

I was invited by Sofia Björkman to give a lecture about quality in art.
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How can I recognize the quality of art, especially of jewelry?

Aristotle: "Nothing is in the mind that was not in the senses before".

The preoccupation with art and here in the narrower sense the examination with the evaluation of its quality presupposes criteria and concepts that are very abstract and whose visualization is at the same time very concrete.

Art is, because it is part of the human mind, dynamic, infinite, supernatural, and yet it can be experienced through its material and through the human senses.
Art is spiritual, not scientific.

Also the descriptive concepts/judgment criteria like dimension, materiality, proportion, sizes are all abstract, but they describe something very concrete, visual. So we come across this dialectic again and again as soon as we want to describe art.

So works of art are both material and immaterial. They appeal to both sides within us - to the sensual as well as to the intellectual. As an expression of man, works of art, like man, must be contradictory.

I find this dialectic in art, in other words its contradictoriness, fascinating. It challenges us to leave our usual patterns of thinking, away from black/white, good/evil, etc. but that is also what makes it so difficult to evaluate or measure its quality.

A further challenge in the recognition of quality in jewelry is that not only the work itself must be considered, but also its relationship to the body and space. Jewelry cannot be perceived as a solitary object, but must always be viewed together with the body and experienced as a carrier. The observer must not only activate the senses of optical perception, but also apply those senses that relate the physicality of the jewelry to his own body and space.

Thus, good jewelry can hardly be adequately photographed. If the relationship between body and space is a yardstick for the quality of jewelry, this cannot be adequately reproduced with the two-dimensionality of an image. But that's just by the way.

The training of seeing through permanent comparison is a basic condition to be able to measure quality, because it can only be recognized by comparison. Nor

does it make sense to measure works from different epochs and social structures against each other. Different cultures come to different results because of different structures.

In my reflections on quality, today I only deal with partial aspects - these are subjectively chosen and depend on my own preferences. For example, the interaction of a piece of jewelry with its surroundings and the wearer's body is very important to me, so today I can say little about jewelry that functions like a canvas. I am fascinated by the 3-tone of jewelry, this interaction between jewelry object, wearer and observer. This makes jewelry unique in the canon of art genres.

In general, art always depends on viewing, but not everyone who looks at a work of art is also a viewer. A viewer is someone who looks at something, who searches, desires, demands....

Art needs this counterpart to remain and let the eye rest, to grasp and think through its impressions, to encounter the work of art self-confidently and reflectively. Of course, every jewelry wearer is also an observer and chooses his own jewelry. With jewelry there is still this wide level: The identification of the wearer with his jewelry, in the best case he enters into a symbiosis with it and forms a unity with the supernatural of art. In addition to the wearer as observer, there is also the opposite, the second observer, so to speak, who at best looks at and thinks through what he sees (the jewelry, the wearer and the unity).

A viewer, however, is not free in his thinking his awareness of quality is always dependent on his socialization.

My personal socialization, I grew up in a multicultural environment between Hungary, France and Germany, and my studies of anthropology make me always look for a cultural root in jewelry. This is entirely in the sense of historical jewelry, which, as a non-verbal code, provides information about status, affiliation and the like. So I am looking for this code. Jewelry that tells me something about the context in which it was created attracts my attention. In this respect, I am not a friend of globalization, because a piece of jewelry that does not give me any information about its origin seems arbitrary to me, it becomes interchangeable and thus an accessory. This coding itself is of course not a quality feature, but it attracts my attention and that is now the basic requirement of viewing and thus the possibility to think about the quality in comparison.

So it is important to me that I see something that attracts my attention, I can then take a closer look at it and form a quality judgment in the context. It is desirable that a work of art is suggestive (that there is a difference between what is said and what is not). This creates a place of poetry, where I have to become active with my imagination. Thus the jewelry becomes the medium that communicates with my

consciousness and in a certain way I become the medium of the work. I look for this interrelation in the "good" art (and there I make no difference between the art genres).

I consciously do not deal with jewelry materials. Materiality has played a subordinate role since the 1960s at the latest (in visual art since the beginning of the 20th century). Classical materials such as metals and stones have existed since then alongside all other conceivable materials. There are possibilities in diversity, but no general quality criteria.

I believe it is impossible to spontaneously recognize an outstanding work of art. The meaning for a long period within a certain context can only be recognized later.

Finally, I would like to talk about three aspects for the assessment of quality by Klaus Bußmann (an important German art historian and curator of the German pavilion in Venice in the 1990s):

Uniqueness, execution and standards.

I will gladly take up these aspects, because I find them very exciting, and I will carry them out with my words and on the jewelry.

It is important to me that I can discover new worlds through the art jewelry. I am fascinated by a new perception of body and space. So it's not the uniqueness of the piece of jewelry that's at the forefront, but the experience that the jewelry gives me.

The handcrafted quality is actually something I did not want to talk about here today, because it is a basic requirement of every jeweler and is not negotiable. However, there is something very important about artistic freedom. Because there is a degree of skill that is so perfect that it makes room for artistic ideas. By this I mean that the more sophisticated the craftsmanship, the more freely the spirit can unfold and is not held in check by the hands. If this freedom is lacking, it is difficult for a work of art to survive beyond the artist's lifetime. The work of art loses its substance without the spirit of the creator, because the idea alone is not enough.

A stringent artistic oeuvre, is in retrospect considered a very clear quality award, we see here for example Gerd Rothmann, Manfred Bischoff, Karl Fritsch, or Peter Chang, just to name a few. All great artists who have managed to create something very special under difficult conditions, to create their own aesthetics and style, which has remained true to itself over the years, never repeated itself and became ever better and more sophisticated. Many young colleagues try to move in the direction of these masters, but fail completely.

The art here lies in the unbelievable differentiation of possibilities without ever repeating itself. These are standards that have been created and that will remain.

I would like to conclude with a quote from Joseph Beuys: "You can't understand art, because if you could understand it, you wouldn't need it".

With this in mind, I wish you all a pleasant visit to the exhibition and just train your eye. You don't have to understand anything!

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