



# Glass is the word

Contemporary art glass is back in vogue, with Lalique attracting plenty of buyers

**T**HE career of René Lalique (1860–1945) could almost have been crafted for collectors. He first made his reputation as a jeweller, supplying, among others, Siegfried Bing, whose shop, La Maison de l'Art Nouveau, gave the style its name, and his designs owed much to his apprenticeship with Louis Aucoc, who was already working in that manner. Glass always played a part and one wonders whether Lalique's fascination with the material may not have owed something to his surroundings during two years of training at the Crystal Palace School of Art. Together with the work of the Belgian Philippe Wolfers, Lalique's brooches, hair combs, pendants and necklaces, which are often unique pieces, are the most striking in the style.

As Art Nouveau waned following its short dominance of European fashion, Lalique transitioned into the foremost Art Deco glassmaker, best known for his iridescent vases, bowls and dishes, as well as for carbonnet mascots, but he also made impressive architectural pieces for hotels, Atlantic liners, including SS *Normandie*, and a church in Jersey. Some pieces were one-offs and even the commercial runs came in differing colours or tones. After his death, the business continued under his son Marc and granddaughter Marie-Claude, until it was sold in 1994. However, it no longer produced 'Lalique glass', turning instead to lead crystal.



Figs 1–4: Lalique: jade 'Poisson', £25,200; orange 'Poisson', £15,120; Escargot, £20,160; Tortues, £47,700

In market terms, all this means that there is a reasonable supply, with certain designs and colours being very rare and others relatively easy to find, and the price range reflects this. I have mentioned before that I have followed the prices for Ceylan iridescent vases (design No. 905, 1924) since I worked for Christie's in the early 1970s, when examples routinely made 45gns in its auctions. These vases, sometimes fitted as lamps, are satisfying market indicators: neither excessively rare nor commonplace. The design of paired lovebirds is standard, but there are slight differences in colour and quality.

Over the next couple of decades, prices rose to about £2,000 and, at one time, £8,000 or even £10,000 was possible. In 2011,

one sold for \$22,500, but I don't believe that there has been anything similar since. Between £5,000 and £8,000 seems to be the current rate.

Last month in London, Lyon & Turnbull held a sale of a private collection of 156 vintage Lalique pieces. There was a 92% selling rate and there were several examples of some designs, which made the point about the importance of colour and quality. One of the highest prices of which I am aware was paid at the much-missed Christie's South Kensington in 2012 for an electric-blue intaglio 'Poisson' vase (No. 925, 1921), which sold for £79,250; a deep-red moulded version made £34,850 in the same sale. At Lyon & Turnbull, a cased jade and grey-stained 'Poisson' (Fig 1) reached

£25,200, whereas a cased orange version made only £15,120 (Fig 2). ('Cased' means glass in two layers, either of different colours or one plain, one coloured.)

Similarly, there were three Escargot (No. 931, 1920) vases: the orange-red with white stain (Fig 3) sold for £20,160, butterscotch reached £15,120 and electric blue only £8,820. The most expensive lot was the last, which, as were many others, was precisely estimated. This was a Tortues vase (No. 966, 1926) (Fig 4), which reached £47,700. There was also one good-looking Ceylan on offer and it made £7,812 (Fig 5).

Contemporary art glass seems to be enjoying something of a moment, although not all of it is immediately recognisable as glass. Last year, I mentioned Dawn



*Fig 5 left: Lalique Ceylan. £7,812.*  
*Fig 6 below: Keeper of Rainbows by Scala. With Joanna Bird*



*Fig 7: White Ground II by Helen Carnac. With Sarah Myerscough*

Bendick, whose dichroic glass sculptures were to be shown by the pot-and-glass dealer Joanna Bird at the Somerset House Collect fair. At this year's fair, which starts on Friday (until March 5), the dealer offers her work again, together with glass artists Steffen Dam, Anthony Scala, Kaja Upelj and Gregory Warren Wilson. I particularly like Scala's *Keeper of Rainbows* (Fig 6).

Maak Auctions, established by Marijke Varrall-Jones in 2009, generally specialises in contemporary ceramics, but a wider range of crafts will be represented when she offers parts of the Victoria de Rothschild Collection in London in September. Lady de Rothschild died in 2021, and, from March 17, when the house and gardens open to the public, the sale will be on exhibition at Ascott House, Buckinghamshire. It includes work by the Japanese sculptor Ritsue Mishima, whose abstract forms are created by glassblowers.

The current show at Sarah Myerscough in Barnes, SW13,

'Sensing Place, Three Responses' (until April 15; [www.sarahmyerscough.com](http://www.sarahmyerscough.com)), is of three artists: a painter, a creator of 'furniture objects' and a maker in vitreous enamel on copper, all united by their involvement with their immediate localities. The painter, Andrew Mackenzie, has focused on a small overgrown quarry and the pictures share a numinous quality with his fellow Scottish Borderer Victoria Crowe. A recurrent motif for Somerset-based David Gates is the cabinet of curiosities and his furniture objects are conceived as frames to display other objects. Helen Carnac, also in Somerset, draws inspiration from what she sees around her (Fig 7). She says: 'My translation of the things I see and note into made work is often not literal, but rather I find myself trying to engender something of a feeling and the framing and layers I see are translated (somehow) through my manipulation of material.' 🐛

**Next week Prepare for TEFAF**



### Pick of the week

To some non-vitreous materials. The traditional Chinese tangram is a set of seven polygons that can be put together to form many different shapes. In this 'Aesop Tangram', created by the sculptor Susie Bacon and the Cardozo Kindersley Workshop, the polygons are plinths for seven bronze birds and beasts (and a lilypond). The edges of the plinths are inscribed with single words from the fables, which can be read in many different combinations. This may sound whimsical, and perhaps it is, but it is also thought-provoking art—and potentially great fun. An edition of nine has been produced; they are on show and sale at Patrick Bourne, 6, St James's Place, London SW1 ([www.patrickbourne.com](http://www.patrickbourne.com)). The plinths are wood, but if a buyer preferred, the Workshop will produce slate versions.