



INTELLIGENCE

Beyond Picasso: Jewellers Set Up Shop at London's Art Fairs

Contemporary jewellers are turning to fairs like Pavilion of Art and Design and Frieze as alternative distribution channels to fashion retailers to woo collectors and design-conscious consumers alike.

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COMMENT

BY SARAH ROYCE-GREENSILL

OCTOBER 4, 2018 05:28

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LONDON, United Kingdom — Mayfair is especially buzzing at this time of year. The international art crowd flock to the Pavilion of Art and Design in Berkeley Square before heading north to Regent's Park for the Frieze Art Fair and Frieze Masters. Increasingly it's not just midcentury furniture or 17th-century Dutch portraits they're seeking, but also contemporary jewellery.

Jewellery galleries have exhibited at PAD since its inception in Paris 23 years ago. At PAD London, now in its 12th year, this has increased from five jewellery exhibitors in the first edition to nine this year, four of which are new to the fair. The spotlight has shifted from "artists' jewellery" — wearable pieces created by artists, a genre that dates back to the 1940s and '50s, when the likes of Calder, Picasso and Dali began experimenting with precious metals — to contemporary jewellers whose one-of-a-kind pieces are recognised as art in their own right.

One such jeweller is German family-run house Hemmerle. Renowned for using traditionally "non-precious" metals such as copper and iron alongside valuable gemstones and found objects such as pebbles and shells, around 200 one-of-a-kind Hemmerle jewels are handmade in its Munich atelier each year. They are sold from the flagship in Munich, via private appointments and at a handful of international art fairs. This year is the third time Hemmerle has exhibited at PAD, while it has been a part of TEFAF (The European Fine Art Fair) for over 20 years.

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Returning to PAD for a fourth year is Siegelson, the New York-based jewellery dealer that specialises in vintage jewels and objects from the likes of Cartier, Van Cleef and Arpels and Belperron. “We moved from Masterpiece to PAD to attract a contemporary art-buying crowd who are looking for great design and who have a strong spending capacity,” says Lee Siegelson. “These are clients who can buy any diamond they want, but they want to be recognised for their style and taste, not just their wealth.”

The provenance of a piece matters — this year Siegelson is showing a ruby and amethyst starfish brooch by Boivin that belonged to actress Claudette Colbert — but design comes first. Siegelson displays clocks, boxes and other objects alongside jewellery, with a particular focus on items from the Art Deco period, to demonstrate the “perfect proportions, balance and design created by these jewellery firms,” says Siegelson.

PAD’s increased focus on collectible jewellery this year “highlights the links between art, design and jewellery,” says Patrick Perrin, the fair’s co-founder. “There is a lot of crossover between art collectors and jewellery customers: both are seeking refined objects with the highest level of craftsmanship that tell timeless stories.”

Art and fine jewellery intersect in a literal way at the stand of Suzanne Syz, the Swiss-born jewellery designer who is herself a prolific art collector. Her pieces this year include ultra-light titanium earrings featuring enamelled recreations of Andy Warhol paintings.

Every exhibit at PAD is subject to a vetting process by the Objects Admissions Committee who ensure that they are accurately described. Independent jewellery specialist Joanna Hardy is one half of the vetting committee for jewellery, tasked with making sure each piece is “fairworthy.” The inclusion of jewellery within the context of an art fair has a positive impact on the industry, she believes. “Jewellery has always been a poorer relation in terms of appreciation of its design and execution. Fine art has an academic side to it that traditionally jewellery hasn’t had, but that’s changing by putting more jewellery in an art environment.”

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“The pieces created by Hemmerle and shown at Siegelson are definitely art. They are the first of their kind, made by artists who push boundaries,” Hardy continues. For her to consider a piece of jewellery as art, “it must challenge your senses and emotions. There has to be a dialogue between the wearer and observer.”

Unlike fine art, wearability is a concern for jewellery connoisseurs. This has held it back from being appreciated as an art form, believes **Valery Demure**, founder of the eponymous PR and sales agency who was one of the newcomers to PAD this year. Her *Objet d’Emotion* stand exhibited one-of-a-kind pieces by 11 contemporary female jewellers, the likes of which are rarely picked up by wholesale fashion retailers.

“Jewellery is considered more as an accessory, or clothing, but the level of artistry in certain pieces matches that of fine art,” says Demure. She points to Monique Pean, who uses fossilised dinosaur bone and chunks of meteorite alongside diamonds and gold. “They are groundbreaking in their use of materials and design. Of course she wants to sell it but there’s a complete creative vision behind it,” says Demure.

Together the jewellers who exhibit at *Objet d'Emotion* cover 30 percent of the cost of exhibiting and the associated events (Demure has also organised talks and a dinner), while Demure takes a commission from the sale price — which she says makes it a “better deal” for the jewellers than wholesale.

Also exhibiting at PAD at the first time is Glenn Spiro, the Mayfair-based private jeweller who launched his house, G, after decades of ghost-designing for international brands. Art fairs, he says, offer him an opportunity to introduce his work to the right audience. “Our business has grown entirely by word of mouth and traditionally the only way to see our work has been behind closed doors, so these fairs are a fantastic opportunity for us to start relationships with collectors whose paths we may not have crossed previously,” Spiro says. “We’ve only been doing these shows for a year but I think it’s been phenomenal for our reputation.”

It’s not just the independent brands who are targeting the discerning art market. London’s Masterpiece Fair, which sets up at Royal Hospital Chelsea every July, hosts international jewellery houses alongside vintage jewellery dealers. Van Cleef and Arpels, Boghossian and Moussaieff are among those who exhibited this year.

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And outside of the walls of official art fairs, early October is a thriving time for London’s jewellery scene. Last night, Swiss family jeweller Boghossian launched its Silk high jewellery collection in a dinner for its clients — many of whom are in town for Frieze. A stone’s throw from PAD, jeweller [Jessica McCormack](#) hosts an annual “Frieze re-hang,” in which the art dotted around her 19th-century townhouse is changed. And on Tuesday Solange Azagury-Partridge will launch her latest collection, *Scribbles*.

“Many of my international clients are in town now so they tend to have a preview,” Azagury-Partridge says. Art collectors have an affinity with her work, she believes. “I do very limited runs of pieces and I don’t design with a view to the commercial value of the jewel, but rather according to whether it says what I want it to say. I have long-standing clients who collect my jewellery, a few of whom have almost every piece I have ever designed. Those same clients collect art in a very similar way.”

Auction houses too are embracing the art world’s interest in fine jewellery. Christie’s, which has always offered a private sales service for its clients, boasts an intimate jewellery salon within its King Street headquarters, while Sotheby’s Diamonds, the contemporary jewellery boutique that’s a joint venture between the auction house and diamond cutter Diacore, opened on Bond Street last year. Both auction houses have hosted selling exhibitions by contemporary jewellers.

Taiwanese high jewellery artist Anna Hu exhibited at Christie’s last May, and later this month Sotheby’s will host the first UK exhibition for Parisian maison *Edéenne*. *Edéenne* takes a literal approach to jewellery as art: among her creations is an extraordinary display of diamond butterflies set en tremblant to flutter when anybody passes by. Hidden among them are a diamond cuff, necklace and pair of earrings: proof that jewellery really can be considered “wearable art.”