

Global Jewellery Players

31 August 2023

Chinese contemporary jewellery artists are becoming key power players in the international collectors’ market. We meet the influential designers combining their heritage with cutting-edge techniques to craft extraordinary haute joaillerie.

Kim Parker

“I feel very lucky to be seen as a kind of ambassador for my culture through my work,” says the jewellery artist [Anna Hu](#), fresh from her latest exhibition at The European Fine Art Foundation in Maastricht. “Each of my pieces has a deep historical thread and much of that is rooted in my Chinese heritage. It’s wonderful to be able to share that with the world.”

Renowned for her use of remarkable gemstones, Hu is just one of a growing number of Chinese jewellery artists that have emerged over the past few years whose work is increasingly finding a global audience – with many of their most dramatic pieces achieving record-breaking prices at auction.



Red Magpie Brooch
[Anna Hu](#)

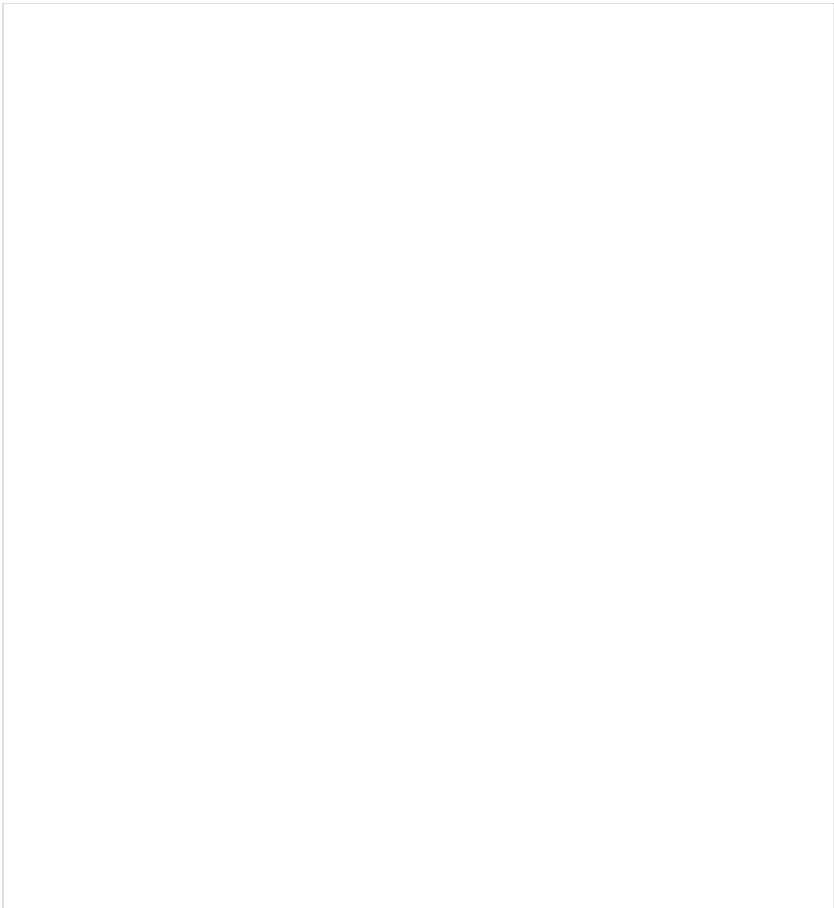
“With a legacy of over 5000 years of Chinese art history and craftsmanship fused with new ideas from the West, these designers create jewellery that is unique and hasn’t been seen before,” says Stewart Young, director of jewellery and head of department at Bonhams Asia, which is auctioning five of Hu’s creations at its Hong Kong Jewels and Jadeite sale on 28 May. “Each designer also brings their own distinctive style embodying new techniques... [creating] one-of-a-kind pieces that are highly collectible.”

So collectible, in fact, that Hu has twice broken the record for a Chinese contemporary jewellery artist at auction. In 2019, her Dunhuang Pipa necklace, which featured an intense yellow diamond weighing over 100 carats, sold for US\$5.78 million at Sotheby’s Hong Kong, beating her own record of US\$2.59 million that she set in 2013 with her jade Orpheus Ring, sold by Christie’s Hong Kong. Other pieces are sought after for museum collections, such as a serpentine-like hand ornament crafted in collaboration with the American artist Cindy Sherman, which was inducted into the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris last year.



Orpheus Jade Ring
Anna Hu

Born in Taiwan and now living between New York and Monaco, Hu began her career in jewellery after an injury at the age of 18 scuppered her ambitions to become a cellist. She attributes her success to her resolutely scholarly approach to design. "My role as a creative is to unite the past, present and future, so I'm not interested in typical cultural stereotypes," says the jeweller, who counts Middle Eastern royalty, Oprah Winfrey and Chinese entrepreneurs amongst her clientele. "I love studying and draw inspiration from a wide range of sources, as well as Chinese philosophy." Indeed, Hu's latest collection of just 20 pieces includes a gem-set torque shaped like an elegant lotus stem as an ode to the work of Chinese artist Zhang Daqian (a contemporary of Picasso), and also a bib necklace encrusted with tanzanite, tourmaline and sapphire 'waterlilies' as a tribute to Claude Monet.



Monet Water Lily Necklace
[Anna Hu](#)

Fellow record-breaking jeweller, [Edmond Chin](#), also considers himself “a researcher at heart”, with a passion for “ancient works of art, architecture, textiles, ceramics and sculpture.” The Singaporean-born, Hong Kong-based designer began collecting antique Southeast Asian jewels as a teenager (amassing an exhibition-worthy assortment by the time he graduated from Oxford University in the UK) and went on to lead the jadeite and jewellery department of Christie’s Hong Kong before founding his own atelier in 2001. Now, as the creative director of Boghossian, Chin is celebrated for the modernity and technicality of his works, which minimise the amount of metal needed to showcase sensational gemstones. A double rivière necklace which sold at Christie’s in 2020, for example, was comprised of 28 cushion and octagonal-cut emeralds alongside 22 large diamonds suspended, as if by magic, from fancy-cut jadeite and diamond links. It [realised over HK\\$54 million](#), smashing the record for no-oil Colombian emeralds. It’s this “fresh approach”, a willingness to be unconventional to achieve stunning feats of artistry, says Chin, that makes the work of many Chinese jewellers so appealing to sophisticated collectors.

It’s a sentiment shared by [Anabela Chan](#), the London-based contemporary jeweller who is pioneering the use of more sustainable materials in her nature-inspired pieces such as the Orchid Poppy earrings, which are crafted from enamelled and anodised aluminium, recycled gold and lab-grown sapphires. “I’m grateful for my Chinese roots, which have given me a huge appreciation of detail and craftsmanship, as well as a bold approach to colour, which means I’m always testing the limits of what’s possible and what can be considered beautiful,” she says, adding that international platforms such as red-carpet events and social media have helped to raise the profile of contemporary Asian jewellers around the world (Chan’s aficionados include Lizzo, Lady Gaga and Beyoncé).

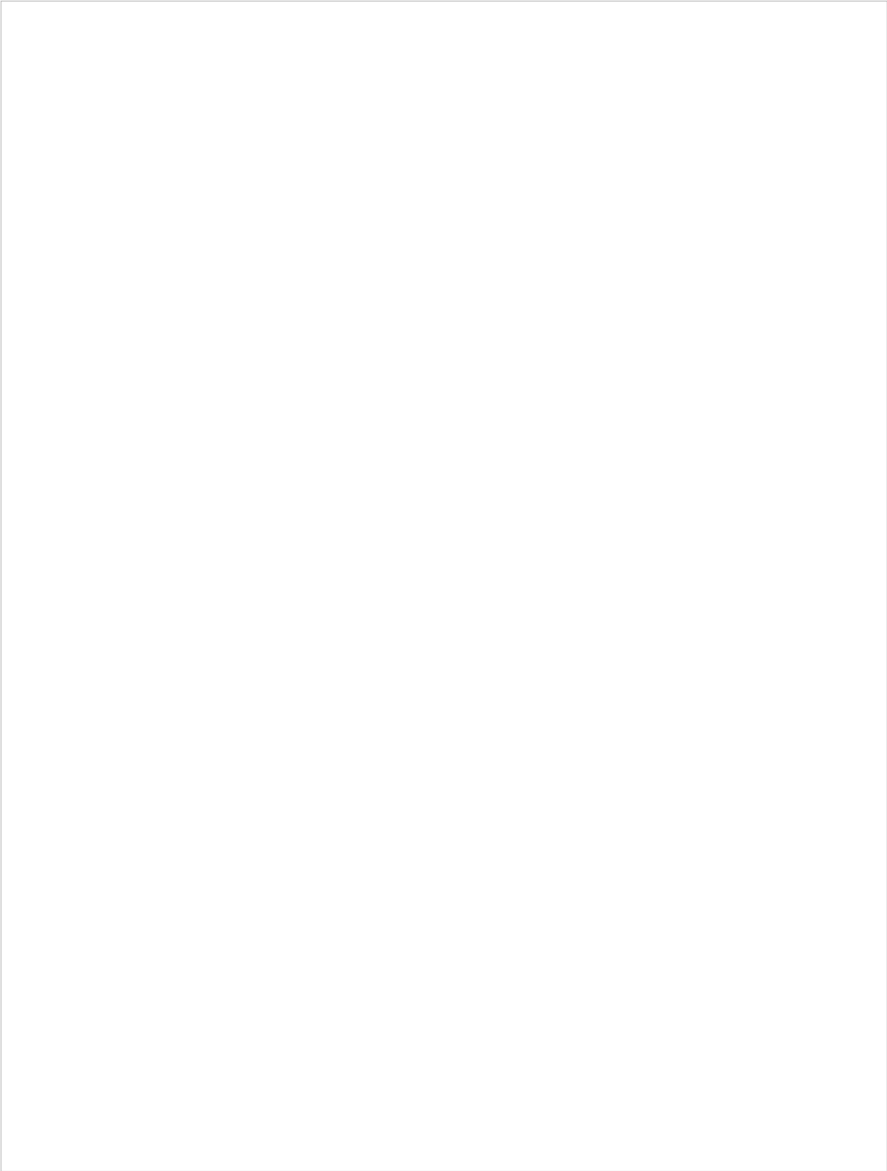


Orchid Poppy Earrings

[Anabela Chan](#)

Recycled enamelled and anodised aluminium with 18k yellow gold set with laboratory-grown gemstones including yellow, fuchsia pink sapphires and white diamonds.

Also no stranger to pushing boundaries is [Wallace Chan](#), the Hong Kong-based sculptor and artist who became the first Asian to exhibit at the Paris Biennale des Antiquaires in 2012, TEFAF Maastricht and Masterpiece London in 2016. The artist began working as a gemstone carver in 1973, eventually developing his eponymous ‘Wallace Cut’ to carve designs within gemstones for a complex, three-dimensional effect. More recently, his virtuoso work in titanium and in creating an unbreakable form of porcelain have garnered him wide-reaching acclaim. Launched in 2018, after almost a decade of research, Chan’s porcelain retains the pearlescent sheen of the traditional material but is five times tougher than steel – inspired by the memory of a prized porcelain spoon which he shattered as a child. “My whole life, I have only ever wanted to create things that are meant to stand the test of time,” says Chan, who sculpts the porcelain into curvaceous, organic silhouettes set with iridescent gems, as in his kaleidoscopic Pupa ring. “It’s inevitable that all of us come with our cultural identities, a certain level of which must also be reflected in our works, consciously or unconsciously,” he notes. “But to be an artist of any kind, one must have their own unique visions and skills, and these are not necessarily tied to where one comes from.”



Stilled Life by [Wallace Chan](#)

Brooch & Sculpture

Imperial Jadeite, Imperial Jadeite bead, Lavender Jadeite, Jadeite, Ruby, Fancy-Colored Diamond, Fancy Colored Sapphire, Tsavorite Garnet, 18K White Gold and Titanium