

THE ART OF  
CARTIER

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## THE ART OF CARTIER

Since 1983, Cartier has assembled jewellery, watches, clocks and other precious objects into the Cartier Collection. Sourced from private individuals, retailers or at auction, the more than 1,450 objects in this growing collection have been selected according to criteria of style but also the materials used and the techniques employed. Dating from the 1860s for the oldest items to the late 1990s, they are a material reminder of Cartier's 165-year history and, more widely, European decorative arts and society from the end of the 19th century.

Since a first major presentation in 1989 at the Petit Palais in Paris, the collection has been shown at internationally renowned museums. For this new exhibition, *The Art of Cartier*, the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza has carefully selected more than 400 pieces representing six themes which illustrate the stylistic evolution of Cartier. The exhibition also includes prestigious private loans from the Spanish Royal Family and the Palace of Monaco.

Enlargements of sketchbook pages, preparatory and production drawings from Cartier's Archives are projected onto the walls as a reminder of the creative process that brought each of these pieces to life. These Archives are today conserved in three centres —Paris, London, and New York— and trace the life of every item, from its inception in the workshops to the day of its sale. In addition to drawings and sketches, they conserve life-size black-and-white photographs, very rare autochromes, and plaster casts.



Family portrait of Alfred Cartier with his three sons, Pierre, Louis and Jacques, in Saint-Jean-de-Luz, 1922

## From Apprentice to Rue de la Paix

In 1847 Louis-François Cartier (1819–1904) was employed by the jeweller Adolphe Picard, at 29 Rue Montorgueil in Paris. When in 1847 Maître Picard moved, he left his business in the young man's hands. Six years later, Louis-François Cartier set up under his own name close to the Palais Royal. The refinement of Cartier's jewellery of ancient and classical inspiration soon came to the attention of an elegant clientele. Princess Mathilde, cousin of Emperor Napoleon III, became acquainted with Cartier: the company's ledgers record that she purchased over two hundred items. In 1859 the Empress herself, Eugénie de Montijo, ordered a silver tea service. That same year Cartier moved to 9 Boulevard des Italiens, an area very much *en vogue*. Alfred (1841–1925), Louis-François's son, took over the company in 1874. Meanwhile, the discovery in the late 1860s of South Africa's



Fig. 1. *Lily stomacher brooch*. Cartier Paris,  
special order, 1906

diamond deposits had enormous impact on the world of jewellery: substantial quantities of fine quality stones suddenly became available. Jewellery from that period was made with characteristic gold-backed silver mounts and inspired by the Louis XVI style, also known as the Garland style, which reached its peak in 1890 and would remain in fashion until the First World War. In the meantime, to solve the problem of silver oxidation, Cartier turned to platinum, whose malleability, white colour and strength meant Cartier could sculpt ethereal mounts resembling diamond lace and garlands [fig. 1].

Alfred had three sons: Louis (1875–1942), Pierre (1878–1964), and Jacques (1884–1942). In 1898 Louis joined his father in the family business followed by his brothers a few years later. He demonstrated an eye for beauty and a head for business and convinced his father to move to the city's most elegant thoroughfare, 13 Rue de la Paix, in 1899 which is still Cartier's landmark building today.

## Head Ornaments

Adopted as an insignia of royal power, the tiara evolved over the centuries into increasingly precious versions that were symbols of the high rank of the wearer. It returned to favour in the 19th century and continued to exert its fascination until the end of the First World War. Cartier's first large tiaras were recorded at the turn of the 20th century. While some were still made in gold-backed silver, most were crafted from platinum. Garland-style jewellery, inspired by decorative motifs of the 17th and 18th centuries, was a perfect match for the requirements of Belle Époque fashion [fig. 2]. Just as imposing *devant de corsage* were held in place by the corset, large tiaras were secured by the hair drawn back into a chignon.

From 1907, the Russian influence produced marvels known as *kokoshniks* (Russian for “cock’s comb”) inspired by a headdress in folk costume. To lighten the heavy proportions suggested by the *kokoshnik's* solid form, Cartier made some with diamond drops suspended within the mount.

The years between the two world wars were times of great change. A period of short-lived prosperity, technical innovation and the emancipation of women gave way to the worst economic depression ever. Still, the newly conquered freedom transformed the way women dressed and wore their hair. Heavy tiaras and imposing *devant de corsage* no longer had their place. Worn on the forehead, the bandeau was now in fashion [fig. 3]. Fashion changed again in the 1930s with the return of a more feminine silhouette, a marked waistline and longer hair. Although *passé* in Paris and New York, tiaras were still called for at the royal court in London. However, a sign of difficult economic times, so-called “fine” stones replaced more costly diamonds [fig. 4].

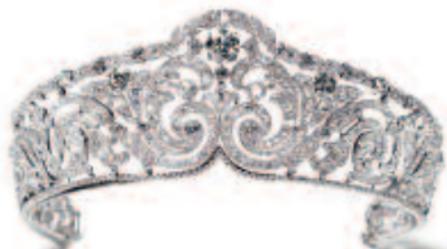


Fig. 2. **Scroll tiara.** Cartier Paris, 1910  
Fig. 3. **Bandeau.** Cartier New York, 1924  
Fig. 4. **Tiara.** Cartier London, 1937

## Modern Style and Art Deco

As early as 1904, there appeared designs notable for their geometric lines and abstract shapes that broke with the Garland style [fig. 5].

The year 1909 was characterized by a major artistic event: Serge Diaghilev's Ballets Russes triumphed in Paris. The troupe's explosive use of colour juxtapositions entranced Louis Cartier. One of his favourite combinations was blue and green, which was translated into a beautiful blend of turquoise, lapis lazuli and jade or the more precious sapphires and emeralds.

Onyx was used from the 1910s and would become a favourite Cartier material. It would enhance diamonds and reinforce the lines of a piece of jewellery. In 1914, one of the classic Cartier motifs made its first appearance: the "panther-skin" pattern of diamond and onyx [fig. 6]. From the 1910s to the 1930s, polished rock crystal became another much-loved material for Cartier.

Indeed it was well before World War I that Cartier anticipated a new style which would later be dubbed "Art Deco" in reference to the 1925 *Exposition internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes*. Purely geometric forms became limited to the framing of brooches or to the decorative patterning of objects such as cigarette cases [fig. 7].

At the end of the 1920s the Art Deco style began to echo the use of light platinum and the brilliance of diamonds that had characterised the tonal values at the beginning of the century.

Audacious stone cuts were used, such as the baguette-cut diamond: its straight-edged, simple form visually conformed to geometric Art Deco lines.

The distinctively flat and smooth-surfaced designs successively developed into more voluminously styled creations during the 1930s as jewels began to appear distinctively three-dimensional [fig. 8].

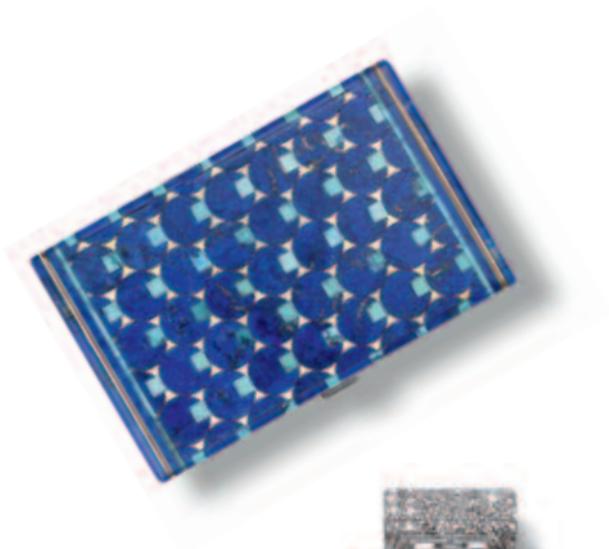
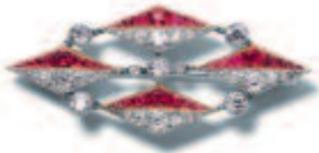


Fig. 5. **Brooch.** Cartier Paris, 1904

Fig. 6. **Panther-pattern watch-brooch.** Cartier Paris, 1915

Fig. 7. **Cigarette case.** Cartier Paris, 1930

Fig. 8. **Pyramid clip brooch.** Cartier Paris, special order, 1935



Fig. 9. *Scarab brooch*. Cartier London, 1924

Fig. 10. *Chinese vanity case*. Cartier Paris, 1928

Fig. 11. *Tutti Frutti necklace*. Cartier Paris, special order, 1936, altered in 1963

Fig. 12. *Dragon brooch*. Cartier Paris, special order, 1924

## Oriental Influences

Louis Cartier had a passion for exotic cultures. While Islamic art truly fascinated him—he had built up a very fine collection of Persian miniatures—Egyptian, Chinese and Indian art were equally influential on Cartier artworks from the beginning of the 1910s. He had established a remarkable library of reference marks which served as inspiration for the jewellery designs. He also sought out authentic fragments of ancient art which entered the stock as *apprêts* and were incorporated in jewellery and objects. It was the unusual combination of non-European ancient art and modern mounts that led Cartier to a unique interpretation of 1920s Art Deco pieces.

### *Egypt*

Louis Cartier's fascination with Egyptian civilisation and its cultural heritage is manifested in his jewels from the 1910s where he incorporated a particularly Egyptian touch. In 1922, Howard Carter's discovery of the tomb of Tutankhamun brought Egypt back to the centre of artistic attention. Cartier's Egyptian-style pieces can be categorised into two distinctive sets: jewels and objects decorated with Egyptian-style ornamentation, as found in reference works, and those that were embellished with an actual Egyptian antiquity such as a fragment of blue-glazed faïence [fig. 9].

### *Persia – India*

In 1911 Jacques Cartier travelled for the first time to India where he witnessed the reverence with which Parisian jewels and watches were treated by the maharajahs. These royals spent lavishly on Cartier pieces and also entrusted their stones to the jeweller so that they could be set in contemporary mounts, usually in platinum. This contact with India

also inspired Cartier to design his magnificent Indian-style parures. Stones carved using ancient Indian gem-cutting techniques opened up new avenues for Cartier. Rubies, sapphires and emeralds were carved into leaves or fluted beads and set into fruit and foliage jewels that became known as the *Tutti Frutti* pieces [fig. 11].

### *The Far East*

The Far East is a source of inspiration that led Cartier to create some outstanding works of art. The Art Deco period saw a huge surge in popularity in vanity and cigarette cases. Their varied dimensions gave the designers a great deal of freedom in their creations, as seen in a vanity case depicting a Chinese legend of long-lasting friendship [fig. 10]. Antique jade was a favourite in the jewellery designs, as, for example, in a brooch made from an 18th- or 19th-century Chinese belt clasp [fig. 12].

### The Power of Style – Iconic Clients

During the first three decades of the 20th century, there emerged in Paris a new kind of social atmosphere out of which “Café Society” was born. Its Golden Age spanned roughly two decades from the 1930s onwards and it was during this time that marriages between the grandest aristocratic European families and the heirs of great American fortunes gave birth to a new elite class that was rich, cultivated and audacious. Its members bubbled over with imaginative creativity and spent fortunes making their lives a veritable work of art.

The Duchess of Windsor was one of the reigning queens of Café Society, rivalling in elegance her contemporaries Daisy Fellowes and Mona Bismarck. Jewellery played a significant role as a statement of sophistication and the Duchess’s *Flamingo* brooch [fig. 13], *Panther*



Fig. 13. *Flamingo brooch*. Cartier Paris, special order, 1940

Fig. 14. *Necklace*. Cartier Paris, 1951, altered in 1953

brooch [fig. 23] as well as a splendid necklace from 1947 are fine examples of her own daring elegance.

From the 1950s other iconic clients turned to Cartier. In 1956, Grace Kelly married Prince Rainier of Monaco. The prince ordered his beloved's engagement ring from Cartier. The bride's trousseau also included a large diamond necklace, a diamond bracelet, and three ruby and diamond clips.

Elizabeth Taylor, too, was a faithful client. Her love of jewellery became legendary and she was indulged by the amorous men in her life.

In 1957 Mike Todd gave her a Cartier ruby and diamond necklace [fig. 14]. In the late 50s and 70s, the boldest commissions ever were the jewellery ordered by the Mexican actress María Félix. A reptile enthusiast, she approached Cartier to create her unique *Snake* necklace and pair of earrings as well as her *Crocodile* necklace [fig. 21].

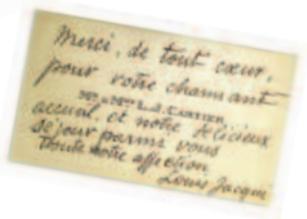


Fig. 15. *Mignonnette* clock. Cartier Paris, 1911

Fig. 16. *Santos* wristwatch. Cartier Paris, 1915

Fig. 17. Visiting card with envelope. Cartier, special order, ca. 1927

Fig. 18. Jean Cocteau's Academician's sword. Cartier Paris, 1955

## Precious Time, Precious Objects

The Maison has offered clocks and watches since 1853. In 1904, Louis Cartier would present the Brazilian aviator Alberto Santos-Dumont with a watch whose dial he could consult while at the commands of his airship.

On sale to the public beginning in 1911, the *Santos* wristwatch was the first timepiece with a case expressly designed to be worn on the wrist [fig. 16]. The three models that followed were greeted with the same instant success: the *Tonneau* wristwatch in 1906, the *Tortue* wristwatch in 1912, and the *Tank* wristwatch in 1919.

When in 1900 Louis Cartier visited the Universal Exposition in Paris, he fell under the spell of Fabergé delicate *guiloché* enamel. Henceforth, Cartier's stock would include numerous desk clocks in pastel-coloured enamel [fig. 15], together with objects in the Russian style, such as hardstone animals and flowers.

Until the late 1930s, ladies' jewellery wristwatches favoured platinum and diamonds. In the 1940s, Cartier preferred to work with gold. The bracelets were fashioned into chains, bangles or flexible mesh.

### *Unique and Symbolic Objects*

Numerous accessories were embellished with a monogram or a coat of arms at the customer's request. During the 1920s and 1930s, such elitism often resulted in a personal message engraved on an object for the future owner [fig. 17].

Many exceptional pieces were also commissioned from Cartier to coincide with important events in the worlds of art, literature, politics, sport or science. One example conserved in the Cartier Collection is Jean Cocteau's Academician's sword [fig. 18].



Fig. 19. *Model A Mystery clock*. Cartier Paris, 1914

Fig. 20. *Large Portique Mystery clock*. Cartier Paris, 1923

### *Mystery clocks*

Mystery clocks resulted from a joint endeavour between Louis Cartier and a gifted clockmaker, Maurice Couët, Cartier's exclusive supplier of table clocks. He took inspiration from the illusionist and clockmaker Jean-Eugène Robert-Houdin (1805–1871) to create clocks whose hands appear to float inside a transparent dial, seemingly unconnected to the movement, hence their “mystery”.

In 1912 he devised the first Mystery clock for Cartier, known simply as *Model A*, similar to the clock in the Collection [fig. 19]. In 1920 Couët perfected the “central axle” model. This system gave Cartier greater freedom to vary the form and decoration of its Mystery clocks. In an unprecedented feat of technique in 1923 the movement was housed inside the top of a *Portique* clock [fig. 20].



Fig. 21. *Crocodile necklace*. Cartier Paris, special order, 1975

## Flora and Fauna

In 1933, Louis appointed Jeanne Toussaint (1887–1978) head of Cartier’s Fine Jewellery department. From that time to the 1960s, Toussaint —nicknamed “the Panther”— enjoyed enormous success in this role thanks to her outstanding intelligence and creativity.

Toussaint’s touch was such that it created a new standard of taste that was dubbed “*goût Toussaint*”. It was under her infallible instincts that flora and fauna became representative of a fantastic world and testimony to a new sensibility for nature that was altogether unlike the geometric stylization of Art Deco. Marking a definitive break from the use of monochrome platinum and diamonds, Toussaint’s directorship oversaw the reintroduction of yellow gold.



Fig. 22. *Palm-tree clip brooch*. Cartier Paris, special order, 1957



Fig. 23. *Panther clip brooch*. Cartier Paris, 1949

It was during the eventual return to prosperity in the 1950s that fine jewellery in platinum, diamonds and precious stones reappeared in Cartier's windows. An almost naturalistic, a three-dimensional *Palm-tree* brooch created in 1957 is an outstanding example from that period [fig. 22].

Jeanne Toussaint became a mouthpiece for the most sophisticated women of the time. Many of the Duchess of Windsor's jewels were designed in collaboration with her, such as her *Panther* brooch [fig. 23] in which the animal sits on a 152.35-carat Kashmir sapphire cabochon.

## Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza

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www.museothyssen.org  
Paseo del Prado, 8 - 28014 Madrid

### Dates

24 October 2012 to 17 February 2013.

### Venue

First Basement galleries, Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza.

### Opening times

Tuesdays to Sundays, 10am to 7pm.

The temporary exhibition will be opened until 10pm on Saturdays. Closed on Mondays.

Closed 25 December 2012 and 1 January 2013.

Visitors are asked to leave the galleries 5 minutes before closing.

### Ticket sales

At the Museum's ticket desks

www.museothyssen.org

Tel: 902 760 511

### Ticket prices

General:

Thyssen-Bornemisza Collections: 9,00 €

*The Art of Cartier* exhibition: 8,00 €

Combined ticket for Thyssen-Bornemisza

Collections and *The Art of Cartier* exhibition:  
12,00 €

Senior citizens (65 and over), pensioners, Carné Joven holders, Fine Arts teachers, students, Disabled with 33% rating and members of large families, with proof of status:

- Thyssen-Bornemisza Collections: 6,00 €
- *The Art of Cartier* exhibition: 5,50 €
- Combined ticket for Thyssen-Bornemisza Collections and *The Art of Cartier* exhibition: 7,50 €

Free admission:

Accompanied children under 12  
and officially unemployed people.

### Transport

Metro: Banco de España.

Buses: 1, 2, 5, 9, 10, 14, 15, 20, 27, 34, 37, 45, 51, 52, 53,  
74, 146 and 150.

Train: Atocha, Sol and Recoletos stations.

### Information Service

Tel: 902 760 511

cavthyssen@stendahl.com

### Bookshop / Giftshop

Ground floor. Catalogue of the exhibition on sale.

### Cafeteria Restaurant

Ground floor.

### Audio-Guide

Available in Spanish, English and French.

***Mobile telephones must not be used  
in the exhibition rooms.***

### Illustration credits

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**Kingfisher brooch.** Cartier Paris, 1941  
Graphite and bodycolour on buff tracing paper

Front cover: **Kingfisher clip brooch**  
Cartier Paris, 1941