

## Crystal clear: jewellers are hypnotised by glass

The enduring appeal of glass has captivated jewellers for centuries

By Hannah Silver

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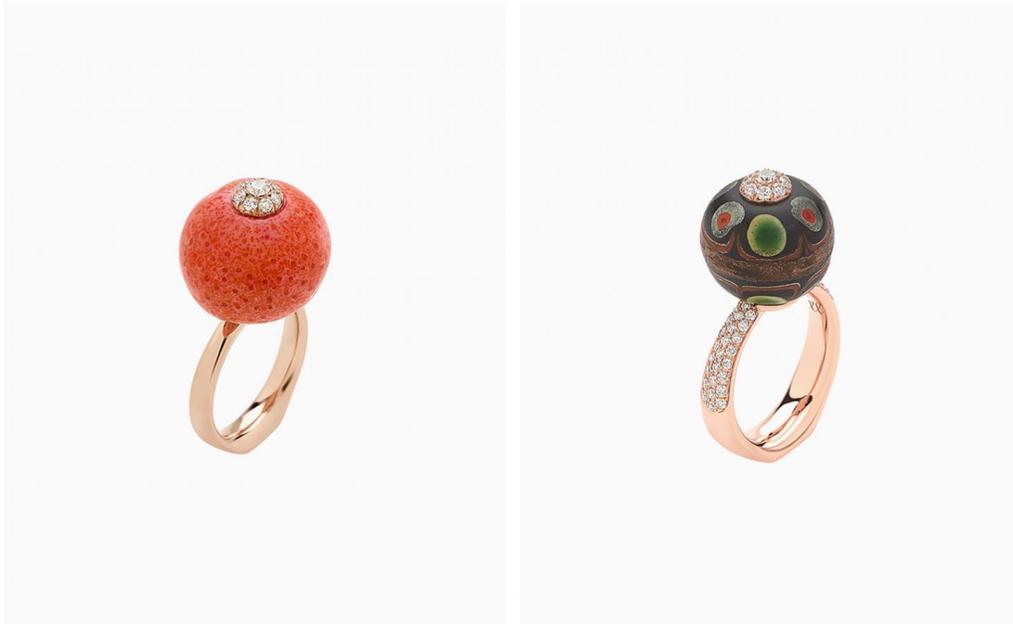


Antique reverse crystal carving of a cat set in a ruby and diamond mount brooch, 1900, A La Vielle Russie

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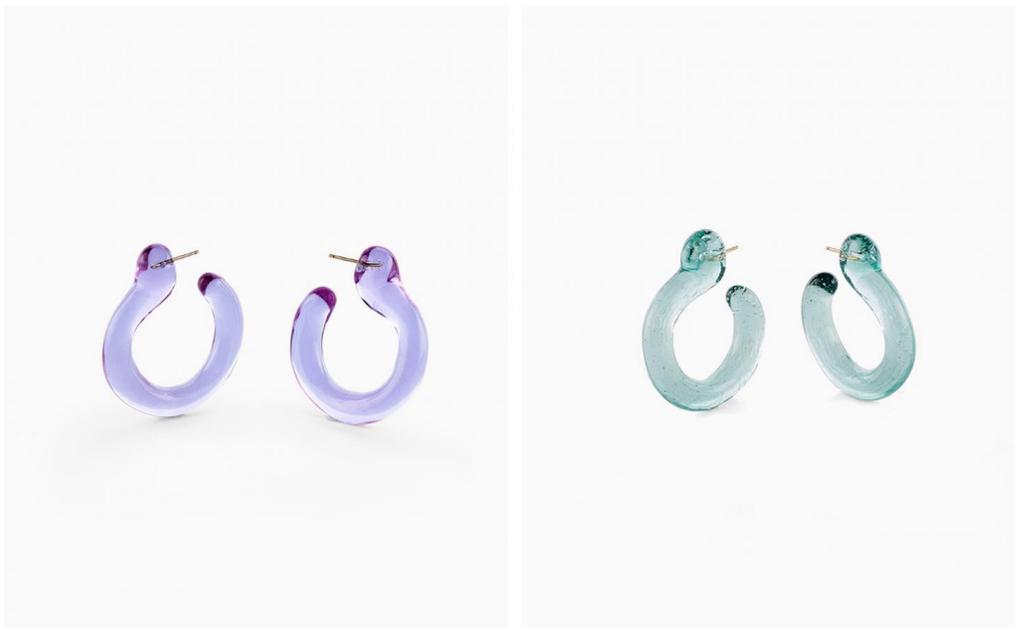
The contradictions inherent in glass have long fascinated jewellers who are drawn to the wealth of possibilities it offers. Today a sustainable alternative, glass jewellery is utilised to reduce environmental impact. Contemporary jewels draw on the rich history of glass in jewellery, its inclusion unfailingly rendering antique and new pieces alike wholly modern.

**Francesca Villa at Objet d'Emotion**



Francesca Villa delves into a historical jewellery box for her delicate rings crafted from early nineteenth century Venetian glass beads. Long prized for their beauty, glass beads were often a form of currency for tribes on the African continent who commissioned them for trade from European explorers. Francesca Villa, enticed by the unique spotted finish on the beads, uses a gold post studded with diamonds to attach a single bead to a band, creating a ring. By sculpting a flat base at the bottom of the band, she allows for the ring to stand alone, a beautiful miniature sculpture in its own right.

## Annika Inez



'I am drawn to glass because of its ability to be both bold and barely there at the same time – it is both minimalist and maximalist,' says New York-based jeweller Annika Inez. Her twisting loops of glass nod to its ability to appear frozen in time, caught between its two states of liquid and solid. 'I love that glass is an amorphous solid,' she says. 'Transparent hand-shaped glass has a visual quality, looking like it might melt at any moment.' She is inspired by

Swedish artist Åsa Jungnelius, whose bold and generous silhouettes belie the apparent fragility of glass. 'I feel there are great possibilities with glass in that traditionally it has been thought of as more of a crafty 'hippie' material, so there is a larger unexplored realm of art and design still available.'

## A La Vieille Russie



New York-based antiques dealer A La Vieille Russie have glass pieces dating back two centuries in their collection. Their jewels reflect designers' fascinations with passing trends; many pieces, for example, are crafted from glass paste, which was favoured in the late nineteenth century by jewellers looking to emulate precious stones. Glass paste, a type of glass developed by glassmakers who experimented with lead oxide, was foiled and backed in silver, eventually becoming a desirable material in its own right. Other pieces, such as the reverse crystal cat brooch, were the result of popular yet laborious techniques. Peter Schaffer, director of A La Vieille Russie, explains: 'First, the cabochon form is cut and ground by hand. Next, a draft in watercolour is made on the reverse, followed by scratching, and then engraving, the image into the crystal before painting. The three-dimensional effect created by this technique really brings the pieces to life.' René Lalique was another who was fascinated by the possibilities glass could offer – pictured above are his crystal wasps linked by an enamelled vine; a tantalising mix of fragility and malevolence.

## Cled



Cled's focus on sustainable jewellery led them to an organic emphasis on glass. 'Glass is an eco-friendly material composed of sand and is a renewable resource, which means it can be recycled endlessly without a loss of purity,' explains founder Seulye Jo. They upcycle discarded glass bottles in a plethora of hues and patterns and curve them into any shape they desire – an abstract amorphous contour, an oval loop, a flower. 'It's always mesmerising to see the fluid movement of glass as heat and gravity work together in the flame. This magical transition is so impressive. Glass can look like liquid when it's molten, but after it's annealed, it is rock solid like any other stone.' By melting glass in a kiln, curves and kinks can be reshaped, smooth lines forming from sharp edges. 'Many experiments are done with recycled glass, and discovering unexpected outcomes makes this fun and ultimately leads to new unconventional designs,' says Seulye Jo. §

### INFORMATION

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