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Brilliant: Cartier in the 20th Century Showcases Iconic Styles and Dazzling Jewels at the Denver Art Museum

Featuring 250 objects including jewelry, timepieces, men’s accessories and more, the exhibition illustrates the rich and glamorous history of Cartier

DENVER – The Denver Art Museum (DAM) will be the sole venue worldwide for Brilliant: Cartier in the 20th Century, on view Nov. 16, 2014–March 15, 2015. Organized by the DAM and curated by Margaret Young-Sánchez, Frederick and Jan Mayer Curator at the museum, the exhibition will feature an assortment of jewelry, timepieces and precious objects produced between 1900 and 1975. The exhibition highlights Cartier’s rise to preeminence in the midst of historical events as it transformed itself into one of the world’s most prestigious names in jewelry, timepieces and objects. A special section focused on masculine items will offer a rare look at the pieces Cartier crafted especially for men, including the modern wristwatch.

“The evolution of Cartier takes us on a journey through 20th century history, from the era of the last czars in Russia to the Roaring ’20s in America to the onset of Hollywood glamour as we know it,” said Christoph Heinrich, Frederick and Jan Mayer Director of the DAM. “Focusing in on the creativity and pioneering vision of the Cartier brothers and their designers, visitors will walk away not only in awe of Cartier’s stunning works of art but also aware of the drastic cultural shifts that took place throughout the history of the Maison.”

In 1900, Paris-based jewelry firm Cartier was poised at the brink of a new era. The wealth of America’s Gilded Age mercantile and industrial magnates brought new energy to Europe’s cultural capitals. Numerous American heiresses married into the European aristocracy in the 1890s and early 1900s, and shopped at the Cartier boutiques in Paris and London. By 1909, when Cartier opened its New York branch, Americans such as J.P. Morgan and the Vanderbilt family patronized Cartier, along with Russian aristocracy, Indian princes and King Edward VII of England. Over the course of the next seven decades, the company’s trend-setting designs and ability to capture the spirit of the times were key to its success.
Cartier's glittering international clientele included royalty and aristocrats, business leaders and stars of the stage, cinema and music—a literal who's who of the 20th century's financial, industrial and cultural sectors. Cartier's rise took place in the context of an increasingly cosmopolitan cultural scene and aligned with international social, political and economic trends. **Brilliant** will present a selection of themes that span time periods and styles to display the immense influence and innovation of the Maison.

“Cartier’s visually striking designs, impeccable workmanship and genius for innovative marketing made them the 20th century’s preferred purveyor of luxury goods,” Young-Sánchez said. “**Brilliant** brings together a spectacular assortment of Cartier’s greatest works, characterized by the highest quality stones and materials, and a continually evolving yet always recognizable style. Highlighting the Maison’s handsome men’s items is a rare treat for visitors near and far.”

The immersive installation will be designed by Nathalie Crinière, exhibition designer for the DAM’s **Yves Saint Laurent: The Retrospective**. It will include a selection of original preparatory drawings alongside historic photographs and film clips, advertising materials and movie stills to provide insight into the evolving cultural setting of the time period represented and to tell the story of Cartier. In addition to items loaned by the Cartier Collection, the exhibition will include loans from museums and private collections in the United States and Europe. A fully illustrated publication accompanying the show will be available at The Shop at the Denver Art Museum.

The exhibition will be on view in the Anschutz and Martin and McCormick galleries on level two of the Hamilton Building. Special exhibition tickets will go on sale Oct. 1.

**Brilliant: Cartier in the 20th Century** is presented by Bank of Colorado. This exhibition is organized by the Denver Art Museum. Exhibition support is also provided by Jet Linx Denver, Sill-TerHar Motors, John Brooks Incorporated, the generous donors to the Annual Fund Leadership Campaign, and the citizens who support the Scientific and Cultural Facilities District (SCFD). Promotional support is provided by **5280 Magazine**, CBS4, and **The Denver Post**.
Exhibition themes include:

- **Aristocracy and Aspiration**: Focusing on objects from 1900–1918, this section features diamond, sapphire, rock crystal and pearl jewelry and enameled decorative items that showcase a refined and elegant aesthetic embraced by European royalty and aristocrats—and the wealthy Americans who aspired to join their social class. Cartier was a pioneer in the use of platinum, which complements the whiteness of diamonds, and permits the creation of light, delicate settings.

- **Art Deco: New Outlook**: Cartier was a leader in the innovative Art Deco movement of the 1910s to 1920s that highlighted a bold look with a new emphasis on color and geometry. The Maison utilized new materials in this era including jade, coral and black onyx.

- **Art Deco: Foreign Fascination**: Cartier capitalized on the excitement generated by international events after World War I, such as the discovery of Tutankhamen’s tomb, to create original designs that incorporated exotic styles and materials including imported carved jade, lacquer and faience. Cartier’s exotic flair culminated in the colorful tutti-frutti style jewelry and sculptural mystery clocks.

- **Masculine View**: While Cartier is most famous for women’s jewelry, they have always produced sleek, handsome items that appeal to men. Louis Cartier is credited with inventing the modern men’s wristwatch. The exhibition will include numerous models and styles, in addition to elegant and complex pocket watches. Cartier also designed beautiful cuff links, pocket items, cocktail and desk accessories, and inscribed cigarette cases, to name a few. Historic events such as Charles Lindbergh’s flight across the Atlantic, Franklin Roosevelt’s role in the Allies’ World War II victory and the American lunar landing were commemorated by inscribed gift items made by Cartier and featured in the exhibition.

- **Art of Smoking**: At the turn of the century, smoking in polite society was largely limited to men and Russian women. As social norms loosened, cigarette smoking was adopted by all classes, and elegant smoking accessories became a necessity for fashionable women. This section features textured, enameled and jeweled cigar cutters, cigarette cases and lighters from 1907 through the 1940s.

- **Age of Glamour**: The global depression affected Cartier’s business, but a wealthy, cosmopolitan clientele continued to purchase showy jewelry, clocks and accessories in platinum and massive yellow gold settings. This section highlights designs from the 1930s to 1960s preferred by celebrities and Café Society (as international jet-setters were sometimes known).

- **Icons of Style**: The exhibition’s concluding section is devoted to Cartier’s most famous clients, including style icons Daisy Fellowes, the Duchess of Windsor, Princess Grace of Monaco, Dame Elizabeth Taylor and Mexican film star María Félix. Cartier’s original designs were essential to the self-expression of the individuals who shaped 20th century culture and fashion.

Media Resources

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The Denver Art Museum

The Denver Art Museum is an educational, non-profit resource that sparks creative thinking and expression through transformative experiences with art. Its holdings reflect the city and region—and provide invaluable ways for the community to learn about cultures from around the world. Denver metro citizens support the Scientific and Cultural Facilities District (SCFD), a unique funding source serving
hundreds of metro Denver arts, culture and scientific organizations. For museum information, call 720-865-5000 or visit www.denverartmuseum.org.

**Cartier Collection**
In the 1970s, Cartier began to reassemble objects from its own production: jewelry, watches, clocks and other precious accessories were collected for conservation, which led to the foundation of the *Cartier Collection* in 1983.

Today, the *Cartier Collection* comprises items dating from as early as the 1860s till as late as the 1990s. These pieces act as material records of Cartier’s 167-year history but also provide a wider historical account of the evolutions within the decorative arts and within society since the end of the 19th century.

With almost 1,500 pieces and still growing, the *Cartier Collection* has sparked the attention of museums worldwide. Since its first major exhibition in 1989 at the Petit Palais in Paris, the *Cartier Collection* has shown selections of its pieces in twenty of the world’s most foremost institutions, amongst them the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the British Museum in London, the Kremlin Museum in Moscow, the Palace Museum inside the Forbidden City in Beijing and the Grand Palais in Paris.

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