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Special Selection

The Shozo Izuishi Selection No. 2



Ago Bay, IseShima

A Pearly Tale of Tenfold Fortune

Photography/Satoru Naito

Rare jewels loved by queens

In the famous story of Cleopatra and the pearl, Cleopatra dropped a pearl into a vessel of wine and swallowed it once it dissolved, with Marc Antony looking on. The pearl, which Cleopatra had worn as earrings, was valued at around \$375,000 at the time, and would be worth an astronomical amount if converted into today's currency.

Marc Antony fell for Cleopatra, who was around 28 when they met in 41 BCE, upon seeing her nonchalantly swallow the pearl. He was so attracted to this daring queen that this event may have been the turning point leading to their eventual marriage.

Some say the vessel contained vinegar. Whether wine or vinegar, pearls are insoluble. Cleopatra essentially swallowed the pearl as a pill. For her, swallowing the pearl—which was seen

as a drug for eternal youth and longevity—was possibly her way of showing the



The 7.5 mm-bead string in the front is a common pearl necklace. The 10.5 mm-bead necklace in the middle is obviously larger. The 9.5 mm bead at the top is a valuable rare pearl.

importance she placed on her life and prosperity. Then and now, people

believe that pearls hold a mysterious, spiritual power.

Pure, innocent and eternal

A discussion on queens who loved pearls with a passion is not complete without mentioning Elizabeth I (1533–1603), who was said to enjoy wearing pearl bracelets on a regular basis and even adorned the borders of her fans with pearls. In the portrait painted by George Gower in 1588 the Queen seems to be buried in pearls. She wore hair ornaments bejeweled with pearls, along with a pearl necklace and earrings, but she also had countless pearls stitched into the creases of her garments.

Naturally, these pearls needed to be removed and reapplied when the garments were cleaned or revamped, so the Queen had many seamstresses attending her. Nowadays we would

Natural Akoya Pearl Necklace (Outside)

Produced in Ago Bay, Ise-Shima, Hanadama Certified AAA
Color: White pink
Size: 10.5–11 mm beads
Clasp: White gold
12,600,000 yen incl. tax

Natural Akoya Pearl Necklace (Inside)

Produced in Ago Bay, Ise-Shima, Hanadama Certified AAA
Color: Natural blue
Size: 10.5–11 mm beads
Clasp: White gold
9,975,000 yen incl. tax



真珠

Six factors decide pearl prices: size, shape, color, complexion, nacre thickness, and luster. Prized as miracles created by the gods, cultured pearls are cultivated for six years by the mother sea, which dedicates labor, time and effort to cleaning the shell daily. Also called shien (fate of the gods) pearls, they are of the highest quality and are the pinnacle of pearls. If the probability of creating a pearl over 9.5 mm in size is less than 0.0001%, consider how many years it takes to produce one measuring 10.5 mm. The pearls on this necklace are close to 11 mm. Considering the current state of the sea and the uncertainty over future production, this rare masterpiece may well be the last miracle of its kind.

Natural Akoya Pearl Cufflinks

Produced in Ago Bay, Ise-Shima,
Hanadama Certified AAA
Color: Natural blue (natural)
Size: 10.5–11 mm beads
Mounting: White gold
840,000 yen incl. tax



The most popular akoya pearls are the pale blues. These natural colors are not processed at all. Over 10.5 mm in size, this pearl with high-quality color, shape, nacre thickness and luster has rarity value and can only be created through accumulated miracles.

probably refer to this occupation as a pearl changer.

Queen Elizabeth's lady-in-waiting, Lady Howard, once appeared in a stunning velvet garment studded in pearls. On seeing this, Queen Elizabeth is quoted as saying, "I should be wearing that dress." One could go as far as to say she had a time-honored belief in pearls, an attachment inherited from her father, King Henry VIII (1491–1547), who was also a believer in pearls.

As the self-proclaimed virgin queen, Queen Elizabeth also believed the pearl was a symbol of virginity. She considered the pearl—the crystallization of purity, innocence, and eternity—supreme. Queen Elizabeth doubtlessly believed that the more pearls she wore, the more her body and soul was purified.

A mystery bead from the sea

The liquid drops of tears that you have shed,
Shall come again, transform'd to orient pearl,
Advantaging their loan with interest
Of ten times double gain of happiness.

The pearl's mystique can be traced back as far as the 15th century when Shakespeare, included the above verse in his historical drama, Richard III. How pearls formed was a mystery at the time, and the perfection of the pearl may have been seen as something magical that was too profound for human intellect. The mystery surrounding pearls remains

today in the 21st century. The pearl was once said to be one life in a thousand, because finding one pearl in one thousand opened oyster shells was considered lucky. However, this referred to a simple pearl. A large, beautiful pearl cannot be found in one thousand oyster shells, and finding one in ten thousand or even one hundred thousand shells is a blessing. The perfect pearl is the elite of the elite—more difficult to find than money in a sand dune.

The words coating and luster are used when referring to a pearl's virtues, but much is still unknown of these terms and pearls, in general. When an oyster shell detects a foreign object, it wraps a nacreous layer around the object to protect itself; thus a pearl is born. This much is common knowledge. However,



Natural Akoya Pearls Tiny keshi-pearl 30-row necklace

Produced in Ago Bay, Ise-Shima
Color: White (natural)
Clasp: White gold
1,050,000 yen incl. tax

Some keshi pearls—sand-like, round, without a core, and measuring less than 1 mm—are unprecedented. The mind-boggling job of opening a hole in the middle of this tiny pearl and threading it is a next-to-impossible task undertaken only by skilled technicians.

a beautiful pearl requires a splendid nacreous layer. This layer's beauty depends on various factors, such as water quality and temperature, and the motion of the waves. Further influences can only be referred to as heaven's blessings and the universe's mysteries. One can only conclude that the sea off Toba in Ise Bay is heaven's exquisite cradle.

Perfect, miraculous brilliance

In Somerset Maugham's short story, A String of Beads, the tutor Miss Robinson sends an imitation necklace to a shop for repairs. The shop mistakenly returns a necklace of genuine pearls worth several million yen. The story continues

as Miss Robinson's life is temporarily transformed by wearing these genuine pearls. This story alone might convince readers that pearls hold a supernatural power.

The pearl necklaces featured in this installment are more magnificent than the necklace in Maugham's story. A large drop pearl such as this, which is over 10.5 mm, is rare. Stringing perfect pearls with a uniform excellence into a necklace such as this is nothing less than a miracle. To lay eyes on such a stunning necklace makes me glad I have lived long enough to see it. I may never have the privilege of beholding a large-drop necklace as fine as this again.

Shozo Izuishi

Born 1944. Joined the fashion industry in 1964. Izuishi has forged a career as a fashion designer, consultant, and critic. Author of numerous books including *Otoko wa Naze Nekutai wo Musubu no ka* (Why do Men Wear Neckties?) (Shinchosha) and *Bruu Jiinzu no Bunkashi* (Blue Jeans: a Cultural History) (NTT Shuppan). His recent work, *Suutsu no Hyakka Jiten* (An Encyclopedia of Suits) (Banraisha), instructs men on how to wear a suit and has attracted favorable reviews.

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