

Fairy Lamp Club



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NEWSLETTER

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CLUB NEWS

FAIRY LAMP FORUM UPDATE

I have added a new "Announcements" category to the Fairy Lamp Forum. This category is for announcements of meetings, conferences, major antique shows, and any other activity that may be of interest for our forum members or antique collectors in general. It is particularly useful for activities that may take place near you or places that you may be visiting. In addition, it alerts you to auctions that may have on-line bidding available. Check it out when you get a chance and post activities that are going on in your area.

CALL FOR ARTICLES

Once again I encourage you to participate in this newsletter.

The concern is that I do not want this newsletter to be a "one person show." It needs to be a collaborative effort of all our members. So, if you have information to share, please pass it along. Your fellow Club members will thank you for your participation.

FROM OUR MEMBERS

CARL RADKE, PHOENIX STUDIOS, by Jim

If you are a frequent visitor to the eBay auctions, I suspect you have noticed the hand crafted art glass candle lamps by Carl Radke, Phoenix Studios.¹

Carl Radke participated in the renaissance of American luster art glass in the early 1970s. Luster glass was patented by Louis C. Tiffany in 1881² and was popular during the early part of the twentieth century.

The United States patent for luster glass was primarily developed to enhance the visual quality of stained glass windows. The patent reads in part:

"This invention relates to the introduction of a new character of glass in colored glass windows.

The improvement consists in a metallic luster being given to one surface of pieces of glass and the insertion of such glass among other pieces of colored glass in a window or mosaic. The effect is a highly iridescent one and of pleasing metallic luster, changeable

¹ www.phoenixartglass.com or www.carlradke.com

² Patent No. 237,418, February 8, 1881. Louis C. Tiffany, NY, Improvement to colored glass windows

from one to the other, depending upon the direction of the visual ray and the brilliancy or dullness of the light falling upon or passing through the glass. The metallic luster is produced by forming a film of a metal or its oxide, or a compound of a metal, on or in the glass either by exposing it to vapors or gases or by direct application."

Tiffany, inspired by the natural iridescence of ancient Roman glass, experimented with lustering techniques. Favrite glass,³ the trademark for Tiffany handmade glass, resulted from these experiments.⁴

Luster glass had fallen out of favor after 1925 and had practically become a lost art. Because of the silver content in the glass, it has always been one of the most costly forms of glass ever produced.

Not only the specific formulas and high costs, but the experience and technique of maintaining this glass in a usable state has kept the blowing of luster glass in the hands of a few skillful artisans. Carl Radke is one of only a few glassblowers out of thousands in the U.S. who continues to work in this difficult and traditional glass. His skill with glass and glass decoration has allowed him to experiment with this type of glass and to develop this unique collection of art glass.⁵

The following short biography is from Carl's eBay Store.⁶

"I am an American glass artist and designer. I first touched glass in 1970 while going to art school. I immediately felt called to it; now, 40 years later. My studio, in Harmony



California, was open to the public for 20 years. Four years ago, however, I moved my studio to my home. I am now blessed to be able to blow glass in solitude. This solitude has breathed new life into my work. I am essentially a one

man studio; however, my wife Stephanie helps me when I need assistance. The art glass colors I use in my work are similar to the Favrite glass made by Tiffany Studios around the turn of the twentieth century, however, personalized by me."

A visit to Carl's eBay store will quickly illustrate the broad range of designs of his art glass. They are unique in every way and are destined to be the "antiques of tomorrow."

Among the range of designs is a small unique collection of candle lamps. It is probably not appropriate to refer to them as fairy lamps, but they do possess similar characteristics.

When I first came across these candle lamps, I was intrigued by the artistic qualities of the glass and by their unique shapes. I immediately contacted Carl and asked how he got into making candle lamps, did he have any additional designs, and could I have permission to use his photos. He replied in part:

"Thank you for your interest in my fairy lamps. This is something completely new to me. I have been making glass for forty years and in that time I have made a total of 4 or 5 fairy lamps, all in the past six months.

I had a fairy lamp collector contact me and gave me some advice about technical aspects of these little lamps. This information I welcome as I have very little experience in

³ Favrite glass is a type of iridescent art glass. It was patented in 1894 and first produced in 1896. It differs from most iridescent glasses because the color is ingrained in the glass itself, as well as having distinctive coloring. (www.en.wikipedia.org)

⁴ www.studiosoft.it/antiquetiffany.htm

⁵ www.mendocinostories.com/ART_GlassFire2.html

⁶ www.stores.ebay.com/Carl-Radke-Art-Glass-and-Gallery

making them. The most recent lamp I made uses some of the advised technical data I received.

If there is interest shown in these lamps, I would be happy to make more fairy lamps in the future. Thank you Carl."

I find it interesting that someone with Carl's artistic talent and technical expertise would focus his skills on candle lamps. I am not surprised, however, since so many glass artisans of the late nineteenth century had the same fascination.

I also find it interesting that one of our fellow collectors valued his work enough to offer some "technical advice" on the construction of fairy lamps. Again, I was not surprised that fairy lamp collectors were generous with their knowledge. Do they see Carl's work as the "prized fairy lamp of tomorrow?" I suspect so.

Now, a review of Carl's latest designs in candle lamps.



*Gold Aurene Art Glass Optic Fairy Lamp
6.5" x 4.0" - \$350*



This is indeed an interesting design. Aside from the luster glass, it seems to have the characteristics of a miniature oil lamp or Glow Light. It does not seem to have some of the "technical aspects" necessary to make a good candle lamp.

You may notice that, in addition to the Phoenix Studio sticker, Carl engraves his work with his signature. As we all know, this will be an important feature fifty years from now.



*Blue Aurene Art Glass Fairy Lamp
5.5" x 4.0" - \$320*



This design is a little closer to making a good candle lamp. The opening in the base is a little wider making the candle a little easier to maintain. The ribs on the shade may provide enough air, but improvements in the design are apparently still evolving. In fact, Carl states on his webpage: *"I am playing with ideas for these lamps so they are prototypes."*



*Gold Aurene Art Glass Optic Fairy Lamp
4.0" x 3.0" - \$175*



As you can see this lamp is much smaller than the others and has the fundamental design of a fairy lamp. However, the shade has a smooth rim and it is not apparent that the ribs in the base will allow enough air for the candle to burn.



*Gold Aurene Art Glass Optic Fairy Lamp
on a saucer base*



This design uses the same shade on a saucer base. Again, the shade has a smooth rim. The ribs in the base seem to be adequate to allow enough air for the candle, but it is not certain.



*Amber Trailed Fairy Lamp with Gold Aurene Base
4.5" x 3.0" - \$75 (small blemish on base)*



This design really got my attention. What Carl refers to as "trailed" is the classic reversed Nailsea-type design. The looping, while not as fine as original designs, seems to be well formed and somewhat uniform. This shade also has a unique heavy rolled edge on the top opening. Only time will tell if this variation in glass thickness will contribute to or diminish the risk of cracking when the candle heats the shade.

The base design has evolved into a more traditional design for the lamp cup, but it remains to be seen if the ribs are sufficient to allow for enough air.

So far, this is the extent of Carl's candle lamp designs and as you can see the designs are still evolving. Perhaps with encouragement from our members and exposure to the glass types and designs prevalent in the 1890s, Carl will add his name to the long list of fairy lamp glass artists that came before him.

Contact information for Carl Radke:

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WEBB DECORATIONS – ORIGINAL AND NOT SO ORIGINAL, by Jim

In recent months there have been numerous examples of modern decorations on Victorian-era art glass. The first example appeared on eBay Auctions in August 2008. Since that time, there has been a proliferation of similar modern decorations. Some of these decorations were on Victorian-era Burmese ware by Thomas Webb and were apparently done to recreate the well known original decorations by Webb's chief designer, Jules Barbe.

Over the past six months these modern decorations have appeared on a variety of glass types, including Burmese and satin glass, and on a variety of shapes including fairy lamps, cabinet vases, and rose bowls. They also have been seen on contemporary art glass items such as epergnes and fairy lamps.

These modern decorations are reaching epidemic proportions and seem to be originating from a single source in the United Kingdom. The decorations, originally in colored enamel, are now showing up as gold colored designs, again to simulate original Webb/Barbe designs.

I will not speculate on the reasons why these modern decorations are being applied to Victorian art glass. Some of the decorations, however, are close enough to the original designs that beginning collectors and even some advanced collectors and dealers could easily be fooled into thinking the decorations are original. Of course, decorated Victorian-era art glass commands a higher value than undecorated ware and that poses a risk to the uninformed buyer.

The consequences of decorating Victorian-era art glass go far beyond today's antique art glass market. Today, by exposing these practices, collectors and dealers are cautioned to inspect their purchases carefully

before making an ill-informed purchase. But, what about tomorrow's market?

As we know, knowledge is fleeting. The information we learn today is often not passed on to new collectors. In ten, twenty, or fifty years from now this information will have been forgotten and many modern decorated pieces of Victorian-era art glass could be easily accepted as original work. Could it be that some of the "unusual decorations" that we see today are products of a "cottage industry" some fifty years ago and not original to the maker?

It is important to remember that this article does not address the legitimate decorating shops that routinely decorated Victorian-era art glass blanks provided by the glass manufacturer of the time. That was a legitimate practice and not to be associated with these modern decorating practices.

In preparing this article, I gave some thought to recounting what we already know about Webb's decorations on fairy lamps. As you may know, there are four common decorations and several others that are original designs but not as common. I have decided to delay that explanation for another time and instead focus on the most important issue of today – the modern application of well known Webb decorations on Victorian-era art glass.

The proliferation begins

On August 31, 2009 I began a thread on the Fairy Lamp Forum⁷ titled *Webb Burmese "hand-painted in the manner of Jules Barbe."* I chose that title for the thread because it was the description used by the eBay seller. I believe the wording was carefully chosen so as to not imply that the decoration was original. It was simply "in the manner of" Jules Barbe.

⁷ www.fairylampforum.com



These are the first items that caught my attention. As we well know, decorated Burmese is difficult at best to find and to find four pieces at once is indeed unusual. To be honest, I was impressed with the collection and was looking forward to participating in the auction. However, my first impression was short lived.



Upon closer inspection it was apparent that the decoration⁸ was not right.

⁸ This decoration pattern is Number 2363 Hawthorn registered by Jules Barbe, 1886-1888. The pattern was previously referred to as "Prunus"



The most obvious difference is the bright green color of the normally "shaded leaves" and the presence of brush marks in the enamel. There are other features that are not typical, but it is obvious that this decoration is not original to the Webb Burmese ware.

I was certainly disappointed that someone had decorated these previously undecorated pieces of authentic Webb Burmese. At the time, however, I did not believe that this was anything more than a single occurrence and was not too concerned that it would occur again. I was sadly mistaken.

Not too long after, another piece of decorated glass showed up on eBay. This piece, perhaps a toothpick or match holder, was also decorated in the Hawthorn pattern,



The glass has similar coloring to Burmese but it is not Burmese glass. The decoration

is quite similar to the four cabinet vases and was probably done by the same artist. I was, at the time, relieved that this decoration was not applied to another piece of Webb Burmese. Less than a month later, however, I would be disappointed again.



These two pieces of Victorian-era Webb Burmese have been decorated in the same manner of the previous examples.



Looking at the decoration closely, you will recognize the bright green "shadow leaves" and the very distinct brush marks not found in authentic Webb decorations. Once again this "artist" has defaced choice examples of Victorian-era Burmese ware. At least they were not Burmese fairy lamps. That sad day, however, was just around the corner.

Like clockwork the proliferation of modern decorations on antique Burmese ware continued.



This small bowl appears to be shiny Burmese ware; it may simply be pink glass. The decoration is typical of previous examples with the signature bright green leaves.



This is a choice example of Webb's shiny Burmese ware. This creamer would have significant value in its own right without any decoration. The question is, of course, "Does adding a modern decoration add to or diminish the value of antique Burmese ware?" For me, the answer is clear. It is not much different than painting over the patina of a piece of prime antique furniture.



This decoration is unknown to me, however, I do not believe it is a Victorian-era design. I have included this example because of the unusual decoration and because it employs very similar bright green colors found in the previous examples. Could this be the same artist developing their own unique decoration?

For over eight months I watched the proliferation of modern decorations on antique art glass, predominately Webb Burmese ware. I certainly suspected that it was simply a matter of time that the defacing of antique Burmese would eventually find its way to Clarke's Burmese fairy lamps. In April 2010 that sad day finally arrived.



This is the first example of a Clarke Burmese fairy lamp with a modern decoration. As you can see it has the same distinctive bright green leaves as the previous examples. There are, however, other features of this decoration that are uncommon to the original decoration, including the "berry-like" shape of the flower buds.



The above illustration shows three sides of the same fairy lamp. As you can see, the blossoms appear both sides of the shade. Within my small collection of decorated Burmese fairy lamps, none have the blossoms on both sides of the shade. It may not be unprecedented, but it certainly is very uncommon.

For me it is clear that modern decorations "in the manner of Jules Barbe" are being added to Victorian art glass, primarily Burmese ware. If you are not yet convinced, perhaps the following examples will remove any doubt.



Many of you may recognize this elaborate epergne as the work of Nick Inman, Horncastle Studios,⁹ in the United Kingdom. Nick is an exceptional glass artist who has

⁹ eBay Store: www.stores.ebay.co.uk/Horncastle-Glass-Studio

produced many exceptional contemporary fairy lamps, including Burmese ware using Fenton's glass formula.¹⁰ I have seen this epergne many times before, but never decorated.

When I first noticed the decoration, I was disappointed that Nick would decorate his products in this manner. So, I sent a note to Nick asking if this was his epergne and, if so, did he decorate it? Or, if not, did he know who did? Nick replied:

"The answer to your question is yes, this is one of my epergnes and no the decoration has not been carried out by me or on my behalf, but added after the sale."

While it confirms the decoration is "modern" and eliminates one source for the decoration, it does not provide any leads to who is doing the decorations.



As you can see, the decoration is very similar in technique and color as the previous examples. There are subtle differences, but the "trademark" bright green leaves is clearly evident.

I have been monitoring these "modern decorations" for some time. While most have been done in the past year, one example was done much earlier.

¹⁰ Horncastle Burmese Fairy Lamp Candelabra, FL-XLVI-10



In August 2005 this item showed up on eBay. Most of you certainly will recognize this as a base for one of Fenton's fairy lights. The decoration, of course, is not a Fenton design but added by someone else to simulate the Webb/Barbe Hawthorn decoration. The seller of this base provided the following description:

"Victorian Clarke Fairy Lamp Custard Satin Glass Base. This item dates to around 1880 and is vintage Victorian Custard Yellow opaque glass. This mold blown piece is the bottom of one of Clarke's Fairy lamps, it has no markings. This piece has the hand painted floral design on the front. There is a ground polished smooth edge done at the factory and has no damage. This piece measures 2"x3" and the dome would be 2 3/4" across the bottom to fit on this piece."

You could write a book on the inaccuracies in this description. It is not the inaccuracies that troubles me; it is the potentially poor investment made by an uninformed buyer who relies on the description provided by an equally uninformed seller. While unfortunate, this type of transaction happens every day in a broad range of antique sales.

This decoration seems to be much different than the most recent decorations. It appears to be done by another artist. That said, could this example, done over five years ago, been the genesis of the proliferation of modern decorations we are seeing today? Perhaps, but we may never know.

So, what is the impact of this "defacing" of antique Burmese ware?

Some may say the expression "buyer beware" is good advice for anyone buying decorated Burmese. I may tend to agree, but my concerns go deeper than that. I have serious concerns on the effect this may have on the current and future value of decorated Burmese ware, especially if these decorations continue to improve in quality and accuracy. At some point, the ability to tell "original from not so original" may become difficult at best, or impossible at worse. The following may be a good example.



This marriage of two unrelated pieces of Burmese showed up on eBay in August 2008. Putting aside the "marriage" of unrelated pieces of Burmese, what do you think of the decoration?



The decoration on the saucer appears to be modern, but what about the fairy lamp dome? Is the decoration original or modern? Are you sure? Is there any doubt? That, I believe, is the crux of the problem. Where there is doubt, there is diminished value.

I have spent considerable ink and paper in an effort to expose these modern decorations – not for my benefit, but for the benefit of others who may be just beginning their collections. If this article does nothing more than to cause someone to "think twice" before investing in decorated Burmese, it is time well spent.

By now, you may think that this is all there is to this story. Unfortunately, you would be wrong. There has been an equal proliferation of modern gilt decorations on antique glass, possibly by the same artist. I will continue to collect examples of these gilt decorations and report on them in a future article. In the meantime, invest wisely.

For more information

If you would like to see more examples of these decorations and to read the discussions on the Fairy Lamp Forum,¹¹ visit the following threads:

eBay Discussions > *Webb Burmese "hand-painted in the manner of Jules Barbe"*

eBay Discussions > *After Market Decorations*

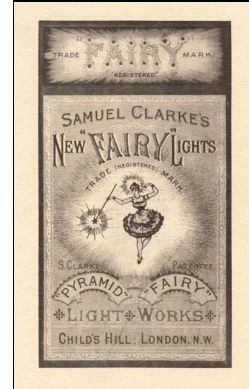
Victorian Art Glass > eBay Discussions > *Paranoid over Webb Decorations*

Victorian Art Glass > eBay Discussions > *Webb decorations on cased glass*

¹¹ www.fairylampforum.com

CLASSIFIED ADS

REFERENCE MATERIALS OR SALE



Samuel Clarke's New Fairy Lights, catalog reprint by T. Robert Anthony. This is a rare reprint of Clarke's original fairy lamp and Cricklite 1887/88 and 1898 catalogs. The condition is new and unused. \$40 (shipping to US included).



Undocumented Fairy Lamp Photo Album

This photo album of previously undocumented fairy lamps was developed from contributions of the members of the Fairy Lamp Club over a 12-year period. It is a unique document not available anywhere except through the Fairy Lamp Club. Each page contains four color images with a description and unique identifier. The collection is bound in a three-ring binder with an attractive cover insert and spine label. \$43 (shipping to US included).



Fairy Lamp Club Newsletters and Undocumented Photo Album on CD This is a complete set of quarterly Fairy Lamp Club Newsletters beginning in November 1996. Each issue, except the first few, will contain approximately 12 pages of text and numerous photographs. In addition, the CD includes all the Undocumented Fairy Lamp pages. All documents are in Microsoft WORD format. \$35 (shipping to US included).

Place your order by sending payment to:

Jim Sapp
P.O. Box 438
Pine, CO 80470

REFERENCE GUIDELINES

This newsletter makes extensive use of *FAIRY LAMPS - Elegance in Candle Lighting*, by Bob and Pat Ruf, Schiffer Publishing, Ltd., 1996, in identifying fairy lamps. While this is the most complete reference book, there are others that you may also use. For consistency, we will use the following key to reference illustrations of fairy lamps. The first letter will identify the reference book followed by a plate or figure number.

For example:

A-P3-4 Refers to T. Robert Anthony's book *19th Century Fairy Lamps*, plate 3, number 4.

C-227 Refers to a fairy lamp number in Clarke's 1888 catalog, reprint by T. Robert Anthony catalog number 227.

FL-XV-2 Refers to the Fairy Lamp Club Newsletter, Issue XV (15), page 2.

H-P117-2218 Refers to the Hosch catalog, Plate 117, item 2218. In the case where the Hosch catalog plate number is unknown, the plate number will simply be "Unknown."

R-167 Refers to Bob and Pat Ruf's book *FAIRY LAMPS-Elegance in Candle Lighting*, figure 167.

T-PV-8 Refers to Dorothy Tibbetts' book *Clarke's Fairy-Lamps*, plate V, number 8.

U-10 Refers to photographic examples of fairy lamps that are not shown in any of reference books. They have been assigned an undocumented reference number in the Undocumented Fairy Lamps section of the newsletter. In this example Undocumented fairy lamp number 10.

MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

The Fairy Lamp Club is a not for profit club for collectors of Victorian and modern fairy lamps. The Club's quarterly newsletter is published in the months of February, May, August, and November. The purpose of the newsletter is to provide a forum for members to share information about fairy lamps with others and is greatly dependent upon the contributions of our members for its content.

To join the Fairy Lamp Club and receive the Fairy Lamp Newsletter for one year, please send \$20.00 (\$25.00 foreign) to:

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Checks must be made payable to Jim Sapp.

Thanks

Thanks to everyone who contributed to this issue of the newsletter.