

## Lacloche

Lacloche officially founded in 1892, was one of the most prestigious Parisian jewellery houses of the 20th century. Renowned for its exquisite fine accessories, the family-run firm attracted a loyal pool of customers, and opened a main branch in Paris (where it was known as Lacloche Freres) and international stores in Madrid (where it was known as Lacloche & Cie), and London. Lacloche grew in fame as it received commissions from European royalty such as Queen Alexandra (1844-1925), Princess Grace of Monaco (dates please) and Hollywood starlets such as Kay Francis (1905-68) for its jewellery, vanity cases, cigarette holders, watches and other accessories. Today, Lacloche is widely known not only for its fine jewellery, but also as a pioneer and leader of design and craftsmanship in the Art Deco and post-war period.



Figure 1. Three Lacloche brothers Jules, Léopold and Fernand with their employee.

### History

The early history of this business dates back more than a century, and it involves the entire Lacloche family. Lebe Elias (c.1777-1857), a Jewish peddler in Gulpen took on the name Hector Lacloche after Napoleon issued an imperial decree (*the Décret de Bayonne*) on the 20th July 1808, ordering all Jewish people living in or immigrating to the First French Empire (1804-15) to choose and adopt a fixed surname and first name<sup>1</sup>. His son Hendricks Lacloche (1828-70) was born in Maastricht and worked as a travelling salesman in Liège before becoming a fabric merchant in Brussels<sup>2</sup>. Although Hendricks Lacloche died at a young age, it is likely that his business as a fabric merchant allowed his six children (four boys and two girls) glimpses of high fashion

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<sup>1</sup> De Vincenti, 2022.

<sup>2</sup> De Vincenti, 2022.

and society. The six Lacloche siblings all entered the field of fashion and, jewellery across several European cities. Jules (1867-1944) and Léopold (1863-1921) opened the first Lacloche jewellery shop in 1890 on the rue du Marché-aux-Herbes in Brussels<sup>3</sup>. Shortly after, they moved to Paris in 1892 and set up their company, Lacloche Frères, at 51 rue de Châteaudun.



Figure 2. Members of the Lacloche family.

Their brothers Jacques (1865-1900) and Fernand (1868-1932) left for America in search of fortune before returning to Europe in 1895, and jointly ran a boutique in Madrid under the name ‘Lacloche et Cie’, selling jewellery designed and produced in Paris<sup>4</sup>. In 1897, Bertha Lacloche (1857-1945) and her husband Jacob Jacques Walewyk (1852-1925) opened their own shop, ‘Walewyk-Lacloche’, and sold wedding gifts, such as bridal baskets<sup>5</sup>, and hosiery<sup>6</sup>. At this time, Léopold and Jules worked in collaboration with Levie Gompers (b. 1863), a renowned jeweller and Léopold’s brother-in-law, establishing Lacloche-Gompers at rue de l’Opéra, and later at Place Vendôme, with branches of the shop in Aix-les-Bains, Monaco, Nice, Trouville, and Ostend<sup>7</sup>. Unfortunately, Jacques Lacloche died in a train derailment in 1900, and Lacloche-Gompers dissolved soon after, re-opening ‘Lacloche Frères’ on 15 rue de la Paix<sup>8</sup>, an area with a ‘concentration of talent’<sup>9</sup>, for its cluster of goldsmiths, jewellers and gem setters. Last but not least, in 1902, Émilie Lacloche (1855-1910) and her

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<sup>3</sup> L’Ecole, 2019.

<sup>4</sup> Lang Antiques, 2022.

<sup>5</sup> Bridal baskets became a popular gift between the 1860s-1910s, and it was borne out of a custom of bestowing gifts of silver during ceremonial events. They are often wrought in silver or silver-plate, paired with a glass or ceramic bowl.

<sup>6</sup> Luchsinger and Rondouin, 2022.

<sup>7</sup> Lang Antiques, 2022

<sup>8</sup> The Lacloche Brothers House, 2022.

<sup>9</sup> The Forgotten Masterpieces of Lacloche, 2022.

husband, Joseph Cohen (Coven, 1850-1916), sold jewellery on rue de la Paix under 'Coven Lacloche'<sup>10</sup>. With so much talent under one roof, the designs of Lacloche were brought to life through the joint efforts of many artisans and every member of the family.

In the early decades of their business, Lacloche was met with promising success. Business continued to expand as Lacloche was adored not only for its jewellery, but also for its extensive range of daily products, such as combs, handbags and clocks. While Paris remained home to its flagship store, chain stores opened throughout Europe and America, operating on a large scale as Lacloche's clientele and customers grew. In 1904, Lacloche acquires Streeter & Co. on Bond Street in London<sup>11</sup>; and in 1917, Lacloche purchased Fabergé's London inventory as Fabergé closed its business abroad and repatriated their capital to Russia<sup>12</sup>. Furthermore, the Lacloche siblings opened up shops in numerous places throughout France and Europe over the years, targeting resorts, spas and seaside cities, such as Aix-les-Bains, Biarritz and San Sebastian, catering exclusively to royalty and the upper classes<sup>13</sup>. In total, Lacloche opened at least 19 shops related or linked to the extended Lacloche family between 1890-1931. This was highly unusual at the time as businesses generally had very few branches. For example, Cartier, who was already well-established at the time, had their main store in Paris with only branches in London, New York, and briefly, St. Petersburg<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> Lang Antiques, 2022.

<sup>11</sup> The Lacloche Brothers House, 2022.

<sup>12</sup> Duncan 2009, p. 303.

<sup>13</sup> Gallerease, 2022.

<sup>14</sup> Cartier, 2022.

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Figure 3. Addresses of Lacloche's different stores.



Figure 4. A drawing of the London branch.



Figure 5. The Lacloche Brothers in Paris.

Before the First World War (1914-1918), the Art Nouveau and Garland styles<sup>15</sup> were in vogue, and as such, is the style that predominates Lacloche jewellery. This pendant-watch (fig. 6) is a prime example of Lacloche's early works at the time. Ribbons and embroideries are interlaced symmetrically as decorations, paired with the silvery-white tone of platinum; on the other side is the pale lavender of the amethyst and a delicate painting. The watch appears delicate and light<sup>16</sup>, expressing an ornate yet elegant aesthetic. Pendant watches were designed for women, popular during the 18th-20th century, pairing functionality with beauty. At the time, checking the time was considered uncouth and pendant watches could disguise the timepiece, allowing the user to check the time discreetly<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> Art Nouveau (c.1890-1910) is a decorative style that is characterized by curving, asymmetrical lines based on plant forms. The Garland style was developed by Louis Cartier during the Art Nouveau movement, using platinum to create jewellery lacework.

<sup>16</sup> Luchsinger and Rondouin, 2022.

<sup>17</sup> Agarwal, 2020.



Figure 6. Pendant-watch, Lacloche Frères, 1908, Materials: rock crystal, gold, platinum, pearls, diamonds, miniature painting on a faceted amethyst, Vacheron Constantin Heritage Collection.

At the *Exposition Internationale des art décoratifs et industriels modernes*<sup>18</sup> of 1925 in Paris, Lacloche Frères showcased its marvellous jewellery and vanity cases, alongside two gouache albums featuring hand-painted illustrations of the presented items<sup>19</sup> in the art gallery of the French Embassy, which left spectators in awe and earned the company a Grand Prix<sup>20</sup>. 400 jewellers applied to join as part of the French delegation, and Lacloche was selected as one of the 30 invited participating companies<sup>21</sup>; Lacloche's participation in this exhibition not only affirms their importance and status as a jewellery house at the time, but also their influence on the designs and material culture of that period.

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<sup>18</sup> The International Exhibition of Modern Industrial and Decorative Arts in Paris 1925: A grand worldwide exhibition, in preparation since 1913, was held to showcase the new *style moderne* in Europe and throughout the world. The art gallery in the "French Embassy" displayed works of leading French designers. The *style moderne* presented was later renamed the Art Deco style after the name of the exposition .

<sup>19</sup> Mouillefarine and Ristelhueber 2019, 165.

<sup>20</sup> Sotheby's 2022.

<sup>21</sup> The Forgotten Masterpieces of Lacloche, 2022.



Figure 7. A poster of the Paris Exposition.

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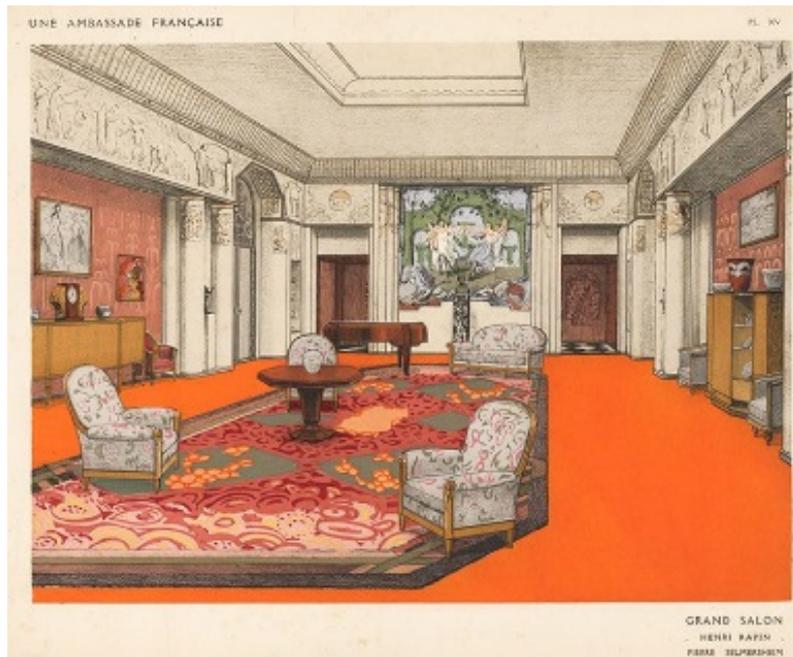


Figure 8. Grand Salon of the French Embassy, 1925, private collection.

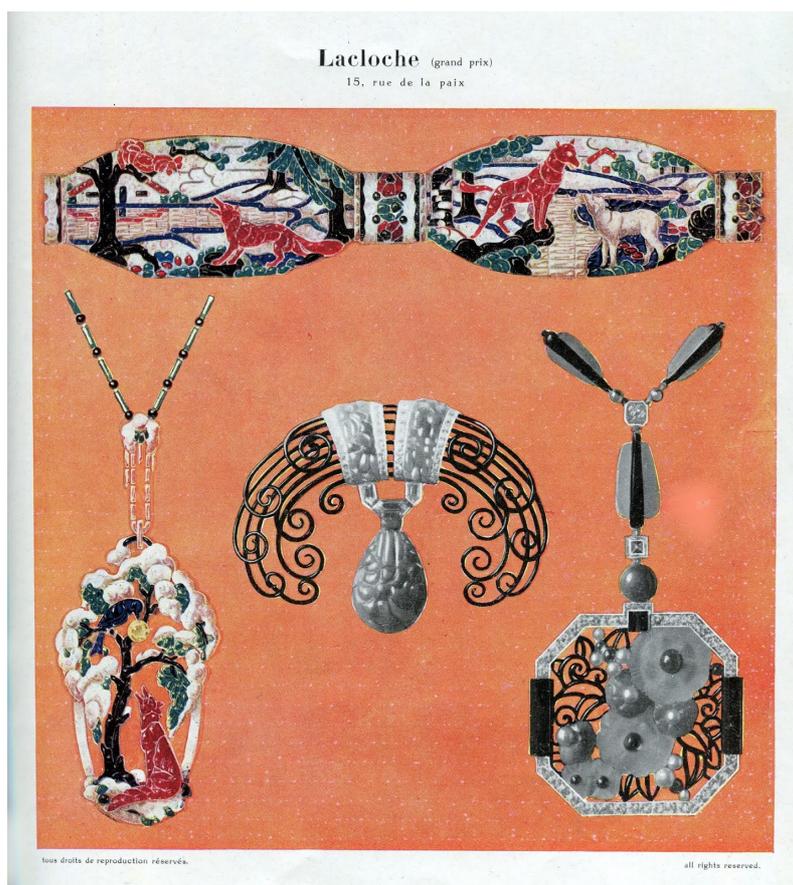


Figure 9. Illustration of grand prix winning pieces by Lacloche at the 1925 Paris Exposition, *Le Grand Négoce Catalogue* by Pierre Contreau (text) and Jean de Gruze (illustration).

A wide range of artistic expressions is observed in Lacloche products, perhaps unsurprisingly given the number of decision-makers within one firm. In the 1920s and 1930s, patterns on Lacloche pieces became audacious, with its use of bold, contrasted colour schemes and a large variety of decorative stones. In response to a French craze over the Far East, Lacloche took reference from the art of China, Japan and Persia, and applied them extensively on its designs. For instance, the Chinese “*shou*” motif (壽), meaning longevity, is a popular motif at the time and is featured on some vanity cases by Lacloche and other jewellery houses such as Cartier. Simultaneously in the late 1920s and 1930s, a tide of abstraction was observed in Lacloche’s Art Deco creations, featuring geometric shapes and vertical lines placed together in zigzag forms; baguette diamonds<sup>22</sup> and gemstones studded along case borders.<sup>23</sup>

Lacloche was popular among royalty and the aristocracy, from whom it received numerous commissions. Their royal clients included Queen Alexandra, George I of Greece (1863-1913), and Eugénie de Montijo (1826-1920) to name a few. Hollywood celebrities such as Kay Francis (1905-1968) and Peggy Hopkins Joyce (1893-1957) were seen wearing jewellery by Lacloche on screen<sup>24</sup>. Their most noteworthy commission is from the Duke of Westminster (1879-1953) in 1930<sup>25</sup>, who asked for a halo tiara for his third wife (m. 1930-1947), Loelia Ponsonby (1902-1993). The tiara comprised 1,400 smaller embedded diamonds in addition to the three famous Hastings and Arcot diamonds<sup>26</sup>. The Westminster Halo Tiara, as it is now known, was designed and inspired by the traditional Chinese headdress, and is a prime example of the popular aesthetics during the Art Deco period.

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<sup>22</sup> The baguette cut is an elongated, rectangular table cut, and is derived from hogback cut seen in paintings and jewellery from the mid-16th century. The cut was reintroduced to diamonds by Cartier in 1912, and popularised by the Art Nouveau and Art Deco movements at the time.

<sup>23</sup> The Forgotten Masterpieces of Lacloche, 2022

<sup>24</sup> Mouillefarine and Ristelhueber 2019, 92.

<sup>25</sup> Sotheby’s, 2022.

<sup>26</sup> Mouillefarine and Ristelhueber 2019, 98.



Figure 10. Duchess of Westminster wearing the commissioned Lacloche tiara.

Despite their success, Lacloche did not survive the turbulent years that followed due to the lavish and gambling lifestyle of Henri (1895-1962) and Jacques Lacloche (1897-1968), sons of Fernand Lacloche, which ultimately led to Lacloche Frères filing for bankruptcy in 1931. Fernand Lacloche died shortly thereafter, and Jacques Lacloche Junior (1901-99), son of Jacques Lacloche, reopened the business in 1936 and continued his venture in the jewellery industry until the late 1960s<sup>27</sup>.

Jacques Jr. was quick to integrate himself among high society, and produce unique designs of his own. In the late 1930s, women's fashion became more robust and uniform-like as more women joined the workforce<sup>28</sup>, resulting in Lacloche's production of chunky, sporty jewellery pieces to accommodate this shift in style. One famous piece is a cuff bracelet (fig. 11), with removable gem cabochons that allow wearer to change the jewels to match their outfits, a spectacularly modern concept at the time. The design was inspired by the clip-brooch by Cartier in 1927<sup>29</sup>, which was popularised by the versatility that allowed for many styling possibilities.

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<sup>27</sup> The Lacloche Brothers House, 2022.

<sup>28</sup> Luchsinger and Rondouin, 2022.

<sup>29</sup> Schwartz, 2017.

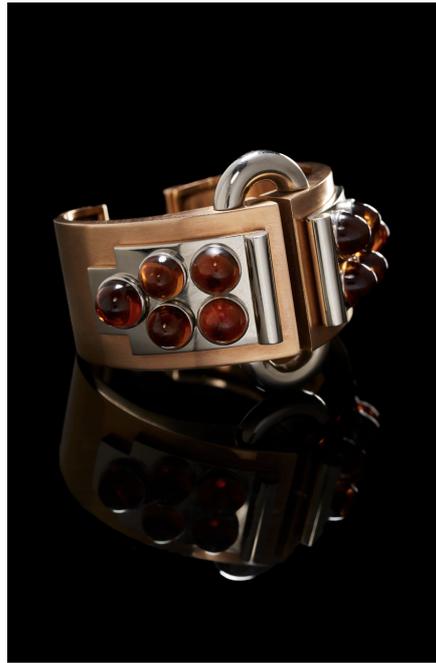


Figure 11. Cuff bracelet, Lacloche Frères, 1937, Materials: silver, white and yellow gold set with topaz.

Although Lacloche Frères is now lost to time, its fascinating creations never cease to intrigue spectators and connoisseurs today. By studying the designs of the pieces produced, we can better understand the taste and style of high society at the time, and the timeless elements that still attract us today.

### **In the Collection**

Liang Yi Museum houses more than 20 vanity cases created by Lacloche Frères, with the majority produced in the 1920s and 1930s. As mentioned, a major theme among the majority of these vanities is the use of East Asian motifs. This is usually expressed through the use of either the decorations, materials or both. In terms of decorations, one example from our collection is a compact (fig. 12) composed of various different materials to form a visually appealing, yet asymmetrical picture of blooming flowers at the tip of a plum tree branch, a popular motif in both China and Japan. Similarly, fig. 13 and fig. 14 both depict the Chinese ideogram of “*shou*”. Both vanity cases as well as fig. 15 showcase scenic landscapes often found on Chinese and Japanese panels. Fig. 15, in particular, combines the use of red and black enamel to imitate and recreate Chinese and Japanese lacquer art.

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Figure 12. Compact, Lacloche Frères, c. 1900, Materials: amber, onyx, gold, enamel, diamond, amethyst and pearl, Height 1.6 x Width 5.2 x Length 7.3cm, Liang Yi Museum Collection.



Figure 13. Compact, Lacloche Frères, c. 1925, Materials: gold, lacquer, mother-of-pearl and diamond, Height 1 x Width 5.4 x Length 7.1cm, Liang Yi Museum Collection.



Figure 14. Compact, Lacloche Frères, c. 1925, Materials: gold, enamel, diamond and pearl, Height 1 x Width 3.8 x Length 8.2cm, Liang Yi Museum Collection.



Figure 15. Compact, Lacloche Frères, c. 1920, Materials: gold and enamel, Height 1 x Width 6.1 x Length 8.5cm, Liang Yi Museum Collection.

Lacloche's references to the East can also be observed in its choice of materials as well. The following nécessaire (fig. 16) is one example. Its body is made of carnelian with a *shou* medallion decorated in the centre of the top panel; while the two ends are decorated with carved jadeite panels. This compact (fig. 17), with a flat case body and delicate appearance, is made using lapis lazuli, one of the earliest traded goods along the Silk Road. Another compact (fig. 18) in our collection, which was part of the 1925

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Paris Exhibition, uses black enamel as the central part of lid, which contrasts to those almost glaring colours of coral, turquoise and lapis lazuli along the borders.



Figure 16. Nécessaire, Lacloche Frères, c. 1925, Materials: carnelian, jadeite, enamel and diamond, Height 3.8 x Width 4.1 x Length 9.2cm, Liang Yi Museum Collection.

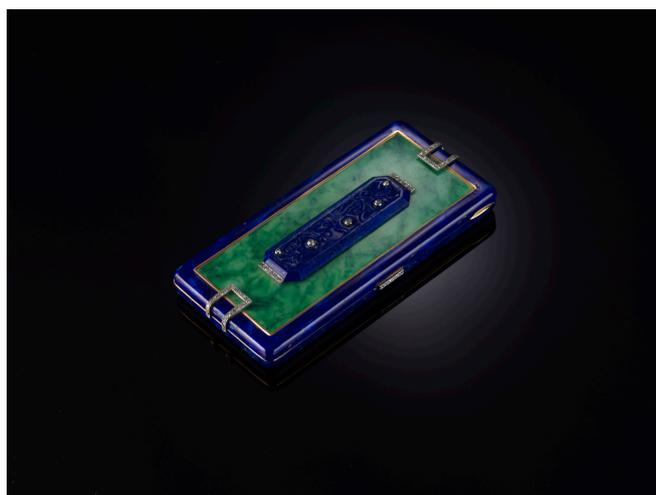


Figure 17. Compact, Lacloche Frères, 1925, Materials: gold, lapis lazuli, enamel, jade and diamond, Height 1.1 x Width 4.5 x Length 9.2cm, Liang Yi Museum Collection.

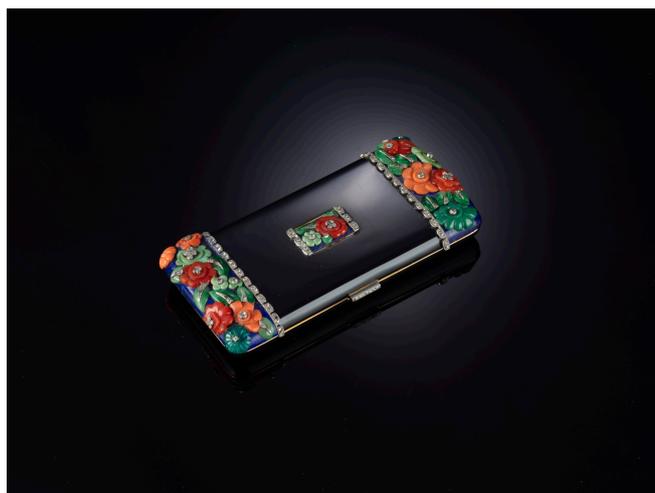


Figure 18. Compact, Lacloche Frères, 1925, Materials: gold, enamel, coral, turquoise, lapis lazuli and diamond, Height 1.4 x Width 4.3 x Length 8.8cm, Liang Yi Museum Collection.

In addition to these exquisite East Asian-inspired pieces, geometric motifs typical of the Art Deco era are present on other items in our collection. This nécessaire (fig. 20), marked by its ribbed and striped ornaments, exhibits a utilitarian and sturdy exterior. Another compact (fig. 21), designed and created during Jacques Jr.'s era, has a charming quality in its simple and sporty linear pattern, which emphasises the prominent yellow and navy-blue enamel stipes cut diagonally in the middle.

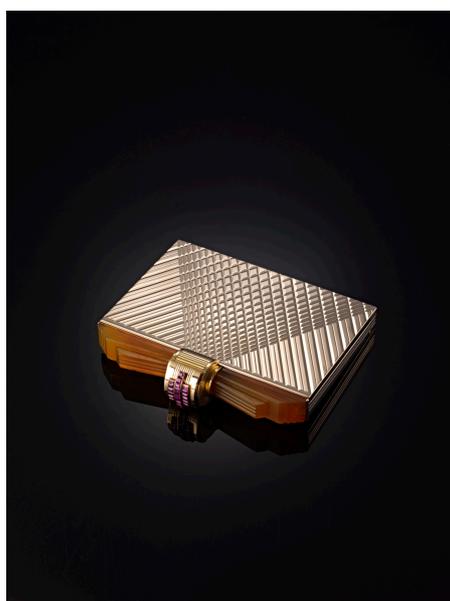


Figure 20. Nécessaire, signed J. Lacloche, made by Helluin Mattlinger, c. 1940, Materials: gold, ruby and bakelite, Height 1.6 x Width 11.2 x Length 13cm, Liang Yi Museum Collection.



Figure 21. Compact, signed Lacloche, Paris, c. 1937, Materials: silver and enamel, Height 0.7 x Width 6.8 x Length 7cm, Liang Yi Museum Collection.

Last but not least, this *carnet de bal* (dance card)<sup>30</sup> (fig. 22) is a rather peculiar piece among our collection. Shaped in an irregular trapezium, it has the facial features of the famous Italian tenor Enrico Caruso (1873-1921), one of the first commercially recorded singing talents and popular entertainment stars across Europe and the Americas<sup>31</sup>, depicted on its lid in simple coloured enamels. Modelling a vanity box after such famous figure hints at not only Lacloche's popularity internationally, but their ability to keep up with popular and ever changing trends at the time.

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<sup>30</sup> *Carnet de bal* (dance card): A small box used by women to record the names of men with whom they intend to dance at balls or social events.

<sup>31</sup> Mouillefarine and Ristelhueber 2019, 52.

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Figure 22. *Carnet de Bal*, Lacloche Frères, c. 1910, Materials: enamel, silver, gold and ivory, Height 1.6 x Length 11.9cm, Liang Yi Museum Collection.

### **Conclusion**

Today, Lacloche's name still stirs excitement among collectors. It remains one of the most celebrated jewellery manufacturers for its aesthetic vision and audacious configurations.

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