

Saffronart's 2nd Jewellery Conference is a Grand Success with Participants from Asia, Europe and America

Saffronart's online auction, *Fine Jewels: Ode to Nature*, follows on 15 - 16 October 2019

Mumbai, 15 October 2019: The second edition of Saffronart's biennial jewellery conference, *Mapping a Legacy of Indian Jewels*, concluded on Saturday night with an overwhelming response from nearly 200 participants – including some who travelled especially for the event from locations as far as Italy, the US and Russia. The two-day event, which is part of Saffronart's ongoing **Dialogues in Art** series, took place on **11 – 12 October 2019** at the Four Seasons Hotel in Mumbai.

The conference was curated by renowned jewellery historian **Dr. Usha R Balakrishnan**. The distinguished panel of speakers across both days included India's foremost contemporary jewellery designer **Viren Bhagat**; international jewellery specialists **Lisa Hubbard** and **Joanna Hardy**; fashion designer and author **Wendell Rodricks**; jewellery historian **Jack Ogden**; and GIA's Chief Quality Officer **John King**, an expert on coloured diamonds. The conference was co-sponsored by the **Gem and Jewellery Export Promotion Council (GJEPC)**, partnered by the **Diamond Producers Association (DPA)** and the **World Diamond Museum**, and supported by the **Gemological Institute of America (GIA)**.

Saffronart's President and Co-founder Minal Vazirani said, "Saffronart's succession of jewellery conferences have created a unique global conversation around jewels that is centred in India, one of the most important origin points of jewels in the world. We are delighted to have spearheaded this pioneering effort that traces the dialogue between tradition and modernity, history and myth, and charts a contemporary Indian aesthetic in jewellery design. This second edition of the conference has gained a great deal of momentum, as it was a platform for information and learning which is not in the public forum. As a result, we have doubled participation and we will plan to host this as a biennial event. We look forward to continuing this journey and organising the third edition of the Saffronart Dialogues in Art jewellery conference in 2021."

Dr Usha R Balakrishnan said, "The conference was a success beyond all expectations, and truly mapped the legacy of Indian jewels and looked at jewellery as art. It is my firm belief that it has served as a catalyst for the further study and documentation of this incredible heritage. Chinua Achebe, the Nigerian novelist and poet, famously said, "Until the lions have their own historians, the history of the hunt will always glorify the hunter." Since gemstones and jewels can never reveal their journeys and stories, we have to be that historian, to share scholarship, make discoveries and introduce the art of jewels to collectors, connoisseurs, and enthusiasts. At Saffronart's 2nd jewellery conference, speaker after speaker chronicled the histories of gems and jewels and related their journeys across time and continents."

CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS**Day 1**

The conference opened on 11 October to a packed room with a talk by international jewellery specialist **Lisa Hubbard**, a veteran auctioneer who was formerly Jewellery Chairman of the Americas for Sotheby's, and is currently an advisor to Christie's. **Hubbard, who spoke at the inaugural edition of Saffronart's jewellery conference in 2017**, shared the anatomy of the recent auction ***Maharajas and Mughal Magnificence***, which featured jewels from the **Al-Thani collection**. She said that the collection provided **"an understanding and appreciation of how much western jewellery design at all levels owes India"** – a sentiment that brought her back as a speaker to this pioneering conference in Mumbai.

"For us, design leads everything." This philosophy guides renowned jewellery designer **Viren Bhagat**, who was the keynote speaker for the evening in conversation with Dr Usha Balakrishnan and Saffronart co-founder Minal Vazirani. The audience sat riveted as Bhagat shared his **creative process and design philosophy**. Describing how his designs are inspired by Mughal architecture, nature and the everyday, Bhagat explained that they are a stylisation rather than an imitation of his surroundings. Expressing his desire to move beyond the "baggage" of history and his attempt to **bring Indian jewels into the present day**, he explained why he doesn't make designs on commission, never creates the same piece twice, and believes that when it comes to design, **"there are no rules."**

Day 2

The first session on 12 October delved deep into the history of Goa with art historian and author **Hugo Miguel Crespo** and international fashion designer and author **Wendell Rodricks**. Crespo shared research that he has completed just weeks ago, for the first time on a public platform. He showed extensive examples of jewelled objects that demonstrate the **interaction between Indian and European design and techniques**, citing testimonies that proved to be an important resource in the near absence of archives. Rodricks wove stories about the hybridity and exchange between **Konkan jewellery and fashion and other countries and cultures**, such as the *pano bhaju* – "a garment that came out of thin air" and borrowed from a Peranakan Chinese costume; and bangles called *ananas kankana* inspired by pineapples that were brought to India from Portugal.

Next were two illuminating talks on diamonds. Jewellery historian **Jack Ogden** spoke about the **early history of diamonds**, which were initially utilitarian and used for cutting, drilling and scratching; as well as the **diamond trade** spanning more than 2500 years, with India at its centre for centuries. GIA's **John King** shared hallmarks of some of the most **fascinating coloured diamonds** that he has come across, including some from India, and factors such as innovations in cutting, grading systems and marketing strategies that brought these diamonds into the spotlight. Later, in conversation with **Alexander Popov**, Founder and CEO of the World Diamond Museum, Ogden and King discussed the intrinsic value, rarity and pricing of these precious stones.

International jewellery specialist **Joanna Hardy** shared stories of her travels in pursuit of fine jewels, specifically **emeralds and rubies** during her research for her books, as well as from her experience over the last 12 years of being a specialist on the BBC *Antiques Roadshow*. Director of Eka Archiving Services **Deepthi Sasidharan's** presentation portrayed the significance of the photographic archives of 19th century India in obtaining knowledge about the attire and adornment of women of the time. **Cynthia Meera Frederick**, Chief Advisor to the Maharaja of Kapurthala, added a royal touch with her talk about the jewels favoured by Maharaja Jagatjit Singh – "one of the truly global Indians" – right from his childhood. She added that **"Jewellery, gems... are never static. The moment they are mined, they are cut, polished, they change ownership, almost like the pieces have a life of their own."**

In the closing session, author **Manu Pillai** and jewellery historian **Dr Usha R Balakrishnan** took the audience on a journey into the rich jewelled legacy of South India. Pillai discussed the rise and fall of the Travancore empire, which retained only the Padmanabhaswamy temple after the collapse of the old order. Dr Balakrishnan shared examples of the meticulousness of ancient inscriptions that provided clues to the names of ornaments, among others; reiterated the importance of documentation; and described the thrill for the historian of identifying and researching pieces and traditions. She remarked that it was all about **"the hunt. The hunt is exciting, the hunt is challenging... never boring."**

The conference, in traversing across the subcontinent, provided a platform for discussion, research and exchange about the rare body of jewels and gemstones that define our cultural legacy, and how deeply it has influenced the rest of the world for centuries.

CONFERENCE IMAGES (OVERLEAF)

All images taken at *Mapping a Legacy of Indian Jewels*, courtesy of Saffronart.

First row (L-R): 1. India's foremost jewellery designer Viren Bhagat in conversation with Minal Vazirani, Co-Founder and President of Saffronart, and Dr Usha R Balakrishnan, jewellery historian and cultural capital consultant; **2.** Speakers at *Mapping a Legacy of Indian Jewels*: (L-R) Viren Bhagat, Wendell Rodricks, Hugo Miguel Crespo, Lisa Hubbard, Jack Ogden, Dr Usha R Balakrishnan, Alexander Popov, Cynthia Meera Frederick, Deepthi Sasidharan, Minal Vazirani and Joanna Hardy.

Second row (L-R): 1. India's foremost jewellery designer Viren Bhagat in conversation with Minal Vazirani, Co-Founder and President of Saffronart, and Dr Usha R Balakrishnan, jewellery historian and conference curator; **2.** International jewellery specialist Lisa Hubbard; **3.** Author Manu Pillai and jewellery historian and cultural capital consultant Dr Usha R Balakrishnan in conversation with Minal Vazirani, Co-Founder and President of Saffronart.

Third row (L-R): 1. Deepthi Sasidharan, Founder-Director of Eka Archiving Services; international jewellery specialist Joanna Hardy; and Cynthia Meera Frederick, Chief Advisor to the Maharaja of Kapurthala in conversation with Lisa Hubbard; **2.** International fashion designer and author Wendell Rodricks (left) and art historian and author Hugo Miguel Crespo (right) in conversation with Alexander Popov, Founder and CEO of the World Diamond Museum (centre).

Fourth row (L-R): 1. Alexander Popov, Founder and CEO of the World Diamond Museum; John King, Chief Quality Officer of GIA Laboratory; and jewellery historian Jack Ogden in conversation with Nirupa Bhatt, GIA's Managing Director for India and the Middle East; **2.** A glimpse of the diverse international audience at *Mapping a Legacy of Indian Jewels*, Saffronart's 2nd jewellery conference.



ONLINE AUCTION OF FINE JEWELS

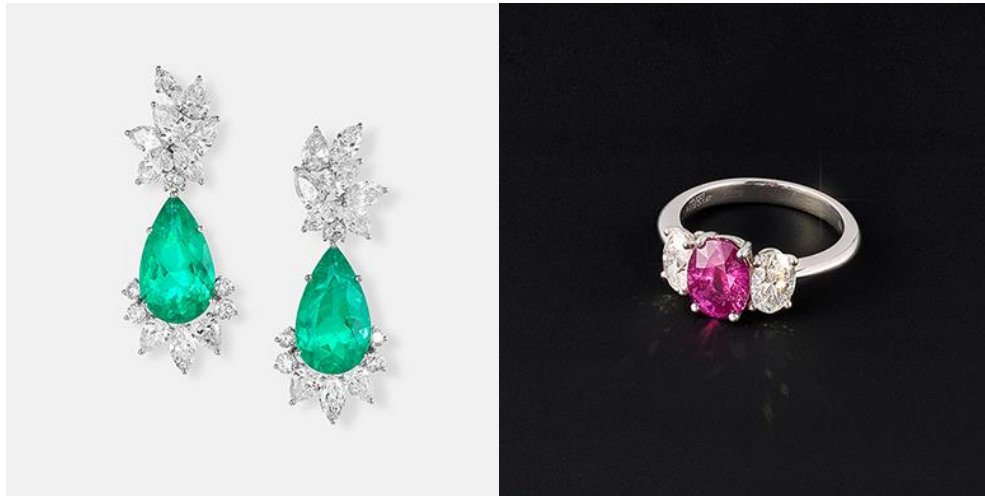
The conference is followed by an online auction of Fine Jewels on 15 – 16 October 2019. It features a curated selection of versatile jewellery that merges traditional Indian craftsmanship with modern sensibilities, as well as fine gems and signed collectible pieces selected for their uniqueness and rarity. Thematically, the auction is an **Ode to Nature**, and the collection of 174 lots will highlight the influence of floral and celestial motifs in jewellery design and techniques, as well as the natural processes that are responsible for the creation of gemstones, with their diverse and mesmerising hues, qualities and optical effects. The auction will take place on saffronart.com and is preceded by viewings in Mumbai through 16 October 2019.



At *Mapping the Legacy of Indian Jewels*, Wendell Rodricks explored the influence of fruits, flowers and natural motifs in Indian jewellery design – including bangles inspired by pineapples, a fruit brought to India by the Portuguese. Such motifs can be seen in the lots in Saffronart's upcoming auction, such as (L) [Lot 11](#): Suite of Polki Diamond Necklace and Earrings (INR 2.5 - 3.5 lakhs) and (R) [Lot 26](#): Pair of Rubellite and Diamond Dahlia Earrings (INR 7 - 9 lakhs). Images courtesy of Saffronart.



At *Mapping the Legacy of Indian Jewels*, Jack Ogden delved into the early history of diamonds. In Saffronart's upcoming auction [Lot 63](#) is a dazzling Diamond 'Sunburst' Brooch set with old-cut diamonds (INR 18 - 22 lakhs). Image courtesy of Saffronart.



At *Mapping the Legacy of Indian Jewels*, Joanna Hardy shared stories from her travels in pursuit of emeralds and rubies around the world. Examples of these precious gemstones are seen in Saffronart's upcoming auction, including (L) [Lot 74](#): Pair of Emerald and Diamond Earrings (INR 42 - 48 lakhs) and (R) [Lot 75](#): Burmese Ruby and Diamond Ring (INR 48 - 55 lakhs). Images courtesy of Saffronart.



At *Mapping the Legacy of Indian Jewels*, Dr Usha R Balakrishnan took us on a journey of the jewels of South India. Saffronart's upcoming auction features examples of South Indian jewellery, including (L) [Lot 18](#): Gold Gejjetic Kantasara or Necklace (INR 2 - 3 lakhs) and (R) [Lot 146](#): Gemset Necklace (INR 2.5 - 4.5 lakhs). Images courtesy of Saffronart.

ABOUT SAFFRONART

Founded in 2000 by Minal and Dinesh Vazirani, Saffronart is a leading international auction house, and India's most reputed, with over two hundred auctions to its credit. Its flagship gallery is in Mumbai, with offices in New Delhi, London and New York. At the forefront of selling Indian art, Saffronart has held online and live auctions, exhibitions, and Dialogues in Art, working with collectors, gallerists and artists to develop a strong market for art and aesthetics. Its focus is to bring transparency to the auction process, and provide easy access and information to collectors around the world. Saffronart's services go beyond auctions to include private sales, appraisals and valuations for clients. Saffronart has set several global benchmarks for online auctions, and was the subject of a case study at Harvard Business School in 2005.

ABOUT SAFFRONART DIALOGUES IN ART

Since 2000, Saffronart has not only led the market, but also fostered an environment of innovation and thought leadership within the art and cultural arenas. As part of this focus, Saffronart created Dialogues in Art, a platform for discussion, education and exchange on ideas, concepts and scholarship.

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