Symbols of Devotion – Hand-crafted Rings

Edited by Glen Joffe



Sterling and gold wash ring with ancient folded glass 'Buddha Bead,' from Afghanistan

Item #J0700-280

Will you marry me? For some people it’s the biggest question they will ever ask; for others, it’s a question to be repeated multiple times during their lives. Yet, no matter how many times it is asked, this proposal is almost always accompanied by a ring. The tradition of giving and receiving rings has had fashionable, spiritual, and romantic significance for thousands of years throughout innumerable cultures all over the world.

As far back as ancient Egypt, the endless circle of a ring symbolized eternal love. In Ancient Greece, husbands gifted gold and silver rings to their wives. It was an indication that the wife was trusted with the husband’s valuables. Never mind that the ring was really hers. The concept of the "ring finger" dates back to the 17th century when an English ecclesiastical lawyer called Henry Swinburne wrote about the *vena amoris*, or vein of love. Citing ancient sources with Egyptian connections, Swinburne described it as the vein connecting a person's fourth finger to his or her heart. Although his sources are unconfirmed (and biologically, all veins are connected to the heart) the convention of placing an engagement and wedding ring

on the fourth finger of either hand has endured to this day.



Silver and gold ring with amber from Jaipur, Rajasthan, India

Item #J0700-390

Blame the tradition of giving a diamond engagement ring on the Archduke Maximillian of Austria who gifted one to his betrothed, Mary of Burgundy, in the 15th century. It can be an expensive custom in any culture, but most women will tell you it's not the *diamond* that's important. Instead, it is the promise the ring represents. In fact, it doesn't even have to be a diamond ring to qualify as an engagement ring. Any ring that is thoughtfully selected can be used to pop the big question, especially when it is a meaningful one-of-a-kind piece. Then again, unique rings don’t have to be given to find the answer to a question. They can make incredible gifts just about any time – the meaning of the gift often locked into the appearance and symbolism of the ring.



22 karat gold ring with royal mudfish motif from the Ashanti people of Ghana, West Africa

Item #J011201-294



Ring with Mudfish motif · Ashanti people · Ghana, West Africa · 20th C. · 22 karat gold

Item #J011201-294

PRIMITIVE's extensive collection of one-of-a-kind rings comes from all over the world. Some are embedded with ancient stones and powerful gems, others with talismanic inscriptions and auspicious symbols. There are Akan gold rings from West Africa; true collector's pieces symbolizing royalty and wealth. There are rings composed of 4,000 year old beads from the Indus Valley, antique rings from Tibet, Afghanistan and India, and a large collection of rings from contemporary craftspeople and designers. Some of the more unusual rings in the overall collection were created by the artist, Lou Zeldis. These rings stand out for their

distinct artistry and symbolism as well as the story behind the man who created them.



Silver and bone ring with Tibetan Love Knot motif from Bali, Indonesia

Item #J1402-202

Zeldis, who passed on in 2012, had a legendary lust for life. He began his career as an actor in an international theater troupe. This work took him all over the world, from the Americas to Africa to Asia. While the work satisfied his wanderlust it also triggered his artistic need to create objects, which took the form of intimate mementoes from places he visited. In Peru, he discovered a world of personal charms, which took him on a lifelong journey to study primordial charms from other cultures worldwide.



Silver and bone ring with male torso motif from Bali, Indonesia

Item #J1402-215

After leaving the theater, Zeldis migrated to Bali, Indonesia. Bali is home to some of the finest jewelry artisans in the world. It was there that he began to design jewelry in earnest. As a self-taught artist and designer he worked with no stylistic restrictions or limitations. He learned the art of ancient jewelry and textile making techniques, then adapted those techniques to create something new, non-traditional and uniquely his own. For example, many of Zeldis' jewelry pieces are in fact found objects such as glass shards, raw gemstones or washed-up seashells that he carved, chiseled, polished and fitted to become centerpieces of his creations. They are as much miniature sculptures as they are conventional rings. His designs are bold, striking and unconventional. One series of rings depicts naked male torsos. If you look closely, it's impossible to miss the intricate details. The rings capture the feeling of Michelangelo's David, but in miniature. One of these rings features the Hindu god Indra. It could pass for a miniature section of a frieze from an ancient temple. His reversible rings featuring the faces of the sun and moon are delightful works of ingenuity leaving us to ponder these ancient symbols. Elegant lines form the Tibetan love knot in another series. Each of his works perfectly juxtaposes natural materials with the power of form. These are works that engage the human imagination while making strong, meaningful fashion statements.



Silver and bone ring with Indra motif from Bali, Indonesia

Item #J1402-233

It's no wonder that Zeldis rings have this effect on people. His home, Bali, can be described as a "trance island." It is a Hindu province of a Muslim country, which was an early

stronghold of Buddhism. In short, Bali is a spiritual center with a firmament built around the unseen world. It is a place where daily acts of devotion are commonplace, and devotion can be inspiring. Add some ingenuity and ambition to the mix, combine with creativity and a long jewelry making tradition, and you have a recipe for unique, enduring pieces.

The rings created by Lou Zeldis, like so many others in PRIMITIVE's collections, go beyond the normal meaning associated with wearing rings in general. In an unpredictable world they offer us the opportunity to explore symbols and ponder deeper meanings. They ask us to recognize the extraordinary beauty of natural materials as well as the power of human ingenuity and creativity. Like all rings, they can be given when asking the big question or just about any question at all; on special occasions and holidays or on days that have no obvious significance; and as an expression of love, friendship, or just about any other emotion or sentiment we wish to express. One thing is certain: whenever a ring is given, to anyone else or our self, the meaning of the gift is found in the giving – and the symbolism of the ring itself.



Select collection of silver and bone rings with Moon, Skull and Female and Male Torso motifs; Bali, Indonesia
Item #J1402-173, J1402-079, J1402-208 and J1402-224