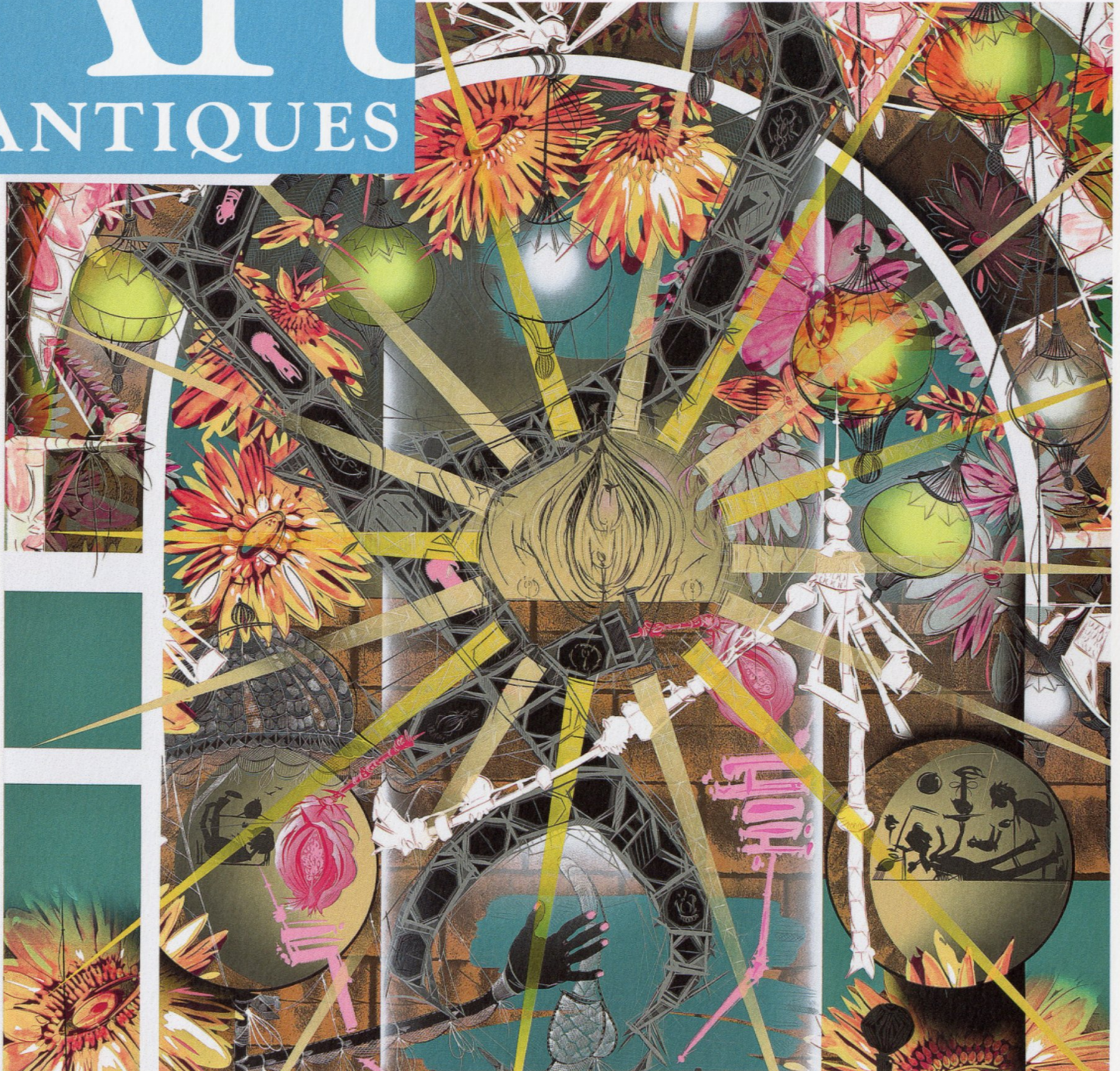


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Art & ANTIQUES

FOR COLLECTORS OF THE FINE AND DECORATIVE ARTS



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DISPLAY THROUGH DECEMBER 3, 2019

LARI PITTMAN

Ring of Power

"Diamonds will always be a magical window facing the invisible world," says Benjamin Zucker, a collector who has amassed one of the most enviable caches of diamonds in the world. But diamonds also provide a window into Zucker's world: his grandfather was a leading expert in uncut diamonds in Antwerp and his uncle a powerful diamond dealer in the Far East. The Zucker family has dealt in gems of staggering beauty and importance, like the Wittlesbach-Graff Diamond, a deep, grayish-blue example that has been in both the Austrian and Bavarian crown jewels.

Continuing in the family business, Zucker, who was born on the French Riviera and educated at Yale and Harvard Law School, made a name for himself in New York as a gem merchant and historian. He's written several bling-related books, in both the non-fiction and fiction categories, including *Gems and Jewels: A Connoisseur's Guide* (1984; 2003), *Blue: A Novel* (2000) and *Green: A Novel* (2002). He's lent historic examples in his collection to exhibitions at the Yale Peabody Museum of Natural History, the Museum of Fine Arts Houston, and, most recently, the Met.

Zucker's collection of rare diamonds, which he has acquired over the course of 45 years, is currently on view and—for the first time—for sale at New York gallery Les Enluminures. The show, "Diamonds: The Collection of Benjamin Zucker, New York,"

features 35 precious jewels set in rings, brooches, hairpins, and earrings and will be on view from October 24–November 9.

Most of the one-of-a-kind examples in the exhibition were made for European patrons. The piece seen here, The Spitzer Renaissance Point Cut Diamond, is thought to have been created for a princely patron in Venice in the 16th century. The ring features a high bezel, which displays five point-cut diamonds in the shape of a star. Table-cut diamonds and rubies adorn the ring's elegant gold hoop.

The lapidaries of Europe began developing the point-cut diamond in the 14th century. They started grinding diamonds against lead plates covered in diamond dust, a process that shaped the stone into octahedral faces and eliminated surface imperfections. In a point cut, the faces of the octahedron shape are smoothed, creating striking, even surfaces.

Zucker's collection showcases how the cuts of diamonds evolved over the course of centuries from point to table to rose to brilliant cut—the latter being the closest to the way diamonds are cut today. At times, "old mine" cuts have been recut in the name of modernization, making these older cuts rarer and, in some ways, more desirable again. The collection also represents the 600-year history of India as the locus of the world's diamonds before mines were discovered in Brazil in the 18th century.



