

Les Enluminures New York Gallery's New Exhibition Sale Is Breathtaking



Beth Bernstein Contributor

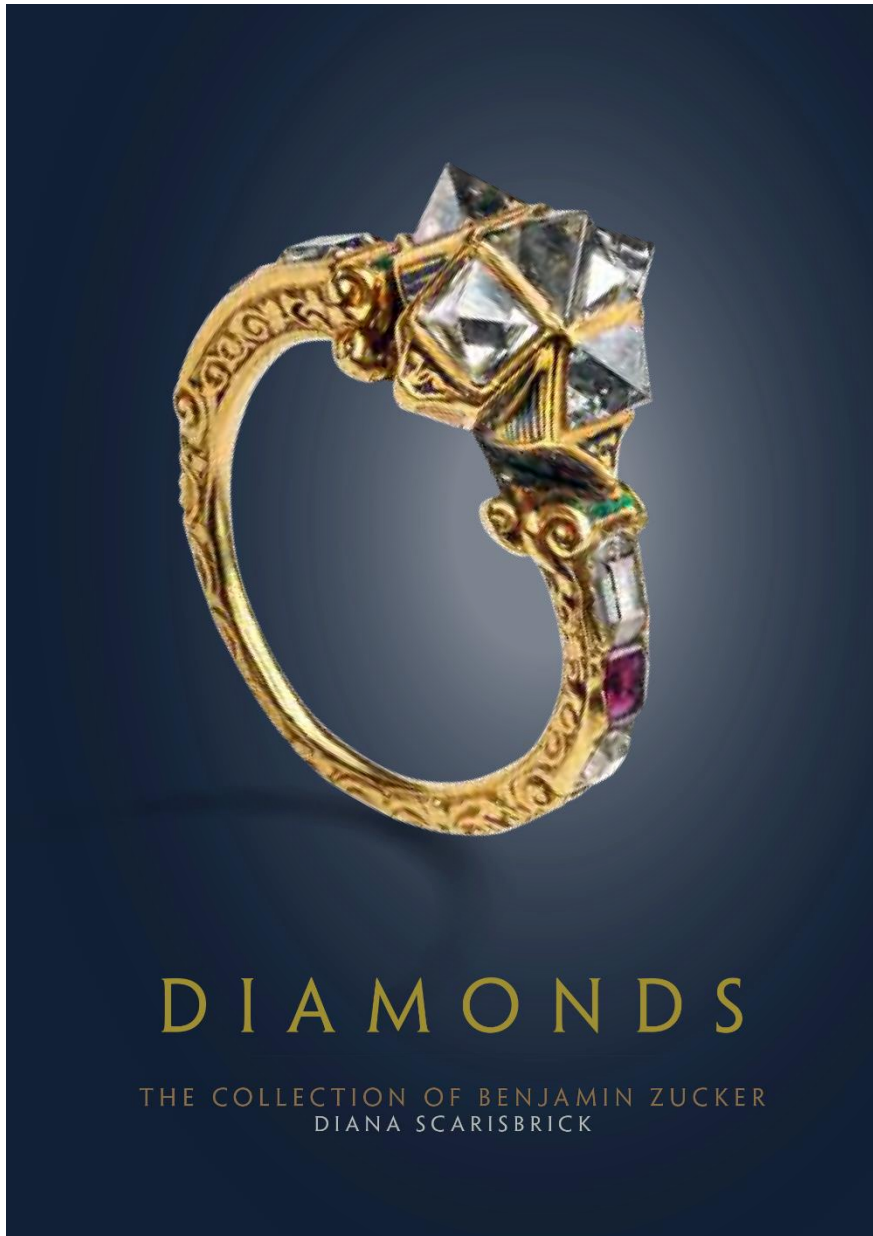
I write about modern and antique fine jewelry.

When it comes to jewelry, I am transfixed by the history, lore, legend, provenance, passionate collectors and gems that date back to antiquity. If you are anything like me, then you too will be awe-struck by the new exhibition sale that will open on Thursday, October 24-Saturday, November 9, 2019, entitled *Diamonds* and hosted by Les Enluminures New York. Thirty-five jewels from the collection of Benjamin Zucker, author, historian, collector and one of the foremost dealers in both diamonds and precious gems will be on display and for sale at the gallery.

This is not the first exhibition sale of Zucker's pieces that Les Enluminures has featured. In 2014, *Cycles of Life* showcased and sold 40 plus rings which focused on birth, love, betrothal, marriage, mourning, and death and were assembled together for the first time for public view and sale at the New York arm of the gallery. Les Enluminures also has locations in Chicago and Paris. While walking through a preview of the rings Zucker amassed and then sitting down and trying them on, I could feel the essence of their sentimentality, meaning, and while listening to tales of their past, I found myself hard-pressed to leave.

After returning four times to see the rings before they went to their new owners, my instincts tell me that *Diamonds* will be another breathtaking event and record-breaking sale. Sandra Hindman, founder, and owner of Les Enluminures, says "Over our decade long friendship, I have been continuously impressed by Benjamin Zucker's subtle intelligence and deep knowledge, and I am profoundly honored that he has entrusted me with the presentation of his entire collection of diamonds to the public."

According to Hindman, "Most of these jewels are published. Many of them have been exhibited in prestigious museums, such as the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore, the Yale Peabody Museum of Natural History in New Haven, the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston, and most recently in an impressive and informative display in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. As assembled in the present collection they have never been displayed together and have never been offered for sale."



DIAMONDS

THE COLLECTION OF BENJAMIN ZUCKER
DIANA SCARISBRICK

The Accompanying Diamonds Catalog for the exhibit, LES ENLUMINURES

A beautifully illustrated full-color catalog, written by jewelry historian and author Diana Scarisbrick, with an essay by Zucker on how he became a collector and a preface by Hindman will accompany the exhibit. The book is as gorgeous as it is informative. I keep going back to view the oversize photos and re-read the text. In the preface, Hindman explains the theme for the pieces which was assembled by Zucker over a forty-five year period. “This truly rare and immensely valuable collection includes thirty-five precious jewels mostly made for European patrons — rings, brooches, hairpins, earrings. Until diamonds were discovered in Brazil in the eighteenth century, the vast majority of these treasured stones came to Europe from the so-called Valley of Gems, an extensive territory in India composed of five areas from north to south along the eastern portion of the country.”

The exhibit and the catalog focus on these diamonds over 600 years and includes five cuts that define the times in which the jewels were made: the octahedral, the point cut, the table cut, the rose cut, and the brilliant cut.



"OCTAHEDRAL: Sultan Muhammad of Ghor's Diamond Ring Afghanistan or Pakistan, 13th century. Set with three-point cut diamonds on a substantial hoop, this Islamic ring can be regarded as a trophy of conquest. It belonged to the famous Sultan Mu'izz ad-Din Muhammad Ghor, or Muhammad of Ghor, who in 1173 departed from central Afghanistan to invade India."

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"TABLE CUT: The Guilhou Renaissance Table Cut Diamond Western Europe, 16th century The prestigious combination of a diamond with rubies, forming the raised quatrefoil bezel, unites two powerful talismans, and their protective powers or virtue are referred to by John Lyly, *The Anatomy of Wit* (1578): "is not the diamond of more value than the Rubie because he is of more virtue?" It was treasured by two of the most important collectors of rings in the 19th and 20th centuries.'

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To quote Scarisbrick in parts of a catalog passage, "By profession an American dealer in precious stones, Benjamin Zucker is... also a collector of antique jewelry, with a marked penchant for diamonds. This preference is not only on account of their rarity and unsurpassable luster but also has a spiritual dimension. In his book, *Gems and Jewels: A Connoisseur's Guide* (1984, reprinted 2003) he declares that "diamonds will always be a magical window facing the invisible world," and to justify his belief he quotes the Talmud: "to understand the invisible world you must carefully study the visible." Dedicating himself to this precept for more than fifty years, he has studied every aspect of diamond jewelry history while acquiring a collection of examples representing each successive period. Accordingly, the rings and jewels...have been chosen as a means of telling the story of the evolution of cutting...from the primitive point to the table, triangular, hogback, rose, and brilliant cuts, these diamonds, which are shown in their original settings that reflect changing artistic styles in miniature, are as expressive of the culture of their time as monumental sculpture and painting."



"THE DUTCH ROSE JEWEL: Western Europe, The Netherlands, Early 18th Century is set with colored (grey, greenish, and brownish-yellow) rose-cut diamonds, the effect deriving from the subtle rainbow shimmer of the 'almost fancy stones'. Of this early date, virtually no other colored diamond jewels are known except within the French royal circle." LES ENLUMINURES



"THE BRILLIANT CUT: The St. Alban's Bodkin: An ornamental hairpin. The back is inscribed in italics, 'The Gift of Charles 2nd to Nell Gwynne'. This historic jewel is part of a group given by King Charles II of England (reigned 1660–1684) to his Welsh mistress, Nell Gwynne (1650–1687) and inherited by their illegitimate son, Charles Beauclerk, created 1st Duke of St. Albans (1670–1726" LES ENLUMINURES

Zucker is a third-generation gem dealer who was trained by his grandfather, a leading expert in uncut diamonds in Antwerp, and his uncle, one of the primary dealers of diamonds in the Far East. His foray into the business began while Zucker was 33, living in NYC's Greenwich Village, with a desire to be a novelist after obtaining degrees from Yale College and Harvard Law School accompanied the company's buying agent to Jaipur. Drawn in by the magic of what he saw that day and during his learning process

and the diamonds and jewels he began to see and then collect along the way, he says, “I formed in my mind a *Musée imaginaire*: a collection of diamond rings, a composite of the rings I saw in museum catalogs or catalogs of private jewelry collections. My dream was to form my own collection that I could study, examine, lecture on, and show to friends.” Over 45 years of curating this collection, he achieved that goal and has written three novels: *Blue*, *Green*, and *White* and have nearly completed *Red*. I’ve written six studies of gemstones including *Gems and Jewels: A Connoisseur’s Guide*, published in many languages.”

In his essay in the catalog, Zucker writes, “I can’t imagine a more dazzling and adventuresome voyage than the one that started on that blistering hot day in Jaipur in 1973, almost half a century ago. Having conceived of a diamond *Musée imaginaire*, having written novels and books about Indian jewels, having had the pleasure of possessing these jewels and having seen them on display in museums, it is a source of pleasure to me that others will now share in this “diamond life.”

Please contact Les Enluminures for further information at 212-717-7273

note: all descriptions of jewels are from Les Enluminures

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Beth Bernstein

I am a jewelry historian, jewelry expert and collector of period and modern jewel and a purveyor of all things sparkly. I have a romance going on with the legend, language and sentiment behind the pieces and the story. My passion for this has inspired me to pen three books—'My Charmed Life,' a memoir; 'Jewelry's Shining Stars,' a modern jewelry design coffee table book; and 'If These Jewels Could Talk,' an in-depth look at celebrities and the stories behind their legendary jewels on the silver screen and in real life—with a fourth one in the works. I have written and continue to write for major magazines including Departures, Elite Traveler, Four Seasons Magazine, and thejewelreditor.com. I have also written for newspapers including Newsday and many more online and print publications.