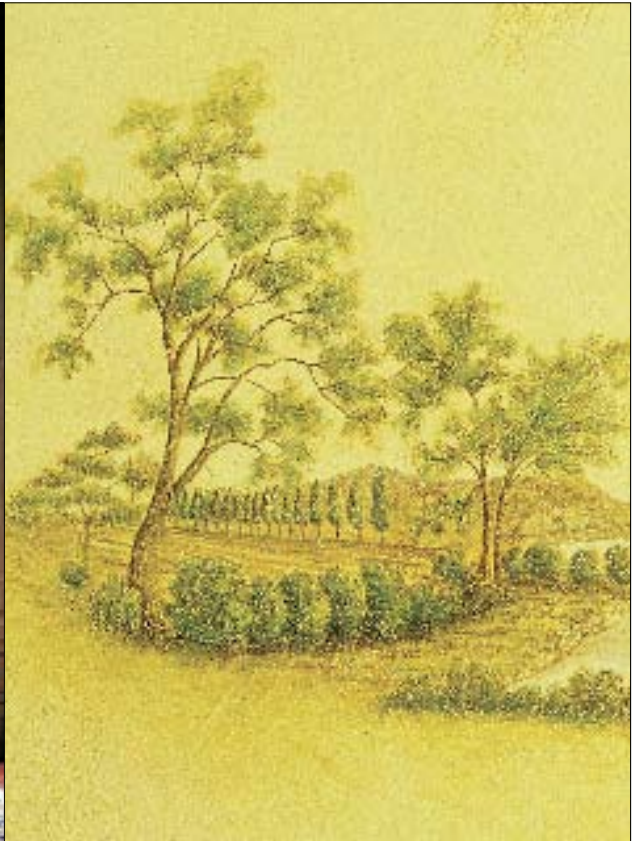


FROM | THE | FIELD

news, notes, and information

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MURALS THROUGH THE AGES—AND TODAY

What's on Your Walls

BY | FLORENCE DE DAMPIERRE

I HAVE DEVELOPED, OVER THE YEARS, A GREAT FONDNESS for all sorts of painted surfaces. I find their beauty and whimsical nature extremely appealing. In my own Litchfield house and in many of my design projects, I have incorporated several types of wall treatments, ranging from wallpaper to faux finishes and wood paneling. These enhancements have had lasting effects. While I work with and have written about various types of wall décor, here I focus on murals.

Murals, one of the oldest forms of decoration, are works of art painted directly on walls, ceilings, or other surfaces. The function of murals varies from culture to culture; they can be allegories, records of events, or even social or political statements. The first murals we know of are cave paintings from the Paleolithic Age. Vestiges have been found in northern Spain and France's Lot region. Recent excavations of early settlements in Turkey, dating from 7,000 to 5,500 B.C., reveal fresco as one of the earliest mural techniques. With the advent of oil paint in the 15th century, painted murals evolved in a variety of ways. Often backed with canvas, murals ranged from

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figurative to *trompe l'oeil* in style.

FRESCO TECHNIQUE

In the elaborate process of fresco painting, pigments are applied to a freshly plastered ground. Extremely time-sensitive, this technique requires artistic ability and finesse before the plaster has set. *Fresco* is derived from the Italian word for fresh.

TEMPERA TRADITION

Since antiquity, frescoes have been painted in tempera, a pigment with an egg-yolk base. Similar to contemporary acrylic

Renaissance, some artists painted murals on canvas with oil-based paint. This enabled the murals to travel safely throughout the Continent, spreading the riches of different cultures.

BAROQUE PERIOD

During the 17th-century's Baroque period, panel painting on canvas became more fashionable than fresco. The most prolific artist was the Flemish Peter Paul Rubens, who painted a series of murals for Marie de Medici. All



paint, tempera is not prone to cracking or yellowing like oil paint. The beauty of tempera is that it enables the full brilliance of pigments to show through.

OIL PAINTING

During the 15th century in Flanders, tempera painting gradually was superseded by oil painting. During the Italian

24 paintings are in the Louvre.

CHINOISERIE AND SINGERIE

In the late 17th century, chinoiserie emerged as a result of the West's fascination with the Far East. The French court of Versailles re-imagined this exotic style which inspired spectacular chinoiserie wallpapers,

lacquered surfaces, and painted murals. Walls became populated with strange animals, pagodas, and ladies strolling with fanciful parasols. The Chinese monkey was particularly appealing. Singerie—French for “monkey decoration”—emerged during the 18th century as a new decorative style.

NEOCLASSIC, ROMANTIC

By the mid-18th century, archaeological discoveries at Pompeii and Herculaneum prompted a return to classical iconography. The German Romantic Nazarenes as well as the English Pre-Raphaelites resurrected the medieval tradition of painted murals that embodied spiritual values of the late Middle Ages and Renaissance.

DOMESTIC SETTING

Murals have again become popular for the home. These works of art can have more dramatic impact than a painting due to their size and prominence. If you turn to a professional mural painter, he or she is trained to layer the colors to achieve a desired effect. Paint choices range from oil to latex. You can have a mural painted on a canvas surface and mounted to the wall or painted directly on the wall.

Excerpted from *Walls* (Rizzoli)



SPELLING? CHECK

From actual college applications that spell check missed

FROM THE APPLICANTS

“I have been a soccer couch for several years; I find it very rewarding to be a couch.”

“I live in an affluent suburb. The boy I mentor is growing up in an impoverished urbane area.”

“Everyone I work with at the hospital thinks I’m a terrific candy stripper.”

“... and I exorcise regularly.”

FROM THE TEACHERS

“Intelligent, focused and motivated, XX is an excellent candydate for your school.”

“I hope the Emissions Office will carefully consider XX’s qualifications.”

—Carolyn Rundle Field