



As we approach the 75th anniversary of René Lalique's death, a leading expert has revealed the Holy Grail of collecting: a complete and perfect set of all 30 pre-war Lalique glass mascots

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*ABOVE* This is *Hibou* (owl), one of the rarest of the 30 mascots. It was introduced in 1931, just as the popularity of Lalique mascots was in decline – hence its rarity. Note the stepped and grooved base, which means it was made for automotive use – a metal ring would have clamped around that groove. Mascots intended for use on cars were lucky to escape damage, but those for bookends and paperweights are fortunately just as desirable. The displayed signature varies: most pre-war mascots show ‘R.-Lalique’ but some are ‘Lalique France’.

*LEFT* The Lalique mascots shown in this group are from the mid-late 1920s. From the left, we have: *Coq Nain* (literally dwarf rooster, or bantam); *Hirondelle* (swallow); *Saint Christophe*; *Grenouille* (frog); and *Tête d’Aigle* (eagle’s head). Coloured glass, as used on the eagle, was a popular choice for some of the mascots, and values now vary according to the colour. Expert Simon Khachadourian has seen a version of the frog mascot in green glass, although that’s rare and probably unique.

## LALIQUE MASCOTS



*ABOVE* Of the 30 Laliq mascots, this is arguably the most famous. It's Victoire, sometimes known as Spirit of the Wind, made in 1928. More than any other Laliq mascot, it absolutely epitomises Art Deco style, with the hair stylised into a typically strong geometric shape. With mouth agape, it's often said to be rather androgynous in look. Victoire's 'hair' can be prone to damage, making perfect examples such as this extremely rare and sought-after.

**IT WAS THE** golden age of motoring, and every important automobile announced its presence with a striking mascot leading the charge from the top of the radiator. This was the 1920s, and many of the mascots from that time are now highly collectible – none more so than the glass creations of René Lalique.

Thirty different Lalique designs were used as car mascots, usually mounted on the radiator although sometimes on the scuttle or roof. The same designs were also sold as bookends and paperweights.

The Holy Grail for Lalique collectors is to gather the full set of 30 pre-war mascots. The examples shown here are from one of the few full sets in the world – and in case you're under-estimating the significance of this, note that this particular set, with all pieces in perfect condition, is worth around £1 million.

It's taken Simon Khachadourian of London's Pullman Gallery more than 20 years to bring this collection together, although he has been dealing in Lalique since 1974; his first-ever auction purchase was a Victoire mascot at Christie's.

The majority of the mascots were created between 1925 and 1931 – the

height of the Art Deco period. However, René Lalique, born in 1860, had found fame well before then as one of the great jewellers of the Art Nouveau age. He'd begun his career apprenticed to a Parisian goldsmith, and went on to study in Paris and in London, before becoming a freelance jewellery designer. His reputation flourished, and he was soon working for Cartier and Boucheron.

By 1902 he'd expanded his skills into glasswork, and it wasn't long before he was producing elegant fragrance bottles for his retail neighbour, Coty. With the perfection of a press-mould casting production technique, Lalique was able to switch from jewellery to glassmaking, producing everything from dinner plates to the mascots for which he's so famous.

The popularity of Lalique's work began to ebb during the '30s, and the company went out of business in 1939. René Lalique died in 1945, aged 85, but his son Marc relaunched the company, and it was later run by granddaughter Marie-Claude. It is now Swiss-owned.

There's a big difference in quality between the mascots of René's time and those produced after the war, though. This is because in 1951 production was switched to glass with a higher lead content for ease of manufacture.

"You can still buy a new eagle's head, for example, for a few hundred pounds," says Simon Khachadourian. "But to put it against an original is like looking at a milk bottle in comparison."

*Thanks to Pullman Gallery, +44 (0)20 7930 9595, [www.pullmangallery.com](http://www.pullmangallery.com).*



*ABOVE* These mascots date from the late 1920s and early 1930s, and are, from left: Tête de Coq (rooster's head); Tête d'Epervier (sparrowhawk's head); Tête de Paon (peacock's head); Tête de Bélier (ram's head); and Archer.

You can see that the rooster and the ram are both mounted on plinths; this is not unusual, and if it's done well it shouldn't affect the value of the mascot. Sometimes a mascot will still be fitted with its original mounting collar, perhaps bearing the name of London Lalique dealer Breves Gallery – although the Breves collars weren't always such a good fit as their French equivalents.

Take a look at the crest of the peacock, and how vulnerable it is to breakage. There's a known case of one being offered without the crest, described as a rare one-off, where in fact the crest had been broken off and the head expertly polished over. It was an extreme example of the efforts sometimes made to disguise damage, and demonstrates why it's crucial for a known expert to inspect any potential Lalique purchase.



**ABOVE** This is where it all began, with the first five mascots of the eventual 30 produced. They are, from left: Cinq Chevaux (five horses); Naïade (water nymph); Faucon (falcon); Comète (comet); and Sirène (mermaid). Lalique's association with cars in many ways began here, with the striking Cinq Chevaux on the far left of the group. The idea for the mascot was suggested by André Citroën to mark the display of Citroën's 5CV model at the 1925 Paris Exposition. With that clever move, Lalique's work was introduced to the masses. The first of the 30 mascots, however, was the 1920 Sirène, which although not intended as a car mascot, is thought to have been converted for automotive use by Breve Gallery. It's often overlooked, which is why you'll sometimes read that there are 29 Lalique designs. The wonderful Comète was inspired by Citroën's use of the Eiffel Tower, which was lit up using 250,000 lights, each letter of Citroën formed from the shapes of flaming comets.



**TOP** From left to right are five stunning examples from the latter years of pre-war Lalique mascot production: Longchamp A and Longchamp B; Vitesse; Epsom; and Lévrier (greyhound).

The two Longchamp mascots are named after the Hippodrome de Longchamp horse-racing course in the Bois de Boulogne in Paris, while Epsom acknowledges the British market for Lalique by paying tribute to the UK's horse-racing equivalent.

As for the sensuous Vitesse, she's one of the most sought-after of the 30 mascots, created in 1929. Female nudes were extremely popular as mascots, and Vitesse was one of the very best, inspired by René Lalique's love of Greek mythology.

**ABOVE** From left: Hibou (owl); Chrysis; Sanglier (boar); Pintade (guinea fowl); and Renard (fox). These are the last five mascot designs introduced by René Lalique before his death in 1945. They date from 1929-'31.

The Chrysis nude, similar in style to Vitesse, is more iconic as a design but produced in higher numbers, so tends to be less valuable than Vitesse or the rare Hibou.

The boar is unusual in being made from such a dark glass; values of the coloured mascots vary according to a combination of rarity and aesthetic appeal of the colour.



*ABOVE This is Renard, the wily fox that mesmerises, eludes and frustrates Lalique collectors the world over. Renard was introduced in 1930, towards the end of the 'arts and elegance' period. By then, the appeal of Lalique and other car mascots was on the wane, seen as unfashionable and unnecessarily ostentatious. Still, many examples of the Renard would have been sold at the time, but now just six or seven are known to be in circulation. A slightly damaged and restored Renard sold at Bonhams for \$338,500 in 2012, breaking the record for the highest price for a car mascot. The example shown here was certainly intended for automotive use, as that groove in the base demonstrates, but given its remarkable condition either the car was rarely driven or Renard managed to avoid being attached to the vehicle altogether. Ever cunning, the fox...*



*ABOVE* All produced during the late 1920s, these mascots are, from left: Grande Libellule (large dragonfly); Perche (Perch fish); Victoire; Petite Libellule (small dragonfly); and Coq Houdan (Houdan cockerel). The dragonfly motif was a favourite of René Lalique, and used across many of his designs, from jewellery to vases.

The fish demonstrates not just another of the available colours, but also how appealing the mascots can look when lit. In January 1929, around the same time that these five mascots were produced, René Lalique applied for a patent for a lighting system for car-mounted mascots. The system was connected to a dynamo on the vehicle, and could even be set up to glow brighter as the car's speed increased.

The non-coloured mascots could be made to light up in different hues thanks to circular filters in the base. Now, mascots on display tend to be lit using subtle fibre optics, negating the need for unsightly wiring and bulbs.

Collectors have found this preferable to attempting to use the original radiator mounts to show the mascots, because such mounts are difficult to use neatly in a display. And while we're on the subject, Pullman Gallery's Simon Khachadourian points out that even this Holy Grail of all 30 mascots can be shown in a single, elegant cabinet – rather less space consuming than a car collection, for example...