

TREASURE HUNTER

Butterfly-shaped wall lamps, sculptural sofas, pensive moonstone brooches...

it's no wonder Albert Boghossian describes his collection as 'eclectic'. But for the sixth-generation jeweller and CEO of the fine-jewellery brand that bears his family name, the act of collecting is less about the result and more about a process that connects him to his heritage

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Albert Boghossian's home is an Aladdin's Cave of magnificent pieces, including a Tephra Formations sofa by Robert Stadler and a number of astonishing eggshell lacquer artworks



THE PIECES IN Albert Boghossian's collection talk to him. "An object has to give me some emotion so I feel that I have to buy it," he explains. "I've been collecting for more than 35 years, and in the beginning it's easy. Then your tastes develop, and you become more selective. You immediately notice when something cries out loud, 'I need to be part of your collection. The other guy didn't buy me, but maybe you should buy me. Don't leave me alone!'" He continues (somewhat unconvincingly): "I keep saying that I must limit myself, because I don't know where to put all these things. But when I see something special – something that challenges me, or tells me, 'I'm beautiful, I have something else to offer' – I just need to own it."

As a sixth-generation jeweller and CEO of the house that bears his family name, Boghossian is well attuned to the beauty of 'things'. Just look at his Lalique tiara, in which pearls glisten like water droplets against gold and enamel leaves; or his Paul Liénard brooch, a quintessential example of Art Nouveau design with its sinuous lines and serene moonstone face. Granted, small pieces like these don't necessarily demand vast amounts

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of space – but when you have cabinets full of them, one imagines it starts to add up. Then there are the paintings, the sculptures, and the undulating Robert Stadler sofa that spills itself across the floor. Boghossian's collection is a feat of eclecticism.

"I'm resolutely contemporary in how I define myself," he says. "And Boghossian's jewellery reflects that modernity. However, I'm capable of encompassing and identifying with all styles. I cannot confine myself." He flips his camera and I catch a blurred glimpse of Lake Geneva stretching out beyond the window before I'm confronted with a spectrum of wonders: antique jewellery in electric turquoise; a Cartier etui in warm amber and coral; a sewing kit encrusted in pearls. "I always want to bring diversity and originality to my collection," he continues. "I could say that I only want pieces from the Middle East, because that is where I am originally from. But I don't. In terms of collecting, I have been everywhere – Africa, China, South America. It is my voyage through the world."

This last statement is the key to understanding Boghossian's drive to accumulate precious artefacts. And it's something he has inherited from previous generations of Boghossian jewellers. "My collecting style is a reflection of my heritage," he explains. "We are Armenians, and Armenians have always been voyagers. They spent their lives on the Silk Road as merchants seeking treasures."



Clockwise from this image: Gold, enamel and pearls create a beautiful Lalique tiara; a 1920s Cartier etui in amber, coral, enamel and diamonds; Boghossian surrounded by pieces ranging from delicate jewellery to the powerful Congolese 'Masque kifivebe' (back left)



The Boghossian family history is something of a voyage itself, encompassing generations of global adventures – and tragedies. At the outbreak of the First World War, Albert Boghossian's grandfather, Ohanness, fled the Armenian genocide and headed for Aleppo in Syria. Sixty years later, his grandsons (Albert's brother, Jean, is a Belgium-based artist and sculptor) left their home in Lebanon to escape the civil war there. And as children, the pair watched their father and grandfather traverse the world in search of treasure: "Antique furniture, jewels, sculptures – these objects were always part of our home," says Boghossian. "For me, acquiring different pieces of art is a continuation of that same journey."

Boghossian's Armenian heritage also feeds into his tastes. "Armenians are known for being major artisans," he says. "I've always been sensitive to the exquisiteness of execution, the intricacies of an object." He points out an Art Deco clock by Lacleche Frères that features a stylised landscape conjured from layers of mother-of-pearl and gold. "It's beautiful work," he says fondly.

One of the most striking elements of Boghossian's collection is his selection of compacts and small boxes by Jean Dunand, >



A striking 19th-century sewing set featuring gold inlaid with pearls



an artist and sculptor who was best known for his use of the eggshell lacquer technique. This method (as the name suggests) involves crushing parts of an eggshell and applying each minuscule fragment directly onto a freshly lacquered surface to create a design. “Eggshell is something I really love,” says Boghossian. “I discovered it 15 years ago, and now I have between 20 and 25 pieces. What drove me to them is the craftsmanship. It’s unbelievable how, by fissuring eggshells like this, someone could create something so beautiful.”

By now, it should come as no surprise to hear that Boghossian frequently finds inspiration in his treasures. “Sometimes, when I’m sitting and reading, I will suddenly stand up and start looking at a piece that has been in my home for 15 years. Then I might pick out a certain motif within that object and use it to build an idea for a necklace or a ring.”

Essentially, the act of collecting has now become as fundamental to Boghossian’s family company as it is to his personal history. “I think Boghossian offers a different interpretation of jewellery, and that comes from our background of looking at many things, educating our eyes and refusing to confine ourselves,” he explains. “For me, collecting has been an inspirational, educational process, taking in what is beautiful, what is less beautiful, and what is truly exquisite.” □

Photofeyer

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Top and opposite page: Old and new meet in artistic harmony under Boghossian’s curation; left: Enamel, diamond, onyx, amber, emerald, mother-of-pearl and gold combine in a 1920s Lacloche Frères Art Deco clock; above: Art Nouveau elegance shines through in a Paul Liénard moonstone, pearl, enamel and diamond brooch