



ROCKS AROUND THE BLOCK

Auction houses and art fairs are becoming rich seams for contemporary jewellery as the genre crosses the line into design collectable. **Vivienne Becker** reports

During Frieze Week last October, I found myself caught up in a flurry of unexpected jewellery activity. Piaget hosted a dinner at Annabel's in collaboration with the Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh; De Grisogono welcomed us into Christie's new private salon on King Street to ogle its stupendous 163ct flawless D-colour diamond (sold for around £25m, pictured right); costume jeweller Vicki Sarge held an exhibition of jewels by artist-designer Hervé van der Straeten at her Belgravia atelier; Munich-based master jeweller Hemmerle and jewellery dealer Siegelson brought their best wares to art and design fair PAD in Berkeley Square; and in the dark, fragrant wood-lined Antony Gormley room at the Beaumont Hotel, the wunderkind of contemporary jewellery design Lauren Adriana previewed some of the jewels (example pictured overleaf, price on request) being presented at contemporary art auction house Phillips this spring.



This upcoming Phillips show, the first public exhibition of Adriana's work, is of particular note. Not only does it give this young and hugely talented designer a global platform, but it also marks a major milestone in the presentation and perception of contemporary jewellery, not so much as a work of art, but as a fully fledged, sophisticated design collectable.

These Frieze jewellery events are evidence, too, of a shift in focus towards the work of individual designer-jewellers, which in turn is helping to rebalance the intrinsic value of a jewel with that of cutting-edge design.

From top: Christie's Magnificent Jewels auction in Geneva in November 2017. One of the lots was this De Grisogono necklace with a 163ct flawless D-colour diamond, which sold for around £25m at Christie's



Clockwise from left: Lee Siegelson's stand at last year's Design Miami/Basel – he is the first fine jeweller to have exhibited at the fair. A Piaget watch that belonged to Andy Warhol and went on show at Annabel's as part of a collaboration with Pittsburgh's Andy Warhol

Museum. Lauren Adriana gold, silver, peridot, garnet, tourmaline and spinel XO cuffs, price on request. Margaret rose gold, silver and diamond Tiara ring, £30,000. Viren Bhagat platinum, ruby and diamond ring, sold for \$10.5m at Sotheby's Hong Kong



“Component materials have always been the driver for the price of jewellery, but after a period of transition, collectors are now looking for exquisite design as well as superb quality of materials and craftsmanship,” says Christian Hemmerle, now at the helm of the family business. While Hemmerle has long married these elements in equal measure (ever since the 1990s, when Stefan Hemmerle dramatically changed the company's design direction towards powerful modern-art-inspired linear abstraction), now there is a significant change in attitude. This year, Hemmerle celebrates its 125th anniversary with a series of one-of-a-kind jewels (earrings pictured overleaf, price on request) inspired by the medals and orders the company made in the 1890s, such as the Star of the Order diamond earrings made from the original stamp for the Order of St Gregory the Great.

Last year, New York-based dealer Lee Siegelson – who sells 20th- and 21st-century jewellery, including pieces by Adriana and the illustrious Daniel Brush – was the first fine jeweller to exhibit at Design Miami/Basel (pictured above). He says his participation there, and at Design Miami and PAD London, sets jewellery in a different context, one that appeals to a younger, contemporary-art-buying clientele. “Art and design fairs are where the buyers and excitement are right now. When I first went to Design Miami, as a visitor, I was struck by the furniture galleries getting behind new designers and selling their work as limited editions. I realised they'd crossed a line into contemporary design collectables – and that the same thing could and should happen to jewellery.”

Siegelson's instincts were spot-on. The shift in attitude is being fuelled by a millennial-driven trend towards the experiential, immersive-luxury purchase, involving a quest to discover the most excitingly innovative and unique pieces by individual designers, and a personal connection with that designer's creative vision. In his private salon, an elegant eyrie on New York's Madison Avenue, designer-jeweller James de Givenchy embodies that personal connection with both the jewel and the



client. He has perfected a strong, sophisticated, modern aesthetic that explores colour, form and new materials, such as ceramics, rubber and steel – a style that draws clients with cutting-edge, contemporary tastes. He agrees that “the biggest buyers of individual, contemporary jewellery are the clients who collect design furniture and have contemporary art on their walls. They want to be part of the future.”

In terms of the quest-based buying experience, this has been further stoked by the fact that 50 or so years ago, a designer-jeweller would probably have opened a boutique, whereas now prohibitive costs and the desire for extreme exclusivity mean this is often no longer a viable option. Subtle though it may seem, this move away from the traditional store signals a paradigm shift that's challenging and disrupting the conventional, long-established structure of buying fine jewellery.

In a quiet, under-the-radar way, auction houses have nurtured this new approach, supplementing their familiar sales of antique, estate and second-hand jewellery with

fine contemporary works sourced directly from the designer. A watershed was reached last December, when the Sotheby's New York sale of designer-jeweller Shaun Leane's archive collection of catwalk jewels (example pictured overleaf, sold for \$31,250), made for Alexander McQueen, fetched a total of nearly £2m. The sale was a departure for Sotheby's: many lots were non-precious, unconventional ornaments of pure design value that crossed jewellery with art and fashion and made provocative cultural statements. Each was ferociously fought over by collectors and institutions who were willing to pay top dollar.

Now, seeing the growth of the contemporary designer-jewellery market, these auction houses are injecting more energy into it, at both public auctions and in private sales. Phillips, on a mission to showcase the best of 20th- and 21st-century art and design, is keen to align fine jewellery with contemporary design. Sarah O'Brien, Phillips' international director of jewellery and collaborator in Adriana's exhibition, feels Phillips is in a unique position – as part gallerist, part museum and part educational and cultural hub – to demonstrate how Adriana's resolutely modern approach to jewels is right for now. “Lauren has

Showing jewellery at design fairs sets it in a different context – one that appeals to a contemporary-art-buying crowd



Clockwise from left:
Hemmerle white gold, blackened silver and diamond earrings, price on request. Shaun Leane silver and porcupine quill earrings, sold for \$31,250 at Sotheby's

New York in December 2017. David Bennett, Sotheby's worldwide chairman of jewellery, fielding bids at the auction house's Magnificent and Noble Jewels sale in Geneva in May 2017



her finger on the pulse. She works with precious gems in an abstract, non-referential style, as an expression of her urban environment, and her design adds value. These are jewels for women who want to communicate who they are – and who have a great deal to say.”

Adriana believes today's mood is about the move towards modernism. “We're consuming so much of the past, of every style and era, that there's almost no more past to consume,” she says. But it is Adriana's knowledge and love of jewellery history that enables her to innovate, to look forward, rather than back. “It is the first time since the modernists of the 1920s that designers are truly championing the contemporary,” she adds, with characteristic candour. Adriana makes exception for designer-jewellers of the 1970s, notably Andrew Grima, who looked to the future and broke radically with tradition, capturing this moment of social change with space-age, organic styles. Tellingly, Grima jewels have been riding high at auction, including, as Bonhams jewellery director for Europe, Jean Ghika, points out, more recent creations made to original Grima designs under the direction of his widow, Jojo Grima. Last September, an amethyst and diamond ring (pictured overleaf) from 2001 sold at Bonhams for £25,000, against an estimate of £4,000-£6,000.

François Curiel, Christie's chairman for Europe and Asia, has been a prime instigator of the contemporary jewellery movement and played a significant role in the backstory to today's market phenomenon. Curiel struck out on his own in the 1980s, when he championed the incomparable genius of Paris-based American artist-jeweller Joel Arthur Rosenthal (JAR). At a time when jewellery design was perceived to have little emotional depth, JAR's dreamlike, sculptural creations were deeply

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emotive – their rich cultural and historical references made modern by a painterly palette of exquisite and previously overlooked gemstones. JAR influenced generations of designer-jewellers and was the spark that ignited the entire contemporary market. Curiel experimented by offering the first JAR jewel for auction at Christie's in 1984, when the designer was virtually unknown – a pair of amethyst, sapphire and pearl-drop earrings that doubled their estimate, fetching \$16,500.

Today, JAR jewels, all one-of-a-kind and famously hard to get hold of, generate huge prices. Last November, Christie's Geneva sold a pair of multigem and sapphire-

centred shield-shaped earrings (pictured overleaf), made in 1992, for SFr324,500 (about £245,000), while a pair of ruby and diamond leaf-shaped earrings, made in 1989, more than doubled their high estimate to realise SFr336,500 (about £251,000).

There were similar trailblazing one-off sales during the 1990s, by both Christie's and Sotheby's, that paved the way for today's contemporary market – most notably of pieces by Viren Bhagat, the Mumbai-based artist-jeweller famed for his use of slender, flat, petal-shaped diamonds, light-as-air gem architecture, and compositions of shimmering serenity that blend Mughal and art-deco inspirations into truly original creations. David Bennett (pictured above), Sotheby's worldwide chairman of jewellery, admires Bhagat's artistry in contemporising



Clockwise from left: Margaret co-founders Oriana Melamed-Sabrier and Candice Ophir arriving at an exhibition of their jewellery at Christie's. Matthew Girling, global CEO of Bonhams, where Grima jewellery is achieving high prices at auction. JAR gold, silver, ruby and diamond

earrings, sold for about £245,000 at Christie's Geneva. Grima gold, amethyst and diamond ring, sold for £25,000 at Bonhams. Wallace Chan titanium, diamond, sapphire, garnet, onyx, citrine, lapis lazuli and opal Sea of Joy brooch, price on request



300-year-old influences and making them very much his own. Today, Bhagat is considered one of the most important living jewellers, likened to JAR (in fact, the two are firm friends), and his jewels are coveted by connoisseurs across the globe. Last October at Sotheby's Hong Kong, a ruby and diamond ring (pictured on second page) by Bhagat, the band set with graduated diamond beads, sold for about \$10.5m – Bhagat's name and design adding considerably to the already huge value of the rare ruby.

Since that time, Curiel has also supported Hong Kong master gem-carver and jeweller Wallace Chan (brooch pictured right, price on request), and encouraged Edmond Chin, former head of Christie's Hong Kong jewellery department, in setting up his own jewellery brand, Etcetera, in 2000. Chin's technically ingenious, complex compositions bring freshness and unexpected visual excitement to valuable gemstones that so often intimidate jewellers into safe classic designs. Chin works closely with Albert Boghossian, head of the eponymous Geneva-based jewellers and gem merchants, who has seen the appetite for contemporary design jewellery steadily grow. "Clients today are more daring," he says. "They have classic status jewels and are willing to jump into something entirely new. This in part comes from their relationship with contemporary art; now they want the same connection to their jewellery."

Last May, the Christie's Hong Kong sale of magnificent jewels devoted a special section to pieces by contemporary Asian designer-jewellers, including Chin, Michelle Ong of Carnet in Hong Kong, and Cindy Chao, a Taiwanese sculptor-jeweller whose career has been forged and fuelled by her collaboration with the auction houses, whom she calls her "long-term partners". She explains that every two years she selects pieces to be sold at auction, thus keeping her international profile high and hopefully establishing an impressive market value. It's a risk, of course, but she says the salerooms represent "a free market" and offer a "global platform", especially through the travelling previews that take highlights to key markets around the globe.

Anna Hu, another Taiwanese designer-jeweller with a theatrical, gem-laden style that writhes with movement, light and colour, was last year the first contemporary jeweller to be invited to show her work at Christie's new King Street salon. Senior international jewellery



director David Warren, who curated the show, says, "Interest in modern, cutting-edge jewellery has gathered momentum, especially among younger buyers". Even more recently, Curiel invited Geneva-based private jeweller Margaret to host an exhibition at Christie's New York of its antique-inspired jewels with their contemporary rock 'n' roll edge (example pictured on second page, £30,000) at the time of the major November art sales, when the *Salvator Mundi* exhibition was on view.

As jewellery joins the ranks of contemporary design collectables, it seems that auction houses and art fairs are the places to go today to see avant-garde, cutting-edge precious jewels by today's most talented, innovative designers and creators. As Phillips' Sarah O'Brien says, "This is the right moment to reassert the importance of design in jewellery, to show that contemporary jewellery is far more than the sum or value of its materials." ♦

A PIECE OF THE AUCTION

1stdibs, 1stdibs.com. **Anna Hu**, anna-hu.com. **Bonhams**, 101 New Bond St, London W1 (020-7447 7447; bonhams.com). **Carnet**, 119 Prince's Bldg, 10 Chater Rd, Central, Hong Kong (+852-2805 0113; carnetjewellery.com) and see Symbolic & Chase. **Christie's**, 8 King St,

London SW1 (020-7839 9060; christies.com). **Cindy Chao**, by appt, Suite 1205, 50 Connaught Rd, Central, Hong Kong (+852-2561 8298; cindychao.com). **Daniel Brush**, danielbrush.com. **De Grisogono**, 15A New Bond St, London W1 (020-7499 2225; degrisogono.com). **Design Miami/Basel**, designmiami.com; Basel, June 12-17 2018; Miami, December 5-9 2018. **Edmond Chin**, edmond@etc-ltd.com.hk. **Frieze London**, frieze.com; 4-7 October 2018. **Grima**, by appt, 07900-590 123; grimajewellery.com. **Hemmerle**, hemmerle.com. **Hervé van der Straeten**, 11 Rue Ferdinand Duval, 75004 Paris (+331-4278 9999; vanderstraeten.fr). **James de Givenchy**, +1212-421 6222; taffin.com. **JAR**, see 1stdibs. **Lauren Adriana**, 020-7727 9229; laurenadriana.com. **Margaret**, 3 Quai du Mont-Blanc, 1201 Geneva (+4122-732 6640; margaret-jewels.com). **PAD London**, pad-fairs.com/london; 1-7 October 2018. **Phillips**, 30 Berkeley Sq, London W1 (020-7318 4010; phillips.com). **Piaget**, 169 New Bond St, London W1 (020-3364 0800; piaget.com). **Shaun Leane**, 020-7493 9601; shaunleane.com. **Siegelson**, 589 Fifth Ave, Suite 1501, New York, NY 10017 (+1212-832 2666; siegelson.com). **Sotheby's**, 34-35 New Bond St, London W1 (020-7293 5000; sothebys.com). **Symbolic & Chase**, 30 Old Bond St, London W1 (020-7499 9902; symbolicchase.com). **Vicki Sarge**, 38 Elizabeth St, London SW1 (020-7259 0202; vickisarge.com). **Viren Bhagat**, virenbhagat@hotmail.com and see 1stdibs. **Wallace Chan**, wallace-chan.com.

BONHAMS, HEMMERLE, RICHARD VALENCIA, SCOTT MCDERMOTT, SIEGELSON, NEW YORK, WALLACE CHAN