Joya Art Jewellery Fair and Digital Production

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Joya Art Jewellery Fair and Digital Production
By Roberta Bernabei
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In the last decade, social media has had a considerable impact on Studio Jewellery, particularly in terms of its promotion and dissemination. Equally, thanks to the efforts of bloggers and websites like Klimt02, the public can remain constantly aware of global developments in exhibitions, conferences, prizes, information on jewellers and technological developments. Furthermore, passive consumption can quickly become active through participation in collective forums on various jewellery related discussions.

Notwithstanding the innumerable possibilities for digital communication, the need to encounter jewellery physically and emotionally in real life persists; as do exchanges with the objecthood of jewellery, its makers and wearers. The value of this physical interaction might be perceived to be of increasing importance given the virtual expansion of the digital world. Meeting this haptic need is a continuous offer of exhibitions, conferences, symposia and jewellery fairs.

With regards to the latter, there appears to be a desire amongst jewellery artists to participate in fairs such as Schmuck in Munich, whose focus falls upon contemporary jewellery, rather than industrial production. Another category of fair promotes the craftsmanship of individual makers, as opposed to commercial mass production. Amongst these number the International Fair for Skilled Trades in Munich, founded in Germany in the 1970s, as well as the Sieraad International Jewellery Art fair in the Netherlands already on its 14th edition. The United Kingdom hosts COLLECT, the International Art Fair for Contemporary Objects, which held its 10th edition in 2015 at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, with the 2017 edition due to be held at the capital’s noted Saatchi Gallery.

A recent entrant is the Barcelona Art Jewellery Fair: Joya, which offers its jewels every October (www.joyabarcelona.com). Its geographical location makes it unique in Latin countries and a point of connection between Mediterranean countries like France and Greece and Northern Europe. Joya is rapidly gaining ground in the realm of contemporary jewellery fairs. This acceleration prompted my visit to determine the merits of participation through direct observation and an interview survey with participants.

The survey sought to analyse the kinds of jewellery shown at Joya in terms of its characteristics, the experience of the participants and given advances in technology, how Computer Aided Design and Computer Aided Manufacture (CAD/CAM) have affected the development of jewellery production. Amongst the 12 participants surveyed were gallerists, lecturers and jewellers of diverse experiential backgrounds and nationalities.

SURVEY RESPONSES
Respondents had between 1 and 38 years of experience, with attendance of jewellery fairs varying between first timers and those who attend up to 3 per year. A common expression amongst attendees was associated with the perception of belonging to a family and that attendance smoothed the way to an expanded network of professional colleagues, alongside the strengthening of existing connections. Attendance also enables opportunities to see the recent work of contemporaries and to engage in debates surrounding contemporary jewellery practice.

There was a general consensus that in order to maximise returns from participation in fairs, one should ideally gain a foothold through multiple attendances, combined with the continued exposition of evolving or new collections. This combination of physical presence and the development of personal jewellery languages demonstrates to occasional buyers and collectors the rigour and seriousness of any jeweller’s creative intent. Whilst cost of participation remains high for those in attendance, the financial implications are not prohibitive and the short and long term returns are conducive. Including
as they do, immediate sales and commissions for future work.

Katja Toporski presenting her new collection at Joya 2015

**CAD CAM**

Responses were also sought from those showing at *Joya* in 2015 about their perspectives upon the use of *CAD/CAM*. The majority see jewellery as an artistic expression derived from experimentation with materials, techniques or explorations of a particular concept. Manual dexterity seems to be desirable, if not essential. Even when production involves the use of machines such as a laser cutter, the belief remains that jewellery should be hand finished to impart the signs and sensitivity of the maker; otherwise objects made exclusively by machine do not reside in the realm of contemporary jewellery. Whilst some of the jewellers take advantage of *Photoshop* or *Illustrator* to assist the promotion of their work, the majority do not use 3D CAD software like Maya and Rhino or employ digital production through 3D printers. Notwithstanding this lack of contemporaneous usage, many expressed a curiosity for the new technologies and remain open to the possibilities for its complementary inclusion in their practice. Yet relatively few are aware of online bureaus or websites delivering innovative digital production for jewellery, such as *Nervous Systems* [http://n-e-r-v-o-u-s.com](http://n-e-r-v-o-u-s.com) or *Shapeways*
It is interesting to note that results obtained from a recent university paper appear about the teaching of CAD/CAM for the design and production of jewellery, chime with the answers obtained from the Joya survey. (http://makingfutures.plymouthart.ac.uk/accepted-abstracts/cadcam-and-jewellery-design-education/). In that the use of CAD/CAM is perceived to be one of many tools at the disposition of the craftsman, designer or artist. For all respondents it was clear that whist useful, digital production is not a suitable means for all, or for that matter, viable for all creative intents. With an ideal solution being the union of traditional and digital techniques.

For those who have recently attended an education institution, and have therefore likely acquired the digital skills to successfully integrate CAD/CAM with traditional production, the choice of whether to favour digital production is dictated more by artistic research than any technical facility of mechanical means. Even if these makers have digital skills, it is not necessarily their first technical solution for creating jewellery.
In conclusion, there were examples at Joya where the use of CAD/CAM delivered dynamic results, but they were somewhat sporadic and mostly produced by those recently in education. For the most part, the exhibitors interviewed at Joya 2015 consider manual skills synonymous with originality and even if certain aspects of production have been digital, it is always at the service of the concept behind the jewellery.

Conclusions
With regards the survey and the possible motives for participation at Joya, one must underline the enticing sensation of belonging to a family and attendance of Joya certainly confirms this positive atmosphere and love for jewellery. Naturally, the numbers surveyed represents a proportion of participants and the responses cannot loyally convey a totality of positions. However, they do suggest many makers share a desire for engagement with a broader public, whilst at the same time remaining aware they belong to a niche sector.
In other words, there is a tacit acceptance that the realm of contemporary jewellery is unlikely to have the same impact and recognition as Design, Fashion or Fine Art. For this reason, jewellers may have further impetus to come together and explore how the language may be stretched through the addition of diverse disciplines, whilst still maintaining some of the fundamental characteristics of jewellery, such as wearability.

What seems clear to the majority of participants is that the discussions about our sector, that which is made and how we operate, do not seek a restrictive definition. It seems that even amongst different languages, the term Contemporary Jewellery is readily understood by all and identified as jewellery created by artistic investigation and research.

Perhaps the most imminent challenge is working together to maintain, protect and promote the integrity and quality of contemporary jewellery. Where, as previously discussed, manual dexterity and mechanical interventions coexist in the formation of exponents of contemporary jewellery and both traditional and digital production methods are employed in synthesis with the aims of the jeweller’s artistic research.

About the author

Roberta Bernabei is a jewellery maker and historian whose work has been exhibited at various national and international venues. Since 2004 she has been a lecturer at Loughborough University, Social Sciences and Humanities, UK. Her research profile has been the result of peer reviewed outputs, both practical and theoretical. Recent outings includes conference papers given at Making Futures at Plymouth College of Art, 2015 and All Makers Now at Falmouth University, 2014. She has been an instigator of the academic use of interview process in Jewellery Studies with the publication by Berg in 2011 of Contemporary Jewellers: Interviews with European Artists.