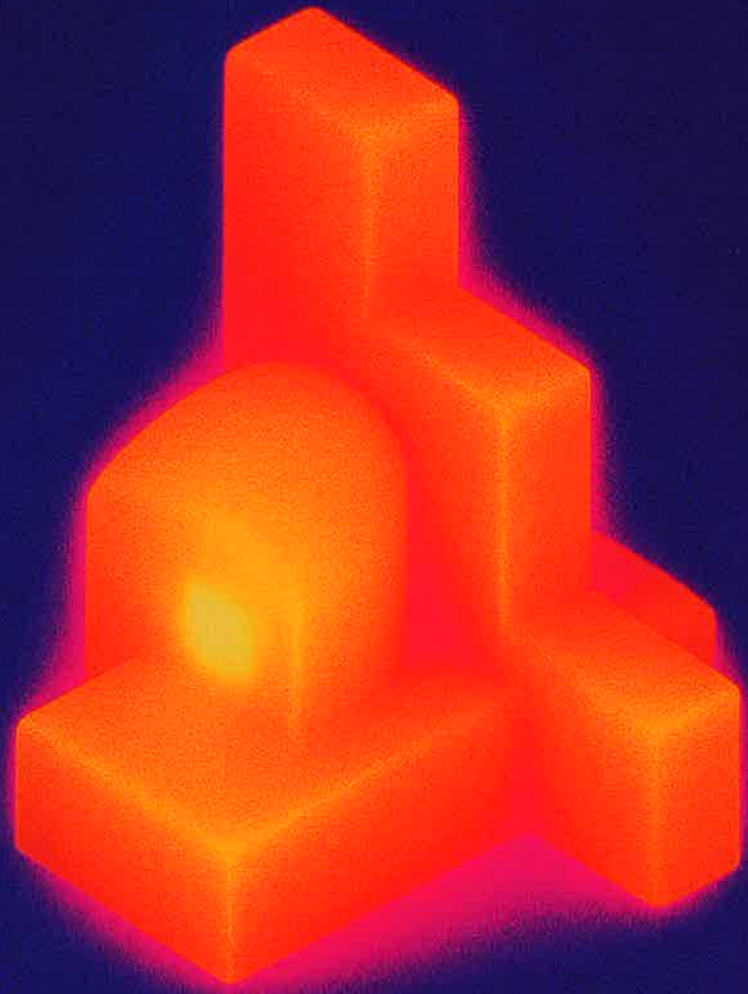


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In the Limelight

Reframing Tiffany Lamps at the Driehaus Museum with Curator Alexandra Ruggiero

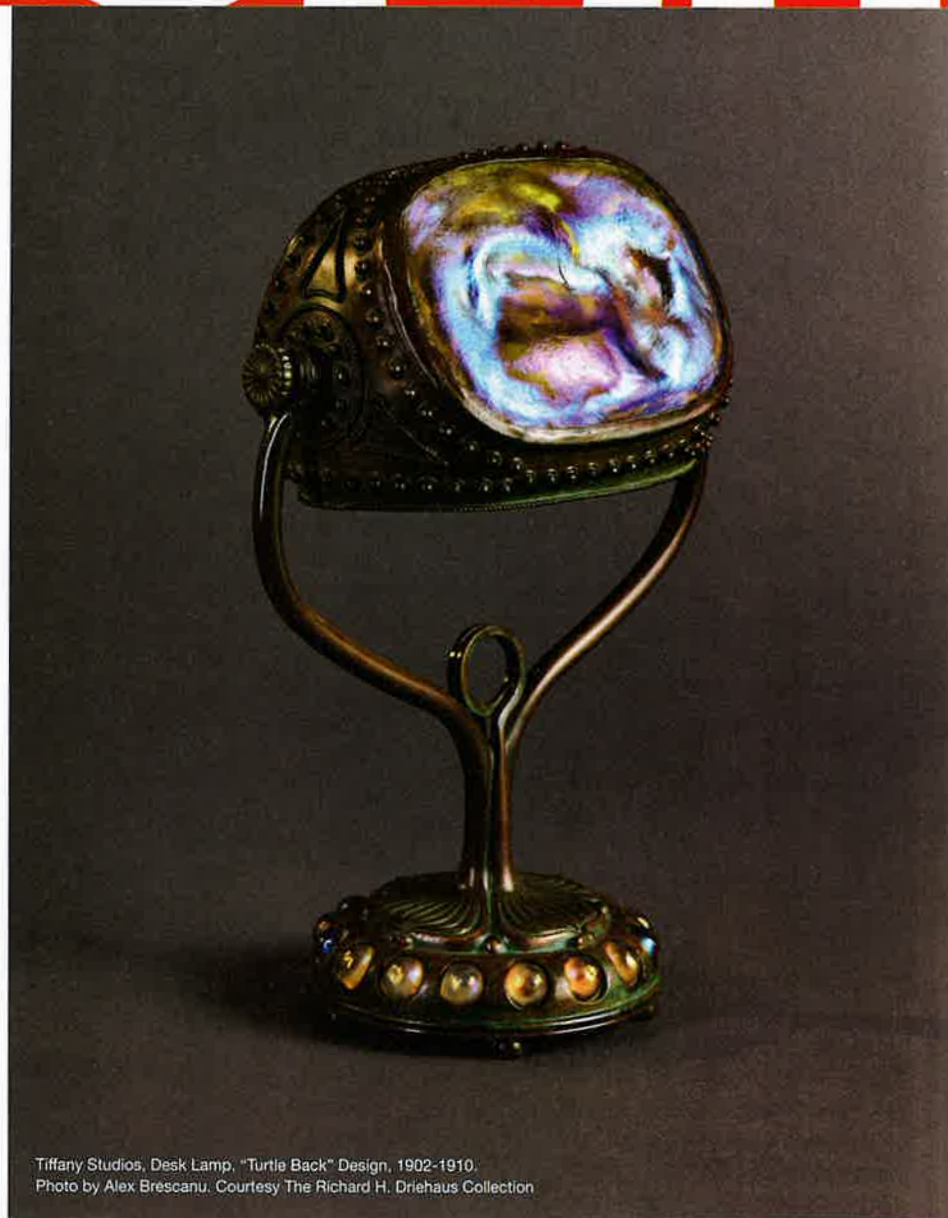
By Vasia Rigou

Looking for a fresh take on one of America's most iconic design names? With “Tiffany Lamps: Beyond the Shade” at the Driehaus Museum, guest curator Alexandra Ruggiero goes beyond the instantly recognizable stained-glass shades to showcase the full range of Tiffany Studios' innovation. Think sculptural bronze bases, dazzling blown Favrite glass, even unexpected materials like enamel and ceramic. Set against the opulent interiors of the museum's Gilded Age mansion, the exhibition reframes Tiffany as not only a master of beauty, but also of business and design innovation. Ruggiero talks about rethinking Tiffany's story, the overlooked role of women in the studios, and what surprises even the most devoted Tiffany admirers might discover.

What was your entry point for “Tiffany Lamps: Beyond the Shade”? Was there a piece, story or gap in the existing narrative that sparked the show?

When conceiving “Tiffany Lamps: Beyond the Shade,” I was immediately inspired by the breadth and depth of the Driehaus collection. They contain stunning examples of everything from small reading lamps to monumental chandeliers. This range of lighting fixtures called to mind a 1910 Tiffany Studios catalog in which the company advertised “the stock of the Studios is large and varied, embracing every form from the dainty desk lamps to the massive floor standards carrying leaded shades of exquisite colors.”

It was exciting to recognize the variety of works that Richard Driehaus collected enabled an exhibition that could showcase the signifi-



Tiffany Studios, Desk Lamp, “Turtle Back” Design, 1902-1910.
Photo by Alex Brescanu. Courtesy The Richard H. Driehaus Collection

cant and varied output of Tiffany Studios. I eagerly embraced the opportunity to present an expanded narrative beyond the company's iconic leaded glass shade and to illuminate the innovative design, materiality and business of Tiffany lamps.

Clara Driscoll and the women of Tiffany Studios have become central to how we talk about these works. How did

their presence shape this exhibition—and the way visitors will experience it?

A central component of “Tiffany Lamps: Beyond the Shade” explores how different materials were artistically combined to produce a captivating range of lighting fixtures. Rooms devoted to materials like bronze, ceramic, enamel and glass provide visitors with an entry point to understand the materiality and outstanding artistry of Tiffany Studios products.

The discovery of Clara Driscoll's letters expanded knowledge of the behind-the-scenes work that occurred at Tiffany Studios and provided further insight into the division of labor and attributions of beloved designs. The information included in Driscoll's correspondence has been foundational to my own understanding of how Tiffany Studios operated and absolutely influenced my approach to the themes of this exhibition.

You've worked with some of the most important glass collections in the country. How did that background shape the way you approached these works—especially as Tiffany's designs evolved with new technologies?

My experience at The Corning Museum of Glass deepened my understanding and appreciation of glass as a material, and my work at The Neustadt Collection of Tiffany Glass—whose glass archive boasts nearly half a million examples of original Tiffany glass—constantly sparks newfound admiration of Louis C. Tiffany's central role in revolutionizing the American glass industry. Perhaps it's not surprising that glass is traditionally my entry point for interpreting these amazing works of art. With this exhibition, it has been such a rewarding opportunity to explore other materials and present a more comprehensive view of Tiffany lamps. Bronze, for example, is an essential component of Tiffany's lighting fixtures and features in everything from artistically designed knobs to sculptural bases. It has been so enjoyable to dive into this topic and highlight the sculptural and artistic ways in which bronze was used at Tiffany Studios.

The Driehaus Museum is such a rich architectural backdrop for these works. How did the space itself—its history, its details, its mood—influence how you imagined the lamps and objects would come to life in the galleries?

Though this is my first time curating an exhibition at the Driehaus Museum, I've had the privilege of visiting many times before. During every trip, I've been awed by the architecture and interior spaces and always see new details to admire. The chance to display and interpret Tiffany lamps within this period setting was particularly appealing as it aligns so beautifully with the focus of the exhibition. When creating lighting fixtures, Tiffany's artisans selected materials that enhanced the overall design. But they also understood that lighting fixtures were just one component of an interior space. All Tiffany Studio lamps were meant to complement

rooms—like those we see at the Museum—which already featured an assortment of materials like wood, textiles and ceramic. The company advertised the combination of bronze and glass, for example, allowed their designs to harmonize with any architecture and interior decoration scheme. Considering this context, Tiffany lamps are right at home within the remarkable rooms of the Driehaus Museum.

Do you have a favorite piece in the show? One that makes you smile every time you walk past it?

This exhibition is full of objects that make me smile! It's always hard to choose a favorite, and I find that each day I'm drawn to a different object. One of my favorite pieces included isn't actually a lamp, but an object that provides a behind-the-scenes look at the business of Tiffany lamps. It's a sample box of bronze squares featuring the patinas and finishes available to Tiffany Studio customers. Something I appreciate about Tiffany Studios is how the company married innovative technology with outstanding artistry, and how they balanced those as part of a business. Only wealthy customers could afford the artistic goods created by the Studios but even so, the company understood the need to appeal to a range of consumer budgets. Most lamps were designed as interchangeable bases and shades and customers had the ability to specify a bronze finish. The variety of available designs, materials and finishes all impacted final cost and allowed Tiffany Studios' customers the ability to find a lamp that best suited their personal taste and budget.

We think we know Tiffany—beautiful glass, floral motifs, classic elegance. What's one thing in this exhibition that might surprise even the most knowledgeable Tiffany fans?

When most people hear "Tiffany Lamp," they usually think of a radiant lampshade assembled from many pieces of colorful glass. But these legendary shades are just one style of lighting created by Tiffany Studios. Exhibition visitors will, hopefully, be surprised to see the wide range of Tiffany lamps on view, including early oil lamps with gorgeous blown Favrite glass bases and monumental chandeliers featuring a dramatic combination of bronze and glass. There is one object in the exhibition that might surprise even the most devoted Tiffany fans: an oil lamp featuring a stunning enameled metal base!

"Tiffany Lamps: Beyond the Shade" is on view at the Driehaus Museum through March 15.

DESIGN TOP 5

1 Chicago Architecture Biennial. [Chicago](#)

[Cultural Center](#) and across the city. The Chicago Architecture Biennial brings global design to the city with bold installations, talks and events exploring how architecture meets today's biggest challenges. *Through February 28*

2 Chicago Fashion Week. [Across the city](#), Chicago

Fashion Week is back with over fifty shows, pop-ups and workshops—a ten-day celebration of local talent, sustainability and style. *October 9-19*

3 Robin Givhan on Virgil Abloh. [Chicago Humanities Festival](#), IIT—Kaplan Institute, Pulitzer

Prize-winning critic Robin Givhan and curator Michael Darling unpack Virgil Abloh's legacy and its impact on fashion, race and luxury. *October 4, 5pm-6pm*

4 Designing for Dignity 3: A Convening of Possibilities. [Museum of Contemporary Art](#).

Two days of talks and activations centered on liberatory design, dignity, social practice and creativity—bringing together diverse voices to imagine new futures. *October 24-25*

5 Tiffany Lamps: Beyond the Shade. [Driehaus Museum](#).

See Tiffany Studios like never before: Rare lighting in glass, bronze and enamel reveals the innovation, craftsmanship and untold stories behind the iconic designs. *Through March 15*