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Tiger lorgnette owned by the Duchess of Windsor, Cartier Paris, special order, 1954. Gold, enamel, emeralds, glass. Cartier collection. —Nick Welsh photo



Brilliant

Cartier In The Twentieth Century
AT THE DENVER ART MUSEUM
Through March 15



Egyptian striking clock owned by Mrs George (Florence) Blumenthal, Cartier Paris, 1927. Rectangular eight-day movement, Breguet balance spring. Gold, silver gilt, mother-of-pearl, lapis lazuli, coral, emerald, cornelian, enamel. Cartier collection. —Nick Welsh photo

BY PIERRE RAINERO

DENVER, COLO. — “A particle of God”; “a flash of the light that created the world”; “spirit made matter to be held between the fingers, the invisible made substance and stone”: these are the gemstone-inspired metaphors that the great poet Paul Claudel used in *The Mystique of Precious Stones*, a book-length poem he wrote in 1937 for his friend Pierre Cartier. Four years earlier, the poet’s son had married the jeweler’s daughter, sealing the union of two families and, symbolically, of two art forms destined to come together — not least because both, prior to either interpretation or appropriation, distill pure emotion.

By imparting a mystical dimension and spiritual significance to precious stones and the art of their assembly, Claudel, among other things, emphasized what sets jewelry apart among the decorative arts: a jewel is a declaration of faith. This is not only because the creation of its sublime materials is shrouded in mystery but also because we offer jewelry and accept it out of love. We wear it as a message, a declaration, an offering, a talisman. Jewelers work in an ever-present symbolic and poetic dimension that designers of furniture and other functional objects rarely touch upon. In this, jewelry is a truly singular art form.

The House of Cartier, moreover, through its unique style — characterized by a quest for refinement, true emotion and authenticity — has always emphasized originality. This did not prevent the firm from inscribing its creations within the artistic and cultural landscape of its time. But it did so in a manner all its own: countless examples from the history of the firm illustrate its original approach, including the many creations of the 1920s

inspired by faraway civilizations. Consider, for example, the six brooches in “Brilliant: Cartier in the Twentieth Century” that draw on ancient Egypt and place them alongside architectural and decorative works of similar inspiration produced in the same period.

In city streets, in the apartments of Paris and New York, and aboard ocean liners, the Egyptomania of Art Deco materialized in buildings and decor that blended elegance and kitsch in a pastiche of the stylistic elements of Nile Valley temples and tombs. Grauman’s Egyptian Theatre in Los Angeles (1922) and the Louxor cinema in Paris (1921) are spectacular examples. Cartier’s creative spirit, however, was of another kind entirely. Drawing inspiration from distant lands, its approach was neither pastiche nor imitation; instead, it set out to recapture the authenticity of universal and timeless emotions. This explains the frequent use of *apprêts*, a term used at Cartier to refer to authentic items — such as faience components — that Pierre’s brother Louis purchased from antiques dealers and reinterpreted in the form of jewelry.

The quest for the essential became a hallmark of the firm from the moment Louis Cartier took over the direction of jewelry creation in 1899. Applying a classically influenced aesthetic and philosophy, he consistently stripped away anything he considered superfluous in order to arrive at the essence of beauty. It was a Platonic approach, similar to the one that leads Socrates, in the famous *Greater Hippias* dialogue, to ask the sophist: “What is the beautiful?” By way of answer, Hippias can only recite examples of beauty: a gracious maiden; gold, for its ability to ennoble all things; the virtues of a happy life. But

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Vanity set, Cartier Paris, 1927. Silver, gold, *laque bur-gauté* panels, enamel, coral, obsidian, glass. Purchased by Florence Blumenthal and subsequently by Count Edmond de Fels, Prince de Heffingen. Barbara Streisand collection.

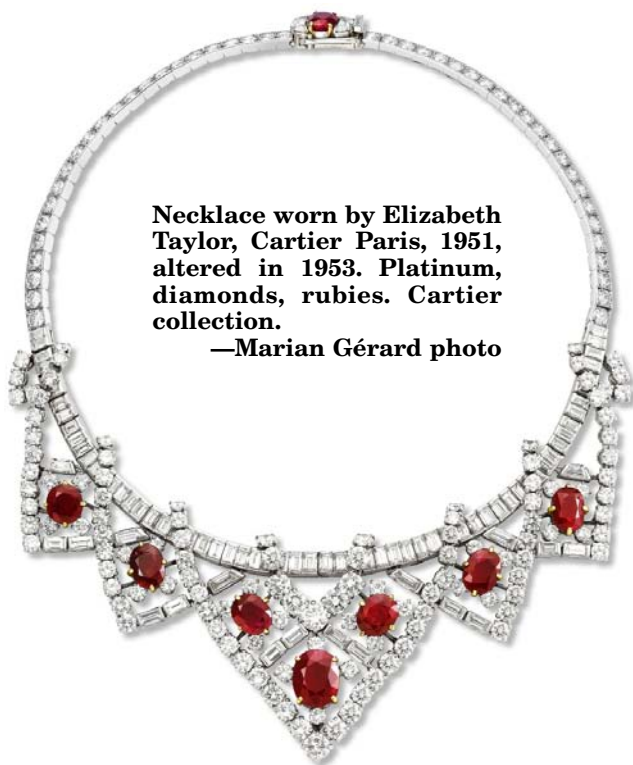


Five-dial clock owned by Franklin D. Roosevelt, Cartier New York, 1930. Ebonite, silver, nephrite, enamel, European Watch & Clock Company movement. Translated, the French inscription reads "The Hour Of Victory / In The World / In Honor Of Its Architect / President Of The United States / Franklin D. Roosevelt." Private collection.



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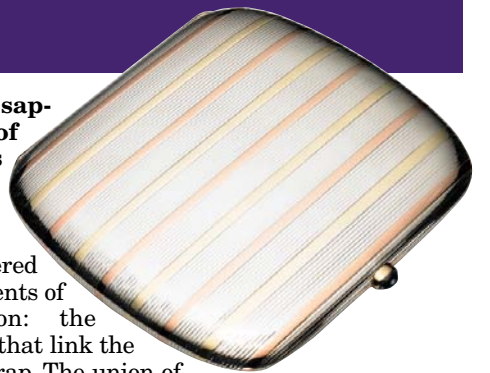


Necklace worn by Elizabeth Taylor, Cartier Paris, 1951, altered in 1953. Platinum, diamonds, rubies. Cartier collection.
—Marian Gérard photo



Necklace created for Sir Bhupindra Singh, Maharaja of Patiala, Cartier Paris, special order, 1928. Platinum, diamonds, zirconias, topazes, synthetic rubies, smoky quartz, citrine. Cartier collection.
—Nils Hermann photo

Cigarette case, Cartier Paris, 1912. Silver, green and pink gold; sapphire cabochon. Inscribed on its interior with the signatures of approximately 30 figures related to the birth of aviation, this case belonged to Willis McCormick, president of Queen Aviation. Cartier collection. —Nick Welsh photo



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for Socrates, these examples fall short of defining the nature of what is beautiful, and he finally renounces his quest, acknowledging the truth of the proverb "Beautiful things are difficult." Cartier's exceptional craftsmanship resembles this subtle exercise, in which rigorous aesthetic principles combine with imaginative inspiration to arrive at the essence of beauty.

A New Aesthetic

This new approach emerged in the first years of the 1900s with the garland style, the name given to Cartier's innovative and virtuoso use of diamonds, platinum and millegrain settings to reinvent and refine Eighteenth Century French neoclassicism in the form of sparkling, fluid and ethereal jewels. These would lay the foundation for Cartier's international reputation. References to Louis XVI style were also incorporated into bejeweled decorative and functional objects, such as the enamel desk clocks that were gradually stripped of their traditional classical decorations — garlands, acanthus and laurel leaves, tassels and bows — to achieve the spare elegance of a circle in a square. As early as 1904, Cartier also began producing abstract jewelry with geometric styling. This established the firm as a pioneer of the Modern style, not only within the field of fine jewelry but also within the history of art in general.

The House of Cartier anticipated not only the streamlined minimalism of the Modern but also the future of another functional object: the wristwatch, to which Louis Cartier turned his attention in 1904 — a quarter of a century before wristwatches achieved broad popularity. This time, especially with his men's watches, he not only gradually stripped away superfluous decoration but also undertook an aesthetic process focused on the object's *function*, namely, to show time on the wrist. The jeweler was never more a *designer* than in that moment,

Santos wristwatch, Cartier, Paris, 1915. Gold, sapphire, leather strap. Cartier collection.
—Nick Welsh photo



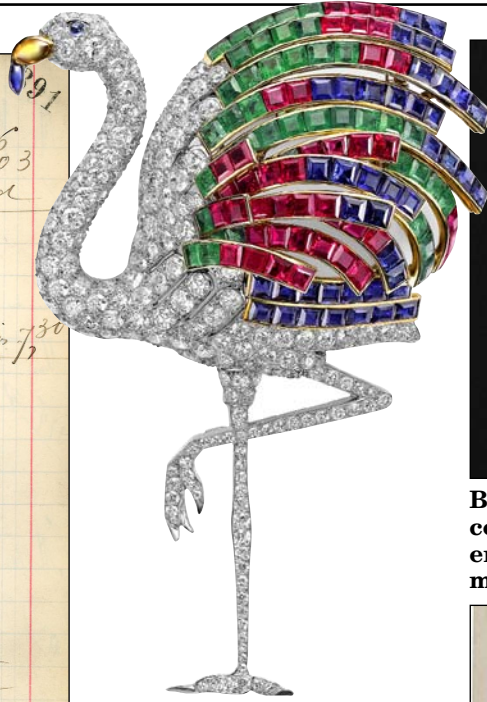
as he pondered the key elements of this function: the attachments that link the watch and strap. The union of the two achieved formal and functional perfection in the Tank, which debuted in 1919, refining concepts first articulated in the Tonneau (1906) and the Tortue (1912). Throughout the firm's watchmaking history, the wristwatch has been a privileged indicator of the radical changes that have swept society. Thus, for example, the radically deconstructed Crash captures the energy of swinging London in the late 1960s while the massive Pasha de Cartier expresses the 1980s trend toward objects that display taste and power.

Beyond Fashion

In the 1920s, the growing influence of Jeanne Toussaint — who would be appointed director of fine jewelry in 1933 — marked an evolution in Cartier's style, though its fundamentals would never be called into question. "The panther," as Toussaint came to be known, was a woman of elegance, forceful character and bold taste. With a confident, feminine approach that was groundbreaking for jewelry design at the time, she brought about the reinstatement of figurative elements at Cartier, especially floral and animal motifs. Through her independent turn of mind and visionary grasp of the profound social changes of the period after World War I, she embodied the triumph of the *garçonne*, or flapper, and of modern women in general, with great refinement. With the creation of long *sautoir* necklaces perfectly adapted to straight dresses, she responded aesthetically and functionally to the new silhouettes put forward by her fashion designer friends Jeanne Lanvin, Elsa Schiaparelli, Jean Patou and Lucien Lelong. Toussaint also understood and shared the desire of women to assert themselves beyond the dictates of fashion. Influenced by sculpture, she thought up bold, three-dimensional ornaments, either abstract or figurative, that would previously have been inconceiv-



Original drawing of the flamingo brooch, designed by Jeanne Toussaint for Cartier in 1940. Cartier Archives.



Flamingo brooch worn by the Duchess of Windsor, Cartier Paris, special order, 1940. Sold to the Duke of Windsor. The Duke and Duchess supplied many of stones. Platinum, diamonds, emeralds, rubies, sapphires, citrine. Cartier collection. —Nils Hermann photo



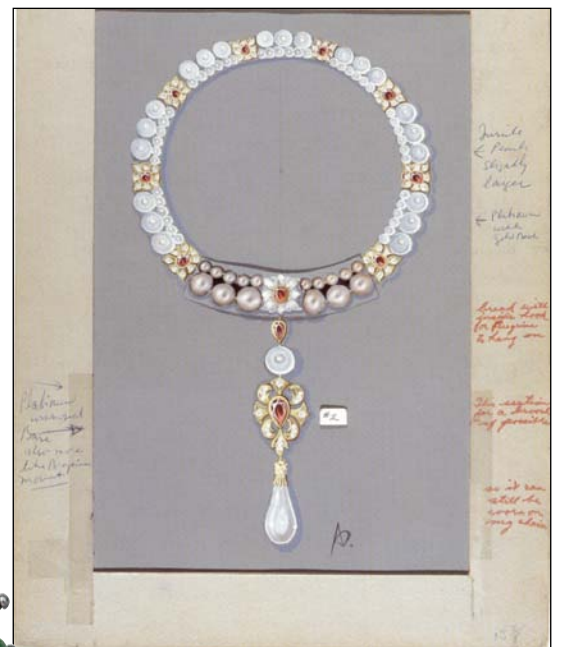
Bracelet, Cartier Paris, 1922. Platinum, coral, cushion-shaped emerald, collet-set emerald and onyx cabochons, pave-set diamonds. Private collection.



Desk set with clock, Cartier Paris for Cartier New York, 1931. Round European Watch & Clock Company movement, Cotes de Genève decoration, Breguet balance spring. This set holds two fountain pens and a matching mechanical pencil. The clock is mounted on the cover of a compartment that holds stamps, flanked by two inkwells. Silver, gold, lacquer, nephrite, enamel. Cartier collection. —Nick Welsh photo



Necklace, Cartier London, 1938, lengthened by Cartier Paris in 1963. The film director and producer Sir Alexander Korda (1893–1956) gave this necklace to his second wife, actress Merle Oberon (1911–1979). Cartier lengthened the chain by adding 29 diamond rondelles. Old European and single-cut diamonds, slightly baroque-shaped emerald cabochon drops. Private collection.



Design drawing for the necklace with the La Peregrina pearl, for Elizabeth Taylor. The actress specifies her choices in red ink on the drawing, a reminder of her intense dialogue with Cartier. Cartier New York, 1972. Archives Cartier.

able accessories for women of society. They were manifestos for an emancipated womanhood, freed from constraint, that challenged the narrow limits of “good taste.” In 1926, she debuted naturalist brooches featuring wild beasts, such as tigers and panthers that were coiled to jump — and perhaps even bite. The House of Cartier also expressed this new audacity through stunning color combinations that mixed diamonds with emeralds, rubies and sapphires engraved with floral motifs in the Indian manner. This style, later given the name Tutti Frutti, overturned the conventions of jewelry design.

This same period saw the launch — in 1924 — of one of Cartier’s most iconic creations, first popularized by Jean Cocteau: the Trinity ring and bracelet, made of rolling bands of white, rose and yellow gold. Once again, Cartier had pioneered an innovative and versatile creation, both simple and extremely refined, that responded to a new and very down-to-earth desire: to be able to wear the same piece of elegant jewelry from morning to evening, regardless of the occasion.

It was also in this period and in the same Modern spirit that Cartier set the trend for other designers by multipurpose accessories made from precious materials: letter openers with watches embedded in the handles, calendar pens and watch pens, and even a watch-lighter-pen combination.

Modern Poetry

Large, bold jewelry that allowed women to assert their individuality remained a Cartier mainstay until at least the 1950s and reappeared in the 1980s with the relative “masculinization” of the executive woman. In the wake of World War II, still under the aegis of Jeanne Toussaint, a further dimension emerged: humor. It reflected the *joie de vivre* of the postwar era with a satirical note inherited from the Zazous — outrageously dressed jazz aficionados who frequented the basement bars of Saint-Germain-des-Prés in Paris. A similar whimsy found its way into the world of design, notably in George Nelson’s Coconut



Crocodile necklace made as a special order for Mexican actress Maria Félix, Cartier Paris, special order, 1975. Gold, diamonds, emeralds, rubies. Cartier collection. —Nick Welsh photo

lounge chairs, Verner Panton’s classic Panton chair and Jean Royère’s Polar Bear sofa. At Cartier, Toussaint offered clients delightful gold jewelry that was sculpted with imagination and humor: gold was woven, twisted into fine strands or cords, and transformed into mesh and flexible gas-pipe coils. And yet Toussaint never lost the thread of Cartier’s distinctive style, with its fluid movement and refined elegance. Even after her departure in 1970, Cartier continued in the same spirit, looking beyond the world of jewelry to find inspiration in everyday life and returning with the nail-shaped bracelet and Love, a flat bangle fastened with a screwdriver — a “handcuff” evoking inseparable love.

Although they emerged from different, specific contexts, the Trinity, Nail and Love bracelets remain iconic decades later. They offer ample proof that the great emblems of the House of Cartier are less a reflection of their times than of the aesthetic principles that make Cartier creations timeless and universal: refinement and elegance.

Pierre Rainero is director of Image, Style and Heritage at Cartier. This essay is reprinted, with permission, from Cartier in The Twentieth Century, published by Denver Art Museum and Vendome Press. The catalog accompanies the exhibition “Brilliant: Cartier in The Twentieth Century” at the Denver Art Museum through March 15. The book is edited by Margaret Young-Sánchez with essays by Young-Sánchez, Martin Chapman, Michael Hall, Stefano Papi and Janet Zapata. For information, www.denverartmuseum.com and www.vendomepress.com.



Set of three clip brooches worn by HSH Princess Grace of Monaco, Cartier Paris, 1955. Platinum, brilliant and baguette-cut diamonds, three-cabochon rubies weighing approximately 49 carats in total. Palais Princier de Monaco.



Laurel leaf tiara owned by Marie Bonaparte, Cartier Paris, 1907. Platinum and diamonds. Qatar Museums Authority. This tiara was among the jewels ordered by Bonaparte for her wedding.



Tutti Frutti strap bracelet worn by Mrs Cole Porter, Cartier Paris, 1929. Platinum, diamonds, sapphires, emeralds, rubies. Cartier collection. —Nick Welsh photo



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