

Beetle Wings for Embroidery Embellishments or jewelry



Broderies victoriennes

Wings from the Asian “green jewel” beetle (*Sternocera aequistignata*) have been used to embellish textiles in Asia for centuries. In the Victorian era, it became fashionable in the western world to add these glorious little wings to elaborate clothing and accessories. The wings are still used today to embellish textiles and to make jewelry and other decorative items.

The beetles are farmed, and the wings are collected from beetles once they are dead, after their short 3-4 week lifespan

They are made of chitin, like our hair, last very long and don't lose their color

A camera cannot catch the scintillating depth of colors in these wings. Predominantly, the wings are green, but some carry as well a copper, gold, or yellow tone, and others a deep blue-ish tone. The light plays on the wings to reflect almost “layers” of colors. They look like two-dimensional emeralds – you don't get the depth in a glassy way like you do with a jewel, but, because of the reflection when you move the wings around, the colors are deep and changing. The copper-colored or the bluish colored aren't always that dominant! They shimmer depending on the angle. Their brilliant metallic coloration is due to a phenomenon called interference, and occurs in the physical structure of the insect's chitin. Multiple layers of cuticle in the elytra are composed of minute spacings that allows light waves to reinforce, weaken, or eliminate each other. The interference colors are not static, but fluctuate with shifting rays of light. The colors vary from dull bronze to bright emerald to blue and violet as the light shifts. Interference colors are the most pure and brilliant of colors and no other form of pure pigment can match such intensity of brilliance. Therefore, the seemingly magical coloration of metallic beetles has made them extremely fascinating, and since the elytra are hard and the brilliant color is permanent

The wings don't chip or crack easily. They're sturdy. They only break if you try to fold them hard between your fingers, step on them or hit them strongly.

They're pretty light – even the slightest breeze moved them around while I was outside. When you shake them they make a pleasant little chinking sound.

To make holes in the elytras, some people steam them for five minutes to soften and then pierce them with a sharp where it's needed. I put them on a thick and soft piece of material and hold them firmly, and use a nice wide but sharp needle.

There is a beautiful dress made in England in 1888 for the great Shakespeare actress Helen Perry. It was restored some times ago. They had to replace some of the 1000 elytras because the threads were broken and the wings fell and were lost. On the repaired dress you don't see any difference between the new and the old ones. You can see this dress and its story there :

<http://www.pasthorizons.com/index.php/archives/03/2011/the-archaeology-of-a-dress>

More about beetlewings embroidery :

<http://www.wormspit.com/blog/2006/12/25/beetle-wing-embroidery-second-round-flower/>

<http://mrsbertinsjewelrybox.blogspot.fr/2012/11/jewel-beetles-in-19th-century-fashion.html>

<http://www.yourjewels-supplies.com>