

Object Study:
Trophée de Vaillance, Jean Schlumberger's Design for Diana Vreeland

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In 1941, French jewelry designer Jean Schlumberger (1908-1987) created a one-of-a-kind diamond, amethyst, ruby, and enameled jewel for his dear friend, twentieth-century fashion leader and celebrated editor-in-chief for Vogue magazine Diana Vreeland (1903-1989) (Fig. 1). Named the *Trophée de Vaillance* (trophy of valor), the clip was a representation of a dream she had had. Created shortly after arriving in New York from France, the clip's design was influenced by surrealist principles Schlumberger encountered while living in Paris. Schlumberger's early collaborations with the Surrealists influenced his artistic expression and the creation of the *Trophée de Vaillance*.

Born on June 24, 1907 in Mulhouse, France to textile industrialist Paul Albert Schlumberger (1877-1952) and Elisabeth Schoen (1884-1942), Schlumberger received no official fine arts training and approached his education through real-life experiences. By the 1930s, Schlumberger was working in Paris alongside surrealist artists, many of whom he later considered close friends and clients. His first experimentation with jewelry was in 1936 when he created brooches made from reclaimed "china flowers originally used for funeral wreaths."¹ With this creation, Harper's Bazaar quickly declared him "important in the fashion world because all the smart women of Europe are asking him to design for them."² Initially created for Princess Jean-Louis de Faucigny-Lucinge (1901–1945), a model, fashion icon, and part of the surrealist artistic circle in Paris, Schlumberger's china flower brooches were soon requested by many others including fashion icon Princess Natalia Palovna Paley (1905-1981), the French artist Christian Bérard (1902-1949) and surrealist author Jean Cocteau (1889-1963). This early design was probably Schlumberger's first readymade—he elevated old porcelain flowers to beautiful pieces used for personal adornment.³

Schlumberger's innovative brooches caught the attention of Italian

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Fig. 1. Jean Schlumberger, *Trophée de Vaillance* (Trophy of Valor) clip, 1941, gold platinum, diamonds, rubies, amethysts, and enamel, 9.8 x 6 x 2.2 cm, Tiffany & Co. Archives, A1998.14

designer Elsa Schiaparelli (1890-1973). Creator of bold, striking outfits for women, Schiaparelli collaborated with surrealist artists to become one of the leading couturiers during the interwar period. She designed hats, gloves, and other accessories that were inspired by the art of her contemporaries, including Man Ray and René Magritte, and accented coats and daywear embroidered with designs by Jean Cocteau and Salvador Dalí. Schlumberger created enameled buttons for some of Schiaparelli's couture in 1936. The buttons depicted whimsical vignettes such as a boat on turbulent water, the skyline of a French village, or the profiles of panthers or warriors. Vreeland recalled the buttons were "very important and very smart on Schiaparelli's small, tight black suits...Women were buying the suits. But I happened to know the chap that made the buttons."⁴

The collaboration with Schiaparelli lasted for two more years, premiering in winter 1937 and concluding in 1939. During this time some of Schlumberger's creations were included in other surrealist projects. His iconic gilt cupid earrings and brooches from the Winter 1937 collection were worn by his surrealist friend Nusch Éluard (1906-1946), wife of surrealist poet Paul Éluard (1895-1952), in a

1937 painting by Pablo Picasso. In autumn of the same year Paul Éluard published *Les Mains Libres* (The Free Hands), an illustrated book of poems. Éluard included a drawing by Man Ray of surrealist painter Sonia Mossé (1897-1943) lovingly embracing and resting her forehead on Nusch's head. In the foreground of the drawing, Ray included Schlumberger's Victorian-inspired brooch of a hand holding a black enameled flower.⁵ Although he did not work with Schiaparelli for an extensive period, Schlumberger credited her with pushing him in new directions and stretching his artistic boundaries.⁶

Schlumberger's involvement with the surrealist scene in Paris abruptly ended in 1939 when he joined the French Armed Forces. Stationed in Northern France until 1940 when he was evacuated at Dunkirk to England, Schlumberger then traveled to New York City. Upon his arrival to the United States, by way of Canada, Schlumberger called upon his dear friend Vreeland.

I was in my country house, when the telephone rang. The United States was not yet in the war, but I was in the war because I'd spent so much time in Europe and had so many friends and family there. I picked up the phone and the small voice—the smallest voice I've ever heard—came over the air, saying, "I'm in Montreal." I said, "Who is this?" "This is Johnny—Schlumberger. I'm here with two friends and we are coming to New York..."⁷

Shortly after arriving, Schlumberger opened a jewelry salon, Schlumberger Inc., at 743 Fifth Avenue, in partnership with his childhood friend Nicolas Bongard (1909-2000) in July 1941. Many artists associated with Parisian surrealist circles and friends of Schlumberger had also relocated to New York and the city was an epicenter for artistic activity. Operating the salon until July 1942, Schlumberger then returned to Europe to serve in the French Freedom Forces. It was during this brief time in New York that Schlumberger crafted the *Trophée de Vaillance*—perhaps as a thank you to Vreeland for her support.

The *Trophée de Vaillance* is a wearable vignette composed of armor, a shield, and weapons. A tunic studded with round-cut diamonds set in gold with finely polished platinum accenting the collar, armholes, waist, and skirt is the jewel's main focal point. Gold fringes set with diamonds hang freely at the skirt and sleeve hems—lending the clip a sense of delightfully kinetic energy. Contrasting the tunic's white tones is a splendid oval shield of modified, oval-cut amethyst sprinkled with rubies. The gemstones are contained by a deep, royal-blue enameled frame which is accented with gold details. Emerging from behind the shield is an enameled bow, spear, and axe that bristle in all directions. A sword handle, carefully crafted from gold and platinum, rises from the tunic's neck, capped by a ruby hexagram. The armor shimmers like polished chainmail against the colorful tones of the shield.

Dreams were a significant source of inspiration for surrealist creations, including Vreeland's clip. Schlumberger credited daydreaming as a major spring for many of his designs.⁸ Many surrealist artists sought to release the creative energies of the unconscious. At times this was accomplished through automatic drawing, where one's hand drew freely without control. Another approach was to create a vision of their dream, by drawing images in free associations. Undoubtedly influenced by surrealist concepts, Schlumberger adopted daydreaming as a way to conjure design ideas.

Schlumberger was not responsible for dreaming the design of the *Trophée de Vaillance*; it was based on a vision Vreeland had. In *Jean Schlumberger*, published to celebrate of the jeweler's contributions to design, Vreeland recounted the dream that had inspired the clip:

I came to Johnny with a dream. In Lorraine, near where he was born, is the beautiful town of Nancy. My husband and I, when we were living in England, went through it every year on our way to Germany.... It has what is considered to be the most perfect piece of architecture in the whole of Europe—the Place Stanislaus, named after King Stanislaus, the father of Marie Leszczynska, who spent five years there. And on top of every building there are wonderful escutcheons representing all the Chivalric orders.⁹

Vreeland described the clip as a trophy of the gallantry and chivalry of men in past wars, fighting for the honor of women.¹⁰ A trophy—one of the elements of the Classical tradition—customarily contained discarded articles of war that were collected by the victorious. The collection would be displayed as a warning to other enemies. Vreeland wore the *Trophée de Vaillance* as her own trophy, making a bold and powerful statement about her place in the competitive fashion industry.

It is likely that Vreeland was describing the Hôtel de Ville (City Hall) located on the Place Stanislas. The building's main pediment features a clock with sculptural figures. Flanking the central clock are two allegorical statues of justice and prudence next to sculptures that depict armor, arrows, and flags (Fig. 2). One sculpture includes a short-sleeve, knee-length tunic embellished with fringe hems. Scallop-motifs decorate the warrior's outfit and flags with arrow finials radiate from behind the tunic. The sculpture's architectural elements, especially the tunic and arrows, are visible in the *Trophée de Vaillance*.

Schlumberger also studied printed sources to transform Vreeland's vision into a jewel. In a 1956 interview conducted by the New York jewelry firm Tiffany & Co., Schlumberger shared his sources of inspiration.

Above all, documentation which has no relation to jewelry: that is to



Fig. 2. Façade of Hôtel de Ville, Place Stanislas, Nancy, France (cropped from original photograph courtesy of Patrick, taken on May 25, 2017, Flickr.com)

say I make use of works of art, including engravings, usually colored, dealing with subjects as varied as: architectural motifs, tropical leaves, medicinal flora, shells, marine fauna, birds, textiles, tapestries, embroidery, lace, etc. These documents are usually quite old, and their charm and beauty contribute to the overall creative effort by providing a favorable artistic atmosphere.¹¹

Schlumberger's extensive library, which included many secondhand publications purchased at flea markets and antique shops, ranged in subjects, eras of publication, and countries of origin. He studied each one, leaving annotations next to select images that indicated his intent for the motifs. In one publication featuring engraving of silver designs, Schlumberger indicated he was interested in the etching of an arrow.¹² Similar if not identical arrows appear on Vreeland's clip.

In addition to the silver publication, Schlumberger probably also referenced a seventeenth-century engraving of a jewel by the German goldsmith Paul Birkenhultz (1561-1639; Fig. 3).¹³ Birkenhultz's pendant also features a tunic with spears and axes radiating from behind. Schlumberger believed the proper way to



Fig. 3. Paul Birkenhultz, Vertical Panel with Design for a Pendant in *Omnis Generis Instrumenta Bellica*, c. 1600, engraving, 11.6 × 8.1 cm., New York, The Elisha Whittelsey Collection, The Elisha Whittelsey Fund, 1956, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 56.500.81(2)

use historical sources was “not a question of simply copying these documents, but rather making use of them as a point of departure for the inspiration of a shape and a texture.”¹⁴ Schlumberger reformatted motifs taken from historical sources—the Hôtel de Ville’s pediment and Birkenhultz’s pendant—in creating a jeweled representation of Vreeland’s dream.

Vreeland considered the *Trophée de Vaillance* one of her favorite objects; she regarded it as her lucky charm and one of the only jewels she wore for chic evenings. According to her son Fredrick Vreeland she often traveled with the clip, displaying it on her nightstand.¹⁵ Schlumberger believed that a jewel should reflect the patron’s personality and be as wearable as possible, and not to just be a symbol of one’s wealth.

I believe that modern jewelry has become mainly a display of cash value. In most cases, a woman would achieve the same effect if she merely pinned a cheque to her lapel. It would serve the same purpose—to tell the world she is loved by or that she belongs to a man who has money, or is rich herself.

This has reduced the world’s most luxurious art to nothing more than a window-dressing. Today, the jeweler tries to create a maximum of effect with a minimum of expense. He eliminates all intricate details because they require workmanship and more stones. The result is the extra-flat modern jewel in which all stones are visible and are spaces as widely apart as possible. Modern jewelry, despite its precious material, has become rustic: it’s as if you were to use mahogany only to make rustic furniture.¹⁶

Schlumberger’s creations diverge from the accepted custom of what jewelry should be. Like his surrealist friends, Schlumberger was concerned about the design process, how the design reflected the owner’s personality, and, most importantly, that the final product reflected this artistic process. For Schlumberger, what makes the *Trophée de Vaillance* valuable is the personal story behind the design: it is a representation of the unconscious. Through precious materials, Schlumberger created a wearable, public version of Vreeland’s inner beauty.

- 1 Bettina Ballard, *In My Fashion* (New York: McKay, 1960), 28.
- 2 “Jean Schlumberger,” *Harper’s Bazaar* (December 1937): 105.
- 3 Toni Greenbaum, “Bizarre Bijoux: Surrealism in Jewelry,” *The Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts* 20 (1994): 198.
- 4 Diana Vreeland, “Notebook,” in *Jean Schlumberger*, ed. Venusta Paccès and Karen Lenardi (Milan: Franco Maria Ricci, 1991), 69.
- 5 Dils E. Blum, *Shocking! The Art and Fashion of Elsa Schiaparelli*, exhib. cat. (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, in association with Yale University Press, 2004), 131.
- 6 Charlotte Gere, “Preface,” in *Schlumberger*, 18.
- 7 Vreeland, “Notebook,” 69.
- 8 For more discussion on Schlumberger’s daydreaming, see: Évelyn Possémé, “From Reality to Imagination, from Imagination to Expression,” in *The Jewels of Jean Schlumberger* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 2001), 114.
- 9 Vreeland, “Notebook,” 72.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Jean Schlumberger, Interview by Tiffany & Co, transcription, New York City, March 15, 1956. Jean Schlumberger Collection, Tiffany & Co. Archives.
- 12 *Argintirie Albulm de Echantilles de la Labrigin d’Argeture de A. Kunne a Altina fres Tserlobn [sic.]*, c. 1820, Jean Schlumberger Collection, Tiffany & Co. Archives, Parsippany, NJ. This publication does not retain its original title page. The publication’s title is based on a handwritten note by Schlumberger.
- 13 Paul Birckenhultz, Vertical Panel with Design for a Pendant in *Omnis Generis Instrumenta Bellica*, c. 1600. Engraving, 11.6 × 8.1 cm. New York, The Elisha Whittelsey Collection, The Elisha Whittelsey Fund, 1956, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 56.500.81(2).
- 14 Jean Schlumberger, Interview, 1956.
- 15 André Leon Talley, “Schlumberger: Today’s Treasures,” *Women’s Wear Daily* (November 11, 1977): 29.
- 16 Jean Schlumberger, Interview, 1956.