

Antiques

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French Art Glass Begins Auction Series At Christie's in December

Auction houses can be as trend-driven as fashion houses.

In New York, Christie's is capitalizing on recent record-breaking sales of late-19th- and 20th-century decorative arts by scheduling six such auctions in December. Some 900 lots are involved, and they are expected to fetch about \$20 million.

The series begins with three sales on Dec. 18. The first offers 200 pieces of French art glass from the 1,500-piece collection of the late Dr. Simon Pinhas of Los Angeles. (Part II is scheduled for June 2007.)

Beginning in the 1980's, Dr. Pinhas assiduously collected nearly every type of glass made by Daum Fr[?]s, an art glass company founded in 1875 and based in Nancy, France.

"He became obsessed," said his widow, Paula Pinhas. "There wasn't a room, a closet or even a corner in the attic that wasn't overloaded."

The couple took yearly trips to France looking for Daum.

"Once, when we visited the original factory in Nancy, my husband was able to purchase a bunch of old pieces that were black with dirt, forgotten in an old warehouse," Mrs. Pinhas said.

The Art Nouveau glass in the sale is colorful, translucent (not transparent) and often decorated with nature motifs like dragonflies, mushrooms, autumn leaves and rainy landscapes. This is labor-intensive work. A blown-glass piece may subsequently be overlaid with enamels, or etched, carved and modeled. A vessel may have glass put down in layers.

In the sale, one rare example of Daum glass is a realistic-looking gourd vessel of vitrified glass with an applied wavy green stem, from about 1900, which is estimated at \$80,000 to \$100,000.

In 1898 Daum artisans discovered a way to add outer and inner blown glass layers to existing vessels in a patented Daum technique called intercalary decoration.

"Dr. Pinhas was a great collector and scholar," said Jason Stein, a decorative arts specialist with Christie's in Los Angeles. "He bought largely in France," Mr. Stein said, but he had advisers looking all over for pieces.

Barbara Deisroth, a longtime art adviser to Dr. Pinhas, said that he "was so passionate about Daum, he was always offered the best things on the market." The sale is expected to total about \$2 million.

That auction will be followed by a sale of more than 90 lots of Tiffany lamps and glass, including chandeliers from Laurelton Hall, the Long Island country estate of the artist Louis Comfort Tiffany. (An exhibition about Laurelton Hall is to open Nov. 21 at the Metropolitan Museum, with rooms recreated from salvaged architectural elements and windows. The 84-room house was

largely destroyed by fire in 1957.)

The highlight of the Tiffany sale may be the tall "Magnolia" floor lamp from about 1910 with a patinated bronze base. It is estimated at \$1 million to \$1.5 million.

"It was a wedding present and is inscribed 'to Herbert G. Wylie on the occasion of his marriage,' " said Jeni Sandberg, a decorative arts specialist at Christie's. "We don't know who the fabricator was, but it has a solid blue background, with pink, lavender, white and pale green blossoms and brown branches."

Ms. Deisroth, an expert on Tiffany, said, "The selection of glass on this lamp is sensational; it's a very painterly lamp."

Apart from glass, there is a large Tiffany pastel mosaic panel depicting birds in trees that was commissioned in 1908 by a Manhattan fruit merchant; a vaguely Moorish-looking indoor balustrade of twisted wire with insets of pale blue glass from a house in Manhattan; and a magnificent copy of "The Artwork of Louis C. Tiffany," from the library at Laurelton Hall. One of 10, the volume has parchment pages (many uncut) with photos of Laurelton Hall tipped in and gilt bronze clasps. It retains its original box.

The timing of the Tiffany sale coincides with a Louis Comfort Tiffany exhibition at the Carnegie Museum of Art in Pittsburgh through Jan. 15. Its 120 objects include lamps, windows, mosaics, pottery, furniture and jewelry.

Five of the pieces are loans from the Lillian Nassau gallery in

Manhattan, which has specialized in Tiffany for five decades. Arlie Sulka took over the gallery this month after having worked first for Mrs. Nassau, who died in 1995, and then for her son Paul.

"It was my dream," said Ms. Sulka, who has been with the gallery since 1980. She recalled that Mrs. Nassau had instructed her: "Buy the best; you can't overpay. Someone will always buy it."

It took Ms. Sulka three months to complete an inventory of the art, which included not only Tiffany but also glass by Loetz and Steuben, S?es porcelain, Hungarian pottery and Wiener Werkst?e ceramics. On Dec. 11 the gallery, at 220 East 57th Street, will open a special 60th anniversary show of Tiffany Studio glass tiles and mosaics.

Christie's third sale on Dec. 18 offers a private collection of 150 works designed by the French art glass pioneers Ren?alique and Gabriel Argy-Rousseau, master of the p? de verre (literally, "glass paste") technique, in which ground glass is mixed with colored powders in a mold, then refired under high temperatures.

On Dec. 19, there are three more sales scheduled. The first is of 220 lots from the Historical Design gallery in Manhattan, which is celebrating its 21st anniversary. The inventory here, expected to realize more than \$3 million, includes an English tureen designed by Christopher Dresser, a Georg Jensen silver menorah, a Josef Hoffmann silver tray, a Walter Teague radio and an Archibald Knox wall clock from 1905.

Why the sale? "We are moving in a new direction, going more

into the worlds of fine art and jewelry," said Daniel Morris, the gallery's co-owner. "People are now looking for unique pieces rather than multiples."

The second sale that day comprises some 200 works designed by Line Vautrin, a mid-20th-century French artist who is very much in fashion. The sale includes 40 of her wildly imaginative mirrors, 120 boxes and 35 pieces of jewelry.

Last, there is a various-owner sale of 20th-century objects: a 1931 "Jazz" bowl by the 100-year-old designer Viktor Schreckengost; a 1949 desk from Ren?erbst's private collection; and furniture, light fixtures and glass vases by Gio Ponti, the Italian mid-20th-century architect.

If this trend holds, December will be a feeding frenzy.

Photo: A Christie's sale of works by Line Vautrin, a mid-20th-century French artist, will include 40 of her mirrors, like "Roi Soleil," above. (Photo by Christie's)