

Jean Schlumberger

Jean Michel Schlumberger (1907-1987) was born into a prominent family of textile manufacturers in Alsace, France in 1907. He showed ability for drawing from a young age, but his parents discouraged his artistic interests and sent him to Berlin to study business and finance¹. However, in 1929, after working in a textile mill in New Jersey, he decided to follow his artistic impulses and left his studies to begin working for art publisher Braun in Paris². Schlumberger struggled to follow his passions in his early life, but eventually excelled as a jewellery designer, and made a significant impact in the field.

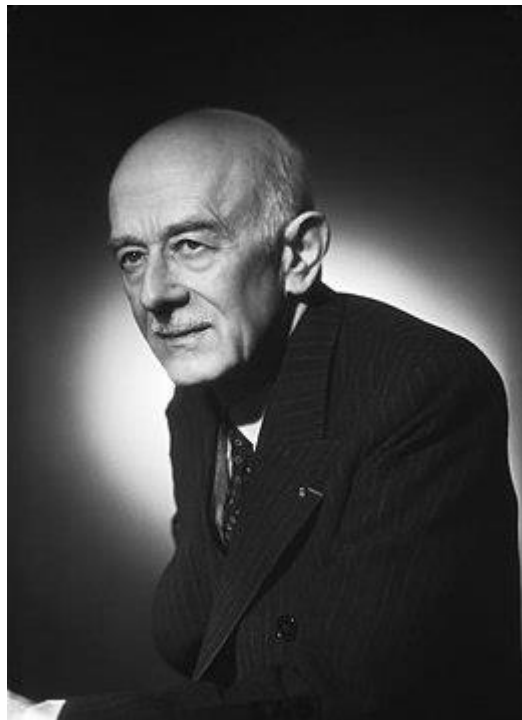


Figure 1. Portrait of Jean Schlumberger.

In his 20s, Schlumberger relocated to Paris to pursue his passion for art. He was first employed by French fashion designer Lucien Lelong (1899-1958) in 1936, before working at a Parisian art publishing house, Braun. One day, after seeing an antique chandelier covered with Meissen porcelain flowers, Schlumberger turned them into elegant, personalised clips, necklaces and earrings for his elite acquaintance circle, such as Daisy Fellowes (1890-1962) and Marina of Greece and Denmark, the Duchess of Kent (1906-68). Schlumberger's porcelain clips quickly gained popularity.

¹ Person (2019)

² Christie's (2022)

Schlumberger created new jewellery styles that rapidly attracted attention . The large number of requests for his designs allowed him to quit his regular job to concentrate solely on jewellery designing, and he opened his own atelier on rue de la Boétie³. The Parisian elite rapidly sought out Jean Schlumberger for outstanding jewellery. Elsa Schiaparelli (1890-1973), a rising fashion designer at the time well-renowned for her stylised accessories, noticed Schlumberger's artistic potential.



Figure 2. Portrait of Elsa Schiaparelli, by British Vogue⁴

Schlumberger was hired by Schiaparelli in 1937, to supervise the design of her button and costume jewellery lines. It was an immediate hit, not just in Paris but internationally. Schlumberger's creative buttons for Schiaparelli's outfits included reliefs of animals, shells, cherubs, fruit, and insects; this lively repertoire would later reappear in his jewellery masterpieces. Even the legendary *Vogue* editor, Diana Vreeland (1903-1989), was impressed by Schlumberger's fantastical buttons and artistic joie de vivre.



Figure 3. Cherub Clips, Jean Schlumberger for Schiaparelli, Cupid Clips, 1937-1938, Collection of Mark Walsh Leslie Chin, Vintage Luxury

³ Tiffany & Co. (2020)

⁴ Crisell (2018)

After serving in the French Army during World War II, Schlumberger moved to New York, where he ran into Nicolas Bongard (1908-99), a childhood friend. In 1947, they established a small salon in Manhattan where they designed handmade buttons. Soon after, the pair's design was worn by New York's most fashionable women.

The partnership between Tiffany & Co. and Jean Schlumberger

In 1956, Schlumberger was invited to work at Tiffany and Co. as vice president by Walter Hoving (1897-1989), who was the company's chairman at the time. The company offered Schlumberger a space on the mezzanine floor of the original Tiffany & Co. Fifth Avenue flagship shop as his personal design studio and salon. Some of Tiffany's most recognised pieces were created by Schlumberger using the vivid and rare-coloured gemstones and diamonds. Examples include his intricate paillonné enamel bangles and bold coloured rings, the Cooper bracelet and the Sixteen Stone diamond ring (fig. 4), as well as the Bird on a Rock clip (fig. 5).



Fig 4. The Sixteen Stone diamond ring, designed by Jean Schlumberger for Tiffany & Co.



Figure 5. the Bird on a Rock brooch, one of Schlumberger's most beloved creations at Tiffany and Co. It was exhibited at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs' Jean Schlumberger retrospective in Paris, 1995⁵



Figure 6. Photo of Schlumberger design and sketching, Photo from Museum of Fine Arts in St. Petersburg, and Tiffany & Co. Archives⁶

⁵ Tiffany & Co. (2022)

⁶ Fasel (2022)

Schlumberger created his innovative shapes and motifs by applying the gouache method to smooth, fine tracing paper using a pen and India ink as his medium. Another aspect that sets Schlumberger's sketches apart is their prominent sculptural quality. 3000 of his original drawings were collected and preserved by the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in 1995 and were occasionally displayed. These priceless images document his design process (fig. 6). Liang Yi Museum houses a number of Schlumberger's compacts (Fig 7-10). The irregular compact in particular (fig. 7) resembles the one being held in the hand and sketched in the image (fig. 6). The compacts in Figures 8 to 10 have similar designs to those placed on the table in Figure 6.



Figure 7. Compact, Maker: Schlumberger for Tiffany & Co., c. 1950, Materials: Gold and diamond, Height 1.9 x Width 7.4 x Length 9.1cm, Liang Yi Museum Collection.



Figure 8. Compact, Maker: Schlumberger for Tiffany and Co., c. 1950, Materials: Gold and diamond, Height 2.5 x Diameter 7cm, Liang Yi Museum Collection.



Figure 9. Compact, Maker: Schlumberger for Tiffany & Co., c. 1950, Materials: Gold, peridot and turquoise, Height 5.4 x Width 5.4 x Length 6.3cm, Liang Yi Museum Collection.



Figure 10. Compact, Maker: Tiffany & Co., c. 1950, Materials: Gold, emerald and diamond, Height 2.3 x Width 4.3 x Length 5.4cm, Liang Yi Museum Collection.

Schlumberger's most recognisable designs are jewels with floral and animal motifs. He took frequent trips to Bali, India and Thailand and finished a lot of his sketches during his travels. He was able to transform the creatures of nature into pure-form, fantastical jewels. His unusual designs combined the elements of nature with his imaginative spirit. It is typical to see elements of both land and sea animals and plants in his works⁹, such as pinecones, jasmines, butterflies and sea horses. One of Schlumberger's works influenced by nature is the pair of star flower ear clips (Fig. 10). The flowers and other living things he portrayed are stylised as he attempted to capture everything in a growing, uneven and organic form¹⁰.

⁹ Sotheby's (2019)

¹⁰ Tulsidas (2022)



Figure 11. Star Flower ear clips, Maker: Tiffany & Co. Schlumberger, Materials: yellow gold, platinum, sapphires and diamonds, Tiffany and Co. archive.¹¹



Figure 12. Compact, Maker: Schlumberger for Tiffany & Co., c. 1950, Materials: Gold, enamel and diamond, Height 2 x Width 4.3 x Length 8.1cm, Liang Yi Museum Collection.

¹¹ Ibid.

This compact (Fig. 12) from the Museum's collection features a similar floral pattern in paillonné enamel, one of Schlumberger's distinctive designs. It incorporates laying enamel on top of 18k yellow gold. By firing translucent coloured enamel multiple times on fine sheets of gold foil, rich hues with extraordinary depth of colour will appear. Hence, delicate yellow gold lines are used to frame the bluish-purple flowers. The finishing on the compact is elegant and refine.



Figure 13. Pill Box, Maker: Schlumberger, c. 1950, Materials: Gold and emerald, Width 2.1 x Length 3.4cm, Liang Yi Museum Collection.

Another piece of jewellery by Schlumberger that draws inspiration from nature is this pill box (Fig. 13). It is shaped as a tiny walnut of textured 18k yellow gold with 2 round cabochon rubies at each end. The design was influenced by the form and use of a walnut, where the tablets are described as pine tree seeds kept inside a walnut.

As the son of a textile manufacturing family, Schlumberger's reimagining of ropes, tassels and ribbons became one of his most iconic creations. Schlumberger's 'basketry' design of woven 18k yellow gold began when he discovered a small woven metal basket for children at a flea

market in Paris and asked Pierre G. Brun (1902-82) to reproduce it¹². The lyrical and fluid style of the basketry design not only pays homage to his family's textile heritage, but is an example of Schlumberger's use of geometric patterns in the formation of textured, three dimensional forms¹³.



Figure 14. Powder Box, Maker: Schlumberger, c. 1950, Materials: Gold and sapphire, Height 1.7 x Diameter 7.2cm, Liang Yi Museum Collection.



Figure 15. Compact, Maker: Schlumberger, c. 1950, Materials: Gold and sapphire, Height 2.3 x Diameter 7.6cm, Liang Yi Museum Collection.

¹² Christie's (2022)

¹³ Antique Jewelry University (2022)

An example of Schlumberger's woven gold, twisted rope, and tassel design is seen in this powder box (Fig. 14) and compact (Fig. 15) in the Museum's collection. Although they are of different sizes, they share a similar design. The weaved components are executed in gold. The lines are regimented and rigidly geometric and convey a sense of refinement and opulence at the same time.



Figure 16. Shrimp Basket evening bag by Jean Schlumberger, 1973, Photo by Tiffany & Co. Archives¹⁴

Schlumberger's creativity was stimulated by weaved thread and natural components. This gold, diamond, and platinum evening bag (Fig. 16) was designed by Jean Schlumberger for Lyn Revson (1931-2011), wife of Charles Revson (1906-75), founder and owner of the American make-up company Revlon. Her initials 'L R' are encrusted with diamonds on the top of the bag. It is made in 1973 and exactly modelled after a shrimp basket. It perfectly exemplified how Schlumberger combines natural inspiration with the technique of weaving gold.

¹⁴ Fasel (2022)



Figure 17. Evening Bag, Maker: Schlumberger, c. 1950, Material: Gold, Height 5.3 x Width 8.4 x Length 14.4cm, Liang Yi Museum Collection.

Liang Yi Museum houses another similar evening bag (fig. 17). The authentic design reflects Schlumberger's remarkable interpretations of the natural world and family-rooted traditions.

Numerous medals and awards have been given to Schlumberger in recognition of his outstanding career by the art and fashion industries. He was the first jewellery designer to receive the Coty Award from the Fashion Critics in 1958. In 1977, the French government awarded him the Chevalier of Ordre national du Mérite. Later in life, Jean Schlumberger returned to Paris, the city that first sparked his artistic spirit. On the 7th September, 1987, he passed away in Paris¹⁵.

Schlumberger is a completely self-taught artist. All his designs were first conceived as drawings, though he never had any formal artistic training. Exhibitions were held to honour his legacy of jewel-encrusted flowers, marine life and amazing birds, including *Exposition* in Paris by Musée des Arts Décoratifs in 1995-1996¹⁶; the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts presented *The Jewels of Jean Schlumberger* in 2012¹⁷; *Jewels of the Imagination: Radiant Masterworks* by

¹⁵ Los Angeles Times (1987)

¹⁶ Bijoutiers et Joailliers (2022)

¹⁷ VMFA (2022)

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Jean Schlumberger from the Mellon Collection by the Museum of Fine Arts, St. Petersburg in 2018-2019¹⁸.

He was also one of only four designers that Tiffany & Co allowed to stamp their name on its pieces¹⁹ and would go on to gather a number of renowned fans, including Jacqueline Kennedy (1929-94)²⁰, Diana Vreeland, Elizabeth Taylor (1932-2011), Babe Paley (1915-78), Greta Garbo (1905-90), the Duchess of Windsor (1896-1986), and more. His legacy of high jewellery design has continued to live on after his death. Many of his designs remain in production today and are still sold at Tiffany & Co.

¹⁸ Museum of Fine Arts, St. Petersburg (2018)

¹⁹ The other three being Frank Gehry, Elsa Peretti and Paloma Picasso.

²⁰ President John F. Kennedy famously gave his wife, Jackie, a Tiffany & Co. Schlumberger Berry clip in 18k yellow gold with rubies and diamonds when their son John Kennedy, Jr. was born in 1960.

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