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Passion Made Tangible: Christopher Dobranski's Peregrine Falcon

The Idar-Oberstein-based gem carver relates the painstaking work that led to his latest stunning creation.

I created the Peregrine Falcon carving after completing my Parliament of Owls series (see Summer 2024 *G&J* pp. 40–43). Although I have carved gem material every day for many years, I am always looking to improve my techniques in carving and finishing. I challenge myself to improve upon what I did in the last carving. Perhaps this is a form of obsessive disorder; perhaps this is just part of being an artist that strives for perfection. I was restless after the Owls series and, taking stock, I considered the very large citrine rough crystal from Minas Gerais, Brazil, which was sitting on my workbench.

I am passionate about carving animals in such a way that they are 'brought to life'. Birds, particularly birds of prey, are among my favourite animals to create. I am from Vancouver Island, on the west coast of Canada. There, I have had many experiences with large raptors, but the one that always fascinated me is the 'fighter jet' of birds: the peregrine falcon. I had the appropriate gemstone to carve; now I needed to sketch a design that captured the subtle movement and form of a falcon sitting on a branch. Once I had the sketch, I could begin the long process of bringing this stone to life.

The process began with roughing out the stone to where the falcon's form was ready for detailing. I wanted to push the stone to its very limits. Within this carving, I wanted to see feathers moving in the wind. I wanted it to be clear that this falcon was surveying the landscape and looking for his next meal. When I started the detailing of the bird, I needed tools that could not be bought. Thus, the next part of the journey was the design and development of specialised diamond-sintering tools I made myself that allowed me to push the stone to where I was satisfied.

As days turned into months, The Falcon became my next obsession. I still only have a rough idea of how long I sat and carved. When I was finished and satisfied with the carving, then came the polishing, which was not a simple task. Many small steps were required until the final polish made the stone glow; the feathers were like fibre optics with the tips on fire.

For the final construction I needed the eyes to look 'alive'; if they are not correct even the best animal carving would look lifeless. I pride myself on the eyes I design for my carvings. For the Falcon, I chose blue Indian sapphire with palladium. The combination gave this falcon a spark of life and intelligence. When it came to work on the 18K gold for the eyes, beak and talons – a choice I made before gold prices skyrocketed – I worked with Volkmar Juchem, one of the best goldsmiths working today (and my best friend). We have developed a process that makes the gold fit precisely and function 'as one' with the gem material that comprises the object. Thus, when you look at the falcon as a whole, you see all the material as one object, rather than a stone with gold attached.

When I finally had a chance to sit and look at the work and see what I created, I literally cried with satisfaction. I have invested roughly 700 hours into the carving and design; the goldwork and finishing added about 300 hours. A year has passed since I finished the Peregrine Falcon, but I am satisfied that to date this is one of my greatest works. ■





To create the Peregrine Falcon, Christopher Dobranski transformed a seven-kilogram citrine crystal from Minas Gerais, Brazil, into a 1,860 gm carving. The eyes, beak and talons use 26.58 grams of 18K gold. The bird's eyes are created from 3.20 ctw Indian sapphire and 0.64 gm of palladium. Photos by Patrick Oscuri.