



**WORKSHOP IN SPAIN**  
Madrid 26-27 September 2005

# **The Art of Silver, European Heritage and Modern Designs**

CO-ORDINATION – PRESENTATION

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GRUPO **VIRIDIANA**

## **OBJECTIVES**

*At the end of this seminar you will be able to identify different:*

- Styles
- Production methods
- Historic periods
- Origin of creations
- Symbolic Meanings

*Throughout the seminar slides of objects will be shown and will be later available for observation by the participants. Following the seminar all participants are invited to participate at a guided tour of the silverware exhibition*

## Sessions of seminar

- Presentation of Silv-Ad: European Heritage and Modern Design
- Spanish Silver Art: Middle Ages – Present Day
- Presentation of project's catalogue
- Techniques
- Roundtable discussion on modern design trends
- Presentation of [www.silverart.org](http://www.silverart.org) website and guidance in finding material
- Practical Exercise

Presentation of Silv-Ad:  
European Heritage and Modern Design

## Silver Art

- Part of the common European heritage which has developed since ancient times and flourished in the mediaeval era and the subsequent historic periods till contemporary times.
- Production of impressive array of both ecclesiastical and secular objects, including household and jewellery items, as well as weapons and coins.
- Techniques and design motifs travelled across Europe and were cross-fertilised with local traditions and local technology.
- A common heritage developed which is visibly shared between the southwest and the southeast of Europe, including the whole of the Balkan peninsula.

The *SILV-AD* project examines this common heritage as well as modern silver art and crafts, aiming to provide useful “ground material” to artists and craftsmen working with silver, and encourage them to draw further inspiration from the shared European tradition.

## **Objectives**

- ✓ Study in a comparative way the European heritage and tradition in silver craft and art and illustrate differences and similarities in technique and design.
- ✓ Create and publish a design thesaurus illustrating the rich European tradition in silver art and crafts from medieval times till present time, as a resource open and accessible to the wider public as well as the history and design experts, the artists and craftsmen interested in silver.
- ✓ Promote innovation in modern design through training and providing silver artists and craftsmen the resources to study and experiment with traditional design permutations.
- ✓ Encourage cross-fertilisation of ideas and experience between different European areas and traditions and between different institutions of the public and private sector.
- ✓ Disseminate the results of the documentation, research and educational activities of the project through a dedicated web-site, an international conference, exhibitions and seminars.

## **Activities**

- ✓ Conduct research in the three participating countries, i.e. Greece, Spain and Bulgaria, to establish the historical background to the development of silver art and crafts and identify typical examples of silverwork, presenting a variety of techniques and design motifs.
- ✓ Compile an inventory ("thesaurus") of characteristic and interesting silver craft and art items from medieval times until our days, originating from the three participating countries and create a databank of techniques and design motifs. Publish the "thesaurus" on the web site and in CD-Rom.
- ✓ Create a training package for silver craftsmen, to demonstrate how traditional design may be used as inspiration for contemporary creative and innovative design, aided by modern technology. Organise seminars for craftsmen in the three participating countries. Publish the training material in electronic format and in print.
- ✓ Organise and hold an exhibition in each participant country, showing the common roots of the European silver art and craft tradition and the inspiration provided by tradition to contemporary artists and craftsmen. The exhibition will be accompanied by a printed Guide.
- ✓ Organise and hold an end-of -project international conference in Ioannina, Greece, to disseminate and discuss the results of the project.

## Results

- A “thesaurus” of silver art and craft techniques and design motifs, originating from the three participating countries, i.e. Greece, Spain and Bulgaria, published in electronic format (website and CD-Rom) in four languages (English, Greek, Spanish, Bulgarian) aimed at silver artists and craftsmen, researchers and design professionals.
- Three exhibitions held in Ioannina, Sofia and Madrid, showing the common roots of the European silver art and craft tradition and the inspiration provided by this tradition to contemporary artists and craftsmen.
- Publication of an Exhibition Guide in English, Spanish, Bulgarian and Greek
- Training material for delivery to silver craftsmen, demonstrating how traditional design may be used as inspiration for contemporary creative and innovative design, aided by modern technology, published in the languages of the participating countries.
- Three training seminars for silver craftsmen in Ioannina, Sofia and Madrid.
- An international conference in Ioannina, in September 2005.
- A dedicated web site, brochures and other publicity materials.

## **Spanish Silver Art: Historical Perspective**

### ***Middle Ages:***

Silverware in Spain follows the general stylistic trends to be found in other forms of art, such as architecture and sculpture, with important repercussions for economic and social life.

### ***The Gothic period:***

Works commissioned by monasteries (the great majority of them religious objects though some are secular), and by austere decoration of floral and geometric motifs. The discovery of America contributed to the importing of a large quantity of raw materials and aesthetic models, which were combined with the Spanish tradition.

### ***In the 16th century:***

Silverware was almost exclusively ecclesiastical, while from the middle of the century, and the transition from the Gothic period to the Renaissance, silversmiths acquired special privileges. They began to organise themselves systematically in neighbourhoods-guilds and private shops.

***In the 17th century:***

A typically Spanish style developed, which was different from the rest of Europe and was predominantly a simple serious style.

***In the 18th century:***

Three artistic currents existed alongside each other: baroque, rococo and neoclassicism.

***In the 19th century:***

Despite the coexistence of different trends in silverware, neoclassicism predominated and a new, neo-Gothic current made its appearance, in which the motifs were mainly geometric and representational subjects were non-existent.

***In the 20<sup>th</sup> Century:***

Every artist acquires a personal style combining traditional, classical and modern trends. Modern Spanish silversmiths, create interesting postmodern objects, jewellery and handicrafts. While the ecclesiastical ornaments follow traditional trends to a greater degree.

## **Presentation of Project's catalogue and discussion**

*In the following session the Thesaurus will be presented by using the available computers and the different sections will be explained and discussed by the seminar tutors.*

*Following this section you will be able to understand the different sections of the Thesaurus description such us:*

*Origin*

*Artist*

*Style*

*Type*

*Material*

*Technique*

*Design*

*Date*

*You should also be able to search for silverware across all four participating countries by using different options of the search engine*

# TECHNIQUES

## ***1. Casting***

The casting of silver is very common and is suitable for the production of multiple copies of objects.

*Stages:*

1. The molten silver is poured into clay, bronze, rubber or wax moulds.
2. The cast, already formed, mass is finished with a variety of smoothing tools, until the desired effect is achieved.

*Cast AND other techniques:*

Cast and engraved pieces, cast and repoussé, and cast with *savati* or with stones in settings and enamel.

*What is it used for and where can it be found?*

Accessories (pendants, crosses, amulets) and jewellery assembled from individual parts, such as chains, belts, buckles and earrings.

In Spain: ecclesiastical vessels, jewellery, and objects of everyday use.

In the Balkans: traditional jewellery is characterized by individual cast parts that are assembled in impressive pieces.

*Modern design:* cast objects in multiple copies or singly, by using wax moulds.

## ***2. Forged***

Forging is probably the oldest method of working silver. Despite being a painstaking, time-consuming technique, it has great potential for producing sculpted, three-dimensional objects.

*Stages:*

1. The silver is first heated and sheets or strips are created
2. The sheets or strips are then worked and shaped by the hammer on the anvil
3. The form of the metal is altered to produce the final product and the desired aesthetic effect.

*Forged AND other techniques:*

Forged items are often adorned with engraved or inlaid decoration, enamel, precious stones, *savati*, or cast attachments.

*What is it used for and where can it be found?*

Both secular and ecclesiastical silverware

In all three countries, the technique was used to make objects, particularly expensive jewellery, since each piece is always unique.

*Modern design:* Still widely used to produce modern artifacts

### *3. Embossed or repoussé*

The tradition of embossing, or repoussé chiselled work, or repoussé perforated, has been handed down from generation to generation and used in ecclesiastical silverware without break down to the present day, giving a striking, relief effect.

Stages:

1. The design is drawn on the back of a piece of cast silver sheet,
2. The details are then hammered on the reverse side, against a soft lump of pitch or steel, until the front side is worked in relief.

*What is it used for and where can it be found?*

The technique is used to enhance religious representations, and is ideal for covers of gospel books, fonts, sacred vessels, patens, communion chalices and flabella.

In Greece and Bulgaria: Outstanding examples of the repoussé technique have been inherited from traditional secular silverware, including jewellery (mainly brooches), amulets, weapons, tobacco pouches and boxes.

*Modern Design:* Still used today by modern artists experimenting with relief volumes

#### ***4. Engraved***

Engraving is the simplest form of adornment, with both figurative and aniconic decoration.

##### *Stages:*

Engraving is the principle technique that allows the addition of a signature, a votive inscription, a date, or any kind of dedication.

Simple or complex compositions, with plants or geometrical patterns, human beings or animals, representations or abstract designs, are engraved on the silver surface to adorn or to supply information, a message or a symbol.

Engraving is executed by chisels of varying diameters, depending on the needs.

##### *Engraving AND other techniques:*

It usually supplements casting, forging, or embossing, for decorative, symbolical or votive purposes. Part of the engraved decoration is often filled with *savati* to give a two-colour effect.

##### *What is it used for and where can it be found?*

From Palaeolithic to modern art, engraved decoration has played a primary role. *Ex votos* and wedding wreaths were often engraved with stylised depictions of angels, dates, names or dedications. Engraving is also found on plates, weapons, swords, tobacco pouches, boxes and crosses.

##### *Modern Design: Still used today*

## ***5. Enamel***

Enamel is a coloured decorative technique used to supplement others and is an ideal method for producing exciting aesthetic effects and artistic expressions. It often supplemented silver creations, giving them added splendour and luxury. Two different kinds of enamel work are known: carven (*lakoto* or *skafto* for Greek) and cloisonné or cellular enamel.

*Enamel AND other techniques:*

Used with casting and repoussé

*What is it used for and where can it be found?*

It was used both for representations of religious subjects, and for systematic efforts to reproduce the plant world, for paradise compositions and for complex geometric designs.

In Spain, enamel adorned precious ecclesiastical artefacts, though it was at the same time also found in secular silverware.

In recent years, traditional silverware in Bulgaria has produced some choice enameled jewellery and vessels for the church or wealthy individuals. The silversmiths of Epiros (Greece), were skilled in this technique, and have produced superb enameled silver pieces.

*Modern Design:* Still used today by modern artists for more colour and glazing

## ***6. Perforated or openwork***

The perforated or openwork technique flourished greatly on the coasts of the Mediterranean from the 3rd to the 7th century AD, and has survived from the Byzantine period to the present day.

*Perforated AND other techniques:*

Used with cast, embossed, engraved, granulated or with inlaid stones.

*What is it used for and where can it be found?*

Ecclesiastical silverware and in the manufacture of jewellery

Many perforated (commonly known as *plique à jour*) bibelots are still to be found today in museum and church collections in Greece and Bulgaria.

Spain can boast of some outstanding examples of perforated ecclesiastical silverware in both liturgical and devotional vessels.

*Modern Design:* Still used today by the modern artists to continue the play of the translucency of the objects

## ***7. Filigree***

This elaborate technique was very widespread because of the delicate perforated effect, which produces a play of light metal volumes and voids, and also because of the noticeable saving on metal.

*Stages:*

The compositions are created from thin silver wires that are twisted, bent and welded together. Sometimes the metal wires are braided to create wire interlaced bands (herring bone).

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*What is it used for and where can it be found?*

Jewellery, ecclesiastical and secular objects

*Modern Design:* In modern Greek art, filigree jewellery and vessels are still preferred as works of exceptionally fine art.

The traditional filigree art of Bulgaria lives on in modern jewellery, in accordance with the Balkan tradition. Exactly the same technique is followed for traditional compositions adapted to modern aesthetic demands.

This technique is also found in Spain, where it is probably the result of Islamic influence, through conquest or the great migration movement.

## 8. *Savati – niello*

The technique of *savati* decoration was known as early as the Roman period and developed particularly under the Byzantine Empire, from where it passed to the West and reached its peak in the 15th-16th century. The word *savati* derives from the Arabic *savad*, meaning black, while niello comes from the Latin *nigellum*, which means black enamel and is a diminutive of the word *niger* (black).

*Stages:*

1. Adding a compound of black colour
2. Create a striking contrast with the colour of the metal
3. Create a play of depth and volume in the representations
4. Used as supplementary decoration in many styles, for cast and repoussé items.

*Savati AND other techniques:*

Cast and Repoussé

*What is it used for and where can it be found?*

Weapons, ecclesiastical silverware, secular vessels, jewellery

*Modern Design:* Today, *savati* is becoming increasingly less common, as a result of the difficulty of the technique. It is found either in copies of traditional pieces or in other artistic aspirations.

## Roundtable discussion

Relationship between European Heritage and modern design trends

*Participants:*

- Manuel Mandianes Castro
  - Anthropologist and Sociologist. Project researcher.
  
- David Muñoz Rubio
  - Professor of Jewellery at the School of Applied Arts
  - Philosopher and Sociologist
  
- Maria Palero García
  - Professor of jewellery and costume jewellery design.
  
- Ricardo Fernández-Espina Calvet
  - President of the Guild of Jewellers and Silversmiths of Toledo.
  - Professor at the School of Silversmiths of Toledo.

***Following the discussion, all seminar participants will be able ask questions and maybe find a topic to discuss further***

**Presentation of [www.silverart.org](http://www.silverart.org) website  
and guidance in finding material**

## **PRACTICAL EXERCISE**

In this exercise five different pictures will be shown and the seminar participants will have to identify the technique used as well as the period and country it was created. A discussion will follow in order to identify the symbolic meaning of the object and how it relates to modern creations.