

Dhurmer. Hence the present exhibition, the goal of which is threefold: To expose the public to Massier's masterful lusterwares, to provide the stepping stone toward a future full-scale, museum-mounted Massier exhibition; and to inspire the more adventurous among you to become Massier collectors yourselves.

A historical overview of Clément Massier should begin with his great-grandfather Pierre Massier (1707-1748). Pierre was a pioneer of ceramics on the Côte d'Azur, opening a factory in the town of Vallauris before the French Revolution. The first in the long family line of ceramists, he set a standard in quality. Under the guidance of his son Jacques (1806-1871) the factory in Vallauris expanded, a profitable local business. During this period, the factory produced utilitarian pottery for cooking, garden wares, and bricks. Massier cooking pottery was known to "resist fire and the flavors of foods." The following generation would be represented by a pair of brothers, Delphin (1836-1907) and Clément (1844-1917).

A great turning point for the Massiers arrived with the hiring, in 1859, of an Italian master ceramist and artist. Notes left by Clément Massier prove that Gaetano Gandolfi was the artistic and technical genius whom Clément himself regarded as his master. Gandolfi developed many of the glazes that remained standard for the Massier majolica production for years to come. Under his tutelage, Clément and Delphin excelled, becoming master ceramists themselves.

For a time, the brothers worked together, running the family factory at Vallauris. When a rivalry developed, however, it became necessary to open a second factory in the town. Then in 1883, Clément Massier closed his Vallauris operation and reopened on Golfe-Juan, a small port town conveniently located on the route linking Monaco, Nice, and Cannes. The Côte d'Azur was quickly becoming a popular vacationing spot for the new middle class, an up-and-coming area. Only one year later, in 1884, Clément was employing 120 workers and could claim a profit. Near his new factory he erected an exhibition hall and a gallery, the latter in neo-classical style with turquoise detailing inspired by Persian and Moorish faience. By the 1890s, Clément Massier's production would be sold in at least five Paris galleries and an unknown number of other venues across France.

Lucien Lévy (1865-1953), later known as Lévy-Dhurmer, hired on as primary artistic director for Massier in the year 1887. As it happened, the new director was a collector of Hispano-Moresque ceramics and the decorative arts of North Africa and Asia. He soon had Massier fascinated with the luster glazes of Hispano-Moresque ceramics. The first known example of Clément Massier's metallic luster glaze dates from the year of Lévy-Dhurmer's arrival. Massier luster-glazed ceramics from the first years are decorated with Persian and Moorish patterns, patterns reminiscent of the henna tattoos painted on the hands and feet of Moroccan women.

In 1889, Massier exhibited in the Exposition Universelle de Paris, winning a gold medal for his new metallic luster-glazed pottery. At this time, the patterns were generally applied to a great variety of forms: Isnik, Persian, Moorish, Japanese, Greek, and Neoclassical. Lévy-Dhurmer's influence on the decorative style of the Massier production became clearly dominant during the 1890s. The use of decorative elements based on nature became more prevalent: Fabulous patterns of geometric shapes glazed like textiles on the surfaces of vessels, insects crawling, prawns cavorting, butterflies dancing, spiders, starfish, eels, algae fields, endless floral patterns. Forms based on fluid, organic shapes were created, too, but in the first half of the decade most of the decorating was done on earlier forms. Lucien Lévy-Dhurmer worked almost exclusively with the metallic luster glaze (his pieces are signed "L. Lévy").

Lévy-Dhurmer left the Massier factory in 1895 to pursue painting as a career in Paris. Today his works are collected by museums worldwide and he is considered one of the important artists of the Symbolist movement.

The catalogue of the Massier factory offered seven categories of decoration on standard form patterns, with a price for each. The categories were: "jaspe" (green), "rouge" (red), "turquoise-céladon-jaune-orange" (turquoise-celadon-yellow-orange), "poudre d'or" (gold), "décor" (decorated), "décor riche" (richly decorated), and "degrades" (graduated color). Massier's metallic luster glaze was not listed among the options in his catalogue, since it was used only for one-of-a-kind pieces. Most of the decorators at his factory, hired as teenagers, developed their skills there (Massier himself had begun working in his father's factory at the age of 12.) The man in charge of the training was Charles Lévêque. In 1889 he claimed to have trained more than 20 young artists at the Massier factory

who went on to make careers of their own as ceramists.

In 1895, the year Lévy-Dhurmer left Massier's employ, Sigfried Bing, a French dealer of Japanese decorative arts, decided to start a Paris gallery that would focus exclusively on a new style in European decorative arts. To test the market for the new style, Bing held an exhibition in London, showing glass by an American, Louis Comfort Tiffany, and ceramics by Clément Massier; the ceramics were glazed, of course, in rich iridescent hues. Although the exhibition was not well received by critics, Bing sold almost every piece. Toward the end of 1895, in October, the gallery in Paris was finished: Galerie L'Art Nouveau. Paintings by Vuillard, Munch, Josef Rippl-Ronai, and Georges de Feure hung in rooms decorated with Henry van de Velde furniture and vases by Massier in vitrines and on shelves.

Massier would spend the remainder of his life perfecting the iridescent metallic luster glaze. By the turn of the new century, this glaze reflected a level of complexity and skill that no artist of our day can come close to matching. The glaze itself may be something of a mystery, but basic knowledge of the technique has been preserved.

To create a metallic luster glaze, the vessel must first be underglazed at high temperatures. The underglaze must be fired twice, once at 1040° C. (1840° F.) and again at 960° (1696° F.) to achieve the "émail biscuité" in turquoise or burgundy. During the cooling, or drying process, the kiln master applies a solvent—it can be an organic oil, vinegar, or terebenthine—mixed with metallic oxides—copper, gold, platinum, etc. and other pigments. For a gold luster, for example, a mixture of copper oxide, red ochre, and silver carbonate is combined with vinegar.

The kiln master stirs his solvent into the mixture and crushes the ingredients to obtain the thick juice that can be applied with a brush. This application will leave an "oil stain" on the surface of the form. The designs are then drawn, engraved, stamped, scratched, or marked with manganese oxide. Finally, the piece will be fired a third time, using a reduction technique. During the reduction, oxygen is removed from the kiln. Apparently one way of effecting the reduction, which modifies the final iridescence, was by burning an oilcloth in the kiln.

The preceding description is by no means complete. As I have said, the techniques developed by Clément Massier were so complex that none of his contemporaries were able to match him. Today such glazing is a lost art. Needless to say, Massier's metallic lusterwares are highly prized and collected by museums across the globe.

Delphin Massier's factory in Vallauris produced primarily high-fired majolica items. His line of purely artist ceramics was destined for the home and garden. At some point during the Art Nouveau years, Delphin Massier mastered the technique for metallic luster glazing invented by his younger brother. He, too, proceeded to create wonderful iridescent objects. While not as well known for his lusterware, Delphin was very successful, and the firing of his vessels often obtained a brilliant iridescence. A second cousin, Jean Baptiste Massier, inherited Jacques Massier's factory in Vallauris; the pottery made under his supervision was signed "Jerome Massier fils."

Of the many artists who left Clément Massier's factory to start studios of their own, perhaps the most remarkable was Jean Barol (1873-1966). Barol learned metallic luster glazing at Golfe-Juan, where he was employed at a young age. In 1911, with three other artists from the factory—Marius Alexandre, Jean Carle, and François Sicard—he founded BACS in Cannes. At BACS, Barol was the glaze artist, Alexandre the painter, Carle the decorator, and Sicard the potter. A new technique was found by BACS for applying high-fired enamel "cloisonné" decoration to metallic luster-glazed vessels. The firm also became well known for the enamel-glazed, impressionist style landscape painting fired on its ceramics. In 1917 Barol left BACS along with Sicard to found Montieres, in the city of Montieres-les-Amiens, in the north of France; the company produced work similar to that of the parent company. Barol rejoined BACS three years later, in 1920, and remained until 1927, after which he continued as a ceramist in Vallauris until his death, at the ripe age of 93.

Throughout history, great iridescent glazes have been invented for the decoration of ceramics. The Art Nouveau movement, however, was blessed with an insatiable market for its opulent creations. It is not surprising that dozens of studios leapt to compete in creating the most glorious glazes. Certainly the factory of Vilmos Zsolnay, in the Hungarian city of Pecs, mastered the art; using proceeds from his industrial ceramics production, Zsolnay drew on the skills of dozens of extraordinary artists and chemists to design pure Art Nouveau pottery. The magnificent

creations of Ernest Bussiere, at Keller and Guerin in Luneville near Nancy, show the influence of Galle's "École de Nancy". Bussiere's twisted, gnarled, plant-inspired forms, glazed with iridescent coppery reds and browns, are treasured by collectors and museums. Galileo Chini of Florence combined a Secessionist style with the iridescence of Art Nouveau in his metallic luster-glazed pottery produced at his own factory, Arte della Ceramica. Jacques Sicard brought the secrets of his master, Clément Massier, to the Weller Company in far-off Zanesville, Ohio.

Yet as wonderful as these artists are, and as technically competent, none put as much passion into the development of metallic luster glazes as Massier. No other ceramics artist ever achieved his level of technical understanding; no other artist took experimentation to such dogged extremes. Massier's works, with their complexity and subtlety, are supremely eloquent. Yet Massier is not merely the great master of Art Nouveau ceramics, since he is just as important as a Japonist. Ultimately, I think of him as the Symbolist Ceramist.

The surface of a Massier vase offers a glimpse into its creator's dreams, itself inspiring dreams. No decorative object in any medium surpasses a perfectly fired, exquisitely decorated vessel by Clément Massier and Lucien Lévy-Dhurmer. There, I said it. I know it in my soul.

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