



# SUE OLLEMANS

Sue Ollemans has been selling Asian Works of Art for over 40 years. She was trained at the Percival David Foundation, SOAS, London and specialized in Asian works of Art from the Song Period and in particular pieces that were made or traded by the Dutch East India Company. For the last 18 years, however, she has specialized in jewelry from Asia and related jeweled objects. From Indonesia there are always treasures from Central Java and the Majapahit Periods and wearable pieces from Bali and the archipelago islands. From China rare jewelry pieces are found from the Liao, Song, Ming and Qing Dynasty. Champa and Khmer pieces are well represented from Vietnam and Cambodia with a few pieces from Ayuthya and Sukhothai, Thailand. Finally she has a large inventory of jewelry from the Indian sub-continent dating from the Mughal Period through to the Art Deco Period. The gallery spends a lot of time researching the pieces and only selects pieces in the original state. Some pieces are wearable, some are for collectors. Given that jewelry of, some form or another is worn by every man woman and child on the planet, whether it is a feather or large flawless diamond, it gives us an intimate view on the societies for whom it was made. It has always been a reflection of the status of the owner and in many cases a way of appeasing the gods and as such, it is a much-overlooked field in its importance in the world of art. Jewelry need not be worn nor locked away in a safe but can be enjoyed as a sculptural work of art, displayed as you might a Brancusi or Renoir. She regularly exhibits at Asia Week New York, San Francisco Fall Fair, Fine Art Asia, Hong Kong International Asian Art Fair Hong Kong, Taiwan, Asian Art London and private shows in Paris and Brussels. She has sold items to Smithsonian Institute of Art, Brooklyn Art Museum, Newark Museum of Art, Middelbury College USA, Asian Art Museum Singapore, Hong Kong Museum of Art.

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#### A NAVARATNA, GOLD AND ENAMELLED BELT BUCKLE

Aurangzeb period 1658 – 1707 ce

5 X 6 CM

Provenance: a member of the hyderabad royal family

Now in a Private European collection

The gold belt buckle is enameled with a dark blue ground into which is set in the kundan style a stylized navaratna. The stones of the navaratna average about 3 carats in size and are exceptionally clear. Each stone is cut in a rectangular or square format that form a bold design. Left to right: Pearl, Yellow Sapphire, Hessonite, Diamond, Cats Eye, and Garnet (in place of red coral) Emerald, Sapphire, Ruby. The nine holy stones each represent a planet, revolving around the sun (Ruby) in harmony, bringing order and peace to the wearer. It is believed that Aurangzeb was particularly fond of navaratna.



Ruby (Sun), Pearl (Moon), Red Coral (Mars), Emerald (Mercury), Yellow Sapphire (Jupiter), Diamond (Venus), Blue Sapphire (Saturn), Hessonite (Rahu, ascending lunar node), and Cat's Eye (Ketu, descending lunar node)

Aurangzeb was the sixth Mughal Emperor who reigned for a period of 49 years from 1658 until his death in 1707. Widely considered to be the last effective Mughal emperor; Aurangzeb was also one of the most influential rulers of the 17th Century. As a memorizer of the Quran he was one of the few powerful rulers who established Sharia law and Islamic ethics in India. It is his sense of frugality that supports the theory that this piece was for his personal use as well as the Provenance of the piece.

The reverse of the belt buckle is decorated with fine floral enamels within a quatrefoil that is bounded by deep blue enameling. The flowers are in deep red enamel against a white ground and touched of green in the leaves of the plants. The petals of the flowers are outlined in black and the white ground shows typical black flecks within the white enamel that again is typical of the period.

A Single cloth would have been passed through the hoop and secured by the buckle.



A GILT COPPER EAR ORNAMENT WITH SURYA  
Nepal 19th Century  
18.2 x 12.2 cm  
Chengxuntang Collection, Hong Kong

#### WHY DID YOU CHOOSE TO SPECIALISE IN ANTIQUE ASIAN FINE JEWELLERY?

I started my dealing life selling Chinese Ceramics and Jade. I was always short of money so I started taking African trade beads to India, trading those for Mughal Jewellery, which I then took to Hong Kong and sold, so that I may buy Chinese Jade and Ceramics. It took me a long time to cut out all the other steps and stick to jewellery. Having done so, I discovered the amazing world of Asian Jewellery and incorporated works from Indonesia, Cambodia, Vietnam, Thailand and China. Each rich in their own traditions.

#### WHO WAS YOUR GREATEST INFLUENCE IN SHAPING YOUR TASTE IN JEWELLERY? DO YOU REMEMBER WHEN AND HOW YOUR PASSION WAS KINDLED?

My passion for jewellery was formed in India. The wonderful romantic life of the Maharajas took hold. Men wearing the most extravagant jewellery in the world captured my imagination. I then saw the Al Sabah Exhibition of Mughal Jewels at the British Museum, London and from then on I was hooked. It was there that I began to understand the historic importance of jewellery in society and what it reflects. Emma Bunker was a great influence in my understanding of gold in particular. She was a great scholar and enthusiast and shared freely her knowledge. From here I learnt about the rich traditions of Central Asia and Indonesia.

#### WHAT ARE THE IMPORTANT THINGS TO CONSIDER WHEN LOOKING AT ANTIQUE FINE JEWELLERY?

One should always look at the history behind a piece of antique jewellery. Why was it made? For whom was it made? Condition of the piece, quality of the stones and in Mughal pieces the quality of the enamelling.

#### YOU ARE A RENOWN JEWELLERY EXPERT, WHAT IS THE ITEM WHICH CAUSED YOUR 'EYES TO POP AND YOUR JAW TO DROP'?

Too many to list here one more marvellous than the next but currently a navartana belt buckle inset with the 9 holy stones arranged in the most dramatic style,

the reverse enamelled with magnificent enamelling. It is believed to be from the Aurangzeb Period and the quality does suggest that the Emperor himself may have owned it.

#### MANY OF YOUR COLLEAGUES ENVY YOUR SMALL AND TRANSPORTABLE ARTWORKS. HOW MANY EVENTS WERE YOU USED TO TAKE PART IN A YEAR?

I have been used to exhibiting at two sometimes three exhibitions in Hong Kong per year, one in New York and one in San Francisco. One in the United Kingdom and usually one in Europe alternatively Paris and Brussels or Holland. So 2020 – 2021 has been a shock to the system.

#### DO YOU AGREE THAT A JEWEL'S PROVENANCE IS NOT JUST WHO HAS OWNED IT BUT WHERE IT HAS LIVED AND WHERE IT HAS BEEN EXHIBITED?

Jewellery is a mirror on the society it is found in. Every man, woman and child on the planet has some form of adornment, whether it is a feather, a tattoo or a massive diamond, so provenance is absolutely part and parcel of its value. If you think of the collection of the Nizam of Hyderabad that was sold in Geneva in 1987 and into what famous collections these pieces have found themselves it is fascinating.

#### JEWELLERY HAS BEEN A COMMON WAY TO STORE OR TRANSFER WEALTH AND IS WIDELY CONSIDERED THE MOST COLLECTED ASSET ON A GLOBAL LEVEL. DO YOU THINK JEWELLERY AND STONES SHOULD BE BOUGHT AS AN ASSET OR AS A PIECE TO LOVE?

In Asia, Jewellery is a statement of position in society. It reflects your status in the community. In many of the Asian cultures, but particularly, in India it is given as part of the woman's dowry on marriage and becomes the sole wealth of a woman when she leaves her own family. It is handed down in one form or another to her daughters so it is immensely important to have the best your family can afford. It is not always a selection of passion in Asia but rather dictated by tradition and status. We are more fortunate, in that we are free to choose what we want to wear. I think that all collections should be built with passion and that you should love what you buy and wear. But the old adage that you should buy the best you can afford is

never wrong.

When collecting it is important to decide what your aim is. If you are buying pieces solely as an asset then maybe you should just buy raw flawless stones: a clinical decision. If you want to wear the pieces then you decide with passion what looks best. If you collect historically a combination of study, research, provenance and passion is essential.

#### WHAT ARE THE MOST COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS IN THE JEWELLERY INDUSTRY YOU BELIEVE FIRST-TIME BUYERS HAVE?

That wonderful pieces are too expensive to buy. By comparison Asian jewellery is very inexpensive when looking at today's contemporary pieces. In buying ancient jewels you are getting an original design, hand made, historic piece unencumbered with the expense of a Bond Street store.

#### WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THE TREND FOR THE BLING JEWELLERY AND THE MIXING OF STONES?

I absolutely love the mixing of stones. It has been done since the Byzantine period, if not before. Nothing is new! It gives a piece of jewellery depth and a sense of luxury. I am not mad about bling i.e. jewellery and more of it for jewellery's sake. One has an idea that Indians and the Mughals were covered in bling but in effect they wore a lot of jewellery, which is something different, however, each piece was restrained and magnificent in workmanship and design. In South East Asia, jewellery was worn as a tribute to the Gods. Today people have become confused with the Bollywood bling look, which I personally don't much like, and the purity of design and workmanship you find in earlier pieces.

#### IF YOU COULD ONLY WEAR ONE PIECE OF JEWELLERY FOR THE REST OF YOUR LIFE, WHAT PIECE DO YOU CHOOSE AND WHY?

Well in a virtual world of dreams I would take the "Talisman of the Throne", or Timur Ruby, a magnificent 249 carat inscribed spinel found in the Al Sabah Collection, presented to the Emperor Jahangir in 1621 by Shah Abbas 1. It bears several royal inscriptions the earliest being that of Timurid

ruler Ulugh Beg (1447–1449) Jahangir, Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb as well as the Afghan king Ahmad Shah to the marvellous jeweller Veran Bhagat in Bombay and have it set by him. That way I would have a spinel with one of the most exciting and rich provenances enhanced by the greatest jeweller, in my opinion, on earth. What a combination. Hanging around my neck would be a stone handled by Ulugh Beg, Jahangir, Shah Abbas to name but a few.

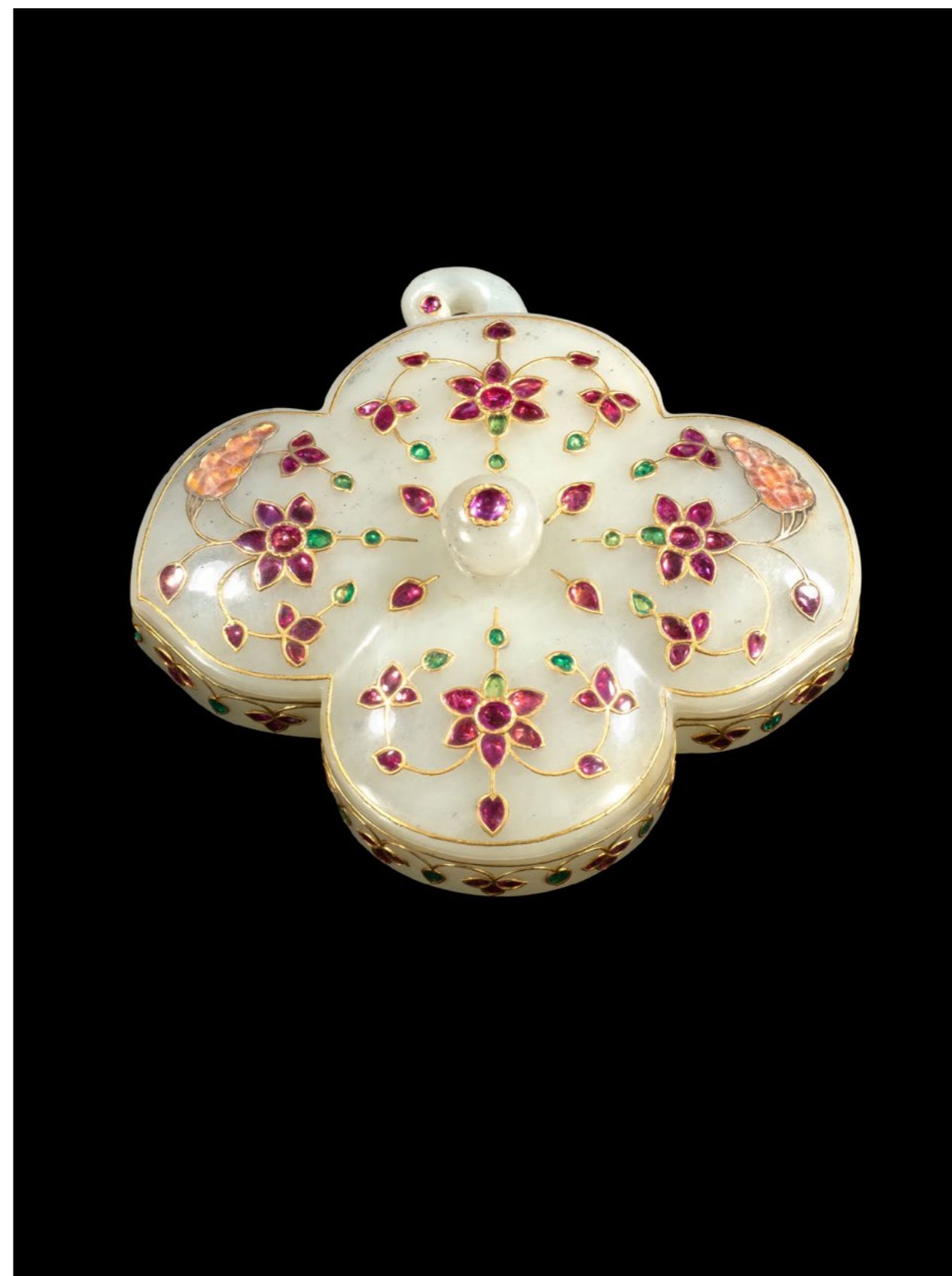
However, in reality I am a sober kind of person and would be very happy to and do wear a simple gold sri ring from Central Java dating from the 9–12th Century

A GEM-SET WHITE NEPHRITE QUATREFOIL BOX AND COVER  
Mughal India  
late 17th century early 18th century  
Diameter: 4 inches  
Height ¾ inches  
Provenance: Ex Al Thani Collection

This small box made of white nephrite jade is set with rubies, carnelians and emeralds in the kundan technique within 24 carat gold wires. The cabochon rubies (Burmese) form the petals of four flowers set around a central knob. The cabochon emeralds (Colombian) form the scattered petals whilst the carved carnelians form delicate bunches of grapes. The interior of the box is carved into four sections; the stem of the flower forms the handle, inlaid with a single ruby. Around the base of the box is found a band of ruby flowers interspersed with emerald leaves.

Boxes such as these were likely to have been used for paan and served on a tray as seen in the jade box and tray from the Bishop R Heber Collection in the Metropolitan Museum, New York which is similar in form but later in date.

In courtly and royal circles guests were presented with paan to mark the end of a visit and these boxes were often as richly embellished as the other princely accoutrements such as munil, huqqah, surahi and thuk-daan.





A Pair of Gold Granulated Earrings  
Silla Dynasty 57 BC–935 AD  
8.7 cm  
Korea

Gold earrings were worn by both men and women of the Silla and Gaya elite and are the most prevalent type of jewelry found in tombs. Goldsmith techniques on display here range from simple hammering to the more complex method of granulation, in which tiny gold beads were adhered to the surface to create intricate designs.

Similar Examples:  
Silla gold earrings from a couple's tomb at Bomun-dong  
6th Century  
National Treasure #90  
National Museum of Korea  
Metropolitan Museum New York