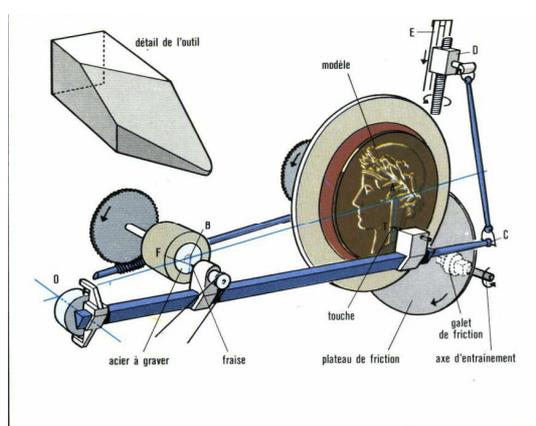


Presentation: 'The machine as tool' 29 January 2014

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1. Lalique, a unique career as both artist and industrialist

The French artist and designer of luxury, René Lalique (1860-1945), experimented throughout his career with industrial techniques and new materials to produce a complete new artistic concept. He used the reduction machine or 'pantograph' to produce small ivory statues incorporated in his jewellery. He invented new techniques for enamelling and embroidered silk and from 1909 on he used pressed air machines, originally used in the French wine bottle industry, for blowing luxury art-glass and experimented with molten glass cast in iron molds, a technique he learned earlier from the director of the St. Gobain glassworks, Mr. Henrivaux.¹



He also applied all kinds of new material in his jewellery as soon as it came available on the open market like platinum, Bakelite, aluminium and the light weighted horn. In the 1920's he used this kind of materials (Bakelite and aluminium) for packaging designs like face-powder boxes for the French and American perfume industry.

The strong idea to combine industrial techniques, drawing skills and creative insights could have been learned at Sydenham College at the Chrystal Palace in Sydenham when he was a pupil there in 1878-1880.² These so called 'schools of design' prepared young men to become a designer or engineer in the field of the decorative arts and were state of the art in regards of technical knowledge and practice training.³

In France Lalique tried to patent most of his inventions. From 1885 till the late 1930's seventeen patents were put under his name.⁴ Besides that he uses new national and international law when available to protect his intellectual property. The so-called 'enveloppe Soleau' made it from 1909 on possible to protect not only the technique but also the design against plagiarism. This was internationally acclaimed and defended by a group of art-loving lawyers organized in an international association for protecting industrial and intellectual ownership.⁵

¹ Booij 2013, 59

² Booij 2013, 53-57

³ Bell, 1963, 69-70

⁴ Cat. tent. Paris 1991, 247

⁵ Booij 2013, 71

2. Paradoxes in the cooperation between artists, designers and the industry

A. The friction between art and industry

Problematic for the Arts and Crafts leadsmen like Morris and Ruskin was the cooperation between artists and industrialists. However Morris was more open for experiments and acclaimed some designers who did work on an industrial scale like Dresser, most of the industrial products were criticized for their poor quality, lack of invention and old-fashioned designs based upon old styles.

B. Can the uniqueness of the work of art survive in a reproductive area?

Walter Benjamins idea that a true work of art must be unique, and therefore making its encounter almost religious, became disputed in French debate by writer Paul Valéry. He acclaimed that reproduction of art could still hold unique elements if the quality of the original was strong.⁶ Lalique must have been alarmed by this insight, understanding that an endless reproduction would vanish the unique experience. Reproduction can survive if edition is limited and the outer quality holds enough artistic value in the eye of the beholder.



C. Is it art or industrial design? (Artist-designer paradigm/debate)

Understanding the principles of the luxury market and the use of machines to make limited editions, is the maker still artistic, an artist? We have become to speak about a 'designer' concerning utensils. What about modern industrial luxury items? Lalique considers himself an expressive artist working for an even greater and demanding public; the modern art market.

⁶ Booij 2013, 171

Matrix:

Handmade
Household



Machinemade
Household



Handmade
Luxury



Machinemade
Luxury



⁷ From left to Right: Voysey chair, Loewy Coca Cola, Ruhlmann desk and Lalique vase

3. Machine-made luxury? The MAYA principle.⁸

Lalique used machines, as the result could be more rewarding than handwork and the amount of products could be raised. Thereby he closely followed the ‘laws of luxury.’

Laws of luxury:

- Consistent top quality, from the least to the most expensive products of the brand;
- A history of craftsmanship going back all the way to the founder;
- (A suggestion of) limited volumes that reinforce exclusivity;
- Sophisticated marketing that emphasizes this exclusive availability;
- Worldwide recognition;
- A strong association with the country of origin as a recognized source of excellence;
- A unique element in every product, an intentional deviation or imperfection;
- A good sense of changing fashions and adapting as required;
- The personality and values of the designer.⁹

4. Connection to Holland and Leerdam?

Andries Copier visited the Lalique factory in the late twenties.¹⁰ This had mainly to do with the poor moulding quality at the Leerdam factory plant. Moulded glass had been a struggle since the first pressed mould breakfast-set designed by architect De Bazel in 1917. Copier probably visited the Lalique plant in Combs la Ville to find out more about the four-part folding moulds. The first design, a Madonna was plunged in a two-part mold. The Bloch car mascottes were more easily moulded after 1929 because of the folding structure and better designs.



⁸ Loewy, ‘Most advanced yet acceptable’

⁹ Nueno and Quelch, *Business Horizons*, (November--December 1998), 61-68.

¹⁰ Booij 2013, 153

Conclusion:

The artist Lalique mastered the machine for luxury's sake. 'This was already noted by American critic Nilsen Laurvik at his first glass exhibition in 1912 in the United States: 'Herein lies the true strength of René Lalique, whose accomplished craftsmanship has enabled him to utilize the services of the machine without in the least affecting the artistic quality of his productions. In his hands it is no longer mechanically meaningless; it has become a tool of the artist where with he may communicate his ideas to a greater number than was ever possible to the craftsman of old.'¹¹ It defines his work as modern industrial luxury: machine produced, finished by hand, and marketed exclusively. The modern bourgeoisie who bought glass objects by Lalique received a complete and carefully crafted illusion of luxury, nostalgia and uniqueness: the dream of every modern marketeer.'¹²



5. Questions?

¹¹ Nilsen Laurvik 1912, 12

¹² Booij 2013, 171