

LOUIS COMFORT TIFFANY
AND
HIS ART NOUVEAU
LAMPS

A Senior Honors Thesis
by
Marthe Honts

Interest in the art of Louis Comfort Tiffany is on the rise, due to recent scholarship and many new exhibitions of his work. However, as with any rediscovered artist, controversy has also arisen. Two of the newest flashpoints of this debate are the questions of where to classify Tiffany in the history of art, and of what importance his work has been to future generations. Although this paper cannot hope to qualify any conjecture as to the latter, it will attempt to answer the former, at least in relation to a selected group of his work.

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Following this discussion, the paper will examine the Art Nouveau question, that is, it will attempt to determine whether or not Tiffany was an important and influential member of this turn of the century art movement. Using illustrations of Tiffany's work at the time, the focal lamps, and other widely recognized Art Nouveau products, this paper will show that although Tiffany certainly created some objects that fit within this rubric, it is impossible to use the term Art Nouveau to encompass his entire career.

Finally, this paper will address contemporary criticism of Tiffany and his lamps. Although he was highly acclaimed as an artist in stained glass windows and mosaics,

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Finally, this paper will address contemporary criticism of Tiffany and his lamps. Although he was highly acclaimed as an artist in stained glass windows and mosaics,

he was also widely criticized for being too commercial. Again, using the lamps as evidence, this paper will prove that although Tiffany himself never came to terms with the "commercial" vs. "fine" arts issue, his lamps can be considered independently as works of art, and should be judged as such.

Louis Comfort Tiffany was the first surviving child of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Lewis Tiffany.¹ As the co-founder and sole remaining partner of Tiffany & Co., Charles Tiffany was a very wealthy man, with stores noted for their fashionable and expensive jewelry and other merchandise all over the United States and Europe. Although he was raised in a wealthy family, Louis was not spoiled. His father hoped to raise him to take over Tiffany & Co., but when Louis failed to show interest, Charles sent him to boarding school and a military academy to try to bring him down to earth.² Louis Tiffany, however, had a mind of his own, and that mind wanted to study art. He became the only pupil of George Inness, sitting in the studio of the American painter, and learning more by osmosis than any organized lecturing.³ In 1868, at the age of twenty, Charles sent Louis to France to check up on the Parisian branch of Tiffany & Co. and to see more of the world.⁴ On subsequent trips to Europe, Tiffany studied with Leon Bailly and

¹ Vivienne Couldrey, The Art of Louis Comfort Tiffany, (Secaucus, New Jersey: Wellfleet, 1989), 34-35.

² Couldrey, 35.

³ Couldrey, 17.

⁴ Couldrey, 39.

Samuel Coleman, and traveled to Algiers, Morocco, Spain, Venice, Palestine, Persia, Egypt and Italy.⁵

It was France and Italy that first sparked Tiffany's interest in glass, from the windows of Chartres Cathedral to the mosaics of the churches of Ravenna.⁶ In the early 1870's, Tiffany began to experiment in glass, first focusing on its use in windows and later expanding his experiments to include blown pieces.⁷ It wasn't until 1899 that he produced his first leaded glass shade: a Nautilus shell.⁸ Before this, he was a founding member of the Society of American Artists, the head of the interior decorating firm Louis C. Tiffany and Associated Artists, and the owner of several important glass related patents.⁹ After his stint with the Associated Artists, Tiffany set out on his own, incorporating Tiffany Glass Co. in 1885. In 1893, he built his own glass furnaces on Corona Island, New York, so that he could ensure the quality and workmanship of the glass used in his windows.¹⁰ By 1910, Tiffany had mostly withdrawn from his corporations, inaugurating a school for artists at his home, Laurelton Hall.¹¹ There he

⁵ Couldrey, 17 and 39.

⁶ Hugh F. McKean, The "Lost" Treasures of Louis Comfort Tiffany, (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1980), 2.

⁷ Couldrey, 66.

⁸ McKean, "Lost" Treasures, 187.

⁹ McKean, "Lost" Treasures, 3.

¹⁰ Albert Christian Revi, American Art Nouveau Glass, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1968), 21-22.

¹¹ Robert Koch, Louis C. Tiffany: Rebel in Glass, updated 3rd ed., (New York: Crown, 1982), 152.

lived out his days, and died at age 84 in 1933.¹²

¹² Koch, Rebel in Glass, 204.

CHAPTER 1

Tiffany Studios on Corona Island, New York, produced diverse objects throughout its existence. Along with collectable blown glass pieces, the workers at this factory produced the sheet glass for all of Tiffany's windows and bronze work of high quality. One of the most widely popular, and least expensive forms of Tiffany glass was the leaded lamp shade produced at Corona. This paper will discuss two lamps, which occupy opposite ends of the spectra of price and permutations: the Hanging Head Dragonfly lamp, and the Spider-web lamp.

The first version of the Dragonfly lamp was exhibited at the Paris Universalle in 1900.¹³ The Hanging Head Dragonfly (fig. 1), one of several versions of this pattern, is ringed by seven inverted dragonflies with their wings outstretched. The name of the lamp comes from the fact that the heads of each dragonfly hang below the plane of their wings with no reinforcing glass, creating an irregular lower border. The upper border is ringed by three narrow concentric bands of glass. Often the center ring matches the background while the upper and lower bands are of an opposing color. The background itself is composed of variously sized elongated pieces of glass in graduated color from top to bottom. Interspersed with these pieces of glass are several oval and circular jewels of glass. Each of the dragonflies' wings is covered with a metal filigree representing the scales of real wings.

Dragonfly lamps were produced in many versions and sizes. In addition to the

¹³ Couldrey, 144.

Hanging Head which measures 22 inches in diameter, a smaller diameter version, with fewer dragonflies, was made. Also, a 10 inch diameter lamp with a matching mosaic and brass base was sold. The Dragonfly was one of Tiffany Studios' most popular motifs, and hundreds of color variations of each style were produced. In 1906, each Hanging Head Dragonfly lamp shade cost \$175.¹³ The base was purchased separately, and several different bases from Tiffany Studios' line were used interchangeably.

The Spider-web lamp (figs. 2 & 3), however, was never as widely popular. Developed before 1904, only nine of these lamps were ever produced.¹⁴ The lamp is 19 inches in diameter and 30 inches high. The shade is composed of two different ranks of cobwebs. Each cobweb is placed inside a brass framework, and is partially invaded or covered with leaves and apple blossoms. The bottom register contains eight large cobweb regions, and the upper register contains eight smaller ones. The base is brass with an inlaid mosaic of narcissus flowers. Originally, this lamp was designed so that the base could hold a fuel canister for oil, but with the widespread use of electricity, they were wired to accept light bulbs. The shade is supported by brass arms rising from the base, forming a network of branches. The metalwork which joins

¹³ Alastair Duncan, Art Nouveau and Art Deco Lighting, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978), 168.

¹⁴ Owing to the materials and time invested in a single lamp of this style, a new lamp was not begun until the first one was purchased. Alastair Duncan, Louis Comfort Tiffany, (New York: Abrams in association with the National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, 1992), 97; Richard L. Hoover and Helen K. Olson, "Lights of the Night," Stained Glass Quarterly Spring 1988, 12.

the shade to the base is hardly distinguishable from the shade itself, and even has small pieces of glass fitted into the framework. In 1906, this lamp cost \$500.¹⁵ There are several reasons for this, the greatest of which is the fact that the base and shade were sold only as one unit.

The first aspect of the lamps made in Tiffany Studios which must be explored is what role Tiffany actually had in their production-- after all they were sold under the Tiffany name, which implied quality of craftsmanship and continuity of design. To consider a work's artistic merit one usually refers to such things as line, color, and form. Both line and form were developed in the design stage, while color was not determined until a lamp's construction. We know that Tiffany did not design the Dragonfly lamp. Mrs. Clara Driscoll won a gold medal at the Paris Universalle in 1900 for the design.¹⁶ Mrs. Driscoll was hired by Tiffany Glass and Decorating Co. in 1887, as a studio designer, and by 1900 she was the head of the newly formed Leaded Glass Shade Department.¹⁷

Although our common image of the working woman at the turn of the century is of a factory line worker, Tiffany worked with uniquely artistic women early in his career. This experience may have helped to keep his mind open to the best candidate for each job, regardless of sex. When Tiffany first entered the decorating industry, one of his

¹⁵ Duncan, Art Nouveau, 172.

¹⁶ Couldrey, 144.

¹⁷ Couldrey, 144; Henry J. Francis Winter, The Louis Comfort Tiffany Commemorative Edition, (Boston: Henry Winter, 1972), unpagd.

original partners was a woman named Candice Wheeler. Wheeler was primarily responsible for the textiles produced under the Associated Artists' label, but she was also a women's advocate. She founded a "Ladies Society for the Decorative Arts," modeled on similar cooperatives in England, in order to help married, middle class women earn money for themselves.¹⁸

When Tiffany, newly separated from the Associated Artists, ran into labor trouble over the hiring of too many apprentices, it may have been his acquaintance with Candice Wheeler that inspired him to look for his workers' replacements at a local women's art school.¹⁹ As his company expanded, he created an enameling department entirely composed of and headed by women.²⁰ In addition, much of the mosaic and "coppering" work was done by female employees.²¹ Finally, Tiffany was not oblivious to women's particular needs at a time when they were often the primary care-givers in a family. Mary Williams, who signed windows, was allowed to stay at home with her young child, and work was delivered to her there daily.²² Tiffany was, by our standards,

¹⁸ Robert Koch, "The Stained Glass Decades: a Study of Louis Comfort Tiffany (1848-1933) and the Art Nouveau in America" (Ph. D. diss., Yale University, 1957), 48-49.

¹⁹ John LaFarge, "Art and Artists" International Monthly 4 (1901), 157.

²⁰ Donald L. Stover, The Art of Louis Comfort Tiffany: An Exhibition Organized by the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco from the Collection of the Charles Hosmer Morse Foundation, Exhibition Catalog, (San Francisco: Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 1981), 92.

²¹ Duncan, Louis Comfort Tiffany, 77; McKean, "Lost" Treasures, 193. "Coppering" is the term used to refer to those workers who encircle individual pieces of glass with copper foil. The foil adheres to the glass and forms a surface for the lead solder to stick to.

²² Winter, 44.

a liberal employer, but he expected excellence equally from all of his employees.

Clara Driscoll, the designer of the dragonfly lamp, was one of the highest paid women executives in the country, earning over \$10,000 per year.²³ Under Mrs. Driscoll in addition to other designers, were glass cutters, "copperers", solderers who assembled the lamps, and finishers who applied the patinas and matched shades to bases.²⁴ Driscoll had real power in her department, and as a designer was partially responsible for the artistic quality of the lamps which she designed. Her drawings determined the final shape each lamp would take, and the size and shape of the pieces of glass which would make it up. Yet each lamp had a unique aspect quite apart from its design: color.

Once a lamp shade was designed, the paper pattern was transferred to a wooden form in the shape which the lamp was to take.²⁵ These templates could then be used by anyone in the workshop to create the desired type of lamp. The shapes of glass to be cut were precisely defined, but the colors were not. The furnaces at Tiffany Studios were constantly producing glass in huge quantities of colors and textures. At any one time there could be as many as 5,000 colors of glass to choose from for any

²³ Couldrey, 144.

²⁴ Wendell Garrett, "Decorative Arts of the Tiffany Studios: 'to Delight the Eye'," in Highly Important Tiffany Lamps from the Collection of John W. Mecom, Jr. Houston Texas, (Hong Kong: Southeby's, 1995) .

²⁵ Dr. Egon Neustadt, The Lamps of Tiffany, (New York: Fairfield Press, 1970), 3.

project.²⁶ With so many colors to choose from, creating even a simple lamp could have been a daunting task. Although rare, Tiffany employed "colorists" to aid in color selection on occasions.²⁷ It is unlikely that such "experts" aided in the assembly of lamps, however, as they were probably employed to advise Tiffany's Mosaic and Ecclesiastical Window departments, which dealt with the same wide variety of glass and were responsible for much more prestigious and expensive projects. It seems very likely that as a worker cut the glass for a lamp, he chose the colors himself.²⁸

If color and design contribute equally to the merit of these lamps, then clearly the glass cutters of Tiffany Studios deserve equal credit for their creations. What role, if any, did Tiffany play in these two stages of creation, and how much credit does he deserve? It has been suggested that owing to the elaborate design and mosaic work that Tiffany himself may have designed the Spider-web lamp.²⁹ One lamp which we are sure Tiffany designed, the Nautilus, was patented by Tiffany in 1899 (fig. 4).³⁰ But even for this lamp, Tiffany's idea was to use a real shell, and that idea was later translated into glass. Although it is not safe to assume that this is the only lamp which Tiffany ever designed, no patent was ever obtained for the spider web lamp. This leads to the

²⁶ Cecilia Waern, "Industrial Arts of America, part 2", The International Studio 5 (1898), 16.

²⁷ Neustadt, 3.

²⁸ Duncan, Louis Comfort Tiffany, 110.

²⁹ McKean, "Lost Treasures", 255.

³⁰ Duncan, Louis Comfort Tiffany, 97.

conclusion that either Tiffany did not design the lamp or he did design it but did not feel that it was worthy of a patent. (Tiffany's attitude towards lamps will be discussed in greater detail in the next two chapters.) Additionally, if this lamp is compared to other works that we know Tiffany designed at this time, the use of line and form are rather different. Tiffany's desire to use glass to its fullest extent is obvious in "Pumpkin and Beets"(fig. 5). Whenever possible, he avoids lead lines, letting the glass define the structure of his design. The lines which he does use are much less rounded and abstract than those of the Spider web lamp. The Spider web is a simplification of reality while "Pumpkin and Beets" strives to represent nature itself.

Tiffany did insist that each finished lamp design be submitted to him for approval. Once he saw a design he liked, he initialed it and returned it to the Studios.³¹ In his book, *Louis C. Tiffany: Rebel in Glass*, Robert Koch illustrates a sketch of a lamp with Tiffany's signature which he claims Tiffany drew (fig. 6). However, it is also likely that this could be a design submitted by an employee which Tiffany approved and signed. So, although Tiffany did not necessarily design lamp shades, he did approve each design before it was transferred to a template. Tiffany was, to a certain degree, responsible for the final design, but did he have any say in the choice of color for the lamps?

In order to understand Tiffany's personal involvement in the Leaded Glass

³¹ Stover, 57.

Shade Department, we must look at Tiffany's role in other parts of his business. Tiffany first became interested in glass around 1870. At that time he began experimenting at the Heidt Glass House, next to John LaFarge, the other major glass worker in the U.S. at the time.³² What these "experiments" actually involved is unclear. According to workers at the Studios, Tiffany never signed or blew a piece of glass because he did not know how to.³³ It is very likely that Tiffany at least knew how to mix up a batch of hot glass,³⁴ but he probably did not do his work exclusively in secret. Tiffany refers to his "chemist and furnace men,"³⁵ who were instrumental in achieving Tiffany's dreams of a new type of glass. Certainly he was not the only one involved in developing his patented glass. He also claimed to have personally trained his original workers.³⁶ Although he was undoubtedly able to assemble leaded glass windows,³⁷ he also hired some people for their expertise in areas about which he was not knowledgeable.

Finding others who possessed knowledge that he did not was Tiffany's goal from the start of his glass business. As Tiffany began to realize that his own glass house was necessary to achieve the results he desired, he hired Douglas Nash, an expert

³² Couldrey, 70.

³³ Revi, 58.

³⁴ Hugh F. McKean, The Treasures of Tiffany, Exhibition Catalog, (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 1982), 42.

³⁵ Koch, "Stained Glass Decades", 104.

³⁶ Couldrey, 110.

³⁷ McKean, Treasures of Tiffany, 42.

glass blower from England. Tiffany immediately set him up at Corona, hiring and teaching other glass blowers.³⁸ When Tiffany created Tiffany Glass and Decorating Co. in 1885, he hired W. Pringle Mitchell as his business manager and book keeper.³⁹ In 1890, he also hired Joseph Briggs as a personal assistant, and Briggs later went on to become the head of the Mosaic Department.⁴⁰ In 1897 he hired J. A. Holzer as chief window designer.⁴¹ Tiffany was not a great draftsman, and hired other designers for his figural windows.⁴² Tiffany also hired a financial secretary, public relations promoter, general contractor, and heads of his various departments, including Interior Decorating, Funerary Monuments, and Jewelry.⁴³ In 1902, his father died and he inherited Tiffany & Co. besides his other business concerns. As time passed he depended more and more on others to design his work.⁴⁴ Tiffany Glass and Decorating Company was a huge, fast growing corporation which required many subordinates in order to run smoothly. How much independent control did each department head have over their final product?

A closer look at the window-making department of the company will help to

³⁸ Revi, 25.

³⁹ Koch, "Stained Glass Decades", 113.

⁴⁰ Couldrey, 107.

⁴¹ Koch, "Stained Glass Decades", 157.

⁴² Koch, "Stained Glass Decades", 134.

⁴³ Winter.

⁴⁴ Koch, "Stained Glass Decades", 275.

answer that question. Tiffany was an obsessive perfectionist.⁴⁵ Each window cartoon was submitted to him for approval. If any details were unpleasing to him, he would note them and have the cartoon redrawn until it satisfied his taste.⁴⁶ When Tiffany himself drew the cartoon for a window, he played a part in choosing the perfect colors, and went so far as to designate certain sections of glass for specific details.⁴⁷ Critics of the time were even led to believe that a sheet of glass would be specially made for a window if there was not a suitable piece available.⁴⁸ If the perfect piece of glass could not be found or made, two or more layers of glass would be used to create the desired effect.⁴⁹ In his ghostwritten autobiography he vehemently stated that a cartoon cannot just be turned over to a craftsman, but must be constantly supervised to ensure adherence to the original idea.⁵⁰ He certainly was devoted to his windows and spent a great deal of time ensuring that they were produced well.

Did he do the same with lamps at Tiffany Studios? It is hard to say. The Lamp Shade Department was on the premises of the furnaces, along with the Brass Foundry,

⁴⁵ Duncan, Louis Comfort Tiffany, 11.

⁴⁶ Duncan, Louis Comfort Tiffany, 62.

⁴⁷ Hoover, 76.

⁴⁸ Waern, "part 2", 17-18.

⁴⁹ [Charles deKay], The Art Work of Louis C. Tiffany, (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1914), 18.

⁵⁰ [deKay], 21-22.

which opened in 1887 as lamps began to be produced on Corona Island.⁵¹ Tiffany's storefront and other departments were located downtown on Madison Avenue. Tiffany visited the Furnaces often, sometimes bringing sketches to be translated into blown pieces (fig. 7).⁵² Given Tiffany's perfectionistic attitude, he probably looked in on Clara Driscoll and her department on most of his visits, but it seems unlikely that he saw every piece which passed through the studio in order to give it his personal approval. Once a lamp design was approved, it seems that Tiffany's personal involvement ceased.

In a book entitled, *The Art Work of Louis C. Tiffany*, written by Charles deKay in 1915, the author states,

"... the number of different art works to which he gave his attention became so great that it seems marvelous that one man, however well supported by capable assistants, could find the waking hours in which to keep track of them all. No one could have done it all except a person who could double his existence as a creative artist with the life of a business man."⁵³

It is important to note that this biography was ghostwritten by deKay at Tiffany's request and expense, and is little more than a piece of vanity publishing. Tiffany personally delivered copies to his children and prominent citizens and libraries. None of the

⁵¹ Hoover, 78; Martin Eidelberg, "Tiffany and the Cult of Nature," in The Masterworks of Louis C. Tiffany by Alastair Duncan, Exhibition Catalog, (New York: Abrams, 1989), 80.

⁵² Koch, "Stained Glass Decades", 381.

⁵³ [deKay], 77.

copies made of this book were sold.⁵⁴ Although dedicated to his children, it is generally agreed that the book was a propaganda ploy made in order to empower his art work and creative vision at a time when his popularity was rapidly declining.⁵⁵ The vision of Tiffany as a tireless worker and artist is one which Tiffany wanted to create. However, his daughter remembers him arriving home punctually each night at Oyster Bay after a short drive from New York.⁵⁶ A secretary at Tiffany & Co. remembers that he stopped by only once a day, because he was more concerned with the Studios and glass work.⁵⁷ Also deKay's book claimed that, "Mr. Tiffany has his helpers so well trained that he needs to devote but a few hours a day to enamels and jewelry."⁵⁸ In reality whether his workers were well trained or not, Tiffany did not stand over each worker to monitor the status of every project. The image of a tireless half-artist, half-businessman will be explored in more detail later, but for now, it is important to consider the fact that Tiffany supervised up to 200 workers and still arrived home in time for dinner each night.

Is supervision the same as authorship? If all of the lamps created in the two styles focused on are considered unique creations, did Tiffany play any part in their

⁵⁴ Couldrey, 159.

⁵⁵ Harris, 39.

⁵⁶ Hugh F. McKean, Louis Comfort Tiffany as I Remember Him, (Winter Park, Fla.: Rollins Press, 1977), 12.

⁵⁷ Winter, 26.

⁵⁸ [deKay], 35.

uniqueness? The final question to consider is the role of the Tiffany name under which these products were sold. Does it erase the importance of the individual worker who chose the glass and gave the lamp its final form?

Hugh McKean, in his remembrance of Louis Tiffany, states that, "all of [Tiffany's workers] knew they were there to execute his designs and or his wishes: as a consequence, everything which bore his name reflected his standards and his taste whether he designed it personally or not."⁵⁹ Although it may be an exaggeration to state that every worker, even the boy apprentices, understood Tiffany's artistic vision, Tiffany was involved in enough steps of production to ensure that his tastes were not violated. First, he designed or approved the designs of each object made under his name. Second, he supervised the production of work-specific glass, and undoubtedly was such a perfectionist that sheets of glass which he found displeasing were promptly disposed of. Objects created with glass which held Tiffany's tacit approval by explicitly approved patterns would certainly reflect "his standards and his taste." There are stories of Tiffany striding through the Furnaces and breaking pieces which did not please him.⁶⁰ His demanding standards pervaded all aspects of his business.

Donald L. Stover, the curator of an exhibit of Tiffany's work, seems to put it better when he says, "Like his father, Tiffany ... had a unique ability to identify compatible artistic talents and to direct them in ways that compromised neither his

⁵⁹ McKean, Tiffany as I Remember Him, 11.

⁶⁰ Revi, 90.

insistence upon total artistic control nor the creative expression of his associates."⁶¹

Tiffany hired managers and department heads whose ideas of beauty and artistic merit meshed with his own. These department heads, in turn, encouraged those workers who produced the best renditions of their designs. In essence, the Tiffany artistic ideal "trickled down" throughout the realm of production.

A contemporary critic referred to Tiffany's studios as,

"Handiwork on a large scale,... skillfully organized, in fact so skillfully organized, that it allows for the personal interest on the part of the worker, as well as obedience to the inspiration from the fountainhead."⁶²

Workers were free to choose the colors involved in a lamp, but not outside the bounds of Tiffany's taste. Ultimately, Tiffany's signature pervaded the lamps produced at Corona Island, from the design to the realm of color available for use. Even though they are not produced by his hand, they bear its stamp.

⁶¹ Stover, 17.

⁶² Cecilia Waern, "Industrial Arts of America, part 1", The International Studio 2 (1897), 157.

CHAPTER 2

Louis Comfort Tiffany has often been called the leader of American Art Nouveau. However, recent scholarship has begun to question that assumption.⁶³ In order to properly address the question of whether Tiffany in general, and his lamps in particular fit into the category of Art Nouveau, I will begin by examining the movement's view of itself. The most important figure writing and talking about Art Nouveau at the turn of the century was S. Bing⁶⁴, the creator of the movement's name.

Bing opened his first show of L'Art Nouveau in 1895, which included a display of contemporary artists, such as Bonnard, Toulouse-Lautrec, and Rodin,⁶⁵ and several fully decorated rooms. Each room's decoration was conceived and designed by a single artist. The result was, "a series of rooms that represented various attempts to solve contemporary design problems."⁶⁶ Later shows in the gallery featured such variety as works by Edward Munch, and contemporary book printers and binders.⁶⁷

Bing's first show was rather poorly received. Although interior design critics gave him some credit for trying to break the mold, the public was very confused by his

⁶³ See particularly Eidelberg.

⁶⁴ Although there is some historical confusion, general evidence points to the fact that Bing's first name was Siegfried. For a description of the confusion, see Gabriel Weisberg, Art Nouveau Bing: Paris Style 1900, (New York: Abrams, 1986), note to the Introduction.

⁶⁵ Couldrey, 123.

⁶⁶ Weisberg, 60-66.

⁶⁷ Weisberg, 119.

conglomeration of "New Art".⁶⁸ Bing was widely criticized for including foreign as well as French artists, and not seeking out new artists.⁶⁹ For the most part, there were no unknown artists in Bing's first show. This was due to Bing's desire to draw a crowd with established art, and thereby introduce them to the decorated rooms. However, the name of the show undermined that idea. People who went to see "L'Art Nouveau" wanted new art, not the same artists they saw in Salons.

When writing about Art Nouveau in 1903, Bing was quick to point out that the name Art Nouveau was intended to name a movement not a style.⁷⁰ Bing's intention from the beginning was to revitalize the decorative arts in France. According to John LaFarge, a contemporary American artist, the decorative arts had become a "lesser" art because of the abundance of bad decorative art. By setting the goals for decorative artists very low, artisans could excel at their craft while being excluded from the ranks of great artists.⁷¹ Bing wanted to elevate the decorative arts to the level of "fine" art.⁷² According to Bing, French progress in the decorative arts had stagnated in the beginning of the 19th century, and he wanted to remedy this problem.⁷³

⁶⁸ Weisberg, 84.

⁶⁹ Weisberg, 77-80.

⁷⁰ S. Bing, "L'Art Nouveau" from The Craftsman, (Oct. 1903), in Artistic America, Tiffany Glass and Art Nouveau, ed. Robert Koch, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1970), 227.

⁷¹ LaFarge, 339.

⁷² Weisberg, 66

⁷³ S. Bing, "L'Art Nouveau" from The Architectural Record, (1902), in Artistic America, Tiffany Glass and Art Nouveau, ed. Robert Koch, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1970), 217.

Initially, in order to further the progress of French decorative art, Bing decided that a total rejection of the past was necessary. He wanted to replace the blind reproduction of "period pieces" with new and innovative ideas. He believed that the primary inspiration for the movement must come from nature.⁷⁴ Drawing on his experience with Japanese art and artists, as a former Oriental art dealer, Bing adopted the philosophy that, "nothing exists in creation, be it only a blade of grass, that is not worthy of a place in the loftiest conceptions of art."⁷⁵

By 1899, after four short years of trying to advance non-historical art, he changed his theory drastically. When he exhibited Art Nouveau works at the Grafton Galleries in England, he wrote in the program that, "the goal of artists at this time should be confined to the progressive development of former ages."⁷⁶ Obviously progression from historical ideas is not totally divorced from the past. Not only did Bing find the public unreceptive to art which had no bearing or comment on the past, it was extremely difficult to find and produce. Artists are a product of their time, and it is impossible even for a completely uneducated artist to divorce himself from the past and create a new form of art. Bing discovered that,

"It was necessary to resist the mad idea of throwing off all associations with the past, and to proclaim that, on the contrary, every thing produced by your predecessors is an example for us, not, assuredly, for its form to be servilely copied, but in order that the spirit which

⁷⁴ Weisberg, 77, 145.

⁷⁵ Koch, Rebel in Glass, 73.

⁷⁶ Grafton Galleries, Exhibition of L'Art Nouveau, May-July 1899, (London: Ballantyne, 1899), 17.

animated the authors should give us inspiration."⁷⁷

At the same time, Bing realized that the new art which he was promoting had no cohesive style or direction. His role as a co-ordinator was insufficient to produce the results he desired. To remedy this, Bing hired artists and artisans and expanded his business to include various creative shops.⁷⁸ Bing created an artistic atelier around him much like Tiffany. His new philosophy was to,

"Thoroughly impregnate oneself anew with old French tradition; try to pick up the thread of that tradition with all its grace, elegance, sound logic and purity, and give it new developments, just as if the thread had not been broken for nearly a century; strive to realize what our distant predecessors would do if they were alive today."⁷⁹

Nature was the vehicle through which his artists could rejoin the decorative tradition of the past (fig.).⁸⁰

In the mind of its creator, Art Nouveau embodied the decorative ideals of a new century. It was an art meant to be both "traditional and original."⁸¹ However, the name was often used to describe things which did not fit Bing's criteria.⁸² He was partially to blame for the name's misuse. When Bing was a Japanese art dealer, he advertised his

⁷⁷ Bing, "L'Art Nouveau" (1902), 219.

⁷⁸ Bing, "L'Art Nouveau" (1902), 219.

⁷⁹ Bing, "L'Art Nouveau" (1902), 222.

⁸⁰ Bing, "L'Art Nouveau" (1903), 229.

⁸¹ Grafton Galleries, 42.

⁸² Bing, "L'Art Nouveau" (1902), 215.

collections as "art nouveau."⁸³ Art Nouveau was a very diverse style, because it involved a search by many artists in various locations and directions for a new vocabulary.⁸⁴ Bing's main interests were natural forms, void of excessive ornament, that "reveal taste, dignity and a proper 'look'."⁸⁵ One of his inspirations for this goal came from England, and the Arts and Crafts movement, particularly its spokesman, William Morris.

The English Arts and Crafts movement first came into the public eye at the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition in 1876, where the English and Japanese succeeded in winning almost all of the interior decorating prizes.⁸⁶ It was Morris' cooperative decorating firm Morris and Co. that Bing and the Associated Artists hoped to imitate.⁸⁷ English advances in the decorative arts moved Bing to begin his decorating revolution.

Ideals of Morris' which Bing borrowed included the idea that,

"Everything made by man's hands has a form, which must be either beautiful or ugly; beautiful if it is in accord with Nature, and helps her; ugly if it is discordant with Nature, and thwarts her."⁸⁸

⁸³ Weisberg, 26.

⁸⁴ Koch, "Stained Glass Decades", 207.

⁸⁵ Weisberg, 130.

⁸⁶ Koch, "Stained Glass Decades", 30-33.

⁸⁷ Koch, "Stained Glass Decades", 41-42.

⁸⁸ William Morris, "The Lesser Arts," in The Collected Works of William Morris, v. xxii Hopes and Fears for Art, Lectures on Art and Industry, (New York: Russell and Russell, 1966), 4.

Nature was Morris's ideal, but through the eyes of history.⁸⁹ However, Bing felt that Morris had stagnated,⁹⁰ and more change and movement was needed. Another figure who seemed to share his vision was Louis Comfort Tiffany.

When Tiffany's father, Charles Lewis Tiffany, hired Edward Moore, a renowned silversmith, he took a step that would greatly influence the career of his oldest son. Moore introduced Tiffany to collecting oriental art, and to his dealer, S. Bing.⁹¹ Bing also visited the 1893 Columbian Exposition, where he first saw Tiffany's innovative glass work. Tiffany and Bing agreed to collaborate on some windows which Tiffany would produce after designs by French painters. These windows, designed by Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec (fig. 8), Edouard Vuillard, Pierre Bonnard, and others, were displayed in the first Salon of L'Art Nouveau.⁹² Bing became Tiffany's exclusive agent in Europe, selling numerous blown glass pieces and other decorative work.⁹³

In 1892-94, when Bing visited America and the Columbian Exposition, he was gathering material for a book on American art. In the book, called Artistic America, he discussed America's standing in the areas of sculpture, painting, architecture and the industrial arts. Under the last category, he discussed five points where America was

⁸⁹ Morris, "Lesser Arts", 15.

⁹⁰ Weisberg, 145.

⁹¹ Weisberg, 49.

⁹² McKean, Louis Comfort Tiffany, 9; Weisberg, 50-52.

⁹³ Weisberg, 135.

successful. First, Bing wrote that Americans were dedicated to raising the prestige of useful objects to that of art objects. Second, they had created factories of diverse arts under a "single directing spirit." Third, Americans had the ability, owing to their removal from the continent and relative youth, to ignore history and relate their work to the present. Fourth, Americans insisted that form followed function, doing away with unnecessary ornament. Finally, they constantly spent money to improve their equipment and technology.⁹⁴

Bing seems to refer directly to Tiffany when he praises American progress in promoting decorative art and organizing ateliers. Although his largest and most prestigious departments were those which made windows and blown glass, Tiffany's workers also made furniture, carpets, desk sets, funerary memorials, and lamps. Tiffany was also the exemplar of a huge cooperative art factory. Bing marvels that,

"America has always been distinguished for its capacity to bring its enterprises into perfect keeping with one another, and to direct all its energies and activity towards a definite object, in conformity with the needs of the time."⁹⁵

Bing admired this quality so much, that he used its ideals in creating his workshops. He organized his artists into departments under designers, but, like Tiffany, reserved final judgement on each design for himself.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ S. Bing, Artistic America, (1895), in Artistic America, Tiffany Glass, and Art Nouveau, ed. Robert Koch, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1970), 185.

⁹⁵ S. Bing, "Louis C. Tiffany's Coloured Glass Work" from Kunst und Kunsthandwerk (1898), in Artistic America, Tiffany Glass, and Art Nouveau, ed. Robert Koch, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1970), 197.

⁹⁶ Weisberg, 167.

It is concerning his dependence on history that Tiffany ceases to be the model American industrial artist (at least until Bing changed his philosophy.) Tiffany's interest in glass came directly from seeing historical examples, not only in Chartres and Ravenna, but also in Rome and Egypt. Additionally, Edward Moore, who introduced him to Bing, had an extensive collection of ancient glass.⁹⁷

While Tiffany was traveling through Europe and the Near East, he saw ancient glass uncovered in recent archeological excavations.⁹⁸ The glass had been so altered by time and exposure to different chemicals that the surface was pockmarked and iridescent, while the piece itself was extremely fragile. This glass inspired Tiffany to search for a way to reproduce such visual effects without producing a fragile material. Tiffany even brought antique glass pieces to the furnaces from museums for the inspiration of his workers.⁹⁹ As a result, most of his first blown glass pieces were naturalistic, but closely linked to ancient and oriental themes.¹⁰⁰

Tiffany's interior decoration, completed with the Associated Artists, and later in his Decorating department broke another of Bing's precepts for Art Nouveau. The rooms which the Associated Artists designed were described as, "rich in color, ornate detail, sumptuous textures, and glowing glass" (fig. 10).¹⁰¹ The rooms which Tiffany

⁹⁷ Koch, "Stained Glass Decades", 8.

⁹⁸ Couldrey, 41.

⁹⁹ Revi, 48,49.

¹⁰⁰ Eidelberg, 78,79.

¹⁰¹ Couldrey, 51.

designed, both for himself and others, were full to overflowing with different furniture, ornate rugs, and art works. Even wallpaper which he designed early in his career seems much more concerned with ornament than nature (fig. 12). The rebellion of Tiffany's style of decoration was that none of the rooms were "period pieces" as had been the custom.¹⁰² Although, to that extent, Tiffany's rebellion would have been smiled upon by Bing, Tiffany's excessive use of ornament would not have been. One of the first decorative works by Tiffany which Bing may have seen was his Byzantine chapel at the Columbian Exposition in Chicago, 1893 (figs. 13 & 14). It was a sumptuously decorated room, containing an elaborate altar and baptismal font both covered in glass mosaics.¹⁰³ One critic described the decoration as "eclectic and groping."¹⁰⁴ One fact which cannot be denied about Tiffany's decorative art was its ornate nature. Every space of a room was filled with some kind of color or texture. This was a direct antithesis of Bing's goals for a new kind of decorative art. (Compare figs. 10 & 15)

Tiffany agreed with Bing's later philosophy that there was nothing new in art, only new ways of saying the old things.¹⁰⁵ However, like Morris, Tiffany's main goal

¹⁰² Koch, "Stained Glass Decades", 75-77. An interesting illustration of Tiffany's reuse of historical forms is his extensive collection of over 4,000 Japanese sword guards (or tsuba), which he soldered together to make lamps and decorative molding for fireplace trim. Stover, 89.

¹⁰³ Koch, "Stained Glass Decades", 178.

¹⁰⁴ Wearn, "part 1", 158-161.

¹⁰⁵ Winter.

was to improve upon the past, not just continue the thread. The major marketing point for his "Favrile" glass windows was the fact that they needed almost no pigment to render true color, even on flesh. The name "Favrile," which Tiffany invented, was linked in Studio publicity to the roots of the word "fabricate". This stressed the handmade and unique qualities which Tiffany and Morris felt were so important.¹⁰⁶

Morris' ideal worker was the Medieval craftsman. He glorified the "common folk" who built cathedrals, and claimed that they should receive credit for such achievements, not the Popes and kings whose names we remember.¹⁰⁷ According to Tiffany, Medieval glass artists made more pure and brilliant colors because they did not have the technology to remove impurities from the molten glass. Then English artists removed the impurities from the glass mixture, and thereby removed the rich color, substituting glass-dulling enamels to paint color onto the glass. Tiffany's goal was to return to the "purity" of Medieval glass, but with such a range of colors and textures that no paint would be necessary.¹⁰⁸

The idea that past forms of crafts were an ideal for modern artists was adopted by Art Nouveau critics. When writing on the sculptor Meunier's work for the Grafton Gallery exhibit in 1899, a critic praises it by comparing the sculptures to ancient

¹⁰⁶ Koch, "Stained Glass Decades", 11.

¹⁰⁷ William Morris, "The Arts of the People" in The Collected Works of William Morris v. xxii Hopes and Fears for Art, Lectures on Art and Industry, (New York: Russell and Russell, 1966), 40.

⁴¹ Roger Riorden, "American Stained Glass, part 3" The American Art Review 2 (1881), 62.

fresco.¹⁰⁹ The comparison of Tiffany's glass work to medieval ideals was repeated as positive criticism in several contemporary articles.¹¹⁰ Modern critiques of medieval windows (which often appeared in conjunction with discussions of Tiffany's work) praised the 13th Century artisan for appreciating the value of glass, using mosaic (meaningful) lines, and acknowledging that glass is glass and, as such, should transmit light.¹¹¹ The glass which Tiffany made adopted these three principles. Instead of using dulling enamels, Tiffany's glass, "[held] its color in the material, and with the effects, good, bad, and indifferent, which may be obtained by its use."¹¹² The idea of modern crafts improving on the past was probably used in company publicity, but art critics also found it valid. One writer goes so far as to claim that the new improvements in stained glass were sufficient to call it a "native art".¹¹³ But was Tiffany really Art Nouveau?

When Bing wrote about Tiffany's work which was displayed at Grafton Galleries in England, he said,

"He sought to go back to the primitive starting-point, and inaugurate a school, in which the supreme refinement of taste and learned technique should be concealed under the most modest exterior; everything should

¹⁰⁹ Grafton Galleries, 33.

¹¹⁰ Horace Townsend, "American and French Applied Arts at the Grafton," The International Studio 17 (1899), 40; W.H. Thomas, "Colored Glass Windows," The International Studio 29 (1906), xlv-xlvi.

¹¹¹ Thomas, xlv.

¹¹² Roger Riorden, "The Use of Stained Glass," The Art Amateur 12 no.6 (May 1885), 130.

¹¹³ Ibid.

have the ease and softness and spontaneity of Nature herself."¹¹⁴

Nature was a top priority for Bing in his search for a new style. So was simplicity of form and line (fig. 16). Some of Tiffany's early work exhibits many of these Art Nouveau principles.

In his "Eggplant Transom" (fig. 11), made in 1879, Tiffany shows off his newly developed glass. His simple use of line, which is sparse, but intricate, is owing to the superiority of "accidental" shading within a single piece of glass. This is the mosaic use of line which contemporary critics talked about. Lead lines define forms, separating fields of color. In the enameled paintings of the Renaissance, glass pieces could be as large as the annealing kiln allowed, and did not need to be divided into logical color forms.¹¹⁵ Tiffany abhorred the unnatural manipulation of natural forms. He even resisted partitioning and dividing his many gardens because it was forced and unnatural.¹¹⁶ Tiffany accepted the Art Nouveau ideal of natural inspiration, but he did not approve of going so far as to abstract a natural form totally.¹¹⁷

Another window, made for the 1900 Paris Universalle, when Art Nouveau excitement was at its peak,¹¹⁸ displays these same characteristics. The "Four

¹¹⁴ Grafton Galleries, 15.

¹¹⁵ Roger Riorden, "American Stained Glass, part 1", The American Art Review 2 (1880), 232.

¹¹⁶ Eidelberg, 86-87.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Weisberg, 211.

Seasons" window (fig. 17) again allows the color and texture of the glass to define the form. He used natural forms, but encircled them with a very abstract and curvilinear frame. The use of line in the frame of the "Four Seasons" easily translates to the "whiplash curve" in Bing's Art Nouveau furniture for the Exposition (fig. 16). In addition, for the connecting glass, Tiffany used brilliant, but less varied glass, much like French glass work at the turn of the century (fig. 9).¹¹⁹ This treatment of glass seems very different from the panels of the seasons themselves, and also from his earlier windows such as Feeding the Flamingos (fig. 18). Tiffany's interests are in creating a three dimensional form by using variations within each sheet of glass, instead of dividing forms into light and dark pieces.

According to historian Martin Eidelberg, Tiffany's dedicated naturalism does not compare to the flowing, structured rhythms of High Art Nouveau in Europe.¹²⁰ Tiffany's first artistic mentor, George Inness is quoted as saying,

"Every artist who, without reference to external circumstances, aims truly to represent the ideas and emotions which come to him when in the presence of nature is in process of his own spiritual development and is a benefactor to his race."¹²¹

Tiffany's first love was nature and its realistic representation. Tiffany experimented with early photography equipment, and often used photographs as references for paintings. He even photographed flowers in detail, so that they might be used for

¹¹⁹ Gabriel Maurey, "Round the Exhibition," The Studio 20 (1900), 177.

¹²⁰ Eidelberg, 70.

¹²¹ [deKay], 6.

reference in the Company's floral windows.¹²² His windows and mosaics concentrated on natural forms, though somewhat abstract, carefully defined by choice of glass and placement. Compared to Bing's 1900 Art Nouveau display in Paris (fig. 15), these natural forms are somewhat out of place. Bing took nature as a starting point and simplified the lines to abstraction. His interest seems to shift to line and its use to define the function of an object. Bing strove for "simplicity and structure."¹²³ Tiffany's lines are functional, but his desire is to eliminate as many lines as possible and replace them with effects of the glass itself. One critic claimed that accident played a larger part than design in the creation of a Tiffany window.¹²⁴ Accidents in the glass added dimensions to Tiffany's work that would otherwise have been unavailable.

Tiffany retained some ideals in common with Bing, but his different interests in pictorial rather than functional pieces necessarily removed him from Bing's ideal Art Nouveau. His concerns were natural representation, beauty and color, always color. Tiffany is quoted as saying, "[a flower's] form is distinctly a secondary consideration which comes after the satisfaction we feel in [its] color."¹²⁵ "It is a perfect riot of color which we are invited to look at," stated one European reviewer of the Grafton Gallery show.¹²⁶ Tiffany was a self-labeled colorist, to whom line, form and shape became

¹²² Eidelberg, 83.

¹²³ Revi, 148.

¹²⁴ Townsend, 41.

¹²⁵ Couldrey, 46.

¹²⁶ Townsend, 40.

secondary. He was not content to make windows with existing glass, but had to open his own furnaces in order to get enough color. In fact, in his ghostwritten autobiography, Tiffany claims that by turning from oils and watercolors to glass he became a more pure colorist. Now, by being limited by the color of glass, he could not cheat in representing nature.¹²⁷ Instead, he reinvented the medium.

Tiffany used ideas presented by the Art Nouveau movement to mature in his work, exploring ever richer color and more “pure” windows. While Tiffany readily adapted to Bing’s philosophy regarding the use of historical influence and natural inspiration, Bing’s precepts did not necessarily limit him. It is quite possible that there were real differences between the two, particularly over Tiffany’s type of interior design work, but regardless of their personal relationship, it was in Bing’s interest to promote Tiffany’s art.¹²⁸ Since he held a monopoly on Tiffany glass sales in Europe, Bing may have taken advantage of their similarities in philosophy and ignored the differences in order to promote a highly popular art form.

Tiffany’s basic philosophy relied more on the representation of beauty than on any tradition or imposed limits.¹²⁹ Even his search for a method to reproduce the aging of ancient glass was motivated by its beauty. Tiffany, “present[ed] all living things in

¹²⁷ [deKay], 76.

¹²⁸ Koch, “Stained Glass Decades”, 197.

¹²⁹ Neil Harris, “Louis Comfort Tiffany: the Search for Influence,” in The Masterworks of Louis C. Tiffany by Alastair Duncan, Exhibition Catalog, (New York: Abrams, 1989), 39.

their most fortunate circumstances."¹³⁰ Tiffany balanced between natural representation in glass and ornate decoration in interiors throughout his life, but Art Nouveau was a passing whim.¹³¹ Just as Bing pursued his ideals beyond the failings he saw in Morris, Tiffany tried to remedy the failings which he saw in Bing's art, particularly in the realms of color and beauty. After 1900, Tiffany remained rather conservative in style, blatantly rejecting the new schools of cubism and modern art as "fads".¹³² Tiffany's mind was always full of new ideas, whether in glass, interior design, or architecture, but what aspect of his art do his lamps fit into?

It seems that each of the two lamps being examined in this paper exemplifies a different aspect of Tiffany's art. First, the Dragonfly lamp (fig. 1) made the use of color very important. Its theme certainly comes from an interest in nature, and perhaps from a Japanese influence,¹³³ but because of the repetitive nature of the design, and the similar shaped pieces used between each dragonfly's body, the real variety and visual interest in these lamps is the interaction of color. The difference between the color of the dragonflies' bodies and their eyes, as well as the contrast between the dragonflies and the background draw the viewer into the piece. Each of these lamps was unique in

¹³⁰ Hugh F. McKean, "The World of Louis Comfort Tiffany", in The Art of Louis Comfort Tiffany, Exhibition Catalog, (Toledo: Toledo Museum of Art, 1978), unpagued.

¹³¹ McKean, "Lost" Treasures, 3; Winter.

¹³² Eidelberg, 89.

¹³³ Eidelberg, 81.

its use of color, and a piece of decorative art intended to make the life of its owners more beautiful. However, the base pictured is very ornate. No doubt Bing would have approved of other, less flashy Studio bases.

The Spider-web lamp (figs. 2 & 3) is a true representative of the Art Nouveau style, but still contains a bit of Tiffany ornament. Although it contains several colors and many intricate designs, the designer maintained a continuity of line and form, owing mostly to the interdependence of the base and shade. Since the two parts of this lamp were designed to go together, they form a very cohesive unit. Also, the form of the bronze holders for the shade follows their function, that is support. Depicted like branches of a tree, it seems quite right that they should be adorned with leaves and blossoms. Even the support structure between the different cobwebs is clearly defined without losing any sense of naturalness. Finally, the design of the glass pieces on both the base and shade is very naturalistic. Despite the small pieces necessary to fit the mosaic to the curved base, the blades of grass and narcissus blooms seem very realistic. However, Tiffany's devotion to color reigns supreme here as well. The color of the blossoms in the shade is accentuated by its juxtaposition with frosted and more lightly colored glass.

As always, we must be cautious about labels. According to John LaFarge, Tiffany's competitor, names cannot accurately describe distinguishing factors of art, but must be used simply as bookmarks in history for later reference.¹³⁴ Some of Tiffany's work appears to be in the Art Nouveau style, while other work is very natural, and still

¹³⁴ LaFarge, 33.

other much more ornamental. His art certainly cannot be fully contained within the Art Nouveau movement. However, his style in the Studio's lamps, seems to fit rather well into that rubric.

CHAPTER 3

There is one final aspect of Louis Tiffany's art that must be discussed in this paper, and that is: how did Tiffany feel about the art being produced in his studios? Was he equally satisfied with all of his productions? The best way to begin exploring this question is to examine how Tiffany portrayed himself to his contemporaries and how he wanted to be seen by generations to come.

According to Bing, in order to succeed, the Art Nouveau movement needed, "the artist-- of born talent to be sure-- who will commit himself wholeheartedly to an artisan's work."¹³⁵ This is a fairly good description of the way that the press (and Tiffany himself) portrayed the stained glass artist. He was described as an untrained artist,¹³⁶ which he was to some degree, but not entirely. The idea of an untrained artist producing works of such extravagant color as Tiffany did is a romantic notion. It serves to degrade further the necessity of "schools" of art, organizations which Tiffany is critical of in his biography.¹³⁷

Through interviews with the press and free-lance journalists, Tiffany was further able to create a "working class" image for himself. Captions under pictures of blown glass vases in one article read, "Favrile glass vase designed and executed by Louis C. Tiffany."¹³⁸ Bing seems to credit Tiffany alone with the recipe for his patented glass

¹³⁵ Bing, Artistic America, 124.

¹³⁶ McKean, Louis Comfort Tiffany, 6.

¹³⁷ [deKay], xxiii-xxiv.

¹³⁸ Waern, "part 2", 19.

when he says, "Long and patiently did he labor before securing the result of his discoveries, but at last he did attain a definite result."¹³⁹ Later, he goes even farther, when he talks of Tiffany, "display[ing] his skill in glass blowing."¹⁴⁰ Whether these writers knew it or not, these statements are blatant lies. Tiffany could not blow glass. He never made a piece of Favrile glass, however much of a part he may have played in finding the recipe.

Whether Tiffany claimed these things in interviews, or they were simply inferred, is impossible to tell. However, in his introduction to Tiffany's biography, Charles deKay comments on the fact that the arts appeared from obscure places among "humble folk."¹⁴¹ Perhaps deKay did not mean to infer that Tiffany was "obscure" or "humble," but the medium for which he was best known, that is glass, certainly held those connotations. The craftsmen of the middle ages, whom Tiffany credits with the greatest development of stained glass, were very "humble folk," whose names and stories will never be known.

In reality, Tiffany was far from being a poor, working-class artist. Tiffany was a gentleman artist. He was free to pursue his career because his father financed his travels and education. Many of his first decorating clients were friends and customers of his father's business, Tiffany and Company.¹⁴² The image Tiffany wanted to portray,

¹³⁹ Bing, "Tiffany's Coloured Glass", 206.

¹⁴⁰ Bing, "Tiffany's Coloured Glass", 211.

¹⁴¹ [deKay], xxii.

¹⁴² Harris, 18.

however, was that of a tireless perfectionist. Certainly he was a perfectionist, but when the 1915 catalog of Tiffany Glass and Decorating Co. stated that the items included were "made under the supervision of Louis C. Tiffany,"¹⁴³ it was true only in the loosest sense.

The page of contents in deKay's biography is helpful for determining other aspects of his life which Tiffany wished to stress. The chapters are headed, "Tiffany the painter", "Tiffany the maker of stained glass", "Favrile glass", "Enamels and jewelry", "Textiles and hand stuffs", "A decorator of interiors", "A builder of homes", and "As landscape architect."¹⁴⁴ These chapters lay out the kinds of art Tiffany made in their order of importance to the artist.

First, Tiffany was a painter. Hand in hand with that is: Tiffany was a colorist. At least four times, in different areas of his biography, there are references to the general lack of color in American art and architecture, and the lack of artists sensitive to such things.¹⁴⁵ "Colorists are men apart. ...[A]lways they are antagonized and decried by artists and critics who lack the gift, and see nature in outline rather than in color."¹⁴⁶ Written at a time when his popularity was rapidly declining, and his art was thought of as too extravagant and decadent, this seems to be a direct attack on his critics. Not only does Tiffany want to be remembered as a struggling artist, coming from "humble

¹⁴³ Winter.

¹⁴⁴ [deKay], contents page.

¹⁴⁵ [deKay], 31 and 71-72.

¹⁴⁶ [deKay], 15.

folk,”¹⁴⁷ but he wants everyone to know that he succeeded against great odds. If the press and his peers were against him, but the public accepted him, than he is a martyr for art’s sake.

In his introduction, Charles deKay talks about the powerful force of Art, which cannot be controlled. In some artists, according to deKay, it focuses itself narrowly, but in others it is extremely broad, like in Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Albrecht Durer, El Greco, Benvenuto Cellini, or (by inference) Tiffany.¹⁴⁸ The many chapters of his book, each devoted to a different medium of art, attest to Tiffany’s scope as an artist. Whether his impact will have such a scope cannot yet be determined, but he certainly wanted to be associated with giants in the art world.

The second and third chapters of his biography discuss Tiffany’s glass experience. This is logical, since his glass work served to boost his popularity and occupied much of his life. What is interesting are the subjects of the two subsequent chapters: jewelry and textiles. In 1902, when he took over Tiffany & Co. after his father’s death, Tiffany designed a line of jewelry to be marketed through his father’s company. However, the entire line was unprofitable and was discontinued after a very short time.¹⁴⁹ In addition, his admitted role in the textile production of Tiffany Glass & Decorating, was limited only to color choice; he could not weave or sew.¹⁵⁰ It is curious

¹⁴⁷ [deKay], xxii.

¹⁴⁸ [deKay], xx-xxii.

¹⁴⁹ Koch, “Stained Glass Decades”, 357.

¹⁵⁰ [deKay], 42.

that he concentrates on two media with which his experience and direct involvement were so limited. One reason could be that they were used to illustrate the scope of his creative sphere. They also relate to the idea of the inspired craftsman. Both jewelers and weavers were traditionally only artisans but with the ideals of Art Nouveau were being raised to the level of fine artists. Perhaps Tiffany wanted to stress his connection with these crafts of the people.

“One reason for the wide variety of Tiffany productions was the steady stream of new ideas flowing through his mind. Another was his conviction that the world needs art.... He was convinced useful articles made with care and taste could help the world with its values.”¹⁵¹

It was a popular theme, for Tiffany, Bing, Morris, and their contemporary decorative art advocates that if beautiful things which were also useful were produced then the taste of future generations would be changed enough to demand such things.¹⁵² The decorative arts tend to reach more people than paintings, and Tiffany claimed that he wanted to “bring beauty to every home.”¹⁵³

Not all art critics believed this, however. Cecilia Waern, a writer for The International Studio claimed that,

“The Tiffanys certainly do not try to emulate Morris & Co. in educating the public taste; their aim is to sell, to persuade, not to elevate or instruct; there is also a tendency to simplify the labor expended, as far as

¹⁵¹ McKean, “Lost” Treasures, 221.

¹⁵² Charles deKay, “The Application of Art to American Industries”, Artist 25 (n.d.), xix.

¹⁵³ Daniel Cohen, “Splendor in Glass,” Historic Preservation 39 (July/Aug 1987), 24; Duncan, Louis Comfort Tiffany, 81.

possible, with a view to reducing the cost of production."¹⁵⁴

Looking at the items addressed in his biography, Tiffany certainly never wanted to be seen as commercial. The romantic ideal of making useful things into art did not reduce the quality (or price) of the art work, it merely made useful things more expensive. However, Tiffany was, undeniably, a businessman.

When Tiffany decided to leave the Associated Artists, he told Candace Wheeler, "we're going after the money in art, but the art will be there all the same."¹⁵⁵ Alastair Duncan, an art historian, calls Tiffany Studios, "a consortium of industrial designers producing a clearly defined and highly personalized range of household goods marketed aggressively through press releases, advertisements, sales brochures, and domestic and international expositions."¹⁵⁶ When Tiffany released his first Favrile blown glass pieces, he made gifts of high quality pieces to famous international museums. Then, when he began advertising, he listed the museums which owned pieces of Favrile glass, implying that the museums had purchased the pieces themselves.¹⁵⁷

Neither was he beyond catering to public taste in order to make money. In 1891

¹⁵⁴ Waern, "part 1", 162.

¹⁵⁵ Lila M. Held, "Louis Comfort Tiffany: Artist and Craftsman" ([Englewood, CO: the Author], 1986), 105.

¹⁵⁶ Duncan, Louis Comfort Tiffany, 9.

¹⁵⁷ Couldrey, 104; Koch, "Stained Glass Decades", 264.

and 1892, he was criticized for designing windows directly from German lithographs.¹⁵⁸ Although the images appealed to the public, they lacked the original design which critics insisted belonged to "real" art. After 1900, his Studios began to mass produce blown glass for matching sets of glassware.¹⁵⁹ Again, although the public wanted to be able to set a table for 12, critics complained that the quality of the products was diminished because they were no longer unique.¹⁶⁰

Once these changes occurred, however, Tiffany became less enthusiastic about them. He complained that the widely used glassware was too commercial.¹⁶¹ In 1913 he disassociated himself from Tiffany Furnaces with the same complaint.¹⁶² Although Tiffany clearly understood the need to make money in business and certain ways through which that might be achieved, he tended to agree with the art critics of the age that if things were either cheap or easily duplicated, their artistic value was diminished.

Bing put it very clearly when he said that, "real art cannot be measured in dollars and cents. That is why the trickster and the knave flourish. They capitalize on commercialism."¹⁶³ Bing's ideals for the Art Nouveau movement were to make the

¹⁵⁸ Koch, "Stained Glass Decades", 137.

¹⁵⁹ Robert Koch, Louis Comfort Tiffany, Exhibition Catalog, (New York: Museum of Contemporary Crafts of the American Craftsmen's Council, 1958), 12.

¹⁶⁰ Koch, "Stained Glass Decades", 276.

¹⁶¹ Revi, 53.

¹⁶² Couldrey, 165.

¹⁶³ Hugh Weir, "Through the Rooking Glass," Collier's (May 23 1925), 51.

decorative arts beautiful, not necessarily affordable. In his first exhibit of L'Art Nouveau, each room's furnishings were specially designed and manufactured for the show. None of the objects at the gallery was accessible to the French public. They were too expensive.¹⁶⁴ In fact, throughout his success, Bing continued to appeal more to the international elite than to the French people.¹⁶⁵ Like Tiffany, Bing hoped to change the public's taste by producing elegant and expensive goods. By the time the demand had been created, it was hoped, the means would be available to produce them more extensively and cheaply.¹⁶⁶

Tiffany's idea that handmade (and therefore expensive) things were necessary in life was a fond one. During his life, he owned two Cranes, handmade and individually numbered cars. He was wealthy all his life, able to travel to other countries whenever he desired. He had a very carefree attitude towards money. He did not understand the average workingman's house, budget, or taste.

Another effect which his great wealth had on his business was to make it extremely uneconomical. Since he was used to extravagant spending on personal items, he did the same in his business. However, he was never able to cover these expenses with the earnings of the company. Each year, Tiffany would write a personal check to balance the books of Tiffany Glass and Decorating Co.¹⁶⁷ Part of the reason

¹⁶⁴ Weisberg, 91.

¹⁶⁵ Weisberg, 191.

¹⁶⁶ Weisberg, 204.

¹⁶⁷ Find

for his company's debt was that an enormous amount of capital was tied up in inventory. Tiffany retained up to 300 tons of glass on hand.¹⁶⁸ In addition, the company showrooms were full to capacity with various objects for sale (figs. 20 & 21). A contemporary writer reported that during a visit to Tiffany's workshops, she saw evidence of discarded ideas and trends, some very expensive, lying around in the back staircases.¹⁶⁹ Because of this great expense for inventory, Tiffany's prices rarely reflected cost and overhead.¹⁷⁰

Another reason for Tiffany's constant business debt was his sales policy. He had several exclusive stores which he stocked with his glass items. However, he insisted on selling everything on commission. This meant that he could retain the right to determine prices, and display, but the items also remained in his inventory. If his conditions of price or display were not met, or a piece did not sell in three months, he would recall the item and distribute it to another store. If a glass piece failed to sell at three successive consignment shops, it was destroyed, given away, or sold to a worker at a discount.¹⁷¹ He refused to have any of his glass resold in an antique shop. He hired workers to go around to various stores and buy up any Tiffany glass that they saw in order to prevent them being sold "second hand."¹⁷²

¹⁶⁸ Gertrude Speenburgh, The Arts of the Tiffany's, (Chicago: Lightner, 1956), 44.

¹⁶⁹ Waern, "part 1", 162.

¹⁷⁰ Winter.

¹⁷¹ Revi, 90.

¹⁷² Winter.

These policies, undoubtedly prevented Tiffany from making a profit almost as much as his huge inventory. Why did he insist on such restrictive sales practices? Perhaps it can be traced to his aversion to commerciality. It may be that he wanted to retain tight control of selling circumstances so as to ensure that his work was treated like the art he thought it to be. By their very nature, the decorative arts were considered commercial, and Tiffany may have wanted to downplay that by controlling the number and types of glass pieces displayed at each store.

Tiffany constantly struggled between the need to be commercial, producing things which people would buy, and his desire to be artistic, producing only that which he found beautiful. The problem lies in the very mission of the arts to which he chose to devote himself. According to Bing, "the mission of decorative art is to adapt itself to the taste and habit of others."¹⁷³ This issue is addressed by deKay in Tiffany's biography. He states that since the creation and expansion of the middle class, the people have become the major patrons of art; and what the people want are useful things.¹⁷⁴ Moreover, according to deKay, all art was originally useful, and by producing useful things, the modern artist was becoming more pure and truthful. Separating the "fine" arts from decorative arts has served only to turn many fine craftsmen into poor artists because they were afraid that they could not succeed while producing "lower" forms of art.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷³ Bing, Artistic America, 119.

¹⁷⁴ [deKay], xxiv.

¹⁷⁵ Winter.

The greatest struggle with producing decorative arts in a mechanized world was the common perception that art which is popular necessarily loses artistic quality. By being confronted with a great demand, the artist is tempted to sell work which may not meet his artistic standards.¹⁷⁶ Even when the movement to raise the quality of decorative arts was at its height, entrepreneurs were fighting a strong prejudice, even from their peers. John LaFarge, a close competitor of Tiffany's, degrades artists who work quickly for popularity and not slowly for posterity.¹⁷⁷ This was a prejudice which Tiffany had to face quite regularly, and one which gave him a bit of trouble.

When deKay is describing Tiffany's decorative art work, he states, "the fact that things of daily use like lamps, flower vases, and toilet articles reach a wider public than do paintings and sculpture make the 'decorative' arts more important to a nation than the 'fine' arts."¹⁷⁸ The odd thing about this statement is the fact that deKay never mentions lamps again in his book. The only lamp illustrated is one which has a globe of blown glass, not a leaded shade (fig. 21).¹⁷⁹ Since this book was published and illustrated with Tiffany's money, undoubtedly he had the final say on the engravings used, and possibly even the text. By reason of their exclusion, we can safely say that Tiffany did not consider his leaded glass shades to be an important (or memorable) part of his life's work.

¹⁷⁶ Riorden, "Use of Stained Glass", 130.

¹⁷⁷ LaFarge, 345-346.

¹⁷⁸ [deKay], 27-28.

¹⁷⁹ [deKay], 34a.

Hugh McKean, a Tiffany historian, suggests that Tiffany's aversion to the leaded lampshades was due to their replicative nature. After all, he states, painters do not copy their own paintings just to be able to sell more.¹⁸⁰ However much Tiffany disliked the repetitive nature of his lamps, it is that very nature which served to disseminate the "Tiffany" style.¹⁸¹ Henry Winter, the author of a Tiffany newsletter says about his lamps, "no other form of the Tiffany Arts & Crafts have so greatly popularized the form and color values of Tiffany glass, illuminated or UNilluminated."¹⁸²

It is ironic that the medium which Tiffany liked very little actually helped to broaden his popularity. Lamps were the most popular in the United States, a land of mechanization and the interchangeable part. Perhaps it was the same repetitive nature which drove away Tiffany that attracted the American public to his lamps. "The lamp[s]... were not unique, even though hand-made. Their variations moved for the most part within recognizable limits. Such recognizability was part of their appeal."¹⁸³

Tiffany's lamps' continuing popularity is an indication of their lasting appeal. Although they were reproduced in great numbers, each one retains a little of the personality of its creator. The color used in Tiffany's lamps serves to distinguish one from another, and define their character. It is their variation and creative use of color

¹⁸⁰ McKean, "Lost" Treasures, 198.

¹⁸¹ Harris, 37.

¹⁸² Winter.

¹⁸³ Harris, 37.

which allows these lamps to be defined as works of art. Each one was made separately, by hand, with careful choice of color. Like all art, some of Tiffany's lamps are more successful than others, but that does not negate their artistic quality.

Tiffany's lamps are also good examples of Art Nouveau. Although Tiffany experimented with the style around 1900, he soon moved beyond its ideals in his personal work. Perhaps that is another reason for his dislike of the lamps. As his tastes and desires changed, the design being used for lampshades remained the same. Not only were there lots of lamps being produced, but by the end of Tiffany's life, they could have all been examples of art that he no longer liked.

In addition to their Art Nouveau characteristics, Tiffany disliked the lamps produced under his name because they were criticized as being "commercial". Tiffany wanted history to discuss him as a great artist, not a businessman, and being accused of commerciality truly offended him. However, we are not forced to look at Tiffany's art through his eyes. We can appreciate the unique character of his many lamps, and place them in the realm he was unable to: fine art.

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fig. 1



Fig. 2

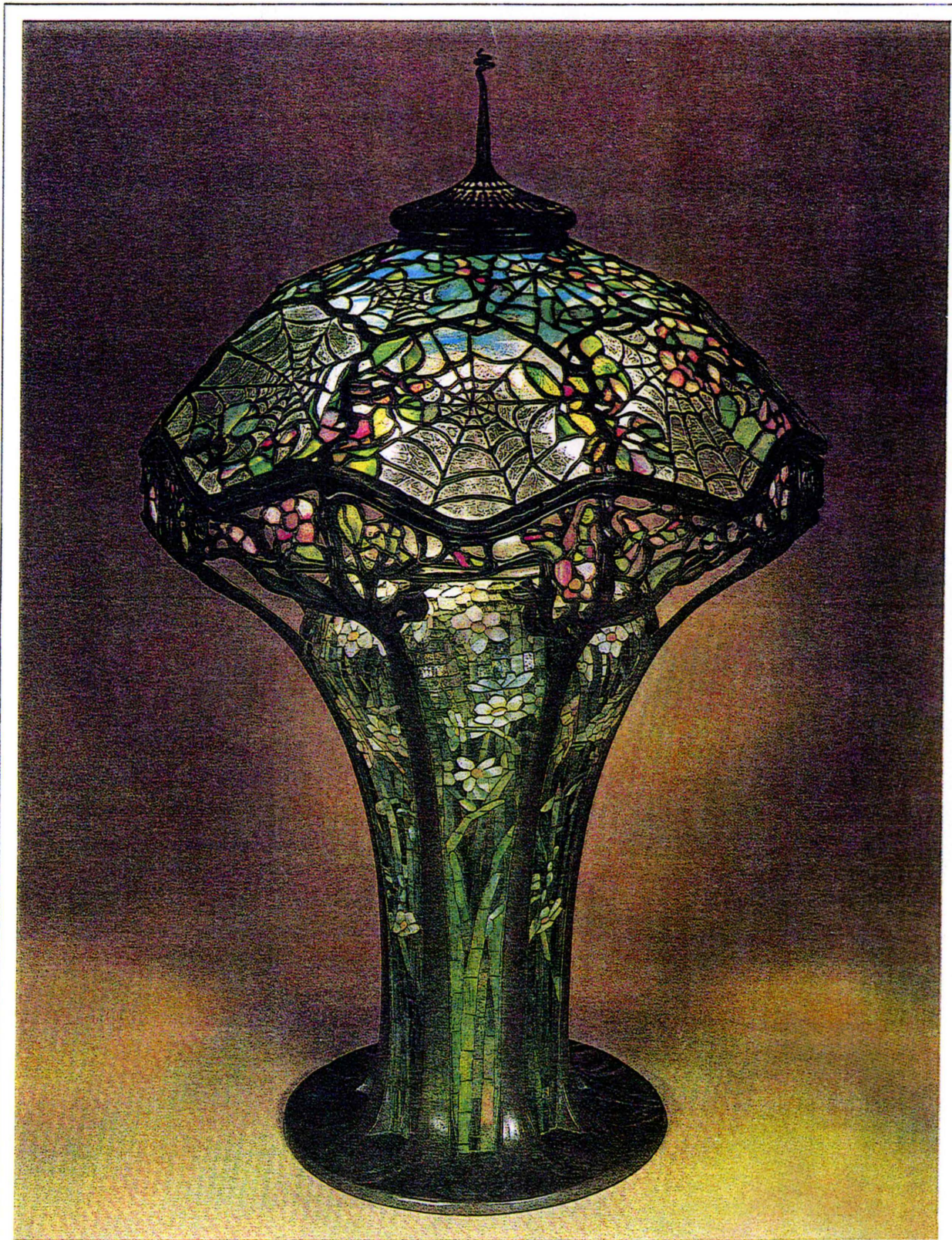


fig. 3

No. 30,665.

DESIGN.

Patented May 2, 1899.

L. C. TIFFANY.
LAMP.

(Application filed Feb. 1, 1899.)

Fig. 1.

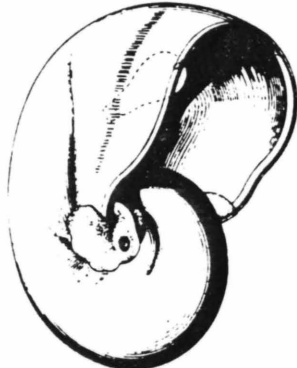
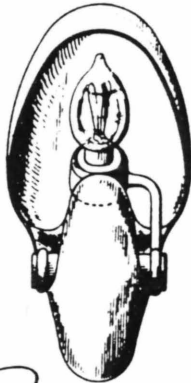


Fig. 2.



WITNESSES:

John L. ...
John L. ...

INVENTOR

Louis C. Tiffany

BY *Munn & Co.*

ATTORNEYS.



... Nautilus lamp with leaded glass shade as exhibited in London in 1899.

fig. 4

Patent of May 2, 1899, for the nautilus lamp designed by Louis C. Tiffany.



"Pumpkin and Beets." Leaded window. Designed by Louis C. Tiffany, 1900-5. Unsigned. Height 47".

fig. 5

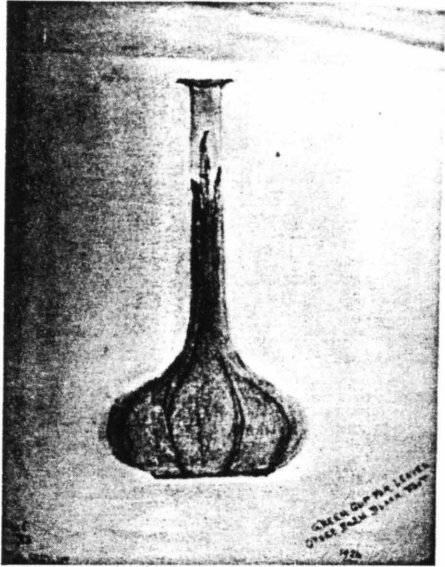


SUGGESTION FOR
LAMP
FOR
MISS H. W. PERKINS
BY THE
TIFFANY STUDIOS
N. Y. C.
SKETCH No 1915G
SCALE: 3/4" = 1 FT. 0 IN

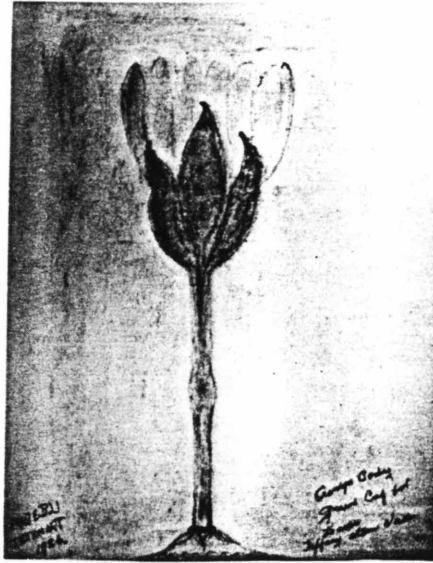
Louis C. Tiffany

Watercolor design for a lamp, signed by Louis C. Tiffany. *The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Walter Hoving*
1967.

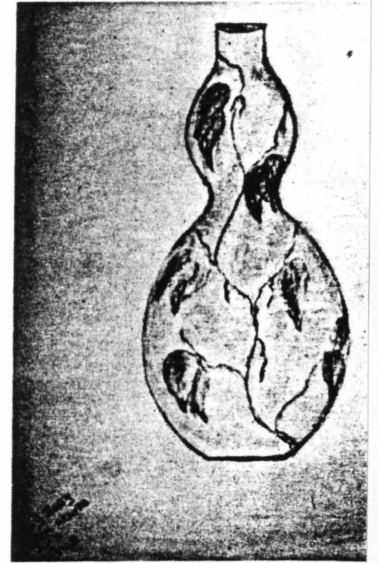
fig. 6



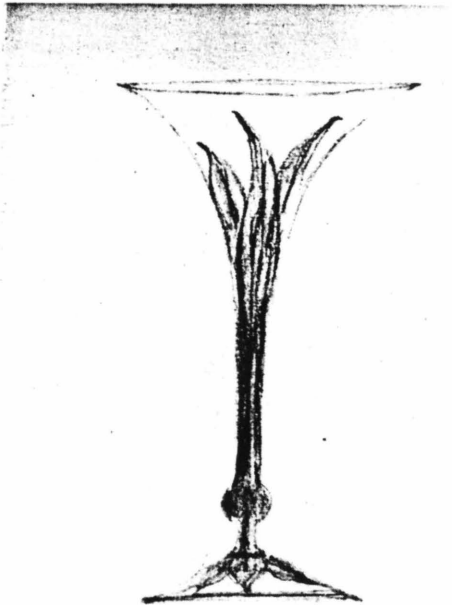
Made by J. A. Stewart. Green cup for leaves, orange body, black foot, 1926.



Made by J. Stewart 1926. Orange body, green cup for leaves, Tiffany stem vase.



Made by J. Stewart 1926. Ru green leaves and stems.



Made by J. Stewart 1926. Light ruby body, dark green cup for leaves on body and foot.



Made by J. A. Stewart 1926.

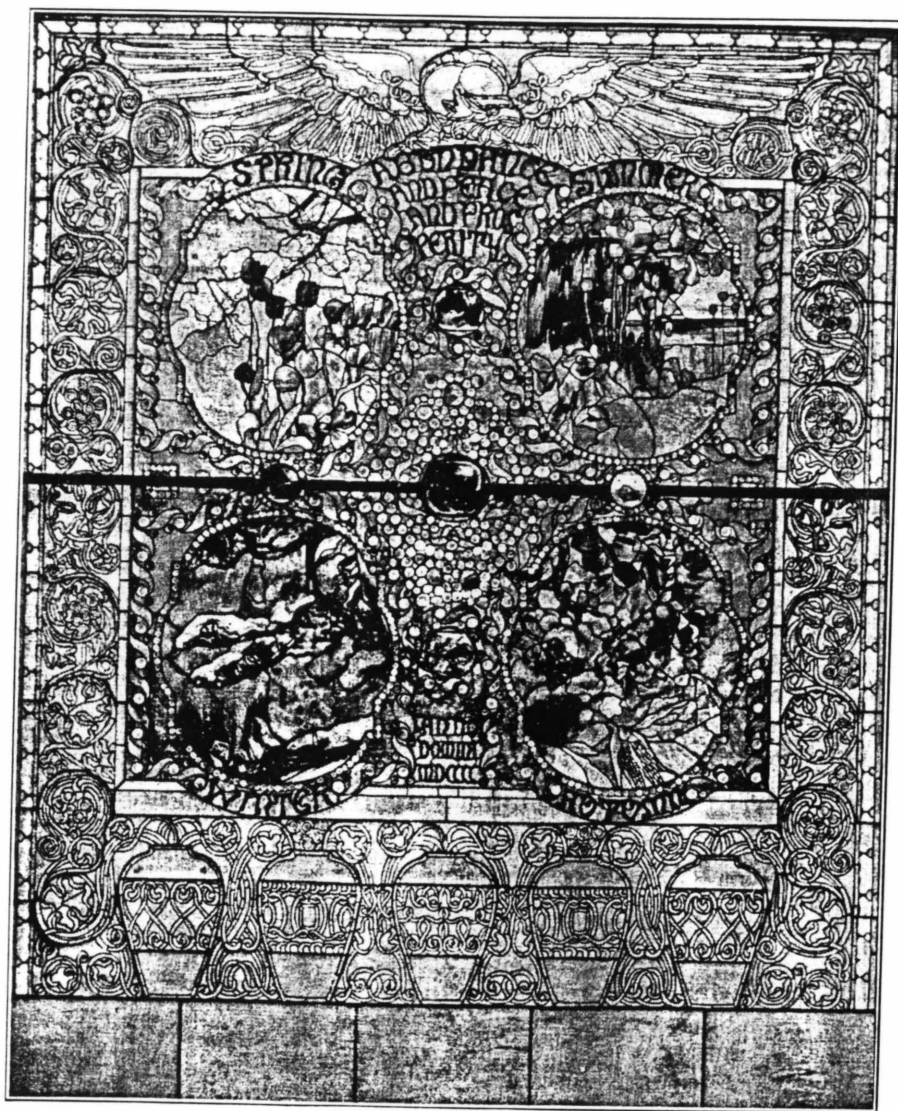
fig. 7



Fig. 8



Fig. 9



THE FOUR SEASONS

— a domestic window —

—COURTESY LOUIS COMFORT TIFFANY FOUNDATION.

fig. 17

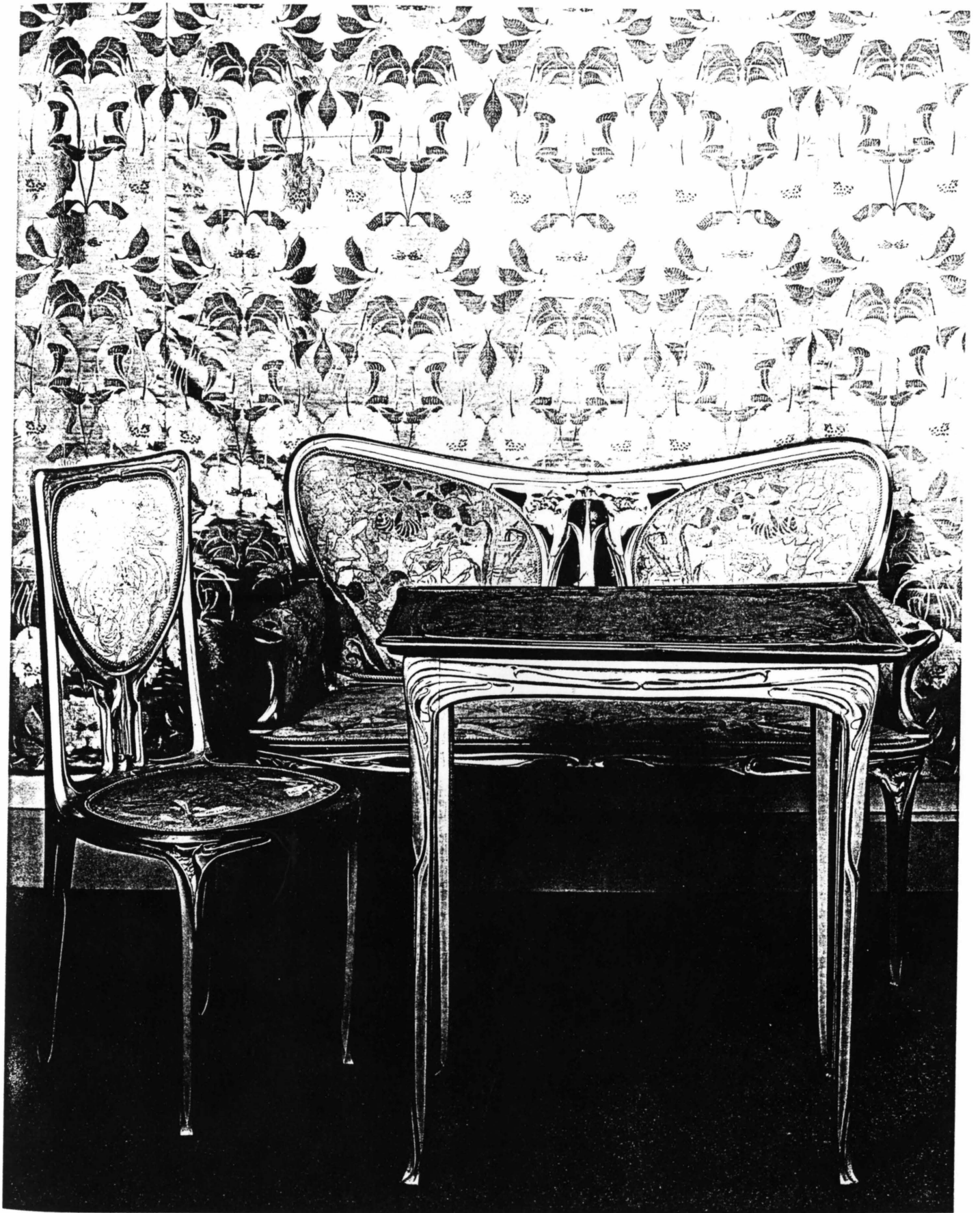


Fig. 16

Georges de Feure. *Second view of the dressing room.* 1900 (contemporary photograph)

Eugene Gaillard, *Bedroom.* 1900, photograph from *Album de références de l'Art Nouveau* (Photo/Album Bing). Bibliothèque, Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris

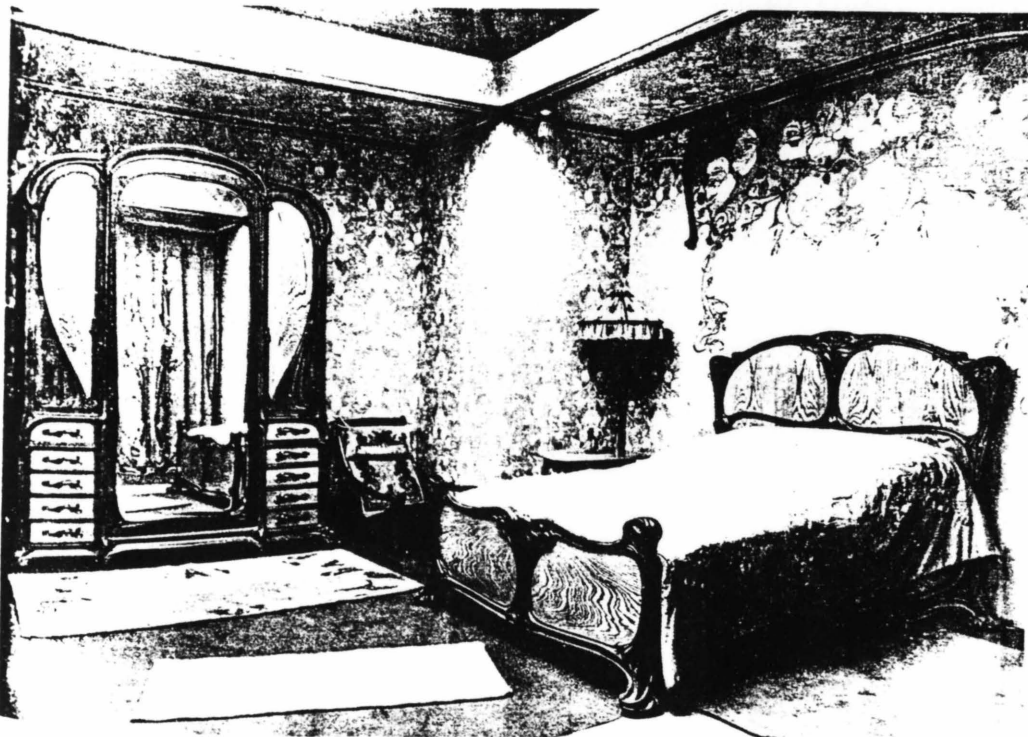
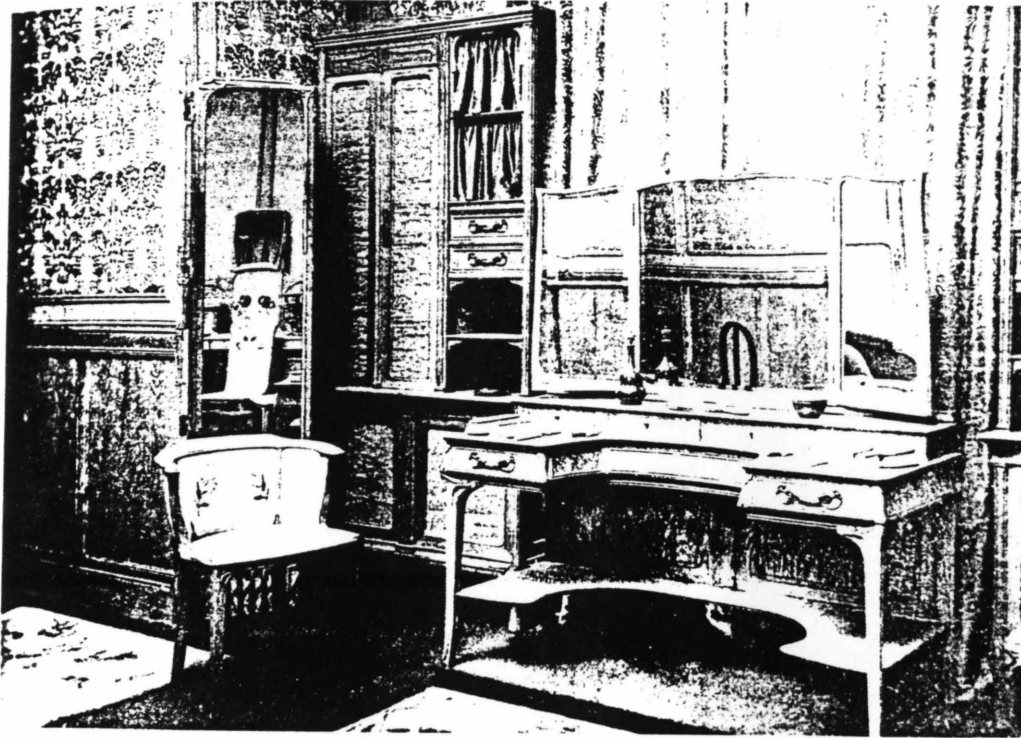


fig. 15

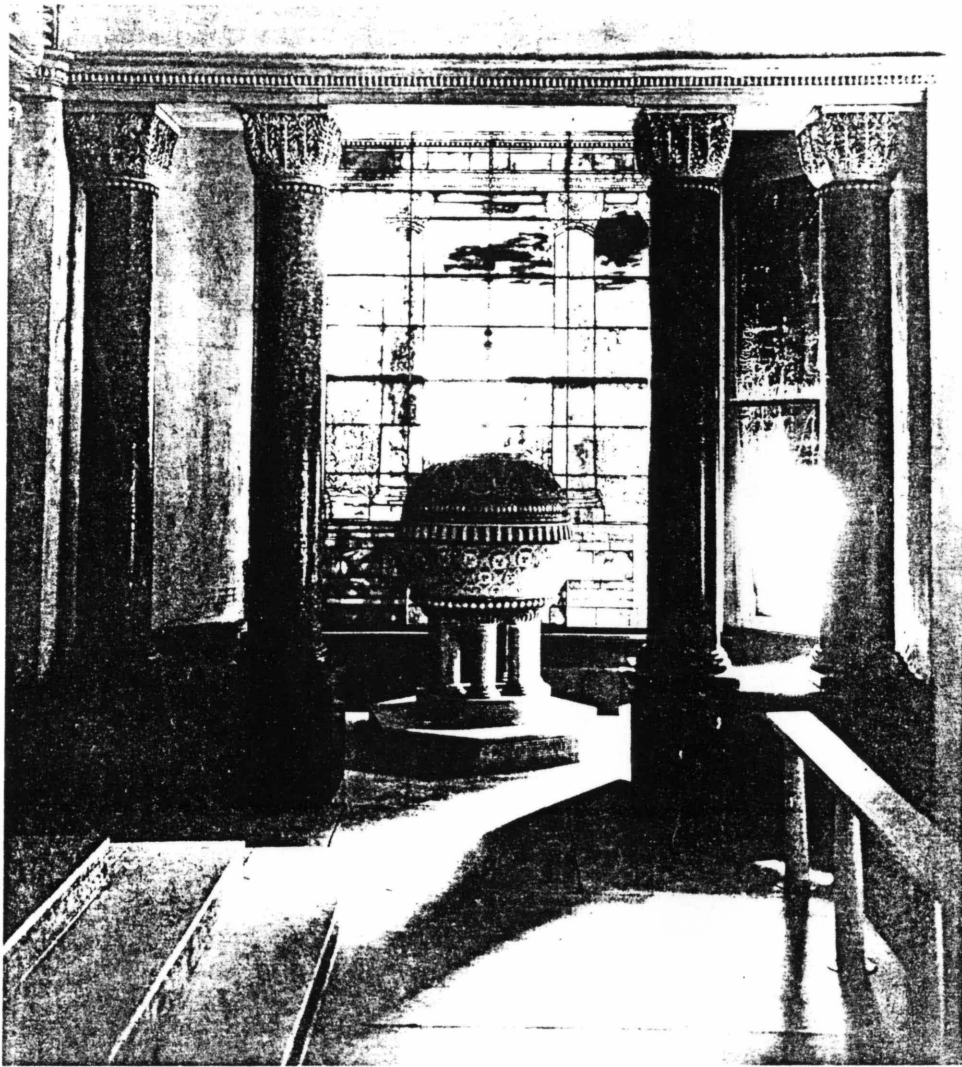


fig. 14

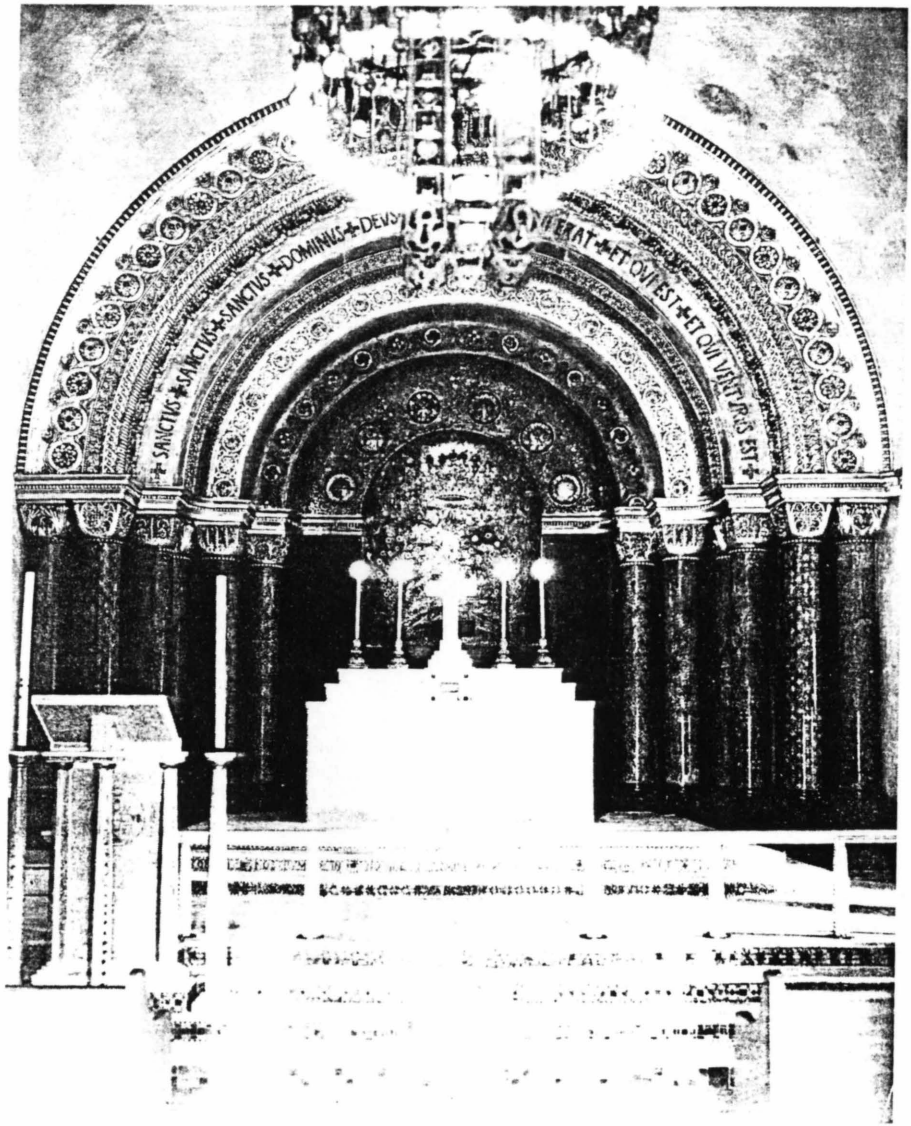


fig. 13



"Eggplants." Leaded transom. Possibly from the Kemp residence, which was decorated by Louis C. Tiffany in 1879. Unsigned. Height 32".

fig. 11

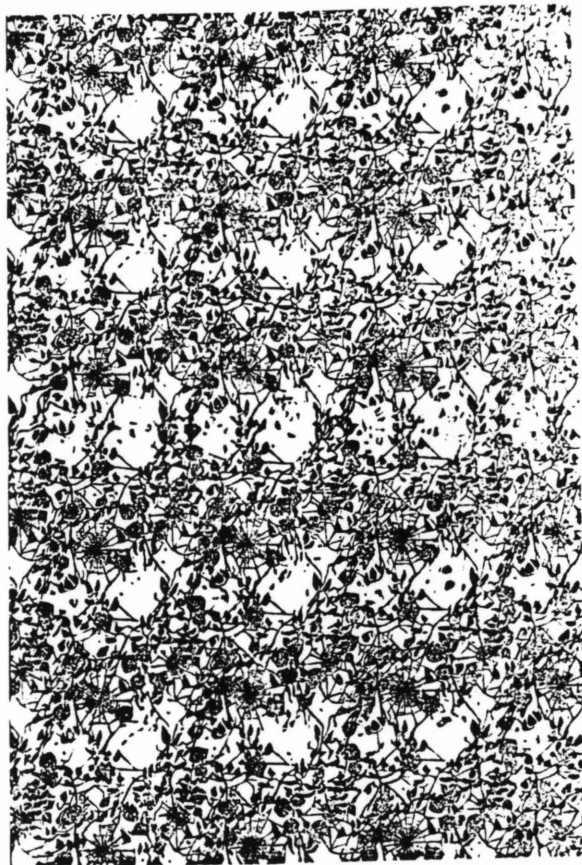
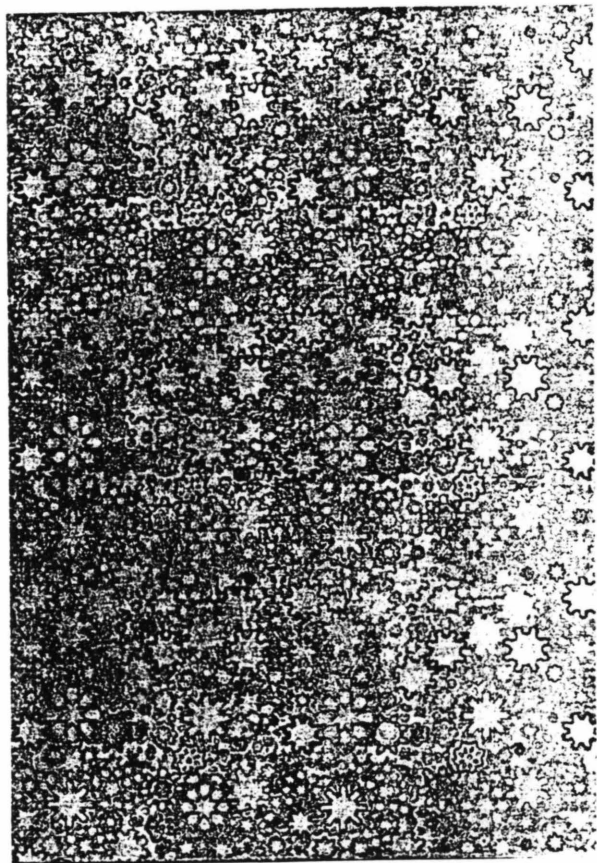
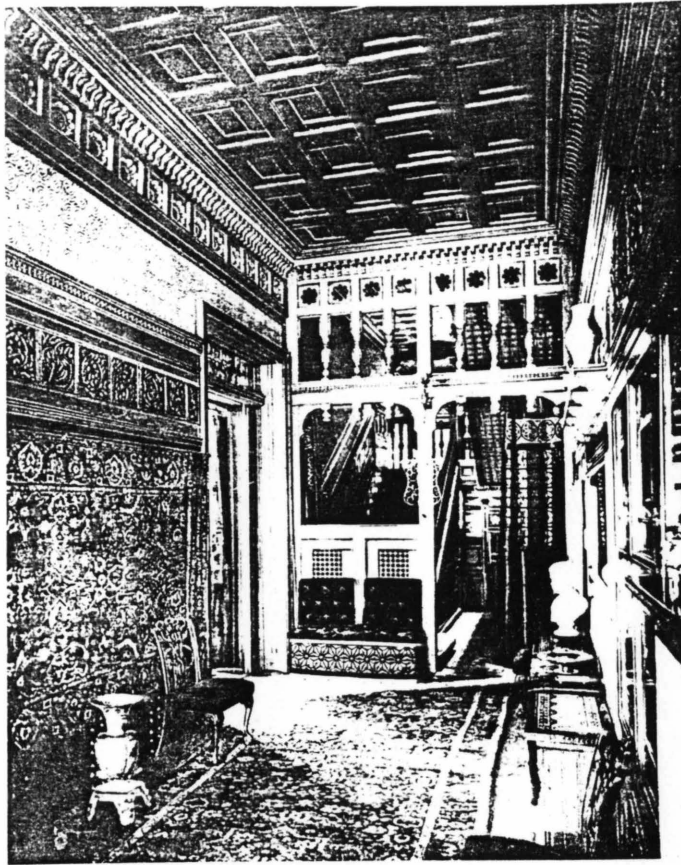


Fig. 12



George Kemp retained Tiffany in 1879 to decorate his Fifth Avenue house. In the hall (*top left*) were glass chandeliers as well as in the salon (*above*). The oak-paneled dining room (*below*) had a frieze on gilded canvas.

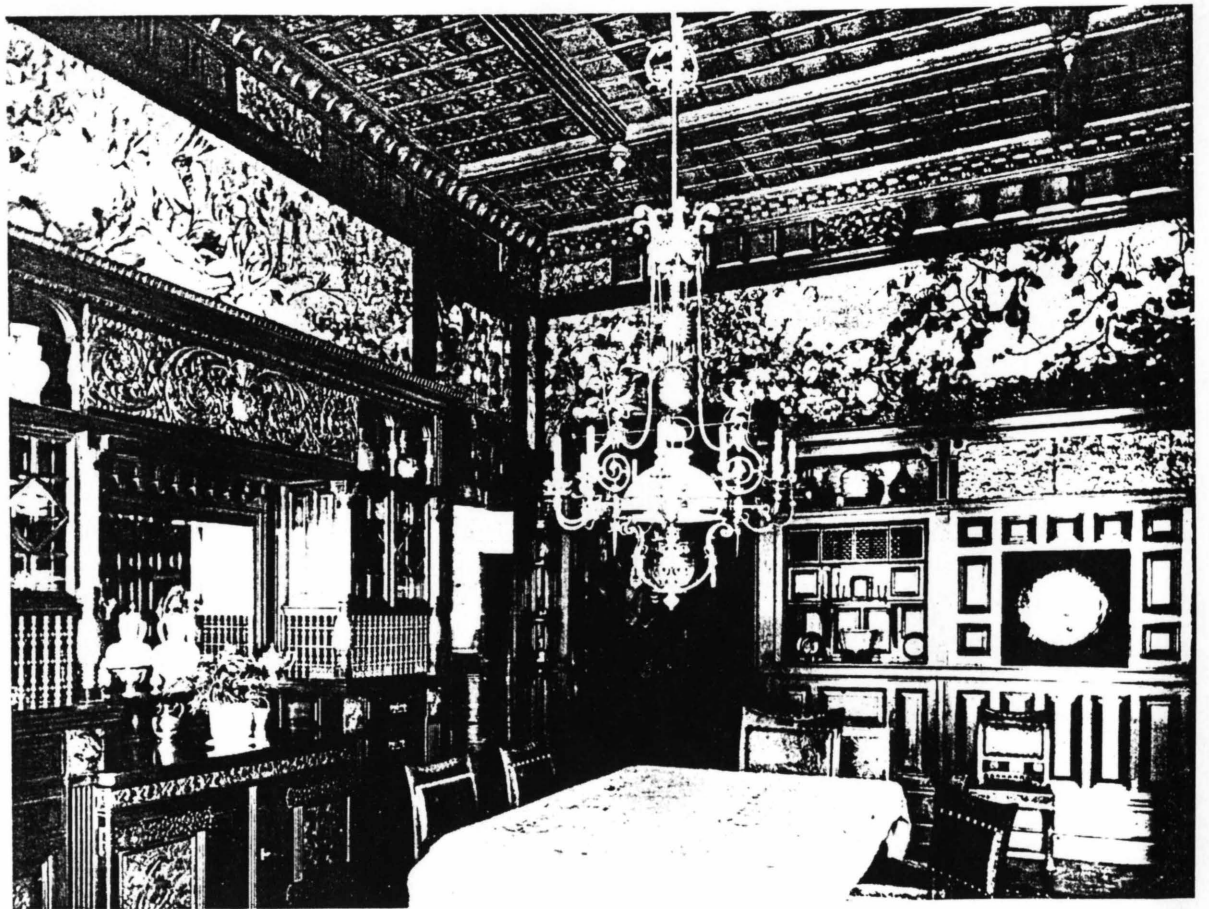
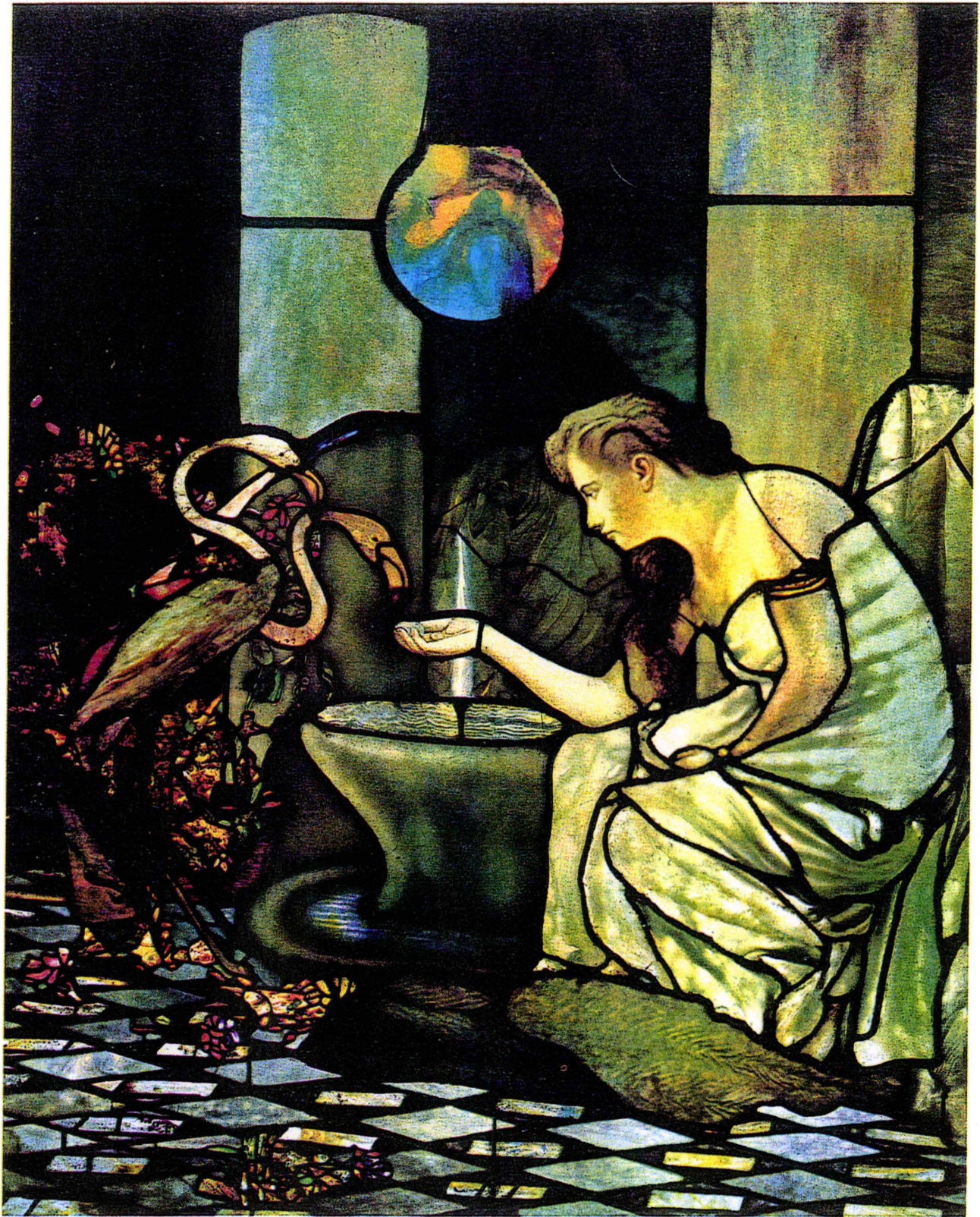


fig. 10



"Feeding the Flamingoes." Leaded window from painting by Louis C. Tiffany, c. 1892. Signed, "Tiffany Glass & Dec. Co., 333-341 4th Ave. N.Y." Made for the World's Columbian Exposition. Height 62".

fig. 18

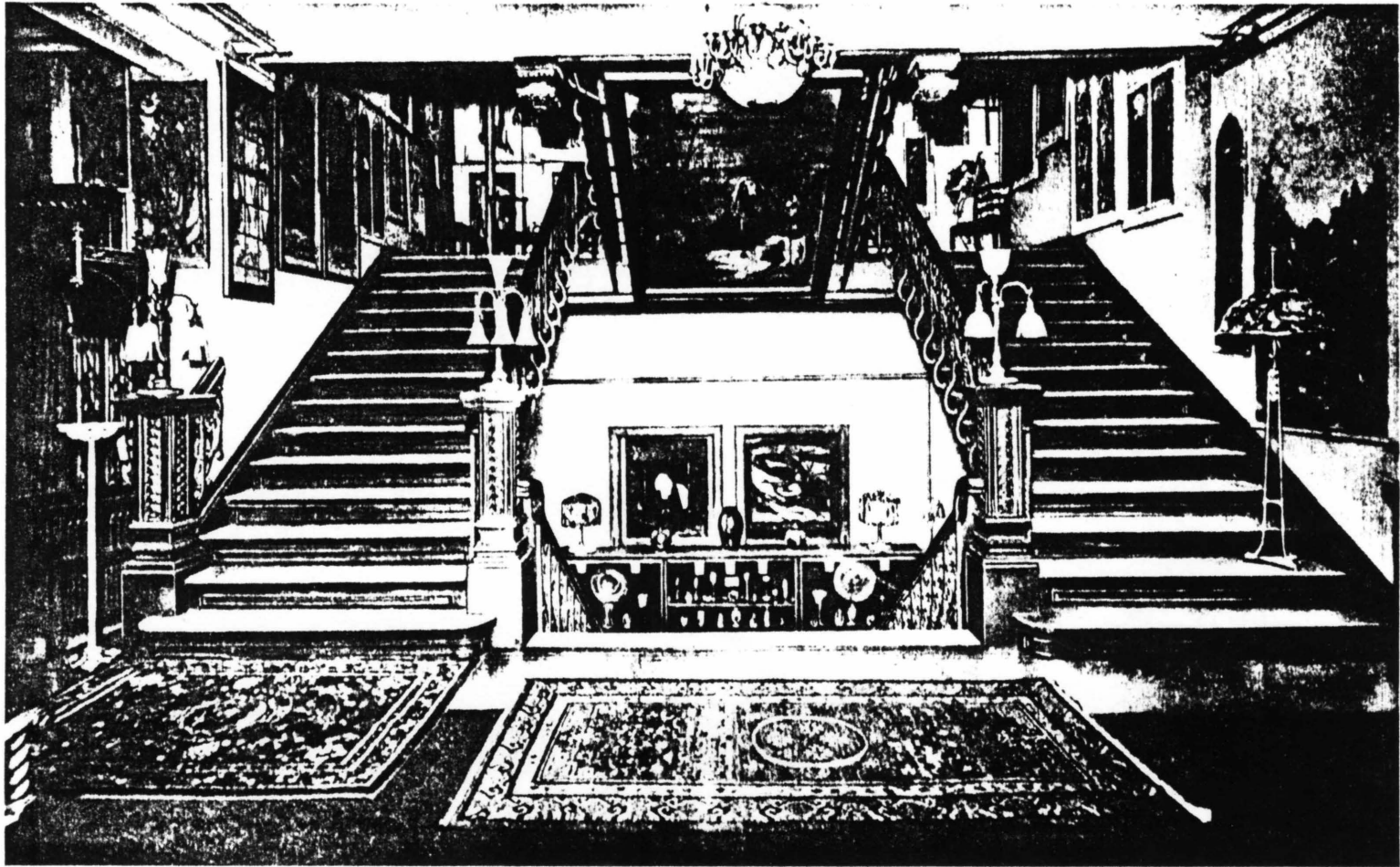


fig. 19

MAIN STAIRWAY

TIFFANY STUDIOS

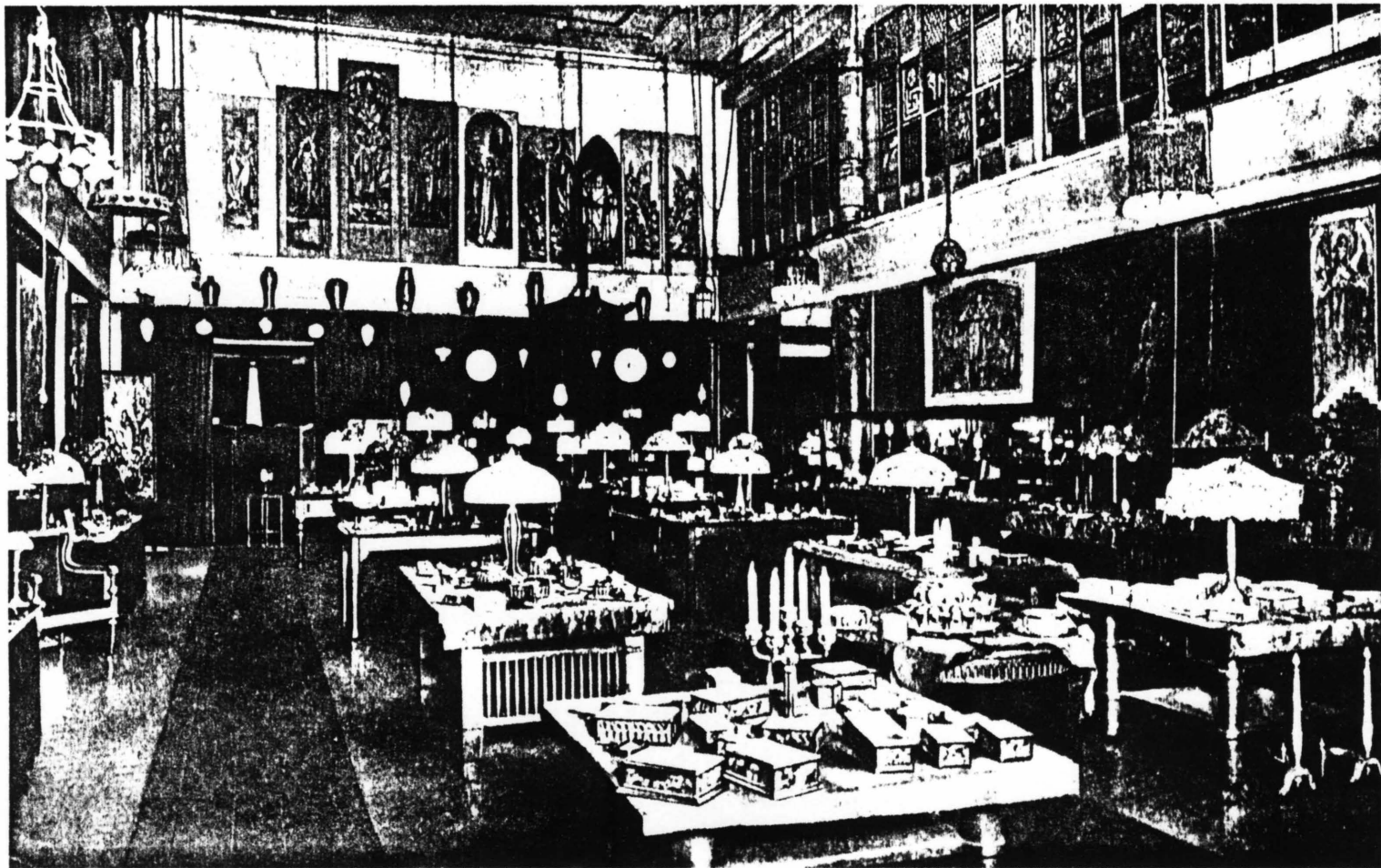


fig. 20

METAL SHOWROOM

TIFFANY STUDIOS



fig. 21