

Leon Victor Solon: Color, Ceramics and Architecture

Michael Padwee

For a brief period during the first half of the 20th century there was a movement in the United States to put color in architecture, more than the color of the materials used. This movement had its roots in the Art Nouveau and Arts and Crafts styles and had a leading theorist in an Englishman originally from the pottery district of Stoke-on-Trent.

Leon Solon was intrigued with the possibilities of color when he worked as a designer in England, before he emigrated to the United States in 1909. John Hopper, a textile and design historian, discussed some of Solon's color and design work as it pertained to textiles:



Leon V. Solon
(from E. Stanley Wires, "Decorative Tiles, Part III, Their Contribution to Architecture and Ceramic Art", *New England Architect and Builder Illustrated*, No. Sixteen, 1960)

"Although mostly known for his ceramic work, Solon did produce decorative work in a number of disciplines including textiles. It is unknown to what extent his textile work was commercially produced. The textile design shown...which was called Allegorical Figures and was produced in about 1893, is said either to be the only textile design produced by Solon, or at least the only remaining documented piece. That the design had some value in its own right is shown by the fact that it was printed by Wardle & Co, the prestigious textile printing company that had...a close relationship with William Morris and the Arts & Crafts movement. This printed design, which could be bought on both silk and velvet, is an extraordinary piece of work, particularly for an English design. Solon was a keen purveyor of the general European Art Nouveau movement and was an important contributor to the style when he worked at Minton's. However, he was much more specific in his tastes and championed the Austrian version of the movement, popularly known as the Secession*. [...Solon's] ideas regarding contemporary decoration were somewhat more adventurous than many of his English contemporaries, and certainly more Eurocentric." (John Hopper, "The Allegorical Figures of Leon Victor Solon", *The Textile Blog*, Nov. 10, 2010, <http://thetextileblog.blogspot.com/2010/11/allegorical-figures-of-leon-victor.html>)



Leon Solon, "Allegorical Figures" textile design, c. 1893. Used with the permission of John Hopper and "Design. Decoration. Craft at The Textile Blog", <http://thetextileblog.blogspot.com/2010/11/allegorical-figures-of-leon-victor.html>.

In a paper read by Thomas Wardle at the Applied Art Section of the Society of Arts on May 7, 1895, Leon Solon is mentioned as one of the talented, new textile pattern designers: "I have thought it would be fitting to exhibit a few designs for silk fabrics, chiefly for dress, by a few pattern designers who aspire to be useful in the ornamentation of British silks. Amongst them Mr. Walter Crane has one-design for printed silk for hangings and cushions ; Mr. Lewis Day and Mr. Lethaby have one each; Miss Clowes...is here exhibited for the first time..., Mr. Leon Solon (the artistic son of an artistic father), Mr. Rigby, of Leek, Mr. Mawson, and one of my sons, trained to pattern designing, have each contributed a few designs of their own." [Solon had two designs for printed silk exhibited.] (Thomas Wardle, "On the Improvements in the Designing, Colouring, and Manufacture of British Silks Since the Egerton Exhibition of 1890", *Journal of the Society of Arts*, Vol. XLIII, No. 2,219, May 31, 1895, pp. 666+)

"Solon himself was a keen purveyor of classical themes which he often tied into the Art Nouveau styling of elongated figures, foliage and nudes. However, although there were elements of individual interest and exploration within Solon's work, at the heart of his

style at least during the Art Nouveau period was his obvious admiration and indebtedness to Central European contemporary styling. The ceramic work he produced for Minton was much closer to the Germanic interpretation of Art Nouveau than it was of either the French or Belgian. To some extent this can be seen in this particularly early design piece by Solon. The textile design contains features that would not look amiss in either the early German Jugend or Austrian Secessionist forms that were to become such highly popular and alternative versions of Art Nouveau."

(<http://thetextileblog.blogspot.com/2010/11/allegorical-figures-of-leon-victor.html>)

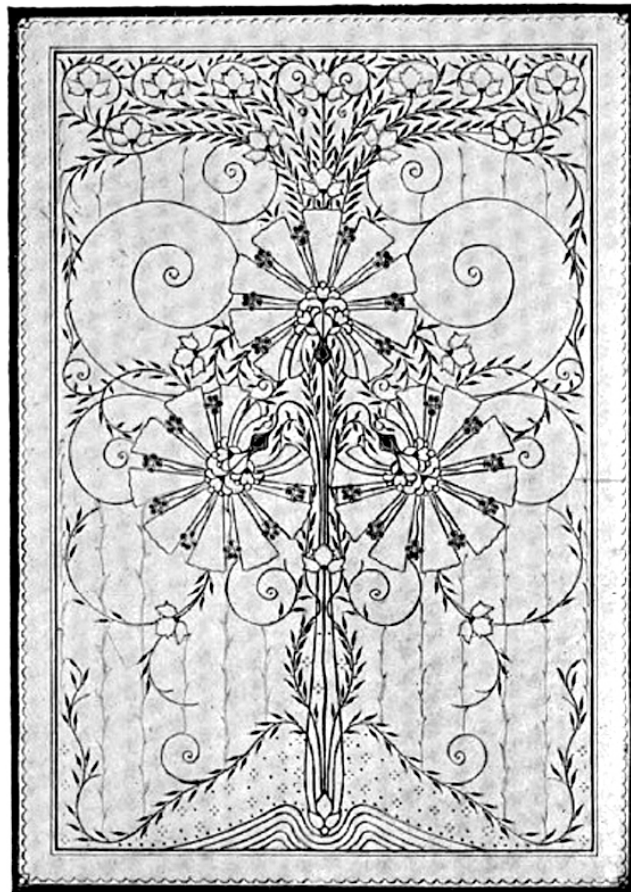
*["The development of the Art Nouveau movement as it spread across Europe was shaped in part by a group of rebel Viennese artists who had turned their backs on the Establishment. ...The city's young intellectuals, the artists, writers and scientists, looked to the new century for a new beginning. For its artists, it came with the founding of a new society – the Secession – which, unlike Vienna's long standing traditional Society of Artists, was intended to raise concern for art in the city and promote contact with artists abroad. It was founded by Gustav Klimt, Kolo Moser, Josef Hoffmann and Joseph Maria Olbrich. They decided to form their own exhibiting society and to publish a magazine called Ver Sacrum... . At the same time Minton was casting around for new ideas and with this European roots, Léon was eager to contribute. His first designs in 1898 were based on the principles of the Viennese movement and named Secessionist ware, underlining the Secession Movement's impact even in North Staffordshire." (Christopher Proudlove, "Minton's Secessionist Ware is an epitaph to designer Leon Solon"; <http://writeantiques.com/mintons-secessionist-ware-is-an-epitaph-to-designer-leon-solon/>)]

(From the [Fine Art Society](#), London, as reproduced by the [Victorian Web](#))



A color reproduction of Leon Solon's "Allegorical Figures" textile design. Printed tussah silk: 286 x 168.75 cm; 114 x 67 1/2 inches. (<http://www.victorianweb.org/art/design/textiles/37.html>)

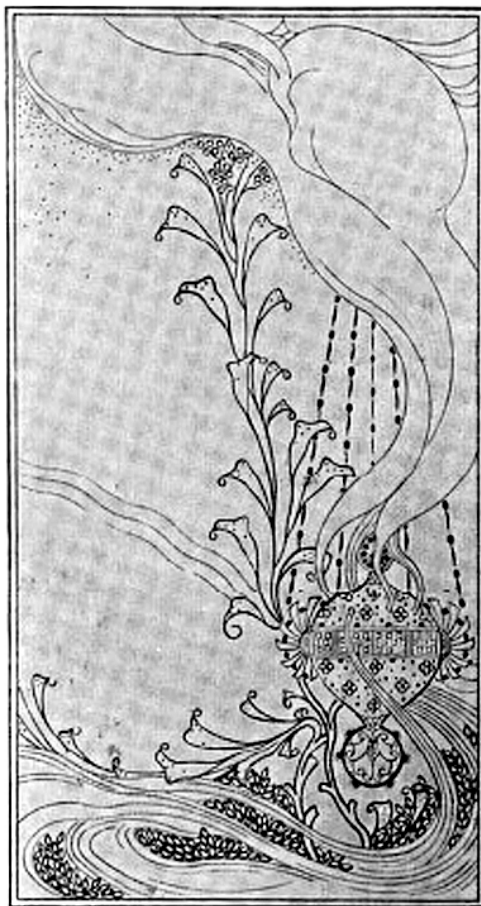
Solon was influenced by the Arts and Crafts principles espoused by William Morris. "...Morris, a contemporary of Dresser, is the most famous of the Arts & Crafts pioneers and probably the most influential figure involved in nineteenth century textile production. His legacy lies not only in his approach to design but also in his methods of manufacture as well as his views on the role of the designer and craftsman. ...Morris's dislike of commercial production and chemical dyes led him to traditional earlier techniques such as handloom Jacquard weaving and the use of vegetable dyed hand-block printing. ...Thomas Wardle worked closely with Morris in experimenting with vegetable dyes. His travels to India also influenced his work, both in terms of design...and the type of silk he used. He printed Leon Victor Solon's only known textile design, which is considered one of the most beautiful figurative patterns from the Arts & Crafts period." (The Fine Art Society, "Victorian Textiles and Textile Design: An Introduction": <http://www.victorianweb.org/art/design/textiles/intro.html>)



A doublure--an elaborately decorated vellum or leather inner cover of a book--of "L'Art dans la décoration extérieure des livres", designed by Leon V. Solon. The colors are Deep Green, two shades of Blue, Grey and Gold. (Kineton Parkes, *The Sutherland binding*, Printed for Private Circulation, Newcastle-under-Lyme, England, 1900)

In 1897 Solon assumed the position of art director of bookbinding for George Thomas Bagguley at Newcastle-under-Lyme. Bagguley had been the librarian of the Duke of

Sutherland's library. Solon created book binding designs for the new "Sutherland Decoration".



"SUTHERLAND"
BINDING
188

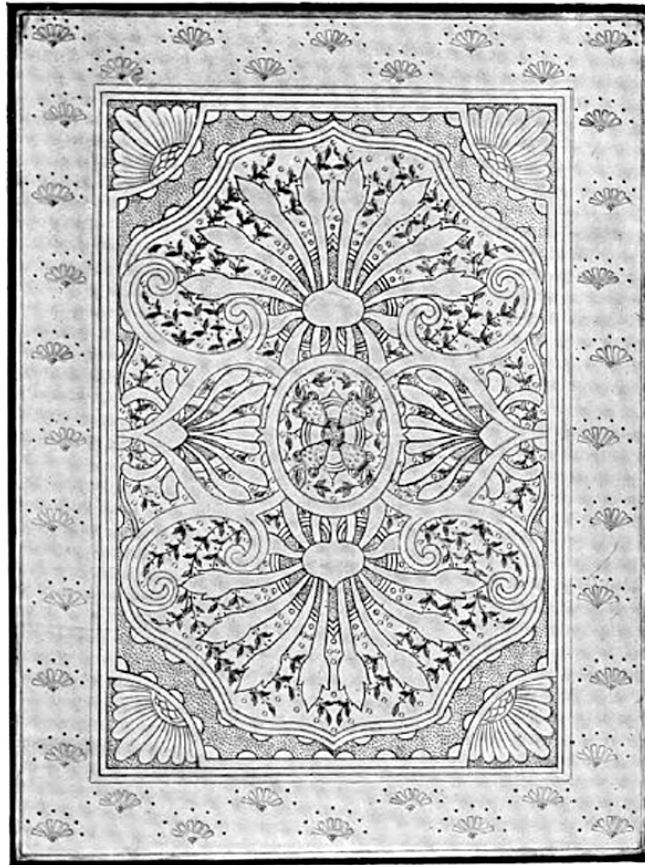
DESIGNED BY LEON V. SOLON
EXECUTED BY G. T. BAGGULEY

("Studio-Talk", *The Studio*, Vol. XXX, No. 2, Nov. 1903, p. 158)

These designs were hand-tooled in color by Mr. Bagguley. "Hitherto colour-decoration has been applied to leather-binding either by painting or staining, by inlaying, or by embroidery. Now Mr. Bagguley tools the pattern itself in brilliant permanent colours... . The designs by Mr. Leon Solon were made especially for the particular volumes they adorn... . That the 'Solon' designs in the 'Sunderland [sic] Decoration'* will be the prize of collectors is a safe prophecy, for everything that makes binding a fine art is obeyed here, plus the novelty of colour, which is their own entirely." (E.B.S., "Studio Talk", *The Studio*, Vol. 12, No. 2, 1898, pp. 122-124)

*["Patented by the Staffordshire binder George Thomas Bagguley (b. ca. 1860), the inventive Sutherland bindings (named after the Duchess of Sutherland) are characterized by vellum doublures that are elaborately decorated with gilt and colored tooling. ...Established in 1890, the Bagguley firm employed a number of outsiders to design bindings (including Leon V. Solon, Dorothy Talbot, and Charles Connor), and although the bindery operated for only a few years, its output was distinguished." (Stephen J. Gertz, "More Magnificent Bindings, Bound to be Great", *Booktryst*:

A Nest for Booklovers, October 26, 2011;
<http://www.booktryst.com/2011/10/more-magnificent-bindings-bound-to-be.html>]



A doublure of "Queen Elizabeth", designed by Leon V. Solon. The colors are Rose Pink, two shades of Veronese Green, Pale Blue and Gold. Solon also designed another doublure for Richard Holmes' *Queen Victoria*. (Kinton Parkes, *The Sutherland binding*, Printed for Private Circulation, Newcastle-under-Lyme, England, 1900)

"[Solon] also worked as a painter, sculptor and illustrator. [He] exhibited at the Royal Academy and Royal Society of British Artists in London and the Royal Society of Artists in Birmingham, England, between 1897-1905... .

(http://www.achome.co.uk/antiques/international_decorative_arts.htm) Solon also created artistic book-plates during his career:



An art nouveau bookplate created by Leon Solon. (Photo courtesy of [Lew Jaffe](#))

Leon V. Solon was born in England in 1872 "to a family of distinguished ceramic artists at Stoke-on-Trent... ." Leon was the son of "Marc Louis Emmanuel Solon...[who] had been hired in 1870 from the French national factory at Sevres to become head decorator at Minton's [in England]. ...Leon's maternal grandfather, Leon Arnoux, had been a highly accomplished ceramist at Sevres when Herbert Minton hired him to be his art director" from 1849-1892. Leon studied "...classical art...[and] was also trained to understand the practical aspects of contemporary ceramics manufacturing." (Riley Doty, "British Tile Makers in the United States: 1910-1940", *Journal of the Tiles & Architectural Ceramics Society*, Vol. 17, 2011, pp. 8-11)

Solon, like "...many other Staffordshire natives,...was raised in the tradition of practical potting. But...Solon [also] possessed a wide knowledge of ceramics manufacturing because, through family tradition, he had been trained to be a company art director. ...In this industry where style was a major sales device, practical men responsible for deci-

phering consumer taste--that is, factory art directors--were labor aristocrats... ." (Regina Lee Blaszczyk, "'This Extraordinary Demand for Color': Leon Victor Solon and Architectural Polychromy, 1909-1939", *Flashpoint, the Newsletter of the Tile Heritage Foundation*, Vol. 6 No. 3, July-September 1993, p. 1)

"Solon's formal education provided him with a strong practical foundation in ceramics and exposed him to the methods, theories and techniques of British industrial arts practice. ...his formal training was complemented by the indoctrination to classicism he received from [his father,] Louis Solon. Under his father's tutelage, Solon developed an expertise in the art and architecture of the ancient world, including a knowledge and understanding of Greek polychromy..." which was very influential in Solon's future theories. (Regina Lee Blaszczyk, p. 10) Solon was raised in the late nineteenth century when "there was intense interest in the presence of color on ancient sculpture[,...] largely inspired by an 1886 exhibit in Berlin directed by archaeologist Georg Treu in which... painted casts of ancient works were displayed, correcting the impression that they had only ever been white." (Jarrett A. Lobell, "Not Quite Ancient", *Archaeology*, Vol. 66, No. 4, July/August 2013, p. 10)



An early Minton Secessionist twin handled vase c. 1905 by Leon Solon and John Wadsworth of inverted trumpet form, with twin ear shaped handles and tubelined laurel swags in shades of blue and purple, with a cream roundel to the neck. A stunning example of the Art Nouveau style introduced by Solon and Wadsworth. (Photo courtesy of Nick Cashin, "UK Pot Heads" blog; <http://ukpotheads.blogspot.co.uk/2012/05/minton-secessionist-vase.html>)

Partially as a result of favorable publicity in The Studio, Leon Solon was hired by Mintons. While chief designer at the Mintons pottery in Stoke-on-Trent, "Solon and...John W. Wadsworth...collaborated to create 'Secessionist Ware' in an attempt to capture the market for art nouveau home decorations for Minton. ...Solon and Wadsworth created a brilliant palette for Secessionist Ware that foreshadowed Solon's later work in architectural faience." (Błaszczuk, p. 10) There are disagreements, however, as to who actually created the major part of the designs.



A 12-tile Secessionist-style panel designed by Leon Solon. (Photo from the Woolley & Wallis auction website: <http://www.woolleyandwallis.co.uk/PrintLot?id=225963>)

"Solon's first work for Mintons was in flat patterns for tiles and decorative panels. Various...techniques used in the secessionist ware came directly from both the tile production and [Mintons'] 'Angloia' range of pottery, including block-printing, relief moulding

and slip trailing. ... The early pieces are all designed by Solon and are mostly overtly art nouveau in shape, pattern and even colour. These early pieces feature peacocks, flowers and various art nouveau trailing motifs. They are produced in a variety of techniques usually combining moulded relief with block printing. The basic shape would be produced in some quantity in moulds incorporating the raised relief. These would then be passed to decorators who would add the block printing where required and then colour the pieces with lead glazes. They would be encouraged to be quite loose in their technique so that runs and irregularities could be seen. This in effect meant that the pottery was a combination of industrial production and 'art pottery' finish."

(<http://mintonobsessionist.wordpress.com/what-is-minton-secessionist/>)

Secessionist ware is further "...characterised by bold Art Nouveau designs of highly stylised, often powerfully organic plant forms, applied as either moulded or slip-trailed raised outlines. These are filled by transparent lead (majolica) glazes in a palette of sludgy greens, yellows and reds, and soft blues. From the beginning [also] appears a strong purple and blue combination which always seems...to have a particularly intense Art Nouveau character." (Simon Wilson, "Mintons Secessionist Ware : a Triumph of English Art Nouveau", <http://mintonobsessionist.wordpress.com/2012/06/23/mintons-secessionist-ware-a-triumph-of-english-art-nouveau/>) "...Solon had favoured blues, greens, and turquoise grounds with sand and salmon pink decorations. Wadsworth introduced stronger colours, especially reds, pinks and blues." (<http://mintonobsessionist.wordpress.com/what-is-minton-secessionist/>)

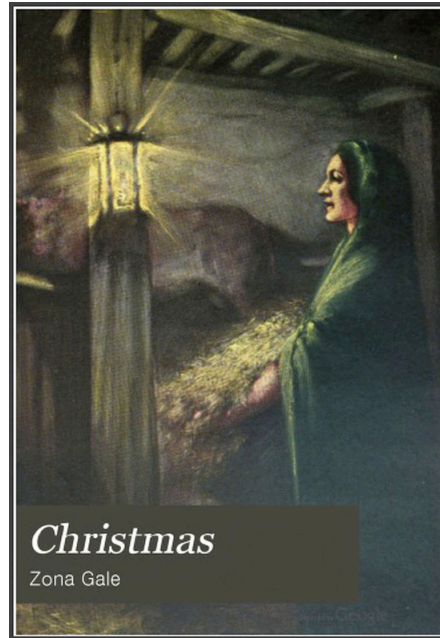
As an artist Leon Solon painted scenes from novels and plays that were reproduced in the published volumes or as advertising posters. One poster which was painted by Solon while still in England was for Aristophanes' "The Frogs."



DESIGN BY LÉON SOLON.

(Charles Hiatt, *Picture Posters*, George Bell and Sons, London, 1895)

In the United States Solon also illustrated books like Zona Gale's *Christmas* and *The Loves of Pelleas and Etarre*.



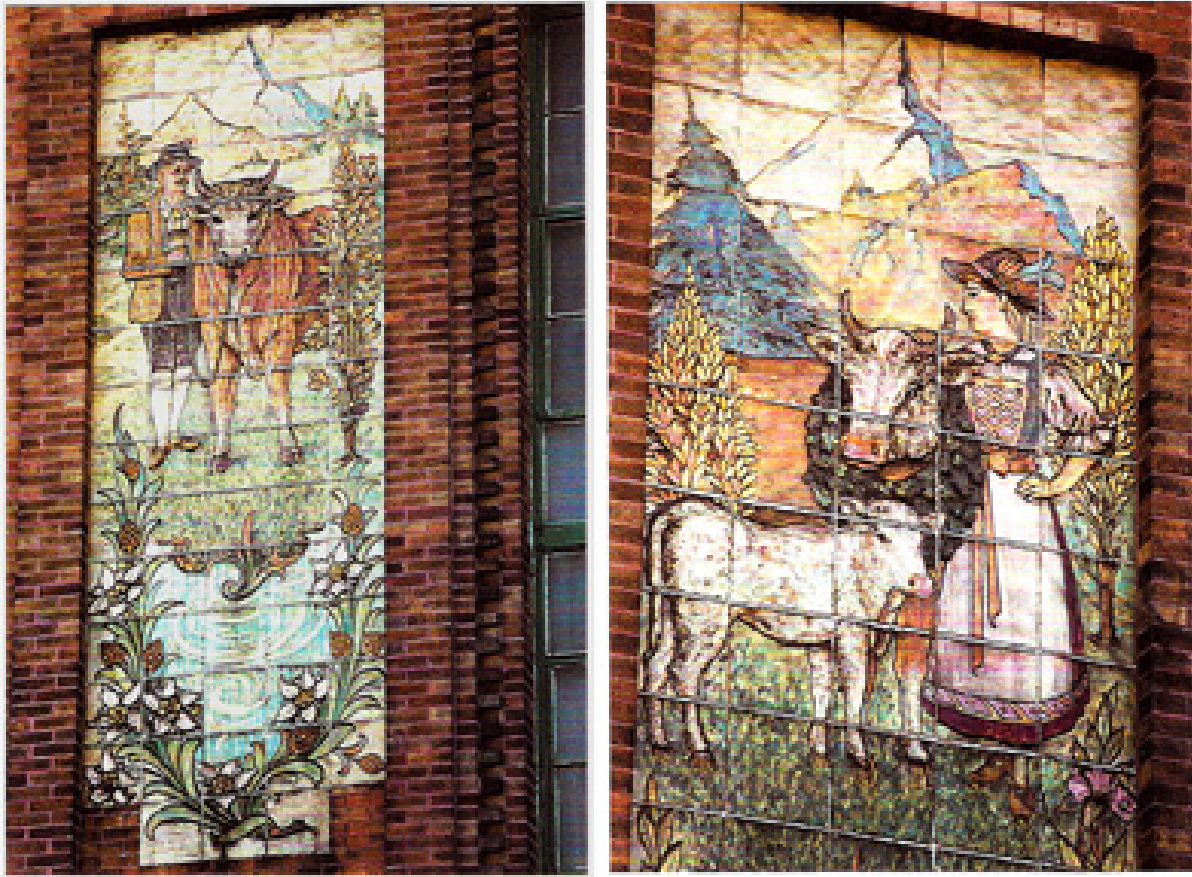
Book jacket by Leon Solon. (Zona Gale, *Christmas*, The Macmillan Company, New York, NY, 1912)

Solon's Tiles



One of Solon's pictorial, Persian-style designs for AET. "The Persian Warrior of the Twelfth Century (Cloisonné outline in Gobelín glazes)" (Evelyn Marie Stuart, "Art Tiling: Its Place in Architecture and Decoration", *Fine Arts Journal*, Vol. 29, No. 6, Dec., 1913, p. 742)

Solon emigrated to the United States in 1909, and "...In 1912 [he] became art director at the American Encaustic Tiling Co. [AET]... Leon's role was to direct the overall development of AET's tile lines." (Riley Doty, "British Tile Makers in the United States: 1910-1940", *Journal of the Tiles & Architectural Ceramics Society*, Vol. 17, 2011, pp. 8-11) Solon "encouraged a change of direction in the production [of tiles] to the more hand-crafted appearance much in vogue during the building boom of the 1920s." (Suzanne Perrault, "The Development of the American Art Tile Industry", in *The Fourth Annual Summer Tile Show*, The Perrault-Rago Gallery, Lambertville, NJ, June 22nd through July 6th 1997, p. 4)



Two large AET faience tile panels made for the Empire State Dairy, 2840-2844 Atlantic Avenue, Brooklyn, NY between Barbey Street and Schenck Avenue. Designed c.1913 when Leon Solon was AET's Artistic Director. (https://sites.google.com/site/historictileinstallationsn/ny_brooklyn--empire-state-dairy-tile-panels)

While at AET, Solon encouraged artists from varied disciplines to design tiles. The artist Arthur Crisp, for instance, designed two large faience tile panels, which were exhibited at the Architectural League of New York.



THE SACRED DRAGON

Designed by ARTHUR CRISP, Painter, New York

Executed in Actco Faience by the American Encaustic Tiling Co. (c. 1921)

(Photos of these panels can be found in "The Architectural League of New York and Its Relations to Crafts and Manufactures" by H. Van Buren Magonigle in *The American Architect*, Volume 121, No. 2387, Feb. 15, 1922, pp. 166-167, and in the *Year Book of the Architectural League of New York...*, Vol. 37, 1922. Both panels were part of the annual exhibition of the Architectural League of New York.)



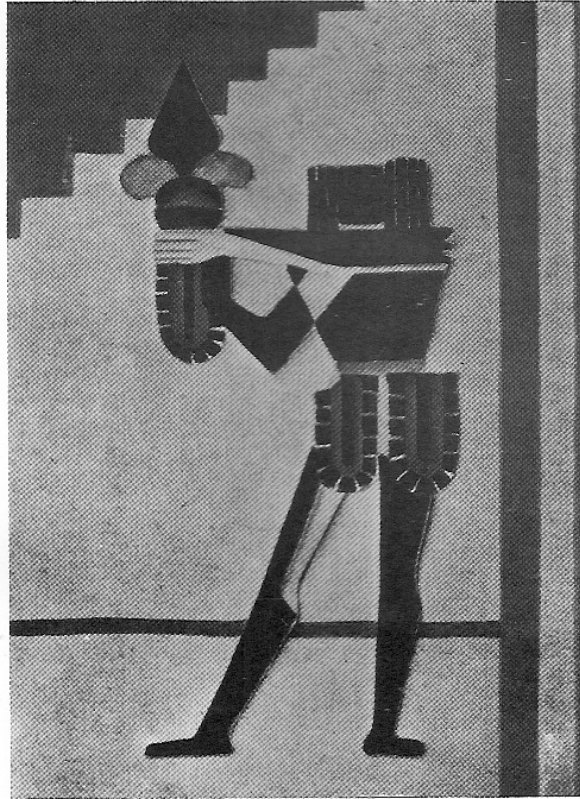
TWO GREEN ELEPHANTS

Design by ARTHUR CRISP, New York

Executed in Actco Faience by the American Encaustic Tiling Co. (c. 1921)

Another series of tiles was created for the *Aztec Ballet*. The *Aztec Ballet* was created by the Mexican composer Carlos Chávez (1899-1978), who "became the first Mexican composer to recapture the spirit of pre-Columbian culture in his music. [...Chávez] found a legend in Aztec mythology that he considered appropriate, which dealt with the ceremony signifying the renewal of life after the fiftytwo-year Aztec 'century' by means of a new gift of fire from the gods. ...In 1928 the Ballet was to be produced in New York City. Based on motifs in Augustin Lazo's costume design for the ballet, the Cheney Silk firm and the American Encaustic Tile Company...made products that were to be introduced

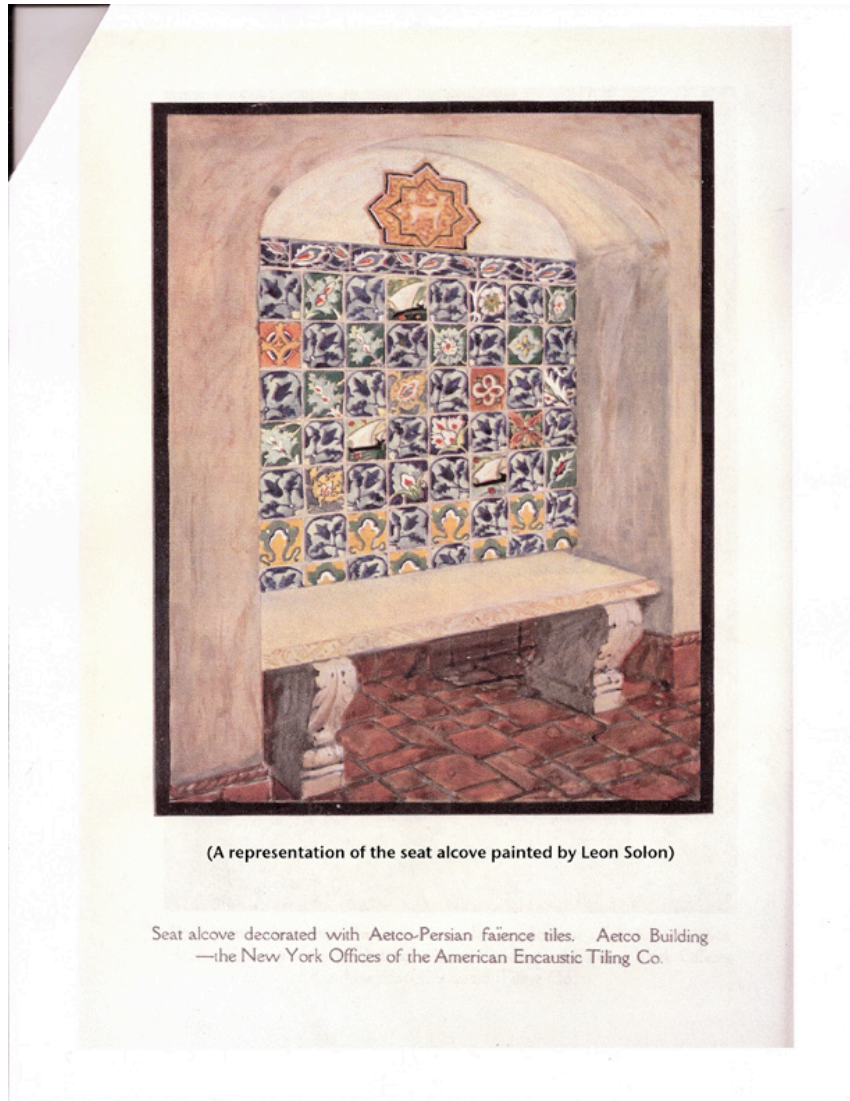
simultaneously with the ballet production." (Robert L. Parker, "Carlos Chávez and the Ballet: A Study in Persistence", *Dance Chronicle*, Vol. 8, No. 3/4 (1985), pp. 180, 184)



(E. Stanley Wires, "Decorative Tiles, Part III, Their Contribution to Architecture and Ceramic Art", *New England Architect and Builder Illustrated*, No. Sixteen, 1960)

"[...The] board of the Metropolitan Museum of Art displayed [the tiles] in an International Exhibition of Ceramic Art in 1928... ." (Robert L. Parker, "Carlos Chávez and the Ballet: A Study in Persistence", *Dance Chronicle*, Vol. 8, No. 3/4 (1985), p. 184)

Leon Solon designed the facade and showrooms of the American Encaustic Tiling Company at 16 East 41st Street in Manhattan using a planned glaze color scheme... . The street entrance and facade were decorated with polychrome faience, including a bear's head over the entrance. Solon designed the showrooms "...as a virtual 'Tile Museum', as a showplace for parading the decorative potential of colorful architectural ceramics. ...If the exterior of the...showroom [the building facade] was the epitome of understatement, the building's interior communicated chromatic splendor that must have bedazzled architects and persuaded many to utilize tiles in their installations. ...This main display area, a virtual symphony in distinctive hues of brilliant blues, greens and gold, was Solon's tribute to maiolica potters of the Italian Renaissance." (Regina Lee Blaszczyk, " 'This Extraordinary Demand For Color': Leon Victor Solon and Architectural Polychromy, 1909-1939" in *Flashpoint, the Newsletter of the Tile Heritage Foundation*, Vol. 6, No. 3, July-September 1993, p. 14)



(A representation of the seat alcove painted by Leon Solon)

Seat alcove decorated with Aetco-Persian faience tiles. Aetco Building
—the New York Offices of the American Encaustic Tiling Co.

"The manner in which these strongly contrasting Aetco-Persian faience tiles are arranged follows the pattern-plan found on certain mosque towers of northern Africa; in those examples we find harmony established in an assembly of brilliantly colored patterns, by means of a method of pattern grouping. It is a species of alternation, or checker, in which one pattern is constant; the other alternating unit in the checker has the maximum degree of variation." (Leon V. Solon, "The Display Rooms of a Tile Manufactory", The Architectural Record, Vol. LII, No. 5, Nov. 1922)



(This photo and the photo below courtesy of the [Tile Heritage Foundation](#))

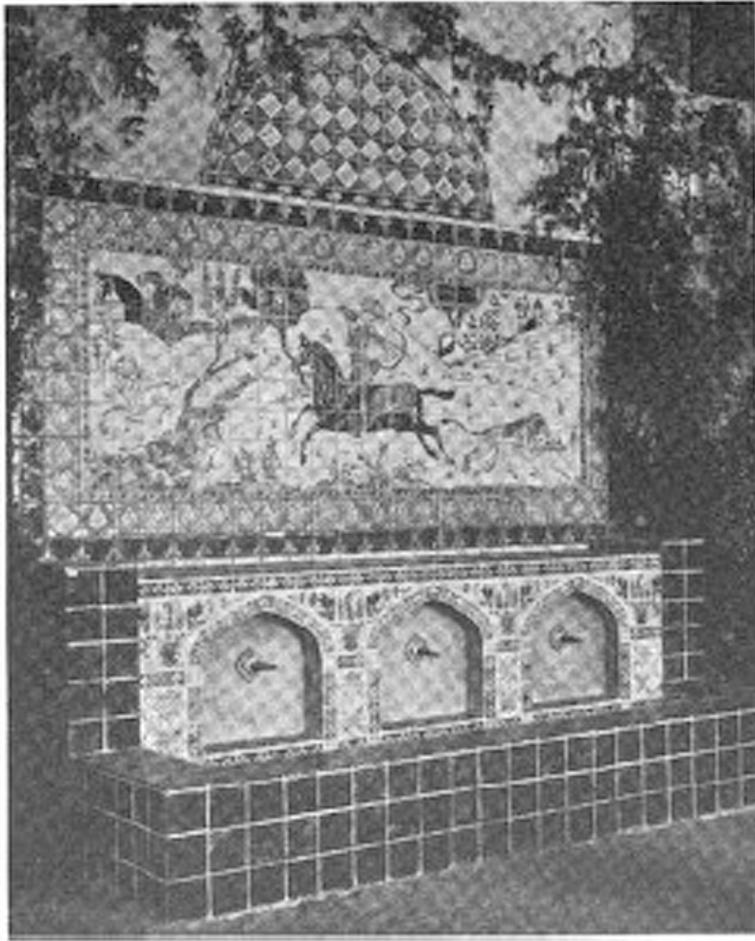


"In 1927, Solon lamented the 'dull and lifeless buildings of today' and called for increased use of color in skyscrapers. 'A soothing green would be suitable for localities like the Wall Street district where nerves are subject to constant excitement,' he wrote. At 16 East 41st Street Solon found the opportunity to put such theories into practice. The interior was a polychromed labyrinth of tile art, with majolica fountains, faience radiator grilles, niches, cornices and even ceilings in intensely shaded red, blue, gold, green and other colors. [...For] the exterior Solon sought a more subdued, neutral character. On a wall of light yellow roughened stucco, he laid out a polychrome network -- deep, burnt umber door and window enframements on the first floor, brilliant blue and gold heraldic plaques at the midsection and cream-and-blue rectangular patterns of square tile at the attic story." (Christopher Gray, "Terra Cotta Magic With a Polychromed Interior", *The New York Times*, "Streetscapes" column, July 20, 1997; <http://www.nytimes.com/1997/07/20/realestate/terra-cotta-magic-with-a-polychromed-interior.html?src=pm>)



Tiled facade, 16 East 41st Street, removed in 2013. (Photo courtesy of Michael Padwee)

Solon left AET about 1928. He then worked as a consultant and art director at the Mosaic Tile Company, the Robertson Art Tile Works and the U.S. Quarry Tile Company. (Błaszczuk, p. 10)



A wall fountain of faience tiles, in the Persian manner, designed by Leon V. Solon, and shown at the 1921 Architectural League by the American Encaustic Tiling Company

(Frank W. Purdy, "American Art for America", *Arts & Decoration*, Vol. XVI, No. 4, Feb. 1922, p. 270)

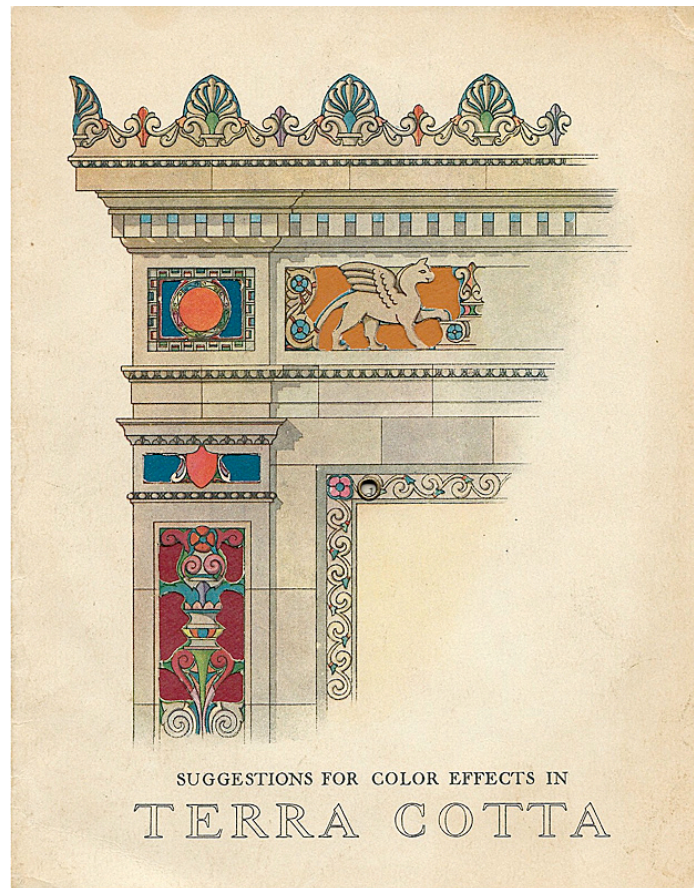
Color in Architecture

Regina Lee Blaszczyk, an historian of the use of color in commerce, states that a "color revolution turned the drab Victorian city into a brilliant modern showcase of terra cotta, electric light, sound, and paint. ...New public buildings, whether classical or Art Deco in style, were colorized and modernized with electric lights, ceramic tiles, murals and bright paints. ...The [terra cotta] industry employed sculptors to create stock designs or to customize designs in the Beaux-arts and Art Deco styles, and boasted its own theorist: Léon Victor Solon." (Regina Lee Blaszczyk, *The Color Revolution*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 2012, pp. 191, 196-197)

“Architectural Polychromy” is the title of a six-part series of essays that Leon Solon wrote for *The Architectural Record* in 1922. This followed two other essays published in *The Architectural Record* in 1918, “The Greek System of Architectural Polychrome Decoration” and “Principles of Polychrome in Sculpture Based on Greek Practice”, all of which put forth Solon’s theory that the most virile and spontaneous period of Classical Greek architecture--the 4th, 5th and 6th centuries B.C.E.--used color as an architectural resource, subordinate to architectural properties “...in a rigid adherence to certain decorative conventions... . [...The] Greek polychrome method...teaches us the principles governing color location, color adjustment in ornamentation, and the manipulation of light as the means of developing color interest in the uniformly applied tone--the only form in which color may be used in architecture... .” (Leon V. Solon, “Architectural Polychromy: Part I”, *The Architectural Record*, Vol. 51, No. 1, January 1922, p. 7)

In an earlier article, Solon noted that “In a race preeminent in philosophy and in the analysis of abstractions, we might assume that color would have enjoyed the free rein accorded poetry or music. This, however, was not the case, and extremely rigid rules controlled [...color’s] application when embellishing architecture..., according to archaeologists like Borrmann, who conducted extensive research into color usage at the Olympia excavations. (Leon V. Solon, “The Greek System of Architectural Polychrome Decoration”, *The Architectural Record*, Vol. XLIII, No. 4, April 1918, p. 323-324, 326, 332)

In 1927 The National Terra Cotta Society published a “color wheel” for architects who wished to utilize color on buildings constructed with terra cotta. The front page of this four page cardboard brochure featured part of a building facade with colored areas and holes cut into parts of the design. The color wheel is attached to the inner page and is turned to illustrate the proper colors to be used with each other. The explanation of the use of the color wheel could have been written by--and may actually have been written by--Leon Solon, as it follows his views on color use in architecture. The six colors on the wheel “illustrate certain principles of successful coloration more or less common to every problem of design. There are no invariable rules which limit, much less prohibit, the use of color in architecture, but there are principles which should govern the amount and quality of color used in any specific application. So long as the distribution of color does not impair the sense of structural function in features which should properly express this, color may be freely used. [Color] is often the final touch necessary to give form its fullest significance[,] and when not found appropriate to a structural member may be used as a foil in related features not structural... .” (National Terra Cotta Society, “Suggestions for Color Effects in Terra Cotta”, 1927)



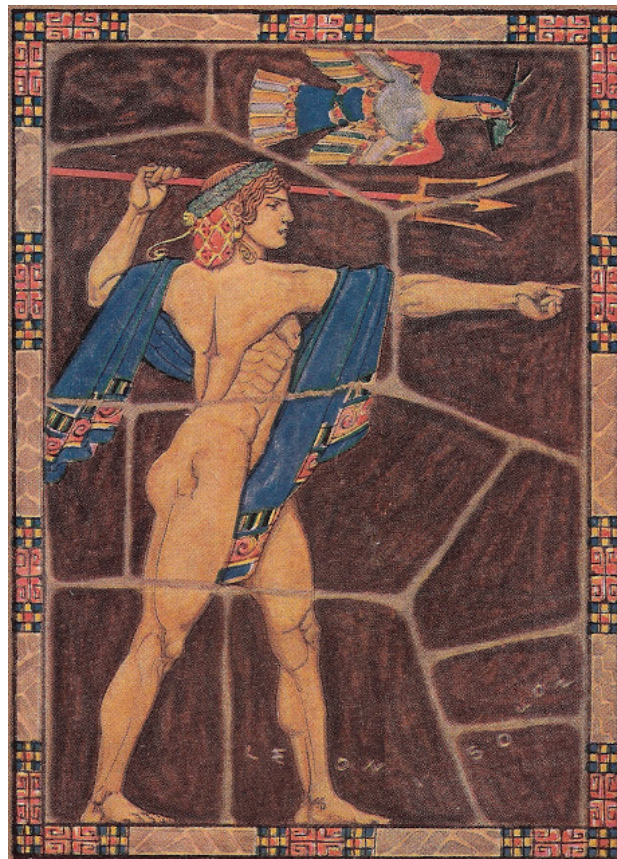
The National Terra Cotta Society color wheel. The maroon, blue and orange colors are part of the wheel attached to the back of the front page.

This brochure also discusses the principles to remember when choosing a color scheme. "...generally, warm colors advance while cool colors recede. This is important [...when] color is used in connection with shadow or to accentuate the apparent projection of relief and depth of background recesses. ...In handling the relation of color areas to each other, the larger areas should be duller or less intense than the smaller. This is very necessary where these are designed to appear in the same surface plane.

...Weight, strength and mass are suggested by the duller..., cool colors [...which] may be employed effectively for the base and lower part of a building[...]; the more intense, warmer and luminous colors [may be] used in treatment of the upper levels and their decorative detail. The use of complementary colors is an important aid to securing emphasis in decorative features and achieving a balanced color effect. Juxtaposition of the complements will tend to increase the apparent intensity of each... ." (National Terra Cotta Society, "Suggestions for Color Effects in Terra Cotta", 1927)

In 1917 Solon analyzed the reasons why colors were not being appropriately utilized with terra cotta construction. Solon believed that modern designers inappropriately used colors by blindly following Renaissance styles, which used colors on areas of buildings that did not need coloring. Instead, he suggests that designers should look to the color

schemes used by the classical Greek potters: “In analyzing the colored ornamentations on the Greek vases the foremost characteristic...is that form is primarily expressed by silhouette, decorative rhythm and contrast being attained by careful calculation of the relative value of motif and field.” As one example of this Solon writes, “An examination of ornamental sculpture decorating buildings erected in Greece during the fourth and fifth centuries, B.C., when polychrome was extensively used both in architecture and sculpture, reveals a number of examples carved with a very distinctive technique, differing essentially from the conventional renderings of such motifs, by the manner in which the edges of reliefs are treated. [emphasis mine] ...The peculiarity of this method is that the contour of the forms is bounded by a narrow, delicately embossed fillet giving additional projection to the edge...[, which is different from the Renaissance tendency to efface certain edges]. ...The light falling on the raised edge of the fillet, accentuated by its delicate shadow, adds an appearance of richness and softness to the colors which is unattainable by other means.” (Leon V. Solon, “Architectural Polychrome Decoration: An Analysis of Fundamental Principles”, *The Architectural Record*, Vol. XLII, No. 5, November 1917, pp. 454-457) This can be observed in some of Solon’s faience murals created when he was the artistic director of AET.



A muted background color with brighter blue, red and yellow on a filleted, raised design show the subject to its best advantage. (*The Architectural Record*, Vol. XLV, No. 1, Jan. 1919, cover)

Solon does acknowledge that science has advanced greatly in the areas of ceramic production and glazes since the fourth century BCE and allows for this when considering using colors in modern architecture and ceramics.



Leon V. Solon, "A Sketch in the Italian Majolica Style for American Faience", *The Architectural Review*, Vol. XLVIII, No. 1, July 1920, (cover)

. In 1924 one reviewer took Solon to task in a review of his book, ***Polychromy, Architectural and Structural***: "The book aims at an analysis of the theory and practice of polychromy as practised in architecture and sculpture by the Greeks of the sixth and fifth centuries B.C. in order 'to provide the architect and sculptor with simple maxims for guidance.' The author over-labours many of his points and brings in irrelevant aesthetic on matters that are obvious to every practical designer. Nevertheless, his book is of importance, as it is written on a subject which badly needs handling, and it has the great merit of a sound outlook about unreliable data. It is a real advantage to the practical designer who has no time for archaeological research to be told what sources he can trust. [But, in his theories,] Mr. Solon is not always convincing." (Review by D. T. F., *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, Vol. 44, Part 2 (1924), pp. 308-309)

In the 1920s, and during the Depression in the 1930s, Leon Solon put his theories of color in architecture and sculpture to practical use. In 1927 "New York was the site of

the Architectural and Allied Arts Exposition. [...Solon participated in a] forum that discussed 'modernistic views on color schemes in skyscrapers.' [Other participants] included architects Raymond Hood and Julian Clarence Levi,...and sculptor John Gregory. [While] Hood predicted that whole buildings [...would have one distinct color,] Solon strongly disagreed, ...saying 'The tendency will be to color the embellishments. It is not likely that one color will predominate in the entire building. One must be careful of the visibility of his colors. The areas of ornamentation will be carefully judged so the color will carry for a good distance.'" (Susan Tunick, "The Evolution of Terra Cotta: 'Glazing New Trails'", *APT Bulletin*, Vol. 32, No. 4, 2001, pp. 5-6) While Hood favored "large masses of color--...to achieve Art Deco splendor...", Solon believed that "Color under no circumstances can be regarded as having structural significance... . Its obvious purpose in application is decorative." (Regina Lee Blaszczyk, *The Color Revolution*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 2012, pp. 200-201)

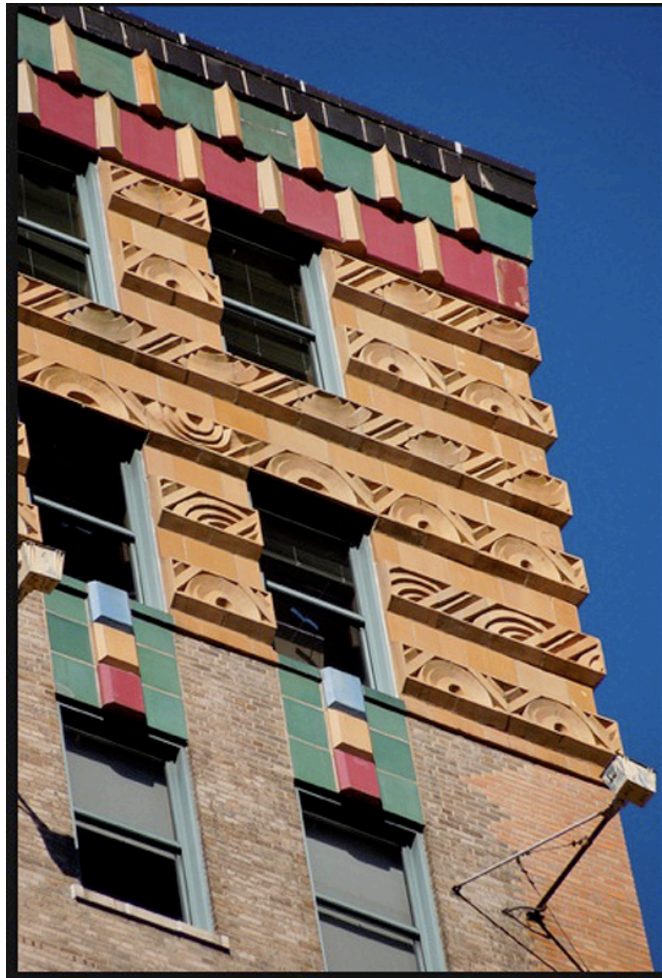
Three of Solon's architectural coloring projects were Ely Jacques Kahn's 2 Park Avenue Building in Manhattan, the coloring of some facade elements and of Carl Paul Jennewein's pediment sculpture grouping on the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and the coloring of many of the sculptural elements in the Rockefeller Center complex in New York City--especially those of Lee Lawrie and C. Paul Jennewein.

2 Park Avenue



(Photo courtesy of [Anomalous A](#))

"Two Park Avenue was designed by one of New York City's most prominent 20th century architects – Ely Jacques Kahn – in an Art Deco/Modernist architectural style. The 28-story tower was built between 1926 and 1928: of the 50 office buildings he designed in Midtown Manhattan, Two Park Avenue remains one of Kahn's most dramatic and successful works." (<http://www.greenbuildingsnyc.com/properties/two-park-avenue/>)



(Photo courtesy of [Anomalous A](#))

"Kahn's use of colored terra cotta on 2 Park Avenue, was a high point in the development of his ornamental vocabulary. Kahn wanted to replace the historically-inspired ornament of previous eras with broad areas of texture and color on his buildings. He advocated that, 'Flat surfaces [should] take the place of the obsolete cornices and finally color in surfaces, in proportion to the distance from the observer, mark the accents that the artist desires.' Kahn also observed that instead of a profusion of ornament, a modern designer should 'introduce in his work precisely that quality of interest that the musician understands by rhythm, accent or colour.' This type of wall treatment was also being employed by Ralph Walker in his large telephone company buildings and reflects the

ideas of the German and Dutch Expressionists who looked back to the early Gothic tradition in northern Germany for its expressive use of brick. The buildings from this period had a variety and richness to their surfaces that appealed to Kahn.



(Photo courtesy of [Anomalous A](#))

"...Above the 17th story, the intersections of verticals and horizontals are indicated by blue terra cotta squares in the spandrels, emphasizing the effect of woven fabric. Kahn later admitted that in these designs, 'I was thinking of the texture of fabric.' Panels of bright blue, red, green, yellow and black terra cotta, some plain and some molded with intricate patterns are integrated into the design. They are especially obvious near the top floors of each section making these sections stand out rather than recede with distance the way they would on other tall buildings. Kahn had been trying to introduce color into his buildings for some time. He hoped that color would 'supplement and maybe replace the play of light and shadow of traditional ornament...The possibilities of strong contrasts of colors eliminating futile carving and crockets, pinnacles and similar appendages of the early skyscraper are unlimited.' For the designs of 2 Park Avenue, Kahn consulted with colorist Leon Solon to determine the best choices." (Landmarks Preservation Commission, "2 Park Avenue Building", April 18, 2006, pp. 5-6; <http://www.nyc.gov/html/lpc/downloads/pdf/reports/2ParkAvenue.pdf>)

Solon and Kahn conducted a color experiment. They installed a full-size, full-color model of part of the terra cotta on the roof of the unfinished building. "This experiment provided some idea of how the colors would change under differing light conditions and what their impact would be from street level...since the terra cotta did not begin until the seventeenth story... ." (Susan Tunick, *Terra-Cotta Skyline*, Princeton Architectural Press, New York, 1997, p. 75) This experiment was similar to what Solon, C. Paul Jennewein and John Gregory did when they worked on the Philadelphia Museum of Art.



(Photo courtesy of [Anomalous A](#))

"The main difference between the decorative details on Two Park Avenue and those of more traditional buildings was that Kahn's ornament became an integral part of the facade rather than being merely applied to the surface. Kahn considered the mass as a whole, dividing it into areas of colored terra cotta appropriately scaled to the building. The architectural detail was created by varying the surfaces of the terra cotta so that shadows or holes would be produced by their projections or recesses." (Susan Tunick, *Terra-Cotta Skyline*, Princeton Architectural Press, New York, 1997, p. 75) This view mirrored Solon's theories of architectural polychromy.

The passing years did not treat the building well. "2 Park Avenue had undergone a series of clumsy renovations in the 1970s resulting in a confused building whose original

glory had been mostly obscured. Careful study of original building documents and historical photos, combined with building probes and exploration, determined what elements were primary and what had been added later...[and an appropriate restoration was more recently completed]." (http://www.studios.com/projects/2_park_avenue)

The Philadelphia Museum of Art



North Portico and Pediment, Philadelphia Museum of Art. (HABS-PA-1661-6)

“Philadelphia celebrated the 100th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence with the 1876 Centennial Exhibition, America's first World's Fair. Its art building, Memorial Hall, was intended to outlast the Exhibition and house a permanent museum. Following the example of London's South Kensington Museum, the new museum was to focus on applied art and science, and provide a school to train craftsmen in drawing, painting, modeling, and designing. The Pennsylvania Museum and School of Industrial Art opened on May 10, 1877. Its permanent collection began with objects from the Exhibi-

tion and gifts from the public impressed with the Exhibition's ideals of good design and craftsmanship.



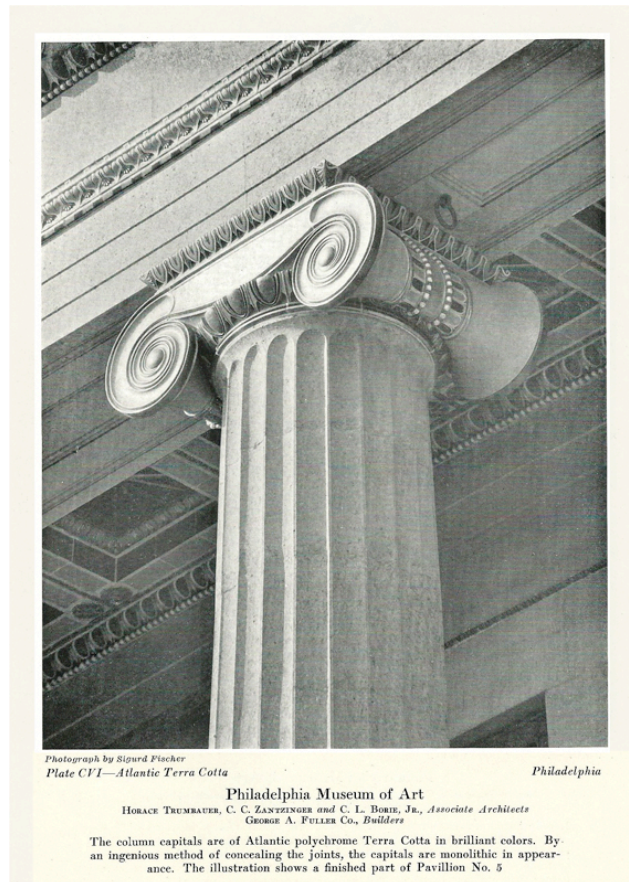
(Photographer, Ed Uthman; [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Pediment,_Philly_Art_Museum_\(2\).jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Pediment,_Philly_Art_Museum_(2).jpg))

“The City Council of Philadelphia funded a competition in 1895 to design a new museum building, but it was not until 1907 that plans were first made to construct it on Fairmount, a rocky hill topped by the city's main reservoir. The final design is mostly credited to two architects...: Howell Lewis Shay for the building's plan and massing, and Julian Abele for the detail work and perspective drawings. Construction of the Main Building began in 1919, [but, because...]of shortages caused by World War I and other delays, the new building was not completed until 1928. The facade and columns are made of Minnesota dolomite. The building's eight pediments were intended to be adorned with sculpture groups, but only one was completed: "Western Civilization" (1933) by C. Paul Jennewein, with painted terra-cotta figures depicting Greek gods and goddesses [colored by Leon V. Solon].” (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philadelphia_Museum_of_Art)

Leon Solon described the process they went through to make a polychromatic building according to classical Greek principles of coloring architectural and sculptural subjects:

“The idea of reviving the practice of polychromy in the new museum building germinated in the fertile imagination of Charles L. Borie, of the firm of Borie, Zantlinger and Medary, of Philadelphia. ...only a small minority of the profession realize that polychromatic decoration was inseparably connected with Greek architectural design,...not as an occasional and minor embellishment, but as a

dominant factor in all exterior effect. ...When [...Eli Price, the Chairman of the Fairmount Park Commission's Committee on the Museum] grasped the extent of polychromatic practice in Greece, and the feasibility of producing an equivalent effect...in the museum building, he became an enthusiastic supporter of the Borie project... . . .he and Borie decided that every...precaution should be taken to assure satisfactory results. The first step was to order an eighth scale model of one of the smaller pavilions, upon which all color decoration could be developed. The services of the writer [Solon] were retained as polychromist... . . .
 ...Borie...communicated with the late Professor Goodyear in order that those refinements which [Goodyear] had recorded in connection with the Parthenon and other famous Greek structures might be applied to the new [museum] building. The next stage was to commence the polychrome decoration in accordance with Greek practice. ...A small section of the entablature and a column cap were supplied to [me] for the development of ornamental detail and color arrangement. When [...a] satisfactory result was realized, the detail was drawn in pen-outline, reproduced, and printed upon thin paper so that it might be stuck upon the moldings and colored... ." (Leon V. Solon, "The Philadelphia Museum of Art", *Atlantic Terra Cotta*, Vol. VIII, No. 11, February 1927, pp. 1, 3)



Coloring detail of the column cap and entablature from the *Atlantic Terra Cotta* brochure.

At this point sculptors had to be chosen who were willing to work with a colorist. Borie selected C. Paul Jennewein and John Gregory to work on the sculptures for the pediments.

Then, "A similar experimental process was adopted with pediment groups that had proven so valuable with the polychrome ornamentation. Small groups, made to the scale of the model, were roughly decorated with color and placed in the colored pediment. [Corrections and changes were made, and when] each group had finally reached a stage of development which appeared to leave no detail in doubt, they were cast in plaster and shellaced ready for coloring. [As polychromist, Solon viewed color as...] a dynamic force which could link together or completely separate features in composition. Brilliant colors were used...being adaptable to conditions of visibility at long range." (Leon V. Solon, "The Philadelphia Museum of Art", *Atlantic Terra Cotta*, Vol. VIII, No. 11, February 1927, p. 3)



John Gregory, c. 1921.
(*Arts & Decoration*, Vol. XV,
No. 1, May 1921, p. 22)



Plate CXIII—Atlantic Terra Cotta

Philadelphia Museum of Art

Pediment Panel Detail

PAUL JENNEWEX, Sculptor

Even in black and white the difference between colored and monotone sculpture can be partly seen. Imagination is required to visualize the full effect of the actual colors

**A sculptural grouping model in color and monotone
(both photos b&w) from the *Atlantic Terra Cotta* brochure.**



(Photo courtesy of Michael Padwee)

While Solon was the colorist, Jennewein was responsible for the modeling of all the architectural detail. "All models were made to terra-cotta scale, cast in plaster and treated with color and gold; then taken out of doors and hoisted about fifty feet. In most cases ornamental scale which appeared...satisfactory in the studio underwent radical change [at fifty feet]; this necessitated remodelling, recoloring, [etc.]." (Leon V. Solon, "The Philadelphia Museum of Art", *Atlantic Terra Cotta*, Vol. VIII, No. 11, February 1927, p. 4)



Plate CIII—Atlantic Terra Cotta

Courtesy of *The Architectural Record*

TWO FIGURES IN POLYCHROME, FORMING PART OF THE PEDIMENT

DESIGNED BY JOHN GREGORY FOR THE PHILADELPHIA MUSEUM OF ART, FAIRMOUNT PARK, PHILADELPHIA.

The cornices, capitals, portico ceiling and roof for the wings of the Philadelphia Museum, executed in polychrome Atlantic Terra Cotta are already in place. The illustration above shows the contemplated treatment of one of the pediments in polychrome Terra Cotta. The illustration is taken from Mr. Gregory's one-third scale model. The colors shown are the same as used in the architectural detail; scarlet vermillion, gold, light and dark blue, black, white, green and buff. Brilliant glaze finish give the colors life and sparkle

Because only one of eight pediment sculptural groupings was completed, John Gregory's contributions are known only through the one-third scale models and photographs. (From the *Atlantic Terra Cotta* brochure)

Solon concludes that the "Greek principle [of coloring] was absolutely adhered to; this consists in restricting color to decorative features and developing color elaboration in inverse relation to structural significance. ...the main aim was to produce a distinctive color quality upon each member or feature, to prevent unrelated items associating in effect through similarity of coloring." (Leon V. Solon, "The Philadelphia Museum of Art", *Atlantic Terra Cotta*, Vol. VIII, No. 11, February 1927, p. 4)

According to one newspaper article, in 1927 a "...30 foot replica of a portion of the new Philadelphia Museum of Art [was] constructed, accurate in every detail, of Minnesota limestone and terra cotta, to display the working out of the long-forgotten art of Greece. ...The portion of the building reproduced [...for the annual exhibit of the Architectural League of New York] embodies the color designs of Leon V. Solon, and the sculptural work of John Gregory and Paul Jennewein." ...Architects all over the country have ex-

pressed interest in the revival of colors and the League has accorded the exhibit a central position at the exhibition." ("Architects to Show Revived Greek Art", *Springfield [MA] Republican*, February 20, 1927, p. 66)



“Noted classical and art deco sculptor C. Paul Jennewein [1890-1978] lived in Larchmont, New York, from 1924 until his death... . Among his best known works are: the main entrance of the British Empire Building at Rockefeller Center; four stone pylons for the 1939 World's Fair representing the Four Elements; two pylons, painted in the Egyptian style that flank the entrance to the Brooklyn Public Library; allegorical relief panels in the White House Executive Mansion; marble sculptures at the entrance to the Rayburn House of Representatives Office Building; the sculptural decoration, including statues, pediments, and reliefs, for the U.S. Department of Justice Building; and thirteen sculptures of Greek [deities] in the central pediment of the Philadelphia Museum of Art. His work for the Philadelphia Museum of Art was awarded the Medal of Honor of the Architectural League. In the Larchmont area,

Jennewein designed the Neptune silhouettes that have marked the Larchmont Village limits for decades, and the bronze statue incorporated into the War Memorial in front of Mamaroneck Village Hall.” (Originally submitted by: Nita M. Lowey, Representative, 18th District; <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/legacies/NY/200003401.html>; Jennewein photo courtesy of http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:CPJ_Americanart.si.edu.jpg)



The facade of the main branch of the Brooklyn Public Library at Grand Army Plaza, and the entrance with pylons designed by Jennewein. (Photos courtesy of Michael Padwee)



Of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Jennewein said it was "...developed in accord with archeological discoveries and on a different aesthetic basis than a commercial building... . Aesthetically the new building will show the advantage of the use of color as employed in Greek architecture before the third century B.C., in its proper functioning. ...The sculpted figures in the pediments of the Philadelphia Museum were all designed for color." ("Color Treatment In City Buildings: C. Paul Jennewein Explains How Pleasing External Effects May Be Obtained", *The New York Times*, Jan. 30, 1927, reprinted in *Atlantic Terra Cotta*, Vol. VIII, No. 11, February 1927)



Photograph by Sigurd Fischer
Plate CVII—Atlantic Terra Cotta

Philadelphia

Philadelphia Museum of Art

HORACE TRUMBAUER, C. C. ZANTZINGER and C. I. BORIE, JR., *Associate Architects*
GEORGE A. FULLER CO., *Builders*

This illustration shows the brilliant polychrome Terra Cotta ceiling of the portico.
The grilles are of bronze

(From the *Atlantic Terra Cotta* brochure)



(Photo courtesy of Michael Padwee)



Polychrome Pediment Panel
JOHN GREGORY, Sculptor

Mr. Gregory's one-third scale model for one of the Terra Cotta pediment panels contemplated for the Philadelphia Museum of Art



Plate CXI—Atlantic Terra Cotta

Philadelphia

Philadelphia Museum of Art

A composite photograph of the completed elevation with a photograph of Mr. Gregory's one-third scale colored model inserted

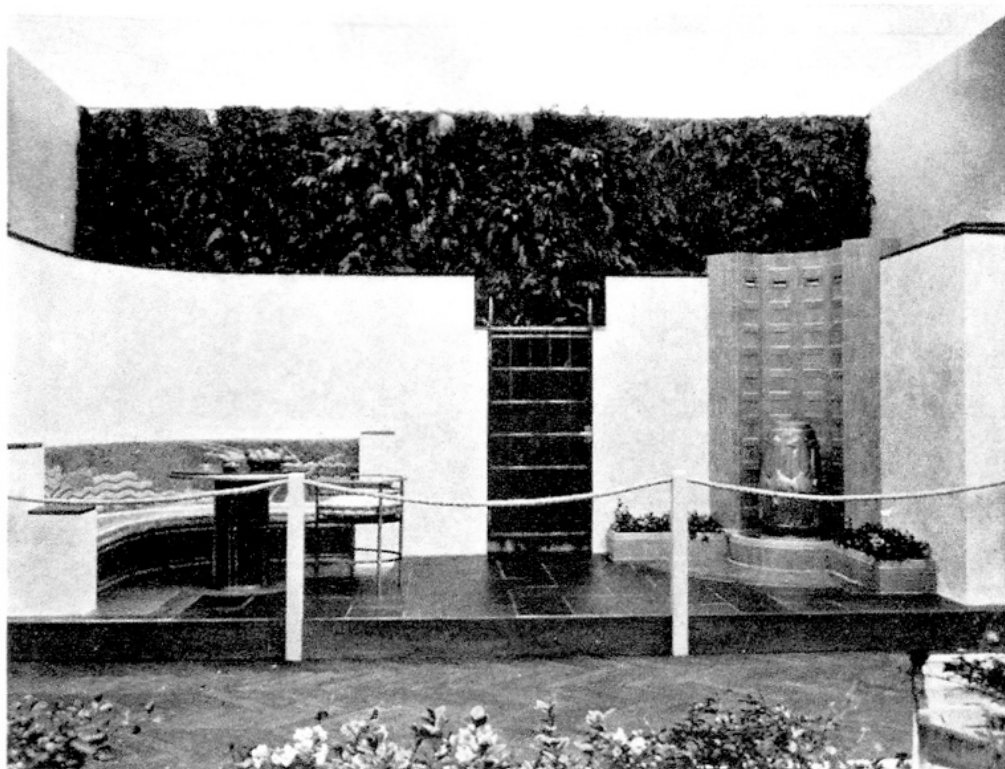
The John Gregory pediment model from the *Atlantic Terra Cotta* brochure.

According to Susan K. Anderson, the Martha Hamilton Morris Archivist at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, "As for the 1/3 scale model of the pediments, only the Gregory...model still exists. It used to be located in the sub-basement of our Museum... ." (Email from Susan K. Anderson to Michael Padwee dated 03/01/13, titled "RE: Use of Archives and Finding Aids")

One reviewer stated that the Museum was "a model of Greek Ionic architecture... . There are forty columns, some of these sixty-four feet high and over eight feet in diameter... . Architecturally, the building should please any classicist. It is correct to the last detail, a meticulous exemplar in archaeology... . There is color, for instance, plenty of it, used as the old Greek preferred; color in the capitals and cornices and several other architectural features-the solid, deep, but glazed color of terracotta. But more than that, there are to be pediment groups in full color... . These high-lights are set off against walls and shafts of Minnesota dolomite, cut from five strata to gain color advantage. ...This building exemplifies also a thorough adherence to the principle of "optical refinements." Perspective and the human eye play havoc with long straight lines, both vertical and horizontal... . Such lines in a building require studied modulation to rectify optical effects. In other words, the ridge of a terracotta roof is constructed as a shallow arc,...and then to the eye it seems straight and true. ...Similarly, to aid the effect of firmness, the columns all slope inward... ." "So the Greeks worked out the living quality of their temples and so here the architects have with consummate skill wrought these refinements into their museum building." (Richard F. Bach, "A Philadelphian Acropolis: The New Building of the Pennsylvania Museum", *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, Vol. 23, No. 6 (Jun., 1928), pp. 160-166)

The Architect and the Industrial Arts

In 1929 the Metropolitan Museum of Art mounted an exhibit, The Architect and the Industrial Arts--An Exhibition of Contemporary American Design, with the motivating factor that this was art by the American designer for American industries, more specifically, of the architect as designer. "[...With] his strong position in relation to the manufacturing world and his strategic position with regard to the dictation of styles to be used, [the exhibit] has been able to give an illuminating exposition of what might result in the realm of design if the designed himself were to occupy a position of authority." (H.W. Kent, "The Motive of the Exhibition of American Industrial Art", *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, Vol. 24, No. 4, Apr. 1929, p. 97)



The Backyard Garden, designed by Ely Jacques Kahn, included a colored tile fountain and orange-tile fountain wall executed by the Robertson Art Tile Works. (<http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015023511937>; *The Architect and the Industrial Arts: An Exhibition of Contemporary American Design*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Feb. 12-Sept. 2, 1929, p. 34)

Leon Solon, now a Ceramic Designer for the Robertson Art Tile Works in Trenton, New Jersey, was on the Exhibit's select "Co-Operating Committee", which organized the exhibit and which, besides Solon, consisted of Armistead Fitzhugh, Raymond M. Hood, Ely Jacques Kahn, John W. Root, Eliel Saarinen, Eugene Schoen, Joseph Urban, and Ralph T. Walker, all architects.



Central Garden Feature designed by Armistead Fitzhugh, Landscape Architect.

Tiles designed by Leon Solon, executed by the Robertson Art Tile Company and set by the William H. Jackson Company. (<http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015023511937>; *The Architect and the Industrial Arts: An Exhibition of Contemporary American Design*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Feb. 12-Sept. 2, 1929, p. 82)

Of this exhibit and Leon Solon's contribution, Richard F. Bach writes that "[These] specifically designed objects have been brought together in group displays that simulate room arrangements but are not necessarily treated with the finality of a problem in decoration involving the personality of a client, as would be the case commercially. ...For several years it had been the Museum's desire to offer an exhibition American-designed and American-made throughout, but the form that this presentation should take was not at first clear... . [...At] a meeting of the Advisory Committee on Industrial Art, ...the first suggestion was made...for a concerted arrangement of objects from various industries. This [...idea] was developed further...particularly by Léon V. Solon of the Robertson Art Tile Company, enlisting such enthusiasm and encouragement that the feasibility was considered of presenting the unified collaborative exhibition which has now been realized." (Richard F. Bach, "American Industrial Art: An Exhibition of Contemporary Design", *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, Vol. 24, No. 2, Feb. 1929, pp. 40-41)

Rockefeller Center



"Atlas", sculpted by Lee Lawrie. (Photo courtesy of Michael Padwee)

The art-deco Rockefeller Center complex was built between Fifth and Sixth (i.e., Avenue of the Americas) Avenues and 48th and 51st Streets. The space for Rockefeller Center was leased "...from Columbia University in 1928 and developed...from 1930 [to 1939]. Rockefeller initially planned a syndicate to build an opera house for the Metropolitan Opera on the site, but changed his mind after the stock market crash of 1929 and the Metropolitan's continual delays to hold out for a more favorable lease... .

Rockefeller...took on the enormous project as the sole financier, on a 27-year lease (with the option for three 21-year renewals for a total of 87 years) for the site from Columbia; negotiating a line of credit with the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company and covering ongoing expenses through the sale of oil company stock. The initial cost of acquiring the space and razing some of the building and construction of new building was an estimated \$250,000,000 dollars; a staggering sum in 1930.”
(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rockefeller_Center)



A sculpture by Lee Lawrie at 30 Rockefeller Plaza colored by Leon Solon, once the art director of the American Encaustic Tiling Company. "Sculpted by Lee Lawrie, the imposing low-relief, [37 foot high] panel, Wisdom, was insalled over the entrance to the main building of Rockefeller Center... ." (<http://www.flickr.com/photos/wallyg/454792763/in/pool-327670@N25/>;
2012 photo courtesy of Michael Padwee)

"Rockefeller Center represents a turning point in the history of architectural sculpture: it is among the last major building projects in the United States to incorporate a program of integrated public art.



A model for Lee Lawrie's sculptural treatment above the main entrance to Rockefeller Center.
(*Architecture*, Vol. LXVI, No. 5, Nov. 1932, p. 273)

"Sculptor Lee Lawrie contributed the largest number of individual pieces – twelve – including the statue of Atlas facing Fifth Avenue and the conspicuous friezes above the main entrance to the RCA Building." (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rockefeller_Center)



Two other sculptures by Lee Lawrie and colored by Leon Solon flanking the entrance to 30 Rockefeller Plaza. “Sound and Light, [were] installed over the entrance to the main building of Rockefeller Center, 30 Rockefeller Plaza. The two 5-foot low-relief panels represent the cosmic forces derived from Wisdom, which they flank... . Lawrie's art deco carvings on indiana limestone with cast glass and gilding accents herald the arrival of radio (sound) and the motion picture industry and television (light).” (<http://www.flickr.com/photos/wallyg/451861786/in/pool-lee-lawrie/>)



"Paul Manship's highly recognizable bronze gilded statue of the Greek legend of the Titan Prometheus recumbent, bringing fire to mankind, features prominently in the sunken plaza at the front of 30 Rockefeller Plaza. A large number of other artists contributed work at the Center, including Isamu Noguchi,...Carl Milles, Hildreth Meiere, Margaret Bourke-White, Dean Cornwell,...Leo Friedlander [and Henry Varnum Poor]."
(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rockefeller_Center)



"Lee Lawrie's bas relief, Progress, has stood above the 49th Street entrance of One Rockefeller Plaza since its installation in 1937. The main character is Columbia, the traditional female symbol of America... . The flat low relief, carved by the Piccirilli Brothers, is level with the stone facade...[,but] Lawrie had to recarve some areas. The coloring is done by Leon V. Solon."
(<http://www.flickr.com/photos/wallyg/45157759/in/photostream/>; Photo courtesy of Michael Padwee)

"A major unifying factor of Rockefeller Center art is that much of it consists of bas-relief cut into limestone, in many cases highlighted with gold and strong primary colors. ...Ce-

ramicist Leon V. Solon revived [...the color schemes of the ancients, which had fallen into disuse] for Rockefeller Center. By chance, Solon learned that...the German manufacturer Keim had developed a paint that bonded to limestone and formed a resistant surface. ...For his first assignment Solon colored Wisdom, Sound and Light [...over] the entrance to 30 Rockefeller Plaza. The results were so stunning that Solon was engaged as the colorist for the entire Rockefeller Center project...[and submitted] eighty-seven different color schemes." (Suzanne Loebl, *America's Medicis: the Rockefellers and Their Astonishing Cultural Legacy*, Harper Collins Publishers, New York, NY, 2010, p. 105)



"Lee Lawrie's *The Story of Mankind*, a massive carved limestone Art Deco sculptural grill has adorned the entrance to the International Building at 29 West 50th Street, since its installation in September 1937. Serving a dual purpose--chronicling the progress of mankind, as well as symbolizing the purpose of the International Building, Lawrie divided the screen into fifteen small rectangular spaces contained carved images he called 'hieroglyphs'." (<http://www.flickr.com/photos/wallyg/451862334/in/pool-lee-lawrie/>; Above photo courtesy of Michael Padwee)



"The 'story' begins at the bottom center, with four stereotypical figures depicting the races of mankind: red, white, yellow and black. ...Rene Chambellan worked with Lawrie to create the model, and Leon V. Solon [designed] the coloration." (<http://www.flickr.com/photos/wallyg/451862334/in/pool-lee-lawrie/>; Above photo courtesy of Michael Padwee)

No colored terra cotta ornament was used in Rockefeller Center, and this omission helped lead to the decline of its influence in future construction. "If terra cotta had been an integral part of the Rockefeller Center color scheme, the business outlook for that industry would probably have improved in the years that followed." (Susan Tunick, "The Evolution of Terra Cotta: 'Glazing New Trails'", *APT Bulletin*, Vol. 32, No. 4, 2001, p. 7)



636 Fifth Avenue. (Photo courtesy of Michael Padwee)



620 Fifth Avenue. (Photo courtesy of Michael Padwee)



610 Fifth Avenue. (Photo courtesy of Michael Padwee)

Even though much of our architecture is not colored as Solon would have liked, because of projects like Rockefeller Center, 2 Park Avenue and the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Leon Solon's architectural color theories live on and continue to enrich us all.

LINKS:

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