



Woodbine Table Lamp (ca 1910)
Tiffany Studios
Leaded glass and bronze
Fund in honor of John Loring, 2009

Louis Comfort Tiffany
February 18, 1848 – January 17, 1933

An American artist and designer who worked in the decorative arts and is best known for his stained glass windows and leaded lampshades.

“I have always striven to fix beauty in wood, stone, glass or pottery, in oil or watercolor by using whatever seemed fittest for the expression of beauty, that has been my creed.”

Louis Comfort Tiffany

References:

- Clara & Tiffany (fiction)
- A New Light on Tiffany – Clara Driscoll and the Tiffany Girls by Eidelberg, Gray & Hofer
- Tiffany by Charles de Kay
- The Lamps of Louis Comfort Tiffany by Eidelberg, Frelinghuysen, McClelland & Rachen
- Article on John Loring in 10/70/2011 Kalamazoo Gazette

Louis C. Tiffany was the son of Charles Lewis Tiffany (founder of Tiffany and Co. jewelers) and Harriet Olivia Young. He was born in 1848, and attended two military academies, although he was too young to fight in the Civil War. Instead of college, he studied painting and he trained first under American landscape artist George Inness, then under Samuel Colman in New York City and Leon Bally in Paris. Later, his interest shifted to glassmaking and he began working in glass houses in New York. In 1879 he joined with three other artists to form an artistic design company and with his talent and his father's money and connections, his business thrived.

In 1881 he did the interior design of the Mark Twain House in Hartford, Connecticut. His most notable design work came in 1882 when then President Arthur refused to move into the White House until it had been completely redecorated. He commissioned Tiffany to do the work.

A desire to concentrate on art in glass led to the breakup of his firm in 1885 when Tiffany chose to establish his own glassmaking firm. The first Tiffany Glass Company was incorporated in 1885 and in 1902 became known as Tiffany Studios.

In the beginning of his career, he used cheap jelly jars and bottles because they had impurities that finer glass lacked. When he was unable to convince glassmakers to leave the impurities in, he began making his own glass. He used opalescent glass in a variety of colors and textures to create unique style of stained glass. He always loved nature, color and shapes and was never swayed by expensive materials. He always used just what looked good to his design eye.

In 1893 he built a factory called the Tiffany Glass Furnaces. He then introduced the term "Favrile" in conjunction with his glass. He later trademarked this name (French for handmade) and used it to apply to all of his glass, enamel and pottery works. He displayed works at the 1893 Worlds Fair in Chicago and in 1900 at the Paris Exposition (where he won a gold medal for his "Four Seasons" stained glass windows).

His first commercially produced lamps date to around 1895. Much of his company's production was in stained glass windows and Tiffany lamps, but he also designed a range of interior decorations. At its peak, his factory employed more than 300 artisans – many of them women. Women played a crucial role at the firm, making significant contributions as artists. This was brought to light by the letters of Clara Driscoll, who was one of top designers.

Clara is credited with the design of the leaded-glass lamps and she supervised the execution of many of the windows and mosaics. Many people consider Clara to be the “hidden genius” behind many of Tiffany’s designs. Tiffany only hired single women, so when Clara was married (twice) and engaged (once) she had to leave the firm. She was probably the highest ranking, highest paid (\$35 per week) and most respected woman artist in the company. She was very friendly with Mr. Tiffany, visiting his home on several occasions and traveling to Europe with him once.

Louis Comfort Tiffany is considered to be one of the most influential and famous designers at the turn of the 20th century. He helped establish the Art Nouveau movement and influenced many artists and businessmen. Steve Jobs, the creative genius behind Apple, was influenced by him, especially by the way he brought “art to the masses.” The name “Tiffany” has become synonymous with beauty and excellence and we find works by Tiffany in every sort of building in virtually every city in the world. The name “Tiffany” has almost become generic for stained glass windows and leaded glass lamps.

In 1902 he became the first Design Director for Tiffany & Co., his father’s jewelry company. He continued there until his death. Tiffany was married twice and had eight children. He died on January 17, 1933 and is buried in Green-Wood Cemetery in Brooklyn, New York.

How did the KIA acquire such an impressive collection of Tiffany works?

The answer is John Loring.

Loring was the design director for Tiffany & Co. for 30 years, until he retired in 2009. An accomplished designer, author and artist, Loring now travels the world as a spokesman for Tiffany & Co. Although raised in New York and Florida, Loring’s mother’s family maintained a home in southwest Michigan and he was aware of the KIA. He gave the KIA some objects he acquired during his tenure at Tiffany’s and at the time of his retirement, he requested that Tiffany’s give the KIA \$125,000 to begin collecting more works.

There are currently 27 items on display at the KIA. They are focusing on works from the late 1800’s to the 1910’s and are really trying to collect things that Tiffany himself had a hand in making, according to Vicki Wright, director of collections and exhibitions for the KIA.