ability to speak with authority about the subject 2) a group of amateurs or laymen, who, though keenly interested in the technical phases of their craft, lack sufficient training in the subject of designing to expect much serious weight to be given their opinions

Now, while a discussion among group 1) may bring forth views at some variance with each other regarding technical excellence of design, such a discussion generally results in a really worth while exchange of ideas which at least share a common agreement regarding the importance of thinking in terms of "originality" On the other hand, a discussion of the merits of original vs copywork among group 2) generally and quickly resolves itself around the following commonly expressed points of view:

"The dividing line between original and copy work is so fine, it is difficult to recognize the difference"

"There is no longer any such thing as a completely original piece of work"

"There is no new thing under the sun" (perpetuating a quotation from Ecclesiastes)

"Cannot someone, who designs a pattern for a product, but who may adapt a decorative motif from others, claim his product as original?"

Unhappily, these are all "negative-approach" views They represent thoughts typical of those who, though they may be highly skilled in the technical requirements of their craft, lack the training needed in the fundamentals of designing to qualify them as authorities on the subject Practically all claims

(continued page 6)

"Leathercraft Society Forms Local Group" (Toronto Telegram June 1952)

The Toronto local group of the Canadian Society of Creative Leathercraft was formed at a meeting at the McGill Street YWCA when J L Scobbie of the arts and crafts department of Central High School of Commerce was elected president Mr Scobbie is also chairman of the executive council of the national group

The Leathercraft Society, which has existed just three years, has been accepted into the Canadian Arts Council Thirty-two members attended the first meeting Workshop and special events are being planned for the coming season

Other officers elected are: Vice-president, Mrs Jean Newton; Secretary, A H Pearson; Treasurer, Miss Faith Symington

THE LEATHER FAIR

The Canadian Society of Creative Leathercraft has been honored by a unique invitation -- the first offered the decorative leathercraft field to appear in the Annual Fair of the Canadian Shoe and Leather Association The Leather Fair is being held this year in the Automotive Building, Canadian National Exhibition Grounds, Toronto, October 14 to 18 The general public will be admitted to the Fair on Friday evening, October 17 and throughout Saturday, October 18

Our Society's travelling exhibition: "Canadian Handmades in Leather" has been recalled from its trans-Canada tour to appear at the Leather Fair Considering the many important industrial exhibits to be shown (including: Canada's most valuable collection of historical footwear; leather fashion shows; leathergoods and leather industry accessories exhibits) a preview of our Society's travelling exhibition by Leather Fair executives encouraged them to offer one of the largest of the Fair's numerous display units for our showing of decorative leatherwork

Our Travelling Exhibition will be augmented by numerous special pieces by professional and advanced specialist craftsmen In addition, selections of antique and foreign country leathercraft will be shown We believe even the Canadian leather industry will take surprised notice of the status of Canadian decorative leatherwork

The CSCL display of the Leather Fair is in charge of our very active Toronto region Exhibition Committee, under the chairmanship of Mrs Reta Larmour CSCL members' work will be accepted for review by the Chairman, Exhibition Committee until October 7 (address page 12) All who can should see this unique display of Canadian decorative leatherwork, which promises to be by far the most important demonstration of it kind to date Bulletin #II Volume II of "Canadian Leathercraft" will contain a special Leather Fair report for the interest of all unable to attend the Fair



A Modern Cordovan Leathercraft Project

It is with special personal pleasure that we are able to offer, as the feature article for this issue of "Canadian Leathercraft" a description of a unique and very large decorative leatherwork project just nearing completion at St Mary's Church, Montreal

We believe the project described represents the largest of its kind to have been attempted in Canada, as we are unaware of any other single decorative leathercraft project of comparable magnitude. The work was designed and is being executed by Stefan Kontski -- an artist with considerable Old World training and background in large-scale interior decorative arts.

Having co-operated with Mr Kontski in his long search for the special leathers required for his project, we have also enjoyed the chance to keep aware of his progress. While, from the point of view of the contemporary trend in North American designing for decorative leatherwork, Mr Kontski's style of leather art may prove for many somewhat difficult to interpret, we believe, however, that the very magnitude of his current achievement, with its graphic demonstrations of a revived Old World craft will earn for its designer-craftsman a unique place in the history of "Canadian leathercraftsmanship".

About the Craftsman --

Stefan Kontski was born in Poland. After matriculation he spent 5 years studying at the Academy of Fine Arts, Krakov, Poland. Later, as a result of a growing professional interest in the arts of restoring old murals and other important works of art, Mr Kontski became one of the few practising craftsmen in the art of working to Cordovan leathercraft standards. He studied this art in Italy for 3 years, and followed up this and allied interests in France for another 4 years.

Mr Kontski came to Canada in 1948, carrying on his leather art in Ottawa and Montreal, where at first his work appeared all but too strange for Canadians to understand and to appreciate. Gradually, Mr Kontski began to enjoy more frequent and larger commissions for his special skills, until in 1950 he received his largest commission -- the designing and executing of murals in the Church of Our Lady of Czestochowa, corner Gascon and Hochelaga Streets, Montreal. An important part of this large and unique church decorating commission included the working of some eleven large panels in Cordovan leather techniques. With his reputation now established and spreading, it is expected that Mr Kontski will commence work on another and similar project in the United States when his present Canadian commission is completed.

From Mr Kontski, we have received the following brief account of Cordovan leatherwork --

The History of Cordovan Leatherwork

The art of designing and working Cordovan leathers began well before the XIII Century in GHADAMES, Libia

In the XIV Century the craft was introduced into Spain by the conquering Moors Cordova became the chief centre for such characteristic leather decorating and from here the products and techniques of Cordovan leatherworkers were brought to France and Italy Mention of Cordovan leather art occurs frequently in the archives of the XIV and XV Centuries

When Phillipp II, King of Spain, expelled the Moors in 1610, the big Cordovan leather industry and art began to die out Products of the craft, as so admired by travellers to Spain in the XVII Century, were no longer exported to other countries While France, Italy, Germany and Holland accepted some of the heritage of the Moors, the last Cordovan leathers were executed in the late XVII Century

The decorative motifs of Cordovan leather art generally took the form of figurative compositions, floral ornament, architecture, landscape, birds and animals In the museum of Cluny are to be seen panels with figurative compositions from Ariostos, Orlando Furioso The panels were found in one of the houses of the XV Century in Rouen as parts of wall decoration

By the XVIII Century Cordovan leather creating techniques were forgotten

In 1932, during the restoration of the King's Castel WAWEL, some ancient Cordovan leathers were found as wall decorations behind some later superimposed decoration The study of this one-time world renown, but now forgotten leather art, was re-explored until a satisfactory restoration project could be undertaken for this important wall panelling discovery

For the interest of "Canadian Leathercraft" readers, Mr Kontski has listed some of the more important phases of Cordovan leatherworking --

- 1) Equipment needed in working panels: silver in foils, various modelling and stamping tools, artificial gold, made from boiled resins in linseed oil, painting media - oil colors mixed with resin varnishes
- 2) All kinds of decorative motifs may be used for Cordovan leather art -- floral ornaments, figurative compositions, landscapes, animals, architecture, abstract designs
- 3) Certain tannages of calfskin are the most suitable for executing Cordovan decorated leathers The foils must bind tightly to the leather surface (we have seen Mr Kontski demonstrate this tightness by scraping a finished piece with a sharp knife blade with no ill effect)
- 4) Sizes of panels may be as large as the skins allow Some neck and flank sections must be cut out, as they are unsuitable for tooling and finishing

- 5) Wall panel decorations are mounted on pure linen canvas, which is stretched on the wall and the skins are glued to the canvas. Nowadays panels may be glued on wallboard or plywood directly.
- 6) The durability of panels depends upon conditions under which the skins were originally decorated and subsequently preserved. In museums are samples from the XIV Century. As wall decorations, we may see them from the XIV to XVII Centuries, still in their places as originally fixed centuries ago. The passing of time very often makes them more distinctive.
- 7) Working time for Cordovan leather art depends largely upon richness of composition or ornament. One panel with a figure of a saint, measuring 42 inches high by 8 inches in width, may take 55-60 hours of work. The tooling does not require as much time as painting and gilding.

In the St Mary's Church project are being executed the following Cordovan leather panels:

- the background of the crucifix - 3 feet by 12 feet
- the background of the niche (part of the high altar) 8 feet by 13 feet
- eight figurative panels - 42 inches by 9 inches
- one decorative panel for the tabernacle - 16 inches by 42 inches

Canadian students and appreciators of decorative leatherwork would find a visit to St Mary's Church in Montreal well worth while if at all possible, as the several photographic illustrations (see slip-sheet enclosed) cannot do justice to the scope of Mr Kontski's unique project

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The Executive and General Membership of the Canadian Society of Creative Leathercraft wish to express sincere appreciation for the helpful support and good will demonstrated by the following new Sustaining Members for the coming active season of decorative leathercraft in Canada

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Original, Copied or Adapted? (continued from page 1)

advanced to make out a case for "cribbing" and "adapting" the work of others into work we might like to claim as our own, seem to represent nothing less than excuses for not taking the trouble to study the fundamentals of designing, and thus becoming better qualified to discuss the subject logically. Too many fail to realize there is quite another way to approach the subject-- if it is to be clearly understood. Why not, instead of advancing simply "negative-approach" views, endeavour to think positively about the subject?

Suggestion - Group 2) could receive invaluable help if they invited representatives from Group 1) to discuss this important matter with them

There is a third and important group of craftsmen to be recognized. They are the craftsmen, who having earned wide recognition for technical perfection in their craftwork, simply admit outright that they have had no training in designing; that they have not practised this phase of their craft; and that they cannot, therefore, claim to offer original designs in their work. With such craftsmen we know where we stand -- we can admire their technical skills and learn much from them about this phase of their work; while, in turn, they can admire our additional interest in the phase of their craft which concerns "originality of design"

We now propose to offer a plan for the serious consideration of all craftsmen interested in understanding the differences between "original" "copy" and "adapted" designs. The plan is simple. It is not new. Its principles are applied frequently in other fields - whenever issues become too obscured by generalities to help us arrive at sensible conclusions. It involves simply that we forget all the art-language arguments we may have heard or read concerning original design, and make a fresh start. To do this, we must be willing to analyse systematically the root meanings of all words which will help us understand the subject. To help readers in such a study, we offer a few dictionary definitions of terms and expressions related to our field. We suggest that the craftsman study each word and accompanying definition -- then apply such definitions to his own work. If this is done, it should soon become clear whether the craftsman's work may be considered as "original" "adapted" or "copied" --

- ORIGINAL - not copied, imitated or reproduced
 - independent and creative in thought or action; inventive
 - that of which anything else is a copy or reproduction, as
 a writing or an object portrayed in a work of art
- ORIGINATE - to produce as new
- CREATE - to bring into being; to cause to exist in original form or character
 - to present a new conception in an artistic embodiment
 - to produce as a work of thought or imagination - especially as
 a work of art
- AUTHOR - the creator or originator of anything

- DESIGN - to plan mentally; to scheme; to conceive; frame mental image
 - to arrange details of a work of art
INVENT - to fabricate mentally, create or devise in the imagination
 - to discover, as by study or experiment
 - to produce for the first time
 - to originate, frame, design, concoct
 - to form something new, or attain an end by means unknown before
INVENTION - a fabrication of the imagination
 - a form or design originated through imaginative thought, study and experiment

- COPY - an imitation or reproduction of an original work
IMITATE - to follow a pattern, model or example
 - to copy or reproduce
IMITATION (strict) when original theme or form is copied in all detail
 (free) when original theme or form is modified or adapted
ADAPT - to adjust; make suitable for a purpose
ADAPTATION - modification of a form or structure
MODIFY - to partially alter
 - to change somewhat the form or qualities of a product
PARAPHRASE - a restatement of a text, passage or work of an author in a revised form

- Creative craftsmen may liken their work to the work of a literary author --
 - an author's product is original when demonstrating expressions of new thoughts, or new terms for established thoughts
 - a plagiarist's product intimates originality, when in reality his efforts represent simply paraphrased terms for the work of an author

IMPORTANT - THINK about the above definitions carefully and seriously Apply them to your own efforts As their true and logical meanings become clear in our minds, we will realize there remains just one course left for us -- if we desire recognition for an ability to produce original work That course is to start immediately to learn something about the fundamentals of designing If we are not prepared to study and to practise these fundamentals, we should once and for all admit, as some craftsmen will frankly admit, that we have neither the inclination nor patience to work through the processes required in designing a product which other skills may produce in all but flawless techniques

With this honest approach towards understanding the subject of original-copy-adapted work, students can do much to help themselves and their fellow craftsmen "Canadian Leathercraft" will offer illustrated articles in future issues to help students commence such a study In the meantime, craftsmen may make an immediate start by: 1) inquiring about good courses in design 2) studying the subject through recommended books 3) discussing the subject with trained designers 4) subscribing to carefully selected periodicals

Among the numerous excellent references on the subject may be recommended:

- "Design Approach to Crafts" by Harriet E-Knapp, Prang Company Publishers,
Sandusky, Ohio
- "Creative Hands" by Doris Cox & Barbara Weisman, John Wiley & Sons, Inc
New York City
- "Craft Horizons" a bi-monthly magazine of the highest calibre; contributed
to by internationally recognized craftsmen, published by "Craft Horizons
Inc, 40 East 49th Street New York 17
- "Design" - a monthly, containing articles of interest and importance to both
artists and craftsmen, published by: Design Publishing Company, 337 South
High Street, Columbus, Ohio
- "Canadian Art" - four times a year, offering important discussions on fine,
applied and industrial design fields, published co-operatively by leading
Canadian art galleries and Canadian art associations Editor: Box 384,
Ottawa, Ontario

Books and periodicals recommended above all contain bibliographic lists and
book reviews describing other helpful references on the subject of design
and craftsmanship

At this stage, it is of interest to report the following growing observa-
tion among leathercraft appreciators in Canada and the United States --
that, even since the formation of the Canadian Society of Creative Leather-
craft, "there has been a marked improvement in the standards of designing
for leathercraft in Canada" One sometimes amusing, but altogether impor-
tant result of this trend is also beginning to appear -- that craftsmen who
but several short years ago were content to copy imported patterns and dec-
orative motifs, now seem committed to designing their own products And the
more they display their newly-developing skills the more their efforts are
becoming recognized and appreciated by serious critics

The challenge to produce "original leathercraft" in Canada has been
made -- a few have accepted the challenge and are struggling to meet
it successfully Encouragement will come in direct relation to our
scale of efforts to understand and practise good designing Grad-
ually we may expect Canadian leathercraft to earn for itself prestige
comparable to the status of the work of craftsmen in other fields
who have already gained their appreciation of good designing for
their craft media



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WORKSHOP TIPS

From far and wide we are urged to make a regular feature of offering Workshop Tips To encourage active participation by member craftsmen, "Canadian Leathercraft" will pay \$2.00 in cash, or a General Membership Renewal Card for each Workshop Tip accepted from CSCL members for reprinting in "Canadian Leathercraft"

Professional Studios and experienced craftsmen are particularly invited to share their knowledge with fellow members - thus helping to increase the enjoyment of our craft by spreading useful leathercraft education Full credit will be given all contributors Send your Workshop Tips to the Editor of "Canadian Leathercraft"

Cement for Leathercraft - leathercraftsmen often wish for a "sticker cement" i.e. one that will really hold fast We reproduce hereunder a listing of a manufacturer's claims about a cement which will likely soon become available to the decorative leathercraft field It is, we are told, gaining in prestige as a superior leather cement throughout the shoe making and repair trade - a field constantly on the watch for better cements --

a solvent type cement - no nailing or stitching required - one coat application - spreads evenly - no lumps forming - perfect adhesion no press necessary - no freezing spoilage - 100% waterproof - 200% more flexibility - laboratory tested - name of product "BARGE Cement"

Fillers for Embossed Leatherwork - various texts recommend different fillers for embossed leatherwork, including - - - plastic wood, plasticine, paper, sawdust and size, cotton wool and cement Another very satisfactory material - always at hand for the leatherworker - is skived shavings or the thin slices of leather which are skived away when reducing leather thicknesses prior to assembly operations

Such skived leather slices may be laid one over the other to fill embossed cavities or depressions from the flesh side A little cement touched to either side of the slices will fix such built-up fillings securely in place, creating an all-leather embossed area which offers the strength and flexibility of leather throughout the product

This practice is highly recommended by the Mumart Studios, Toronto and by the Ottawa Valley Leathercraft Studios, Ottawa Comparing notes with Al Stohlman, designer-craftsman for Craftool Company, Los Angeles, both studios were interested to learn that Mr Stohlman goes a step further in his larger pieces -- he actually carves or sculpts leather into the form of filling desired so that areas of his large scale pieces may be embossed to desired depth, then completed with solid leather for a permanent, dependable filler

BOOKS for Your Library

"COLOR DECORATION and FINISHING of LEATHER" by Robert Muma, 62 McGill Street,
Toronto ... Price \$1.50

Robert Muma, a Canadian leather artist well known for his skills as a leather coloring and finishing expert, has just published a long-needed manual on coloring and finishing of leather. Mr Muma's newest publication offers, in well-organized chapters, the results of his many years experience in this important phase of decorative leatherworking.

"Color Decoration and Finishing of Leather" will help students to understand many of the puzzling problems which arise as each new project must be finished. Contents of the book offer discussions on: Color in Leather; Tooling for Color; Leathers for Color Work; Equipment; Techniques; Color Materials and How to Use Them; Conditioning, Polishing, and Exercises in Color Techniques.

One rather striking feature of Mr Muma's book is his readiness to discuss critically many name brands of leather colors and finishes available to North American leathercraftsmen. The manual concludes with the author's own "Leather Finishing Chart," which helpfully classifies many standard leather cleaning, bleaching, staining, dyeing, varnishing and polishing products.

For its economical price, craftsmen will be well repaid by adding this helpful manual to their leathercraft reference libraries. Copies should by now be available through all Canadian leathercraft supply houses.

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"GLOVEMAKING FOR BEGINNERS" by Natalie S Woolf, McKnight & McNight Publishing Company, Bloomington, Illinois (in Canada through Moyer School Supplies Ltd, Toronto). Probably available through most major leathercraft supply houses. Price ...

One of the most comprehensive and profusely-illustrated books we have seen on the subject of making gloves by hand. The author is a highly recognized custom glovemaking and instructor of New York City. Thoroughness in attention to all details of making gloves by hand is the theme throughout Miss Woolf's manual. In fact, this reviewer, with but limited experience as a maker of gloves by hand, but with fair knowledge of the abilities and capacities of the average home glove maker, might consider the technical instructions much too advanced for general adoption -- particularly the sections on dampening and stretching gloving leathers preparatory to cutting out. The book, consequently, might have been given another title. However, such professional knowledge and practice need not deter the home glove making student from acquiring this unusually thorough manual and using the many helpful suggestions throughout its chapters dealing with: Measuring Hands for Gloves; Cutting Gloves; Marking Stitches and Designs; Sewing; Making Evening, Combination, Fabric and Lined Gloves; How to Wash and Press Gloves. Full-size patterns are offered for Ladies, Children and Men (4 each). Whether you are a beginner or a glovemaking of wide experience it is likely you can enjoy new and important chances to learn more of the interesting and practical craft of making gloves by hand.

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Who's Who in Canadian Leathercraft

(to acquaint field members of CSCL with the interests and achievements of fellow leathercraftsmen)

ROBERT MUMA - Toronto - interested in nature, taxidermy, drawing and crafts since childhood; illustrated university texts and nature stories; trained as a bookbinder in several of Toronto's larger binderies; has specialized in leather as a decorative art-craft for the past 7 years

Bob Muma has exhibited competitively at several of Canada's major craft exhibitions. Received first and second prizes at 1947 CNE; first prize and bronze medal at 1948 PNE; Lewiscraft Award, 1949 CNE. Has shown work also at a number of private and non-competitive displays, including the current CSCL Travelling Exhibition "Canadian Handmades in Leather"

For the past three years Bob Muma has acted as consultant on tooling with Clarke and Clarke Leathers and has displayed at their annual CNE exhibitions. Under the registered trade name of "MUMART" Bob has conducted his own business for 6 years, offering custom bookbinding and general leathercraft products. He publishes the MUMART Leathercraft Designs and his latest manual "Color Decoration and Finishing of Leather" is just off the press. Private and group lessons are conducted at his Studio.

Mr Muma is a Charter Member of the Canadian Society of Canadian Leathercraft and has acted as Treasurer for the Society since its formation nearly three years ago.

Canadian Leathercraft

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Sustaining, Associate and Fellow Membership Standing upon qualification

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Stefan Kontski - designer-craftsman for Canada's largest
Cordovan leathercraft project





Slip Page - "Canadian Leathercraft" - Fall 1952 - illustrating
one of a series of articles of interest to decorative leather-
craftsmen For subscription rates see page 12