



## A Glass Menagerie

Work by Amalric Walter (1870-1959)

March 11th - April 13th

We are delighted to be able to present this fascinating selection of glass, loaned for display by the Broadfield House Glass Museum in Dudley. It focuses on the work of a remarkable maker, Amalric Walter, and his mastery of an intriguing technique, 'Pâte de verre'.

Amalric Walter was born in Sèvres in 1870 and from the age of 15 followed in his father's and grandfather's footsteps by becoming apprenticed to the Sèvres Porcelain Factory as a ceramic painter. It was a particularly rich period for French decorative and fine art, when French sculpture, painting and architecture were enjoying a creative explosion, led primarily by individuals rather than institutions. The production of glass was part of this movement, through the likes of Emile Gallé.

Walter experimented with encaustic painting before settling on working in glass, focussing particularly on the Pâte de verre technique. This method can be simply described as the filling of a mould with granules of glass and then heating the mould and glass until the grains fuse into a single mass. Once cool the mould is broken away and the glass is brushed with dilute hydrofluoric acid to removed mould residues, washed and sometimes (in all, or part) polished.

Pâte de verre dates back to the second millennium B.C. The Mesopotamians were the first to leave records of the process which they used for inlays in jewellery and sculpture. The Egyptians used Pâte de verre in intricate mosaics and vessels between 1500 and 1000 B.C. Then in the 4th and 5th centuries, Persians used it to produce exquisite vessels. However after the Romans invented glassblowing, glass became easier and less expensive and Pâte de verre declined until its revival in the 19th century.

The revival was centered in France and was influenced by the archeological discoveries of the time. Henry Cros (1840-1907), symbolist sculptor and archeology enthusiast, fascinated by the discoveries of Egyptian amulets, jewellery and precious embellishments of funerary furniture established research in Pâte de verre. He was a pioneer who introduced the technique of selectively using different coloured glass grains in the mould. Amalric Walter was one of the second generation of glass makers who then began perfecting the method. Pâte de verre was fraught with technical challenges such as mould breakdown, imprecise temperature control, unwanted flows of colour and gaps in the fused glass. These problems were compounded by the fact that the mould is destroyed during firing and that the glass is hidden during firing by the mould. It was also very challenging to have the coloured glass grains exactly where they were wanted, particularly on complex three-dimensional sculptures. For some pieces it would have taken many hours to fill a mould with its complicated arrangement of layers.

By the time he was 30, Walter had become proficient in Pâte de verre, and came to the

attention of the Daum brothers in Nancy, famed for their Art Nouveau glass. In 1903 Walter joined the Daum factory where he was given his own workshop and a substantial fee in return for the secrets of his technique. His time at Daum was beneficial to both parties - Daum gained Pâte de verre expertise that is still in use today and Walter, drawing on the resources of Daum, brought his technical mastery to a peak.

Throughout the period of 1904 until the outbreak of the First World War, Walter tested and refined his technique, creating tiles, dishes, busts and a bestiary which is the focus of this exhibition.

After the end of the War, and having received the Legion d'Honneur for gallantry, Walter returned to Nancy. He separated amicably from Daum and set up his own workshop in Nancy, which he ran until the start of the Second World War. By the late 1930s the fashion for Pâte de verre had waned and by the late 1930s Walter stopped producing. On his death in 1959, Walter's studio and workshop were dispersed and very little has come to light since.

The items in this exhibition come from a private collection on loan to Broadfield House Glass Museum. The collection is the largest of Walter's work ever seen in the UK and had never been on public display until 2006, when it was shown as part of the International Festival of Glass. It was later exhibited at the National Glass Centre in Sunderland during 2008. To accompany the first exhibition a new book on Amalric Walter was published, written by Keith Cummings, a respected authority on Pâte de verre as both an artist and author. This was the first to focus on Walter's work and will be available from the Nature in Art shop.

