

JEWELRY

Jewelry should be seen as more than an accessory: Christie's

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Christie's Magnificent Jewels live auction begins Dec. 8. Image credit: Christie's

By NORA HOWE

While fashion design and architecture have historically been examined within the realm of fine art, jewelry has oftentimes been overlooked as an art form.

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In a panel discussion on Nov. 30 hosted by collector and entrepreneur Marjorie Gubelmann and sponsored by auction house **Christie's**, jewelry experts spoke about art and innovation within the high jewelry industry ahead of Christie's Magnificent Jewels live auction. Through an examination of pieces highlighted in Melanie Grant's *Coveted*, the panelists discussed some of the most innovative creations in jewelry design and what makes these pieces not only coveted objects but works of art.

"High jewelry has sat within the hierarchy of art below fine art it is seen as a decorative art," said Ms. Grant, jewelry expert and author. "Why is it that some things are considered more important than others?"

Jewelry is art

Fine jewelry has been glorified on red carpets, at royal events and in many high-value auctions, securing its place as an exceptional and particularly coveted accessory, but rarely seems to fall among the ranks of fine art.

"Working in a field where there are so many categories, jewelry is an outlier," said Daphne Lingon, head of jewelry at Christie's Americas. "It speaks to the creativity of so many who are involved in the process: the designer, the jeweler, the cutter.

"Creating jewelry means creating a union between the man made and natural worlds and it must be seen as more than just a commodity," she said.



Scott Armstrong for Chaumet,
Veriges Tiana, 2017.

Scott Armstrong for Chaumet. Image credit: Melanie Grant

While *Coveted* examines more than 70 of the most prominent designers working across the world today, the panelists covered only a few, such as Van Cleef and Arpels, Cindy Chao, Daniel Brush, Scott Armstrong, John Moore, Hemmerle, Chopard, Viren Bhagat and the work of panelist and designer Nicholas Varney.

"If you're willing to be true to your own voice, it's hard to not call yourself an artist," Mr. Varney said.



Nicholas Varney, Agate and Diamond Ring

Nicholas Varney agate and diamond ring. Image credit: Melanie Grant

When discussing his design inspiration for the agate and diamond ring, Mr. Varney expressed the notion of balancing opulence with modesty.

"European and American designers tend to use materials which are more modest for instance, taking a precious material like a diamond and sticking it with something that is not," he said. "Here, I've taken the edge off the opulence."



Van Cleef & Arpels, Zip Antique
Transformable necklace, 2012.

Van Cleef & Arpels antique zip. Image credit: Melanie Grant

Christie's December magnificent jewels sale will offer more than 380 lots, highlighted by noteworthy gemstones, renowned private collections and a wide selection of important signed jewels by makers including Ren Boivin, Bulgari, Cartier, Graff, Harry Winston, Raymond Yard, Tiffany & Co., Van Cleef & Arpels and Verdura.

Rounding out the sale are contemporary jewels by leading houses such as Etcetera, Hemmerle and JAR. The sale also offers the unique opportunity to own a custom ring by JAR, with proceeds from this lot designated for The

Elizabeth Taylor AIDS Foundation.

Sustainable stones

Jewelry companies have shown progress in setting industry standards through individual policies for sourcing, but many still fall short of meeting international ethical norms.

As a follow up to its 2018 "The Hidden Cost of Jewelry" report, Human Rights Watch assessed how jewelers' existing certification schemes lack rigor and transparency, determining that more needs to be done to assure consumers that the jewelry they buy is sourced responsibly.

Now more than ever, due to the increased risk of abuse, jewelry companies should conduct human rights due diligence to ensure that they do not cause or contribute to rights abuses in their supply chains.

New York-based Tiffany & Co. received a "strong" ranking in a new report from Human Rights Watch on responsible sourcing in the jewelry industry, while fellow luxury jewelers Bulgari and Cartier were scored as "moderate" ([see story](#)).

In October, the jeweler's chief sustainability officer Anisa Kamadoli Costa received the 2020 award for Ethical Leadership in Responsible Practice in Jewelry presented by Initiatives in Art and Culture ([see story](#)).

"Arts always follow a conversation that is happening at the time in which they are made," Mr. Varney said. "So it is not just what you make, but when you make it and what part of the conversation it is reflecting."

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