

Reviews

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CAMEOS OLD AND NEW

By Anna M. Miller, 216 pp., illus., publ. by Van Nostrand Reinhold, New York, 1991. US\$39.95*

This well-organized book begins by reviewing the history of cameo carving and its evolution from the cylinder seals of Mesopotamia to the scarab seals of Egypt and then to the naturalistic engravings and portraits of ancient Greece and Rome. Detailed explanations are given of the powerful myths of the various periods, which were commonly depicted in the cameo jewelry. Later, intarsia during the Dark Ages would reflect the odd mixture of pagan beliefs and Christian symbolism of Medieval Europe.

The renewed interest in art during the Renaissance influenced the use of perspective and light in the cameo carvings of that time, and materials other than chalcedony, such as shell, gained popularity. The romanticism of the 18th century led to an obsessive desire for cameos in the upper and newly emerging middle classes of the 19th century. Thus, a busy market in fraudulent "ancient" cameos was spawned. By the end of the 1800s, these forgeries had successfully doused the flames of interest in this art form, and it has never fully recovered.

The chapter on cameo production compares ancient tools and techniques to modern carving methods. A valuable portion of this chapter provides criteria to separate hand-carved cameos from those mass-produced today by ultrasonic machines. Ms. Miller explains the "fresh-fallen snow" char-

acteristic (recognized by the absence of undercutting or tool marks, a matte finish, and repetitive texture and design) that readily identifies ultrasonically carved cameos. Another clue is provided by the surface of the carving: The hand-carved piece feels smooth, whereas the machine-carved cameo feels slightly rough to the experienced touch. A short discussion covers the materials employed and the use of color in planning a carving. This is followed by a step-by-step description of the cutting process. The chapter concludes with information on major carving centers and master carvers associated with those centers.

A chapter on distinguishing ancient from modern cameos examines the difficulties involved in circa-dating cameos (i.e., assigning an approximate date of manufacture) and notes the importance of signatures in authenticating a piece. To help the reader identify legitimate carvers, Ms. Miller provides information on the signatures of the major carvers and where they are typically located on given pieces. She emphasizes, however, that fraudulent cameos of period and signature abound, as do assembled carvings.

Various glass cameos are discussed, as are Wedgewood, sulphide, and plastic cameo imitators. Ms. Miller also discusses cameo wax portraits (a totally new cameo form for this reviewer) along with plaster-of-paris and sulphur-cast cameos.

The book concludes with discussions on appreciating the artistic aspects of cameos and the factors

involved in building one's own cameo collection. Ms. Miller cites a number of historic public and private collections.

A series of appendices includes a fairly extensive glossary; helpful lists of auctioneers, booksellers, retail sources, and suggested reading; and a bibliography. Particularly useful is the compact information provided in the "Instant Expert" portions, which cover common cameo subjects and materials, as well as what features to look for when circa-dating cameos.

Ms. Miller's *Cameos* is easy to read and comprehend. It will undoubtedly prove useful to appraisers, collectors, and admirers of this art form.

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BASIC WAX MODELING: AN ADVENTURE IN CREATIVITY

By Hiroshi Tsuyuki, 106 pp., illus., publ. by Matsubara-Kashiwa Books, Japan, 1990. US\$25.00*

Directed toward the novice, this book is a wonderful step-by-step guide to carving wax for jewelry casting. It discusses the various techniques as well as commonly

**This book is available for purchase at the GIA Bookstore, 1660 Stewart Street, Santa Monica, CA 90404. Telephone: (800) 421-7250, ext. 282.*

used tools and the wide variety of waxes that are available.

The greater part of the book is dedicated to 11 wax-carving projects, which are laid out in an easy-to-read photo/text format. Covered are hard-wax carving, wax buildup, sheet-wax work, and texturing and welding techniques. Beginning with simple skills and working progressively to more complicated levels, the author illustrates each project with black-and-white photos, line drawings and close-up views of the actual piece being worked. At the end of each project, additional sketches illustrate the types of rings or jewelry that could be created using the skills learned in that particular exercise.

Some of the projects include useful tips or "tricks of the trade," such as using an ink eraser to clean up deep grooves. Similarly, the author does a nice job of including cautions in especially critical areas. Overall, the book is well presented and easy to comprehend. There are occasional typographical or translation errors, but they are minor and do not detract from the usefulness of the book.

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THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF GEMSTONES AND MINERALS

*By Martin Holden, 303 pp., illus., publ.
by Michael Friedman Publishing
Group, 1991. US\$45.00.*

Although from the title one might expect a book that contains all the information from both the *Encyclopedia of Minerals* and the *Color Encyclopedia of Gemstones*, this is not the case. Rather, this is a good, comprehensible book about most minerals and gem materials that the average collector or gemologist is apt to see. Also

included are a number of related topics, such as atomic structure, cleavage, polymorphism, and sedimentary rocks.

Each mineral or gem entry includes, in list form: classification (e.g., carbonate, native metal, organic gem material, etc.), chemical composition, crystal system, hardness, and specific gravity. Some of the important properties of each material are also discussed, as are how the material is formed and major localities, primary uses, and name origin. Unfortunately, there is little mention of optical properties, including refractive index, which would have made this book even more useful for gemologists.

Most of the 340-plus photographs are very good, and many minerals are complimented by crystal drawings from Viktor Goldschmidt's classic work, *Atlas der Krystallformen*.

However, the book does contain a few notable errors. In the discussion on diamonds, for example, the dark yellow color is erroneously attributed to iron rather than nitrogen, and the pink color is attributed to manganese rather than structural defects. Also, play-of-color in opal is wrongly referred to as "opalescence." Under corundum, the only method of synthesis mentioned is the Verneuil process, and the discussion of topaz includes no mention of the irradiation treatment that has produced millions of carats of blue topaz.

Despite these shortcomings, collectors, students, and general readers will find this book a useful introduction to the world of gems and minerals.

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ANCESTRAL JEWELS

*By Diana Scarisbrick, 191 pp., illus.,
publ. by Vendome Press, New York,
1991. US\$37.50**

This book presents a brilliant study of

heirloom jewelry as it relates to British aristocracy. Beginning with traditions of late Medieval and Renaissance times, and continuing into the 20th century, Ms. Scarisbrick examines ancestral jewels in a way that successfully enables the reader to understand their historic significance. She also exquisitely illuminates the circumstances of their creation and use.

Fantastic portraits of bejeweled nobility mark each of the six chapters that detail the loves and lives of Britain's most illustrious bloodlines—Tudors, Stuarts, both early and later Georgians, Victorians, Edwardians, and their successors. Ms. Scarisbrick's research is meticulous, with specific dates and events referenced and cross-referenced. Detailed explanations not only describe the physical aspects of a particular jewel, but also discuss precisely the way it was worn or kept—often coupled with an anecdote relating to its presentation. A great deal of rare information has been compiled to give the reader these new perspectives on the past.

The appendix titled "Where Are They Now?" further explores the dispersal, transformation, or theft of some of these exquisite objects. The brief glossary that follows is particularly helpful for those who are unfamiliar with certain terms.

Most of the illustrations are in black and white, which is probably due to the limited accessibility of the actual pieces and the age of the photos themselves. Where possible, contemporary color photos are provided. A nice balance is achieved by including historic color portraits that show the owners wearing their jewels.

I highly recommend this well-written, reasonably priced book to anyone interested in augmenting their knowledge of antique and period jewelry.

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