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The Lamps of Tiffany



Highlights of the Egon and Hildegard Neustadt Collection

by Lana A. Burgess

Louis Comfort Tiffany (1848-1933), the quintessential artist of the Gilded Age, was trained as a landscape painter but made a name for himself as a master craftsman whose focus was interior decoration. Subscribing to the doctrines of the Arts and Crafts movement—a movement promoting craftsmanship and reform of industrial design—Tiffany sought to gain the same status for the decorative arts as that bestowed upon the fine arts of painting and sculpture. Known for his stained-glass windows, lamps, and vases, Tiffany created everything from the aforementioned objects to metalwork and ecclesiastical items.

Tiffany began fabricating lamps in 1885 with the majority being made between 1895 and 1920. He publicly introduced the lamps for sale in 1899 at an exhibition in London. He intended the lamps to be purchased for use in the home, not collected and preserved

for exhibition. However, by the turn of the century, decorative arts museums were eager to acquire works by Tiffany.

Aspiring to make a variety of decorative arts objects, Tiffany's goals were somewhat lofty. Not being able to achieve this goal alone, Tiffany sought out assistance to produce these items. It was common for stained glass to be made in a workshop environment; therefore, Tiffany formed a production studio. In 1897, Tiffany established a foundry and metal shop in Corona, New York, where objects, including lamps, could be made and assembled in large quantities. Artisans working in the studio followed designs specified by the artist, but were given the freedom to select the colored glass used in the lamps.

Through the lamps and stained glass, Tiffany was able to satisfy his interests in light, color, and glass while venerating nature by detailing seasonal flowers in his work.

Tiffany saw the value of the newly invented Edison electric light bulb, and incorporated its use into his own plans and designs for lamps. Because the first light



THE GRAPE TRELLIS CHANDELIER (ABOVE) HAS SCATTERED VINE AND LEAF PATTERNS ON A GEOMETRIC BACKGROUND. AN EXAMPLE OF THE FLOWERED GLOBE GROUP, THE BLUE PEACOCK TABLE LAMP (AT LEFT) GLOWS WITH TRANSLUCENT COLOR.

bulbs were clear and shed a harsh light, Tiffany selected semi-translucent glass to act as a diffuser. Therefore, he often designed lamp shades in the shape of a dome or a triangle, with no opening at the top, to force light down and out from underneath the shade.

Lamps were by far the most popular items made by Tiffany Studios. It is fitting that the Museum presents *The Lamps of Tiffany: Highlights of the Egon and Hildegard Neustadt Collection* because this collection includes the greatest number of Tiffany lamps with the widest assortment of lamp designs found in any private collection. The themes examined in this exhibition trace the advent of the lamps from the favrile design, a kind of multicolored iridescent glass invented by Tiffany, through the geometric to the varied floral designs with ample representation of each style.

This presentation at the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts includes forty-three spectacular lamps and chandeliers, all which will be lit, and two stained-glass windows, allowing for a dramatic installation.


The exhibition is accompanied by an illustrated catalogue, which includes color reproductions of many of the exhibition's lamps, and interpretive essays by Robert Koch and Alastair Duncan.

Lana A. Burgess is an Associate Curator of Paintings and Sculpture at the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts.



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Ren' as Stout, EW Eye Cases, mixed media, 1995. Courtesy Drs. Gail and Albert Holloway



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