

Jewel Purpose

JEWELLERY

As the global demand for exclusivity increases, the worlds of art, jewellery and architecture are colliding to create a wealth of extraordinary pieces

Words Sarah Royce-Greensill



There was a sparkling aside to the autumnal art-fest that is Frieze week this year. Many high-end jewellers, recognising the art world's penchant for fine jewels (not to mention the size of their bank balances) also took the opportunity to launch new collections; while October's Pavilion of Art and Design (PAD) had a significantly larger jewellery presence than in previous years, hosting several art-jeweller collaborations as well as, for the first time, New York-based vintage jewellery dealer Siegelson. There's something of a love-in going on between the worlds of art and jewellery, as more and more artists unleash their creativity on a smaller, bejewelled scale.

Artists creating jewels is nothing new: Pablo Picasso, Alexander Calder, Salvador Dali, Max Ernst, Lucio Fontana and Roy Lichtenstein are just a few of the celebrated names to dabble in 'wearable art'. But it's not just the modern masters. More recently, superstar architect Zaha Hadid turned her hand to fine jewellery

Above, clockwise from left: Jonathan Meese for Cada Tomi pendant and chain in 18-carat white gold, £12,485; Andy Hope 1930 for Cada Devil Sun ring in 18-carat pink gold and rubies, £17,185; Aaron Curry for Cada one-of-a-kind Cactus ring in 14-carat pink gold and amethyst, £38,580; all at stylebop.com. Below left: Andy Hope 1930 Devil Cross, 2012, (acrylic on board). Right: Jonathan Meese Die Boccia Spielerin (Fräulein 'Djottidei' am Starti), 2013, aluminium

design for Swiss jewellery brand Caspita as well as fellow Lebanese jeweller House of Mouzannar, while a collaboration between Tracey Emin and Stephen Webster – two rock stars of the British art and jewellery worlds – will be released early next year: the former's romantic neon handwritten phrases rendered in precious metal and diamonds that will be commercial gold dust come Valentine's Day.

Artists' jewellery is also being brought to a global fashion-focused, digitally savvy audience thanks to a collaboration between German goldsmith Cada and three contemporary artists: Aaron Curry, Jonathan Meese and Andy Hope 1930. Launched this weekend during Art Basel Miami Beach and sold exclusively through luxury online retailer Stylebop, the project stemmed from Stylebop's co-founder Thorsten Eimuth and Herbert Kopp of Cada's mutual love of contemporary art.

Kopp had little trouble convincing the artists to take part. 'I am a fan of jewellery by Salvador Dali, Dieter Roth and Alexander Calder, and this project was an exciting opportunity to try for myself,' says Aaron Curry. As a sculptor, he says that creating wearable pieces 'came quite naturally; it was just a matter of working in a different scale.'

The resulting 52-piece collection sees each artist's signature style translated into gem-encrusted and eminently wearable jewels. The artists were given free rein on the design; somewhat surprising in the commercial e-tailing environment. 'While it was important to create something that would sell, we didn't want to put too many constraints on it from a commercial point of view,' says Thorsten. 'These are works of art from world-renowned artists; if they want to add more diamonds, it's their decision.' Which explains why the collection includes pieces fully pavé with diamonds, sapphires or rubies, with prices of up to £105,000.

'For us the excitement is not about selling masses, it's about the creativity that goes into making an artwork. It's much more important to find the true artwork here than to create a commercial vision of it.' And the boon for Curry? 'My wife gets to wear something I have made.'

The project may blur the boundaries between artwork and fine jewellery, but for London-based gallerist Louisa Guinness, who has been helping artists conceive jewels since 2003, there's an important distinction between the two. 'We don't want our jewellery to look like it

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has come off Bond Street – we're very different to that,' she says. 'Artists like to make bold, daring sculptures; we're not just trying to make decorative material.'

Her works include rat, frog and cat remains cast in gold and silver by Tim Noble and Sue Webster; Marc Quinn's Frozen Strawberry, the result of picking seeds out of a real fruit and replacing them with diamonds; and, one of the most recent projects, oversized chunks of silicon chipped into earrings and a necklace by Israeli industrial designer and architect Ron Arad. All come with a specially made stand, making them miniature sculptures on a dressing table as well as when worn.

The key to a successful art jewel, says Guinness, who stages exhibitions of work by modern masters including Man Ray, Claude Lorraine and Niki de Saint Phalle, as well as collaborating on new pieces, is to go beyond miniaturisation. 'People don't just want a scaled-down version of what they've made before. They like to see an adaptation of the work and more thought going into it.' It takes some time to come up with a concept, produce and tweak prototypes before finalising the design, with Guinness doing much of the legwork between artist and goldsmith – she tends to use a jeweller in Hatton Garden for the more traditional goldsmithing work, while scouring jewellery shows for specialists in specific techniques such as 3D printing or enamelling.

Elisabetta Cipriani, who began commissioning artists in 2009, agrees: 'For me it's essential that an artist's jewel is not a miniature sculpture – that's what you find in a museum gift shop.' That said, the artists she works with have complete creative control. 'You can't tell a painter what to paint, so you can't tell an artist what to do as a jewel.' Instead, she looks at their existing work and thinks, 'What would I wear? Because jewellery sells when you wear it. I've been very lucky that all the artists I've worked with have designed beautiful jewels.'

Artists' jewellery carries both an intrinsic value as well as its worth as an artwork, which Guinness stresses is important for her clients. 'People will pay lots of money for a canvas, where the cost of production is very little, but with jewellery they're getting something made by the same artist in real gold. There's so much labour, love and time that goes into them besides the cost of the raw materials.' Some pieces are handmade by the artist themselves, such as Nic Fiddian Green's wearable horse head pendants that are hammered from a sheet of gold at the artist's home. 'You can see the little hammer marks – it has got his hand on it,' says Guinness.

Cipriani agrees; 'It's not about showing off; no one knows that a piece actually costs more

than a diamond ring. It's a conversation piece – it's not about the money; it's all about the story.'

There's a story and a half behind Cipriani's newest work by Chinese artist and political activist Ai Weiwei. Launched last month to coincide with the artist's Royal Academy exhibition in London, the work, entitled *Rebar in Gold*, comprises solid, 24-carat gold bars inspired by the 150 tonnes of steel rebar he collected from collapsed buildings after the 2008 earthquake in Sichuan, and straightened into his 2011 sculpture, *Straight*. Weiwei's investigation into the 70,000 deaths caused by the earthquake landed him in jail in 2011, and *Straight* is often considered his most important work.

'I'm quite emotional that he picked this piece as a jewel,' says Cipriani. 'It's simple with a very strong concept behind it – to me that's what an artist's jewel should be.' Its journey to Cipriani's gallery was less straightforward. She originally met Weiwei in 2012, having been introduced

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by Greek painter Jannis Kounellis, who had collaborated with Cipriani on a re-working of his stolen 1972 artwork *Lips*, but Weiwei was not ready then. In the world of artists' jewellery, patience is a virtue. 'You can never give a deadline to an artist. When you give a deadline you lose them,' says Cipriani.

Three years later, Cipriani got a message from a friend in Beijing: Weiwei was ready to speak. Cipriani flew out the next day. 'Even if it wasn't going to happen, I had to go, because it had been three years of talking, it was never ending: worse than childbirth!' The artist presented her with the gold rebar, which he had conceived in 2013 but hadn't been ready to share until this year. Sold as straight bars in two lengths, they will be coiled into bracelets in Beijing by Weiwei himself. 'It's an act of freedom for him,' Cipriani explains, 'He straightened the rebar and now he's bending them again. I bought one for myself of course...how could I not?' ■



Clockwise from top left: Ai Weiwei *Straight*, steel reinforcing bars, 2008-2012, and *Rebar in Gold*, 2013, 24-carat gold bracelets, £22,900 (20cm) and £45,500 (60cm); both at elisabettacipriani.com; Ron Arad *Rocks earrings II*, 2015, in 18-carat gold and silicon, £3,000; louisaguinnessgallery.com