

A La Vieille Russie Takes Us On A Jewelry Journey from the Post War Years through The 1980s



Beth Bernstein Contributor 

ForbesLife

I write about modern and antique fine jewelry.

Oct 14, 2019, 07:09pm

When you think of A La Vieille Russie in NYC, you think of rare Russian treasures, premier pieces that represent the finest of 18th and 19th century European and American jewelry and Objets de vertu. The shop which was originally founded in 185 in Kiev counted legendary goldsmith Peter Carl Faberge as a client and later became experts in his work. If you want to find authentic pieces with provenance, A La Vieille Russie (ALVR) is a small world of jewelry recalling the details and early techniques that create the magic that is antique jewelry.

Over the past several years, Peter Schaffer, Director of A La Vieille Russie has been witnessing a change in the market and he has been building a collection to meet the growing demand. He has curated *Deceptively Modern: Jewelry 1940s-1980s*, an exhibition sale that highlights dynamic pieces that were designed from the end of WWII through the 1980s. On view from October 23rd through November 15th, the collection features bold statement jewelry by famed designers such as Cartier, Van Cleef & Arpels, Mauboussin, Gucci, and Angela Cummings, among others. “Our goal to present the change from delicate realism of previous decades and concentrate on the abstract, the singular and the ultra-modern pieces that were designed during the time periods we are featuring,” Schaffer explains.



Cartier Paris gold and silver earrings, circa 1960s A LA VIEILLE RUSSIE

There will be approximately 70 pieces in the collection including incredible gold works from sculptural earrings and brooches, geometric bracelets as well as colored stones in vivid cocktail rings to vibrant statement necklaces which Schaffer describes as “both timelessness and relevant for today’s fashion and lifestyle.”



Gold gas pipe bracelet, circa 1940s A LA VIEILLE RUSSIE

To learn more about the collection, I stopped in for a preview and met with Peter Schaffer, who graciously answered my questions about the exhibition.

Over the past few years, we have been seeing a new trend toward more collectors and jewelry enthusiasts interested in purchasing pieces that are vintage postwar and beyond. Is this the reason you decided to curate this collection?

Schaffer: “I’m not sure I would call it a ‘new’ trend, but rather a more visible one. What we are witnessing is the collector’s desire to purchase jewelry that can be easily worn in all situations. The ‘in all situations’ is a driving force today. The modern woman wants to be able to wear a piece or pieces in the morning to the office or a meeting and be just as comfortable wearing it to the theatre at night. When we talk about earlier time periods, say Art Nouveau, early Victorian or Georgian, we are dealing with rare, often more fragile pieces that cannot be worn all of the time. This works for the collector who is looking at jewelry not only from a wearable perspective but also from a historical one. With these vintage pieces, we are appealing to a wider range of clients and potential clients.”



A pair of white and yellow gold bracelets, circa 1950s A LA VIEILLE RUSSIE



Angela Cummings black and gold bangle, circa 1795 A LA VIEILLE RUSSIE

Is this what appealed to you most about mounting this exhibition?

Schaffer: “A few aspects about this time period in jewelry appealed to us. People often begin collecting with items that are familiar and we’ve found that this era resonates with a large global audience of starter and consummate collectors. Another factor that piqued our interest in this collection—starting in the 1940s after WWII, gold became available again for use in jewelry design after being banned for years prior in Europe. This allowed for great artistic expression and exploration with gold in the following years and we are fortunate to have some of the best examples from this period including pieces from many of the renowned houses.”



Jean Ete blue sapphire yellow sapphire and citrine bracelet, circa 1970s A LA VIEILLE RUSSIE



Gold bamboo form fringe necklace, circa 1950 A LA VIEILLE RUSSIE

Who is the customer given the higher price point and rarity of the pieces you've chosen?

Schaffer: "The higher price point is commensurate with the high quality we have on offer. You cannot have one without the other. We think current clients and visitors to

the gallery will be surprised at the accessibility of the collection, considering that they are also some of the finest representations from these decades. For example, we have several pieces by master goldsmiths like George L'Enfant who has created pieces for some of the best jewelry houses including Cartier and Van Cleef & Arpels. We encourage people to buy what they love and what appeals to them. The great thing about these pieces is that, while collectible, they are also extremely wearable. It is easy to see ways in which you can incorporate and adapt them to today's fashion. “



Aquamarine and diamond necklace, circa 1955. Photo: A La Vieille Russie

This brings me to my next question. ALVR is known for its rare Europe and American antique pieces—from the Victorian through Art Nouveau periods. How did you find the pieces for this exhibition?

Schaffer: “We have offered pieces from this period for a long time, but only recently have we been able to amass enough of the highest quality to mount a full exhibition. We look to acquire pieces that will delight our clients as much as they delight us,

however, it's always about the quality, rarity and beauty. Our motto is 'Where the Unusual is Usual' (sm) and we take that to heart with each piece we decide to acquire. During our search, it was easy to find ordinary pieces from these time periods. It took us a while longer but we continued our search and are finally able now to mount our exhibition.”



Mauboussin_Gold, Ruby and Diamond Bracelet, circa 1940s A LA VIEILLE RUSSIE

Can you tell me more about your working Katy Kane, 25-year vintage andcouture clothing and accessories expert and dealer for the exhibition?

“We thought it would be more alluring and interesting to put the jewelry in context with the clothes and we could think of no one else who we would trust to collaborate on this with us than Katy who specializes in 20th century American and European fashion and accessories. Among her prestigious clients, she lists The Costume Institute at the Metropolitan Museum, The Boston Museum of Fine Arts, The Kyoto Costume Institute, private museums and fashion designers, celebrities and Hollywood costumers. Much of the fashion she used as a backdrop for the jewelry is rare, one of kind, or custom items by leading designers of the periods we are

showing in jewelry, including Norman Norell, Geoffrey Beene, Yves Saint Laurent, Balmain, and Halston And, like the jewelry, many of these fashion houses remain timelessly relevant and are still coveted by collectors today.”

Can you mention some of the pieces of jewelry that are particularly noteworthy?

“There are so many wonderful pieces but to list a few: a pair of 1960s Paris Van Cleef & Arpels gold, ruby and diamond earrings; a pair of English onyx and diamond earrings set in platinum circa 1970s; and an oversized Siberian amethyst and diamond cocktail ring circa 1950s. A significant selection of rare signed Cartier jewelry is also in the mix. Among these pieces, is a rare, circa 1950s, gold calla lily brooch set with citrines, diamonds and sapphires from Cartier Paris which can be seen in a black and white photo in *Amazing Cartier: Jewelry Design since 1937*.



Van Cleef and Arpels gold, ruby, and diamond earrings, circa 1960s A LA VIEILLE RUSSIE



An amethyst ring with diamond accents, circa 1950s. Photo: A La Vieille Russie



Cartier, Paris yellow sapphire ring, circa 1950s A LA VIEILLE RUSSIE



Cartier gold and citrine calla lily brooch, circa 1950s A LA VIEILLE RUSSIE



Cartier diamond and gold earrings, circa 1950s A LA VIEILLE RUSSIE

Will you be adding more to evolve this collection and this time period?

Schaffer: “We believe that this collection is not a departure from, but a continuation our tradition of having wonderful and unique pieces. We have been a family-run business for nearly 170 years and the key to longevity is continually introducing new and unusual items back to the market and to grab the attention of collectors. Don’t forget, when we first started in business, many of the items we now have were not even a glimmer in the eye of the maker whose work we now treasure! That is the beauty of this business, time continues and brings new and great pieces to light.”



Gold Bracelet, circa 1970s A LA VIEILLE RUSSIE



Gucci Elephant Hair ring, circa 1960s A LA VIEILLE RUSSIE



Carvin French lapis lazuli snake brooch, circa 1980s A LA VIEILLE RUSSIE

Follow me on [Twitter](#) or [LinkedIn](#). Check out my [website](#).



Beth Bernstein

I am a jewelry historian, jewelry expert and collector of period and modern jewel and a purveyor all things sparkly. I have a romance going on with the legend, langu... **Read More**