



## Makers and muses sparkle in Frick jewelry show



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The 200 bejeweled objects beckon across the galleries of The Frick Pittsburgh in Point Breeze like stars sparkling in the night sky.

[“Maker & Muse: Women and Early Twentieth Century Art Jewelry”](#) opens Saturday and continues through May 10.

“It’s a lot about bling but it’s a lot about ideals, too,” said Sarah Hall, the museum’s chief curator and director of collections.

Precious stones and gold are featured in abundance, but semi-precious stones, enamels and even an occasional polished pebble signal that the jewelry shown here reflects an era of change.

A circa 1914-1933 gold bracelet from the Louis Comfort Tiffany studio in New York, for example, is resplendent with emeralds, rubies and sapphires. Equally entrancing is a circa 1918 gold and enamel Tiffany brooch and pendant with two large, brooding Australian black opals.

Both are credited to Meta Overbeck, one of the women who oversaw the Tiffany studio and may have been involved in the objects' designs. But that wasn't acknowledged at the time and there are no records to support it.

In the second half of the 19th century, the Arts and Crafts movement in Great Britain began in response to the depersonalization and banal design brought about by the Industrial Revolution. Jewelry produced within that aesthetic became known as art jewelry.

Impeccable craftsmanship and unique expression were hallmarks. Artisans eschewed expensive materials, choosing silver over gold, rarely using diamonds and integrating surprising components.

Two of the most extraordinary pieces in the exhibition are circa 1906 lily-pad hair combs by Ella Naper. Carved of horn and set with moonstone, they have an otherworldly beauty and are atypical of English Arts and Crafts work.

The tone of the exhibition is set at the entry by a poster of the illustrious French actress Sarah Bernhardt (1844-1923). A free spirit who frequently departed herself outside of traditional female roles, she was a self-made celebrity known as much for her eyebrow-raising behavior as for her acting. As a modern woman she was both a patron and a muse of French art jewelers.

An engaging video shown in the galleries features clips of the Serpentine Dance popularized by another fin de siècle artist muse, Loie Fuller. An American who moved to Paris in 1891, she staged dance performances that incorporated new light technology. An electrified Loie Fuller lamp, circa 1899-1905, captures her dance movements in flowing gilt-bronze.

The exhibition draws from five countries — France, Austria, Germany, Great Britain and the United States — to show varying ways women influenced jewelry making, other than as consumers. Women were still generally perceived as muse on the continent, but became active makers in Britain and the U.S.

Industrialization likely was a significant contributor to this difference. In Britain, as populations moved from rural areas to cities, women were sometimes driven to prostitution because there were no jobs available for them. As the middle class began to develop there and in the U.S., more opportunities became available for occupational training, including maker skills. Money also became available to purchase art jewelry, which strove to be affordable. On the continent, post-World War I women were encouraged to stay home, birth children and raise their families.

Contemporary social movements in Britain included fashion reform. Restrictive Victorian corsets were abandoned and women adopted long, flowing dresses inspired by Pre-Raphaelite paintings that allowed greater freedom of movement.

“They wanted a different kind of jewelry to work with those clothes,” Ms. Hall said.

That included waist clasps and buckles to secure the cloaks that had become popular.

In Britain and America, the suffragette movement was becoming active. Even when they couldn’t speak openly about suffrage issues, women showed solidarity by wearing jewelry that incorporated the colors of the movement – green, white and violet – the first letters of which stood for “Get Women Votes.”

Two necklaces by unknown makers exemplify this practice, one from circa 1900-1920 of silver with amethyst, pearl and enamel, and a second from circa 1908 of yellow gold with Russian amethyst, pearl, jubilee enamel and diamond.

The first case in the exhibition holds three works made in the last decade of the 19th century by Charlotte Newman (1840-1927), the first woman to be recognized as a jeweler in her own right in England. Her style varied but her work was always well-executed. She is represented by a gold, pearl and aquamarine necklace; a gold, amethyst and enamel pendant; and a yellow gold Mary Queen of Scots pendant with moonstone, amethyst and pearl.

Other works range from formal to whimsical in style, decorative to practical in application.

An ornate Tiffany Studios filigree table lamp of Favrite glass and gilt-bronze shows off ornamental work also applied to jewelry, such as a circa 1910 necklace next to it.

In France, Rene Lalique championed the sensual, organic forms of Art Nouveau. His expensive pieces, 16 of which are exhibited, sold to an avant-garde segment of society often associated with the demimonde – courtesans, dancers and actresses, including Ms. Bernhardt.

German and Austrian art jewelry was affiliated with the Jugendstil movement or youth style, and similarly male makers found inspiration in the female form.

In the United States, Tiffany Studios employed women but did not publicly credit their work. Clara Barck Welles, who had attended the Art Institute of Chicago, was the lead among six women who founded the Kalo Shop, represented by 15 objects ranging from a gold and freshwater pearl ring, circa 1910-1920, to a 1920 sterling silver claret spoon. The Chicago shop remained open until 1970.

The exhibition was organized by the [Richard H. Driehaus Museum](#) in Chicago and toured by International Arts & Artists. Ms. Hall added a local component by inviting some Pittsburgh area makers to write guest labels for objects of their choice.

“When you’re in a museum and you read a label, you ask who is talking to you,” Ms. Hall said.

Inviting guests to write labels introduces “a different personal touch,” she said. Work by each of the guest labelists are displayed in the final gallery where a reading room is also available.

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