

# Diamonds are forever

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With a new coat of charcoal paint sparkling beneath glimmering spotlights, the Garfield Weston Exhibition Hall in the ROM's Michael Lee-Chin Crystal oozes class and luxury, a fitting location for the Royal Ontario Museum's newest exhibit, The Nature of Diamonds. Organized in collaboration with the American Museum of Natural History, The Nature of Diamonds explores the many facets of one of the world's most alluring gems. This spectacular exhibit will be on display at ROM until March 22, 2009, the only Canadian stop on a North American tour that includes the Houston Museum of Natural Science and Chicago's Field Museum.

The expansive exhibit is divided into seven sections. "What is Diamond?" discusses the chemical properties of diamonds, including interactive stations like a three-dimensional structural model of the famous gem, and a handgrip that measures the pressure exerted by the user compared to the 80,000 kg of force required to make a diamond.

Other sections focus on the gemstone's geological origins, providing an explanation of how its unique properties make it an invaluable tool. The "Four C's" gives patrons a look at the four ways diamonds are evaluated: cut, carat, clarity, and colour.

Canada's prominence as a diamond-producing region is given a tribute in a video entitled Crystal Clear: Diamonds from Canada's North. The video will accompany the exhibit on tour, emphasizing Canada's swift ascent in the industry from the opening of our first diamond mine in 1998, to our current place as the world's third-largest producer.

In the Historical Galleries, beautiful pieces chronicle the significance of diamonds throughout history and across cultures. Among the most captivating displays are a painting depicting the exchange of diamond engagement rings between Hapsburg Emperor Maximilian I and Mary, Duchess of Burgundy in 1477, and a butterfly brooch made with rose-cut diamonds, an example of the insect motif popular in the late 1800s.

Also on display is the "Tip of the Iceberg" ring designed by

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*Here's a photo essay featuring some highlights from #startUofT, and some stunning shots from*

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independent jeweler Niki Kavakonis. A U of T alum, Kavakonis did her masters and doctoral studies in Art and Architectural History. She used a natural uncut diamond for the ring and embedded it into the metal, forgoing traditional setting techniques. The result is a modern ring with the simple elegance of the Canadian icebergs that inspired it. Ms. Kavakonis' ingenuity was also reflected in a necklace of her own design. "Ice Floe: Blue Ice" is a rectangular gold pendant with an uncut triangular macle diamond jutting out to one side. The apparent simplicity of the piece is misleading: under UV light the diamond shines bright blue, breaking away from the pendant. In both pieces, Ms. Kavakonis pays tribute to the individuality of the naturally formed diamond crystals.

The much anticipated "Gem Vault" showcases some of the most incredible diamonds from around the world. Included are a rose corsage worn by the niece of Napoleon I and a pendant watch belonging to Catherine II of Russia. At the centre of the vault is the Incomparable Diamond, the third largest cut diamond in the world.

Other highlights are the "Milky Way" necklace and "The Aurora Butterfly of Peace," which represent the diamond's wide range of appeal and their captivating beauty.

Canadian designer Dieter Huebner designed the "Milky Way" in collaboration with Brinkhaus Jewelers, winning the DeBeers Diamonds International Award for creative commemoration of the new millennium. Made of exactly 2,000 diamonds set on a platinum frame, the "Milky Way" has an ethereal quality that reflects the majesty of its namesake. "I am captivated by the fire of the diamond," Mr. Huebner mused. "By fire, I mean its sparkle, its life, the play of the light and the colors of the rainbow."

"The Aurora Butterfly of Peace" was the result of twelve years of labour on the part of Alan Bronstein and Aurora Gems. The piece resembles a constellation of natural coloured diamonds forming the image of a butterfly. It's not jewelry—the diamonds aren't even set in a medium. Yet crowds gather around the case to gaze at the unconventional design. "Seeing a collection of coloured diamonds for the first time," Mr. Bronstein explains, "is like seeing a rainbow for the first time. It lifts your spirits, even if only for a few seconds, then you go back to daily life. But for that moment, you know there's more to life—there's something that can bring happiness."

Dr. Kimberly Tait, the ROM curator for this exhibit and a U of T professor, says she hopes The Nature of Diamonds will provide to the public a better understanding of the diamond: its explosive beginnings deep beneath the Earth's surface, the difficult mining processes, and Canada's growing role in the industry. The exhibit also treats the diamond as not only a favourite trinket and a girl's best friend, but as a paradigm of beauty and elegance.

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