



View of the inaugural Mari Funaki Award Exhibition for Contemporary Jewellery at Gallery Funaki in Melbourne, 2014



Inari Kiuru (Finland/Australia), 'Evolution Series', 2013, brooches, stainless steel, crystals, mild steel, clay, iron, patina and paint

Mari Funaki Award for Contemporary Jewellery

THE inaugural Mari Funaki Award attracted an outstanding response from more than 500 international and local artists. The exhibition, which comprised some 31 selected works from the overwhelming total of submissions, was open till the 13th September at Gallery Funaki in Melbourne, Australia. The three judges were renowned practitioners and educators Warwick Freeman and Simon Cottrell, and leading curator and writer Julie Ewington. Their task was to award the AUS \$5000 prize to an established artist and two \$3000 prizes to two emerging artists. The judges also awarded three commendations, the first in the "established" category to Jiro Kamata, a well know artist from Japan who practices in Munich and teaches there at the Academy of Fine Arts, for his spectacular necklace, *Spiegel*. This work is a bold re-working of

the traditional necklace-form in silver, camera lenses and mirror. When worn the piece is a kind of play on the convex surfaces and studded frames of an English-style regency mirror. In similar fashion to the antique object, the reflections from the mirrored camera lenses play an important part in the effectiveness of this piece by framing the wearer in a halo of bright lights and reflecting back to the observer or admirer of the piece, miniaturised worlds contained within each 'bead'. The other commendation (emerging category) was awarded to Inari Kiuru (Finland/Australia) for her *Evolution Series* brooches. These two objects, which are an exploration of the relationship between "organic" and "geometric" forms, communicate an experimental attitude towards material and form. The patina of the organic forms of one brooch stands in contrast to

the precision of the stainless steel webs of the companion piece. One form is naked, the other blossoms with colour and texture; one is cold in its perfection, while the other is inviting and almost comically amusing. Kiuru's sensitive reinvention of natural forms seems to include the entrapment of the beautiful by the coldly manufactured – a commentary perhaps of our urban condition and conflicted relationship with nature. The Mari Funaki prizes in the emerging category were awarded to Sara Gackowska (Poland) and Patricia Correia Domingues (Portugal/Germany). Dominquez's piece, *Duality*, a pendant in an unspecified material described as "artificial ivory", engages with the Japanese notion of *wabi-sabi* an aesthetic principle where imperfection plays an important part in engendering beauty to an object. In this case the artist appears to

have generated the opportunity for the material to crack and break in a controlled fashion so as to reveal the natural texture in the object. The artistry displayed by this work is in knowing precisely where and how the material will behave when stressed and in applying the right amount of force so that it doesn't shatter completely but breaks in a minimal and controlled number of sections. One wonders how many "failed" prototypes preceded this piece before the desired result was achieved. By coincidence Gackowska's work also contends with similar aesthetic questions, this time through the use of a brittle hematite stone. The artist contrast the fine and smooth surface of the stone with the delicate cracks she has formed on its surface in a composition recalling geological formations or the random trail of lights as seen from the air at night in sparse con-



Kiko Gianocca (Switzerland), 'Veneer #1', 2014, necklace, wood veneer, balsawood, brass, 24 x 24 x 1.8 cm



Jiro Kamata (Japan), 'Spiegel', necklace, 2014, camera lenses, silver, mirror



Kiko Gianocca (Switzerland), 'Veneer #2', 2014, necklace, wood veneer, balsawood, brass, 20 x 24 x 2 cm

urbations. The most unexpected and captivating aspect of this work is its "feel" – the brittle hematite wafer rests on a thicker spongy layer of "bio-resin". On picking up the brooch the firm but slightly yielding substrate of the resin provides a sensual response which lends the work an altogether new dimension on touch. The piece is not how it appears – a stone sandwiched on another "stone" – both inert and inanimate, but rather almost a friendly presence which when worn responds to the touch and hence becomes highly subjective and part of the body.

As an artform, contemporary jewellery, with its roots in alchemy, has always looked to the quality of the material as inspiration and often a starting point for the work. In an interview with Anna Sado

for the International Amber Association, Gackowska says: 'Contact with the material is the most important for me in the designing process. It's the factor that gives me the most pleasure from work, as well as provides new, unconventional solutions. In my opinion, the joy of creation has a big influence on the final form of an object and its relationship with the end user.' Creating one's your own material is the "Eldorado" of contemporary jewellery as an artform. The relationship one has with it and the pleasure the artist gets from working with the material are essential factors in the success of the work. It is interesting therefore to view the work of mature artists owing to the breadth and variety of materials and techniques that they can bring to life. This is the case with

the winner of the major prize, in the established artist category of the 2014 Mari Funaki Award for Contemporary Jewellery in 2014, Kiko Gianocca (Switzerland) for his *Veneer Neck Pieces*. Gianocca is a renowned international artist and has exhibited on numerous previous occasions with Gallery Funaki, showing work in materials as varied as gold, silver, polyurethane, wood, resin and now in this Award Exhibition veneer. Responding to my remark about the surprising scale of the pieces, a characteristic of Gianocca work, the judges said, referring to these three neckpieces: 'Superficially they could appear bold ... but they are actually intimate on the body'. Compared to the visual "weight" of the works, the actual lightness Gianocca creates is a mystery that

make the pieces all the more surprising and engaging. The attachment of the "cord" connection allows independent and an almost "shadow puppet"-like movement on the body, an innovation which enhances the appeal of his works. The 2014 Mari Funaki Award show was an outstanding exhibition and an admirable initiative by this well-known gallery curated by gallery director Katie Scott and award manager Chloë Powell. The show was well supported by a small but dedicated group of private sponsors: Vivienne and Leo Donati, Johannes Hartfuss and Fabian Jungbeck. I look forward to enjoying many similar happy events in the future.

Eli Giannini

Eli Giannini is Director of McGauran Giannini Soon Architects in Melbourne.



Patricia Correia Domingues (Portugal/Germany), 'Duality', 2013, pendant, artificial ivory



Sara Gackowska (Poland), 'Membrane', 2014, brooch, bio-resin, silver and hematite