

CHAPTER 3-2

FINE ARTS: ART



Figure 1. Floats made of foam present artistic figures with mosses for hair and other accents. Artwork and photograph by Minoru Takeda.

In Artwork

Mosses would seem to be a natural for art work (Saito 1973), but they are actually rather difficult to portray. I once helped run a workshop using mosses for water color subjects and tools. The seemingly delicate moss leaves and branches, pressed into water color paints, then onto paper, did little more than make a smudge at the hands of these beginning artists. And painting their delicate structure is no less of a challenge.

Beatrix Potter, of Peter Rabbit fame, rendered mosses in her beautiful watercolors (Edwards 1993).

Most recently, I have seen an advertisement for moss graffiti. The "artist" is experimenting with a formula for painting moss parts onto a building, wall, or even a coffee pot (!) instead of paint to serve as decoration. The creator

provides a recipe involving a blend of mosses, beer, and sugar that are then applied with a paintbrush. The promoter advises to visit your handiwork over the next few weeks to be sure it has ample water. The pictures provided, however, are an artist's rendition with real paint, as the moss artist is still perfecting the moss paint formula.

One Finnish artist, Barbro Eriksson, is creating a sculpture in which mosses will be used to fill in the design on a slab of rock, thus providing the relief (Figure 2).

Other artwork includes picture frames, decorations of bookmarks (Figure 3), and even wall hangings. Pressed, dried bryophytes are often used in framed artwork (Saito 1973), and I was privileged to receive a poem about mosses, framed in the same, from one of my students.

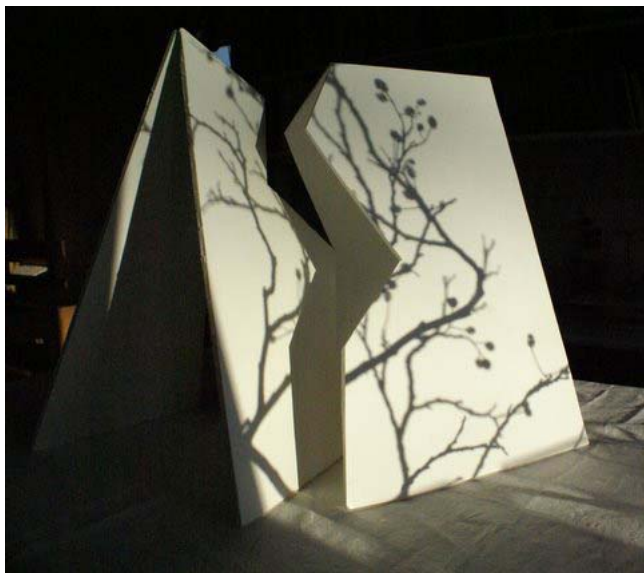


Figure 2. Model of sculpture that will become a living sculpture of mosses growing in the crevices that create the design. Artwork and photo by Barbro Eriksson.

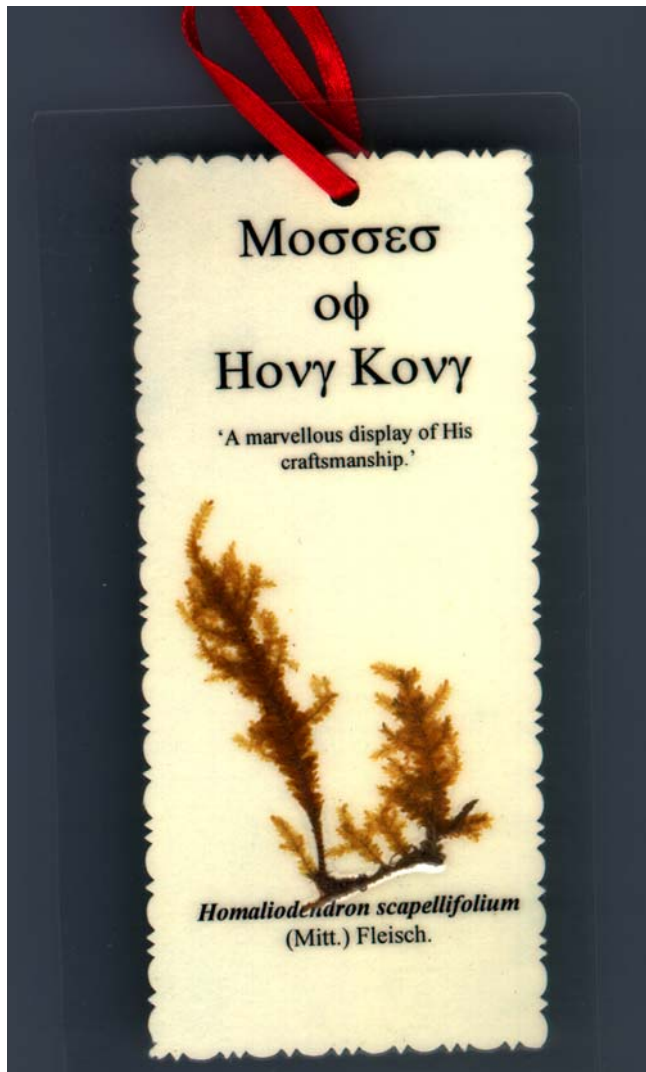


Figure 3. The moss *Homaliodendron scapellifolium* is used here to make a bookmark. Photo by Janice Glime.

Rarely does a moss receive such a place of honor as a coin, but in 1990, a species of *Polytrichum* decorated one side of the Finnish 50 penny coin, with the national animal, a brown bear (*Ursus arctos*), on the other (Hyvönen 1990; Figure 4). It would be nice to think the intention was to honor the moss, but in fact, it was the bear that was "honored" and the moss inclusion was really a product of language. In several Scandinavian languages, the word moss is affiliated with the word for bear, e.g. björnmossa, bjørnemose, and karhunsammal. Hyvönen speculated that the name of the bear may have been associated with the moss because bears sometimes bury their food under carpets of *Polytrichum commune* in wet forests. Linnaeus reported that bears gather *Polytrichum* to line their winter holes. However, it seems that bears now are not so discriminate, using the more common *Pleurozium schreberi* and *Hylocomium splendens*.



Figure 4. The Finnish 50 cent coin exhibits a bear on one side and the moss *Polytrichum* on the other. Photo by Jaakko Hyvönen.

Foam Novelties

Not surprisingly, the Japanese use bryophytes in their artwork. Minoru Takeda is a master at growing art pieces with bryophytes (Deguchi 2007; Figure 1, Figure 5). He has kindly contributed the many photographs that follow. Among these are foam figures that float on ponds (Figure 6 - Figure 8) or in glass dishes to decorate a table (Figure 9).



Figure 5. Floats and mascots with moss highlights, usually forming hair. Artwork and photo by Minoru Takeda.



Figure 6. Moss floats on a pond in Japan. Artwork and photo by Minoru Takeda.



Figure 7. Moss floats on a pond in Japan. Artwork and photo by Minoru Takeda.



Figure 8. Moss floats on a pond in Japan. Artwork and photo by Minoru Takeda.



Figure 9. Japanese moss float decoration. Artwork and photo by Minoru Takeda.

The use of bryophytes in artwork, particularly moss pots and ceramic designs (Figure 10 - Figure 12), is popular enough that there are classes where students of all ages learn the art (Figure 13 - Figure 15). Even streets may be decorated with this unusual form of art (Figure 16).



Figure 10. Float with moss as hair. Artwork and photo by Minoru Takeda.



Figure 11. Float with moss. Artwork and photo by Minoru Takeda.



Figure 12. Japanese mascot with *Sphagnum* as hair. Artwork and photo by Minoru Takeda.



Figure 13. Students of all ages learning how to create moss art in Japan. Photo by Minoru Takeda.



Figure 14. A moss art teacher demonstrates how to make moss pots. Photo by Minoru Takeda.



Figure 15. Students complete their moss pots with *Sphagnum* as a bed. Photo by Minoru Takeda.



Figure 16. Mascot with moss as hair. Artwork and photo by Minoru Takeda.

Corpus Christi Festival

In Béjar, Salamanca, Spain, mosses are a major part of the Corpus Christi celebration (Martínez Abaigar & Núñez Olivera 2001). The border between the Moslem and Christian kingdoms had been under siege for more than 300 years. According to the legend of the Moss Men, Christians were hidden in the mountains at El Castañar, 3 km from the present town of Béjar. On the day of the feast of St. Marina of Bitinia, the Christians gathered to celebrate mass at La Centenna. After the ceremony, they covered their clothes and weapons with mosses from nearby stones. So camouflaged, they went to the Moslem fortress and lay on the walls and rocks. When the gates opened at dawn, they were able to enter and surprise the watchtowers. In a day-long struggle, the Christians took the streets one-by-one. Thus, on the ninth Sunday after Easter each year the event is celebrated with Moss Men as part of the Corpus Christi festival. Six Moss Men volunteers from the region of Béjar each year use more than 200 m² of moss made into moss plates, including such common ones as *Hypnum cupressiforme* (Figure 17), *Antitrichia californica* (Figure 18), *A. curtispindula*, and *Homalothecium sericeum*. They use these plates to dress themselves in commemoration of this historic event (Figure 19 - Figure 24). Fortunately, these moss plates are kept at the Convent of San Francisco, and only damaged parts need be replaced by new mosses each year.



Figure 17. *Hypnum cupressiforme*, one of the mosses used in commemorative dress in the Corpus Christi festivity. Photo by Michael Lüth.



Figure 18. *Antitrichia californica*, one of the mosses used in commemorative dress in the Corpus Christi festivity. Photo by Michael Lüth.



Figure 19. Men being dressed in mosses for the Corpus Christi Festival. Photo by Eloy Diaz-Redondo.



Figure 22. Corpus Christi celebrators surround the "monstrance," a sacred vessel in which the consecrated host is displayed. Photo by Eloy Diaz-Redondo.



Figure 20. Participants of the Corpus Christi Festival clothed in mosses. Photo by Eloy Diaz-Redondo.



Figure 23. Moss Men with one of the dignitaries during the Corpus Christi celebration. Photo by Eloy Diaz-Redondo.



Figure 21. Parade of Moss Men in the Corpus Christi celebration. Photo by Eloy Diaz-Redondo.



Figure 24. Close view of one of the Moss Men in the Corpus Christi celebration. Photo by Eloy Diaz-Redondo.

Summary

Artists have used bryophytes in framing, accenting relief in sculptures, and providing texture. Even a Finnish coin sports a moss. The Japanese use them to simulate hair and other adornments on foam statues and floats.

The Corpus Christi Festival in Béjar, Salamanca, Spain celebrates the capture of the Moslem fortress by donning sheets of moss and parading through town.

Acknowledgments

Inkeri Ahonen helped me obtain the picture and information from the sculptor, Barbro Eriksson.

Hironori Deguchi provided me with the pictures of artwork from Minoru Takeda.

Javier Martínez-Abaigar helped me with information regarding the Corpus Christi Festival and to obtain the pictures and permission for their use.

Literature Cited

- Deguchi, H. 2007. Moss Use. Accessed on 27 July 2007 at <<http://www.digital-museum.hiroshima-u.ac.jp/~museum/plant/index.php?%A5%B3%A5%B1%A4%CE%CD%F8%CD%D1%20Use%20of%20bryophytes%20in%20Japan>>.
- Edwards, S. R. 1993. Mosses in English Literature, Supplement one. *Bull. Bryol.* 61: 30-31.
- Hyvönen, J. 1990. Bryophyte illustrated on a coin. *Bryologist* 93: 256.
- Martínez Abaigar, J. and Núñez Olivera, E. 2001. The legend and procession of the Moss Men from Béjar (Salamanca, Spain). *J. Bryol.* 23: 264-265.
- Saito, K. 1973. Framed art work with mosses. *Proc. Bryol. Soc. Jap.* 1: 36-37.