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Putting on A SHOW

Jewellery houses are increasingly displaying their wares as art, which is exactly as it should be, says **Carol Woolton**

Carnelians, cabochons and diamonds shimmer seductively on a long necklace, displayed in the Bulgari store. It's the type of piece with a story to tell, imbued with the memory of its era. A glance at it conjures a snapshot of a tanned Elizabeth Taylor in Positano, throwing the pendant over a purple-patterned kaftan, the turquoise sea lapping in the distance. It's a Seventies masterpiece. The chaotic colour and flamboyant style mask its complex design, so the original drawing and a detailed explanation of the craftsmanship involved are shown alongside, with a view to inspiring those clients who are shopping for a modern bespoke piece. "We want to communicate more about jewellery," says Julie Ann Morrison, managing director of Bulgari. "We want to elevate it to a more culturally significant level because the perception of jewellery as art has been lost."

It's certainly true that although the glittering explosion of jewellery in the fashion world has had the positive effect of stimulating the creation of more pieces, jewellery has become more and more dissociated from its traditional artistic roots. During the Renaissance it was usual for artists such as Leonardo da Vinci to dabble in gold and metalwork, creating jewels as well as fine art. Design, workmanship and mastery of materials and colour were considered of equal importance in both fields. It is a shame really that the medium's artistic value

should appear less prestigious than some artworks, when some of the high-profile work of our Leonardos *du jour* arguably won't stand the test of time; after all, a well-designed and crafted piece of jewellery is for ever. "People looking at a jewel now don't think about its design and construction," says Morrison, "which can reflect social and cultural history as much as any painting."

Like Bulgari, many jewellery brands are already highlighting the association between jewellery and art by showing their high-end pieces in the artistic milieu of the Paris Biennale or Masterpiece London fairs. Now, with that same goal in mind (that is, to encourage clients to understand the passion, innovation and craftsmanship involved), some individual jewellers are beginning to exhibit their wares in gallery-style environments.

This month, Jessica McCormack opens a fine jewellery gallery, with jewels, art and *objets* scattered throughout a five-floor Victorian house in Carlos Place in Mayfair. A Haas Brothers candelabra (Donatella Versace and Lady Gaga are Haas fans) welcomes visitors in the hall. Tribal art and ceramic sculptures by Nick Cave line the stairs that lead you to important emerald- and diamond-set necklaces and diamond Wing earrings that are housed in marble, brass and glass cabinets, the display designed >



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GOLD AND
BROWN-DIAMOND
NECKLACE, £16,700

BELMACZ GOLD
AND EMERALD
RING, £16,480



LEFT: GOLD-LEAF FISH TANK,
AT THE BELMACZ
GALLERY. BELOW:
INSIDE THE GALLERY



OLEG COVNIAN

DE ROEMER RUBY AND TANZANITE PENDANT NECKLACE, £4,995



PIECES ON DISPLAY IN THE DE ROEMER SHOP IN LONDON



DE ROEMER CITRINE AND EMERALD RING, £9,500



DE ROEMER EMERALD AND DIAMOND NECKLACE, £12,000



so as to tell their stories. The jewels are set with McCormack's precious signature modern look, using old, cut stones and blackened gold, which has a "forever" look about it. Clients can relax in a Rick Owens-designed chair, or take one of the jewellery books from the library into the garden for a quiet read.

The Romance Room boasts the ultimate fusion of tradition and modernity – clients use interactive screens to compose the love letter or message they want engraved on a jewel or spelt out in stones in the style of acoustic jewellery. And you might leave with more than a new pair of earrings. "Everything is for sale at the end of the day," laughs McCormack, "as my father the antique dealer says."

"The perception of jewellery as art has been lost"

There's also a trend within these galleries to include an extended repertoire of designs, immersing the client in the artist's aesthetic. Designer Julia Muggenburg's look – a Rick Owens jacket slung over black harem pants, plaited red hair tucked underneath a Stephen Jones trilby, and fluorescent lime-green socks peeping out from R Soles cowboy boots – is as eclectic as the art, adornment and objects dotted around her gallery, Belmacz, in Davies Street. "I bring things together that flow into each other," she says, "but everything has to be either spectacular or poetic."

Her dome-shaped sculptural gold pieces sit alongside her new jewellery collection, Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy, which includes silver oxidised chains cluttered with imagined trinkets that might have been found by mudlarks along the Thames. A diamond-set jewel like a workman's dice, an old Victorian gaming chip carved from bone and a delicately set coloured pearl hang together, creating Muggenburg's bespoke vision of a cool "rosary bead or wheel of fortune".

The word "adornment" spills over into Muggenburg's beauty products, such as her crushed freshwater-

pearl powder or 24-carat gold-leaf glinting Glow lip balm. "I don't like to compartmentalise – it's all my vision," she says, "the cosmetics, which look like the alchemy, which drives the jewellery, which in turn drives the art." Muggenburg exhibits 12 art installations a year in the gallery (Greta Garbo's lace gloves and stripy Scandinavian apron were on sale in *Miss G: The Private World of Greta Garbo* in a collaboration with Bronwyn Cosgrave when I visit) while *City/Urban Camouflage*, by Simon Mullan, opens this month.

Parisian Muriel Grateau's black-polonecked, tapered-trousered simplicity sits perfectly with her stark, white-walled Left Bank gallery. There's nothing to distract the eye in this room of black boxes that house her strong collections of intricately carved rock-crystal cuffs and rings set with tiny black-diamond effects, black onyx sculpted "gargoyle" profile rings and finely wrought coloured lacquer-lace pieces. "I like to be simple and pure," she says, "and I don't like the jewellery to be in isolation." Leading into the "jewel room"

are immaculate displays of French linen in every shade from palest pastel to vibrant red and purple, with ceramic plates and bowls in competing hues gleaming against the white walls.

Jewel-like "Geisha" tie-top gold and silver bags, as well as kimono-style colourful cashmere, may line the walls of De Roemer's warm Porchester Place space, but super-stylish designer Tamsin de Roemer distances her jewellery from the seasonal aspect of these designs. Malachite and diamond pendants, also chiming with a Seventies Taylor vibe, green and cranberry-red spinel bead rings and diamond rondelle bracelets shimmer in their own displays.

"Our clients lead with the jewellery," says De Roemer, who merged her own Jean Muir and Garrard background with her husband Justin Packshaw's business background and taste for adventure to create niche brand De Roemer, "but you can see everything is designed by one hand." She takes great care sourcing individual stones in Jaipur and having the pieces handmade in Hatton Garden and Cornwall. "It's about my vision, but also the time and energy and detail that goes into the pieces," she says, showing her delicate Whisper chains hung with drops of emerald, ruby and sapphires. "We like to get across the artistic merits of the jewellery because it's fine in every sense of the word." ■



ABOVE: JESSICA McCORMACK'S NEWLY OPENED GALLERY

JESSICA McCORMACK DIAMOND EARRINGS, PRICE ON REQUEST



JESSICA McCORMACK DIAMOND AND EMERALD EARRINGS, PRICE ON REQUEST



JESSICA McCORMACK DIAMOND RING, PRICE ON REQUEST

