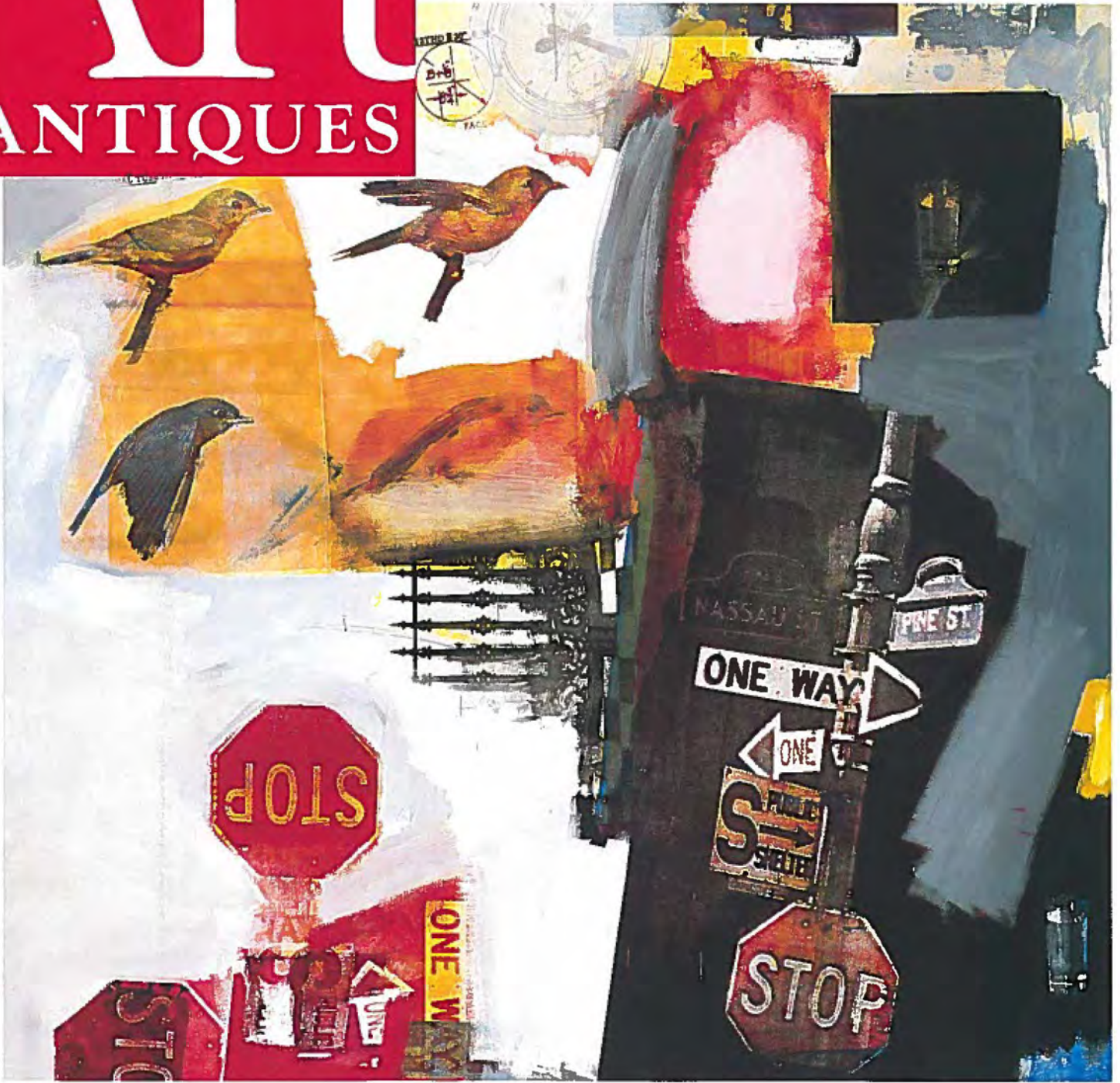


Art ANTIQUES

FOR COLLECTORS OF THE FINE AND DECORATIVE ARTS



NORTHWEST COAST ART | JOHN GRAHAM | GEORGIA O'KEEFFE | JEAN SCHLUMBERGER

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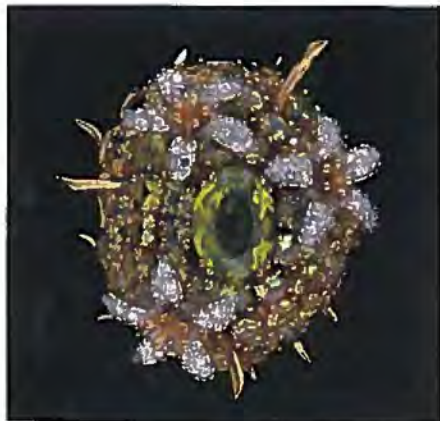
ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG

Out of the Box

A COLLECTION OF JEAN SCHLUMBERGER'S AVANT-GARDE JEWELRY DESIGNS GOES ON VIEW IN VIRGINIA. BY SARAH E. FENSOM



Clockwise from top left: Jean Schlumberger, *Blue Shell (Clip)*, 1957, 18-karat gold, platinum, diamond, fancy colored diamond and sapphire; *Birds*, 1964, enamel, lacquer, rubies, turquoise, 18-karat gold; *Floral "Coussin" Broach*, 1963, 18-karat gold, platinum, peridot, and diamond.



THE VIRGINIA Museum of Fine Arts' current exhibition "The Rachel Lambert Mellon Collection of Jean Schlumberger" (through June 18) gives viewers a peek inside a fashionable 20th-century jewelry collection. Rachel "Bunny" Lambert Mellon, the second wife of Paul Mellon, collected jewelry and objects by Jean Schlumberger while the French designer had his own salon at Tiffany & Co.'s Fifth Avenue headquarters. Schlumberger, who began his career in France, became a darling of the postwar American fashion and society set, counting Jacqueline Kennedy, Diana Vreeland, and Elizabeth Taylor as friends and patrons. The exhibition at the VMFA, which is located in Richmond, features 142 bracelets, earrings, rings, clips, and accessories designed by Schlumberger during the 1950s and '60s, the bulk of which are from a 2015 gift of 113 pieces of jewelry from

the Mellon collection (the rest is from prior gifts of hers). However, rather than depict Mellon's trove as a treasure chest lined with glitzy accessories or Schlumberger's work as the bejeweled, wearable candy of ladies who lunch, the show rightfully positions Mellon's cache as an ambitious art collection and Schlumberger's innovative pieces as Modernist design objects.

Mellon, who died in 2014 at the age of 103, was one of the last members of the American aristocracy that Edith Wharton and Henry James wrote about. She was an heiress to the Listerine fortune, a philanthropist, and an avid and skillful horticulturalist who often created gardens for high-profile friends and donated commissions to charity. While First Lady, Jacqueline Kennedy asked Mellon to redesign the White House Rose Garden (which Mellon crafted in the French style using American



botanical varieties), for which she was given the Conservation Service Award in 1966. In 1948, her fortune grew substantially when she married Paul Mellon, her second husband and the only son of Andrew W. Mellon, one of the wealthiest financiers in the world.

Together, the Mellons created a distinctive art collection. Though it was decidedly out of fashion in mid-20th-century American collections, the couple pursued French Impressionism and Post-Impressionism. A special wing of the VMFA, for which Mr. Mellon served as a long-time board member, was built in 1985 to house the couple's gift of important works by Edgar Degas, Claude Monet, Pierre Bonnard, and nearly every other big name of the era, as well as Mr. Mellon's collection of British sporting art and American art. Mrs. Mellon was an early champion of Mark Rothko (she first purchased his canvases off his studio floor), and the 2014 sale of her art collection at Sotheby's included *Untitled (Yellow, Orange, Yellow, Light Orange)*

(1955) and *Untitled* (1970). The sale, which also included several works by Richard Diebenkorn, Georgia O'Keeffe, and Edward Hopper, as well as Old Master paintings, realized \$158.7 million (against a presale estimate of \$121 million), with all 43 works selling. In a *New York Times* article about Sotheby's subsequent auction of 2,000 of Mrs. Mellon's personal and decorative items, her friend the writer Marina Rust is quoted as saying, "[Mellon] could have had anything she wanted, but she surrounded herself with just what she loved."

Mrs. Mellon gave the VMFA pieces of tableware and decorative art objects from her Schlumberger collection in 1985, 1999, and 2006. The 2015 gift, a bequest of over 100 pieces of jewelry, which made the VMFA the largest and most comprehensive public collection of Schlumberger jewelry and art objects in the world, was a surprise. "We were not advised to expect anything further and we



Clockwise from top left: Jean Schlumberger and Tiffany and Company, *Jasmine (Breath of Spring)* (Necklace), 1966, model 1962, 18-karat gold, platinum, colored sapphire, diamond; *Obelisk*, circa 1963, 18-karat gold, enamel; *Bees Ring (Abelles impériales)*, 20th century, 18-karat gold, platinum, colored diamond, diamond.





Clockwise from top left: *Flowers and Leaves (Necklace)*, circa 1958, 18-karat gold, platinum and diamond; *Flower Pot*, 1960, amethyst, emeralds, diamonds, black garnet ore, terracotta, 18-, 20-, 22-karat gold; Jean Schlumberger and Tiffany and Company, *Jellyfish (La Méduse) (Brooch)*, 1967, 18 karat gold, platinum, moonstone, diamond, sapphire.



were quite happy with what we had," says Mitchell Merling, the VMFA's Paul Mellon Curator and Head of the Department of European Art as well as the curator of the exhibition, "so when we were notified of Mrs. Mellon's bequest after she died, we were surprised and delighted to receive a collection of her jewelry."

Mellon and Schlumberger moved in somewhat similar circles. The collector counted many artists and designers as friends, notably Cristóbal Balenciaga and Hubert de Givenchy, who designed Mellon's wardrobe, including her gardening smocks. "It's well known that she surrounded herself with creative people," says Merling. Schlumberger, who was born in Mulhouse, France and came from a long line of prosperous textile manufacturers, was a member of the European avant-garde. His early jewelry pieces, which were made of found porcelain flowers, attracted the attention of Surrealist fashion designer Elsa Schiaparelli, and he fell in with the Surrealist crowd in the 1930s, which included Picasso and Stravinsky. He created buttons and jewelry for Schi-

aparelli, often from found materials like feathers, chains, wood, and plastic. In 1939, Léonor Fini painted his portrait. In New York, his circle expanded. In 1941, he created his *Trophée de Vaillance* brooch for Diana Vreeland, then a columnist for *Harp-er's Bazaar*. Vreeland, who would become perhaps the most influential fashion editor in history, described the diamond, amethyst, ruby, and enamel brooch, which featured several martial accoutrements, by saying, "It's exciting. A Schlumberger lights up the whole room!" From there, his clientele and friends grew to include Princess Marina of Greece and Denmark (later the Duchess of Kent), Greta Garbo, Audrey Hepburn, Babe Paley, and Gloria Vanderbilt.

Mellon and Schlumberger first met in 1954, in the Upper East Side townhouse the designer turned into a shop. Schlumberger and his business partner Nicolas Bongard, a childhood friend and the nephew of pioneering French fashion designer Paul Poiret, had opened a jewelry workshop on Fifth Avenue (near 57th Street) before World War II, and reestablished their New York store on East 63rd Street after the war. Two years



after meeting Mellon, Schlumberger was made a signature designer at Tiffany's & Co., and he and Bongard were appointed vice presidents of an independent department inside the Fifth Avenue flagship store. Schlumberger would work with the company for 30 years.

Schlumberger and Mellon forged an affectionate relationship and partnership. "There was a great deal of collaboration," says Merling, "but we don't know exactly how that worked and who suggested what to whom." It is known that for the most part, the decorative objects in Mellon's collection were made on her commission,

while the jewelry was largely prêt-à-porter, with certain details or stones being customized to her specifications. The VMFA has a collection of sketches of the objects, which were kept by Mellon (the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris and the Oak Spring Garden Library, on Mellon's former estate in Virginia, have the rest of Schlumberger's sketches).

The sketches reveal just how intuitive art making was to Schlumberger. One graphite and watercolor sketch—the study for the rock crystal *Obelisk* (1970–71), a one-of-a-kind object and a standout of the show—manages to blend Chrysler Building-esque Art Deco with the mechanical minimalism of Dan Flavin's preparatory sketches. Schlumberger, who was an adept draftsman, was never formally trained in art or design. Yet, his designs, though replete with organic forms, bear a technical precision. "He has a sort of inventor's way of thinking," says Merling, "and he was experimenting with that in a way other jewelers were not." This can be seen in Schlumberger's *Sautoir* necklace (late 1960s), a coral bead, diamond, and enamel piece that has detachable segments. Another innovation, the *Jellyfish* (*La Méduse*) brooch—an 18-karat gold, platinum, moonstone, diamond, and sapphire piece made in 1967—has tentacles that move as if the brooch were floating in the ocean.

It stands to reason that one of the strongest links between the artist and his patron was a shared love of nature. Mellon turned her main residence, Oak Spring Farms in Upperville, Va., into a nearly encyclope-

Clockwise from top left: *Tiger Lily (Cilp)*, 1956, 18-karat gold, platinum, yellow sapphire, sapphire and diamond; *Brooch*, date unknown, 14-karat gold, platinum, amethyst, and diamond; Jean Schlumberger and Tiffany and Company, *Butterflies (Bracelet)*, 1956, 18-karat gold, platinum, amethyst, sapphires, turquoise, peridots, yellow diamonds, diamonds, colored stones; *Obelisk*, 1970–71, enamel, rock crystal, 18-karat gold; *Mermald (Sirène) (Candlestick)*, 1969, enamel, black lacquer, 18-karat gold.





Clockwise from top left: *Leaves (Necklace)*, 1956, platinum, 18-karat gold, turquoise and diamond; Jean Schlumberger and Tiffany and Company, *Plsces (Polissons) (Brooch)*, circa 1965, diamonds, emeralds, pailonné enamel, 18-karat gold, platinum; *Pair of Earclips*, 1960s, 18-karat gold, platinum, and diamond.



dic horticultural and botanical archive and sanctuary. Schlumberger was particularly inspired by a 1954 trip to Bali and spent time in Thailand, Sri Lanka, and the Philippines sketching his tropical surroundings. Flora, fauna, and sea life around his home in Bisdary, Guadeloupe, a French island territory in the Caribbean, often found their way into designs. Countless pieces in the collection exemplify this shared interest. *Butterflies* (1956), a bracelet fashioned in amethyst, sapphires, turquoise, peridot, yellow diamonds, diamonds, colored stones, 18-karat gold and platinum, was designed with Mellon's input. The bracelet employs *en tremblant* setting, which uses small hidden springs to attach the butterflies (each designed differently and made of different materials) to the openwork band, so that the butterflies appear to be fluttering when the wearer moves. Mellon had two of these specially designed bracelets, which can join by their clasps to form a choker. The *Jasmine (Breath of Spring)* necklace (1966)—a confection of colored sapphires, diamonds, 18-karat gold, and platinum—was not designed specifically for Mellon, though



the example in this collection, which has 211 carats of gemstones, was made for her. The incredibly intricate piece features a gold vine, heavy with bejeweled blossoms, wrapping around ribbons of diamonds. *Flower Pot* (1960), features an extremely rare 94-karat Kashmir sapphire (from the deposits of northern India and Pakistan) as the center of a gold flower planted in a terracotta seedling pot from Mellon's Virginia garden. Mellon ordered a detachable diamond clip mounting for the object so it could be worn as a brooch.

"Schlumberger was always thought of as a second Fabergé," says Merling, "but one of the points of this exhibition is to caution that reading. Fabergé was looking to the past, whereas Schlumberger was not." The curator considers Schlumberger "high modernist" for his lack of references and his innovative use of materials: "He was making modern jewelry for modern life." Perhaps Schlumberger described his work best. He said, "For me, the art of the jewel is above all a means of expression with possibilities of pure and durable beauty, which go beyond the usual framework of Fashion." ■