

# findings

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Goldsmiths' Craft and Design Awards New Perspectives for a New Designer Future Craft: Entrepreneurship or Enterprise? Munich Jewellery Week How to work with Argentium Silver Round Table Group Conversations Beach Combing International Networking in Jewellery Education Not Only Decoration Forging New Jewellery Histories BLINKERED: A Jewellery-only Catwalk Show Jewellery Matters Book Review

# HOLY SCHMUCK!

Reflections on Munich Jewellery Week

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**Munich Jewellery Week offers the greatest concentration of contemporary art jewellery in Europe.** It is where practitioners, gallerists, academics, students and aficionados come together to see new projects, new bodies of work, new collaborations which are brought to the city every year for the eyes of the world.

The main fair at the Internationale Handwerksmesse houses stands from artisans in all the craft disciplines. Jewellery takes centre stage with the juried exhibitions and prizes Schmuck, Talente, Meister Der Moderne and Handwerk & Design (the last three also open to other high-end craft); FRAME, where some of the best contemporary art jewellery galleries in the world exhibit their artists, and Chrome Yellow Books, where one can find the most interesting and recent publications in the field of craft; and stands from collectives and individual jewellers (including fine and more design-led jewellery).

But it is the fringe events, all one hundred of them, that paint the yearly picture of what is happening in contemporary art jewellery in the world. From students' collectives organising moving exhibitions, to emerging talents taking over all kinds of retail spaces from cafés to shoe shops, to famous city galleries and exhibition spaces curating shows from more established practitioners, the range of work on display is a snapshot of a moment in time, of the 'now' of contemporary art jewellery. And the range of presenting styles is a testament to the ingenuity and creativity that the most diverse bunch of artists in the world could conjure up, even with a very limited budget.

A week of intense full-immersion is bound to promote reflection and generate questions. Some will perhaps be existing ones which call for regular revisiting, such as the nature and focus of our work, or our positioning in the field. Others might catch us more unaware: why can't we decide whether we like a body of work or not? Why do we find ourselves inexplicably attracted to the work of particular artist whose aesthetic we had not previously found particularly compelling? What draws us to love a piece and reject the material from which it is made? What are the dialogues that we are (not) initiating between our work and the body, our work and space?

Art Jewelry Forum ran two sharp panel discussions this year, one on collecting jewellery and one on writing, and the focus of both debates converged on criticality. It has been suggested that perhaps in order to develop new audiences and new literature we need to hone our own critical understanding of our field. And this is the arena in which to do it. After all, the ability to forge critical thoughts comes, like our other hand-on making skills, with practice. The more work we expose ourselves



I thought I'd got it, but there is so much more for me to understand in Jorge Manilla's pieces

to, the more we start to understand on a very basic level what we like and don't, until we start noticing patterns which can lead us to the reasons why. Is our judgement linked to particular materials, concepts or aesthetics? Or perhaps with the exhibition space itself? Eventually, the questions themselves might begin to display a specific pattern of inquiry which will be worth investigating.

Munich Jewellery Week is also where relationships are forged. New friendships lead to new collectives, new working partnerships, new exhibition spaces and formats, new purchases (by the public but also by fellow jewellers), and of course new critical writing. Its democratic, unstructured, unchecked formula does away with the classic top-down elitist validation structures, breaking the norms of both gallery inclusion and social interaction, and giving everyone the opportunity to play, to a point, on a level field. Initiative and resourcefulness are rewarded: as long as you can find a venue or are happy to perform in a street corner, you're in. With this comes a fresh free-form of networking, where there is room for everybody not only to have their individual voice but, crucially, to have it heard.

Whether you are armed with a work-hard-party-hard attitude, or following a rigorous daily schedule to maximise your visits and networking opportunities, or in fact want to jumpstart your inspiration mojo, Munich Jewellery Week is what you want to make of it. Its value, like anything in our diverse practices and interests in the field, is made up of how we approach it and what we ask of it, and this can change (and quite rightly so) not only from individual to individual but also from year to year.

We need Munich Jewellery Week because, even being the bubble that it is, it provides somewhere to exist as part of something bigger than ourselves. Because it links often lonely practices in far-reaching corners of the world into a interconnected powerful net that once a year can experience the transmutation of intangible social media friends into real people who exchange real hugs and drink real wine, and whose work can be experienced as physical objects in all their materiality. Because, despite all its self-referentiality, it shows us a form of globalisation that does not necessarily rely on predatory practices but on collaborations, cultural intersections, common learning and sharing of ideas. Because it forces us to confront ourselves with what is out there in our field, and yes, that includes the good and, crucially, the bad and the ugly. Because, through its sheer size, it helps us understand more specifically what part we want to play in this field, and how we want to play it. And more than anything, we need it because it sends us home physically trashed but hopefully filled with the energetic potential of so many unanswered questions that we didn't even know we had, and without which our practices as jewellery artists would not remain intellectually and critically sustainable.



Reflecting on the sound of silence with Anja Eichler



Confronting my own fetish for dog noses with Franziska Rauchenecker. But why gold plated silver?