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treasure search

Figurine shows Art Deco style

BY NANCY AND FRANK BOOS
Special Writers

Dear Nancy and Frank:
This 14-inch high figurine has been in my husband's family approximately 50 years. The body and base are bronze and the face, hands and feet are ivory. The base is inscribed "A. Gory."

Janet,
Bloomfield Hills

Dear Janet:

What you have is a category of sculpture called chryselephantine (bronze and ivory), which was made very popular during the period in art called Art Deco. Actually, this type of sculpture became synonymous with Art Deco, even though the form was a copy of the ancient classical Greek sculptures done in gold and ivory and sometimes precious stones.

More often than not, an art movement is merely a revival of a previous movement or style. Not so with Art Deco, which has its own distinctive look.

Many believed the Art Deco movement to be a repudiation of the short-lived Art Nouveau movement that preceded it. Not true. Art Deco was a natural transition from Art Nouveau, which was considered by some to be too fancy, fussy and with too much superfluous ornamentation, and Modernism, which held the tenet that function should precede form. Art Deco was the bridge between these two concepts.

Deco moved away from Nouveau by eliminating much of the superfluous elements that weren't relevant to the intrinsic beauty of the design. This resulted in Art Deco being highly recognizable by its angularity and stylization, or representational treatment, of its subject matter, while still maintaining a certain playfulness. The artists of this period seemed to especially enjoy stylized women, flowers and fawns.

The name Art Deco doesn't have any special meaning. It merely came from the Exposition des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels Modernes that took place in Paris in 1925, where the work of the international designers in this style was displayed. Although most people think of the Art Deco period as covering the years between the World Wars, it actually reached its zenith at that exhibition.

Although most of the great artists of this period worked in Paris and Berlin, you'll be surprised to realize how many



Deco look: This figurine is in a sculpture category popular during the Art Deco period.

of those names you recognize: Louis Icart (magazine and fashion print artist), Asprey & Co. (London jewelers), Black, Starr & Frost (New York jewelers), Boucheron, Frederick Carder (founder of Steuben Glass), the Cartier family and Coco Chanel (what women doesn't know those names?), Erte (designer for the Folies Bergeres), Majja Grotell (head of the design department at Cranbrook Academy of Art), Carl Milles (head of sculpture at Cranbrook Academy of Art), Tiffany & Co. (which began as a stationer and dry goods store) and the Saarinen family (furniture, textile and architectural designers at Cranbrook Academy of Art), to name just a few.

Your piece is by the French artist, A. Gori (spelled with an I or a Y), and is entitled "Kimono." An illustration of it can be found in Harold Berman's book, "Bronzes, Sculptors and Founders," illustration 1879. Your figure is somewhat atypical of the more elaborate, high style Art Deco sculptures we've come to know. Also, it appears to have some condition problems on one arm and hand in that it appears discolored. In good condition, this piece would bring about \$1,400 to \$1,800 at an auction.

Nancy and Frank Boos are with the Frank H. Boos Gallery, an appraisal firm and auction house at 420 Enterprise Court in Bloomfield Hills.