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August 26, 2020

Highlights from the Largest Independent Handbag Collection in the U.S.  
to be Exhibited at the Coral Gables Museum.

# PURSEONALITY

## A STYLISH HANDBAG HISTORY



**Coral Gables, FL, August 26, 2020** – The Coral Gables Museum is pleased to announce the opening of the exhibition *PURSEonality: A Stylish Handbag History*, encompassing highlights from the personal collection of Ilene Hochberg Wood. Conceived through a partnership between Wood and Historic Bethlehem Museums & Sites, Pennsylvania, where it premiered, the show will be on view at the Coral Gables Museum from September 15<sup>th</sup>, 2020 to January 7<sup>th</sup>, 2021.

The collection ranges in style from folk art, to contemporary designer, to embroidered, and numbers into the thousands, making it the largest in the U.S., if not the world. Visitors will have the opportunity to explore a timeline of the handbag, representing the trends of each

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decade. They will experience a selection of handbag superlatives featuring the most rare, unusual and expensive purses acquired by Wood in her decades of collecting. Also included in the show is the series *BAG LUNCH with Ilene Hochberg Wood*, a collection of short videos where the collector abounds on the history and anecdotes on specific items in her collection.



Highlights include major A-list designer brands from the past and present including Chanel, Hermes, Dior, Judith Leiber and more. The display at the Coral Gables Museum will explore themes including Most Royal, Most Talkative, The Legends and The New Kids. The artist bag section will spotlight bags that are hand-decorated or inspired by famous artworks.

“We are very excited to be presenting this unique exhibition,” stated Museum Executive Director John Allen. “The collection of purses that Ilene has amassed over decades is not only the largest in the world, but incredibly diverse. It captures looks and styles ranging from Hollywood Glamour and the timeless chic of the legendary jet set, to unpretentiously playful, vintage and specialty pieces. The enormous collection features not only the classic Chanel and the glittery allure of Judith Lieber, but also unique custom and vintage pieces. It is a trip through time, and each piece has a unique and different story to tell.”

Ilene Wood holds many bags near and dear including two handbag designers who are responsible for many of the designs we see in today’s modern handbag world, Anne-Marie of Paris and Nettie Rosenstein. Anne-Marie of Paris was a Parisian designer in 1940’s. Her specialty was novelty bags such as the “Champagne and Ice Bucket” and “Telephone” and her business was based in a grand hotel in Paris. The collection is considered one-of-a-kind in its arena and another version of the “Telephone” is part of the collection at The Costume Institute at the Met. Nettie Rosenstein was an American designer in the 20th century, based in NYC and deemed to be one of the most highly-regarded American designers by LIFE Magazine. Known for both fashion and accessories, Mamie Eisenhower carried a Nettie Rosenstein handbag to the Presidential Inauguration of her husband which was co-designed by Judith Leiber, who worked under Nettie until starting her own business and legacy in 1963.

“I view my collection from both aesthetic and academic perspectives, and always seek specific handbags to fill a gap in the collection. I read extensively on fashion history and the art of adornment to learn as much as I can about my growing collection,” says Wood.

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She continues, "Women love handbags. They are totems and objects of desire that convey who we are and what we hold dear, both literally and figuratively. Look at any woman and the bag she carries, and you will learn a lot about her and the image she wants to convey to the world. Empty the bag and examine its contents to learn who she really is and what she finds essential to her everyday life."

The collection which now numbers at over 3,000 handbags and counting, is under review for a Guinness Book World Record.

*PURSEonality* is sure to create excitement among viewers of all ages and spark an appreciation of fashion history and the arts. Wood seeks to travel the show to additional venues after its debut in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, and this exhibition at the Coral Gables Museum.



### Images (from top to bottom):

Peter Gourniak, *Jewelry-Encrusted Trunk Bag*, Courtesy of Ilene Hochberg Wood © 2006

Peter Gourniak, *Champagne Bucket Handbag*, Courtesy of Ilene Hochberg Wood © Circa 1940s

### About Ilene Hochberg Wood, Collector:

A lifetime collector of art, Ilene Hochberg Wood holds a B.S. in Design and Environmental Analysis from Cornell University and is an avid community activist involved in a number of non-profit organizations. After spending eight years in retail management as a Director of Fashion Coordination and Visual Merchandising for several department and specialty stores, she then founded the pet apparel company Dogwear. She is also the author of several pet parody books, including *DOGUE*, a canine version of *VOGUE*, which became an international bestseller. Wood is most passionate when sharing personal anecdotes about each piece of her handbag collection and takes pride in knowing every detail - the designer, where they were purchased, events she has carried them to and each one's special feature. When not in exhibition, many are kept in her home and an army bunker on her property in Pennsylvania.

### About Coral Gables Museum:

The Coral Gables Museum fosters an appreciation for the Civic Arts in Coral Gables. It explores and celebrates the history, vision, urban and environmental design, and cultural landscape of the City Beautiful within a broad audience that goes from children, families, and community members to national and international visitors. The museum optimizes its



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mission by cultivating effective partnerships, and providing programming that includes exhibitions, educational programs, lectures, tours, publications, and special events.

## **PURSEonality; A Stylish Handbag History**

September 15<sup>th</sup>, 2020 – January 7<sup>th</sup>, 2021  
Gallery 109 and Anthony R. Abraham Family Gallery  
Coral Gables Museum



 **Historic Bethlehem  
MUSEUMS & SITES**  
In association with the Smithsonian Institution

**Coral Gables Museum**  
285 Aragon Avenue, Coral Gables, FL 33134  
[www.CoralGablesMuseum.org](http://www.CoralGablesMuseum.org) | [info@coralgablesmuseum.org](mailto:info@coralgablesmuseum.org) |  
**305.603.8067**

**Museum Hours:**  
**Monday - Sunday: 12pm - 5pm**

*\*Amid the current COVID-19 Pandemic the museum has implemented a few changes to better protect our visitors and staff. Sanitation stations will be available throughout the venue, as well as yellow floor markers to assist in maintaining social distancing. Due to Miami-Dade County ordinances, facial coverings are mandatory. We strongly encourage you to RSVP in our website ([www.coralgablesmuseum.org](http://www.coralgablesmuseum.org)) ahead of your visit and pre-purchase tickets to avoid in-person transactions at the Museum.*



For more information:  
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*Special thanks to collector ilene hochberg wood and to josé valdés-fauli*

This exhibition encompasses highlights from the personal collection of Ilene Hochberg Wood. The handbags range in style from folk art, to contemporary designer, to embroidered, and numbers into the thousands, making it the largest collection in the U.S., if not the world. Visitors will have the opportunity to explore a timeline of the handbag, representing the trends of each decade. They will experience a selection of handbag superlatives featuring the most rare, unusual and expensive purses acquired by Wood in her decades of collecting. Also included in the show is the series BAG LUNCH with Ilene Hochberg Wood, a collection of short videos where Wood abounds on the history and anecdotes on specific pieces.

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