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"ZEITGEIST"

ZILBERSCHMUCK: ART JEWELLERY
TORONTO
MARCH 27-MAY 7, 2005

by JOHN CARNES AND KEN VICKERSON



Zeitgeist is literally translated from German as "time ghost;" the definition is "the spirit of the time; the taste and outlook characteristic of a period or generation." This is the title and theme of a juried exhibition at Toronto's newest jewelry gallery, Zilberschmuck. This broad theme was interpreted by a geographically diverse group of Canadian jewelers and metalsmiths. Viewing the responses both written and wrought, brings to mind the apocryphal Chinese curse, "May you live in interesting times."

Andrée Wejsmann's entries, which garnered her "Best of Show" honors, speak about a personal sense of time. Her surreal pocket chairs, one of which sports a tiny mohair sweater, are metaphors for time's relativity. The bail bars give the viewer a visual clue that references pocket watches; the titles remain cryptic and personal, lending the works an air of mystery. Her eloquent statement describes the works as symbolic of "the trace of time spent thinking rather than doing" and "the delicate futility of sitting and marking time." Their meticulous wonkiness suggests an accidental materialization from a dimension where they make complete sense—time ghosts indeed.

The subtle surface and exquisite finish on Erin Anderson's ring, titled *Semi-Precious Roads*,



believe a lamentable environmental situation in Erin's native Nova Scotia. The ring, executed in 14k gold and sterling, is inlaid with powdered enamel, crushed orange farolite, and epoxy. Anderson tells the story of the basalt cliffs near Digby that are being blasted to produce material for use as road pavement. These cliffs provide habitat for numerous species of birds and contain semi-precious stones such as the rare orange farolite, which she crushed to "pave" her ring. It is hard to mistake the meaning of the broken gold line that runs down the center of her ring and hard to look at the piece without thinking about the environmental disaster it represents.

Without compromising its integrity as an engaging stand-alone object, Brenda Roy's *Wall Brooch #1* addressed the theme of the show quite well. Roy's accompanying essay spoke of "walls," both literal and metaphorical. Paranoia and xenophobia push countries into reflexive nationalism, and individuals into gated communities. Other barriers (the Berlin wall, prohibition of gay marriage) are simultaneously dismantled. Roy's piece depicts this contradiction elegantly: a rectangular silver frame inlaid with concrete and jasper (the "wall"), with a central "broken out" area of negative space and exposed silver "rebar." Depicting a monolithic structure and its inevitable collapse, this piece is a snapshot of the human social condition, a coded "yin-yang" symbol.

Sarabeth Carnat also writes of contradiction, but in her brooch, titled *Awe and Wonder* (to my mind, an answer to "shock and awe") she chooses to express one side of the coin: a humbling appreciation for the beauty of the natural world. At the bottom right of the rectangular piece sits a pearl shaped like a human head, on a sheet of reticulated silver. It "looks" up and left toward a mysteriously amorphous piece of rainbow hematite, supported by an 18k gold frame. By placing the "observer" below the "observed," Carnat wished to evoke a sense of humility. The amount of negative space between the two gems accomplishes this, implying not a

sense of oppressive subservience, but a feeling of weightless serenity.

The *Dupont Bracelet* by Anna "Lindsay" MacDonald alludes to a specific street in Toronto. Pierced from a single sheet of sterling and formed into a cuff with intersecting ends, its motif reflects a textile sensibility. Upon closer inspection familiar patterns emerge until a map of the city becomes clear. MacDonald's work plays with scale relationships and the juxtaposition of the actual and the virtual. Perhaps living for the first time in a large urban center has necessitated the development of jewelry as navigational aid.

Andrea Wenckebach's *Cellular Decay Bracelet*, made of sterling silver and cell phone parts was engagingly tactile, due to the rubber buttons of the very technology she was critiquing. This playful piece asks the question: in our obsession to stay "connected," what are we "connected" to?

With her *Caracura* ring, Janet Miller expresses her anxiety over genetic engineering and the biotech industry. Two innocuous items from the natural world (a pistachio shell and a section of twig) cast together in silver become a sinister, otherworldly (or, all too this-worldly) open-mouthed mutant animal form.

Though the jury seems to have picked one or two of the pieces for their novelty alone, the show was of consistent quality and thoughtfulness in responding to the theme. And although the theme of the show opened the door for political proselytizing, the general response was mature and observational. None of the participants tried to hide work of dubious quality behind an eloquent artist's statement, and any judgments in the essays were directed at "us" and "we," not some conveniently disowned "they." If these kinds of sober reflections are even a small part of the spirit of the times, the curse "may you live in interesting times" may well yet turn into a blessing.

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clockwise from top left

Sarabeth Carnat
Awe and Wonder, 2005
18k and 24k gold, 800 silver, rainbow hematite, pearl
1 3/4 x 2 1/4 x 1/2"

Andrée Wejsmann
You Can't Catch a Cold Like That (pocket chairs), 2004
sterling silver, hand knit mohair sweater
height 3 3/8"

Erin Anderson
Semi-Precious Roads, 2005
14k gold, sterling silver, epoxy, enamel powder, crushed orange farolite
diameter 3/4"

Brenda Roy
Wall Brooch #1 (pendant), 2005
silver, concrete, jasper, agate
1 5/8 x 1 3/8"

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