Exquisite Jewels

THE ART OF CARNET

BY MICHELLE ONG

Foreword

When Hyper Exhibitions was presented with the opportunity to develop and produce a decorative arts exhibition showcasing the jewellery of Carnet the women in the room, as one might expect, shouted an eager "Absolutely!". The men were a bit more hesitant, not really believing that jewellery could be so beautiful and unique that people would be very keen to visit a museum to see it displayed. Thankfully, the amazing creations of Michelle Ong quickly persuaded the disbelievers.

After seeing Michelle's designs they understood that these are truly pieces of art, each with its own story, inspiration and place within a collection that has been developed over the last few years. It was then that we all believed that the story of the pieces had to be told. The combination of the spectacular gemstones and the distinctive material in which they are set must be allowed to shine and glitter in the public realm so that the many, not just the few, can enjoy how they spring to life through exceptional design and presentation. This is why Hyper Exhibitions is delighted to be able share this exhibition with so many people.

We hope that the exhibition will not only inspire visitors to recognise the individual beauty of the rare gemstones being showcased, but also show how those gemstones are shaped and moulded into something different when placed amongst others. We hope that the exhibition will show that the richness and variety of colour is not limited to paints or dyes, but can be found borne from rocks and minerals. We hope that the exhibition will capture the visitor's imagination, just as Michelle's designs demonstrate that hard elements can be fluid, flexible and can seem light as a feather. We hope that visitors will come to understand that each item is a work of art to be appreciated as much as a painting or sculpture, and that the art of jewellery is a relevant art form.

Hyper Exhibitions would like to also acknowledge and thank key people and organisations without whom this exhibition would not have taken place. We would first like to thank Michelle Ong and her business partner and co-founder of Carnet, Avi Nagar, whose energy and expertise have been limitless. Their tireless efforts to ensure the success of this exhibition by delivering their finest and most relevant pieces, and by working together with us in its co-ordination (day or night), are not to be matched. We could not be more grateful.

We would also like to thank the Glasgow City Marketing Bureau and the Burrell Collection for so willingly supporting the exhibition's launch and hosting it in such a prestigious setting. Their combined efforts to bring the exhibition to their City and to the world have been without par.

Finally, Hyper Exhibitions would sincerely like to thank all those who worked on the exhibition from the designers to the project managers, from contractors to specialist suppliers and everyone in between.

HYPER EXHIBITIONS

Preface

We live so far away from beauty.

Today it is practicality, speed, profit, smallness, bigness, these are in control, and they influence, too, the people that we meet, how many, and how we do. Grand achievements abound, we are told, and their makers are the geniuses of our world. But there does remain those for whom a machine, its product, and the very image of it, no matter its convenience, is running with ugliness, and this has no place in their lives, too far from the longest shadow of beauty. Numbers, today's emperor, cannot touch beauty, nor imitate it. Beauty is what banishes numbers, stops our calculations, stops us, to carry us, speedless, to its own paradise.

When one meets Michelle Ong, one's eyes stop on this greatest visible fortune, her beauty. When one is told that she makes beautiful things, this seems both natural and yet impossible; but the proof of her beauties comes, and it is a shock.

Surely Michelangelo was pushed to make beauty by his own ugliness, a need for a different vanity. Ong is not vain, or if she is, it is the vanity that looks around and within, and from that indescribable place where oneself, the world, and imagination meet, from there come not frescoes nor poems nor dim sum but her jewels, and they, like all great pleasures, are devoured in one bite of the eye to remain unforgettable.

Ong's jewels are mouth-watering, and they come about with a need, the demanding knowledge, and finally the delectation, that she has for food. It is a terrifying and memorable scene, listening and watching as she orders a meal. One is so happy to be at her banquet and not in the kitchen, for what must it be to get these jewels made to her taste? There are Chinese clouds, utterly different from ours, in scrolls of

Carnet

For a fine jewel to be truly timeless it has to carry with it, through history, the spirit of its moment. The greatest jewels are those that fearlessly blend the most precious, rarefied gems and exquisite craftsmanship with artistry, meaning and a message reverberating with the zeitgeist of their era. Michelle Ong's jewels for Carnet, both powerful and meltingly tender, perfectly capture *l'air du temps*, and so rightfully take their place in the story of jewellery. Created in collaboration with Avi Nagar, her business partner and gem expert éxtraordinaire, these are timelessly modern couture creations that celebrate the art of the jeweller, past and present. Pushing boundaries, they audaciously but reverently subjugate gems and metals and conventions of jewellery-making to the will and whimsy of design, underscored always with themes and inspirations, layered with cultural references, the floating clouds, a Chinese dragon, magic hoops, an antique lace cuff.

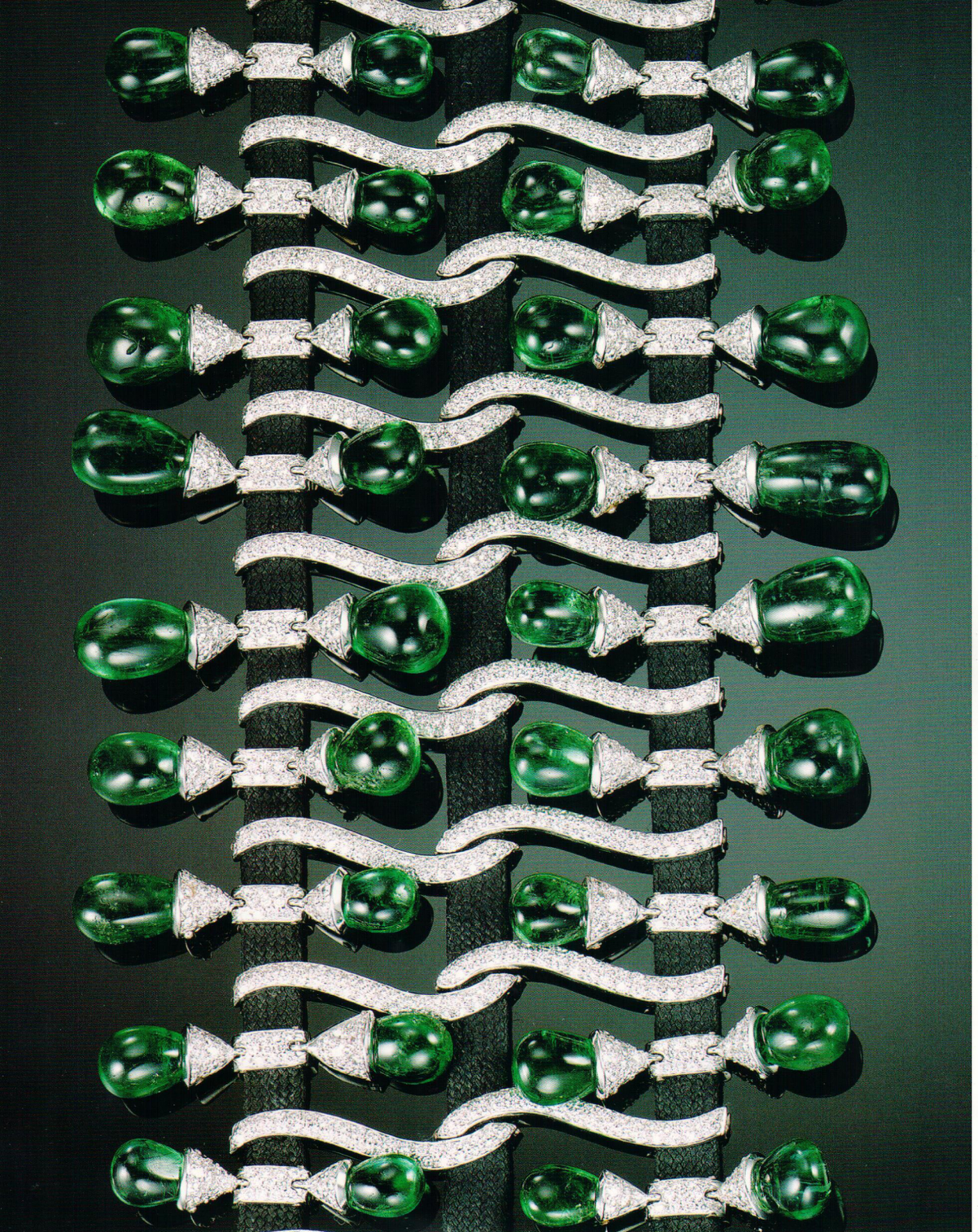
It is this fusion of influences from East and West that gives Carnet jewels their extraordinary charisma, resonating with echoes from the past. China, and the Orient, has always held a fascination for Europeans, particularly during the great trading centuries of the 17th and 18th centuries, and culminating in a huge vogue for a whimsical, rococo 18th century Chinoiserie. When Japan was re-opened to the West in the 1860s, and the craze for Orientalism, bordering on obsession, flooded Europe, this too influenced art and design shaping Impressionism and nurturing Art Nouveau. From this time on, the master jewellers of the world, notably Cartier in the 1920s, have looked to the East for inspiration and innovation.

Yet these are ornaments that turn the jewel rules on their head, originating in the East, in Hong Kong, where worlds collide, East and West, ancient and modern, tradition and superstition living side by side with high-finance and super high-

diamonds; unexpected blackness with reds and greens making ferocious, billowing dragons we will remember; diamonds again trickling about a neck and slipping down wrists; geometry, monsters, flora, colour, a free hand making things we have never seen and will keep-see forever.

From where ever it comes, from however far away, Michelle Ong's power ignores the rules of machines, of numbers, of today, bringing us beauty so near it is here in our hand.

JOEL ROSENTHAL



technology, the instinctive with the rational. All this is captured in Carnet's jewels: elegant and glamorous, romantic and exotic, they carve out a place of their own establishing a new lineage of contemporary Asian jewels. One that is set against a historical background that has little tradition of jewel-wearing as we know it, in which bronze and jade traditionally took the place of gold and diamonds.

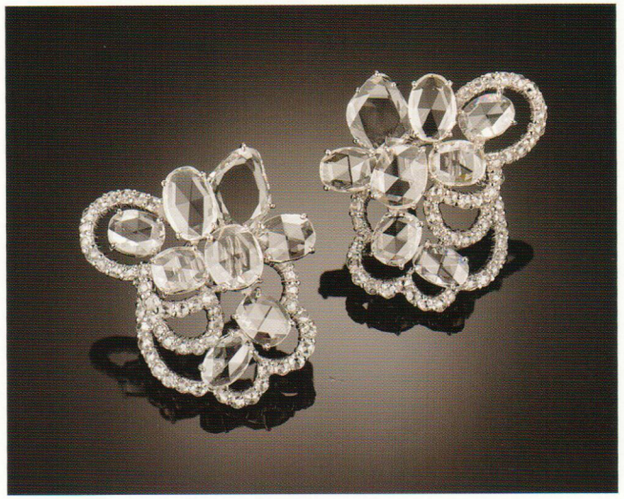
For me, Michelle Ong's masterpieces also follow in a direct line from the great historical jewels that have expressed changing ideals of femininity: glorious 18th century diamond ribbons, bows, rosettes and feathers, the courtly magnificence of corsage ornaments and girandole earrings; the *Belle Époque* ruled by the cult of femininity with its refined, slender white diamond and platinum jewels like flower garlands, lace, moiré or petit point embroidery; or Jeanne Toussaint's exuberantly predatory creatures, for Cartier in the 1940s and 50s, worn by powerful women of style and status.

Carnet's alluring jewels capture and reflect today's fast changing femininity: strong, independent with a touch of fantasy, and the joy of luxury and escapism. The intense colour, which plays such an important part in Michelle Ong's creations, often in shaded pavé work, is the emotional key to a jewel, but also speaks to us of a vogue very much driven by women choosing and buying their own jewels. Her themes so often fuse fabric and gems, fashion and jewellery, in a way that is of the moment, the couture attitude shown to perfection in the breathtaking blackened lace-like diamond jewels, redolent of both noble *Belle Époque* diamonds and 19th century Berlin Iron. Most of all, by effortlessly layering these memories and references, working with integrity, spontaneity and dynamism, Michelle Ong follows in the footsteps of great women jewellery designers, like Jeanne Toussaint or Suzanne Belperron, and lifts jewellery into the realm of a work of art. We should be grateful that Michelle Ong, and Avi Nagar, have turned their talents towards the art of the jewel, and welcome this exhibition of exquisite works of art, jewels for all time, carrying the mood of their moment into jewellery history.

VIVIENNE BECKER
Jewellery historian

Feather Brooch 2001
Diamond and coloured
gemstones (ruby, amethyst)
Titanium and platinum

Brooch 2000
Diamond and coloured
precious stones
Titanium and platinum



Earrings 2005
Diamond
18k white gold and platinum

Musical Key Brooch 2002
Diamond
Platinum