

# Carole Tanenbaum's Vintage Costume Jewelry

by Mary Ann Brown  
Photos courtesy Ripley Auctions

In late winter this year, I was eating at an osteria in a nearby coastal Maine town with a friend, who told the owner/cook/baker that I write a column about antique jewelry. We had become regular visitors, slogging through winter, taking respite in his comfortable place, eating spinach pies and cannoli, and chatting about our lives. When we next returned, he kindly gave me the Carole Tanenbaum book *Fabulous Fakes: A Passion for Vintage Costume Jewelry* (2006) and a couple of other jewelry-related books.

**“An astounding assemblage, from the Victorian era through to the present day.”**

In June a press release from Ripley Auctions arrived in my e-mail inbox announcing session I of Tanenbaum's vintage costume jewelry collection, and the synchronicity caught my attention. I had the book and could use it as a reference when covering the sale! The Ripley press release described the auction, held on June 18, as “an astounding assemblage of pieces lovingly gathered over the course of 40-plus years and featuring examples from the Victorian era through to the present day.” The sale also included pieces from Tanenbaum's vintage Scottish and Bakelite vintage jewelry collections.

Andrea Hastings, vice president, head of inventory at Ripley Auctions, said of Tanenbaum, “She really runs the gamut of everything—she's got antique Victorian jewelry, Art Deco, all the way up to contemporary designers that are still doing things today, and new designers—everything.”

Tanenbaum was quoted in the press release, giving us background information about how she came to collect costume jewelry. “I've never been interested in fine jewelry, which is often priced out of reach for most people anyway because of the precious gemstones. I view vintage costume jewelry as objects of art, because that's what they are. For me jewelry is all about the aesthetics. If something tempts me and interests me, I'll buy it. My collection is creative and comprehensive.”

In addition to Ripley's marketing efforts, Tanenbaum helped advertise the sale. “She did a lot of promotion. We did have a larger crowd for her auction, and then we noticed for the Portzline auction that we just had [session IX, held July 16], that Carole's people were there, too. We are extremely grateful to have worked with Carole.”

I'm always interested in finding out who goes to jewelry auctions, and I asked who was in attendance. Hastings said, “The collectors for costume jewelry are really not local, so we really don't have an audience live. There are a few people that come to it, and there are people who travel, but not for every sale. There's a really huge Internet presence. We've picked up a lot of bidders from Russia and China.”

## Highlights

The top lot of the Tanenbaum sale was a signed Har 1950s gold figural genie link bracelet, brooch, and earring set that sold for \$2250 (includes buyer's premium), well above the \$600/900 estimate. Other notables include a Max Neiger Art Deco Egyptian Revival multistrand King Tut pharaoh head figural parure that brought \$1750 (est. \$800/1000); a rare complete unsigned Hobé vanity set, in amber with green faceted crystal jewels, that realized



At \$2250 (est. \$600/900), this signed Har 1950s gold figural genie link bracelet, brooch, and earring set, with glass crystal balls, jewels, and rhinestones, was the top lot of Carole Tanenbaum's vintage jewelry collection at Ripley Auctions.

\$1875 (est. \$1200/1500); and an unsigned Schreiner pink ruffle flower brooch with opaque glass and crystal jewels for \$625 (est. \$150/250).

A 1940s signed Coro Duetto Native American Indian prince and princess figural gold, diamante, and red brooch by Alfred Katz realized \$1625 (est. \$550/750); a signed 1940s Marcel Boucher currant berry brooch with metallic enamel and rhinestones brought \$1500 (est. \$600/800); and a signed Kenneth J. Lane necklace and earring set with yellow graduated teardrop glass cabochon jewels surrounded by crystal and pearl dangles brought \$1125 (est. \$700/900). All are pictured with descriptive captions accompanying this column.

Session II of the Carole Tanenbaum collection is scheduled to go on the block October 15, so you haven't missed your chance to acquire something from the costume jewelry icon. For more information and to view the sale catalog, check in at ([www.ripleyauctions.com](http://www.ripleyauctions.com)).

## Costume Jewelry Is Hot

I've had my head in an antique jewelry cloud for years and was made aware only in the last few years of how large a group of costume jewelry enthusiasts/collectors there are—mostly through communications with Eleanore McMillan, an early and important force in the costume jewelry auction milieu.

When I confessed my ignorance to Andrea Hastings, she replied, “It is a huge market. Even *we* didn't totally know that it was this abundant.”

Before he had an auction house, Dan Ripley was a dealer. He sold costume jewelry, Bakelite, and Arts and Crafts furniture, decorative arts, and Italian glass. These categories are still the subject of sales at the auction house, but a primary focus is its single-owner sales of costume jewelry.

“Sometimes you just find your niche, and this has definitely turned out to be what we do. And we've tried—we've really tried to become *the* place to sell costume jewelry. Dan says that he was the first one to have an auction of just costume jewelry, in the 1990s. We've always had a huge interest in it, and we've considered it one of our specialties. It took a while to find these collections, and once we found Bonny [Yankauer], it just kind of snowballed from there.”



The top lot of session VIII of the Portzline collection of costume jewelry, this 4½" x 3¼" Trifari patriotic eagle brooch with Lucite wings, a pearl belly, and enamel and pavé rhinestones, by designer David Mir, sold for \$10,000 (est. \$5000/7000). Hastings said, “That piece is extremely desirable. I don't think there are very many that are known to exist.” It was on the cover of Carla Ginelli Brunialti and Roberto Brunialti's book *American Costume Jewelry: Art & Industry, 1935-1950*, N-Z. Portzline collection, May 14.

## Portzline Collection, Sessions VIII and IX

Before and after the Tanenbaum auction, Ripley held two sales of Thomas Portzline's collection of costume jewelry, session VIII on May 14, and session IX on July 16.

The top-selling lots of the May sale included a Trifari patriotic eagle brooch with Lucite wings, a pearl belly, and enamel and pavé rhinestones designed by David Mir that sold for \$10,000 (est. \$5000/7000); a rare Marcel Boucher octopus figural pin brooch with blue and yellow enamel and rhinestones that realized \$4750 (est. \$3000/4000); and a Trifari 4¼" high giant lilac enameled flower pin clip with pavé rhinestones designed by Alfred Philippe that brought \$1250 (est. \$800/1200).

When Hastings and I spoke earlier in the year, she had said, “There will be no shortage of costume jewelry” coming to auction, and I thought, “But the Portzline collection will be sold, eventually.” (Session X, the final sale of the collection, is scheduled for August 13.) When speaking with Hastings for this article, I told her what I'd been thinking, and she said, “That is just *one part* of his jewelry collection—it's just the 1940s—those *ten* sales!”

## Kenneth Jay Lane Collection

Hastings was excited to pass on the news that the comprehensive private collection of Kenneth Jay Lane will be sold in a single sale on Monday, November 12, at 3 p.m. The sale “will include samples, prototypes, and some personal favorites of his own designs.”

For further information and to view the online catalog, go to ([www.ripleyauctions.com](http://www.ripleyauctions.com)).



This Max Neiger Art Deco Egyptian Revival multi-strand King Tut pharaoh head figural parure, comprising a necklace, bracelet, and brooch clip, in jade Peking glass and enamel, mounted in brass, sold for \$1750 (est. \$800/1000).



This rare complete unsigned Hobé vanity set, in amber with green faceted crystal jewels, comprising a clutch purse, two hair combs, a brooch, and a necklace, brought \$1875 (est. \$1200/1500).



This 1950s signed Schiaparelli bracelet, earrings, and brooch set, with unfoiled red stones around aurora borealis crystal centers, sold for \$1062.50 (est. \$800/1200).