



Ashtray

Gabriel Argy-Rousseau

Not on display

Title/Description: Ashtray

Artist/Maker: Gabriel Argy-Rousseau (Designer)

Born: 1920 c.

Object Type: Glassware

Materials: Glass

Technique: Blow moulding

Measurements: h. 50 x w. 105 x d. 105 mm

Inscription: 'Argy-Rousseau'

Accession Number: 21082

Historic Period: 20th century

Production Place: France

School/Style: Art Nouveau

Credit Line: Donated by Sir Colin and Lady Anderson, 1978

This design for an ashtray was designed by Gabriel Argy-Rousseau (born Joseph-Gabriel Rousseau; 1885-1953) and manufactured using a technique known as *pâte de verre* or 'glass paste'. Using this process, finely crushed glass bound with gum arabic is applied as a paste to the inside of a ceramic mould and fired in a kiln. Oxides and metal salts can be added to the powdered glass to produce different colours in the firing.

Clear *pâte de verre*, streaked with blue, has been cast in the shape of a flower head. The thick rim of this shallow vessel is formed from two rows of overlapping petals, reflecting the influence of nature on Art Nouveau design. This stylised open flower sits upon a raised circular foot and is incised with the maker's mark 'G. Argy Rousseau' on the side of the dish.

The *pâte de verre* technique developed from Roman frit casting that used moulds and chips of glass. It is likely that Argy-Rousseau first modelled the bowl form in plaster and clay before developing the

moulds needed to cast a positive model in wax. This piece of kiln-fired glass relied on the lost wax casting method to create a cavity within a refractory ceramic material. Once the wax had drained out, glass paste was applied to the walls of the cavity and fired. [1]

From 1902-1906, Argy-Rousseau studied at the Ecole Nationale de Céramique at Sèvres where he earned a diploma in ceramic engineering. [2] During this period, Argy-Rousseau's classmate Jean Cros introduced him to mould-cast glass production [3]. Jean Cros was the son of César-Isidore-Henri Cros (1840-1907) who had rediscovered the pâte de verre technique in 1893 and developed his own method for kiln-firing powdered glass in clay moulds [4].

Argy-Rousseau founded the company 'Société des Pâtes de Verre' in 1921 [5] and formed a partnership with Gustav Moser-Millot who marketed Argy-Rousseau's art glass. [6] Over the next 15 years he produced between 200 and 300 wax models for lamps, vases, and bowls. [7] Blighted by the economic crisis of 1929, series production ended with the dissolution of Argy-Rousseau's company in 1931. [8]

Vanessa Tothill, January 2021

[1] *Keith Cummings, Contemporary Kiln-formed Glass*(A&C Black, 2009), pp. 34-37.

[2] <https://www.christies.com/lot/lot-gabriel-argy-rousseau-1885-1963-a-jeunesse-vase-circa-5978726/> [accessed 4 January 2021] references Janine Bloch-Dermant, *Argy-Rousseau: Glassware as Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1991).

[3] <https://www.christies.com/lot/lot-gabriel-argy-rousseau-1885-1963-a-jeunesse-vase-circa-5978726/> [accessed 4 January 2021] references Bloch-Dermant. (1991).

[4] <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/195144?searchField=All&sortBy=Relevance&ft=C%a9sar-Isidore-Henry+Cros&offset=0&rpp=20&pos=3> [accessed 4 January 2021]

[5] <https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/term/BIOG64679> [accessed 4 January 2021]

[6] <http://argyrousseau.com/history/> [accessed 7 January 2021]

[7] <https://www.christies.com/lot/lot-gabriel-argy-rousseau-1885-1963-a-jeunesse-vase-circa-5978726/> [accessed 4 January 2021] references Bloch-Dermant (1991).

[8] <https://www.christies.com/lot/lot-gabriel-argy-rousseau-1885-1963-a-jeunesse-vase-circa-5978726/> [accessed 4 January 2021] references Bloch-Dermant (1991).

Further Reading

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

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

Sembach, Klaus-Jürgen, *Art Nouveau. Utopia: Reconciling the Irreconcilable* (Köln and London: Taschen, 2000)
