Dancing Beauties

FAMED JEWELRY designer René Lalique (1860–1945) was attracted to the arts his entire life.

At the age of 12, Lalique, who grew up in Paris, entered the College of Turgot, where he started drawing, sketching, and taking night classes at the École des Arts Décoratifs de Paris. Later, at 16, Lalique apprenticed to the leading Parisian Art Nouveau jeweler Louis Aucoc, with whom he truly honed his craft and began focusing on jewelry.

In 1885, Lalique opened his own business, designing and making jewelry and other glass pieces. Because his creations were in great demand, Lalique and his team worked around the clock; however, they produced only 15 to 20 items per month.

Lalique began experimenting with jewelry inspired by his original blending of Classicism and Japonisme as early as 1888—uniting sculpture, goldsmithing, enamel, and gem-setting in jewels intended to represent "total artwork," a reigning concept motivating artists of the period.

Created around 1898-99, this superb pendant necklace featuring "deux figurines dansant" is composed of *champlevé* enamel and 18K gold. The pendant is designed as a rectangular chased gold plaque depicting two figures in relief, against a background of pale green enamel, with hands interlaced as they dance in a circle, one partly veiled in *en plein* enamel, in a wooded glade, the reverse counter-enameled, within a frame of green thistle of Lorraine blossoms, seed heads, thorny leaves, and sinuous stems in shades of green enamel, highlighted by two step-cut glass accents, suspended from a later trace link chain.

Celebrated in Roger Marx's 1899 review hailing Lalique as a "master French decorative artist," the dancer relief of this jewel personifies the spirit of nature, not only in the abstract, but in the artist's most beloved place, the woodlands and meadows of Eastern France, where he often spent the summer in his youth.

The exquisite artifact—part of "René Lalique: Collector's Reserve," the most comprehensive collection of the maker's artistic jewels found outside of a museum in more than three decades—is on view at the Macklowe Gallery in New York City.



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