

JEWELRY

Christie's celebrates keen collector's eye, curates milestone private jewelry auction

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Thanks to the collector's fine jewelry expertise, the impressive range showcases the changing trends of the last sixty years. Image credit: Christie's

By EMILY IRIS DEGN

Auction house Christie's is making history by way of an upcoming auction, set to feature the priciest and most extensive volume of privately-owned jewelry to date.

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The collection was owned by Austrian billionaire Heidi Horten, who amassed her fortune following the death of her first husband of almost 20 years, Helmut Horten the founder of the German department store Horten AG in 1987. She spent the rest of her life collecting art and fine jewelry, cataloging the height of luxury design throughout the years until her death in 2022.

"Mrs. Horten was a very private collector and the collection was known to be legendary in the world of luxury and jewels for decades," said Rahul Kadakia, international head of jewelry at **Christie's**, New York.

"Now Christie's has the pleasure to reveal to the world this once-in-a-lifetime collection," Mr. Kadakia said.

"Highlights will be on exhibition in Hong Kong from the 3rd to the 6th of April, and further highlights, including the Briolette of India, will be on view in New York as of the 14th of April."

Tracing treasures

Mrs. Horten's impressive collection tells the story of 20th and 21st-century fashion, tracking the changing jewelry styles in real time.

In May, Christie's will auction 700 items from the collection through an **auction series** to take place in Geneva on May 10th and 12th during Luxury Week, and **virtually** from May 3rd through the 15th. The world-renowned lineup includes treasured pieces from luxury jewelers like Roman jeweler Bulgari, French jewelry maison Cartier and U.S. jeweler Harry Winston, offering a glimpse of what the most elite figures were wearing in each era that she lived through.



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"This collection retraces 60 years of jewelry designs from the best houses in the world, giving an overview of taste and fashion changes during this period of time," Mr. Kadakia said.

"Mrs. Horten collected with passion, knowledge and a very keen eye to add the best jewels and gems on the market to the collection."

The carefully selected pieces demonstrate this knowledge Mrs. Horten held, making the collection not only the biggest in scale and potential profits, but among the most prestigious in content, her expertise adding to the impressive value of it all.



The Bulgari necklace of sapphire, colored sapphire, emerald and diamond necklace is to be included in the first auction in Geneva. Image credit: Christie's

There are numerous key items that will go up for auction, including designs made of jade, pearls and sapphire. They will range from 1970s vintage pieces to more modern styles from the 1990s.

One of the most important pieces is the Briolette of India.

"The Briolette of India is an incredible diamond, cut by celebrated diamond cutter Atanik Eknayan in Neuilly France in 1908-9," Mr. Kadakia said.

"It is featured in Hans Nadelhoffer's famous book on Cartier jewels where it was suspended from a large natural pearl," he said. "The American philanthropist George Blumenthal purchased the stone from Cartier in 1910, and in 1946 his widow sold the stone to Harry Winston.

"A year later the stone was sold to an Indian Maharaja in a jewel that was designed to be worn as a pendant to a necklace, as a clip or as a diadem, and it remained in the Maharaja's possession until he passed and Winston

repurchased it in 1956."



The Harry Winston natural and cultured pearl and colored diamond necklace will be auctioned in Geneva's first slot. Image credit: Christie's

It was then that the elite gem was sold to a Canadian woman, and later rebought by Mr. Winston in 1967.

After this extensive journey on the part of the diamond, it finally found a permanent home, coming into the hands of Mrs. Horten in 1971, where it remained for 52 years. Now, it is entering a new stage of life.

"This is the first time that this 90-carat, D-color, elegantly shaped Briolette is offered for sale at auction," Mr. Kadakia said.

There is also another rare jewel to be featured at auction.

"The Sunrise ruby is the most important ruby to have ever been offered at auction," Mr. Kadakia said.

"Over 25 carats and pigeon blood' red in color, it previously sold at auction for \$30 million in Geneva in 2014," he said. "The ruby possesses a highly attractive homogenous color and a fine purity alongside an exceptional brilliance.

"It is undoubtedly one of the rarest gems on earth."



The Sunrise Ruby' Cartier ruby and diamond ring joins the Geneva first auction line-up. Image credit: Christie's

The Bulgari range alone is among the top five ever curated according to quality rankings, detailing 30 years of the brand's signature styles.

"The amazing 30 jadeite jewels are highlighted by a single-strand necklace of 26 uniformed beads," Mr. Kadakia said.

"The selection also comprises the largest offering of Bulgari jewels ever assembled by a private collector, accounting for around 130 of the 700 jewels."



The Bvlgari pieces are among the most noteworthy, due to the extensive range. Image credit: Christie's

It is for these iconic treasures that the collection is predicted to be only one in three jewelry collections in history to ever surpass \$100 million in profits, as the pre-sale estimate put the auction at realizing over \$150 million.

Female framing

Honoring the wishes of Mrs. Horten, all of the proceeds are to go to the Heidi Horten Foundation, supporting the organization's private museum in Vienna that hosts her large art collection, filled with modern and contemporary pieces.

Additionally, the proceeds will help fund the foundation's medical research and humanitarian work, continuing the legacy of Mrs. Horten.



Mrs. Horten was a wealthy philanthropist, whose last wishes included the continuation of her work. Image credit: Heidi Horten Foundation

Christie's has often supported both women collectors and artists, celebrating the female figures fueling the world of successful art. Recently, the auction house presented a showcase film about female surrealist painters, focusing on the achievements of 1920s artists ([see story](#)).

In October of 2022, Christie's also auctioned the archaeologically-focused collection of Ann Getty a paleoanthropologist, philanthropist and socialite ([see story](#)). The auction included more than 1,500 items.