



THE
BOUGUEREAU
FRAME

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This is the story of the transformation of a beautiful Bouguereau painting recently sold at auction at Sotheby's.

The painting required a frame as special as the artwork. Sotheby's specifically requested a tabernacle style frame, having seen a tabernacle style frame on another large-scale Bouguereau painting.

The tabernacle style frame originated during the Renaissance. Derived from ecclesiastical architecture, it was especially popular in Italy. Indeed, the architecturally based style emerged as frame devices were created to house paintings that were all part of a larger decorative scheme created to inhabit church interiors and altars. (figure 1) Architectural in purpose and design, the style is characterized by columns or pilasters at each side and very distinct bottom and top (pediment).

The style evolved over the centuries, never disappearing entirely, and became especially popular again in the 19th century. The British Pre-Raphaelites such as Edward Burne-Jones and Dante Gabriel Rossetti utilized the style. (figures 2&3).



Figure 1: Fra Angelico, The Annunciation, 1433-34, Cortona, Museo Diocesano



Figure 2: Edward Burne Jones, King Cophetua and the Beggar Maiden, 1880-1883, Private collection.



Figure 3: Dante Gabriel Rossetti, The Blessed Damozel, 1875-79, Lady Lever Art Gallery, Port Sunlight.



Figure 4: Lord Leighton's studio, 2 Addison Road, London, 1895, National Monuments Record, London

Other British painters such as Frederic Lord Leighton and Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema often chose, and even designed, tabernacle style frames for their paintings. (figure 4) Leighton, especially, designed several variations of the tabernacle style and it was one of Leighton's designs that was the inspiration for the frame created for the Bouguereau. (figure 5)

The bottom of the frame employs a simple fluted base topped with the classical egg-and-dart motif; next a pair of fluted pilasters extends up each side and they are in turn crowned by capitals of the Ionic order. The Ionic capitals are volutes, a swirling rounded form, and are embellished with a smaller scale of the same egg-and-dart motif found at the base. The entire structure is surmounted by a pediment that is decorated with classical ornament of both bead-and-reel and acanthus leaf patterns.

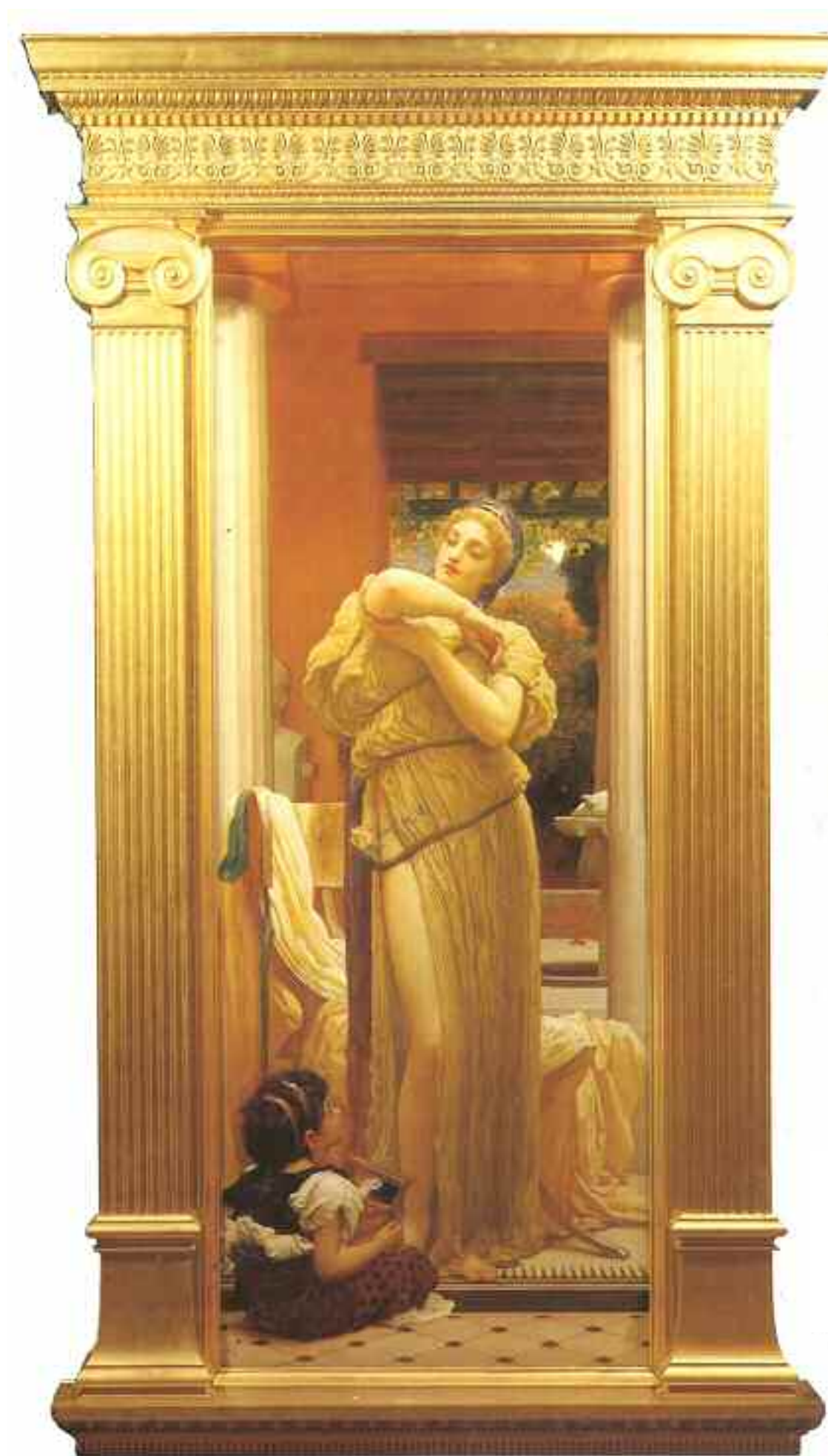


Figure 5: Frederic Lord Leighton, The Braclet, c. 1894, Private Collection



Figure 6



Figure 7

Creating the frame for the Bouguereau required that the basic architectural structure of the frame be crafted in wood, including the carving of the pilasters and capitals. (figure 6)

Next, the decorative motifs of egg-and-dart, bead and reel, and acanthus leaf were cast and applied. (figure 7)

Once the entire structure of the frame was complete the frame was prepared for water gilding.

Water gilding is a labor intensive process. In order to form a smooth, porous surface several preliminary coats of gesso (a thin plaster-like material) were applied; each coat must dry and be sanded before the next coat can be applied; usually there are 6 to 8 coats of gesso. (figure 8)



Figure 8



Figure 9

Next, special liquid clay called 'bole' was brushed on; this, too, must dry before the application of the gold leaf. (figures 9 & 10)
Bole comes in a variety of colors; in this case both ochre and terra cotta red bole were used.



Figure 10

The gilder brushed on a mixture of alcohol, water, and hide glue (hence the term 'water gilding') that creates a very wet surface and the leaf is laid onto the frame. The gold leaf was applied using a special squirrel-hair brush called a gilders tip. The special brush is used to lift the delicate gold leaf from the book and onto the frame surface. (figure 11)

Gold leaf comes in books of 3 1/4" squares of the leaf. The gilder worked carefully to apply hundreds if not thousands of leaves onto the surface to cover the entire frame



Figure 11



Once the entire frame was gilded the frame was lightly rubbed with cotton to remove any loose pieces of leaf and to give a lustrous matte appearance. Selected areas were burnished with a special agate tool to bring the burnished passages to a shiny, reflective gold.



Finally, the entire frame was patinated to achieve a sense of age. This patination process was accomplished with special inks, dyes and stains that were carefully applied so that the hand of the gilder is not evident. The desired effect is that the frame appears to be from the 19th century just as the painting it surrounds.



THE PAINTING IN ITS NEW FRAME...



Eli Wilner & Company

The area between where the painting ends and the wall begins is, indeed, of the utmost importance. It can make all the difference in how artwork is experienced. And, when it comes to historical expertise, craftsmanship and artistry, it's an area in which Eli Wilner & Company truly excels. Which is why the finest art collections, museums and galleries, including the White House, The Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Smithsonian American Art Museum, all turn to Eli Wilner & Company to craft masterpieces for their masterpieces.

Restoring antique frames to their former glory. Recreating frames to customize color, texture and size. Designing entirely new frames in collaboration with artists and collectors that become an integral part of the art. Eli Wilner's team of skilled craftsmen and conservators have been

creating frames at one with the purest artistic and historical vision, one at a time, for more than thirty years.

During that time, Eli Wilner's own collection has grown to more than 3,000 antique frames and 10,000 historical photographs. Yet it is an uncanny ability to get inside the artist's head, see the work through their eyes, feel the sensibility of their era, that has taken these exceptional resources to the next level.

Today, in addition to world-class framing, Eli Wilner & Company has expanded its product line to include hand-carved doors and window frames. Most recently, the company launched a smart phone app that allows companies to use digital frames to capitalize on social media and viral push marketing.



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