

In the last decades of the 20th Century, one of the most vigorous and successful collectors of the literature of gems and jewelry has been Joseph O. Gill, B.Sc., G.G., F.G.A. and Christie's is privileged to offer his outstanding collection.

The rich panoply of books and papers in this collection not only represents the paradigm of a great jewelry history library, but also has the added distinction of being the best of its kind in America.

The volumes offered in this sale, and in subsequent jewelry sales to be conducted by Christie's in December of this year and in April and June of next year, were assembled before the collecting of early works on gems and jewelry assumed the almost frenzied proportions recent sale-room prices have reached today. The care and discernment shown in bringing this collection together has insured that the volumes offered have merit and éclat, and the connoisseurship shown by the collector has resulted in the dazzling array of material offered in this sale.

Joseph O. Gill assembled this major collection in a relatively short span of years—less than twenty all told. His purpose was simple and straight-forward, to put together a usable research library in English of all books, papers and journals on gems and jewelry. What he has achieved is akin to the formation of the great libraries of the Renaissance, and it has evolved both in quantity and quality far beyond the collector's original intent.

What is being offered in this and subsequent sales of the Gill Collection is by far the finest and most complete body of gemological and jewelry literature and ephemera in America, possibly the world. The dispersal of this collection will establish the benchmark in specialized library sales for years to come and will refresh and nourish both private and institutional libraries around the world.

Many of the items offered are unique. Most are extremely rare, museum-quality volumes. All are of a level of distinction and interest to astonish every literate person—gemological bibliophile or not—by its range and depth.

In forming his library, Mr. Gill brought both professional expertise and dogged persistence into play. He was fortunate in that he had the splendid combination of opportunity to discover and means to acquire; surely the best possible situation for a collector. More importantly, his knowledge of the field and his facility for self-control (rare in a collector of anything) assured that he accepted only the best, the rarest and the most desirable.

Mr. Gill's contributions to the body of literature on gems and jewelry have not been limited to the formation of a magnificent library. His own book, *Gill's Index*, is a comprehensive and invaluable source of gem information which provides a cumulative index to the world's leading journals and books on gemology, mineralogy, jewelry and the lapidary arts. It is the only book of its kind to be published by the Gemological Institute of America, and along with his numerous contributions to jewelry trade publications, has established him as a leader in the field of gemological research.

As Chief Gemologist for a leading Boston firm, and later as the head of the jewelry department of Sotheby's in Los Angeles and presently as the senior partner in the firm of Gill & Shortell in San Francisco, he stands on the cutting edge of a highly competitive and constantly changing profession. His success in the active day-to-day buying and selling of precious stones of the magnitude offered in this sale adds a perspective to his writing and professional opinions which can be matched by few individuals anywhere in America.

There is always some natural curiosity about why such a lovingly and pains-takingly assembled library should be sold *at all*. In Mr. Gill's case it is purely a developing interest in other more technical and esoteric aspects of gemology, of other goals to achieve, other mountains to climb. Whatever his reasons, the jewelry and gemological community are better off for his having demonstrated the perspicacity and zeal coupled with scholarship and erudition to bring together the remarkable library we see offered here today.

Neil Letson

*Neil Letson is an author, gemologist and jewelry historian. As a freelance journalist his articles have appeared in a wide range of magazines including Connoisseur, Smithsonian, The Saturday Evening Post, Antique Monthly and Gems & Gemology. Mr. Letson has served as a consultant on many international expeditions and lectures widely on various subjects related to gems and the history of jewelry.*