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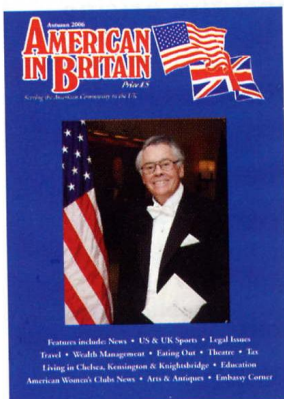
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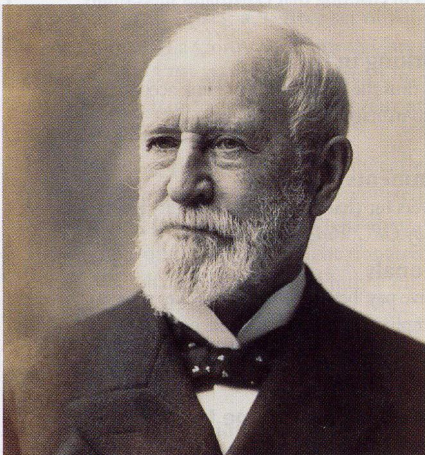


# Fine Arts and Antiques

*Bejewelled by  
Tiffany:  
1837-1987*

*by Abby Cronin*

When you enter the Gilbert Collection at Somerset House, climb the glass staircase leading to the exhibition: *'Bejewelled by Tiffany, 1837-1987'*. All at once you will find yourself in an atmosphere of luxury and opulence. This landmark show explores 150 years of Tiffany & Co.'s jewellery and accessories and brings us up-to-date, 2006. More than 200 objects are arranged chronologically. Twenty themed showcases contain pieces from different periods and styles. Photos of president's wives, film stars, celebrities, and socialites wearing Tiffany jewellery are featured. Gallery walls are papered with enlarged photographic images of Charles Lewis



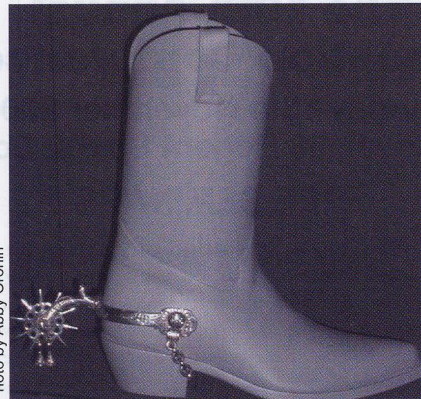
Charles Louis Tiffany



Transatlantic  
Cable circa 1858

Tiffany, his partners and designer son, Lewis Comfort. The images show the store's New York locations, workshops and catalogues. Archival material displays jewellery designs, illustrations from international expositions, and photos of the major designers. *'Bejewelled by Tiffany'* has a beguiling – almost seductive mood. This is the perfect setting for learning about the myriad of glamorous goods produced by this internationally acclaimed company.

From humble beginnings as a stationery and 'fancy goods' emporium selling fans, Chinese goods, umbrellas, pottery and 'curiosities of every description', Charles

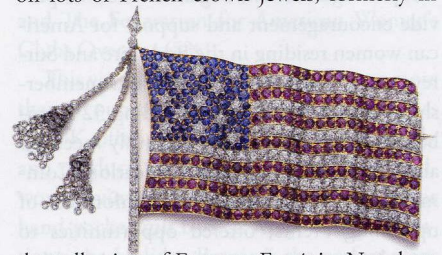


Silver Spurs circa 1893 on cowboy boot

Lewis Tiffany and John Burnett Young opened their store on Broadway, New York City in September 1837. The first day's sales took \$4.98. Their business venture was soon to reap rewards from the emergent economic expansion in America. After the Civil War in 1865 the United States experienced a major transformation: it developed into an urbanised industrial society with enormous consumer power. Almost overnight, new wealth acquired a taste for material luxuries. This period became known as America's 'Gilded Age'.<sup>(1)</sup> It was perfect timing for Tiffany and his partners. Fashions for the home, dress, silverware and jewellery filled pages of books and popular magazines. All that was needed were goods to satisfy a growing demand. Given the entrepreneurial genius of C. L. Tiffany, the firm grew, expanded its range of

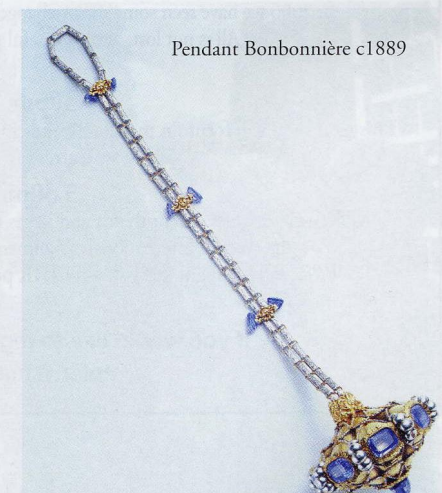
merchandise, moved to new premises, opened its first shop in Paris in 1868 and never looked back.

By the end of the 19th century the firm had earned a reputation for combining excellence in craftsmanship with an understanding of gemstones and brilliant marketing strategies. Recognising that wealthy Americans sought European jewellery designs, John Young, Tiffany's partner, made shrewd investments during political upheavals in Paris in 1848 when the value of diamonds dropped by 50%. He bought diamonds and gems from Europe's royal houses, took them home to be made into tiaras, necklaces, rings, and much more. At auction in 1877, Tiffany bid on lots of French crown jewels, formerly in



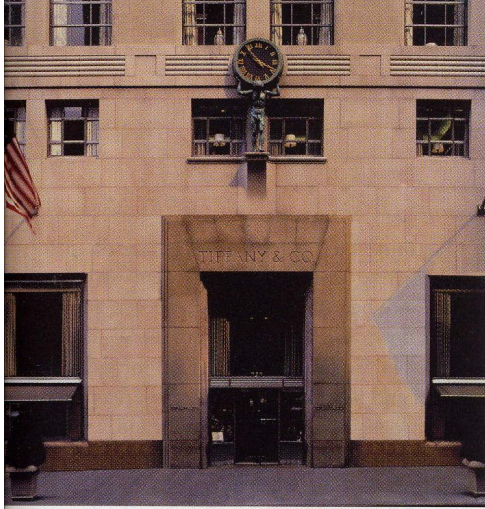
the collection of Empress Eugénie, Napoleon III's wife. Having cost some \$487,956, this diamond jewellery went to New York where it was sold to prominent figures in society. The famous 'Tiffany Diamond', a 128.54 carat diamond, discovered in the Kimberley diamond mines, was purchased in 1878 for \$18,000. The press soon dubbed Charles Tiffany the 'King of Diamonds' and the New York store became known as an 'Art Emporium', a museum of industrial art. Stock included imported items and those made domestically. Acclaim and awards were gained by showing wares in several international exhibitions beginning in the 1867 Exposition Universelle in Paris on through to the 1939 New York World's Fair where Tiffany's Art Deco jewellery was shown in the 'House of Jewels'.

Tiffany & Co. gradually became an unashamedly patriotic American institution. A conspicuous symbol is the rippling diamond studded 'American Flag' brooch, circa 1900,



Pendant Bonbonnière c1889





New York Store Front

which greets you as you enter the exhibition. Exquisitely designed, the flag is made of platinum, gold, sapphires and diamonds attached to a diamond flagpole with two diamond tassels. This constellation of gems represents the Union of the United States: thirteen stars being the number of original colonies with thirteen alternate red and white stripes. A more modest range of flag brooches were kept in stock from 1889 to 1912 and could be ordered from the company's catalogue. In 1862 President Lincoln purchased a seed pearl suite of jewellery for his wife to wear at his inauguration. To commemorate the laying of the first transatlantic cable, 1858, Charles Lewis Tiffany bought twenty miles of surplus steel cable which he had cut into uniform sections. Brass mountings with the Tiffany logo were added and sold in attractive boxes for fifty cents each. This ingenious marketing device publicised the importance of a communication link from North America to Ireland and also made less expensive items available to more modest customers.

Tiffany's exceptional designers, gemologists and craftsman responded to changing life-styles among the wealthy. Functional objects such as scent bottles, umbrella stands, parasols, pipes and watches were turned into

works of art. They are displayed in the cases showing 'Ladies' and Gentlemen's opulent accessories'. G. Paulding Farnham created an exquisite *Pendant Bonbonnière*, (an elaborate container for small sweets) for the 1889 Exposition Universelle in Paris. And there is a fabulous pair of silver spurs, designed in 1893 by John Curran. The spurs are decorated with stylised animal and geometric motifs inspired by the art of Native Americans. Each one cost \$65.31 to make, used 10.3 ounces of silver and were listed in the 'Silver Fancy Goods' section of the catalogue. They glamorised accessories worn by cowboys and captured the romance of the Wild West. In 1879, George Kunz, a gemologist, collected mineral treasures from his worldwide travels and discovered a multitude of indigenous American jewels. Kunz revealed the mineral wealth of the United States: Montana sapphires, Beryls and tourmalines in Maine, Arizona and New Mexico garnets, an Oregon opal and American freshwater pearls. His book on pearls remains the definitive text on the subject. Kunzite became the descriptive term used to identify indigenous gems in many Tiffany settings.

The firm's reputation depended on exploring many themes. Inspired by nature, G. Paulding Farnham designed enamelled and jewelled orchids which caused a sensation in 1889. These brooches were described as 'so perfect, so life-like in their grace and charm, that they give the illusion of being natural'.<sup>(2)</sup> Louis Comfort Tiffany's jewellery, influenced by oriental and art nouveau designs, insects such as the dragonfly, and foliage set in enamel are, today, recognised as signature pieces. Despite economic difficulties in the 1920s and 1930s and World War II, Tiffany continued to produce designs reflecting the spirit of the times. A patriotic charm bracelet, 1944, could be purchased by a serviceman for his sweetheart. The excep-

tionally talented Jean Schumberger, who created extraordinary and extravagant pieces, joined Tiffany's in 1956. He designed three settings for the 'Tiffany Diamond' which was worn only twice, most memorably by Audrey Hepburn in a publicity photograph for the film *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. In the 1960s Donald Chaffin's bejewelled animal figures gained popularity. And in the 1970s, the innovative styles of Paloma Picasso and Elsa Peretti were widely esteemed. Peretti's deceptively organic sculptural contemporary cuff bracelets, heart designs and bangles are in production today. The acclaimed architect, Frank Gehry, was recently commissioned to design a range of modern jewellery now on sale. There is little doubt that 'Bejewelled by Tiffany' is a show which has captured the spirit of each age of jewellery and accessories from archaeological finds, the renaissance, Japanese arts and crafts period, through the twentieth and into the 21st century. It invites us to peek into cabinets of exquisite jewels and luxurious objects where we can explore the evolution of a remarkable American institution.

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#### Bejewelled by Tiffany 1837 – 1987

Opened 24th June 2006 & has been extended to 7th January 2007

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by Clare Phillips

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Free Exhibition Guide contains full plan of exhibition

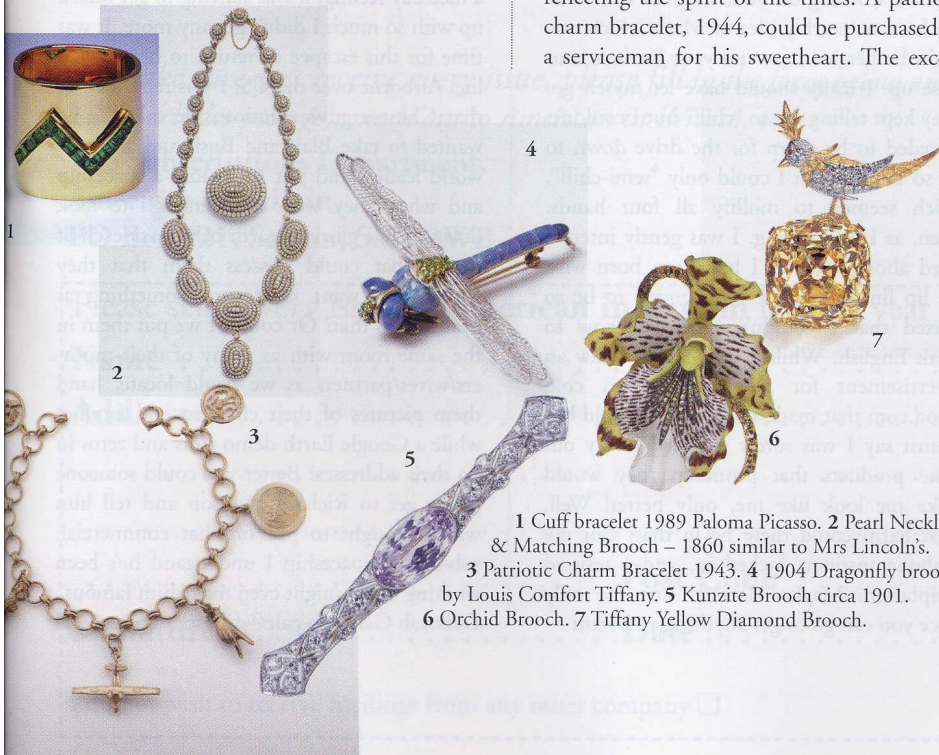
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www.suebond.co.uk

#### Notes

1. Mark Twain's term: 'Gilded Age' quoted from U G Dietz in Phillips, C (ed) *Bejewelled by Tiffany: 1837-1987* "The attainment of wealth and power became an American preoccupation. In Mark Twain's *The Gilded Age*, all the characters seem obsessed with becoming wealthy, even if their dreams are unreasonable." p. 47

2. Phillips, C (Ed). *Bejewelled by Tiffany: 1837-1987*. Yale University Press 2006 p. 202

**SHOP** at Gilbert Collection: Good stock of Tiffany jewellery postcards, notes, & cards. Full range of books about Tiffany. Reproduction modern sterling silver jewellery by Tiffany stamped with Tiffany & Company 1837 hallmark.



1 Cuff bracelet 1989 Paloma Picasso. 2 Pearl Necklace & Matching Brooch – 1860 similar to Mrs Lincoln's. 3 Patriotic Charm Bracelet 1943. 4 1904 Dragonfly brooch by Louis Comfort Tiffany. 5 Kunzite Brooch circa 1901. 6 Orchid Brooch. 7 Tiffany Yellow Diamond Brooch.