

THE BROOCH

BOLD, BEAUTIFUL, AND DEFINITELY BACK

During the last few years, we have seen renewed interest in the brooch. From its utilitarian roots dating back to the Bronze Age to today's spectacular designs in precious gems and metals, the brooch has seen its popularity wax and wane. Today, though, the brooch is definitely back.

By Cynthia Unninayar

From their humble beginnings as unassuming utilitarian pins during the Bronze Age, brooches evolved over the centuries to become more ornamental in nature, crafted with myriad decorative techniques. By the Byzantine Era, they were made in precious metal and adorned with colorful gems and pearls. The elite wore them, not only to functionally secure clothing, but also to display elaborate artisanship, opulence and wealth, making the brooch a status symbol.

Moving ahead a few centuries, brooches in the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries were pinned all over the clothes as decorations. In the 18th century, they evolved into single large *stomacher* designs that covered the entire center of the chest.

Along with new jewelry trends and techniques ushered in during the Victorian Era, brooches took on designs as divergent as cameos, flower sprays, crescents, stars and serpents. As the 19th century moved into the 20th, the Art Nouveau period saw the arrival of enameling with motifs evoking femininity, flowing lines and Nature's creatures, especially nymphs and insects with translucent plique-à-jour enamel wings.

Art Deco soon replaced Art Nouveau and, in the 1920s and 1930s, brooch designs became more linear and geometric. They were worn on all parts of clothing, including hats, belts, lapels, on the shoulder and in the hair.

1. Brooches in the Art Deco era became more linear and geometric as in this piece adorned with sapphires, emeralds and diamonds. (Photo: Gemolithos)

2. Emerald and diamond brooch from the early part of the 19th century. (Photo: Gemolithos)

3. Brooch from the 1940s in diamonds evoking a more three-dimensional design. (Photo: Gemolithos)

4. The Art Nouveau period ushered in the arrival of brooches featuring stylized flora and fauna, including insects with translucent enamel wings. (Photo: Gemolithos)

5. Diamond brooch featuring various cuts from the 1960s. (Photo: Gemolithos)

6. Nymphs and feminine figures were popular motifs in the Art Nouveau period. (Photo: Lang Antiques)



7. Griffin brooch in pearls and diamonds by Alessio Boschi. (Photo: Alessio Boschi)

8. Paraiba tourmaline and diamond brooch, convertible to a pendant and hair accessory by Caroline C. (Photo: Caroline C)

9. Brooch/pendant in citrine and diamonds by Erica Courtney. (Photo: Erica Courtney)

10. Sapphire, diamond and pearl brooch by Mousson Atelier. (Photo: Mousson Atelier)

11. Gemstone and diamond brooch by Gumuchian. (Photo: Gumuchian)

12. Multi-gemstone Dragonfly brooch in gold by Crevoshay. (Photo: Crevoshay)

13. Multi-gemstone and diamond brooch by Zorab Creation. (Photo: Zorab Creation)

14. Ruby, diamond and emerald brooch that has a stand, letting it double as an *objet d'art* by Hammerman. (Photo: Hammerman)

During the 1940s, brooches grew larger and more three-dimensional and, by the 1950s, largely evoked freestyle floral designs. Alas, by the end of the 1960s, the popularity of brooches was in decline. Over the next three decades, they were hardly worn—with a few exceptions, notably by the Queen of England and Margaret Thatcher.

Brooches gained renewed awareness after the turn of the 21st century, brought to the attention of mass audiences by Carrie Bradshaw in the long-running TV series, *Sex and the City*. In 2009, former U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright published her book *Read My Pins*, which explored the use of brooches as a means of personal and diplomatic expression, thus strengthening their popularity.

Today, brooches are definitely *en vogue*, available in a wide variety of designs and materials. Popular motifs are flowers, butterflies, birds and assorted marine creatures, as well as whimsical, fantastical and historical representations; just about everything goes. The way they are worn is also vast, and can be seen on the lapel, in the hair, on belts and so much more. With the addition of a chain, brooches can also be worn as pendants, among other design possibilities.

Presented here are a few examples of antique and vintage brooches as well as a selection of bold and beautiful modern pieces, demonstrating that brooches are definitely back. ■