

***Animaliers* and Match Holders**

By Neil Shapiro

The term *animaliers* was coined by French art critics around 1830 to cast ridicule on French artists who choose to create bronze animal sculptures instead making traditional copies of great Greek and Roman statuary, or sculpture elevating humankind above the animal world. The *animalier's* work followed the Age of Reason's focus on human achievement and individuality and was initially scorned by the artistic community.

It took only about a decade before the term *animalier* was no longer an insult but praise. With the installation of large bronze animal sculpture in public areas, the term *animalier*, became laudatory and significant artists, such as A. L. Barye (17996 – 1875), P.J. Mème (1810 -1879), and C. Fratin (1801-1864), gained renowned for their artistic animal sculpture.

At about the same time, in Germany (actually Prussia, during 1850-60) and Austria, metal working foundries, both state sponsored and private, were creating match holders with animal motifs. Whether the creation of animal motif match holders was connected to the rising fame of the French *animaliers* is debatable, but it is likely as there were considerable commercial and artistic exchanges during this period among these countries.

Animalier artist, Christophe Fratin, made small bronzes that look eerily like match holders. Other *animalier* artists also created sculptures that may have influenced or been used by match holder makers. (See below)





Sculpture by C. Fratin



Bronze match holder, c.1860



Bronze match holder, c. 1860



Sculpture by Pierre Jules Mème



Bronze pheasant (Masson, Clovis, c.1860)



Bronze match holder, c.1860



Bronze cat (Emmanuel Frémiet, c.1850)



Bronze cat match holder c.1860

From the examples shown in this essay it is easy to see the similarities in appearance between the *animalist's* work and the match holder sculptor's output. What is also instructive is to realize that the casting techniques were the basically the same for the

animalier's art sculptures and for the bronze match holders. Both primarily used the sand casting method for creating their finished products.

Usually, bronze sculptures are produced in editions, much like the match holders. The only unique piece being the one created by the modeler or sculptor. Once the sculptor makes a piece it is sent to the foundry for copies to be made. The foundry's work is of considerable importance to the finished bronze. If the *ciseleur* or chiseler at the foundry does not remove all the casting edges and does not apply a complementary patina the bronze work will suffer, despite the skill of the sculptor.

In 19th century Germany and Austria it was not illegal to make copies of another foundry's bronzes. Copies made from another bronze and not from the artist's model are called *surmoulages*. Usually, these copies have less detail and are not the quality of the original. Many match holders, because of their ubiquity, are copies and not originals. Even some *animalier's* sculpture are *surmoulages*. The easiest way to see the difference is in side-by-side comparisons. Most of the original sculptures are signed and many of the match holders are marked by the foundry – it is rare to have the modeler of the match holder to mark their work.

Several *animaliers* made small, even miniature bronzes and the artistic line from the *animaliers* to the match safe makers seems direct, but it will take more research of primary contemporary documents to confirm the actual transfer of sculptural forms.

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