



Lamp base

Not on display

Title/Description: Lamp base

Object Type: Lighting device

Materials: Metal

Technique: Metalworking

Accession Number: 21022B

Elegant yet unadorned, this metal lamp base by Louis Comfort Tiffany (1848-1933) was designed to support a leaded glass shade. The hollow base is fitted with an electrical cord to provide electrical light in the home. At the time that this lamp base was manufactured, the supply of AC electrical current for domestic use was a relatively new invention, having been developed throughout the 1880s and 1890s. For this reason, the lamp base can be viewed as a symbol of technological progress and modernity. [1]

Thomas Edison (1847-1931), who invented the incandescent bulb and patented a system of electricity distribution, was a close friend of Louis Comfort Tiffany. The two had met in 1884 when working on New York' city's Lyceum Theatre - the first theater to be entirely electrically lit. [2] This collaboration encouraged Tiffany to explore the commercial and artistic potential of producing electrical lamps for contemporary domestic interiors.

Electric lamps became a staple product of Tiffany & Co. after the company introduced stained glass shades in 1895. Varying in design and inspired by nature, the lamps met fashionable demands for a New Style that would reflect the sensibility of a new technological age.

Although this base is relatively spare, Louis Comfort Tiffany's bronze lamp bases did take more inventive forms. Lamp bases and supports were often modelled after tree trunks, twisting roots, sinuous plant stems and clusters of leaves. The innovative treatment of the lamp base complemented the floral designs of its glass shade.

Tiffany opened a bronze and copper foundry and metal shop at his Corona factory in 1897, which enabled his designers to experiment with this component of the lamp's design. [3] As the company profited, the Stourbridge Glass Company in Corona, Queens, New York, expanded, becoming Tiffany Furnaces in 1902. [4]

Vanessa Tothill, November 2020

[1] <https://americanhistory.si.edu/lighting/19thcent/comp19.htm> [accessed on 16 November 2020]

[2] <https://thoughtgallery.org/events/iridescence-met-incandescence-thomas-edison-louis-comfort-tiffany/> [accessed 18 November 2020]

[3] Vivienne Couldrey, *The Art of Louis Comfort Tiffany* (London: Quarto Publishing, 1989), p. 114.

[4] <https://www.tiffanystudios.org/tiffany-chronology.html> [accessed 18 November 2020]

Further Reading

Mario Amaya, *Art Nouveau* (London: Dutton Vista, 1966)

Vivienne Couldrey, *The Art of Louis Comfort Tiffany* (London: Quarto Publishing, 1989)

Amanda Geitner and Emma Hazell, eds., *The Anderson Collection of Art Nouveau* (Norwich: Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, University of East Anglia, 2003)

Paul Greenhalgh, ed., *Art Nouveau, 1890-1914* (London: V&A Publications, 2000)

Paul Greenhalgh, ed., *The Nature of Dreams: England and the Formation of Art Nouveau* (Norwich: Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, University of East Anglia, 2020)
