Black Glass 101: Other Material Embellishment
By Claudia Chalmers
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Over the years there have been several different ways of referring to “other material embellishment.” My mother’s generation called it “trim”; early in my adulthood we called it “ornamentation.” Today’s classification consistently uses the term “embellishment” and since we now have a handy little acronym, “OME,” I’m sure the term is here to stay.

The National Button Society Blue Book (2011-2012) defines OME as “material(s) different from the base, added onto or inlayed into the surface during or after formation of the buttons to enhance the face design” (p. 73). It goes on to say that decorative finishes like paint or luster are not considered OME (see “Black Glass 101: Decorative Finishes,” Minnesota Button Bulletin, March 2010). However, clear and/or colored glass on black glass is considered an “other material embellishment,” as you will see in the photos in this article.

Most of the buttons pictured here are antique examples, meaning they were made before 1918. Buttons made from 1919 to 1980 are designated as “vintage,” and those made since 1980 are referred to as “modern.” Please note that the term “vintage” is not approved by the National Button Society (all buttons made since 1919 are “modern” in the classification), but is used here to distinguish button age just as an educational tool for beginning button collectors.

Metal Embellishment

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<th>Collectors use the word “escutcheon” to describe metal embellishment that is added to the top of a button through mechanical means. Both of these examples have a metal head attached to a wire that runs through the button and then becomes the shank, like an ornate pin shank. The button on the left is a child’s head which is unusual and desirable, and the button on the right shows a classic woman’s profile on a medium sized sheet overlay. (The back of the button is black glass.)</th>
<th>These two buttons are examples of “bound with metal.” The metal strips wrap snugly through the lobes of the glass and tuck under the shank plate in back. The metal strips appear to be copper on the left hand button, and the strips on the right hand button are crimped brass. Both buttons are small.</th>
<th>Electroplated copper deposit with gilding. See October 2003 National Button Bulletin, p. 195, for information on this type of button as researched by Herman A. Bangeman, Jr.</th>
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<td>These buttons have the metal embellishment applied through impression inlay; in other words, while the glass is still hot and soft, the embellishment is pushed down into it. The first example is generally referred to as a “bracelet” by collectors and is the most common example of this type of button. The second example shows a “twisted wire” construction. The ball shaped button has brass flower shapes embedded and then further embellished with balls of blue glass. The fourth sample is an impression inlay fox head and the button on the right is a plain tip impression inlay with white overlay. For a complete list of impression inlays, see the December 2007 National Button Bulletin.</td>
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Shell Embellishment

Shell can be applied to black glass buttons in several different ways. The most common construction is probably insertion inlay, but it can also be applied as an escutcheon. Frames are quite common in this class.

Inlaid shell tulips come in a variety of different designs on antique buttons. This shell ring is inserted into an embossed and lustered black glass base. A modified ball shape, this faceted example has cross shaped shell inserted. This is actually a very large button with a carved shell center. It has a deeply embedded four way brow shank with deep thread grooves, making it an antique button despite its more modern appearance.

The shell discs in these buttons are held in place by a steel cut tipped pin shank. The button on the left has a plain steel cut, and the sample on the left has a six point star. Both are pin shank frames. The shell leaf inlaid into the top of this wonderful button embellishes the acid etched bird on branch design. This button is very scarce. Another scarce example is this aristocrat poppy with a shell center. The petals of the poppy are silver lustered. Pictorial examples of shell embellishment are more difficult to find than conventional designs. Here is an embossed, gold lustered owl with shell eyes.

Clear and/or Colored Glass Embellishment

Perhaps one of the most colorful and varied types of embellishment on black glass buttons is clear and/or colored glass. Remember, in order to be categorized as black glass, the shank or holes must be in black glass. If the shank goes into the colored glass, the button would be categorized as clear and/or colored glass.

Coronets have clear/colored glass embellishment. The first two here have clam both tips, the third example is a red tip, and the last is white. Many varieties in color and moldings are available in coronets. This is a modern studio by Mike Edmondson with white, red, and yellow glass OME fused to the black glass.
Fabric Embellishment

Three rather typical examples of black crocheted or knotted fabric in a black glass frame. The sample on the left is a sew-through, which is rather unusual, and the sample in the middle has a center of black glass.

This is a corded example in a black glass frame.

These four samples and are wrapped with string or cord. Sometimes the cord itself forms the shank, but often it is tucked under the shank plate as in the photo on the right.

Other Embellishments

The center flower in this basket is embellished with brightly colored glitter.

This unusual black glass frame contains a disc of wood.

Paste is a desirable embellishment for black glass buttons, and is not easy to find in antique examples. The first example here is an impression inlay. The bird is a vintage button, heavily gold lustered, with a single paste used for the eye. The third example is black glass rimmed with brass (not set in metal) and claw set pastes, size large. The button on the far right has a red paste jewel embellishment.

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