

Watches & Jewellery

**PAD London** The UK capital showcases bold contemporary styles aimed for an international clientele, reports *Kate Youde*

# Designers reimagine Indian jewellery heritage

When Valery Demure visited a jewellery fair in Mumbai before the pandemic, there was one local brand that stood out. She liked everything she saw from Moksh, whose pieces showcased techniques including micro pearl weaving. “You could tell there was a desire to expand outside India and also to convey a more contemporary India,” says the jewellery curator and consultant. So, next week, Demure will show Moksh’s designs in Europe for the first time, when the PAD London design fair returns to Berkeley Square.

The brand is among a “new wave” of contemporary designers from India that are reimaging the country’s centuries-old jewellery heritage, which has long influenced Western design, to create bold new styles for an international clientele. “You have a new guard of Indian designers,” says Demure, known for spotting new talent. “It’s only starting, but it’s quite exciting.”

Net-a-Porter, which already stocked pieces by Bina Goenka, Amrapali and Ananya, launched Indian jewellery brand Kanzen on its platform last month.

International auction houses are also promoting the work of contemporary Indian designers. Christie’s is showing six pieces by Neha Dani, who has her own stand at PAD London for the first time this year, in its private sales salon on October 11. The New Delhi-based designer draws on India’s tradition for detailed handcraft and coloured gemstones – Jaipur is the world’s lapidary capital – but is keen to bring her own perspective to jewellery. This includes using titanium, which she says gives her “freedom to explore” larger designs, as she is not restricted by the weight of the metal, and to create “another palette of colour” by anodising it.

Phillips held a selling exhibition of about 40 Sinti pieces in London last month, the first time the brand’s jewellery had been shown publicly. The pieces by Krishna Choudhary, who launched his first designs in London in 2019, were displayed alongside the historical Mughal jewels and objects from his family’s collection that inspired them. His gem-set titanium jewellery draws on traditional Indian architectural and decorative motifs including paisley.

“He honours his family legacy and tells his beloved story of Indian jewelled arts through the filter of his individual vision of modernity,” said jewellery historian Vivienne Becker, exhibition co-ordinator, in publicity ahead of the sale. “He has become a leading exponent of a new wave of excitingly innovative Indian jewellery.”

Benoît Repellin, worldwide head of jewellery at Phillips, says Choudhary’s use of old stones, which are “very hot on the market” at the moment, such as carved emeralds and



Clockwise from above: Krishna Choudhary of Sinti; ruby diamond ring and pearl earrings from Moksh, emerald petal and diamond wave rings by Sinti; diamond and sapphire earrings and pearl necklace from Bhagat; blue moonstone diamond cut and pink diamond earrings by Neha Dani

old cut diamonds, appeals to clients. “It adds more charm and one can feel the story behind it,” he says.

He credits jeweller Viren Bhagat, of Mumbai-based Bhagat, with giving “more visibility to contemporary Indian jewellers in a broader market”. Bhagat’s pieces have been displayed in museums worldwide and were part of Christie’s \$19.5m sale of Indian jewels and jewelled objects from the Al Thani collection in 2019.

They attract high prices: Christie’s sold a five-strand natural pearl and diamond necklace for \$1,695,000 in the 2019 sale. A pair of diamond and sapphire earrings fetched \$126,000, against an estimate of \$30,000-\$50,000, in June this year.

“Viren has his very distinctive, Deco-inspired Indian jewellery style,” says Rahul Kadakia, international head of jewellery at Christie’s. “There’s always an inspiration which leads back to India, but his jewellery is not just Indian, in that you can wear it anywhere. That is the magic.”

India has been an important global influence in jewellery because it is “culturally ingrained in the country,” says Kadakia. As the recent exhibition, Cartier and Islamic Art: In Search of Modernity, at the Dallas Museum of Art showed, stones and techniques from India inspired the jeweller in the early 20th century.

“In a lot of instances, it was with Indian clients in mind that [French houses] produced jewels that had a particular Indian element to it and yet were very Deco,” says Kadakia. This is something that New Delhi-based jeweller Harjit Singh knows only too well: his grandparents, Maharaja Kumar Karanjit Singh and Maharani Sita Devi of Kapurthala, took their stones to French houses in the 1920s and 1930s. As an untrained designer, Singh says the resulting jewellery by the likes of Cartier was his “study field”.

Singh, who counts Madonna and Beyoncé among his clients, is represented by Farian dealer Karry Berreby, who also shows work by Mumbai jeweller Estaa in her eponymous gallery. She has noticed “more and more” interest in contemporary Indian jewellery from customers in Europe and the US because of its versatility.

“The Indian jewellery pieces you can wear with a long black dress or with jeans,” says Berreby, who exhibited jewellery by Singh and Estaa at PAD Paris in April.

Most of Neha Dani’s clients are based in the US, Europe or the Middle East. She says that, as the younger generation steps into the Indian jewellery industry, there are more designers emerging.

“Everybody’s experimenting, deviating away from the traditional motifs and traditional Indian jewellery,” she says. “They’re bringing in their individual flavours. I think there’s going to be a lot more designers in the coming years coming out of India.”

Two Geneva-based events want to fill the gap left by the defunct trade show, says *Maria Doultou*

# Fresh fairs emerge from Baselworld’s demise

When Baselworld’s 102-year reign as the defining world watch and jewellery fair ended abruptly in 2020, it left a vacuum. The Geneva-based Watches and Wonders show – an extended version of the original Salon International de la Haute Horlogerie, which had started as luxury group Richemont’s riposte to Basel – swiftly stepped in to cover the big watch brands. But many jewellers who used to exhibit under the auspices of Baselworld had to find other solutions on their own.

So, two new events emerged from the jewellery industry itself to fill the need for jewellery fairs in Europe.

The first was GemGeneve, which held its inaugural show in 2018, followed by Haute Jewels Genève in 2019, just a year before the first lockdowns. While GemGeneve is held in May in a wing of the vast Palexpo exhibition halls, Haute Jewels Genève now takes place in late March at the Hotel Kempinski – coinciding with the Watches and Wonders trade show.

The shows have different profiles. GemGeneve mainly caters to gemstone and antique jewellery dealers, and Haute Jewels Genève is aimed at high jewellery brands and manufacturers looking to meet wholesale buyers and find new outlets for their jewels.

Behind GemGeneve are two Swiss men: Thomas Faerber and Ronny Totah. Faerber started as a diamond dealer in 1973 in Basel and moved into antique jewellery and coloured gemstones. Totah specialises in coloured gemstones and antique jewels.

“We were in at the deep end,” says Faerber of the creation of GemGeneve, now in its fourth edition. “We never expected to be exhibition organisers but we felt that we weren’t welcome in Basel anymore. There was a need for a show where organisers and exhibitors spoke the same language and in an environment that is right for us.”

The 201 exhibitors at GemGeneve in May 2022 were a mix of diamond and gem stone dealers, antique dealers, and some contemporary jewellery design-

ers. The show focuses on what Totah describes as “human-size, mainly family-run, businesses, that behave well. We select those who are good in their sector with a breadth of price points.” GemGeneve reported 3,302 visitors to its latest show, mainly made up of buyers looking to source loose stones and antique jewels. Though primarily a trade event, it is open to the public and Totah reports that 25 per cent of the visitors are private buyers. There will also be a special November 2022 edition of GemGeneve “to respond to the needs of the market” which could not travel for many months due to global lockdowns.

Haute Jewels Genève is an even younger event that had its first show in 2019 with just four exhibitors. It was put together by Michael Hakimian, chief executive of Yoko London, the pearl jewellery brand that also wholesales pearls and manufactures jewels.

“There is no doubt we filled the gap left by Basel,” says Hakimian. “When the show closed down, we were left high and dry. While Basel had over 1,000 exhibitors, we have selected just 18 brands. Each has its own niche and look with a strong heritage, innovative products, good reputation, and an international reach. The spirit of the show is to try and help each other.”



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Above: Michael Hakimian at the ribbon cutting opening of Haute Jewels Genève. Right: Visitors and gem traders at GemGeneve.

Yoko London, David Page

Haute Jewels Genève coincides with Watches and Wonders and benefits from the fact that the buyers from big global retailers are in town. The date is also crucial, says Hakimian, as orders placed in April can be fulfilled in time for the Christmas season.

But there is room for both shows. In fact, Hakimian’s operation, Yoko London, will be exhibiting at GemGeneve in November to gain access to its audience, in order to sell loose pearls and manufacturing services.

“We are not competing with GemGeneve at all,” says Hakimian. “I liaise closely with them and we share our strategies.”

Hakimian feels there is still a need for Asian and American shows and that smaller and more focused exhibitions for specific sectors will spring up in Asia, the Middle East and America.

“The day someone creates a show that can bring all the high end jewellers together, I will book a booth,” says Hakimian. “I didn’t start out as an exhibition organiser and never thought I would be designing showcases, lighting systems and overseeing security and we don’t do this as a profitmaking venture but because our industry needs it. Our third edition is already sold out as everyone rebooked. I am a very busy man.”

