

THE TAO OF JEWELRY: A COLLECTOR'S GUIDE

BY PAULA CREVOSHAY

The greatest and one of the strongest bridges between cultures is the one that is built out of art. Religion and politics have their own dialects. The language of art is universal.

– David Khalili, 2004

What is the difference between accumulating and collecting? Certainly there is nothing wrong with any of us buying things we like. But conscious collecting demands a greater degree of involvement.

Collecting is not just price and attraction, but learning about artists, materials and techniques, along with the social and economic context in which the work is produced. The payoff is a richness of enjoyment that extends deeply into the subject matter. In many respects, it's the difference between superficial enjoyment and substantial engagement.

While collecting jewelry opens windows on both social and natural history, concentrating on contemporary jewelry extends the role from voyeur to active participant. In the contemporary realm, the buyer becomes part of the artistic process. Like an editor, a collector of contemporary art can influence the here and now.

There was a time when jewelry was among the finest of the fine arts. Witness the letter Michelangelo sent to a friend complaining about his troubles working on the Sistine Chapel: "I'm a jeweler, not a painter."

Like Michelangelo, I was formally trained in the fine art disciplines. Unlike Michelangelo, I am a painter, not a jeweler. Early in my career, my focus was painting and sculpture. It was only later that I started to apply fine art principles to jewelry, using gemstones as my palette.

I have made it my life's goal to re-establish jewelry as a fine art discipline. That is why I have resisted the call of the easy money in mass-produced jewelry. I only make one-of-a-kind jewels because original art is always worth more than a copy or a print. I also think that it is important to our culture to use ancient labor-intensive techniques like granulation, piercing and hand engraving so the skills aren't lost.

That said, what does one look for in collecting fine jewelry? These are my personal ABC's...

A FOR ART

I design jewelry by applying fine art principles. Each piece tells a story. There must be perfect balance of form and proportion and complete harmony of color. At times there should be excitement and drama; other situations call for soothing serenity and comfort.

A signed jewel by a well-known artist or *haute* (high) jewelry house often bring significant premiums. With mass-produced items, the premium can be modest, while fabulous one-of-a-kind pieces are much more desirable and literally the sky is the limit.

B IS FOR BOLD

In my opinion, fine jewelry should invite engagement and elicit a reaction. And yet surprisingly, jewelry design is often *intentionally* bland. Yes, this makes little sense on the face of it. Why would someone craft a design that by definition is supposed to be regarded as beautiful, and do so by simply trying to make it "not ugly?"

Many designers work not to upset, so as not to put clients off because a design is not to their taste. This is particularly true of jewelry

featuring the most expensive stones, where you might see a ruby ring with a diamond on each side or a halo of diamonds around the center sapphire, often set in lightweight gold or platinum. This type of jewelry has no value beyond the intrinsic value of the materials. But one-of-a-kind jewelry exceeds the sum of the parts. As with any art, jewelry can and should elicit an emotional response; it should be bold.

C IS FOR CREATIVITY

Nature is my inspiration. It is an endless fount; every day I see amazing things and they excite me and I draw my inspiration from them.

I love gemstones. To me they are tangible light. When I design, most of the time I start with the center stone. I just hold it in one hand and listen for it to tell me what it wants to become and the vision of the jewel just comes to me and I draw it, so the designs don't come from me so much as come through me.

D IS FOR DETAIL

Quality is crucial and this is often reflected in the time spent in making a piece. Attention to detail is a fine way of judging this. It should be an obvious labor of love. The back and underside must be as meticulously crafted as the front; it must be beautiful in every aspect.

When you look at a well-made piece of jewelry, it should exude quality. As you rotate it beneath the light, focus on the reflections of the gems. Each stone should be mounted so that the light rolls across it in a symmetrical way. It should sparkle smoothly.

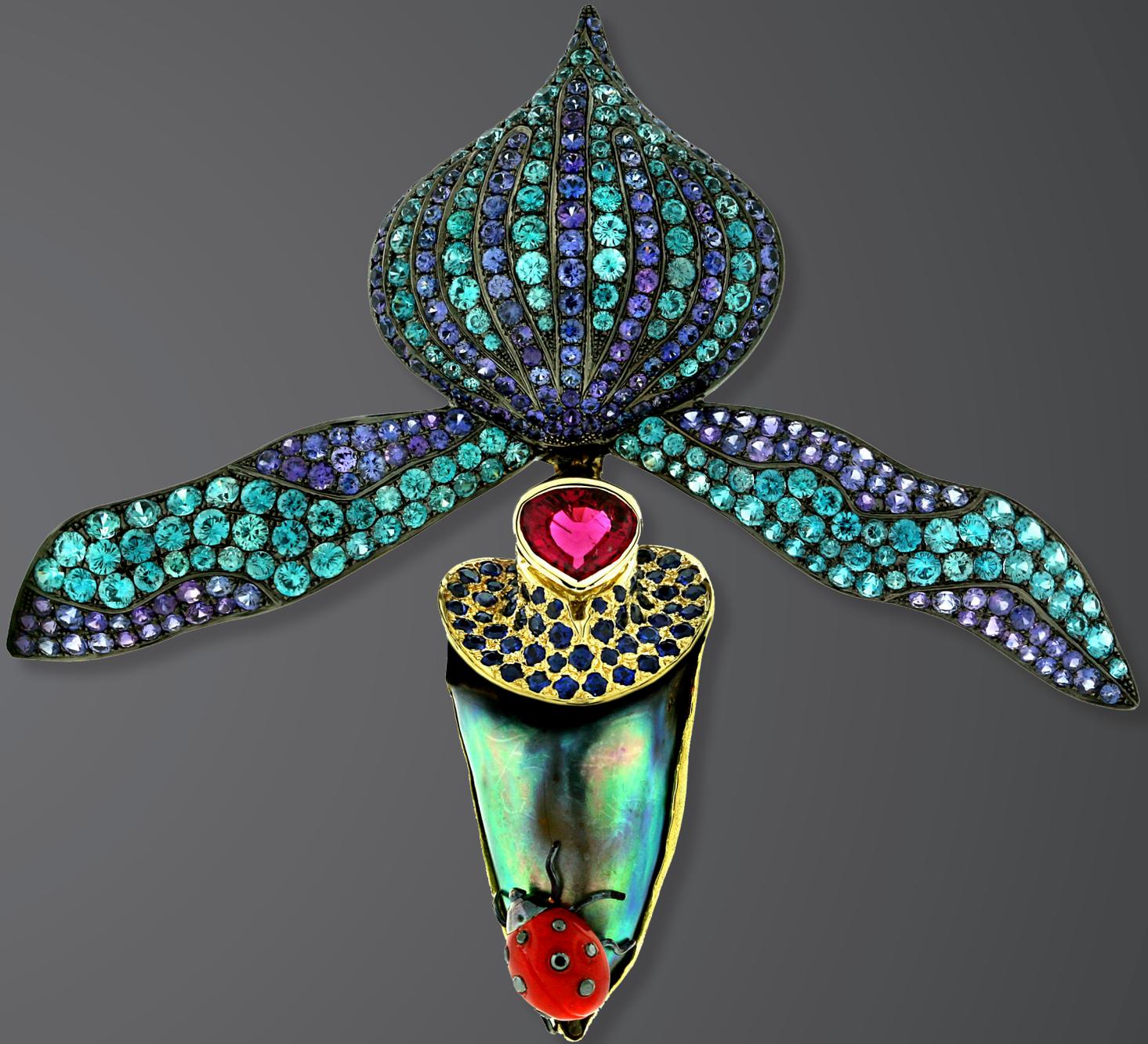
Extreme attention should be paid not just to balance and proportion, but to details. Can it withstand a lifetime of wear? How about many lifetimes? Quality jewelry is never flimsy. Are the accent stones big enough to give balance not just to the size of the other stones, but to the harmony of colors in the composition? How about the engineering? Is everything easy to work? Are the mechanisms secure and sturdy?

Finally, wearability is of supreme importance. The item must be comfortable over time, sit correctly on the body and must never catch or snag clothing.

E IS FOR EXCELLENCE

In summary, what does one look for in a fine jewel? Excellence in all ways. This means balance of form and color. The design should provide a unique viewpoint, one that draws you to it. The selection of gems should be means to an end, not an end in themselves. Each gem has its own personality. The jewel must reflect and accentuate that personality.

In creating a jewel, I do so understanding that the precious stones I work with are timeless gifts of nature. I endeavor to create something around them so beautiful that it will also stand the test of time. Jewelry can and should be more than just a setting for a gemstone; it must be fine art. It should be something so beautiful that no one would ever dream of melting it down.



"Midnight Seduction" from Paula Crevoshay, a beguiling blend of sapphire, zircon, diamond, coral and tourmaline, accented by a magnificent abalone pearl.