MOLDED IN BRONZE: THE DESK SETS OF LOUIS C. TIFFANY 1897-1929

by

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Molded in Bronze: The Desk Sets of Louis C. Tiffany, 1897-1929

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ABSTRACT

MOLDED IN BRONZE: THE DESK SETS OF LOUIS C. TIFFANY, 1897-1929

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George Mason University, 2013

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The act of writing and the objects that facilitate writing are commonplace in our everyday lives and have been so for hundreds of years. As a result, even when renowned artists manufactured them, they are sometimes overlooked by the scholarly world. Louis C. Tiffany (1848-1933), known for his work in glass, created many object to aid in writing, such as inkstands, pens, rocker blotters and pen trays. Today, these objects, also called “fancy goods,” are somewhat ignored in the academic writings on Tiffany and overlooked by a large part of the population. In this thesis, I will argue that although the desk sets did not receive critical praise like other Tiffany products, they fully embody Tiffany’s design aesthetic and reflect the cultural history of the time period. In order to address these topics, the desk sets are discussed in three chapters: the desk and material culture; design and manufacturing techniques; and marketing tactics. A study of the desk sets reveals that Tiffany was just as in tune with society as he was engaged in influencing
it. This relationship is illustrated in the way the desk sets were designed, created and marketed; that in turn, created one of the most successful and socially relevant products Tiffany ever released.
INTRODUCTION

Louis C. Tiffany (1848-1933), the son of Tiffany and Company co-founder, Charles Lewis Tiffany (1812-1902), is one of the most critically acclaimed and well-known decorative artists and businessmen from the turn of the twentieth century. Known mainly for his work in glass, Tiffany devoted his life to creating works of art for the private and public sector. These objects range from stained-glass windows and vases to lighting fixtures, desk sets, and other objects of art. Tiffany’s business ventures were fuelled by his combination of talent, desire and entrepreneurship, which gave way to some of the most celebrated works of the period. Many scholarly books have been published on Tiffany Studios’ various products. A number of scholars have published in-depth analyses of Tiffany’s work in glass as well as provided an overview of his other works. However, there is still more that can be said about Tiffany and his many business ventures. In this thesis, I will explore one such venture – Tiffany Studios’ bronze and brass desk sets. These desk sets, or fancy goods, made up the bulk of his line of decorative and functional objects for consumption by the wealthier classes.¹

It is not surprising that Tiffany began a line of metal luxury goods. During his youth, he spent time with Edward C. Moore (1827-1891), a skilled metalworker and the

¹ Martin P. Eidelberg, "Tiffany’s Lamps and Fancy Goods," in Tiffany Glass: A Passion for Colour, ed. Rosalind M. Pepall (Montreal: Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, 2009), 164-199. In addition to the desk sets, the fancy good line also included candelabras, small bowls, dishes, and tea screens.
head of design at Tiffany and Company. Tiffany’s early relationship with Moore likely fueled his interest in the applied arts and laid the groundwork for his later career. Additionally, Tiffany was an avid collector of metal objects such as tsubas, or Japanese sword guards, Near East metal bowls and plaques, as well as American and European decorative accessories. Desk sets were becoming increasingly popular around the time that Tiffany opened his metal foundry in 1897. Indeed, a New York Times article on the growing popularity of parlor writing desks from the same period states: “The artistic possibilities of the parlor desk are great. The inkstand should be elegant…and fancy may run riot in pens, pen racks, pen wipers, paperweights, seals, wax and tapers.” Many articles such as this one were published at the turn of the twentieth century and helped to further solidify the popularity of desk sets. In addition, numerous firms were already manufacturing desk accessories and retailers, such as Tiffany and Company and Sears, Roebuck and Company, begun to sell these goods. There is no doubt that Tiffany was aware of this push for luxury writing accessories and he began to encouraged his designers to produce small objects such as inkwells, candlesticks, boxes and tea screens, to help keep his staff fully employed year round. This was the beginning of the “fancy goods” line. From here, Tiffany further expanded his hold on carriage trade objects, or

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objects that cater to the wealthier classes, to include glassware, leaded-glass lampshades, ceramics, and other metal household objects.

Little scholarly attention has been paid to Tiffany Studios' desk sets. Two books devoted to the subject have recently been published, but they are largely collector's guides, detailing information on finishes, markings, and rarity rather than providing any historical or scholarly information.\(^6\) Likewise, books that attempt to give an overview of Tiffany Studios’ metalwork only state that desk sets were produced and name a few well-known or specialty designs. In addition, little is known about the metal foundry at Tiffany’s Corona, Queens factory, which produced thousands of other metal objects and sculpture. It is unclear why nothing has been written exclusively on the desk sets from a scholarly perspective since they were produced in considerable quantity. Perhaps it is the lack of variation from piece to piece since virtually identical copies were made.\(^7\) The Favrile glass or leaded-glass lampshades, one the other hand, were produced in quantity but they were, by nature, one of a kind.\(^8\) The connotations implied by mass production have more than likely caused scholars to shy away from Tiffany’s desk sets, viewing

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\(^7\) For an in depth explanation of the desk set manufacturing process, see Chapter 2.

\(^8\) Martin P. Eidelberg, "Tiffany’s Glass Vessels," in *Tiffany Glass: A Passion for Colour*, ed. Rosalind M. Pepall (Montreal: Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, 2009), 119; and Eidelberg, Gray, and Hofer, *A New Light on Tiffany*, 53-55. Adding decoration before the glass was completely formed, as discussed in “Tiffany’s Glass Vessels,” allowed for the decoration to vary slightly even if the form was the same. In *A New Light on Tiffany*, the authors discuss the intense selection of glass pieces for inclusion in the lamps. This selection processes insured that each pieces of glass went well with one another. This process meant that each shade had a different color because each piece of glass was unique in its own right.
them as less important in relation to Tiffany’s other unique designs. However, Tiffany’s desire for his metal objects to be carried out to his exact specifications illustrates that he did not view these objects as secondary to his other lines of production. In fact, in 1899, an inkstand was displayed in London at the Grafton Galleries. The display at Grafton Galleries illustrates that Tiffany considered this desk accessory to be just as artistic as his leaded-glass lamps and Favrile vases and felt that the piece was noteworthy enough to promote outside of his New York showroom. A case in point, as stated by a Tiffany advertisement, reads, “Mr. Louis C. Tiffany’s achievements in stained glass windows are well known. No less care is bestowed upon the lamps, candlesticks, desk sets and every other article on view at the Studios.” If anything it appears that Tiffany did not view these pieces as “lesser than” but as an equally valuable part of his various product lines.

In the following chapters, I will outline distinct factors that influenced the production and success of the Tiffany Studios desk sets. In chapter one, I will discuss the innovations that occurred in the mid-nineteenth to early-twentieth century that allowed for a new culture of letter writing. This culture placed a new social value on writing, which, in turn, elevated the objects associated with writing from everyday objects to markers of class. Next, I will discuss other manufactures and their products in order to place Tiffany’s objects in a broader social context. In chapter two, I will give a brief history of Tiffany’s companies and the beginning of the foundry. I will also provide a

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9 Ibid., 82-83. This inkstand was designed by Clara Driscoll (1861-1944), head of the Women’s Glass and Cutting Department.

10 Tiffany Studios. Advertisement. Printer’s Ink, January 8, 1908. 15.
detailed account of the manufacturing processes of the desk sets, which include sand casting, overall ornamentation in the form of patination and gold leaf, and enamel and glass jewel decorative highlights. Following this discussion, I will give an in-depth analysis of the desk sets designs and how they fit into the larger design history of Tiffany Studios.\footnote{Throughout his career Tiffany founded and closed many different companies under several names including, the Stourbridge Glass Company, Tiffany Studios and Tiffany Glass and Decorating Company until Tiffany left the firm in 1920. The company was immediately reorganized and continued under another name. For simplicities sake, from this point forward refer to Tiffany’s many companies as Tiffany Studios.} Finally, in chapter three, I will provide a brief overview on the history of marketing and advertising. Then, I will discuss the specific strategies and advertisements used by Tiffany Studios to promote products. The conclusion will offer a brief history of the foundry after the firm filed for bankruptcy and the distribution of the desk sets left in stock. In addition, I will discuss the desk sets in terms of their contemporary significance. This research will demonstrate that Tiffany’s venture into the mass production of desk sets was rooted in a lucrative business venture that offered a broader clientele access to his designs and, therefore, extended his brand’s reach.
CHAPTER ONE: WRITING AND THE DESK AT THE TURN OF THE TWENTIETH
CENTURY

The way in which writing implements and their uses reflect the culture of the
early twentieth century is largely unexamined and this is likely due to the fact that pens,
pencils, inkwells, and other writing accessories are common, utilitarian objects used on a
daily basis. When they are discussed or studied, it is because they were made by a notable
manufacturer or cost large sums of money.\footnote{David Barton and Nigel Hall, \textit{Letter Writing as a Social Practice} (Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins Pub., 2000), 83.} However, writing instruments and the social
rhetoric that surrounds them can convey a lot of information about the society that used
them. About one hundred years ago, writing accessories and the art of writing held a
much higher cultural value and the public understood the significance of a luxury
accessory. This was the culture and time in which Louis C. Tiffany created his
elaborately designed desk sets. This culture of writing was perhaps one of the greatest
reasons Tiffany’s line of desk sets was so successful; they were not only well made and
ornate, but the social status that it carried signified the owner’s position in society.

In order to understand how the Tiffany desk set fits into the culture of writing at
the turn of the century, we must first examine Victorian writing as a whole and the
innovations that allowed it to flourish. It is important to remember that letter writing
was the primary form of long distance communication for the vast majority of people during Tiffany’s lifetime and, consequently, pens, inkwells and other writing accessories were used daily. Sending a letter, however, was costly and required travel to a post office. During the Civil War, individual mailboxes were installed in homes. In 1873, a legislature was passed that reduced the cost of mailing a letter, from five cents to two cents and the “lick and stick” stamp was introduced. These innovations allowed people to mail letters from a much wider range of locations, including their homes, without having to pay high postage costs beforehand. In turn, Americans wrote and sent letters more quickly and conveniently.

The Art of Writing

Following this growth in postal innovation and the effect it had on the increase of letter writing, a strong emphasis on elegant handwriting developed. These cultural ideas began to dictate that letters be executed in a consistently legible and artistic way. Beginning in the early to mid-nineteenth century, American schools taught students to form each letter correctly according a strict curriculum before they even learned what the letters meant. These ovals and inverse curves were the aesthetic building blocks of the

14 Ibid.
16 Ibid.
alphabet.\textsuperscript{17} The lessons in execution, not literacy, were a manifestation of the Victorian obsession of conformity. By teaching children of all socioeconomic backgrounds the same handwriting technique, schools were molding a generation built to conform.\textsuperscript{18}

So vital was the art of handwriting in Victorian America that it served as an expression of character and breeding.\textsuperscript{19} In 1854, an author of two handwriting copybooks called handwriting “a letter of recommendation” and, indeed, it was viewed that way by society. A young man going to a job interview would be asked to present a handwriting sample which the potential employer would use to draw conclusions about the candidate’s self-discipline, character, and trustworthiness – three signifiers of a proper Victorian upbringing.\textsuperscript{20} In this culture, one’s handwriting was an extension of one’s character, a way to present oneself to society without speaking or even meeting in person. Furthermore, handwriting was an expression of self-discipline because it literally was the act of disciplining the body to create the perfect letter.\textsuperscript{21} This push to master the correct manner of handwriting was further felt when copybooks on handwriting were published with step-by-step instructions. Many books began first with a lesson on how to hold the pen and then moved on to the act of forming letters.\textsuperscript{22} One of the most notable books was written by Platt Rogers Spencer (1800-1864) who published a set of instructor’s manuals on his own method called the “Spencerian script,” which was fluid and based in natural

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 47.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 52.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 43.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 53.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid.
Later, the Spencerian script was replaced with the Palmer script, created by Austin Norman Palmer (1860-1927). Palmer’s script (Figure 2) was rigid and claimed to be free of “pretty characters.” It was billed as the real, live, useable, legible and stable penmanship, perfect for the working man.²⁴

²³ Ibid., 48.
²⁴ Ibid., 67.
The Materiality of Writing

The changes in writing and postage had a substantial effect on writing instruments. It is easy to see how postal service innovations affected the popularity of letter writing by making it more broadly accessible. However, intense handwriting instruction also placed a social value on the formation of letters and solidified them as a trademark of good character. This, combined with an increase of wealth and education among the classes, gave more people the skills to read and write.\textsuperscript{25} It is possible that, before the change in writing ideology and the social significance that followed, many people wrote with whatever implements were available. However, when writing became a marker of good character, the objects associated with it became markers of these traits as well. Many designers and manufacturers saw this as an opportunity to sell elaborately designed writing objects to the public under the guise that these desk set articles would help elevated their status in society. These accessories, including those produced by Tiffany Studios later in the century, reflected the shift in the class structure as well as the social changes taking places in Victorian America.

There are several ways that the materiality of an object can become visible. As stated by Nigel Hall and David Barton in their book \textit{The Materiality of Letter Writing},

\begin{quote}
“Materiality is most visible when the technology doesn’t work or does not work well: the quill that blunts or breaks, the paper that tears… the ink that has dried up, the fountain pen that splatters…suggest[s] that the rationale for the technical development of such an apparently simple piece
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{25} Barton and Hall, \textit{Letter Writing as a Social Practice}, 88. For further reading, see Linda C. Mitchell and Susan Green, \textit{Studies in the Cultural History of Letter Writing} (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 2008).
of writing equipment as the pencil was the drive to make it work better…“26

This is understandable; we only come to acknowledge the tools used when they fail, and the desire for something better drives us to invest in a more technologically advance instrument. However, Hall and Barton also state, “the materiality manifests itself at the point of acquisition of a writing-related object, or at the selection of an object for a particular task.”27 When we make a conscious decision to purchase a certain object over another, we become aware of our preferences, as well as the object. Finally, the materiality of the writing object becomes visible when the object is elevated from an everyday tool to an art form.28 These objects of art usually become apparent when a designer’s name is attached or a high quality material is used. The social value attached to that object, signified by either the designer’s name or material, and the act of purchasing such an object for everyday use showed the importance and wealth of the buyer. Interestingly, a quote from a 1992 edition of the Daily Telegraph in regards to a MountBlanc pen sums up this Victorian ideology perfectly; it states: “A fountain pen in Paris fulfills the same sort of emblematic function as a car and may cost almost as much; all kinds of social and identity messages are tied up with it. To write with a Bic might be *practique,* but not *chic.*”29 This sentiment was true at the turn of the twentieth century, too. The act of writing, and writing well, had been elevated to a status symbol and, by association, writing accessories were also elevated. The wealthy, or those who wanted to

26 Ibid., 85.
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid., 86.
29 Ibid.
appear wealthy, bought and wrote with ornate desk sets on elegant desks to further show their status in society.

**Manufactures**

Manufacturers and retailers took advantage of the consumer’s desire to have writing accessories that signified status and personal taste by producing many different styles of objects. These objects, such as inkwells, paper racks, pen trays, clocks, blotter ends, and rocker blotters, were associated with letter writing, but were not essential for carrying out the act. In an 1895 Montgomery, Ward and Company catalogue devoted eight pages to desk sets and listed ten different inkstand models. Additionally, an 1895 1897 catalogue, Sears, Roebuck and Company filled nine pages with desk accessories and writing instruments. No doubt some of these accessories were meant to meet a certain personal preference for design or style. However, this number seems to be dependent on the social and economic pressures that made pens, and other desk accessories, the ultimate status symbol. Another reason for such a wide variety of objects were the Victorian views on design and consumerism. As stated by Barton and Hall, “The lack of consensus about the design of things, about education and taste, about the evolution of style, or about the values which were associated with consumption or possession, meant that the accessories to letter writing abounded in just about every

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32 Barton and Hall, Letter Writing as a Social Practice, 94.
imaginable shape and form.”\textsuperscript{33} Objects with an almost identical function were camouflaged in ornate designs, patterns, and materials.\textsuperscript{34} Because many people could, for the first time in history, afford goods outside of the basic necessities, consumers did not know what they wanted. Manufacturers responded to this uncertainty by creating a plethora of goods geared toward a specific interest or personality in the hopes of selling goods to a wide variety of consumers.

Income played a large role in determining the types of products a person could afford. One of the main reasons such a wide variety of desk sets were produced during the Victorian Era was the rise of the class structure. Up until the 1800s many people were still farmers or artisans who made their living growing or producing goods. However, by the middle of the nineteenth century, this had drastically changed as more people began to move into the cities and the mercantile and industrial industries began to grow. In turn, many people began to make more money and separate themselves from lower paid factory work; this group of people what we would today call the middle class.\textsuperscript{35} This new group of people began to enjoy some of the same luxuries that only the upper class had previously been able to afford.\textsuperscript{36}

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., 103.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid.
Tiffany’s desk sets articles sold, on average, for about twenty dollars apiece.\textsuperscript{37} However, purchasing a whole desk set from the Tiffany Studios would have cost roughly $100, and this was a large sum considering that the average annual salary for one person in 1910 was only about $700.\textsuperscript{38} Clearly Tiffany’s goods were luxury items made for the upper class and these consumers were likely already purchasing Tiffany’s wares. Offering desk accessories and sets, in a plethora of designs, made it easier to target specific tastes and sell a significant number of desk sets.

Tiffany and Company also sold desk sets at their show rooms. For example, in 1893, a few years before Tiffany Studios released their desk sets, Tiffany and Company’s Blue Book list library sets, a synonym for desk set, in their fancy goods department. These objects, manufactured by many different companies, were offered in an array of materials at a wide range of prices. Sets began at three pieces and went up to as many as eighteen pieces. A brass, gilt, bronze, or enamel library set is listed as costing between six dollars and $150, while a silver set could cost twenty dollars to $600.\textsuperscript{39} When compared to Tiffany Studios’ desk accessories, Tiffany and Company was selling goods at every price point and quite possibly reaching across class divides. A middle class person could certainly afford a multi-piece desk set for six dollars, while an extremely

\textsuperscript{37} Tiffany Desk Sets – Desk Sets and Useful Articles. New York: Tiffany Studios, n.d. 13. Average price is based on eight pieces (blotter ends, rocker blotter, pen tray, calendar, ink stand, utility box, paper rack, and paper knife) from the Etched Metal and Glass pattern Price List in Tiffany Studios.


\textsuperscript{39} Tiffany and Company, Blue Book 1894 (New York: Tiffany and Company, 1893), 177.
wealthy person would be able to spend $600 on a solid silver set, perhaps like this inkstand sold at Tiffany and Company in 1890 (Figure 3).

Like Tiffany and Company, department stores including Montgomery, Ward and Company and Sears, Roebuck, and Company also sold a wide range of desk sets. Electroplated designs, such as this one from the 1897 Sears, Roebuck and Company’s catalogue (Figure 4), provided the look of expensive metal at a relatively low cost. This inkstand sold for one dollar and forty-five cents while another on the same page sold for two dollars and seventy-five cents.\(^\text{40}\) Sears, Roebuck and Company’s catalogue also lists an enameled iron revolving inkstand for twenty cents and a “no spill” inkstand for a dollar and twenty cents (Figure 5).\(^\text{41}\) Other object such as pens and blotters could also be

\(^{40}\) Sears, Roebuck and Company Catalogue 1897, 462.
\(^{41}\) Ibid., 365.
Figure 4: *Advertisement for Ink Set*, c. 1897. Sears, Roebuck and Company Catalogue, 1897, 462.

Figure 5: *Advertisement for Revolving Inkstand and Common Sense Inkstand*, c. 1897. Sears, Roebuck and Company Catalogue, 1897, 364.
purchased from Sears, Roebuck and Company and they were priced at around fifty cents to two dollars; therefore a set of three objects – a pen, inkwell and blotter ends – could be had for around five dollars.\textsuperscript{42}

Another manufacturer of desk sets was Roycroft, utopian craft colony founded at the turn of the twentieth century and working in the Arts and Crafts style.\textsuperscript{43} Their goods were sold in several New York stores, most notably Lord and Taylor’s department store, but they were also available by mail order.\textsuperscript{44} Roycroft desk sets were handmade in leather and copper with designs of flowers and animals and motifs from foreign cultures. Inlays of silver were also used at times in their designs.\textsuperscript{45} Even though their design inspirations were similar to Tiffany Studios, they were more reserved and used decoration sparingly instead of applying it to the entire surface. Their 1919 catalogue offered a five-piece desk sets consisting of an inkwell, paper knife, blotter ends, and pen tray, and starting at twenty dollars.\textsuperscript{46} Each desk set was made of hand-worked copper or leather and could be made with or without decorative finishes.\textsuperscript{47} One design featuring stylized flowers (Figure 6) offered the option of purchasing four additional accessories – a calendar, a blotter, a stamp box and a clip – to complement the standard five-piece set. However, even if

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 365- 367, 439-440.
\textsuperscript{43} For more information, see Robert Rust and Kitty Turgeon, \textit{The Roycroft Campus} (Charleston: Arcadia Pub., 1999); and Elbert Hubbard, \textit{The Roycroft Shop: A History} (East Aurora, NY: Roycrofters, 1909).
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 49-52.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid.
Figure 6: Roycroft, *Ink Pot, #703*, c. 1900s. Copper with brass wash. 1 7/8 x 2 7/8 x 2 7/8 inches. Buffalo, New York: Burchfield Penny Arts Center, SUNY Buffalo State.

all nine accessories were purchased; the entire desk set would have only cost around thirty-one dollars, a dramatically lower price when compared to Tiffany Studios’ eight-piece set, the simplest of which cost around $100. The Roycroft desk set would have still been a costly purchase for some of the middle class, but it would have been more accessible than the Tiffany Studios pieces.

In addition to purchasing desk sets from larger retailers or craft-working communities, desk sets could be made at home. A 1929 article from the *Washington Post* (Figure 7) provides step-by-step instructions on making an inkstand and other desk accessories out of wood. This weekly installment ran several “do it yourself” projects on how to craft objects such as a garden bench, a mirror frame and a telephone stool. It is possible that this series of article may have been geared toward the industrious middle class person with spare time looking for a hobby. Of course, owning a homemade desk set did not carry the same social weight as owning one from Tiffany Studios or other manufactures. However, the fact that the desk set was highlighted in their series illustrates how desk sets had inundated the culture and become common household goods. By 1929, many people of all classes owned a wide variety of goods and desk sets were no exception; they would have been found in many different materials and styles in homes across the United States.

48 Ibid., 50.
CHAPTER TWO: MANUFACTURING AND DESIGN

Tiffany’s desk sets and the fancy good line started after Tiffany realized the demand for small luxury objects. However, Tiffany’s Studios could not produce these items on site and these metal objects were sent to a commercial company to be manufactured. As stated in an article from *Studio International*, “It may be mentioned in passing that the metal workshops were first started, because it was found impossible to get manufacturers to carry out the designs given.”51 To better control production of his metal wares, Tiffany opened his own metal foundry on the same land as his Corona, Queens’ glass factory.52 The line quickly became a way to keep the furnaces active and profitable during the hot summer months when the number of commissions for large windows and mosaics declined.53 These objects were produced in a wide variety of designs, which included extensive handiwork with glass inlays or additions, and utilized the skills of the workers as well as the materials already being used at the factory. The desk sets were produced in at least twenty-one different patterns from the early years of

51 Cecilia Waern, "The Industrial Arts of America," *Studio International* 11 (August 1897): 161. Early pieces designed by Tiffany Studios and manufactured at other commercial companies possibly included wall sconces, basic lamp fixtures and other architectural elements. It is also possible that some early desk set works were manufactured at these outside foundries. However, it is more likely that the desk sets were introduced after the founding of the Corona foundry because this was around the time Tiffany started to expand his line of carriage trade goods. To view some examples of early metal work designed by Tiffany Studios see, Eidelberg, "Tiffany’s Lamps and Fancy Goods," 164-166.
the foundry to its closing in the 1920s.54

Tiffany’s early forays into art were a major influence on his later design aesthetic and, in turn, his designer’s aesthetic. His relationship with Edward Moore and his exposure to luxury objects retailed by his father’s company nurtured Tiffany’s future aesthetic and had a significant impact on his career. In 1863, Tiffany began to pursue an interest in art while attending the Eaglewood Military Academy in Perth Amboy, New Jersey. It was here that he discovered his love of and talent for painting during his informal training with the landscape artist George Inness (1825-1894).55 To further his education in the arts, Tiffany embarked on two European and one North African trip. During these trips, he studied with other artists and painted landscapes and architecture scenes.56 His travels provided an opportunity to collect objects from other cultures that he admired, a practice he would continue throughout his life. These large collections of drawings and objects, which were eventually housed at Laurelton Hall, Tiffany’s Long Island estate, were used as inspiration for his later work.57

54 This number is based on Tiffany Studios Price List from 1906, 1913, 1920, 1924, and 1929. As well as various Tiffany Studios brochures, including Tiffany Studios Tiffany Desk Sets – Desks Sets and Useful Articles; and Tiffany Studios. Tiffany Desk Sets. New York: Tiffany Studios, n.d. Various Tiffany and Company Blue Books were also used as well as two collector’s guides on the subject, Kemeny and Miller’s Tiffany Desk Treasures and Holland’s Tiffany Desk Sets. The number includes any desk set pattern made after the release of the Etched Metal and Glass pattern and does not include the specialty desk sets.
55 Pepall, A Passion for Colour, 16.
56 Ibid.
Tiffany’s role as the artistic director at Tiffany Studios was central to the company’s success. After all, it was Tiffany who kept the designers and craftsmen focused on a unified design theme. An article from the *New York Observer* states, “Indeed there appears to be a ‘Tiffany Guild’ bent upon fashioning wonderfully beautiful objects of art for commercial purposes, all produced under the direction of an artistic master mind.”58 This “guild” was made up of designers, craftsmen, and managers all overseen by Tiffany. Although the designers were encouraged to think creatively, they were always carefully directed toward a central design aesthetic predetermined by Tiffany’s own taste, and to a degree, the taste of clients.59 This was done by supplying the designers with innumerable photographs, design drawing, objects and other forms of inspiration.60 In fact, many of the items were from Tiffany’s own design library and were marked with Tiffany’s stamp or signature.61 Tiffany also utilized his extensive collection of objects from different cultures ranging from China and Japan to Plains and Southwest Native American tribes.62

By exposing these designers to objects, drawings, and photos from his own collection, Tiffany was able to ensure that the objects produced would not only match his taste but conform to an aesthetic that the public had come to recognize as uniquely

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60 Ibid.
61 Ibid., 36.
Figure 8: Tiffany Studios, *Design for a Filigree Spandrel*, c. 1882. Ink and watercolor over graphite on paper. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Figure 9: Tiffany Studios, *Design for a Mirror Frame*, c. 1892-1902. Watercolor, pen and black India ink, and graphite on white water color paper. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art.
Tiffany. In these Tiffany Studios’ design drawings of a spandrel (Figure 8) and a mirror (Figure 9) it can be seen that they share many of the same design elements, such as filigree and a circular design around a central motif. The relationship between the two objects is not coincidental – designers were constantly looking at the same materials and each other’s designs for inspiration. This practice of design sharing will also be seen in the design of several desk set patterns.

Tiffany also encouraged his designers to visit parks, museums, and other attractions in New York City. In one of her many letter to her family, Clara Driscoll wrote about her design for the Deep Sea lamp, describing that it will be made of “ambers and greens like the tanks at the Fisheries Building at the [Chicago] World’s Fair, [Alice Gouvy (c. 1870-1924)] is going to the aquarium to make some sketches to work from.” It stands to reason that if designers made trips outside of the studio to study nature first hand, then they would also have visited a renowned art collection such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Indeed, Clara Driscoll had studied at the Metropolitan Museum Art School, and the Tiffany Studios also had a relationship with the Museum. On at least one occasion, the firm lent them two sixteenth-century Spanish rugs. These sketches, such as the aquarium drawings, were a way for the designers to improve their artistic talent by exposing them to new sources of inspiration constantly and were later used when designing objects for Tiffany Studios. This is perhaps why there is a

63 Eidelberg, Gray, and Hofer, A New Light on Tiffany, 26.
64 Ibid., 14.
65 “List of Loans, December 20, 1908, to January 20, 1909,” The Bulletin of the Metropolitan Museum of Art 4, no. 2 (February 1909): 33. This bulletin lists two sixteenth century Spanish rugs on loan from Tiffany Studios. Tiffany is known to have been involved with the Metropolitan Museum of Art in its early days of collecting. This loan illustrates this point.
noticeable relationship between historical design and Tiffany Studios’ works, including the desk set patterns.

The designers and craftsman at Tiffany Studios were not the only employees who had an impact on the firm's output and design. Tiffany also employed businessminded people to assist him with the day-to-day activities of his enterprise, such as accounting and other managerial duties. Tiffany was first and foremost an extraordinary artistic director. For that reason, however, practical matters such as production costs, including material and labor, were not always his first concern. At times, these managers influenced the designers as much as Tiffany did, but in a very different way. They would instruct the designers to make standardized, less expensive objects that would be commercially viable. This is evident in a letter written by Clara Driscoll concerning a new lampshade design. She states,

“She [Alice Gouvy] and I are now interested in getting up another lamp shade to take the place of the dragonfly…which is very expensive. This is to be exactly the same shape so that the same mould can be used. The base of the lamp will also be the same, so that the same fittings can be used.”

Although this passage refers to the lampshades, it illustrates how Tiffany Studios was trying to reuse patterns and produce more cost-effective objects. This is possibly why such standardization exists between the later desks set patterns.

Manufacturing Techniques

There are several methods that can be used to cast metal objects; however, sand

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casting was the standard method of metal molding at the turn of the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{67} This method is easy to identify because it leaves a grainy texture on the metal.\textsuperscript{68} Sand casting starts with a plaster mold of the original object model. The plaster mold is then pressed into a rectangular box, called a drag, which is filled with coarse, moist sand. Sand is then packed around the object with a mallet until it is level with the walls of the drag. Then a fine grain sand, called French sand, is used to create a piece mold around the exposed parts of the plaster mold. The French sand creates a “block” around the plaster mold. Additionally, a second rectangular box, called a cope, is fitted to the top of the drag and bolted together. The empty area around the piece mold of the cope is filled with coarse sand and packed with a mallet. The box is then inverted, and the process repeated. The mold is then complete, and the plaster mold must be removed.\textsuperscript{69}

To remove the plaster the drag is removed, and the piece mold is carefully peeled away from the plaster. It is then reassembled in the drag on top of the coarse sand and set aside. An empty third box is placed on the cope, clamped, and then filled with coarse sand to hold the mold firmly in place. Next, the box is inverted and the process repeated on the other side. The cope and the drag now hold negatives of the original plaster mold.\textsuperscript{70}

The drag, cope, and core are then baked for twelve hours until the sand is hard.

\textsuperscript{67} Michael E. Shapiro, \textit{Bronze Casting and American Sculpture: 1850-1900} (Newark: Univ. of Delaware Pr. I.e., 1985), 16.
\textsuperscript{68} Jeffery Spring. "Conversation with Jeffery Spring, Modern Art Foundry." Interview by author. February 17, 2012. This texture is most visible on the interior of assembled pieces, such as boxes and inkstands, and the undecorated underside of all pieces, confirming that this was the method used for the desk sets.
\textsuperscript{69} Shapiro, \textit{Bronze Casting and American Sculpture}, 16-17.
\textsuperscript{70} Ibid., 17- 21.
Then all the pieces are assembled, and the metal is poured. Once the bronze is cooled the cope and drag are removed, and excess sand is removed with a brushed. The object is then removed from the mold and any protruding pieces of metal are cut away, and the metal is polished. The piece is now ready for any additions in the form of patination, enamels, or chasing.71

Once the desk sets were assembled there were several decorative additions made to some of the patterns. One of the most common additions was a patina in either green or brown.72 Patination is “the chemical alteration of a metal surface, resulting in a change of color. Artificial patination can be carried out with the aid of chemicals or heat or a combination of the two.”73 Tiffany Studios most likely submersed their metals in a chemical bath to permanently alter the coloration of the metal. Most likely, this process was done after the objects were assembled since the color of the patina can vary slightly from bath to bath. Most of the desk sets produced were available in at least one patina, but at times either brown or green was an option.

Another addition that Tiffany Studios preformed in the metal working department was gold plating. Gold plating is when a thin, gold coating is adhered to the surface of bronze pieces by a chemical, electrical, or mechanical process.74 In terms of the desk sets, gold plating was done on several patterns for an overall gold finish, such as the Zodiac,

71 Ibid., 23.
72 Frelinghuysen, Tiffany at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, 89.
*Etched Metal and Glass,* and *Abalone* patterns. Tiffany most likely adhered the gold to the surface by an electrical process, which would have ensured that the gold would last longer. Some other Tiffany wares were also made in silver, but it was extremely rare.\(^{75}\) As in the case of the patina, gold plating was offered as an option on some of the desk sets and done once the pieces were fully assembled.

Certain patterns also received additions of glass inserts, pressed jewels or mosaic work. The earlier desk sets incorporated glass mosaics into their design. To allow artistic freedom, there were no restrictions on the color or texture of the glass. Streaky glass was also used but mostly in the *Etched Metal and Glass* patterns. Here, the glass sheets were fitted into channels on the bronze and a piece of pierced bronze was attached to one side, which made the glass visible. The glass used in these patterns was readily available at Tiffany Studios due to the production of windows, mosaics, and lampshades. Therefore, most of the glass varied in color and texture. The most commonly used glass was monochromatic glass jewels as illustrated in the *Ninth Century,* which received inserts of round red and green pressed-glass jewels.

Lastly some pieces, most notability the *Zodiac* and *Bookmark* patterns also featured enamel work to highlight the low relief designs. Enameling is done by placing glass frit, or finely ground glass, on the surface of the desk set and then heating the pieces until the glass melts and adheres to the metal.\(^{76}\) Since each color of glass has a different melting point, each desk set article would have to be heated several times depending on

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\(^{75}\) Frelinghuysen, *Tiffany at the Metropolitan Museum of Art,* 90. An example of a tyg, or cup, from 1905 is illustrated on this page. It was presumably designed by Louis Tiffany but manufactured at Tiffany and Company.

\(^{76}\) Trench, *Materials Techniques in the Decorative Arts,* 144.
the number of colors used in the design.\textsuperscript{77} In the case of the polychrome enameled \textit{Zodiac} and \textit{Bookmark} patterns there were anywhere from three to five colors used.

\textbf{Specialty Desk Accessories}

Objects such as inkstands and pen trays were some of the first objects to be made at the Corona factory. These specialty desk accessories do not illustrate the standardization of forms and patterns from the later period. They were mostly produced in limited quantities with additions of mosaic glass inlay and enamels in various designs. Clara Driscoll and the Women’s Glass Cutting Department designed most of these fancy goods.\textsuperscript{78} An example of this early work by Clara Driscoll is a \textit{Poppy} inkstand (Figure 10). The inkstand itself is cylindrically shaped with molded poppy leaves on the base. Blue and green mosaics and a glass poppy blossom cover highlight the bronze design. The women’s department worked on several mosaics, in addition to windows, for installation in churches and private homes; therefore, the use of mosaics would have been a natural choice for Clara Driscoll and the other designers.\textsuperscript{79} There were many limited edition desk sets made in the same manner as the \textit{Poppy} inkstand during the early years of production at Tiffany Studios. However, because of the long production time and cost, the elaborate desk sets were soon discontinued for simpler designs with less glass and more metal. An example of these all-metal patterns is an inkwell designed by Clara Driscoll, which

\begin{flushleft}
\footnotesize\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., 143. \\
\footnotesize\textsuperscript{78} Eidelberg, Gray, and Hofer, \textit{A New Light on Tiffany}, 70. \\
\footnotesize\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., 35.
\end{flushleft}
Figure 10: Clara Driscoll, *Poppy Inkstand*, 1901. Glass mosaic and bronze. 3 inches. Norfolk, VA: Chrysler Museum of Art.

Figure 11: Clara Driscoll, *Wild Carrot Inkstand*, 1900-1902. Molded bronze. 3 ¼ x 5 ¼ inches. Norfolk, VA: Chrysler Museum of Art.
features the wild carrot or Queen Anne’s Lace (Figure 11). The early desk sets are limited in number, possibly because of the time spent designing the object from the ground up. These objects were later discontinued in favor of standardized forms.

The Pond Lily pattern (Figure 12) provides is an example of the transition between the specialty desk sets and the standardized patterns. Each piece in the pattern is embellished with different designs elements, much in the same way the specialty desk sets differ from design to design. The letter knife is adorned with cicadas, several other accessories have dragonfly motifs, and still others are decorated with moths. However, despite the variation from piece to piece, there is one element that is found on all pieces – the pond lily. The use of the pond lily throughout gives the pattern a sense of continuity.

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80 Eidelberg, Gray, and Hofer, *A New Light on Tiffany*, 82-83. In a letter, she describes her plan to create the pieces based on the flower, but only the inkstand was executed.
like the later desk sets. This pattern is extremely rare, suggesting that it was put into relatively limited production and discontinued soon after.\textsuperscript{81} One of the first known desk sets to include multiple accessories the shapes of the paper rack, picture frame, rocker blotter and pen tray closely resemble the forms of the later desk sets. This suggests that the \textit{Pond Lily} pattern was a precursor to Tiffany Studios’ standardized patterns.

\textbf{Standardized Desk Sets}

For the purpose of this paper, eleven of the twenty-three patterns created between 1899 and 1928 will be discussed. The patterns are significant to the history of Tiffany Studios’ desk sets because they reflect the wide variety of designs that Tiffany created. The earlier pieces drew on Tiffany Studios widely praised “flower motives” from earlier works in windows and Favrile vases.\textsuperscript{82} Later, Tiffany Studios would draw upon foreign and ancient cultures, including Byzantine and Asian aesthetics, both of which Tiffany studied first hand during his trips abroad as a young man.\textsuperscript{83} The desk sets also drew inspiration from the Zodiac and Native American designs, which were popular contemporary topics during the time. These different cultures and motifs drew heavily on Tiffany’s personal interest as well as the interest of the greater public, making a diverse and captivating desk set line.

\textsuperscript{81} Eidelberg, Gray, and Hofer, \textit{A New Light on Tiffany}, 82.
\textsuperscript{83} Frelinghuysen, \textit{Tiffany at the Metropolitan Museum of Art}, 6.
Figure 13: Tiffany Studios, *Etched Metal and Glass, Grapevine Desk Set*, c. 1900. Favrile Glass and bronze. Letter rack, $5 \frac{3}{16} \times 6 \frac{1}{4} \times 2 \frac{1}{2}$ inches. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Figure 14: Tiffany Studios, *Abalone Desk Set*, c. 1910. Gilt bronze and abalone shell. Stamp box, $4 \times 2 \times 1$ inches. New York: Lillian Nassau Gallery.
Nature as Inspiration

One of the first standardized patterns produced was the *Etched Metal and Glass* pattern, (Figure 13) which uses grapevines and pine boughs as inspiration for its decoration. It is by far the most botanically accurate standardized desk set pattern made by the Tiffany Studios. Tiffany’s earlier decorative art designs were heavily based in nature. Therefore, it makes sense that the first standardized patterns would draw from this motif. Both the pine bough and the grapevines patterns have an extremely intricate cutout design. In the case of the grapevines, the design is composed of leaves and bundles of grapes highlighted with green and white streaky glass. As for the pine bough, brown and white streaky glass is used to highlight the pattern of irregular lines shooting out from a central point. What sets the *Etched Metal and Glass* pattern apart from the earlier desk set is the use of flat glass pieces instead of mosaics. This use of flat glass would have reduced the labor spent on the pattern but given the same overall effect as the mosaic inlays. This pattern illustrates the transition to more cost effective design methods because it uses flat glass that was easy to insert under the cutout bronze design.

The *Abalone* desk set pattern (Figure 14) also resembles natural motifs. However, it has one unique property that sets it apart of all of the other desk sets manufactured by Tiffany Studios, which is the addition of abalone shell.\(^{84}\) The desk set, named for the addition is relatively uncomplicated in design with a few elements of intertwining knots and curves. In fact, the design seems to resemble a cluster of grapes hanging on a vine, curling around a trellis, much like the *Etched Metal and Glass* piece. The use of the shell

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\(^{84}\) Tiffany Studios, *Tiffany Desk Sets*, 11.
instead of another material is not as far as a reach as it may seem. Tiffany Studios used shells in several other works such as one lampshade that was made completely from a nautilus shell. In addition, Tiffany prized materials for their beauty and often used pebbles, shells, and semi-precious stones in his work. Therefore, it stands to reason that Tiffany would have endorsed the use of this organic and cost effective addition.

Historical and Foreign Design

Many of Tiffany Studios’ desk sets were also inspired by historical and foreign cultures, which Tiffany explored and studied during his trips to Europe, Africa and the Near East. Patterns put out by the firm with hints of these designs were probably inspired by places or objects Tiffany had visited or owned. These designs not only referenced foreign design but also historical design, such as the grotesques of ancient Italy or the Byzantine mosaics found in Spain and Morocco. Tiffany, as well as his designers, would have looked to books or drawings on the subjects in order to find inspiration. Tiffany owned a large design library including books by writers from the period. He would encourage his designers to use his library for inspiration. Among his books were several volumes on European, Middle Eastern and Asian design, including Owen Jones’ Grammar of Ornament (London, 1865), Encyclopédie artistitique et documentaire de la plante (n.d.), Les arts arabes (1873), Lewis’s Sketches and Drawings

86 Frelinghuysen, Tiffany at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, 90.
87 Ibid., 6.
of the Alhambra (n.d.), and Cave Temples of India (1880). Fueled by the influx of revival styles during the Victorian era, Tiffany and his designers sought inspiration from historical sources and "exotic" cultures. Many of the patterns created using these cultures and places as inspiration are mixtures of several influences combining Tiffany’s, as well as the general public’s, fascination with the exotic from all over the world.

There were several desk set patterns that included historical references in their design. The Byzantine pattern (Figure 15) is one example. A pamphlet published by firm describes the design one that "reproduce[s] in practical forms the ornament found on many old Byzantine metals." This pattern is likely a natural outgrowth of Tiffany’s own love of Byzantine art, which he had studied during his Grand Tour of Europe at the age of 17. Siegfried Bing, Tiffany’s friend and dealer in Europe, later wrote about this love, stating,

“What impressed the young artist and filled his heart with a transport of emotion never felt before was the sight of the Byzantine basilicas, with their dazzling mosaics, wherein were synthesized all the essential laws and all the imaginable possibilities of the great art of decoration.”

Because of this enchantment, many of Tiffany’s designs reference Byzantine art, from his glorious chapel at the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago to this opulent desk set pattern. The rich circular ornamentation of the desk set reflects the elaborate gold objects skillfully produced by Byzantine craftsmen, as seen in this plaque from the tenth century (Figure 16). Here, the plaque’s wide border has been ornamented with

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88 Frelinghuysen, Tiffany and Laurelton Hall, 6. Also see Parke-Bernet, 1946, lots 585, 649, 645, 675, and 681.
89 Tiffany Studios, Tiffany Desk Sets. 19.
Figure 15: Tiffany Studios, *Byzantine Calendar Frame*, c. 1906. Enamel, glass, and gilt bronze. 7 ¼ x 8 ¼ inches. New York: Lillian Nassau Gallery.

Figure 16: *Plaque Depicting the Crucifixion with the Virgin Mary and St. John the Baptist*, 10th century, Byzantine. Gold, enamel, and precious stones. Approximately 10 ½ x 7 ½ inches. Venice, Italy: the Treasury of San Marco.
filigree and precious stones. Tiffany’s pattern is reminiscent of this design, especially on the outside border, which consists of pale red glass jewels set at intervals with coral toned beading against a gold background.91

The Bookmark pattern (Figure 17) was also influenced by historical design. This pattern’s name references the early typographical marks used by printers and publishers, which were used as a trademark to prevent forgery.92 The pattern consists of a patchwork of boxes that each contains elements of foliage and symbols, which resemble marks such as the one used by book printer Julian Notary (1455-1523) (Figure 18). Some boxes are elaborately ornamented, including foliage and scrollwork like the elaborate border of Notary’s mark. Others are simple and reference common designs such as the “orb and cross” motif found in the center of the early design used by Notary. In order to further enhance each object, the sets were offered with a gold finish or polychrome enamel. A brochure of historical sketches accompanied each desk accessory explaining the inspiration of the designs.93 In this case, the desk set more closely copies the objects from which it borrows its designs, instead of being merely a loose interpretation like the Byzantine pattern.

Another pattern that drew from classical design was the Venetian pattern (Figure 19). Like its name suggests, Tiffany was referencing Venetian design in the new

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91 Tiffany Studios, *Tiffany Desk Set*, 20
93 Ibid. The Tiffany Studios’ brochure references the existence of this supplementary pamphlet. However, I have not been able to locate one.
Figure 17: Tiffany Studios, detail of *Bookmark Blotter Ends*, c. 1905. Gilt bronze. Blotter ends, 19 ¼ inches. New Orleans, LA: Crescent City Auction Gallery.

Figure 18: *Mark of Julian Notary*, c. 1500. Etching on paper. From *Printers’ Marks: A Chapter in the History of Typography*, 61.
The pattern is heavy in ornamentation and contains geometric triangles and intertwining knots. A Tiffany Studios’ brochure states, “Decorated with fields of richly chased ornament relieved by a deeply carved band of ermines at the base of each piece. In metal gives the rich effect found in East Indian metal work.” It is evident that Tiffany’s desired effect was a mixture of Venetian and Indian design. The repeating patterns on the border of this picture frame resemble the decoration on this Italian leather carrying case (Figure 20). However, the repeating floral patterns at the base of the frame

![Figure 19: Tiffany Studios, Venetian Calendar, c. 1910. Bronze and enamel. 6 x 6 ½ inches. Norfolk, VA: Chrysler Museum of Art.](image)

94 Tiffany and Company, *Blue Book 1908* (New York: Tiffany and Company, 1907), 597-598. The *Venetian* and the *Ninth Century* both have heavy ornamentation, geometric triangles, intertwining knots and small animals at the base. This is not surprising because both appear for the first time in the 1908 Tiffany and Company *Blue Book*, meaning they were more than likely released the same year.  
95 Holland, *Tiffany Desk Sets*, 22.  

Figure 21: Bidri Box for Holding Pan, late 16th to early 17th century, India. 3 15/16 x 3 3/8 inches. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art.
are similar to the interlacing design on this East Indian box made around the end of the sixteenth century (Figure 21). In addition to being influenced by outside cultures, the pattern illustrates the mixing of cultural design influences which was common at Tiffany Studios.

The Adam pattern (Figure 22) was the second to last desk set pattern that Tiffany Studios released. It is possibly the only pattern named after a specific design style of another artist. The pattern is adorned with classical garland and circular wreaths. As a Tiffany Studios’ brochure states, “Among our latest patterns is an Adam set which is designed to harmonize with furnishing originated by the famous Adam brothers.” The Adam brothers were two Scotsmen who designed buildings and interiors throughout England. Their work was a mix of Neoclassicism (Eighteenth to Twenty-first century), Palladianism (Nineteenth to Twentieth century), and Rococo (Eighteenth century), resulted in a unique and highly recognizable style. In fact, this style was being revived during Tiffany’s lifetime and he was no doubt aware of its popularity and decided to capitalize on it. Many elements in the desk set’s design can be seen in this ornamental furniture drawing from The Works in Architecture of Robert and James Adam (Figure 23). Most recognizable is the garland, scrollwork and the use of a central circular motif. This interpretation of the Adam style is an example of Tiffany looking to popular culture of the time and catering to the taste of his clients.

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Figure 23: Robert and James Adam, *Various Pieces of Ornamental Furniture*, no date. From *The Works in Architecture of Robert and James Adam*, Plate VIII.
The Use of the “Exotic”

The late-nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries were not only a time of revivals but also saw an enormous interest in the exotic and unknown. This interest is reflected in the *Zodiac*, *American Indian*, and *Chinese* patterns, which were all inspired by popular topics of the time. These patterns were also a personal interest to Tiffany who was an avid collector of Asian and American Indian objects. His personal collections and drawings from his travels may have been used as inspiration for these patterns. Designers would have also consulted Tiffany’s design library, possibly looking at books such as the *Grammar of Ornament* and *Encyclopédie artistique et documentaire de la plante.*

The *Zodiac* pattern (Figure 24) was possibly the most popular pattern made by Tiffany Studios. It was produced in over seventy different pieces and came in a variety of patinas, which could be enhanced with enamel work. It was also the first commercial pattern Tiffany produced that was influenced heavily by popular culture. The *Zodiac* is an ancient belief of twelve signs that represent periods in the calendar year. A person born under each sign is believed to be controlled by the sign and exhibit certain personality traits. Additionally, many aspects of that person’s life are controlled by the movement of the sign throughout the year including luck, health and finances. The

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100 Frelinghuysen, *Tiffany and Laurelton Hall*, 6. Also see Parke-Bernet, 1946, lots 675, 681.
101 The *Royal Copper* pattern from the later years of production is a variation on the *Zodiac* design. It appears that the *Zodiac* symbols have been repurposed in a more minimalistic style. To see illustration of this pattern see, Holland, *Tiffany Desk Sets*, 220-222.
Figure 24: Tiffany Studios, *Zodiac Pad Holder*, c. 1900. Bronze and enamels. 4 ½ x 7 ½ inches. New York: Neustadt Collection of Tiffany Glass. Photo by author.

Zodiac has roots in Babylon but existed in other parts of the world throughout time.\textsuperscript{103} Many cultures also understood and referenced these symbols in their decorative objects as seen in this inkwell from the twelfth century (Figure 25). At the turn of the century, knowledge of these symbols was widespread and many peopled believed in their power.\textsuperscript{104} This strong interest in the Zodiac would have made this pattern a point of interest for many people. The \textit{Zodiac} pattern features one or several of the Zodiac symbols on each piece, such as a crab for the sign Cancer and a scale for the sign Libra. The negative space is then occupied by interlacing patterns of lines similar to Celtic knots seen in Owen Jones’ \textit{Grammar of Ornament}.\textsuperscript{105} There are several similarities to this desk set pattern and the inkwell from Iran, most notably the way each figure is enclosed in a circle and highlighted with enamel. It is quite possible that the designers used elements from similar objects when designing the \textit{Zodiac} pattern. Different additions were also offered, such as enameling, green patina or gold plating, which added to the overall aesthetic of the pattern.\textsuperscript{106} The popular culture connection to this pattern combined with the freedom to customize the pieces undoubtedly added to the desirability of the pieces.

\textsuperscript{103} Tiffany Studios, \textit{The Zodiac Desk Set}. New York: Tiffany Studios, 15-16. It is possible that this brochure accompanied purchased pieces in order to give more background information on the pattern’s imagery.
\textsuperscript{106} Kemeny and Miller, \textit{Tiffany Desk Treasures}, 18.
Figure 26: Tiffany Studios, *American Indian Stamp Box*, c. 1910. Bronze. 5 x 2 x 3 inches. New York: Neustadt Collection of Tiffany Glass. Photo by author.


The *American Indian* pattern (Figure 26) also reflected a trend in popular culture of the time. During the early twentieth century, the interest in Native American design and culture increased because it was seen as an escape from the “over civilized” urban environment of industrial America. As a result, there were many writers and artists trying to document Native American culture and their design style in order to translate it into contemporary design. The Aesthetic Movement (1860-1900) was by far the biggest proponent of Native American design and encouraged its followers to decorate homes with Native American artifacts. An article in *Craftsman Homes* instructs the reader to cover a cement floor with “a thick Indian blanket or two, or any rug of sturdy weave and

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primitive color and design.” The use of Native American objects in homes was a popular design theme, and they were often used in “Indian corners.” These “Indian corners” were found in homes all over the United States, Laurelton Hall included. Tiffany, like many people of the day, was an avid collector of Native American decorative arts and artifacts and he made several collecting trips to the West. His fascination with Native American design is evident in the design elements in the pattern. This pattern incorporates design motifs that were popular in Native American art, including repeating triangle, rectangle design and stylized heads of animals. The American Indian Tiffany Studios’ brochure states, “In choosing motifs for the decoration of the American Indian desk set, the Tiffany Studios have selected the serpent, the frog, the bird and the wind and rain symbolizing the seasons…The season motifs particularly are taken from the crudely modeled earthen dishes of the gulf tribes.” The season motifs, or vertical, horizontal and crisscrossed lines, can be seen on the border of the stamp box. In Native American design they are found on baskets and textiles, such as this one from Navajo Tribe (Figure 27), which were a popular collector’s item during the twentieth century. The stylized heads of frogs, birds, and snakes can be seen on the different sides of the desk set as well as this native bowl (Figure 28) from Tiffany’s...
collection. There appears to be a connection between the face on this bowl and the faces of the bird and frog, perhaps suggesting that this bowl was used as a source of inspiration.

The Chinese pattern (Figure 29) was also a pattern inspired by popular culture. In the mid-nineteenth century, the Treaty of Nanking forced China to open more trade ports which allowed an increased number of goods to enter Europe and the United States. This exposed the Western world to more Chinese art objects than ever before, resulting in a surge of Chinese-inspired designs. Tiffany immensely appreciated the decorative objects and craftsmanship of Asian artists and was an avid collector of small utilitarian objects from Asia including several Chinese bronzes. As stated in the Tiffany Studios desk set brochure, the Chinese pattern incorporates some elements of Chou or Zhou dynasty metal design, which can be seen on this Hu (Figure 30), or wine container. The heavy, rounded “hooked” figures on the top of the Chinese pattern resemble the same type of decoration found on the body of the bronze container. Geometric patterns also adorning the desk set closely resemble a similar squared pattern illustrated in the Grammar of Ornament. Although this pattern was called Chinese, it has elements of Japanese design; among the most noticeable elements is the curvaceous yet stylized

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116 Parke-Bernet, 1946, lots 855-864. For more information on Tiffany Asian collections, see Meech, "Tiffany's Collection of Asian Art at Laurelton Hall," 157-176.
117 Jones, Grammar of Ornament, 163.
Figure 29: Tiffany Studios, *Chinese Stamp Box*, c. 1910. Gilt bronze. 2 ½ x 3 ½ x 5 inches. New York: Macklowe Gallery.

Figure 30: *Ritual Wine Container with Cover (Hu)*, late 9th to early 8th century B.C., China. Bronze. 21 5/8 inches. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art.
nature of the bat motif, a Japanese symbol of good luck.\textsuperscript{118} This mixing of foreign motifs was not uncommon for the time since many people did not understand the difference between the design styles of each country. Tiffany’s designers were no exception. This attempt to reference, but not directly copy, also allowed for the misinterpretation of the original design resulting in a mix of styles. This eclectic style, although unintentional, was a common result when Western designers tried to replicate Chinese or Japanese design.

\textit{Tiffany’s Designs After 1910}

Around the end of the twentieth century’s first decade, stylistic tastes were beginning to change. Designs were becoming more subdued and modernistic, a drastic change from the elaborate and eclectic designs manufactured at the beginning of the century. A 1908 \textit{Notions and Fancy Goods} article calls these new designs “exceedingly artistic and many of them are entirely different to the desk sets to which we have so long been accustomed. The shapes of the various articles are marked by a severe simplicity and have a subdued air that seems to be more in keeping with the ordinary library furnishing than the bright and showy designs that once were so popular.”\textsuperscript{119}

By 1914, Tiffany Studios had introduced eleven different desk set patterns, which no doubt would have been grouped into the latter category. These earlier works embodied the stylistic flourishes and ornamentation that customers had come to expect from Tiffany Studio products. However, Tiffany’s designers endeavored to create more relevant objects and keep up with the changing times.


The *Graduate* pattern, with its restrained decorations composed of triangles, diamonds, squares and circles, was one of the last patterns released (Figure 31).\(^\text{120}\) Not only was it produced for just four years, making it the pattern with the shortest production time, but it was also the most simplified design: the only form of ornamentation was gold plating that could be highlighted with monochrome blue or red enameling. This pattern’s austere design was likely in reaction to changing tastes in America and an effort to remain relevant.

**In the “Tiffany” Style**

Tiffany Studios desk sets were so popular that several contemporary firms, including Riviere Studios and the Apollo Studios in New York, and Jennings Brother Manufacturing Company in Bridgeport, Connecticut, copied some of the firm’s

\(^{120}\) Kemeny and Miller, *Tiffany Desk Treasures*, 22.

Figure 33: Tiffany and Company, *Paper Rack*, c. 1915. Bronze. 9 ½ x 6 ½ x 3 ¼ inches. From *Tiffany Desk Sets*, 236.
patterns. Most notably Riviere Studios copied the *Etched Metal and Glass* pattern (Figure 32) but the *American Indian* and *Adam* patterns were also replicated. These manufacturers’ goods, of slightly inferior quality, have variations such as color of patina, placement of filigree, and the shapes of the objects. Tiffany and Company also appears to have sold desk sets in the Tiffany Studios’ style. However, unlike the previously mentioned firms, the Tiffany and Company designs (Figure 33) are not an attempt to copy an already existing Tiffany Studios' pattern. The other three firms, however, did attempt to imitate Tiffany’s popular designs and their eagerness to capitalize on Tiffany’s profit illustrates the success of entire desk set production line during the period.

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121 Holland, *Tiffany Desk Sets*, 236.
122 Ibid.
123 Ibid., 236-241.
124 It is possible that the Tiffany and Company patterns were overseen by Louis C. Tiffany after he became the firm’s artistic director after his father’s death. No pattern names are known for these pieces.
CHAPTER THREE: MARKETING AND ADVERTISING

Advertising in the United States has a long and convoluted history, which is necessary to understand when discussing the influence it had on the way Tiffany Studios marketed and sold its products. During the late-nineteenth century there was a dramatic change in the way advertising was used and perceived by many businesses and consumers. Not only did it begin to look different, but the target audience for luxury goods expanded due to the population’s increase in wealth. There was also a shift in the way people viewed and reacted to advertising in the United States. This shift, along with Tiffany Studios’ marketing, branding, and selling strategies, helped facilitate a demand for Tiffany’s desk sets, which in turn created a highly publicized and successful line of luxury goods.

In the early years of advertising, advertisements looked dramatically different from the types of ads that were released at the turn of the twentieth century. This was in large part due to the United States’ economic culture and the self-sufficiency of the population in the 1700s. During these early years, most advertisements were limited to three basic topics: slaves, land, and transportation (Figure 34). \(^{125}\) This was the direct

result of the way people consumed products. Almost ninety percent of the population lived on farms and grew or made most of their own goods, and therefore, this lifestyle considerably decreased the need for outside goods. 126 When a product was needed, it was

126 Ibid., 13-16.
from a local merchant who did not need to bring attention to the goods in his store because there was no competition.¹²⁷ This limited market meant that advertised goods were products that people could not provide on their own, such as transportation, land, or slaves. In essence, the consumer at the end of the eighteenth century looked completely different from the consumer of Tiffany’s time.

Consumerism in the United States changed with the rise of the Industrial Revolution.¹²⁸ The once self-sustaining farmer became the factory worker. As people moved from their farms into the city for better employment opportunities, the amount of space they had decreased, and they could no longer grow large amounts of food or raise their own livestock. As a result, many people had to rely on others for these types of products, thus giving way to the age of the consumer.¹²⁹ Urbanization also meant that there was more competition for retailers and advertising became a way to not just promote stores and goods, but to also entice the consumer to buy specific products. The structure and look of advertisements, however, is noticeably different from those we are accustomed to today. Late eighteenth century newspapers required that all advertisement be composed of only a few lines, with no additional headlines; no illustrations or slogans were included, resulting in little individuality. Each advertisement was also one column wide (Figure 35), which meant nearly all ads were approximately the same size, and therefore, nearly indistinguishable from one another.¹³⁰ This made advertising

¹²⁷ Ibid.
¹²⁸ Ibid.
¹³⁰ Ibid., 13-16
unprofitable for the manufacturer because it was a matter of chance that a consumer would read the advertisement. In addition, it was also challenging for the consumer who had to sift through identical advertisements to find the ideal product.  

Advertising changed again during the Civil War with the invention of wood-pulp newspaper, which reduced the price of paper. New technology developed during the war also allowed images to be printed. This made advertising different on a case-by-case basis; photos, slogans, and wordy text were included and the overstuffed Victorian advertisement (Figure 36) was born. Soon manufacturers were creating new ads that

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131 Ibid., 19-20.
132 Ibid., 23.
drew customers in and then bombarded them with propaganda positioning their products as superior to their competitors. In addition, this was the first time companies began to standardize the way they packed and marked their goods, which gave rise to logos, recognizable packaging, and product slogans.\textsuperscript{133}

By the time Tiffany Studios began to market its goods in the late-nineteenth century, print publicity had changed dramatically. Advertisements had prominent illustrations, large headlines, and ample white space, all of which was intended to attract the eye of the consumer to the highlighted product. A shift in the way marketing functioned also occurred: for the first time in advertising history, ads were intended to persuade the consumer to buy objects that they really had no need for but desired all the same.\textsuperscript{134} This new style of advertising was meant to sell products that no one wanted or possibly even needed until they saw the advertisements. The idea of the consumer was central to Tiffany Studios' ads because they were in the business of making luxury goods for people with expendable incomes.

Before advertising was established as a part of everyday life, people saw advertisements as dishonest and a way to trick consumers into buying a product of lower quality or value. However, by the late-nineteenth century, the public began to see advertising as a straightforward way to promote a business.\textsuperscript{135} This shift in thinking was not only advantageous to Tiffany Studios but it also helped other companies sell products through advertisements. Without this shift, many people might have overlooked the

\textsuperscript{134} Ibid., 32.
\textsuperscript{135} Ibid., 190.
advertisements and stayed loyal to other retailers or brands. However, more people looked to advertisements for information to help them buy goods.

Another concept that was coming into being during the last quarter of the nineteenth century was the idea of the brand, or a particular name or symbol under which goods are manufactured that becomes easily identifiable by consumers.\footnote{Ibid., 95-100.} The Tiffany name may well have been one of the earliest and most successful brands in America and it had long been associated with luxury goods years before Louis started designing and producing his objects of art.\footnote{Pepall, \textit{A Passion for Colour}, 21. Listing for Tiffany Studios desk sets can be found in Tiffany and Company \textit{Blue Books} from 1906, 1907 and 1910 under the heading “Tiffany Favrile Glass-Metalware.”} Tiffany Studios' association with Tiffany and Company elevated the firm's work and drew in customers because the brand was held in such high esteem. It also helped that Tiffany and Company sold Louis Tiffany’s objects, including the desk sets, at their main store in New York.\footnote{Tiffany and Company, \textit{Blue Book 1908}, 593-598. I have had difficulty locating copies of Tiffany and Company \textit{Blue Books} from this period. However, I was able to examine \textit{Blue Books} from 1893, 1907, 1910, and 1912. The three books from the 1900s list a wide selection of desk sets and other Tiffany Studios goods. The 1893 book was published four years before Tiffany Studios is known to have released desks accessories. However, the earlier \textit{Blue Book} does show that stationery items were being sold at Tiffany and Company, although the selection was limited. Presumably, the rise in inventory in later years is due to the demand for writing accessories.} By linking his products with his father’s already established reputation of excellence and quality, Tiffany Studios was able to attract new customers into its showrooms.\footnote{Thalheimer, "Tiffany's Gospel of Good Taste," 28.}
**Newspaper and Magazine Advertisements**

Tiffany Studios’ promotional efforts were not limited to desk sets. In the early years of the company, Tiffany established an active marketing department, which mounted advertising campaigns, produced booklets and helped exhibit the firm’s wares in the showrooms and at exhibitions. These ads sought to educate the consumer on Tiffany Studios, offering information on the craftsman, design inspirations and manufacturing innovations developed at the firm. Tiffany Studios used this advertising to promote its artistic services and artwork, and eventually, bring customers into its showrooms. The overall message of the advertisements was that Tiffany Studios’ products were for the fashionable individual with refined tastes and owning these products conferred this status onto the individual. As stated in a Tiffany Studios advertisement, “The products of the Tiffany Studios appeal especially to those who desire articles that posses the stamp of artistic grace and individuality, combined with the very heist quality of material and workmanship.” Tiffany products were meant for the upper class and advertised as such. The bulk of these advertisements were placed in New York newspapers, mostly the *New York* Times, whose primary readership was wealthy

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140 Throughout my research, I have looked at Tiffany Studios advertisements in the *New York Times* from November 1903 to May 1939. I have found several reoccurring themes, which are discussed above. Additionally, many advertisements list prices for certain goods or at least give a price point. Advertisements are also broken into categories, where like objects are advertised with like objects (i.e., it is very rare that desk sets appear with lamps). Across all categories, advertisements also tend to look similar during certain periods and tend to evolve as one uniformed design scheme, which correlates with the success of the company at the time of the advertisement’s release.


individuals with expendable incomes.\textsuperscript{143} Additional advertisements appeared in other large cities throughout the U.S., including Chicago and Los Angeles.\textsuperscript{144}

Tiffany used any opportunity he could to bring attention to his wares and his artistic achievements, including displaying his goods at several World’s Fairs in both Europe and the United States.\textsuperscript{145} Tiffany entered and received awards for his goods, at both the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago and the 1900 Exposition Universelle in Paris.\textsuperscript{146} The acclaim he received for his artwork brought a lot of attention from the public and the press when he returned to New York. Tiffany used this press as a way to promote his artwork by mentioning his success in his advertising and other articles about his firm. For many exhibitors, including Tiffany, the world’s fairs were a chance to show off their greatest achievements and garner attention from the public. Tiffany used any such opportunity to its fullest by featuring editorial praise in his advertisements in order to further promote his work and goods. Although desk sets were not displayed at the world’s fairs, they were displayed outside of Tiffany Studios’ showroom. The most notable example was the \textit{Wild Carrot} inkstand designed

\textsuperscript{145} For more information on World’s Fairs, see Paul Greenhalgh, \textit{Fair World: A History of World's Fairs and Expositions, from London to Shanghai, 1851-2010} (Winterbourne, Berkshire, UK: Papadakis, 2011). For more information on Tiffany at World’s Fairs, see Benjamin Cummings Truman, \textit{History of the World's Fair: Being a Complete Description of the World's Columbian Exposition from Its Inception} (Mammoth Publishing Company, 1893), 219.

Figure 38: *Tiffany Showrooms*, 1913. From *Character and Individuality in Decorations and Furnishings*, 17.
by Clara Driscoll, which was displayed at Grafton Galleries in London.

Holidays provided an additional opportunity for Tiffany Studios to conduct focused marketing campaigns. Glassware and fancy goods were often advertised as the perfect Easter or Christmas gift for a family member or friend. They especially made excellent gifts for the notoriously hard-to-buy-for Victorian businessman who seemed to own everything. For example, an advertisement from 1905 (Figure 37), presents the desk sets as “distinctive Easter gift of chaste design and lasting utility ordinarily difficult to find.” These objects were portrayed as unique gifts not only because they were Tiffany products but also because they were high quality. The advertisement then continues, “[They] may be selected without trouble from the collection of Tiffany productions in Bronze Desk Sets and Library Table Objects, Bronze Lamps and Favrile Vases.” The collection being referenced in this line is most likely the large assortment of desk sets patterns displayed at the showrooms, which can be seen in this image from a Tiffany brochure (Figure 38). Holidays were a time when people were already buying gifts. These ads were meant to influence the readers to purchase Tiffany Studios’ objects over other retailers. Highlighting the variety of products just further solidified that any person’s taste could be met.

While some strategies were used more frequently for some goods than others, the listing of prices or price ranges was employed across the board. Early on in desk set marketing, Tiffany Studios did note price ranges in their advertisements, just

148 Ibid.

like many other retailers. Tiffany probably listed prices in his ads in order to place his goods in context with other manufacturers. One example of Tiffany Studios’ advertising from 1903 (Figure 39) states, “Picture frames and desk and boudoir appointments are now being shown which may be had in complete sets or as individual pieces at prices ranging as low as one dollar.” Later, in a 1912 Christmas advertisement (Figure 40), a price range of two to fifty dollars is listed for desk sets and other small objects such as lamps. Although some of these advertisements are not exclusively for desk sets, the ads place them within the broader context of Tiffany Studios’ fancy goods and show the consumer for the cost of a Tiffany-designed and manufactured piece.

There were also many advertisements highlighting the design and durability of the desk sets made at Tiffany Studios. One early desk set advertisement (Figure 41) released shortly after Tiffany started to produce several different patterns reads, “Presented now in extensive variety. Unlike the typical ornamented desk appointments these sets are for daily use; do not demand delicate handling nor frequent polishing. Artistically they rank with our best productions.” By specifically addressing the durability of their desk sets, Tiffany Studios successfully set their desk sets apart from those by other manufactures by calling attention to the fact that their sets were works of art on par with their “best productions,” but also useful everyday articles that could be used without worry. The durability of the desk sets meant they would withstand the test of time and daily use.

Therefore, spending a large sum of money when purchasing the desk sets meant that less time and money would need to be spent later, unlike products by other firms which may have broken or needed constant care.

Tiffany Studios also marketed their wares in magazines, which had a more specific targeted audience than newspapers such as interior design or poetry. These ads allowed Tiffany Studios was able to market their goods to people who might have more interest in their goods than the general public. For example, desk sets were listed in an advertisement (Figure 42) from a 1903 lifestyle magazine for the wealthier classes – *Town and Country.*¹⁵¹ By placing Tiffany Studios’ goods in the magazine along with other lifestyle information it was framing them as fashionable and artistic objects.

Figure 42: Town and Country, *Tiffany Studios Advertisement*, November 14, 1903. From *Town and Country*, November 14, 1903, 47.

Figure 43: Art and Decoration, Tiffany Studios Advertisement, December 1921. From *Art and Decoration*, December 1921, 83.
perfect for the fashionable elite. Interestingly, this ad also features Tiffany Studios’ products as perfect gifts, illustrating how some tactics also crossed publications in order to target consumers.

Later, in 1921, desk sets were featured in a full page ad in *Art and Decoration* (Figure 43), a magazine “for those who love beauty in everything that contributes to the joy and comfort of living.” The readership of this magazine would have been interested in interior design and decoration, which meant they were also interested in desk sets. The advertisement states, “They are representative of the highest art combined with utility,” just like the earlier ads from the *New York Times*. In this ad the desk sets are displayed on a desk in the center of the page which is a very prominent position. This is very different from advertising in newspapers, most likely in part due to space limitations.

**Other Marketing Strategies**

Numerous Tiffany Studios newspaper advertisements include a line at the bottom urging readers to request a booklet or pamphlet on Tiffany Studios goods (Figure 44). These booklets, some exclusively on desk sets, were used to sell desk sets to customers outside of the store, much in the same way that mail-order catalogues function. In one booklet titled “Suggestion for Gifts,” three out of the four text pages are devoted to desk sets. This pamphlet illustrates the desk sets carefully displayed on a desk (Figure 45). Next to the picture the text reads, “Tiffany desk sets are executed in solid bronze,

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Figure 45: Tiffany Studios, *Adam Desk Set*. From *Suggestions for Gifts “Desk Sets”*, c. 1913.
finished in dark green, brown or rich gold. Booklet on desk sets will be sent on request."154 The suggestion of desk sets as a gift had already been promoted in Tiffany Studios’ newspaper and magazine advertisements, but this booklet emphasized the point that these objects were perfect gifts because, in addition to being fashionable and well made, the gift giver could select the accessory or accessories that best fit their price point.

Tiffany Studios also published several promotional brochures focusing exclusively on desk sets. These booklets often contained a photograph of each desk set pattern arranged on a desk, a list of accessory prices and the available finishes, and background information on the source of inspiration for each design. In later brochures, a wide variety of designs at many different price points were offered, starting with the Etched Metal and Glass pattern ranging from $100 to $147 for a full eight piece set to the Graduate pattern ranging from $107 to $128.155 This price difference between the patterns would have been beneficial for Tiffany Studios because the differently priced items would have appealed to different clientele. The brochures helped draw attention to the different designs and price points by placing them context with each other. This way each pattern and piece could be considered based on the customer’s needs.

These pamphlets were also used as a marketing ploy to influence the customer to buy a specific pattern based on their interest. The design explanation created associations between the designs and its inspiration, which could have played to a certain desire or

155 Tiffany Studios. Tiffany Desk Sets – Desks Sets and Useful Articles, 13-15. Price ranges are based on Graduate and Etched Metal and Glass patterns. Eight core pieces were used including, blotter ends, rocker blotter, pen tray, calendar, ink stand, utility box, paper rack, and paper knife. The reason ranges are given is that in some cases such as inkwells, “small” and “large” designs were offered. The lower price given includes these “smaller” pieces and omits the “larger” ones and vice versa for the larger sum.
interest of the customer. For example, if a customer was interested in literature and noticed the *Bookmark* pattern, he could then read the description and find out that it was based on earlier printer’s marks. This connection might make him feel like the pattern represents his character and personality, as well as portraying him as wealthy and educated. The multifaceted connection with the customers would have created a bond that would have made them more likely to buy the pattern.

Perhaps the most compelling marketing ploy Tiffany Studios used was selling the desk pieces individually. This ensured the customer would keep coming back into the store on a regular basis to purchase additional articles in the set. Also, for some desk sets, Tiffany Studios almost certainly expanded the line by introducing new accessories that were released later than the original pieces. Although it is unclear which pieces were released later than others, this tactic brought clients back into the store to purchase the new accessory.156 By selling the desk sets in this manner, Tiffany Studios was potentially able to keep a customer purchasing pieces for an extended period of time, which was different from the other single statement pieces that Tiffany Studios sold. Selling the desk set accessories individually also allowed for people to customize their desk set based on their needs as well as their tastes.

Framing the desk sets as the ultimate luxury good was something the success of the desk set line relied heavily on. Of course, Tiffany already had a client base of wealthy

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156 After consulting several desk set brochures I have been unable to locate any information on specific pieces released later than the patterns debut year. However, it stands to reason that this was a common practice at Tiffany Studios based on the fact that not all desk set patterns contain the same kind or number of pieces. It is also quite likely that the pieces listed in the brochures are not a compressive list.
New York aristocrats, including the Vanderbilts and the Havemeyers, who would have had an interest in his artistic glass lines. Nonetheless, creating a demand for the desk sets and other fancy goods would have taken persuading. This was because, as discussed in the first chapter, desk sets could be purchased from any retailer at prices and designs that competed with Tiffany. However, Tiffany’s many advertising tactics helped set his line apart from the completion and created demand for the line and his brand.
CONCLUSION

The mid-nineteenth to early-twentieth century was a time of remarkable change for American society. The redistribution of wealth created a culture, unlike any before in the United States, which laid the groundwork for luxury household products, including writing accessories. Tiffany, realizing the demand for such objects, created his desk set line, which was full of fashionable designs and motifs. Furthermore, the public interest in revival styles and “exotic” design motifs provided Tiffany’s designers with a plethora of inspiration, which, in turn, resulted in a staggering variety of desk set patterns. Finally, changes in advertising helped to fuel the public’s rampant desire to consume new and fashionable goods, which allowed Tiffany to heavily – and effectively – market his products to the greater public. These combined factors created the perfect atmosphere in which Tiffany’s desk set sales flourished.

After taking a closer look at this product line's cultural context, it is easy to see how Tiffany’s desk accessories appealed to such a wide variety of public tastes. Although the majority of these consumers will never be known by name, given the hefty prices of the desk accessories, it is fair to assume that many of them were members of the upper

157 Tiffany sales records do not survive. Additionally, original owner’s names are not usually public record unless their estate has been opened to the public, they were noteworthy figures from the period or their estate has been sold at auction.
class. Although information on many of the Tiffany Studios’ clients is scant, it has been possible to identify some of the original desk set owners. A Texas industrial and financial leader, William Henry Stark (1851-1936), for example, is known to have owned a Byzantine, an Abalone and at least one other Tiffany desk sets.158 Both the Byzantine and the Abalone patterns are particularly luxurious patterns, perfect a wealthy businessman. Desk sets were also appropriate gifts for retiring head nurses, celebrated doctors, and company presidents.159 As a case in point, a desk set was given to Dr. I. D. Rawlings of Chicago in celebration of his medical achievements and work in Tuberculosis prevention. In the article recounting the event, the desk set is described as “a handsome and costly Tiffany designed bronze and gold desk set, a gift so unique and beautiful that it is intended by the givers [to] last Dr. Rawlings so long as he shall be spared to use it and afterwards descend to his son.”160 Perhaps the most notable owner of a Tiffany desk set was President Woodrow Wilson (1856-1924), who received a Grapevine desk set as a wedding gift in 1915.161 As demonstrated by these examples, the desk sets were desirable for both their luxury and the prestige they implied. Gifting a Tiffany desk set also conferred status of sophistication and good taste on the owner and the gift giver. And the

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158 Samantha Hoag. "Conversation with Samantha Hoag, the W. H. Stark House." Interview by author. March 10, 2013; and "Explore the Collection" The W.H. Stark House. Accessed March 23, 2013. http://starkculturalvenues.org/whstarkhouse/collection. The W.H. Stark House showcases the Byzantine and Abalone desk set on their website but I was not able to confirm the pattern of the third. However, it was confirmed by the museum that they do indeed own three sets.


160 "Testimonial Banquet," Chicago’s Health 15, 42.

fact that a desk set was deemed as a gift befitting a sitting president and his bride unequivocally illustrates their status as luxury goods.

The Final Chapter of Tiffany’s Fancy Goods

Beginning in the middle of the second decade of the twentieth century, public tastes began to change and the ornate, elaborate designs that characterized the Gilded Age were replaced by a simpler, modernist aesthetic. In addition, because of socioeconomic factors such as World War I and the onset of the Great Depression, there was no longer a demand for high-priced luxury goods on quite the same scale. Tiffany Studios was affected by these socio-economic changes because their entire business was based on luxury goods, which many people could no longer afford. Tiffany’s main focus also shifted to his newly formed foundation and he retired from Tiffany Studios in 1919, although continued to provide financial backing. After Tiffany’s departure, A. Douglas Nash (1881-1940), son of Tiffany’s head glass chemist, took control of the company and it was immediately reorganized into the Louis C. Tiffany Furnaces, Inc. At least five additional desk set patterns were introduced in the 1920s under this new company and the firm continued to sell earlier desk set patterns as well. Most of these new patterns had relatively short production spans and appear to have been attempts at producing similar

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163 Jennifer Perry Thalheimer, "For the Advancement of Art: The Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation," in *Louis Comfort Tiffany and Laurelton Hall*, by Alice Cooney Frelinghuysen (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2006), 203-216. The Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation was established in 1918 as an educational program for young artists. It was housed on Tiffany’s Long Island estate and centered on techniques as well as art appreciation.
designs, complete with gold plating and enameling, like those from the earlier years. However, with an increased popularity in modernist designs, the later patterns proved unsuccessful in the marketplace. The so-called “Art Deco” pattern (Figure 46) was more strikingly colorful and well designed than the earlier attempts making it a relevant creating a more contemporary design. This pattern, however, lacks the stylistic flourishes and attention to detail, which had become synonymous with the Tiffany Studios’ name. It is fairly simple and made up of repeating geometric patterns highlighted by monochrome enameling. Additionally, because of its minimalist design, it may have been more cost efficient to produce, perhaps in response to the recent economic

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166 Little is known about this pattern, including its original name. Collectors have assigned it the name of Art Deco and, to avoid confusion, I will refer to it with this moniker as well.
downturn. Despite the attempt to remain competitive in this changing market, Tiffany’s products fell out of favor with the general public and desk set production ceased in 1924.\textsuperscript{167}

In 1924, the Louis C. Tiffany Furnaces, Inc. filed for bankruptcy but was immediately reorganized into the A. Douglas Nash Company. Tiffany also withdrew his financial backing and turned his focus to his foundation.\textsuperscript{168} Revenue continued to decline and, in 1928, the bronze factory in Corona, Queens was sold to the newly formed General Bronze Company.\textsuperscript{169} In 1930, the Arthur D. Nash Company filed for bankruptcy and the company closed its doors forever.\textsuperscript{170} In 1936, the contents of its facilities and remaining stock were sold at auction.\textsuperscript{171} Desk sets were advertised at a sixty percent reduction.\textsuperscript{172} This price reduction speaks to the unpopularity of the desk sets, and Tiffany’s work generally, in the firm’s later years.

\textsuperscript{167} Frelinghuysen, \textit{Tiffany and Laurelton Hall}, 231-232.
\textsuperscript{168} Ibid., 231.
\textsuperscript{169} “Bronze Corporation Buys Tiffany Studios,” \textit{New York Times}, January 21, 1928, 36. “Tiffany Studios Deal.” \textit{New York Times}, February 4, 1928. 27; “Bronze Corporation Buys Tiffany Studios.” \textit{New York Times}, January 21, 1928. 36; “Factory in Queens in New Ownership.” \textit{New York Times}, November 30, 1946. 32; Roman Bronze Works Archives, Amon Carter Museum of American Art, Fort Worth, TX. In 1928, Tiffany sold his foundry along with the equipment to the General Bronze Corporation. Also, it appears that all of the business records were left behind. The owner of the General Bronze Corporation was also, at one point, the head of Tiffany’s foundry. Roman Bronze Works was also a subsidiary of General Bronze Corporation and was later housed the Tiffany factory. The foundry changed hand several times after the initial sale. The foundry building and all its contents later became part of Roman Bronze Works. When Roman Bronze Works closed its doors all of its ledgers, which including some of Tiffany’s original documentation, became part of the Amon Carter Museum Archives.
\textsuperscript{170} Frelinghuysen, \textit{Tiffany and Laurelton Hall}, 231, and Eidelberg, McClelland and Nash, \textit{Behind the Scenes of Tiffany Glassmaking}, 128.
\textsuperscript{171} Frelinghuysen, \textit{Tiffany and Laurelton Hall}, 231.
Tiffany Desk Sets Today

Today, Tiffany Studios’ desk sets are still appreciated for their arresting designs and fine craftsmanship. They have become collector’s items partially because they encapsulate Tiffany’s design aesthetic and have remained relatively affordable. They are highly sought after by a number of devoted individuals including President George H. W. Bush, who proudly displayed a Zodiac set on his desk in the oval office (Figure 47).¹⁷³

Tiffany Studios desk sets are also represented in notable museum collections throughout the United States including large museum such as the Smithsonian National Museum of American History and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, as well as small museums like the Woodrow Wilson House in Washington, D.C. In a way, the desk sets’ popularity has

¹⁷³ Kemeny and Miller, Tiffany Desk Treasures, 27.
remained virtually unchanged for over 100 years, making them among the most accessible, although still pricey, Tiffany objects on the market today.

Tiffany Studios’ desk set line was one of the largest and most diverse the firm ever attempted. Over the course of nearly thirty years, the firm produced at least twenty-three commercial desk sets and an unknown number of specialty desk sets and accessories in an astonishing array of designs. In the words of Tiffany Studios,

"[the] Bronze Desk Sets [aim] to create unique and interesting design, interpreted in the finished pieces by the skill of the artist-craftsman. An old book or symbol, the art of some ancient civilization often furnishes inspiration for the motif for a new desk…Some are dignified and simple for the desk of the business man. Others, of exquisite workmanship and delicacy of detail, are more suitable for the home."  

174 Tiffany Studios, Desk Sets by Tiffany Studios. New York: Tiffany Studios, 1.
The information tabulated below lists all known Tiffany Studios’ desk set patterns and the years they first appeared in either Tiffany Studios *Price Lists*, Tiffany and Company *Blue Books*, or period advertisements. It can be assumed that these patterns continued to be sold in the years following their initial introduction. However, because each pattern was manufactured in quantity, pieces of each pattern were left in stock long after patterns were discontinued. It is, therefore, virtually impossible to know when production ceased for each pattern; consequently, no end date is listed. Additionally some of the following patterns were made in “miniature,” and were released either with or after their parent pattern.175 For years that are missing from this list it appears that no new desk sets patterns were released. It should also be noted that, Tiffany and Company Blue Books were prepared a year before they were published. Therefore, the debut of a pattern means it was released the previous year.

1900
Advertisement, May 31, 1900, lists “Tiffany Glass Combined with Metal,” presumably refers to “specialty desk sets.”176

1903
Advertisement, November 2, 1903, lists “Tiffany Glass overlaid with Etched Metal,” presumably refers to the *Etched Metal and Glass* pattern.177

1906
Tiffany Studios *Price List*178
*Bookmark*
*Byzantine*
*Zodiac*

1907
Tiffany and Company *Blue Book 1908*179

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175 Kemeny and Miller, *Tiffany Desk Treasures*, 22 and 53. Kemeny and Miller list the “Miniature” line as its own separate pattern. However, since it appears no new patterns were released as only miniatures I have not included it as a separate pattern.


1909
Tiffany and Company *Blue Book* Abalone

1910
Tiffany and Company *Blue Book* American Indian Chinese Royal Copper

1913
Tiffany Studios *Price List* Adam

1914
Tiffany and Company *Blue Book* Graduate

1919
Tiffany and Company *Blue Book* Louis XVI Nautical

1920
In 1920, Tiffany Furnaces is reorganized and named Louis C. Tiffany Furnaces. Tiffany is no longer formally involved with the company. However they continue to make and release new desk set patterns for at least ten years. The new patterns released under this name are listed below.

1924
Tiffany Studios *Price List* Modeled

1929
Tiffany Studios *Price List*

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180 Kemeny and Miller, *Tiffany Desk Treasures*, 22.
181 Ibid.
183 Kemeny and Miller, *Tiffany Desk Treasures*, 22.
184 Ibid.
185 Ibid. *Price List*, October 1st 1924.
1936-1939

Advertisements list the following desk set patterns available at the Louis C. Tiffany Studios Inc. liquidation auctions and sales held by Percy A. Joseph Auctioneers.\(^{188}\)

- Abalone
- Adam
- American Indian
- Heraldic
- Louis XVI
- Ninth Century
- Venetian
- Zodiac

Additional Notes

Little is known about the following patterns, however, it appears there were several pieces made in the same fashion as the other desk sets. Quotation marks are an indicator that the original pattern name is also unknown.

- “Art Deco”
- “Etched Crosier”
- “Double X”
- Japanese\(^{189}\)

\(^{186}\) Tiffany Studios. *Price List*, October 1st 1929. There were also several patterns listed in this price list for which it is not clear if they were full sets or specialty pieces. They do not appear in earlier price lists and only appear as single or few pieces in the 1929 list. They include, *Coptic, Egyptian, Disciples, and Gothic patterns.*

\(^{187}\) The *Pond Lily* pattern does not appear in early publications that I have consulted but *A New Light on Tiffany* list is as being produced in the early twentieth century. I agree with this earlier date but have listed it here because I have not found evidence of it in any other period publication. It is quite possible it appears in the 1929 *Price List* because there were still pieces in stock when the company was liquidating its assets. ;


\(^{189}\) The Japanese pattern appears in the 1906 *Price List*. However, it is unclear how many or what pieces of this pattern were made. A design drawing of Japanese desk pieces does exist in the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s collection. However, it is unclear if the pattern referenced here and the design drawing is one and the same.

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CURRICULUM VITAE

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