



Sons of Norway Information Banks

#207: ROSEMALING

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HISTORY

Rosemaling, or rose painting, is a term that covers a wide variety of decorative painting styles found throughout Norway. Rosemaling developed in Norway around the 1700s when travelers to southern Europe returned with paintings and painting materials not widely available in the north. Early rosemaling combined several contemporary European styles but eventually foreign design elements evolved into uniquely Norwegian creations. Soon rosemaling could be found on walls, ceilings, furniture and household items like ale bowls, caskets, jugs and chests. Over time, certain styles evolved in particular regions of Norway, especially in the southern part of the country.

By the 1800s, a few regions—Gudbrandsdalen, Hallingdal and Telemark—began to stand out for their artistry. Style differences became so obvious that the origin of each rosemaled piece often could be identified on sight. Styles sometimes overlapped as artists moved from one district to another, and a few painters ventured from floral motifs to people, landscapes, biblical scenes and animals.

As with other Norwegian arts and crafts, rosemaling traveled to America with emigrants in the mid-1800s. But when American furniture styles and trends in home decor changed, the traditional art form began to disappear. It remained somewhat dormant in the United States and Canada until resurrected by Norwegian-American descendants in the 1950s. It has grown since that time to become a treasured form of ethnic expression.

COLORS AND METHODS

There is hardly a color or a combination of colors that has not been used in rosemaling at some time somewhere in Norway. The most common background colors are blues or reds. Designs are usually in red or yellow, green, white or blue.

Often rosemalers put more than one color on the brush and execute a long stroke which semi-blends these colors, adding spontaneity and liveliness to the design. Black, white and sometimes yellow lines and accents are used to set off colors and designs. Proficiency of brush stroke, pleasing blend and match of colors, balance of composition and overall impression of design reveal the painter's level of skill and artistry.



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POPULAR PAINTING STYLES

For Americans and Canadians of Norwegian descent, rosemaling has been an extraordinarily popular way to demonstrate their heritage. Most of today's painters build on the floral and vine motifs of Telemark and Hallingdal styles. Many have brought the art to a state of perfection, ranking them among the finest rose painters ever.



The **Telemark** style is recognized by its graceful, elongated leaf forms and dainty flowers. The basic pattern consists of root, main stem, broad C-shaped central form and flowers on long, graceful stems. Leaves and stems swirl and curve out in any direction from the root in the center. White and/or black outlines accent the clean shapes and organic design.

By: Judy Kjenstad



The style of **Os** often employs cubes, squares and other geometric patterns as design elements. The colors tend to be bright and unblended, with veins a distinctive detail in the leaves.

By: Nancy Schmidt



The **Hallingdal** style is famed for its colors. Red and yellow blaze in contrast to each other; unconventional shades are matched in clashing, but exciting combinations, showing great artistry and imagination. Real roses bloom in Hallingdal painting, bold and vigorous, with no need for outlining or other detail work.

By: Judy Kjenstad & Shirley Evenstad



Rosemaling from **Gudbrandsdal** calls woodcarving to mind with its spiraling acanthus scrolls. Subtle shading gives some designs a three-dimensional effect.

Photo: Vesterheim Norwegian-American Museum, Decorah, IA, Artist unknown



The **Rogaland** style emphasizes flowers over scrolls. Stylized tulips, roses and other flowers are common elements, and designs are usually symmetrical and presented on dark backgrounds.

By: Nancy Schmidt



Valdres-style rosemaling uses soft, simple colors and realistic-looking flowers.

Photo: Vesterheim Norwegian-American Museum, Decorah, IA, By either Torstein Gubrandsen or Helge Olsen Kvale



LEARNING MORE

You can learn more about rosemaling and try it yourself through Sons of Norway's Cultural Skills Program, or by checking out a rosemaling video from the media lending library. You can find out more about both of these member benefits at www.sonsofnorway.com.