Koopman Rare Art

Director’s Choice - Kimberley Smith Target Rings and Latest Acquisitions

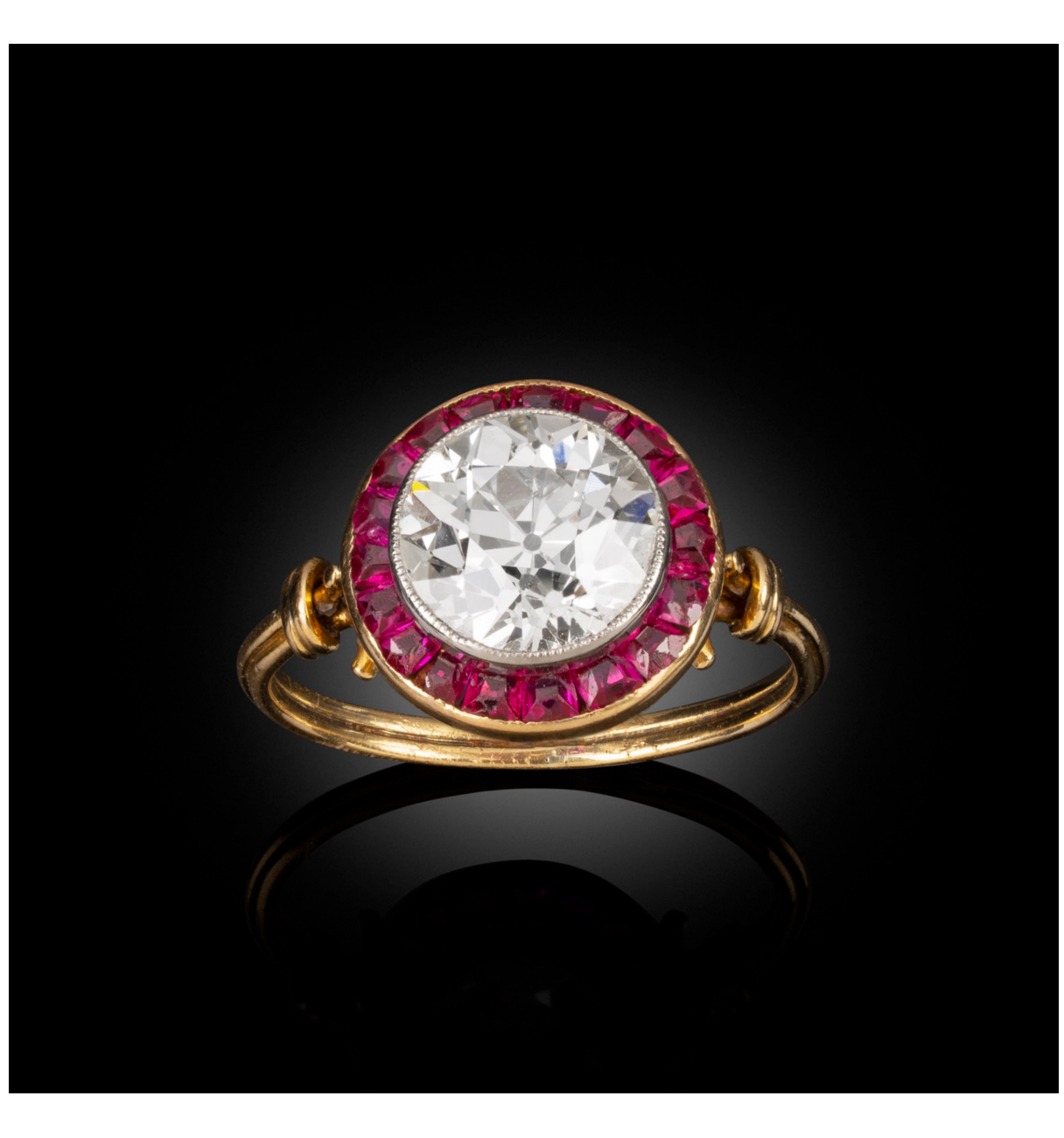
When looking through our latest acquisitions to show you in this week’s directors’ choice, I picked out my favourite ring I’ve recently purchased and noticed a slight trend in my ring buying patterns of late; I had subconsciously built a small collection of target rings. The main reason for this being that I personally love them and thus am always drawn to them, and as our jewellery collection conveys, I buy what I love. In recent times, diamond rings and primarily engagement rings have become standard and samey, that being the classic solitaire diamond mounted in a small variety of settings. And don’t get me wrong, this is a timeless design which is why it is so popular, but there’s something to be said for adding a pop of colour to your diamond ring. Enter the target ring: a ring designed with a central diamond with one or more concentric circles of smaller stones around it, usually sapphires, rubies or emeralds. The layered, circular look is what gives it the “target” name.

Target rings first emerged in the early 1900s during the Edwardian era, though they became especially popular in the art-deco period when bold, geometric designs and symmetry were so popular. Although they were seen as decorative, they also carried meaning as romantic love tokens; the circular “target” was associated with cupid’s arrow hitting the heart. During the early 20th century, different gemstones had different meanings, for example rubies symbolised love and passion, and sapphires symbolised wisdom, loyalty and protection. So essentially these target rings were a coded message of love, as an engagement ring is today.

Additionally, what really encouraged their popularity was advances in jewellery craftsmanship in the early 1900s and the details within these rings. Jewellers had better gemstone cutting techniques and therefore the ability to precisely cut and set calibre-cut gemstones in circular designs. Also, the changing fashion tastes from the Victorian era to the Edwardian and then the art deco era emphasised bold visual contrasts, so target rings with the white diamond against the bright red ruby for example, fit perfectly into this aesthetic.

Here are some of my favourites in our collection, starting with my most recent purchase:

A ruby and diamond target ring, circa 1900

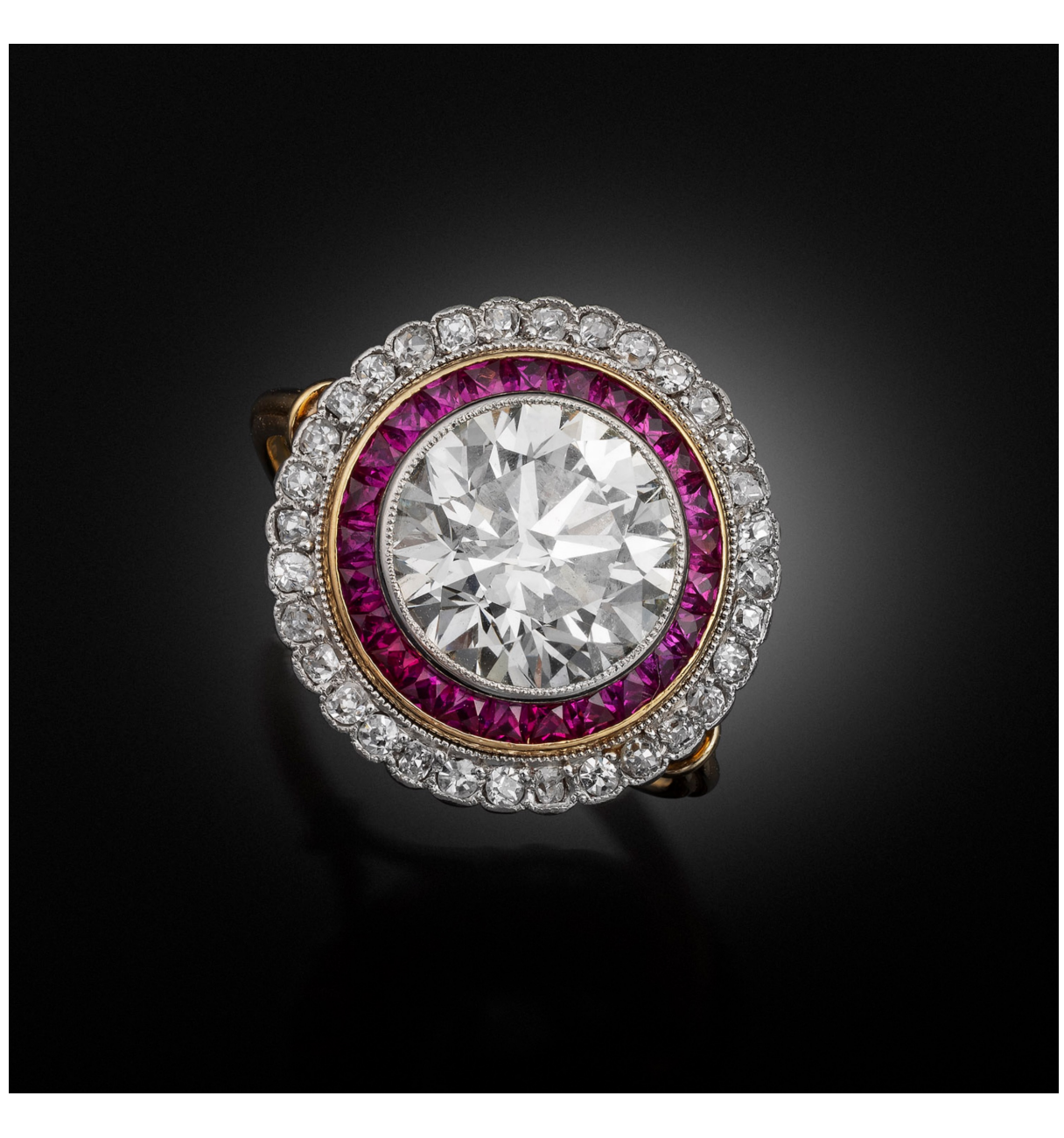


Centring an old European cut diamond in a platinum bezel setting, approx 2.80 carats G/H colour VS2 clarity, within a surround of calibre cut rubies in a gold mount, with openwork details to the shoulders.

I loved this ring the moment I saw it, and being set all in yellow gold, it is one of the earlier examples of a target ring. The design feels soft yet bold, featuring a high quality old European cut diamond. The rubies, likely Burmese, are bright and lively and offset beautifully against the white diamond but perfectly compliment the yellow gold.

And if you want something similar but with a little added sparkle, this one might be for you:

An Early 20th Century Diamond and Ruby Target Ring

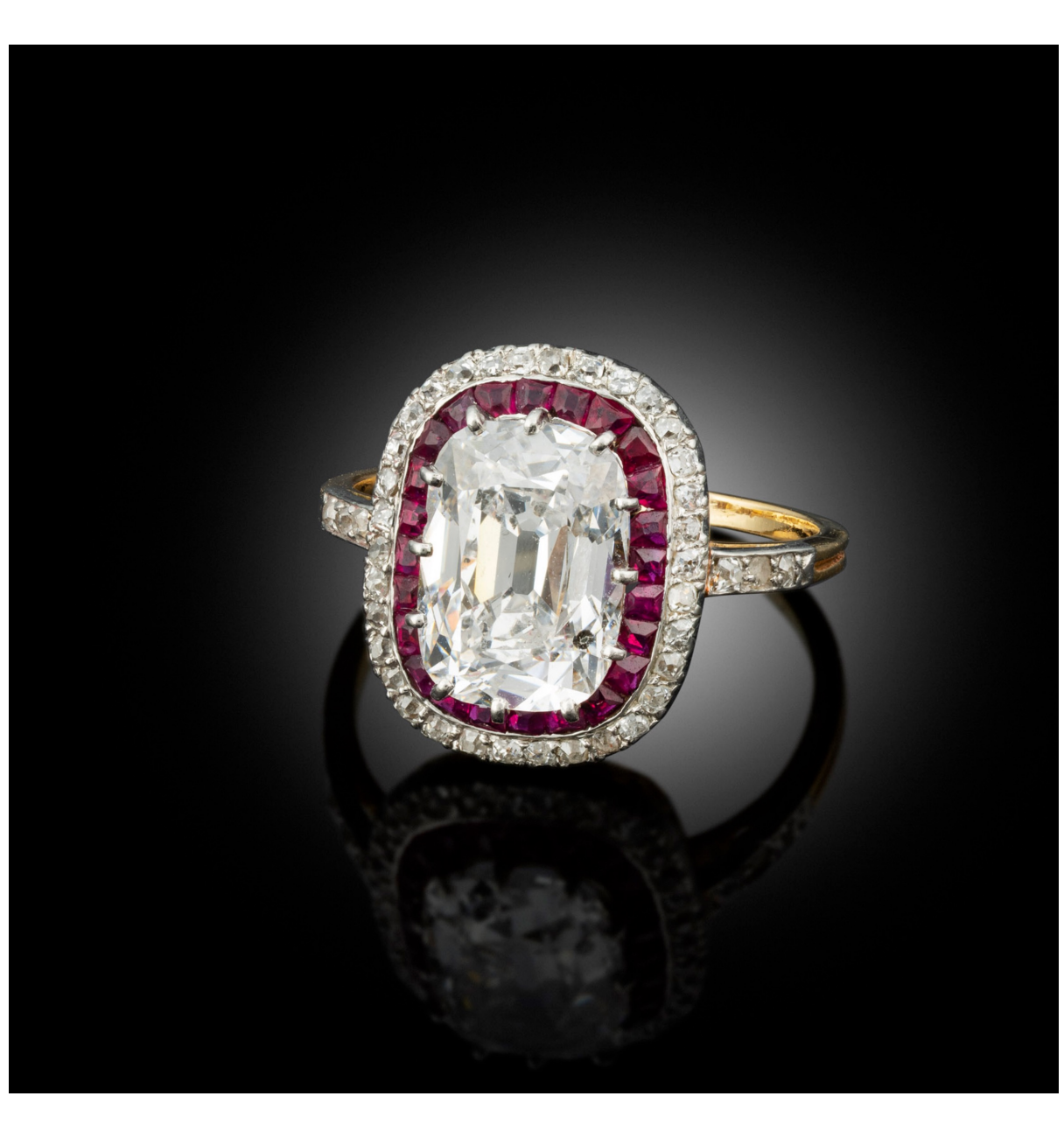


Centring a transitional old cut round diamond of approx 3.04 carats H/I colour VS2 clarity, within a surround of carre cut rubies and circular cut diamonds. Set in platinum and yellow gold on a yellow gold band.

As we get slightly further into the Edwardian period we see the use of platinum being used. Although the rubies are set within a yellow gold bezel, both diamond surrounds are set in platinum. Platinum is stronger than gold and can be worked into very thin and delicate settings, for example the scalloped edge around the outer row of diamonds, allowing the stones to sit tightly in a circle and producing a more elegant and refined look. The use of platinum essentially enhances the look and the sparkle of the smaller diamonds.

This is also shown in this example, which although isn’t a target ring as such, it is of a similar design and period, and undoubtably my favourite ring in our jewellery collection:

Early 20th century elongated old mine cut diamond, ruby and diamond cluster ring, Circa 1915

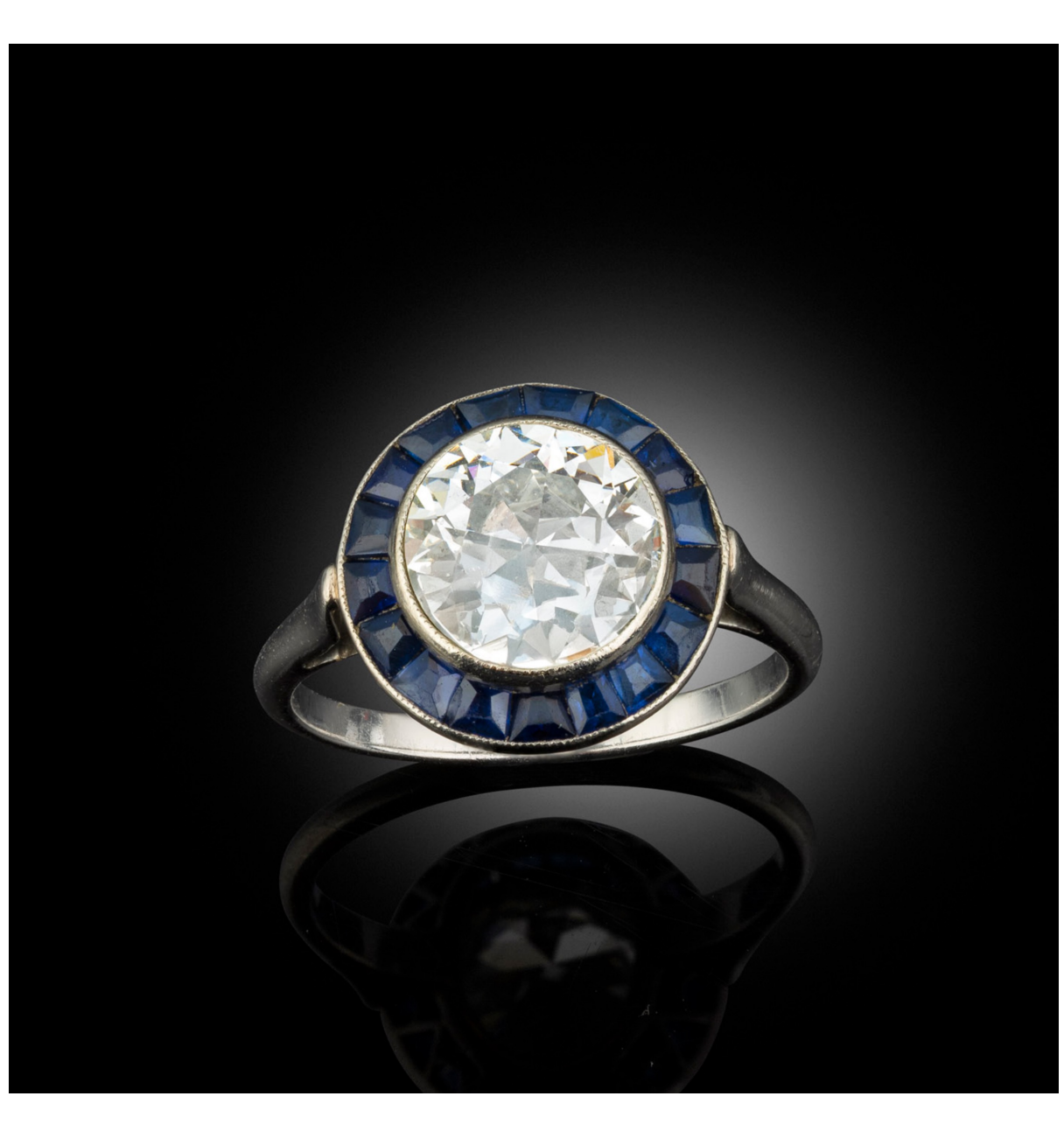


the principal diamond of approximately 2.55carats D/E colour I1 clarity, claw set within a two row border or rubies and diamonds set in silver and gold.

Elongated old mine cut diamonds are amongst the hardest to find, even before Taylor Swift got one for her engagement ring and introduced the cut to those who might not have ever heard of it before. They are often a more shallow cut so spread well across the finger, and to find one of a high colour grade is a rarity. This ring, which again incorporates both yellow gold and platinum in the setting, is the most wonderful example of an Edwardian diamond ring, feeling both significant in size yet delicate in detail at the same time.

But if rubies aren’t your thing…

An early 20th century diamond and sapphire ring, circa 1920



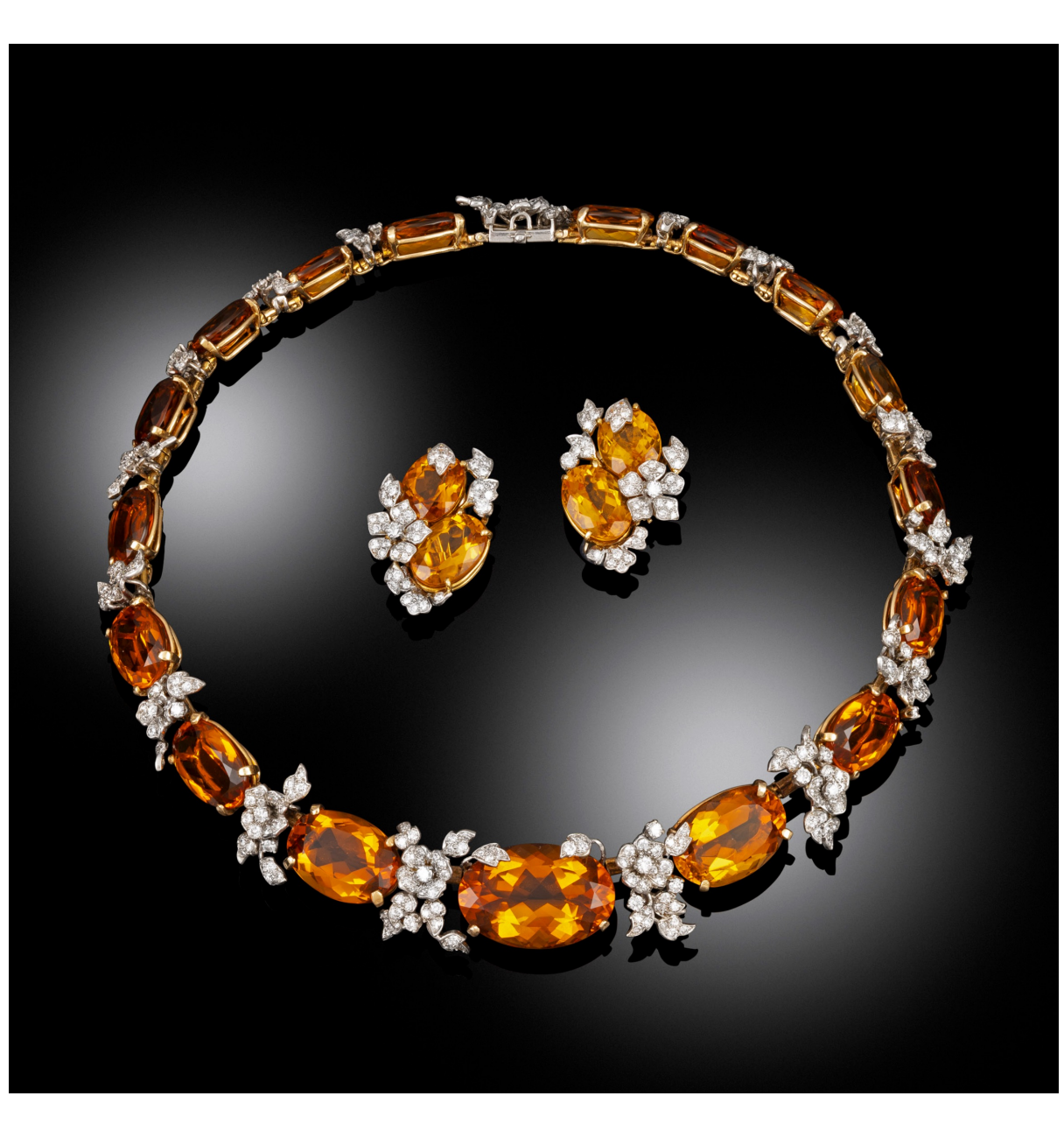
set with a central old european cut diamond of approx 2.00 carats within a surround of calibré-cut sapphires.

Being an art deco example, this ring has a slightly thicker band and a chunkier, bold look, with the deep blue sapphires around the diamond creating that typical deco contrast between light and dark.

Moving on from target rings, and onto the original aim of this email, I want to show you some more of our latest acquisitions. Having had successful shows at both The New York Winter Show and Tefaf Maastricht, it was time to go shopping! And that we have done.

Starting strong with this incredible mid-century Verdura suite:

A Verdura Mid-Century Citrine and Diamond Parure



Comprising a necklace and a pair of ear clips, the necklace set with a series of oval and cushion-shaped citrines of warm golden hue, spaced by diamond-set flower-shaped cluster links, mounted in gold and platinum; the ear clips en suite. Signed Verdura and numbered.

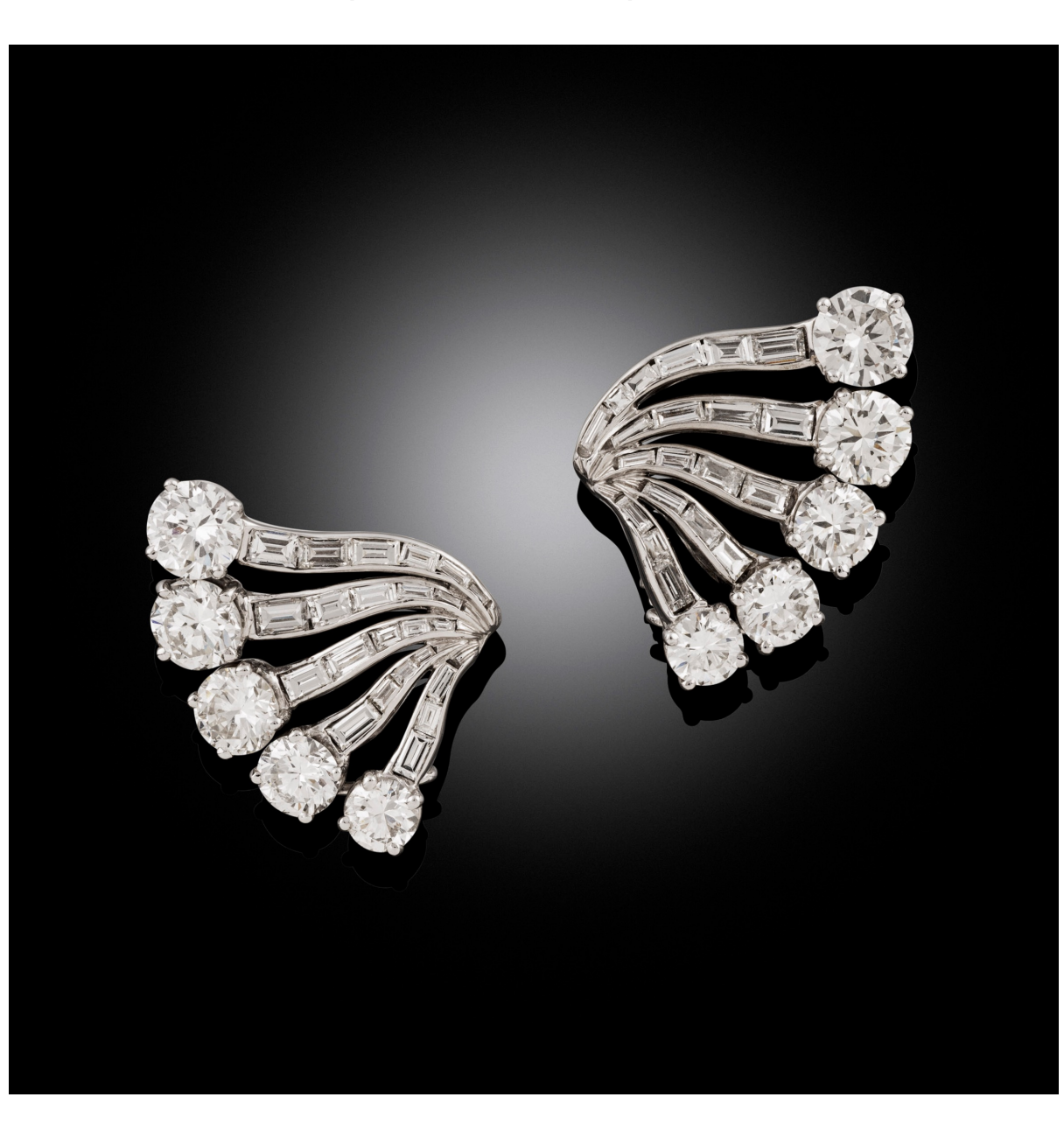
Verdura was founded by the Sicilian aristocrat Fulco di Verdura, one of the most influential jewellers of the 20th century. He began his career working with Coco Chanel in Paris during the 1930s, where he helped develop Chanel’s bold costume jewellery aesthetic and became known for combining historical inspiration with a relaxed, modern elegance.

In 1939 he opened his own jewellery firm in New York, quickly attracting elite American clients such as Marlene Dietrich and Catherine Hepburn. During this time, Verdura became known for jewellery which felt high-end yet bold and playful, often using vivid coloured gems and bold motifs. Importantly, Verdura helped bridge European aristocratic and American taste, incorporating couture influences from Paris with the bold glamour of post-war American luxury.

This suite, a wonderful choker style necklace and ear clips, is very much in line with the glamourous, high-colour luxury jewellery that defined mid-century jewellery. The warm large citrines paired with the bright white diamond clusters create a dramatic “cocktail jewellery” effect that was especially popular after WW2 when jewellery became bolder and more sculptural. Additionally, matching necklace-and-earring suites were especially popular among both wealthy American and European clients as they create a more succinct and complete look.

Going back in time a little, we also have new in:

A pair of diamond ear clips, 1940s



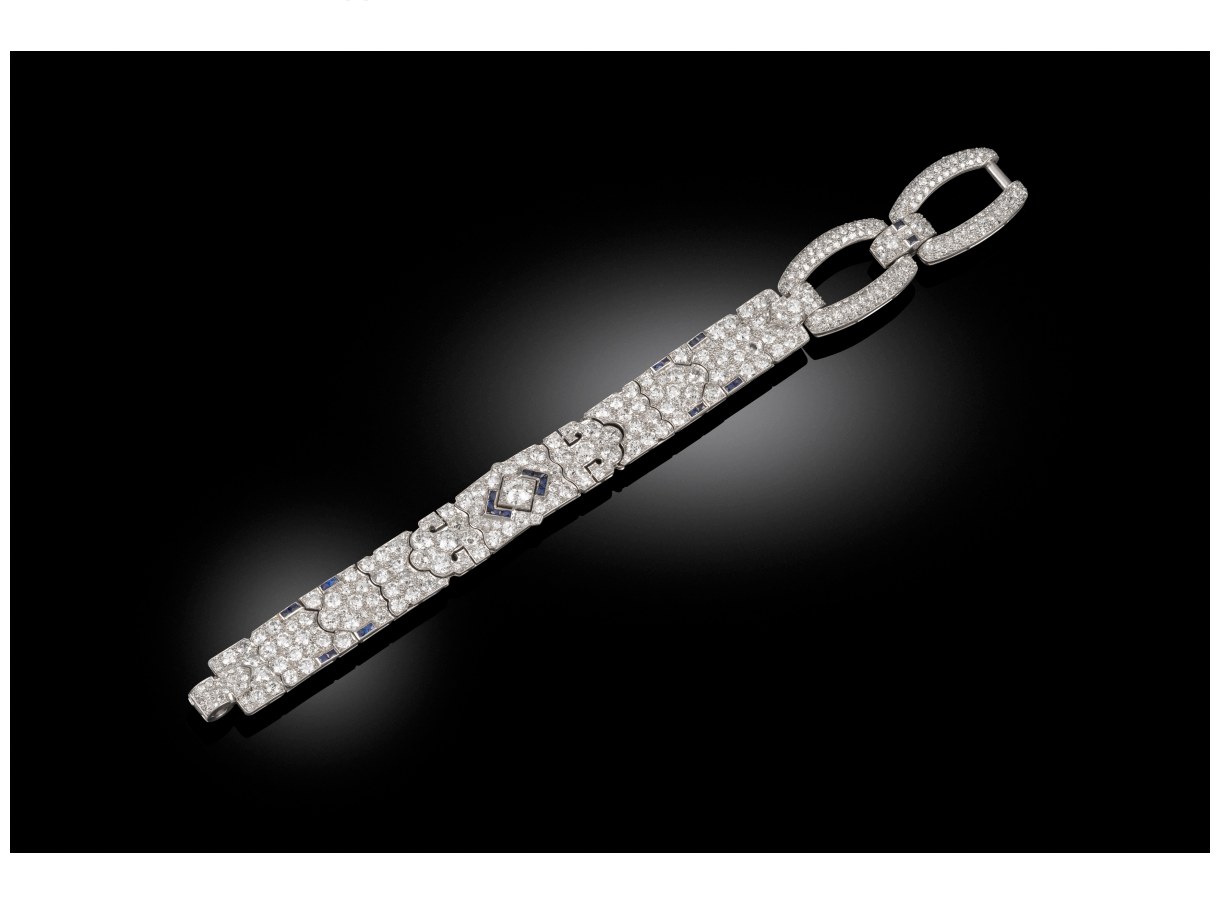
each designed as a stylised spray, composed of tapering scrolling lines set with baguette cut diamonds, terminating a larger round brilliant cut diamond, mounted in platinum. Total Carat Weight approx 4.50 carats per earring.

I love these earrings as they really illustrate that “Hollywood” style of the 1930s and 40s. This style of jewellery created a glamorous and “camera ready” aesthetic associated with the American film industry from the 1930s roughly through to the 1960s, known as the Golden Age of Hollywood. It overlaps heavily with mid-century high jewellery, but the emphasis is less strict on design movements and more on spectacle and bold statements.

These earrings, now known as “climbers” due to way they “climb” up the ear, became very popular in the 1940s as they worked perfectly with short, structured curls and elegant chignons that were so popular at the time. Imagine these on Marylyn Monroe with her short curly hair… perfection! They also reflect a move away from the flat geometric art-deco style with their asymmetrical spray design.

Now going back even further in time to the art-deco era, we have an exceptional special-order bracelet by Cartier:

A sapphire and diamond bracelet, Cartier 1927

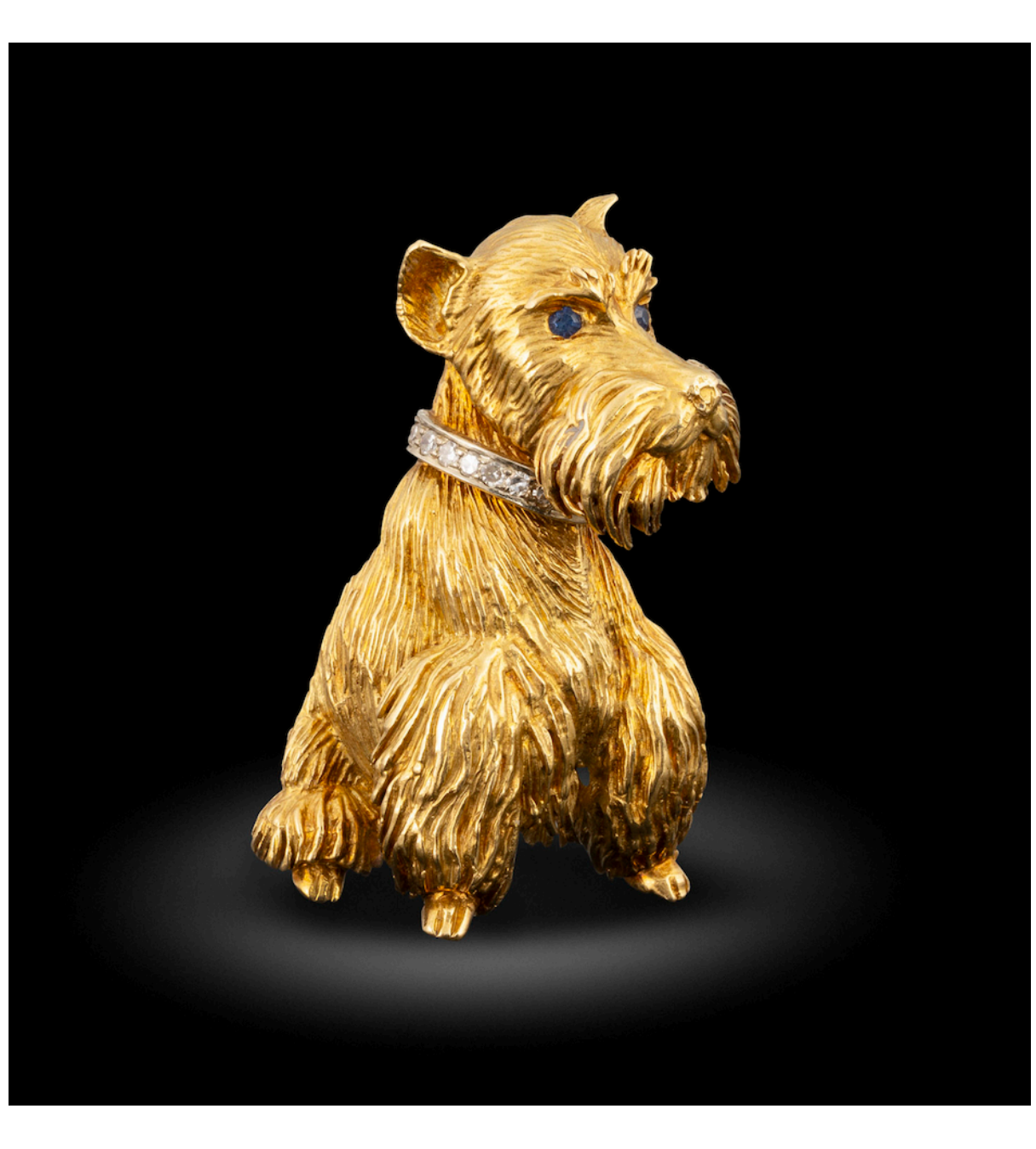


The flexible ribbon pave set with old European and single-cut diamonds, a larger diamond at the centre flanked with two chevron motifs of channel-set calibre-cut sapphires, each side accented along the borders with two pairs of further calibre sapphires forming short lines; one side continued with two open pave-set diamond buckles of barrel shape connected with a similarly set ridge link, the latter also box-set with two calibre sapphires. Diamond set spring hook clasp. Signed Cartier and numbered.

There are few things that are easy in life, and getting your hands on a true art deco diamond bracelet by Cartier is certainly not one of them. This bracelet was a special order by Cartier New York in 1927, meaning it is likely a one-off design. It was perhaps made to fit the exact wrist measurements of the client, and would have involved sketches, gouache renderings, gemstone / diamond presentations and revisions before production began.

Although likely unique, this bracelet is highly characteristic of the late 1920s art deco aesthetic, with its geometric forms and symmetry, platinum setting, extensive pave set diamonds and small accents of sapphires. Its craftsmanship is highlighted in the way it moves fluidly on the wrist, and when closed has a totally hidden clasp. It really is a beautiful bracelet and a rare opportunity to own a Cartier special order.
Keeping on the Cartier theme, but jumping forwards about 70 years, we have my new favourite brooch:

A gold, sapphire and diamond dog brooch, Cartier



designed as a scottie dog in 18k gold with a diamond set collar and sapphire eyes. Signed Cartier 2004.

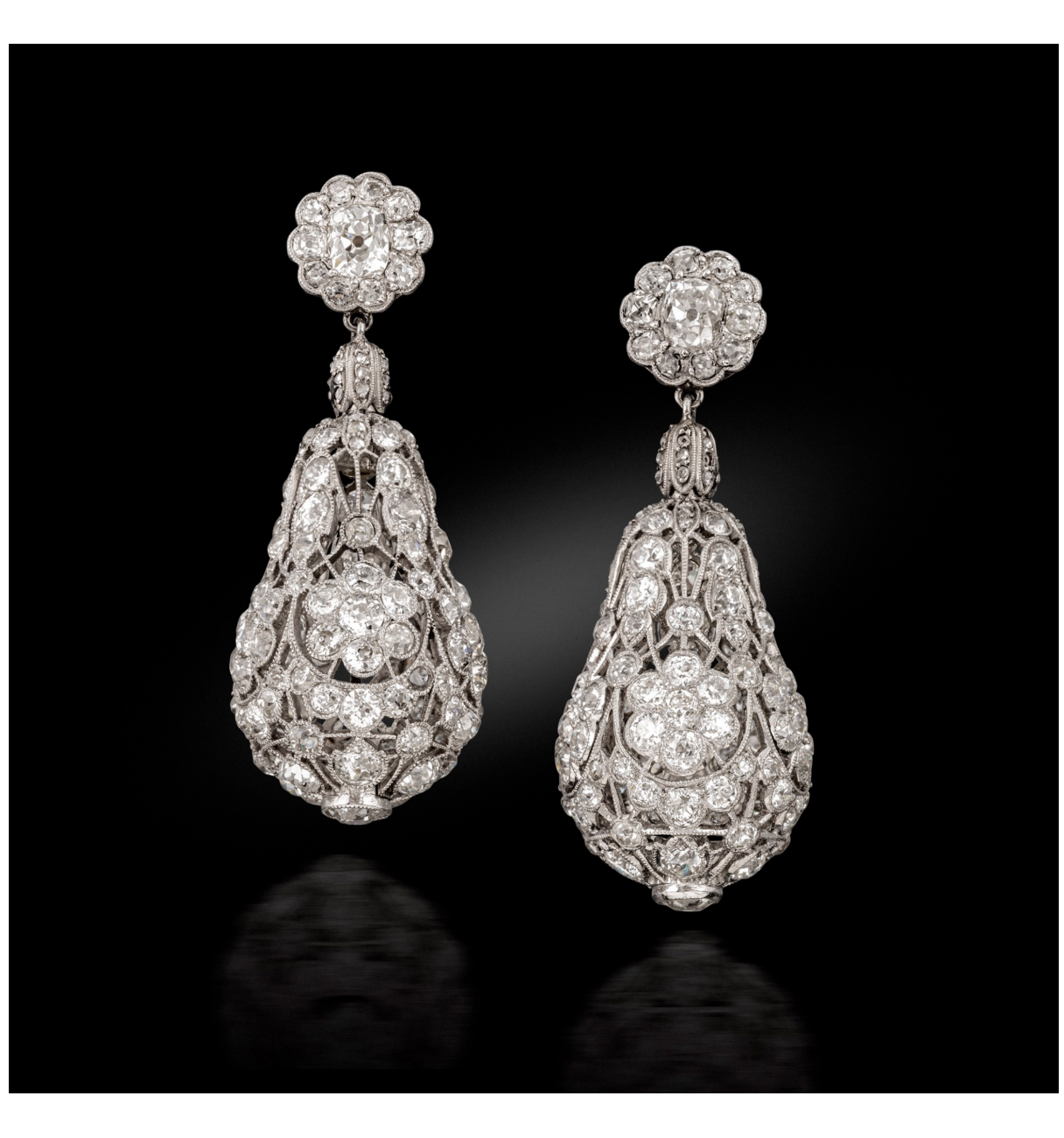
Now I don’t tend to purchase modern jewellery, but for this I had to make an exception. Cartier began making chunky textured gold animal jewels in the 1940s (of course other animals came before i.e the panther but these were more intricate) when sculptural jewellery was becoming more popular. The use of chased or striated gold to imitate fur gave animal jewels personality and movement whilst still feeling luxurious.

Animal Jewels are central to Cartier’s history, and by the mid-century period they were producing a large range of animals clips including poodles, terriers, birds, lions and exotic cats. This period was when jewellery became more personal, witty and wearable, as animal brooches conveyed individuality and charm.

Although made in the early 2000s as Cartier have never stopped creating animal jewels, this wonderful example deliberately references the mid-century Cartier tradition of creating dog clips with textured yellow gold, gemstone eyes and sculptural modelling.

The final new acquisition I’d like to show you goes right back again to the Edwardian era…

A pair of Edwardian Platinum and Diamond Pendant Earrings



Of openwork design, each suspending a finely pierced pear-shaped drop, milgrain set throughout with old European cut diamonds in a delicate lattice of scrolling foliate motifs, the five principal flower-shaped clusters centrally arranged within a floral cartouche. The drops articulate from a similarly set flower-shaped cluster via a diamond-set link.

These earrings are absolutely gorgeous; I love the spherical shape and how the delicate openwork detail goes all the way around. Additionally, although small, the millgrain-set diamonds are all old cuts providing that antique charm and sparkle.

Stylistically, these earrings embody the “garland style” – one of the defining jewellery aesthetics of the Edwardian era. This style often used lace-like scrolls and floral motifs, and emerged partly as a reaction against heavier Victorian jewellery. Although quite large in scale, these earrings have a wonderfully delicate feel to them creating a light and feminine appearance.

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