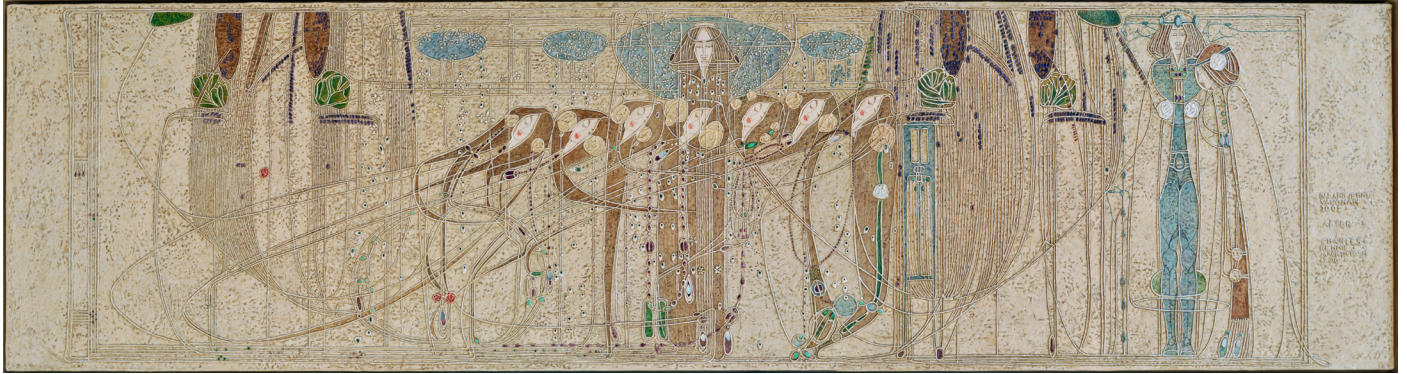


Preserving the Vienna Panels for Posterity



The Seven Princesses

The medium of the gesso panels of Margaret Macdonald and Charles Mackintosh startle us by their genius because the medium is capable of such detail and depth of image. Its third dimension has proved impossible to capture by two-dimensional photography until now.

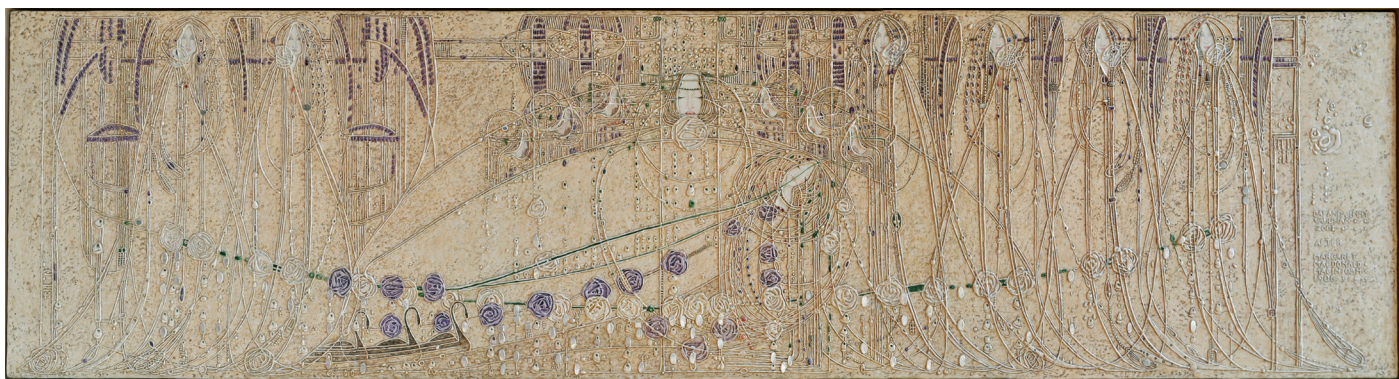
The first execution of the Return of Marcellus from its design in 1902 and its partner panel, so happily rediscovered in 1990, called for a new photographic process by which the images could be captured. The sale last year by Christies of the two Turin (1902) Rose panels of regular ration and size (approximately 1 x 1 metre) were expertly reproduced by Christies expert photographers; but despite the detail the jewel-like luminosity and third dimensional depth were only hinted at. Could we do better?

Various ideas of 3-D laser image-capture were considered but the answer proved to be a little simpler; but not much!! Using digital photography – which now rivals film – the technique involved natural lighting for the xxx photographs to capture the detail and the play of light on the raised elements. The basic problem is then the fact that no lens and no camera can capture the whole with perspective. Too far away and the detail is lost. Too close and the lens is like a fish eye; the lines are curved.

The technique was to photo the design as made (in the case of the Seven Princesses): three sections. Rostrum camera and lens were carefully chosen (specify xxxx). A remarkable Italian tripod using products from three manufacturers (legs, head and platform) was used to position the camera so that the object could be lit optimally by placing it in sunshine emerging from a south facing window. Two possible methods were tried (both using the traditional string and chalk marks on floor methods!!!): radial and parallel panorama to give the digital imaging two options at the next stage.

The three high resolution images were then digitally sewn together using hand-crafted rather than computer automation which is imperfect. By hand, with great care, the joins are invisible. The digital artist drew the joins irregularly down the very edges of the Mackintosh lines; then the edges were made transparent temporarily so that they could be joined on screen. One click of a mouse and almost a hundred hours of work in three images came together before our eyes on a monitor to form the life size one square metre of artwork by Dai and Jenny Vaughan; but the one square metre was in the awkward dimension of close to one half by two metres.

By this point it emerged that the digital photos had significantly different colour temperatures from each other; the reason was that over an hour elapsed between the capturing the images of each artwork during which the sunlight had changed. This would prove to be a problem as the photographer



The Arrival of Prince Marcellus

believes in the art of very gentle digital manipulation in the pursuit of lifelike fidelity. Adobe allows almost anything to be done but here we are not involved with animation pictures!! In the end we decided to draw the two panels slightly closer to each other as a compromise as the husband and wife's artworks for Waerndorfer were, as Dai points out, magically conceived to work as a pair.

The final step will be to make a colour correction for each proposed medium or format. If they will be printed by the art Giclee process or for a poster, the printer needs to measure the original panel and correct the digital image for his print process and paper. If they will be reproduced on an electronic monitor, the balance will be quite different.

Using most gently the tools of Adobe Photoshop in our preparation of the electronic archive the final step was to return to the physical panels to enhance the resolution, depth of image and the luminosity of the jewels as exquisitely designed by the Mackintoshes and lovingly purchased, cut, and mounted by the Vaughan's during the year 2008. From the images of useable JPEGs of 16Mb were derived for useful file transfer etc.

Finally the two raw Photoshop images of about 140Mb each artwork were transferred to the CRM Society to keep. A word of praise seems not out of place for its remarkable officers; their energy and enthusiasm has thrust the cause forward in a world of complacency and neglect. If this seems a harsh judgement of the state of the world, how else can this enlightening human period of art and expression have passed so quickly into history? It is as if the Great War permanently damaged man's belief in his own humanity. Now, with the right marketing, any junk passes the auctioneer's showroom as an artistic masterpiece.

Jack Lawson