

Diamond Butterfly on Display for a Week

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How many types of butterfly bling are there? There's Betsey Johnson butterfly bling for \$235. There's Mariah Carey butterfly bling for a reported \$31,200. Then there is serious museum butterfly bling for millions upon millions.

Yesterday, the American Museum of Natural History unveiled one of the view public collections of colored diamonds in the world: the Aurora Butterfly of Peace yesterday, which consists of 240 colored diamonds weighing a total of 167 carats. Assembled over 12 years by Alan Bronstein and Harry Rodman, the butterfly is one of perhaps three publicly viewable colored diamond (also known as 'fancy diamonds') collections in the world in the world. Two others have been publicly viewable: another one by Aurora Gems and one owned by De Beers, the diamond company.

The butterfly will be on display in the Morgan Memorial Hall of Gems for just one week, ending next Thursday.

While diamonds that are mined are mostly "white" or colorless, a minute percentage of natural diamonds actually come in a number of colors like black, orange and purple. The most common color is yellow, or champagne. Red, green, purple and blue are rare. The most famous blue diamond is arguably the 45-carat Hope Diamond, which is housed at the Smithsonian. (The Hope Diamond is the inspiration for the diamond in "Titanic.")

There are a number of rare and unusual colored diamonds in the butterfly design, including purple diamonds from Russia, blue and orange diamonds from South Africa, lime green ones from Brazil, plus violets and dozens of pinks from the Argyle Mine in Australia.

The Aurora diamonds were actually used for scientific study using a new type of fluorescence spectrometer. The spectrometers help identify whether colored diamonds are natural or doctored. Different colors have different causes.

Blue diamonds get their color mostly from boron. Greens get their colors from radiation. Pinks are due to crystal deformation. Purple diamonds have hydrogen in them. But scientists do not know why orange diamonds are orange.

George Harlow, the curator of minerals and gems for the museum, said their colored diamond exhibits have “the highest slobber factor of anything in the gem house” with “nose prints and handprints” commonly found on the glass. “In the special exhibitions we have had to move the colored diamonds because it would cause traffic problems,” he said.

This time they have turned it around, putting the diamonds out front by themselves to create a crowd to attract passersby to the rest of the exhibit. “They come over to look,” Mr. Harlow said.

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