

SOLITAIRE

THE FINE ART OF JEWELLERY AND LIVING

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N°105

ASIA PACIFIC EDITION

*Modern
Romance*



INSIDE THE FRAME

London-based fashion photographer John-Paul Pietrus is also known for his brand, Francis de Lara, which produces bespoke, dramatic, gold plated, and gem accented eyewear. Equally fascinating is his new line of fine jewellery, where his love for Renaissance art and history underpins the designs.

Words by **Smitha Sadanandan**

Photos courtesy of **John-Paul Pietrus**





Eve Eyewear in handmade Tuscan leather purse-case; **Below** John-Paul Pietrus

Hi John-Paul. Tell us more about yourself.

I was born in Manila, Philippines and eventually, my parents moved the family to the U.S. I studied fine art photography, painting, and art history at the Minneapolis College of Art and Design (MCAD). Here I realised that picking up the camera was natural to me, as was the paintbrush.

How did you make the transition to fashion photography?

In Hong Kong, I began working in news and reportage, which I quickly discovered was not my calling so I focused on fashion photography. Although I think I had great ideas and a way of seeing, I don't think I was a good photographer until after many years, to be honest.

How did you end up learning how to craft jewellery?

In 2015, I had had enough of the negative sides of the fashion industry, which really compacted and ran rampant that year for me, so I decided to take a mini sabbatical and escape London for a while.

Three of the best jewellery schools in Europe are in Florence and I've always had a fascination with fine jewellery as a photographer, marvelling at all of these incredible creations that arrived on-set from all the big houses, as well as independent designers. Additionally, I've always been interested in Renaissance art, and Metallo Nobile, where I ended up studying, provided me with an education that touched upon the Renaissance, as well as precious and semi-precious materials. It was a very personal education, being largely one-on-one; I particularly loved and appreciated the zeal of my teacher, Enrico.





Clockwise Ruby Teardrop Eyewear, The Three Serpents Eyewear, Adam & Eve Earrings, My Bleeding Heart II.O Eyewear, Ruby Teardrop Eyewear

What drew you to the idea of launching a jewelled eyewear brand?

It was quite a natural decision that came from a point of inspiration when I was at the Uffizi Gallery in Florence. I was looking at portraits of royalty and clergy bedecked in exquisite jewellery, and then it dawned on me that no one was wearing glasses! Thus, I wondered what would it look like if these very characters had glasses to match the rest of their outfits? There is also the fact that as far as my research could provide, there was no one really doing it. My aim was to create couture art glasses that meet jewellery.

What's the core aesthetic of Francis de Lara?

There is a Renaissance spirit in my work and it is important to me that things have a strong handmade presence. I also want the pieces to look like well-preserved relics with the wisdom of age and time. In 'Eve,' I made

stone settings devoid of gems to give the idea of stones lost or pilfered over time.

The first collection was called 'Serpents and Ribbons' and these motifs are omni-present in jewellery, especially of the Renaissance era. I incorporated traditional materials of sterling silver, precious and semi-precious gemstones, and solid gold elements as tradition and historical reference is an integral part of the brand DNA.

What inspired your fine jewellery line?

It was Francis de Lara admirers who urged me to make non-eyewear pieces. They wanted something more wearable and more affordable. Additionally, although there are still certain restrictions that jewellery has to adhere to, I think the variables are greater: The eyewear cannot be more than 75 grams before it gets uncomfortable, but you can wear a cuff or necklace which weighs more than that. I have more freedom to design things for other parts of the body. Although, my fine jewellery range will always hold the brand DNA of the eyewear.

What do you cherish most these days?

JPP: I am totally in love with my jewellery life and I really cherish my time conversing with other designers, gem dealers, writers, and more. Personally, people in this industry seem more genuine and pleasant than those in fashion. I would also cherish the opportunity to collaborate with a big house – what De Grisogono is doing with their 'Creativity in Residence' is great; I would love to do that someday, as I am sure most designers would.

Where is Francis de Lara available?

JPP: At present, I ship internationally from my website, francisdelara.com. The original 'Ruby Teardrop,' 'Eve' and 'Three Serpents' are available at matchesfashion.com, which ships to over 176 countries. Some pieces are also available at juliacastelli.com.

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