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ELLE

ALEXIS BITTAR MARKS MAJOR MILESTONE WITH ONE-OF-A-KIND COLLECTION

Celebrating fantastic jewelry with even more fantastic jewelry.



Alexis Bittar has always existed a bit outside of the fashion industry: The jeans- and New Balance-wearing jewelry designer looks more like a painter who gets his hands dirty than, well, a fashion maven. Perhaps that's appropriate for someone who straddles both worlds. His signature candy-colored, hand-carved, hand-painted Lucite bangles, now celebrating their twenty-fifth anniversary, are sold at art museums such as New York's Guggenheim and the Museum of Modern Art, as well as at Bittar's own 12 retail stores and Barneys New York. His designs have graced everyone from Madonna to Michelle Obama, yet Bittar is showing his collection during New York Fashion Week for the first time this month. To mark the occasion, he's designed a limited-edition range of

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five statement necklaces and exaggerated cuffs, each individually painted with a free-hand technique and numbered, so no two pieces are the same.

Bittar has also commissioned original artwork in Lucite by four contemporary artists, to be unveiled at the presentation. Among the artists is an old pal, sculptor Cordy Ryman; the two have known each other since Bittar was working out of an East Village apartment and Ryman was creating large-scale installations from pieces of colored wood in the Chelsea basement of his father, painter Robert Ryman. Cordy Ryman now has a studio in Sunset Park, Brooklyn, around the corner from Bittar's new Industry City factory, where Bittar employs 400 local artisans. "I want to show Lucite in an artistic light," Bittar says.

His design innovation was to fuse the ideology of Bakelite jewelry with the applications of Lalique glass, using an industrial material to create beautifully colored, semitranslucent pieces. "Most plastics are injection molded," he explains. "So it's all literally just pumped out. The way I looked at plastic, and Lucite specifically, was as a medium that can be sculpted and crafted."

So what insights can his artist friend offer—besides the 3' x 3' sculptural pieces he made for Bittar's presentation? "Lucite is really hard to carve!" Ryman says. Bittar replies, "Well, it *is* bulletproof glass."



A hand-painted Lucite pebble necklace and Lucite and molten metal cuff from the Alexis Bittar twenty-fifth anniversary capsule collection, and other details from Ryman's original Lucite artwork.

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