



FIG. 1. TIFFANY STUDIOS, THREE MAGNOLIA PANELS FROM THE LIBRARY OF THE CHARLES TIFFANY HOUSE, CIRCA 1885, LATER MOVED TO LAURELTON HALL, COLLECTION OF THE CHARLES HOSMER MORSE MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART, WINTER PARK, FL © The Charles Hosmer Morse Foundation, Inc.

## Tiffany's Magnolias: Dimensions in Color

Julie L. Sloan

The magnolia was one of Tiffany Studios' favorite flowers. Depicted in some of the firm's most celebrated windows and lampshades, the heavy, languorous blossom lent itself well to decorative treatment in glass (as well as in other materials). The studio often created it from drapery glass—a thick glass pushed into ridges and folds while still hot—capturing the flower's velvety texture and the voluptuous undulations of its petals in three-dimensional verisimilitude. One might expect the white flowers deepened with mauve and brightened with yellow centers to dictate a quiet palette, and often they did, as

in the windows made for Tiffany's 72nd Street house in New York (fig. 1) or for the mausoleum window "Magnolias and Irises" now in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. In the present example, the studio unleashed the full drama of its unique multi-colored glass to create an astonishingly vibrant composition.

Using no drapery glass or plating (layers of glass), all of the modeling relies on the accidental swirls and ribbons of color within a single sheet of glass, and the gifted vision of the artisans who could select this square inch or that one from a



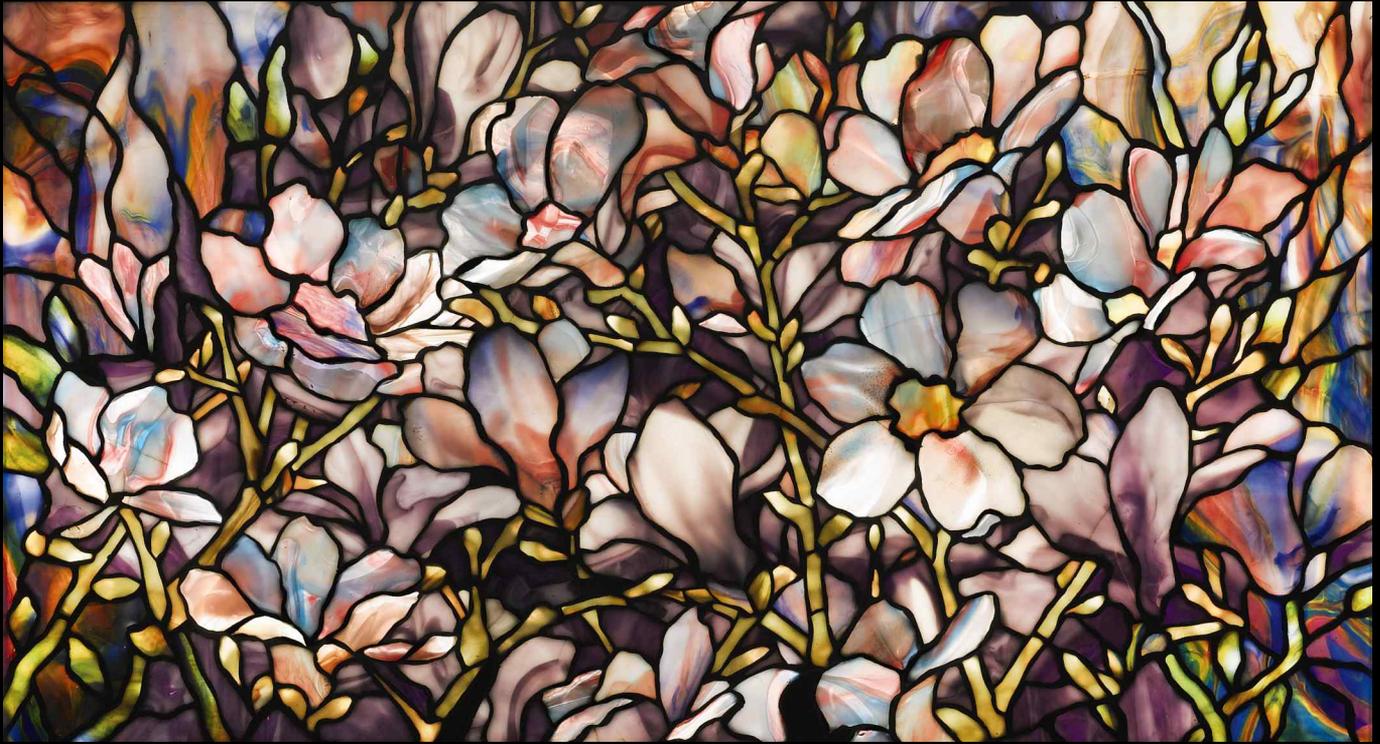
FIG. 2. TIFFANY STUDIOS, MAGNOLIA LAMP SHADE,  
DESIGNED CIRCA 1906-1910, PRIVATE COLLECTION  
Photograph Courtesy of The Vendome Press

sheet. It boggles the mind to imagine how many sheets must have been required to find such brilliant passages where varying densities of nacreous white opalescent glass fall amid fingers of pale blue and flaming pink. This small jewel of a window required a bold and confident eye at the glass bins to know which sheets of unlikely color combinations would work together.

What sets this window above its peers are the end panels, and their transition to the sides of the central panel. Bearing only a single blossom each, they open to a gloriously colored sky. Here is some of the most opulent Tiffany glass ever found in a window. Ringing, vibrant tones of azure, turquoise, emerald, apricot, lemon, and cream combine in one piece that is boldly placed next to another of deep regal purple streaked with lavender and mauve. Strongly colored glass like this can easily overpower a design, but here each piece holds its own in a

masterfully controlled riot of flaming color. Of equal quality is the amazing cutting of the glass. Passage after passage is composed of pieces pulled from the same sheet without loss amid a complex of organically shaped lines. This represents the utmost skill among craftsmen, a ranking feature of Tiffany Studio's finest work.

The center panel teems with flowers and branches. The view is into the center of the magnolia tree—we see no trunk, no ground, no treetop. It is as if we are sitting within its branches looking outward. While this is an unusual perspective for a window, it is not so unusual for a lampshade, in which the designers often created the impression of being within the canopy of the tree or shrub. Careful examination of this window's pattern reveals it to be identical to a single repeat of the studio's twenty-eight inch Magnolia shade pattern (fig. 2), with minor changes to render it into a flat panel. Given the



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density of the flowers and branches within the composition, it seems likely that the design was made first to be a lampshade, then altered into a window. This is a highly unusual crossover between the lampshade and window departments within Tiffany Studios. Other instances are not known, but also have not been researched. Further study may reveal a deeper relationship between the departments.

The design of the Magnolia shade can be attributed to Clara Driscoll of the Women's Glass Cutting Department at Tiffany Studios between 1906 and 1910. It is not possible to know when within that time span the window was created, nor under what circumstances. But given the quality of glass used in the window and the degree of skill involved in its manufacture, it was a valuable commission. It appears to have been an interior window for a residence, given the absence of weathering.

REFERENCED WORKS:

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