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ART

Tiffany & Co. Brings a Century of American Beauty to Crystal Bridges

11.19.26 | By Misha Agostinelli



In 1926 in central Arkansas, an 11-year-old girl discovered what she assumed was just a “pretty rock”—it turned out to be a 27.21-carat diamond, which Tiffany & Co. ultimately acquired and dubbed the Arkansas Diamond. One hundred years later, that pretty rock has returned to its home state as a highlight of *Nature Adorned: The Artistry of Tiffany & Co. and the American Imagination* at Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art in Bentonville, Arkansas.

The diamond’s acquisition reflects a longstanding Tiffany tradition. Under the leadership of George Frederick Kunz, the company’s first chief gemologist, Tiffany championed American

gemstones at a time when European jewelers largely overlooked them. From sapphires sourced in Montana and tourmalines from Maine to emeralds from North Carolina, these stones reveal the geological diversity of the American landscape. The Arkansas Diamond is another example of that legacy.

Bringing together gemstones and jewelry from The Tiffany Archives with works from the museum's collection, *Nature Adorned* explores how the natural world has influenced both jewelry and fine art. Through unexpected pairings, the exhibition reveals shared approaches to color, form, and craftsmanship across different mediums.

"This exhibition reveals the power of seeing The Tiffany Archives and Crystal Bridges' collection in conversation," says Jen Padgett, Crystal Bridges' Windgate curator of craft. "Through this collaboration, we can highlight the remarkable creativity, attention to materials, and skilled making that have shaped American art and design across generations."

Inside the exhibition, this conversation begins in the garden. George Paulding Farnham's orchid brooches balance the fluidity of the natural world with the precision of cut gemstones. Diamonds, emeralds, and pink sapphires are delicately placed among gold and enamel, capturing the flowers with botanical accuracy.

The brooches reflect the paintings displayed alongside them, including Martin Johnson Heade's *Cattleya Orchid, Two Hummingbirds and a Beetle.* The paintings share the same attention to organic form and detail, making the two distinct works feel like an extensions of one another—and of nature itself.

Carmen Herrera's *Cerulean* (1965) and Leon Polk Smith's *New Moon for August* (1983) introduce a different interpretation of nature, where form is reduced to crisp edges and angles. The exhibition pairs these abstract works with faceted gemstones, drawing attention to the relationship between shape, line, and geometry.

While Herrera and Polk Smith focus on precision, Jean Schlumberger lets loose. His rubellite and turquoise necklace, *Hedges and Flowers,* along with his tanzanite brooch, *Bird on a Rock*, capture what he described as the "irregularity of the universe." Instead of taming nature, Schlumberger allows its unpredictability to take the spotlight. Hope Gangloff's *Queen Jane Approximately* echoes this organic approach through lively colors and patterns, creating a visual dialogue with the jewels.

Victoria Reynolds, Tiffany & Co.'s chief gemologist and vice president of high jewelry diamond and gemstone acquisition, describes the exhibition as a celebration of the company's heritage, highlighting "the enduring influence of nature across generations of creativity."