

ESTATE JEWELRY

For love of the lobe

BY SONIA ESTHER SOLTANI - NOVEMBER 12, 2020



A new show at estate dealer A La Vieille Russie features a stunning array of earrings from the last 250 years.

When the team at [A La Vieille Russie](#) (ALVR) started working on an exhibition dedicated to earrings, the hardest part was picking a name, says manager Adam Patrick.

The show “[Ear Candy: 250 Years of Style](#),” which is currently running at the estate dealer’s galleries in New York (by appointment) and accessible online at [ALVR.com](#), is designed to be “a fun and creative exhibition that embraces color and whimsy,” according to Patrick.

“We wanted to create a show that, while still reflective of great design, did not feel all too scholarly,” he explains. “We always want our clients to feel like they are learning something new and interesting when they stop by, and this exhibition allows us to continue doing that while also engaging a new audience.”



Articulated Victorian pendant earrings set in silver and gold with old-mine diamonds and suspended pear-shaped Imperial topaz centers. England, ca. 1870.

The ALVR dealers curated 40-plus items, signed and unsigned, choosing each pair based on what it revealed about an era or design style.

“Over time, styles evolved with changing hairstyles and materials. For example, the fashion for long earrings in the 18th century counterbalanced the high hairstyles of the time. Similarly, long, torpedo-form earrings became fashionable in the 1830s as hair once again was worn piled high on the head,” Patrick says.

The assortment on display, spanning the Georgian period to contemporary times, also explores how technology and innovation have played a role in jewelry making. With the introduction of platinum at the turn of the 20th century, dainty drop earrings became popular. The invention of the clip fitting in the 1930s broadened opportunities to ornament earlobes even further.



Marcus and Company platinum earrings set with black opal and diamonds. America, ca. 1910.

Hair to wear

Patrick points to two pairs of earrings made of hair as the most unusual items in the showcase. “The use of hair in jewelry was common since the 18th century, but peaked in the Victorian period, from which our earrings date. Hair was incorporated into jewelry in a variety of ways — woven into a flat design beneath rock crystal or glass, or woven into three-dimensional coils like the pendant earrings in our exhibition.”

He also debunks the myth that these were mourning jewels. “While it is true that hair was used in mourning jewelry, it was also a commonly exchanged gift and keepsake. For example, mothers would use their children’s hair to make treasured keepsakes — kind of similar to how it was once customary to bronze baby shoes. We believe the earrings in our exhibition are such jewels.”

One pair features gold acorns and oak leaves, recalling the proverb “Great oaks from little acorns grow.” This suggests they were made with the hair of a young child. The other pair contains two distinct hair colors, indicating that the tresses came from siblings, or perhaps mother and child.



Victorian pair of 18-karat gold and woven hair pendant earrings. England, ca. 1870.



Victorian 18-karat gold and two-color woven hair pendant earrings. England, ca. 1870.

Right for the times

Also present in ALVR's comprehensive show — which runs through December 23 — are clip earrings with seed pearls and mixed gems by English Arts and Crafts jeweler Dorrie Nossiter, as well as Cartier creations from the 1950s and 1960s. A 1970s pair of earrings by Georges L'Enfant consists of woven gold that's been flattened, making them as

In 2020, earrings have become the perfect adornment for Zoom meetings and mask wearing, making "Ear Candy" a timely event. "In many ways, face coverings have made us feel expressionless, so earrings can be a great visual representation of one's personality," Patrick says.



Arts and Crafts earrings made of natural seed pearls and mixed gems, including citrine, aquamarine, topaz, and alexandrite, set in gold and gilded silver, by Dorrie Nossiter. England, ca. 1930.



Cartier 18-karat gold heart-shaped earrings set with diamonds. Cartier London, ca. 1960.



Georges L'Enfant flexible woven gold pendant earrings. Paris, ca. 1976.

Main image: Victorian pair of classical revival fringe earrings in 15-karat gold.