

Style Snapshot

A look at a frame, its characteristics, and history

By Peter Werkoven

What style frame is this? This is a tabernacle frame, also known as an aedicular frame.

Who designed it? This was designed by Franz von Stuck (1863-1928), a German symbolist/expressionist painter, sculptor, and architect. He was one of the founding members of the Munich Secession in 1892, and he began teaching at the Munich Academy in 1895. Some of his pupils included Klee, Albers, and Kandinsky, whose subsequent careers enhanced von Stuck's reputation.

Von Stuck believed that the frame of a painting must be an integral part of the overall piece, and generally designed them himself with careful use of panels, gilt carving, and inscriptions that identified the subject. This example was made for his painting "Die Suende" (The Sin). The actual crafting and gilding of the frame was done in Munich by the studio of Hans Telbacher.

What time period is it from? The frame was made in 1893.

What are the defining/common characteristics of this style? Tabernacle frames are based on the forms of classical architecture. The style is characterized by an opening framed by two columns, with a decorated entablature lying horizontally above the columns and usually with a pediment forming the top element of the frame. Earliest known examples of this frame style are seen in Byzantine altarpieces, but it was the structure and decorative elements of later Italian altarpieces that set the style that we recognize today as the characteristic tabernacle frame.

What design departures might be seen on some frames of this style? Because the tabernacle frame is identified by its form rather than an artistic period,

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This tabernacle frame was designed by Franz von Stuck in 1893.

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The studio of Hans Telbacher was responsible for the execution of the frame designed by von Stuck.

there are virtually infinite variations that have been and can be created—right up to the present day.

Additional comments: Von Stuck was a master in creating high contrasts of light and dark in his paintings. To this end he often utilized the framework surfaces to perhaps create extensive light and dark contrasts between the picture and the frame. He also, at times, used the frame to continue the vertical and horizontal lines of the structure of the painting or even to counter-balance extreme picture formats and asymmetrically positioned picture compositions.

One of von Stuck's (later) fans was Adolf Hitler. In fact, some historians claim that Hitler admired von Stuck's painting "The Wild Chase," a depiction of the Norse god Odin on horseback, so much that he copied Odin's hair style and mustache and so created his own idiosyncratic appearance. The truth of this story remains uncertain, however. ■



Peter Werkhoven is owner of Aedicule Fine Framemaking in San Francisco. Mr. Werkhoven is originally from Amsterdam, the Netherlands, and moved to the U.S. a few years ago. His frames can be found in the Rijksmuseum, the Van Gogh Museum, as well as in the homes of many European collectors. He can be reached at pwerkhoven@comcast.net