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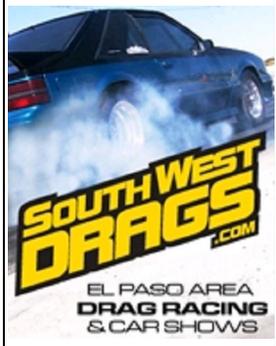



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what's up

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'Bedazzled': Jewelry exhibit shimmers, shines

By Amy Arsenault



If diamonds are a girl's best friend, then it's been that way for quite some time, according to a new exhibit at the El Paso Museum of Art (EPMA). "Bedazzled: 5,000 Years of Jewelry" opened Saturday, March 27.

A stroll through the exhibit, the museum's first of three-dimensional objects, allows anyone to revel in centuries of artisan talent, craftsmanship and impressive technique.

Aquamarines, pearls, rubies, amethysts, multicolored enamels and glass representing power and wealth throughout the ages complement the skill and aptitude of early jewelers and fabricators.

"This exhibit is a real turning point for our museum and our city," says EPMA Director Dr. Michael Tomor. "We are so lucky to have this rich, varied and aesthetically beautiful jewelry collection.

He adds: "The exhibit not only allows us to view art history in the form of embellishments, but it also give us a chance to see an evolution of world culture."

The exhibit takes its visitors through a chronological journey that includes ancient Mesopotamian artifacts, Greco-Christian adornments, Medieval accents and even 20th-century pieces from jewelry icon Tiffany and Co.

Susan Eisen, owner of Susan Eisen Fine Jewelry and Watches, is the presenting sponsor of the exhibit.

"The museum surpassed anything I could have ever dreamt of," she says. "Everything is just so beautiful."

Strolling through the exhibit, she noted that the workmanship was a great testament to the abilities of each manufacturer.

"These pieces are all so stunning, every time you see them you just get a big thrill," she says, adding that many of the pieces were created without using any tools. "No matter how the jewels are cut, they always sparkle."

And sparkle they do. One piece in particular created by Tiffany and Co. lives up to the little blue box's reputation for a generous use of diamonds. So generous, in fact, that the creators were anything but stingy when it also came to sapphires, demantoid garnets and citrines. All together, the nine-and-a half-inch piece shines with 139 gems.

Another featured showpiece is a bracelet from the Olbia Treasure. Olbia is a city in modern day Ukraine where an ancient Greek colony once thrived. In the late 19th century, some of the world's most impressive early artifacts were found at this location.

Among the treasure was the exhibit's centerpiece. The bracelet is cast in gold and ordained in garnets, amethysts, emeralds, pearls, glass, enamel and various stones.

"Pieces such as this bracelet help us realize that this isn't just jewelry we are looking at – this is true artisanship," Tomor says. "These are masterpieces in the form of jewelry."

So what exactly did it cost to bring such a lavish exhibit to El Paso? Approximately \$200,000, Tomor says, but he adds that most of the amount was underwritten by a generous community.

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Among the generous donors, Eisen is a proud provider.

"This exhibit is something that we can all be proud of," she says. "It is truly a feather in everyone's hat."

'Bedazzled: 5,000 Years of Jewelry'

El Paso Museum of Art, 1 Civic Center Plaza

Through July 25

ADMISSION

Adults: \$5 members

\$10 non-members

Children 12 and under: free for members accompanied by adult

\$5 non-members

HOURS

Tues-Sat: 9 a.m.-5 p.m.

Thur evenings: 5-9 p.m.

Sunday: noon-5 p.m.

Closed Monday

For info visit elpasoartmuseum.org

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