

Henry Doig

19th Century Scottish Frame Making Techniques

Henry Doig



Reproduction of Doig frame using moulds by Keith Morrison

Henry Doig was a significant frame maker whose work is essential to the study of Scottish and British frame making techniques and materials of the nineteenth century. Henry Doig was a Nineteenth Century frame maker based in Edinburgh. He was involved in three collaborations throughout his career.

Firstly Doig practiced with two partners; McKechnie and Davis throughout 1857 – 1884. This partnership was formed of three individual trades; carvers, gilders, and plate glass merchants. Doig was a carver and gilder.

Secondly Doig worked solely with McKechnie during 1884 – 1895. They received an appointment as picture restorers, print sellers and publishers to Queen Victoria in Edinburgh in 1889.

Thirdly there was the frame making company of Doig, Wilson & Wheatley from 1895 – 1957. Doig dissolved his firm of Doig & McKechnie and sold his stock-in-trade to Thomas Wilson and Benjamin Wheatley. They continued trade as fine art dealers under the name Doig, Wilson & Wheatley.

Frame Moulds

The National Gallery Scotland acquired a large assortment of Doig's frame moulds for their collection.

Around 210 of these moulds are nineteenth century carved negative boxwood moulds. Another 200 of the moulds made from plaster, composition and resin, after the original carved moulds. The wooden moulds are of better quality but both are essential for the collection.

These frames are extremely fundamental from a historical standpoint for Scottish and British frame making techniques. Their acquisition was elemental to the manufacturing history of Edinburgh, even having a direct connection with some of the frames within the National Gallery collection.

Knowledge of these original Scottish frame moulds create positive implications not only toward the promotion of Scottish art, but also toward conservation practices.



Two specific boxwood moulds used for this reproduction project

Materials & Techniques

The materials and techniques used in the reproductions were consistent with the original composition materials and techniques employed by nineteenth century frame makers such as Doig.

British frame makers as a whole used a traditional recipe of animal glue, water, resin, and linseed oil with little variation between establishments.

The traditional recipe starts with mixing the glue and water together until the glue is fully dissolved. Then whilst heating mix the resin and oil together to the same effect. Combine the resin and glue mixtures and stir until fully emulsified. A small amount of gesso is used to stiffen the mix, then continually added until the mix is thick enough to be rolled and cut into pieces.

The next steps for recreating the nineteenth century ornamentation of Doig's frames begin with the lubrication of the mould using sweet nut oil.

Then, as illustrated by the images, a roll of composition is pressed onto the mould. This is then turned over and pressed onto a flat surface.

The mould is then carefully lifted off to reveal the pattern, which is then cut off and lifted using a knife. After application of glue the design is then placed onto the wooden frame and glue is then once more brushed over.



Rolling of the composition after mixing



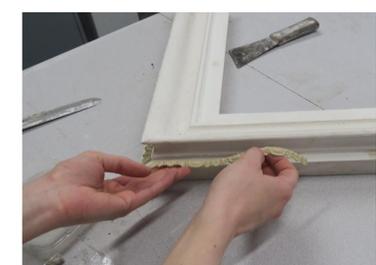
Pressing the composition onto the mould



Pressing the mould onto a flat surface



Cutting out the design



Gluing the design onto the frame



Finished application before painting

Further Research

- Further steps to the acquirement of knowledge surrounding these frame moulds and their history would revolve around firstly, conducting interviews such as with the seller of the moulds.
- Secondly, identifying the specific moulds that were used for the production of frames currently in the collection of the National Galleries of Scotland.

References:

National Portrait Gallery, *British Picture Frame Makers 1600-1950*.
<https://www.npg.org.uk/research/conservation/directory-of-british-framemakers/d#DO>
National Library of Scotland, *Scottish Post Office Directories*
<https://digital.nls.uk/directories/browse/archive/83119913?mode=transcription>