

# RENE LALIQUE

1860–1945

Rene Lalique by Kaitlyn Brass  
The Art Nouveau style was a total art style that took the world by storm in the 1890s, impacting all aspects of life at the time, ranging from paintings, jewelry, and even to architecture. It was a breakaway style that pulled away from the ridged structure that had

been seen throughout most of the nineteenth century. It introduces flowing, and curving lines as well as bringing a focus of nature and the female form to the forefront of all kinds of media during its popularity. Unfortunately, the Art Nouveau style, while it burned bright, burnt out all too quickly



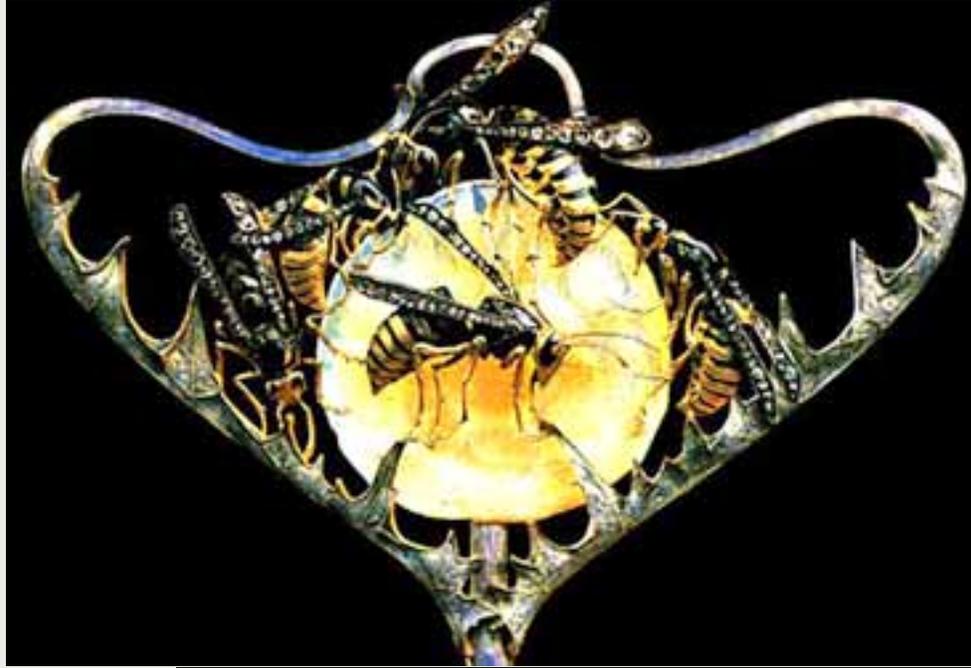
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## LALIQUE *continued*

during the 1910s as the world marched off to the First World War. Yet, while the style faded out all too quickly the pieces that were created by the stars of the time are stunning, even to an untrained eye, and the main star that brought the Art Nouveau style to jewelry was Rene Lalique.

Rene Lalique was born in 1860 Ay-en-Champagne in France but his family soon moved to Paris to be closer to his father's business but spent numerous summers back in his home town which is where he found his love for nature, as he spent those summers sketching the landscapes. This landed him a spot at College Turgot where he studied drawing under Jean-Marie Lequien but decided to also continue his studies at Paris School for the Decorative Arts which is where he began to study jewelry-making.



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In 1876, his father passed which forced Lalique to find some form of employment while he finished school; which he found by taking an apprenticeship as a goldsmith under the guidance of Louis Aucoc and continuing his classes at night. He saved up enough to take two years off to study at the School of Art at Sydenham in London, England. Upon his return to Paris in 1881 Lalique found himself designing jewelry to some of the most famous firms such as Aucoc, Boucheron, Cartier, and Jacta.

In 1885 Rene Lalique took over his first workshop from Jules Destape, and this would start of ten long years of success in which he could exercise as much creativity as he pleased. This shows as he became the star jeweler of the Art Nouveau style. He pushed away from the traditional diamond and gold standard that had been so common for so long and instead used



more humble materials such as enamel, glass, ivory, coral, bone, as well as semi-precious stones such as pearl, opal, aquamarine, amethyst, and mother-of-pearl.

His pieces highlight the nature motifs that are common in other works in the Art Nouveau style but what really seems to set Lalique apart from other artists at the time was how he went beyond what others did was his mastery of cloisonné and then later mastering the very difficult plique-à-jour technique when he used enamel.

By removing the metal backing the enamel was originally set in, either mechanically or by acid, it gave his pieces an almost stained glass quality which allows the natural light to illuminate each piece. This technique's allowed him to truly capture the transparency of the dragonfly's wings or the translucency of water, or even to create the natural lighting between



the trees while a woman and her hound take a walk through the woods on a commissioned brooch.

Lalique was also unique in the way he would take inspiration from things in nature that normally one would not think of when thinking of high fashion jewelry. A hat pin that instead of being decorated with delicate insects such as dragonflies or butterflies, is instead a group of four gold and diamond wasps encircling a stunning yellow opal as if it was a flower or a brooch pendant that took the form of the profile of a woman surrounded by carved glass pine

cones and baroque pearls. These, of course, being some of his tamer examples of his work since Lalique was enamored by the female form. Many of his pieces have the female form worked into them and in fact, he created a whole ensemble that including a ring, a necklace, and bracelet in which a series of nude women are etched into the glass as if caught in the middle of a dance. Many of his pieces Lalique would also combine his two inspirations in a dream-like approach to his pieces by creating his own fairies, nymphs, and mermaids such as one of his most famous pieces: a fairy with the body and wings of a dragonfly and the torso of a woman made so famous by being commissioned and worn by the renowned French actress Sarah Bernhardt.

Even other famous artists at the time recognized his talent such as Emile Gallé, a famous glass artist at the time, called him "inventor of modern jewelry" a title he truly seemed to earn

after he was invited to participate in International Exposition at Brussels, Belgium, and proceeded to win the grand prize in 1897.

Later that year he was also knighted by the Legion of Honor. In 1900 he had an exhibition at the Paris' World's Fair but this would be the last of some of his crowning achievements in the world of jewelry since in 1905, Rene Lalique was approached by perfumer

François Coty, to make perfume bottles after seeing some of his none jewelry related glassworks. By 1909 Lalique had opened his own glassworks and within three years he had stopped creating jewelry altogether. ■

