

CHAPTER 3-2

FINE ARTS: ART

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Figure 1. Floats made of foam present artistic figures with mosses for hair and other accents. Artwork and photograph courtesy of Minoru Takeda.

In Artwork

Mosses would seem to be a natural for art work (Saito 1973), but they are actually rather difficult to portray. I once helped run a workshop using mosses for water color subjects and tools. The seemingly delicate moss leaves and branches, pressed into water color paints, then onto paper, did little more than make a smudge at the hands of these beginning artists. And painting their delicate structure is no less of a challenge.

Beatrix Potter, of Peter Rabbit fame, rendered mosses in her beautiful watercolors (Edwards 1993).

Most recently, I have seen an advertisement for moss graffiti. The "artist" is experimenting with a formula for painting moss parts onto a building, wall, or even a coffee pot (!) instead of paint to serve as decoration. The creator

provides a recipe involving a blend of mosses, beer, and sugar that are then applied with a paintbrush. The promoter advises to visit your handiwork over the next few weeks to be sure it has ample water. The pictures provided, however, are an artist's rendition with real paint, as the moss artist is still perfecting the moss paint formula.

One Finnish artist, Barbro Eriksson, is creating a sculpture in which mosses will be used to fill in the design on a slab of rock, thus providing the relief (Figure 2).

Other artwork includes picture frames, decorations of bookmarks (Figure 3), and even wall hangings. Pressed, dried bryophytes are often used in framed artwork (Saito 1973), and I was privileged to receive a poem about mosses, framed in the same, from one of my students.

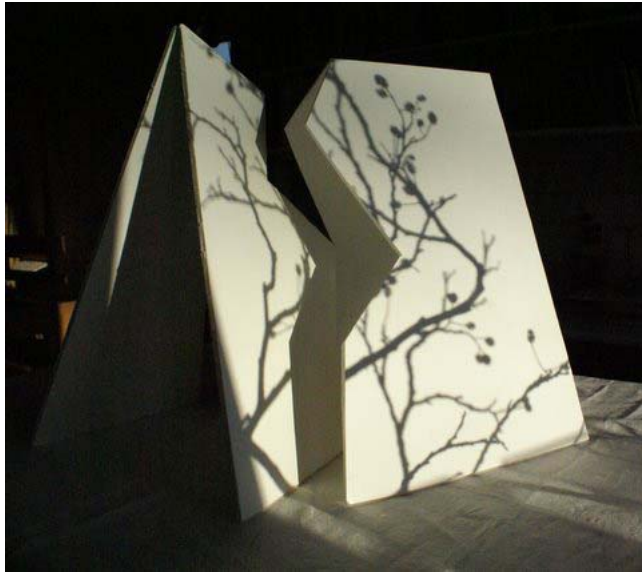


Figure 2. Model of sculpture that will become a living sculpture of mosses growing in the crevices that create the design. Artwork and photo courtesy of Barbro Eriksson.

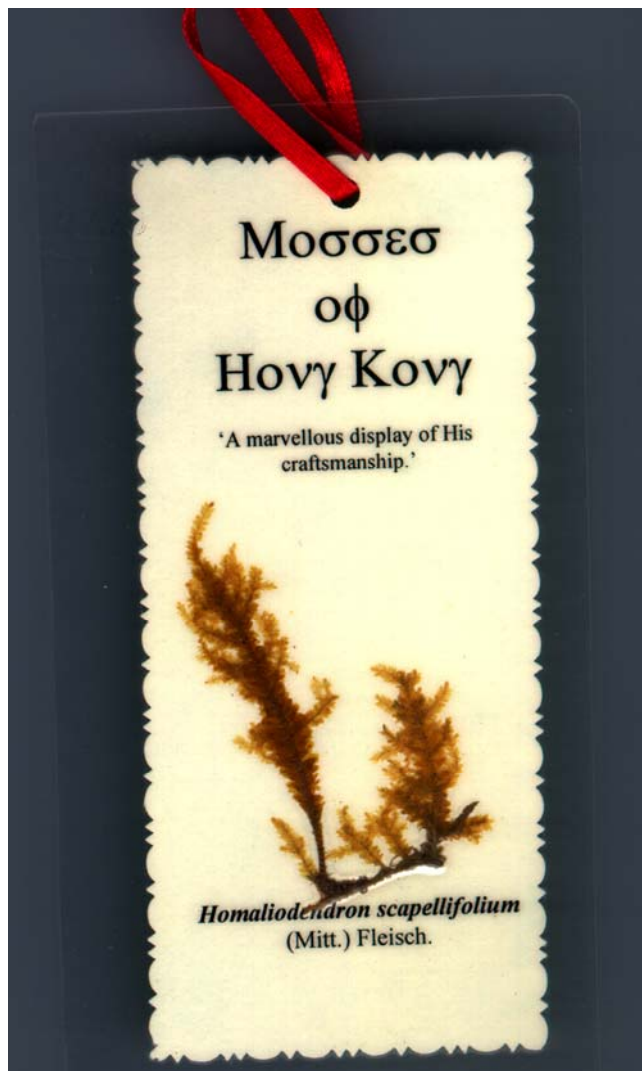


Figure 3. The moss *Homaliodendron scapellifolium* is used here to make a bookmark. Photo by Janice Glime.

Rarely does a moss receive such a place of honor as a coin, but in 1990, a species of *Polytrichum* decorated one side of the Finnish 50 penny coin, with the national animal, a brown bear (*Ursus arctos*), on the other (Hyvönen 1990; Figure 4). It would be nice to think the intention was to honor the moss, but in fact, it was the bear that was "honored" and the moss inclusion was really a product of language. In several Scandinavian languages, the word moss is affiliated with the word for bear, e.g. björnmossa, bjørnemose, and karhunsammal. Hyvönen speculated that the name of the bear may have been associated with the moss because bears sometimes bury their food under carpets of *Polytrichum commune* (Figure 5) in wet forests. Linnaeus reported that bears gather *Polytrichum* to line their winter holes. However, it seems that bears now are not so discriminate, using the more common *Pleurozium schreberi* (Figure 6) and *Hylocomium splendens* (Figure 7).



Figure 4. The Finnish 50 cent coin exhibits a bear on one side and the moss *Polytrichum* on the other. Photo courtesy of Jaakko Hyvönen.



Figure 5. *Polytrichum commune*, a model for the image on the 50 cent Finnish coin. Photo by Christopher Tracey through Creative Commons.



Figure 6. *Pleurozium schreberi*, a moss used by bears to line their beds. Photo by Janice Glime.



Figure 7. *Hylocomium splendens* on spruce forest floor, a moss used by bears to line their beds. Photo by Janice Glime.

Foam Novelties

Not surprisingly, the Japanese use bryophytes in their artwork. Minoru Takeda is a master at growing art pieces with bryophytes (Deguchi 2007; Figure 1, Figure 8). He has kindly contributed the many photographs that follow. Among these are foam figures that float on ponds (Figure 9 - Figure 11) or in glass dishes to decorate a table (Figure 12).



Figure 8. Floats and mascots with moss highlights, usually forming hair. Artwork and photo courtesy of Minoru Takeda.



Figure 9. Moss floats on a pond in Japan. Artwork and photo courtesy of Minoru Takeda.



Figure 10. Moss floats on a pond in Japan. Artwork and photo courtesy of Minoru Takeda.



Figure 11. Moss floats on a pond in Japan. Artwork and photo courtesy of Minoru Takeda.



Figure 12. Japanese moss float decoration. Artwork and photo courtesy of Minoru Takeda.

The use of bryophytes in artwork, particularly moss pots and ceramic designs (Figure 13 - Figure 15), is popular enough that there are classes where students of all ages learn the art (Figure 16 - Figure 18). Even streets may be decorated with this unusual form of art (Figure 19).



Figure 13. Float with moss as hair. Artwork and photo courtesy of Minoru Takeda.



Figure 14. Float with moss. Artwork and photo courtesy of Minoru Takeda.



Figure 15. Japanese mascot with *Sphagnum* as hair. Artwork and photo courtesy of Minoru Takeda.



Figure 16. Students of all ages learning how to create moss art in Japan. Photo courtesy of Minoru Takeda.



Figure 17. A moss art teacher demonstrates how to make moss pots. Photo courtesy of Minoru Takeda.



Figure 18. Students complete their moss pots with *Sphagnum* as a bed. Photo courtesy of Minoru Takeda.



Figure 19. Mascot with moss as hair. Artwork and photo courtesy of Minoru Takeda.



Figure 20. Mascot *Racomitrium japonicum* "hair." Photo courtesy of Hironori Deguchi.



Figure 21. Mascot *Racomitrium japonicum* art. Photo courtesy of Hironori Deguchi.

Glass Bryophytes

For teaching purposes, various museums and other institutions have engaged artists to make glass bryophytes. These endeavor to illustrate the special structures on a scale that can easily be seen without a handlens and in three dimensions (Figure 23-Figure 30).



Figure 22. Workshop students in China learning how to make molds for creating bryophytes. Photo courtesy of Zhang Li.



Figure 23. *Bryum capillare* model in Chinese educational display. Photo courtesy of Zhang Li.



Figure 24. *Haplomitrium mnoides* model in Chinese educational display. Photo courtesy of Zhang Li.



Figure 25. *Marchantia emarginata* model in Chinese educational display. Photo courtesy of Zhang Li.



Figure 26. *Phaeoceros laevis* model in Chinese educational display. Photo courtesy of Zhang Li.



Figure 29. Show table of models in Chinese educational display. Photo courtesy of Zhang Li.



Figure 27. *Physcomitrium eurystomum* model in Chinese educational display. Photo courtesy of Zhang Li.



Figure 30. *Funaria* model in USA educational display. Photo courtesy of David Wagner.

Corpus Christi Festival

In Béjar, Salamanca, Spain, mosses are a major part of the Corpus Christi celebration (Martínez Abaigar & Núñez Olivera 2001). The border between the Moslem and Christian kingdoms had been under siege for more than 300 years. According to the legend of the Moss Men, Christians were hidden in the mountains at El Castañar, 3 km from the present town of Béjar. On the day of the feast of St. Marina of Bitinia, the Christians gathered to celebrate mass at La Centenna. After the ceremony, they covered their clothes and weapons with mosses from nearby stones. So camouflaged, they went to the Moslem fortress and lay on the walls and rocks. When the gates opened at dawn, they were able to enter and surprise the watchtowers. In a day-long struggle, the Christians took the streets one-by-one. Thus, on the ninth Sunday after Easter each year the event is celebrated with Moss Men as part of the Corpus Christi festival. Six Moss Men volunteers from the region of Béjar each year use more than 200 m² of moss made into moss plates, including such common ones as *Hypnum cupressiforme* (Figure 31), *Antitrichia californica* (Figure 32), *A. curtipendula* (Figure 33), and *Homalothecium sericeum* (Figure 34). They use these plates to dress



Figure 28. *Pogonatum subfuscum* model in Chinese educational display. Photo courtesy of Zhang Li.

themselves in commemoration of this historic event (Figure 35 - Figure 40). Fortunately, these moss plates are kept at the Convent of San Francisco, and only damaged parts need be replaced by new mosses each year.



Figure 31. *Hypnum cupressiforme*, one of the mosses used in commemorative dress in the Corpus Christi festivity. Photo by Michael Lüth, with permission.



Figure 32. *Antitrichia californica*, one of the mosses used in commemorative dress in the Corpus Christi festivity. Photo by Michael Lüth, with permission.



Figure 33. *Antitrichia curtipendula*, one of the mosses used in commemorative dress in the Corpus Christi festivity. Photo by Michael Luth, with permission.



Figure 34. *Homalothecium sericeum*, one of the mosses used in commemorative dress in the Corpus Christi festivity. Photo by Proyecto Musgo through Creative Commons.



Figure 35. Men being dressed in mosses for the Corpus Christi Festival. Photo by Eloy Diaz-Redondo.



Figure 36. Parade of Moss Men in the Corpus Christi celebration. Photo by Eloy Diaz-Redondo.



Figure 37. Participants of the Corpus Christi Festival clothed in mosses. Photo by Eloy Diaz-Redondo.



Figure 38. Corpus Christi celebrators surround the "monstrance," a sacred vessel in which the consecrated host is displayed. Photo by Eloy Diaz-Redondo.



Figure 39. Moss Men with one of the dignitaries during the Corpus Christi celebration. Photo by Eloy Diaz-Redondo.



Figure 40. Close view of one of the Moss Men in the Corpus Christi celebration. Photo by Eloy Diaz-Redondo.

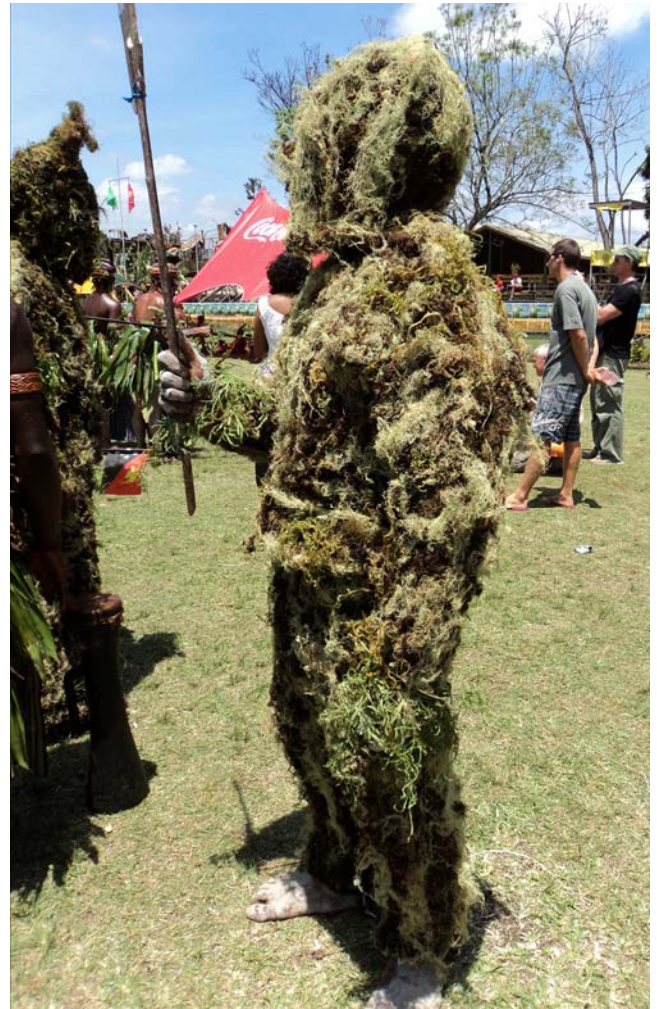


Figure 41. Moss costumes in Papua New Guinea. Photo by Deb Jordan through Robin Stevenson.



Figure 42. Moss costumes in Papua New Guinea. Photo by Deb Jordan, provided by Robin Stevenson.

In what is apparently a different ceremonial use of bryophytes in New Guinea, the villagers of Payakona Village hold a singing ceremony (Laman 2012). They are not covered with bryophytes, but rather wear what appear to be mosses in strategic positions to create beards, hair, and decorative pieces on the head or over the chest. In what appears to be a reverse of the usual confusion, the decorations labelled lichens and Spanish moss appear to be real mosses.

Body Art

In The Philippines, *Dawsonia* (Figure 43), *Pogonatum* (Figure 44), and *Spiridens* (Figure 45) are used both as body decoration and to ward off evil spirits.



Figure 43. *Dawsonia polytrichoides*, in a genus used as body decoration in the Philippines. Photo by Niels Klazenga, with permission.



Figure 44. *Pogonatum aloides* males, in a genus used as body decoration in the Philippines. Photo by David Holyoak, with permission.



Figure 45. *Spiridens flagellosus*, in a genus used as body decoration in the Philippines. Photo by John Game Flickr Creative Commons.

Statues or Topiary?

Bryophytes can be fashioned into various forms with the help of wires and some sort of central core – or just moss. These are sometimes stained so they remain green, but they also can remain alive for a period of time, the duration depending on the suitability of conditions. Such statues (are these really topiary, since they are planted that way instead of cut to make the shapes?) are used to decorate gardens and lawns or used in displays indoors.

Atproot (2009) reports that mosses and lichens can have a different relationship to statues and outdoor art. They may be introduced with stones used in outdoor art. And rock carvings may be damaged by the invasion of bryophytes and lichens, as witnessed at Tennes in Balsfjord, Troms, Norway (Bjerke 2000).



Figure 46. Decorative moss turtle on display at Denoyer's Nursery, Columbus, Ohio, USA. Photo by Janice Glime.



Figure 47. Decorative moss frog on display at Denoyer's Nursery, Columbus, Ohio, USA. Photo by Janice Glime.



Figure 48. Labramoss topiary at Gray Summit, Franklin County, Missouri. Photo courtesy of Marshall Crosby.



Figure 49. Close view of labramoss topiary. Photo courtesy of Marshall Crosby.



Figure 50. Moss dog moodle topiary. Photo courtesy of Marshall Crosby.



Figure 51. Close view of moss topiary of dog moodle. Photo courtesy of Marshall Crosby.



Figure 52. Toad topiary in Europe. Photo courtesy of David Long.



Figure 53. Swan moss topiary in Europe. Photo courtesy of David Long.



Figure 54. Moss topiary dragonfly in Europe. Photo courtesy of David Long.

Film-making

To make a film of King Kong, film makers had to actually miniaturize the mosses (Simpson 2006). Real mosses posed two problems – they were at the wrong scale for the landscape, shrubs, logs, and trees created for the set, and they dried too rapidly under the studio lights. They used a material called flocking that they attached to dacon with adhesive. But in Lord of Rings trilogy, the scene

when a member of the Fellowship of Rings dies on a bed of pleurocarpous mosses used real mosses. Moss Man in Masters of Universe also had real moss. However the toy made in his image used green flock.



Figure 55. Moss monkey in garden shop in Columbus, Ohio, USA. Photo by Janice Glime

Summary

Artists have used bryophytes in framing, accenting relief in sculptures, and providing texture. Even a Finnish coin sports a moss. The Japanese use them to simulate hair and other adornments on foam statues and floats.

The Corpus Christi Festival in Béjar, Salamanca, Spain celebrates the capture of the Moslem fortress by donning sheets of moss and parading through town.

Mosses have been used in movies and in others miniature artificial mosses were used. For educational purposes, some museums and other teaching organizations have ade model mosses of glass or ceramics.

Moss topiary can be made into almost any shape.

Acknowledgments

Inkeri Ahonen helped me obtain the picture and information from the sculptor, Barbro Eriksson.

Hironori Deguchi provided me with the pictures of artwork from Minoru Takeda.

Javier Martínez-Abaigar helped me with information regarding the Corpus Christi Festival and to obtain the pictures and permission for their use.

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