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# MUNICH JEWELLERY WEEK 2020: THE SCHOOL REPORT

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Above; Munich Jewellery Week 2020: 1. BIER4TOT, Yonghak Jo / 2. BLACK & WHITE, Juanita Sierra / 3. MEME, Patrik Graf / 4. CRYSTAL PALACE, Markus Pollinger / 5. CRYSTAL PALACE, Saika Matsuda / 6. SENSATIONS, Jing Ma / 7. SENSATIONS, Yuanyuan Liu / 8. SHARING IS CARING, Lina Söderberg / 9. SHARING IS CARING, Nils Hint



When I was commissioned to write an article about exhibitions of work from international jewellery and metal schools during Munich Jewellery Week 2020, I was thrilled. This gave both me, an independent writer and researcher with a strong interest in pedagogical practices, and ARTS THREAD, a platform aimed at bridging the gap between design education and industry, the chance not only to highlight new student and graduate work but to explore the educational institutions that provide the environment for the development of new talent and new thinking in the field of contemporary art jewellery and metalwork.

It is very unfortunate that, due to last-minute decisions due to the new and global Coronavirus situation, many of those that were scheduled to exhibit found themselves having to cancel their shows as a result of the closure of the Internationale Handwerksmesse (the main trade fair) and mounting uncertainty about health and safety and travel restrictions. Because of this, we decided to commit to still support those students, graduates and institutions that did manage to exhibit, while at the same time paying homage to those who could not be there.



CRYSTAL PALACE, Danni Chen

It is no surprise that, because of the many international cancellations, this year's school-related shows were mostly by German institutions, with three by students and graduates of the Jewellery and Hollowware department at the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich, now under the supervision of Karen Pontoppidan, and one by the Department for Plastic/Jewellery Burg Giebichenstein Kunsthochschule in Halle, under the guidance of Hans Stofer. Both courses operate outside the shorter degree-standard timeframes common of many arts programmes throughout the world, favouring a longer period of study to facilitate individual development from student to independent studio artist.

**Burg Giebichenstein** presented the student and alumni show 'BIER4TOT', with new work by Yumiko Matsunaga, Eva Ulm, Daniela Trabold and Yonghak Jo. The four very individual projects explored themes of openness and trust, with Yonghak Jo's beautifully crafted large open doors and gate brooches, and concealment and protection, with Daniela Trabold's silk-covered objects evoking both curiosity and restriction. They also explored ideas of the self through an investigation of play and tactility, with Yumiko Matsunaga's colourful and yet somewhat puzzling 'Toy Box' brooches, and Eva Ulm's enamel renditions of thought "ribbons", bearing distinct shapes and yet only subconscious traces of potential words.



The Academy of Fine Arts in Munich inevitably took centre stage this year, and yet was not immune to enforced closures, with the student show 'BLACK & WHITE', hosted in the school-run Akademie Galerie in the underpass of the Universität metro station, managing to stay open only for the inaugural event. The gallery is large, beautifully lit and airy, despite being underground, and offers fantastic opportunities for the students to experiment with display and hone their curatorial eye, both with their own work and with that of others.

Always a highlight of Munich Jewellery Week, this year it held work by Paul Adie, María Eugenia Muñoz Curbelo, Juanita Sierra and Nelly Stein. Using four "architectural" spaces to fill and question the gallery's own, the artists questioned the "space" of their practice within that of the field's own, again with very personal projects closely related not only to the artists' identity but also their very motives for using jewellery as a means of artistic expression.



BLACK & WHITE, Paul Adie

Paul Adie, a multi-lingual translator as well as a jewellery artist, showed a group of oversized and powerfully in-your-face rings from his new body of work exploring issues of identity, sexuality, commodification and politics through the inherent and often taken-for-granted power of popular language and imagery. Nelly Stein showed objects cast in various metals exploring ideas of out-growing and breaking-through, manifested in materials that only appeared amorphous at first sight and in fact seemed to have undergone a forced process of extrusion or to have outgrown their original mould.

María Eugenia Muñoz's very political 'Green Gold' pieces highlighted how the West's appetite for avocado has transformed the local cultivation and global distribution of this fruit into a new form of narco-trafficking where local producers, its original consumers, are not only forcefully exploited but also are no longer able to afford it as a highly-nutritious staple of their diet. Juanita Sierra's project focused on form and material, investigating our primeval attraction and attachment to materials through forms that, like an ancient archaeological tool, not only fit snugly into human hands but also awaken ancestral knowledge and a genetic sense of comfort.





MEME, The Academy of Fine Arts in Munich

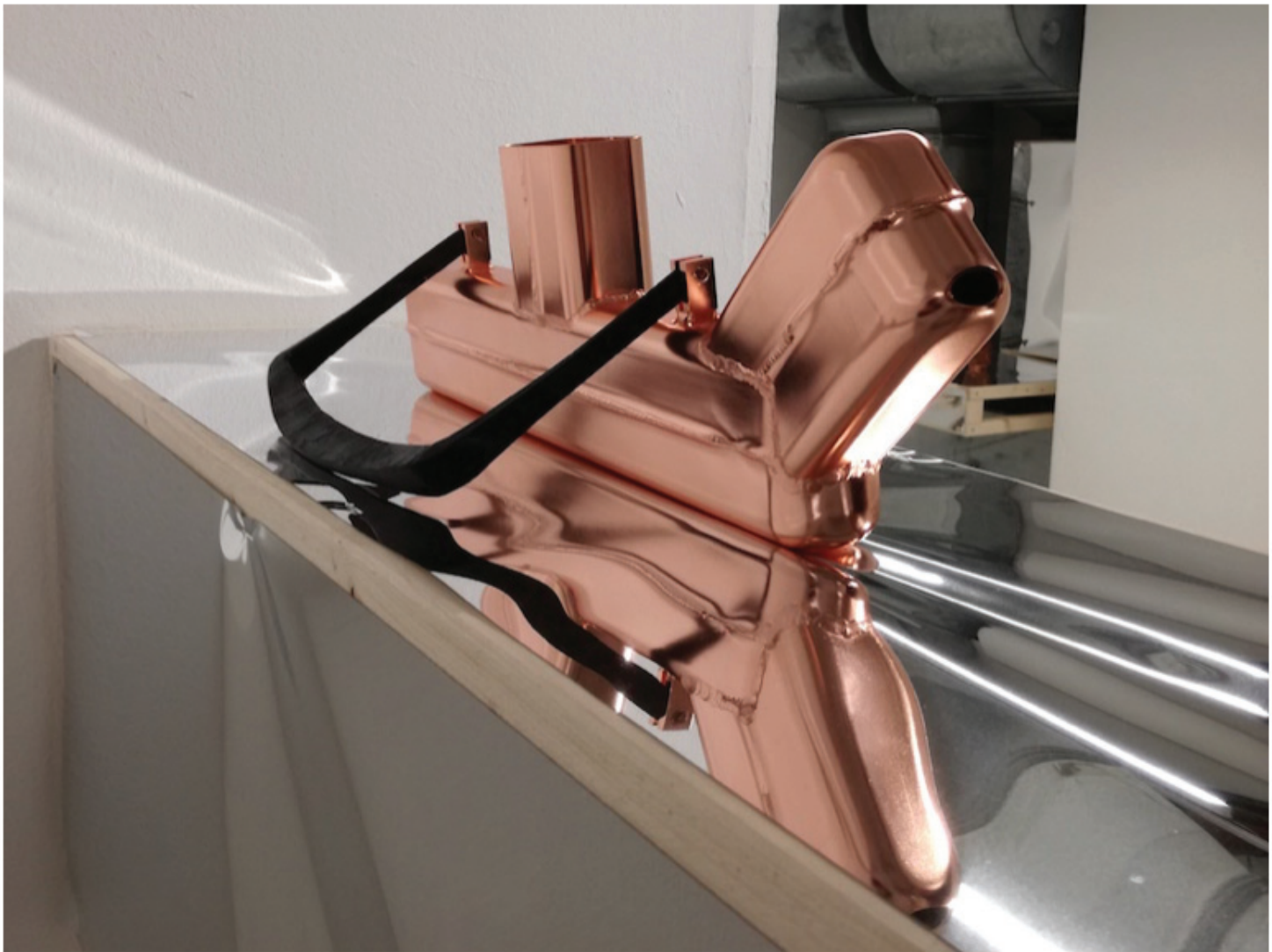
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The second show by Academy students completely took over the historic Maurer Zilioli Contemporary Arts gallery with the large installation titled 'MEME' – yet another testament to the strong and strategic links forged by the Academy with important players in the field. The group effort here was of vastly higher importance than individual contributions. The space was filled, as if an invasive weed, with an enormous plastic river of a map composed by layers of location information relayed through screenshots, copy-and-paste actions and digital collage.

'MEME' talked about the subversion of information in a paradoxical world where the democratisation of knowledge means also its widespread exploitation. Using this metaphor, the show pointed to the way jewellery and the messages of individual pieces constantly undergo a transformative process through the body of each wearer and the eyes of each viewer. And while it is for each of us to think where the power structure lies within jewellery, in the words of Dr. Maurer Zilioli in the accompanying pamphlet, 'there can no longer be art that does not express itself in relation to what is happening around us'.

The third Academy-related show was 'CRYSTAL PALACE', with work by students Saika Matsuda and Jiangyue Guo, and recent graduates Danni Chen and Markus Pollinger, with each artist using a large installation to occupy a space of white-cube-meets-industrial-basement Kunstarkaden. Jiangyue Guo used giant pearl-like shapes covered in black and white fake leather as a reflection of the increasing difficulty to discern true information from false. It was also impossible not to notice a strong visual reference to bondage, truly expressive of the relationship both of desire and self-subjugation that human beings have with information.





CRYSTAL PALACE, Markus Pollinger

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Markus Pollinger presented a series of holding and pouring vessels made with welded steel car parts. Recognisable only to the experts, the forms perfectly mimicked those raised by silversmiths, especially finished as they were with highly polished or brushed matte plating. If these appeared terribly witty and highly contemporary, they also paid great homage to the cross-disciplinarity of traditional design and construction skills, while also deeply acknowledging and demonstrating understanding of the development of such objects across centuries and continents.

Danni Chen also presented a set of surreal table objects designed for the purpose of torturing fruit. Sparking a strange sense of inexplicably dark curiosity, this was an Alice In Wonderland meets Hellraiser project, with heavy manacle rollers for crushing raspberries and ominous barbed spikes for spearing grapes, and even a cage for storage. And if the table was immaculately set up, one could not but be intimidated by the stark contrast of the crisp white tablecloth and the eerie blackness of the forged objects, all accompanied as it was by the eerie recording of some of the instruments as they were being used (minus the fruit screams).

The show ended on a much more ethereal note with Saika Matsuda's installation of vacuum-formed brooches. White, delicate, light to the touch and to the eyes, they were designed to be the three-dimensional embodiment of reflections and ripples in water. This was a fine achievement not only in transforming the transient into the touchable, but also in creating a desirable and easily-replicable series of multiples from the most simple and yet highly emotional design element. 'Crystal Palace' was truly an impressive set-up, with very strong work both visually and conceptually, and a testament to what can be achieved curatorially with minimal and inexpensive materials. Without a doubt one of the top shows I visited this year.





SENSATIONS, Birmingham City University School of Jewellery

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With cancellations by the Royal College of Art and Central Saint Martins, Britain was still represented by 'SENSATIONS', an exhibition by the graduates of the MA Jewellery and Related Products and Artists-in-Residence of the **Birmingham City University School of Jewellery**. The course, under the guidance of Sian Hindle, often has a high percentage of Chinese and Taiwanese students (making up the entirety of this particular graduate cohort), a testament to the strong links built by the School in the Far East which, over the years, has been contributing to the development of new programmes and departments within these countries' institutions.

Set up as it was on a sea of bright pink inflatable rubber rings, one might have expected a set of lighthearted projects, with any commentary carried out with irony and playfulness. And yet, upon examination, all the works engaged with very personal experiences which, however, have a profound global impact. Many socio-political-economic themes were investigated, such as feminism and body ownership, mental health, empathy, and consumerism, and, yes, play, but as a form of expression and critique rather than simply recreation. The life rings then created (or rather brought to life) the deeply reflective side of the works: a metaphor for the search for personal solutions to difficulties encountered as an individual but as part of a more global and shared fragility.

And this is why, in this show as well as 'MEME', the group effort is greater than individual pieces. It lives in the legacy of the deep cultural (ex)change that the students and tutors have undergone through working with each other, of the personal bonds that will have been forged while living in a completely different cultural environment, and of the transformative nature of art education whatever careers these graduates and A-I-Rs will be pursuing.





SENSATIONS, Yixuan Chen

The final show I want to talk about here is 'SHARING IS CARING', not a student show but a collaborative effort of professors and other teaching staff from four institutions around the world that provide metal arts courses and blacksmithing/forging facilities: the University of Gothenburg (Sweden), Southern Illinois University (Carbondale, USA), the Estonian Academy of Arts in Tallinn and Hereford College of Arts in the United Kingdom.

The reason why I found it important to include this show is that at the base of great art education is the relentless dedication of those people who, as tutors, practitioners and technicians (and often all three at the same time!), wish to impart a knowledge that goes way beyond technical know-how. Through teaching about materials, these educators guide students through the most basic lesson in life: that we ourselves are nothing but material, and that the way we go about shaping it has vast repercussions not only for us but, more importantly, for the wider society. The metaphor of forging is then more apt than ever.



SHARING IS CARING, John Grayson



All the works here, then, explore not just global themes such as historical-political and ecological discourse but, crucially the discourse of materials and of what it is to practise. Metalworking of all kinds, and especially forging, is the basis for a very profound confrontation with what it is to be and to forge a material, to be and to use a tool, to have and to confer a function: an existential search for the nature and purpose of the self in its human manifestation. But this confrontation is not always solitary, and the very premise for the exhibition is collaboration, not only in terms of a passive vehicle for shared experiences but as an active tool for shared action.



## SHARING IS CARING

The setting for this exhibition is how I want to finish this piece. The workbench is, despite superficial perceptions, never truly a solitary space: it is instead the biggest shared table, from which one is able to constantly take and contribute nourishment. And art education and art practice, as they enact and promote this communal and level mess ritual, act as an antidote to a future where, through not knowing materials, we don't know ourselves as human beings anymore. Where we don't recognise our provenance from that very Earth that has also produced our iron ore: that we are material and tool within nature and that, if we can exist in a state of isolation and/or dominance, we can only thrive in dialogue.

## WHAT I MISSED...

I very much missed seeing the two scheduled shows from the **Hochschule Trier** – Campus Idar-Oberstein. Both with Bachelors and Masters graduates, the school (under the guidance of Theo Smeets and Ute Eitzenhöfer) very much encourages collective shows during both local and international trade fairs to give the students the ability to develop extensive exhibition skills, including not only branding and stand design but, of course, fundraising, photography and presentation. This year, 'IO&U' would have shown a group of new graduates in a city location, while the well-established Astonished collective of Masters graduates would have delivered their fifth anniversary professional selling show at the main fair.



I missed seeing two of our best British institutions: the Royal College of Art and Central Saint Martins. The RCA Jewellery & Metal student cohort always finds experimental ways to present new projects – as also with their regular Work In Progress end-of-semester shows – often involving an experiential and/or participatory element. And CSM's usual show at the Vitsoe design store, previewed here by ARTS THREAD, showcases the continuity of thinking within the Jewellery Design department, creating a thread between undergraduates, graduates, alumni and teaching staff.

At the main fair, I also missed seeing what the students of the Pforzheim goldsmithing school, under the guidance of Iris Bodemer, had been up to. Last year they they presented an outstanding show – including live demonstrations – that was so good I wanted to buy most of their too encouragingly affordable first-year students' class project work. Equally, in the city I missed seeing the work of the K.O.V. Studio at the Prague Academy of Art under the guidance of Eva Keisler. Judging by the extensive exhibition I was able to see at Gallery S O in London in Spring 2018, we would have been in for a definite treat.

Last but not least... I missed the graduating Masters cohort of the Belgian PXL-MAD School of Arts in Hasselt, under the guidance of David Huycke. Every year they take over the iconic Trippen shoe shop in Türkenstraße, undertaking the difficult challenge of a design and display dialogue with products that already have a very established presence and defined identity. And I missed seeing the work of the students of Korean Kookmin University in Seoul, under the guidance of Dongchun Lee. While I am very familiar with many jewellery departments, this is work that I am less acquainted with. And the most interesting challenge posed by an event as vast as Munich Jewellery Week is to expose ourselves as much as possible to what we don't already know.