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Cheryl Chu

# RING TRUE

MEET JEWELLERY HISTORIAN, CURATOR AND  
AUTHOR BEATRIZ CHADOUR-SAMPSON



Beatriz Chadour-Sampson's life-long passion for jewellery and the role which it has played in human history has led to a prolific career as an author, lecturer and curator. The upcoming exhibition at Landesmuseum Zurich – "Jewellery. materials craft art" from 19 May to 22 October 2017 – will show the diversity of materials used for jewellery, who wore jewellery and why. Over the centuries, jewels have been more than adornment. They have a personal significance or sentimental meaning for the wearer, based on the myths and rituals of society. Historical circumstances, economic changes and art movements have influenced jewellery in many ways and even inspired designs, as Beatriz Chadour-Sampson explains.



*Throughout your career, you have published many studies on finger rings. Is this your area of expertise?*

For over 30 years I have been the curator of the Alice and Louis Koch Collection of 2,600 rings from a period spanning 4,000 years. It is a collection that has been in private hands for four generations, and has recently arrived at the Swiss National Museum, with 300 rings on view. The plan is to show the entire collection by 2020. This is very exciting, as rings, which are an art form on a miniature scale, have many stories to tell.

*In your opinion, what are the reasons why people love jewellery?*

Jewellery has always touched our lives. It is given on special occasions and marks important events. Historically, it was worn as a sign of status, symbols of faith, love and mourning as well as amulets. Since the early 1900s – in parallel with our changing society and the beginning of modernism through René Lalique's unprecedented use of glass with precious metals,

and silver or gold with non-precious materials – jewellery is today more diverse than ever before. It has become an expression of individuality for the wearer. The range of designs and materials is exceptional, and there has always been a fascination for rare, beautiful gemstones. These intrinsic values will never change.

*Which historical pieces of jewellery do you find particularly inspiring or interesting?*

After having researched numerous private and museum collections spanning thousands of years, it is almost impossible to answer. What amazes me, though, is that the wish for adornment is a global phenomenon. Fundamentally, jewellery should have a feel-good factor, and be fun to wear. \*

Photos, on page 88-89, "Pearls", 2013-2014, Victoria & Albert Museum and Qatar Museums Authority exhibition. This page, Beatriz Chadour-Sampson. Opposite page, inside the William and Judith Bollinger Jewellery Gallery at the V&A (left), "Pearls" exhibition (right)



The William and Judith Bollinger Jewellery Gallery's breathtaking re-design between 2004 and 2008 had Chadour-Sampson as consultant curator with a display of 4,000 jewels from all periods at the Victoria & Albert Museum, London. There she was also co-curator to the successful exhibition "Pearls" between 2013 and 2014. Her many courses at the museum have brought a wide range of jewellery history knowledge, from diamonds and pearls to jewellery through the ages, to an enthusiastic public. Amongst many activities, she continues her research in one of her specialties – rings – as a team member of Les Enluminures, a gallery based in Chicago, New York and Paris.

