

Hidden Gems – All the Stories You Wanted to Hear, But Didn't Know Who to Ask

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Are you fascinated by jewels that go up for auction? Do you want to know their history, how they end up in the hands of the auctioneers, and why their owners decide to part with them? Do you ask yourself how auction houses come across extraordinary jewellery and if they immediately recognise their value? If you've answered yes to even one of those questions then I recommend you read Sarah Hue-Williams and Raymond Sancroft-Baker's book *Hidden Gems* which contains a whole host of captivating stories about jewels sold at Christie's.



JAR earrings with saltwater pearls and diamonds

Sarah Hue-Williams, a gemmologist and jewellery expert, has had many years of experience in the industry – and she's even written *Christie's Guide to Jewellery* published in 2001. As a jewellery consultant at an auction house she's been part of countless fascinating stories involving jewels – 40 of which have ended up in *Hidden Gems*. The author admits that writing the book took the best part of two years because "there was almost too much to say as we wanted to cover all different kinds of jewellery, in many different countries, as well as a variety of time periods so there was something for every reader, we hoped."



Cartier necklace with the Peregrina pearl

When choosing the stories, an author might be tempted to pick the biggest and brightest jewels, or the pieces that were sold for the most money. But Sarah and Raymond promised themselves that the book would only include jewels that had some kind of exciting or amusing story attached to them, or a particular emotion or sentiment. By making this sort of selection they show that jewels sold at auction aren't necessarily soulless pieces of 'bling' that simply move from wealthy home to wealthy home, but rather than they have much more to them than might initially meet the eye.

"Stories bring a jewel to life, and I wanted to tell those little stories, such as the one about Princess Margaret's tendency to lose one of her earrings from a pair." In the chapter *Royal Appointment* she tells of items belonging to Princess Margaret that went on sale on the 13th of June 2006. It is a royal tradition that princesses don't have their ears pierced, and since she wore clip-on earrings there were several pairs that were missing one earring. It made the specialists at Christie's chuckle that even princesses can turn out to be human like the rest of us jewellery lovers.

Another story in the book that Sarah found very touching is about an extensive collection of jewels belonging to Princess Salimah Aga Khan. A few of the items were treasures that the Princess wanted to sell in order to raise money for her charitable organisation. One of the jewels – the very first lot – was a torsade necklace of aquamarine beads that was bought by a man living on a remote island off the north coast of Scotland. Sarah recounts: "When we asked him why he was participating in the sale, he simply replied 'well, because wives are princesses too'. What he said was so charming and shows that it doesn't have to be the biggest or most expensive jewel to impress someone. Every jewel is precious and has an association of ideas and emotions bound up with it."



Sarah Hue-Williams and Raymond Sancroft-Baker, authors of *Hidden Gems*

But not all of the stories have such happy endings. The first tale in the book recounts the story of a pink diamond called the Agra whose first owner was Babur (1483-1530), the famous *Tiger* ruler of India. In 1873 the stone was recut by one of the best diamond traders in Paris, its weight dropping from 46 to 32.24 carats. The stone made it to the modern era as an old mine cut, but after it was sold at Christie's in 1990 its new owner decided to give it a more contemporary look, and it was refashioned into a more modern mixed cut with the addition of many more facets. The team at Christie's expressed some surprise that the buyer wanted to deprive the historic stone – born in the legendary mines of Golconda – of all its uniqueness. To which the new owner just replied: "History is yesterday".



Bulgari bracelet created circa 1965

Sarah says of items sold at auction: "So often we have had to just bite our tongues, but when the sale is over, we look at each other, knowing how bitterly disappointed we all are. Yet other sales are just wonderful, because we know that the person who has truly fallen in love with a jewel and who desperately wants to buy it actually wins it on the day. It is a feeling of such elation because you know that the jewel will be really appreciated and looked after."

But don't think that this is just a book of stories, because you'll find lots of useful information about important gemstones, jewellery, and the different design periods in the history of jewellery. "I intentionally included some more educational information in the book as I really didn't want it to feel like a frivolous read. You can actually learn a lot from it, absorbing knowledge as you read, almost without realising it."

Having written *Hidden Gems*, Sarah has already got another book under way. But I won't say what it is; better to wait a couple of years and see it sparkle for yourself! KP



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