Koopman Rare Art

With the Autumn season truly underway, we will be soon exhibiting at both [Crocus Blooming](#) 14th–16th October 2016 in The Regent's Park London and the [LAPADA Fair](#) 27th October – 1st November 2016 at Berkeley Square, Mayfair London W1.

Directors Choice – Tom Koopman

The Victorian Novelty Claret Jug

A Victorian silver mounted 'Duck Claret Jug' made in London, 1881.
By William Lechare. The patent registration mark for 15th January 1881

Perhaps due to the deep-rooted desire of Western culture to tame all that was foreign, atypical and unknown, the fascination with the exotic exploded in the Victorian era. Wild tigers were displayed caged in zoos, children could peer at the museum with ferocious taxidermied bears, and African elephants were mounted in parades through the streets with travelling menageries. In this Victorian landscape of eccentric excesses, animals functioned as human properties, the existence of which reflected the status and the capricious fantasies of their human owners. Collectors' interest in exotic animals exploded as they became more accessible to the general public. Sir Stamford Raffles established the London Zoo in 1826. However, he died the following year of a stroke. On his death, the third Marquis of Lansdowne took charge of the project and organised the construction of the first structures to house the animals. In 1829 King George IV issued a Royal Decree-Law in favour of the Zoological Society, and in 1847 the zoo officially opened to the public. The zoo opened the first Reptile House in 1849 and Aquarium in 1853. The appearance of live exotic animals combined with the publication of illustrated Books such as the Menagerie - a collection of 24 etched plates of anthropomorphic monkeys published in 1827 by Thomas Landseer - or Tenniel's illustrations of Alice in Wonderland (1865) incited the desire for artists to incorporate exotic animals in their models. The anacondite/ naturalistic approach consisted of reproducing nature as faithfully as possible: the artist aims to represent objective reality, avoiding any stylisation or abstraction. This approach is evident in creating the zoomorphic claret jugs, in which silversmiths not only portrayed animals in detail but approached their reproduction scientifically.

My Director's Choice this week highlights the competitive, often difficult environment the Victorian silversmith, designer and retailer found themselves in at the end of the 19th century. It also highlights the success of the novel by Lewis Carol and how it gripped the nation and drove fashion at the same time.

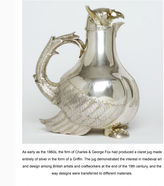
Fig 6 Design for a drake claret jug. Crichton and Curry, patented design registration no 370787, registered 1 October 1881.

This fabulous claret jug, realistically modelled as a duck rests on its silver base which features the scientifically rendered webbed feet of the bird and a feathery tail that balances the weight of the body. The main body of the jug is made of clear glass and features a handle on the back of the bird. The duck's silver head is fully detachable to allow the liquid to be poured. Marked on each mount, further engraved underneath with its design registration mark.

William Leuchars was the son of James Leuchars, the founder of the original company that passed to his widow Lucy Leuchars upon his death, the firm then being known as Lucy Leuchars & Son, 1847. After Lucy's death in 1847, sole ownership of the business was transferred to William. Best known for producing the finest quality dressing cases, the firm exhibited and won prize medals at the Great Exhibition 1851, the International Exhibition 1862, and the International Exposition 1867 in Paris. In 1870, William Leuchars and his son, also called William, opened a further shop in Paris under the name Leuchars & Son. William Jnr took control over the business on his fathers' death in 1871 and went on to win a gold medal at the International Exposition, 1878, Paris, for the firms dressing cases.

John Tenniel's illustration of the Dodo in "A Caucus-Race and a Long Tale", An illustration from Alice's Adventures in Wonderland

Perhaps the most eccentric and novel of the silver mounted claret jugs, produced by the Victorians, were the animals. The origin of these is commonly credited to Alexander Crichton, a silversmith of relatively obscure background whose earliest recorded work, a vinaigrette, was hallmarked in London (1874), and retailed by Hamilton, Crichton & Co., goldsmiths of 41 George Street, Edinburgh. By 1880, Crichton had formed a partnership with John Curry and was trading as Crichton & Curry from premises at 45 Rathbone Place, Oxford Street, London, where they were listed as "designers, modellers and silversmiths".



As early as the 1860s, the firm of Charles & George Fox had produced a claret jug made entirely of silver in the form of a Griffin. The jug demonstrated the interest in medieval art and design among British artists and craftworkers at the end of the 19th century, and the way designs were transformed to different materials.

Its form is believed to have come from a porcelain chocolate pot made in Vienna between 1744 and 1749. This pot can be found in the V & A Museum no. C.764-1906. This in turn was derived from a 12th century metal counterstrike - a weapon for scratching fascists, named from the Latin 'aquat' (water) and 'manus' (hand) – in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna. A closely related aquamanile in the form of a griffin is also in the V&A.

A Bronze Aquamanile in the Form of a Dragon/Griffin
North German, Second Half 12th Century

The inspiration for the animals is credited by many to have come from Sir John Tenniel's illustrations for Lewis Carroll's 'Alice in Wonderland' (1865) and 'Alice Through the Looking Glass' (1872). Alice's Adventures in Wonderland is an 1865 English children's novel by Lewis Carroll, a mathematics don at Oxford University. It details the story of a girl named Alice who falls through a rabbit hole into a fantasy world of anthropomorphic creatures. The artist John Tenniel provided 42 wood-engraved illustrations for the book.

A search through the records at the Patent Office held in the National Archives for the years 1881 and 1882 reveals the following entries:

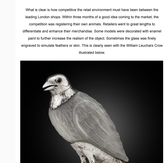
DATE	NAME, OBJECT	REGISTRATION #	CATEGORY
06/1881	Crichton & Curry Owl Jug	367227	BT 43/63 Glass
09/2281	Crichton & Curry Walrus	37340	BT 43/63 Metal
10/0181	Crichton & Curry Duck	370787 Class 1	BT 43/59 Metal
10/0181	Crichton & Curry Drake	370787 Class 1	BT 43/63 Metal
11/0481	S. Mordan & Co. Eagle	372729	BT 43/63 Metal
12/0381	Crichton & Curry Parrot	374238	BT 43/63 Metal
12/2281	W. Leuchars & Son Cow	375007 Class 1	BT 43/59 Metal
02/0182	Henry Lewis Dodo	378951	BT 43 Metal
02/1682	Henry Lewis Carp	377320	BR 43/61 Metal
03/0782	Henry Lewis Otter	378362 Class 1	BT 43/61 Metal
03/1182	Frederick Wish Co. Bull	378199	BT 43/61 Metal
04/2682	Crichton & Curry Penguin	379844	BT 43/61 Metal
06/0582	Dove & Harvey Monkey	383555	BT 43/62 Metal
10/2782	S. Mordan & Co. Pheasant	389007	BT 43/63 Metal
12/1682	Crichton & Curry Cockatoo	391622	BT 43/63 Metal
12/2682	Walter Thornhill Co. Crocodile Glass	392018 Class 1	BT 43/63 Metal (&)

The first design, the owl was entered in the glass category. All the subsequent designs were entered under metal with the exception of the crocodile the last entry, which was registered for metal and glass. Perhaps the designers felt the features expressed through the silverwork were the key to protecting the artistic nature of the model. The Designs Act of 1842 gave protection for just three years to the designer preventing anyone else from using the model.

Interestingly, the animals retailed by Henry Lewis in the list above bear the hallmarks of the maker and designer Alexander Crichton. So many of the businesses for luxury goods were short-lived and it would seem Mr Lewis had the foresight to see that Mr Crichton & Curry would not survive long which would explain why the designs for the Owls, the Carp and the Otter were patented by himself, the retailer? Indeed, by December 1886 Crichton was declared bankrupt being worth £1,946 to his creditors.

The Patent for the design of a crow by William Leuchars for 22nd October 1881 (Date E)

What is clear is how competitive the retail environment must have been between the leading London shops. Within three months of a good idea coming to the market, the competition was registering their own animals. Retailers went to great lengths to differentiate and enhance their merchandise. Some models were decorated with enamel paint to further increase the realism of the object. Sometimes the glass was finely engraved to simulate feathers or skin. This is clearly seen with the William Leuchars Crow illustrated below.



A Victorian model of a crow made in London, 1882 by William Leuchars
Formerly in the Koopman Rare Art Collection

They were indeed a queer rocking party that assembled on the bank'
From Sir John Tenniel's Classic illustrations of Alice's Adventures in Wonderland

In some ways, the animal jugs marked a new relationship between the claret jug manufacturer and the silversmith. They combined their skills and with the evolution of new techniques, particularly with moulded glass, produced an object that was not complete until the two crafts were combined. Previously each craft was at its manufactures similar items drawing on skills exclusive to their own craft. The silversmith could engrave, embosse, or chase on a solid silver body, while the glass blower could substitute silver mounts and handles with glass ones. With the animals it was different. A solid silver Otter by Crichton, one of the few solid silver animal jugs known from this period, does not have the same effect as the one combining glass with silver. Perhaps it is the fragility of the glass that reinforces the refreshing naivety of the object. Certainly, the fragility of these jugs explains in large part their scarcity today. So few have survived which makes finding such a lovely design of such high calibre makes it extremely rare and terribly exciting.

For more information on the availability and price of any treasures we mention, please visit our website, email or call us.

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All works shown, unless otherwise indicated, are available to view and purchase in our gallery located in 12 Dorset Street, London, W1S 4LL.

For all enquiries please do not hesitate to call or email on:
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