

From House of Tiffany, a Line of Pottery

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[Louis Comfort Tiffany](#) promoted his leafy and floral ceramics with the same hyperbole that he used for his glass lampshades and windows. His ads described his pottery vases and lamp bases as “entirely different from anything heretofore shown.” He had such faith in their market potential that when hundreds of dollars’ worth of pots went wrong in the kiln one afternoon, “Mr. Tiffany is not discouraged and has gone at it again,” the staff designer Clara Driscoll wrote to her family in Ohio.

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Richard P. Godbody

A Tiffany “cabbage vase” at the Lillian Nassau gallery.

Between 1903 and 1917, Tiffany’s factory in Corona, Queens, produced about 7,000 clay works with monochrome or spattered matte glazes. They did not catch on. The “highly artistic production,” a Tiffany manager later recalled, “never received much attention.”

The Tiffany dealer Arlie Sulka, who owns the [Lillian Nassau gallery](#) on East 57th Street in Manhattan, is now trying to bring the pottery out of relative obscurity. She has gathered about 60 pieces for an exhibition that opens on Friday and has published a new book by the design historian Martin Eidelberg, “Tiffany Favre Pottery and the Quest of Beauty.”

Tiffany’s staff invented the term Favre to refer to handwork. “In fact, most of the ceramics were cast serially and were not made individually by hand,” Mr. Eidelberg writes. The molded clay did require hand trimming along the filigree mouths and drooping petals, and the experimental glazes, concocted from ingredients like marble dust and bone ash, varied greatly with each firing.

Tiffany executives kept the glaze recipe book hidden, even from their boss, so they could never be dismissed. “They alone knew how to produce the effects that Tiffany cherished,” Mr. Eidelberg writes.

The pottery department offered about 300 shapes, and Ms. Sulka is displaying pieces featuring ferns, poppies, lotuses, sumac branches, rhododendron, tulips, grapes, frogs and fish. Prices range from \$750 for a beige shaft of berries to “the high five figures for the more organic forms,” Ms. Sulka said. In the exhibition is a vase shaped like cabbage leaves, which she bought for \$50,020 in January at Rago Arts and Auction Center in Lambertville, N.J.

Financing the exhibition and book, she said, has led to discoveries. Mr. Eidelberg did research in Denmark, the birthplace of the pottery department’s first manager, Edith Lautrup. (Scholars had long misspelled her name as Lantrup.) Her few surviving papers show that she moved to America partly to escape an unhappy love affair with a married artist, and shuttled between jobs in the Midwest designing pottery and fabrics until Tiffany discovered her.

At the clattering factory in Corona, Miss Lautrup and her underlings, most of them women, hung delicate watercolors of foliage and seedpods on their studio walls. A maid served them tea. Down the hall, Mr. Eidelberg writes, men would “prepare the clay, grind the glazes, stoke the kiln and perform the other requisite, strenuous tasks forbidden to the women.”