

Cannetille Wire Work

By Neil Shapiro

In a prior essay in the IMSA Newsletter I wrote an article about a Sarascenic match safe that may have been made by Gorham Mfg. Co. The essay focused on the type of decoration and the lack of a maker's name on the safe.

I speculated that the decoration may have been inspired by an interest in "Oriental" ideas of ornamentation that were in vogue with leading jewelry firms and their designers at the time.

That still may be the case for the Sarascenic match safe but recently, I came across a type of jewelry design popular in the 1820s Georgian period, called cannetille, that may be a more accurate attribution for the design of the match safe.

Cannetille uses thin wires of silver or gold and coils them into various shapes and sometimes attaches them to a thin plate. It differs from filigree in its three dimensionality. Filigree is flat and cannetille is raised work.

According to an online jewelry dictionary the name comes from the French and evokes a kind of embroidery that used gold and silver twisted threads.

This type of jewelry design may have originated in Portugal or India, and it may have a Moorish look since the Arabs controlled large areas of Portugal and Northern India and left their aesthetic mark on a range of art.

The cannetille work is time consuming and requires great skill. It does not appear to have been used on many match safes, since this is the only example, I have seen.

Below left is a portion Georgian bracelet with cannetille work and next to it is the match safe with the same raised wirework although in silver.

