

## AJF visits Schmuck in Munich

Helga van Leipsig

Thursday March 15, 2012

Munich is known as die stadt der lebensfreude, the city filled with the joy of life – and with the bonus of welcome, sunny weather it was a pleasure to be in the Bavarian capital while *Schmuck* was on.

The AJF program kicked off when we met on Thursday in the lobby of the luxurious Charles Hotel in the center of town – old friends were re-united and new tour members were greeted, a great start to the first day.



1: Olga Zobel-Biró showing work by Lisa Walker

Gallery Biró, our first stop, was just a short distance away, so we walked to where Olga Zobel-Biró and Lisa Walker's exhibition, *Glee*, awaited us. Refreshments were offered – and Olga explained the vision behind Gallery Biró (in Munich, you need to have at least seven exhibitions a year before you can call yourself a gallery). When Olga opened the gallery in 1992, plastic jewelry was uncommon in Munich. But she chose to focus solely on displaying this innovation, featuring jewelers like Peter Chang and Mikiko Minewaki. Word spread and slowly other artists, like Paul Derrez and Ramón Puig Cuyàs, became involved. During our visit, Lisa Walker kindly translated for Olga, before explaining her own intuitive way of working. Olga enthusiastically modeled the jewelry, taking out several items from the displays.

Our tight schedule meant we had to leave for Galerie Handwerk and *The Renaissance of Enameling*. Christine Graf, one of the jewelers featured in this exhibition, reviewed the work, classifying it by technique and explaining terms, such as cloisonné, plique-à-jour and champlevé, with relevant examples. Other artists, like Graziano Visintin and Carolina Gimeno, talked about their work too, giving a nice personal touch to the presentation. Christine Graf outlined how her jewelry was built up with gold thread-stitched, copper mesh and then enameled to give it a colorful, powdery look. This



2: Work from Christine Graf in Galerie Handwerk

international gathering of 41 artists not only showed how big the enameling field has become, but also justified the exhibition's name. There is an enameling renaissance indeed.



3: Lunch at Brenner Grill

A short drive to the Maximilianstrasse brought us to the Brenner Grill where we enjoyed our first meal together. We found the group to be an interesting mix; collectors, gallery owners, a journalist and a maker. The various perspectives led to lively discussion and interesting conversation and fortified by the excellent food we were ready to conquer the Handwerksmesse Hal 1, the venue of *Schmuck* and *Talente*.

*Schmuck* was the first contemporary jewelry show, founded in 1959 by Herbert Hofmann and it remains part of the Internationale Handwerksmesse (trade fair) an annual sales exhibition in Munich. The commemorative Herbert Hofmann award has been given to distinguished work in this exhibition since 1973. Works chosen for the award are judged on 'innovativeness, originality of conception, outstanding execution, and ornamental effect,' to quote the catalog. Curator of *Schmuck* 2012 Dr Karl Bollman, while a collector himself was reticent about his selection, encouraging us to see for ourselves. The glass cases in the gallery featured jewelry by 65 artists from 27 countries.

Next stop was *Talente*, where jewelry was just one of the applied arts on display. Dr Michaela Braesel guided us enthusiastically through a varied show of young designers nominated by art academies worldwide. The focus of our tour was, unsurprisingly, on the jewelry, with work by emerging artists like Suzanne Carlsen, Guanlan Liang, Märta Mattsson and Krista Ruohonen on display. The *Talente* prize, awarded by an international jury, is regarded as a stimulus, as well as acknowledgment of the work and the artist.

After these two exhibitions, there was some spare time to investigate Galerie Marzee and Galerie Ra from the Netherlands and Sweden's Platina and to hunt for acquisitions. The



4 : Bella Neyman talking with Michaela Braesel from Talente

Helga van Leipsig, *AJF visits Schmuck in Munich*

Handwerksmesse Hal 1 also displayed interesting work. Having until 5.30pm to explore was a luxury and the time was well spent.



5: Gerd Rothman showing the poster of his exhibition

Next on the program was a visit to the studio of renowned jeweler, Gerd Rothman. What was scheduled to be a pre-dinner drink expanded into a cordial Bavarian welcome, with food and wine. Plied with questions Gerd answered them passionately. He took us to his storeroom and started unpacking a few of the many boxes to display a wealth of jewelry, from early work to his most recent. To see all this magnificent work and to be able to touch it felt like being let loose in a candy shop. Needless to say, pieces were tried on. Each of us was generously given a catalog of Gerd's work before we hurried back for dinner at the hotel's Restaurant Davvero. We weren't a very lively group at dinner that evening – the day's impressions had made a big impact and a good night's sleep was in order to prepare us for a new day and more jewelry visits.

*Friday March 16, 2012*

Day two started with a short walk to the Pinakothek der Moderne to meet Dr Florian Hufnagl, director of Die Neue Sammlung, the International Design Museum of Munich. Happy to be our host, Dr Hufnagl was also impressed by the 'walking jewelry exhibition' the AJF group displayed. During our visit we concentrated on the permanent loan from the Danner Foundation that includes contemporary work from over 100 international goldsmiths. Dr Hufnagl told us the Danner Rotunda opened in 2004 and that its first exhibition was curated by Herman Jünger and Otto Künzli. After his presentation he left us in the considerate hands of Petra Holscher and Karl Fritsch who took us to the exhibition itself. In 2010, Karl, whose jewelry is renowned internationally, was invited to present a different view of the Danner Collection. He then curated a new exhibition, expanding it with loans from Galerie Spektrum and donations and loans from other jewelers, including Peter Skubic.



6 : Karl Fritsch talking about his views on the Danner Rotunda collection

*Helga van Leipsig, AJF visits Schmuck in Munich*



7 : At the Adellab exhibition

Unfortunately, we had too little time to see all the magnificent pieces assembled for this exhibition, because a private premiere of *The State of Things* at Die Neue Sammlung beckoned. Work by Ådellab, the jewelry department of the Swedish art school, Konstfack, was on display. Under Professor Karen Pontoppidan, an array of final-year projects by graduates from the last five years was on show. *The State of Things* rose to the challenge of an unusual spot to display jewelry (a corridor at the top of some stairs) and made a strong impact. Karen Pontoppidan explained the content and the vision behind it. Ådellab itself was represented by a large red knot with 40 ropes branching from it. Each rope stood for a student moving away from the school, the ones stretching farthest depicted the most accomplished jewelers. It was a very striking visual metaphor.

Before another afternoon's full program, the Japanese-born contemporary jeweler Jiro Kamata joined us for lunch at Restaurant Hunsinger. Since 2009, Jiro has worked as an artistic assistant to Otto Künzli at Munich's Academy of Fine Arts (he was to later guide us through the academy).

We started the afternoon by visiting the shared studio of Helen Britton, David Bielander and Yutaka Minegishi. Laura Deakin was also there, kindly helping out with coffee and tea. The benefits of their studio sharing were obvious. Besides pooled equipment, including valuable machinery for efficient metal-working, the shared studio allows the jewelers close contact with their fellow artists.



8 : Helen Britton explaining her latest work



9 : David Bielander demonstrating the titanium snake necklace on Susan Beech

David Bielander took pains to explain his work and how he approaches the market. He likes to design six to eight pieces a year, putting much thought into each. He then decides if a piece is to be unique, or a limited or unlimited edition. He struck me to be an organized artist who knows exactly what he wants. A highlight of the visit was when a gorgeous piece, a titanium snake necklace, was draped around long-standing AJF member and collector Susan Beech. Yutaka Minegishi also displayed his

work, which focuses on carvings in natural materials. We were allowed to try on the pieces, which had a comfortable feel. Helen Britton is another passionate artist who works for concentrated periods of time on one collection, developing and making several unique pieces contemporaneously. This way of working allows her collections over the years to grow in an organic way.

Next, it was off to the Royal Academy of Fine Arts. Founded in 1808 by Maximilian I Joseph of Bavaria, it is one of the oldest, most significant art academies in Germany. Jiro Kamata's, tour through the jewelry department took us past a wall bedecked with the creativity of renowned jewelry artists from over the years. During the academy's rebuilding this wall was guarded by students who allowed nothing to be removed. Room after room seemed filled with jewelry equipment, all in heavy use by all students, both national and international. In one workroom, Attai Chen welcomed us, kindly putting his work on display and taking time to demonstrate soldering using a blowpipe, a traditional method that is still practiced at the academy. In a big, bright room where weekly discussions take place, Jiro Kamata displayed his work. This uses old reflex-camera lenses to capture the reflections of their surroundings.



10 : Attai Chen demonstrating his favorite tool, the blowpipe



11: Barbara Berlin being pinned with a brooch by Ruudt Peters

Galerie Spektrum was next on the list. It was founded in 1981 and is found on the Theresienstrasse. With a focus only on art jewelry, over the years it has displayed an impressive amount of high-quality work. Owner Jürgen Eickhoff opened the doors for us to have, once again, a pre-opening. Here, we were able to view Ruudt Peters' latest work in his exhibition *Corpus*. We also had Ruudt personally pin a piece of his work on everybody in the group. As the queues began to form at Spektrum we left for Micheko Galerie. Featured was the work of Akiko Kurihara, a student of Otto Künzli, who makes intriguing tree-like brooches with old nails, as well as others, resembling vine leaves, from recycled glass bottles. Mari Iwamoto's soft flower brooches were also on display.

Friday's dinner was held at Cohen's, a Munich landmark, and was open for all AJF members, not just those attending the trip.

Helga van Leipsig, *AJF visits Schmuck in Munich*

*Saturday March 17, 2012*

Saturday's program started with a shared lunch at Café Klenze in the Alte Pinakothek. Then the group split up, some going to shows and galleries around town, while others went back to *Schmuck* to see the Hofmann awards ceremony. In the evening there was a big gathering at the Augustiner Keller. Curators, gallery owners and jewelry makers came to celebrate and eat in a typical Bavarian style.

*Sunday March 18, 2012*

On Sunday, Dutch art historian Marjan Unger lured us back to the Pinakothek der Moderne. The auditorium was packed with a who's who of the art jewelry world. We listened to Marjan Unger's absorbing lecture, titled 'Freedom has its Limitations: Jewellery Now, Seen from a Dutch Perspective.' For me, this was the highlight of the event. Her lecture was in part an extension of her thesis completed in 2010 and titled '[Jewellery in Context: A Multidisciplinary Framework of the Consideration of the Jewel.](#)' The second part of the lecture was about the changes in the world around us and what the consequences are for the jewelry world. She ended by specifically addressing the makers in the audience, motivating them to participate in today's exciting changes. This lecture has been published and is available on the website of [Die Neue Sammlung](#).

When the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam reopens in 2013, the Unger jewelry collection, donated by Marjan and her husband, will be on permanent display. The collection contains Dutch jewelry with an emphasis on the period 1930 to 1970. This collection was featured in Marjan's book, *Dutch Jewellery in the 20th Century*, which served as the starting point for her doctoral research. So perhaps 2013 is a good year for AJF to visit the Sieraad jewelry fair and the Unger collection in Amsterdam?

The lunch at Brasserie Tresznjewski marked the end of a fabulous trip. Together we had the opportunity to see and experience what *Schmuck* is all about, without being lost in all the activities. I cannot thank AJF enough for what they organized. Having exclusive premiers of gallery exhibitions were priceless and the many studio visits were also highlights. Combined with good food, great discussions and gorgeous jewelry, this made the trip far more than merely worthwhile.



**Helga van Leipsig is a silversmith and member of AJF, who graduated from the Academy of Arts in Maastricht. She is currently an independent artist working with metals. [www.helgavanleipsig.com](http://www.helgavanleipsig.com)**

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