



50 Years of Wallace Chan's Jewelry Is on Display in Shanghai

"I am a bit reluctant to call this a retrospective," the designer says, "because I have many more years to create."



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Metamorphosis, a brooch by Wallace Chan. via Wallace Chan

By **David Belcher**

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If your career has included creating a piece of jewelry valued at \$200 million, what's next?

For [Wallace Chan](#), the Hong Kong artist whose jewelry has attracted buyers and been added to museum collections for decades, you return to the Chinese mainland where you were born for a milestone exhibition.

Shanghai Museum East is now featuring more than 200 of Mr. Chan's works in "Wallace Chan: Half a Century" through Oct. 7.

"I am a bit reluctant to call this a retrospective because I have many more years to create," said Mr. Chan, 67, during a recent video interview from his home in Hong Kong. "For me, to create is to discover."

Part of what makes this exhibition different from his previous ones is the presentation. Mr. Chan said he wanted to humanize his work, which has included hundreds, if not thousands, of tiny gems set on titanium frames in the shape of butterflies [or insects](#) or other things from nature. Many of the pieces are shown inside 11 mannequins, made of purple fiberglass and almost 15 feet tall, or in a display case in the shape of an eye.



An installation view of "Wallace Chan: Half a Century" at Shanghai Museum East. via Wallace Chan

“My works of jewelry are created to embody human qualities,” he said. “I have always felt that the insects and the other parts of nature I depict are as vital to our world as humans.”

Among the pieces on display is Metamorphosis, a butterfly brooch of 16 emeralds totaling 52.44 carats, diamonds, other colored stones, mother-of-pearl, 18-karat white gold and titanium. Another piece, called Hera, is a peacock brooch with a detachable ring in yellow diamonds and emeralds. It was crafted in titanium and [Wallace Chan Porcelain](#), a substance that he invented several years ago and has said is five times harder than steel.

Mr. Chan began making jewelry in his teens.

“[Butterflies are flying colors](#),” he said. “This is what I remember from my childhood.”

He trained as a carver in his 20s and began his own business in 1974. The Wallace Cut, which he created, involved carving images into gemstones and drew attention in the industry. Mr. Chan also created several precision tools, and he customized dental drills so they could be used on minuscule jewels.

Perhaps his most famous creation (not included in this exhibition) was an 11,551-diamond necklace created in 2015 for Chow Tai Fook, the Asian business group that includes a large retail jewelry chain. It has been called the world's most expensive necklace, valued at \$200 million at the time.



Mr. Chan in London last year. He began making jewelry in his teens. James Manning/PA, via Associated Press

The exhibition includes loans from the Palace Museum in Beijing, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, and the Pforzheim Jewelry Museum in Germany. There are no official plans for the exhibition to move to another location, but Mr. Chan said he and the museum were considering invitations and declined to identify the museums.

Nina Hald, a freelance curator who has worked with the [Danish royal jewelry collection](#), curated the Chan exhibition along with the Shanghai museum's staff members. She said that she became enchanted with Mr. Chan's work at an art fair in London in 2016 and that she had worked with him several times since then.

"Denmark's design tradition is very minimalist and almost devoid of colors," Ms. Hald said by email. "Wallace's art is literally everything but."

For his part, Mr. Chan sees color as just one aspect of his jewels: "To my eyes, the gemstones are alive, and I want to portray that."