Hands On Learning
with Reading Museum Service

ORNAMENTS FROM SCANDINAVIA G66

Painted horse and peace bird





The Painted horse and Peace bird both come form Mora. Mora is an area in the Dalecarlia Region of Sweden, which is highlighted on this map. Mora is situated on the edges of the picturesque lake Siljan, pictured on the right.



Many old traditions have been kept alive in Mora, such as woodcarving, basket weaving and wearing traditional folk costume. Both of the objects from Mora have been beautifully carved from wood.

The painted horse has become the symbol of Dalecarlia and sometimes for the whole of Sweden. These little horses were originally made as toys for children but have become so well-known that they are more often sold to tourists in gift shops. The horse is usually painted a bright colour and decorated in a style called *kurbits*. The wood comes from the pine forests around Lake Siljan where only the best trees are selected. The sharp angles on the neck and face are made using a knife or a finger plane (pictured on the right). Violin and toy makers use these tiny planes for intricate woodwork and it is a typical Scandinavian style of carving. The wood is seldom sanded or rounded giving a distinctive and easily identifiable look. The technique is called 'flat-plane'.







But you would need more than a finger plane to make the horse shown in the picture on the left! This horse is actually made of concrete and is the largest Dalecarlian Horse in the world. It is located in the Avesta area of the Dalecarlia Region of Sweden.



Look at the underneath of the peace bird and you will see the marks left from the carving process. The beautiful wings and tail of the bird are made from thin strips of wood, which have been carefully carved to a point and then inserted into the body.

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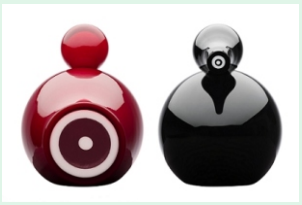
Glass bird



The glass bird comes from Sweden, although the maker is unknown. It has the simple, sharp lines that are typical of the uncomplicated style of Scandinavian design. The style is known as minimalism. Other examples are shown on the right:





The Winter months in Scandinavia are long and dark with only a few hours of sunlight each day. Decorative glassware is often strategically placed around the home to catch the light, helping to brighten the room.



There are several well-known manufacturers of glassware in Scandinavia including iittala in Finland and Orrefors in Sweden. An iittala vase is shown on the left.

Straw reindeer



Reindeer were traditionally central to the lives of the Sámi people living in the most northern areas of Scandinavia.

The Sámi were originally reindeer herders and relied on the animal for meat, clothing and shelter. Only a small number of people still live in this way, as there have been great changes to the Sámi way of life in recent decades. There is a picture of a Sámi girl on the right.

Today reindeer made from straw are sold all over Scandinavia, particularly at Christmas time. They can be used as decorations in the home. Other Christmassy things are also made, such as little animals and stars.





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Cockerels







The interesting iron hook is made in the shape of a cockerel. There is a picture of a real cockerel above on the right. The hook is made from wrought iron and has been burnished, which means that it has been rubbed until it appears polished. It comes from Norway.

The painted wooden cockerel comes from Gastrikland in the east of Sweden. (see the map on the right).



The cockerel is an important animal in ancient Scandinavian folklore. He screeches out a warning of approaching evil or danger and so is considered a symbol of vigilance. The cockerel is also seen as the herald of the dawn, symbolising light winning over the darkness when the sun rises in the morning.

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Seal carved from a walrus tusk



Walruses live in the arctic and sub-arctic regions of the northern hemisphere. This means that they can be found in areas such as Alaska, Canada, Greenland, Iceland, Siberia and the northern parts of Scandinavia.

It is easy to recognise a walrus from its long, white tusks.

But these tusks led to the mass hunting of walruses in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The ivory tusks were popular for making ornaments, piano keys, billiard balls and jewellery amongst many other things. Walrus numbers plummeted as the animal was hunted to near extinction. The hunting of walrus for ivory is now illegal and numbers have steadily risen.



However, local indigenous communities are still allowed to hunt the walrus as they have a great respect for the animal and it has great importance to their society. The walrus provides meat for food, blubber for fuel, skin for clothing and shelter and tusks and bones for tools and producing art work. The tusk on the right is engraved with a polar bear hunting walruses and was made in the 1940s.



This seal is carved from walrus tusk and comes from Norway. It was probably made by indigenous people living in this arctic region.



Walruses are facing another problem today - climate change. Walruses spend a great deal of time in the water searching for food and then use their tusks to hang on to the ice when they need to breath (see the picture on the right). They also use their tusks to haul their heavy bodies onto moving ice packs in the sea, which they prefer to land. However, these ice packs are disappearing as temperatures increase and the ice recedes.