

findings

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Ruudt Peters: Bron/Source

Decker, A. and Elenskaya, M. (eds.) Hardcover, 24 x 28 cm, 278 pp. 154 colour and 47 b/w ills., 41 QR codes

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by Lieta Marziali

Bron is one of the latest thoroughbred additions to the already highly-prized stable that makes up Arnoldsche's art jewellery library. Conceived to accompany Ruudt Peter's eponymous major 44-year retrospective, its glossy coffee-table format, superb close-up photography, and a modicum of carefully-chosen text offer a complete chronological overview of the artist's work from the 1970s to the present day.

Or so it would seem...

Bron is in fact a much more complex beast than its brassy art book appearance would let out. As a catalogue, it certainly provides a closer view of the pieces than the exhibition could ever do. And yet, it is not a three-dimensional one, unlike the exhibition, now at the Museo del Gioiello in Vicenza, Italy, which presents the pieces inside free-standing custom-made blown glass covers on steel stilts. Personally, I have always disliked the glass covers since first seeing them on the internet, an opinion that remained unchanged after nearly knocking one down while gesticulating in Ruudt's own studio in Amsterdam and then seeing them in all their *Bron* glory at the 2018 Legnica Festival of Silver.

I dislike them not on the basis of some decorative judgment but, because despite being clear glass, the reflections they create from the space never allow for a completely clear view of the work. In this sense, I'd take the flat but macro approach of the book over them any time. If the exhibition has never provided any in-depth wall text, the book will also disappoint those who are in search of the usual didactic museum-style monographic approach. There is, after all, never anything *usual* about Ruudt, and yet his work reflects a deeply universal search for the human self, its drives, its fears, and how one can and does exist in the world.



Ruudt himself, still relentlessly in search of challenging and confronting himself and his practice, wished to push his personal and professional boundaries with the *Bron* volume by creating something that provided a different environment than statements and background information. There is surely enough of that on his website and it is a format which he had already explored over 15 years ago – by including documentation of his travels, research and inspiration – with his previous major retrospective book *Change*. The text that readers will find is instead a very personal reflective essay by jeweller Aaron Decker and candid transcripts, put together and edited by one-half of Current Obsession and Munich Jewellery Week team Marina Elenskaya, of their six hours of conversations. It is this 'voice of the artist – honest, funny, brutal, beyond the filters of interpretation and classification', as Marina puts it in her introduction, that gives the reader a method, a bit like a key, to open the door into Ruudt's world.

Peters is a phenomenal educator, as well as a pioneering artist – something I had the privilege to experience personally through one of his yearly one-week summer workshops. His approach is intense but incredibly intimate and the exercises he offers are ones that he has experimented with himself for years. As both educator and artist he is constantly both painfully in your face and tearing up your soul as he is careful, considered and devastatingly open in sharing his own experiences and struggles. But only if you are willing to engage.



Visitors enjoying *Bron* at the Legnica Festival of Silver 2018.
Image: Lieta Marziali

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It is so that with both *Bron* exhibition and *Bron* volume he once again set off to experiment, as for most of his shows, how the public can not only experience jewellery but, crucially, though doing so, also explore the meaning of the word *Bron*, that is "source", a word I find fascinating as I continue to investigate the inspirations and serendipities through which we can better understand ourselves.¹ Both exhibition and book offer, to those who are willing to take themselves through the journey, a multi-media experience through the use of QR codes, which link to short videos of friends, gallerists, other makers, as well as writers and buyers of his jewellery, talking, themselves candidly, about their own experience of a particular piece, what they see in it, why they like it and what it says to them. In this sense, the book and the exhibition are inextricably linked, like individual yet interdependent Siamese twins, both offering another horizon, something beyond the possibilities of live three-dimensional experience and flat two-dimensional visuals.

Neither book nor exhibition then, despite the polished photography and the sleek glass domes, provide a full and unprotected view, and the viewer and reader are left to confront their freedom of choice and their willingness (or indeed not) to go further and make up the rest of their own experience. Ruudt has often been called out for being hard and uncompromising, but the path of exploration is never an easy one. And his practice has been nothing but a long, reflexive endeavour in which he has been first and foremost the student of himself, learning the hardest way to overcome his own baggage and prejudices, ego and fears.

But the best educators know that their pupils have to be both ready and willing to learn. Far from being a patronising stance, their biggest challenge is that of providing tools of discovery and methods of investigation that are sustainable, for those who wish to invest time and effort in their studies. His website might be a good (and free) starting point, but none of the single elements of his vast exhibition, publication and lecturing output allow you by themselves full access. More importantly, with his artwork and his workshops, as well as this book (which generally retails at around 44 euros), the money transaction does not automatically give the buyer the ability to freely appropriate and consume the product. It is only one's willingness to peep through the keyhole, turn the key and open the door, that holds the real power over beginning to understand Ruudt Peters and, through him, oneself.

¹ Ruudt Peters's website at <http://www.ruudtpeters.nl/index.php?id=286> <http://www.ruudtpeters.nl/index.php?id=286>



Detail of *Bron* at the Legnica Festival of Silver 2018. Image: Lieta Marziali

Full view of *Bron* at the Legnica Festival of Silver 2018. Image: Lieta Marziali

