

Fine Jewelry from Suzanne Belperron

Few names in jewelry design manage to escape the notoriety of the firm they work for and build an independent reputation. While brands such as Cartier, Dior, Chanel, and Bvlgari are known throughout the world, the names of the artisans who create their intricate designs often remain a mystery. Therefore Suzanne Belperron, who received offers to design for brands such as Tiffany yet rejected them to build her own business, is an exceptional individual, with talent and drive rare even amongst the world's best artisans.

Suzanne Belperron was born in 1900 in the French Alps, in Saint-Claude, a small town not far from



Geneva. Saint-Claude has a long tradition of arts and crafts due to the long winter months that left residents snowed into their homes. As a young child, Belperron was encouraged to pursue a career in jewelry by her mother, and after finishing high school she enrolled in the School of Fine Arts in a nearby town. She excelled at arts school, graduating with ease, and winning an annual schoolwide

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competition for a pendant watch she designed and built.

After completing her education, she moved from the foothills of the French Alps to the bustling city of Paris and began designing for the Maison René Boivin. She adapted quickly to city and professional life, becoming co-director of the firm at only the age of 23. Within three years of joining, her designs were prominently featured in the business's catalog, and became extremely popular. Belperron's work marked a notable progression from the dominant style at the time, Art Deco, by featuring large, curvaceous jewels, in contrast to the more refined jewels popular at the time.

In 1932 she took up a new position at Maison Bernard Herz. It was in this position that she achieved her international reputation, with her designs regularly appearing in

publications such as Harper's Bazaar and Vogue, alongside the most prominent names of the era. She developed a close relationship with owner Bernard Herz, who allowed her the creative freedom to refine her craft and the resources to execute daring new designs.

Unfortunately, her career with Bernard Herz was interrupted by the Nazi invasion of France in 1940. Belperron saved Herz from the Gestapo on at least one occasion, but her efforts were ultimately overcome by the occupying regime. She herself was interrogated on multiple occasions, taken into custody, and eventually joined the French Resistance. Upon the liberation of France, she joined with Herz's son, Jean to form a new company, Herz-Belperron, where she continued to make custom jewelry,

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marketed without a showroom via word of mouth for the next 30 years.

Belperron never signed her jewelry, simply stating that “my style is my signature,” which makes identification of her pieces difficult in the years since her passing, although the identification of the specific piece on offer at Michaan’s Auctions is made easier by the Goene et Darde manufacture’s mark. However, Belperron’s style is undeniably unique, featuring several international influences, most notably Egyptian, Assyrian, and the cultures of the Far East. Her inspiration was also drawn from the natural world, particularly marine life, as evident in the **Chalcedony, Amethyst, 18k Yellow Gold Brooch** offered for sale at our Winter Fine Sale. This piece also highlights her use of softer karat gold, to emphasize the unique color of the metal.

Unfortunately, her works were largely overlooked in the years following her death, until their rediscovery in an auction of the Duchess of Windsor’s jewelry in 1987. Since this rediscover, much work has been completed to organize her archives, making verification of items easier to achieve. In addition to the societies dedicated to preserving her legacy, Belperron’s work has continued to gain international acclaim as her items have begun to appear at auction over the past few decades. In these sales, jewelry pieces frequently beat auction estimates, as Belperron’s reputation and notoriety continue to grow to the present day.

On offer at Michaan’s Winter Fine Sale, a **Chalcedony, Amethyst, 18k Yellow Gold Brooch attributed to Suzanne Belperron (\$10/15,000)**. This piece highlights the artist’s broad range of influences, featuring

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chalcedony and amethyst, a stone typically procured from Brazil. The sweeping lines of the brooch emulate the curves of coastal marine life and are beautifully accented by its 18k gold setting.

Michaan's Auctions Winter Fine Sale on Thursday, December 14th, features notable names leading the fine art, decorative, and jewelry departments. BANKSY's 2004 screen print "Barcode" headlines a sale

featuring a Tiffany Studios Bronze Lamp and Wisteria Table Screen, wristwatches by Omega and Rolex, and the aforementioned brooch attributed to Suzanne Belperron.

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