A Minor French Salon

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THE admirable French magazine "Art et Décoration" printed in its July issue, over the signature of M. Verneuil, an excellent general criticism of the Spring salon of the Society of French Artists. The criticism itself is ideal; one that should be studied by men and women in America whose task is to indicate what is good and what bad in exhibitions, and thus to foster and improve the public taste, to the end that there be formed an extensive body of individuals who are capable of independent and sound judgment. The style of this article is singularly free from studio phrases, while the arrogant tone of the critic who displays his own knowledge, with no care of fulfilling his office of teacher, is wholly wanting. The reasons for all comments and judgments are there clearly given.

The critic censures the exhibition as a whole, affirming that it has taught the public nothing. He indicates that its failure was the consequence of isolation on the part of the individual artists and
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workers, and to prevent similar future poverty of result he calls for collaboration. He proceeds in his task without fear; favoring or condemning according to his own standard, which appears to have been formed by long study and from a fair, unprejudiced mind. It is interesting, as an example of his treatment of an artist of recognized merit and position, to note his strictures upon the

glass exhibit of Louis Tiffany. Regarding this he writes that it proved deceptive to anticipation. To quote his own words he says: "The name of Tiffany promised us an admirable display, but we must confess to have been deeply disappointed. Still, we
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may hope that the objects exhibited do not indicate a new impulse
and direction in this artistic enterprise, since, with the exception

of a few pieces recalling
ware with all its har-
vious qualities, there is
observe among these
form, and with
rious coloring. Fur-
ples have not even
with which to defend
indeed far from the ex-
M. Tiffany’s earlier
gamut of rich golds
trust that the artist may

In the judgment
principal interest of
in the jewelry and
ecessary to say in the exhibit of René Lalique. In this opinion the
critic would probably find no opponents among the visitors to the
Salon who were capable of aesthetic judgment; since the art-crafts-
man in question has raised himself to be the acknowledged equal of
any living French artist, painter or sculptor, and he is further
adjudged to be the greatest goldsmith in all history. At the men-
tion of M. Lalique’s name his marvellous poppy in enamel is

ing the old Tiffany
monious and sumpt-
absolutely nothing to
pieces heavy, yet weak
vivid, yet inharmon-
ermore, certain exam-
beauty of material,
themselves. We are
quisite specimens of
manner, in which the
sang so superbly. We
return to his first meth-
of M. Verneuil the
the exhibition centered
goldsmith work: it is

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recalled to the memory of all lovers of the beautiful who know the Luxembourg Gallery. That accomplishment alone would have sufficed to place him among the immortals, for in the small masterpiece he shows himself to be supreme in the three functions of naturalist, artist and craftsman. The same characteristics in an equal degree reside in the exquisite hair-comb upon which jewel-ed bees are wrought to the very life; the insects being represented as intoxicated by their food, as heavy and swollen, with their legs clogged by pollen.

Having in mind these translations into hard, unyielding material of the delicately poetic and of the delicately humorous in Nature, the enthusiast regrets to meet with the most recent authoritative judgment of the man who has revolutionized his craft and, as he exercises it, has raised it to a place beside the greater arts. Of the exhibit made by M. Lalique the critic writes, that it fails to offer the harmony and unity of those of former years. He asks the question whether the impression made is owing to the fact that M. Lalique is *slightly less himself*, that is to say, slightly less powerful, and bold as an interpreter of the world about him. M. Verneuil continues his criticism in the words: “This excellent artist evidences, as always, a rare distinction, as well as the most accurate sense of what feminine ornament can and ought to be. But this instinct does not prevent him from creating museum or display pieces, designed solely with the intention of constructing harmonies of precious substances, delicately wrought and shaded, and combined for the pleasure of the eye, without possibility of service.”
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A series of beautiful combs and pendants receives special attention in the French article, and from the illustrations of these ornaments we have again made a choice in the interests of the readers of our magazine. The shapes of these objects, or at least the contours of their ornamental parts are frankly drawn from insects of the butterfly or the beetle order; these are conventionalized sufficiently to meet the demands of use, but they can be easily recognized by a quality which seems to be the vital principle of the thing represented. These articles of feminine adornment strike a note never before sounded or even attempted in what has been, until now, one of the minor arts. They do away with the last trace of suspicion that it is a barbarous instinct which prompts the wearing of jewels and ornaments. It is not exaggeration to say that each of these little creations is a hymn in praise of Nature, composed by one who is capable of feeling the great and of rendering the small. The age and the country which produce such work can not be taxed with gross mate-
rialism. The combs here illustrated show the familiar treatment of M. Lalique, although it is employed upon a new substance, which, in these cases, is horn, chiseled and colored, instead of translucent enamel. One is a study of of insect-wings disposed in a floral figure, while another, based upon the butterfly type, is an exquisite example of structural quality, and of all that is best in l'art nouveau. A third comb shows a new phase of the study of wings which M. Lalique varies almost to infinitude, this time being elongated pinions thickly clothed with feathers issuing from the shoulders of two kneeling figures. A fourth comb suggests the same favorite theme, although it is an arrangement of small blossoms supported upon long stems and reaching out in unequal lengths from a common center.

The French critic notes further two bracelets of which one is a study of poppies and the other of corn-flowers chiseled from delicately tinted stones, and these pieces which he does not illustrate, he appears to

René Lalique.
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judge as the most beautiful of the entire exhibit. In passing to review the work of other men, he observes that "M. Lalique is still the wonderful artist that we have known him, and he excels as ever in composition, as in refined, unaffected color-schemes. And if his exhibits have no longer the charm of the unexpected, as in former years, is not this slight disappointment the fault of those self-styled artists who set themselves to copy him and who, in their own works, distort and denaturalize his inspirations always fresh and spontaneous?"

To M. Gaillard, who is here represent-

M. Verneuil gives the
the exhibitors. He jects shown by M.
interest, as they ap-
mediocrities. This quently in his compo-
horn which he chisels,
crusts with stones or ating low and refined delicacy. In the ex-
as in that of M. La-
objects executed with

L. Gaillard

objects capable of exciting in the cultured subtile pleasures which scandalize the Philistine, dead to all considerations save those of prosaic use."
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At the end of his criticism, M. Verneuil protests against the strong present tendency toward the commercializing of Salons. His protest and warning, although directed against a local and somewhat restricted enterprise, are applicable to ourselves who are about to open an exposition which should be a statement of progress, a school for technicians, artists and craftsmen, and a powerful agent of the higher civilization.

In deprecating the appearance of the halls and cases containing commonplaces produced in quantity, M. Vernueil shows characteristic Gallic vivacity,—the more attractive and convincing, perhaps, because of its slight ironical flavor. He asks somewhat abruptly: "Is the Salon intended to encourage commercial pro-
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A double one. By such means we encourage the labors of producers whose activity would be much better employed elsewhere. We also falsify and deteriorate the taste of the public, who frequent exhibitions in the belief of finding in the exceptional objects displayed sources of instruction and profit, although the well-advised visitor discovers in the same objects nothing beyond the ordinary, current productions of commercial workshops. The present conditions are dangerous. There is need of radical reform.”

To popularize in our own country the warning
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originally intended for France and Frenchmen would be a well-taken measure. Commercialism is everywhere the foe of beauty, art, pleasure, and of the simple life. It is the synonym of all that is sordid and hopeless. It kills enthusiasm and precludes in-

 spiration. But it is most difficult to combat, since in common with all low forms of vitality, it has no central organs at which to aim, and if it be stricken, it contains within itself powers of reproduction.