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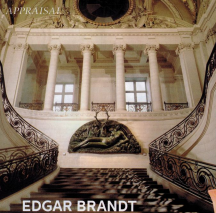
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## EDGAR BRANDT

*This French Art Deco master turned iron and bronze into sumptuous and swirling decorative masterpieces*

BY TIM MCKEEVER

When it came to the mastery of metal in the early 20th century, few people compared with Edgar-William Brandt. Working primarily with iron, the French designer and forger—or Mackintosh—transformed a seemingly unglamorous material into seductive Art Deco furniture, objects, and architectural elements with incredibly intricate details. Frequently depicting natural motifs, he made bands of lionesses with pincurses, grilles blossoming with stylized flowers, and screens that appear to burst with gushing fountains. He possessed as much technical expertise as talent, which sometimes took his work in surprising directions. In between such high-profile commissions as the banister for the Metropolitan Museum at the Louvre in 1914 and the ornate frame for the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Paris in 1915, he also designed and manufactured a portable mortar that became a valuable weapon on the battlefield.

"He worked with both sides of his brain—the artistic side, and this very intriguing

mechanical side," says Jean Kahn, an art historian who wrote the definitive book on Brandt's career, *Edgar Brandt: Art Deco Forger*. "There were many good forgers at the time, but very few who could design."

"One tends to associate the great Art Deco designers with different media," adds Philippe Garnet, head of 20th-century decorative art and design at Christie's. "You think of Jean Dunand for lacquerwork, Jacques-Émile Ruhlmann for cabinetmaking, René Laloux for glass, and Edgar Brandt for ironwork. These designers represent the quintessence of French Art Deco style."

Born in Paris in 1880, Brandt originally studied ironwork at the École Nationale Professionnelle de Vincennes, a technical school that prepared students to work in industry, rather than at an art school. However, following his graduation in 1899 and two years of mandatory military service, he decided to forgo his own path. In 1901, he opened a small atelier in

The wrought-iron staircase banister at the Louvre, completed in 1914.



Political gallery  
© 1901-12.

Edgar Brandt at his workbench in 1907.



Bronze-colored table lamp, early 1920s.



Leo Oppenheim at home, a wrought-iron grille from 1902.



Wrought-iron cast-iron chairs, 1925.



The star ceiling of  
Imperial's culture  
Museum, 1934.



Paris, where he began designing iron-based jewelry and developing his reputation as a skilled artisan. Soon he expanded into larger objects such as lamps, andirons, iron bases for the glass vases, and chair railings.

Returning to the military in 1914 at the beginning of World War I, Brandt soon saw France's need for a portable mortar. By 1916, he had created a weapon that would be used for decades. A few years ended in 1918, he constructed a large building in Paris to house his expanding operations. A proponent of new industrial technology, such as oxyacetylene torches, power hammers, and drop-forging machines, Brandt's company would eventually employ 1,800 workers "making everything from decorative ironwork to window frames to armaments," says Katz. "He was a big fan of Henry Ford and the assembly line."

Still, he remains most famous for his sublime Art Deco creations. He reached the peak of his career at the 1925 Exposition des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes in Paris, a major international event that attracted more than 16 million visitors over six months and crowned Art Deco as the leading style of the time. Brandt's work was featured prominently throughout the fair. He designed elaborate pieces for his own stand, ironwork for pavilions by peers like Rodin, and even the impressive front gates to the fairgrounds themselves. In 2006, Christie's sold Brandt's most sought-after piece from the exposition—L'Oran, the five-panel wrought-iron and electroplated-brass folding screen depicting a fountain

surrounded by tropical foliage—for a record price of nearly \$2.5 million.

Brandt's ability to create such nuanced, intricate work from iron still amazes people today. "It's a very difficult material to work with, and yet his work is never static—it's always refined and delicate," says Renée T. Drut, a partner at New York gallery Maïso Grand. "You could call it the lace of metal."

Adriana Friedman, director of New York gallery DeLoenne, agrees. His work is intriguing because it "takes something so cold, a piece of ironwork, into something organic and beautiful," she says. "Even Andy Warhol collected Edgar Brandt."

He also worked with other metals, not frequently brass, creating objects such as seape-shaped lamp bases and vessels decorated with classical figures. But by the late '20s, Brandt began moving away from his elaborately ornamental style, and producing more restrained, geometric pieces that responded to the modernist ideals proposed by architects like Le Corbusier and the Bauhaus school. At the same time, demand for his murals designs picked up, and he paid increasing attention to the ornate side of his business until his death in 1960.

The decorative pieces Brandt left behind continue to find passionate admirers. New York interior designer Juan Montoya recalls a particularly striking Brandt door with an eagle motif that he used in a client's apartment in Paris. "When they sold the apartment, I saved it," he says, noting that he eventually found a new home for the piece at the entrance to a wine cellar in California. "The craftsmanship and precision evident in the door are incredible," he says. "It's a magnificent way to explain that metal can be very, very noble." ■



A decorative cover of marble  
and polished steel, 1921.

A proposed metal lamp  
from the late '30s.



#### WHERE TO FIND IT

Edgar Brandt's creations are usually stamped "E. Brandt."

- Sotheby's
- DeLoenne, New York City, 212-346-1175, [deLoennegallery.com](http://deLoennegallery.com)
- Maïso Grand, New York City, 212-675-7811, [maïsoGrand.com](http://maïsoGrand.com)
- Moderne Gallery, Philadelphia, 215-522-8224, [modernegallery.com](http://modernegallery.com)
- Paul Stamet Gallery, New York City, 212-754-4100, [stamet.com](http://stamet.com)