Shinde Jewels
By Reema Keswani, 79 pp., illus., publ. by Assouline Publishing, New York, 2004. US$18.95*

This is a spare, unassuming book that clearly reflects a spare, unassuming designer. A man of humble beginnings, Ambaji V. Shinde led a modest lifestyle and sought only excellence in his art—an art that was a way of life from the time he was a young boy until his death in 2003 at the age of 85. Though he never strove for notoriety, he was sought out by Indian and British royalty as well as by Hollywood glitterati. Harry Winston had the vision to ask Shinde to join his New York firm in 1959, then to head the studio in 1966. What a marriage of passion and art this was: A.V. Shinde, the incomparable designer, and Harry Winston, the man with the cornucopia of gemstones.

A. V. Shinde was responsible for designing some of the most magnificent jewels of the 20th century, including the settings for the Star of Sierra Leone, Étoile du Désert, Taylor-Burton, Star of Independence, and Garuda diamonds. Yet he remained largely unknown outside the world of haute couture jewelry. He did not sign his work, only the renderings—the design was his signature. Though these pieces displayed a profusion of diamonds and gemstones, the symmetry, elegance, and stark minimalism started a revolution in design and wearability.

The 49 pages of lavish color photographs and renderings, unfettered by captions, stand in silent testimony to this quiet, elegant man. Here you mainly see the object and the wearer, or the object and the rendering, side by side: sumptuous tiaras and gently folded gem-studded necklaces, both classical Mogul and classical Winston. Then, the four pages of thumbnails in the back of the book give the attributions you crave: dates, styles, and the names of those fortunate to wear these beautiful jewels. When you review these descriptions, you see that the classicism that followed his work from the early 1940s and 1950s is still fresh today.

GAIL BRETT LEVINE
National Association of Jewelry Appraisers
Rego Park, New York

The History of Beads:
From 30,000 B.C.
To the Present
By Lois Sherr Dubin, 364 pp., illus., publ. by Harry N. Abrams, New York, 2004. US$29.95

Anyone who feels that the common agate or glass bead is somewhat, well, common, will be chastened after reading this unique book. As Ornamen Magazine editor Robert K. Liu explains in his foreword, it was written primarily for bead collectors, who must often go to a wide variety of scholarly publications to ferret out information on beads. But the book also has much to offer cutters, gemologists, and jewelers—anyone interested in jewelry. The ancient (circa 3000 BC) agate eye beads pictured in the book are amazing in their shapes and polish. Weight lost through cutting a more desirable shape or size raised the value of these beads, just as it does for cut stones today. And ancient strands of beads are often amazingly modern in their combinations of bead size, shape, and color.

Dubin is less interested in beads as jewelry, however, than she is in beads as important artifacts of human culture and history. She emphasizes how people from around the world and through all ages of human history have used beads as trade goods, talismans, tokens of wealth and status, religious objects, and (usually only secondarily) ornaments. As a result, the book is an exceptional reference and resource, yet also very readable. It abounds with human stories related to beads. The author debunks the myth that the island of Manhattan was purchased for $24 in beads. She gives a chilling example of the secrecy that existed on the Venetian glass-making island of Murano, where at least two men were executed for violating the local prohibition against divulging glass-making secrets. She discusses the theories of explorers Richard Francis Burton and Henry Morton Stanley regarding the disappearance of literally tons of glass beads that were traded into Africa. Throughout, she talks about the beads—stone, glass, wood, bone, pearl, shell, metal—that have been worn, used, and treasured by human beings for their color, their symbolism, and their value.

*This book is available for purchase through the GIA Bookstore, 5345 Armada Drive, Carlsbad, CA 92008. Telephone: 800-421-8161; outside the U.S. 760-603-4200. Fax: 760-603-4286. E-mail: myorder@gia.edu
Dubin’s book discusses beads from almost every area of the world. There are separate chapters covering large categories of special types of beads: prayer beads, magic-eye beads, amber, and pearls. The volume closes with a chapter on contemporary beads. Although they may be modern in materials [such as niobium], the beads manufactured today owe much to their predecessors.

The book’s images are riveting [more than two-thirds of the 356 illustrations are in color], and you can hardly turn a page without finding an exceptionally high quality illustration, map, or photograph, with many of the photos taken by Kiyoshi Togashi. The only complaint I have about the superb photographs—of single beads, strung beads, and beads being held, worn, and made—is that they cannot fulfill the desire they create, the desire to reach into the book and touch and hold these wonderful treasures.

The History of Beads is an excellent research reference. The bibliography is extensive, the index is complete, and the end notes are filled with information. (For example, in Dubin’s section on Middle American jade, she mentions that it takes four hours to cut through an inch of jade using ancient methods. She doesn’t explain those methods in the text, but a check of the end notes provides the description.) A sewn binding and heavy, high-quality paper mean that this book can be used and enjoyed for years. The eight-page pull-out chart of beads throughout history provides a wonderful overview of the human culture embodied in these tiny artifacts. A glossary and bead-shape table complete the resources.

From a deep appreciation of beads, gained through 30 years of collecting, Dubin has strung a narrative with human hopes, fears, beliefs, and desires, like beads on a common strand. Even those with no interest in beads should leave her book with a healthy respect for this “universal object” of infinite variety.

SHARON ELAINE THOMPSON
Salem, Oregon

Totems to Turquoise:
Native North American Jewelry Arts of the
Northwest and Southwest
Edited by Kari Chalker, Lois S. Dubin, and Peter M. Whiteley, 224 pp., illus., publ. in association with the American Museum of Natural History by Harry N. Abrams, New York, 2004. US$45.00

In 2000, a cultural exchange program brought Northwest Coastal Indian artists to Arizona and New Mexico, and Southwestern native artists to Britain Columbia. The program introduced talented Haida, Navajo, and Pueblo jewelers to one other and gave them an opportunity to share their cultures and arts. The exchange program eventually resulted in the recently concluded “Totems to Turquoise” exhibition at the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) in New York. Created as a companion to the exhibit, this book focuses on 39 contemporary North American native artists, their work, and their thoughts on individual roles and responsibilities in supporting their cultures and communities.

This high-quality 9.25 x 11.25 in. book is divided into two main sections, “The Northwest Coast” and “The Southwest,” and includes 150 full-color pages, two maps, and numerous historical photos. Introductory chapters discuss each region’s landscape, culture, and history, followed by biographies of earlier master jewelers such as Charles Edenshaw, Bill Reid, Kenneth Begay, Preston Monongye, and Charles Loloma. Sections on contemporary artists follow those of the master craftsmen. Noted photographer Kiyoshi Togashi took the majority of the photos, including images of the artists that accompany their personal statements and examples of their art.

An intimate portrait of each artist emerges. The personal statements in each section collectively create a larger impression of the group they represent. The totality of both sections gives an even deeper understanding of the importance jewelry and art have played in maintaining the identities and cultures of the Native North Americans from these two vastly different regions. Both groups draw from their age-old traditions, while some individuals push their art forms forward in new and exciting ways.

Native American art continues to reach a wider audience and gain a higher level of appreciation among jewelry collectors worldwide. This book honors that artwork and describes the history and craftsmanship used to create it. The historical background and related essays are written by editor/anthropological writer Kari Chalker, AMNH museum curators Lois S. Dubin and Peter M. Whiteley, Haida artist Jim Hart, and anthropologist Martine Reid. Their essays provide an excellent background on the two cultures and insight into the contemporary art coming from both areas. While no valuations of pieces are given, Totems to Turquoise is a wonderful reference book for collectors, students, jewelry designers, and jewelry historians.

MARY MATHEWS
Gemological Institute of America
Carlsbad, California

Exploration Criteria for
Coloured Gemstone Deposits
In the Yukon

By Lori Walton, 184 pp., illus., publ. by the Yukon Geological Survey, Whitehorse, Canada, 2004. C$5.00
(no charge for PDF version).

Providing more than its title suggests, this book is a wonderful overview of nondiamond gemstone geology, nicely updated from its original 1996 format. The intended audience is geologists and prospectors, already scouring Canada’s north for diamonds and precious and base metals, who are encouraged to keep an eye open for colored gems. The author summarizes many classic gem deposits from around the world and breaks them
down into basic components [e.g., geochemistry], which in turn could be applied to the exploration for new deposits in the Yukon or elsewhere.

Chapters are devoted to ruby/sapphire, emerald, tsavorite/tanzanite, chrysoberyl [including alexandrite], pegmatite gems [including tourmaline, topaz, and aquamarine], and gem topaz/red beryl in rhyolites, making this one of the more comprehensive guides to the geology of colored gems. There is heavy emphasis on practicality and application. Field identification of rough material is covered, as are recommended recovery tools and limitations [e.g., how to apply the tanzanite exploration tips when there is only one known economic occurrence].

The text is very readable, even for someone without a background in geology or a related discipline [although a geology dictionary would be helpful for those not familiar with specific terminology]. As such, this publication is “one-stop shopping” to start learning about or review colored stone geology and exploration.

The author has provided an exceptional up-to-date reference list at the end of each chapter, for those wishing to dive into greater detail. The occasional footnote also references relevant Web sites.

The author enriches the technical portions of the text with human-interest stories or government policies associated with the gem under discussion. The discovery and subsequent flurry of mining and claim-jumping at the Hematita, Brazil, alexandrite deposit is one such example. These stories add a depth to the text that can be rare among scientific publications.

There is one unattributed statement, on page 30, that I would contest; it suggests that blue sapphires from Yogo, Montana, are heat-treated. Vortex Mining [not mentioned in the text] has been mining and selling Yogo sapphires for over a decade and in fact does not heat-treat their stones.

Since this is a summary and not a unique research project, the text sometimes borrows heavily from other well-known sources [e.g., Ruby and Sapphire, by Richard Hughes], although they are properly acknowledged. Overall, however, the format is unique and refreshing, in that few texts of this scope have included lesser-known gems [e.g., tsavorite and tanzanite] with the traditional “Big Three” (ruby, sapphire, and emerald), although the latter still constitute more than half the text. On that note, this reviewer would encourage future editions of this publication to include opal [an obvious omission], peridot, Ammolite, and—in the pegmatite section—more on the spodumene gems [kunzite and hiddenite].

KEITH MYCHALUK
Calgary, Alberta, Canada

OTHER BOOKS RECEIVED

The Pegmatite Mines Known as Palermo. By Robert W. Whitmore and Robert C. Lawrence Jr., 213 pp., illus., published by The Friends of Palermo Mines, 2004. US$150.00. This book, an obvious labor of love, recounts the history of the Palermo mines of North Groton, New Hampshire, along with their secrets, as an economically important producer of industrial mica, feldspar, and beryl. Also included is a beautifully illustrated [by Frederick C. Wilda] catalog of the many minerals—as of March 2004, 90 phosphates and 140 mineral species in all—that have been found since the mine was first worked in 1878. Another section focuses on gemstones fashioned from Palermo beryl and quartz. The rich history of the Palermo mines and their significance to science, industry, and collectors have been captured well in this beautiful work, and the story continues as the mine serves today as a “living laboratory.”

MICHAEL EVANS
Gemological Institute of America
Carlsbad, California

Tourmalines of Malkhan. By V. Ye. Zagorsky, I. S. Peretyazhko, and V. Ye. Kushnaryov, 31 pp., illus., publ. by the Institute of Geochemistry, Russian Academy of Sciences (Siberian Division) and Tourmalkhan Co., Irkutsk, Russia, 2005. US$20.00 (E-mail: victzag@igc.irk.ru). In 1980, Soviet geologists searching for radioactive elements discovered gem tourmalines in the Malkhan pegmatites of Siberia’s Central Transbaikalia region. Since then, this 60-square-mile [97 km²] area has emerged as a significant source of pink-to-red, multicolored, and “watermelon” tourmaline. Tourmalines of Malkhan describes the occurrence of tourmaline in this region and features color photos of faceted stones and cabochons, as well as crystal specimens.

STUART OVERLIN
Gemological Institute of America
Carlsbad, California


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