



DRAWN WITH SPIRIT:

PENNSYLVANIA GERMAN FRAKTUR FROM THE JOAN AND VICTOR JOHNSON COLLECTION



(Previous) The Philadelphia Museum display mingles the Johnsons' fraktur with Pennsylvania German decorative arts acquired by institution over the past century.

(Left) Bookplate for Maria Rohr, attributed to Johann Adam Eyer (1755–1837), Hamilton Township, Northampton (now Monroe) County, January 17, 1820. Watercolor and ink on laid paper, 6½ by 4 inches. A prolific artist and schoolteacher, Eyer worked in Bucks and Chester Counties before settling in Hamilton Township around 1800.

By Laura Beach

PHILADELPHIA, PENN. — More than 240 fraktur promised to the Philadelphia Museum of Art by Joan and Victor Johnson are on view at the museum through April 26. The collection, said to be the finest in private hands, is documented in an accompanying catalog, *Drawn With Spirit: Pennsylvania German Fraktur* from the Joan and Victor Johnson Collection by



Fraktur on the theme of Adam and Eve are grouped in the first gallery of "Drawn With Passion: Pennsylvania German Fraktur from the Johnson Collection," on view at the Philadelphia Museum of Art through April 26.



scholar Lisa Minardi. Including genealogical details, extensive provenance, publication and exhibition histories, and complete translations, the study is the field's most comprehensive in more than

fifty years.

Handwritten and printed fraktur were produced by German-speaking Europeans between the early Sixteenth Century and the Second World War. Immigrants brought the

tradition to Pennsylvania by 1683. The Johnson collection ranges in date from an illustrated sheet of music attributed to Lancaster County's Ephrata Cloister, circa 1750, to 1840s cutworks and printed birth and baptismal certificates of the 1850s. Philadelphia natives, the Johnsons

collection ranges in date from an illustrated sheet of music attributed to Lancaster County's Ephrata Cloister, circa 1750, to 1840s cutworks and printed birth and baptismal certificates of the 1850s. Philadelphia natives, the Johnsons's began collecting American folk art soon after their marriage in 1955.



Joan and Victor Johnson in the den of their penthouse apartment in Society Hill, Philadelphia. The couple began collecting American folk art soon after their marriage in 1955.

Drawing of a woman on horseback, attributed to the Sussel-Washington Artist (active 1760–85), probably Berks or Lancaster County, circa 1775. Watercolor and ink on laid paper, 8 by 6 3/8 inches. Inscribed "Malley Queen of Sedleng," possibly a reference to Mary Queen of Scots. Several other drawings by the artist depict George and Martha Washington on horseback.



After they moved to Meadowbrook, Penn., in 1965, they filled their 1937 stone farmhouse with country furniture and folk art. Initially attracted by the quirky naïveté of fraktur, Joan devoted herself to learning all she could about them.

In a stroke of beginner's luck, Joan, on an excursion to New Hope, Penn., in 1978, secured three inexpensive drawings of animals. She later learned from Weiser that the drawings were probably by the Washington-Sussel artist, an important early practitioner active in Berks and Lancaster Counties between 1760 and 1785. Victor's gift to his wife of her first telephone answering machine in 1992

alerted the Johnsons to a remarkable trio of initialed works by Durs Rudy Sr or his son, Durs Rudy Jr, two artists working in Salisbury Township in what is now Lehigh County. Joan succeeded in purchasing the drawings of a crucifixion, the Prodigal Son and a baptism before they came to public auction. In perhaps their boldest trade, the couple acquired the fraktur collection of the Reverend Scott Francis Brenner in 1981, reselling most of the group to finance their acquisition of Brenner's best nine works. Considered a masterpiece, a circa 1834–35 drawing attributed to



Drawing of a baptism by Durs Rudy Sr (1766–1843) or Durs Rudy Jr (1789–1850), Lehigh County, circa 1830. Watercolor and ink on wove paper, 7½ by 9½ inches. Initialed "D.R." for Durs Rudy, this drawing is from a group that descended in one family. Both Rudys are thought to have taught school and made fraktur. This drawing is from a remarkable group of fraktur that descended together in the same family and surfaced at Zettlemoyer Auctions in Fogelsville, Penn., in 1992.

Samuel Gottschall of Franconia Township in Montgomery County, Penn., crowns the couple's extensive holdings of Adam and Eve-themed fraktur.

Many of Minardi's discoveries relate to the identities of individual artists. Henrich Otto, she writes, was one of the earliest fraktur artists to make birth and baptismal certificates and likely the first to have them printed. Minardi also found evidence that Otto decorated furniture. Other fraktur makers who are believed to have made decorated furniture include Otto's sons William, Daniel and Jacob, and Conrad Trevits. Accompanying "Drawn With Spirit" are two companion displays, both organized by



Drawing of Adam and Eve attributed to the Sussel-Washington Artist (active 1760–85), probably Berks or Lancaster County, circa 1775. Watercolor and ink on laid paper, 7¾ by 6½ inches. The identity of the Sussel-Washington artist remains unknown, but the text and imagery on his fraktur indicate that he was a German immigrant.

Minardi: “A Colorful Folk: Pennsylvania Germans & the Art of Everyday Life,” on view at Winterthur Museum through January 3, and “Quill & Brush: Pennsylvania German Fraktur and Material Culture,” at the Free Library of Philadelphia through July 18. A fourth show, “Word & Image: Contemporary Artists Connect to Fraktur,” was curated by Judith Tanenbaum and is also at the Free Library, through June 14. An international roster of scholars is participating in a symposium hosted by the McNeil Center for Early

American Studies at the University of Pennsylvania March 5–8. Catalogs accompany the Winterthur and Free Library displays.



Drawing of a vase with bird and flowers for Naomi Schultz, attributed to Sarah Kriebel (1828–1908), Worcester Township, Montgomery County, 1852. Watercolor and ink on wove paper, 13½ by 15½ inches. Young Schwenkfelder women produced a significant body of work in the early to mid-1800s. The broad-minded Schwenkfelders established schools that were open to children of any faith.

The Philadelphia Museum of Art's Perelman Building is at 2525 Pennsylvania Avenue. For information, 215-763-8100 or www.philamuseum.org.



Cutwork for Elias Striker, New York, 1844. Watercolor and ink on wove paper, 13¼ by 17½ inches. This cutwork is from a group that can now be documented as originating in New York, not Pennsylvania.

Birth and baptismal certificate for Eleina Haack (b November 28, 1825), attributed to the Northampton County Artist, Chestnuthill Township, Northampton (now Monroe) County, circa 1830. Watercolor and ink on wove paper, 15½ by 12½ inches. The so-called Northampton County Artist is known to have made only about a dozen fraktur, mostly for members of the Haack, Serfass and Dotterer families of Chestnuthill Township.

