



Low Art Tile

Richard Pennington

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This book tells the story of a striking achievement in the last quarter of the 19th century by the largely forgotten Low Art Tile Company. The author first envisioned a simple picture book showcasing the lovely tiles, but as he researched his subject he was struck by the richness of the Low adventure. One short biography of Low stated that "few men had wider and more intimate friendships among American artists than he." This group included painters William Morris Hunt, Elihu Vedder, Childe Hassam and various members of New York's Tile Club. Sculptor William Rimmer was Low's mentor, and writers Sylvester Baxter and Francis Davis Millet helped write his biography. The most important and perhaps the most gifted artist, Englishman Arthur Osborne, was hired by Low in 1878 to model his clay. During the decades that this enigmatic genius labored for Low it seems he seldom rested, creating hundreds of beautiful designs that graced fireplace surrounds, soda fountains, cast iron stoves and a multitude of other products. The story is most often told in the words of the writers of the era, and when possible, contemporary photographs provide a visual explanation of a time when artistic expression reached a new zenith, particularly in the fields of painting, architecture and the decorative arts. The Low Art Tile company pioneered the use of quality photography to market its products, and this book has the complete contents of its tile, soda fountain, and "Plastic Sketches" catalogues. The latter sketches were Osborne's most heralded creations, forty-seven large tiles that were framed and hung on walls like oil paintings. This book begins with Low's birth in 1835 and ends in the 1950's when an enormous cache of Low's tiles was discovered in a Cambridge warehouse, all in perfect condition and crated in boxes unopened for more than half a century.

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