

The Tiffany Mystery

or About the New Original

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If - as various books on the history of modern culture accept as proven - the creation of standardized objects/types is one of the main characteristics of the new spirit or style of this same culture, then we must recognize that the first signs of an aesthetics of the utilitarian object are to be found already at the turn of the century, in objects such as those created by the American designer Louis Comfort Tiffany (1848-1933). Of course, it is not possible, except from a historical perspective, to compare unique or small-series hand-made luxury objects with industrial mass-produced objects, but it is possible today, after an almost century-long history of modern industrialized culture and a number of written historical surveys of the era, to speak about all these phenomena from a certain distance in time.

In this sense, in order to form a certain chain of chronology of the ideas and achievements of industrialized culture, we can now view precious and unique Art Nouveau objects as heralds of the later industrial standardization. Of course, only as heralds, since, it should be stressed, the elitist luxury of Art Nouveau objects places them in the upper part of the scale of social status, while mass-produced objects are part of everyone's daily life.

This fairly long introduction is intended to provide one possible starting point for a discussion of the work of the creative couple, Željka and Boris Rogić, the artists who specialize in a technique named after its "inventor" - Tiffany. How should one, then, understand the fact that modern artists today produce art objects in a historically verified manner? Is this a postmodern mannerism? Or is it a new interpretation of an old method? These and similar questions arise regularly in the minds of viewers faced with this truly unusual opus - questions which not infrequently pose even a dilemma of "originality".

Personally, I believe that in this "case" it is possible, indeed necessary, to think in a different key. Though it may at first sight seem

inappropriate, the Rogićes' art should be viewed in the full context of the history of the ideas and achievements of modern-day design. Such a supracontextual auctorial effort, not strictly defined by its local space and time, can then be judged by more general criteria. Given the fact that the Tiffany technique and aesthetics has been only sporadically present in Croatian culture, mainly through reproductions or bad industrially produced cheap copies, it is difficult to expect, especially in view of the lack of reliable historical information, that a consistent respect for the original idea will be understood and appreciated, as it ought to be, as the only possible way to work.

Talking about the Tiffany technique and aesthetics, I have in mind the fact that Tiffany objects have become, technically as well as aesthetically, a paradigm for a certain style and world-view, that in today's post-industrial age (having been forgotten in the thirties and forties, and rediscovered in the sixties and seventies) they occupy a special place in the store of memories of modern culture, and that, as such, they are subject to further interpretation, including a reinterpretation in a technical and aesthetic sense. This, it seems, is the level at which the creative contribution of the Rogićes should be analysed. It is a well-known fact that it is possible to buy a very cheap Far-Eastern "Tiffany", in almost any luxury store in the West, which only superficially resembles the original, but is in fact technically, and from the standpoint of workmanship but an industrial copy, or, more precisely, a poor imitation of the original Tiffany technique.

From their beginnings, the Rogićes' creative ambition was to discover the secret of the original technique. To this end, after years of preparation, they enrolled in the renowned Tiffany school in Zurich. The fact that they are graduates of this school lends additional credibility to their work.

It should be noted that the meticulousness with which they follow the original technical solutions is the means that the Rogićes employ to continue, in an aesthetic sense, the work of the founder of the technique. Numerous examples of their creative use of the Tiffany technique in designing original lamps,

mirrors and other utilitarian objects bear witness to this fact.

Hence, if for a long time we were inclined to think about Tiff any only in terms of objects, now, especially under the influence of the Rogićes' work, the same name refers also to the technique of execution. It is a legitimate technique of manufacture of functional and decorative objects.

What is more, focusing on the technique, it is far easier to distinguish between a pretended and a genuine Tiffany, that is between objects truly hand-made by painstakingly connecting thousands of specially produced and prepared pieces of glass and those that are mass-produced using industrial techniques.

Connoisseurs know very well that the quality of light passing through glass worked out in the original Tiffany way, cannot be imitated by mass-produced objects - just one look at a pseudo-Tiffany suffices to prove that none of the rich Tiffany reflections can be achieved in sterile copies. The Rogićes remain faithful to the original idea. Their success can be appreciated not only in terms of the truly exceptional number of their completed works (it should be noted that the malting of a real Tiffany object requires long and hard work), or in terms of the fine details on the objects, but also, and

especially, in terms of that special quality of light that is unmistakably Tiffanyesque, under natural or artificial illumination.

As for their aesthetics (I believe enough has been said about the technique itself), similar criteria apply, which means that their work should be viewed, above all, in the light of the history of the ideas and achievements of modern culture. If Tiffany objects have become a general feature of our culture, and, as such, a possible motif in the cultural production (which is, anyhow, busy re-examining itself), then the examination of the aesthetic possibilities within a seemingly strictly defined aesthetics is absolutely legitimate. The Rogićes' strategy could, if one so wished, be labelled postmodernist, though, personally, I am inclined to believe that postmodernism represents a continuation of modern ideas but in a different aesthetic key.

If, then, in an imaginary gallery of anthological objects of the modern era, Tiffany's works occupy a special place, the Rogićes' works occupy an equally special place within the Croatian postmodern cultural production (as locally defined as it is). Their creative contribution has helped to establish the highest standards of design in other time, both in the technical and in the aesthetic sense.

If one were to discuss the relation between the original idea and its modern interpretation, one could most easily describe what the Rogićes are doing as the creation of new originals, or as a desire to move forward, within the rules of a strict discipline, towards standards that will meet the expectations of the modern-day taste.

