Define "Authentic Reproduction"

"Philosophy 101, The Ethics of Reproductions" by P.M.Cunningham (The Cutting Edge of Tinware's Past, Tin Snips, November/December 1994, Vol 4, No.5)

The vast majority of readers of this newsletter deal with the manufacturing of historically related merchandise. For most, this entails the study of antique pieces of tin ware and either reproducing that product as accurately as possible or using that artifact as inspiration to create an adaption or imitation of the original. In either case, the makers develop some kind of philosophy, which they employ in their business. Although this philosophy may not be scrutinized daily, it still affects the day to day operations of all business.

For the past few months, Tin Snips has been asking readers to send in their thoughts on the ethics of reproduction for the purpose of writing this article. On Friday, November 11, [1994]I attended the Mid West Open Airt Coordinating Council (MOMCC) annual meeting in Des Moines, Iowa, where a session was held on "The Ethics and Philosophy of Reproductions." This article is based on the discussion of these two sources. I will try not to draw hard and fast conclusions in this article, for it is next to impossible to do so, but this article will try to describe as many relevant concepts and ideologies as possible. For the purposes of this article, Rob Stone's definitions on reproductions (vol.4, issue 3) will be employed. [the article to follow, entitled Common Language, Defining Reproductions)

MARKING OF WARES

"If a tinner, blacksmith, pewterer, etc., wants to produce an item as a copy, it should be clearly marked with his stamp or touch mark to minimize the likelihood that is could be mistaken for an antique piece."

This was stated by Dawson Gillaspy of Oley, PA, and it is probably the number one concept that people discuss in regard to reproductions. The Society of Workers in Early Arts and Trades (SWEAT) charter in part reads, ...No member shall make or contrive a fraudulent imitation, but any tool or

thing, or part thereof, made as a reproduction or replacement, or an original design for an early device or thing, shall bear at least, & clearly, the date of its making."

It is often in the interest of the buying public that marking is advocated. It is an ethical argument that the buyer should not be deceived, spending money on items that lack provenance and age. The perceived value of the original object is greater; however, the cost, and therefore the price, of a quality reproduction often exceeds the cost of the artifact. This discrepancy in cost can act as a built-in identification of a reproduction.

For some craftspeople the reason for making reproductions is that it is a means to educate about technological history. By studying material culture, details of historic construction and work practices are revealed that are often lacking in written documentation. The making of a reproduction is then the three-dimensional publication of this research. If a reproduction is made accurately it should provide all the same historical detail as the artifact, the only things lacking being the age and provenance. Marking in this case is an attempt to keep the identity of the reproduction from being confused with the artifact.

Other craftspeople use historical items or techniques as a starting point for their own creativity. Dawson writes, "The mark of a real artisan includes the ability to create new ideas and designs so as to fully express one's abilities...so that I can honestly say, 'this is my work,' in every sense of the word." In this case, it is important that adaptations or imitations be marked to keep the material culture record from becoming muddled with modern creativity.

Even if products are marked, there is no guarantee that the mark will be interpreted properly. A reproduction that is marked with a maker's stamp may still be interpreted as a rare early piece because there is no way to know every individual that makes reproductions. Likewise, pieces that are dated have two problems. First, the date can be interpreted as a model number and still be identified as an artifact. Secondly, placing a date on a piece decreases the marketability of the piece after that year is over. Customers often prefer to buy pieces that they know are new.

ACCURACY

"Who makes the decision of accuracy? God!" This comment came out of the group session held by MOMCC. Although it was a flip response, it does have

some merit. It is impossible to say what products are 100% accurate reproductions of the originals; however, it is possible to put restrictions on what can be called a reproduction. Walter Fleming, of Ballston Lake, NY, writes, that "any journeyman or master tinsmith should have sufficient skill to copy any piece of tin ware, even from a poor quality photo. With one or two dimensions, or no dimensions, any journeyman tinsmith should be able to duplicate anything from a photo." Although true, the product that is recreated can generally only be a copy at best, or more likely an adaptation, because exact measurements are not present and construction detail may be missing.

Walter goes on to say that "there is nothing like having an original in your hands and in your shop to make the pattern and prototype." It is only through this means that the most accurate reproduction can be made.

Some people make products with little thought of accuracy beyond the basic function of the object: if it is made with general period techniques and styles it is therefore legitimized as a possible historic recreation. ("If they'd a had it, they would'a used it.") Others would argue that this justification for a product line is nothing more than a means to avoid researching artifacts and period styles. This mixing styles and techniques of different time periods can lead to a poor understanding and interpretation of history.

To alter a reproduction for safety considerations has both its pros and cons.To change the design of a reproduction to prevent injury may be recommended from a liability standpoint, but can thereby create a false impression of the safety practices of the past. Sadly, the choice must be made between safety and education. Then, there is the problem of historical practices or materials (i.e.lead solder) that are banned from modern use. Should items created in accordance with current laws be allowed to be called reproductions when there has been a deliberate change in the design of the piece?

COPYRIGHT, PATENT AND MUSEUM RESTRICTION

Copyrights apply to the creative components of literacy, musical, dramatic and artistic works. Patents confer the exclusive rights over an invention to its inventor for 17 years. Any copyright or patent that may have applied in the nineteenth century expired long ago. In the context of eighteenth and nineteenth century reproductions, copyright and patent restrictions are not a factor.

Access to museum artifacts for reproduction purposes is not so cut and dried.

Most mueums preserve artifacts for educational purposes. To gain access to collections, one must state a desire to study material culture. When the means of disseminating the information gained from a visit to museum collections are through making of reproductions, this access is increasingly resticted. Many museums will allow artifacts in their collection to be copied but more and more are exacting a price for that privilege.

Compensation is relevant for time spent with staff, just as most visitors pay a gate admission to visit the entire facility; however, it is the belief of some museums that licensing fees or royalties be paid to it for every piece that is produced.

RESPONSIBILTY

The responsibility of the accuracy of a reproduction always falls on the maker of the product. The belief that true reproductions do not sell may be an excuse but it can just as well be a matter of poor marketing. If a potential customer requests a product that lacks historical documentation it is the craftsperson's decision whether to make the item or not. The priorities of the maker must then be questioned: being able to fulfill any customer's requests or limiting one's work to the manufacture of strict reproductions. In either case, the reputation that is earned plays an important part in the livelihood of any operation.

CONCLUSION

An idea has been recently discussed to further the ethical standards of reproductions. It is the creation and use of a commonly recognized symbol to permanently mark reproductions for all trades. By recognizing such a symbol, anyone would be able to identify a reproduction quickly and easily, and the integrity of the historic record would be protected. If you have any thoughts on any of these subjects or possible design ideas for this symbols send them to Tin Snips and they will be passed along to coordinators of the projects.

**Tin Snips has been on hiatus a while, yet Mr. Cunningham would be happy to receive thoughts for general discussion. ***The photograph at the top of the page is of a vasculum, a tin box, commonly cylindrical or flattened, used in collecting plants. The article that follows (by Rob Stone) appeared in the same issue of Tinsnips.

Common Language, Defining Reproductions, by Rob Stone

By ROB STONE

As a craftsman who reproduces historical items for sale and my own personal use, I am amazed at the variety of goods on the market that are referred to as "reproductions". To better define this term and rate specific reproductions relative to the original artifacts, I asked Saundra Altman of Past Patterns for some help together we came up with the following definitions and rating scales. We see this information as a way for those of us who make reproductions to broaden our communication skills through a common language.

For this article, a reproduction is defined as a physical recreation of a historic item. Reproductions will be graded into four categories: exact reproduction, copy, adaptation and imitation.

Ø An exact reproduction is a double of a historic item, intended to serve all purposes of the original. It is the best that can be expected.

Ø A copy is a visually recreated historic item, with limited changes in raw material, physical characteristics and function Individuals without a good knowledge of the original item would think it an exact reproduction.

Ø An adaptation is an approximate recreation of a historic item. The craftsman has changed the item to meet preferences in marketing and manufacturing, while combining historic knowledge and self-expression. An adaptation may represent a composite of more than one original artifact and thus be a "typical" representation.

Ø An imitation is an item with some resemblance to a historic item.

Ø A new reproduction is created to look like an original artifact when it was new.

· An aged reproduction is created to look like an original after some amount of use or time.

· An original resource is an original artifact or period information that can be used to recreate a historic item.

· A modern resource is any modern plan, kit, tool, instructional media, advisor, etc. that guides in recreating historic items by providing historically-based assistance.

These definitions classify reproductions in general without breaking them on a numerical scale. An exact reproduction should rate higher, overall, than an

imitation. Yet, a closer examination might reveal that the same raw materials and construction techniques were used and only the physical characteristics differ greatly between them. Six ratable characteristics can be defined to better understand the differences between reproductions. These characteristics include: raw material, hardware, construction, techniques, physical characteristics, functional authenticity, embellishment and general craftsmanship. Each characteristic is defined below on a scale of 1-5:

RAW MATERIALS/HARDWARE

1. The materials used to recreate the item are not the same as an original and the difference is unmistakable.
2. The item has been recreated using raw materials and hardware loosely related to an original. An average person can spot the difference.
3. Raw materials and hardware used in the item differ from an original in many ways and can be easily spotted by a knowledgeable person.
4. Some changes in the raw materials and hardware have been made in the item relative to an original but are not easily noticed
5. The materials and hardware used to make the item are as close as possible to those used in an original.

CONSTRUCTION TECHNIQUES

1. Construction methods used to create the item do not relate to the historic techniques used in an original.
2. The reproduction has been made using modern techniques that relate to historic construction methods. The use of these techniques is apparent to the average person.
3. A mixture of modern and historic tools and techniques has been used in the reproduction. Evidence of modern methods used is noticeable.
4. Some modern construction techniques have augmented the use of historic methods in recreating the item but they are not readily apparent.
5. The item has been made using only tools and techniques employed in an original artifact.

PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS

Physical characteristics include size, shape, color, texture, weight, number and pattern.

1. The item's physical characteristics differ completely from the original.

2. Many of an original item's physical characteristics have been changed in the reproduction. The new item does not look like an original.

3. The item has been recreated with definite changes in some of the original's physical characteristics. They look similar to each other.

4. The reproduction shows minor changes in the physical characteristics from the original.

5. The physical characteristics of the reproduction match those of an original.

FUNCTIONAL AUTHENTICITY

1. The item functions in such a way as to compare it with an original, but does not really function as an original artifact would.

2. The item exhibits only a few of the original functional characteristics. Few people would think it authentic.

3. The reproduction exhibits many functional characteristics of an original, but still differs in as many ways. Most people would notice the difference.

4. This item functions as an original except for a few characteristics. It will pass as functionally authentic for practical purposes.

5. The reproduction functions as an original would.

EMBELLISHMENT

1. The item has been embellished in a way that it unrelated to that of an original.
2. The item's embellishment has been inspired by an original but it is actually quite different.
3. The reproduction's embellishment differs from an original but will not be easily noticed by an average person.
4. The item's embellishment exhibits only subtle changes from an original.
5. The embellishment used on the reproduction is correct and appropriate to an original.

GENERAL CRAFTSMANSHIP

1. The item has been made by someone with very limited training or experience and no real skill.

2. The item has been produced by a craftsman with a limited amount of training, skill and experience.

3. This reproduction has been created by a craftsman with average abilities.

4. The item indicated that the maker has attained a moderate level of skill and experience.

5. The reproduction has been made by a master craftsman whose experience and skills create a product universally recognized as well made.

By including General Craftsmanship as a characteristic, it is not implied that original artifacts were all made by master craftsmen. Certain reproductions might actually be considered historically inferior if made to too high a standard in craftsmanship. Reproduction craftsmanship is important and should be compared to the originals. Can the guidelines used in this article provide a common base by which we can share our observations on reproductions?

Originally printed in The Magazine of the Midwest Open Air Museums Coordinating Council, Vol. XIV, No.2. Editor's note: Tin Snips will be adopting these definitions. If you have any comments on this policy or on the article itself please forward them to the newsletter owner.*