DALLAS MUSEUM OF ART

The Ocean's Bounty: Undersea Windows by Louis Comfort Tiffany
Kevin Tucker

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Kevin Tucker: Thinking about our Summer Spotlight approach, highlighting a number of works from the permanent collection, I had to grin a little bit when I noticed the list of recommended movies and seeing Jules Verne's—Disney's version of Jules Verne's--*20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* since these works [*Window with Starfish ("Spring") and Window with Sea Anemone ("Summer")*; 2008.21.1-2.MCD]are essentially contemporary with Verne's writing and, I think, give you some sense of those mysteries of the aquatic realm as perceived by Louis Comfort Tiffany and his host of talented craftspeople and designers working with him.

As Lisa mentioned, these are fairly recent acquisitions for the museum, having been acquired last year through the McDermott Art Fund and presented here just--end of last September as part of the reinstallation of what we refer to as our North Decorative Arts Gallery, which is essentially early twentieth-century and a little bit of late nineteenth-century design, as these windows introduce you to the realm of English and American Arts and Crafts designs, and then early- or proto-modern designs from continental Europe.

So this pair of windows may also be familiar to some of you if you were here to see an exhibition at the museum just a few years ago on Tiffany which accompanied our *Modernism in American Silver* exhibition, *Louis Comfort Tiffany: Artist for the Ages* exhibition. These two windows were featured within that exhibition. At that time, they were privately owned and they were presented within a gallery of similarly aquatic-themed Tiffany objects:

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Paintings, enamel work, other glass objects including Tiffany's--what he referred to as Aquamarine vessels, these very sort of heavily worked and cast and hot-manipulated glass vessels which looked as if—when you look at them, it looks like as if you're peering under water. So there's definitely a strong connection with these windows and the Aquamarine glass that he produced. And then things such as the nautilus shell lamp, returning to the nautilus and the Jules Verne theme here, where his earliest nautilus shell lamps were actually made out of an actual nautilus shell and then later produced in glass--so going from the actual object to Tiffany's interpretation in glass.

Tiffany really began his career as a painter and I think one of the things that comes across very clearly in these windows is the sensibility of a painter in

dealing with the pallet. And we'll talk a little bit more about the techniques utilized to create this effect. Tiffany was educated at a New Jersey military academy that just also happened to have a fellow by the name of George Inness working there. And he developed a connection with Inness over a period of about four years and then ultimately dashes off to Northern Africa with his associate Samuel Colman, another artist, painting these wonderful Orientalist scenes of Morocco and other areas in North Africa. But during this time--not only in North Africa, but during his time developing his skills as an artist--he was attracted to aquatic scenes, scenes of the shore, fishermen at work things of this nature.

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And you see those works appear in the 1870s as well, as he's continuing to hone his skills. And a number of his paintings are exhibited through the connections of his father Charles Tiffany, the owner and founder of the famous silver and jewelry company Tiffany & Co. Through his connections, a number of his paintings are exhibited at the Philadelphia Exposition of 1876 and, at this point, the young Tiffany is still very much thinking that his future is in painting. He's going to continue along these lines. But things would change for Tiffany, the young family man, in the next couple of years when he begins to find a new mode of expression, that of interior design and decoration, by creating a really marvelous apartment for himself decorated in the mode, we should say, of a number of his Orientalist paintings from the 1870s.

By now he's fairly accomplished as a painter and is a member of the National Academy, a Junior Associate of the National Academy of Design, and his effort to decorate his house is equally noteworthy for its incorporation of all of these different Orientalist themes. We're starting to see how Tiffany fits within the milieu of the aesthetic movement of the 1870s and 1880s and is essentially picking from a host of different sources and influences.

What is he looking at; and what does he bring together in his decoration; and how does that speak to his future work in glass?

Well, he's very much enamored with the notion of the East and the Other and the exotic and these are all part of the definition of the aesthetic movement in the 1870s and 1880s, looking not only at North African sources of inspiration, but looking further afield--looking to Japan, looking to China, and elsewhere.

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And how does he do this? How does he do this in his own apartment? Well you walk into this apartment and you see a collection. You have to imagine yourself walking into the entry foyer--wonderful textiles from Turkey hanging from the walls, brass platters beautifully engraved and hammered with this sort of dull light shining off of them, weapons and other implements coming from the

Middle East. You turn, you look at the fireplace and covering the fireplace surface this pattern work of Japanese sword guards just creating this wonderful theme that continues through the sort of ebb and flow of exotic influences all throughout the apartment. And so he's taking his interest, he's taking his collections, and he's presenting them within that environment.

Well it wasn't only for himself but that interior was actually published as well in a compendium of *Artistic Homes*, as the book was titled. And one of the things that we see in that is his continued development of interest in arranging beautiful patterns. What we don't get a sense of, unfortunately,--because that apartment is lost and was never photographed in color--was his pallet, and we have to rely upon his paintings, his watercolors, his oils, his sketches to get a sense of what he was doing with his pallet. And it was very much akin to what we're seeing here: rich deep blues, soft ambers and yellows and greens, these wonderful natural tones that nonetheless have new points of vibrancy in a particular composition such as this.

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So we're getting a sense of where he's going. But is he really working in glass? Well he's starting to. He's beginning to experiment in glass in the late 1870s and particularly as we get to the development and installation, the decoration of his apartment. And in the following year, his further association with not only Samuel Colman--I've mentioned the artist, his friend, colleague, at times mentor-- but also a gentleman, Lockwood de Forest, and an individual, Candace Wheeler.

Now Lockwood de Forest was another collector of all things exotic, particularly textiles from the Middle East. He also had strong connections to India and the woodcarving traditions of India. These beautiful fretwork screens and panels that for their association—I use the word association because it became known as Tiffany and Associated Artists, this interior design firm of theirs and decorating firm--Lockwood de Forest would provide furniture out of beautifully carved architectural panels, entryways, spandrels and all of these elements that could be incorporated into these lavish interiors in the early 1880s for a host of very important and very wealthy clients. And of course Tiffany, again, had those great connections to these important clients because his father--selling jewelry, silver, and other objects to the wealthiest in New York, Boston and elsewhere.

So Tiffany, rightly, took advantage of those connections with the great families, the Havemeyers and the Vanderbilts and others. And Candace Wheeler, the other individual I mentioned. Wheeler's particular specialty in textiles--a real sensitivity to color, a real interest in wallpaper treatments and patterning--we see there's a real sympathy with Wheeler's work and Tiffany's work in the 1880s as he moves in earnest to stained glass design.

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But what else is happening in 1879? Well, Tiffany, of course, has competition in the development of American stained-glass industry at that time, and perhaps his most noteworthy competitor is John La Farge. La Farge, also a painter, also one with great sensitivity to pallet to affect the tonality, is looking for a way to enhance his own stained-glass designs--ecclesiastical, as well secular--with “a new type of glass”. It’s not really a new type of glass since it had been used quite extensively in tableware, and that’s opalescent glass. Glass that has a sort of milky, iridescent quality and you can see wonderful examples--you can see evidence of opalescent glass behind me--but there are just purely opalescent tablewares, which you can see in the fourth floor galleries if you go to our glass and ceramics study gallery on the fourth floor in the American section.

Tableware cast of opalescent glass. Well, La Farge was interested in using this milky, slightly iridescent glass in stained-glass panels for windows, and actually submits a patent in that same year, 1879, for the use of opalescent glass in window panels. Now, he’s not coming up with anything particularly innovative, I mean, they had already been making it. He’s just suggesting through his patent the use of it in particular flat panels. And also an idea that La Farge and Tiffany are working on at the same time in their windows, that of layering sequences of glass or, as it was also referred to, plating.

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And when we talk about plating, what we’re talking about are multiple layers. And I’ll go ahead and point this out on, I think, this one—both windows have evidence of plating, but what you’re looking at here, if you notice, the wonderful ripples in the surface that gives you that aquatic sensibility to the piece. And if you look very closely you’ll see that this leading that’s holding it all together is very thick in some areas and then narrower and thinner in other areas and that’s because there are multiple layers of glass, as many as four layers of glass giving you the final effect.

Well, Tiffany, three months after La Farge created his patent, which is more about you know sort of the suggestion of using flattened opalescent glass for sheets, Tiffany comes out with his own patent application. And Tiffany’s patent application is for the actual construction of plated opalescent glass that you would use opalescent glass as part of one of these layers in the plating. And Tiffany further distinguishes his layering or plating of the glass by saying that he’s going to put gaps in between the layers. So you have top layer, you have second layer, third layer or however many layers and there’s a little bit of a gap there is an air space.

Now is that significant? Well, if you sandwich a piece of glass right up against another one, right up against another one, it’s going to change the effect. It’s a little bit like a lens. You think about a telescope or something like that where you're sort of extending the distance between two glass lenses. It’s going to

change the effect somewhat and Tiffany had written this into his patent application to make it fairly convincing that it was a dramatic enough difference from regular old plating that it warranted special protection as a patent.

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So, what you have in here is you have thin little air pockets in between glass. So you can, perhaps if we had a La Farge window that you could compare it to side by side in which the plating was sandwiched up you'd be able to sort of make your own comparison. I don't know that anyone has actually done that with similar types of glass. But certainly Tiffany was convinced that this technical difference was sufficient to warrant a special patent application.

Well, and it was also because, frankly, they were competitors and there are numbers of stories--and unfortunately a lot of these stories are not entirely confirmed by all the evidence--of the rivalry between Tiffany and La Farge at that time suggesting that Charles Tiffany, Louis Comfort Tiffany's father, had gone to La Farge asking for the use of essentially what was protected under La Farge's patent in terms of the use of the opalescent glass combined with Tiffany's patent so that Tiffany could go out and produce some other window designs.

And it doesn't necessarily hold up in all of the documentation, supposedly, that Tiffany and La Farge were going to work together, but then somehow Tiffany declined the interest in the deal. Unfortunately, the only record that we have of Tiffany's "relationship" with La Farge--Tiffany doesn't go on about La Farge's work really anywhere in his own writing--is evidence of a lawsuit, a threatened lawsuit, between them. And it's essentially infringement upon the other's technique and it looks as if La Farge was actually trying to sue Tiffany over this issue at that time. So there's that rivalry going on there, there's the issue of technique of plating, the use of opalescent glass which both La Farge and Tiffany use—the plating effect.

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But I think ultimately you have to say what happens in terms of the development of Tiffany's career from that point on, well, 1880-1881, a couple of really important commissions are completed including the Seventh Regiment Armory in 1880. If you go to New York today, I encourage you to try to get access to the Seventh Regiment Armory. It's open during special exhibitions and features, and if you can walk in, and you take a left, and you go down, and you take another left in the hall--sometimes the door is closed, sometimes its open, and sometimes it has a little café setup near--you can see the only Tiffany interior that remains almost intact. Not entirely--the furniture is missing and some things have been changed, and the textiles are long gone, but the woodcarving and the metal work, the hearth all of these elements, you get a sense of what Tiffany's firm was capable of doing with these rich interiors that

were just--all of the money and effort were lavished upon them to make them some of the most spectacular Gilded Age environments ever created.

The following year, the Mark Twain home. Following that, the remodeling of the White House public rooms for Chester Arthur, unfortunately lost, and a host of other commissions of Havemeyer commissions and others that are occurring in the early 1880s when this team of individuals, Samuel Colman, Tiffany, Candace Wheeler and Lockwood de Forest, were all working together with incredible creative energy. Well, there were of course windows being introduced in this period into these homes, into these commissions. And, if you look at these very earliest windows by Tiffany from this period in the early 1880s, they tend to be structurally small and tight and let’s say they go to one extreme or the other. Either they're very experimental in terms of the use of patterns and colors and natural elements or they tend to be sort of rigid pattern work, sort of very traditionally framed elements, but with rich and very interesting glass.

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Now it was not only opalescent glass, obviously, that was an interest, but glass of all varieties and Tiffany was working with three different [glasses?] at that time and saying essentially, “give me your impure glass. I want the yucky stuff. I want the stuff that’s melted slag and bottles and this, that and the other” because he was interested not in, obviously, perfectly clear and beautiful and perfect things relative to this glass, but what sort of effects could be gained by the addition of colorants and chemicals and manipulating that glass in the hot sense.

And both La Farge, to a degree, but particularly Tiffany, what they wanted to do and how they really revolutionized the thoughts about stained glass in the late nineteenth century that were brewing about in a number of manuals suggesting “Oh, you should have stained glass in your home, it’s very artistic,” they wanted to get away from cold-painted, from enamel glass, where you have traditional painted figures, etcetera, and decoration, and they wanted the ornament, the subject, to be integral to the glass.

So rather than having several panels of glass assembled together and then painting waves on it and painting your sea anemones and your starfish on there, how can you actually make them with glass? Now that thought of manipulating, working the glass, rather than coming back to it after you have a sheet and say carving into it, etching the surface, doing these things after it’s cold, that idea of manipulating while it’s hot, while it’s being forged, so to speak, is very sympathetic to the Arts and Crafts Movement that’s developing, brewing in the 1880s and 1890s.

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It's about the honest use of materials and being true to the material, and revealing the nature of the material and how it's used. So it's not an artificial manipulation--that's later--it's a manipulation during sort of the forming process. And this is very different from what is probably the most popular American glass at that time, at least in tableware, and that's brilliant cut or rich cut glass and you can see examples of that in the fourth floor, too. We think about that sparkly crystal with all the cut edges and all the little facets and reflecting light every which way and it has to be clear, clear, clear. You want it brilliant. Totally, totally different from what Tiffany is doing with his windows--and La Farge and others with their windows--in the 1880s.

And, by the 1890s, what Tiffany does with his vessels--the small vessel forms, which you can see an example right on the end-wall here. You have to go around this corner and look at the end-wall, but I will invite you to do that after you've had a chance to look at the windows a little more closely. So very different from what was popular at that time in terms of the treatment of art glass in America in the 1880s. And so, Tiffany's work in that regard, along with La Farge's work, was seen as very novel, not only, again, the introduction of these techniques, but just the overall approach to producing these wonderful windows.

Well, we get to 1885 and Tiffany by this point is starting to dissolve his association with the firm. He continues to work with de Forest for a number of years and they complete certain commissions. But by 1885 Tiffany has established his own glass factory at Corona, in New York.

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And it's this factory that would eventually become known as the Tiffany Glass and Decorating Company—Tiffany Studios, later--that begins producing specialized glass just for Tiffany's works, for creating windows, for later creating vessels and other objects. And it's about this time when these windows were created--you can finally get to these. These we have dated 1885 to 1895, which we consider sort of the early period when Tiffany had his own glass works, could create and experiment with his own glass works rather than going to outside sources.

And there are several reasons why we date and some of these are technical reasons. You notice these horizontal bars, which are very typical to stained glass windows. They're support bars simply to hold up the great weight of the glass and keep everything from sagging down with the lead came that holds the individual pieces in place. Well, these horizontal support bars apparently bothered Tiffany because, as we see in his work in the later 1890s and after 1900, he essentially gets rid of them. He does creative things to get rid of them by flattening them instead of being round bars and following the contours of the leading with the support bars. So they would actually zigzag and follow all sorts

of very complicated shapes so that you didn't have this horizontal break that continues.

So that's one technical aspect where we look at this and say this is maybe an earlier example of his windows because later he gets rid of that. The other aspects are what types of glass were being used in this particular scene. Now you see—I love to look at these wonderful pieces. The detail and the manipulation of glass is amazing here. We have the rippled sort of clear glass with some bubbles in it, if you look very carefully, with various impurities.

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We have these little twisted pieces of opalescent glass here, almost looks like a little ear up here. I think it's really wonderful. They give you different effects and you'll see how thick they are and it's because while they were hot they were twisted and manipulated to create this wonderful textural effect and it gives you this incredible border all the way around. Well, there are other pieces, adjacent glass, again, more experimentation and these point to, again, that early period of how we're dating these windows 1885 and 1895; and these little crusted pieces--now here is an exception to working the glass when it's cold and this is chipping away at the glass, creating a very thick lump and essentially fracturing it and creating what has been referred to as jewels. These are little—almost like gemstones.

And combined with this twisted and worked or "drapery" glass, as it is sometimes referred to, it's twisted and worked glass you have which is very subtle and sort of milky, iridescent, opalescent and then next to it you have this wonderful little jewel or gemstone with light glinting through it and off of the various little chipped facets. And then you have the plated layers with all of these really beautiful colors. And you get a combination of effects that allows for a very interesting whole, because here you have what are seen as really fairly straightforward subjects, although very unusual ones, undersea scenes.

Here we have the horizon lines. Here we have the sky above, and then what happens below. And I love this progression from the sky, which is just pieced in with a couple of pieces of glass, layered glass, at the top to give you this sort of spotty sunset or sunrise effect and then the surface of the water suggested. But once you descend below the waves, once you break that line here--it's almost like a transom. It was never a transom I should point out.

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We actually investigated that because it almost looks like this should be a transom effect with this horizontal separation. But I think it's simply to create a distinction between the upper portion and the lower portion; that you do very much descend into the depths, past the starfish, deep, deep below into these multiple layers and everything just becomes really murky and wonderful when

you start looking into the shadows. What's going on here? And this sort of swirling colors.

And probably my two favorite pieces in any Tiffany window, these corner pieces which they are like swirled little caramels, they're like candies, they're really just wonderful and they're massively thick. What you're seeing here is maybe an inch projection off the front. Well, they project out the back as well. So they're hunks.

[Voice overlap]

The total depth on—? Probably upwards of two inches or an inch and three quarters, going in the back, yeah. Because you're only seeing the top part of it here, and obviously the depth varies on them, so maybe it varies between an inch and a quarter and an inch and the three quarters projecting out the back. So you have quite a bit going on in a very straightforward scene here with the anemones.

Now beyond this subject, why? Is Tiffany simply referencing his love of the water, his love of the ocean, interest in the ocean that he expresses in his paintings and in his other works? Well, certainly that can be part of it. The question here is for whom were these windows made? And that we can't answer at this point. I can't say it was made for a yacht club or someone who was in the yacht club or someone who was a scientist or an oceanographer or something like this. I'd love to have some sort of wonderful association like that, but we can't say that. But what we can say is that we do know that were another pair of windows as companions.

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And one of the things that we have suggested in the title of this work is they are the four seasons under the sea. The under the sea part is very straightforward. Why are we saying these are four seasons? The reason why we're saying these are the four seasons and that this one perhaps suggests summer and this one perhaps suggests spring—spring flowers, the floral elements. It's a little hard to see from just these two, however, if we have the other two here, which are in a private collection, what you would see would be another window that has a circular element, very much similar arrangement, same scale, same horizon element, but instead of starfish in the center, you have a basket with crabs spilling out, falling to the ocean floor. And you would have another window that has a swirl of fish swimming in the center, and on top of the water a totally different horizon with icebergs. So here we have icebergs, we'll make the leap and say winter. The crab basket, the fall harvest--fall, autumn, spring and summer.

And one of the reasons we believe it's a seasonal approach is because of Tiffany's interest in depicting the four seasons. He returned to that subject for

the Paris Exposition of 1900 and a major window depicting the bounty of nature from all the different seasons. And if any of you had the good fortune to see the Laurelton Hall show, which the Metropolitan Museum of Art organized in conjunction with the Morse Museum of Winter Park, Florida, you got to see that entire window recreated for the first time in I don't know, a hundred years or more than a hundred years. So it was a real treat to see that, but very, very different. We look at Tiffany's depiction of fruits and vegetables and other natural elements in his other windows.

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That we almost expect, squash blossoms and flowers and trees and landscapes, but an undersea scene seems so very unusual and there are only a very, very few windows by Tiffany which returned to this theme. One of them, private collection in Japan, called *The Deep Sea*, and it's fish swimming below sort of the deep and murky water, a very beautiful window that was exhibited during the 1890s at series of expositions.

There are two other windows which have undersea or aquatic themes, one of them is--I won't say which one--is a little questionable whether or not it's actually a Tiffany window. And then there is yet another one privately held, which is later and a little more straightforward in terms of its presentation of sea life.

These two windows, much more lyrical, much more abstract and I think you get a sense of this wonderful sort of floating quality with the anemones and with the starfish sinking down. You really do get the sense of the progression from the sky to the bottom, to the seabed below, and it's one of the things I think that makes this pair of windows particularly wonderful, and because they are capturing a very special moment in Tiffany's career before his work becomes, well, I'll say it, a little more commercial in the following years.

By 1900, with Tiffany's success in producing Favrile vessels and produces--and again, I'm pointing around the corner, you can't see it--this beautiful double gourd vessel and again his returning to nature theme and also returning to his love of Japanese art, and I think that love of Japanese art also filters through in the design of our windows.

By the time he is producing Favrile vessels, 1893 and 1894, he is clearly looking for a way to expand his reach beyond the singular commissions for great houses and churches, etc. that he is doing during the 1880s, and trying to find a way essentially to expand his market. He does that by selling his beautiful art-glass vessels.

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He does that by selling lamps, the lamps essentially being a byproduct of window production. If you can assemble these into flat panes, you can put them over a wooden mold and you can assemble them into drum shape objects or conical objects and create lamp shades, and then ultimately bronzes, enamels, woodcarving, jewelry, particularly after 1902 when his father dies and he becomes the design director for Tiffany & Co. briefly and produces a handful of really beautiful jewelry designs, as well as silver designs which are very rare today. But he branches out, essentially, and still manages to produce incredible, creative works of art, and still continues to experiment to a degree. But it's at this moment I think, particularly 1885 to the time of the Columbian Exposition, where we see Tiffany at the height of his creative powers in manipulating stained glass.

So we think about these windows as very straightforward, you know, images of undersea life that have been filtered through Tiffany's pallet, they've been filtered through Tiffany's love of experimentation, of technique and they transform into something, I think, truly extraordinary. Whether you're standing 10 feet away or 10 inches from them, I think there's always something new to see in these works which is really pleasing. It really does give you a sense of motion and movement which I think Tiffany was very much after in creating these scenes behind rippled glass.

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You feel that you can almost move into the work and again it gets to that sensibility of the Arts and Crafts Movement, of taking advantage as fully and as creatively as possible of the medium that you're working within. And I think these pair of windows represents Tiffany at really the height of his powers and being able to exploit hot-worked glass in this fashion.

Now, I keep referring to Tiffany as this sort of singular figure as if he sketched this out and created them himself, and of course that is not true. The Tiffany glassworks employed a number of people to produce these wares. Tiffany we can consider as the design supervisor over these works, but he had a host of talented chemists and glass blowers and others working with him. Arthur Nash and his son Leslie Nash, in particular, from the technical side.

Individuals including Clara Driscoll, perhaps his leading glass designer at the turn of the twentieth century, producing wonderful designs for the poppy lamps and dragonfly lamps and a number of the works that we commonly associate with Tiffany. These individuals Tiffany sort of suppressed because he put his signature on almost everything, on his works. He wasn't necessarily advertising his designer's names. He wanted to advertise his name and his firm's name. So they're only now, a lot of these designers, their contributions coming to light. Recently there was a wonderful exhibition on the "Tiffany Girls," unfortunate name for a project, but revealing the work of Clara Driscoll and others at the

turn of the century and their importance to the production of Tiffany Studios in the late 1890s and the first years of the twentieth century.

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Well, we know that Tiffany enjoyed great success in these exhibitions from the Columbian Exposition of 1893, and the presentation of his great Byzantine mosaic glass chapel to the Favrile vessels and windows and other objects he exhibited in Paris, in London, and elsewhere in the following years. But ultimately, all of this came to an end with economic and stylistic changes in the first decades of the twentieth century. And, by 1919, Tiffany had increasingly disassociated himself from his firm, withdrawing to his estate at Laurelton Hall and returned to his first love, that of painting, and something that he continued doing until his death in 1933. Trained as a young artist to paint in the style, in the mode, this sort of Impressionist mode that he was so enamored with late in life, surrounded by examples of his glass vessels, surrounded by examples of his glass windows and looking out into Oyster Bay, across the water—one just imagines this older gentlemen with his distinguished white beard and white suit, paint brush in hand, gazing across the water thinking about what he is going to create next.

So thank you very much and I hope you've enjoyed this and if you have any questions, I'll be glad to answer those for you.

[Applause]

Male: What is plating again?

Kevin Tucker: It's essentially layers.

Male: They're not hot [inaudible]

Kevin Tucker: No, no, no.

Male: [inaudible]

Kevin Tucker: They're stacked. And that's why I said, if you look at the leading here, and you'll see how the leading is thicker here and thinner here, you have to get really close to this.

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And you can see that there are two layers and they're actually held in place by that leading. So you can actually take them apart and we have these cleaned.

Male: It looks like the leading was actually inside or underneath the glass that's actually just showing through…

Kevin Tucker: Showing through the top layer. All that leading back there is behind a rippled glass. So this is one big sheet right here and there's pieces behind that, there's another layer, at least one more layer.

Male: How many layers?

Kevin Tucker: Uh-hmm.

Male: And then it was like he also made pieces of glass to fit--

Kevin Tucker: One to four layers on this. Excuse me.

Male: He made pieces of glass to fit specific spots or--

Kevin Tucker: Well, all of these things, they would be laid out at full scale and they would be drawn. And then it was sort of a puzzle where the glassworkers and the designer, they would come in, they would usually have, say, a watercolor sketch of a window. They'd lay it out full size. They'll draw out all of these lines. Okay, we need a piece of glass for here, we need a piece of glass here and we need one here. And then they would go over to the glass bin and go "You know, maybe this one or maybe we need somebody to blow one like this and what we really need is more blues over here and we need this lot because these are all from the same sheet of glass and we want everything to match in this section." And then they would just essentially start putting together and cut and cut and cut, and then once they have all the pieces ready, they would start assembling the window.

Now, because this is a separate element here, I mean, this element may have been made—it wasn't made at a different time, I'll just clarify that-- it may have been made separately. Someone may have had this portion on their work bench and they may have been right next to the person doing this. This is entirely supposition. But you can compartmentalize certain works and this one is sort of neatly compartmentalized to where the assembling of them could be shared. Now Tiffany was very insistent that there be a particular harmony with the work. So you're not going to get one guy off in the corner doing this, another guy who's off in the corner doing this, they'd come together and they look terrible.

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There was always a very careful approach to the overall composition and I think that's why so many of Tiffany's windows are so incredibly successful in their pallet, in their tonalities, in sort of progression through the window depending on how, what they're depicting.

Female: [inaudible]

Kevin Tucker: No, the leading has to be of different thicknesses to accommodate the number of layers. If you're going to have, for example, the couple of spots where you have additional pieces or they're attached on the back, you have to have pretty thick leading or you have to have the two front layers attached together and then the two back layers are attached with leading. Okay? They're not adhered, they're not glued, there's nothing like that. They're simply one is attached in there and then another one is attached.

There was actually—the process of plating went beyond Tiffany and La Farge. There are others who did plating, but essentially were following what Tiffany and La Farge were doing in the 1880s. By the mid 1880s, there was a patent actually for extra thick leading to accommodate the plating technique.

Male: When you're looking, say the very upmost, the topmost panel, this effect of cirrus clouds that you get in the sky. What mechanically is done to get that sort of [inaudible].

Kevin Tucker: I mean, that's exactly what it is. It's like drawing color through it. And again, if you go around the corner and you look at this double gourd vase, you'll see these striations of color that sort of run down this, and this is the piece of hot glass, it's blown. In that case it's blown, it's shaped with tongs into this double gourd form and then you have the streaks of hot glass that are introduced as additional color. Someone would be sitting there and they'll be draping that on there, and as that person continues to blow and continues to shape it, the streaks would be drawn out so they could be manipulated further, in the case of sheets like this, while they were still hot.

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They could be pressed, they could be rolled, essentially it's manipulating once that color has been introduced. They would start with the base color and then they would add other things.

You'll see some Tiffany glass, for example, that has some—there are none in this particular example because it's actually a slightly later development, in his work in the 1890s--that has what looks like—the best way to describe it, if you're a mineralogist, you would know the striations, but it almost looks like broken pine straw. They're like little bits of things that are floating in glass and it's essentially just impurities that are introduced in terms of like broken bits of glass and it creates this sort of mosaic-y effect. And again it's just him experimenting with "what happens when I introduce this to the glass, what happens when I introduce that?"

And you see that in the vessels as well, similar experimentation, perhaps the most famous—we don't have any example for you to see, but Lava glass, which was amongst the rarer glass he produced because he was looking at ancient

glass. So it was another one of his influences while traveling in North Africa, he was looking at ancient Roman glass and he loved the iridescent qualities, he loved the coarse qualities of some of the glass. And a lot of this iridescence that we see in ancient glass, of course, is coming from the fact that it was buried and a chemical change takes place in the surface of the glass that provides this iridescence.

Well he was looking and was like, "I like the way it looks and how can I replicate that with iridescent vessels, how can I replicate that effect with iridescent glass?" And you can do that by spraying metallic salts on the surface of hot glass and it gives you a similar effect.

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But with Lava glass, it was not only the iridescence in the lava, but he wanted something that looked like molten lava. So you have this beautiful sort of gold iridescence and then you have this crusty black surface that contrasts with that and all the shapes look like they're collapsing. They look like someone blew something out of glass, a ball out of the glass and then stood back and didn't touch it, well it just sort of crumpled and sort melted before it froze and that's the Lava glass. I mean, it is very deliberately made like that, but I think in those vessels you get that wonderful fluid, organic quality that I can only imagine Tiffany loved and was trying to create because there are so few Tiffany vessels when you look at them and say, "Oh they're perfectly symmetrical. They're perfectly static. They're perfectly—." He wasn't going for that sort of structure and rigidity and traditional ornamentation that you see, again, in the brilliant cut glass. Colorless, faceted, you know, hard geometric patterning. He wanted something organic. He wanted something that spoke to the material that he was using, fluid.

Female: Were there opportunities for recovering from mistakes when he was making these pieces or was it a one-time shot?

Kevin Tucker: The stories always go that he got rid of his mistakes. He just didn't—he didn't want them. It was like destroy them. If it didn't work out the way he wanted, destroy them. There are pieces that are marked on the bottom as experimental pieces and he actually kept a lot of experimental pieces in his home at Laurelton Hall.

In the 1950s, Laurelton Hall burns to the ground and one of his former students, Hugh McKean, essentially works with the estate and takes a lot of material to Winter Park, Florida for safekeeping and becomes part of the Morse Museum. If you go to Winter Park, Florida today, you can see a number of these works from Laurelton Hall. If you go to Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York you can also see a number of these works.

And the works that were marked as experimental, they're wonderful and interesting.

[00:46:00]

He obviously didn't consider them mistakes because they weren't destroyed. But we do know that he was very particular about the works. Now that said, I have seen examples of his work that were not marked as experimental, that were fully marked and there was nothing "wrong" with them, except they might have something a little strange on them.

For example, he created a series of peacock feather vases. The peacock being sort of the motif of the aesthetic movement in so many ways—the peacock feather over the eye--and it was done by employing the hot glass and creating these peacock feather designs.

Now I've seen vessels, including an example which is in our collection, where the surface is almost spotted or blistered with little pock marks, and it's largely because of the working process and because of the impurities and some of the materials are that were used. It obviously wasn't considered a defect enough, again, to destroy it and maybe it was considered an enhancement, we don't know, but generally it's always—when they're describing Tiffany Studios, if something didn't work out that was to their liking, it was smashed. It was recycled.

Male: I'm interested in the [inaudible] who ask [inaudible], how involved would they be in the creative process in the subject matter and also [inaudible] were those designed to be displayed in the same wall or the same wooden [inaudible]?

Kevin Tucker: Without knowing for whom it was created, it is impossible to say how involved--it would be the exception rather than the rule, because usually when you hire Tiffany, you hired him as a creative director for you, that he would say, "what you need here is a window of this subject," and then his firm would to it. Now, that said, Tiffany did copy in glass the work of French artists, for example, and actually replicated paintings in glass and we had one of those as part of the Tiffany exhibition.

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And these were glass windows that were exhibited at Bing's Maison Art Nouveau after 1894, late 1890s, 1898, but he began an association with Bing in 1894, initially selling Favrile glass vessels. So there are some cases where he essentially copied an artist's work in glass, so that is sort of unusual. I cannot off-hand recall a commission where, like, an individual said, "I want you to produce X and X for me and here is the drawing of what I want you to produce." They might have had a particular motif in mind or theme in mind for their house that Tiffany might have incorporated into the design, particularly

Havemeyer--I'm thinking of the early commissions because that might have happened.

Now, these windows, we have to presume—well, we can't really—we have to presume that, yes, they were intended for the same wall or an adjoining wall. They could have been a bay window, it could have been a flat wall, we just don't know. When these two works were sent to a conservator to be cleaned, we asked the conservators to do an investigation when they were sort of taking apart layers and doing all of these very complicated things to these windows, to investigate the framed elements, which you can only see just a little bit of the wooden trim here. There is actually more—the frame is about as big as this, this part bumps out here from the wall, but it's behind here, you can't see it.

And the conservator made a couple of comments to us about the condition of those frames which got us thinking that these might not have ever been installed in a home. They may not have ever been installed in a public space either, and that was because the windows—we're looking at them from the inside. These bars like this are supposed to be on the inside. The outside of the window, so to speak--or the other side that you cannot see--there was not evidence of exterior weathering. You know, rain, all of the changes that would take place from oxidation from being exposed to the elements.

[00:50:02]

And it didn't seem that they were scrubbed clean or something like that on the outside, there just didn't seem to be really any weathering that had gone on, on the other side of the windows.

Now, this to us suggests one or two things. They were either extremely well protected like they were like in the interior corridors or something, which doesn't seem to make a lot of sense for these windows because we have a fair amount of light behind them right now. If we were to take these two—if we pulled them off the wall and put them up to a not particularly bright day, they would be extremely dark, very dark, very murky.

So it seems unlikely that they were for sort of an interior corridor or something like that because they would simply not have been visible in that situation without light projecting through on the back.

So the other possibility is they were created for an exposition. We know that Tiffany created windows specifically to exhibit at every one of these major expositions that he participated in. The problem is there's not a comprehensive listing of every window that he exhibited at every exhibition.

So what we'd love to do, of course, is start going through them one by one and trying to find all of the lists for every exhibition until you see one that says, "four windows with an aquatic theme, starfish…" and then we'll be able to say,

Ah-ha! They were made for a London exhibition or a Paris exhibition or what have you and may have never been installed after that. These windows we do know were, in the 1950s, in private hands, and then they changed hands three times after that.

Male: [inaudible]

Kevin Tuckers: These are not signed. And the earlier ones tend not to be singed and it's only when the studios are sort of well established into the 1890s. Well, Tiffany Glass and Decorating Company and Tiffany Studios in 1902, that you see with regularity signing on the windows, on the bottom edge.

[00:52:09]

Male: [inaudible] I mean if you think about the mechanics, the logistics of how do you put this in a house, you know, do those depends on where your house is, what [inaudible] are, and which direction they are going to face.

Kevin Tucker: Sure.

Male: I mean, if it takes a lot of light to get through them and if you're on the East Coast, you know, kind of thematically you do like to have them faced at least towards the water I suppose, but that wouldn't be the most brilliant light, exposing to that light. You'd like to have them in the south, I suppose, of your house.

Kevin Tucker: Well and the other thing too is we have more—we have light behind these now equivalent to a bright sunny day where the window is being hit directly. A lot of Tiffany's earlier windows used very dark colors. There's lots of—particularly when they're plated with so many layers and everything else is going on, they tend to be very dark. And in instances where you can see some of these early windows with very basic lighting behind them, sometimes you can just get sort of shadows elements.

And Tiffany's ultimate effect was not that that they were going to be presented to you in fully bright light or in dim light, or this, that and the other, but that they would change over the course of the day, you know? I suppose if we had our way, these things would—maybe they should gently fade in and out so that you can get the sense of the changing time of day and those things sort of fade to black and then come back up again. He was interested in the effects and how those things move and it's just like the Impressionists painting the same scene over and over again at different times of day.

Male: From a conservationist standpoint, how [inaudible] was the color?

[00:54:00]

Kevin Tucker: It's not so much of an issue. It's not so much of an issue for these.

Male: So having intense light all day long…?

Kevin Tucker: It's really not an issue with these windows because there's nothing so radically experimental in these works that you're going to suddenly lose color.

Male: Are we looking at the back of these? Is that what you're saying?

Kevin Tucker: Looking at the inside.

Male: Looking inside.

Kevin Tucker: Looking in the inside.

Male: Are those horizontal supports on the other side of the window?

Kevin Tucker: No.

Male: So why don't we have them facing the opposite direction?

Kevin Tucker: Because this is the traditional way that—yes, with the support bars to the interior not the exterior. And maybe you can say that because you don't want this rusting and falling apart if they're exposed to the elements on the outside.

Male: And that's all original, un-restored or do they have to—

Kevin Tucker: That's all original, un-restored. The framing elements, the support elements it's all original.

Male: Okay.

Female: Thank you Kevin.

Kevin Tucker: Thank you very much.

[Applause]

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