

Falling Under the Spell of

SOMEWHERE IN THE RAINBOW

Jennifer-Lynn Archuleta spoke with Shelly Sergent, collection manager at Somewhere in the Rainbow, about the collection's history, acquisitions and goals.

First created as a private jewellery assemblage that developed into an educational platform for the general public, Somewhere in the Rainbow is a privately owned gemstone and jewellery exhibition that has been exhibited in multiple museums, trade shows and high-end retail outlets. The owners of the collection, whose identities have been kept confidential, parlayed their gemstones and love of learning into a programme to educate and benefit the gemmological community. Shelly Sergent helped the private buyers curate what began as a single purchase in 2008 into what eventually became an award-winning collection. She sat during the 2024 Tucson gem shows to talk about the exhibition's roots, mission and focus.

How did you start out in the trade?

When I was sixteen years old, one of my mother's friends ran a jewellery store at the local mall, and she asked me to be a gift wrapper for the Christmas season. I was going to be there for six weeks to gift wrap and clean the glass; those were the only two things I was allowed to do. I loved people taking time to choose meaningful gifts, I loved watching people leave, happy and I loved the intimate moments that a piece of jewellery could create.

Forty-two years later, I am curating one of the most beautiful gem collections in the world. In the intervening time I started in sales and went into corporate management.

From there, I held remount shows for Dave Downey's Designs, based out in Indianapolis, and got exposed to a lot of different types of clients. I then found myself in the world of design by working for a design house in Scottsdale, Arizona.

There, I found my passion for colour and really came to understand the power of design. This journey eventually led to Somewhere in the Rainbow.

So you fell into the world of design and fell in love with colour. What was the seed for Somewhere in the Rainbow? What launched that?

Well, I didn't really launch that. I was working in a design house and a client came in to buy a birthday gift for his wife. I showed him both a heat-treated and unheated sapphire, and he said, "Wow the price difference is astronomical, tell me about that." We talked about rarity, and Mother Nature and what she does, and what man does after that. He ended up buying the unheated sapphire.



Above: This Victorian-era antique quahog pearl brooch also features diamonds and black and white enamel. The upper pearl weighs 13.50 ct, while the lower pearl is about 4.00 ct. Acquired in 2023 from Carlos Chanu and Antoinette Matlins.



Left: Da Vinci, a 177.8-mm tall green beryl from the Ural Mountains, carved by Alfred Zimmerman of Idar-Oberstein, Germany. The goldwork was crafted by American designer Henry Dunay.

But the information was really fascinating to him, and he said, "Give me another gemstone, let me study another gemstone." So I gave him alexandrite. I chose the gem purposely, not only because it is rare, but because his daughter was getting engaged to a man from Russia. I knew it would take them down a journey through the history of alexandrite. I contacted Evan Caplan, who was with Omi Gems at the time, and said, "Bring me some alexandrite, let's give this client an experience," and we did.

At the end of that day there was a 10.50 ct, 4.50 ct, and 15.00 ct tanzanite

laying on the table. They bought the stones to make beautiful pieces of jewellery. Then he called me again, and said "This is so much fun, give me another gemstone, let me study another gemstone." The collection started to grow, one stone at a time. And these were not gemstone aficionados by any stretch of the imagination. But they got 'bit', just as all of us in the industry who fall in love with this work get 'bit'. So Greg Lynch, who I had known for decades as well, he started the appraisals for their pieces. He gave them the best advice: "Never buy the biggest of anything, buy the best of what you can afford."



This ring features a fine 5.17 ct Burmese ruby flanked by two yellow sapphires.

"We dive into the stories of each piece because it creates more provenance and more relevance to our mission."

That is incredible advice, because it is so basic, yet so true.

Yes, and I think we have consistently returned to that message since 2008. Are there bigger, finer Paraiba tourmalines out there than ours? Yes, probably. But ours likely rank with the best of them. And then there are other people out there with the goal of collecting the biggest gems, or to collect only oval cuts or only phenomenal stones. But that was not our goal — and at this point we weren't building a museum collection or an education collection.

In 2011 their collection had grown substantially, to the point where we had to decide what to do with it. We could have stored it in vaults like many collectors do, but the mission of our owners was to allow people to

talking about how "that's my birthstone, and my birthstone is really pretty."

But through that birthstone exhibit there was a major increase in visits to the downstairs area, because kids would go home and talk to their parents and drag their parents back to the museum. That exhibit, which was supposed to last a year, lasted two-and-a-half years, because people loved it and they responded well to it; after all, who doesn't love shiny and sparkly things? That particular exhibit grew into a full-blown exhibit of Somewhere in the Rainbow in the upstairs gallery.

To admit that you don't know something and are willing to learn, to demonstrate a thirst for knowledge — and to then make that knowledge accessible to other people — is so impressive.

Well, our mission to make this accessible was initially met with a lot of trepidation from the industry; it has taken over a decade of twists and turns. No one believed that anyone would acquire material at this level and then not resell it. It was also hard to find an insurance company to insure us, because we wanted to put the collection out in the world and that creates moving parts, which of course establishes risk.



Shelly Sergent, collection manager of Somewhere in the Rainbow. Photo by Kevin Schumacher/© GIA.

How do you choose what will be part of Somewhere in the Rainbow? Is there a certain amount of pieces that are accepted every year? Is there a rolling acceptance process?

There is a specific budget every year; the biggest part of the budget is typically set aside for the Tucson shows. I say the word 'budget' very loosely, because when you have a collection like ours, sometimes a piece comes along that's absolutely going to kill your budget, but you only have one chance to acquire it.

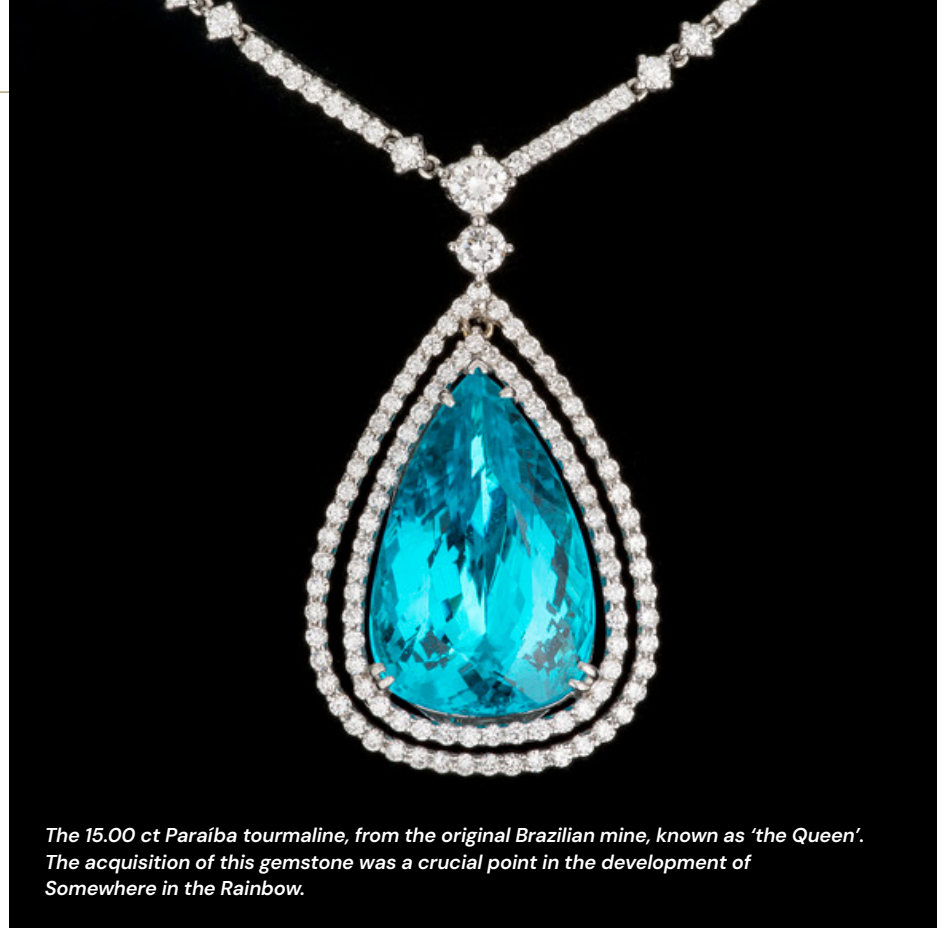
We love supporting the miners, the young up-and-coming lapidaries. You know, the pieces by lapidary students are probably some of our favourites in the collection. We have people that have cut stones for us at age 12. And we have master cutters that have been at their work for seven or eight decades.



The 20.20 ct Scorpion King tsavorite garnet, mined by Campbell Bridges in Kenya.

At this point the criteria really is to pinpoint where the holes are in our collection. We have curated roughly 3,000 pieces since 2008. Now it is about taking what we have done and putting it to use in the field, and maintaining that collection to continue to fulfil the mission. So while we are an actively growing collection, I am much more selective now.

For example, I have been seeking out a really fine Melo pearl for a long time. I don't have a really fine piece. And I kick myself, because one was brought to us a few years ago, and we passed on it. So there is always something that we're looking for. But we do acquire less, because



The 15.00 ct Paraiba tourmaline, from the original Brazilian mine, known as 'the Queen'. The acquisition of this gemstone was a crucial point in the development of Somewhere in the Rainbow.

now our current goal is to maintain the education component.

When we have a piece of jewellery made, typically the artists are invited to our offices. They spend a whole day going through lists and loose-gemstone boxes to choose what speaks to them. Because if I choose a stone for as a designer, they will design a piece, but if they don't connect with the stone, it won't be their best work. Well, we want your best for Somewhere in the Rainbow. I want to show your best effort, and to show what inspired you to create something that's unique. We follow the same process when obtaining gemstones.

You don't require rough material?

The only 'rough' that we require is synthetic sapphire. I do a cutting event every year; Bernd Stephan (Stephan Gems, Idar-Oberstein, Germany) gives me beautiful, big pieces of synthetic

sapphire boule. We break it up into twelve pieces and we invite twelve cutters to take a piece of the boule and interpret it in their own way. It is a great way to show the public and to the industry how twelve artists can start with the same 'canvas' and end up with a very different gemstone.

How do you choose those gem cutters?

I watch them online. I watch their involvement in the gemstone community, in lapidary communities and how they interact with others. I consider how they put forth their work for others to learn from or to grow from. Sometimes I will ask this year's cutters to refer somebody for the following year.

When we think of great cutting, we immediately think of the houses of Idar-Oberstein. But America is producing some of the best lapidaries that we've ever seen. We are able to showcase the work of these cutters, some of them

"It doesn't matter if you've been cutting gems for two years, it matters how you interact with your community."

who are just starting out, while others are very well known. So when you mix those together, you find that the up-and-coming cutter is now learning from the master carver, and all of their works come together in one collection. So it doesn't matter if you've been cutting gems for two years, it matters how you interact with your community. And to me, that's really important.

There are pieces that you may have acquired during meaningful periods, or where you had unusual experiences acquiring them, so you might think of them first when people talk to you about Somewhere in the Rainbow. Can you describe some of these pieces?

Well, the 15.00 ct Paraíba tourmaline necklace – we call her the Queen – she's pretty impressive. Her procurement was something of a turning point for the collection. Acquiring the Queen meant that we were no longer creating a personal collection of beautiful jewellery; we were going in a very serious direction. The gemstone was set in a necklace, and we actually kept it that way because

the whole piece was just beautiful. It wasn't until I showed her at a gem show that a gentleman approached our booth to tell us that his father wrote a PhD dissertation on our tourmaline. We found pictures of it as a crystal, we got pictures of it when it was cut. We now know the entire history behind this piece, and we formed a beautiful relationship with the man who brought us the information. And suddenly, the significance of the Queen grew.

I also love the Scorpion King. It's a 20.20 ct tsavorite garnet that was mined by Campbell Bridges from the Scorpion mine in Kenya. We acquired the stone in 2013 with the permission of Judy Bridges. It has Campbell Bridges' signature on the girdle; it is titled 001, because it's still the finest and largest specimen from that run. Again, it's not just the gem, it's the story of the stone. It's the Campbell Bridges story, the Judy Bridges story and the Bruce Bridges story. It is about overcoming life-and-death obstacles and showing that, through adversity, the love story continues. And that, for me, is, I think, one of the richest stories we can tell.

There are also transitional pieces in the collection that are really important

“We have curated roughly 3,000 pieces since 2008.”

to me. There are pieces that we bought at one specific stage, or the artist's life has transitioned to a new place, or our collection has shifted to a new place. So that piece takes on a different meaning, and the collection evolves; it's constantly changing and growing.

Can you elaborate on the North Carolina emerald necklace?

That necklace actually came to us from the Bolick family, who own the emerald mine. Eric Fritz introduced us to the Bolicks and gave us the opportunity to acquire this necklace. It is a beautiful necklace from the 1970s, designed by Martha Anne Gilchrist, one of the first women to receive a design award in America.

Glenn Bolick was going to sell the piece, and the buyer told him, “I cannot wait to take the emerald out of that necklace to tear the piece apart.” Well, she had no idea that the necklace was a gift to his wife, Kathleen, or he had named the piece the Marie necklace, after his wife's middle name. Or that the necklace, which had undergone amazing amounts of cutting and reforming of the settings, was featured in a lapidary journal. There is this fabulous, fun history attached to the necklace. For somebody to tell him that all she really wanted was the emerald was a deal killer.

When Mr Bolick came to us, he said, “I want you to promise that you will never take this apart.” I told him that I can't imagine tearing up the necklace and destroying its history. And I think that is something that Somewhere in the Rainbow does exceptionally well. We dive into the family's histories, the miners' histories, the cutters, the designers and look into the science-focused people that are involved. We look into the stories of each piece because it creates more provenance and more relevance to our mission.

Necklaces made with natural turquoise from the Sleeping Beauty mine in Arizona (17.5 mm x 23.5 mm).



Has the collection evolved as styles have changed? Presumably you are going to see different pieces from 2008 and 2024, even though some aspects may stay the same.

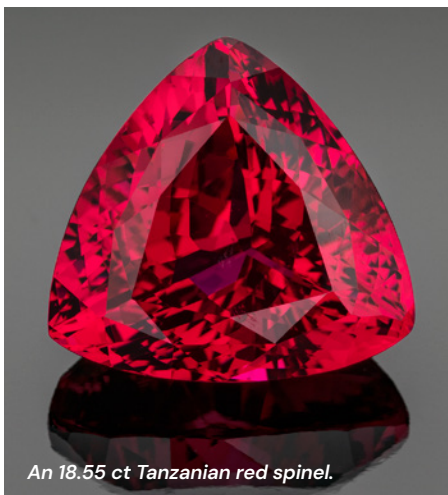
Many museums around the country focus on the historical pieces, and so we leave those gems and jewels to those museums such as the American Natural History Museum and the Smithsonian Institution.

I like to look at our collection as a way to *observe* history. I love the modern jewellery movement. I think that there's a period of modern masters, especially American modern masters, that will never be duplicated again. Starting with Henry Dunay and Jose Hess and the founding of the American Jewelry Design Council, and the coming together of a group of artists at that time that were considered very avant garde, yet today their works are considered very modern. One of my goals is to have a time period dedicated to these designers, just like the Art Nouveau or the Art Deco periods.

It is exciting to see the next generation — like Adam Neeley (Adam Neeley Designs) and Jack and Lizzie Gualtieri (Zaffiro) producing really fabulous works of art. I look at the Zoltan Davids and the Victor Velyans, who produce some of the most avant garde, brave and soulful pieces, because they're unafraid. Eddie Sakamoto has more pieces in our collection than any other artist; I think we have about sixty-two pieces. His work is so recognisable, even to people who do not know his name; they know his style.



A 34.34 ct Imperial topaz from the Ouro Preto region of Brazil is the centrepiece of this stunning pendant — which also uses 10.50 tcw diamonds, 18K gold and platinum — by designer Eddie Sakamoto.



An 18.55 ct Tanzanian red spinel.

I think Somewhere in the Rainbow has evolved, thanks to a better understanding of these objects as pieces of art, and an appreciation for more art or carvings. Our growth comes from new artists and new ideas.

What is the long-term goal for the collection?

My current concern for Somewhere in the Rainbow is to see what we're going to acquire in Tucson. I would like to see the collection spread into more museums and into more gemmological organisations. We would love to do hands-on education with guilds. We

wait for the opportunity, and then we see if it makes sense for us. Is there an educational component to the idea that's been presented to us? In Tucson, I've had no fewer than forty different opportunities. Some of those are fabulous and we're going to follow up and see where they lead; others don't really fit what we do. But I love the fact that people trust me enough to tell me and present me with their ideas. ■

All photos by Robert Weldon/© GIA, courtesy of Somewhere In The Rainbow, unless otherwise indicated.

EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCE OF COUTURE

Jennifer-Lynn Archuleta spoke with the show's organisers, as well as exhibitors, to learn more about the show's history and logistics, as well as to find out what was popular among attendees.

Every spring, members of the trade descend on the Wynn Las Vegas to discover the latest in luxury offerings and emerging trends. This year was no exception. Now in its twenty-ninth year, the annual COUTURE show in Las Vegas is the destination for members of the industry seeking its curated combination of heritage jewellery, luxury timepieces and design. The B2B show provides retail buyers with exclusive access to the launches of new collections as well as contact with up-and-coming brands and designers. From 30 May to 2 June, roughly 4,000 attendees visited the different exhibitors that fall under the umbrella of COUTURE.

Overall, this year's show was well attended by people who were up to the task COUTURE set before them: to enjoy all the products the show had to offer. According to jeweller-designer Jenna Blake, "People definitely came to buy this year. They arrived with clear intentions and were prepared to fill their stock based on metrics from previous years." Ms Blake, along with our other

respondents, noted that the show's visitors expressed definite preferences: a desire for unique pieces, a demand for green gems, and an inclination for gold over other precious metals.

Originally held in Scottsdale, Arizona, COUTURE moved to Phoenix before relocating to Las Vegas upon the opening of the Wynn in 2005. Publicity is cultivated via traditional streams such as business-to-business trade publications, both domestic and international. Organic social media efforts through platforms such as Instagram have also been enormously successful, as has simple word-of-mouth communication. Exhibitors are proud to promote their presence at COUTURE, bringing their own clientele and other retailers to experience the entire show. The COUTURE Design Awards, once a simple addition to the show, now garners attention in its own right, with artists working on their submissions throughout the year. According to Gannon Brousseau, COUTURE's director, "We strive to create an atmosphere that is conducive



Although the show is not open to the public, registered buyers reportedly flocked to this year's COUTURE Show in pre-pandemic numbers. Photo courtesy of COUTURE.

to relationship building and shared experiences, resulting in a strong sense of community that we foster throughout the year."

This atmosphere is accomplished through a number of value-added benefits that COUTURE provides to its exhibitors throughout the year. This includes open communication with the entire team, rather than just a sales representative, across the exhibition experience. COUTURE helps with topics from merchandising to salon layout to wardrobe selection. Marketing assistance is also available, stated Mr Brousseau. "Through our website and our social media channels, we offer complimentary marketing opportunities throughout the year, such as our monthly Brand Spotlights, themed editorials and Day in the Life series, as well as through our podcast, the COUTURE Podcast. Additionally, we have a robust offering of paid-partnership opportunities, both throughout the year and on-site during the event, that designers and brands can take advantage of to promote new



Participants at COUTURE tend towards original artistic expression, a primary reason LORD Jewelry has exhibited there for seven years. Left: This ring from the Wonderland collection features a 3.710 ct Australian boulder opal, 0.450 tcw diamonds and enamel. Right: From the same collection, this ring comprises a 1.780 ct cabochon spinel, 1.020 tcw diamonds and enamel. Both rings use 18K yellow gold. Photos courtesy of LORD Jewelry.

product launches or simply to boost awareness of their brand.”

Invitations to join COUTURE are carefully considered. “After giving right of first refusal to our returning brands, we take a look at all of the designers and brands who have expressed interest in exhibiting with us and determine who might be a fit within our overall curation of brands,” Gannon Brousseau explained. The show’s team takes an interactive approach, observing designers on social media and attending industry events around the world to interview possible



Show visitors expressed a desire for unique pieces, a demand for green gems, and an inclination for gold over other precious metals.

vendors in person. Should a retail partner provide a recommendation, a COUTURE team member will reach out to the potential exhibitor to see if partnership would be a mutually beneficial arrangement. Design Atelier, created to promote a ‘distinctive aesthetic from some of the industry’s most promising emerging designers’ is a three-year commitment.” Each year, we will have a handful of spaces that open up; new designers are selected through an application process and committee review to ensure they are, first a foremost a fit aesthetically, and that their businesses are set up to maximise their success,” Mr Brousseau said.

Businesses who exhibit at COUTURE appreciate the added touches and attention their participation earns them. Suzanne Kalan, whose eponymous company has had a presence at COUTURE for more than five years,

recognised that this was the right venue for her business when she transitioned away from working in fashion jewellery. “We recognised that COUTURE was the premier venue to showcase our collections,” she noted. “The elevated and exclusive nature of the show aligns perfectly with our brand’s vision and commitment to quality, making it the ideal platform to introduce our fine jewellery to a discerning audience.” Similarly, Lena Agdere, CEO and director of LORD Jewelry, felt that the show was the right outlet for her business because of its audience’s appreciation for craftsmanship. “We saw this as an ideal platform to showcase our collections to buyers who share our passion for artisanal excellence and innovative jewellery concepts.”

Ms Agdere, who keeps LORD’s client base interested in her work by continuously introducing new and surprising elements into her lines, including use of colour. She noticed that “many people gravitated towards our statement pieces, showing a strong interest in eye-catching designs.” Indeed, artistic innovation — including in use of colour, unusual design and unexpected materials — is one of the key concepts attendees to the show seek every year, and 2024 was no exception. Jewels that captured



Attendees seemed most interested in gold over other precious metals. Above: The 14K yellow gold Waterfall Necklace by Rainbow K, made for the COUTURE Show, won Best in Gold at the COUTURE Design Awards. Below: This bangle from Rainbow K’s Satin collection comprises 14K brushed gold and 0.720 ct diamonds. Photos courtesy of Rainbow K.



In addition to looking for gold, COUTURE's audience sought out colour. Main picture: Pieces from Suzanne Kalan's Classic Diamond collection. The ring, bangle bracelet and necklace shown here use diamonds and white, yellow and rose gold. Right: A selection of necklaces from Ms Kalan's Beaded collection. Photos courtesy of Suzanne Kalan Jewelry.





the imaginations of visitors ranged from the antiquity motif carried by multiple exhibitors, to the Western-style jewellery of Karina Brez (see pp. 8–9), to the beach-inspired and animal-related pieces by Parisian designer Yvonne Léon.

While there were a wide variety of styles and niches on display, there were other commonalities that vendors noticed among those who came ready to buy. As was noted in previous shows (see Spring 2024 G&J, pp. 12–17), green gemstones were in high demand. Jenna Blake of Jenna Blake Jewelry



Green gems, such as emerald, malachite, tsavorite and turquoise garnered a great deal of attention at this year's show. The turquoise version of Jenna Blake's Squash Blossom charm (left) also uses diamond and 18K yellow gold; her Trophy Ring (shown on the right in malachite) features 4.000 ct of diamonds set in 18K yellow gold. Photo courtesy of Jenna Blake Jewelry.

noted, "Emeralds are a constant in my work and so naturally they are in high demand. We have also seen an uptick in interest in other green stones, such as malachite. The colour is always flattering on the wearer and often reads like a neutral. I particularly love emeralds paired with turquoise, as well as with diamonds; both combinations resonate with our clients."

Visitors also seemed to overwhelmingly prefer gold jewellery over other precious metals. Parisian brand Rainbow K, who are in their second year of showing at COUTURE — and who took the COUTURE Design Award for Best in Gold with their Waterfall necklace — found that their new brushed-gold collection, called Satin, was very well received. They noted that the pieces from this new series "add a touch of elegance to your outfit, whether for a special evening or to complete your daily look. We are happy to see that our pieces were loved." Yvonne Léon, who works with both 9K and 18K gold, indicated that there was a greater call for the

latter type. And Suzanne Kalan, who works with white, yellow and rose gold — sometimes combining the three — said that "This year, we observed a significant demand for gold, particularly yellow gold, paired with diamonds. This classic combination has a timeless appeal and continues to be a favourite among our clients, symbolising elegance and longevity."

Since the show's formation three decades ago, COUTURE has excelled in bringing exclusivity, originality and quality its audience. While the trends may change from year to year, the show's focus on a tailored experience for attendee and exhibitor alike will not. "We will continually work towards providing our community with an exceptional experience and implement any changes, big or small, that may be necessary to enhance our event," Gannon Brousseau remarked. "This applies to the time we spend together in Las Vegas, as well as the ways in which we stay connected and enhance our clients' and partners' businesses throughout the year." ■



COUTURE staff looks for designers, such as Yvonne Léon, who have a 'distinctive aesthetic' to grace the show.

Left: Ms Léon's Paradise Island pendant is composed of 3.000 tcw tsavorite garnets, 0.330 tcw diamonds, 0.170 tcw brown diamonds, 0.006 tcw black diamonds, 0.160 ct blue sapphires and 0.010 tcw rubies, all set in 18K yellow gold. Right: The Watch Ring comprises 1.180 ct diamonds, nacre and 18K yellow gold. Photos courtesy of Yvonne Léon.

