

‘DRAGONFLY’ SILVER & IVORY TEA SET AND TRAY

By Carlo Bugatti
Designed and made in 1911 in Paris

A 4-piece silver tea set and tray, the teapot and coffeepot each with ivory handles. The motif on all pieces, including the tray, is of stylised dragonflies.

Length of tray : 66.5 cms

Height of coffeepot : 16 cms

Signatures : Engraved script ‘Bugatti’ and
A.A. HEBRARD 8 Rue Royale Paris
French poinçons on each piece

Reference

- 1) ‘Carlo-Rembrandt-Ettore-Jean Bugatti’, by Phillippe Dejean, published by Rizzoli New York
- 2) The American ‘The Magazine Antiques’ December 1989 Edition, has an article by Alistair Duncan entitled ‘The Silver of Carlo Bugatti’.



CARLO BUGATTI, Designer

Prolific as he was a furniture designer and maker, Carlo Bugatti's known works in silver number only a handful of objects. The celebrated 'watering can', with its attenuated zoophyte spout, now in London's Victoria and Albert Museum collection, the silver ice-bucket resting on a ring of frog supports, several trays, single cups, pitchers and spoons – conclude the known examples of Bugatti's work as a silversmith.

His tea and coffee services excite keen interest among collectors, there being only three designs. The 'Tusk' Service was cast in duplicate. The other two services are considered unique. The whereabouts of each of the three designs are now known:

- 1) The 'Tusk' Service was purchased by the late Joe Martins of Martins-Forrest, London, at a Sotheby's Belgravia auction in 1976, and sold to the Cleveland Museum, Ohio. (The other example of this service belongs to a prominent French collector).
- 2) The 'Elephant Trunk' Service, (a unique example) came onto the market and was purchased at the estate sale of Helga de Costa Blake in Cape Town in 1988 by a London dealer who sold it to an American collector.
- 3) The 'Dragonfly' Service (also unique) – and without dispute the finest, was the last one to appear on the market - it epitomizes Carlo Bugatti's flights into imaginary menageries. In its design, Bugatti has given full expression to his delight in grafting zoomorphic features onto winged bodies, resulting in outrageous creatures, sometimes nightmarish in their dismembered parts staring from prominent eyes, sometimes charming in their decorative detail and in the populous world of diminutive stylized insects, but always captivating in their manifestation of an unsurpassed imagination. This service was traced to the grandson of Anna Blake (who commissioned the 3 services from Carlo Bugatti) and purchased by Burr & Muir Antiques.

Carlo Bugatti was a designer extraordinaire! He produced what is today considered as some of the 20th century true eccentric masterpieces in furniture but especially in his limited silver designs, which rank in brilliance with the master silversmith Paul de Lamerie.

The fascination of nature and its forms, shared by the Japanese, and characterizing the end of the 19th century, was given expression by, among others, Galle, Gaudi, Lalique and Guimard, but only Bugatti envisioned entire tableaux, as in his "Snail" room at the International Exposition of Decorative Arts in Turin, 1902.

Bugatti's predilection for Oriental and Islamic decorative repertory reflects the influence of his time, with its fascination of the North African calligraphic line, and things Japanese. Visited by Bugatti only through recollections of things read, pictures seen and international exhibitions attended, the countries of Islam, the Orient and Africa provided motifs and references from which Bugatti assembled, superimposed and adapted his visual repertoire.

Bugatti rightly, if somewhat brusquely, corrected the Queen of Italy during her visit to the 1902 International Exposition in Turin when she classified Bugatti's furniture as being in the "Moorish style" by replying, "You are mistaken, your Majesty, this style is my own" – a pronouncement which cannot be gainsaid – and which found its finest expression in the tea and coffee ensemble commissioned by Mrs Blake.

THE 'DRAGONFLY' SERVICE

Important Silver and Carved Ivory Tea and Coffee Service and Tray

by Carlo Bugatti

Commissioned by Mrs. Anna Blake, circa 1911

The Tea and Coffee Service comprising tea and coffee pots cast with circular frieze of recessed arched and notched arches below abstract floral and foliated continuous devices, the loop handles of ivory carved with complementary motifs, terminating in silver armoured beaked bestial masks consuming their own tails of ivory which form the handles, the hinged lids cast as winged fantastic creatures, whose wings extend to clad the pouring spouts; the creamer of conforming decoration with insect looped handle; the gilt-interior sugar with cover cast as an insect at rest, his wings draped over the lid and his elongated beak splaying to metamorphose into wings where it joins the lid. The whole on elongated silver tray edged with articulated scaled reptilian appendages terminating at either end in handles cast as the winged mutant dragonfly.

Each engraved	:	Bugatti
Each stamped	:	A.A. HEBRARD 8 Rue Royale Paris French <u>poinçons</u>
Coffeepot – width	:	16 cms.
- height	:	11 cms.
Teapot - width	:	17 cms
- height	:	9.5 cms.
Tray - width	:	16.5 cms
- length	:	66.5 cms
Condition – immaculate		

References :

- 1) 'Carlo-Rembrandt-Ettore-Jean Bugatti', by Philippe Dejean, published by Rizzoli New York

Carlo Bugatti was the father of Rembrandt and Ettore. Carlo is famous for his Moorish inspired Art Nouveau furniture, made with inlaid woods, vellum and tassels. He designed and produced very little silver, all of which was cast at the Hebrard foundry in France. Today these items are extremely rare and very sought after by those few who can appreciate his bizarre designs.

Rembrandt became a famous sculpture, and Ettore a renowned racing car designer. Ettore's son, Jean, followed in his father's footsteps.

This book shows original photographs of Carlo Bugatti silver designs, including contemporary pictures of all three tea services.

- 2) The American 'The Magazine Antiques' December 1989 Edition, has an article by Alistair Duncan entitled 'The Silver of Carlo Bugatti'. Alistair Duncan is a consultant to Christie's in New York, and a writer of many books on the subject of 20th Century Decorative Arts. Geoff Burr collaborated with Alistair Duncan in the production of this article. The article tells the full history Anna Blake, wife of a South African mining magnate, who commissioned a large portion of Bugatti's limited silver output.

- 3) 'The Paris Salons' Volume V, Alistair Duncan, published by Antique Collectors' Club, 1999, pictured in colour on page 15.

- 4) The 'DRAGONFLY' Service has been on exhibition at :

- i) Cleveland Museum in the USA : early 1990's
- ii) Musée d'Orsay in Paris : on exhibition from 10 April to 15 July 2001, where the 'DRAGONFLY' Service was displayed at the entrance to the Carlo Bugatti exhibition.

VALUE INDICATION

Price substantiation for Bugatti's works is difficult due to the extreme rarity of examples.

- 1) In 1976 the Victoria and Albert Museum in London paid £14000 pounds sterling (plus commission) for a single object, a small 'watering can', from a Sotheby's Belgravia auction. The 'watering can' remains in the V & A's permanent collection. It is interesting to note that this 'watering can' also came from the original South African collection of the Blake family.
- 2) An icebucket was offered by Christie's London in April 1990 where it achieved a total sales price of £94775 pounds sterling, against an estimate of £35000-£45000. The design is comparatively restrained within Bugatti's designs, being uncharacteristically symmetrical, and not displaying the exuberant asymmetry of Bugatti's best work. The ice bucket also lacks the incorporation of ivory, which is an important feature of Carlo Bugatti's top work. The ice bucket was also originally part of the Anna Blake collection.
- 3) The renowned collection in the Cleveland Museum of Art includes the most complete ensemble by Bugatti – an example of the 'Tusk' Service supported on an inlaid table designed by Bugatti for Anna Blake, the undertier of which supports Mrs Blake's first Bugatti piece, the silver and carved ivory oyster dish. That the Cleveland Museum saw fit to acquire the tea table and silver and ivory oyster dish for £470000 pounds sterling (in 1991 from Burr & Muir Antiques) attests to the high regard held by established institutions for Bugatti's work within the context of 20th Century design – and recognition that the values for his work factor extreme rarity and superlative quality.
- 4) Again, originally from the Anna Blake collection, a silver claret jug, modelled with dragonfly and grotesque motifs, was sold at Christie's in New York, on the 19th December 2006, for \$688000 (£460000). Like the icebucket mentioned in 2) above, this piece had no ivory components.
- 5) On a Christie's sale in Paris in November 2012, the following Bugatti silver items were sold :
 - (i) Lot 5 : 'Dragonfly' coupe/comport, 13 cm diameter and 17 cm high, silver, sold Euro 265000.
 - (ii) Lot 8 : 'Dragonfly' cendrier/ashtray, 15 cm diameter and 10 cm high, silver, sold Euro 79000.

One of the few known private collectors of Bugatti's works of art is the famous French actor, Alain Delon.

In view of its extreme rarity, the silver of Carlo Bugatti has never formed a 'market'. Those few pieces which over the years have been selected by their institutional buyers without consideration for their investment or speculative prospects, but out of carefully researched knowledge, a sophisticated approach, and an intelligent appreciation of great 20th century works of art.

The 'DRAGONFLY' tea set and tray is currently stored in London.

