

the art of the craft

Framing the Scene

While paintings may always be the real stars of the show, Jerry Solomon Enterprises makes sure their presentational companions are just as artful By Victoria Charters

So you've just bought a great painting that needs a fitting frame. Or maybe you've got a tricky frame restoration job that you wouldn't trust to just anyone. Where to go?

"If nobody else can do it, bring it to Jerry Solomon," pronounces Jerry Solomon, owner of acclaimed frame-making operation and one of Los Angeles' best kept secrets, Jerry Solomon Enterprises.

Picture framing has been the Solomon family business since the turn of the century, beginning with Solomon's grandfather in Europe and continuing across the Atlantic to Chicago with his father and uncles. Solomon inherited his family's passion for framing. "Since I was a little boy, I used to go down to the factory with my father. That was my biggest thrill and, as I learned more, my appetite grew," he says. Today Jerry is delighted that his son Fred has also chosen to join him in his vocation.



The regilding of leaves is a Solomon forte. The process involves the very delicate use of a camel hair brush. Image courtesy Jerry Solomon Enterprises.



Solomon with his portfolio. Photo by Jim McHugh.

Solomon's official work as a framer started when he moved to Los Angeles in 1956. "It was the beginning of a time when a lot of Impressionist collections were being formed in the Southern California area. I used to go to Edward G. Robinson's house in the evenings to hang pictures—he used to call me the bear because when I took off my shirt I was kind of hairy," he laughs. "I worked on the collections of Cary Grant, Billy Wilder, Swifty Lazar and Frank Sinatra."

Shortly after opening his own framing business, Art Services, in 1964, Solomon and associate Ken Tyler started Gemini Gallery, the self-publishing artists' workshop, on Melrose. At Gemini, the artists do all of the drawing or carving directly onto the printing elements to create their limited edition prints and sculp-

tures. It was here in 1965 that Jerry first began framing for David Hockney; to this day, he handles all Hockney framing worldwide.

Solomon also frames many other Gemini artists, including Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, John Baldessari and Josef Albers. "While working with Gemini, it became quite apparent that a total new look in contemporary framing was necessary. That's when we developed the lucite box; we developed welded aluminum framing, we developed the natural hardwoods while everyone else was still doing pre-finished moldings. The contemporary frames really took off."

In addition to handling contemporary works, Solomon's workshop also creates authentic reproductions of French, Italian or Spanish period pieces. "We handle restoration of oil paintings and works on paper. We do a lot of re-gilding," he says, noting that it "is a very exacting process; it's done by lifting the leaves with a camel hair brush, because you can't touch it or it will disintegrate."

Solomon continues, "Another item which most people are not aware of



Hand carving. Image courtesy Jerry Solomon Enterprises.



Burnishing with an agate stone. Image courtesy Jerry Solomon Enterprises.

is that we resize frames. In other words, if there's an antique frame and it's great for a painting, but it's too small, we resize it by cutting it apart and adding sections and making it bigger. Or the reverse—if it needs to be reduced in size, we do that."

Solomon's extensive gallery client list includes art world heavyweights Gagosian, Margo Leavin, Shoshana Wayne, Marian Goodman, Cambridge Art, Louis Stern Fine Arts, and Martin Lawrence. His hospitality division handles framing for The Four Seasons Resorts, MGM Grand Resorts and Ritz Carlton Resorts, among many others.

And with big names often come raised stakes—high profile jobs keep Solomon on his toes. "I think the most valuable painting we framed was an original Rembrandt for the Norton Simon Museum," he recalls. "They came over with armed guards and we had the frame [ready] and they stood by while we put the painting into the frame with gloved hands." ■