

Golden Spiders

By Ettagale Blauer

Golden Spiders really? When I read *The Golden Spiders*, the idea of a woman wanting to own and wear a pair of "real gold" earrings in the shape of spiders seemed perfectly reasonable but then, I've seen much stranger jewelry in my guise as a jewelry writer and expert. Six legs, eight legs, fins or scales, women apparently will wear jewelry in the shape of practically anything, but there is undeniably a particular love of insects.

The fascination with creepy crawlers is nearly as old as recorded civilization. As far back as the Late Old Kingdom, circa 2575 BC, the Egyptians were fascinated with scarabs, leaving behind many scarabs made of a variety of beautiful materials, including lapis lazuli. Considering that the scarab's personal habits are somewhat unappealing – it spends its days rolling a ball of dung around – it's amusing and amazing that it became such a revered creature. For jewelry lovers, however, the reality of the habits of the insect world bears little relation to the objects of their desire. Spiders, a group that includes some of the most deadly of the creepy crawlers, have fascinated jewelers ranging from the ancient Egyptians to René Lalique and Louis Comfort Tiffany.

While I personally find four pairs of legs to be excessive, spiders have other qualities that are even more repugnant. According to the *Britannica*, "All spiders have venom glands, but the venoms of only a few are harmful to humans." In spite of this dubious and modest caveat, spiders and other bugs have become some of the most sought after pieces of jewelry. Spiders, dragonflies, bees, butterflies, and more have been captured by jewelers. Anyone who would like to view a fairly large group of these can check out, *Jeweled Bugs and Butterflies*, an Abrams book. There you can see larger than life representations of the title creatures – larger, that is, than either the actual insect or the piece of jewel. A gold spider pin set with a moonstone, for example measuring just 1 1/8" x 3/4", marches across an entire page of the book. Most of the jewels in the book are in private collections, so for the arachnid aficionado and kin, this is a rare chance indeed to see some of the finest examples of the jeweler's art. Chapter titles range from the descriptive such as Scarabs, Butterflies and Moths, and Dragonflies; to the whimsical: Creepy Crawlers, Buzzers and Stingers, and Winged Women, the latest covering the designs of the Art Nouveau period. Butterfly wings, in particular, lend themselves to lavish design and decoration, and more than two dozen examples range from plique-à-jour enamel to diamond pavé.

But if you're in the market for your own creepy crawly thing, consider buying something old, something leggy, something scaly, something green. Estate jewelry auctions often include specimens of these species. For example, in April of 1999, Christie's sold a jeweled lizard for \$5,750, a snake for \$8,625, and a serpent (how it differs from a snake I do not know) for \$25,300.

So when Pete Drossos says, "She had big gold spiders for earrings, spiders with their legs stretched out, pure gold," Wolfe may have been skeptical but I'm not. I've been there and seen that.

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