"God does not pay every Saturday, but finally he pays," is an Italian proverb which in homely words acknowledges that Justice rules the world. It is indeed true that the reward of genius, of worth, of honest and excellent work comes always, although often tardily; but with the result that the reward is met by both the recipient and the world with greater appreciation than would have been given, had it been earlier obtained.

This truth and its application are forced upon one who seeks in the great modern museum of the Luxembourg the artistic signs of the times.

First of all, one notes the catholic spirit of the place: the manifest intention to exclude nothing which expresses a real artistic movement or impulse now current in either the Old or the New World. One feels, as never before, the complete absence of that close, exclusive patriotism for which foreigners, with some show of reason, formerly reproached the French. The native painters whose talents are here recognized by their Government, share their honors with Watts and Whistler, Sargent and Harrison. The French sculptures—varying from profoundly studied historical types to the sentimental, the playful, even the fanatical—have received into their company the grave, monumental genius of the American St. Gaudens. In the Luxembourg all nationalities, all schools, provided they have substantial claim to acknowledgment, may make their plea for art as they understand it. Classicism is not permitted to stifle the Romantic spirit, nor is the minute, realistic rendering of Nature's phenomena accepted as truthful and final to the detriment of the impressionist. The palace which, a few decades since, was the treasure-house of modern French art, is now subject to a broad and enlightened policy neglecting no occasion to emphasize the truth that art is cosmopolitan and democratic: confined by no geographical or political limits, or to media of expression which may be counted upon the fingers of a single hand.
René Lalique

If the hospitality shown at the Luxembourg to foreign genius is greatly to be praised, the decisions there made as to what constitutes the true work of art are still more commendable. They acknowledge the new conception of society which is to produce for those who come after us untold good and pure pleasure, through the increased dignity and respect which shall attach to the condition of the workman. In the Luxembourg the craftsman is honored equally with the painter or the sculptor, and, for once, there seems to be no question as to which are the greater and which the lesser arts; the question of excellence and distinction in work being the one paramount.

From halls filled with statues or hung with pictures, each of which represents a world-wide, or, at least, a national reputation, one passes into a large room especially rich in paintings by great modern masters: many of them portraits so instinct with personality as to give the effect of a gathering of living, thinking men and women. But admirable as is this display of genius, it does not detract from the artistic value of certain small objects conceived with a power of brain and wrought with a skill of hand second to the ability of no master there represented. These are glass vases, exquisite in substance, form and color: the successful results of long-continued experiments made by the American artist-craftsman, Louis Tiffany, and with them, contained in the same case, are the flower-jewels of the still greater and more original French master, René Lalique. This comparison between the two men represented, which might at first appear to be based upon personal preference, is made in the spirit of justice. It is true, because an epoch-maker must always be ranked higher than one who advances however far, in directions already indicated; and while Mr. Tiffany recalls, even fully parallels, the great experimentalists of Venice and Murano, Monsieur Lalique is an innovator in his art and craft: one who has broken with tradition and begun a work altogether new, personal, and free from outside influence. To those who would question the wisdom of such high praise bestowed upon a goldsmith and jeweller, it is necessary to define at once the position of M. Lalique among his fellow-craftsmen and
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to indicate at least what have been his accomplishments in the
work to which he has devoted his life and talents. To do this in
the most rapid and convincing way is, perhaps, to describe the
masterpiece by which the French Government has chosen to rep-
resent him. It is a work which shows equally the character of his
genius, the depth of his technical knowledge and his delicate skill
of hand. It is an example of "l'art nouveau," if that term be
accepted in its first and best sense, free from the opprobrium into
which fanaticism and the commercial spirit have drawn it. It
justifies the claim made by the most fervent advocate of the newest
school of French art, since it is the result of the direct contact of
genius with nature. The plant-form here treated by M. Lalique
is a poppy of the large, frail variety that one sees blooming in the
wheat-fields of France. It is reproduced in full size, with such
indications of the essential qualities of the species as to suggest, if
the expression may be permitted—the soul, rather than the body
of the flower. The fragility, the peculiar pose of the blossom,
which by its curves and its relations to the stem, is made to appear
as if expectant of the wind and about to bend and sway: all these
subtle secrets, surprised, caught and recorded by the artist-crafts-
man, witness the power and sympathy of a mind which has pene-
trated deeply into the mysteries of creation. And yet with all
this minuteness of observation, there are apparent and dominant
in the work a breadth and force which speak as plainly as words
could do to the effect that the function of art is to represent and
suggest, but not to imitate. In the ability to connote, to concen-
trate beauty and truth within narrow limits, M. Lalique is not
unlike Browning who, in four lines of verse, paints in "A Toccata
of Galuppi's," a complete picture of Venice: earth, air, sea, and
so on down to Shylock's bridge with the houses standing upon it.
By this power of rapid representation, which is the gift of genius
alone, M. Lalique reveals his rank as an artist. And this is fur-
ther shown by his fertile, ever-working creative imagination which
has made him reject the old traditions of his art and craft, and
caused him to turn to Nature, as to the only worthy inspiring
force. Of his originality a French critic has said that he devises
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jewels which have never been conceived since women and lovers of personal ornament have existed; that he has completely changed such ornaments, as to character, dimensions, form and color; in short, that an important art must hereafter be dated from him.

In the existence of M. Lalique, therefore, France possesses a powerful champion to aid her in maintaining her old-time supremacy; just as the quality of the artist's genius is in itself a happy indication for the future: refuting with fact the gloomy and jealous prophecies of those who are over-anxious to announce her decadence. The fresh and immediate ideas of Nature expressed in the flower-jewels of the French artist-craftsman speak volumes of hope for the continuance of the national art. In him history repeats itself. He has rejected the combinations of lines, the old meaningless symbols used by generation after generation of his predecessors, to draw inspiration from plant and animal life; just as the Gothic artists spurned the dead Byzantine decorative principles to create their own vigorous and vital ornament.

The originality of M. Lalique in design is matched by what may be termed his democracy in the choice of material. The flower of the Luxembourg, not intended for personal adornment, but rather executed as a tour de force, is, in all respects, a typical example of his work. Here, one finds the different textures of stem, calyx, ovary and petal represented by different enamels or smalti; used not as by the old craftsmen of Limoges, nor yet as by modern skilled goldsmiths, but after the manner of a discoverer and with the confidence of a master. The colors, especially those of the greens in stem and seed-vessel, are enchanting: having that grayish-white effect which in nature overspreads the green, and is due to what is named by botanists pubescence; that is, a covering of fine, soft hairs. The petals of the poppy are even yet more marvellous to the spectator, whether he be an unskilled admirer of the beautiful, or yet again one who, through observation and study, knows something of enamels and of the difficulties attending their production. The petals of the flower are gray; the enamel being of a translucence very nearly approaching transparency, and the color varying: passing from pale, light and somewhat cold effects
Cup. Design of René Lalique
Bracelet. Design of René Lalique

Comb
Design from “La Maison Arnould”

Comb decorated with translucent enamels
Design of René Lalique
René Lalique

up to spots or rather dashes of black; the whole being marked with
a most delicate and involved system of veining resembling a min-
ute net-work, and exactly counterfeiting the structural peculiarity
of the field flower. By this complete mastery over a stubborn,
subtle and elusive substance, gained by patience, chemical knowl-
dge and an expenditure recalling that of the old alchemists who,
ever despairing, again and again threw their all into the crucible,
M. Lalique has gained a freedom never before attained by an
adep in his special art. Thus, no longer confined to the use of
the few metals called precious, and to that of rare and costly stones,
he has re-acted against the excessive, one might almost say the
abusive, employment of the diamond. He chooses his gems for
their beauty and appropriateness, not for money value, or accord-
ing to the fashion of the moment, which is in itself based upon a
passing caprice of some sovereign or aristocrat. The preference
of a certain king for the moonstone may send the rich idlers of
Europe on a mad quest through the rue de la Paix for gems large
and lustrous, which shall rival the radiance of the earth’s satellite;
or a queen may adopt designs of costly combinations, inartistic in
themselves and with nothing in their favor save royal patronage.
But such conditions are ignored by M. Lalique who, it can not be
too often insisted, has raised his art to a new level from which it
will be most difficult to lower it. For it is not too much to predict
that his lovely creations will never be found in museum collec-
tions of curios, but rather that they will rank among the works of
master-artists who have added to the real glories of France. What
has before been characterized as his democratic use of material is
sometimes carried to a point which would be perilous for an artist
of less distinction. The Luxembourg poppy contains no mineral
more precious than onyx, and this is by no means an unusual sim-
plcity for the jewels and ornaments of M. Lalique. Often to
adorn and crown a marvel of workmanship he chooses a baroque
pearl, which, a few years since, would have been rejected by the
expert as a vagary of nature,—a poor misshapen thing, fit to form
the hunch on the back of a dwarf in a toy-jewel, such as one sees
in the gem-cabinets of Florence and Dresden. But he is not con-
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tent with the substitution of irregular forms for the round and regular pearls prized in the world-market, or with his preferences for comparatively inexpensive or semi-precious stones, chosen for their qualities of color and substance, as fitting some general scheme. His innovations extend yet further, and he has bestowed the touch of his genius upon material hitherto regarded as common or vulgar. The costly shell of yellow tint so highly prized by goldsmiths as often to be incrusted with diamonds, he has replaced in his work by a certain kind of horn, which, instead of a surface of unvarying translucence, offers graded chromatic tones most grateful to the eye. For color also he often chooses agate, forming of its soft, opaque greens and whites a background for some exquisite piece of craftsmanship, or for some high-light made by the flashing body of a jewel. He has even forced his democracy of choice to the point of using in his more elaborate designs requiring a wide range of colors and values, the small red pebbles found in France in the sand of gardens.
The democratic spirit shown in M. Lalique’s choice of material is quite paralleled by his freedom in selecting a subject for treatment. Not that he pursues vagaries, or forces himself to produce the unusual; for no artist could be more restrained or well-balanced than he shows himself to be even in his most daring schemes. He has simply enlarged the legitimate field of his art and craft by using the prerogative of genius to go beyond the conventional and the commonplace. The rose, the fleur-de-lis, the marguerite, which have satisfied generations of gem-setters and goldsmiths by affording them opportunity for massing the brilliancy of diamonds or the sheen of pearls, are set aside by him for other, oftentimes for humbler flowers, whose character, form, or texture offers possibilities hitherto unperceived by workers in the precious metals. Frequently, he treats the yellow jonquil and the anemone; rendering their individuality by a bold yet chaste use of the art nouveau line. Again, he chooses the mistletoe for its sharply defined foliage; the wheat-ear for the variety of treatment which it permits; the thistle for the beauties of both calyx and corolla; and various aquatic plants and sea-weeds for their structural ef-
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ffects. These subjects, chosen simply as types amid the great variety of his work, mark him as one who has explored the infinitude of Nature, and they recall that other great French artist and craftsman, Bernard Palissy the ceramist, who, like Lalique, as an innovator in an aristocratic art, lovingly studied and portrayed the lower and more obscure forms of plant, insect and animal life.

In the treatment of the latter class of subjects, the modern goldsmith stands alone in his art. Scarabs or beetles, by reason of their symbolism, were among the most ancient objects of adornment, and the same is true of snake and dragon designs. But as symbols, they are always found in isolation, never in their proper environment. As separate pieces, M. Lalique chooses reptiles and other animal types for their charm of line and their beauty or brilliancy of coloring. Beyond this, he introduces them into his more complicated designs, because of their affinity for certain plants, or their agreement with a general scheme which, in miniature, almost assumes the character of a landscape. As a case in point, one may cite an exquisitely wrought comb, in which enamelled bees with wings, transparent as in nature, are seen scaling flower-stalks and gathering honey; the poise of the insects telling that they are intoxicated with perfume, unwieldy through weight, and that their legs are hindered by wax: a situation drawn to the very life and rich in the most delicate humor.

The studies of plant-life found in M. Lalique’s jewels are no less admirable. They represent both flower and leaf in the successive stages of their existence: sometimes in the full beauty of bloom; sometimes in decline, when they wither and take on the color of rust; when their texture, according to the species, thickens and stiffens, or else becomes thin and hard, revealing the shrunken and contracted veins of nourishment. And here again the patient French craftsman becomes an eloquent nature-poet, receiving a powerful impression from all that is beautiful and wonderful in the world about him, and giving out again that impression scarcely diminished in force, although transmuted into unyielding substances and reflected within the narrowest limits.
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Another artistic trait of M. Lalique remains to be noted. That is his quality as a decorator: his manner of transforming the real into the conventional. His process has been described by a French critic as one of simplification, of seizing and isolating the chief characteristic of an object; by which means he but follows the indications of Nature and renders his conventional flower, plant, or animal, truer to its type than any given specimen of the same species, modified by accidents and subjected to special conditions.

Side by side with his great power of conventionalizing, he shows the other essential quality of the decorator, that is to say, the color sentiment. He graduates and shades, he strengthens or weakens his effects as easily as a musician regulates his sounds from piano to fortissimo. He distributes his color-elements to support, or to contrast with one another, so that no fragment is lost and that all concur in a general harmony, rich or simple at his will. It would seem, in fact, that his subtle eye, like the highly-trained ear of a violinist, were constantly intent upon dividing and subdividing tones, to the end of creating a delicate and infinite scale with which to play upon sensuous perception. Sometimes, he composes with pearls of differing colors and tones, crossing and mingling their reflections until they become a very orchestra of color. Sometimes, he selects a ruby which appears on his work like the expanse of deep-toned crimson dominating in a Venetian painting. Or again, with equal but grave effect, he constructs a harmony in which the sapphire carries the principal theme. But always he is the same master, never barely attaining his results, but by his ease and brilliancy giving assurance that his powers have not yet been exerted to their limit.

Taken thus for all in all, M. Lalique is an artist of that type—the creative—which appears most rarely in the course of time. He has given a new direction to the art which he practises, and indicates to those who shall succeed him alluring possibilities of beauty. He has raised the objects which he creates from the rank of toys and talismans up to that of true works of art. This he has accomplished by a double means: the force of genius and the force
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of craftsmanship. The love of Nature and the impulse to translate her beauties into artistic form were bestowed upon him at birth. The power to express what he feels more acutely than common men has been gained through an active union of brain and hand. M. Lalique is at once sculptor, painter, enameler and goldsmith. His thought gathers in the loveliness of the material world and his hand reaches out for the tool lest the heavenly vision be dissipated and the wealth of impression reduced to nothing. The tool has admitted him to the number of the immortals. Nor will it refuse a similar reward to other enthusiasts who shall follow in the path of M. Lalique. The tool for the coming century is the sign of salvation.