

Museum Catalog Entry

The dragonfly lamp was one of the most popular lights that was designed in the 19th century by a renowned American designer Clara Driscoll and Tiffany Girls. Clara was at this time working for Tiffany Glass Company (later Tiffany Studios) which was owned by the famous designer Louis Comfort Tiffany. While working as the head of Women's Glass Cutting Department, she was successful in designing the majority of the lamps in Tiffany Studios. Still, the most famous design was the dragonfly design. She had designed several versions of the same from just an idea that she had over summer, and in 1902 in collaboration with Tiffany Studios, she made the dragonfly lamp. This lamp's design was sophisticated and magnificent with predominantly blue and amber colours. This lamp featured some of Clara's favourite elements including a mosaic and turtlebacks which contain huge oval glasses shaped like turtle shells. The lamp has an upper and lower portion. The upper part features a well-decorated part that is veined.

In contrast, the lower part is decorated with dragonflies with wings outspread and a pierced bronze on all sides of the perimeter of the dragonfly lamp, giving it an aesthetically attractive design. Its dimensions are 46.4 * 35.6* 35.6 centimetres in scale featuring a diversified medium of bronze, glass, and lead to make it appealing. This masterpiece signified Clara's enthusiasm and love for art and had a lot of significance to the medieval artistic world. The dragonfly lamp designed by Clara Driscoll and Tiffany Girls is a symbol to their contribution to the historical society in New York during the 19th century. Due to its historical significance, aesthetic design, and technology used, along with its cultural and economic value, The Brooklyn Museum decided to preserve and exhibit the Dragonfly Lamp for generations to come. Therefore, it is crucial to review Clara's bibliography, the material used in creating the decorative art, aesthetic and technology employed, and the historical significance depicted by the dragonfly lamp dating back in the 19th century.

Designer's Bibliography

Clara Driscoll was born in St. Mary's Texas in December 15, 1861. Unfortunately, Clara lost her father at the age of 12 years, yet she was motivated to pursue higher education along with her three younger sisters. Clara depicted a remarkable aptitude for art during her study at the Cleveland Institute of Art, solely for women. Additionally, during her research, Clara worked for a local furniture architect, subsequently enrolled at the Metropolitan Museum Art School after she moved to New York to pursue an artistic career. On completing her studies at the art school, she was employed as a glass cutter for mosaics and windows at the Tiffany Glass Company ("DRISCOLL, CLARA" 2019). She left the company a year later to assume the duties of a housewife after she was married.

Additionally, the company had strict rules that prohibited married women from assuming any roles. She returned to Tiffany Studios a year later and assumed a managerial position following her husband's untimely death. Carol managed a group of 35 women called the "Tiffany Girls". Together they were responsible for designing the company's artistic works and ultimately they also designed the iconic dragonfly lamp which won a prize during a public exhibition at Grafton Galleries was also preserved in the famous Brooklyn Museum (Gendre, 2015).

Working at the Tiffany Studios came with its fair share of challenges. She was always left to look for new talent as the talented women were forced to resign whenever they got married. There were endless rivalries between her department and those that had men and because the men were unionized, they continued to enjoy certain privileges, and this caused a lot of frustrations to her and the women she managed (Somerville 2020). At one point, the men in the company threatened to strike to strip the women of some of their rights. Despite the frustrations, Carol fought for her women and preserved their rights to be equals to men. Her legacy of spectacular designs continued to thrive at Tiffany Studios (Gedall 2015). She was even profiled in the New York Daily News as among the few women who earned more than 10,000\$

annually. She left Tiffany Studios for good after remarrying in 1909. Her story of achievement and perseverance was an inspiration, especially at a time when women's rights were undermined. Today her story to date has resonated powerfully with women who fight for empowerment and equality.

Material Used to the Design Dragonfly Lamp

Brooklyn Museum noted a significant catalogue of materials employed to design the decorative art, particularly the dragonfly lamp. The 16-inch cone-shaped lampshade, designed by Clara Driscoll incorporated diversified elements to aid in developing the table lamp such as glass, bronze, and lead (Hofer, 2016). It has a bulbous bronze base that is embellished with glass mosaic. The choice of incorporating such materials was to achieve an aesthetically appealing design, marked by the piece of decorative art seen at Brooklyn Museum. The dragonfly lamp has a uniquely designed shade that

incorporates blue and amber colours, predominantly visible at a far glance (“Brooklyn Museum” n.d.). A veined shade on the upper portion of the dragonfly lamp contributes significantly to giving it an aesthetic appearance. The lower part of the table lamp assimilates dragonflies with outstretched wings.

Additionally, Driscoll incorporated a pierced bronze to encircle the lower portion of the perimeter of the dragonfly lamp. The dragonfly decorative has three switch sockets noticeable on the horizontal curved and vertical lobes (“Brooklyn Museum” n.d.). To increase the stability of the dragonfly lamp, Clara integrated a surging ribbed surface design making the lamp have a circular base. Markedly, Clara combined such design to give the table lamp an iconic design preserved at Brooklyn Museum (Gist, 2015).

The elements chosen by Clara in designing the dragonfly were of significance because they were mostly associated with the wealthy. Most of the wealthy families had their decorations and jewellery made with lead, glass, and bronze, during this time of industrialization where these elements were highly valued and appealed to the wealthy members of the society. In addition to the elements used, the dragonfly insect was famous in the 19th century as a decorative motif. Clara realized that the dragonfly would be a favourable and attractive design would appeal to their clients mainly since most of their clientele was composed of affluent members of the society (Charles, 2020). This was an excellent opportunity for the company and for the employees to benefit and grow.



Dragonfly lamp at Brooklyn Museum, New York

Retrieved from: <https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/1308>

Aesthetic and Technology of the Dragonfly Lamp

Remarkably, Clara Driscoll, in collaboration with Tiffany Studio, integrated diversified aesthetically appealing designs and technologies to develop the dragonfly lamp. Dragonfly decorative assimilates glass shades design to create an aesthetic appearance. Clara made a significant contribution to developing numerous magnificent numerous tiffany lamps along with the prominent dragonfly lamp such as Magnolia Shade, Wisteria Table Lamp, and Gourd Shade, among others (Randall, 2019). Although each Tiffany's light is spectacular in its design, dragonfly remained as a standout due to its aesthetic design incorporated by Clara. The dragonfly lamp includes variant design technology such as gleaming glass and brass filigree design, which makes it a standout among all lights made by Driscoll. Dragonfly decorative depicts a dazzling array of variant colours and shades on the same metallic template (Richman-Abdou 2018). Arguably, Clara used diversified subtle colours deliberately into the design to make the lamp signify flowers. Aesthetic vision in the leaded glass was a crucial design

integrated by Clara to develop the dragonfly decorative. The process encompassed merging small glasses from numerous diversified sheets available from the adopted glass cutting department. Lampshade technology enabled designers to exhibit harmony of variant

colours to an intricate array. Women's sensitivity to colours amplified the choice of technology and aesthetic designs to develop magnificent lamps, particularly the dragonfly decorative.

Notably, the dazzling colour of the dragon, along with butterfly wings, inspired the designer to use it while developing the deceptive piece. Therefore, the lightweight and transparency of the wing structure on the dragonfly lamp signified fragility since it has thin membranes and lines (Prince, 2020). The decorative art also has a fantastic spectrum of variant colours that mimic nature perfectly, consequently giving the dragon lamp an aesthetically appealing design. The process of developing the dragonfly lamp was cumbersome since it involved cutting of diversified glass sheets that were done by the cutting department at Tiffany Company led by Clara Driscoll. Only unmarried women were allowed to carry out the glass-cutting errands at the company (Rosa, Elizabeth, Catherine, 2019). Women were vastly involved in achieving a geometric pattern to numerous intricate colours, and women did a difficult task of glass selection. Women's sensitivity in colour was critical during the process of making the dragonfly lamp. Indeed, Tiffany Company incorporated women in the glass-cutting process since they had an aesthetic vision, particularly in leaded glasses (Peers, 2017). A magnificent harmony of variant colour was integral in the quest to achieve the intricate pattern in the dragonfly lamp.

Historical Significance of the Dragonfly Lamp

Historically, the dragonfly lamp is a symbol of Tiffany Girls and Clara's significant contribution to the historical society in New York during the 19th century. Brooklyn Museum placed numerous decorative, particularly lamps designed by Clara to preserve their historical significance for the future generation (Hinchman & Elyssa 2018). Alongside the dragonfly lamp are jewel-toned lamps that elaborate installation offers in Brooklyn Museum that aid in creating an interactive display to allow tourists to have a grasp of how to design lampshade integrating modern technologies. In

the quest to preserve the historical significance of Tiffany's object, notably the dragonfly lamp, Brooklyn Museum incorporates historical video projection and design sketches used to develop diversified lampshades (Huyck, 2020). Moreover, the dragonfly lamp signifies fundamental roles played by women, such as Clara, to create magnificent lampshades in history. Decorative art is crucial in expressing the beauty of cultural diversification and integrating women in design. Brooklyn Museum adopted the dragonfly lamp and other diversified Tiffany's objects in exhibition aids in honouring the significant contribution enacted by women to design numerous decorative artistic works (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2020). Clara gets credited for her prowess in designing the dragonfly lamp put under the Brooklyn Museum exhibition.

Additionally, through Clara's letter, it is evident that Tiffany frequently appreciates women's contribution in designing different ointments. Great designs dating back in the 19th century are preserved in Brooklyn Museum, such as incorporating dazzling dragon colours in the piece of art. Markedly, the dragonfly lamp incorporates valuable elements such as bronze and a magnificent design making it more expensive. Due to the economic value of the dragonfly lamp, decorative art won a price in Paris during the World's Fair.

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