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Rare and colorful diamonds on display in London

By Suzy Menkes
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LONDON — In the bright light, the diamonds, fixed like pin heads to trace a pyramid shape, give out fireworks of color. Splashes of daffodil yellow, orange, olive green, lavender blue and purple dazzle the eyes.

But when the light goes down, the gemstones seem even more miraculous and mysterious. This time, exposed to ultraviolet light, there is an inner glow that makes the colors dance like fireflies in the glass case at London's Natural History Museum.

The Aurora collection of 296 colored diamonds, with a 267.45 carat weight, has been collected and selected over 25 years by Alan Bronstein, an American dealer and gemologist. It was formerly displayed as the Aurora Pyramid of Hope at the American Museum of Natural History in New York from 1989 to 2005.

"It was like seeing a rainbow," says Bronstein of his initial discovery in 1980 of a canary yellow diamond. "That was what started me off on my journey. Not just to sell, but because I wanted to learn more. That was the first moment I found something I could be inspired by."

Since Bronstein thinks of the stones not just for their value but as an example of "the diversity of nature," it is fitting that their display in London should be at the Natural History Museum's new permanent display space: The Vault.

Situated at the far end of a long gallery displaying gems, crystals and meteorites, The Vault contains other exceptional geological pieces. They include the Devonshire emerald, a large uncut Colombian stone; a pink morganite beryl from Madagascar; a nugget of crystallized gold; and a meteorite from Mars that fell to earth in Egypt in 1911.

The Aurora Pyramid is the centerpiece because of the extraordinary variety of the colored diamonds that Bronstein put together with his partner Harry Rodman from 1986.

It is rare for diamonds to be removed from a context of power and value, or of the craftsmanship in the way that the stones are cut and mounted. But in this case, the Aurora Pyramid offers the gemstones as a wonder of nature.

As Alan Hart, curator of minerals at the Natural History Museum, says: "Each colored diamond tells its own story, giving us insight not only into its formation, but also to the deep earth processes that took place when the gem was formed."

Bronstein is aware that the growing fashion for "fancy" diamonds makes it even more difficult to find these rare stones and has therefore increased the value of the Aurora Pyramid. But he says that "the true value of a collection is sharing it with as many people who are interested to experience nature's diversity of expression."

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