

Match Holder Originals or Reproductions

By Neil Shapiro

Today, match safes are being copied and reproduced and these reproductions are for sale all over the internet and at antique shows. Until recently, the same cannot be said about period metal match holders.

Period metal match holders are not as widely collected as match safes, they rarely bring high prices and they are ubiquitous. Now it seems as if there are at least some match holders being reproduced and sold online.

Some reproduction figural match holders made by E.G. Zimmermann and Joseph Glanz (to name just two) are being sold on various online sites. The problem for collectors of these types of holders is that there are period copies of the original holders that are also sold online. And this raises an interesting question, namely, is a holder made by a contemporary of Zimmermann or Glanz a reproduction to be spurned by a collector as merely a copy and therefore rejected by most collectors?

I raise this question because in Germany and Austria from the 1850s through the 1890s there were no laws forbidding the making of copies of these match holders and it was commonplace for metal working foundries to acquire an original, make a casting and sell their own version of the holder. It was not considered disreputable for foundries to recast models from other foundries and the exchange of models and techniques actually help lead Germany and Austria to metal casting superiority. In general, the high quality of casting by most foundries makes it difficult to attribute unmarked holders to an individual foundry or maker.

So while there were some differences between an original piece and a contemporaneous copy it is often difficult to tell a copy from the original. Although in some cases it is easy to tell the differences collectors may want various iterations of a piece.

Such an easy-to-tell difference is shown in the two match holders below.

One is a cast iron example marked by the Joseph Glanz foundry in Vienna, Austria, circa 1860-70 and the other is a bronze example where the age is difficult to determine.



Looking at the front of the holders the obvious differences are the color of the holders and the differences in size. The iron holder is 3" high and the bronze holder is 2 3/4".



The rear of the iron holder is marked with the foundry mark of Joseph Glanz and the bronze holder is unmarked.



A close-up of the rear view shows a receptacle for lighted match on the iron holder while the bronze holder has no receptacle at all.



On the bronze holder's 1 1/8" tricone hat are concentric rings used to strike a match and the iron holder's 1 1/4" hat is flat with no striking surface (a match can be ignited against the iron body of the holder.)

Really close inspection of the two holders reveals crisp details on the iron holder and blurrier details on the bronze holder. In particular, look at the fingers on the image below.



The fingers holding the walking stick on the iron piece are delineated and the fingers on the bronze piece are non-existent as are the cuff, and jacket details.

So, it is clear that the iron holder is a better example and there is no doubt who made it in about 1860-70. But what does this mean for the collector of these types of match holders? In the world of collecting there is always good, better, best. But there is also the reproduction and no collector wants to purchase a reproduction when he can get the real object – is the bronze match holder a reproduction, or is it a contemporaneous copy (circa 1870-80) that is not as good as the original?

An analogy might be found in the world of antique furniture collecting where great woodworkers made furniture for some very wealthy people and other furniture makers,

perhaps, regional or rural, made merely utilitarian furniture. Both types of furniture makers made chairs, tables, desks, etc. but some are better than others, for example, finer grades of wood, fancy ornamentation, more detailed and laborious construction methods, etc.

Another analogous situation might be found in the world of fine art. Many old master paintings are not signed and before there was scientific analysis of materials, experts would study the work for brush strokes, shaping of figures, use of light, etc. and sometimes they could conclude that a particular work was indeed by a particular artist. In other instances the experts could only conclude it was by the “school of.” Maybe we ought to think of these contemporaneous holders in this way.



Another comparison is shown above. Two holders, modeled as men, wearing an odd type of head covering and standing on different types of plinths are similar both quite different if closely examined.

The holder on the left has a pipe in his mouth and the pipe has an opening to hold a lighted match or a small candle. It is 4 1/2” tall, made of cast iron, with a rounded dimpled base for striking a match and signed by its maker, E.G. Zimmermann.

The holder on the right is 4” tall, made of brass, and has a square base, no maker’s mark, and a small opening in the crook of its left arm to hold a lighted match. The base is striated so a match can be struck.

Both holders are well wrought but the Zimmermann holder is more finely worked than the bronze holder.

I do not think the bronze holder in either example is a modern reproduction, but a copy of Glanz’s and Zimmermann’s original holder. But I cannot conclusively prove that opinion. If we had access to scientific testing equipment we may be able to determine its

age, but that is not the case. There is documentary proof that Glanz and Zimmermann made match holders in bronze as well as cast iron, as did other foundries. But who made the bronze holders and when is inconclusive at this time.

Some guidelines for collecting match holders from this period:

Note 1: As collectors we must never confuse an attribution with an authentication. What I have stated above is an attribution.

An attribution by a qualified expert does not mean the art is by the artist only that in the expert's opinion it's likely to be by that artist or from that period.

In terms of marketplace value, an attributed work of art is typically priced substantially lower than an authentic work of art, how much lower depends on the strength of the attribution and who made it.

Note 2: A credible attribution of a match holder typically discusses various aspects of the art including its size, style, materials, construction, composition, surface texture, colors, relation of subject matter to subject matters of other known works by the artist, names of suppliers or manufacturers of materials that might be stamped somewhere on the art, signature style and location, similarity of compositional details to those of other known compositions by the artist (for example, the use of square nuts to anchor the figure to a base – if there is a base), a comparison to other known works created around the same time, and so on.

Note 3: I would welcome any discussion about this question, although I realize that most IMSA members are uninterested in these types of match holders.