

## ARM CANDY

## Bracelets for the biceps

Armlets, which have been around for thousands of years, are having a modern moment in a variety of materials and styles

BY KATHLEEN BECKETT

In ancient times, armlets — bracelets made to sit between the elbow and the armpit — were worn by Egyptian rulers, Roman soldiers, Greek brides, Assyrian deities, and men and women throughout China, Greece, India, South America and the Celtic world.

Nowadays, bracelets for the biceps still are embraced globally, wrapping the arms of Dua Lipa, Rihanna and the spring 2022 models for Prada, Fendi, Tory Burch and Raf Simons, among others.

“While the statement earring is going nowhere fast, after its starring role in Zoom calls across the world for the last two years, we are looking for new ways to make a fresh jewelry statement and the upper arm bangle/cuff is a great way to do this,” wrote Maia Adams, a co-founder of Adorn, a jewelry business consultancy based in London. “It is fun and attention-grabbing, and a great way to express one’s personal style.”

And Kim Russell, whose Instagram feed, @thekimbino, has 147,000 followers, said armlets added a layer of style to an outfit because “it’s not a bangle or an anklet or something we’re used to seeing all the time.”

Here, jewelry designers and experts from around the world share their favorite armlets.

**ANA CAROLINA VALENCIA**  
Cali, Colombia

“The first armlet I designed was around five years ago,” Ms. Valencia wrote in an email, noting that the Gaia Armlet (\$300) was named for the Greek goddess of the earth and inspired by female power.

“This piece is handmade in bronze and has been 24-karat gold plated,” she wrote, a finish Ms. Valencia has used on many of her creations. Each end of the wrap style piece was adorned with leaves, made individually using a filigree technique.

“Armlets symbolize strength and when worn by women they are related to high self-confidence,” she continued. “I love to create statement pieces that are timeless and I definitely think that wearing an armlet is that kind of piece that simply is not a matter of fashion, is a matter of style.”

**AZZA FAHMY**  
Cairo

When Ms. Fahmy opened her luxury jewelry house in 1969, she wanted to “bring different cultures and heritage to life through unique contemporary designs,” wrote her daughter, Amina Ghali,



PRADA, VIA SHUTTERSTOCK



who now heads the brand’s atelier.

Armlets were present in Egyptian history, she wrote, citing as an example “our snake cuff, inspired from the Ptolemaic dynasty’s snake armlets.” The piece (\$2,920) was made of 18-karat gold and sterling silver, the brand’s trademark metal mix, and a choice of two stone combinations.

“We built the snake using the leveling technique, which built up the snake in multiple stages or layers to give depth,” Ms. Ghali wrote. “The final touches incorporate the Ottoman stone setting technique for the snake’s head,” with the stones “built up to create a flowerlike unit.”

Originally armlets were made without hinges but, she wrote, “we have incorporated a hinge mechanism to allow the cuff to open and close without losing the shape or form of the snake over time.”

**CHRISTINA ALEXIOU**  
Athens

“Armlets have always been a part of

my collection,” Ms. Alexiou wrote, “as, along with being beautiful, they also carry a rich cultural history.”

In ancient Greece, armlets were made from hammered gold and generally were worn in pairs by royals, the military and elite members of society, she continued. “The gifting of two armlets was an integral part of the rite of marriage; one armlet was given to the bride upon the engagement and the second was given upon the wedding. Greek soldiers would also wear them to battle as they were viewed as a symbol of comradery, strength, protection and courage.”

Ms. Alexiou said her creations — like her Heart Armlet (\$10,410), crafted from 18-karat hammered gold with a satin finish and carved with symbols painted black to add depth — are designed for the modern woman. “My armlets feature an open back and are constructed with 18-karat gold as it is malleable and offers great versatility,” she wrote, allowing customers to wear pieces on either the upper arm or on the

wrist, as they choose.

**GALERIE PÉNELOPE**  
Paris

Camille Cuvelier, a jewelry expert and historian, spends her time hunting for vintage jewelry that she then sells on her website, Galerie Pénélope. “I found this armlet in an antique shop in the south of France,” she wrote in an email. “I know that the antique dealer got it from a lady who had inherited it, but that’s all I know unfortunately.”

But Ms. Cuvelier said the piece had to have been made in the 1920s “because of its Egyptian-inspired style, which was very fashionable at the time, especially since the discovery of Tutankhamen’s tomb in 1922.” She said the armlet (2,900 euros, \$2,992) was made of 18-karat yellow gold and chased with palmettes holding a blue chalcidony cabochon.

“There was a way of wearing the bracelet which is inspired by the Egyptian style,” Ms. Cuvelier wrote, “but which is above all possible thanks to the dresses that left arms and legs free dur-

ing the Roaring Twenties: Hair and clothes were made short and liberated the woman in the literal and figurative sense.”

**GAY ISBER**  
Austin, Texas

Big, bold and one-of-a-kind pieces are Ms. Isber’s specialty — or, as she wrote in an email, “handmade, sustainable jewelry meant to start conversations.” But not to weigh down the wearer, something that could present a problem when creating an armlet.

Her solution? “I use a few tricks,” she wrote. “On my desk was a cracked plastic drinking glass; as I was about to throw it away, I impulsively stuck my hand inside and a light bulb went off. The tapered shape was perfect for an armlet.”

The rest of the materials for her Golden Armlet (\$650) were lightweight, too, she added. “I used only a thin covering of epoxy clay. Everything else is acrylic: The inside form (plastic cup), cabochons (vintage acrylic) and the gold-plated acrylic disks are as light as fingernails. I used gold micro powder on a white clay to create the organic bright gold look.”

Ms. Isber said that sometimes she added loops to accommodate elastic straps. And, she wrote, “I’ve had some that have a locking wire across the back, which they would have used in ancient times. I love classical jewelry from antiquity. I must have been a Roman way back.”

**LILY GABRIELLA**  
London

“I have been creating armlets by special order for around five years,” wrote Lily Gabriella Elia, founder and creative director of her namesake brand. “I started per a client’s request as they had become quite a popular accessory, especially in South America.”

Her email described “a stack of bespoke armlets that I created for a Brazilian client; they’re 18-karat gold with rubies, sapphires and diamonds. The client loved the idea of mixing precious gemstones to complement the bold choice of color in her wardrobe, yet she wears the armlets day-to-day with a casual and relaxed sense of style.” Prices start at 8,000 pounds, or \$9,766.

Ms. Elia wrote that she used clients’ measurements to ensure that armlets would fit well and not slide down their arms: “They can be worn individually or stacked, depending on the client’s preference. Armlets can be a fun and personal way to reinvent a look and a chic touch to build on the trend for traditional stacking bracelets.”

## SOCIAL MEDIA

## Talking jewelry on TikTok

Influencers reach a whole new generation of jewelry shoppers through the popular video-sharing app

BY MELANIE ABRAMS

In August 2020, when Julie Dang, a 31-year-old psychiatric nurse practitioner in Houston, started a TikTok account to talk about her jewelry and luxury goods collection, she never expected that, a couple of years later, 21,500 people would watch her, as @jkimdee, shopping at the local Van Cleef & Arpels boutique for a Mother’s Day gift.

But those are the kinds of numbers that TikTok, the world’s most successful video-sharing app, has said it intends to grow — in this case, to reach the next generation of potential jewelry lovers: the 18- to 24-year-old Gen Zers, who make up more than 40 percent of TikTok’s more than one billion users, according to the marketing data company Statista.

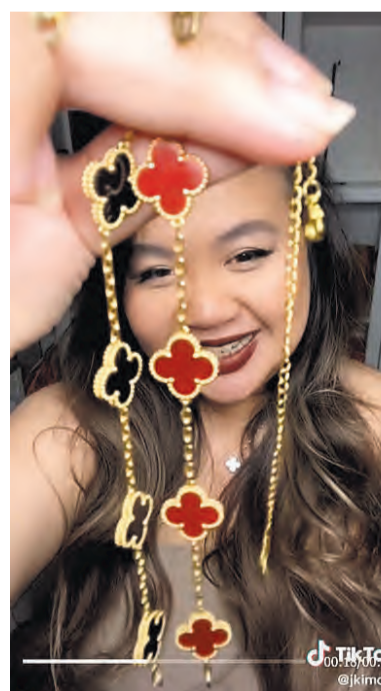
Browns, the London luxury retailer, has been noticing. “We often have Gen Z clients WhatsApping their personal shoppers with screenshots of jewelry they have seen styled on TikTok, wanting to jump on to the latest trend,” Hollie Harding, a Browns buying manager whose job includes making jewelry selections, wrote in an email.

Teresa Sandeman, a 22-year-old student whose TikTok username is @l3asandeman, said she searches the app before she buys jewelry. “People actually make videos saying, ‘This is good; this is bad; this is what happened when I wore it,’ et cetera — and it’s an actual person, and you can actually see them say it, so I trust it more,” she said during a video interview from her family home in Porto, Portugal.

Many TikTokers say they try to ensure their videos reflect such authenticity and personality.

Humor also works, or at least it has for Ms. Dang, who has tallied a total of 1.3 million likes on all her videos. “I’m sarcastic. And make a lot of jokes,” she said on a video call from the game room in her home, where she occasionally makes videos for her TikTok.

She has used her iPhone and a tripod to record good and bad shopping experiences, to share candid observations about her own jewelry (like the four-dia-



mond, rose-gold Hermès Kelly bangle with a handbag-like clasp that “catches onto things”) and to review new collections (including Van Cleef & Arpels’s Zodiacs collection, which, she said, was “giving me gold chocolate-coin vibes”).

Making the right production choices for TikTok posts can be difficult, Ms. Dang said. Sometimes “the ones I put more effort into don’t get much traction, but the videos I found weren’t that interesting, people really like,” she said. “So I’m trying to figure out the algorithm.”

Julia Hackman Chafe, 23, said she has tried to blend a lively, informative approach with celebrity gossip in her @jewelstwithjules videos. That is “what I like to talk about, as I only create content that I want to see,” she said during a video interview from her New York office.

Ms. Hackman Chafe is the social media manager and administrative assistant for Intercolor USA, her family’s colored-gemstone wholesale business; she set up her TikTok channel in October

2021 after she couldn’t find an influencer to work for the company.

While some of her videos tout Intercolor’s activities, others examine unrelated sparklers, like Drake’s diamond necklaces, or the Lorraine Schwartz jewelry that Blake Lively wore to the 2022 Met Gala. The jewelry, Ms. Hackman Chafe said, becomes “fun as a 30-second video that spits a bunch of facts at you with a fun background and pictures and is super interactive.”

But sifting through information and pictures to decide “what will perform well and what information people want or need to know” is more difficult than it might seem, she said, especially when it comes to deciding what length a given video should be: “Because when my videos get too long, people stop watching them.”

And monetizing posts can be difficult. Ms. Dang, for example, said she had earned only a total of \$420 from the TikTok Creator Fund, available to influencers with at least 10,000 followers. “That’s not a significant income,” she



said, noting that she has 37,600 followers and “videos that went viral” with hundreds of thousands of views.

Kira Kirby, a 24-year-old public relations executive based in London, said she has been posting information about jewelry that people “don’t already know” on TikTok since December 2021, five months after she started her fashion and lifestyle channel, @kirakirbyy. (A couple of months later, she became an account executive at Grayling, a public relations agency whose office in Poland represents TikTok in that country; Ms. Kirby said her work has no connection with her TikTok posts.)

As of press time, Ms. Kirby had 16,900 followers and a total of 899,600 likes, plus a spotlight tab on her user page highlighting the jewelry videos, to help her followers find them more easily.

Ms. Kirby said her jewelry videos focus on her own collection. She sometimes talks about her wish list (which includes a skull ring from Polly Wales and a Bulgari Serpenti bracelet) and, other

times, asks her viewers’ opinions about which necklace she should wear for a night out (her gold Tiffany Ball Pendant or a four-strand pearl choker). The videos are compilations of narration and photographs, set to music to “keep the audience interested.” She also always adds a question to viewers at the end of each video, “so people engage,” she said.

Most Gen Z tastes — and pocketbooks — don’t match the rarefied world of high jewelry. But Bebe Bakhshi, 39, intends to ensure viewers are at least aware of it, and of @Champagne\_Gem, her TikTok username that she also uses for her jewelry retail website, Instagram feed and blog.

Her first TikTok video, posted in March 2021, introduced her gems. In other videos, she talks about trade shows, from GemGenève to Jewellery Arabia in Bahrain, “where you have more chance of seeing high jewelry” than you would on a visit to a boutique, she said during a video interview from her home office in Beaumaris, a suburb of Melbourne, Australia.

As for the future, Ms. Bakhshi and Ms. Hackman Chafe are expecting the Venice International Film Festival, scheduled to run from Wednesday to Sept. 10, to drive some content as, Ms. Bakhshi said, “all those amazing Italian jewelers will feature the best of the best on the celebrities, so that’s where you can see some of the most exceptional pieces of the year.” (Bulgari, Pomellato and Pasquale Bruni are among the Italian brands that have adorned celebrities for the festival, and Cartier, the Paris jewelry house, is one of the primary sponsors.)

Ms. Hackman Chafe, however, was anticipating the Venice festival showing of Netflix’s “Blonde,” “since it’s a movie creating lots of buzz,” she wrote in a later email.

“Celebrities I try to make TikToks on mostly wear diamonds,” she wrote. But Ana de Armas, who plays Marilyn Monroe in the biopic, has worn sapphires on the red carpet, so, she wrote, “I have a feeling she’ll really bring it with her jewelry, since ‘diamonds are a girl’s best friend’”

**Wrapped tight**  
Armlets have been appearing on fashion runways, including Prada’s spring 2022 show, center. Clockwise from top right, Galerie Pénélope’s Antique Bracelet Art Deco; Cleopatra’s Favorite Armlets by Gay Isber; Samba Armlets by Lily Gabriella; Christina Alexiou’s Heart Armlet; Azza Fahmy’s snake cuff; Ana Carolina Valencia’s Gaia armlet.