



FRENCH F·A·N·C·Y

AIR chats to **Victoire de Castellane** about her fantastical High Jewellery collection, available for a limited time in Dubai

Words: LARA BRUNT

With her high cheekbones, poker straight hair and polished Parisian style, Victoire de Castellane cuts a striking figure amid the refined surroundings of One&Only, The Palm Dubai. Yet, surprisingly, the statuesque designer – creative director of Dior fine jewellery since 1998 and known for her big, bold and brilliantly coloured creations – admits that she often forgoes statement jewels.

“I think that rings and bracelets are the easiest things to look at on yourself and the most flattering to a woman’s gesture,” she muses. “But I also like to not wear any jewellery, especially when I’m working in order to not be influenced by any existing pieces, colours, shapes or memories.”

The designer is in town to discuss her eponymous, one-of-a-kind haute joaillerie pieces, which can be viewed by private

appointment only at Harvey Nichols Dubai and Bloomingdale’s Dubai until the end of the month. Made up of pieces from her two collections – Fleurs d’Excès and animalvegetablemineral – the jewelled, lacquered and enameled rings, bracelets and necklaces are intended both as personal adornment and stunning objets d’art, each coming with a pedestal to display the piece when not being worn. “My jewels are propositions,” she says, “speaking about concept and form as opposed to objective value. They become sculpture.”

Inspired by sources as diverse as the natural world and the synthetic wonders of Technicolor; the Brothers Grimm and Walt Disney; Hollywood screen idols and Japanese manga characters; pop culture and the darkest depths of the subconscious, de Castellane mixes precious and semi-precious stones, fine and futuristic-looking materials (think gold masked in bubblegum pink lacquer). “I like all



coloured stones but my favourite is the opal," she says. "Because of its fires, it seems to be alive. Like Monet's Water Lilies; it possesses every colour as if a genie was living inside it."

Letting the genie out of the bottle is something she clearly relishes for her own line. "For Dior, I develop the various house codes, which I use as a starting point to produce the themes for new collections. For my personal work, I enjoy the freedom to exclusively draw inspiration from my own field of interests such as art, exhibitions, films, photography, the street, the female world, love, sexuality, psychoanalysis and life itself..." she says.

The jewels on show include four pieces never before seen in the Middle East, such as the Amanita Satana Diabolus necklace (pictured on page 43) from the Fleurs d'Excès collection, a lacquered silver, white and yellow gold creation featuring diamonds, opals, sapphires, garnets and spinels, and the Opiom Velourosa Purpra necklace (opposite) of silver, diamonds and rubies. Meanwhile, the Lunae Magic Lumen ring, crafted from white and pink gold, diamonds and coloured lacquer, makes its worldwide debut.

Each piece is fully formed in the designer's mind before she commits it to paper. "It's like flashes when I have an idea," she explains. "The piece is already defined in my head. I see the stones, the volume, how the woman is going to wear it. And I write it down on a Post-it. Then I usually create a wax model and directly brief the workshops. It's an exchange between them and me. I show them exactly what I want until the end. It usually takes between 18 to 24 months to finish each piece."

Born into one of the most illustrious families in France – her aristocratic family tree includes princes, bishops and generals – de Castellane is pure fashion royalty. As a teenager during the early '80s, her uncle, designer Gilles Dufour – Karl Lagerfeld's

right-hand man for decades – often took her out clubbing to famed Parisian haunts such as Le Palace. It was during this time that she first experimented with dressing up in playful, flamboyant and ultra-feminine styles, often sporting Mickey Mouse ears and wearing lingerie as outerwear.

After joining Chanel in 1984 as a studio assistant, Lagerfeld soon asked her to oversee the development of costume jewellery designs. Self-taught, for the next 14 years de Castellane created bold pieces with playful cartoon and pop references, before moving to Dior in 1998. Since then, she's been celebrated for pushing the boundaries of fine jewellery.

When it comes to designers she admires, de Castellane cites Lalique "for his love and respect for women and Boivin and Belperron for their creative freedom." Her love of extravagant jewels, meanwhile, stems from her glamorous grandmother, Sylvia Hennessy. "She wore jewels matching her outfits and could change them up to three times a day," de Castellane recalls. "She was impeccable, lipstick and nail polish forever on her hands and feet. She was a true vision of loveliness and she was fascinating. She wasn't a grandmother in the classic sense of the term. She was a bit like a Hollywood heroine.

"She was a close friend of Barbara Hutton, the American millionairess married to Cary Grant, who wore emerald tiaras during the day and lived in a palace in Tangiers. She lived in a totally eccentric world peopled with a mix of writers, Hollywood stars and fashion designers. This was the real jet set. Through the eyes of a child, her stones, mounted in a very classic manner, seemed enormous to me," she says. Without doubt, de Castellane's dazzling pieces inspire similar wide-eyed wonder.

Available at Harvey Nichols Dubai and Bloomingdale's Dubai until June 30.



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