



# ARTS AND CRAFTS JEWELRY IN BOSTON

---

FRANK GARDNER HALE AND HIS CIRCLE



## ARTS AND CRAFTS JEWELRY IN BOSTON

---

FRANK GARDNER HALE AND HIS CIRCLE

Nonie Gadsden

Meghan Melvin

Emily Stoehrer

MFA PUBLICATIONS  
MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BOSTON



## CONTENTS

Director's Foreword · 7

The Rise of Art Jewelry in Boston · 9  
*Nonie Gadsden*

The Making of an Artist Jeweler · 33  
*Meghan Melvin*

The Boston Look and Its Creators · 65  
*Emily Stoehrer*

Consuming Arts and Crafts · 93  
*Emily Stoehrer*

Legacy and Influence · 121  
*Nonie Gadsden*

### APPENDIX 1

The Frank Gardner Hale Archive · 137

### APPENDIX 2

Boston Jewelry Makers · 149

Notes · 159

List of Illustrations · 167

Acknowledgments · 179

Index · 183



## THE RISE OF ART JEWELRY IN BOSTON

*Nonie Gadsden*

In 1901, a writer for the *Boston Globe* introduced the city's readers to the latest fashion in jewelry design: "The vogue of the new 'art' jewelry is now established by the right of the exquisite color and designs of the pieces slowly put forth by the goldsmith. Colored golds, enamels, a fanciful, graceful design, and a few splendid gems are the characteristics that distinguish these new ornaments from the old style set pieces that women have long worn with complete satisfaction. . . . We can expect to see a complete revolution in the contents of every well supplied jewel box."<sup>1</sup> In fact, this "revolution" in jewelry design was already under way in Boston.

The concept of art jewelry had emerged in Europe in the 1890s in reaction to the elaborate, ostentatious, and frequently machine-manufactured Victorian and Edwardian styles. Often made in matching sets, that jewelry prioritized the intrinsic value of the gemstones, usually diamonds, over the design of their settings; one critic charged that jewelers' work "had gradually lapsed into mere gem-selling."<sup>2</sup> In contrast, art jewelry was conceived as one-of-a-kind works of wearable art that emphasized creative expression through unified design, color harmony, and skilled craftsmanship. Makers of art jewelry, whether independent craftsmen or part of a larger firm, considered themselves artists, not tradesmen.<sup>3</sup>

Art jewelry gained popularity in Boston among wealthy patrons who could afford to purchase their ornaments from London or Paris. By the end of the first decade of the new century, Boston itself had become a hotbed of art jewelry production. In a 1916 article on "Handwrought Jewelry



**FIG. 14**  
Hale combines enamel colors and textures with gold foil to emulate the iridescent feathers of the peacock's tail.



**FIG. 15**  
Photographs in the Hale archive reveal that he made several variations of this necklace design. This example is missing the gold or gem-set drops that originally hung from the loops on three corners of the pendant.

years, especially in gold and enamel work.”<sup>45</sup> A necklace by Hale with a delicate, pearl-studded chain supporting a diamond-shaped pendant illustrates the type of work they praised: a large, square, ice-blue aquamarine framed in gold and black enamel is surrounded by Renaissance-style overlapping scrollwork highlighted by alternating small aquamarines and pearls (fig. 15). The scrolls at the corners of the pendant are filled with black glossy enamel, defining the overall shape and offering contrast to the lighter gold, blue, and white in the rest of the composition.

A reviewer for the *Boston Transcript* agreed, asserting that the exhibition offered “a fair idea of the present status of the jewelers and enamellers identified with the arts and crafts movement in America” and noting the increase in use of gold and precious stones resulting in designs “conceived in harmony with the rarity and value of the materials, in the direction of a more refined and delicate composition.”<sup>46</sup> This description captures the emergence of a “Boston style” of Arts and Crafts jewelry that would become even more dominant in the years to come. Mature Boston Arts and Crafts jewelry is noted for its delicate designs, excellent craftsmanship, and harmonious use of color and materials. Boston work uses gold more than silver and emphasizes bold color combinations with enamels and gemstones, both precious and semiprecious. Delicate scrollwork and vegetal elements compose the settings, and

the overall composition of the pieces extends to the chains and the clasps. Boston Arts and Crafts jewelry combined English Arts and Crafts production methods and motifs with some of the materials and flash associated with French Art Nouveau, albeit in a more conservative version. What was said of jewels made by Frank Gardner Hale could also apply to those made by members of his Boston circle: “His work has the sure touch of mastery, and in design and color is beautiful, with a sanity of treatment that makes it perfectly wearable.”<sup>47</sup>



Though troubled by homesickness, the sociable Hale integrated quickly into the Guild community. Ashbee and his young wife, Janet, often had Hale and other craftspeople over to their home for meals or to spend the evening “smoking and looking over works printed at Guild,” surely of interest to Hale as a graphic designer. Frequent outings to places of note such as Oxford gave him opportunities to see both historic and contemporary art. He was particularly impressed by the monumental Day of Creation series of stained-glass windows by the Pre-Raphaelite Edward Burne-Jones and the Arts and Crafts luminary William Morris at Manchester College.<sup>19</sup>

The Ashbees and the Guild were somewhat of an international artistic attraction. American visitors stopped in regularly, and Hale was pleas-

**FIG. 19**  
Charles Robert Ashbee's dramatic peacock brooch, wrought in silver and gold and embellished with blister pearls and diamonds, was widely illustrated in contemporary periodicals. Hale may have seen the brooch in person during his time at the Guild of Handicraft.



**FIG. 20**  
These drawings show Hale working out designs of his own jeweled and enameled peacock pendant brooch (pl. 3). Ashbee's design had clearly made a lasting impression.

antly surprised to find that he had friends or acquaintances in common with them. On an excursion with the Ashbees to the Warwick pageant he ran into the extended family of Henry Hunt Clark, who later came to stay at the Guild himself. As a handsome young American, Hale no doubt added novelty to the Ashbees' social circles, as they entertained prominent clients, including the important Hungarian patrons Elsa and Zombor de Szasz. Janet was particularly welcoming of Hale; of one of their frequent musical evenings, he reported, “Mrs. Ashbee played on the spinet & sang old folk songs. She looked very beautiful in a flowing green silk gown.”

The lasting influence of Ashbee and the Guild on Hale was primarily philosophical, but some of Ashbee's jewelry designs, such as a striking peacock brooch designed for Janet, made an impression on the younger craftsman. Hale designed and fabricated several versions of a closely related peacock pendant brooch over the course of his career (figs. 19, 20). In contrast to Ashbee's muted palette, Hale's piece incorporates a highly color-



**PLATE 6**

An opal pendant, framed by scrolling gold elements accented with sapphires and green garnets and Hale's signature grape clusters, is one of the foremost examples of the colorful "Boston look."



**PLATE 7**

The subtle differences between Hale's carefully composed drawing and the finished piece show how the design evolved as the pendant was executed.



**PLATE 18**  
Cabochon-cut chrysoprase and pearls with gold floral surrounds alternate in this necklace by Margaret Rogers. The short-style necklace was a form that Rogers often repeated, using different colors of gemstones and natural motifs in metal.



**PLATE 19**  
Rogers combined polychrome gemstones in innovative ways. The gems shine, as the metalwork disappears into the background, in a brooch featuring a central opal surrounded by pearl, citrine, and pink sapphire.



**PLATE 20**  
This brooch by Elizabeth Copeland, with a turquoise in a floral-garlanded gold frame and a small opal drop, is strikingly similar to the one worn by Paxton's mother, Rose, in her portrait.



While retail records and annual reports offer evidence of vibrant sales, there remain few written accounts of the style choices of Boston women, but depictions by contemporary Boston painters offer a wealth of information on the city residents' fashion preferences. When these paintings are considered alongside national fashion magazines like *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar*, which chronicled high-style American fashion, and decorative arts publications like *House Beautiful*, which discussed work by artist-craftspeople, including jewelers, a picture begins to emerge of the clothing that accompanied this jewelry.

William Paxton's painting *The New Necklace* offers a glimpse inside the home of a Boston woman in 1910 (fig. 35). The intimate scene was likely staged in the artist's studio, but the sumptuous clothing, period furniture, and decorative arts illustrate the era's interest in Asian art as well as taste for lavishly decorated interiors. A standing figure dressed in a green day dress places a gold necklace in the palm of a seated woman.

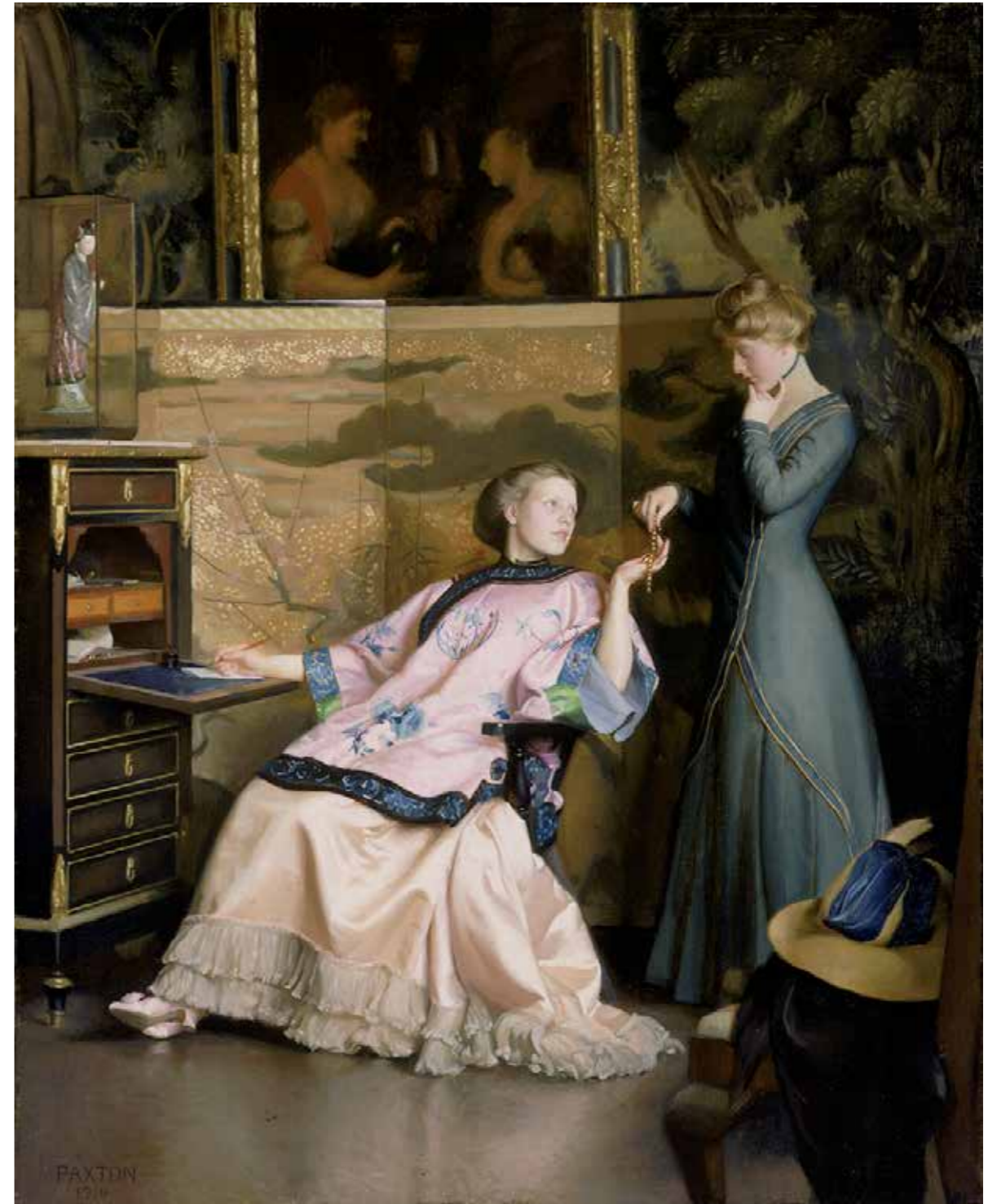
The recipient, who seems to have been interrupted while writing a letter, is depicted wearing a Chinese jacket over a pink taffeta petticoat. Similar clothing styles appear in the fashion press of the time, and it's quite likely that a tasteful, artistic consumer of Boston Arts and Crafts jewelry may have presented herself like either of these two women. Jewelry by Hale, Shaw, or Rogers would have paired well with a dress such as the one worn by the standing figure.

Although most of the jewelry that Paxton included in his paintings is traditional, he depicted a turquoise-colored brooch that resembles one by Elizabeth Copeland in a portrait of his mother (see fig. 30) and again, worn by his wife, in *The Crystal* (fig. 36; compare pl. 20). An instructor at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Paxton would have been familiar with the city's blossoming jewelry and metalworking scene. He used jewelry—scattered across a dressing table, fingered by a sitter as she gazes at the artist, or adding a pop of color to an ensemble—to aid in his creation of a *mise-en-scène* that illustrates how dress and ornament complemented each other.<sup>8</sup>



**FIG. 34** By the 1920s Boston's Society of Arts and Crafts was in the vanguard of locally made jewelry. The cover of a weekly shopping guide features a photograph of two necklaces and a brooch. The lower necklace, in silver and lapis lazuli from Russia, is by Hale (see pl. 27).

**FIG. 35** Paintings by William Paxton, like *The New Necklace* (1910), celebrate the tastes of the era and feature sumptuous decorative arts. The two fashionable figures seen here are the type of patron that Boston jewelers catered to.





**PLATE 31**

During the early twentieth century, daytime fashions included a shirtwaist bodice and skirt, often worn with a belt and buckle at the waist. Elaborate ornaments, like this

silver and enamel belt buckle with a design of galleon ships by Hale, were created to add color and individuality to the otherwise uniform style of dress.



**PLATES 32 AND 33**

Brooches added a personal flair to daytime clothing and could be positioned to adorn a neckline, sleeve, or waistline. Hale sometimes used unusual gemstones in his jewelry—the

light green gem in the brooch at top is a tourmaline, and the orange centerpiece in the one below is a carnelian intaglio with a coat of arms.



**PLATES 34-37**

Over the course of Edward Everett Oakes's long career, he made many brooches in a wide variety of forms and materials. The horizontal bar brooch and the circle

pin dominate, but he also designed more inventive pieces, like this large curved brooch with gold leaves and diamond and sapphire blossoms.

**FIG. 39**

The interior of Edward Everett Oakes's jewel-encrusted silver casket is as beautifully finished as the exterior; it offers a shallow, velvet-lined removable tray above a larger lower compartment. The casket rests on a custom carved laurel-wood stand, also made by Oakes.

**FIG. 40**

This gold, sapphire, and diamond brooch made in the 1920s by Oakes shows the influence of the geometric Art Deco style.

1920s. Boston's intellectual leadership in defining Arts and Crafts ideals had so ingrained the superiority of handicrafts that machine age aesthetics were particularly slow to take hold among New England's cultured elite. In Boston, Arts and Crafts jewelry retained a devoted following of makers and consumers despite the national resurgence of ostentatious high-style jewelry in modern designs accompanied by the growth of mass-manufactured inexpensive costume jewelry. Some jewelers, like Oakes, incorporated modernist motifs in their work to keep up with current styles. For example, an Oakes circle brooch likely made in the late 1920s incorporates Art Deco-inspired geometric columns of faceted sapphires to contrast with the more flowing Arts and Crafts floral motifs (fig. 40). Other craftspeople, such as

Hale, dug in their heels and clung to a more conservative look. The Great Depression severely curtailed the market for all independent craftspeople, especially those working in luxury crafts such as jewelry. Although a few Arts and Crafts jewelry makers were able to weather the storm—for instance, Oakes turned to making stock-design wedding and engagement rings—many abandoned their craft. Yet the influence of Hale, Oakes, and their Boston contemporaries on jewelry making in the United States, widespread during their lifetimes, endures to this day.

In their own time, Boston's jewelry makers were pioneers and national leaders, through their individual actions and their participation in the Society of Arts and Crafts. They mentored jewelry makers in their studios, in schools, in lectures and writings, and through their service on the SAC Jury. They promoted the Arts and Crafts philosophy and developed a market for their creations through exhibitions, competitions, and sales. And they restored the dignity of handicraftsmanship and revitalized older craft techniques. But it is hard to say definitively that Boston's jewelry makers were the inventors of the style they championed and disseminated.

The origins of a style can be hard to pin down in the modernizing world of the early twentieth century, where objects traveled the globe for international exhibitions, and images and information circulated quickly through trade and popular magazines. The jewelry made in Boston is distinctive; compared to Arts and Crafts ornaments made in England, for example, it