
Koopman Rare Art

We are looking forward to a busy October. We will be returning to **Frieze Masters** in Regent's Park from 15 to 19 October, and later in the month we are pleased to be taking part in the **LAPADA Fair** in Berkeley Square from 28 October to 2 November.

At LAPADA, we will be exhibiting as Koopman Rare Art (Jewels) for the first time, showing a carefully selected group of jewellery and gold boxes.

If you would like a ticket for LAPADA, please contact us at info@koopman.art.

Director's Choice -Timo Koopman
A Timeless Art Deco Masterpiece
By Verger Frères for Lacloche Frères



Signed Lacloche Paris, circa 1930

This week's Director's Choice focuses on an object of vertu so perfect and jewel-like, the epitome of all that was so wonderful about the Art Deco period.

An elegant combination of geometric angular shapes, combining carved jade with gold and perfectly selected striated mother-of-pearl to form an octogram on the face of the clock resting on

the stem inlaid with lapis lazuli, malachite, onyx and cabochon sapphires. The stepped onyx base has further gold feet.

The gold mount is signed Lacloche Frères, and the gold touch marks are those of Verger Frères.

Verger Frères

Widely known as the jeweller's jeweller, Verger created some of the most exceptional jewels, clocks and watches of the Art Deco era supplying many of the most famous jewellery houses of the period.

Ferdinand Verger (1851- 1928) founded his eponymous jewellery business in Paris in 1872. He had been apprenticed aged just 11 to the Parisian watchmaker Lépine and after serving in the Franco-Prussian War he travelled to London, returning in 1871. In the early days Verger specialised in women's watches and within a few years had built a reputation that enabled him to become an agent for Vacheron Constantin in 1875. This was to prove a mutually beneficial and enduring relationship which lasted over 60 years with Verger making beautiful cases and jewels set with movements supplied by Vacheron Constantin.



Movement by Vacheron & Constantin, retailed by Lacloche Frères

Verger registered his maker's mark in 1896 at which time he also moved premises to the Place des Victoires. Five years later he acquired the business of his late master Lépine and the firm continued to go from strength to strength. Verger's two sons Georges and Henri joined their father in the business and in 1911 they relocated again to 51, rue Sainte Anne. It was at this point that they changed the maker's mark from F.V. (Ferdinand Verger) to V.F. (Verger Frères). Under the guidance of Georges and Henri the firm reached new heights and not only employed a vast array of craftsmen directly but developed partnerships with some of the most exceptional artisans of the early 20th century such as Lalique and Makovsky. Georges designed the majority of pieces himself however he was also known to have collaborated with other artists and designers of the period.

Alongside their creativity the firm was also a leading innovator in technique, and they filed various patents over the years. They were one of only two companies to create the legendary 'Mystery Clocks' (Cartier being the other) and their desk and mantel clocks were unquestionably some of the most exceptional pieces they created during the early 20th century. Verger formally signed over the business to his sons in 1921 by which time they were employing over two hundred specialist craftsmen including goldsmiths, enamellers, engravers, lapidaries, diamond polishers, and watchmakers. By employing these artists directly, rather than contracting out the work, Verger Frères were able to keep tight control on the quality of their work. Consequently, they became renowned for the outstanding quality and consistency of their pieces – their attention to detail, exquisite workmanship, use of the finest gems and originality of design ensured their huge success.

The firm was known to many as the 'jeweller's jeweller' because they supplied so many of the top jewellery firms. Somewhat unusually for the time, Verger didn't create pieces to the designs provided by their clients but instead sold their own original designs to the retailers. During the 1920s and 30s Verger created jewellery and timepieces for fine jewellery houses in Paris, America and across Europe including Cartier, Lacroix Frères, Boucheron, Van Cleef & Arpels, Chaumet, Tiffany, Trabert & Hoeffler, Black, Starr & Frost and Bulgari.

The firm remained in the Verger family during the 40s and 50s when they created Retro style jewels in gem-set 18ct yellow gold with bold scrolling profiles which were in keeping with the prevailing fashions. Eventually the business was bought by Georges Lenfant and more recently it was acquired by Atelier Boudier who have dedicatedly reconstructed the company's heritage via the extensive archives of drawings and models.

Many Verger pieces go unrecognised today due to the emphasis placed on the name of the

retailer such as Cartier or Mauboussin. However, the quality of workmanship and beauty of design can sometimes alert a keen admirer to the origin of an Art Deco masterpiece and perhaps the presence of a discreet VF.



Chinese style clock, with Vacheron Constantin Movement, retailed by Lacroche Frères

One of the most spectacular “revivals” of the Art Deco period was the mystery clock, originally invented in the mid-19th century by the magician, Robert Houdin. It is called such because the hands appear to float on the dial, with no apparent connection to the mechanism. Supposedly, only two knew the secret of the mystery in the beginning of the 20th century –the houses of Verger and Cartier. Cartier holds the record for the number of these magnificent clocks sold, and Verger was the sole manufacturer and supplier for Van Cleef & Arpels and several others. Unlike the invention of Houdin, these clocks of Cartier and Verger Frères were incredible works of art – various stones housing the mechanisms, often inlaid or accented with spectacular gems, in gold or platinum, the dials usually of rock crystal, citrine, of some other transparent gemstone. These unique works of art vary considerably – from Cartier’s model “A” with its simple, pure linear geometry, to the very elaborate “Chinoiserie” and Indian styles, but all evoking imagery of the exotic.

More than the mystery clock, however, Verger Frères is probably more widely recognized for their magnificent table, or mantle clocks. Again, the use of exotic themes, exotic gemstones, and

unbridled imagination result in magnificent works of art.

Interestingly Verger Frères went from the design to the production, to the final product. It was not the great retailers that went to Verger Frères with their ideas to be put into production, but Verger Frères that sold their designs to the great houses of the time, giving them each exclusivity for their choices. Verger Frères made for most all of the great houses around the world. They made for Vacheron & Constantin, Cartier, Lacloche Frères, Marzo, Bousquet, Boucheron, Hermès, Van Cleef & Arpels, Ostertag, Jaeger, Chaumet, Janesich, Fouquet, and others in Paris. They made for American firms such as Charlton & Co., Trabert + Hoeffler, Udall + Ballou, J.E. Caldwell, Black, Starr, & Frost, Spalding & Co., and Tiffany. Other important clients included Bulgari of Rome, Hauser-Zivy y Cia in Mexico, Gübelin of Switzerland, as well as important firms in England, Denmark, and many other important European jewellers.

Lacloche Frères

The patriarch, Hendricks Lacloche, and his wife raised a family of six children, four boys and two girls all of whom were destined to enter the jewellery trade in one way or another. Circa 1892, two of the brothers, Jules and Léopold, headed for Paris and opened Lacloche Frères while Jacques and Fernand set sail for the New World seeking fame and fortune. Upon their return to Europe, Jacques and Fernand opened a new entity, Lacloche et Cie, in Madrid selling jewellery created in Paris and quickly developed a loyal following among the Spanish aristocracy. Soon, the Lacloche brothers are bedecking the crowned heads of Europe in some of the finest jewels of the day. Among their clientele are Queen Alexandra, His Majesty George I, King of Greece, Napoleon III and empress Eugénie, and Alfonso XII of Spain, his mother and his wife to name a few.



PLacloche Freres Rue de la Paix, c.1923.

Cleverly “following the money” Lacloche et Cie opened shops in the French seaside playground of the rich and famous – Biarritz and another in the upscale resort area known as San Sebastian, Spain. Bertha Lacloche marries Jacob Jacques Walewyk and Walewyk-Lacloche shops specializing in bridal baskets and hosiery appear alongside Lacloche & Cie in these seaside enclaves. Meanwhile, Léopold and Jules collaborate with Louis Gompers (Lacloche-Gompers) in a shop on the rue de l’Opéra in Paris later moving it to the prestigious Place Vendôme. Following suit with their brothers, they also establish shops in the thermal spa town of Aix-les-Bains, the Principality of Monaco, the French Riviera town of Nice, the seaside town of Trouville, and Ostend Belgium, again by the sea. They have seemingly covered all of the desirable destinations for the well-heeled at the fin de siècle.

Nephew Jacques Lacloche, son of the original Jacques opens an eponymous business in 1933 and mysteriously Lacloche Frères reappears in London with jewellery supplied by Jacques. Just coming of age as the business was failing was a lucky break for the family as he was able to re-establish the company’s reputation. He ingratiated himself in upper-crust social circles in Cannes becoming the Motor Yacht Club official jewellery. He, along with Ravinet d’Enfert, created the medals, cups and trinkets used by the club as awards for the Quinzaine motonautique competitions. Befriending the rich, famous, and aristocratic, Jacques was welcome at all their haunts and was even invited to the wedding of Grace Kelly to the Prince of Monaco, creating several jewellery items for the occasion.

Jacques’s business thrived and his designs displayed at the 1937 Exposition Internationale des arts et techniques are still lauded.



*An exceptional Art Deco Brooch by Lacloche Freres in original case currently for sale at Koopman
Rare Art.*

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