

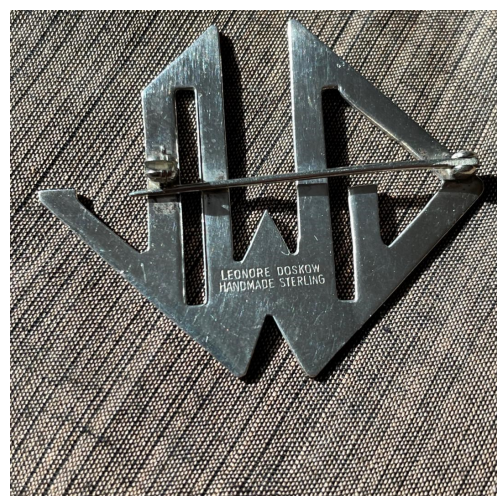
GWL—Given with Love

A Doskow monogram brooch donated in memory of Kay Freeman

By Peter Kaellgren

There are many silversmiths whose work remains largely unknown outside of an informed group of committed collectors. In most cases, these are craftsmen who created small, often exquisitely wrought speciality pieces. Because these items are in many cases recent and often fall below the minimum lot value for the major auction houses, such work seldom receives the recognition it deserves. However, for silver collectors who judge pieces on the quality of the workmanship and design, these items can often be ones that are affordable and bring special pleasure.

About six years ago, I was visiting the old Sunday St. Lawrence Market in downtown Toronto. You never knew what might turn up at that combination flea and antique market! On one of the tables, a vendor displayed several dozen pieces of jewellery including a sterling silver brooch consisting of the monogram GWL. It immediately appealed to me because the monogram was cleverly designed and is an excellent example of the popularity of monograms in the early 20th century, particularly in the Art Deco period. Traditionally silver, linen, personal stationery, handkerchiefs, fine china, and table glass might be decorated with a coat of arms or more often a family crest. For those who had taste but no family history that warranted arms, initials or a monogram were often used. Between 1900 and World War II, monograms were in common use for people, companies, organizations and institutions. Remember



Monogram “GWL” brooch, silver hand cut with a jeweler’s saw and polished. American, Leonore Bernheimer Doskow, New York City, probably 1930s-1940s. H 3.6 cm (1 ½ in) W 4.4 cm (1 ¾ in) Recent gift to the New-York Historical Society Museum from Richard Flensted-Holder and Peter Kaellgren in memory of Kay Freeman

the popular 1930s song *Someone to Watch over Me* where the female singer uses the words “I want to add his initials to my monogram?”

I purchased the monogram brooch for about \$20.00 and took it home where I discovered that stamped on the back in upper case letters was “LEONORE DOSKOW/ HANDMADE STERLING.” I immediately decided to look the name up on the internet and discovered that it was made by the American silversmith Leonore Bernheimer Doskow (1911-2008).

Lenore Bernheimer was born in Philadelphia. While in her teens, she began working with silver. One summer, when her parents were departing for a European vacation, they offered their children gifts. Leonore requested a jeweler’s saw, a type of coping saw which can be used to cut out monograms from a sheet of silver. Once she received this, monograms became one of her specialities and remained so throughout her working career. She continued to work with silver while attending Bryn Mawr College, a respected university for women. After graduating, she opened a small workshop in Philadelphia where she created jewelry and small pieces of silver for a wide range of clients including the orchestra conductor Leopold Stokowski.

After marrying David M. Doskow, the couple moved to New York City. Leonore continued to make silver and David did the marketing while their family grew. In the 1940s, they moved to a more rural area of New York State. Leonore continued to produce silver until she turned 75 with monograms being one of her specialities along with jewelry and various cocktail and serving items.

One of the online entries which states it is researched from reliable sources states that: “From the very first, [Leonore] manifested great skill in monogramming and initialling. All these individual letters and often quite intricate monograms were carefully cut by hand with a jeweler’s saw and soldered to whatever piece she was making rings, bracelets, and napkin rings mostly. And all the monograms and sketches for these were preserved in her many notebooks.”

A range of Leonore Doskow’s silver can be seen on ebay and other online marketplaces. Most of it is not very expensive, but then women’s work is often undervalued. While I appreciated the brooch, I really wanted to place it somewhere where it could tell the story of Leonore Doskow and make the public aware of her work.



Richard Flensted Holder told me about a wonderful silver tour that was conducted by Dr. Debra Schmidt Bach, Curator of Decorative Arts and Special Exhibitions at the New York Historical Society, 170 Central Park West, New York City. Richard was impressed with Dr. Schmidt Bach's knowledge and ability to communicate with the public. I got to thinking. I wonder if the New York Historical Society has any examples of silver by Leonore Dосkow in its collections.

I contacted Dr. Schmidt Bach. She had never heard of Leonore Dосkow but was interested to learn more about her. There were no examples of her work in the collection of the New York Historical Society. She considered my brooch to be an appropriate acquisition. Unfortunately, many American museums and important collectors make most of their acquisitions through high-profile dealers and major auction houses. Neither of these would be interested in handling small-time items like a silver monogram brooch, even though it has a significant story to tell.

Richard was able to deliver the brooch to the New-York Historical Society. I donated it to their collection as a gift from Richard Flensted-Holder and myself in memory of Kay Freeman. Richard has been helpful in delivering my donations to several museums in New York. We both wanted to honour the late Kay Freeman who was a friend and a valued colleague. Kay was a great silver scholar and someone who knew and valued New York City. What could be more appropriate than to honour her and Leonore Dосkow with this donation! Hopefully this modest brooch will inspire more in-depth research into the smaller workshops that produced silver and jewelry in New York City. There is always something exciting to be discovered about silver, even when one has only a limited budget.