

ESTATE JEWELRY

Saying it with flowers

BY PHYLLIS SCHILLER - MAY 28, 2021



Dealer Mark Schaffer discusses the popularity of floral motifs in antique and vintage jewelry.

How popular is floral-themed jewelry? Which eras are most in demand?

Floral-themed jewelry has always been and continues to be popular. All periods are desirable as long as the piece is of good quality, beautiful, and unusual. The more they evoke nature, the better.

What are the most interesting styles and makers? Which types of floral-themed jewelry are easiest to sell — rings, pendants, earrings?

Large diamond floral sprays from the late 19th/early 20th centuries are a style that attracts client interest, especially if en tremblant. The French term, meaning “to tremble,” describes a type of jewelry that moves with the wearer. This technique was designed to reflect candlelight and bring a jewel to life. Such pieces tend to be unsigned.

Floral-themed earrings and brooches seem to be most common. Floral earrings can range from simple, symmetrical clusters to mid-century clips whose foliage climbs the ear. Brooches can be simple, delicate sprigs, [or] large naturalistic creations using multiple colored gemstones that create verisimilitude. Jean Schlumberger (1907 to 1987), one of the premier designers who worked for Tiffany & Co., is known for being inspired by nature and designed a lot of compelling floral-themed jewels. We take a broad view of jewels, so I must include Fabergé flower studies as among the most incredible, with subtly beautiful and realistically enameled petals, gold stems, and rock crystal pots.



Bombé peridot brooch set with three diamond flowers, set in gold, by Schlumberger for Tiffany & Co., ca. 1950. Photo: A La Vieille Russie.

What factors should one consider when stocking antique and vintage jewelry with floral motifs? Is the floral theme's recurrence throughout different eras a plus for choosing inventory?

Quality and rarity are the most important things to consider in choosing pieces to stock. And yes, jewelers from many different periods were inspired by this naturalistic theme, so there's a wide variety to choose from. On the other hand, the best examples are always challenging to find regardless of era.

Where are the best places today to source this jewelry? Are any types or eras particularly hard to find?

We're happy to consider purchasing jewelry from families that offer to sell to us. In fact, having been in business since 1851, we've been able to buy back interesting pieces we sold years ago. We also work with a network of dealers who are familiar with the type of things we're interested in. Georgian-era jewelry (1714 to 1837) is particularly hard to find because production was minimal compared to later periods. Modern and contemporary jewelry tends to be the most available.



Montana sapphire and diamond pansy brooch with centrally set brilliant cut diamond in 18-karat white gold, English, possibly by Johnson Walker and Tolhurst, ca. 1920. Photo: A La Vieille Russie.

Has the nature theme been a positive choice during these months of coping with the pandemic, and especially now with the coming of spring and with restrictions hopefully easing?

With antique jewelry, we find that it's not always about the theme, but what strikes someone and captures their attention. Dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic, people want beautiful pieces that make them happy.



WHO IS MARK SCHAFFER?

Mark Schaffer is a director at New York-based firm A La Vieille Russie, a family business that was established in 1851 and specializes in antique jewelry, Fabergé, and other Russian works of art. He's on the board of the National Antique and Art Dealers Association of America and the American Society of Jewelry Historians.

Mark Schaffer.

Main image: Diamond, ruby, and emerald spray brooch set en tremblant in silver and gold with approximately 4 carats of emeralds, 3 carats of rubies and 4.75 carats of old-mine-cut diamonds, French, ca. 1825. Photo: A La Vieille Russie.



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