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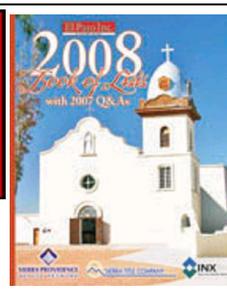
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News Article

## 'Bedazzled'

### The business behind the exhibit

By Myrna Zanetell  
Special to El Paso Inc.



The mother lode of glitter and glamour comes to El Paso in two weeks, when "Bedazzled: 5,000 Years of Jewelry" starts a four-month run at the El Paso Museum of Art.

Opening March 27, this spectacular exhibition showcases 150 precious masterpieces chosen from 25,000 rare collectibles in the Walters Art Museum's permanent collection of fine art jewelry, including some hidden treasures not ordinarily on public display.

Visitors will truly be dazzled by beautiful examples of gems and craftsmanship, ranging from 3,000 years ago and to the early 20th century.

There are amulets and pendants from Egypt and Mesopotamia, an early Byzantine diadem, a Hellenistic golden bracelet encrusted with precious stones, and even intricate creations designed by art deco master jewelers like Tiffany and Lalique.

But bringing the exhibit here from the Walters Museum in Baltimore was not easy or cheap. If things go as planned, however, it would establish a new model for the business side of arts and culture, and ensure that more quality exhibits will travel to El Paso.

#### The plan

Thanks to a series of serendipitous events, the art museum will be the only venue west of the Mississippi to host this unique sampling of fine art jewelry.

Aware of the Walters Art Museum's outstanding list of traveling exhibitions, art museum director Michael Tomor had contacted the Baltimore facility early last year, hoping to schedule an exhibition of Impressionist art in El Paso.

Informing him that another Texas museum already had an exclusive on that exhibit for the entire state, the staff inquired if he might be interested in a jewelry exhibition instead.

Not missing a beat, Tomor answered, "Absolutely."

Acquiring the exhibition represents only the tip of the iceberg, however. Tomor says the lease fee for an exhibition of this caliber is \$100,000 — plus \$37,500 more for shared costs such as shipping, insurance, set up and fees for the conservators who are the only persons allowed to handle the objects on loan.

It's not unlikely that additional marketing and other related expenses may bring the total outlay to more than \$200,000.

"We definitely feel the cost is worth it, because this exhibition will have a significant impact on the museum and our community," Tomor emphasizes. "As a museum our job is to take people beyond what they already know, and 'Bedazzled' will mark the first time the EPMA has ever presented an



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exhibition related to crafts as fine art."

Tomor says such a focus is important because it allows the museum to present the history and culture of these periods as told through fine art jewelry and adornment.

"Had we tried to do this by bringing in paintings and sculptures of the same eras, it would have been much more expensive," he said.

#### **Major sponsors**

Tomor relates that the basic funding needed to acquire the exhibition has already been guaranteed, thanks to the support of major donors, all of whom he considers to be equally important to the success of this exhibition.

Local jeweler Susan Eisen was one of the first to step up, becoming the presenting sponsor with her donation of \$30,000 in cash, plus an additional \$70,000 in marketing and educational programs. She explains her motivation for such a generous sponsorship.

"This year marks the 30th anniversary of my business, Susan Eisen Fine Jewelry and Watches. My first thought on how to commemorate this milestone was to throw a big party, but instead I chose to help underwrite this exhibition as my gift to the city of El Paso," she says.

Eisen has donated funds for the development of an audio tour for the exhibition and is bringing in several professional gemologists related to the educational portion of the exhibition.

Lead sponsors at the \$20,000 level include the law firm of Kemp Smith, United Freedom Associates, which is affiliated with the food service industry at Fort Bliss, and the El Paso Museum of Art Foundation, whose mission is to fund programming, conservation and collection management.

Drawing from its hotel occupancy tax, the County of El Paso is also providing \$33,000 in advertising and cash towards the lease fee.

The \$10,000 major sponsors are Bank of the West and South Texas Money Management, which is also arranging for advertising in two issues of Texas Monthly magazine.

The Shiloff Family Foundation, a supporting sponsor, contributed the final \$5,000, bringing the cash total to the \$135,000 needed to underwrite the exhibition.

"This type of sponsorship is so important right now because it demonstrates that the community is supporting what we are doing," Tomor says.

#### **Funding history**

Even though the museum is a municipal facility, Tomor explains that the funding it receives from the city is limited to maintenance and operating expenses. That's why the museum follows the non-profit model of fund-raising, where all exhibitions, educational outreach programs or other events must be funded by grants or private donations.

"For this reason, we need to make it clear to the business community and the public at large, if they want such services to continue, we must have their commitment," Tomor says.

And he points to historical precedent.

"Two generations ago when our parents and grandparents felt the need for hospitals, community centers, libraries and museums, they got their friends together and not only funded them, but served on the board of directors to ensure a continuum of fiduciary responsibility," he says.

"But many from the past two generations have failed to understand this concept, and that is why non-profit organizations are so fragile right now," he adds.

#### **Model of business**

Relying on community support, Tomor has proposed a business model that ensures the availability of funds for future exhibitions.

"Ticket fees will go into a specially earmarked exhibition fund. Even a \$10 ticket for non-members is a modest admission fee by standards in other cities, and by offering a half-price discount to members, we are also hoping to reach our community and help them understand the benefits of being a museum member," he said.

If that business model succeeds, then a major exhibition in one year will pay for another of equal or higher quality the following season, and the museum won't be continually dependant upon philanthropy, he adds.

"If we get the hoped-for 50,000 visitors in the next four months, ticket sales would equate to between \$300,000 and \$500,000 in revenues and this would make the exhibition fund self sufficient," he said. "We are counting on the community to give us this ultimate vote of confidence."

#### **Bedazzled:**

5,000 Years of Jewelry  
March 27-July 25  
El Paso Museum of Art

Tickets  
Adults: \$5 EPMA member,  
\$10 non-member  
Children 12 and under: Free for EPMA member accompanied by an adult, \$5 non-member

Hours  
Tuesday-Saturday  
9 a.m.-5 p.m.  
Open till 9 p.m. Thursday  
Sunday  
Noon-5 p.m.

For more information  
(915) 532-1707 ext. 47  
[elpasoartmuseum.com](http://elpasoartmuseum.com)

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