

FALL, 1997 - No. 1

The Art Jewelry Forum, a jewelry support group sponsored by the San Francisco Craft & Folk Art Museum, was founded in March, 1997. Our mission is to promote education, appreciation, and support for contemporary art jewelry.

Our goals include the following:

- To organize trips with visits to private collections, educational institutions, exhibitions, and artists' studios;
- To sponsor educational programs, panel discussions, and lectures about national and international jewelry;
- To encourage and support exhibitions, publications, and programs which feature art jewelry.

Our membership, at 53 and growing, includes collectors, museum and jewelry professionals and many who are interested in learning about contemporary art jewelry.

We are sponsoring a lecture by Kiff Slemmons at SOFA with details to the right. Our next trip will take place in Seattle in March 1998. See details inside.

For more information see us at our booth or lecture in Chicago or phone the San Francisco Craft & Folk Art Museum: 415-775-0991.

KIFF SLEMMONS SPEAKS AT SOFA, CHICAGO



Jewelry artist Kiff Slemmons will speak at SOFA Saturday, October 18 at 1pm. Kiff's talk is entitled "Jewelers and Insects: A 4,000 Year Relationship" and is a meditation on scale and image in jewelry which reviews the research and reverie that led to her recent set of 26 brooches - INSECTOPEdia.

Kiff explains, "I needed to make the thought and the feel of insects visible indirectly, like letters make up words. Like jewelry itself, insects and alphabets are crisp, angular, and almost infinitely variable - and have a presence larger than their physical size. The connection seemed natural and had revealing precedents."



Insectopedia: detail

TRAVEL

SEATTLE

Sharon Campbell and Susan Beech are putting together the schedule for our upcoming Seattle trip in conjunction with the Society of North American Goldsmiths (SNAG) conference. This will take place March 25th - 28th, 1998. Hotel plans are being formulated. The tentative schedule is as follows:

Wednesday, March 25:

Arrive in Seattle - Registration at the Madison Hotel (12pm-8pm); Meet for lunch, an overview of plans and a discussion providing background on the active jewelry scene in Seattle; Cocktails at a special collector's home; Dinner with Ron Ho in his magnificent home

Thursday, March 26:

Attend SNAG Conference - Highlights: Keynote speaker Kenneth Trapp: "Things go better with Art" Curator of the Smithsonian Institution's Renwick Gallery in Wash. D.C.

Friday, March 27:

Attend SNAG Conference - Highlights: Myra Mimitsch Gray - assistant professor of Jewelry at State University of New York at New Paltz; Debate between Keith Lewis and Jamie Bennett: Keith is Assistant Prof. of Art @ Central Washington University, Ellensburg, WA. Jamie is a professor of jewelry @ State University at New Platz.

Saturday, March 28:

Attend some of SNAG Conference - Highlights: Otto Kunzll: "Back on Stage" Otto is head of Academy of Fine Arts in Munich, Germany; Barbara Johns: Barbara is the curator of the Tacoma Art Museum and she will give us an overview of the work in the museum's collection. Join the SNAG conference at a banquet that has been described as a surprise - guaranteed to be something we've never seen. *Totally Seattle!*

Evenings:

We will tour jewelry related galleries, museums, and sample Seattle's finest restaurants.

New York

The Art Jewelry Forum's first trip took place on May 1-3, 1997. We began with a New York brunch at the home of Judy Bloomfield where everyone showed a favorite piece of jewelry and Charon Kransen offered information about the current jewelry scene in Europe through slides, jewelry and books about contemporary jewelry. We visited the home and studio of Eva Eisler to see her precise architectural jewelry and Thomas Gentile's new collection made from alternative materials.

We visited the Parsons School of Design where remarkable jewelry artist and teacher Lisa Galnick showed both her work and that of her students whom she both inspired and encouraged to express their individuality. Our trip included a stop at supreme enamelist William Harper's home and studio, John Iversen's studio, the homes of collectors Donna Schneier and Charlotte Heil, and the loft of Danielle and Kevin Berlin, jewelry artist and sculptor respectively, where we were treated to a delicious lunch.

We gained an historical perspective at the American Craft Museum where we viewed "Messengers of Modernism 1940-1960" with curator Toni Greenbaum. We were able to preview Julie Mihalison's new show at the Heller Gallery where she spoke about her work. This was a wonderful and informative trip which included some outstanding food at New York's exceptional restaurants.

CALENDAR

Fall 1997

Aaron Faber
666 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10019
212-586-8411

"In the Spirit: Religion and the New Jewelry",
September 11 - October 24
"Tradition / Innovation" (jewelry for the Bride & Groom),
Nov. 4 - Nov. 29

Concepts Gallery

Ocean Avenue - PO Box 301
Carmel, CA 93921
408-624-0661
Carolyn Morris Bach, Nov. 28 - Dec. 31

Helen Drutt Gallery

1721 Walnut Street, 2nd Floor
Philadelphia, PA 19103
215-735-1625
Thomas Gentile, Sept. 27 - Oct. 25
Bruce Metcalf, Oct. 29 - Nov. 29
Gerd Rothman, Dec. 6 - Dec. 27

Jewelerswerk Galerie

2000 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20006
202-293-0249
Valerie Mitchell "Diagram of Forces", Sept. 18 - Oct. 9

Linda Richman Jewelry

@ Katie Gingrass Gallery, 241 North Broadway
Milwaukee, WI 53202
414-289-0855
Steff Korsage, Dec. 13 & 14

Mobilia Gallery

358 Huron Avenue
Cambridge, MA 02138
617-876-2109
Susan Hamlett "Pictorial Jewelry", Sept. 9 - Sept. 30
Catherine Butler "Humor and Beauty", Nov. 22 - Dec. 28
"Watching and Waiting: Timepieces by Jewelers",
Nov. 22 - Jan. 11
Cythia Toops and Dan Adams "Artifacts", Nov. 22 - Jan. 11

Perimeter Gallery

210 West Superior Street
Chicago, IL 60610
312-266-9473
Bruce Metcalf, Oct. 10 - Nov. 15
Eleanor Moty, Oct. 10 - Nov. 15

Susan Cummins Gallery

12 Miller Avenue
Mill Valley, CA 94941
415-383-1512
Petra Class, Oct. 6 - Nov. 1
Kiff Slemmons, Nov. 3 - Nov. 29
"Stone, Rock, Pearl" (group show), Dec. 1 - Jan. 3

Sybaris Gallery

202 East Third Street
Royal Oak, MI 48067
810-544-3388
Laurie Hall "Parameters to Parallels", Sept. 6 - Oct. 18
Joyce Scott, Oct. 25 - Nov. 29
Group Show, Dec. 6 - Jan. 10

The Works Gallery

303 Cherry Street
Philadelphia, PA 19106
215-922-7775
Douglas Zaruba "The DreamGate Meditations",
Sept. 5 - Oct. 20
Group exhibition of European jewelers, Nov. 1 - Nov. 30

Yaw Gallery

550 North Old Woodward Avenue
Birmingham, MI 48009
248-647-5470
Cheiko Akagi, Sept. 4 - Sept. 30
Cheryl Rydmark, Oct. 5 - Nov. 4
Cornelia Roethal, Nov. 6 - Dec. 2

Call ahead for gallery hours

THE FORUM

STANDARDS by Bruce Metcalf

It has been more than 10 years since Ettagale I... proposed in *Metalsmith* magazine that "being...wonderful, decorative, and salable" could be adequate criteria for judging jewelry. We can safely assume that Ms. Blauer was taking about market-oriented jewelry, and not exploratory work like the "New Jewelry" that appeared from Europe early in the '80's. We can logically add that good jewelry should also be conveniently wearable and durable, as Garth Clark pointed out seven years ago, also in *Metalsmith*. These positive qualities were accepted without debate, and so far, a better list of criteria has not yet appeared.

What should be expected of good, marketable jewelry? Certainly it should be appealing to its audience, and it should function as a successful accent in the overall design of clothing and ornament on the body. That covers "wonderful" and "decorative". And, from the point of view of good business management, it's a sound idea to produce work that will actually sell. Nor will anybody argue that this type of jewelry should attach to the body unobtrusively, and should stand up to normal handling. But the more I think about these criteria, they seem to describe not a standard of excellence, but a minimum level that any competent designer and manufacturer should be able to achieve. Jewelers should be sophisticated enough to pass all five of these criteria without breaking a sweat. Perhaps it is time to raise our expectations: "If you hit your target all the

time, perhaps it's too close."

Jewelry teachers will immediately point out that marketable jewelry should be designed well. The word "design" is used in two different senses; first in the sense of mechanical design; and second as the innovative organization of visual elements. This implies that good jewelry function flawlessly at the physical level, and also that the composition avoid familiar solutions. However, there seems to be some wiggle-room here: some traditional designs - especially mechanisms - are just so good that it makes no sense to abandon them. For instance, very few jewelers would choose to invent a new joint and catch mechanism every time they make a pin. Sometimes, the classic solution is still the best solution.

At this point, jewelers get caught up in one of the central debates about Modernism. For more than a century, a primary value in the art world has been invention. We were told that a new solution is inherently better than an old solution, partly because the old solution was generated by the outmoded (and sometimes destructive) ideologies of the past. Such logic has justified eliminating representation, symbolism, decoration, and even hand production from the realm of design. While this kind of thinking fails to persuade anybody these days, another argument for innovation remains harder to refute. When designers face a choice between a traditional design, and having to invent a new one that is as good or better, far more effort is required to propose the new design. Modernism respects the effort, and rejects any reflexive easy choice. Questioning traditional solutions and embracing the difficulty

of inventing the new are two of the hallmarks of Modernism. These two issues continue to divide the crafts communities.

What you have is a clash between two cultures. One group concludes that the "old ways" (which, in a craft of contemporary jewelry-making, are rarely all that old) are invariably the best ways, and anybody who proposes alternatives is mindlessly pursuing mere novelty. The other group holds that all traditions are open to interrogation, that creative solutions are both possible and desirable, and generally that innovation is a positive value in its own right. They would claim that certain solutions are so obvious, or so overexposed, that a good designer will not use them.

The two cultures shift the debate to peripheral issues like function versus art, but the real conflict is about how respectful jewelers should be about the past. (And what, in fact, is the past?). The conflict also extends to a view of the present: do the tastes of jewelry buyers represent an obstinate resistance to change, or authentic expressions of need?

What else can we expect from jewelry? In North America, handmade jewelry is produced against a background of industrialization, and any assessment of quality must consider this relationship. When mass-production can do so many things more efficiently and at less expense, why bother to make anything by hand? What can be done with the hand-crafted object that the manufactured object cannot accomplish? One jeweler who consciously exploits the

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YES! I am eager to join the Art Jewelry Forum.

NAME _____
STREET _____
CITY, STATE, ZIP _____
PHONE (DAY) _____ (EVENING) _____
FAX _____

_____ I have enclosed \$100 annual membership dues for the Art Jewelry Forum, **AND**

_____ I have enclosed \$35 for annual membership in the San Francisco Craft & Folk Art Museum, because I am not a current member.

Make checks payable to SFC&FAM. Mail to SFC&FAM, Landmark Building A, Fort Mason, San Francisco, CA 94123

_____ Please Charge my _____ Visa _____ Mastercard

Account # _____ Exp. date _____

Cardholder's Signature _____

I am most interested in: Travel and tours Studio Visits Collection Visits Seminars Other

Thank you for your interest in the Art Jewelry Forum.

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inherent advantages of hand-production is Michael Good. His hammered earrings are made from thin sheet metal, and are therefore light and easily wearable. In contrast, if the same design was manufactured, the most common solution would be to cast the earrings, making them considerably heavier. In this case, the hand process is plainly superior to the industrialized process.

Handcraft also accommodates very short (or one-of-a-kind) production runs, which offer several competitive advantages. Handmade jewelry can be designed for a very small audience, which can serve niche markets that industry is incapable of reaching. Hand-crafted objects can also serve a research and development function, creating new design approaches and developing new technologies on a small scale. For instance, coloring of titanium was well-known in the craft world before it entered the mass-market.

Joel Bagnol, who used to run a custom jewelry shop in the Boston area, offered an insight to how limited production impacts on a type of quality. He pointed out that the jeweler provides a service to his clientele, in that he can make symbolic and ritual objects designed for a particular occasion. These objects could be engagement or wedding rings, custom-made gifts, or jewelry that uses imagery of special importance to the buyer.

In responding to his client, the jeweler can design personal meaning into the object, in a way that a mass-produced ornament could never achieve. The client, not being trained in design and the craft of jewelry-making, is not capable of doing this for herself. In a very real way, the jeweler gives a voice to his client, and she is often very grateful.

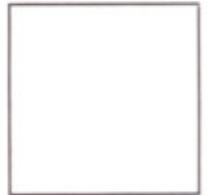
Seeing jewelry as speech is a useful analogy. We all know that jewelry is a form of communication, representing the persona of the wearer. We also know that mass-production offers only a rough, generalized form of speech, not tailored to individual needs. One of the most profound potentials for jewelry is in the way it can act as a receptive screen for the projection of meaning. Jewelry can be specifically designed to accommodate meaning, to act in the gray area between the familiar and the strange where people's imaginations are stimulated, but where they are not alienated by outlandishness. In this sense, the work is not complete until it is both worn and becomes meaningful to its owner. Jewelry can be an unfinished word; the definitions are supplied by the people who wear it.

One production jeweler who designs her work to give meaningful "speech" is Cara Croninger. While her pendants with hearts and stars might seem trite to critics who demand innovative imagery, many of her buyers find those symbols to be perfect

markers for personal meaning. Cara tells the story of a woman who took a heart pendant to the hospital for the birth of her first child, where she used it for meditating upon during labor. The pendant became more than just a decoration, more than an aid in a difficult physical process, but an intimate symbol of the birth of this woman's child. Jewelry can transcend the status of mere commodity, and serve as a vehicle for authentic meaning. This service is not examined enough, and we understand it poorly.

Reflection of tradition, vehicle for invention, servant of human need: these are some of the authentic functions that jewelry can perform, and some of the ways by which jewelry can be judged. There are other uses and standards yet to be articulated. Unfortunately, until jewelers and their customers begin to talk and write about these qualities, our understanding of jewelry remains stunted. The complete story of contemporary art jewelry is yet to be told, and when it is, it will have to be a collaboration between makers and users. In other words, collectors have an active part to play in telling the entire story. And once this story is complete, we can begin to think about a more complex standard of judgement.

"Standards" first appeared in the Fall 1992 issue of Metalsmith magazine.



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