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Foreword Review

Jewels and Jewelry

Clare Phillips
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Lively chats focused on the last five centuries of Western jewelry would sway many admirers of the sparkling symbols of love, faith and affluence to explore further the intricate artistry, precious stones and diverse materials exemplified in the jewelry of long ago.

The Victoria and Albert Museum's Jewellery Gallery in London, one of the most comprehensive jewelry collections in the world with more than 4,500 treasures dating mostly from medieval through modern times, is an ideal stop for anyone wishing to sense the landscape of Western jewelry and gaze dreamily upon historic and sumptuous gems. Among the famous masterpieces contained within the Jewellery Gallery is the sixteenth-century Armada Jewel, an enameled gold set pendant measuring 2.8 inches in height and flaunting table-cut diamonds and Burmese rubies, a gift from Queen Elizabeth to Sir Thomas Heneage after the defeat of the Spanish Armada.

The great news is that one needn't travel to London to appreciate the Armada Jewel or other exquisite combinations of shimmering stones and intriguing techniques introduced over the centuries by Europeans and North Americans. In Jewels and Jewelry, readers are showered with diamonds, pearls and colored gemstones such as emeralds, rubies and moonstones, and engaged with descriptions of craft and style in the use of gold, silver, platinum and base metals, even materials such as enamel and glass. The pages burst forth with jewelry ranging from pendants and brooches to earrings and tiaras, and of course renowned masterworks such as the Armada Jewel, all neatly organized within a historical context by Phillips with dazzling color photography by Ian Thomas. Most of the pieces illustrated in the book are on display in the Jewellery Gallery.

The book is divided into three parts-Materials, Chronology of Style and Manufacturing and Distribution-and succeeds in illuminating a mix of jewelry from various periods to include a 1995 painted papier-mÃ¢ché twenty-inch neckpiece by American designer Marjorie Schick (those wishing to delve deeper into the Jewellery Gallery's entire collection can turn to the book's bibliography). Phillips, a curator in the Department of Metalwork, Silver and Jewellery at the Victoria and Albert Museum and author of Jewelry (1996) do an elegant job of conveying an authoritative examination of jewelry within the Western tradition spanning the last five centuries.

DOROTHY GOEPEL (March / April 2000)

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