

by Marina Elenskaya

# 0 Jewellery: 8 Private, Public, Political

Contemporary jewellery's subtle progression towards becoming more reflective of socio-political phenomena will be 'officially' recognised (and given a name) in Munich this March.

The exhibition *SCHMUCKISMUS*, curated by Karen Pontoppidan, Professor of Goldsmithing at the Akademie der Bildenden Künste München, will showcase works from a new generation of makers. Over 150 pieces, many of them made for the

Marina Elenskaya *I'm curious to know what connections, if any, you would draw between your artistic practice, your role as a professor, and your role as a curator? For example, are your decisions as a curator informed by your intimate knowledge of the processes behind the work being made by this new generation of artists, which include current and former students of yours at both Stockholm and Munich?*

Karen Pontoppidan The subjects I engage with as an artist are also reflected in the choices I make as an educator and when curating. My main interest is in examining the relation between jewellery and society, and doing so in the awareness of general social issues such as gender, ethnicity, etc.

When I curate, I understand the assignment to be the presentation of a particular point of view or the pointing out of a particular aspect within a larger field. When artists are invited to curate, this is very often the intention, and rightfully so.

When talking about the concept for the exhibition, it is important for me to stress that the selection of artists was subjective – and could be nothing but subjective. The concept dictated that I would choose pieces that in my opinion fit the idea of *Schmuckismus*. The artists themselves then added a piece/pieces according to their understanding of *Schmuckismus*.

In my research, prior to the selection of the participants, I came across many very interesting works from a great variety of international artists, all of which were *Schmuckismus* to me. Therefore, this exhibition is only a small representation of a much bigger phenomenon, and the selection was a personal choice.

I am sure that an artwork communicates much more strongly when you can see (and touch) it than when it can only be seen in a photo. Therefore, I presume that pieces with which I was already rather familiar (such as the work of former students) took precedence, when

I was selecting for the exhibition, over work that I only knew from photos. Being a guest-curator does, in my opinion, allow one to make personal choices, but just as with, for example, the gender balance or the internationality of the selection, this is something I also want to reflect upon critically when I curate.

*Please talk to me about the 'Schmuckismus Paradox': the exhibition engages with the significance of jewellery as a 'mirror to a critical discourse', while at the same time (studio) jewellery has a reputation for being limited to the individualistic expression of a given artist.*

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Art is a reflection of society, and so many different approaches to making art must co-exist in order to make a profound reflection.

Therefore, I don't think it is beneficial for the field of contemporary jewellery to pretend that there is only one general approach. There are, and there should be, many different movements within the field. One of my motivations for curating this exhibition was to point this out.

If artists define their works as individualistic objects of self-expression – and I agree that this has been quite a dominant movement for the last while – then I expect they have profound reasons for choosing this approach. For me, jewellery is a sign of group belonging, and it is strongly connected to cultural and political developments, so this is where I place my focus. Defining jewellery in relation to its social significance gave me an understanding of the importance of artistic work within a society, and from this I have also gained as an artist, since it has made all worries about the selfishness of artistic work obsolete.

*Could adding an '-ism' (-ismus) to jewellery (Schmuck) – implying a system, philosophy, ideology or movement – be considered a call to arms? And do you think artists might have a hard time being tied up with a movement? In other words, what are your intentions with the title?*

In curating this exhibition, I gave a title to an approach that was already ongoing within contemporary jewellery. The specific philosophy behind *SCHMUCKISMUS* already existed in various forms internationally. Using an '-ism' to create awareness of a particular phenomenon is a known method within the fine arts, and the '-ism' in *SCHMUCKISMUS* refers to this.

I have no intention of 'starting' a movement; nor do I see any obligations for artists to join or continue using *Schmuckismus* as their concept. Rather, I see an opportunity to create a discourse that might help to sharpen expressions, no matter whether the intentions of a particular artist are in line with *Schmuckismus* or not. Also, even among the chosen artists, I don't believe that everybody would want to have their work always defined as *Schmuckismus*, but they were willing to engage with the concept – willing to let me put this lens on their work.

For me, this is not a contradiction, since all artists develop and shift their focus from time to time. What was important for me was to make people aware of