

Art into Jewellery



Loren Kaplan, *Pod*, 2010. Yellow gold, 960 Argentium silver flower pod, with glass vessel and flower shape that converts into a ring; black, gold, silver and salmon colour cord, diamonds. 6.53 x 3.9 cm

Schwartz Jewellers has combined forces with ten leading South African artists to explore the synergy between fine art and jewellery, resulting in the creation of a number of unique pieces.

Take the individual vision and imagination of ten of South Africa's diverse artists – Norman Catherine, Karel Nel, Diana Hyslop, Loren Kaplan, Marco Cianfanelli, Michael Frampton, Walter Oltmann, Senzeni Marasela, Faiza Galdhari and Dylan Lewis – and combine it with the expertise of a longstanding jewellery house, and what do you get?

Visitors to the Standard Bank Gallery can find out first hand. *Translations: Art into Jewellery* exhibits the creative end results of just such a collaboration. Each artist's own interests and artistic preoccupations – be they intellectual, spiritual, social or emotional – have determined his or her response to the project, resulting in one or more designs; these in turn have been realised in precious metals

and stones, along with less conventional materials including resin and rubber, by the Schwartz family.

The idea to pursue such a project originated in a conversation between Gail and Isa Schwartz, members of the third and fourth generations of Schwartz Jewellers respectively (the business was originally founded by former boxer Ike Schwartz in 1924 in Johannesburg). Along with Robert Schwartz, the three have worked alongside the artists to produce the eventual synthesis of art and craftsmanship currently on show in *Translations*.

The artists, in turn, have drawn a broad range of influences and inspirations ranging in diversity from the far reaches of the galaxy to the intensely personal and private.



Karel Nel, *Splice*, 2010. White gold brooch with Tradacney stones and black and white diamonds. 2.95 x 11.6 cm



Karel Nel, *Dark Edge*, 2010. White gold frame, wire, diamonds, Sydinion baroque kite stone and Tradacney white stone. 9.59 x 6.02 cm

Karel Nel brought in a *Tridacna* shell and a black obsidian stone, collected during his travels and reflecting his intense interest in geophysics, both of which were used to create a brooch. On the front, the brooch displays a line of white diamonds mounted in white gold, representing ‘the dividing line of the galaxies’; while at the back, and thus a secret known only to the wearer, small white diamonds have been set into the stone – creating a sparkling array of stars in the obsidian blackness, harking to Nel’s work as artist in residence for the Hubble Space Telescope’s COSMOS survey.

Like Nel, Diana Hyslop looked to the stars – as well as revisiting her own work, a painting of a young man with a wolf’s head – as sources of inspiration for her brooch; in the catalogue, she says that the animal/ human figure represents ‘how we give our power to something or someone outside of ourselves in order to feel safe’. A reference to Sirius, the ‘Dog Star’, is conveyed by the use of blue topaz in the brooch, surrounding the figure and ‘rendering it as a celestial protector’.

Also in a sense harking to the subject of safety, Marco Cianfanelli’s designs – a delicate ring and a necklace – both depict barbed wire. While this is a fairly ubiquitous sight around South Africa, it is rarely seen translated into gold and diamonds – an ultimately ironic combination of treasured item and the measures taken to protect it.

No stranger to irony himself – he is best known for his slyly comic, sharply satirical figures – Norman Catherine’s engagement with the project ultimately resulted in two works. The first is a pendant executed in yellow gold and red enamel, depicting a cat and a man, with diamonds for eyes; the second a two-faced man with a demon on his shoulder, made from white gold and ornamented with diamonds.

Artists such as Faiza Galdhari and Senzeni Marasela, on the other hand, looked to more intimate, personal aspects of their lives when designing pieces for the project. Senzeni Marasela revisited the doll – a longstanding motif in her work – to create five pendants. Each depicts a figure, four of whom represent typical menial roles assigned to black women in South Africa, and titled accordingly: ‘Firewalker’, ‘Fruit Seller’, ‘Home Executive’ and ‘Street Sweeper’. The fifth, named ‘Theodora’, carries more personal connotations for

Senzeni. Each of these is created from gold and embellished with coloured enamel and diamonds; the necklace itself is made from black rubber, and allows the pendants to be worn either separately or simultaneously.

Galdhari’s design – an elaborately connected bracelet and ring that is worn on the index finger – is imbued with the values and beliefs of her religion, Islam. Beginning with the desire to create a piece that would be ‘testimony to the concept of *Imaan* as an intrinsic part of the Muslim faith’ (*Imaan* means ‘conviction’ or ‘faith’, referring to the belief in a single God, the hereafter, and other fundamental tenets of Islam), she set out not only to create an artwork, but to engage in ‘a spiritual exercise, an affirmation of my faith and its growth... an act of *Ibadah*, or worship’ she says in the exhibition catalogue.

From the divine to the resolutely secular: Michael Frampton turned to slate as his starting point, inspired by his recent work with the material. Following the guidance of Gail Schwartz, he selected pyrite (fool’s gold) as a ‘stand in’ for slate, creating a pendant engraved with a female form. Walter Oltmann, in contrast, looked not to the rock but to the rock paintings of the San – in particular the abstract designs incorporated therein – to create a pendant and earrings.

Both Loren Kaplan and Dylan Lewis referenced forms from the natural world – in Lewis’s case, the animal kingdom: his design incorporates a leopard that encircles the wearer’s neck, constructed of white gold plate and small diamonds. Kaplan, a ceramicist, looked to the plant kingdom. She sees the vessels she creates as metaphors concerning potential, describing them in the catalogue as ‘defined spaces of emptiness that can be filled with something’; consequently, she chose to model her work on the seedpod of the opium poppy – both continuing her fascination with vessels, and approaching her interest in potential from a different angle: the opium poppy, she says ‘has been seen as a symbol of transcendence, a way to push and break down the boundaries we build’.

Thus, to return to the question posed at the start: what you get is a range of designs as varied and individual as their designers.

Translations: Art into Jewellery is on at the Standard Bank Gallery from 14 October until 4 December 2010. **CF**