



Buckle

René Lalique

Not on display

Title/Description: Buckle

Artist/Maker: René Lalique (Designer)

Born: 1903 c. - 1904 c.

Object Type: Buckle, Jewellery, Metalware

Materials: Enamel, Glass, Gold, Opal, Precious stone, Sapphire, Semiprecious stone

Technique: Enameling, Metalworking, Pliqué à jour

Measurements: h. 182 x w. 72 x d. 25 mm

Inscription: 'Lalique'

Accession Number: 21122

Production Place: France

School/Style: Art Nouveau

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

The overall form of this exquisite buckle, designed by René Lalique (1860-1945), suggests a butterfly with its wings spread wide. But on close inspection, the design is in fact composed of two swallowtail butterflies, with their wings folded back, facing each other on either side of an opal beetle. Lalique's carefully observed arrangement reflects his fascination with the natural world as a source for innovative jewellery designs. He engaged exceptional technical skills for these designs, evident here in the intricate *plique-à-jour* enamelling of the wings in varying shades of blue, with a delicate gold framework. The translucent enamelwork is complemented by the discrete insertion of sapphires, while the eye is drawn to the glistening opal cabochon used to suggest the beetle's body.

In the 1890s Lalique's jewellery was celebrated for its craftsmanship and the artistic refinement of its form and design, rather than the size and importance of its gemstones, marking a significant turning point in European jewellery design. [1] Lalique was renowned for his mastery of *plique-à-jour* enamelwork and for his preference for opals, which featured prominently in French jewellery by the end of the nineteenth century. By 1903-4, when this buckle was produced, Lalique was one of the top-ranking Parisian jewellers, famous for his distinctive, inventive approach.

The buckle still has its original box, stamped with the address of Lalique's studio, workshop and showroom at 40 Cours la Reine, Paris. Lalique had moved into these premises in 1902, where he installed an elaborate decorative scheme, based on pine trees.

The Andersons acquired the buckle in 1963 from the German dealer Hans-Jorgen Heuser, who contacted Sir Colin to suggest the sale after being informed by a mutual friend of his new interest in collecting Art Nouveau. In their correspondence, which is in the Sainsbury Centre Archive, Heuser highlights the excellent condition of the buckle, describing it as one of the most important examples of jewellery by Lalique.[2] The Andersons also collected a pendant and hair ornament by Lalique, as well as examples of his glassware from 1925-30 which had by then become the focus of his practice.

Lisa Newby, April 2020

[1] Clare Phillips, 'Jewellery and the Art of the Goldsmith', in *Art Nouveau 1890-1914*, ed. Paul Greenhalgh (London: V&A Publications, 2000), p.238.

[2] Letter from Hans-Jorgen Heuser to Colin Anderson, 2 August, 1963. Colin Anderson Papers, Sainsbury Centre Archive.

Exhibitions

The First Moderns, Sainsbury Centre, Norwich, 2011-12-01 - 2012-12-31

Art Nouveau: The Nature of Dreams, Sainsbury Centre, Norwich, 2020-03-29 - 2020-09-13

Further Reading

Johnson, Penny, *Art Nouveau, The Anderson Collection*, 1978 (p. 35)

Sekules, Veronica, 'Imaginary Poems: Jewellery and the Art Nouveau Phenomenon', in *The Anderson Collection of Art Nouveau*, ed. By Amanda Geitner and Emma Hazell (Norwich: Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, 2003)
