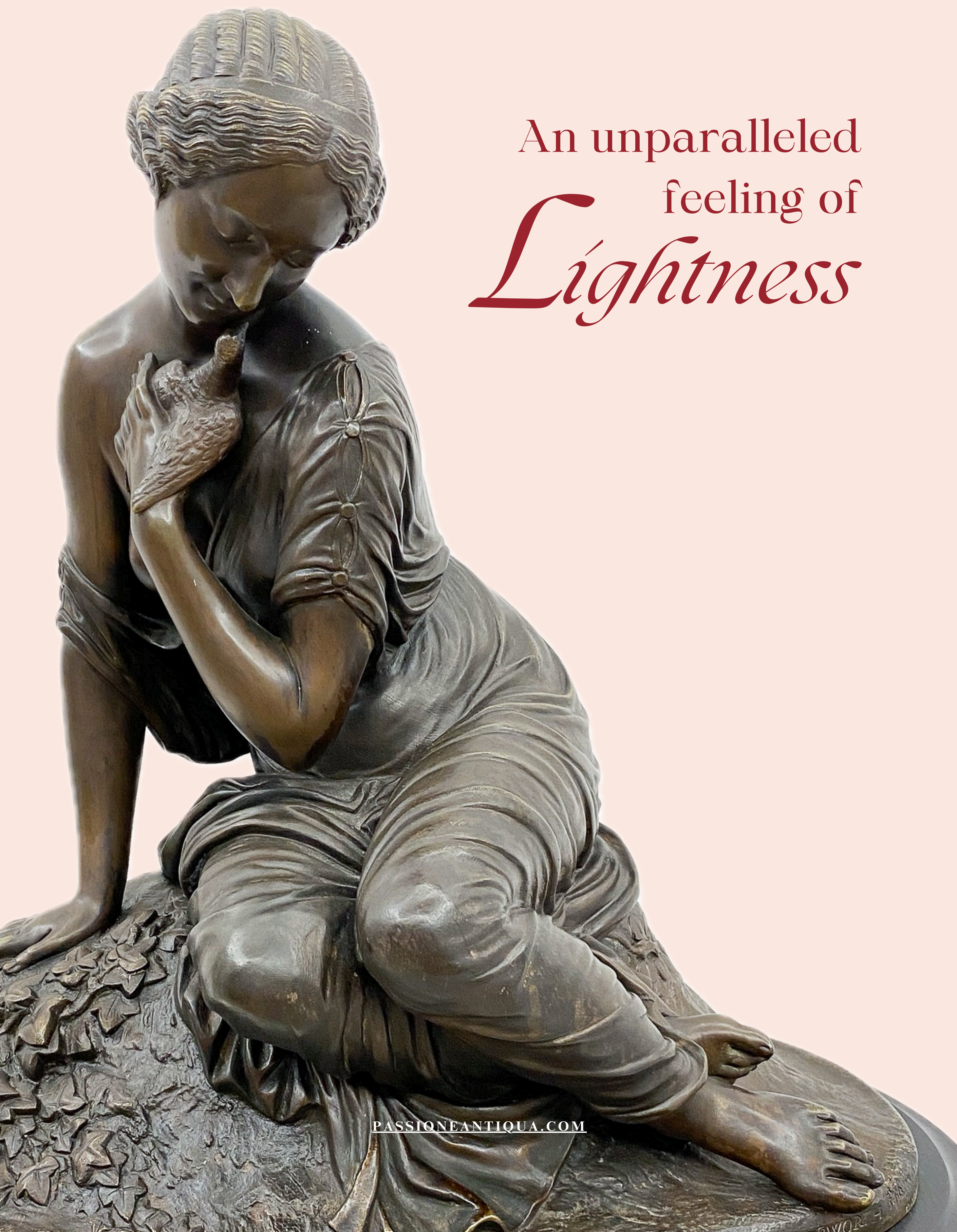




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A Complete Art

Art Nouveau, also known as Liberty in Italy and the United Kingdom, was one of the most influential art movements of the past. Developed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, it was intended to be a reaction to the rigid historicist styles that had characterized the first half of the 19th century, as well as a rejection of the growing industrialism and mass standardization.

Goldscheider lamp in porcelain
Austria, 1910s

Art Nouveau aimed to return to craftsmanship and decorative art, intended as a complete discipline, in which every element of the environment was conceived as a work of art. These objects, however, not only had to be aesthetically pleasing, but also it was important that they were practical and functional to best suit the new bourgeois lifestyle: wealthy, socially open and frenetic.



Art Nouveau developed during a period of great social and economic change, influenced by new scientific discoveries, Darwin's theories of evolution, and symbolism in literature and art. This style was characterized by an enormous international expansion that found expression in various disciplines, from architecture and painting to advertising prints and jewelry. The various names by which this movement is known are the evidence of its wide geographical reach.



Silver cutlery set
Italy, Beginning of 20th Century

The name “Art Nouveau,” used mainly in France, comes from “Maison de l'Art Nouveau,” a Parisian gallery that was, at the time, the center of Europe's finest modernism. “Liberty,” the popular term in Italy and the United Kingdom, was the name of the well-known English department store that helped spread the new artistic models to the masses. Finally, in German-speaking countries, it was named “Jugendstil” after the title of an avant-garde magazine.

Parchment paper fan
France, Beginning of 20th Century



One of the most characteristic aspects of Art Nouveau was the use of sinuous, flowing lines with forms often inspired by elements of the natural world such as flowers, leaves, insects and animals. Proposing an idealized vision of nature as a source of beauty and spirituality, it sought to reconnect humans with their natural surroundings. Art Nouveau design moved away from the classical symmetry and rigid straight lines, typical of industrial mass production, and embraced fluidity and lightness in order to express elegance, harmony and sensuality.



Clock with sculpture by Cumberworth
France, 19th Century

Through the influence of symbolism, the female figure was often used as the carrier of erotic and mythological meanings, while the use of animals and plants evoked the power of nature and its mystery.



Exuberant and unique jewelry

Art Nouveau revolutionized the aesthetics of the decorative arts by proposing a vision of art as an essential part of life. In a world where everything contributed to a harmonious and beautiful ensemble, jewelry certainly did not go unnoticed. Art Nouveau was undoubtedly one of the most fascinating and innovative periods in the history of jewelry, in which a radical change was proposed in the way jewelry was perceived, designed and made.



Up: Gold and platinum earrings with diamonds
Italy, Beginning of 20th Century

Left: Brooch with diamonds and natural pearl
Italy, 19th Century



While the previous decades were dominated by a more rigorous and ornamental style, related to the norms of the Victorian period, Art Nouveau introduced a completely new approach, in which jewelry became an art in its own right, charged with symbolic meanings and with an aesthetic deeply connected to nature and the feminine world.



By the 1880s, people were tired of mass-produced jewelry, which had led to a severe flattening of shapes, making each piece the same, and a lowering of quality with the use of low-title gold. During this period, jewelry consumers once again began to look for handmade objects made with ancient and refined techniques and to chase the beautiful signed piece.



Right: Gold and silver earrings with diamonds
Italy, 19th Century

Down: Platinum brooch with diamonds
Italy, 1910s



At the same time, activists fighting for women's rights rejected the many Victorian jewelry pieces used altogether at once, and preferred a more serious and gritty woman with only a few pieces of jewelry that could stand out for refinement and originality.





Up: Gold latch necklace
Italy, Beginning of 20th Century
Left: Brooch - pendant with diamonds and pearls
Italy, Beginning of 20th Century

Master goldsmiths and great designers, including René Lalique, Georges Fouquet and Louis Cartier, were thus incentivized to give a vigorous change to the direction of goldsmithing, which had become dull and tired. The new jewelry, instead of perfection and uniformity, proudly emphasized their uniqueness and contributed to the goal of bringing art into everyday life. Asymmetrical jewelry was preferred to convey the dynamism of social life, and inspiration was drawn from the sensual stylized female figure, the wings of flying creatures, typically butterflies and dragonflies, along with flowers and mythological figures.

Among the most widely used gems were diamonds. The rich African mines had just been discovered, allowing unprecedented availability and renewed interest in the study of new cuts and shapes to enhance the gem's intrinsic characteristics. Natural pearls, on the other hand, with their subtle luminist variations and their never-perfect shape, greatly fascinated jewelers, who used them extensively during these decades.



Among the first pieces to reflect the Art Nouveau aesthetic were brooches, one of the most popular forms of jewelry at the time. Often featuring lace- and embroidery-like workmanship and inspired by floral or natural motifs, they were designed not only to be worn as ornamentation, but also as a statement of style and personality.



Up: Platinum brooch with diamonds
Italy, Beginning of 20th Century

Left: Gold and platinum necklace with diamonds
Italy, 1910s



Necklaces and pendants were distinguished by their versatility and possibility of being worn in many different ways. They could be long and thin, or short and massive. Certainly one of the motifs most commonly found was the bow or tassel.



One of the most important innovations occurred in the field of bracelets, which were often decorated with natural motifs that, when wrapped around the wrist in the form of snakes or branches of leaves and flowers, looked extremely realistic. Interestingly, this period saw the creation of the first open bracelets, i.e., rigid bracelets with an internal hinge that allowed them to be opened, making them easier to wear.



Up: Gold bracelet with diamonds
Italy, Beginning of 20th Century
Down: White gold ring with diamonds
Italy, 1920s

The rings were often very elaborate, with multiple stones composing various designs. There was an attempt to enhance the natural characteristics of the stones by using less conventional and often asymmetrical cuts, without being afraid to show the imperfections of the gems. This approach reflected the philosophy of Art Nouveau, which celebrated the beauty of nature in all its forms, even the less common ones.



Art Nouveau jewelry was often exuberant and unique, with designs that challenged the conventions of the time. The late 19th and early 20th centuries were a time of great prosperity for the goldsmith's art, of opulence in materials and of great imagination in patterns.



Gold ring with diamonds
Italy, 1910s

The key feature was the unparalleled feeling of lightness, which was not only physical but also symbolic because it expressed the achievement of freedom from the rigid conventions of the past and the greater possibility of individual expression. Each piece became a miniature work of art that reflected the complexity and beauty of the natural world. These pieces of jewelry are not just ornaments, but testimonies to an era of change, a renewed relationship with nature and a celebration of human creativity.



Up: Gold brooch with diamonds and sapphires
Italy, 1920s

Left: Gold and silver brooch with diamonds
Italy, Beginning of 20th Century





PASSIONE
—ANTIQUEA—

Contacts

info@passioneantiqua.com

Viale delle Terme, 151 - 35031 Abano Terme (PD)

Tel e Fax +39 049.8602288

WhatsApp +39 3388299602

@passione_antiqua

www.passioneantiqua.com

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