



# QUEST OF BEAUTY

LOUIS COMFORT TIFFANY'S LIFE AND ART



THE CHARLES HOSMER  
MORSE MUSEUM  
*of American Art*

WINTER PARK, FLORIDA

LOUIS COMFORT TIFFANY today is most famous for his vastly popular creations in glass, and yet his artistic vision left few mediums untouched. Tiffany was a painter, a decorator, an architect, a photographer, and a designer of pottery, furniture, enamels, and jewelry in addition to glass lamps, windows, mosaics, and vases. Nature was his muse, color his obsession, and exotic culture his bottomless well of influence. The teams of talented designers and craftspeople under Tiffany’s watch translated his all-encompassing vision into some of the most beautiful objects of the time. Late in his life, Tiffany elegantly summed up his long and prolific career as a “Quest of Beauty.”

#### 1848–1878: Birth to Age Thirty

Tiffany was born in 1848 shortly after his father, Charles Tiffany, founded a modest venture in New York that grew to become the most prestigious silver and jewelry company in America—Tiffany & Co. Demonstrating early artistic promise, Tiffany as a teenager won an award for proficiency in drawing at his boarding school. The young Tiffany went on to study art in Paris, and teachers there helped seed an enduring fascination with the art and design of Eastern and Islamic countries.

Settling into adulthood, Tiffany found success as an artist. Named at age twenty-three as an associate of the National Academy of Design, he became a well-known and respected Orientalist painter of North African and Middle Eastern scenes, exhibiting often in New York and abroad. The



ARAB WITH REED INSTRUMENT, c. 1870. Watercolor and gouache on fiber paper (55-025).

time Tiffany spent painting only deepened his interest in color and light, leading him inevitably perhaps to the consideration of glass as a medium. As early as age twenty-four, he was studying the chemistry and techniques of glassmaking.

In 1872, Tiffany married Mary “May” Goddard. Together and with friends, Tiffany and May traveled in Europe and North Africa. Tiffany’s new home for his young family at the Bella Apartment House in New York City was also the first residence in which he practiced the fusion of Eastern and Western styles that would become the hallmark of his interior designs. Tiffany’s penthouse suite was an amalgamation of Oriental fantasy and nationalistic sobriety that brought together disparate elements into a grand, unified environment.

#### 1879–1887: The Artist in His Thirties

Tiffany’s home in the Bella Apartment House was an early showcase for his talent, and it suggested to him the market for a fresh type of interior design. Using family connections and financial backing and partnerships with established artists and designers, he was able to make a smooth transition from artist to interior designer. While many

wealthy Americans were looking to European historical models for taste and decoration, Tiffany provided a unique, artistic approach to interiors. Louis C. Tiffany & Co., Associated Artists (1881–83), the most widely recognized of his ventures, decorated the most respected homes, private clubs, theaters, and civic buildings of the day. With commissions such as President Chester A. Arthur’s White House and Mark Twain’s home in Connecticut, Tiffany and his associates quickly became tastemakers in America.

These interiors included windows, lamps, and lighting, and motivated him to apply for patents in his opalescent glassmaking techniques, which produced an unprecedented range of hues and three-dimensional effects in a single piece of glass.

In 1882, Tiffany began work on a fifty-seven room home on Seventy-second Street in New York City for the extended Tiffany family. *Ladies’*



WISTERIA AND MAGNOLIA LEADED-GLASS BAY WINDOW FROM TIFFANY FAMILY RESIDENCE AT 27 EAST 72ND STREET, NEW YORK CITY. Photo from *Arts and Decoration*, 1911.

*Home Journal* (November 1900) some years later would call it, “The Most Artistic House in New York City.” In this personal project, he developed a highly imaginative vision that mixed and mingled historical and exotic sources, creating a coherent, artfully blended interior. The decorations in Tiffany’s apartment included such splendid elements as the *Magnolia* leaded-glass bay window and hand-carved teak doors from India, both now in the Morse collection, as well as the innovative application of Japanese tsuba (sword guards) as ornamentation.

Tiffany made trips to St. Augustine, Florida, during this time hoping to improve his wife’s ailing health. Here he continued his quest of beauty, turning to the relatively modern invention of portable photography. From his many fine photographic studies of St. Augustine, he later executed paintings. May tragically succumbed to her illness in 1884.

In 1885, Tiffany opened the Tiffany Glass Company. He continued to design interiors and also increased production of the individual objects with which he adorned those rooms. In 1886, Tiffany was remarried to Louise Wakeman Knox.

**1888–1900: The Artist in His Forties**

Artistically, the next decade was dominated by two projects considered among the most important of his career: Between 1890 and 1893 he decorated the home of prominent New Yorkers Louisine and Henry Havemeyer and created the Byzantine-Romanesque chapel interior for the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago.

After a bankruptcy in 1892, Tiffany reorganized his business as the Tiffany Glass and Decorating Company, marking the beginning of a highly successful strategy for marketing and selling his designs to a broader audience. He developed, exhibited, and sold individual blown-glass vases, leaded-glass windows, and lamps.

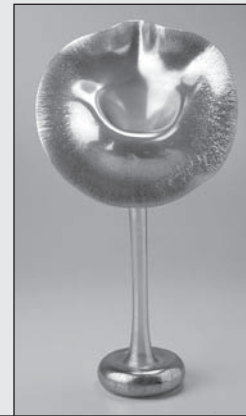
The famed Paris art dealer Siegfried Bing (1838–1905), whose Paris shop *L'Art Nouveau* provided the name to the international decorative art movement, was among the first to see Tiffany's art glass. As Tiffany's sole representative in Europe, Bing helped expand Tiffany's reputation internationally. Tiffany publicly debuted his first leaded-glass lamps at an 1899 exhibition of his works produced by Bing at Grafton Galleries in London. The 1900 *Exposition Universelle Internationale* in Paris is generally regarded as a high point of Tiffany's career. He won a *grand prix* at the exposition, at which he unveiled his *Four Seasons* leaded-glass



**Left:** TIFFANY CHAPEL, 1893. Reassembled at Morse Museum, 1999. 1,082 square feet, including baptistry.



**Left:** HANGING GLOBE FROM FOUNTAIN COURT, LAURELTON HALL, 1904–10. Blown glass with gilt-bronze collar (2003–21).



**Left:** PANSY FLORIFORM VASE, 1913. Blown glass (54-026).

**Below:** SPRING PANEL FROM FOUR SEASONS WINDOW, 1899–1900. Leaded glass (57-018).



window, and was named a Chevalier of the Legion of Honor.

**1901–1915: Age Fifty-three to Sixty-seven**

In 1902, Tiffany incorporated his growing company as Tiffany Studios—the name that would be most remembered by subsequent generations. Tiffany Studios succeeded in turning art into a business of awesome proportion, producing objects desired by both the wealthy and members of the rapidly developing middle classes. Around this time he began experimenting with art pottery, the development of glazes garnering most of his attention. He unveiled

several examples at the 1904 Louisiana Purchase International Exposition.

Tiffany's father died in 1902, leaving him a fortune of more than \$3 million. Louis became art director at Tiffany & Co., and though Tiffany Studios would always operate separately, the firm's expanding lines now included jewelry, enamels, and fine metalwork, objects that were sold through and later produced at Tiffany & Co.

Also in 1902, Tiffany began construction of Laurelton Hall, a vast country estate on Long Island. On the 580-acre site, Tiffany erected an eighty-four room, eight-level house, built conservatories and stables among

other structures, and laid out sixty acres of carefully planned gardens. Tiffany designed every aspect of the estate. He decorated the interior with objects collected from around the world as well as with his own creations, including furniture, rugs, lighting fixtures, windows, enamels, desk sets, art glass, and pottery. Sadly, Tiffany's second wife died in 1904 before her husband's project was completed.

Charles de Kay's authorized biography of Tiffany was published in 1914 at the summit of his career. With this first step, Tiffany began to move his focus from building his business empire toward establishing his legacy.

DINING ROOM AT  
LAURELTON HALL.

Photo from Park-Bernet auction  
catalogue for contents of  
Laurelton Hall, 1946.



VIEW OF LAURELTON HALL,  
COLD SPRING HARBOR,  
LONG ISLAND.

From *American Magazine of Art II*,  
November 1919.

**1916–1933: Age Sixty-eight to His Death**

The beginning of World War I as well as the 1913 New York Armory show of modern painting and sculpture foretold the end of Tiffany's reign as an international design master. In 1916, Tiffany himself began reflecting on his life's achievements and philosophy. His sixty-eighth birthday party at Tiffany Studios was a themed event called the "Quest of Beauty." The next year he published articles on this quest in *International Studio* and *Harper's Bazaar*.

Upon his retirement in 1918, he set out to give Laurelton Hall to the world, endowing the Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation there as a study center for young artists, who were called "fellows," and as a museum for his collections and personal works. Tiffany died January 17, 1933, at his Seventy-second Street

residence only months after Tiffany Studios filed for bankruptcy. In the early 1940s, finances drove the Tiffany Foundation to move to New York City and sell Tiffany's prized collections from Laurelton Hall as well as its buildings and property. A devastating fire finally gutted the house in 1957.

With the physical destruction of Laurelton Hall, it seemed that Tiffany's quest had met its real end. Hugh McKean and his wife, Jeannette, however, who built the collections at the Morse, plus a growing number of former employees, Tiffany Foundation fellows, collectors and scholars, have made it possible to experience Tiffany's quest of beauty through documents, old photographs, and most especially, through the magnificent artwork that remains.

## Louis Comfort Tiffany Chronology

**1848:** *February 18/19* Louis Comfort Tiffany born in New York City.

**1871:** *January* Elected Associate of National Academy of Design.

**1872:** *May 15* Marries Mary (May) Woodbridge Goddard (1846–84) in Norwich, Connecticut.

**1878:** *June 18* Forms Louis C. Tiffany & Company.

**1879:** *Before June–April 1881* Decorates Fifth Avenue home of New York pharmaceutical and chemical manufacturer George Kemp.

**1880:** *By April 20* Organizes the decorating business Tiffany & Wheeler in New York with artist Candace Wheeler (1827–1923).

*October 1* Organizes Tiffany & de Forest Decorators with Lockwood de Forest (1850–1932) to import exotic woodwork; dissolved November 29, 1882.

**1881:** *May 8* Elected Academician of the National Academy of Art.

*June 9–15* Tiffany & Wheeler absorbed into the firm Louis C. Tiffany & Co., Associated Artists (1881–83).

**1881–83:** Commissioned to decorate Mark Twain residence, Hartford, Connecticut.

**1881–85:** Collaborates with architect Stanford White (1853–1906) on a house at 72nd Street and Madison Avenue for extended Tiffany family. Charles Tiffany never moves in, but Louis and family live in studio apartment on the top level.

**1882:** *October* Commissioned by President Chester A. Arthur (1829–86) to decorate the Blue Room, East Room, a corridor, and the State Dining Room of the White House.

**1884:** *January 22* First wife, May, dies of tuberculosis.

**1885:** *December 1* Incorporates Tiffany Glass Company.

**1886:** *November 9* Marries Louise Wakeman Knox (1851–1904) of Philadelphia.

**1889:** Tiffany Glass Company adds ecclesiastical department.

**1890–92:** Redecorates home of prominent New York art collector and sugar refinery magnate Henry Osbourne Havemeyer.

**1892:** *February 18* Incorporates Tiffany Glass & Decorating Company (TGDco).

**1893:** *April 7* Separates glass production facility in Corona (Queens, New York City) from TGDco., calling it Stourbridge Glass Company.



LOUIS COMFORT  
TIFFANY  
(1848–1933).

**1893:** *May 1–October 30* World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago. Exhibits chapel interior. Awarded 54 medals.

**1895:** *December 26* Inaugural exhibition at *L'Art Nouveau*, the Paris gallery of Siegfried Bing (1838–1905), with ten windows and twenty-one pieces of “Favrite” blown glass.

**1899:** *May–July* S. Bing exhibition of Tiffany's works at Grafton Galleries, London. Debut of Tiffany leaded-glass lampshades.

**1900:** *April 14–November 12* *Exposition Universelle Internationale*, Paris. Exhibits blown glass, windows—including *Four Seasons*—lamps, mosaics, and, for first time, enamels. Wins twenty-four awards and the *grand prix* for applied arts. Awarded Chevalier of the Legion of Honor.

**1901:** *May 1–November 1* Pan-American Exposition, Buffalo, New York. Designs central fountain for the inner court of the Manufactures and Liberal Arts Building. Wins a grand prize for enamels.

**1902:** *February 18* Charles Lewis Tiffany (b. 1812) dies of pneumonia, leaving his son nearly \$3 million.

*February 25* Incorporates Tiffany Studios.

*September 29* Opens Tiffany Furnaces, Inc., in Corona, a reorganization of Stourbridge Glass Company.

**1902–5:** Builds Laurelton Hall on Cold Spring Harbor, Long Island.

**1904:** *May 9* Second wife, Louise, dies of cancer.

*April 30–December 1* Louisiana Purchase International Exposition, St. Louis. Debuts art jewelry and pottery.

**1914:** *The Art Work of Louis C. Tiffany* by Charles de Kay (1848–1935) is published.

**1916:** *February 19* Holds a breakfast and masque at Tiffany Studios entitled *The Quest of Beauty* to celebrate his sixty-eighth birthday and to show a retrospective exhibition of his works.

**1918:** *July 30* Creates Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation at Laurelton Hall to support artists and maintain the estate as a museum for his collections.

**1932:** *April 16* Tiffany Studios files for bankruptcy.

**1933:** *January 17* At age 84, Louis Comfort Tiffany dies at his 72nd Street home.

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**On the Cover:** DETAIL, MAGNOLIA WINDOW PANEL FROM TIFFANY FAMILY RESIDENCE AT 27 EAST 72ND STREET, NEW YORK CITY, c. 1885. *Leaded glass (58-013)*.