

# THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO ACQUIRES CLASSIC TIFFANY

### STAINED-GLASS LAMP FOR PERMANENT COLLECTION

#### *Hanging Head Dragonfly Lamp on Mosaic and Turtleback-Tile Base*

#### One of the Top American Art Acquisitions of 2006

The Art Institute of Chicago is pleased to announce the acquisition of a c. 1906 Tiffany Studios New York *Hanging Head Dragonfly Lamp on Mosaic and Turtleback-Tile Base*. This new addition to the Department of American Art is considered one of the top acquisitions of the year. "Tiffany Studios' leaded glass lamps are today widely appreciated for their beauty, and although these objects are readily found on the market, an example of this type and quality with a distinguished provenance is extremely rare. We are thrilled to add this exceptional piece to our collection," said Judith Barter, Field-McCormick Chair of American Art at the museum. The lamp is currently on view in the museum's Gallery 171.



The decorative glass lampshade of the *Hanging Head Dragonfly Lamp on Mosaic and Turtleback-Tile Base* is wrapped by a single row of downward-facing dragonflies that sport intricate, web-like wings and luminescent eyes made of bulbous blue-green glass. Dragonflies were a favorite form of Louis Comfort Tiffany and have become a

signature motif of Tiffany lamps. A deep violet that complements the green tones caps the lampshade. This violet-green combination is repeated in different form on the bronze base of the lamp.

“This lamp is one of Tiffany’s most sophisticated—the saturated hues and multiple textures of the glass are beautifully paired with the turtleback insets and mosaic decoration on the bronze base,” said Barter. “The Department of American Art’s collection contains several notable examples of favrile glass from Tiffany Studios, but this exceptional addition brings a new level of quality.” “Favrile,” which was coined by Tiffany in his original patent application after the 1893 Chicago’s World’s Fair, derives from the Old English word *febrile* (handmade) and is the term most often used to describe this type of glass.

Louis Comfort Tiffany (1848–1933) was born into a family of purveyors of luxury goods. In 1848, the year of Tiffany’s birth, his father consolidated his retail activities to focus on precious stones and silverware forming the internationally prestigious firm, Tiffany and Company. As an adult, Tiffany himself developed a highly successful glass studio, producing the finest and most expensive lighting devices ever made.

Tiffany first launched his glassware at the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago to great fanfare, winning 54 medals and making the Tiffany exhibit one of the most popular at the fair. (Coincidentally, the main building of the Art Institute of Chicago, where the newly acquired lamp will be housed, was originally constructed as headquarters for the fair’s auxiliaries.) After the Chicago fair, stained glass was frequently called “Tiffany glass.” Although Tiffany approved all patterns manufactured by his firm, he designed relatively few lamps himself. Clara Driscoll who was responsible for the Dragonfly shade, became a leading lamp designer at the

firm and by 1904 had become one of the highest paid women in the United States, earning an annual salary equivalent to \$100,000 today. While Tiffany Studios mass-produced lamps like the Dragonfly, glass selectors varied the color scheme of each shade, allowing Tiffany to emphasize the fact that each lamp was handcrafted. Tiffany preferred to hire women for this job because he believed they had better artistic sense.

Tiffany's lamps were so well received because they offered an alternative to two competing styles in American design near the turn of the century: the classicism of the American Renaissance and the modernism of figures such as Chicagoans Louis Sullivan and Frank Lloyd Wright. In response, Tiffany posited that the aim of his company was "not so much to imitate the work of the past, as the introduction of new and original ideas, at the same time making it equal in merit with the best that has been done." The Tiffany style synthesized the eclectic tastes of its founder—nature, Art Nouveau, and non-Western forms of Byzantine, Islamic, and Japanese art—and put them at the service of then-new electric lighting, resulting in innovative and luxurious, yet utilitarian, works of art.

The significance of the Chicago World's Fair to both the success of Tiffany lamps and the history of the Art Institute makes the acquisition of the c. 1906 *Hanging Head Dragonfly Lamp on Mosaic and Turtleback-Tile Base* a truly befitting addition to the museum's great collection of American Art.

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**The Art Institute of Chicago is a museum in Chicago's Grant Park.**

**NEW FALL/WINTER MUSEUM HOURS**

10:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday

10:30 a.m.–8:00 p.m. **Thursday free after 5:00 p.m.**

10:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m. Saturday, Sunday.

Closed Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day, and New Year's Day.

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**The Art Institute of Chicago is a museum in Chicago's Grant Park, located across from Millennium Park.**