CITRINE;
A FALL COLORED GEM THAT ANYONE CAN AFFORD...

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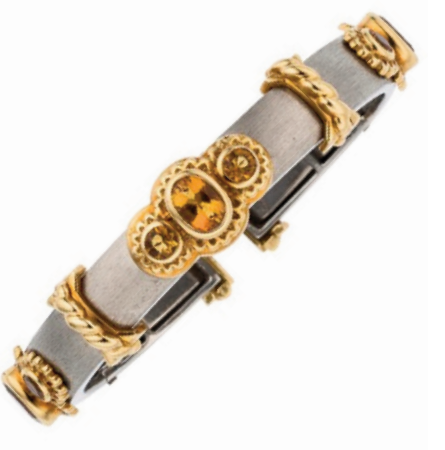
Quartz, the second most common mineral in the world's crust composition, has many uses in our lives. The quartz group encompasses species and varieties, use of which predates history. Unfortunately, for the majority of gem professionals, it is in the "not-so-important" category because it is readily available and very affordable. Such commonality creates a setback especially in disclosure. Quartz is most probably one of the most synthesized and treated gem materials known. Yet, due to its low price point, detailed identification is not a typical practice. Conventional gem testing would reveal the quartz identity but not the synthetic or natural origin, nor most of the color treatments.

Citrine, the transparent yellow variety of quartz, comes in many shades of yellow, often with orange to brown modifiers. Additional to natural versus synthetic origin, one needs to be reminded that almost all natural citrine in the market is heat treated amethyst. Is this news? Of course not! Even ancient Romans knew how to heat treat amethyst to obtain citrine. Here comes the importance of color again. If an affordable, natural, transparent, yellow gem is needed, citrine is the first answer. Interestingly, natural citrine colors can be seen in natural ametrine, the purple-yellow bicolored variety of quartz from Bolivia. Similar coloration is seen in collectable crystals from South Africa and Brazil. Unless these natural crystals are damaged, they will sell in the collector's market due to their rarity and will not end up in lapidarist hands.

73.28 carats citrine.
Courtesy of Bonham's.



Citrine, 18K gold, stainless steel bracelet by Kaufmann de Suisse.
Courtesy of Heritage Auctions.

A pair of Brazilian amethyst geodes, with one half heated into citrine. Courtesy of Bonham's.

19th century citrine and 14K gold seal. Courtesy of Heritage Auctions

Availability of citrine has increased with the discovery of the vast amethyst sources in Brazil during the 19th century. Since amethyst occurs in very light to very dark purples, the heated version turned citrine would reflect the color variation. So much so that medium to dark orangy yellow citrines would have their own trade name, madeira. Based on another feature of amethyst, citrine too can be found as very large, sometimes gigantic, crystals. Such availability and well-known quartz toughness make citrine a popular carving material. However, large crystals over 40 carats would not demand high per carat price. On the contrary, per carat price starts falling for large cut stones as their use is limited. In the case of carvings, it is the work and the artistry for which the price is paid; size is a secondary concern.

A practicing gemologist is restricted in distinguishing natural from synthetic quartz via conventional gem testing methods, unless they have access to XRF equipment. However, once natural inclusions are detected via magnification, at least the natural origin of the crystal is confirmed. As for the color origin of citrine, the safest and most ethical approach is the full disclosure of heat treatment ◆

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