

## La Biennale de Paris – A Gem Among Jewelry Shows

Since becoming an annual event in 2016, the Parisian salon continues its metamorphosis and this year offered an elegant and calm aspect where the booths of merchants and the biggest antique dealers displayed many incredible objects for the pleasure of collectors who attended the latest edition, held 13-17 September 2019 in the nave of the Grand Palais.

By Marie Chabrol



With particular relevance, the show gave remarkable space to Bahrain and its mesmerizing fine pearls, as well as a panel of young, bold and promising exhibitors such as Geoffroy Riondet, a Lyon-based antique jewelry dealer, and the Parisian jeweler Marc Auclert who highlights, like no other, interesting archaeological artifacts.

Eight booths showcased gems and jewelry from international houses whose presence at the show were particularly noted, among them Henn Gems with Axel Henn, a gem-cutter involved in the management of the family business in Idar-Oberstein, who featured jewelry made in London by his brother Ingo.

### A Renewed Fair

On Thursday, September 12, the opening day welcomed no less than 10,000 guests. A real record that followed a gala dinner held the day before with the presence of the Minister of Culture, Franck Riester.

First impressions were excellent. The show looked very different from the previous editions, as was confirmed by Mathias Ary Jan, President of the National Antique Merchants Syndicate (SNA, nda). "We have changed the size of the stands by lowering them to give more space to the big glass roof. This gives the feeling of a Biennale on a human scale. Our provider Stabilo takes care of the TEFAF or Masterpiece and has designed this new cooler scenography, rejuvenating the show, because for three years we are building a new salon."

Although the name stayed the same, as did the gala dinner, the Biennale made a radical change. The 31st edition welcomed 75 exhibitors, 20% more than in 2018. "We reviewed our offer and our prices. Several years ago, the cost of some booths could exceed one million euros and were staged by the most famous decorators. We showed up, but did not necessarily make onsite sales. This situation was no longer bearable. We now offer raw booth space at €825 per square meter, with spaces starting at 20 square meters (and even 10 square meters for young talents) for the smaller ones compared to 40 square meters before. La Biennale Paris needed to evolve in order to capture a new audience as well as to reassure its historical buyers," added Ary Jan. This seems to have borne fruit as the show attracted more than 38,000 visitors, a 15% increase from last year with a five-day show compared to a nine-day show in 2018.

### A Important Guest: The Kingdom of Bahrain

The 2018 Biennale hosted an exhibition of Bahraini artists. By inviting this Middle Eastern country, the show wanted to strengthen its international dimension. "In partnership with ArtBab, the Bahraini Fair, and Sheikh Mohammed Bin

Opposite: *The Spirit of the Sky*, objet d'art made of a 35,600-ct East African aquamarine and a 10,400-ct Brazilian morganite in gold by Henn Gems. (Photo: Henn Gems)



Mathias Ary Jan, SNA president. (Photo: Courtesy of La Biennale Paris, Didier Plowy, photographer)



Peacock necklace by Mattar jewelers. (Photo: Mattar Jewelers)



Mattar Jewelers' 2019's *Phenomenon*, a natural *Pinctada radiata* pearl measuring 13mm, 14.88 carats. (Photo: Mattar Jewelers)

Essa al-Khalifa, President of Tamkeen, who supports their international actions, I invited Kaneka Subberwall, Director of ArtBab to imagine a new exhibition under the curations of Pascale Le Thorel and Amal Khalaf," explained Ary Jan. The result is a beautiful central pavilion designed to honor the artistic culture of the Kingdom of Bahrain.

Among the guests, Mattar Jewelers presented its remarkable natural pearls, all from the Arabian Gulf. The house, which dates back to the 19th century, began with Hussain bin Salman bin Mattar, a palm-date merchant who turned to the fine pearl trade. Over time, the company began specializing more and more in exceptional pieces.

Today, the sixth generation manages the house. The Biennale was an opportunity to present jewelry as rare as it is beautiful such as the *Peacock* necklace made of 749 pearls of *Pinctada radiata* for a weight of 650 carats. The central pearl measures 8.4 mm. This necklace is a beautiful challenge and celebrates the 12 primary colors of Bahraini natural pearls.

Oliver Ségura, Scientific Director at L'Ecole des Arts Joailliers under the sponsorship of Van Cleef & Arpels, commented, "Mattar Jewelers has been established in Bahrain for many generations. They are big connoisseurs of natural pearls and their fishing methods."

The Van Cleef & Arpels-sponsored school also conducted a lecture on September 12, 2019 about the pearl merchants, which provided much information on the relationship of the Gulf and Paris at the beginning of the 20th century. For those who would like see when and where

this lecture will be given again, we advise you to check the school's schedule.

For gemological reports on the pearls, Mattar Jewelers uses the DANAT Bahrain Institute for Pearls and Gemstones, continuing the mission of the Pearl & Gem Testing Laboratory founded in 1990. In 2018, the laboratory analyzed two million pearls in 2018—both natural and cultured of all sizes.

Dr. Stefanos Karampelas, DANAT's Director of Research talked about the peculiarities of these pearls that are so attractive to dealers and collectors. "Bahrain is the only country around the globe where a law is in place that prohibits anyone from selling, offering for sale, or possessing cultured pearls for trading, even if they are inlaid in jewelry items. Today, up to one-year imprisonment and a fine of up to US\$2,500 may be imposed. Moreover, since 2012, the Bahrain Pearling Path is on the UNESCO World Heritage list. Recently, the Bahrain Tourism & Exhibitions Authority introduced the pearl diving pass, with which and with the help of a registered company, interested persons (residents or tourists) can dive and collect up to 60 bivalves to look for natural pearls. Noteworthy, it is still legal in Bahrain to dive for natural pearls. In other places, it is strictly regulated or forbidden (for example, fishing of *Pinctada mazatlanika* bivalves in Mexico). *Pinctada radiata* bivalves grow from 5 to 7 cm in length, although rarely they exceed 10 cm. Consequently, natural pearls found into this mollusk rarely exceed 8 mm."

So, you can imagine how rare it would be to find a 13-mm pearl. Mattar Jewelers did just that, however, and displayed its remarkable pearl, dubbed 2019's *Phenomenon* at La Biennale Paris.



Antique blue chalcedony necklace with oxidized silver and diamond clasp. (Photo: Marc Auclert)



Liz Kim and Jörg Domeisen at their booth at La Biennale Paris. (Photo: Domeisen)



Persian turquoise from the Quajar period set in pink gold by Marc Auclert. (Photo: Marc Auclert)

The fascination for this material comes from both its rarity and its intrinsic quality as explained by Ségura, "The natural pearl market has become a niche market with the arrival of the cultured pearl and the scarcity of supply. However, the greatest designers and jewelry houses still use the natural pearl in their exceptional jewels, for its unparalleled beauty, its long tradition and its rarity! And, the quality of the mother-of-pearl, its colors, and its mythical origin have made pearls of the Gulf the most sought after natural pearls!"

"The natural pearl is a connoisseur gem," concluded Karampelas, especially in the market today where cultured pearls have become prominent. He went on to explain that this material has a bright future. "All countries where natural pearls are fished should try to monitor the natural pearl diving in order to avoid overfishing and keep the health and sustainability of ocean ecosystems. For instance, in Bahrain, divers will soon be directed only to areas overpopulated with *Pinctada radiata* [in some places, 40 mollusks per meter square can be found], so the population can be renewed. I think this parameter will play an important role in the near future as the general public is concerned more and more about environmental issues and is looking for 'fair trade' and 'sustainable' gems."

#### High-End Jewelry Making a Comeback

With the new chairmanship, high-end jewelry is making a comeback at La Biennale—not necessarily with the world famous brands that have made the reputation of this fair, but with more discreet companies. "I am extremely attached to the jeweler's presence at La Biennale. This show

is intended to be representative of the art of living in the French way. Also, jewelry has its place in an event such as this," continued Ary Jan.

Because the antique jewel was well represented with the presence of four highly specialized dealers, we mention a few examples that especially stood out.

Marc Auclert is a Parisian jeweler located on the Rue de Castiglione next to the Place Vendôme. His work revolves around archaeological artifacts that he enhances in a remarkable fashion. In addition to his great kindness and his communicative passion, he has a taste for history and likes to explain what characterizes his unique pieces. We were particularly impressed by several of his turquoise jewels.

One was Persian, a vintage Quajar dating from the 19th century, showcased in a large yellow gold ring. Another was an Indo-Mughal brooch embellished with a gold motif in the kundan style, featuring fine half pearls, a ruby and green beryls. These stones are rare enough in high-end jewelry to be noted.



Enameled gold necklace with diamonds and green tourmalines by Henn Gems. (Photo: Henn Gems)



Gold ring featuring a 13.24-ct green tourmaline by Domeisen. (Photo: Domeisen)



The Polar Bears, crafted from a 5500-ct Brazilian aquamarine by Henn Gems. (Photo: Henn Gems)

The work of Henn Gems is well known to connoisseurs for its carved gemstones as beautiful as they are rare. Among the pieces presented was a platinum and diamond pendant set with a lion's head carved in an aquamarine from the historic Santa Maria Mine in Itabira, Brazil. This stone was discovered in 1927 and remained for three generations in the same family before being crafted by Alfred Zimmermann, one of the company's cutters.

Also of note was Rapperswill-Domeisen Jewelry, a Swiss company based near Zurich, whose ultra-contemporary work has one purpose: to enhance the beauty of gemstones as described by Liz Kim Domeisen. "Stones are protagonists placed in a story among the textural landscape of gold." Their creations are crafted by the artist couple of Jörg Domeisen, a gemologist and master goldsmith, and his wife Liz Kim, a visual artist.

What can we expect going forward? Will we see the return of high-end jewelry as traditionally shown during previous Biennales? Mathias Ary Jan offered his opinion: "The jewelry houses now belong to large groups and their strategies have changed. The collections are presented in July and sometimes known to customers several months in advance. The houses favor solo-show and exclusively made for their customers. That said, I am in contact with them and extremely attached to their return because I am a great admirer of high-end jewelry. As you can see, our door is wide open!" ■