

## Keeping Cool: Fans from the Art Gallery & Museum's collection

### A History of the Fan

A fan can be functional, used in ceremonies, a fashion statement or a means for advertising.

A type of fan was used in ancient Roman, Greek, Egyptian and Chinese cultures. Some of the earliest examples include two fans discovered in Tutankhamen's tomb when it was excavated in 1922. These early fans were single shapes fixed to a handle.

The first European country to produce fans was Italy in about 1500. This was in Venice and was a result of the city being a major trading centre for the Orient to the rest of Europe.

As trade increased during the 16<sup>th</sup> century fans grew in popularity as a fashionable commodity. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century The Guild of Fan Makers was established thus acknowledging its professional status. A century later the Worshipful Company of Fan Makers formed in 1709.

Until the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century fans continued to be very much a luxury item, often made from some of the most expensive materials and jewels. By the latter part of the 17<sup>th</sup> century the range of fans was increasing and France overtook Italy as the main centre for fan production.

By the 18<sup>th</sup> century most countries were making fans of some kind and fan painting had become a recognised craft. Fans were now an essential fashion accessory and styles echoed other trends in fashionable dress.

A decline in fan use began in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and they became more of an advertising tool rather than a fashion accessory. However, their popularity continues in Spain, where they became part of the Spanish culture, and in hot climates for keeping cool.

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### Materials

Throughout their history fans have been made from a diverse range of materials.

Some of the earliest Egyptian and Chinese fans were made of feathers. The peacock feather was popular because of its eye motif which was seen as a protective symbol.

Colourful feathers were used for fans in the third quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. During the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the neutral tones of ostrich feathers mounted on mother of pearl, ivory or tortoiseshell echoed the softer tones of their contemporary dress. 1920s fashions demanded a single ostrich plume dyed to match dress colours.

Leaves of folding fans have been made of fine animal skins (including that of unborn lambs and often referred to as 'chicken skin'), vellum, paper, lace, silk and other textiles. Vellum and 'chicken skin' were used mainly during the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries after which paper increased in popularity. These leaves were painted, the first printed fan dates to the 1720s.

Tortoiseshell, ivory, bone, mother of pearl, metal and wood have all been used as guards and sticks. All either highly decorative: jewelled, carved, pierced, gilded, lacquered, painted, printed or simply left plain.

Artificial materials have been used too. Celluloid, one of the earliest plastics was being used to imitate tortoiseshell during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

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### Styles

The most common styles of fan are folding, brisé, cockade or a simple rigid shape on a handle.

A folding fan is made from a set of sticks with a pleated leaf. The two outer sticks are described as guards and they are frequently decorated. The guards and sticks are held together at the base with a rivet.

Brisé fans are made from separate sticks which are linked together at the top with ribbon and the base is fixed in the same way as a folding fan.

Cockade fans have a folding leaf which is designed to open into a full circle and it closes into a single guard.

Decorative styles vary according to country of origin and changing taste in dress.

Painted scenes, landscapes and vignettes inspired by religious and mythological subject matter ran parallel to contemporary developments in the fine and decorative arts, particularly during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. These earlier styles were revived again in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Other influences include historical and cultural events.

The excavations of Herculaneum and Pompeii in Italy during the 18<sup>th</sup> century encouraged a fascination with classical motifs. Wealthy young men travelled to see the sites and souvenir fans were available for them to purchase for their female relatives.

The French Revolution provided a source for printed fans, sometimes produced to make a political statement.

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### Communication

From the sixteenth century onwards the fan was used in fashionable society as a means of communication. The messages conveyed on the whole were those of love. This form of sign language was published in contemporary etiquette books and magazines. The Original Fanology or Ladies' Conversation Fan which had been created by Charles Francis Badini, was published by William Cock in London in 1797. It contained details on how to hold complete conversations through simple movements of a fan.

Both men and women carried fans and understood the different messages.

Some of the most common are listed below.

Placing your fan near your heart = I love you

A closed fan resting on the right eye = When can I see you

A half closed fan pressed to the lips = You may kiss me

Touching the tip of the fan with a finger = I wish to speak to you

Letting the fan rest on the right cheek = Yes

Letting the fan rest on the left cheek = No

Dropping the fan = We will be friends

Fanning slowly = I am married

Fanning quickly = I am engaged

Carrying a open fan in the left hand = come and talk to me

Twirling the fan in the right hand = I love another

Twirling the fan in the left hand = We are being watched

Shutting a fully open fan slowly = I promise to marry you

Drawing the fan across the eyes = I am sorry

To open a fan wide = Wait for me

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### Cheltenham Art Gallery & Museum's Fan Collection



#### **Brisé fan, about 1830-40**

Wooden lacquered guards and sticks.

Chinese, made for export to Europe.

Length: 200 mm    Accession No.: 1913.68.67



#### **Brisé fan, about 1810-20**

Carved and pierced ivory.

Chinese, made for export to Europe

L160 mm    Accession No.: 1936.73



#### **Brisé fan, about 1850-70**

Solid guards with painted decoration, pierced and carved tortoiseshell sticks.

Silk tasselled loops for carrying were often added to fans of about this date. Original box, lacquered wood, lined with silk, the lid has painted motifs.



L193 mm    Accession No.: 1938.310



#### **Fan, 1750s**

Carved and painted ivory guards with tortoiseshell tips, carved, painted and gilt sticks.



Single leaf of 'chicken skin' painted on both sides. The scene depicts a mythological scene based on the Marriage of Atlanta.

Length: 290 mm    Accession No.: 1939.195



#### **Brisé fan, about 1810-20**

Carved tortoiseshell.

Chinese, made for export to Europe.

L185 mm    Accession No.: 1939.291

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### Fan, about 1840-50

Mother of pearl pierced and carved guards, pierced sticks with silver and gold foil

Double leaf with one side of silk and metal sequins, painted in an Italian style landscape the other paper imitating fine skin painted with floral garlands

Length: 265 mm    Accession No.: 1939.296



### Brisé fan, 1860s

Carved mother of pearl guards, ivory sticks.

This is actually a dance card shaped like a fan. It has a tiny pencil attached and would have been used by a woman at a ball to note who had asked her for each of the various dances.

Length: 85 mm    Accession No.: 1939.297.2



### Brisé fan, about 1830-40

Carved ivory.

The central medallion may have been left blank for the owner's initials to be added. Chinese, made for export to Europe

Length: 190 mm    Accession No.: 1940.315.2



### Brisé fan, about 1830-40

Lacquered wooden guards and sticks, painted decoration, the same decoration is on both sides.

Chinese, made for export to Europe

Length: 200 mm    Accession No.: 1943.64.7



### Fan, about 1840

Bone guards and sticks. Paper leaf

The scene is printed and hand coloured, the reverse is of gold embossed paper.

Length: 265 mm    Accession No.: 1950.30



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### Fan, 1860-1870

Carved bone guards and sticks. Painted silk leaf.

This fan is a good example of the fine quality of painting on fans during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Length: 265 mm    Accession No.: 1950.33



### Cockade fan, 1870s

Wooden handle with marquetry decoration.

Waxed paper leaf, the reverse is inscribed 'Ricardo'. Italian, made as a souvenir

Length: 245 mm    Accession No.: 1950.34



### The New Dance Fan, 1796

Wooden guards and sticks. Printed leaf.

The fan has details for the fashionable music and dance steps for 1796 which are inspired by current topics: The Guillotine, The Fall of Robespierre, and some more light-hearted: We'll all be jolly together.

Length: 250 mm    Accession No.: 1954.18

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### Fan, about 1840-50

Mother of pearl guards and sticks with foil inlay.

Double paper leaf, with a hand coloured print depicting a rural scene on one side and a painted landscape on the reverse. The style of the fan suggests it is French.

Length: 265 mm    Accession No.: 1954.45.1



### Fan, about 1900

Wooden guards and sticks with metallic insertions. Silk and gauze leaf embroidered with sequins.

Length: 240 mm    Accession No.: 1954.45.2



### Brisé fan, about 1820-30

Metal filigree and cloisonné enamelled guards and sticks.

Portuguese, probably made in Macao, off the coast of China.

Length: 190 mm    Accession No.: 1954.61



### Fan, about 1870-1880

Mother of pearl guards and sticks. Male ostrich feathers

Length: 279 mm    Accession No.: 1956.8.5



### Fan, about 1700

Painted ivory guards and sticks.

Double leaf, the scene is painted in gouache on a fine skin and the flowers on paper. The scene depicts the goddess Diana in her bath surprised by the prince Acteon who she turned into a stag as punishment for his intrusion.

Length: 260 mm    Accession No.: 1958.39



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### Fan, about 1670

Bone guards and sticks, the guards have tortoiseshell inserts.

Paper leaf painted on both sides



Length: 255 mm    Accession No.: 1959.30.13



### Fan, about 1880-1900

Celluloid guards and sticks. Leaf made of feathers, with painted detail

Length: 210 mm    Accession No.: 1962.73



### Fan, about 1810

Mother of pearl guards and sticks decorated with cut steel sequins. Net leaf embroidered with cut steel sequins and gold fabric.

Probably English

Length: 163 mm    Accession No.: 1962.80



### Fan, about 1890-1905

Celluloid guards and sticks made to imitate tortoiseshell. Leaf made of feathers, mainly pheasant.

Length: 300 mm    Accession No.: 1966.45



### Brisé fan, 1860-1879

Wooden guards and sticks, hand painted on both sides, pansies on the reverse.

This type of fan was often made as a souvenir or purchased plain and decorated at home.

Length: 235 mm    Accession No.: 1968.102.2

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### Fan, about 1860-80

Bone guards and sticks. Satin leaf covered in lace

Length: 285 mm    Accession No.: 1974.18



### Fan, about 1860-79

Fretted bone guards and sticks. Satin leaf with painted decoration

Length: 245 mm    Accession No.: 1975.172.2



### Brisé fan, about 1850-60

Pierced bone.

Chinese, made for export to Europe. Fans such as this example were described as tea-chest fans because they were packed and sent with tea from China, they rarely have guards.

Length: 190 mm    Accession No.: 1975.176



### Fan, about 1880-90

Wooden guards and sticks. Gauze and lace leaf with painted decoration

Length: 350 mm    Accession No.: 1983.143.1



### Brisé Fan, about 1810

Carved and pierced ivory guards, carved ivory sticks.

Chinese, made for export to Europe.

Length: 193 mm    Accession No.: 1998.29



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### Fan, 1900-1920

Tortoiseshell sticks. Female ostrich feathers

Length: 455 mm    Accession No.: 1999.64



### Brisé fan, about 1800

Wooden lacquered guards and sticks with gilt decoration typical of fans made for export.

Chinese

Length: 188 mm    Accession No.: 1999.65



### Fan, about 1740

Ivory guards and sticks. Painted paper leaf.

Length: 275 mm    Accession No.: 2003.102

### Brisé Fan, about 1815

Pierced and carved ivory, tips decorated with painted and applied fabric motifs.

European.

Length: 170 mm    Accession No.: 2003.113