
Koopman Rare Art

Director's Choice – Kimberley Smith

Vintage Gold Jewellery

Since we started building our collection of jewellery three years ago, we have mostly prioritised purchasing rare and unique antique pieces, mostly made between 1850-1930. Though over the past year we have noticed a shift in taste, including our own, and have accumulated a wonderful selection of 1950s-1980s jewellery. Our main focus when purchasing any jewel is its wearability, and I have found this more modern jewellery (if we can call 1950s modern!) to be extremely wearable and very on trend in today's market, for any age. It is the kind of jewellery you can dress up or dress down due to its versatility and timelessness, and has definitely become part of the growing trend of wearing "vintage" jewellery.

Jewellery in the 50s and 60s was characterised by glamour, sophistication, and a return to elegance following the austerity of World War II. There was a new sense of optimism which was reflected in the designs of jewellery, combining luxurious materials such as 18k gold with bold and eye-catching styles. In this vein, the 1950s saw a rise in bold and oversized statement jewels, with a "more is more" feel. Gold remained a favoured metal throughout the decade, with yellow gold being extremely popular and chunky gold necklaces taking pride of place in a woman's jewellery collection. These necklaces often showcased the craftsmanship and design trends of the period, combining statement making sizes with intricate detail.

One example of this is this wonderful mid-century gold and diamond necklace by Mauboussin Paris.



Mid-20th century gold and diamond two row swag necklace by Mauboussin, Paris

c.1950

Although Mauboussin was first founded in 1827, the brand has been a symbol of excellent craftsmanship and design in the world of high jewellery for almost two centuries. Mauboussin's collections often stand out for their creativity, making a bold statement while maintaining their elegance. This necklace conveys that perfectly, with the chunky gold swag design creating that bold look, yet the diamond links adding the elegance and style.

Another example of wonderful 1960s chunky gold jewellery, and one of my favourite new purchases, is this 18k gold, diamond and emerald lariat necklace suspending carved rock crystal drops.



An 18k gold, diamond, emerald and rock crystal lariat necklace, c1960

During the 1960s, rock crystal was an extremely popular material in jewellery, particularly in designs that reflected the aesthetic trends of the time. 1960s jewellery saw the end of “mid-century modern” and the rise of more experimental and bohemian styles. Rock crystal was often used in bold yet free-flowing designs that captured the spirit of the era, as shown in the design of this necklace. Additionally, the transparency and optical properties of rock crystal made it an ideal stone for pairing with other coloured gems and yellow gold, as its clarity would allow other colours to pop and stand out.

It is impossible to talk about chunky gold necklaces without mentioning the Bulgari “Monete”; an iconic collection featuring antique, often Roman, coins on a gold chain. The concept of integrating coins into high-end jewellery is part of Bulgari’s heritage and appreciation for ancient cultures, where coins were symbols of wealth and power. The “Monete” collection, first launched in the 1980s, has been extremely popular for its fusion of Roman history and luxury design, making it a timeless and distinctive choice for many jewellery collectors. To this day, the “Monete” collection remains one of the houses most celebrated and enduring lines, highlighting how even 40-50 years later these jewels are as modern today as they were then.

Two examples we have are shown below.



Bulgari 3 coin 'Monete' necklace in 18k yellow gold, 1980s

A rare Bulgari single coin and cabochon ruby "Montete" necklace, 1980s

The 18k gold curb link chain in the first necklace compliments the coins with its bold design and polished finish, making the piece eye catching and extremely stylish. Curb link chains were one of the most iconic and popular designs of the 80s, with Bulgari embracing this popularity and adding their touch of luxury. The second is a rare design, one of the first to be made in the 80s and set with a larger coin and cabochon rubies. It is also illustrated in the “Bulgari; Tribute to Femininity, Magnificent Roman Jewels” exhibition book from the Kremlin Museum exhibition in Moscow 2018.



Our “vintage” gold jewellery collection also features some wonderful brooches, and although they aren’t so commonly worn now (despite my #bringbackthebrooch campaign) they were an essential part of a woman’s accessories during the 50s and

60s, often worn on coats, hats and dresses to express individuality and creativity.

Additionally, as fashion became more diverse, designers like Coco Chanel popularised the use of bold and whimsical brooches. Designs were often rather feminine, featuring floral, leaf and bow shapes and often set with gemstones or diamonds. This is highlighted here in these two wonderful gold and Citrine brooches by Cartier.



A large mid-century Citrine, gold and diamond flower brooch by Cartier

A Citrine, gold and diamond flower brooch, Cartier London, 1950s

In the post war era there was a renewed interest in floral designs which Cartier heavily embraced. Furthermore, citrine's bright colour was a perfect compliment to the elegant, nature inspired designs that were popular at the time, so their flower brooches from this period often incorporated citrine petals or centres, often paired with diamonds and set in 18k yellow gold.

During the 1950/60s, Cartier, as well as other renowned jewellers such as Van Cleef and Arpels, embraced the "chunky gold" aesthetic throughout many of their designs. Thick gold bracelets and bangles, worn alone or stacked, became extremely popular, and the houses took advantage of this with their own designs.



A gold and diamond bracelet, Cartier 1950s

A mid 20th-century gold and diamond bracelet, Van cleef and Arpels

During the 1920s, it was extremely common for a woman to stack several diamond bracelets up the arm, and this influence continued in the 50s yet with the newer trend of 18k yellow gold. Though at this time the bracelets were of a more significant size and design, giving the option for them to be worn together or alone and yet still create a significant look.

Although gold jewellery was favoured during this period, there was also an increased popularity in platinum and diamond jewellery due to the post-war economic boom, which made high-quality, luxury goods more accessible to affluent buyers. Furthermore, during WWII, platinum was used for military purposes so its use in jewellery was limited. Thus after the war it re-emerged as a top choice for finer

pieces. Platinum's density and strength made it an ideal material for holding larger diamonds, and it often featured milgrain or fine detail which gave pieces a "vintage" feel.

An example we have is this wonderful floral platinum and diamond necklace.



A platinum and diamond flower necklace c1950

The make of this necklace is wonderful, it is beautifully articulated showing the influence of 1920/30s craftsmanship, yet with the popular floral design of the 1950s.

The use of platinum here allows for a more delicate and intricate design that was favoured in high end jewellery in the mid 20th century, and its natural white colour also makes an ideal backdrop for the brilliance of diamonds, creating a sophisticated, timeless and less metal heavy piece as shown in this necklace.

The final piece I must mention, a new acquisition that beautifully highlights the use of platinum and diamonds in mid-century jewellery, but also the whimsical, nature inspired theme of brooches that was so popular during this period is this wonderful Cartier fish.



Mid-20th Century Diamond Fish Brooch, Cartier

Here Cartier have drawn inspiration from the natural world to create a playful and imaginative jewel, yet also keeping it luxurious, elegant and fun. This again reflects the broader cultural mood of the post-war era. During this period Cartier became known for incorporating animal motifs into their designs, for example their famous “Panther” collection which was first introduced in the 20s but reinterpreted in the 50s due to its widespread popularity. This theme extended throughout their designs, which remain timeless symbols of creativity and craftsmanship.

All of these wonderful jewels, and many more, are available to try on (or to buy!) at our Dover Street gallery, so please do stop by if any take your interest. We will also be exhibiting in America in January at both **The Original Miami Beach Antiques Show (9th -13th January 2025)** and **The Winter Show, The Park Avenue Armory, New York (24th January—2nd February 2025).**

For more information on the availability and price of any treasures we mention, please visit our website, email or call us.

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All works shown, unless otherwise indicated, are available to view and purchase
in our gallery located in 12 Dover Street, London, W1S 4LL

For all enquiries please do not hesitate to call or email on:

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