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The Colorful Pottery Of Joseph Mrazek

By David Fein

Understanding the background of Joseph Mrazek, and the influence of the country of his birth, helps to explain how his ceramic creations have held so many enthralled with the vibrant colors and designs - then and now.

Joseph Mrazek was born in Podebrady, Bohemia in 1889.

At a very young age he worked as an apprentice artist, before leaving to live in America.

At that time there were two major artistic influences in that area. Art Nouveau was the artistic movement found mostly in the large cities of Bohemia while Peasant Art could be found in the towns and villages. It was the Peasant Art of his homeland that captured Joseph Mrazek's creative heart.

Peasant Art was prevalent in architecture, paintings on fireplaces, window sills, kitchen borders, folk art clothing, ceramics, and furniture design.

It's been said that the Slovak is a born colorist who enlivens and beautifies even the humblest cottage, the most ordinary utensils, even the coarsest costume, with an innate sense of color harmony.

This is Striking B pattern plate.

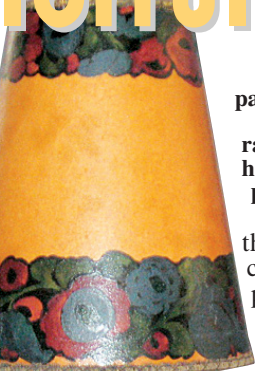
the seed of creativity that was planted in Joseph Mrazek that he took with him when he migrated to America to escape being drafted by the Austrian/German military.

Joseph continued his artistic education at the St. Louis Academy of Arts. Upon graduation he set out for New York City to find employment as an artist.

He found work with Hester Decorating Company. Being based in New York City was very important to the next step Mrazek would take.

At Christmas time in 1917, Macy's department store ran an advertisement for a do-it-yourself ceramic artist kit, where a person could create their own pottery and Macy's would fire the creation in their ovens to create a finished product. The kit consisted of paints, unpainted pottery or porcelain, camel hair brushes and thinner, with a guide on how to decorate using color.

Joseph Mrazek could not resist, he was always intrigued by



Rare B pattern lamps with very rare Mrazek handpainted parchment shades.



He ended up buying a few more kits and experimenting with colors, changes of colors after firing, intensity of colors, and translucency.

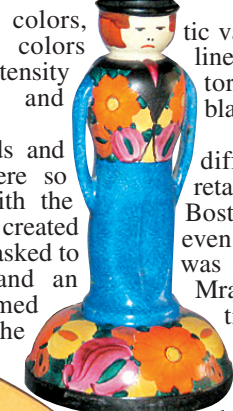
His friends and neighbors were so impressed with the pottery he created that they asked to buy it, and an idea formed in the

apartment in New York City.

The early pieces were what collectors call the black bird pieces. This is because a thickly painted brush stroke in the shape of a blackbird was used to cover the previous mark on the pottery/porcelain mark of the Delancy Street pieces. These pieces had some of the most artistic variations in the Mrazek line. In fact certain collectors collect these early blackbird pieces only.

Samples were taken to different wholesale and retail outlets in New York, Boston, Philadelphia, and even Miami. The response was so positive that Joseph Mrazek resigned his position at Hester Decorators and went out on his own.

He rented a loft on West 19th Street in lower



downtown Manhattan set up his business, and hired employees. This "Blackbird" period lasted

Covered compote in yellow K pattern.

from 1918-1922.

The next period of the Czecho Peasant Art Company came during a humanitarian trip to the newly formed Czechoslovakia.

While in Czechoslovakia, Mrazek inquired about areas that might be suitable to open up a ceramics factory. Mrazek was told of a small town in Moravia called Letovice. Letovice seemed ideal because it had everything for ceramic production; coal, nearby clay mines of superior clay for baking, and several pottery factories in the vicinity.

Before the end of the trip Mrazek found a factory that formerly had produced ceramic stoves. The factory was available for a short lease - making it perfect for his needs. He secured local

help, including his brother-in-law, and the company was on its way to moving its base of operations to Czechoslovakia.

When Mrazek returned to the United States he prepared his New York facility for receiving and distribution of the shipments that would arrive from Czechoslovakia.

Upon his return to Czechoslovakia, the concern was to find decorators to paint his pottery pieces with his Czech Peasant traditional adornments.

These traditional adornments were the bleeding heart, the tulip, the daisy, the apple, the bird and numerous other symbolic designs conceived centuries ago.

The pottery Mrazek is best known for was produced in this period.

Many variations were made of these peasant patterns in Mrazek's pottery. (At last count there were 28 - a subject to be presented in



Manhattan set up his business, and hired employees. This "Blackbird" period lasted

"A cactus pattern on a background of bright yellow or jade."

"A spiked shaped pattern on a background of bright red, yellow, jade, blue, or black."

What has endured over the years, since the closure of the Czecho Peasant Art Company in 1933, is the fascination with the color of these wonderful pieces. Collectors have long sought different combinations of the pottery to adorn their homes and show-cases.

Small wonder that even after the

A pattern in rare raspberry color.

outstanding book written by Harold and Robert Mrazek, *The Art Pottery of Joseph Mrazek*, another is in the works.

We will always admire the creativity of

those with vision.

Editor's Note: David Fein is the owner of South Beach Antiques shop. Visit online at www.angelfire.com/art/antiquepottery. He is also a member of the Czechoslovakian Collectors Association, and will be showing at the organization's Annual Antiques Show and Convention in Houston, Texas, June 7 through 9.

book in the future).

In the mid 1920s Mrazek looked for new exciting patterns to expand the interest in the Czecho Peasant Pottery Company.

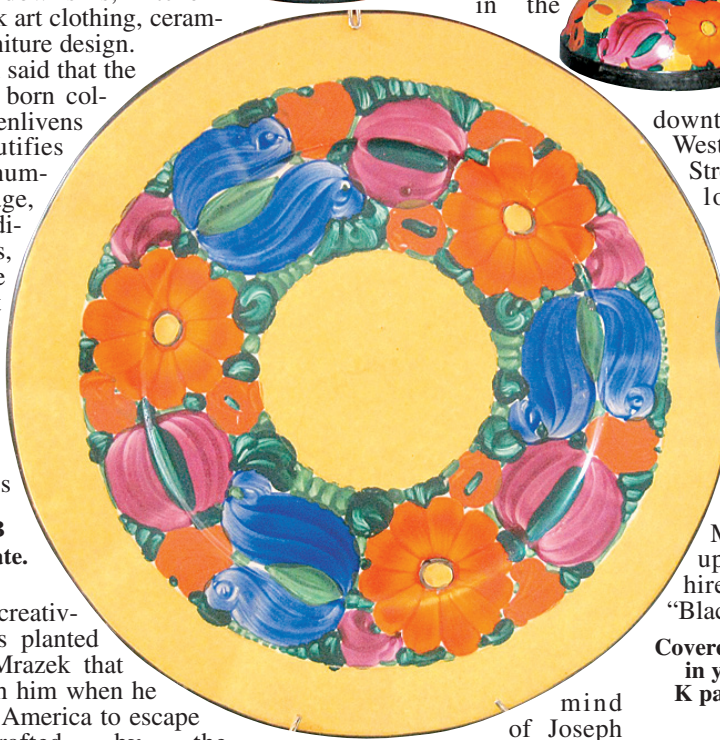
These took the form of a more cubist style. The

1920s saw the arrival of Art Deco. Early Art Deco was an outgrowth of Art Nouveau, employing the use of detail and ornament but with a geometric sensibility. This part of Deco is characterized by geometric detail, delicate lines and bold unconventional colors.

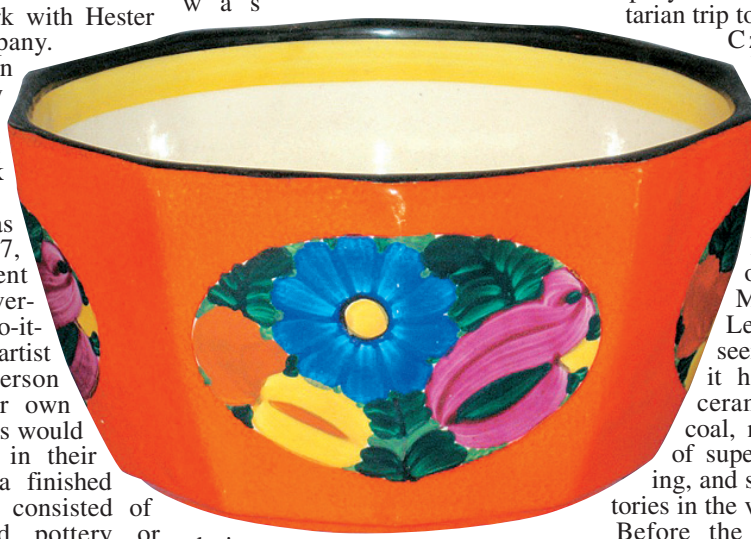
The Mrazek Peasant Art Company called these their "Modern" patterns. At last count, the number of variations of these patterns was 10.

Some of the company descriptions used for these patterns were:

"A gay combination of circles and triangles on a background of bright red, yellow, blue jade or black."

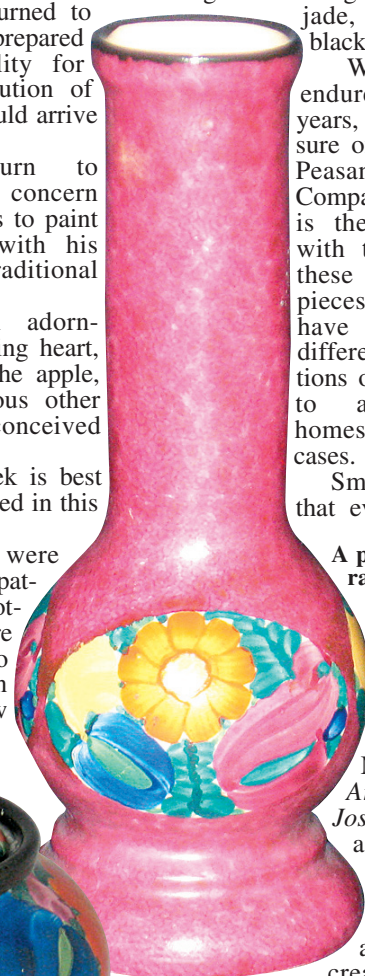


Striking B pattern plate.



A pattern bowl.

obvious to him that this was a profitable venture, Mrazek started the Czecho Peasant Art Company from his



A pattern in rare raspberry color.

Rare RN pattern humidor.



MORE PHOTOS ON PAGE 2

Sixth Annual June Festival Of Antiques - June 9

The sixth annual June Festival of Antiques in Mullica Hill, New Jersey, is slated for June 9th. Hosted by The Yellow Garage Antiques, the festival has been a popular event ever since its return in 2007. Drawing dealers and

Orientalia, toys, garden accessories, and the rare and unusual. The fairgrounds will be inundated with antiques as the approximately 70 dealers will be set-up under 4 pavilions plus many more on the lawn.

Show goes of past years have found it to be large enough to fill the better part of the day as they enjoy making several trips around the venue to take in the vast collections that are available. There is a barbeque lunch and picnic area under a grove of trees and ice cream available. The 4-H girls have a horse competition adjacent to the show that is included with



attendees from throughout the Northeast and beyond, it has quickly become one of the favorite shows of its kind in the Tri-State area. The event has averaged about 90 dealers and 1,400 in attendance per year. Antiques in all categories and price ranges will be available. The show has an emphasis on Americana such as furniture, quilts, samplers, folk art, decoys, stoneware and redware, items in old paint, etc. But there is also a wealth of other antiques, including fine art, jewelry, dolls, glass and pottery, Victoriana, Victoriana,

show admission. Once you leave the fairgrounds, the Mullica Hill Historic District is only one mile away. Known as "Antique Country," the village has



been an antiques shopping haven for many decades. This year's festival will be held from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. rain or shine at the Gloucester County 4-H Fairgrounds on Route 77. The venue is located just one mile south of the Historic Main Street section of Mullica Hill. It is

been an antiques shopping haven for many decades. This year's festival will be held from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. rain or shine at the Gloucester County 4-H Fairgrounds on Route 77. The venue is located just one mile south of the Historic Main Street section of Mullica Hill. It is



easy accessible from the NJ Turnpike Exit 2, I-295 and all Delaware River Bridges. Admission to the event is \$6, discounted to \$5 with show card. Children under 12 are free. A portion of the proceeds benefits the Harrison Township Historical Society.

More information with photos of last year's show can be found at www.yellowgarageantiques.com or call The Yellow Garage Antiques at (856) -478-0300.

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Pottery Of Joseph Mrazek

(Continued from page 1)



K pattern box.



Example of the Blackbird mark.



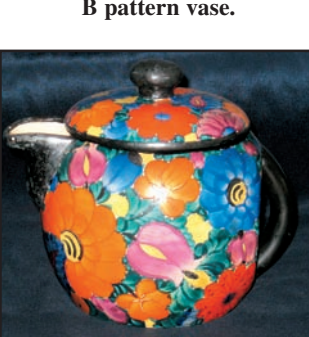
B pattern vase.




Blackbird creamer.



Early handpainted pieces, Blackbird mark.



Rare CA pattern teapot.



Z pattern Deco wall pocket.



X pattern Deco lamp.



BB Pattern Flower vase.



Various Deco patterns.

General Deadline for Shows, Markets, Shops, Auctioneer Directory, Services/Supplies/Specialties Every Wednesday At 3 P.M.
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