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EXPERIMENTAL JEWELLERY – THE DEVELOPMENT OF A CRAFTS TRADITION INTO ART IN EUROPE

ABSTRACT

European jewellers, until the middle of last century, kept the well-known concepts of what jewellery had been for many centuries such as demonstrating wealth, power and status, in other words: jewellery was an item of luxury. Gold, diamonds, precious stones and pearls were the most attractive materials for jewellery.

Jewellery has always been a medium of human adornment, but it was also more than that. Let aside all its mystical functions such as amulets, medicine and so on, it is until today a means of social communication and a mirror of society.

Social Change: This is exactly what happened in Europe after World War 2. Lifestyle in European countries and especially in Germany has completely changed and opened new areas especially for modern art. This also had an important impact on transforming contemporary jewellery into fine art. With the upcoming new industries, not only new materials and techniques became available, but also jewellery artists were ready for completely new concepts of experimental jewellery.

New trends: Artistic European jewellery started in the sixties and seventies of last century. Many types of synthetic materials like plastic, acrylic (perspex) and laminated raisin were highly attractive for the artists, often in combination with other material and a technoid design. Found objects transformed into jewellery were as attractive as traditional techniques used in new ways. Artists started to act as researchers on materials known for thousands of years: gold, silver, precious stones or wood.

In the last thirty years contemporary jewellers did not only explore new materials but also a different approach of creating jewellery, and developed jewellery into fine art reflecting modern western society. This development had a big influence on commercial jewellery design, as jewellery companies continue to pick up trends and ideas from art pieces.

With examples from many European jewellers I shall try to illustrate this development in jewellery with pieces from all kinds of style, material and technique. The lecture is accompanied by a Powerpoint presentation with pictures of the works and a short vita of each artist.

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