

EXHIBITION OF CHRISTMAS CARD PRIZE DESIGNS

AT THE ART INSTITUTE,

Corner Michigan Avenue and Van Buren Street.

~~1884~~

THERE is now on exhibition at the Art Institute a collection of original designs for Christmas cards by famous artists, which has an unusually interesting history. In it are seen the results of a systematic and repeated effort on the part of Messrs. L. Prang & Co., the well-known art publishers of Boston, to place at the head of their annual publications for Christmas the very best that can be procured from artists or art amateurs.

The three first prize exhibitions of Christmas Card Designs held by Messrs. Prang & Co. during the years 1881 and 1882, although highly interesting to the public at large, stimulating to the amateur talent of the country, and perfectly satisfactory to Messrs. L. Prang & Co., discouraged the artists of highest professional rank from further contributions to a similar enterprise, on account of the avalanche of *dilettante* work with which they found themselves mixed up.

To gain this riper talent for a new effort which should furnish models for the ideal Christmas Card, artistic and popular alike, Messrs. Prang & Co. conceived the plan of a competition, confined to a limited number of artists of recognized ability and mutual esteem, vying with each other in producing representative works of art to be submitted to the sole test of popularity.

Messrs. Prang & Co. succeeded in obtaining designs of exceptional merit from the following artists :—

- J. CARROLL BECKWITH,
- E. H. BLASHFIELD,
- ROBT. F. BLOODGOOD,
- I. H. CALIGA,
- TH. W. DEWING,
- FREDERICK DIELMAN,
- ROSINA EMMET,
- FRED. W. FREER,
- ALFRED FREDERICKS,
- I. M. GAUGENGIGL,
- W. ST. JOHN HARPER,

- LISBETH B. HUMPHREY,
- WILL H. LOW,
- LEON MORAN,
- PERCY MORAN,
- THOMAS MORAN,
- H. WINTHROP PEIRCE,
- A. M. TURNER,
- DOUGLAS VOLK,
- J. ALDEN WEIR,
- C. D. WELDON,
- DORA WHEELER.

These original paintings are truly representative of the peculiarity of each artist in his own ideal conception as well as in style of treatment. They have been acquired by purchase, and in order to ascertain the favor with which they would be viewed and received by a refined public taste, and as an additional inducement to encourage further endeavors of our best artists to contribute their best work for reproduction and publication, Messrs. Prang & Co. decided to offer four prizes, consisting of a first prize of \$1,000, second prize of \$500, third prize of \$300, and fourth prize of \$200, to be awarded to the four most popular designs.

The exhibition was held in New York, in November last, and the judgment of the dealers in Christmas cards in New York was invited to decide as to the popularity of the designs.

This mode of deciding a very delicate question seemed to promise by its simplicity the results to be desired, as the dealers, standing in close proximity to the purchaser, might well be considered good representatives of the popular feeling in regard to those tokens of friendship and good-will which custom has now elevated to a recognized institution at Christmas-tide.

The voting, attended by an unusual interest on the part of dealers, artists, and the press, resulted in the following awards :—

First Prize, to Design by C. D. Weldon.

Second Prize, to Design by Will H. Low.

Third Prize, to Design by Thomas Moran.

Fourth Prize, to Design by Frederick Dielman.

At the conclusion of the exhibition the designs were sent to Boston, where they were exhibited at the galleries of Messrs. Noyes & Blakeslee, which were filled every day by an appreciating and enthusiastic crowd of visitors. To ascertain the respective popularity of the various designs, an opportunity was given the visitors to vote on the most popular design (except the four designs having received prizes), the successful one to be reproduced for Christmas, 1885, as

“THE BOSTON CARD.”

The result was the designation of one of the designs by Miss L. B. Humphrey as the successful card by a considerable plurality of votes, — a result which happily coincided with the decision by the New York dealers, who gave the same design the highest number of votes next to the four successful ones.

It will be for the interest of visitors to give here a brief biographical and descriptive note of each of the successful artists and their designs.

FIRST PRIZE CARD DESIGN.

BY C. D. WELDON.

[Born in Ohio. Pupil of Walter Shirlaw, New York, and Munkacsy, Paris. First exhibited N. A. D., 1883. Member American Water-Color Society.]

A child's Christmas-eve dream. A lovely little child, dressed for sleep, sits on the carpet near a rich rug, gazing into the fire, from which dream-vapors rise and curl through the room and assume the fantastic shapes of fairies and spirits placing presents in the Christmas tree, while Santa Claus furiously drives his reindeer team, as he hastens to bring the little maid her holiday gifts. This picture is a singularly happy representation of a child's idea of Santa Claus.

SECOND PRIZE CARD DESIGN.

BY WILL H. LOW.

[Born in Albany, N. Y., 1853. Studied in Paris for five years with J. L. Gérôme and Carolus Duran. First exhibited N. A. D. Member Society of American Artists. Instructor in drawing from antique and from life in the Cooper Union School of Design for Women.]

The theme is the birth of the Saviour. The Virgin Mother is lying on the ground clasping the Child in her arms, while, standing over them, resting on the clouds (occupying the entire centre of the picture), is a group of angels, the central one singing from a scroll held in her hands, "*Gloria in Excelsis Deo, in Terra Pax,*" while the four other angels are blowing trumpets. This is a strong artistic conception, remarkably well executed.

THIRD PRIZE CARD DESIGN.

BY THOMAS MORAN, A. N. A.

[Born at Bolton, Lancashire, England, 1837. Came to America, 1844. First studied and practised wood-cutting in Philadelphia in 1862 and 1866. Went to Europe, where he studied the works of Turner and the old masters. A. N. A., Member of American Water-Color Society, New York Etching Club, British Society of Painter-Etchers, and of American Art Union.]

Christmas eve is illustrated by a mediæval city, over the cathedral spires of which hovers an angel, carrying a lighted torch, against a dark blue night sky. The color effect is strong and eminently characteristic of Mr. Moran's genius.

FOURTH PRIZE CARD DESIGN.

BY FREDERICK DIELMAN.

[Born in Maryland. Completed his studies at the Academy at Munich, under Prof. Dietz. He is now one of the Art Students' League, and a successful exhibitor here and abroad.]

This is a very striking design. Four children, each a separate and charming type of young innocence and beauty, look out on the spectators from a frame formed of holly. This picture is one of Dielman's best efforts and worthy of his genius.

DESIGN FOR "THE BOSTON CARD."

BY MISS LISBETH E. HUMPHREY.

This lady is well known by her excellent black and white illustrations in "Wide Awake" and other magazines, as well as by her very successful Christmas cards, two of which received prizes at the last Prize Exhibition of L. Prang & Co.

The design is illustrative entirely of the modern Christmas. There are three figures,—a young lady, a boy, and a little girl of two or three years of age. While all the figures are admirably drawn, the child in pose, coloring, and expression deserves to be recognized as, it were aptly called, an idyllic inspiration. Every spectator is delighted with it, from whatever point of view it is regarded,—as a poem of childhood or as a gem of art.

The two exhibitions—in New York and Boston—were characterized by an unusual interest on the part of the press, which accorded them the most favorable and encouraging criticism. A few extracts by leading papers are submitted as showing the estimation in which Messrs. Prang & Co.'s endeavors and their artistic results were viewed by the best art critics.

New York Tribune, Dec. 3, 1884.

It is due Mr. Prang to say that he has probably secured the best goods within his reach, and that they are, for the most part, of excellent workmanship. As compared with work in previous competitions, it is of no mean order.

New York Evening Mail and Express, Dec. 6, 1884.

No exhibition of competitive designs ever before proved so interesting.

New York Letter in Boston Sunday Herald, Dec. 7, 1884.

Prang & Co., your Boston fine-art publishers, have made quite a sensation here this week by their exhibition of original prize designs, by American artists of some—more or less—eminence, for Christmas cards.

Boston Daily Advertiser, Dec. 9, 1884.

Not much fault will be found with the judgment of the dealers who, acting as a jury, have awarded the prizes to Messrs. Weldon, Low, Moran, and Dielman; for theirs are not only the most striking designs from a popular point of view, but also the best in some other respects.

American Bookseller, Dec. 15, 1884.

Through Messrs. Prang & Co.'s kindness, the public have been allowed the privilege of viewing the prize exhibition of designs for Christmas cards. One goes prepared to see artistic designs well executed, but one is not prepared for the treat in store. The display far more than realizes the expectations. The exhibition possesses greater attractions and merit than ever before.